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Retention: The controversy continues

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RETENTION: THE CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate and determine if there existed significant differences in the mathematics and reading achievement levels of students who were retained in sixth grade and their promoted seventh grade counterparts, as measured by grade equivalent (GEQ) scores earned on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The study also sought to discover if being retained raised the academic achievement levels of the retained students. Finally, the study explored the relationship between retention and self-concept using the Student Self-concept Rating Scale (SSCRS).

The sample from the available population consisted of 16 students from a Chicago public middle school. The experimental group consisted of eight students who were retained in sixth grade. There were six females and two males. The control group consisted of eight students who were promoted to seventh grade. There were six females and two males. There were two male teacher study participants and three female teacher participants, who provided qualitative data through semistructured interviews.

The quantitative data analysis included the use of t-tests to determine if statistically significant differences exist between the two groups. Percentages were calculated to present a summary of the scores of each group on the SSCRS. The qualitative data analysis included uncovering common themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews conducted with teacher participants and sixth grade retained students. Comparisons were made of student reading and mathematics scores on the ITBS. The tests were administered when both groups of students were in sixth grade. A further comparison was made of the scores of the retained students during the year of

retention and the sixth grade scores of their now promoted seventh grade counterparts.

The findings revealed that in the area of reading achievement, the ITBS mean GEQ scores of the retained and promoted students student were not statistically significantly different during the year in which both groups were in sixth grade. After spending an additional year in sixth grade, the retained students raised their reading scores by only a half year. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the end of the retention year.

In the area of mathematics achievement the ITBS mean GEQ scores of the retained and promoted students was statistically significantly different during the year in which both groups were in sixth grade. The promoted students outperformed the retained students by a year and a half. After spending an additional year in sixth grade, although the retained students made gains in mathematics, their mean score still did not equal that of their now promoted sixth grade counterparts. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the end of the retention year.

Retained and promoted students were administered the SSCRS. It was expected that there would exist significant differences in the self-concept levels of the retained and promoted students. The quantitative analysis did not support that contention. However, the qualitative interview data revealed a profile that demonstrates a low level of student self-esteem, which is the evaluative component of self-concept.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the prayer warriors, who clearly understood

" . . . with God, all things are possible."

Holy Bible
Gospel of Saint Matthew
Chapter 19 verse 26

Also, to the resilient spirit that characterizes members of the Gray, Williams, and Branson families.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has been called the fourth 'R' (Holmes, 1983). Reading 'riting, 'rithmetic and retention. Retention is the practice of assigning a student to repeat a grade due to a perceived deficiency. For decades, the question of whether retention is the answer to the problems that arise when students do not meet particular academic standards has been raised. Retention research has produced conflicting results. Educators and school districts have been inconsistent in their use of retention and, over the years, the practice has fallen in and out of favor.

Educational Reform, Chicago Style

The practice of retention became favorable for one school district in 1996 when the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Reform Board of Trustees established a new promotion policy for students. The policy was intended to end the practice of social promotion, which is the automatic placement of students in the next grade level in spite of unsatisfactory academic performance. The policy also was intended to raise the level of student achievement in this sizable school system that is comprised of 600 schools, student enrollment of over 435,000, and a total annual operating budget of over $3 billion (Chicago Public Schools, 2002).

The Reform Board designated Grades 3, 6, and 8 as benchmark grades, in which students were required to attain minimum scores in both reading and mathematics on the

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), if they were to be promoted to the next grade level. The ITBS, a general achievement measure, is usually given to students each May. Since the inception of the promotion policy, the minimum scores required for promotion have changed every school year since 1996. The minimum required scores actually changed several times during the 1997 school year because, based on the form of the test used, students could not attain the score designated as the cut-off by CPS (Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton, & Allensworth, 1999).

Students who do not achieve the minimum test scores for promotion are required to attend the "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" (Bridge) academic summer school program and are retested at the end of the program. The Bridge program is an 8-week long, intensely scripted curriculum that focuses on the content of the ITBS. In general, the students attend the program in their home schools.

At the conclusion of the Bridge program, students who obtain the minimum scores in both reading and math are promoted to the next grade level, and those who do not are retained. Retained students are usually retested in January. Third grade students who obtain the minimum scores on the test in January move into fourth grade, sixth graders move into seventh grade, and eighth grade students move into alternative high schools called transition centers.

These transition centers, or academic preparatory centers as they are also called, began in February of 1997 as small schools with a longer school day, double blocks of reading and mathematics, and extra social services. According to Duffrin (1999), the transition centers are intended to be a "safety net for older, low-scoring eighth graders". If students in eighth grade are 15 years old and do not meet the minimum scores on the

ITBS after completion of the Bridge program, they are transferred to the regional transition centers. After students gain the scores required to qualify for an eighth grade diploma, they are eligible to enter regular high schools.

Using the ITBS to Determine Promotion or Retention

Few would argue that schools should not set high academic standards for students. Neither would there be many persons who oppose a system-wide promotion policy. What is problematic, according to House (1998), is that the use of the single test is not a legitimate way to make such a high-stakes decision. He reported that in a September 3, 1998, article in *Newstips*, H. D. Hoover, who heads the ITBS operation, is quoted as saying:

> A single test should never be used as the sole basis to make a decision such as promotion and retention. That's because you have other information available from what the teacher knows . . . the teacher has been with the kids all year, and that should be taken into account. (p. 8)

For CPS to use the ITBS as the sole criteria for promotion is an apparent misuse of the test.

Retention and Academic Achievement

The basis for the Chicago schools' use of retention is a lack of student achievement. There is research evidence to support retention. For example, Alexander, Entwistle, and Dauber (1994) stated, " . . . retention appears to be a reasonably effective practice" (p. ix).

In contrast, House (1998) stated that the research on the negative effects of retention is so overwhelming that the Chicago Reform Board should never have

implemented the promotion policy. According to Shepard and Smith (1989), there are many negative consequences for children who are not promoted:

> Retention does nothing to promote the achievement of the affected individual or the average of the group as a whole, and because the disadvantaged and minority children are most apt to be affected, retention should best be thought of as educational waste to those who most need the benefits of education. Retention has high cost and virtually no value, save the public relations advantages for the schools. (p. 235)

In a political climate in which school reform and accountability are the watchwords of the day, retention is the apparent remedy for what ails the CPS system.

Statement of the Problem

This study will examine whether being retained raises the academic achievement level of students, as intended by the implementation of the promotion policy of the CPS. Academic achievement is measured according to student scores on the ITBS. Although the summer Bridge program curriculum is tied to the ITBS, the curriculum during the retention year is not. It is noted that in the case of CPS, requirements for promotion in the benchmark grades appear to be based singularly on the results of the ITBS in reading and mathematics, not on successful completion of the whole curriculum.

Students generally experience no change in their curriculum during the period of retention. The work tends to be repetitive, and the process of instruction is no different than the previous year. Not only are students forced to repeat the curriculum in which they were unsuccessful the first time, but also there may exist social and emotional consequences for retention.

Therefore, this study will also explore whether there are differences in the self-concept levels of students who have been retained and their counterparts who were promoted. Research indicates that there is a relationship between retention and self-concept. Rankin and Parish (1995) reported that self-concepts are an important attribute in the lives of children and adolescents, since they seem to provide a good general indicator of how one is doing socially and emotionally.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses on student achievement will be investigated:

O = Null

A = Alpha

Hypothesis I

Ho: There will be no significant differences in the achievement levels in reading of students who have been retained in sixth grade when compared with their promoted sixth grade counterparts as measured by their scores on the ITBS.

Ha: There will be a significant difference in the achievement levels in reading of students who have been retained in sixth grade when compared with their promoted sixth grade counterparts as measured by their scores on the ITBS, as determined at the .05 level of statistical significance.

Hypothesis II

Ho: There will be no significant differences in the achievement levels in mathematics of students who have been retained in sixth grade when compared with their promoted sixth grade counterparts as measured by their scores on the ITBS.

Ha: There will be a significant difference in the achievement levels in

mathematics of students who have been retained in sixth grade when compared with their promoted sixth grade counterparts as measured by their scores on the ITBS at the .05 level of statistical significance.

Hypothesis III

Ho: There will be no significant differences in the self-concept level of students who have been retained in the sixth grade and their counterparts who were promoted to the seventh grade as measured by the Student Self-concept Rating Scale (SSCRS).

Ha: There will be a significant difference in the self-concept level of students who have been retained in the sixth grade and their counterparts who were promoted to the seventh grade as determined at the .05 level of statistical significance.

Study Question

This research will also explore for a study question whether being retained raises the academic achievement level of students in reading and mathematics.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study is timely and meaningful, because Chicago reform is being touted as a model for troubled schools around the country. The CPS promotion policy is a critical component of the reform process. Therefore, as much information as possible regarding the consequences of the reform policy should be made available to those seeking to replicate the Chicago experience. An analysis of the impact of retention on the achievement levels and the self-concept of those students who have been held back, with a view toward planning appropriate interventions if needed, may help policymakers make decisions that will benefit educators and students.

Organization of the Study

This study will be presented in five chapters and have the following structure:

1. Chapter I: Introductory Chapter

    A. Introduction

    B. Statement of the Problem

    C. Hypotheses

    D. Purpose and Significance of the Study

2. Chapter II: Review of Literature

3. Chapter III: Methodology

    A. Research Design

    B. Research Site

    C. Protection of Human Research Participants

    D. Population

    E. Sampling

    F. Data Collection

    G. Instruments/Tests

    H. Data Analysis

4. Chapter IV: Findings

5. Chapter V: Summary of Findings, General Discussion: Implications and Recommendations for Further Study.

Definition of Terms

These definitions are operationally defined in the context of this study.

Grade Equivalent Score: Describes a student's score in terms of grade level and

month in which the student is functioning.

Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS): Standardized general achievement tests published by Riverside Publishing Company, designed to measure how well a student has learned the basic knowledge and skills that are taught in elementary schools.

Promotion: Placement in the next consecutive grade for a full school year.

Raw Score: An individual score on a measure as determined by a scoring key, without any further statistical manipulation.

Retention: Used as equivalent term with nonpromotion, flunking, and grade repetition. Meaning repetition of the same grade for a full school year.

Self-concept: "The totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence" (Purkey, 1988, p. 1).

Academic Self-concept: Refers to students' perception of how successful they are in school.

General Self-concept: Refers to students' perception of how good they are overall.

Subject-specific Self-concept: Refers to students' perception of how successful they are in mathematics and reading.

Self-esteem: Refers to how students feel about, or how they value, themselves.

Social Promotion: Policy of automatic promotion to the next grade level for students performing below their current grade level.

Student Self-concept Rating Scale: A nonstandardized measure of student perception of academic achievement and self-worth.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Retention: The Legacy of Graded Schools

From early colonial times, schools in the United States combined students of all ages and varying abilities in one room. There was no differentiation by grade. Grade levels, based on the chronological age of the students, began to replace the nongraded school in the mid-1800's (Harvey, 1994a). It was around 1860 that it became common practice in U.S. schools to group students in grade levels, where promotion depended on mastery of a quota of content (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Having been influenced by the German model of school organization, scholars brought the concept to the United States, and by 1870, buildings, teachers, textbook, curricula, and pupils were part of a graded system (Balow & Schwager, 1990).

Larabee (1984) wrote that American education had previously been more of a small-scale, individualized, self-paced process; advancement being determined by recitations with the teacher. With the advent of universal public education and increased numbers of students in the educational system of common schools, change began to take place. Larabee tells of the dilemma the schools faced now that there was a need to develop a system of instruction that was fiscally, socially, and pedagogically efficient:

> The result was that they abandoned the inefficiency of traditional individualized instruction in favor of the economies of scale embodied in

> the simultaneous instruction of an entire class. . . . Individual craft production gave way to large-scale batch production, which in turn led to batch promotion--cohorts of students of similar age and presumably, similar ability, moving through a progression of educational stages. (p. 69)

This model of school structure was soon adopted throughout United States schools. In Chicago, within 5 years of his appointment in 1856 as superintendent of schools, William Harvey Wells instituted a graded school system and prepared a completely graded curriculum, dividing the 14,199 public school children into 10 grades, plus high school. Superintendent Wells published a book in 1862, *A Graded Course of Instruction with Instructions to Teachers*, which provided detailed instructions on material to be covered in each grade level. Thousands of copies of the book and two later revised versions were sold and the contents adopted as official curriculum all over the northwest states (Herrick, 1971).

This graded curriculum raised the question of what was to be done with students who did not master the content of the curriculum. Harvey (1994a) wrote that obviously all children did not have the same academic skills at the same time, and that some children were neither emotionally nor socially prepared to move to the next level. These concerns were fundamental reasons educators began to practice retention.

After the mid-1800's, retention became a common practice for students who did not master the graded curriculum. By the year 1900, the retention rate for all grades was 16%, even though Harvey (1994b) wrote, "by 1911, studies showed that retention was far from the remedy educators had hoped it would be; they continued its practice because nothing more logically appealing or academically beneficial was available at the time"

(p. 4).

Retaining children raises questions such as whether retention improves academic achievement and whether retention promotes successful school experiences for students. Questions also arise such as which children are likely to be retained and what are the social and emotional effects of retention on these children. What are the implications for school districts that endorse retention or that explicitly use retention as a consequence when establishing standards for promotion?

A Call to End Social Promotion

Social promotion, the practice of automatically advancing students to the next grade level even when their academic performance is below grade level, is a questionable policy. Questions arise about the validity of a high school diploma when students have graduated, lacking in basic academic skills. Questions about social promotion come from teachers who are concerned when students are advanced through grades but do not have the skills to cover grade-level material.

The call to end social promotion has come from the highest levels of our government. In a memorandum written for the Secretary of Education, President Bill Clinton stated:

> At present standards don't count for much. Students are often passed from grade to grade, regardless to whether they have mastered required material and are academically prepared to do work at the next level. . . . That is why I have repeatedly challenged states and school districts to end social promotion--to require students to meet rigorous academic standards at key transition points in their schooling, and to end the practice of promoting

students without regard to how much they have learned. (Department of Education, 1999, p. 1)

State and local leaders alike have joined with those calling for an end to social promotion. Holmes and Saturday (2000) reported that the governors of the states of California, Delaware, Michigan, Texas, and Wisconsin have pledged to eliminate social promotion.

However, there are also voices issuing a warning call to those who would jump on the bandwagon to eliminate social promotion. James and Powell (1998) cautioned that merely abolishing social promotion will not solve the problem. They stated that unless special programs are provided, failing students will simply be recycled, creating 17-year-old junior high school students and producing adults who read on an elementary level.

Support for Retention

Retention is the repetition of the same grade for a full school year. Research overwhelmingly found no benefit to students in academic, social, or personal adjustment realms when they are retained. In fact, many studies have found negative effects associated with retention. Even so, it is evident that those persons most influential in the educational process of students do not base their practice on the evidence of research. Dawson and Rafoth (1991) found that 74% of school administrators, 65% of teachers, and 59% of parents were in favor of retention. In an earlier study, Byrnes (1989) also found that a majority of school principals, teachers, and parents who were interviewed believed retention to be an acceptable way to correct deficient academic skills. Connell and Evans (1992) also stated that parents, teachers, and school administrators prefer to

retain those students who do not meet expected criteria. Anderson and West (1992) found that not only did the parents believe nonpromotion aided academic progress, but the retained students believed it as well.

Decisions about retention are often the province of individual teachers. Their viewpoints on retention influence their choices about whether to retain students. Tomchin and Impara (1992) examined teacher beliefs about retention in Grades K through 7. They found that teachers at those grade levels believe retention to be an acceptable school practice that motivates students to work harder and prevents them from facing daily failure as may result from social promotion.

When students are not performing at a certain grade level, there is concern about what should be done with them. There are those who think retention is the solution. However, Rothstein (1998) wrote that the arguments for retaining students who are below grade level, while they initially sound appealing, are misleading. He cited the arguments that are usually put forth, such as, student motivation to study may decrease if they are automatically promoted. He also references the argument that if students fall behind their peers, and the teacher must spend time on review material, the learning of their peers will be hindered. Rothstein reminded us that there will be a distribution of student performance around an average, regardless of the standard we set for any subject in any grade.

Frequency of Retentions

The practice of retention appears to be cyclical, often resurfacing depending on economic conditions and on the latest movements to effect educational reform. Foster (1993) wrote:

> Responding to the public and political pressure to improve the quality of education, many school districts adopted retention policies and practices over the past decade. Children are "held back" from progressing with their age mates in order to provide them with a "year to grow" or a year to improve their academic performance. (p. 38)

The most recent accountability movement, which began in the early 1980's, appears to have influenced the rise in retentions. According to Roderick (1995), from 1980 to 1992, the national percentage of retained students increased from approximately 20% to nearly 32%. Sheehan, Cryan, Wiechel, and Brandy (1991) reported that 16% of all children in one midwestern state had experienced at least one grade retention by the fourth grade. The American Federation of Teachers (1999) estimated that between 15% and 19% of United States students are retained in grade each year.

This increase in the practice of retention is occurring despite what Doyle (1989) wrote, "There is probably no widespread practice in education today that has been as thoroughly discredited by research" (p. 215). The lessons of research are not reflected in actual school practice in the United States.

Retention and Academic Achievement

Those who favor retention usually cite reasons such as how retention allows students time to mature and provides students with added time to reach a desired degree of competence, resulting in increased levels of academic achievement. In fact, Reynolds (1992) wrote that the purpose of grade retention is to allow students additional time to master academic skills, thus improving school performance.

Although the majority of research regarding the academic achievement level of

retained students indicates that they perform no better than those students of like ability who have been promoted, there are studies that report gains made during the retention year. In a study of the effects of nonpromotion on junior high school students, Lenarduzzi and McLaughlin (1990) found that students who were retained did show significant academic improvement when compared to students of like abilities and characteristics who were arbitrarily promoted. They matched nonpromoted seventh and eighth grade students to a control group of promoted students. They concluded that nonpromotion significantly improved the academic achievement and scholastic effort of the nonpromoted students.

However, in a 1992 follow-up to the 1990 study, Lenarduzzi and McLaughlin evaluated the long-term effectiveness of retention and promotion for much of the original sample. The results of the study indicated that there was no significant difference in the grade point average between the promoted and the retained students. This suggests that what appear to be gains made during a retention year are only temporary and disappear over time.

Similarly, Alexander et al. (1994) contend that their study of students in Baltimore schools demonstrated that students who were retained gained academically and showed no adverse effects in other ways. However, Shepard, Smith, & Marion (1996) examined the same data and concluded that although first grade retainees did improve test scores during the repeated year, they returned to the lowest percentile by the end of the second year.

Holmes and Matthews (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of 44 retention and promotion studies. They examined the impact of promotion or retention on student

achievement, personal adjustment, self-concept, attitudes toward school, behavior, and attendance of elementary and junior high school students. They determined that in all cases, the outcomes were more positive for promoted students than for retained students.

In 1989, Holmes updated the previous synthesis. In this study he analyzed 54 negative and 9 positive studies on promotion versus nonpromotion issues. He concluded that retention had consistent negative effects on students. The most substantial differences were found in the area of academic achievement. Retained students scored about one third standard deviation less than similar students who were promoted.

Recent studies found that increased levels of academic achievement favor promoted students over retained students. Walters and Borgers (1995) wrote that students who have been retained fall behind their lower achieving peers who have been promoted. Karweit (1991) found that promoted and retained students matched on prior achievement levels generally find higher achievement test scores for promoted students when they are compared with retained students of the same age but an earlier grade. When students were measured in different grades but at the same age, promoted students outperform retained students by a wide margin (Holmes, 1989; Reynolds, 1992). In an earlier study, Goodlad (1954) synthesized and summarized the research literature between 1924 and 1948 and concluded that the research showed that retention had no positive effect on educational gains. Jackson (1975) examined the research design of 44 retention studies and concluded that no valid research showed positive effects of retention.

Some proponents of retention believe that retaining students in the early grades--kindergarten and first grade--is less harmful than later retentions. In a study that examined the long-term impact of the effect of being retained in kindergarten or first

grade on seventh and eighth grade academic achievement and self-esteem, Setencich (1994) concluded that, "retention as an intervention is ineffective and that educators who believe they are 'helping' students by holding them back are really making a false assumption" (p. 7).

Similarly, Meisels and Liaw (1993) examined retention in kindergarten through eighth grade and the effects of early versus late retention. They used a sample of students from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. After controlling for prior achievement and family background, they found that retained children had lower standardized test scores and academic grades than promoted students. They also found that students who were retained early, in kindergarten to third grade, were more likely to experience a decline in academic performance than were students who were retained in Grades 4 through 8. They concluded, "retention at any point is associated with less optimal academic and personal-social outcomes" (p. 305).

In 1992 Reynolds conducted the Chicago Longitudinal Study, based on the premise that if retention promotes academic success for students, retention must be superior to grade promotion or other educational strategies. Reynolds studied the effects of retention on the fourth grade adjustment of low-income, inner-city African American and Hispanic children retained in Grades 1 through 3. Reynolds used same-age comparison groups and employed preretention control variables. He concluded that grade retention was significantly associated with lower reading and mathematics achievement scores in the fourth year of school.

McCoy and Reynolds (1999) conducted a follow-up study of children from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, which focused on the effects of retention on school

achievement, perceived school competence, and delinquency. Of the entire study sample, 28% had been retained by age 14. While they found that the rate of delinquency of retained students tended to be lower than that of the same-age comparison group, they found that retention was associated with significantly lower reading and mathematics achievement at age 14, as well as perceived school competence at age 12.

Shepard and Smith (1990) said, "Despite the popular belief that repeating a grade is an effective remedy for students who have failed to master basic skills, the large body of research on grade retention is almost uniformly negative" (p. 84).

Fiscal Implications of Retention

The decision to retain comes with a high price tag. Natale (1991) articulated a concern that retention is a practice that is costly to school districts. Shepard and Smith (1990) wrote,

> Based on an annual retention rate of 6% and a per pupil cost of $4,051 (U.S. Department of Education Center for Education Statistics) . . . American school districts spend nearly $10 billion a year to pay for the extra year of schooling necessitated by retaining 2.4 million students. (p. 87)

Hess, et al. (1978) wrote that by analyzing the cost of retention on a per pupil basis, grade retention gives the district 1 year for the price of 2, since all of the expenses connected to each child are repeated during the retention year. Hess continues, "Can the expenditures be justified when the results are of questionable value?" (p. 160).

House (1998) described retention expenditures in Chicago, stating that it will cost the district $ 4,641 per year per student. If 10,000 elementary school children are

retained, the annual cost will be 46 million dollars. House also reported that summer school in Chicago cost $25 million in 1996, $34 million in 1997, and $42 million in 1998. With an additional $12 million dollars for teacher personnel and after-school programs for retained students, House estimates that Chicago's retention program is costing over $100 million per year.

Balow and Schwager (1990) also cited the need for additional teachers, facilities and materials when children are retained. They approximate the rate of increased expenditures is parallel to the rate of retention, i.e., a 7% retention rate results in a 7% increase in costs. They stated that the costs can be justified, provided retention is proven to be helpful to the retained students, effective in maintaining standards, the integrity of the curriculum or the maintenance of discipline. However, if retention accomplishes none of these and is primarily a financial burden on the taxpayer and the educational system, they recommend that it should be abandoned. In fact, Norton (1990) wrote, "If the results of the retention of students were positive in regard to achievement and personal development, perhaps the monetary costs would be a small price to pay for improved learning for students" (p. 204).

Norton (1990) noted that over the past 80 years, retention research has made it apparent that retention does not increase student learning or learning readiness. Neither does it improve socialization and tends to promote problems in student discipline. The high cost of retention is not limited to dollars spent.

Eide and Showalter (1999) found that

> . . . estimates of the effect of grade retention . . . on labor market earnings suggest a negative and statistically significant relationship between

repeating a grade and the outcomes. These findings represent the gross effect of grade retention . . . on earning, and do not reflect the cost associated with financing an additional year for a child who repeats, nor do they capture the foregone earnings associated with the individual's delayed entry into the workforce. (p. 309)

Consideration should also be given to the fact that one retention will cost a child a year of his or her life (Smith & Shepherd, 1987). Foster (1993) stated, "Retention is costly--not only in terms of tax dollars, but also the children's well being. The children being held back pay with a year of their lives and possible continued academic, social and emotional problems" (p. 38). Rothstein (1998) concurred and stated that retention costs the retained student, whose demoralization at having been failed may hinder further academic progress.

Retention and School Dropouts

One of the goals of grade retention is that students are given an extra year to "catch up," thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful school experience. In reality, remaining in grade for an additional year increases the risk of students dropping out of school. Prior studies document that there is a strong correlation between retention and dropping out of school (Doyle, 1989; Holloman, 1990; Moran, 1989, Nason, 1991; Natale, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1989).

Grissom and Shepard (1989) found that retention significantly increases the probability of dropping out, after controlling for prior achievement, sex and race. They said, " . . . repeating a grade is a highly visible act which separates a student from his age-peers. Therefore, having been retained is expected to have a direct effect on dropping

out, over and above the effect of achievement" (p. 44). They also found that in one southwestern state, repeating a grade increased a White female's chances of dropping out of school by 17% and an African American male's chances of dropping out by 38%.

Roderick (1995) reported high dropout rates among retained students. She wrote that the proportion of over age students entering high school has risen almost 40% since 1975, and that repeating a grade from kindergarten to sixth grade is associated with a substantial increase in the odds of these over age students dropping out of school. Roderick explained three aspects of the retention experience that cause students to drop out. She stated that first, as a remediation strategy, retention is not effective. Secondly, she believes that retention sends a strong message to students that the teacher and school view him or her as a failure. Third, she stated that retention makes a student overage for grade and increases the likelihood that the student will become frustrated and disengaged from school, thereby decreasing his or her chances for a successful school experience. Overage students are candidates for dropping out (Anderson, 1990; Hahn, 1987).

A majority of research evidence finds that retention is associated with early school leaving. House (1998) cites prior research in Chicago that provides evidence that failing a grade is correlated to dropping out of school later. Retention is as strong a determinant as low achievement, especially in reading, as to whether a student will drop out of school. He wrote,

> The level of reading achievement and the student being overage (an indicator of flunking) were the best predictors that the student would drop out (Hess & Lauber, 1985). The dropout rate was 37% for those not retained, 59% for those retained once, and 69% for those retained twice.

> This study (Hess & Lauber) also concluded that students who were retained in elementary school were more likely to drop out, even when the retained student was reading significantly better than a student who entered high school at the normal age. (p. 13)

These conclusions are corroborated by Harrington-Lueker (1998), who wrote that research has consistently demonstrated that the number of times a student has been retained in grade is a strong predictor of whether that student will drop out of school. Miller, Allensworth, and Kochanek (2002) of the Consortium on Chicago School Research reported that roughly a quarter of all students sent to academic preparatory centers drop out in their first year.

Retention and Social and Psychological Adjustment

Self-concept is a complex system of beliefs, perceptions, and opinions one holds about himself or herself. Student self-evaluation is developed largely through the messages they receive from sources such as parents, peers, teachers, and significant persons within their school environment. School experiences, including social interactions with peers and adults, and experiences of success or failure also help to shape the students' view of themselves. Although retention is widely believed to create a sense of failure within a child, there are those who have a different opinion.

For example, Ubelhart and Walkup (1994) said that students should be retained because when they are not, they "usually move through each grade slowly, losing more academic ground each year. Falling so far behind makes them feel stupid, and they develop a dislike for themselves" (p. 39). In this case the researchers believe promotion, rather than retention, would cause the student to experience a sense of failure.

Likewise, in a longitudinal study of public school students which tracked the academic progress and socioemotional development of students, Alexander et al. (1994), stated, "We have detected no emotional scars from the retention experience. In fact, because of their improved performance, repeaters' self-confidence went up, not down" (p. ix).

However, other studies support the view that retention actually makes students lose self-confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, low achievement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Goodlad, 1954; French & Nelhaus 1990; Purkerson & Whitfield 1981). Self-esteem is the evaluative component of self-concept, referring to how students feel about or how they value themselves. For a student to be retained as a result of unsatisfactory academic performance is an inarguably strong message from the most significant influences in his or her environment: that the child is a failure. Retention, therefore, may have a negative effect on subsequent academic performance.

While some studies show that retained students are not better off psychologically than their promoted peers (Holmes & Matthews, 1984), others show that the psychological effects of retention are negative (French & Nelhaus, 1990; Shepard & Smith, 1987). Sherwood (1993) wrote that the 1988 Delegate Assembly of the National Association of School Psychologists adopted the following position statement:

> The retention of students, while widely practiced, is in large measure not substantiated by sound research. The cumulative evidence indicates retention decisions cannot be validated using any standardized or competency-based tests and that retention can negatively affect achievement and social-emotional adjustment. (n.p.)

In a frequently cited and quoted study, Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) wrote that retained students who were interviewed perceived retention as a punishment and stigma, not as a policy designed to help them. Next to blindness and the death of a parent, children rate the idea of retention as most stressful. Smith and Shepard (1987) said, "No matter how sensitively teachers and parents handle the retention, the children understand that they are being taken from their age-mates because of some failure. This upsets them and causes them to feel shame" (p. 130). While Byrnes (1989) reported that only 6% of retained students gave positive answers regarding their feelings about retention, such as "it lets you learn more" and "it lets you catch up", interviews with both retained and high-achieving students revealed that students shared the perception that retention is the result of either being bad in class or student failure to learn.

Other studies also support the view that retention has a negative effect on the self-concept of children (Bocks, 1977; Holloman, 1990; Larabee, 1984; Nason, 1991; Natale, 1991; Smith & Shepard, 1989). Children who are held back exhibit lower self-concepts and achievement (Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987).

Fine (1991) interviewed youth who dropped out of school. One who had experienced retention had this to say:

> I wanted to get in my right grade 'cause every class I'm in, I'm older than all the kids 'cause I was held back in fifth. So that's what really put me down, being older than the others. I said, if I'm older than all the kids in fifth, imagine how I will feel in sixth! (p. 73)

Goodlad (1954) conducted a study of social attitudes in promoted and

nonpromoted students and found that there was a general decline in social attitudes for the retained students. He also found that students who were promoted reported experiencing less peer rejection than did retained students. Setencich (1994) focused on comparing seventh and eighth grade students who were retained in kindergarten or first grade to students who had not experienced retention. Self-esteem was measured using the Self-esteem Inventory School Form. Setencich said, "This study supported the hypothesis that the retained students had significantly lower academic achievement and self-esteem scores than the promoted pupils" (p. 7). Similarly, other studies have concluded that retention has a negative effect on student self-esteem (Bocks, 1977; Bossing & Brien, 1979; Moran, 1989).

In contrast, Finlayson (1975), in a longitudinal study on the self-concept of promoted, nonpromoted, and borderline primary grade students, stated, " . . . it seems clear that the fact of nonpromotion with the subsequent repeating of the first grade experience did not negatively affect the self-concept of the primary grade pupils" (p. 12). In fact, Finlayson reported finding an increase in self-concept of students after retention, based on the results of the self-concept measures and questionnaires used in the data collection process. Having surveyed teachers and parents, as well as students, Finlayson reported that 91% of parents reported improved overall attitudes of students toward school. Finlayson reported that these parents also attached no stigma to their children because of nonpromotion.

In a study of retained students in Grades 3 through 6, Pierson and Connell (1992) reported finding evidence that retained students did not differ significantly from the comparison group in perceptions of self-worth. The results suggested that there were no

significant differences in general self-worth among the four comparison groups in their study. They also reported that the results suggest that retention was not harmful to the general self-worth of the retained subjects in the sample.

Pomplun (1988) reported that although retained intermediate and secondary students demonstrated decreases in self-esteem, primary grade students' self-concept level appeared stable over a 2-year postretention period. Although they predicted regularly promoted students would have higher self-concepts than retained students, Plummer and Graziano (1987) found the opposite to be true. However, they wrote that one possibility in higher self-esteem ratings of retained children may reflect defensive responding. They also suggest that grade retention may enhance self-evaluation because " . . . it provides retained children some success experiences through social comparisons. Children who have been retained are placed in classrooms where the work should be repetitive. Hence they may perform better than they did previously" (p. 274).

Although adolescent problem behaviors, including delinquency, drug use, and dropping out of school, have been linked to grade retention, Gottfredson, Fink, and Graham (1994) reported that subjects in their study appeared not to have the social adjustment costs anticipated by many. "Our results imply that, if retention has any effect at all, it is to reduce rebellious behavior and increase attachment to school during the retained year (p. 778).

Characteristics of Retained Students

Who are these retained children? According to Bishop (1993), there are different subpopulations of students within the total student population who are prone to failure in school. Bishop concluded that there exist five categories of retained students:

1. The gifted but bored student, who lacks motivation.

2. The learning impaired student, who might traditionally be labeled as a "slow" learner, where school is a source of negative feelings and repeated failure.

3. The disinvited/alienated student, whose school experience is characterized by frustration, anger, and disappointment, who blames the educational system for failing to meet his/her need.

4. The academic acrobat, who may perform close to grade level, but whose inappropriate classroom behaviors and poor study habits are causes of academic difficulty.

5. The traumatized student, who has had difficult life experiences which have had a direct impact on his or her educational progress.

Foster (1993) wrote that not only does the education literature suggest negative outcomes of retention, including academic, social and emotional, but there is strong evidence that certain children have an increased likelihood of experiencing retention: "This inequality is in direct contradiction of equal access to education and equal treatment of all people" (p. 41).

The inequality manifests itself in demographic data that show retained students tend to come from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, more than their promoted counterparts (Thomas et al., 1992). Retained children are more often male, African American, with parents who are less educated than those of promoted students, according to Dauber, Alexander, and Entwisle (1993).

Kunjufu (1995) stated that some teachers lower their expectations based on the combination of student race, gender, income level, and attire, which places them "at risk"

of failure. These lowered expectations may account for why some students initially fall behind. In fact, Ogbu (1974, 1994) wrote that the way African American students are perceived and treated results in unequal educational outcomes. Teachers set low standards for students of perceived deprived backgrounds.

Meisels and Liaw (1993) examined data on 16,623 public school students. They found that out of a total of 19.3% of those students who had experienced retention, minority students were retained in significantly higher proportions than White students. They reported that 29.9% of the African American students and 25.2% of the Hispanic students, as compared with 17.2% of the White students, had been retained. They found that boys were retained at a higher rate than girls--24% to 15.3%. They also found that 33% of those retained came from the lowest quarter socioeconomic status families as compared with 8.6 from the highest quarter socioeconomic status families. Shepard and Smith, (1989) wrote, "Because the disadvantaged and minority children are most apt to be affected, retention should be best thought of as educational waste and the denial of life chances to those who most need the benefits of education" (p. 235). Because students more likely to be retained are poor, minority, and male, it is recommended that unfair school policies should be challenged in the judicial system (House, 1989; Smith & Shepard, 1989; Stroup & Zirkel, 1983).

Retention as Educational Policy

When students are retained in grade, the school system is, in effect, accepting none of the responsibility for their failure. The blame for the failure is placed entirely on the students (Lehr, 1982; Koons, 1977). Cooke and Stammer (1985) maintained:

Failing, retained, socially promoted, or inappropriately placed students are

symptoms of an educational system that is suffering from serious malfunctions. It is a system where retention practices habitually focus on the child as the problem rather than looking at the shortcomings of the system as a possible contributing failure. (p. 302)

Tightening standards and promotion from grade to grade is reflective of the political and reform climate (Karweit, 1991). Ushered in under the banner of school reform in Chicago, the practice of retention, although thought by some to be well meant, is viewed differently by others such as House (1998) who told how programs and policies that hurt minorities are acceptable to Americans:

> Chicago would not have its retention program if Chicago's students were not 89% minority. By contrast, a survey of 15 Chicago suburban districts indicated that those suburban districts retained fewer than 1% of their students (Ryndar, 1997). It is the inner city with large minority populations where these harmful programs are implemented en masse. (p. 18)

Promotion policy decisions based on inflexible criteria, such as minimum competency testing, where the test results take precedence over any other information known about a student, were described by Hess and Bingham (2000) as a double-edged sword:

> The promise of high-stakes tests is that they can set a clear and challenging hurdle for students and for schools. High-stakes testing that has real consequences can motivate significant educational improvement. In doing so, however, such testing puts the state in the business of labeling

significant numbers of students as "failures". (p. 26)

Riverside Publishing (2000) explained that minimum skills have incorrectly been equated with basic skills. They stated, "Basic skills are to be the entire range of skills a student needs to progress satisfactorily through school" (p. 15). The publisher is adamant in stating that basic skills are not minimum skills and never will be.

FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2002a), described dangerous consequences for policies emphasizing high-stakes standardized testing. They stated that high-stakes tests are unfair to students who do not have access to adequate and equitable education such as students who do not test well, students who attend poorly funded schools, and students with learning disabilities.

FairTest (2002b) also contended that the damage caused by using norm-referenced tests, such as the ITBS, is far greater than any possible benefits the tests provide. They stated that the main purpose of these tests is to rank and sort students, not to determine whether the students have learned the material they have been taught. They continued to say that test standards and major research groups, such as the National Academy of Sciences, clearly state that major educational decisions should not be based solely on a test score. In a high-stakes testing environment, the limit to educational improvement is largely dictated by the tests, but the tests are a poor measure of high-quality curriculum and learning. FairTest, like House (1998) stated that in particular, the emphasis on testing hurts low-income students and students from minority groups.

New York's Promotional Gates

Chicago is not the first sizeable school district to implement a promotion policy

and program based on rigid standards of achievement. One such failed program is the Promotional Gates initiative implemented by New York City in 1981. Smith and Shepard (1987) described such programs as "instituting 'promotional gates' that swing open when pupils pass tests and slam shut when they fail" (p. 129).

According to House (1998), New York City initially targeted fourth and seventh grade students who were unable to meet a required cut-off score on citywide reading tests. These students were required to attend summer school, and if they still did not attain the cut-off scores, they were retained at grade level and assigned to special, reduced-size classrooms. The following year, the Promotional Gates program was extended to other subjects and grade levels.

House (1998) wrote about the findings of the evaluation of the program. He said that after 2 years, the test scores of students who had been retained under Promotional Gates were compared to those of similar low-achieving students from previous years who had not been retained. They found no substantial differences between the students who had been retained and those who had previously been promoted before the advent of the program. House said, "In other words, students did just as well if they were passed and received the education provided before Promotional Gates existed" (p. 3).

House (1998) told of how students failed to make the cut-off scores after being retained for a year, 2 years, and in some cases, up to 3 years. He said,

> The school district faced the prospect of having to promote these students or having students shaving in fourth grade. The Promotional Gates Program began to look like the Boulder Dam program, with tens of thousands of students backed up at the fourth and seventh grades. (p. 4)

House reported the quiet demise of this program as a new head of schools replaced the chancellor of schools who implemented the program.

Based on the evidence of research and the history of similar failed programs, the CPS policy to retain students in grade is a questionable one. Therefore, a closer look at the effects of the implementation of the CPS policy is warranted. Roderick et al. of the Consortium on Chicago School Research did take a closer look and published *Ending Social Promotion: The Results From The First Two Years* (1999).

Roderick et al. (1999) examined the CPS effort to end social promotion during the years 1997 and 1998. They compared the ITBS scores of the third, sixth, and eighth grade students who were required to meet minimum scores for promotion during this time period with a previous group of same-grade students. They found that overall, more students had test scores that met the minimum cut-off for promotion, and that participation in the summer Bridge program accounted for a large proportion of the improvements in the passing rates. However, they also stated that large test score gains in the summer Bridge program were not followed by improved performance in the next year.

When reporting the progress of the students who were retained under the promotion policy, Roderick et al. (1999) found that three fourths of retained eighth grade students and two thirds of retained third and sixth grade students did not make "normal" progress during the retention year. They reported that retained students did not do better than previously socially promoted students.

The result of the CPS decision to retain students in grade to improve their academic performance was also examined. On this aspect of the promotion policy,

Roderick et al. (1999) stated,

> In short, Chicago has not solved the problem of poor performance among those who do not meet the minimum test cutoffs and are retained. Both the history of prior attempts to redress poor performance with retention and previous research would clearly have predicted this finding. (p. 53)

There is a substantial amount of interest in the topic of retention, and the vast quantity of literature supports that high interest. The literature ranged from studies that claim retention is beneficial (Alexander et al., 1994) to studies that show retention is ineffective and has negative effects on students (Norton, 1990; Robertson, 1997; Berliner & Casanova, 1986; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Niklason, 1984). To summarize, a few studies have shown retention to be beneficial to some students. However, the evidence of research is overwhelmingly in favor of using strategies other than retention to address poor academic performance (Harvey, 1994b; Shepard, Smith, & Marion, 1996).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design since nonrandomized groupings were used. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) wrote, "This type of experiment, if carefully designed, yields useful knowledge" (p. 506).

To add depth and dimension to the study, a multimethod approach is used. An observational case study utilizing qualitative methods of inquiry is a component of the design. These qualitative methods include observations and semistructured interviews of the student and teacher participants in the study. Rubin and Rubin (1995) wrote, "Qualitative interviewing is a great adventure; every step of an interview brings new information and opens windows into the experiences of the people you meet" (p. 1).

Quantitative and qualitative methods are complementary if correctly used. This is especially applicable when conducting research with children, according to Greig and Taylor (1999), " . . . because we acknowledge the complex nature of children, we actively encourage the consideration of research designs which use both frameworks" (p. 49).

Research Site

The study was conducted in a Chicago public middle school that serves students in Grades 4 through 8. It is considered to be a medium-sized school based on an average

enrollment of 500 students. According to the State of Illinois School Report Card for the year 2000, 85.9% of the students are designated low-income based on qualification for federal free lunch funding. The racial/ethnic background of the student population is 99.6% African American, 0.2% Hispanic, and 0.2% Asian/Pacific Islander.

The school is located on the far south side of Chicago in a neighborhood experiencing many of the problems associated with low socio-economic status urban communities. High incidences of unemployment, crime, and illegal drug-related issues are challenges for the area residents and the schools. In spite of these challenges, the school has a motto that places an emphasis on striving for excellence.

The school physical plant is a large, well kept brownstone building. There is colorful playground equipment in the schoolyard, but it goes largely unused during the day because it is a closed-campus school, meaning that once students have arrived at school, they are not permitted to leave the building until the end of their school day. The interior environment of the school is adorned with Afro-centric displays of masks, carvings, and artifacts as befitting a school that places an emphasis on the fine arts.

There is a departmentalized instructional program at the seventh and eighth grade levels, meaning that students are assigned to a homeroom for some instruction, but have different teachers for other subjects. Students are grouped homogeneously in Grades 4, 5, and 6 by reading scores. There are accelerated classes for students classified as academically gifted, and there are reduced membership classes for students who are in need of additional academic assistance.

There are a total of 31 teachers. There are 21 female and 10 male teachers.

Protection of Human Research Participants

The research proposal and forms for this study were submitted to the DePaul University Local Review Board of the School of Education for approval of this investigation because human subjects are involved. The documents were approved by the Local Review Board and submitted to the Institutional Review Board for university approval. The Institutional Review Board evaluated and granted full approval for the study to proceed.

Population

The experimentally accessible population in this study is comprised of sixth and seventh grade students and teachers. These students were chosen because sixth grade is one of three benchmark grades required to achieve minimum scores on the ITBS to be promoted to the next grade level.

Sampling

The sample was selected from the available population. A total of 16 students make up the sample. They are African American students ranging in age from 12 to 14. All of the students are designated as low income. Eight of those are students who are retained at the sixth grade level, as a result of not meeting the minimum cut-off scores in reading or mathematics on the ITBS. This experimental group is comprised of two males and six females.

Eight of their promoted counterparts, now in the seventh grade, comprise the control group. The seventh grade students with passing test results on the May 2000 or August 2000 ITBS, were randomly selected from two seventh grade classrooms. They were further matched with the sixth graders on gender.

The classroom teachers of the sixth grade retained students ($n = 2$) and the classroom, mathematics, and reading teachers of their seventh grade promoted counterparts ($n = 3$) are included in the study. All five of the teachers are African American. There are three female and two male teachers. Of these five teachers, two of the seventh grade teachers are certified and have completed teacher preparation programs. The two sixth grade teachers and one of the seventh grade teachers do not have standard elementary school teaching certificates and are classified as substitute teachers.

Data Collection Method

A letter was given to the principal of the school requesting that members of the school community participate in the study, allowing the researcher to have access to students and teachers in the sixth and seventh grades who meet the requirements of the study. The legal department of CPS was sent correspondence, asking to approve the administration of a survey, conducting of interviews, and the examination of student records.

Student promotion status was confirmed by conferring with the principal and classroom teachers. Letters requesting consent for the students and their teachers to participate in the study were distributed by the researcher. The students were instructed to return the consent forms to their classroom teachers. The classroom teachers collected the completed consent forms and returned them to the researcher.

The records of the mathematics and reading results of the students' past ITBS tests were obtained from the students' cumulative records. The cumulative record cards also provided the grades in reading and mathematics given by the classroom teachers. Pertinent data was recorded on the Student Participant Data Collection Form (see

Appendix F).

The 16 student participants were administered the SSCRS in a group setting on a single day at the research site. The researcher, to facilitate student comprehension of the questions, administered the survey orally, as the students read along silently and responded to each item by appropriately marking their survey booklets. One research assistant monitored the student respondents during the survey session. The researcher and assistant collected the surveys at the conclusion of the session. The researcher scored the surveys, and recorded the raw scores on the Student Participant Data Collection Form.

Qualitative data were gathered through semistructured interviews with the students and teachers, according to methodology suggested by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). The interviews took place at the research site during hour-long periods of time set aside for this purpose by the school administrators. First, the researcher and the students engaged in casual conversation for the purpose of helping the students feel at ease. Next, the interviewer used an eight question protocol (see Appendix G) to enable the students to share their views on their schooling and on how they have been impacted by retention.

The teacher interviews took place at the research site at times designated by the teachers, with the approval of the school administrator. The interviews were approximately 1 hour in duration. As with the student participants, the researcher and the teachers engaged in casual conversation to break the ice before proceeding to the interviews. The interviewer employed a 14-question protocol (see Appendixes H and I), asking follow-up questions when appropriate. Teachers were asked to share their views on the performance levels of their students and on the practice of retention.

Teacher and student interviews were recorded on audiotape to allow the

conversations to be conducted more naturally. After the tapings, the audiotapes were taken to a transcriber. Typed copies of the conversations were made available to the teacher participants to clarify or further explain their responses.

Data collection included informal conversations with school administrators on academic interventions, if any, which are in place for the students. The researcher recorded pertinent information in a journal. All collected data were securely stored at the residence of the researcher.

Instruments/Tests

ITBS

The instrument used to measure academic achievement was the ITBS. Each spring, students in Chicago schools are administered the ITBS. The ITBS is a nationally normed, standardized general achievement measure. According to its printer, Riverside Publishing (1998), "the primary purpose of using the Iowa Tests is to provide information that can be used to improve instruction" (p.4).

Reviewers for the Buros Institute of Mental Measures consider the ITBS to be one of the better achievement batteries available. They discuss how the Kuder Richardson 20 reliabilities for the subtests and total scores have high reliability coefficients of around .90 (Brookhart, 1998; Cross, 1998). Riverside Publishing attempted to establish content validity for the ITBS, according to Salvia and Ysseldyke (2001), through using curriculum guides, textbooks, and research. However, the ultimate decision on content validity must be made by individual users of the test (Salvia & Ysseldyke; Brookhart; Cross; Riverside Publishing, 1998).

The tests consist of articulated levels, ranging from kindergarten through eighth

grade, more or less corresponding to the ages of the children who will take them (Brookhart, 1998). Riverside Publishing recommends the use of Levels 9 through 14 for Grades 3 through 9, which applies to the research site, since it serves students in Grades 4 through 8. Sixth grade students were administered Level 12 of the ITBS.

Riverside publishes several forms of the test, Form K, Form L, and Form M, which they stated are equated, although each contains different items (Riverside Publishing, 1998). According to a representative of the company, their forms are renamed by the CPS for security purposes to prevent general knowledge of which form of the test will be administered from year to year. The ITBS results in this study are from CPS Form 93 used in May 2000 and CPS Form 94, used both in August 2000 and May 2001.

The sample population for this study, students in the sixth and seventh grades, were administered a battery of tests that assess basic curricular areas, to include reading, language, mathematics, social studies, science, and sources of information. Their teachers administered the tests in a group setting to students in their classrooms.

According to the CPS publications *Guidelines for Promotion* (1999-2000 and 2000-2001), promotion for the sixth grade is based, in part, on the grade equivalent (GEQ) composite scores received on the mathematics and reading tests. The mathematics composite scores consist of scores attained on the subtest categories of math concepts and estimation, problem solving and data interpretation, and computation (Riverside Publishing, 1998). The minimum mathematics scores required for promotion in the 1999-2000 school year and the summer Bridge program was 5.5 GEQ. The minimum scores required for promotion in mathematics for the 2000-2001 school year was 6.0

GEQ. It should be noted that the cut-off scores are selected by CPS, not by the test publisher. Riverside Publishing does not recommend test scores be used to make promotion decisions. In fact they stated, "Inappropriate use of the test include . . . to retain students at grade level . . . " (p. 10).

Reading comprehension consists of select passages on the ITBS. The minimum reading score required for promotion in the 1999-2000 school year and summer Bridge program was 5.5 GEQ. The minimum reading score required for promotion in the 2000-2001 school year was 6.0 GEQ.

After completion, the tests are taken to CPS central office to be scored. Students who do not reach the minimum requirements are required to attend the summer Bridge program and are retested at the conclusion of the program. Students are retained or allowed to proceed to the next grade level based on whether they attain the cutoff scores determined by CPS. In addition to the use of the ITBS to measure academic achievement, self-concept was examined using the SSCRS.

Student Self-concept Rating Scale

The SSCRS is a 20-item rating scale designed to measure the perceived self-concept of students. This scale is a modified compilation of items from the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965), FACES scale (also called Attitudes Towards School), and primarily Harter's Self-perception Profile for Children (1985).

Harter's Self-perception Profile for Children (1985) is a 36-item rating scale which taps children's judgment on their self-adequacy and competence in five specific domains--scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct--and also in the domain of global self-worth. The

scale is appropriate for students above the third grade level.

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965) is used to measure adolescent global feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance. It is a 10-item Likert-like scale with items answered on a four-point response scale from *agree* to *strongly disagree*.

Frymier's (1975) FACES scale is an 18-item scale designed for research use. It assesses self-concept in young children in the domains of school, social relationships, physical development, and home life. The items are administered orally, and the child responds by marking a sad or happy face, according to his or her feelings.

The SSCRS (see Appendix J) is a modified version of Harter's (1982) scale designed to meet the needs of the target population in this study and to collect specific content area data. Certain items were modified to improve clarity. Harter's scale does not necessarily involve competence in the form of actual skills. Therefore, the SSCRS includes items from the FACES scale that specifically address reading and mathematics competence.

Items on the SSCRS use the format of Harter's (1982) scale which consists of two alternative statements that allow students to decide which statement is "sort of true" of them or "really true" of them. This format was selected to provide students the opportunity to respond in other than a true/false or yes/no format to reduce the possibility of student respondents making socially desirable choices.

Each item is scored on a scale from 1 to 4, where a score of 1 indicates the most negative judgment and 4 reflects the most positive judgment. The wording of scale items varies. In some cases the most positive statements are on the right and in others the most positive statements are on the left. Thus items with the most positive description on the

left are scored 4, 3, 2, 1; whereas the item scores with the most positive description on the right are scored 1, 2, 3, 4.

For example, in the SSCRS sample question, "Some students have a lot of friends, but other students don't have very many friends," the student who first indicates that he/she is most like the student who has a lot of friends and then describes this as "sort of true" for him/her would receive a three (3). The student who indicates that he or she is like the students who don't have very many friends and then describes this as "really true" for him or her receives a one (1).

The scale contains eight items that will measure general self-concept. There are 12 items on the scale that measure academic self-concept. Three of these twelve items are content area specific in mathematics, and three are content area specific in reading self-concept measures.

Qualitative data were gathered from sixth grade retained students and teacher participants using protocols to guide semistructured interviews. The teacher interview guide (Appendixes H and I) consists of 4 questions eliciting teacher description and experience information and 10 questions designed to obtain teacher opinions on aspects of schooling for the student study participants. The student guide (Appendix G) consists of eight questions designed to elicit student opinions on a variety of aspects of their schooling. Appropriate follow-up questions were asked, based on participant responses. The data analysis from the use of these instruments is presented in the following section.

Data Analysis

The data from the ITBS (Forms CPS93 and CPS94) were analyzed using t-tests to determine if significant differences exist between the reading and mathematics scores of

the two groups as stated in Hypotheses I and II. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) wrote that in general, educational researchers choose to reject the null hypothesis if tests of significance reach a level of $p<.05$.

The data from student responses on the SSCRS were analyzed using t-test to determine if significant differences exist between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group on each of the four subscales. Percentages were used to further analyze student responses on each question within the SSCRS. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated to validate the reliability of the SSCRS.

The computer software instrument that was used in the analysis and organization of quantitative data is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 10.0. SPSS generated t-value data and Levene's test for equality of variances, which is a test for the homogeneity of variance assumption.

The data obtained from taped semistructured interviews with teachers and students were transcribed, and typed copies of the interview data were examined by the researcher. Through reading the student and teacher interview data and listening to the audiotapes, common themes emerged from the data. The researcher identified and delineated themes by color-coding on the typed copies. The data were then synthesized and presented in narrative form.

Chapter IV presents the analyses and results derived from the statistical treatment of data and the themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

A major purpose of this study is to explore whether there are significant differences in the achievement levels in reading and mathematics of students who have been retained in sixth grade when compared with their sixth grade counterparts, now promoted to seventh grade, as measured by their scores on the ITBS. This study also explores whether retained students made academic gains in reading and mathematics, based on test data from May 2000, August 2000 Bridge, and May 2001. Finally, this study examines whether there are differences in the self-concept levels of students who have been retained and their counterparts who were promoted, as measured by their responses on the SSCRS. The SSCRS is scored on a scale of 1 to 4, where a score of 1 indicates the most negative self-judgment and 4 reflects the most positive self-judgment. Qualitative data, where students and their teachers were asked to share their views on schooling, were gathered through semistructured interviews.

In this chapter, the results of quantitative and qualitative data analyses are presented. The quantitative data are presented in four main sections that address the three research hypotheses and the study question. The data are presented through the use of tables, charts, and graphs. The qualitative data are divided into two main sections. The first section presents an analysis of teacher responses to interview questions, and the

second section presents an analysis of student responses to interview questions. The data are organized according to themes that emerged during the interviews.

Five major themes emerged from the interviews with teachers. These include (a) teacher methods of instruction, (b) teacher perceptions of parental involvement and student success, (c) teacher perceptions of student motivation on academic progress, (d) teacher beliefs in the efficacy of retention, and (e) teacher perceptions of the social and emotional effects of retention.

Five major themes emerged from the interviews with student participants. These include (a) student opinions on their ability, (b) student opinions on teacher roles, (c) student academic achievement and improvement, (d) social and emotional effects of retention, and (e) student resilience.

The data and the quantitative analysis are presented first. The themes from the qualitative interviews follow.

Quantitative Analysis

The analyzed data consist of results from the reading and mathematics batteries of the ITBS from the school years 1999-2000 for retained and promoted students and 2000-2001 for the retained students. The May 2000 test data, the August 2000 Bridge test data, and the May 2001 test data were analyzed for the retained students. The May 2001 SSCRS outcomes for the retained and promoted students were also analyzed.

Hypothesis I: Analysis of Reading Achievement

Comparison of Student ITBS Reading Scores

There were two comparisons made between the retained and the promoted students in the area of reading achievement. The ITBS scores in reading for the academic

year 1999-2000 for both groups of students were compared. The second comparison of ITBS reading scores for the academic year 1999-2000 for promoted students and 2000-2001 for retained students was made. The comparisons were made to test Hypothesis I, which asks whether there are significant differences in the reading achievement levels of the retained and promoted students.

ITBS Reading Comparison 1999-2000

Table 1 displays individual ITBS 1999-2000 reading scores for the retained and promoted students when both groups were in sixth grade. Although there is a difference in the total scores of 4.0, favoring the promoted students, there is a wider range of individual scores within the retained group. The data are further analyzed in Table 2.

Table 1

Display of Retained and Promoted Student ITBS Reading Scores for Year 1999-2000

Retained	Promoted
5.2	5.7
6.3	6.0
6.9	4.6
5.9	6.2
4.6	5.0
4.2	5.4
3.4	6.2
5.2	6.6
41.7	45.7

Note. Difference = 4.0.

Table 2 shows the analysis of ITBS GEQ scores. The mean reading score of the students who would be retained, 5.2, did not equal that of the students who would be promoted, 5.7. The probability level of 0.31 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of the students. The null hypothesis could not be rejected. Although the mean difference between the students shows that the retained

students trailed the promoted students by only .5 GEQ in reading, they were not allowed to proceed to the next grade level.

Table 2

Comparison of Retained and Promoted Student 1999-2000 ITBS Reading Scores

Variable	# of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean
ITBS reading				
Retained	8	5.21	1.15	.4051
Promoted	8	5.71	0.67	.2386
Mean difference = .5000				
Levene's test for equality of variances: F = 1.481			Sig. = .244	
Variance	T-value	df	sig., two-tailed	
Equal p<.05	-1.06	14	0.31	

ITBS Reading Comparison Retained (1999-2001) Promoted (1999-2000)

Table 3 contains a display of individual ITBS reading scores for the retained students for academic year 2000-2001, the year of retention, and for the promoted students for academic year 1999-2000, when they were in the sixth grade.

Table 3

Display of Student ITBS Reading Scores Retained (2000-2001) and Promoted (1999-2000)

Retained (2000-2001)	Promoted (1999-2000)
5.6	5.7
5.9	6.0
7.3	4.6
6.5	6.2
5.9	5.0
4.4	5.4
5.3	6.2
5.4	6.6
46.3	45.7

Note. Difference = 0.6.

The difference in the total scores of 0.6 favors the retained students. The data is further analyzed in Table 4.

Table 4 shows an analysis of the ITBS reading scores for the retained students for academic year 2000-2001 and promoted students for academic year 1999-2000. The mean reading score of the retained students (5.8) is slightly higher than that of the promoted students (5.7) with a mean difference of .075. The probability level of .849 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the students. The null hypothesis was not rejected. The results show nearly a half year improvement in reading scores for the retained group.

Table 4

Comparison of Student Reading Scores Retained (2000-2001) and Promoted (1999-2000)

Variable	# of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean
ITBS reading				
Retained	8	5.78	.859	.3038
Promoted	8	5.71	.674	.2386
Mean difference = .075				
Levene's test for equality of variances: F = .103			Sig. = .752	
Variance	T-value	df	sig., two-tailed	
Equal	.194	14	.849	
p<.05				

The difference in the reading achievement levels of the retained and promoted students was not great when both groups were in sixth grade. The retained students trailed the promoted students by only .5 GEQ in May 2000. In fact, three of the eight retained students had not only met the 5.5 minimum reading score on the ITBS, they actually exceeded that score. Their passing scores in reading did not exempt them from

having to retake the reading portion of the ITBS after attending the summer Bridge program.

The Bridge program uses a scripted curriculum directly tied to the ITBS. In spite of this intense focus on the test, there was no distinguishable difference in the mean scores for the retained students in May 2000 and August 2000. Once again three of the eight students passed and exceeded the minimum ITBS reading score. Only one, however, was from the group that had passed in May, and three students actually scored lower on the August 2000 test than they had in May 2000. Although a different form of the ITBS was used, the results raises questions about the effectiveness of the Bridge program as a remediation alternative for these students.

When the retained students took the ITBS in May 2001 their mean score exceeded that of their promoted counterparts on a same-grade comparison by .1. This is perhaps an indicator that retention did slightly improve academic performance. However, although studies show students making gains on standardized tests after the retention year, these gains tended to disappear within 3 years (Karweit & Wasik, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Snyder & West, 1992). The mean ITBS reading score for the retained students showed nearly a half year improvement from the year 2000 scores. The improvement in test scores could be the result of the students receiving extra instructional support services to complement the traditional curriculum they experienced during the retention year. Perhaps the fact that the students took the exact same ITBS, CPS94, in August 2000 and again in May 2001 may also account for higher test scores.

Hypothesis II: Analysis of Mathematics Achievement

Comparison of ITBS Mathematics Achievement

There were two comparisons made between the retained and the promoted students in the area of mathematics achievement. The ITBS scores in mathematics for the school year 1999-2000 for both groups of students were compared. The second comparison of ITBS mathematics scores for the school year 1999-2000 for promoted students and 2000-2001 for retained students was made. The comparisons were made to test Hypothesis II, which asks whether there are significant differences in the mathematics achievement levels of the retained and promoted students.

Table 5 displays individual retained and promoted student ITBS mathematics scores for the 1999-2000 academic year when both groups were in sixth grade. There is a wide range of scores within the promoted group. However, the promoted students outperformed the retained students by a total mean difference of 12.6. None of the retained students achieved the minimum score of 5.5 required for promotion.

Table 5

Display of Retained and Promoted Student ITBS Mathematics Scores for Year 1999-2000

Retained (1999-2000)	Promoted (1999-2000)
4.8	6.7
4.5	6.0
4.9	6.3
5.0	7.0
4.9	4.9
4.3	5.0
4.5	6.6
4.6	7.6
37.5	50.1

Note. Difference = 12.6.

Table 6 shows the analysis of ITBS GEQ scores. The mean score of the retained

students, 4.69 is well below the mean score of 6.26 achieved by the promoted group, for a mean difference of −1.5750. The probability level of 0.00 indicates there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the retained and promoted students. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 6

Comparison of Retained and Promoted Student ITBS Mathematics Scores for Year 1999-2000

Variable	# of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean
ITBS mathematics				
Retained	8	4.69	0.25	8.7500
Promoted	8	6.26	0.94	.3316
Mean difference = -1.5750				
Levene's test for equality of variances: F = 7.062			Sig. = .019	
Variance	T-value	df	sig., two-tailed	
Equal	-4.59	14	0.00	
p<.05				

Table 7 displays the individual ITBS mathematics scores for the retained students for the academic year 2000-2001, which was the year of retention, and for the promoted students for 1999-2000, when they were in sixth grade. The promoted students' total score exceeds that of the retained students for a total difference of 4.7. The data are further analyzed in Table 8.

Table 8 shows the analysis of ITBS GEQ scores. The mean score of the retained students, 5.67, does not equal the mean score of 6.26 achieved by the promoted students. The null hypothesis could not be rejected since the probability level of 0.14 did not reach a level of statistical significance. The retained students had made gains that equaled over a full year improvement.

Table 7

Display of Student ITBS Mathematics Scores Retained (2000-2001) and Promoted (1999-2000)

Retained (2000-2001)	Promoted (1999-2000)
5.0	6.7
6.1	6.0
6.3	6.3
6.1	7.0
5.5	4.9
5.1	5.0
5.7	6.6
5.6	7.6
45.4	50.1

Note. Difference = 4.7.

Table 8

Comparison of Student Mathematics Scores Retained (2000-2001) and Promoted (1999-2000)

Variable	# of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean
ITBS mathematics				
Retained	8	5.67	0.47	.1677
Promoted	8	6.26	0.94	.3316
Mean difference = -.5875				
Levene's test for equality of variances: F = 2.762			Sig. = .119	
Variance	T-value	df	sig., two-tailed	
Equal	-1.58	14	0.14	
p<.05				

In May 2000, students who would be promoted outperformed the students who would be retained by nearly 1.5 GEQ on the mathematics section of the ITBS. Despite being in the same classrooms with the same teachers and experiencing the same curriculum, not one of the students who would be retained obtained the minimum passing score of 5.5 GEQ on the ITBS. Failure to reach the minimum score in mathematics meant the students were required to attend the summer Bridge program, regardless of their

performance on the ITBS in reading or grades earned on report cards.

Although the scripted curriculum of the Bridge program is directly linked to the ITBS, the mean mathematics score of the students increased by only .1 from their May 2000 mean score. None of the students reached the 5.5 GEQ minimum passing score, three students gained a few points, two students received the exact same score, and three students actually lost a few points. Results such as these call into question the efficacy of the summer Bridge program, particularly since failure to reach the minimum score now meant the students would remain in the sixth grade for another year.

By the spring of 2001 the retained students had achieved close to the same level ITBS mean mathematics score as had their year 2000 promoted counterparts. In fact, the mean mathematics score of the retained students showed a full year GEQ improvement from 4.7 to 5.7. That the students experienced substantial improvement in their performance in mathematics is not unexpected, based on the evidence of increased attention to mathematics topics during the retention year by teachers and instructional support staff. As revealed in the qualitative data section, one of the teachers in particular, Mr. Williams, described how after reviewing student ITBS mathematics scores from year 2000, he planned instruction to build up their weak areas. He exposed them to curriculum beyond what is traditional for sixth grade students. Furthermore, the students were administered the identical ITBS they had previously taken at the conclusion of the summer Bridge program, which resulted in a less successful outcome.

Analysis of Retained Students Academic Gains

Reading Achievement

A comparison was made to address the study question of whether the retained students made academic gains in reading during the year of retention. Table 9 displays mean ITBS reading scores for the retained students for May 2000, August 2000, and May 2001. Table 9 also shows paired difference comparisons of mean ITBS scores for May 2000 and August 2000 and August 2000 and May 2001. The paired difference test for May 2000 and August 2000 shows a mean difference of -.025. The probability level of 0.95 did not reach a level of statistical significance.

Table 9

Comparison of Retained Student Reading Scores for May 2000, August 2000 (Bridge Program), and May 2001

Student	May 2000	August 2000 (Bridge)	May 2001
1	5.2	5.8	5.6
2	6.3	5.1	5.9
3	6.9	7.7	7.3
4	5.9	5.1	6.5
5	4.6	5.6	5.9
6	4.2	4.4	4.4
7	3.4	4.4	5.3
8	5.2	3.8	5.4
M	5.21	5.24	5.79
SD	1.15	1.20	0.86

Paired Differences

	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
May 2000 August 2000	-.025	1.0053	-0.07	0.95
August 2000 May 2001	.5500	.7407	2.10	0.07

Note. N = 8. df = 7. p< .05.

Results indicate minimal impact of the Bridge program in the area of reading

achievement. In fact, the means for May 2000 and August 2000 are indistinguishable.

The paired difference test for August 2000 and May 2001 shows a mean difference of .5500. The probability level of 0.07 shows no statistically significant difference between August 2000 and May 2001 scores. However, the students did raise their reading test score by .5 during the retention year.

Mathematics Achievement

A comparison was made to answer the study question of whether the retained students made academic gains in mathematics during the year of retention.

Table 10 displays the mean ITBS mathematics scores of the retained students for May 2000, August 2000, and May 2001. Table 10 also shows paired difference comparisons of mean ITBS scores for May 2000 and August 2000, and also for August 2000 and May 2001.

The paired differences test for May 2000 and August 2000 shows a mean difference of –.1125, indicating minimal impact by the Bridge program in the area of mathematics achievement. In fact, the means for May 2000 and August 2000 are almost indistinguishable and not statistically different at the 0.58 level of significance. The paired differences test for August 2000, mean 4.80, and May 2001, mean 5.68, show a mean difference of .8750. The probability level of 0.00 shows a statistically significant difference. The retained students raised their mathematics scores by a full year during the retention year.

Table 10

Comparison of Retained Student Mathematics Scores for May 2000, August 2000 (Bridge Program), and May 2001

Student	May 2000	August 2000 (Bridge)	May 2001
1	4.8	4.3	5.0
2	4.5	4.5	6.1
3	4.9	4.7	6.3
4	5.0	5.4	6.1
5	4.9	4.9	5.5
6	4.3	3.9	5.1
7	4.5	5.7	5.7
8	4.6	5.0	5.6
M	4.69	4.80	5.68
SD	0.25	0.58	0.47

Paired Differences

	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
May 2000 August 2000	-.1125	.5489	-0.58	0.58
August 2000 May 2001	.8750	.5523	4.48	0.00

Note. N = 8. df = 7. p< .05.

Did Retained Students Make Academic Gains in Reading and Mathematics?

If the purpose of retention is to raise the academic achievement level of students to prepare them to advance to the next grade level, it is appropriate to look at the retained students' academic achievement to determine if indeed they made academic gains. This will be accomplished through an examination of the ITBS reading and mathematics scores of the retained students.

The ITBS scores utilized by CPS to determine the level of student achievement are reported in GEQs. The test scores to be examined are from May 2000, August 2000 (Bridge program), where the students were to meet the minimum required score of 5.5 GEQ points for promotion to seventh grade, and scores from May 2001, when the

minimum passing score was 6.0 GEQ points. A display of student reading scores is found in Table 9. Student mathematics scores are found in Table 10.

In May of 2000, Student #1, Jeannette, having received scores of 5.2 in reading and 4.8 in mathematics, did not meet the requirements for promotion in either subject area. After attending the Bridge program, her reading score increased by 6 points to 5.8. She lost 5 points in mathematics scoring only 4.3. In May of 2001 Jeannette scored 5.6 in reading, losing 2 points from her Bridge score but gaining 4 points from the previous year. In mathematics she scored 5.0 for a net gain of 2 points. Having spent an additional year in sixth grade, Jeannette experienced growth equal to only 4 months in reading and 2 months in mathematics. Her scores did not meet the requirements for promotion to seventh grade.

Student #2, Lavelle, exceeded the minimum reading score in May 2000 with a 6.3; however, his mathematics score was 4.5. His mathematics score was exactly the same, 4.5, after the Bridge program, but his reading score had decreased to 5.1. In May 2001, Lavelle's mathematics score had increased to 6.1. However, his reading score was only 5.9. Lavelle appears to have made gains of over a year and a half in mathematics but experienced a decline of almost a half year in reading. Although Lavelle met the minimum score in mathematics, his reading score was not high enough for promotion.

Student #3, Tamara, with a May 2000 reading score of 6.9, attended the Bridge program because her mathematics score was only 4.9. She increased her reading score by 8 points to 7.7 after Bridge, but she lost 2 points in mathematics, scoring only 4.7. By the end of the retention year, although Tamara lost points in reading, scoring 7.3, this was growth of almost a half year from the May 2000 score. Tamara experienced growth of

almost a year and a half by scoring 6.3 in mathematics. Since both reading and mathematics scores exceeded the 6.0 minimum requirements, Tamara qualified to be promoted to seventh grade.

Student #4, Allen, received May 2000 scores of 5.9 in reading and 5.0 in mathematics. After the Bridge program, he gained 4 points in mathematics, scoring 5.4, but his reading score decreased by 8 points to 5.1. At the end of the retention year Allen scored 6.5 in reading, slightly over a half year's growth. In mathematics, Allen's score of 6.1 shows growth of just over 1 year. These scores were sufficient for him to be promoted to seventh grade.

In May 2000, Student #5, Cheryl, scored 4.6 in reading and 4.9 in mathematics. After attending the Bridge program, she received exactly the same score of 4.9 in mathematics. However, she increased her reading to 5.6. After spending a second year in sixth grade, Cheryl scored 5.5 in mathematics, showing growth of only 6 months. In reading, Cheryl's score of 5.9 shows growth of nearly one and a half years. Cheryl did not score high enough to be promoted to seventh grade.

Student #6, Sherry, scored 4.2 in reading and 4.3 in mathematics in May 2000. After the Bridge program she gained 2 points in reading, scoring 4.4; however, her mathematics score decreased by 4 points as she scored 3.9. At the end of the retention year, Sherry scored 5.1 in mathematics, a net gain of 8 months. In reading her score was 4.4, showing growth equaling only 2 months. Sherry did not make the minimum scores required for promotion.

In May 2000, Student #7, Faith, scored 3.4 in reading and 4.5 in mathematics. After the Bridge program her scores increased to 4.4 in reading and 5.7 in mathematics.

At the conclusion of the retention year, May 2001, Faith scored exactly the same 5.7 in mathematics as she had after the Bridge program. In reading, her score of 5.3 was indicative of close to 2 years' growth from the previous year. Her scores were not sufficient for promotion to seventh grade.

Student #8, Deja, scored 5.2 in reading and 4.6 in mathematics in May 2000. After the Bridge program she had increased her mathematics score by 4 points to 5.0. However in reading, she scored only 3.8. In May 2001, after completing a second year in sixth grade, Deja scored 5.6 in mathematics, demonstrating a full year's growth. However, her reading score was 5.4, showing a net gain of only 2 months' growth. Neither of her scores equaled the scores required for promotion.

The study question asked whether retention raised the academic achievement levels of the students who were retained in the sixth grade. During the retention year each of the retained students raised their ITBS test scores in both reading and mathematics from the prior year. However, it is noteworthy that even after attending the summer Bridge program and spending an additional year in sixth grade, only two of the retained students made sufficient academic gains to be promoted to seventh grade.

Hypothesis III: Analysis of SSCRS

Hypothesis III is an exploration of whether there are significant differences in the self-concept levels of the retained and the promoted students. The students were compared on a self-report measure, the SSCRS. The SSCRS is a modified compilation of items from the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965), Frymier's FACES scale (1975), and primarily Harter's Self-perception Profile For Children (1985). As such, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to validate the reliability of the SSCRS.

Cronbach's Alpha

The SSCRS consists of four domains of self-concept: general, academic, reading, and mathematics. The reliability analysis was conducted on the items comprising each domain. In general, an alpha level of .75 or higher indicates that items within a set cohere as a unit. Cronbach's alpha for general self-concept equaled .84, academic self-concept equaled .76, reading self-concept equaled .77, and mathematics self-concept equaled .78. The alpha levels for all four domains of self-concept measures are in acceptable range.

Student Self-concept Rating Scale Analysis by Question

Student scores on the self-concept rating scale questions were normed, and tests were conducted to determine if there exist significant differences between the retained and promoted students. Table 11 shows the means and standard deviations for the retained and promoted students on individual rating scale questions. The mean total of 11.01 for the retained students and 10.97 for the promoted students result in a mean difference of 0.04. The significance level of 0.98 indicates that null hypothesis could not be rejected and that the overall self-concept levels reported by both the sixth grade retained students and their seventh grade promoted counterparts are not statistically significantly different. In fact, they are virtually indistinguishable. Although comparisons for none of the 20 questions reached a level of statistical significance, differences do exist within the student responses on individual questions and within subscales. The questions are examined in more detail in the subscale analysis.

Table 11

Table of Means and Standard Deviations for Responses to Student Self-concept Rating Scale Questions

	Retained		Promoted			
Question	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T-value	Sig.
1.	3.00	1.07	2.50	0.93	1.00	0.33
2.	3.63	1.06	3.88	0.35	-0.63	0.54
3.	2.88	1.13	2.38	1.30	0.82	0.43
4.	2.50	1.20	2.75	1.28	-0.40	0.69
5.	1.75	0.89	2.25	0.89	-1.13	0.28
6.	2.13	0.83	2.63	0.92	-1.14	0.27
7.	2.63	1.30	2.38	0.74	0.47	0.65
8.	2.75	1.17	2.63	1.19	0.21	0.84
9.	3.25	1.04	2.88	0.99	0.74	0.47
10.	3.13	0.83	2.75	0.71	0.97	0.35
11.	2.75	1.04	3.13	1.36	-0.62	0.54
12.	2.88	1.13	2.63	0.92	0.49	0.63
13.	2.00	1.07	2.50	1.20	-0.88	0.39
14.	2.88	1.55	3.38	1.06	-0.75	0.46
15.	2.88	0.99	3.13	0.83	-0.55	0.59
16.	3.63	0.52	2.88	0.99	1.90	0.08
17.	2.13	0.99	2.50	0.76	-0.85	0.41
18.	3.25	1.17	3.13	0.99	0.23	0.82
19.	2.75	0.89	3.13	1.13	-0.74	0.47
20.	2.75	1.17	2.63	1.30	0.20	0.84
N = 16						
Mean	11.01	10.97	Mean difference = 0.04			
SD	2.50	2.46				
t-value	0.03		p<.05			
Sig., two-tailed	0.98					

Student Self-concept Rating Scale Subscale Analysis

The questions on the SSCRS are categorized and grouped into four subscales: general, academic, reading and mathematics self-concept. To reduce the possibility of students giving socially desirable responses to questions, subscale questions were, in general, not presented to students consecutively in the SSCRS. Student responses to the questions, based on their perceptions of themselves, were scored using numbers from 4 to

1. Number 4 represented a positive response to a question, 3 somewhat positive, 2 somewhat negative, and 1 represented a negative response. The subscales were analyzed using tests of significance and percentages.

Table 12 displays the results of the analysis of the general self-concept subscale. General self-concept refers to how students perceive themselves overall, including nonacademic areas. Both groups were happy with the way they looked, with 100% of the promoted students responding positively, while 88% of retained students gave positive responses. Fifty percent of the retained students liked the way they are living their lives compared with sixty-three percent of the promoted students. Only 38% of the retained students responded that they act the way they are supposed to, compared with 63% of the promoted students. Seventy-five percent of the promoted students reported that they usually do the right thing, and only sixty-three percent of the promoted students gave positive responses to this question. When asked if they are pleased with themselves, 63% of retained students gave positive responses, as did 75% of promoted students. While 88% of promoted students felt they had a lot to be proud of, only 63% of retained students responded positively. Similarly, 100% of promoted students reported that they are happy with the way they do things, while 75% of retained students gave positive responses. However, on the question of whether students are happy being the way they are, 75% of retained student responded positively, but only 63% of promoted students reported being happy the way they are.

Table 12

Comparison of Student Responses on General Self-concept Subscale

Question	Retained P	Retained N	Retained Mean	Promoted P	Promoted N	Promoted Mean
2. Some students are happy with the way they look, but other students are not happy with the way they look.	7	1	3.63	8	0	3.88
4. Some students don't like the way they are living their lives, but other students like the way they are living their lives.	4	4	2.50	5	3	2.75
6. Some students act the way they are supposed to, but other students don't act the way they are supposed to.	3	5	2.13	5	3	2.63
8. Some students usually do the right thing, but other students often don't do the right thing.	6	2	2.75	5	3	2.63
11. Some students are often unhappy with themselves, but other students are pretty pleased with themselves.	5	3	2.75	6	2	3.13
14. Some students feel they don't have a lot to be proud of, but other students feel they have a lot to be proud of.	5	3	2.88	7	1	3.38
15. Some students are not very happy with the way they do a lot of things, but other students think the way they do things is just fine.	6	2	2.88	8	0	3.13
18. Some students are very happy being the way they are, but other students wish they were different.	6	2	3.25	5	3	3.13
Mean for subscale			2.84			3.08

Note. Mean difference = 0.24. t-value = -.637. $p < .05$. Sig., two-tailed = .53. N = 16.
P = Positive Response N = Negative Response.

The findings from the analysis of the general self-concept subscale show a mean difference of 0.24 between the retained students' score of 2.8 and the promoted students'

score of 3.1. The significance level of 0.53 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of the two groups. The mean score of the retained students was lower than that of the promoted students. This indicates that retained students held slightly more negative views of themselves overall than did the promoted students.

Table 13 displays the results from the analysis of the academic self-concept subscale. Academic self-concept is the students' perception of how good they are in school. The promoted students appeared to be more worried about whether they could do the work assigned to them, with only 50% responding positively compared with 75% of the retained students reporting that they feel good about their schoolwork. Only 50% of both the retained and the promoted students reported that they remember things easily.

Seventy-five percent of the retained students reported that they could do their schoolwork quickly, compared with sixty-three percent of the promoted students. When asked whether they felt okay when the teacher says it is time to take a test, 75% of both groups gave positive responses. Thirty-eight percent of promoted students and twenty-five percent of retained students reported being happy to take their report cards home. Only 50% of students in both groups responded that they felt as smart as other students their age.

When compared in the area of academic self-concept, the findings show a mean difference of 0.19 between the retained students' score of 2.75 and the promoted students' score of 2.56. The scores were not found to be statistically significantly different, sig. = 0.59. However, the retained students rated themselves slightly higher than the promoted students, an indication that they have more positive views of their

academic competence.

Table 13

Comparison of Student Responses on Academic Self-concept Subscale

Question	Retained P	Retained N	Retained Mean	Promoted P	Promoted N	Promoted Mean
1. Some students feel they are very good with their schoolwork, but other students worry about whether they can do the work assigned to them.	6	2	3.00	4	4	2.50
7. Some students often forget what they learn, but other students can remember things easily.	4	4	2.63	4	4	2.38
10. Some students are pretty slow in finishing their schoolwork, but other students can do their schoolwork quickly.	6	2	3.13	5	3	2.75
12. Some students feel okay when the teacher says it is time to take a test, but other students do not feel good when they have to take a test.	5	3	2.88	5	3	2.63
17. Some students are not happy to take their report cards home, but other students like taking their report cards home.	2	6	2.13	3	5	2.50
20. Some students feel they are just as smart as other students their age, but other students are not sure and wonder if they are as smart.	4	4	2.75	4	4	2.63
Mean for subscale			2.75			2.56

Note. Mean difference = 0.19. t-value = .546. p< .05. Sig., two-tailed = .59. N = 16.
P = Positive response. N = Negative response.

Analysis of Reading Self-concept Subscale

Table 14 displays the results of the reading self-concept subscale. Reading self-concept is the subject-specific student perception of how successful they are in the area of reading. Sixty-three percent of the retained students reported that they liked it when they have a chance to read out loud in class, compared with only fifty percent of

the promoted students. Similarly, 88% of the retained students reported feeling good about the way they read, compared with 75% positive responses from the promoted group. Only 75% of the promoted students reported that they feel reading is easy, compared with 100% positive responses from the retained students.

Table 14

Comparison of Student Responses on Reading Self-concept Subscale

Question	Retained			Promoted		
	P	N	Mean	P	N	Mean
3. Some students do not like it when the teacher says it is their turn to read out loud, but other students like to read out loud.	5	3	2.88	4	4	2.38
9. Some students feel good about how well they read, but other students do not feel they read that well.	7	1	3.25	6	2	2.88
16. Some students feel reading is easy, but other students do not feel reading is easy.	8	0	3.63	6	2	2.88
Mean for subscale			3.25			2.71

Note. Mean difference = 0.54. t-value = 1.308. p< .05. Sig., two-tailed = .21. N = 16. P = Positive. N = Negative.

In the area of reading self-concept the findings show no significant difference, sig. = 0.21, between the retained students' mean score of 3.3 and the promoted students' mean score of 2.7. The mean difference equals 0.54, revealing that the retained students rated themselves higher than the promoted students. This is an indication that the retained students are more confident of their abilities in the subject of reading.

Table 15 displays the results of the mathematics self-concept subscale. Mathematics self-concept refers to how successful students feel they are in the subject of mathematics. Seventy-five percent of the retained students reported they have trouble

figuring out the answers to math problems, compared with fifty percent of the retained students. Similarly, 75% of the retained students reported that they found math to be difficult, compared with 50% of the promoted students. Fifty percent of the retained students reported that they do not learn new things in math easily, compared with twenty-five percent of the promoted students.

Table 15

Comparison of Student Responses on Mathematics Self-concept Subscale

Question	Retained P	Retained N	Retained Mean	Promoted P	Promoted N	Promoted Mean
5. Some students can almost always figure out the answers to math problems, but other students have trouble figuring out the answers to math problems.	2	6	1.75	4	4	2.25
13. Some students feel math is difficult, but other students feel math is not difficult.	2	6	2.00	4	4	2.50
19. Some students do not learn new things in math very easily, but other students feel good when they have a chance to learn something new in math.	4	4	2.75	6	2	3.13
Mean for subscale			2.17			2.63

Note. Mean difference = 0.46. t-value = -1.091. $p < .05$. Sig., two-tailed = .29. N = 16. P = Positive response. N = Negative response.

The analysis of the mathematics self-concept subscale revealed a mean difference of 0.46 between the retained students' mean score of 2.2 and the promoted students' mean score of 2.6. No statistically significant difference was found, sig. = 0.29, in the mean scores of the retained and promoted students. However, the retained students rated themselves lower than did the promoted students. This is consistent with the findings that the retained students are experiencing difficulty in the area of mathematics.

Student Self-concept Rating Scale

Research studies have demonstrated that there is a relationship between academic achievement and self-concept (Henderson, 1991; Kelly & Colangelo, 1984; Stevenson, 1992). Certain studies regard academic achievement as the motivation for students to develop more adequate self-concepts (Harter, 1985; Moeller, 1994), and others show that there is a beneficial relationship between positive self-concept and academic achievement (Hansford & Hattie, 1982).

Perceptions of one's self are multifaceted and differentiated (Harter, 1982; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Therefore, student self-concept was measured in four separate domains: general, academic, reading, and mathematics self-concept.

Table 16 shows the means and standard deviations for the retained and promoted students for each of the subscales. The composite total for the subscales of the SSCRS indicates that there were no statistically significant differences, sig. = 0.98, between the mean scores of the retained and the promoted students.

It is not surprising that the retained students reported higher levels of reading self-concept than the promoted students. There were no significant differences found between the retained and the promoted students' ITBS reading scores for the school year 1999-2000. In fact, at the end of the 2000-2001 school year, the retained students' ITBS reading scores exceeded that which their now promoted counterparts had earned in sixth grade. Considering that the retained students' ITBS scores in mathematics were significantly lower than that of the promoted students, it is not surprising that their reported levels of self-concept in mathematics is at a lower level than that of the promoted students.

Table 16

Comparison of Retained and Promoted Students' Normed Scores on SSCRS Subscales and Composite

Subscales	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
General	2.8	.8524	3.1	.5974	-.637	.53
Academic	2.8	.8309	2.6	.5035	.546	.59
Reading	3.3	.6607	2.7	.9667	1.308	.21
Mathematics	2.2	.8729	2.6	.8055	-1.091	.29
Composite	11.1	2.5040	11.0	2.4648	0.03	0.98

Note. N = 8. df = 14. $p < .05$, two-tailed.

In the area of general self-concept, the retained students report a level of self-concept that, while not statistically significant, is lower than the promoted students. Harter (1983) and Marsh and Shavelson (1985) recognize that general self-concept is a dimension separate from specific aspects of self-concept. Since it taps the students' overall evaluations of their self-worth, it is a usefulness measure of student self-esteem.

It is interesting that in the area of academic self-concept, retained students reported a slightly higher level of self-concept than the promoted students. This observation is perhaps not so surprising when Urdan and Davis (1998) discuss Graham's (1994) report that when asked to predict how well they will do on a task, African Americans are more likely than European Americans to overestimate their performance. Furthermore, they are more likely to report high future expectancies following failure situations. These data suggest that African American students remain optimistic about their future performance even after experiencing failure on a task. This optimism about future performance is coupled with a positive perception of personal and academic competence.

Wylie (1989) noted that the means on self-perception measures tend to be high, as

are students' mean scores on the SSCRS. Rosenberg (1979) expressed the idea that individuals are motivated to evaluate themselves highly. Harter (1985) suggested that children are defensively self-protective and that in spite of poor performance, children may try to maintain their self-esteem by having inflated competence perceptions.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The purpose of this study was an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Are there differences in the achievement level in reading of students who have been retained when compared with their promoted counterparts?

2. Are there differences in the achievement level in mathematics of students who have been retained when compared with their promoted counterparts?

3. Do retained students make significant academic gains?

4. Are there differences in the self-concept level of students who have been retained when compared with their promoted counterparts?

During the year 2000, there were no significant differences in the mean ITBS reading achievement scores between the two groups of students. However, the mean ITBS mathematics achievement scores of the students who would be promoted were significantly higher than those of the students who would be retained. By 2001, the results of the ITBS scores indicated that there still existed no significant differences in ITBS reading scores, and the differences in the mean ITBS mathematics scores had now disappeared.

For the retained students, there were no statistically significant differences in ITBS reading achievement scores for May 2000, after the summer Bridge program in August 2000, and May 2001. In the area of mathematics there was no significant

difference in the ITBS scores from May 2000 and after the summer Bridge program in August 2000. However, there exist significant differences when those scores are compared to the mean ITBS mathematics achievement scores from May 2001. After completing the summer Bridge academic program and being retained in the sixth grade for a year, the majority of the students did not make sufficient academic gains to be promoted to the seventh grade level.

Finally, retained and promoted students were compared on the SSCRS. The results from the analysis revealed no significant differences in the composite scores from the four subscales that comprise the self-concept measure.

Qualitative Analysis

Introduction

The second section of the study presents the viewpoints of study participants obtained from semistructured interviews conducted by the researcher. The purpose of the interviews was to encourage study participants to share, in depth, their views on aspects of the school experiences of students at the research site, a middle school in the CPS district. Interview participants included a total of eight African American students, six females and two males. The students were all repeating the sixth grade as a result of having not achieved minimum scores in both reading and mathematics on the ITBS as required for promotion in their school district. The interviews took place toward the end of the retention year, May 2001, to allow student participants to reflect on the school year and to share their perceptions on their current academic status. The students, along with the interviewer, chose fictitious names that will be used to describe their responses to interview questions. Interviews were also conducted with the classroom teachers of the

retained students and the classroom, reading, and mathematics teachers of student study participants who had been promoted to the seventh grade level. The interviews took place toward the end of the school year in April 2001. There were a total of five African American teacher participants, two male and three female teachers.

Teacher Interviews

By interviewing teachers of retained and promoted students, comparisons of teaching and learning experiences for both student populations could be made. The results from the interviews yielded descriptive information and five major themes. These themes include (a) teacher methods of instruction, (b) teacher perceptions of parental involvement and student success, (c) teacher perceptions of student motivation on academic progress, (d) teacher beliefs in the efficacy of retention, and (e) teacher perceptions of the social and emotional effects of retention. Fictitious names were selected by the interviewer and will be used to identify teacher participants.

Descriptive Teacher Information

Section one of the interview questions focused on description and experience of the teachers. Table 17 displays the descriptive teacher data. Of the five teacher participants in the study, two of them are male, and they are both teachers of the retained sixth grade students. Neither Mr. Jackson nor Mr. Williams has completed a teacher preparation program that would lead to the state certification required to become a regularly appointed teacher in this school district. One of the seventh grade female teachers, Ms. Charles, has not completed her teacher education preparation program. Only Mrs. Randall, the seventh grade mathematics teacher, and Mrs. Stevens, who teaches seventh grade reading, are regularly appointed, state certified teachers.

Table 17

Characteristics of Teachers of Sixth Grade Retained Students and Seventh Grade Promoted Students

Teacher	Sex	Grade/ Subject	Years at this school	Years of teaching experience	State certification	Completed teacher preparation program?
Mr. Jackson	M	6	2	1	No	Currently enrolled
Mr. Williams	M	6	2	5	No	Currently enrolled
Mrs. Randall	F	7 / Math	2	3	No	Yes
Mrs. Charles	F	7 / Lang. arts	.5	1	Yes	Currently enrolled
Mrs. Stevens	F	7 / Reading	15	32	Yes	Yes

Mr. Jackson and Ms. Charles began as substitute teachers the previous year, so each has been in classrooms for only 1 year. Mr. Williams has taught general educational development classes for students at the high school level. He has been a substitute teacher at the elementary and high school levels in the district for 5 years. Mrs. Randall and Mrs. Stevens are the teachers who possess the most adequate teacher preparation and levels of experience, and it appears that the teachers with the most expertise are not teaching the students who have the greatest need.

Themes

The themes that emerged from the interviews with the teachers will now be discussed in detail.

Teacher Methods of Instruction

The first theme to be discussed is the traditional curriculum to which both the retained and promoted students are exposed: "We work from the book, and I write it on the board" (Mr. Jackson).

In general, both the sixth and seventh grade teachers indicate that they follow a traditional model of providing instruction for the students. Scruggs (1995) identifies evidences of traditional curriculum of instruction: (a) teacher-driven instruction, (b) basal readers and textbooks, (c) specific time slots for subjects, and (d) frequent testing. Additional evidences include board work, charts, workbooks, skill sheets, and minimal student involvement.

Interview data from the teachers confirmed the use of the traditional model. The teachers reported that they work from published reading and mathematics textbook series. The reading lessons are occasionally supplemented with magazine and newspaper articles. Students read some novels from a required list. The seventh grade reading teacher explained that the main emphasis is placed on vocabulary and comprehension, because that will determine whether a student passes or fails the ITBS. The description provided by the sixth grade teachers about their reading instructional program was almost identical to that of the seventh grade teachers.

Karweit (1991) wrote, "Rarely is it assumed that the approach or content is inappropriate for the learner; rather, it is assumed that the learner is inappropriate for the material being presented" (p.8). The instructional materials presented to the student study participants are apparently based on what is deemed appropriate for the grade level, not the individual students.

Mathematics instruction for the students proved to be slightly more nontraditional than the reading instruction. Mr. Jackson, one of the sixth grade teachers, explained that although he tries to be as basic in math as he possibly can, he does encourage students to take notes as he writes step-by-step instructions on the chalkboard. Mr. Williams, the

other sixth grade teacher, explained that he emphasizes to the students that basic math skills are universal to any curriculum. The types of problems he provides for the students come not only from their textbook, but also from books that are prepared for a high school or college student. He also explained that he relates math to how they will use it in everyday life. Mr. Williams provided this information: "I saw their scores, and I can say I attacked the areas in math they are low in. Many of them have very low computation skills and problem solving. That's the areas I emphasize most." This intense focus on mathematics may partially account for the substantial increase in mathematics scores the students achieved on the 2001 ITBS assessment. The use of nontraditional curriculum appears to have benefited the retained students.

Prior research studies indicate that it is of little or no benefit for students to be retained and placed in an environment similar or identical to the one in which they did not succeed the first time (Harvey, 1994a). The change in instructional strategies in reading and mathematics during the 2000-2001 academic year for the retained students comprise a variety of tutorial services during the regular school day, as well as opportunities to participate in after-school and Saturday academic programs. Mr. Jackson has a positive opinion on the academic support the students receive during the Saturday tutoring sessions: "That one-on-one thing, I think that's one of the best things that this school could have thought of." Mr. Williams concurred, saying the one-on-one tutoring allows the focus to be on the needs of a particular child as opposed to the needs of a class.

Much of the increased instruction focused on preparation to take the ITBS. Student learning is impacted when teachers are forced to "teach to the test." Critics argue

that the more time required for test preparation and test taking translates to a reduction in time available to teach relevant and meaningful concepts and materials that are not addressed on tests (Illinois Federation of Teachers, 2001).

Teacher Perceptions of Parental Involvement and Student Success

The second theme to be discussed is teachers' views of parental support as a major barrier to student success: "Let's say, I don't have enough experiences with their parents" (Mr. Williams).

Many research studies cite parental involvement as an important and positive factor in the school experiences of children. In fact, Anderson and West (1992) wrote that family is a critical element in school success. Both the sixth and seventh grade teachers expressed a sense of frustration at their perceptions of a lack of parental involvement in the educational process of the students. The teachers described most of their contact with the parents as being initiated by teachers concerning discipline issues with the students.

Mr. Jackson said it this way:

> Some kids, I call their houses three or four times a week, go to their house every Friday and say, hey, your kid is cutting up. Monday morning, the same problems! I don't want to continually have to suspend a kid for cutting up. You would think that, hey, this is your child, tell him there is a certain way he's got to act in school. . . . But for whatever reason, the parents get so defensive about anything negative said about their kids.

Mrs. Randall, the seventh grade mathematics teacher exemplifies this sense of teacher frustration as she explains that typically she teaches five classes of students totaling about 175 in all. With the exception of the students in her homeroom, maybe five

of those parents come to see her on regularly scheduled report card pick-up and conference days. She said that she is most disappointed about the fact that she sends out progress reports at 5-week intervals and "there is next to no response," regardless of whether it was a negative or positive report.

Mrs. Stevens concurred, saying whether students receive B's or F's on their report cards, she does not see too many parents. She stated,

> I guess parents are too busy. Students who are struggling now usually have been struggling for a long time. Parents get tired of hearing bad news, and at a certain point they don't want to hear that they have to do more, or that the student has to do more. Too many parents don't realize the value of helping and supporting their children. The students would do better if their parents were just pushing them all the time.

Mrs. Randall stated that one reason the parents did not participate more was because they were not sure if they had the necessary skills to really help their children. According to research by Keith et al. (1993), parents want to be involved so they can help their children, but they need assistance and guidance to do so. Mrs. Randall stated that issues like this could be addressed, for example, through a program she knew about called Family Math, where parents and students learn together. She expressed an interest in starting such a program in the school but cited a lack of resources to do so.

The teachers were unaware of any current programs at the school that encouraged parents to be involved in the school. Natale (1991) wrote how many parent education and involvement programs presume cultural deficits in the home. The school does not have a Parent-Teacher Association, as is common in many of the schools in the district. It might

be helpful to explore establishing one, because the Parent-Teacher Association has useful standards that might provide a basis for increased positive family involvement.

Teacher Perceptions of Student Motivation on Academic Progress

The third theme to be discussed is how teachers believe students lack motivation and how it hinders their progress: "They like school. But they don't like the work school requires of them" (Ms. Charles).

The sixth grade and seventh grade teachers expressed their beliefs that the students lack motivation. Teachers indicated that the students were very enthusiastic when they could demonstrate concepts that were easy for them, but that they tended to shut down when more difficult topics were explored. Mr. Jackson explained, "It's like anything they can pick up real fast, they want to do, but when we get into something more difficult, that's when we start having behavioral problems."

Covington (1984) discussed how what looks like a lack of motivation, procrastination, or students choosing easy tasks when choice is available may be attributed to another cause--not trying, since trying hard but failing is an indicator that the student is lacking in ability. Students need to believe they can successfully accomplish the learning goals established for them by their teachers.

Koons (1977) wrote that best educational practice occurs when we make the schools fit the students, not the students fit the schools. Mr. Williams observed, "A silent, fixed environment is not friendly to the way an African child learns. People learn better by high involvement." Knowledge of how students learn is an important variable in effective teaching.

Mrs. Stevens stated,

> They need something that is meaningful to them. I would like to start with short, quick stories so they can have success, success, success, and build up their confidence. If I could set up the reading program, that is what I would do. Maybe start with sports, or something interesting in science or technology. They like the computers.

Mrs. Stevens' comment that engagement in meaningful work is an important element in student learning is supported by research. For example, Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) explained, "Students who learned text material in order to put it to use reported more intrinsic motivation for learning and showed greater conceptual understanding than did students who learned the material to be tested" (p 331).

Teacher Beliefs in the Efficacy of Retention

The fourth theme to be discussed is the opinions of teachers on whether retention raises students' level of academic achievement. "I don't think it [retention] raises the level [of academic achievement], but I think it's necessary" (Mr. Williams).

There are many research studies that indicate a majority of school administrators, teachers, and even parents believe retention is an acceptable way to correct deficient academic skills (Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Dawson & Rafoth, 1991; Byrnes, 1989). In contrast, both the sixth and seventh grade teacher participants in this study stated that they did not believe that retention was an effective way to raise the academic achievement level of students.

However, both Mr. Williams and Ms. Charles stated that they believed retention could be used as a motivational factor for students. Haack (1984) described the basis for the type of rationale the teachers are using: "A third argument for maintaining the use of

grade retention is the need to hold students personally accountable to minimum achievement level. Without threat of failure (author underline), some students would not make an effort in their school work" (p.10). However, if threat of failure really motivated students to succeed, the retained students might have been more successful in the Bridge program, which was their final opportunity to avoid retention.

Ms. Charles expressed her views, "Some who are pretty bright, at least on grade level, it will help them. For example, if they fooled around all year and failed because they weren't paying attention, I think it will help them to be retained." Although Ms. Charles emphatically stated that retention should never be used to punish a child, she does not think all struggling students should be retained, only those who were able to do the work but did not.

Mr. Williams explained his reasoning for supporting retention:

> Many of the students do have the capacity to pass a structured exam. But they don't have the initiative. And being held back puts the initiative under a certain child right away. Because there is pressure, from peers, parents, and facing the prospect of being held back even another year.

Mrs. Stevens exemplified the beliefs of the other teachers, who stated that students should be promoted and given extra help. She did not believe retention motivated them toward higher achievement. Research does indicate that if students are promoted and provided extra help, they do better academically than when they are retained (Karweit, 1991).

Mr. Jackson pointed out that retention may be an impediment to academic achievement. He stated that the retained students now feel all they need to do is pass the

ITBS rather than to learn content material in the classroom. He stated that they also do not feel they need to do certain things because they have done them already. In fact, Harvey (1994a) wrote that "recycling students through the same programs that were originally inappropriate for them will only perpetuate the inappropriate programs that become less interesting the second time around" (p. 2).

Teacher Perceptions of the Social and Emotional Effects of Retention

The fifth and final theme to be explored is teacher opinion of the social and psychological effects of retention on the retained students. "They are very sensitive about it" (Mrs. Stevens).

Research indicates that retention causes student to lose self-confidence and self-esteem, consequently low achievement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (French & Nelhaus, 1990; Goodlad, 1954). The teachers recognize these adverse effects that retention appears to have on the students. Mrs. Stevens talked about it: "The retained students seem not to want to work. They feel hurt. And it's like saying, 'You didn't do enough work, and that's why you didn't go to the next grade.'" Korn (1991), in maintaining that students in traditional classrooms are valued on the basis of their production rather than for themselves, substantiates the teacher's statement.

Mr. Jackson described the retained students in his classroom: "When they come into this situation, they don't want to be here. They feel ostracized." Goodlad (1954) found that in a comparison of social attitudes in promoted and nonpromoted students, there was a general decline in social attitudes for the nonpromoted students. These results confirm Mr. Williams' lament concerning the retained students:

The students struggle the most with social skills. There are so many issues

that need to be addressed prior to the learning process. Many of these children don't know how to sit next to someone without creating an attention situation.

It is apparent that the retained students' emotions and moods interfere with their learning.

Summary of Teacher Interview Themes

The themes that emerged from the teacher interviews focus on how both the retained and promoted students, for the most part, experience a traditional model of curriculum and instruction. The retained students now receive additional academic support from tutors and supplemental school programs. Both sixth and seventh grade teachers perceive that the students lack motivation to succeed. All of the teachers exhibit frustration over what they perceive to be a lack of parental support. There was a range of teacher opinions on whether retention is an effective means of raising the academic achievement level of students. The teachers agreed that there do exist negative social and emotional effects of retention on children.

Student Interviews

To better understand who these retained students are, the research of Bishop (1993) indicates that certain subpopulations within the total student population are prone to failure in school. These include (a) the gifted but bored student, (b) the learning impaired student, (c) the disinvited/alienated student, (d) the academic acrobat, and (e) the traumatized student.

Student participants in this study fit into several of Bishop's (1993) categorizations. For example, Tamara, an example of a gifted but bored student, exceeded the ITBS minimum score in reading in May 2000, with the highest GEQ of all

student research participants, including students who were promoted. Mr. Williams described Tamara as being gifted:

> The young lady reads on a 12th grade level, writes poetry, hasn't done so well in math and was retained. Excellent reader. Thinks on a higher level than a lot of adults that I have met. But because she hasn't fulfilled that goal in mathematics, she's being retained. There is no way that young lady should be in sixth grade.

Sherry fits into category number two, the learning-impaired student. After being retained in sixth grade, Sherry was tested and found to have a learning disability and was given special education services during the retention year. She described the difference her special education status has made: "I don't stay in the classroom no more. I go upstairs and do my work. But before I was going up there I got all F's. Now that I'm upstairs, I got all A's."

Deja and Lavelle may be described as disinvited/alienated students. Their school experiences are characterized by frustration, anger, and disappointment. Deja talked about being picked on a lot and getting involved in physical fights with the other students. Lavelle clearly believes his classroom teacher is not meeting his needs.

Allen, Jeannette, Faith, and Cheryl are typical of academic acrobats. Their grades fluctuate and there appears to be no consistency in their levels of achievement, although they perform close to grade level on achievement tests. Self-reports of inappropriate classroom behaviors and poor study habits contribute to their academic difficulties.

Themes

During the interviews, students shared their perceptions of school and their

teachers. They voiced their opinions about the practice of retention and shared their personal experiences. The results from the interviews revealed several themes. These themes include (a) student opinions on their ability, (b) student opinions on teacher roles, (c) student academic achievement and improvement, (d) social and emotional effects of retention, and (e) student resilience.

Student Opinions on Their Ability

The first theme to be discussed is how retained students place blame on themselves for not obtaining the ITBS scores required for promotion: "I think I wasn't paying attention enough" (Lavelle).

The students blame themselves for failing the ITBS tests they took both in May of 2000 and after the summer Bridge program in August of 2000. Only Jeannette directly addressed the test and said it was hard. All the other students gave reasons wherein they were responsible for not passing. Allen talks about "not studying". Sherry said she was not "focused". Tamara felt that she was "not being serious" at test time. Deja felt she did not pass because she was "playing around." That the students focused on behavioral issues, rather than academic ones, such as not understanding the questions or content of the tests, is consistent with the findings from the SSCRS. The students rated themselves higher on academic items than on behavioral ones.

For example, for question 6, which addressed the issue of whether the students act the way they are supposed to, the retained group averaged a score of 2, indicating a somewhat negative view of the appropriateness of their behavior. In contrast, on the academic self-concept question 20, which asked whether they felt as smart as other students their age, the group average score was 3, indicating a more adequate judgment

of their academic self than their behavioral self.

Cheryl talked about her test anxiety, "I knew I should have done better, but I don't understand. All the math problems on the Iowa test was that easy. How could I get the score that I got? I just froze." She explained that the source of her anxiety was not the test itself, but fear of the consequences should she fail the test.

Student Opinions on Teacher Roles

The second theme to be explored is student perceptions of the role of their teachers in their learning experiences. "Mr. Williams is practically the best teacher I ever had in my life" (Cheryl).

Student beliefs about their teachers make a difference in their learning. Retained students expressed high praise for their classroom teacher, Mr. Williams. Tamara credited Mr. William's teaching as one of the reasons for her improved academic performance: "He doesn't just teach a lesson. Every lesson relates to life."

However, the students appear to be in agreement with Lavelle's statement about Mr. Jackson: "He's not that good. He's nowhere near a professional." Sherry described her dissatisfaction with the instruction: "He keeps us on the same story for a month. He can't teach. That's why half the class had to go to summer school!" These students credit their improvement in school to other teachers and support personnel in the building.

The students expressed positive responses to instruction and support they received from the pullout resource teacher, Mrs. Adams. Deja reported, "She really helped me a lot." Allen stated that Mrs. Jones "taught me a lot." Students had high praise for their after-school teachers and Saturday tutors.

The students are not in classrooms with the same teachers from the previous year.

Student opinion of the previous year's teachers is not positive. Jeannette remarks about her teacher from the previous year: "Mrs. Waters, she really didn't teach us nothing." Faith stated that although she asked for assistance, the teacher would not help with the work, directing her instead to get help from classmates. "They didn't understand anything either," Faith explained.

Student Academic Achievement and Improvement

The third theme focused on student perceptions of their academic achievement and improvement during the retention year. "I learned some things" (Allen).

All of the students reported showing improvement on their 2001 report card grades. Grades on report cards are subjective to individual teacher decisions, and the criteria for earning grades is not standard. It is, however, an indicator of how teachers view the academic performance of students as well as a measure that students accept as an indicator of their own performance. This is significant because on a measure the students had previously taken, question 17 on the SSCRS, the students were asked if they were more like students who like taking their report cards home, or if they were more like students who were not happy to take their report cards home. Six of the eight students responded that they were not happy to take their report cards home.

Faith is proud of her grade in mathematics. "My math grade is a C. Last year I had a D. So I brought it up one grade."

The students were also pleased to have raised their ITBS mathematics GEQ scores. Lavelle talked about how he improved in math by "2 years", but stated that he "didn't do so good in reading."

The students link their improved behavior to their improved achievement. Sherry

reported, "I stopped being bad. My test scores in math came up." Cheryl said she had a problem with acting silly in class the previous year, "and that's what got me in trouble all the time. It's different this year."

Of course, Plummer and Graziano (1987) tell us that children who have been retained are placed in classrooms where work should be repetitive, therefore they may perform better.

Social and Emotional Effects of Retention

The fourth theme to be discussed is the social and emotional effects of retention on the students: "I felt dumb. I felt dumb and stupid. Because there I was with them little sixth graders" (Sherry).

With a few notable exceptions such as Alexander et al. (1994) who said that no emotional scars were detected from their study of the retention experience, the research is overwhelming that the psychological effect of retention on students is negative (Setencich, 1994; French & Nelhaus, 1990; Larabee, 1984; Shepard & Smith, 1987; Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Goodlad, 1954). In fact, a large sample of children who were retained in grade was interviewed by Byrnes (1989). Out of that group, 87% said that being retained made them feel "sad, bad, upset, or embarrassed" (p. 116). The results of the interviews with children in this study favor the majority opinion.

The SSCRS, used in this study to explore student self-perceptions of their general and academic competence, revealed no significant differences in the self-concept levels of the retained and promoted students. However, based on the results of interviews with the retained students, it was glaringly apparent that their self-esteem, which is the evaluative component of self-concept (Strein, 1993), and their feelings, had been badly

damaged as a result of the retention experience. The students reported that they were embarrassed, upset, hurt, and discouraged by being retained. Tamara reported feeling such a sense of shame that she wanted to hide her face as she walked by her promoted classmates in the hall.

Cheryl explained,

> I felt hurt that I didn't go on to the seventh grade. I just felt bad. And the biggest thing, my classmates and my best friend went to seventh grade before me and stuff. And now she's going to graduate without me.

Research such as Shepard and Smith (1987) supports Cheryl's statement because indications are that a major negative issue for retained students is separation from age-mates.

Student Resilience

The fifth and final theme to be discussed is student resilience in moving beyond the retention experience: "I'm an eighth grader! I'm an eighth grader!" (Tamara).

In spite of the academic, social, and emotional challenges the students faced during the retention year, student resilience was evident in that they believed they could succeed. This is consistent with the findings of Graham (as cited in Urdan and Davis, 1998) who reported that African American children are likely to report high future expectancies following failure situations. His data suggest that African American students remain optimistic about their future performance even after experiencing failure on a task.

Buoyed by a promise from school administrators to be double promoted to join their classmates if they reached the required score on the ITBS in May 2001, the retained

students had a positive outlook on their futures. Students not only expressed plans for furthering their education, but looked beyond school and spoke of career goals. Jeannette talked about teaching, Cheryl and Allen were considering careers in professional sports, and Faith was interested in pediatric medicine.

When the students received their ITBS scores for May 2001, only two of them had achieved the minimum scores required for promotion. Tamara expresses her feelings on receiving the results of her ITBS, "I was overwhelmed with joy! I was just going crazy. And I was in the car yelling, I'm going to eighth grade!"

Although the majority of students had brought their scores up to the level of the minimum score of 5.5 GEQ required in the year 2000, the requirements for promotion had changed. The students now needed to achieve minimum scores of 6.0 GEQ in both reading and mathematics for promotion.

A more complex promotion policy, where students were categorized according to a variety of characteristics, had been hastily created and implemented at the end of the 2001 school year. The majority of the retained sixth graders again were required to attend some type of summer school program. In certain cases, the students no longer would have to meet the minimum score on the ITBS during the Bridge program. By September of 2001, of the students who remained at the school, all but two of them had joined the ranks of the eighth grade students, entering their "right" grade. These two students were promoted to the seventh grade, but not allowed to proceed to eighth.

Summary of Student Interview Themes

The themes that emerged from the interviews focus on how the retained students blame themselves for not passing the ITBS tests, student opinions about their teachers,

academic achievement and improvement, social and emotional effects of retention on the students, and student resilience in moving beyond the retention experience. The students had mixed opinions on the instruction and support they received from classroom teachers. The students viewed the instruction from support and special teaching staff to be beneficial. The majority of the students believed their performance had improved during the retention year due to behavioral changes. The students all reported having negative feelings about being in the same grade for a second year, although their opinions were mixed on whether retention was a good idea. Finally, in spite of the retention experience, the majority of students had positive outlooks on their futures.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, GENERAL DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In this final chapter, a summary of the research findings, general discussion, implications, and recommendations for further study is presented. The hypotheses stated that there would exist statistically significant differences between the retained and the promoted students. The findings did not fully support every hypothesis. However, there do exist noteworthy differences as well as interesting conclusions and inferences to be drawn from the findings.

Summary of Findings

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine and describe the effects of retention on the academic, social, and emotional experiences of school children. Biddle and Anderson (1986) described the different purposes of quantitative and qualitative research, one to test hypothesis and the other to generate insights, and they concluded, " . . . the two perspectives have complementary goals. We need them both" (p. 29). A synthesis of the results from the quantitative and qualitative data will be discussed.

The quantitative analysis focused on students retained at the sixth grade level because both their ITBS reading and mathematics scores did not reach the minimum required levels mandated by the school district. The qualitative data revealed the reasons

the students believed they did not reach those cut-off scores, such as being inattentive or not taking the tests seriously. Literature, however, reveals that decisions on promotion and retention should not be based on a single criterion, like test scores (House, 1998; Riverside Publishing, 1998).

The quantitative data revealed significant differences in the ITBS mathematics achievement level of the retained and promoted students when both groups of students were in sixth grade. Further analysis of quantitative data showed a substantial increase in the ITBS mathematics scores of the retained students during their year of retention. The qualitative interview data provided us with possible reasons for improvement, such as increased teacher attention to topics in mathematics and student participation in tutoring and after-school and Saturday academic programs.

The quantitative data indicated that there was no significant difference in the self-concept levels of the retained and promoted students. However, qualitative data revealed that in the evaluative component of self-concept, self-esteem, the retained students were experiencing embarrassment, shame, and sadness in response to their retention experience.

General Discussion

At the end of the retention year, the retained students appeared to have narrowed the test score gap in mathematics between themselves and the level their promoted counterparts had achieved at the end of their sixth grade year. Although the retained students did make gains, the group failed to reach the mean score achieved by their promoted counterparts.

The performance gap was not so wide between the two groups in reading

achievement the year both groups were in sixth grade. At the end of the retention year, the retained students posted a mean score of .1 greater than their promoted counterparts had earned as sixth graders. However, there was only a net gain of .6 in reading for the retained students after spending an additional full year in sixth grade. There is little evidence to suggest that the retained students received the same level of instructional support in reading during the year of retention that they received in mathematics.

Research indicates that children may make progress during a retention year, thereby giving the appearance that retention is effective. However, comparative studies demonstrate that similar children who were promoted made as much or more progress without retention (Shepard & Smith, 1990; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987). In the case of several of the student participants in this study, they had, in fact, received the necessary scores and were eligible for promotion in one of the subject areas.

However, the policy of CPS demands that students achieve minimum scores in both reading and mathematics. CPS has no policy of subject repetition where students who, for example, did not meet the minimum requirements in mathematics, but did in reading, would only have to repeat the mathematics curriculum.

It is interesting to note that in May 2001, although each of the retained students raised their test scores, only Tamara and Allen achieved the scores necessary for promotion in both reading and mathematics. Of the remaining students who were retained, only Lavelle achieved a passing score in mathematics.

This is because the minimum ITBS scores in reading and mathematics required for promotion changed, and the cut-off score increased from 5.5 GEQ to 6.0 GEQ. Had

the minimum scores remained the same as the previous year, all but two of the students would have achieved the scores required for promotion (with the exception of Sherry, who is now a special education student and not required to obtain the minimum scores).

There are problems associated with the use of scores gained on standardized tests as the criteria to make high-stakes decisions, such as promotion from one grade to the next. One problem is, as FairTest (2002b) reported, one more question answered right or wrong can cause a big change in the student's score. They also reported that since all tests have measurement error, meaning they are not "perfectly" reliable, a score that appears as an absolute number is really an estimate, and the true score more accurately lies within a range or "score band." This exemplifies how little difference a few points in test scores may make in determining the actual achievement level of a student.

Retention and Self-concept

According to the results of the SSCRS, the overall self-concept levels of the retained and the promoted students are nearly identical. The normed scores show the retained students scoring .1 higher than the promoted students, an almost indistinguishable difference. It was expected that significant differences would exist. The quantitative analysis did not support that contention. However, the self-concept literature suggests that students may try to maintain their self-esteem by having inflated competence perceptions (Harter, 1985).

In addition, researchers such as Scruggs (1995) tell how people do not easily divulge self-concept, but instead protect their integrity by only sharing information that supports his or her individual beliefs. Scruggs indicates that self-esteem can be a better indicator of self-concept than disclosure. In fact, the qualitative interview data revealed a

profile for the retained students that demonstrates a low level of self-esteem, which is the evaluative component of self-concept.

Retention and Educational Policy

Policy decisions regarding promotion versus retention remain controversial and divisive issues. Equally controversial and disturbing is how policy decisions are made and implemented according to the race and class of those affected by the decisions. House (1998) wrote, "It is the inner city, with large minority populations where these harmful programs are implemented en masse" (p. 18). He tells how Americans support programs and policies that hurt African Americans, though they would not support the same policies if they were applied to the general population.

It is not only the students who are affected by policy decisions that conflict with effecting social justice in the educational arena. Teachers are too often hard pressed to provide the type of positive educational experiences they would like to engage in with the students. This is because the system is increasingly holding teachers accountable for test scores, rather than promoting genuine student learning, which prompts teachers to teach only that on which they know the students will be tested.

It is clear from the results of this study that questions continue to exist over what constitutes effective schooling for African Americans, even as the questions existed over 60 years ago (Woodson, 1933). It is also apparent that teacher education is a vital component in the effective schooling equation. Darling-Hammond (1998) asserts that teacher expertise is the most important determinate of student performance and can account for a difference of as much as 40% in overall student performance.

Ladson-Billings (1994) has identified four components necessary to prepare

effective teachers for African American students. Teachers need: (a) to know the history of African American education, (b) more and better explications of African American culture, (c) to examine the pedagogy of successful teachers of African American teachers, and (d) to become advocates on their behalf. Ladson-Billings stated that these components must be incorporated into teacher preparation programs.

Implications and Recommendations

Karweit (1991) wrote that both promotion and retention with additional instruction are more effective than either social promotion or retention alone. The results of this study appear to support that statement. The retained students in this study did not experience a retention situation where retention was the remediation strategy; instead they experienced retention combined with a variety of remediation strategies. The students participated in a variety of instructional activities designed to boost their academic achievement level. These included tutorial programs, after-school and Saturday learning sessions, and several teachers supported their learning.

This implies that student learning was impacted by the varied instructional and learning experiences. These experiences took place during the year of retention. Therefore, this raises the question of what might have happened if the students had been promoted and received the type of support they experienced during the year of retention.

Alternatives to Retention and Social Promotion

Retention has not been proven to be an effective strategy to increase academic achievement. Social promotion does not work. There are many alternative strategies that can be employed that will result in more effective education for students than either retention or social promotion.

To begin with, skilled teachers should be placed in the classrooms. Accomplished teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies, including ones that are both academically and culturally coherent, to accommodate the diverse learners in their classrooms. Effective administrators have high expectations for teachers and provide meaningful staff development opportunities to increase teachers' knowledge and skills.

Next, relevant and meaningful curriculum that relates student work to their interests and needs should be provided. Active learning and engaging activities will prevent students from becoming disengaged and disinterested in learning. If there is an emphasis on genuine learning, gains on test scores will naturally follow.

Additionally, more attention must be paid to individual students to find out their needs so they can be provided with appropriate instruction and early intervention when academic difficulty is detected. Schools should not wait until students fail before needed assistance is provided.

Also parent and community involvement is a fundamental component in providing positive educational experiences for children. Schools can help by maintaining regular, meaningful, two-way communication between home and school; welcoming parental assistance and support in the school; teaching families how to help their children at home; and using community resources to support and facilitate student learning.

Finally, promotion with extra help such as tutoring, after-school and summer school programs, and remedial instruction will help low-achieving students improve academically. Based on the results of this study, targeted and sustained extra help is academically beneficial to students.

Recommendations for Further Study

Although studies show students making gains on standardized tests after the retention year, these gains tended to disappear within 3 years (Karweit & Wasik, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Snyder & West, 1992). Therefore, one recommendation for further research would be to conduct a longitudinal study on CPS students to track student progress over time to determine if gains made on the ITBS are sustained or if they will disappear, as many researchers predict will happen. Since this study was limited by a small sample size, it is recommended that this further research would use a larger sample size.

Based on the results of this study, a closer examination of the efficacy of the CPS summer Bridge academic program is warranted. Despite the scripted curriculum directly tied to the ITBS, there was no positive impact on the test scores of the study participants. Therefore, further study on what might constitute an effective academic remediation program is recommended.

Another interesting aspect revealed, albeit outside the scope of this study, is that a review and analysis of the desegregation policy concerning the teacher population in the CPS may be helpful. As in the case of the school in this study, some who teach students may not have completed appropriate teacher preparation programs. Qualified African American teachers are unable to be permanently appointed to the school. Appointment would place the school out of racial quota compliance, because based on teacher demographics, the staff is not considered diverse enough. The dichotomy is that the classrooms are still largely staffed with African American personnel, only now they are ones who possess lesser qualifications, as documented in this study in the descriptive

teacher data (see Table 17).

Despite any limitations, the results of this study demonstrate that there is little evidence that holding students back improves academic achievement. Therefore, when the question of how best to raise the academic achievement level of students is posed, it is hoped that policymakers and education professionals will no longer consider retention to be the only solution.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT FROM PRINCIPAL TO CONDUCT STUDY AT THE RESEARCH SITE

Principal
Chicago Public School
Chicago, Illinois

I am undertaking a study designed to uncover the perspectives and feelings of teachers, students, and their parents on student achievement and self-concept. I am a doctoral student at DePaul University in the School of Education, and this study will be my dissertation. I will conduct this study under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Vera Rhimes.

I will need to administer a self-concept survey to selected students. I would like to conduct one or two classroom observations of teachers to observe their teaching techniques and interactions with students. I will interview the teachers of the students who are participating in the study and ask them to complete questionnaires on each student participant.

I will ask the parents of the students who are participating in the study to complete questionnaires on their children.

I will need to examine any pertinent student records and have access to their scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

I will use pseudonyms to identify all participants. Only my academic advisor and I will have access to the entire information. Any information that can identify the participants will be disclosed only with their permission.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and they are free to withdraw their consent to participate at any time.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Beverly J. Greene or Dr. Vera Rhimes, 773/325-4344, DePaul University, School of Education, 2320 North Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60614.

Your signature will indicate that you give me authorization to interview teachers and students and to have access to statistical data.

_____
Print name

_____ _____
Signature Date

APPENDIX B

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FORM

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY

School of Education
2320 North Kenmore Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60614-3298
773/325-7740
FAX: 773/325-7748

Parent/guardian Permission Form For
Child's Participation in Research
Academic Achievement and Student Self-concept

1. My name is Beverly Greene.

2. I am asking you to permit your child to take part in a research study, because I am trying to learn more about student achievement in the Chicago Public School system. I am interested in how students feel about themselves and their school experiences. Your child has been asked to participate because he/she is a part of this system and has valuable insights to share. If your child is to participate, he/she will complete a 20-item survey which asks questions about what they are like. This survey will take less than 30 minutes to complete. I may interview your child and ask him/her to share his/her views on schooling. The interviews will last for about one hour. Your child will be observed in the classroom as I watch the teaching and learning that takes place there.

3. If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, your child will be asked to complete the survey here, at school, along with certain of his/her classmates. The interviews will take place before and after school, once the surveys have been completed.

4. Your real names will not be used in this study. Only my DePaul University sponsor and a transcriptionist may see the information. This will lessen the risk that others will be able to identify your child as a study participant. The transcriptionist will sign a pledge to keep all information confidential. All documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my residence. The computer on which the data will be entered is password protected. I am the only one who has access to the keys to the file cabinet and to the computer system password.

5. Your child will receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, the results of this study may provide useful information to benefit the field of education. Although your child's real name will not be used, there is a risk that someone will know that he/she is participating in the study.

6. If you do not want your child to be in this study, your child does not have to participate. Remember, your child's being in this study is entirely up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not want your child to participate. You may even change your mind later and withdraw your agreement for your child's participation.

7. All information that your child provides in this research study will be kept strictly confidential, and any report of this research will not identify your child personally in any way.

8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you do not think of now, you can call me (773/325-4344).

9. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to allow your child to be in this study. You will be offered a copy of this form after you have signed it.

10. Investigator's responsibility: I have fully explained to _____ the nature and the purpose of the above-described research procedures and the risks and benefits involved in its performance. I have answered all (and will continue to answer all) questions to the best of my ability. I will inform the parent/guardian of any changes in the procedures or risks and benefits if they should occur during or after the course of this study. I have offered a copy of this permission form to the parent/guardian.

Investigator's signature_____ Date_____

11. Parent/guardian's consent: I have been satisfactorily informed of the above-described procedure with its possible risks and benefits. I agree to allow my child _____ to participate in this research study. If I have any questions regarding my child's rights as a participant in this research study, I may request to speak to a member of the DePaul University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Research Participants by calling 773/325-7388. I understand that my child's participation in this research study is voluntary and that I am free to stop my child's participation at any time, without any penalty, even after signing this form. I have been offered a copy of this form.

Name of parent/guardian_____ Date_____

Signature_____

DPU-IRB approval number_____

APPENDIX C

CHILD ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

IN RESEARCH FORM

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY

School of Education
2320 North Kenmore Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60614-3298
773/325-7740
FAX: 773/325-7748

Child's Assent to Participate in Research
Academic Achievement and Student Self-concept

1. My name is Ms. Greene.

2. I am asking you to take part in a research study, because I am trying to learn more about student achievement in the Chicago Public School system. I am interested in how students feel about themselves and their school experiences. You are being asked to participate because you are a CPS student and what you have to say is important to me. Your participation means that you will complete a 20-item survey that asks questions about what you are like. This survey will take less than 30 minutes to complete. I may interview you to have you share your views on your schooling. The interviews will last for about an hour. You will be observed during class as I watch the teaching and learning that takes place in your classroom.

3. If you agree to be in this study, you will complete the survey, along with certain of your classmates here, at the school. The interviews will be conducted at the school once the surveys have been completed.

4. Your real names will not be used in this study. Only my DePaul University faculty sponsor and a typist may see the entire information. This will lessen the risk that others will be able to identify you as a participant in the study. The typist will sign a pledge to keep all information confidential. All documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my residence. The computer on which the data will be entered is password protected. I am the only one who has access to the keys to the file cabinet and to the computer system password.

5. You will receive no rewards from taking part in this study. However, the results of this study may provide useful information to benefit the field of education. Although your real names will not be used, there is a risk that someone will know you are participating in the study.

6. I have asked your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents have said "yes", you can still decide not to do this. I hope that you have talked this over with your parents before deciding whether or not to participate.

7. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or

even if you change your mind later and want to stop and withdraw your agreement to participate.

8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you do not think of now, you can call me at 773/325-4344 or ask me next time.

9. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Name of participant_____ Date_____

Signature_____ Age_____ Grade in school_____

DPU-IRB approval number _____

APPENDIX D

TEACHER CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

IN RESEARCH FORM

DEPAUL
UNIVERSITY

School of Education
2320 North Kenmore Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60614-3298
773/325-7740
FAX: 773/325-7748

Teacher Consent to Participate in Research
Academic Achievement and Student Self-concept

1. My name is Ms. Beverly Greene.

2. I am asking you to take part in a research study, because I am trying to learn more about student achievement in the Chicago Public School system. I am interested in how students feel about themselves and their school experiences. You are being asked to participate because you are an experienced CPS teacher and because you have valuable insights to share. I will interview you and ask you to share your views on teaching and learning. The interviews may be about an hour in duration. I may visit your classroom several times to observe the instructional practices and interaction between you and your students.

3. If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the initial interviews that will be conducted before and after school. The classroom observations and subsequent interviews will take place after the initial interviews have been completed.

4. Your real names will not be used in this study. Only my DePaul University faculty sponsor and a transcriptionist may see the information. This will lessen the risk that others will be able to identify you as a participant in this study. The transcriptionist will sign a pledge to keep all information confidential. All documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my residence. The computer on which the data will be entered is password protected. I am the only one who has access to the keys to the file cabinet and to the computer system password.

5. You will receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, the results of this study may provide useful information to benefit the field of education. Although your real names will not be used in the study, there is a risk that someone will know that you are a study participant.

6. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Remember, being in this study is entirely up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop and withdraw your agreement to participate.

7. All information that you provide in this research study will be kept strictly confidential, and any report of this research will not identify you personally in any way.

8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you do not think of now, you can call me at 773/325-4344.

9. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

10. Investigator's responsibility: I have fully explained to _____ the nature and the purpose of the above-described research procedures and the risks and benefits involved in its performance. I have answered all (and will continue to answer all) questions to the best of my ability. I will inform the participant of any changes in the procedures or risks and benefits if they should occur during or after the course of this study. I have

Investigator's signature_____ Date_____

11. Participant's consent: I have been satisfactorily informed of the above-described procedure with its possible risks and benefits. I agree to participate in this research study. If I have any questions regarding my rights as a participant in this research study, I may request to speak to a member of the DePaul University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Research Participants by calling 773/325-7388. I understand that my child's participation in this research study is voluntary and that I am free to stop participating at any time, without any penalty, even after signing this form. I have been offered a copy of this form.

Name of subject_____ Date_____

Signature_____

DPU-IRB approval number_____

APPENDIX E

ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT UNDERSTANDING

OF CONSENT FORM PROCESS FORM

Academic Achievement and Student Self-concept
Assessment of Participant Understanding of Consent Process

Please write your answers after we read the questions aloud together.

1. What is this study about?

_____

2. What are the risks involved for participation in this study?

_____

3. What are the benefits to you for participation in the study?

_____

Name of participant_____ Date_____

Signature_____

APPENDIX F

STUDENT PARTICIPANT DATA COLLECTION FORM

Student Participant Data Collection Form

Student #_____

Room #_____ Grade_____ Teacher(s)_____ _____

Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Scores:

May 2000 Reading_____ Mathematics_____

August 2000 Reading_____ Mathematics_____

May 2001 Reading_____ Mathematics_____

Report Card Grades:

June 2000 Reading_____ Mathematics_____

June 2001 Reading_____ Mathematics_____

Student Self-concept Rating Scale:

Raw score_____ Derived score_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX G

GUIDE FOR RETAINED STUDENT SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Guide for Student Semistructured Interviews

Appropriate Follow-up Questions May Be Asked, Based on Participant Responses

Protocol for Sixth Grade Retained Students

1. Tell me about school.

2. Tell me about your teachers.

3. What do you think are the reasons you did not pass the ITBS last year?

4. Compared with last year, tell me in what ways you have improved in school this year.

5. Is it a good idea to retain students in the same grade?

6. How do you feel about being in the same grade for another year?

7. What is the one thing you really want me to write about your experience?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?

APPENDIX H

GUIDE FOR SIXTH GRADE TEACHER SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Guide for Teacher Semistructured Interviews

Appropriate Follow-up Questions May Be Asked, Based on Participant Responses

Protocol for Teachers of Sixth Grade Retained Students

A. Description and experience

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. What grade levels/subjects have you taught?

3. Have you taught in any other school systems?

4. Why did you become a teacher?

B. Opinions

1. Tell me about your instructional program.

2. How does it differ from last year?

3. Is it the same for retained students and for those who have not been retained?

4. Tell me about the support structures that are in place for students who are struggling.

5. Tell me about the attitudes of the students toward their schooling.

6. Tell me about your experiences with the parents of your students.

7. What do you think are the greatest challenges for the retained students?

8. Is retaining students an effective way to raise their academic achievement level?

9. What are your recommendations for students who are struggling?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

APPENDIX I

GUIDE FOR SEVENTH GRADE TEACHER SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Guide for Teacher Semistructured Interviews

Appropriate Follow-up Questions May Be Asked, Based on Participant Responses

Protocol for Teachers of Seventh Grade Students

A. Description and experience:

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. What grade levels/subjects have you taught?

3. Have you taught in other school systems?

4. Why did you become a teacher?

B. Opinions:

1. Tell me about your instructional program.

2. How does it differ from last year?

3. Is it the same for all of your students?

4. Tell me about the support structures that are in place for students who are struggling.

5. Tell me about the attitudes of the students toward their schooling.

6. Tell me about your experiences with the parents of your students.

7. What are the greatest challenges for the students.

8. Is retaining students an effective way to raise their academic achievement level?

9. What are your recommendations for assistance to students who are struggling?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

APPENDIX J

STUDENT SELF-CONCEPT RATING SCALE

	Really true for me	Sort of true for me				Sort of true for me	Really true for me
1.	☐	☐	Some students feel they are very good at their school work.	BUT	Other students worry about whether they can do the school work assigned to them.	☐	☐
2.	☐	☐	Some students are happy with the way they look.	BUT	Other students are not happy with the way they look.	☐	☐
3.	☐	☐	Some students don't like it when the teacher says it's their turn to read out loud.	BUT	Other students like to read out loud.	☐	☐
4.	☐	☐	Some students don't like the way they are living their lives.	BUT	Other students like the way they are living their lives.	☐	☐
5.	☐	☐	Some students can almost always figure out the answers to math problems.	BUT	Other students have trouble figuring out the answers to math problems.	☐	☐
6.	☐	☐	Some students usually act the way they are supposed to.	BUT	Other students don't act the way they are supposed to.	☐	☐
7.	☐	☐	Some students often forget what they learn.	BUT	Other students can remember things easily.	☐	☐
8.	☐	☐	Some students usually do the right thing.	BUT	Other students often don't do the right thing.	☐	☐
9.	☐	☐	Some students feel good about how well they read.	BUT	Other students don't feel they read that well.	☐	☐

	Really true for me	Sort of true for me				Sort of true for me	Really true for me
10.	☐	☐	Some students are pretty slow in finishing their work.	BUT	Other students can do their school work quickly.	☐	☐
11.	☐	☐	Some students are often unhappy with themselves.	BUT	Other students are pretty pleased with themselves.	☐	☐
12.	☐	☐	Some students feel okay when the teacher says it's time to take a test.	BUT	Other students don't feel good when they have to take a test.	☐	☐
13.	☐	☐	Some students feel math is difficult.	BUT	Other students feel math is not difficult.	☐	☐
14.	☐	☐	Some students feel they don't have a lot to be proud of.	BUT	Other students feel they have a lot to be proud of.	☐	☐
15.	☐	☐	Some students are not very happy with the way they do a lot of things.	BUT	Other students think the way they do things is just fine.	☐	☐
16.	☐	☐	Some students feel reading is easy.	BUT	Other students don't feel reading is easy.	☐	☐
17.	☐	☐	Some students are not happy to take their report cards home.	BUT	Other students like taking their report cards home.	☐	☐
18.	☐	☐	Some students are very happy being the way they are.	BUT	Other students wish they were different.	☐	☐

	Really true for me	Sort of true for me				Sort of true for me	Really true for me
19.	☐	☐	Some students don't learn new things in math very easily.	BUT	Other students feel good when they have a chance to learn something new in math.	☐	☐
20.	☐	☐	Some students feel they are just as smart as other students their age.	BUT	Other students aren't sure and wonder if they are as smart.	☐	☐

APPENDIX K

RAW DATA

ITBS GRADE EQUIVALENT SCORES

FOR RETAINED AND PROMOTED STUDENTS

Grade Equivalent Scores on Iowa Tests of Basic Skills

and Percentile Ranks of Retained and Promoted Students

for May 2000 and May 2001

Grade Equivalent Scores on Iowa Tests of Basic Skills

for August 2000 (Bridge Program) for Retained Students

	Reading			Math		
	May 2000	Aug 2000	May 2001	May 2000	Aug 2000	May 2001
Student	GEQ	GEQ	GEQ	GEQ	GEQ	GEQ
			Retained			
1	5.2	5.8	5.6	4.8	4.3	5.0
2	6.3	5.1	5.9	4.5	4.5	6.1
3	6.9	7.7	7.3	4.9	4.7	6.3
4	5.9	5.1	6.5	5.0	5.4	6.1
5	4.6	5.6	5.9	4.9	4.9	5.5
6	4.2	4.4	4.4	4.3	3.9	5.1
7	3.4	4.4	5.3	4.5	5.7	5.7
8	5.2	3.8	5.4	4.6	5.0	5.6
			Promoted			
9	5.7		5.8	6.7		7.0
10	6.0		6.0	6.0		6.1
11	4.6		6.9	6.3		6.2
12	6.2		5.3	7.0		7.3
13	5.0		6.2	4.9		6.2
14	5.4		4.8	5.0		7.2
15	6.2		6.7	6.6		6.9
16	6.6		8.2	7.6		7.5

APPENDIX L

RAW DATA

STUDENT SELF-CONCEPT RATING SCALE SUBSCALE SCORES

FOR RETAINED STUDENTS

Retained Students' Raw Scores on Student Self-concept Rating Scale

Subscales and Composite Totals

	Subscale	General self-concept									Academic self-concept							Reading self-concept				Mathematics self-concept				Composite
S	Item #	2	4	6	8	11	14	15	18	Sum	1	7	10	12	17	20	Sum	3	9	19	Sum	5	13	19	Sum	Totals
1		4	4	2	3	4	4	3	4	28	4	2	2	3	2	4	17	2	4	4	10	2	2	4	8	63
2		4	2	1	1	2	1	4	3	18	3	2	3	2	1	2	13	4	4	4	12	3	3	3	9	52
3		4	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	27	4	4	4	4	2	4	22	4	4	4	12	1	1	2	4	65
4		4	1	3	4	4	1	2	4	23	3	4	4	4	2	3	20	3	4	4	11	1	2	3	6	60
5		4	3	2	3	3	4	3	4	26	3	1	3	1	2	2	12	3	4	3	10	2	2	2	6	54
6		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	1	1	2	3	1	1	9	1	1	4	6	1	1	2	4	27
7		4	4	3	4	2	4	3	4	28	4	3	4	4	4	4	23	4	3	3	10	3	4	4	11	72
8		4	3	2	3	3	4	3	2	24	2	4	3	2	3	2	16	2	3	3	8	1	1	2	4	52
										182							132				79				52	445

Note. S = Student. Response key: 4 = positive, 3 = somewhat positive, 2 = somewhat negative, 1 = negative.

APPENDIX M

RAW DATA

STUDENT SELF-CONCEPT RATING SCALE SUBSCALE SCORES

FOR PROMOTED STUDENTS

Promoted Students' Raw Scores on Student Self-concept Rating Scale

Subscales and Composite Totals

	Subscale	General self-concept									Academic self-concept							Reading self-concept				Mathematics self-concept				Composite
S	Item #	2	4	6	8	11	14	15	18	Sum	1	7	10	12	17	20	Sum	3	9	19	Sum	5	13	19	Sum	Totals
9		4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	31	3	3	3	3	2	4	18	2	3	4	9	3	3	3	9	67
10		4	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	28	4	2	2	4	2	4	18	3	4	4	11	3	4	4	11	68
11		4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	28	3	3	2	3	3	2	16	3	3	3	9	3	3	2	8	61
12		3	1	4	4	3	1	2	2	20	3	3	3	3	2	3	17	4	3	3	10	2	4	4	10	57
13		4	1	2	1	1	4	2	2	17	2	2	3	1	2	1	11	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	4	35
14		4	3	3	3	4	4	3	2	26	1	1	2	2	3	2	11	1	3	3	7	1	1	3	5	49
15		4	2	1	1	1	4	4	4	21	2	2	4	2	4	4	18	1	2	2	5	1	2	4	7	51
16		4	3	2	2	4	3	4	4	26	2	3	3	3	2	1	14	4	4	3	11	3	2	4	9	60
										197							123				65				63	448

Note. S = Student. Response key: 4 = positive, 3 = somewhat positive, 2 = somewhat negative, 1 = negative.