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Grade Retention: An Exploration of the Pedagogical Experiences and Attitudes of Elementary Principals that Influences Decisions to Retain Students in a Grade

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GRADE RETENTION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE PEDAGOGICAL
EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS THAT
INFLUENCE DECISIONS TO RETAIN STUDENTS IN A GRADE

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education
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ABSTRACT

For decades there has been an on-going debate regarding whether or not retention is the best strategy to use for students who are not meeting academic success--whether determined by a test, grades, or standards. Much of the research has indicated that little is gained academically over time by retaining students, but even more significant are the claims that retention has serious negative consequences for a student's emotional and social well-being. If that is the case, why then do principals continue to support the practice of retaining students?

This question was the basis for this study, which was to determine the factors that contribute to the grade retention decision-making of principals as reflected by a survey shared with the elementary principals in Gloucester County and Camden County, in New Jersey. This study explored the demographic information, experiences, and beliefs that principals have toward the practice of retaining students, relative to specific designations of struggling learners.

The survey, Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey (GRDMS), used in this study was derived from the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) developed by Praisner (2003), based on how decisions are made by principals regarding inclusion in special education.

The overall results of the GRDMS indicate that there is a negative attitude toward the practice of retaining students. It is a shared belief of the survey participants that effective teachers, instructional strategies, and funding should be made available to support struggling learners in an effort to avoid using retention as an intervention strategy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Administrators, educators, and parents often find themselves faced with a decision about what to do in the case of a child who has not mastered the requisite skills to move ahead in school. There are many children who have been retained or who have been recommended for retention at some point in their educational career. In fact, the use of grade retention has been increasing in the past 25 years, with as many as 30%-50% of American students retained at least once before ninth grade, depending on geographical location, with urban schools having the highest percentage of the retentions (National Association of School Psychologists NASP, 2003). Additionally, according to Alexander, Entwistle, and Dauber (2003), those students raised in poverty levels, and/or whose parents who were high school dropouts, have a rate of retention is as much as 50% higher than students who are raised with ample resources, by educated parents (p. 5). As economic difficulties prevail, and minority populations increase, there is a likelihood that the percentage of students being retained will also increase. Xia and Glennie (2005) pointed out that grade retention increases the risks for students to drop out of school in later years (p. 2). Thus, a negative pattern of retention followed by dropping out could ensue within a school unless an attempt to reduce retention is made.

Historical Background

There are many identified reasons that students have been, and are being recommended for retention in a grade. In the late 1990s, President Clinton deemed “social promotion” a bad practice in his State of the Union addresses (Alexander, Entwistle, and Dauber, 2001, p. viii). As a result, states began amending policies to

disallow social promotion. Following the call to action, President George W. Bush signed No Child Left Behind into law, requiring states to develop high standards and demands for student and school accountability. In response to both presidential actions decisions regarding grade retention are being made based upon mastery of standards, as often determined by a state assessment (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006, p. 1).

In light of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), there is significantly more pressure on schools to ensure the academic progress of students. When the school year ends and a student has not mastered the skills required for his/her grade level, and perhaps the state assessment has not been met with a “proficient” score, educators often resort to the only option they have-retention. As Xia and Glennings (2005) reported, “Research showing the drawbacks of retention easily get lost in a sea of prevailing appeals to maintain high academic standards” (p. 3). Murray, Woodruff, and Vaughn (2010) determined that little research has been conducted regarding the retention beliefs and practices of elementary school principals. That coupled with the fact that much of the grade retention research has shown that retention does not improve student outcomes over time (Levin, 2007), led to the purpose of this study: Why do elementary school principals endorse grade retention for some students and not others?

Theoretical framework

This study sought to view grade retention through a student-focused lens that reinforces the belief that the purpose of schools is to address the needs of students. The human resource frame (Bolman and Deal, 2003) serves as the theoretical foundation upon which this study is based. The use of the human resource perspective allows educators to focus on the importance of fulfilling students’ needs. For that reason, it is the

responsibility of administrators to make decisions, develop policies and implement programs that positively support student efforts to make academic progress, while also supporting students' social and emotional needs. According to Bolman and Deal (2003), "An effective human resource philosophy provides overall guidance and direction" (p. 135) in organizations, like schools, that focuses on commitment to their subjects, in this case, students. The challenge for educators is to develop strategies that can be implemented to guide and support students who are not meeting academic success. Students who deal with a sense of failure have their needs for security and self-esteem jeopardized, making it impossible to ever achieve "self-actualization" as defined by Abraham Maslow (Bolman and Deal, 2003, p. 117). The human resource frame encourages educators to be mindful of the psychological and emotional needs of the students, and to attend to their needs first in order to provide a foundation that supports the students' progress toward reaching their full academic and personal potential.

With the human resource framework as the perspective from which to construct meaning, an exploratory approach is the basis for the inquiry used in this study since little is known regarding the pedagogical beliefs that serve as the factors that lead principals to make decisions regarding grade retention (Patton, 2002).

Research Question and Research Goal

To what extent do the training and experiences, as well as the attitudes of elementary principals influence the decision to retain a student in a grade?

Although nearly a century of research has consistently failed to support the efficacy of grade retention, there is research that does support the academic practice. Grant and Richardson (1998) promoted the theory that grade retention is most appropriate

for students who are “chronologically and/or developmentally at least a year behind their classmates in terms of their ability to meet the curricular requirements for their grade level” (p. 9). It seems that they, like other proponents of retention, share a belief that mastery can be achieved with a second opportunity to learn the content. Hong and Yu (2007) qualified that belief in terms of student confidence. Young students who compare themselves with younger peers and who experience success may gain confidence. Some researchers believe that children who are retained do benefit by the retention: According to the American Federation of Teachers, “promoting children who clearly are not prepared sets them up for further failure...” (Alexander et al., 2003, p. 12).

Taking into account the research in past decades, the evidence indicates in the most recent studies a need to move beyond grade retention and social promotion. Instead, in the spirit of John Dewey, the founder of progressive education, educators must focus on interventions that build upon the strengths of students and target their needs (English & Larson, 1996, pp. 65, 139). Specific interventions to promote the academic success of students are essential to meet achievement standards. In this era that emphasizes evidence-based interventions, current research unequivocally fails to support the effectiveness of grade retention.

Significance of the Study

The following passage by Jimerson and Ferguson (2007), highlights the responsibility of educators of providing viable options to grade retention:

Thirty years ago, educational researchers declared grade retention to be “an unjustifiable, discriminatory, and noxious” intervention. The results of research failing to support grade retention as an academic intervention, and the evidence

indicating positive effects of other educational interventions, in addition to the disproportionate use of grade retention among children of ethnic minority and low-income backgrounds, now raises the concern that the continued use of grade retention is “educational malpractice.” Educational malpractice emphasizes *a standard of care in educating children and the responsibility of educational professionals* to provide intervention strategies that research supports as generally effective in promoting student’s academic success. (p. 334)

Recent longitudinal studies (Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, 2002; Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson & Dalton, 2002; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Hong & Yu, 2007) suggest that the detrimental effects of grade retention may never be lost; in fact, it may negatively impact students throughout their entire school experience and into adulthood. In the last several decades numerous researchers have shown that retention is a harmful practice, which is closely associated with increased high school dropout rates (Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, 2002). In addition, Jimerson and Kaufman (2003) report that retention diminishes self-esteem and contributes to socialization issues. Yet, grade retention continues to be seen as a viable option for students in many schools, indicating a disparity between educators who support the practice of grade retention and researchers who do not.

In the face of strong evidence that grade retention may not achieve the results that it was intended to elicit; namely, academic improvement; the educational community needs to understand why, then, it is still being supported. Allowing elementary school principals an opportunity to share the factors that undergird their decisions will assist the educational community in this understanding.

According to Saaty (2008), there are critical aspects to making decisions that begin with being able to identify the problem. Decisions include both intangibles (i.e. values and beliefs), as well as tangibles (i.e. test scores and grades). Decision makers are encouraged to proceed through the Analytic Hierarchy Process, beginning with the problem, in this case, insufficient academic progress, the inability of students to demonstrate proficiency with regard to the mastery of standards, and/or immaturity; and making informed decisions based on goals and comparisons (what works and what does not work) (p. 83). The survey questions posed to elementary principals in this study (see Appendix C) incorporate the features of the decision-making process by allowing the subjects to indicate which factors such as beliefs, attitudes and experience impact the grade retention decision when faced with the “problem” of struggling learners.

Variables

The goal of this exploratory study is to understand the factors that influence grade retention decisions when addressing the deficiencies of struggling learners. Levin (2007) stressed the significance of pedagogical practices “...that offer us some hope of escaping the cycle of failure and of helping many thousands of young people to develop their skills and talents” (p. 235). Therefore, one of the variables this study seeks to understand is the pedagogical beliefs and attitudes of principals who are the subjects of the study. In addition, the findings of the study, based on survey responses, will provide insight into the other factors that may impact how and why grade-retention decisions are made, and the extent to which the other variables such as professional training, experience, and program factors are related to principals’ decisions.

Research Questions

The research examining the practice of grade retention primarily focuses on the impact of that practice on the students. There are several other considerations regarding the leadership of the schools and how decisions are made. Reeves (2009) put in context what must be considered to make an effective decision, particularly taking time to examine the evidence and using ones own skills and abilities. To uncover the impetus of the decision-making, and to address the primary research question, the following questions must be regarded to determine which factors play an integral part in the decision to retain students or not:

1. What pedagogical beliefs or attitudes of elementary school principals most influence retention decisions (of students)?
2. What factors, such as training and experience most impact the decision-making process when considering the retention of a student?
3. Based on previous decisions and the professional experiences of elementary principals, are there educational/instructional program options considered to be successful alternatives to grade retention?

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations presented in this study:

1. The subjects of this study were limited to elementary school principals in Gloucester and Camden Counties, in New Jersey, in districts of varying sizes and demographics.
2. Although the demographics of the reporting principals are being reported in this dissertation, those responses are to provide information only. The demographics

were not considered to impact the decisions of the principals, which may or may not reflect their reality in making grade retention decisions.

3. The data gathered was based solely upon self-report responses. The perceptions of the principals may not have represented the effectiveness of grade retention decisions; that would require studying school district data more deeply, effectiveness of program options, and longitudinal status of students who were or were not retained.
4. School districts with limited resources may leave the principals with no alternative other than to retain students. Information regarding the ability of the district to provide alternatives to grade retention were not solicited in this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Overview

During the 19th Century, students were placed in age-related grade levels, with promotion being contingent upon mastery of the subject matter of the designated grade (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Students were required to repeat the grade level if mastery was not achieved. Historically, then, as education became more formal, retaining students was used as a way to reduce "...skill variance in the classroom in an attempt to better meet student needs" (p. 87).

For decades retention was a common practice until the 1930s when there was a noticeable increase in the number of students being retained. During the same time frame, the school dropout rates were also on the rise. For these reasons, researchers began taking a look at the practice of retaining students and studying its effects on students. Initial studies indicated that retention not only did not improve student achievement, but there were apparent negative consequences (Owings & Magliaro).

Teachers and school administrators resort to grade retention as a way to remediate academic shortfalls. Given that often primary-school students often demonstrate short-term academic gains, combined with the fact that the teachers do not follow students throughout their education, it is understandable that teachers may favor grade retention. However, there is substantial evidence that there are few, if any, long-term benefits (Roderick, 1995). A Harvard Educational Letter (1999), as cited in Kelly (1999, p.1), highlighted that it is not uncommon for students to be retained for being emotionally immature or small for their age. Additionally, in urban areas there is a "...disproportionate number of disadvantaged

minority children,” especially boys, who are retained for having behavior problems.

A shift in determining grade retention occurred in 2002 in Florida when a new law mandated retention for any third-grade student who could not meet proficiency requirements on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). In addition, the retention was also a result of a demonstrated reading deficiency. The decision-making was in the hands of the state, not the principals. The results of that policy implementation indicated that little or no gains were made for those students who were retained. Schools simply used available exemption clauses to keep the number of retained students from being too high (Galatowitsch, 2007). The findings in Florida supported previously noted research and denounced any benefit to grade retention. According to Lange (2006), because the subsequent Florida policy study data failed to produce any significant positive results, it should be considered a “failed school intervention” (p. 1).

Effects of Grade Retention

Based on decades of educational research focusing on the effects of grade retention, educators are called upon to make informed decisions based on the research. A number of studies provided compelling information denouncing any efficacy in the practice of retaining students in a grade level, while others minimized the negative effects of retention.

In a review of historical research conducted on grade retention, David (2008) referred to a review of 44 studies conducted by Jackson in 1975 that failed to support that grade retention was beneficial. Jackson’s work, however, incorporated only a minimal set of comparative methodological criteria, which should be considered a weakness in the findings. In fact, according to Pomplun (1988), Jackson’s study found that much of the “...retention research suffered from inadequate experimental design ignored the difference

between basic and applied educational research (Ausubel, 1953) with applied ‘research performed in relation to the actual problems . . . under the conditions in which they are to be found in practice’ (p. 6).” (p. 281). However, nearly 10 years later, the work of Holmes and Matthews (1984) showed more compelling results, in their review of another 44 studies from 1929-1981, that did include comparison groups of students. In that first comprehensive statistical meta-analysis that explored the effects of grade retention on elementary and junior high school students, Holmes and Matthews revealed that there was a significant difference between retained and promoted students on both academic achievement and socioemotional outcomes (David, 2008, VanAuken, 1999, & Jimerson, 2001). Galatowitsch (2007) summed up the realistic limitations that research on grade retention must face: “No matter how many factors students are matched on, there are always unmeasured factors at work which may favor the promoted group” (p. 20).

Jimerson (2001) provided a synthesis of grade retention research that included former studies, but also included a more current set of studies from 1990-1999, which utilized comparison groups of retained and promoted students. This synthesis also included the results from published meta-analyses of earlier research of Holmes and Matthews (1984), and was based on effect size (a systematic pooling of results across studies.) The statistical significance of the meta-analysis provided results that indicated a negative effect when comparing retained students with students of similar abilities who were promoted (pp. 48-49).

Jimerson’s (2001) synthesis focused on research information regarding the effects of grade retention on academic achievement and socioemotional adjustment. The academic items studied included language, reading, and mathematics. The intensive and

comprehensive meta-analysis provided results that were consistent with earlier findings “...of nearly 700 analyses emerging from research during the past 75 years demonstrate consistent negative effects of grade retention on subsequent academic achievement” (pp. 50-51). Of the socioemotional domain, Jimerson (2001), and Holmes and Matthews (1984), considered several individual aspects of adjustment: social, emotional, behavioral, self-concept, attendance, and attitude toward school (Jimerson, 2001). Results from Jimerson’s (2001) meta-analyses further supported “poorer social adjustment, attitudes toward school, attendance and more problem behaviors in comparison to matched controls” (p. 51). Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) conducted a 12-year longitudinal study that provided additional findings of the long-term negative effects of grade retention of students in the primary grades through the age of 20. This study explored academic and behavioral factors of 137 students. Subjects who were deemed struggling with similar academic and behavior characteristics were compared after being categorized in one of two groups: retained or promoted (despite academic difficulties). Spanning subsequent years in school, teachers of the subjects were surveyed, test scores and grades were reviewed, and behaviors were assessed. A statistical “analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)” was done to address adjusted estimates of population means (p. 325). The conclusions presented claimed that retained students had lower academic achievement through high school, demonstrated more aggressive behaviors, were more likely to drop out by age 19, were less likely to ever receive a diploma or be enrolled in a post-secondary education program, and suffered less employment opportunities.

Despite a very thorough study, there were limitations. VanAuken (1999) pointed out that true experiments cannot be conducted because neither school administrators nor

parents will allow students to be assigned in a true random fashion to a retention or non-retention group. So matched groups were used in the research mentioned. In addition, the sample size was small and may not have reflected results for a larger population (p. 2). Some of the later findings were compromised because students dropped out of school before the study was concluded. Also, while study after study purports to the lack of efficacy in the practice of retaining students in a grade, it appears that causation is difficult to establish given the multitude of environmental factors that impact the lives of students. Regardless of the cause, research fails to support grade retention across studies.

Despite consistent findings that grade retention poses little, if any, benefits, critics of grade retention should be mindful of limitations in the research. Specifically, consideration of "...how repeaters' test scores and test score gains compare with promoted children's, as viewed from several vantage points. Such comparisons, however, are a step removed from telling us whether grade retention abets or inhibits children's academic progress because repeaters and promoted children differ in a host of other ways besides their retention status – for example, low family income and weak pre-retention academic skills." (Alexander et al., 2003, p. 117)

Alexander et al. (2003) seriously challenged the multitude of grade retention studies conducted by Jimerson. Although Jimerson's results favored promotion over retention, the results failed to note that repeating students "...are not as far behind their classmates after retention as they had been before," a fact that should be used to determine retention's effectiveness (p. 17). In addition, much of the research has been based on same-age comparisons that weigh repeaters performance against their promoted peers. This, perhaps, is not the best measure, as it would seem unfair to expect second grade retainees

to perform as well as third-graders after two years in second grade and no time yet in third grade. The preferred measure is to use same-grade comparisons that provide repeaters the opportunity to go through the curriculum twice before being judged against peers who complete the grade for the first time. Both types of comparisons are useful, with same-age studies yielding results against retention and same-grade comparisons favoring retention. The studies cited by Alexander et al., especially that of Karweit, showed some positive effects of retention, based on same-grade comparative data. “Positive”, in this case, means that repeaters are less far behind as same-grade peers than they were prior to the retention, and as such, retention is considered effective. A distinction is made from typical research results where the interpreter simply looks at the fact that the retained students are still academically behind their counterparts (pp. 17-26).

Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) provided findings from a longitudinal study of grade retention. The study failed to indicate any level of effectiveness of grade retention. Additionally, behavior was analyzed; students who were retained in elementary school demonstrated an increase in aggression during adolescence than their nonretained peers. Leckrone and Griffith (2006) provided additional support for not retaining students: They reported that in a comparison between retained students and students with similar academic profiles who were promoted, the promoted students performed better in the year following the retention/would-be retention. According to Mims, Stock, and Phinizy (2001), retention negatively impacts “social adjustment, attitudes toward school, behavioral outcomes, and attendance.” Frighteningly, Leckrone and Griffith (2006) indicated that grade retention is a “stronger predictor of delinquency than socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity,” as well as being a strong predictor of substance abuse and teenage pregnancy (pp. 54-55).

An ongoing study being conducted at the University of Washington (Mason, Kosterman, & Hawkins, 2008) seems to indicate that the effects of school failure on girls leads to more long-term social/emotional problems than it does on boys. The findings suggest that girls who had encountered an experience of failure (retention) were significantly more likely to suffer depression by age 21. The study revealed that girls who drop out of school have an increased potential to experience mental health problems, experience less job stability, have a chance of being on public assistance, and suffer an overall level of poverty that also indicates an economic strain on the public.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2003), grade retention research that examined effects of 19 empirical studies during the 1990s yielded results indicating that retention negatively impacted academic achievement in reading, math, and language, as well as socioemotional issues involving self-esteem, peer relationships, behavior problems, attendance, and general adjustment issues. In addition, as students moved into adolescence, there was an increase in “health-compromising behaviors” such as substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, risky violent activities, suicidal ideations, and emotional distress. Given the multitude of detrimental effects of retaining students in a grade, it is difficult to understand why it is still a relatively common practice.

A prevailing warning among the grade retention literature is that academic demands are not going to decrease for students from elementary through high school, so unless school district leaders promote student success, retention will continue to be a viable option for struggling learners. Accepting that reality, what can educational leaders do to turn the tide?

Grant (1997) highlighted the importance of considering the needs of all learners including, but not limited to, those impoverished, those developmentally not ready to learn in a formal setting, those who have moved to various schools and lost valuable instruction, and those who have suffered extended illness. He suggested that:

... rather than relying on forced social promotion, schools can and do offer students who need additional learning time a variety of helpful options, including remaining in the same classroom with the same teacher for another year. The key to the success of these extra-time programs is making informed decisions about the specific needs of individual children—and then determining which programs best meet those needs (p. viii).

Grade-retention decisions should not be made based on a single criterion, such as a test score, or a struggle with a certain aspect of the curriculum, but rather on an understanding of the cause of the lack of academic progress. Grant (1997) shared with his readers research and information to support grade retention as a viable option, although he recognizes that several other options also exist. He challenged researchers who categorically denounce grade retention, especially when they offer no other alternatives for struggling learners. He cited the 1994 Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning in its claim that “ Research confirms common sense. Some students take three to six times longer than others to learn the same thing. Yet...usage of time virtually assures the failure of many students.” (p. 28) For this shortcoming, Grant placed a great deal of the responsibility on the school system’s lack of focus and commitment to providing resources to address the many contributing factors of student failure (poverty, poor health care, students starting school too young, etc.) Until the time we fix a “broken”

system, proponents of grade retention, like Grant, will continue to offer it as a viable option for students lacking the skill and mastery to be promoted to the next grade level.

Decision-making Considerations

The theoretical underpinnings of the many studies and syntheses conducted by Jimerson and colleagues supported the transactional model of development of Sameroff and Chandler (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). This theory emphasized the relationships between adults and children, and the impact that the interplay has on child development. This framework challenged educators to consider that it is the responsibility of the school personnel to provide “a conceptual framework to facilitate the interpretation of achievement, socioemotional, and behavioral outcomes associated with grade retention and also emphasizes the importance of effective prevention and early intervention strategies” (p. 320).

As Covey (2003) explained, transactional decision-making accompanies transformational leadership that focuses on values and beliefs, and also works at preventing negative situations. He further revealed, that transformational leaders support the human resource perspective, enhancing the potential of those within the system, including students (pp 285-286). Because beliefs and values influence decision-making, this study sought to understand what types of beliefs and values play a part in the grade retention decision--for or against.

Although Grant (1997) did not discount the use of grade retention, he did acknowledge that only the well-informed decision-makers are in a position to act in the best interest of the student, recognizing specific needs and causes for student academic delays. The principal, as primary decision-maker, must be cognizant of his or her own

attitudes toward grade retention, to consider the full scope of alternatives, as well as to effectively work with parents. The principal will draw from experience and his or her beliefs as he or she considers whether or not to broach the subject with the parents. Grant (1997) provided a list of important factors to consider when making a decision to retain, or not to retain. Among his considerations are: chronological age; developmental readiness; gender; physical size and ability; social, emotional, and behavioral problems; attendance; linguistic differences; learning disabilities, etc. One important consideration is whether or not there are any feasible alternative programs to address the needs of the students. Grant also cautioned decision-makers to consider that there are reasons to not retain, such as: low ability; laziness or a lack of motivation; emotional disturbance; low self-esteem; lack of parental support; etc. (pp. 66-77) Ultimately, it is incumbent upon the principal to weigh all options and obtain thorough and accurate information to make the best decision possible for the students in his or her charge. The decision is fraught with many challenges.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Grade retention, as the topic of much educational research, is strongly debated among proponents and critics of using it as an educational practice. Ultimately, the decision to retain students belongs to that of the school principal. This study sought to understand how those decisions are made and, specifically, which experiences and attitudes lead to decisions promoting grade retention, and which reject it.

Subjects

With the assistance of the Gloucester County and Camden Counties Elementary School Principals' Associations, the survey was sent out to the principals in these two southern New Jersey counties. Because these counties are comprised of districts offering a broad demographic range--from rural, urban, and suburban, to small, medium and large, from affluent to economically disadvantaged--they provide a diverse perspective on the attributes being studied.

Of the entire membership from both counties, it was the goal of this study to include survey responses from at least 20% of the contacted elementary principals, representing the educational diversity of the counties. There were a total of 132 elementary schools in both counties involved in this study.

Procedure

The complete electronic address was provided by both Gloucester County and Camden County Elementary Principals' Associations, and served as the participant

data base. The researcher-developed survey (Appendix B) was sent electronically to each principal. The research data was collected by ASSET, the Academic Survey System and Evaluation Tool. This online survey tool was developed by Dr. Bert Wachsmuth, Chair of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science at Seton Hall University, in South Orange, New Jersey. This technological survey program established a process for the collection of anonymous responses, while further insuring confidentiality by being run solely on a secure Seton Hall University server (Cooper, 2008).

A letter of introduction and explanation (Appendix A) was e-mailed to all elementary school principals in Gloucester and Camden Counties. It included: a) an introduction of the researcher; b) a brief description and rationale of the project; c) instructions on completing the survey; d) a link to the survey, providing effortless access; e) assurance that the survey has met Seton Hall University's standards for the Institutional Review Board; f) a note of gratitude (Appendix C). The survey was sent electronically on October 17, 2010. Participants were asked to complete the survey by November 6, 2010.

The ASSET link allowed each participant to complete the survey anonymously. ASSET collated all responses, providing the researcher with a central location for data collection, without compromising anonymity and the integrity of the survey. An acknowledgement and note of appreciation were sent to each principal electronically as a followup to the study (see Addendix C).

Instrument

The survey utilized in this study was an adaptation of the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) developed by Praisner (2003), with full permission of the author

(see Appendix E) to do so. The purpose of the survey was to measure the extent to which certain factors, such as how experience and the attitude of principals impact decisions regarding placement of special needs students into inclusion classes. The PIS was designed to determine the attitudes of elementary school principals in the context of the inclusion of students. The developer of the instrument was contacted by written correspondence, requesting the use of the survey (see Appendix D). Because the PIS sought to determine factors that mirror the goals of this grade retention study, it seemed fitting to modify the survey for the purpose of this study, maintaining the integrity of the survey items.

Following the lead of Praisner, who addressed the issue of validity by presenting the questionnaire items to a panel of four university professors with experience in the area of students with educational disabilities, the survey used in this study was also presented to four professors with expertise in educational leadership. Four university professors were contacted via e-mail (see Appendix F) to request assistance in reviewing the Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey. The survey items were reviewed and analyzed for potential content validity of the questions for measuring the variables that may relate to the decision-making attributes of elementary school principals (Praisner, 2003). The feedback from the university professors assisted me in refining the survey items for the purpose of using them in the grade retention decision-making study.

The Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey (GRDMS) includes four main sections: demographics, principal training and experience, attitudes toward retention, and elementary school principal decisions regarding placement options for struggling learners.

Section I has four items to provide a description of general demographic information of all subjects in the sample.

Section II has 10 questions that provided me with information regarding background data on the principals' educational experiences, and were based on the work of Grant (1997). Questions 1 through 9 provide the subjects an opportunity to respond using a closed format (multiple choice) or a fill-in. These items were initially analyzed by categorizing the characteristics (age, gender, school-related experiences) indicated by the responses of the individual subjects. Then, a cross-subject comparative analysis was conducted, looking for trends among the responses. The scores based upon respondents' answer choices for Question 10 are presented as a chart; a -2 is associated with a negative experience, a -1 for a somewhat negative experience, a 0 for no experience, a 1 for a somewhat positive experience, and a score of 2 is for a positive experience. A negative experience is one that indicates a lack of academic success; where a positive experience represents general academic success. The total possible score for the 10 qualifiers that respondents are asked to address is -20 to 20. Therefore, the negative experiences denote a principal's acknowledgement that students with that particular trait do not demonstrate academic success. In contrast, the responses that point out positive experiences indicate the principal's identification that students with those traits generally demonstrate academic success.

Section III consists of 10 questions that measure the attitudes and beliefs of elementary school principals toward struggling learners who are potential candidates for retention. Responses in this section correspond to a five-point likert scale with the

following options: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree. Each is given a score weight from five to one, with five indicating the most positive attitude in favor of retention. Therefore, a subject who indicates a strongly positive attitude in support of retention responds to the survey by agreeing with half of the items, and disagreeing with the other half.

The last section of the survey was designed to identify the placement decisions principals make for struggling learners. These decisions may be made in response to their past training and experience, and their attitudes toward retention; or they may be made based on alternative programming options they may have for struggling learners that serve as options to retaining a student in a grade. Section IV consists of seven free response questions whereby participants must decide the best option for a struggling learner with specific needs. These items were derived from the work of Grant (1997), and represent considerations he identified in his grade retention checklist (pp. 109-120). For the purpose of scoring this section, a 2 is given to the decision to retain students; and a 0 is given for all other options. Scores in this section, therefore, range from 0 to 14; the higher the score, the greater indication that the principal tends to favor a decision to retain students.

The total survey consists of 31 items. Due to the variety of questions types and information being gathered, a reliability measure is not feasible.

Design

This study is designed to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data. A review of the demographics and the first nine questions in Section II provide data that can be organized into themes (i.e., years as principal, training, knowing someone retained, school

district's policy regarding retention, etc.). The responses for all participants were charted according to those themes represented by the items identified in Sections I and II. In addition, the recommended support services and interventions that principals described when completing the final section of the survey, specifically the open-ended response, provided the researcher with rich insights into the principals' beliefs regarding struggling learners with specific characteristics. These shared recommendations impact the decisions that are made about how best to place struggling learners (to retain or not.)

Consideration of all data will yield qualitative conclusions about the impact the training and experience, and the principals' attitudes about the decision to retain students or not to retain them.

Data Collection and Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and present summaries of all data provided by respondents. Charts and graphs depict the analysis of responses of participating principals. Section I and responses to questions 1 through 9 of Section II were charted and analyzed by theme, and were analyzed for frequency of information presented and experience types expressed. The responses were categorized in an effort to determine the emerging themes and patterns as they relate to the variables. These themes relate to the pedagogical beliefs, experiences and practices of the principals, and serve to provide an understanding of the most significant factors in the repertoire of the principals in making the decision to retain students.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The Grade Retention Decision Making Survey (GRDMS) was sent electronically to the principals of the elementary schools in Camden and Gloucester Counties. The results provide insight into general characteristics of the school, as well as experiences and beliefs of the principals as they relate to the practice of retaining students. In addition, the final section indicates possible placement decisions regarding struggling learners, with the free responses at the end highlighting the support services that may be used, may be available, and/or are recommended as strategies to implement while working with students struggling to make academic progress.

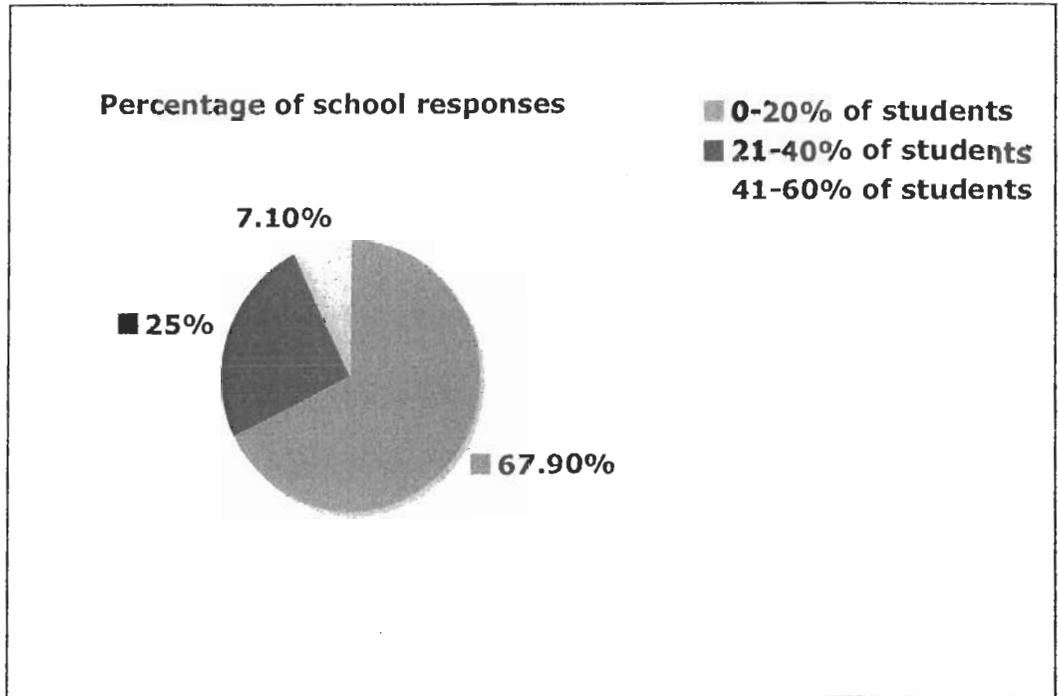
Although there are a total of 160 elementary schools in Camden and Gloucester Counties, the survey was sent to the principals of 131 of them. The difference was due in part to the fact that some schools were without assigned principals at the time the data base was derived. Also, there are instances where one principal is responsible for multiple schools. In addition, changes in e-mail addresses rendered some notices undeliverable. Of the requests sent and presumably received, there were 28 valid responses that comprise the results for this data analysis. In addition, seven responses were incomplete, and fifteen responses were deemed “temporary.”

Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey: Section I Results

The results garnered from Section I indicate that the most common number range of students in the elementary school populations in Camden and Gloucester Counties is 251-500, with an average class size between 20 and 29. In nearly 43% of the schools, retaining students in a grade does not occur; yet in 53.6% of the schools, 1-5% of

students are retained annually. Despite the low percentage of students retained, 92.9% of the responses indicate that between 0 and 40% of the general education population receive remedial services (See Figure 1).

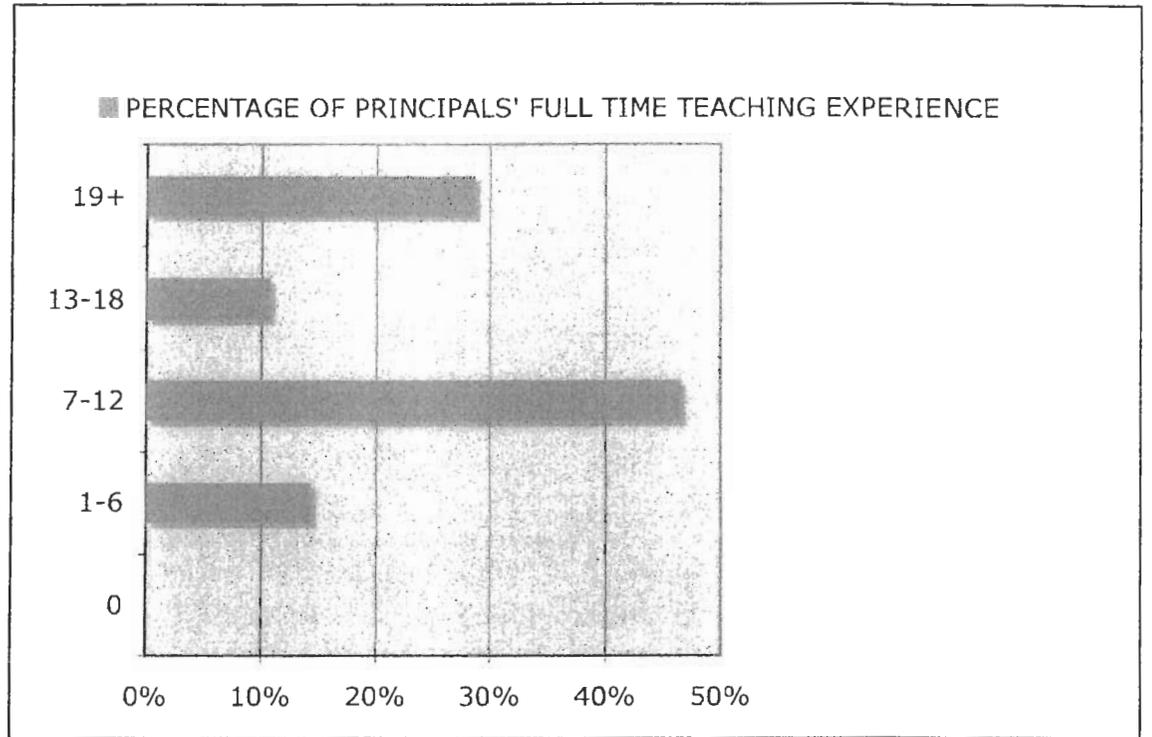
Figure 1



Percentages of Students Receiving Remediation

The responses from Section 2 provide a profile for the principals who responded to the survey. Basically the ages of the principals are divided equally among those in their 30's, 40's and 50's. However, slightly more than two-thirds (67.9%) are males. The teaching experience varied among respondents with most having seven or more years in the classroom (See Figure 2).

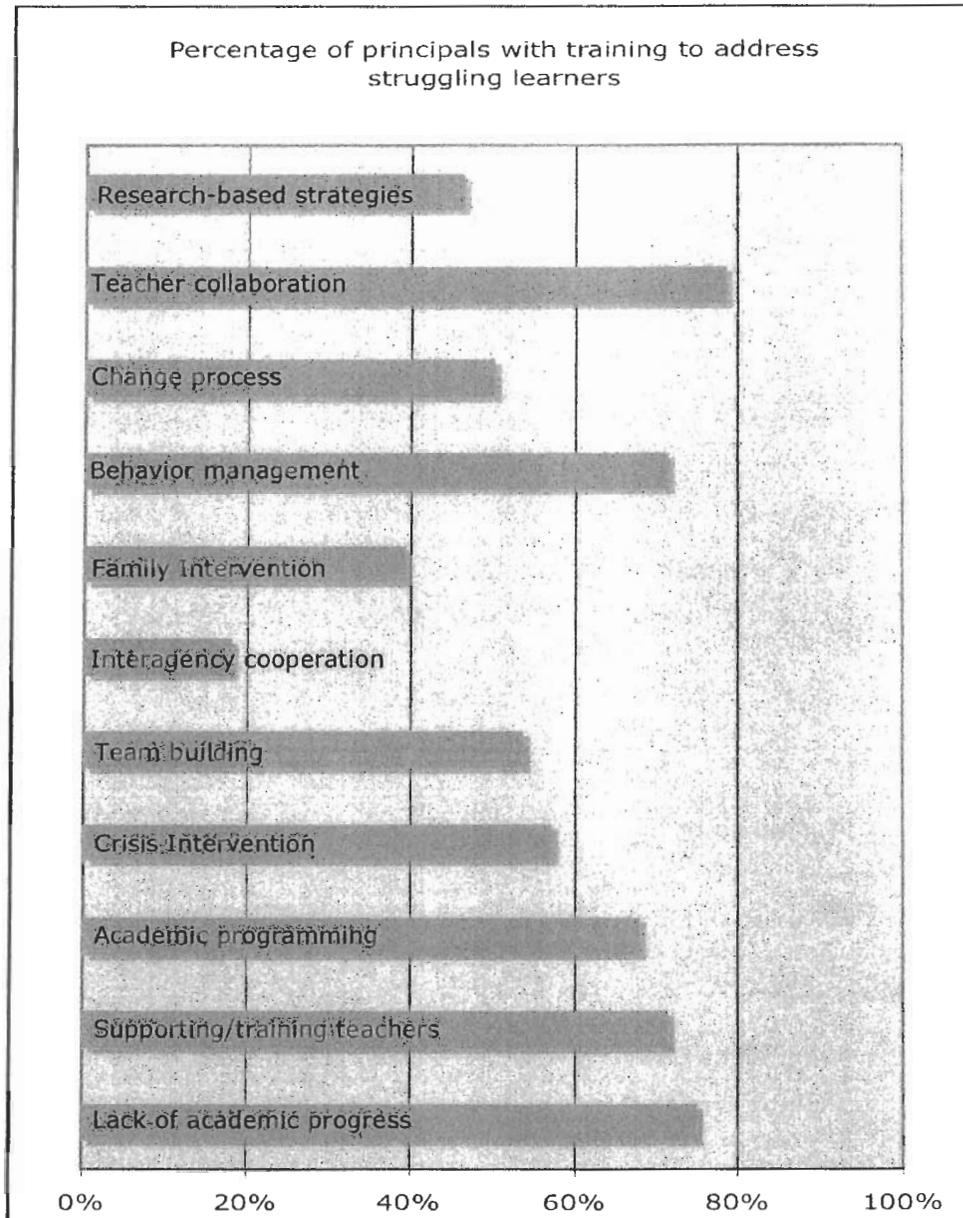
Figure 2



Years of Teaching Experience of Current Elementary School Principals

The vast majority of the principals had been in the leadership position for 1-10 years. Therefore, many have had more years working directly with students as a teacher than as an administrator. Regardless of their position in the educational arena, they all had in-service training addressing struggling learners, with over 64% of them completing more than 25 hours of professional development with that focus. Figure 3, below, reflects the specific content of formal training to which the participants were exposed:

Figure 3



Professional Development Content for Principals

In addition to training offered and provided to educators to address struggling learners, most principals (71.4%) reported that their schools have a specific written policy or protocol to provide guidance in making decisions for students who are not meeting academic success and who may be candidates for retention. Yet only 50% of the schools

include a goal for struggling learners in their mission statement. Another experience that may impact the decisions that principals make regarding retaining students is of a personal nature; one-half of principals have had a close, personal experience with someone who was retained.

Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey: Section II Results

The findings from the final question of Section II, presented as a chart, provide insight into the perceptions, based upon the experiences that these principals have had regarding 10 types of struggling learners. Because there are five possible responses, ranging in value from -2 to +2, the overall score for each potential retainee is associated with either a positive score, which denotes that principals believe that students with that particular academic concern tend to meet success; or a negative score indicating that the participants associate a potential academic failure with the noted learning characteristic. Six types of struggling learner descriptors yielded positive scores: struggling learner, young chronological age, physical size, ELL/Linguistic differences, immature/developmental readiness, and gender. This finding suggests that these six traits, often true of potential candidates for retention, are less likely to result in retention since the experiences of principals are more favorable with regard to academic success. The other four struggling learner characteristics presented average scores that were negative, indicating that students exhibiting these traits were thought of as being more apt to be academically unsuccessful: struggling reader, poor family support, non-proficient test scores, and poor attendance (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

Learning Characteristic	Average score
Struggling reader	0.5
Young	0.8929
Physical size	0.9643
Foor family support	-0.6071
Non-proficient test scores	-0.2857
ELL/ Linguistic differences	0.4643
Poor attendance	-0.5357
Poor behavior	-0.3571
Immature/ developmental readiness	0.3929
Gender	0.7857

Perceptions of Principals with Varied Types of Struggling Learners

Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey: Section III Results

Section III consists of 10 items that reflect assumptions about struggling learners. It is designed to convey the attitudes and beliefs of principals regarding the impact the educational system has on students who may be candidates for grade retention. In this section, principals were asked to score each educational assumption based on a likert-type scale--from 1, strongly disagree; to 5, strongly agree. However, half of the items are worded such that an agreement indicates an attitude in favor of retention (Item numbers 1,2,4,5,10); the other items present the reverse. Therefore, there is consideration of two total score ranges, each from 5-25. A high score, close to 25, indicates a positive attitude. The mean score for the items in favor of retention is 11.4642, indicating a negative attitude toward retention. The mean score for items numbered 3,6,7, 8 and 9 is 15.9286, indicating a positive score not in favor of retention. These two independent scores tend to imply disagreement with the practice of retention, as the scores for the educational assumptions and beliefs suggest. In addition, the standard deviations of each item range from 0.6696 to 1.5882.

It is critical to review the average scores for each item, combined with the percentage of the responses. It is this analysis that offers data to serve as the basis for a rich discussion about which factors within the educational system are believed to support struggling learners. Of the respondents, 85.7% disagreed that only teachers experienced in dealing with struggling students can prevent retention; while only 50% disagree that students who are young (birth date close to cutoff date) are candidates for retention. This statistic gives pause for question, since in the previous section 70.5% of the respondents indicated that being young provided a positive educational experience. The third assumption is consistent with the age response from Section II: 82.8% indicated disagreement that a lack of preschool experience leads to a lack of readiness and success. There is a clear indication that principals believe 75% of these principals believe that a good educator can successfully prepare a struggling learner for the next grade level. Of the respondents, 92.9% do not believe that immaturity is a reason for grade retention. Although 67.8% of school administrators surveyed believe that on-grade-level (average or above average) students can benefit from contact with struggling learners; those who do not believe that there is mutual gain could be those more likely to retain, so they keep the students from sharing a classroom.

The data revealed that 89.3% of elementary principals believe that instruction should be modified to meet the needs of all students, while 10.7% do not share that belief. Consistent with that data is the finding that 89.3% of the surveyed principals agree that teachers should be expected to address the needs of students not making adequate academic progress. Only 2% of the respondents disagree that discretionary financial resources should be allocated for remediating struggling learners to avoid

retention. Additionally, only 2% believe that school districts should have a policy to mandate retention for students who are not performing on grade-level.

The presiding attitude toward grade retention based upon the data from Section III is negative. The shared beliefs of the principals indicate that teachers, instructional strategies, and funding should support struggling learners in an effort to not retain.

Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey: Section IV Results

Responses presented in Section IV indicate the strategies principals believe are most appropriate when considering placement for struggling learners. Because a score of 2 is given for a recommendation to retain, and all other intervention strategies yield a score of 0, the highest score in this section could be 56 for any one question, for the 28 respondents. That raw score is only one indicator in this section; the closer it is to 56 the stronger the propensity for principals to recommend grade retention as a strategy for the student who is struggling. In this case, the retention score is 14, which is low. Because 28 participants responded to seven types of struggling learners, there were a total of 196 responses embedded in this section. There were only seven instances when retention was recommended, representing only 3% of all responses. This 3% is consistent with the data gathered in the first section that indicated that 1-5% of students are retained annually.

The most valuable information garnered from Section IV is the identification of the placement decisions principals believe are most appropriate for the seven types of struggling learners. Struggling learners--described as young, having linguistic difficulties, and lazy/unmotivated--each had one respondent recommend retention based on those traits. Two participants recommended retention for students with poor academic performance and for students with poor attendance. For students who are chronologically

young, nearly half of the principals believe students should delay the start of kindergarten for a year.

For students exhibiting the remaining (other than young) six characteristics, more than 46% (up to 82.2%) of the responses indicate that it is recommended that students be promoted to the next grade level but to provide support (Appendix G). How the participants describe and identify “support” is critical. The last item of the survey asked for clarification of the type of support/s principals recommend to address the needs of struggling learners. Of the responding principals, 20 of the 28 generated a list of 77 intervention strategies recommended to support potential candidates for retention, many of which were the same or similar. Of the 77 recommended support strategies, there are 17 educational themes that emerged based upon the frequency of the suggested interventions (see Appendix I).

The top five strategies comprise 48.05% of all recommended strategies. These interventions involve direct services and contact with struggling learners. The top two, both being suggested eight times, yield 20.78% of all responses: Related services-- Physical therapy, Occupational therapy, ABA therapist, speech, community agency; and Additional instructional time--before school, after school, during recess, summer. The following three support strategies were recommended seven times: Basic Skills Instruction (BSI), One-on-one instruction (tutoring, reading, supplemental instruction), and Counseling/Guidance. The aforementioned interventions address needs of the whole child--physical, academic, and social/emotional. This variety of strategies supports the work of Grant that acknowledged that “...diverse and problem-ridden students need a range of educational programs that can effectively meet their needs...” He emphasized

that struggling learners need more than just instructional enhancements, but also “...a range of time-flexibility options that enable students to master the curriculum and meet high standards...” (1997, p. 27).

In addition, there is a strong correspondence between the formal training received by principals (Figure 3), and the top ranked intervention strategies. The greatest percentages for formal training focus on struggling learners, academic programming for them, behavior management (the social/emotional piece), and supporting the teachers to provide the necessary strategies for supporting students. This suggests that formal training, not only for principals, but teachers and policy-makers alike, targeting specific strategies to reduce the occurrence of retention could potentially eliminate grade retention.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Summary

The intention of this study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs of elementary school principals as they relate to the decision to retain students in a grade. The findings from this study suggest that, although there is a negative attitude toward retention, an average of 3% of the elementary students in Gloucester and Camden Counties in New Jersey are being retained. Of more significance is the identification of recommended support strategies and interventions proposed by the participants of the Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey (GRDMS). These findings can aid school leaders to develop a “tool kit” of alternative programs to support struggling learners, in an effort to promote academic progress without using retention as the strategy.

Educators should join the ranks of other helping professionals (e.g., psychologists, physicians) who ascribe to the early writings of Hippocrates, “Primum non nocere” (First, do no harm). Despite that very fundamental philosophy, educators continue to retain students after years of research indicating the negative effects of doing so. Through the human resource lens that emphasizes a “good fit” by making learning meaningful and rewarding, school leaders must be cognizant of the needs of both students and staff, and provide programs that support students (Bolman and Deal, 2003). Ethically, there is a responsibility to “do no harm,” yet school leaders continue to support grade retention.

Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) provided findings from a longitudinal study of grade retention. The study failed to indicate any level of effectiveness of grade retention. Additionally, behavior was analyzed; students who were retained in elementary school

demonstrated an increase in aggression during adolescence than their non-retained peers. Leckrone and Griffith (2006) provided additional support for not retaining students: They reported that in a comparison between retained students and students with similar academic profiles who were promoted, the promoted students performed better in the year following the retention/would-be retention. According to Mims et al., (2001), retention negatively impacts “social adjustment, attitudes toward school, behavioral outcomes, and attendance.” Frighteningly, Leckrone and Griffith (2006) indicated that grade retention is a “stronger predictor of delinquency than socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity,” as well as being a strong predictor of substance abuse and teenage pregnancy (pp. 54-55). An ongoing study being conducted at the University of Washington (Mason et al., 2008) seems to indicate that the effects of school failure on girls leads to more long-term social/emotional problems than it does on boys. The findings suggest that girls who had encountered an experience of failure (retention) were significantly more likely to suffer depression by age 21. The study revealed that girls who drop out of school, have an increased potential to experience mental health problems, experience less job stability, have a chance of being on public assistance, and suffer an overall level of poverty that also indicates an economic strain on the public.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2003), grade retention research that examined effects of 19 empirical studies during the 1990s, yielded results indicating that retention negatively impacted academic achievement in reading, math, and language, as well as socioemotional issues involving self-esteem, peer relationships, behavior problems, attendance, and general adjustment issues. In addition, as students moved into adolescence, there was an increase in “health-compromising

behaviors” such as substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, risky violent activities, suicidal ideations, and emotional distress. Given the multitude of detrimental effects of retaining students in a grade, it is difficult to understand why it is still a relatively common practice.

Implications for Research and Practice

The results of the Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey (GRDMS) strongly imply that current elementary school principals recognize the many opportunities that exist within their purview to support struggling learners.

Grade retention is decided upon by elementary principals, with various attitudes and beliefs that are impacted by a plethora of experiences. What would it take to change the beliefs of principals to reduce the number of students being retained? As seen in a recent research study conducted at the University of Texas at Austin by Murray, Woodruff, and Vaughn (2010), first-grade retentions decreased when principals had sufficient data provided by the RTI (Response to Intervention) 3-Tier framework. As one principal noted (p. 42):

The first-grade teachers used to like to retain a lot of students and would know whom they wanted to retain in November of the school year. Now, they aren't allowed to think like that anymore, and they must convince me by showing me data that this student absolutely *must* be retained.

As a result, we are retaining fewer students.

That study supports the notion that with alternatives, struggling students may receive supportive programs that can serve as preventive strategies to retention. In addition, Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) recommended, based on the results of their grade

retention longitudinal study, a need for school leaders to develop educational policies that will support struggling students with prevention and early intervention programming. Educators, as instructional leaders, need to advocate for policy changes that emphasize strategies to address the needs of students with achievement or behavior problems that could determine a need for grade retention. For that reason, school leaders should conduct school and/or district research to determine how many students are being retained, and review existing school policies that may currently promote grade retention, in favor of policies that focus on prevention and intervention strategies to eliminate the need for grade retention.

Since nearly 29% of the principals surveyed indicated that their school does not have a plan, policy, or written protocol to deal with students who have been identified as in possible need of retention, policy implications exist. Thompson and Cunningham (2001) highlighted such policy implications for school leaders:

1. Based on research that indicates that retention is harmful, importance needs to be given to preschool and early intervention programs to better prepare students for school success.
2. Swift remediation needs to be provided at first sign that students are struggling.
3. Transition years (to middle and high school) are critical for students at risk for retention.
4. No single assessment should determine retention/promotion; but rather multiple opportunities should be provided to demonstrate skill attainment, and to be used as evidence of promotion readiness.

5. Retained students are at a high risk of being high school dropouts.
6. Policies should provide for supportive measures not only during the year of struggle, but beyond that year.

Grade retention, as it looms in the policy arena, has been more about accountability and educational standards, than about the needs of students. As Hong and Yu (2007) emphasized in their kindergarten study, the issue of grade retention "...has entered public debate as accountability policies pressure schools to ensure..." (p. 239). Not only is retention costly, by generating the need to educate students for an additional year or two, but it also has not proven to be effective. A policy initiative can address that disparity.

An avenue for a future study would be a review and analysis of existing school policies that provide guidance to school leaders in making grade retention decisions. Because nearly half of the principals who responded to the GRDMS indicated that retention does not occur at their schools, district retention policies should be compared and contrasted to determine if any specific schools/districts are more effective in preventing grade retention than others, based on the number of actual student retentions and interventions provided by the schools. Educational leaders should collaborate and help make decisions based on research and best practice, and to enhance grade retention policies so that they can best support struggling learners, indicating appropriate and available strategies and interventions. An additional consideration relating to policy and practice is to include and evaluate the role of the parents in the decision-making process. How do the beliefs and attitudes of parents whose child is being recommended for retention impact the decision of the principal?

The results from the GRDMS and aforementioned research provide support for the need for policy revisions that de-emphasize retention and emphasize prevention and intervention of educational strategies that will serve as alternatives to grade retention. The proposed alternative strategies, identified in Section IV of the survey, can be provided to school leaders who embrace the research, in order to prevent students from facing an educational career that may actually be putting them at a disadvantage by having to repeat a grade in elementary school.

Schools could, in the face of research, adopt “No Retention” policies. Jimerson, Pletcher, and Kerr (2005) suggested turning focus from retention to “...‘promotion plus’ strategies—specific interventions that are designed to address the factors that place students at risk for school failure” (p. 14). They further challenge administrators to consider the socioemotional factors, as well as the cognitive attributes of students, as school policies are established.

The data review from the results of the GRDMS provided the researcher a few points of interest that warrant further consideration. The four struggling learner characteristics that yielded a negative score from principals, indicating that students exhibiting these traits were thought more apt to be academically unsuccessful, are not all necessarily “academic,” except that of the struggling reader. Nonproficient test scores do not always indicate that an academic weakness exists or that students struggle to learn. The other two qualifiers, poor family support and poor attendance, do not reflect academic challenges (See Figure 4), although they may certainly impact student success. Two of the characteristics were found to be consistent with the findings of the Murray et al. (2010) study, showing that, although principals differed with their reasons for

retention, there was some consistency in the factors influencing the retention decisions: assessment data, parental input, and student grades (p. 42). Nearly one-third of the principals surveyed shared a belief that, for average, on-grade-level, or above-average students, there is no mutual benefit for struggling learners to be a part of that classroom environment. This could have far-reaching implications regarding class grouping, as well as retention decisions. This concept warrants further exploration.

It is of no surprise that nearly 90% of elementary principals believe that instruction should be modified to meet the needs of all students; what is surprising is why the others do not share that belief in this culture of No Child Left Behind, with an emphasis on all children's learning and achieving.

The results of the Grade Retention Decision Making Survey indicate that elementary school principals in Camden and Gloucester Counties, in New Jersey, have knowledge of support services and interventions to serve the struggling learner populations. Even when the strategies are employed, 1-5% of elementary students are being retained. This statistic could be the foundation for a future study to determine which strategies are employed in the schools where retention does not occur. Additionally, a correlational study could be conducted to determine which strategies yield the most academic progress, as well as reduce the need for future retention consideration and/or eligibility for special education.

Alternative Interventions to Grade Retention

It is important to note that the list of recommended support strategies and interventions generated by the survey respondents closely matches the recommendations made by the NASP (2003). For a comprehensive comparison see Appendices J and K.

This indicates that principals have a practical working knowledge of effective academic practices to support struggling learners. The question remains: Which, if any, do they incorporate into their school programs, and which are most effective?

Because much of the current and past literature and research fail to support retention as a method to improve academic performance (Jimerson, 2001), it seems incumbent upon current and future educational leaders to respond through research, policy, and practice by providing interventions to support the struggling learners. As Murray et al. pointed out, retention "...implies that students possess not only the requisite ability to be successful in school but also the ability to catch up if they are simply given more time (p. 27)." In reality, that just is not the case. For that reason, NASP (National Association of School Psychologists) urges schools and districts to take into consideration any number of "...well-researched, evidence-based, effective, and responsible strategies in lieu of retention or social promotion (2003, p. 4)."

A common theme running through current research regarding grade retention is one of hope, because there are strategies and programs that can replace retention as the only method of addressing the needs of struggling students. As the transactional model provides the basis for recognizing the significance of early childhood development on later development, educators are called upon to provide prevention and early intervention programs to facilitate achievement and to support those students most at risk for retention (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Jimerson, Ferguson, and Whipple et al. (2002) stressed the importance of relying on "...programs that have been empirically demonstrated to meet the needs of these students in facilitating both positive academic success and socio-emotional adjustment" (p. 59).

Jimerson et al. (2005) provided the following examples of evidence-based strategies used to help eliminate the practice of grade retention: parental involvement, age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional practices, supportive systematic assessment strategies, reading programs, school-based mental health programs, student support teams, classroom behavior management strategies, extended year and extended day programs, and tutoring and mentoring programs. They also note that these strategies found to support low-achieving students are also best practices for the general student population.

Four consistently recommended strategies are seen throughout much of the research. Darling-Hammond (1998), Cortez and Cortez (2005), the Intercultural Development Research Association, as well as the many studies conducted by Jimerson and his colleagues, all support the practice of enhancing professional development of teachers to ensure that the most effective instructional practices are being delivered with a high level of knowledge and skill to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners. Many new teachers lack preparation for the job of effective teaching, while many veteran teachers were never trained to meet the needs of current standards education (Darling-Hammond, 1998). According to Darling-Hammond (1998), “Students who have highly effective teachers three years in a row score as much as 50 percentile points higher on achievement tests than those who have ineffective teachers three years in a row” (pp. 49-50). As the research is considered regarding the impact of effective teaching on student achievement, one limitation is that there are few, if any, recommendations for methods of evaluating effectiveness versus ineffectiveness.

Redesigning schools is another method for altering the failure rate for some students. Darling-Hammond (1998) indicated the need for more contact between teachers and students. She recommended allowing teachers to teach the same students for more than a year, and/or teach multiple subjects to provide for more personalization and intensive instruction. Cortez and Cortez (2005) also stressed the need for school redesign to maximize time for students and teachers to be together. Jimerson, Anderson and Whipple (2002) found a correlation between students who were retained and an increase in aggression and other behavioral problems. By restructuring, schools can build programs and schedules that enhance the relationships between teachers and students, thereby reducing behavior problems (Darling-Hammond, 1998). School policies need to be in place to support not only struggling students, but teacher instructional practices, as well. Darling-Hammond (1998) stressed the importance of effective instruction in the practice of providing alternatives to grade retention. “Highly skilled teachers who know how to use a wide range of successful teaching strategies adapted to diverse learners are, of course, the most important alternative to grade retention” (p. 49).

Given the evidence reflected in the literature that grade retention negatively affects students, it may behoove school leaders to consider options and revise and/or develop policies to address alternatives. NASP (2003), as well as Jimerson, Pletcher, and Kerr (2005) stressed the necessity of administrators to “advocate for ‘promotion plus’ policies that depend on effective, evidence-based interventions” (p. 11).

The number of students who are retained is largely determined by school districts’ promotion/retention policies and by the attitudes and beliefs of educators (Roderick, 1995). Grade retention policies have shifted significantly in the last few decades based on

the trends in education at the time. In the 1970s, social promotion was acceptable. In the 1980s, the standards movement challenged social promotion practices as not holding students accountable for learning, thus creating no social promotion policies; but instead students were being retained. Also, in the 1990s, the pendulum swung yet again, challenging the practices of retention in the face of research that indicated a higher dropout rate among students who were retained. According to Roderick in Phi Delta Kappa International (1995) the “Chicago School Reform Law, passed in 1989, set a central goal of education reform reducing retention rates by 10% over four years” (p. 3).

Jimerson (2001) denoted two effective, empirically studied school-wide programs that also promote socioemotional and academic competencies. Project ACHIEVE involves seven components designed for elementary and middle schools that focus on strategic planning, consultation processes, effective instruction, curriculum-based assessments, behavioral interventions, parent and community outreach, and research and accountability. The other empirically based intervention program is PATHS: Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies that focuses on student knowledge and skills needed for self discipline, social problem solving, and regulating emotions.

The third strategy for school leaders to consider as they plan to reduce student failure and grade retention is to provide specific targeted services (Darling-Hammond, 1998). In order to support struggling learners, it is critical to identify learning deficiencies early. It is especially important to assist elementary students with reading difficulties. Kelly (1999) emphasized this need; “Without the ability to read, a student is virtually cut off from learning in every subject” (p. 3). She highlighted the fact that many schools across the country have targeted struggling readers with one-on-one intervention/

prevention programs such as Reading Recovery program. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007) Reading Recovery, when used on low-achieving students produced positive results in reading achievement and alphabets, with “potentially positive effects” in fluency and comprehension (p. 1). The report indicated that some limitations exist, and that not all studies included in the report met evidence standards of the agency. However, despite that, there were definite positive benefits across all studies giving support to the Reading Recovery program. Kelly (1999) also referred to two studies conducted in the 1980s that produced results indicating that students involved with Reading Recovery “...substantially outperformed control students on almost all measures of reading. Researchers found the program reduced the number of retentions by 9 percent” (p. 3). The primary and secondary research findings concur that prevention and intervention strategies are necessary to eliminate grade retention.

The final area for strategizing and developing a plan to promote no-retention practices is that of using assessments to assist in the delivery of instructional techniques that enhance the learning experiences of all students. The research overwhelmingly denounces the use of a one-size-fits-all, high-stakes test being used to determine grade retention. What Darling-Hammond (1998) emphasized is the use of a variety of assessments that provide useful information about students, what they know, and how they learn. This type of information is then to be utilized to guide teaching practices. The National Research Council also urged school leaders to use more performance assessments to design curricula, activities, and programs that meet the needs of students (FairTest, 1998). Levin (2007), in his work in Canada reported the same findings noted in current research of the United States. Using various methods of assessment leads to

diagnostic instruction that supports students, enhances the learning experience, and ultimately leads to student success. The latest research indicates that computer-adaptive tests are most beneficial because they reduce student stress, build in feelings of success, and reduce tester frustration. Because these types of tests adjust the item difficulty as students proceed, based on the responses, they provide true diagnostic instructional information. At test conclusion, teachers are provided with information specifying what a student does know (Yeh, 2006, pp. 66-67). This type of testing provides support for altering instruction to meet the needs of students because of the diagnostic feedback the teachers receive. Darling-Hammond (1998) reminded educators that true accountability is defined by a system that puts the needs of students first; a system that may need to ensure skillful teaching, restructure, provide targeted services, and draw upon many opportunities to assess students in varied ways, all as a means of eliminating grade retention.

Currently, one intervention strategy being touted as a powerful one that positively impacts student achievement is response to intervention (RTI). This framework is research-based, systematic in its delivery, and has been written into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. The interventions are tiered, and increase in intensity as the needs of the students increase. Typically, RTI focuses on reading instruction and begins with classroom interventions (Tier I). Tier II includes more intensive instruction (i.e. Basic skills, tutoring, etc.). Tier III strategies are even more intense, using perhaps research-based reading strategies delivered one-on-one; and more frequent progress monitoring. RTI and similar programs tend to focus more on individual student needs

and identification of at-risk students, and provide prevention services for students who may traditionally be retention candidates (Murray, et al., 2010).

Implications for Future Research

By holding schools accountable for the academic progress of students, the implication is that there will be programs and strategies available to meet the needs of *all* students. The majority of the principals surveyed had diverse backgrounds in training and exposure relative to content and topics as they relate to struggling learners. There was no apparent link to that training and the retention decisions. However, it may behoove researchers to determine if such a correlation exists, and to find a link between the training and the proposed support strategies found in the final section of the survey. Providing alternative strategies not only impacts the decision-making of school principals, but an emphasis must also be placed on proper training of staff.

Since there was an overwhelming belief conveyed by respondents that teachers have the ability to assist students in overcoming learning challenges, and that instruction should be modified to meet the needs of students, it would be prudent to include teachers in decision-making and enhancement of instructional techniques. Therefore, the conclusions of this study also call for a need of in-service training and professional development for teachers, as well as the principals. With a belief that retention should not be used to support struggling learners often comes a paradigm shift. Strategizing to implement alternative new or additional instructional programs necessitates that school leaders conduct a needs analysis to determine the goals of the school with regard to reducing or eliminating grade retention by focusing on student success. Once the vision becomes clear, principals can decide what type of training their staff needs to move

forward and achieve the goals of enhancing academic progress, and to provide interventions to be used in lieu of retaining students. Such training must include, but not be limited to: alternatives to retention, specific program training (i.e.: RTI), specific academic and behavior strategies (ie: Reading Recovery, behavioral intervention, etc.), schoolwide decision-making (i.e.: class grouping, scheduling, grading, etc.)

An additional implication for future research and implementation of alternative strategies is the issue of funding. Discussions regarding the services that can be offered within the current fiscal structure, and those that cannot, must be conducted with school and district level personnel. The school budget could be greatly impacted by the implementation of new programs to support struggling learners.

Since over two-thirds of the respondents of the survey are male, it would be interesting to determine if gender has any impact on retention decisions. A future study could seek to determine whether or not being a male principal correlates more or less frequently to retaining of students.

Conclusion

The results of the research conducted are beneficial to the educational community in providing an understanding of the beliefs and attitudes of principals. While the results of the survey do not provide definitive reasons why principals support or fail to support grade retention, there is an understanding that struggling learners are considered differently. The research also provides the educational community with more questions to ponder regarding the very complex decision of grade retention.

APPENDIX APrincipal Grade Retention Survey Participation Request
(to be e-mailed)

Greetings,

My name is Jill DelConte, a Seton Hall University doctoral student. In addition, I am currently a principal at Oak Knoll Elementary School in Monroe Township Public School District, Williamstown, New Jersey. I am conducting research regarding the practice of grade retention and how decisions are made in that regard. I have received approval from the Gloucester/Camden County Elementary School Principals' Associations to contact you to request your participation.

I have included a link and the password to my survey below. If you agree to assist with my research, I am asking for you to complete it by November 6, 2010. Completion of the survey guarantees anonymity, as the results are collated by a program called ASSET on a dedicated Seton Hall University server, without identifying the participants.

I recognize the time constraints under which we all operate, but I am humbly hoping you can find 10 minutes to complete this survey that will provide critical information I need to complete my dissertation.

Yours In Education,
Jill A. DelConte

Link to survey: <http://asset.tlrc.shu.edu/servlets/asset.AssetSurvey?surveyid=4179>

Password to access survey: jdsurvey

APPENDIX B

Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine the opinions of elementary principals toward the use of grade retention as an educational strategy. In addition, the responses will provide insight into the experience of principals who are faced with the decision of how to address the needs of struggling learners. There are no right or wrong answers so please address the questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

* * * * *

SECTION I- Demographic Information

The following information will only be used to describe the population being studied.

1. Approximate number of all students in your building:
 0- 250 251-500 501-750 751-1000 1000+
2. Average class size for all students:
 0-9 10-19 20-29 30-39 40+
3. Approximate percentage of students who are retained annually:
 0-5% 6-10% 11-15% 16-20% 21%+
4. Approximate number of students receiving remedial services each year (excluding special education):
 0-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81%+

SECTION II- Training and Experience

1. Your age: 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61+
2. Your gender: Male Female
3. Years of full-time teaching experience:
 - 0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19+
4. Years as an elementary school principal:
 - 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21+
5. Approximate number of in-service training hours to deal with struggling learners:
 - 0 1-8 9-16 17-24 25+
6. Mark the areas below that were included in your formal training such as courses, workshops, and/or significant portions of courses (10% of content or more.)
 - Characteristics of students not making adequate academic progress
 - Behavior management class for struggling learners
 - Academic programming for struggling learners
 - Crisis intervention
 - Teambuilding
 - Interagency cooperation
 - Family intervention training
 - Supporting and training teachers to provide strategies to deal with struggling students
 - Change process
 - Fostering teacher collaboration
 - Field based experiences with research-based intervention strategies
7. Does your school have a specific plan to deal with possible student retentions?
 - No Yes
8. Do you have personal experience with (an) individual(s) recommended for retention or who was retained, outside of your professional role as educator (i.e.: family member, friend, etc.)?
 - No Yes

If yes, please indicate relationship to you.

 - Self Immediate family member Extended family member
 - Friend Neighbor Other: _____
9. Does your school district's mission statement include a vision for struggling learners?
 - No Yes

10. In general, what has your experience been with the following types of students in the school setting? A positive experience is one marked by demonstrated academic success; a negative experience indicates frequent academic failure.

Mark one level of experience for each disability category.

Reasons to retain	Negative Experience	Somewhat Negative Experience	No Experience	Somewhat Positive Experience	Positive Experience
Struggling reader					
Young					
Physical size					
Poor family support					
Non-proficient test scores					
ELL/ linguistic differences					
Poor attendance					
Poor behavior					
Immature/ developmental readiness					
Gender					

SECTION III- Attitudes toward grade retention

Please mark your response to each item, placing an X in the box, using the following scale:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Only teachers with extensive dealing with struggling learners can be expected to prevent retention.					
2. Students who begin school with birthdates close to the cut-off date are candidates for retention.					
3. Students with no preschool experience are not ready for formal schooling.					
4. A good educator can do a lot to help a struggling learner prepare for the next grade level.					
5. In general, students who are immature should be retained.					
6. Students on grade-level can profit from contact with students who are struggling.					
7. Instruction should be modified to meet the needs of all students, including those lagging behind, or needing acceleration.					
8. It is unfair to ask/expect teachers to address the needs of students who are not making adequate progress.					
9. Discretionary financial resources should be allocated for remediating struggling learners to avoid retention.					
10. It should be policy and/or law that students who are not performing on grade-level successfully be retained.					

SECTION IV- Most appropriate interventions for struggling learners

Although individual characteristics would need to be considered, please mark the intervention that, in general, **you believe** is most appropriate for students with the following characteristics:

Young chronological age

- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Delay the start of kindergarten for one year
- Enroll in kindergarten and provide remedial services*
- Promote to next grade and provide support*
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

Physical development is delayed in comparison to peers

- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Delay the start of kindergarten for one year
- Enroll in kindergarten and provide remedial services*
- Promote to next grade and provide support*
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

Social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties

- Promote, pending a CST evaluation
- Promote to next grade and provide support*
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Retain and provide support and/or CST intervention*
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

Poor academic performance/low ability

- Promote, pending a CST evaluation
- Promote to next grade and provide support*
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Retain and provide support and/or CST intervention*
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

Poor attendance/ transience

- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Promote to next grade
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Promote to next grade and provide support*
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

Linguistic Difficulties (ELL)

- Promote
- Promote to next grade and provide ELL or bilingual services
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

Lazy/ Unmotivated

- Promote to next grade
- Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)
- Retain- same grade, same curriculum
- Place in a transitional or multi-age class

* If you chose an option that includes providing support and/or remedial services, please list below which such services/support should be included:

APPENDIX C
(To be sent electronically)

Dear Principal,

I would like to thank you for the educational commitment and dedicated service you provide daily to your school community. If you were able to assist in my research by completing the on-line survey, I greatly appreciate it; I realize how busy we all are. The information I garnered is of great assistance to me, not only as a Seton Hall University doctoral student, but as an educational practitioner, as well. The insights I gained regarding how decisions are made with regard to grade retention will provide me the opportunity to determine the factors most critical in our work with struggling learners.

Yours In Education,

Jill DelConte
Doctoral Student
Seton Hall University

APPENDIX D

Letter requesting permission from Cindy Praisner, author of the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS), to use her survey in this research study:



(856) 728-3944
Fax (856) 728-6791
www.monroetwp.k12.nj.us

Monroe Township Public Schools

OAK KNOLL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
23 BODINE AVENUE
WILLIAMSTOWN, NEW JERSEY 08094

"The Journey Begins Here"
April 14, 2010

CHARLES M. EARLING
Superintendent

JILL DELCONTE
Principal

DENNIS M. SPERA
District Assistant Principal

KRISTY L. BAKER
Head Teacher

Dear Ms. Praisner,

I am currently a doctoral student at Seton Hall University, in New Jersey. I recently read your study regarding the attitudes of elementary school principals toward students with disabilities. I am doing a dissertation that is similar in scope dealing with the attitudes of elementary school principals toward grade retention. I noted that you used the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) to determine the extent the variables had relating to the attitudes of principals. Is this a survey that I could also use? Or does it only pertain to students with disabilities? Are any of the questions/items of use and found to be reliable and valid?

I have not been able to find an instrument that suits my needs specifically, despite a year of research. I am hoping you can provide the component I have been missing- an instrument for use in my research. If you do not feel that your survey can be utilized in my study, would you have any advice for me regarding where to go from here?

I am getting desperate to move forward with my dissertation, but without an appropriate instrument for ascertaining what drives the decisions of principals regarding whether or not to retain students, I will have to abandon my topic. If I can use your survey, would you please provide a letter indicating your permission to do so? In addition, where can I find the survey? If there is a cost, please provide that information, as well.

I welcome and value any guidance you can provide. Feel free to respond in writing, via e-mail, or by fax to the above school address. Thank you for your anticipated assistance.

Yours In Education,

Jill DelConte
jdelconte@monroetwp.k12.nj.us

APPENDIX E

Permission to use the PIS from the author, Cindy Praisner:

Subject: PIS

Date: Monday, April 19, 2010 9:07 PM

From: praisner@netzero.net <praisner@netzero.net>

To: <jdelconte@monroetwp.k12.nj.us>

Conversation: PIS

Hi Jill-

I hope that my survey will help in your doctoral work. I adapted it from previous work to "fit" my study. Perhaps you can do the same.

I have attached a copy of the survey as well as the Instrument section of my dissertation. It will describe how I modified the questions as well as validity and reliability issues.

If you decide to use the survey, let me know and I will be happy to send you a letter of permission.

Best Wishes,
Cindy

Penny Stock Jumping 2000*

Sign up to the #1 voted penny stock newsletter for free today!

<http://thirdpartyoffers.netzero.net/TGL3231/4bccfe80c283cb2751st05duc>

APPENDIX F

**E-mail request for feedback on the Grade Retention Decision-Making Survey from
University Professors:**

**Dr. Jan Hughes, Texas A&M University
Dr. Barbara Williams, Rowan University
Dr. Patrick Westcott, Rowan University
Dr. Robert Campbell, Rowan University**

Re: help with dissertation

Jan Hughes [jannhughes@gmail.com]

Sent: Tuesday, June 29, 2010 11:09 AM**To:** Jill DelConte**Attachments:**Grade Retention Decision s~1.doc (95 KB)

Attached are a few comments to survey.

Best,

Jan Hughes

On Tue, Jun 29, 2010 at 6:45 AM, Jill DelConte

<jdelconte@monroetwp.k12.nj.us> wrote:

> Greetings, Dr. Hughes,

> Once again I am reaching out to you. Since you have done work with
> retention, although you did note that not regarding the decision-making
> process, I could use your insights.

>
> First let me thank you for your anticipated time in assisting me with my
> dissertation. Attached here is a survey that I adapted from one created by
> Cindy Praisner. Her work dealt with the beliefs and experiences of
> principals that influenced decisions regarding inclusion. She determined
> content validity by sharing her survey, before giving to principals, with
> several university professors who read it and provided feedback. Their
> feedback was critical, as it helped determine if the survey would determine
> what she sought to discover.

> Praisner gave me permission to use her survey in my doctoral work. I am
> seeking to determine the beliefs and experiences that influence principals'
> decisions regarding grade retention. The survey that I have attached for
> your review, hopefully, does just that.

>
> Would you please take a few moments and provide some much needed feedback?
> Should I include anything else? Should I delete anything? How could it be
> improved? Is the length adequate? Etc. I welcome your expertise in this
> matter.

>
> Yours In Education,
> Jill DelConte
> Principal, Oak Knoll Elementary School
> Doctoral Student, Seton Hall University

>
>
>
>
>

--

Jan N. Hughes, Ph.D. Professor
Texas A&M University
4225 TAMU
College Station, Tx. 77843-4225

APPENDIX G

Strategies Principals believe appropriate to consider for placement of struggling learners

	Retain- same grade, same curriculum	Delay the start of kindergarten for one year	Enroll in kindergarten and provide remedial services*	Promote to next grade and provide support*	Promote with the condition that student receive extended-year program (summer)	Place in a transitional or multi-age class	Promote, pending a CST evaluation	Retain and provide support and/or CST intervention*
Young chronological age	3.6% 1	46.6% 13	17.9% 5	17.9% 5	3.6% 1	10.7% 3	0.0% 0	0.0% 0
Physical development is delayed in comparison to peers	0.0% 0	21.4% 6	17.9% 5	46.5% 13	3.6% 1	7.1% 2	3.6% 1	0.0% 0
Social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties	0.0% 0	17.9% 5	3.6% 1	50% 14	3.6% 1	10.7% 3	14.3% 4	0.0% 0
Poor academic performance/ low ability	7.1% 2	7.1% 2	7.1% 2	50% 14	7.1% 2	3.6% 1	14.3% 4	3.6% 1
Poor Attendance/ transience	7.1% 2	3.6% 1	0.0% 0	64.3% 18	17.9% 5	3.6% 1	0.0% 0	3.6% 1
Linguistic Difficulties (ELL)	3.6% 1	0.0% 0	7.1% 2	82.2% 23	3.6% 1	3.6% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0
Lazy/ Unmotivated	3.6% 1	0.0% 0	3.6% 1	71.4% 20	10.7% 3	7.1% 2	0.0% 0	3.6% 1

APPENDIX H

SUPPORT SERVICES RECOMMENDED BY PRINCIPALS TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING LEARNERS, AND TO AVOID GRADE RETENTION

- Access to an EA - one on one EA - LAL early interventionist - differentiated instruction - small group instruction - one on one instruction - PT - OT - ABA therapist - older buddy program - Parent volunteer reading program -
- Additional instruction by reading/math specialists; extra support before/after school; instructing parents how to help
- After school assistance, counseling, possible outside agency intervention for attendance, in class support for academic, behavioral assessments and plans
- Basic Skills Instruction, Summer Remediation Program, ELL instruction, one-on-one reading tutor program, after-school tutoring program, IR&S
- Basic Skills Instruction; Fast ForWord
- Basic skills, counseling, enrichment/motivational activities, computer technological strategies
- Basic skills, reading recovery, counseling
- Counseling, peer tutoring, BSI, Inclass support teacher available, extra instruction during recess
- Differentiated instruction, parent support, tutoring and 1-1 supplemental instruction
- ESL/Basic Skills/Extended Day Program/Tutoring/Mentor
- I&RS, Modify work, Guidance Counselor, behavior plan
- Math & LAL intervention program, after-school academic support, mentoring, tutoring
- Push in teacher/mentoring
- Reading and math intervention
- Reading recovery, BSI, counseling
- RTI committee to determine goal oriented supports.

- Small group instruction, LLI, Foundations
- Speech, pt,ot and related services
- Team teaching situation with BSI and/or SpEd teacher in the classroom. Possible classroom assistant. Class with fewer number of students.
- Tutoring, literacy coach, guidance services, ELL services, after-school programs.

APPENDIX I

Recommended supports provided by principals

Emerging Themes	Frequency of responses
Related services--Physical therapy, Occupational therapy, ABA therapist, speech, community agency	8
Additional instructional time: Before school, after school, during recess, summer	8
Basic Skills Instruction (BSI)	7
One-on-one instruction (tutoring, reading, supplemental instruction)	7
Counseling/Guidance	7
Intervention by reading/math specialists (early intervention, coaching)	5
In-class/co-teach academic support-- BSI, special education teacher, class aide	5
Research-based programs- Fast ForWord, Reading Recovery, Foundations, LLI	5
Peer support--Older buddy program, peer tutoring, mentor	4
Differentiated instruction	3
Instructional group/class size small	3
Parent involvement--Parent volunteer reading program, parent training	3
ELL/ESL instruction	3
Intervention Committee--I &RS (Intervention and Referral Services) intervention, RTI	3
Access to educational advocate	2
Behavioral assessments and planning	2
Supplemental activities--Enrichment/motivational, computer/technological strategies	2
Total Responses	77

APPENDIX J

Recommendations to reduce retention by NASP (2003, p. 4)

- Encourage parents' involvement in their children's schools and education through frequent contact with teachers, supervision of homework, etc.
- Adopt age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies that accelerate progress in all classrooms
- Emphasize the importance of early developmental programs and preschool programs to enhance language and social skills
- Incorporate systematic assessment strategies, including continuous progress monitoring and formative evaluation, to enable ongoing modification of instructional efforts
- Provide effective early reading programs
- Implement effective school-based mental health programs
- Use student support teams to assess and identify specific learning or behavior problems, design interventions to address those problems, and evaluate the efficacy of those interventions
- Use effective behavior management and cognitive behavior modification strategies to reduce classroom behavior problems
- Provide appropriate education services for children with educational disabilities, including collaboration between regular, remedial, and special education professionals
- Offer extended year, extended day, and summer school programs that focus on facilitating the development of academic skills
- Implement tutoring and mentoring programs with peer, cross-age, or adult tutors
- Incorporate comprehensive school-wide programs to promote the psychosocial and academic skills of all students
- Establish full-service schools to provide a community-based vehicle for the organization and delivery of educational, social, and health services to meet the diverse needs of at-risk students.

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