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## Retention versus promotion: A study of local policy

Karol Rae Boike  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## Retention versus promotion: A study of local policy

### Abstract

An elementary student in today's schools who is failing has two alternatives open to him, either be retained in the same grade for another year, or be socially promoted to the next grade in spite of apparent academic failure. Educators and parents have to make this decision and in most cases, both the process and effect of the decision have prompted considerable controversy. Proponents of retention argue that students who do not know the material at one grade level will be hopelessly frustrated if promoted to a higher grade level. Retention allows such students a year to catch up. Such students have a chance to succeed and feel good about themselves. If the student is immature, an extra year allows the student more time with other students of the same maturity level.

RETENTION VERSUS PROMOTION:

A STUDY OF LOCAL POLICY

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A Research Paper

Presented to

the Department of School Administration

and Personnel Services

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Karol Rae Boike

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Norman L. McCumsey

7/6/83

Date Approved

Director of Research Paper

Robert Krawjewski

7/22/83

Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Norman L. McCumsey

7/6/83

Date Received

Graduate Faculty Adviser

Robert Krawjewski

7/22/83

Date Received

Head, Department of School  
Administration and Personnel  
Services

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

An elementary student in today's schools who is failing has two alternatives open to him, either be retained in the same grade for another year, or be socially promoted to the next grade in spite of apparent academic failure. Educators and parents have to make this decision and in most cases, both the process and effect of the decision have prompted considerable controversy. Proponents of retention argue that students who do not know the material at one grade level will be hopelessly frustrated if promoted to a higher grade level. Retention allows such students a year to catch up. Such students have a chance to succeed and feel good about themselves. If the student is immature, an extra year allows the student more time with other students of the same maturity level.

Proponents of social promotion, on the other hand, argue that grade retention does not help. They believe that simply being recycled through the same material which was possibly inappropriate the first time is no cure. In addition, they feel that the stigma of "flunking" is great; it damages students' self-concept to the point where they see no point in trying any more.

Both options contain pros and cons, and therefore educators experience many agonizing hours trying to decide

which option is best for a certain child. Educators have attempted to sort out certain factors about children that will help to determine whether or not retention is the right decision. In 1977 Wayne Light published an instrument designed to help teachers sort out these factors more systematically. It is called "Light's Retention Scale", a scale of nineteen different weighted factors. By completing the retention scale form, adding up the scores, and totaling a teacher can determine if a student is a suitable candidate for retention. This would appear to resolve the issue, but there are some who doubt the validity of Light's scale.

How do educators decide whether or not to retain a student? Is it an intuitive process? Is it a stab in the dark? Or do they have some systematic means such as Light's Scale?

## Chapter 2

### The Problem

#### Statement of the Problem

Student retention has been practiced in schools for years and yet there seems to be little research indicating the practice is worthwhile. It is hypothesized that teachers have been deciding intuitively whether or not a child is a good retention candidate. The purpose of this study is to see how educators in AEA 7 decide to retain a child and if they feel their retentions are successful.

#### Importance of the Problem

Educators continue to retain students. Once the retention is completed, an individual teacher forgets about it. Especially if the retained student is in a different teacher's class the next year, the retaining teacher might never get any feedback on the success of the retention. If retention is to continue, teachers must be appraised of the successes and failures. Using intuition to decide whether or not to retain is allowable only if the retentions are successful. If not, other methods must be found.

## Chapter 3

### Review of Literature

#### The Problem of Flawed Research

Since retention has been such a controversial issue, one would expect to find that the subject has been extensively researched, and indeed it has. However, most of the research has been quite inadequate. Educators have been unable to make valid inferences about the effects of grade retention.

In 1975, Gregg Jackson did an extensive review of forty-four studies pertaining to grade retention. He found the research mixed in results and poor in quality. Jackson concluded that the research is inadequate for any definitive answers, although he sided with a policy of social promotion.

Jackson found that the research studies could be divided into three major designs. The first type of design compared the achievement and social adjustment of retained students with promoted students. An example of this is Chansky's study in 1964. He studied lists of low achieving students. The better risks were promoted while the poorer risks were retained. After nine months the promoted group had made significant improvements over the retained students. Chansky's study and all others like it are flawed. It is not a true experimental design. These types of studies are biased toward promotion of students. The

students who were promoted probably had higher IQ's and probably would have shown significant improvement over the others if all had been retained or if all had been promoted.

A second type of design that Jackson noted compared the achievement of retained students before and after the retention. This type of design is also flawed and is biased towards retention of students. There is no control for other factors besides the retention which influence the improvement in achievement over a year's time. This design not only fails to evaluate the effects of retention relative to promotion, but it also fails to evaluate the effects of retention itself.

Jackson's third type of design involved a comparison of students with difficulties in school who were randomly promoted or retained. This is the only true experimental design and can best provide a reliable test of the effects of grade retention. Jackson found only three studies of this type. They are all over thirty years old, and they all involve a comparison of only one semester. They failed to investigate the long term effects of retention.

Jackson urged that current research is needed using this third type of design. Also this design should be used over longer periods of time to determine the long term effects of retention. Unfortunately, moral considerations enter in. It is not fair to children to randomly

assign them to be promoted or retained, and very few parents would go along with the idea.

Jackson concluded by saying, "Those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment will provide greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than will promotion to the next grade." The following studies need to be analyzed with Jackson's review in mind, for all the studies show some of the weaknesses he described.

#### Some Studies Favoring Social Promotion

Dobbs and Neville in 1967 used what Jackson refers to as the first type of design whereby retained students are compared to promoted students. They attempted to lessen the bias involved by matching students in the two groups according to reading achievement, mental ability, type of classroom assignment, chronological age, race, sex, and socioeconomic status. After the first and second years, both the reading and arithmetic achievement gains of the promoted group were significantly greater than those of the retained group. The authors concluded that promotion led to the increased achievement gain of the promoted group. However, it is still possible that other differences which existed between the two groups influenced the outcome.

Another study by Abidin, Golladay, and Howerton in

1971 followed student achievement through six grades. The authors studied eighty-five children who were retained in either first or second grade, and forty-three children who scored below the twenty-fifth percentile on the Metropolitan Readiness Test but were never retained. The data collected did not show negative short term effects of retention. However, looking at all six years, the retained students' achievement and ability dropped relative to those of the promoted students. The retention seemed to harm the students long afterward. The authors concluded that retention is a noxious educational policy. It should be either abolished or its use should be severely restricted.

White and Howard in 1973 did a study concerning self-concept among elementary school children. The authors collected data on 624 sixth graders of whom seventy-three (12%) had failed to be promoted once, and twenty-two (4%) had been retained two or more times. The authors compared the students' self-concept using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and found that failure was significantly related to self-concept. This relationship was more pronounced for the students who had failed more than once.

Ernestine Godfrey in 1971 also found that retention of students had detrimental effects on students' self-concepts and attitudes. More than 1,200 students in grades six and seven from fourteen representative schools were

tested. She also used the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and found that students who had repeated grades scored lower than those who had not. Godfrey also analyzed these students' achievement and found out that the repeaters were lower academically in reading and mathematics. Retaining students did not result in helping them catch up academically, which is the usual reason for having a child repeat.

Paul Street and Terrence Leigh found similar results in 1968-69. Academically, a student who attempts first grade twice is not substantially better off than he or she was after completing it the first time. Street and Leigh had another interesting discovery. The ages at which students entered first grade exerted far more influence on academic achievement than did repetition of the curriculum.

In 1977 William Bocks did a review of the literature concerning grade retention. He concluded that the practice of non-promotion, as a device to ensure greater mastery of elementary subject matter, does not receive support. The majority of pupils who repeat a grade will achieve no better the second time than they did the first time. A substantial number will even do poorer work the second time.

### Schools with Strict Promotion Standards

In spite of the large number of studies favoring promotion, a few schools have set up policies with strict

promotion standards in an attempt to stop pushing poorly prepared students up the educational ladder. They feel that this is much less damaging to students than is retention.

As more and more states pass competency based education laws, schools may have to go to this kind of strict promotion standard. Competency based education demands student mastery on prescribed goals and presents a clear "no" to the practice of social promotion (Pipho, 1978).

One school that has gone to this type of approach is the Greenville School. Owens and Ranick (1977) charged that age-based promotion has become a malignancy in our schools. No student at Greenville is to be promoted until mastering the skills of his or her grade level. Retained students are not put in classes with promoted students, but rather grouped with other retained students their own age.

Another example is the Dade County Public Schools in Florida (1977). This school does have transitional rooms, summer programs, and other special helps for students who are retained. It must be noted, however, that the minimum standards that they have adopted are so low as to be almost meaningless. One would question if such a program is really worth implementing.

### Some Support for Retention

The Greenville Program and the Dade County Program represent the extreme of retaining many students who don't

master the necessary skills. Retention does not need to be that severe. Several studies show that retention can be beneficial.

In 1981, Jackson McAfee did a study using a non-experimental design, but he claimed that he had improved the design so that the threats to validity had been reduced. His study showed that retention appeared to be beneficial in the elementary grades only. However, he acknowledged that the nature of the non-experimental design limits the degree of certainty that can be attached to the study.

Anthony Donofrio made a distinction between "Fate's Favored Group" and "Fate's Unfavored Group" (1977). The unfavored group generally has a July to December birthdate, verbal difficulty, an 80 to 90 IQ, and hyperkinesis. They are male and are late to mature. Donofrio felt that "marking time" for a year will add that year of mental and emotional age which will tune him in on a wave frequency more consistent to his classmates. Retention should be seriously weighed as a simple but vastly important administrative device that could help the well being of these children. Donofrio himself had done no study, but he mentioned others to support his view.

A study by Harry Finlayson in 1977 questioned the notion that retention fosters low self-concept. He maintained that all the self-concept studies have been a one-shot assessment, which does not answer the question of

whether poor self-concept contributes to school failure or whether school failure contributes to poor self-concept. He studied this by examining children before they have failed and following their self-concept development after the non-promotion. Finlayson found that the retention did not create self-concept problems. Supplementing his data were questionnaires to parents and teachers. Parents and teachers felt that the retention was not harmful and most often was beneficial to the student.

There are several studies that have looked at the retention issue solely on the basis of immaturity of the student. Betty Scott and Louise Ames (1969) studied twenty-seven elementary students who were retained in various elementary grades. These were all children who were retained only because of their immaturity. The children's IQ's were at least 90. Scott and Ames found that retention seemed to benefit these children. All children showed increased improvement in grades. Teachers and parents reported improvement in the children's emotional, social, and academic adjustment. The authors maintained that earlier retention studies had found retention to be unprofitable because they had included all retained children in the study. Retention cannot remedy the problems of low ability and emotionally disturbed children. Retention does give an immature child the extra time he or she needs to be ready for the work in a certain grade.

Joan Chase (1968) did a study similar to that of Scott and Ames. Students chosen for the study were repeating a grade at the time of examination. They were almost a year older than their classmates and were designated by their teachers who had retained them as being immature. They were of normal intelligence. Questionnaires were given to teachers and parents. A battery of four tests was administered to each child. The study showed that the immature children who were retained in first grade were in a far better position to compete with their classmates. For the immature child, repeating the first grade may be the means of preventing the large differences between the perceptual motor abilities of second and third graders and their classmates. The study also indicated that repeating a grade will engender no negative social or emotional effects in the child whose school failure is based primarily on his or her immaturity.

#### When Retention Might Work Best

The studies previously mentioned indicate that retention will probably be most beneficial if it is used to give immature students a year to grow. However, there are other factors which can influence a decision to retain or promote.

Stringer (1960) examined fifty cases of retention in grades one through eight to determine what factors would

indicate improvement in the retained year. She found two criteria associated with favorable achievement during retention. First, students gained from retention when the amount of lag was from one to two years below grade level. When the lag was either less than one year or greater than two years, students did not benefit from retention. Second, students gained from retention when their rate of progress in the year before retention was less than half the normal rate. Stringer speculated that perhaps students view retention as helpful and just if in their perception they were far enough behind that they deserved the retention.

Stringer studied the problem further by delving into parental attitudes. Children whose parents seemed chiefly concerned with their children's well being did better than children whose parents seemed chiefly motivated by their own hurt pride.

Reinherz and Griffin (1970) followed fifty-seven boys of normal intelligence who were repeating for the first time in grades one through three. They found that a large proportion characterized as immature made "satisfactory achievement" during the retained year compared to children with less evidence of immaturity. Furthermore, over eighty per cent of the first graders made satisfactory progress, whereas more than half of the second and third grade repeaters showed only fair or poor achievement. So retention would seem to be most helpful and least risky in

the early grades. Purkerson and Whitfield stated this information as a rule to follow: "If non-promotion is to occur, the earlier the better" (1981).

### The Question of Motivation

One issue that needs to be discussed is the effect of retention policies on motivation of students. It is already clear that retention will not help motivate problem students. Failure is self-perpetuating. Glasser (1969) stressed that students who feel they are failures continue to behave as failures to solidify their identities.

However, does the threat of being retained motivate students to work harder and achieve more? Most people assume it does. That is always a strong reason for not adopting a social promotion policy. Otto and Melby (1935) decided to find out if such was the case or not. They studied 352 students; four control group classrooms and four experimental group classrooms. Control group teachers informed their classes several times during the semester that anyone who did not work hard and do well would have to be retained. Experimental group teachers stated to their classes that all would be promoted at the end of the semester. Otto and Melby found that the children who were told that they would be promoted did as well on a comprehensive achievement test as did the children who were threatened with retention. The elimination of the threat of failure

did not affect the quality of work, the attitudes, or the application of the pupils.

A single study by Otto and Melby cannot resolve the issue of motivation, but its findings are consistent with a body of theory and research on motivation. Recent research supports the theory that people are naturally motivated. Outside controls often act as a deterrent to this natural motivation (Thompson, 1980).

### School Achievement and Classroom Homogeneity

Many elementary teachers are concerned about the wide spread of abilities which exist in classrooms. Particularly as the students advance into the upper grades, the spread becomes wider. High school teachers have been heard to say that they wished elementary teachers would not promote students who didn't know a certain level of material. It is a fairly common belief that retaining students who are not performing at a certain standard will help keep classrooms more homogenous.

However, the research does not support this belief. Walter Cook (1941) studied eighteen schools and found that those with strict promotion policies did not have more homogenous classrooms. In fact, a high percentage of retained students lowered the achievement average of the grades when compared with schools that had more lenient standards of promotion. This actually aggravates the pro-

blem of wide ranges of ability.

In a review of literature done in 1952, Goodlad concluded that homogenous grouping is not feasible nor desirable. When groups are made homogenous in one subject area, they will still be divergent in other areas. Goodlad also concluded that whether or not homogenous grouping is desirable or attainable, non-promotion does not appear to reduce the range of abilities in a classroom.

A study done more recently by Kowitz and Armstrong (1961) found that the retained students continued to lag behind in achievement, even when compared to their new younger classmates. Retaining the students did not make the classroom more homogenous.

### Retention as a Discriminatory Practice

Several studies of retention bring to light some disturbing evidence of a pattern of discriminatory practice. It appears that lower class and minority children are retained in disproportionate numbers. For example, results of the aforementioned study by Reinherz and Griffin indicated that primarily the lower class children were retained. Fifty out of fifty-seven were students in the bottom two classes. The retained children were also alike in that their fathers had low educational levels. Forty-seven of the fifty-seven had a parent or other family member who had been retained.

Pottorf in 1978 compared sixty-five retained students with a random selection of sixty-five promoted peers. He found that a student had the greatest chance of being retained if he or she: 1) belonged to a minority, 2) came from a large family, 3) had a mother with a poor education, 4) came from a home with separated or divorced parents, 5) was poor in reading, and 6) was poor in mathematics.

Casavantes (1973) used data from the 1969 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Mexican-American Education study. This showed that Chicano and black students in Texas and California were retained two to five times as often as white students.

In the study by Abidin, Golloday, and Howerton previously discussed, the authors found vague reasons for retaining students. In fact, forty per cent of the students studied had been retained for "miscellaneous" or "unspecified" reasons. Yet a black male from a low socioeconomic family with a working mother and absent father was much more likely to be retained. The authors concluded that retention is "largely a de facto discriminatory policy against the poor".

Caplan (1973) found a different type of discriminatory practice. She matched fifty promoted and retained students according to age, sex, race, and grades in reading, arithmetic, and language arts. The grades given for behavior were then recorded and analyzed. The retained

girls received significantly lower behavior ratings than did the promoted girls. No such difference existed in the groups of boys. Caplan concluded that teachers appear to decide whether or not to retain girls partly on the basis of their behavior, and not just on their achievement. Aggressiveness among girls attracts special attention because it counters sexual norms.

### Alternatives to Retention and Promotion

The research leads one to conclude that retention of students is futile to all but a small number of pupils. Many times retention creates additional problems while solving none. Also, the threat of failure is not seen as increasing the rate of educational gain.

Yet promotion for all is the other extreme. Group activities become too frustrating for students not equipped with necessary skills. The value of the high school diploma becomes suspect. Schools are found guilty of graduating students who are practically illiterate.

Neither approach is satisfactory. Reiter (1973) advised an approach that avoids both extremes. Schools must respect students' individual differences and try to meet their individual needs. More important than a set promotion policy is a policy of doing what is best for each child. Schools may have to settle for a program which favors social promotion in general, but allows for

occasional purposeful retention in the primary grades.

Clair Koons (1977) criticized the Greensville Program which did away with social promotion in favor of strict standards for promotion. Koons said the fallacy in the Greensville Program lies in the assumption that low-achieving students who are promoted with their peers cannot be given work at their own level. Koons maintained that schools should be made to fit the students, not the other way around.

Cunningham and Owens (1976) stated that simply recycling retained students through programs that were inappropriate the first time will not work. They felt that new solutions and new alternatives are needed.

In an article written in NEA Today Pamela and Timothy Granucci (1983) gave an example of such a solution that they feel is working well. Every year they retain thirty per cent of their kindergarten class. These students do not attend kindergarten again but instead go into a transition level called Readiness. Readiness is to a certain extent a postponement of the formal demands that start in first grade. Their community strongly supports this program. In fact, some parents are disappointed if their children get promoted to first grade instead of Readiness.

The McKinley Project (Lorton, 1973) is another example of an alternative. This school was reorganized around two main concepts: nongradedness and team teach-

ing. Students are grouped and regrouped during the day so that they are working at their level. The project was also organized around the concept of non-retention. Students, parents, and staff all had positive attitudes and feelings about the school.

William Walker (1973) stated that the nongraded, continuous progress program seems to be the best solution to the promotion/retention issue. Research on nongraded programs however, has been inconclusive and poorly designed. Nongraded continuous programs need to be evaluated more completely in the future in order to assess their benefits.

The problem with all these alternatives is that they require board approval and they cost money. In these days of tight money, very few school boards are willing to support programs that have not been proven. It is quite likely that for the next several years educators will have to follow Reiter's policy of social promotion in general with occasional retentions. Yet, if educators are to do that, they need some sort of guide to help them decide which students are the best candidates for retention.

Laurence Lieberman published a decision-making model for retention in 1980. It consists of a list of factors that should be considered. Included in this list are child factors such as physical size, maturity, grade placement, age, and self-concept; family factors such as transiency, language, and age of siblings; and school

factors such as attitudes of teachers and principals and availability of personnel and special education services. Lieberman discussed each factor and identified several "rules of thumb" to follow.

Light's Retention Scale is similar to Lieberman's list except that he defines nineteen separate factors with several statements about each factor. These statements are scored and a total is computed. This score is then used to make a decision about retention. Light discussed the justification for each factor, but did not mention any research to support him. The scale is valuable for stimulating thought about the multitude of factors that need to be considered, but it has not been validated by research (Sandoval, 1980).

Once the decision has been made to retain, Margaret Hallenbeck (1981) has a list of steps that can be taken to counter the negative effects of retention. First, enlist the cooperation of the parents. Stress how important it is for them to accept the retention as a positive step. Never guarantee that the child will score higher scholastically the following year. Discuss the retention one-to-one with the child with a smile. Help the child understand that he or she has not failed.

## Chapter 4

### Design of the Study and Analysis of the Data

In order to determine what methods educators are using to make decisions concerning retention, a questionnaire (see Appendix A) was sent to sixty-four principals in the Area Education Agency 7. Principals were asked how many students they retain in a year, who makes the final decision, and how successful they felt the retentions to be. They also rated a list of nineteen items from one to five to indicate how important that factor was to their decision to retain.

Table 1

#### Rate of Return of Questionnaire

Schools	Sent	Returned	Percentage
Waterloo	17	14	82%
Cedar Falls	6	5	83%
Church	12	10	83%
Others	29	26	89%
Total	64	55	85.9%

The questionnaire was sent to all the principals in AEA 7. These schools were divided into Waterloo schools, Cedar Falls schools, church schools, and all other schools. The rate of return varied from eighty-two to eighty-nine percent with an average rate of return of almost eighty-

six percent (see Table 1).

The schools that responded were then ranked in order according to the size of their enrollment. They were then arbitrarily divided into three categories. The eighteen with the smallest enrollment will hereafter be called small schools. The eighteen with the largest enrollment will be called large schools, and the middle nineteen will be called medium-sized schools.

It was determined that most schools do retain a few students (see Table 2). Small schools mostly retained one to three students, whereas large schools usually retained four to six students. Therefore the percentage rate of retention was fairly constant.

Table 2

Number of Students Retained in a Year

	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10 or more
Small schools	2	14	2	0	0
Medium schools	1	12	3	1	2
Large schools	0	3	8	3	4

Table 3 shows that very few schools have written district policies regarding retention. Only twenty out of fifty-three schools reported such a policy, and thirteen of those schools were part of the Waterloo School District.

This confirms that most educators are retaining students intuitively. Very possibly different schools in the same district might be using different reasons and methods to make decisions concerning retention. Waterloo does have a district policy, however three Waterloo principals described it differently and other Waterloo principals didn't describe it at all. Is it possible that they know there is a policy, but don't know what it says?

Table 3

## Retention Policies of Schools

	Written Policy	No Policy
Waterloo	13	1
Cedar Falls	0	6
Church schools	2	7
Other Schools	5	19
Total	20	33

Next the principals responded to nineteen factors which might be used to make retention decisions. They indicated the amount of consideration given to each factor by responding on a scale of one to five, one indicating very strong consideration, and five indicating a low consideration.

Appendix B shows the results of this question.

Over thirty percent of the principals felt the following factors were the most important to consider: child's intelligence, present academic level of child, previous retentions, history of learning disabilities, emotional problems of the child, and immaturity of the child. Of those, present academic level and previous retentions ranked the highest, as over sixty percent of the principals gave them a strong consideration. Least important to consider were the child's sex, number of siblings, and the child's knowledge of English.

These same responses were then tabulated according to the size of the school. Appendix C shows how the small schools responded, appendix D shows how the medium-sized schools responded, and appendix E shows how the large schools responded. Larger schools seemed to consider strongly more of the factors than did small and medium sized schools. Over thirty percent of the principals from small schools rated present academic level, previous retentions, history of learning disabilities, emotional problems of child, and immaturity of the child as strong considerations. Medium sized schools added the child's intelligence to that list, but omitted history of learning disabilities and emotional problems of the child. Large schools included all of those factors plus the child's age and present grade placement.

Larger schools also found more factors to be a low

consideration than did small schools. Over thirty percent of principals in small schools rated only the child's sex and the number of siblings as being low consideration. Medium-sized schools added parents' school participation, and large schools added history of delinquency of child and child's knowledge of English to this list. The child's sex and number of siblings was consistently ranked by seventy to eighty percent of principals as being a low consideration.

Table 4

## Person Making Final Retention Decision

	Parent	Parent/ Principal	Principal	Principal/ Teacher
Waterloo	7.6%	7.6%	84.6%	0%
Cedar Falls	66.6%	33.3%	0%	0%
Church	37.5%	37.5%	25%	0%
Other	45.8%	20.8%	12.5%	20.8%

Table 4 shows the responses to the question about who makes the final decision to retain a child. Most schools do not retain if the parents are opposed. In their comments principals added that parents must approve and be supportive if retention is to be beneficial. Waterloo schools include in their district policy that the principal should make the final decision. However, one would suspect that if the parents disapprove, the principal most

likely will choose against retention.

When asked how successful the retentions have been, principals generally felt that they were successful. Percentages quoted ranged from 50% to 100% successful. Comments ranged from generally okay to very successful. Only four principals out of fifty-five rated the retentions as fair or poor.

The last item on the questionnaire was a place for additional comments about retention. Many principals emphasized the need for parental support and approval if retention is to help. They also felt that retention should be done early; no retentions should be done after third grade. Three schools used Light's Retention Scale to help make their decision. Several spoke of their transition rooms between kindergarten and first grade. These principals found transition rooms to be highly favorable. Transition rooms often eliminate the need to retain.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Implications

The data from this questionnaire indicates that educators do not follow a set policy when making decisions regarding retention. Rather, they decide intuitively. They feel that their retentions are mostly successful, but they have conducted no research to support that statement. Are students being treated fairly when there is no set policy? It would appear that retention could become a discriminatory procedure.

Yet, in defense of educators, retentions are carefully planned. Retention is used infrequently. Educators are following what the research is telling them. They are carefully weeding out the few students who will be most likely to benefit. Whether they know it or not, they are following Reiter's approach which favors social promotion in general, but allows for occasional purposeful retention in the primary grades.

With the lack of good research, educators are doing the best they can. Retentions are perhaps a stab in the dark, but right now no alternative is readily apparent. More research is definitely needed. Children who are retained need to be carefully monitored. Transition rooms appear to be a new alternative with lots of promise, but research needs to be done on that concept also. It is understandable that school boards are hesitant to invest

dollars into an unproven idea.

Until this research is done, educators have little choice but to continue down their same course. An occasional retention of a student is the best solution to a problem that continues to be perplexing.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

April 1, 1983

Dear Elementary Administrator,

The end of the school year is fast approaching. I know you are very busy with all the usual end of year details. Into this hectic schedule, I would like to ask for your assistance.

I am working toward my master's degree in Elementary Administration and am currently working on a study of retention of students in the elementary school. In my study, I am looking at attitudes of administrators toward retention, frequency of retention, and what factors determine whether or not a child should be retained.

I would appreciate very much if you could take a few moments to fill out this questionnaire. I assure you that your responses will be kept confidential and will be destroyed after I have collected the information. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Karol R. Boike



Present grade placement	1	2	3	4	5
Transiency of child	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional problems of child	1	2	3	4	5
Social and cultural background experiences	1	2	3	4	5
Immaturity of child	1	2	3	4	5

5. What is your primary consideration(s) when deciding about a child's retention?

6. Who helps decide if a child should be retained?  
(Check those that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> principal
<input type="checkbox"/> AEA personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> student
<input type="checkbox"/> parent	<input type="checkbox"/> superintendant
<input type="checkbox"/> other (Please name) _____	

7. Who makes the final decision to retain a child?

8. Overall, how successful do you feel your retentions have been?

9. Any other comments you might have about retention of students would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much for your cooperation! I would appreciate if this questionnaire could be returned to me before May 15.

APPENDIX B

Principals' Responses (in Percentages) to Retention Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
Number of school days missed by child	15.0%	18.8%	33.9%	22.6%	11.3%
Child's intelligence	37.7%	32.0%	22.6%	3.7%	3.7%
Present academic level of child	69.8%	18.8%	9.4%	0%	0%
Physical size of child	13.2%	37.7%	32.0%	5.6%	11.3%
Child's age	22.6%	50.9%	24.5%	1.8%	0%
Child's sex	0%	3.7%	15.0%	13.2%	67.9%
Number of siblings	0%	0%	5.6%	18.8%	75.4%
Previous retentions	65.3%	17.3%	11.5%	0%	5.7%
History of learning disabilities	44.2%	26.9%	25.0%	1.9%	1.9%
Child's attitude about retention	11.3%	35.8%	35.8%	11.3%	5.6%
Parent's school participation	7.6%	19.2%	26.9%	17.3%	28.8%
Child's motivation to complete school tasks	15.6%	47.0%	33.3%	3.9%	0%
History of delinquency of child	1.9%	15.3%	30.7%	25.0%	26.9%
Child's knowledge of English language	4.1%	25.0%	27.0%	12.5%	31.2%
Present grade placement	27.7%	42.5%	22.2%	5.5%	1.8%
Transiency of child	7.6%	23.0%	53.8%	7.6%	5.7%
Emotional problems of child	36.5%	34.6%	25.0%	1.9%	1.9%
Social and cultural background experiences	11.3%	28.3%	37.7%	16.9%	5.6%
Immaturity of child	55.7%	42.3%	0%	0%	1.9%

APPENDIX C  
 Small School Principals' Responses (in Percentages)  
 to Retention Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
Number of school days missed by child	16.6%	16.6%	27.7%	16.6%	22.2%
Child's intelligence	27.7%	38.8%	27.7%	5.5%	0%
Present academic level of child	72.2%	11.1%	11.1%	5.5%	0%
Physical size of child	16.6%	27.7%	16.6%	16.6%	22.2%
Child's age	16.6%	38.8%	33.3%	11.1%	0%
Child's sex	0%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%	83.3%
Number of siblings	0%	0%	11.1%	16.6%	72.2%
Previous retentions	50.0%	27.7%	16.6%	0%	5.5%
History of learning disabilities	50.0%	27.7%	22.2%	0%	0%
Child's attitude about retention	27.7%	27.7%	33.3%	5.5%	5.5%
Parent's school participation	16.6%	27.7%	27.7%	16.6%	11.1%
Child's motivation to complete school tasks	17.6%	41.1%	35.2%	5.8%	0%
History of delinquency of child	0%	22.2%	33.3%	16.6%	27.7%
Child's knowledge of English language	0%	26.6%	40.0%	6.6%	26.6%
Present grade placement	22.2%	27.7%	33.3%	11.1%	5.5%
Transiency of child	0%	5.8%	58.8%	17.6%	17.6%
Emotional problems of child	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	5.5%	5.5%
Social and cultural background experiences	11.1%	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	0%
Immaturity of child	55.5%	38.8%	0%	5.5%	0%

APPENDIX D  
 Medium-Sized School Principals' Responses (in Percentages)  
 to Retention Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
Number of school days missed by child	0%	27.7%	27.7%	33.3%	11.1%
Child's intelligence	44.4%	27.7%	16.6%	5.5%	5.5%
Present academic level of child	66.6%	27.7%	5.5%	0%	0%
Physical size of child	11.1%	44.4%	38.8%	0%	5.5%
Child's age	11.1%	66.6%	22.2%	0%	0%
Child's sex	0%	5.5%	33.3%	16.6%	44.4%
Number of siblings	0%	0%	5.5%	22.2%	72.2%
Previous retentions	66.6%	11.1%	11.1%	0%	11.1%
History of learning disabilities	22.2%	27.7%	38.8%	5.5%	5.5%
Child's attitude about retention	11.1%	16.6%	44.4%	22.2%	5.5%
Parent's school participation	0%	5.5%	38.8%	16.6%	38.8%
Child's motivation to complete school tasks	6.2%	56.2%	31.2%	6.2%	0%
History of delinquency of child	0%	5.8%	35.2%	35.2%	23.5%
Child's knowledge of English language	5.5%	22.2%	33.3%	11.1%	27.7%
Present grade placement	22.2%	55.5%	16.6%	0%	5.5%
Transiency of child	5.2%	26.3%	63.1%	0%	5.2%
Emotional problems of child	10.5%	42.1%	42.1%	5.2%	0%
Social and cultural background experiences	6.6%	13.3%	60.0%	6.6%	13.3%
Immaturity of child	38.8%	61.1%	0%	0%	0%

APPENDIX E  
Large School Principals' Responses (in Percentages)  
to Retention Factors

	1	2	3	4	5
Number of school days missed by child	27.7%	11.1%	44.4%	11.1%	5.5%
Child's intelligence	33.3%	33.3%	27.7%	0%	5.5%
Present academic level of child	72.2%	16.6%	11.1%	0%	0%
Physical size of child	11.1%	38.8%	38.8%	5.5%	5.5%
Child's age	38.8%	44.4%	16.6%	0%	0%
Child's sex	0%	0%	5.5%	16.6%	83.3%
Number of siblings	0%	0%	0%	16.6%	83.3%
Previous retentions	82.3%	11.7%	5.8%	0%	0%
History of learning disabilities	61.1%	27.7%	11.1%	0%	0%
Child's attitude about retention	5.5%	61.1%	22.2%	5.5%	5.5%
Parent's school participation	5.8%	23.5%	17.6%	17.6%	35.2%
Child's motivation to complete school tasks	22.2%	38.8%	38.8%	0%	0%
History of delinquency of child	5.5%	16.6%	22.2%	22.2%	33.3%
Child's knowledge of English language	11.7%	29.4%	5.8%	17.6%	35.2%
Present grade placement	33.3%	44.4%	16.6%	5.5%	0%
Transiency of child	11.1%	33.3%	50.0%	5.5%	0%
Emotional problems of child	55.5%	27.7%	16.6%	0%	0%
Social and cultural background experiences	16.6%	33.3%	22.2%	22.2%	5.5%
Immaturity of child	70.5%	23.5%	0%	0%	5.8%