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Teacher and Administrator Beliefs about Grade Retention in
Northeast Tennessee School Districts

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Christopher A. Feathers

May 2020

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Keywords: Grade Retention, Social Promotion, No Child Left Behind, Every Student Succeeds

Act, Adequate Yearly Progress

ABSTRACT

Teacher and Administrator Beliefs about Grade Retention in Northeast Tennessee School Districts

by

Christopher A. Feathers

The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers and administrators hold differing beliefs about grade retention. School districts in Northeast Tennessee participated in this study.

Participants in eight school districts took an online survey designed to collect data on beliefs about grade retention. The survey consisted of two sections. Section A inquired about beliefs about grade retention. Section B collected demographic information and also included an open-ended response question. Respondents were also asked to choose a factor that has the strongest influence on their belief. Responses from 205 surveys were analyzed and informed the results of this study.

A quantitative study was conducted to determine if significant differences about grade retention existed between teachers and principals. Overall belief scores were measured to determine if teachers and administrators favor grade retention as an effective intervention strategy.

Independent variables in this study included: type of system, grade level, years of experience, and type of degree. Factors that had the strongest influence on beliefs about grade retention included: other people's opinions, principal's opinion, research, experience with a retained student, or other. Respondents choosing other were asked to explain their answer.

Findings from the study indicated that there is not a significant difference in beliefs about grade retention between teachers and administrators in a city school system versus a county school system. Additional analysis did not show significant differences in beliefs about grade retention between teachers in grades kindergarten through fourth grade (K-4) versus teachers in grades fifth through eighth (5-8). A teacher's or administrator's number of years of experience did not indicate significant differences in beliefs about grade retention. The type of degree held by teachers and administrators did reveal a significant difference in beliefs about grade retention between the two degree types (graduate or bachelor's). Results from this test indicated that teachers with a graduate degree significantly favor retention over teachers who hold a bachelor's degree. Additionally, an overall belief score for all respondents was calculated for significance.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my wife and children. Lisa, you have been a source of encouragement and my constant champion from the start. Your support has been unwavering throughout this process. You are the reason I started on this journey in the first place. From the very beginning of our relationship, you challenged me to get an education and made many sacrifices along the way so that I could accomplish my goals. Thank you for walking each step beside me. I could not have done this without you. My success is your success. I love you!!!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Student retention became standard practice with the founding of the graded school system in the late 19th century. Retention was used as a corrective intervention for students not meeting required educational standards. Students of similar age and development were grouped together but did not advance to the next grade level unless they demonstrated satisfactory mastery of the content (Caples, 2005). As cited by Caples (2005), Coffield and Blommers (1956) report as many as 7-10 students were retained in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

School accountability continues to be at the forefront of education. From NCLB (No Child Left Behind) to ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), adequate yearly progress (AYP) is paramount. Adequate yearly progress is a measure used by school districts to determine that students are improving academically; in order to achieve AYP, districts must exhibit an increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding statewide yearly achievement objectives (Thompson, Meyers, & Oshima, 2011).

Schools must perform and demonstrate growth lest they be placed on an underperforming list with risks of further consequences (Powell, 2010). The *No Child Left Behind Act*, enacted in 2001, fueled increased pressure for schools to ensure the academic success of all students. The No Child Left Behind Act was passed as a landmark in education reform. NCLB was designed to improve student achievement and also sought to change the culture of America's schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). As a result, school districts came to rely heavily on students' performance on standardized tests to determine the need for grade retention (Gottfried, 2012).

Schools across the country are looking for effective practices to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. The result is a plethora of practices that persist even though their effectiveness remains unproven (Bestwick, Sloat, & Willms, 2008). One practice, retention, is one of the longest and most contentious educational practices in existence (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Grade retention, or repeating a grade, is the act of holding a student in the same grade for a second year (Shepard, 1989; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). Educators who use retention make the assumption that additional time on task is all that is required for students to master the objectives.

Passing, or being promoted to the next grade, is a worry for every child as he or she progresses through their education. Fear of failing a grade is a great stressor for children. In a study conducted by Anderson, Whipple, and Jimerson (2005), children rated the fear of academic retention only behind the fear of losing a parent or going blind. Typically, teacher recommendations influence retention decisions, but, ultimately, the principal makes the final decision (Ellwein & Glass, 1989; Rose, Medway, Cantrell, & Marus, 1983). Most retention decisions are linked to academic performance, however, other variables such as social and emotional maturity, are also considered.

Although existing research challenges the effectiveness of grade retention, it is still a widely used educational practice in the United States and throughout the world. Research shows that grade retention fails to produce prolonged academic or emotional growth (e.g. Huang, 2014; Pagani, Vitaro, Tremblay, McDuff, Japel, & Larose, 2008; Wilson & Hughes, 2009). However, it is estimated that approximately 2.5 million students in kindergarten through twelfth grade are retained each year at a cost upwards of \$14 billion dollars annually (Dawson, 1998; Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Shepard & Smith, 1990). Simultaneously,

budget cuts at the state and district level are causing educational agencies to operate at a loss (Education Week, 2011). As a result, this deficit is inflated by the excessive annual cost of grade retention (Denton, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Public education in the United States has seen tremendous changes over the years (Greene & Winters, 2009; United States Department of Education, 2010). Every year educators are faced with the decision on whether or not to promote or retain struggling learners. While many states and school districts have strict retention and promotion policies, others present vague guidelines to assist in the decision-making process (American Federation of Teachers, 1997). Even though grade retention can negatively impact students (Pagani et al., 2008), it is broadly used throughout the United States (Bornsheuer, Polonyi, Andrews, Fore, & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if significant differences about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy exists between teachers and principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers in a county school system and teachers in a city school system?
2. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between administrators in a county school system and

administrators in a city school system?

3. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers?
4. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of teaching experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?
5. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of administrator experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?
6. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers who hold graduate degrees and teachers who do not?

Significance of the Study

This study focused on teacher and administrator beliefs about grade retention. This is an area of research that has not been fully explored. Tomchin and Impara (1992) along with Witmer et al. (2004), asserted that, according to research, teachers tend to maintain positive beliefs about retention, however; a conceptual understanding of how often teachers' beliefs are in agreement with team retention decisions, is not fully understood. Whether retaining a student in kindergarten through fourth grade or grades five through eight, this practice can have a profoundly negative impact on students and their future academic success. According to Jimerson (2007) there is a strong association with grade retention and dropping out of high school. Earlier research conducted by Anderson, Whipple, and Jimerson (2002) found that

retention was one of the most powerful predictors for dropping out of high school. Their research showed that retained students were 2 to 11 times more likely to drop out than were promoted students. However, many school systems have policy in place that make allowances for the continued use of retention. Additionally, many states have gone so far as to mandate student retention for children who are not reading on grade level by the end of the third grade (Alvarez, 2017). The findings of this study may prove useful for teacher preparation programs in educating future teachers and administrators and help shape their perceptions about the negative impact student retention can have on future student success.

Definitions of Terms

The terms listed below are important in this study, the findings, and the recommendations for further research:

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Measure utilized by school districts to determine that students are improving academically; in order to achieve AYP, districts must exhibit an increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding statewide yearly achievement objectives (Thompson, Meyers, & Oshima, 2011).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The act that created accountability measures for improving education in all schools (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). ESSA was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015.

Grade Retention

Practice of having students repeat a year of schooling in which they did not meet the required educational standards (Reschly & Christenson, 2013).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

A “landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America’s schools” that was passed in 2001 (U. S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 7).

Social Promotion

The practice of advancing students to the next grade with their same-age peers despite not having met the required educational standards (Reschly & Christenson, 2013).

Limitations

This quantitative study was conducted in six school districts in the Northeast Tennessee region, including three county and three city school systems. Conducted during the 2019-2020 school year, survey results reflected the responses from participants in select districts which may not reflect the perceptions of educators in other regions of Tennessee or the nation. Respondents participated voluntarily and those unwilling to participate may have provided differing responses than those who chose to respond to the survey instrument. Another limitation is the sample size of principals’ comparative to teachers. With a smaller number of potential participants, fewer surveys may be completed, which may not be a true representation of the population surveyed.

An additional limitation is the variation in campus criteria or district policies regarding the practice of grade retention may not be consistent among districts.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the topic, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations, and chapter summary. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature including the history of grade retention, who is retained, short-term and long-term effects, costs of grade retention, emotional and behavioral effects, decision making, perceptions, early grades vs middle grades, and alternatives to grade retention. Chapter 3 provides research methods including guiding research questions and null hypotheses, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and chapter summary. Chapter 4 provides results of the study and chapter summary. Chapter 5 provides statement of the problem, discussions and conclusions, implications for practice, recommendations for further research and chapter summary.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

School accountability continues to be at the forefront of education. As a result, both state and district accountability systems are expanding and now incorporate grade retention for students who do not demonstrate satisfactory achievement levels (Frey, 2005). From NCLB (No Child Left Behind) to ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), adequate yearly progress (AYP) on standardized achievement tests is paramount. Schools must perform and demonstrate growth lest they be placed on an underperforming list with risks of further consequences (Powell, 2010). The *No Child Left Behind Act*, enacted in 2001 under President George W. Bush, fueled increased pressure for schools to ensure the academic success of all students. This act sought to close the gap in achievement through accountability, flexibility, and choice. Interestingly, Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nickerson, and Kundert (2006) proposed that more children have been “left behind” after its passing than before it was passed. According to Jahng (2011), this legislation marked one of the most drastic changes to K-12 public education.

As a result, schools across the country are looking for effective practices to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. Bestwick, Sloat, and Willms (2008) surmised that the result is a plethora of practices that persist even though their effectiveness remains unproven. According to Reschly and Christenson (2013), of the practices that persist, grade retention and social promotion are educational issues that have a continued history of longevity and contentiousness. Grade retention is the act of repeating a year of schooling if certain educational, or in some cases, social standards have not been met, whereas, social promotion advances students to the next grade level despite not having mastered the required educational or social standards.

Retention requires a child to repeat a grade if they have not demonstrated sufficient mastery of grade level curricular objectives. The underlying argument is that retention will provide low achieving students an additional opportunity to improve achievement and meet the standards (Chen et al., 2010; Lorence, 2006, 2014). Grade retention is not only an educational concern in the United States, but in other countries utilizing this same approach. Many countries have a widespread practice of retention (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008; Goos, Van Damme, Onghena, Petry, & de Bilde, 2013; Pagani, Tremblay, Vilar, Boulerice, & McDuff, 2001) in spite of research studies condemning the practice as ineffective in improving student learning (Holmes, 1989, Jimerson, 2001). Using *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data, Marsh (2016), however, noted a substantial variation from country to country in their use of grade retention.

Passing, or being promoted to the next grade, is a worry for every child as he or she progresses through his or her education. Fear of failing a grade is a great stressor for children (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2005). Previous meta-analysis of grade retention studies has documented the negative effects of retention on student's social and emotional adjustment (Jimerson, 2001a).

Even though substantial research exists citing the negative impact of retention, it is still in practice across the nation (Burkam, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007; Jimerson, 2001; Ou & Reynolds, 2010). In some states retention has become a mandatory practice as a result of policy or law. These policies and laws were born out of President Bill Clinton's call for an end to social promotion and were viewed as permission to retain low achieving students (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Students not reading on grade level or having not mastered certain criteria by the end of the third grade are required to repeat the same grade instead of being promoted with their same-age peers.

History of Grade Retention

Prior to the late 1800s, education in the U.S. was acquired in nongraded, one room schoolhouses where the material was taught by one teacher. Children attending school had the opportunity to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. During this time, students attending school varied in age and acquired knowledge. Therefore, the education was individualized based on the differing needs among children. Students worked at their own pace, and their education level was determined by the number of books completed and the material mastered (Medway & Rose, 1986). Grade retention became common practice in U.S. Schools as early as the 1900s. Ehmke (2010) noted that grade retention, as an educational practice, has been established and implemented, since the provenance of the age-based classroom in the 19th century.

According to Lynch (2014), the problems of the age-grade classrooms emerged with the arrival of grade schools in the nineteenth century. The first school with graded classrooms, Quincy School, opened in Boston in 1848. However, grouping children by age and grade levels became common practice in U.S. schools around 1860. Promotion was dependent on mastery of specific goals prior to promotion to the next level (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Retention of children not mastering the required knowledge became a routine practice. Additionally, labels categorizing children based on standardized exam performance began to surface in the late 1800s (Lynch, 2014). Children who were deemed normal were able to advance at the expected pace while children considered not normal were retained (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Owings and Magliaro (1998) reported that Maxwell's age-grade progress study became the leading source for school system reports on retention, promotion, and dropouts. Results from the study prompted researchers to examine the effectiveness of grade retention regarding student achievement.

As an educational practice, grade retention is not new. Powell (2010) pointed to research executed by Keyes as early as 1911. Peterson and Hughes (2010) acknowledged that in the United States educational system grade retention has been used for more than 100 years. Grade retention is the practice of having students repeat a grade (year of schooling) if they do not meet specific educational standards. According to Reynolds (1992), the goal of retention was to provide students with additional time in order to develop satisfactory academic skills and improve school performance. These standards may also include social-emotional (maturational) standards, especially in the lower grades. Historically, grade retention became common practice in U.S. Schools as early as the 1900s.

Social promotion and grade retention have shared the educational spotlight for much of our educational history. However, the pendulum began to swing toward social promotion in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Owings and Magliano (1998) social promotion is the practice of promoting students to the next grade level who failed to master current grade level curriculum. Social promotion can also have ill effects on students. Owings and Kaplan (2001) argued that students permitted to advance to the next grade may enter lacking deficient knowledge which could result in diminished student accountability. In a comparison of the two practices Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994) contended that retention is an admission of failure for both students and schools. However, after being retained most repeaters in a social promotion system would fall further behind in the upper grades.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was presented to the United States Secretary of Education by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report drew national attention to the decline of academic performance of students in the United States. Subsequently, policy makers, educators, and parents became apprehensive about the state of education in the United States. As

a result, social promotion was no longer seen as a feasible educational strategy for students. In turn, as social promotion ended, grade retention quickly filled the void (Hennick, 2008).

President George W. Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act through No Child Left Behind (2001). This legislation required states to set high standards and establish measurable goals as a means of improving educational outcomes. Under this legislation, further emphasis was placed on annual testing, annual academic progress, report cards, and teacher qualifications. According to Jahng (2011), this legislation marked one of the most drastic changes to K-12 public education. Despite No Child Left Behind (NCLB), millions of students are still being left behind, thus, marking the 21st century as the grade retention era (Jimmerson et al., 2005).

Even though evidence shows substantial costs and negative effects, grade retention remains a fairly common educational practice (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). In 2004 Black reported that nearly 2.5 million students in the United States were retained each year. Balkcom (2014) reported that 13 different states introduced new and controversial third grade reading laws, requiring mandatory retention between 2013 and 2014. On average, between 7-15 % of students in the United States are retained each year (Davoudzadeh, McTernan, & Grimm, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2006; Warren & Saliba, 2012). Furthermore, retention in the early grades is a prominent issue on a national level (Warren, Hoffman, & Andrew, 2014). As a practice, grade retention continues to be a source of contentiousness in American Education.

Characteristics of Retained Students

To date there is no formal guide to identify students whom should be retained in a grade. Retention policies vary from state to state and even district to district. After conducting a review

of the promotion policies of 85 of the nation's largest school districts, The American Federation of Teachers (1997) found that 78 districts had written policies, however; details for standards of performance, decision making regarding retention, or alternatives for failing students were not included.

Some states have legislated mandatory retention if a student is not performing at grade level by a certain grade. Beginning in 2013-2014, 13 states and the District of Columbia introduced reading laws to make grade retention mandatory for third grade students not performing adequately on standardized tests or not reading on grade level (Balkcom, 2014). Although retention policies are not consistent, research indicated that some children have a greater risk for retention than others (Frey, 2005). Doyle (1998) claimed that retention is not independent of demographic characteristics, but also demonstrates bias towards students with specific characteristics such as race and ethnicity. Doyle further concluded that educational opportunity is a right granted to all children and not a privilege to be earned. Available data appears to support this claim, however, there are a variety of characteristics associated with the practice of grade retention.

It is estimated that between 7-15% of students are retained each year in the United States (Davoudzadeh, McTernan, & Grimm, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2006; Warren & Saliba, 2012). There are a variety of factors associated with student retention. No one single demographic is more substantial than another. In 1998, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) provided demographic data indicating that retained students exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: Black or Hispanic male; have a late birthdate; are developmentally delayed or struggle with paying attention; live in poverty or in single parent households; low educational attainment by parents and/or low parental educational

involvement; display behavior problems or exhibit immaturity or aggression; poor peer relations and/or low self-concept; and demonstrate early literacy difficulty, which includes English Language Learners (ELL).

Yang, Chen, Rhodes, and Orooji (2018) suggested that students from low-income families are more likely to be retained. In fact, children from low-income households were two to four times more likely to be retained in school (Jimerson, 2001; Meisels & Liaw, 1993). However, the association between student socio-economic status and retention is not that simple. Some studies, cited by Yang et al., (2018) spoke to the relationship complexity between poverty and grade retention due to finding insignificant associations between the two. Low socioeconomic status can be a factor for some students but is not predetermine for retention to all children living in poverty.

While both male and female students are retained, studies indicated that male students are twice as likely as their female counterparts to be retained (Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1993; Meisels & Law, 1993; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). Survey results provided by Planty et al. (2009) reported a greater percentage of male students having ever been retained in a grade as opposed to female students. A study conducted by Meisels and Liaw (1993) found that females, in general, are never retained.

Minority students are often retained. Bali, Anagnostopoulos, and Roberts (2005) suggested that African American and Hispanic students are disproportionately affected by retention. Furthermore, Hauser et al. (2004) found that African American and Hispanic students are 50% more likely to be retained as opposed to their white peers.

Other demographic factors also associated with retention include: chronic absenteeism and school disengagement (Andrew, 2014; Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, and

Benbenishty (2016) cited school quality, resources, and climate as influencing students' academic outcomes. As a result, higher levels of grade retention might occur in poor school districts with fewer and lower quality resources. Powell (2010) stated that children who are retained, also exhibit socioemotional behaviors.

Early literacy learning has also been determined to have a strong association with ultimate educational outcomes. According to Owens and Kaplan (2001), early reading success is not a guarantor of later school success, nonetheless, it does impede negative effects that reading failure brings such as remediation, retention and social promotion. As such, literacy, in the early grades is also a predictor of student retention. Often, parents are not cognizant of the literacy involvement expected of them in order to help their child(ren) develop adequate literacy skills. According to Lapp, Fisher, Flood, and Moore (2002), many parents are unaware of this necessity and do not perceive early literacy training to be their job. Bestwick, Sloat, and Willms (2008) reported that deficits are cumulative, and without intervention, are remarkably resistant to change.

Other risk factors associated with retention include young age at kindergarten entry, behavior problems, having special needs, being an English Language Learner, etc. However, Davoudzadeh, McTernan, and Grimm (2015) argued that children's lack of school readiness and academic skills put them at a greater risk for retention.

Teacher and Principal Perceptions on Grade Retention

The decision to retain a student in grade is typically made at the school level. Both teachers and the principal are involved in the decision-making process. Personal perception is a part of the decision-making. However, Haynes (2007) proposed that principals and teachers

have limited knowledge in regards to current research findings on grade retention. Bestwick et al. (2008) deduced that the academic futures of students are jeopardized when educator's beliefs are guided by misinformation. Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis, (2004) acknowledged the importance of identifying and developing an understanding of teachers and principals' personal beliefs about retention. Therefore, it is vitally important to understand the relationship between belief and action concerning teacher held beliefs about educational issues (Johnson & Howell, 2009).

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers typically make the recommendation to retain a student and participate in the decision to retain, therefore, it is important that their beliefs about retention be identified and understood, especially when their beliefs may impact a group's decision to retain (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). While teachers' opinions about grade retention vary, Shephard and Smith (1988) identified a perception commonly held by teachers was that

An extra year provides time for the children to mature, moves the child from the bottom of his age appropriate class to the top in which he or she is retained, makes the child a leader, prevents later and more painful retention, and prevents deviant behavior later in life. (p. 322)

These beliefs are important to understand because classroom teachers initiate the majority of retention recommendations (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Bonvin (2003) conducted a study documenting the role of the teacher in the decision-making process to retain a child. This study examined the effects of teacher attitudes towards the retention and evaluation of students on the probability of retention beyond children's objective characteristics. Results from the study indicated that teachers did not favor retention as an

effective academic intervention, nor did they share a consensus on the usefulness of grade retention. These findings are in stark contrast with other research studies (Shepard & Smith, 1987; Pouliot & Potvin, 2000) regarding teacher perceptions on grade retention.

In general, teachers support the use of grade retention as a viable intervention for academic failure and or social immaturity (Shepard & Smith, 1987). Pouliot and Potvin (2000) contended that many teachers hold the belief that grade retention is an acceptable and effective practice to keep students from facing potential failure in the next grade. Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) conducted a research study of 35 elementary teachers, representing grades kindergarten through fourth grade. Results from an administered questionnaire showed that teachers from each of the grade levels viewed retention as an acceptable practice based on academic performance. Hossler, Ziskin, and Gross (2009) had similar findings. After administering a questionnaire to 75 teachers from three different elementary schools, the results revealed that those teachers held the belief that a majority of students should be retained based on poor grades and poor academic standing. They held the belief that retention was not harmful if done in grades K-4. Results from a study conducted by Harrison (2010) revealed that teachers believed retention provided students an opportunity to catch up and also provided a positive effect on student learning. Elementary teachers support the practice of grade retention based on immaturity (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). However, Hossler et al. (2009) reported that those same teachers were less likely to retain in fourth through seventh grades due to the belief that it was too late to accomplish foundational skills obtained in the primary grades. Larsen and Akmal (2007) pointed to previous research that has shown that educators who doubt the effectiveness of retention, continued to retain, but tried to retain as few students as possible.

Witmer et al. (2004) found that teachers' beliefs about retention stem from peer influence more than by research. This is further supported by Tanner and Combs (1993) who asserted that teachers' beliefs are rarely based on or changed by research studies. However, their beliefs can be changed by listening to their peers' beliefs (Kagan, 1992).

Principal Perceptions

Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield (2009) contended that principals begin the decision-making process by looking at their schools' mandates or rules and then applying their own conscience to their decision-making. However, in the end, principals base their decisions on what they perceive as being best for both student and teacher (Meyer et al., 2009). Like teachers, principals' knowledge of retention is rooted in experience, rather than gathered from a review of research (Fenstermacher, 1994).

Current research regarding principals' beliefs about retention is very limited. Many principals report that retention has exceedingly greater negative results on student performance than there are benefits (Patterson, 1996). Haynes (2008) found notable differences between the beliefs of teachers and principals concerning grade retention. Results from his study revealed that in grades K-6 a majority of teachers believed retention should be based on what students had achieved, whereas, principals looked at a student's potential. Other differences in beliefs found in Haynes study include 68% of the principals surveyed disagreed with the statement "retention is an effective means of preventing students from facing daily failure in the next higher grade" (p. 52); 84% disagreed with the statement, "retention is necessary for maintaining grade level standards" (p. 52). Lastly, 95% of K-6 teachers disagreed with the statement, "children should be never be retained" (p.53) compared to only 78% of principals surveyed. Murray, Woodruff, and

Vaughn (2010) proposed that without clearly defined policy, principals are left to form their schools' own procedures on grade level retention. This, in turn, can lead to inconsistencies in grade retention decisions.

Decision Making Regarding Grade Retention

Understanding the contentiousness of retention, it is critical that informed decision making be employed when retention of a student is under consideration. Information regarding how retention decisions are made is limited. Akmal and Larsen (2004) described retention decisions as being arbitrary and having inconsistently applied standards. Similarly, Fredrick and Houser (2008) spoke to the variation in grade-level retention among states, the variation by grade in each state, and the absence of a stable trend over time. While many school districts have policies that provide the acceptable criteria for grade retention, the American Federation of Teachers (1997) found that 78 school districts nationwide had written policies for retention, however, few articulate who makes the decision to retain a student. Additionally, Bowman (2005) found that little agreement existed among school officials as to how many times a student can be retained, who makes the decision to promote or retain, and appropriate cut scores on standardized tests. Typically, teachers and principals make the decision whether to retain a student or not and do so based on unobservable characteristics such as maturity or parental involvement which raises serious selection concerns (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009). Hence, Jimerson (2001) contended that, with their distinctive training (research, child development, and education), school psychologists are in a notable position to participate in the retention decision making at both the individual and policy level. Murray and Murray (2001) suggested that retention policies should be approved through the school board. Such policies should be

publicized and provide opportunities for parents, students, and other stakeholders to respond.

They further suggested that retention policies should be based on multiple criteria with adequate provision being provided for parental appeal through a committee of educational professionals.

When a child is under consideration for retention, multiple factors should be examined before making a final decision (Lieberman, 2001). Several tools exist to help educators provide a methodical approach to the problem and conduct an in-depth analysis of factors identified and pertaining to retention. One of the most notable tools is Light's Retention Scale (LRS).

Developed in 1981, this scale is a quantifiable measure, and as such, received more credibility in the literature (Warner, 1985). Light's Retention Scale consists of 19 different categories used to analyze for grade retention. Several statements are included under each category. Each statement is rated using a scale ranging from zero to five (0-5). Categories included in LRS are: knowledge of the English language, physical size, student's age, sex of student, present grade placement, previous grade retention, immature behavior, emotional problems, history of delinquency, experiential background, siblings, parents' school participation, transiency, school attendance, present level of academic achievement, student's attitude about possible retention, motivation to complete school tasks, history of learning disabilities, estimate of intelligence. After rating each category, scores are added for a composite total related to the overall total. This composite score determines the suitability for retention. Although this scale could be useful in the retention evaluation process, Light warned that it is a counseling tool and cautions against using it as a psychometric instrument.

A limitation to the LRS, at the time of its inception, was the lack of supportive research and the absence of indices standardization, which questions its validity (Sandoval, 1982). Light's Retention Scale is unaccompanied by normative, reliability, or validity data. As a result,

Hannafin (1983), contended that validity needs to be established if the scale is to be used in predicting candidacy for retention. It should be noted that there is a lack of evidence supporting that retention of students with a low composite score has been beneficial nor unsuccessful for students with high composite scores.

Principals and teachers make the decision to retain a low-achieving student. Because there is relationship between belief and action teacher beliefs concerning educational issues are vitally important to understand (Johnson & Howell, 2009). Teacher perceptions about retention are crucial factors when making this decision. Those perceptions include beliefs about student potential, content knowledge, personal values, and school policies. Considerable research has been done to show the effects of retention on student outcomes, however, Bonvin et al. (2008) argued that research about why educators recommend it for students is underdeveloped. Powell (2010) posited that teachers may be unaware of the research regarding grade retention. Early research (Pouliot, 1997) found that teachers in Quebec strongly believed retention to be beneficial. Similarly, Shepard and Smith (1989) found that teachers in the United States held similar views. Lack of maturity and poor academic achievement was cited most frequently by teachers as reasoning for their recommendation to retain a student. Most teachers acknowledged retention should occur in kindergarten rather than later grades (Range et al., 2011b; Silbergliitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Principals' views about retention are similar to teachers in that they report low academic performance and maturity as reasons to retain students and propose retention should occur in kindergarten as opposed to first or second grade (Cannon & Lipscomp, 2011; Range, 2009). Smith and Ronan Herzog (2014) suggested that when faced with the decision to retain or not, information pertaining to the impact on achievement of students who have been retained before would be beneficial in helping to make an informed decision. The

decision to retain a student in grade can have a lasting impact on the student. Therefore, several factors should be considered before making the final decision on whether to retain or not.

Jimerson, Pletcher, and Kerr (2005) recommended the following factors to consider:

- A. Prior and current data pertaining to academics and behavior
- B. Prior intervention strategies and their effectiveness
- C. Previous retention
- D. Community resources
- E. Student's familial context
- F. Parent participation in student's education
- G. Health issues
- H. Risk behaviors

In some states, the decision to retain students has been made through legislation.

Currently 16 states plus Washington, D.C. have laws that mandate grade retention for third grade students not reading at a specified level by years' end. However, Alvarez (2017) concluded that multiple measures should be used to measure student success. She recommended the use of authentic assessments aligned to standards, curricula, and the materials and resources used by educators.

Early Grades vs Middle Grades

Students of all grades can be retained, yet, generally, children in the primary grades are retained more frequently (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Norton, 2011; Range, Pijanowski, Holt, & Young, 2012). Even so, available research examining the effectiveness of grade retention provides consistent and seemingly indubitable evidence that shows grade retention to be an

ineffectual and potentially harmful practice (Lindelow, 1985; Shepard & Smith, 1987; Streib, 1996). Nevertheless, advocates of grade retention purport retention in the elementary grades (K-2) is a justified exception (Silbergitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). These advocates also suggest that students not meeting grade-level standards will continue to fall behind, especially as they move through the grades (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006).

A longitudinal study comparing reading growth trajectories between students retained in grades K-2 and students in grades 3-6 was conducted by Silbergitt, Jimerson, Burns, and Appleton in 2006. Results from this study failed to support the claim that retention in the early grades is more effective. The notion is that students are retained in the elementary grades to prevent future failure, while students in high school are retained to prevent graduation by students who lack the necessary skills for success after high school. In that regard, early intervention, before second grade, is an intervention or preventative measure. Data provided by Schwerdt and West (2012) supported early grade retention. After studying the effects of grade three retention on student outcomes up to 6 years later, they provided evidence showing significant short-term gains in math and reading achievement. In turn, they also found that grade three retention substantially reduces the probability of being retained in the later grades. Schwerdt and West posited that level of early school readiness is a strong predictor of grade retention. Students who delay entry into kindergarten fare better in first and second grade opposed to those who did not delay kindergarten entry (Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997). The age in which a student may enter kindergarten varies across states and districts, therefore, the age at which a student enters kindergarten is important. Students with later summer birthdays (June, July, August) are the youngest students entering kindergarten. Light (2006) pointed out that students with summer and fall birthdates are retained more often as compared to students with

earlier birth months. In fact, starting kindergarten at an older age reduces the chance of failure, according to Corman (2003) and Sprietsma (2010). They further contended delaying the kindergarten start date for students born in the first quarter of the year as a viable option to reduce the possibility of future retention for those students. Realizing this importance, some states, such as California, are rolling back their birthday cut-offs to allow children more time to gain school readiness skills before beginning formal schooling. Davoudzadeh, McTernan, and Grimm (2015) estimated that this strategy could reduce grade retention rates by as much as 15%.

Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Grade Retention

Not only are there high monetary costs associated with grade retention, but there are also other costs that need to be mentioned. Because of the monetary and other “costs”, Lynch (2014) asserted that retention is not only ruining our public education system, but is also having a harmful effect on society as a whole. Grade retention negatively influences the national labor force, national economy, and social services because students are not prepared for future success in in life and their careers.

Retention is a strong discourager to students whose confidence and motivation is already unsettled (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Retained students often develop low self-esteem when they are no longer with their same-age peers. Promoted students advance to the next year’s curriculum, while retained students cover the same curriculum as last year and thus fall further behind. As a result, retained students become a risk for dropping out of school. Students dropping out of school can be attributed to the “cost” of grade retention. There is a high correlation between student retention and drop-out rates. According to Sparks (2010), three main

factors influence student dropout: being retained at any grade level, failing an end of year course exam, or discipline resulting in a long-term suspension.

Results from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) revealed that being retained in a grade is the single strongest predictor of student drop-out, and is a consistent predictor for both early and late drop-outs (Lynch, 2014). Jimerson (2001) found that the risk of dropping out increases between 20% and 50% due to retention and, of students who drop out before graduation, up to 78% have been retained at least once. Additional research concluded that grade retention increases the probability of dropping out of school (Bowman, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Hartke, 1999; Jimerson, Pletcher, & Kerr, 2005; Shepard & Smith, 1986).

Dropping out of school can be a burden on society. Im, Hughes, Kwok, Puckett, and Cerda (2013) revealed that “previously retained students reach the age for legally dropping out of school or working as well as other developmental milestones, such as, becoming a parent, when they are further away from graduation than are continuously promoted, same-age cohorts” (p. 365). Leckrone and Griffith (2006) reported that controlled studies of comparable children, who had been retained, showed poorer outcomes in early adulthood. Compared to students who have not repeated a grade, students who are retained are more likely to become unemployed, depend on public assistance, or be placed in prison (NASP, 2003).

Psychological “costs” are also associated with grade retention. Andrew (2014) posited that retention is a traumatic event in the educational life of a student, therefore; retaining a student in grade can have long lasting effects. Passing or being promoted to the next grade is a worry for every child as he or she progresses through education. Fear of failing a grade is a great stressor for children. In a study conducted by Anderson, Whipple, and Jimerson (2005) children rated the fear of academic retention only behind going blind or the fear of losing a parent.

Retention has a destructive effect on students' self-concepts and their personal adjustment and social adjustment. Ehmke, Dreschel, and Carstensen (2010) spoke to the negative impact retention has on students by decreasing their educational motivation, lowering their self-esteem, as well as limiting their learning opportunities. Students who have been retained have heightened risks of stress, low self-confidence, substance abuse, and violent behaviors. Fanguy and Mathis (2012) found that retained students reported highly negative developmental changes. Problems reported by these students include social isolation from peers, feeling a sense of shame about grade retention and being older than their same grade peers, indignation towards teachers and administrators, and a lower quality of life. Retained students also report feeling distant from non-retained peers, an inability to connect and socialize with students in the grade in which they had been retained and being teased and made fun of for being "stupid" or "dumb". Lynch (2014) acknowledged that a long-term "cost" of retention is that, inescapably, these students become broadly maladjusted.

Short-Term and Long-Term Effects

Short-Term Effects

Although most of the educational and psychological research pertaining to grade retention rarely shows it to be a positive intervention, there are studies that show retention to be effective, but the gains are short-lived. After summarizing the results from a handful of longitudinal studies, Goos, Van Damme, Onghena, Petry, and de Bilde (2013) reported that there may be some positive academic effects for retained students during the retention year, however; these positive effects fade fairly quickly. Similar studies suggested an initial positive outcome from grade retention in the elementary grades; but, none of the studies demonstrated the same

improvement over time (Im, Hughes, Kwok, Puckett, & Cerdia, 2013; Klapproth, Schaltz, Brunner, & Martin, 2016). This was confirmed by Thompson and Allen (2012) who also reported demonstrated positive short-term effects, however; in the long-term students repeating a grade are at greater risk of failure or dropping out of school. In some studies, no consistent differences existed between student performance of retained students versus promoted student in the short-term (Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004). In the elementary grades teachers often witness an increase in retained students' academic performance in the year directly following retention (Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersly, 2010). Yet, according to Shepard and Smith (1990), it is improbable the gains will have long-term effect after students leave elementary school. Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) presupposed that academic achievement in the year after grade retention might improve, but such gains generally decline during successive years. Respectively, Jimerson and Brown (2013) emphasized that retention remains a contentious topic in research and practice because of potential short-term and long-term effects on student achievement and socioemotional outcomes.

Long-Term Effects

Grade retention is associated with social, emotional, and behavior problems affecting students. Additionally, grade retention is a predictor of emotional distress, poor peer relations, low self-concept, drug and alcohol abuse, tobacco use, sexual promiscuity, suicidal ideations, and violent adolescent behavior (Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). Ladd, Herald-Brown, and Reiser (2008) posited one of the strongest predictors of school adjustment is fitting in with the classroom peer group. Demanet and Van Houtte (2016) cautioned that building new friendships is challenging for all students entering a new class group but retained students'

adaption may be even more challenging due to the stigma of retention. Both middle and high school students can have additional negative effects stemming from grade retention. Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) advised that, as a result, retained students may experience consequences that impede academic and social engagement. This might include poor peer interaction, aversion to school, and behavior problems. In addition, these students are more independent, lack close parental supervision, and have greater access to negative influences in the community and online. In agreement with Jimerson and Ferguson (2007), Shinn and Walker (2012) submitted that all these effects can add barriers between the student and learning and can escalate the potential for failure.

Costs of Grade Retention

Grade retention does not come without a price. Many “costs” are associated with this practice. According to (Lynch, 2014), costs that accompany grade retention may include: academic, social, emotional, and economic.

When a student is retained, school districts must provide an additional year of instruction for these students. Already faced with limited budgets, schools are seemingly being asked to do more with less. Leachman, Albares, Masterson, and Wallace (2015) reported that as many as 31 states provide less funding now than they did before the Great Recession with some states continuing to make funding cuts. However, this is not the desired result of grade retention. Regardless of grade level in which a student is retained direct financial costs accompany this policy. A considerable monetary investment is spent on remediation and retention each year (West, 2012). Researchers agree that grade retention can be a costly intervention (Markey, 1988; NASP, 2003; West 2012). Citing results from a 2009-2010 study conducted by the United States

Education Office of Civil Rights (ORC), West (2012), reported that about 2.3% of all students from 7,000 school districts (representative of more than 85% of American public-school students) were retained a grade at the conclusion of the school year. Of this 2.3% of students, approximately 1% were retained in grades Kindergarten to eighth grade, with Kindergarten and first grade reporting the largest number of retentions. In 2009-2010, approximately \$10,700 dollars was the per pupil expenditure for a typically developing and progressing student. Therefore, the cost to retain 2.3% of the 50 million students enrolled in any given year is in excess of \$12 billion dollars. Absent from this estimate is the cost covering any remedial services, such as, learning support or specialized programs, provided to repeating students. West also noted that this estimate also excludes the costs of forfeited wages by retained students delayed entry into the work force and labor market.

Failing to provide adequate and effective support for students at risk for retention, results in a substantial population of future workers to be underprepared or underprepared to successfully participate in the work force (Lynch, 2014). Furthermore, these individuals have fewer qualifications and less knowledge and skill than their counterparts who graduate high school and beyond. In turn, these individuals are overall less productive in the workforce. Having the inability to pursue higher education opportunities makes these individuals more likely to be unemployed and their earning potential over the course of their lifetime is considerably less (Lynch, 2014). If students continue to be retained in grade without mastering the necessary skills and knowledge required, all stakeholders (students, teachers, parent, policy makers, employers, etc.) absorb a cost or pay a price that will be difficult, if not impossible, to regain.

Alternatives to Grade Retention

The costs of social promotion and retention strategies, along with the cost of the pass or fail focus of our current school system, strongly warrants the review of current education strategies and the deliberate development of alternative strategies for managing students who do not perform well academically (Lynch, 2014). As alternatives become available, more states and school districts are employing different strategies as proactive measures to extinguish grade retention. According to several research studies (Bowman-Perrot, 2010; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Murray et al., 2010; Range et al., 2011a) the most promising practice to decrease retention rates is early identification of low performing students followed by intense formative interventions. Additionally, Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) concluded that alternatives focusing on prevention, early intervention, and intensive targeted interventions are the most effective.

Existing research consistently supports that retention is an ineffective, and sometimes harmful, practice (Hong & Yu, 2007; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). The act of passing unprepared students along in school or retaining them without first addressing their needs deprives students of accessing opportunities in their next level of schooling, college, and the work place (U. S. Department of Education, 1999). However, school accountability regarding student growth continues to increase (Powell, 2010). In turn, school leaders are under enormous pressure to increase student achievement. In the wake of this accountability, school leaders must look for other options. Algozzine, Ysseldyke, and Elliott (2002), along with Shinn and Walker (2012), suggested that a targeted approach to address students' academic, social, and mental health issues, while linking specific evidence-based interventions to individual needs, is the most effective strategy.

One possible solution to decrease grade retention is to prevent academic failure before it occurs. Powell (2010) proposed greater intervention in early childhood years prior to schooling and effective early grade interventions. In order to prevent student failure and retention, Smink (2001) suggested that schools need to do a better job identifying students who are at risk for failure. Furthermore, early identification of learning problems should be immediately followed by the implementation of intervention strategies (Denton, 2001). Early and frequent intervention are positive first steps in helping students achieve school readiness and develop strategies for success. Other alternatives to grade retention have been proposed throughout the years.

Examples of these alternatives provided by Lynch (2017) include:

- accountability
- clearly defined standards and expectations
- extended learning time through after school programs
- hiring competent teachers
- learning resource programs
- mentoring to help re-engage students to the education process
- multi-age classrooms
- multiple assessment measures
- parental involvement
- redesigned schools
- year-round schooling

Other examples of evidenced based strategies provided by Jimerson, Pletcher, and Kerr (2005) include:

- Age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies to accelerate progress in the classroom
- Systematic assessment strategies and continuous progress monitoring
- Reading programs that provide developmentally appropriate, intensive, and direct instruction strategies to develop reading skills of low-performing students
- School based mental health programs to address the social and emotional needs of students
- Student support teams who can identify and assess learning and/or behavior problems, design appropriate interventions, and analyze the effectiveness of the implemented interventions
- Behavior management and cognitive behavior modification strategies to decrease classroom behavior problems. (p. 13)

Regardless of the available alternatives, any and all interventions need to be effective in targeting specifically identified deficits and build on student strengths. Szabo (2014), citing the work of Burns, Appleton, and Stehouwer (2005), reported that teachers should be encouraged to differentiate using a variety of response to intervention strategies based on the strengths and weaknesses of each child, instead of retaining them.

Accordingly, Jimerson et al. (2005) also provided strategies for parents and school administrators to help students avoid retention. For parents, they suggested the following strategies:

- Provide a consistent time and place for completing homework
- Work with the teachers to address the needs of their child and identify opportunities to enhance learning outside of the classroom

- Open and frequent dialogue to address concerns as they arise
- Stay up to date on assignments and consistent monitoring to make sure assignments are completed and turned in
- Advocate for their child – share their child’s strengths and provide any valuable insights about them
- Provide routines to help maintain their child’s physical and emotional health. (p. 14)

If school administrators are committed to helping all students achieve success, they must develop interventions that address factors that place students a risk for failure. Intervention programs that target at-risk students should engage student support personnel, who in turn, will work with the student, teacher, and parents during the intervention. Strategies proposed for administrators include:

- Implement early identification procedures to promote cognitive and social aptitude
- Collaborate with teachers and parents to meet student needs
- Use research to inform decisions and establish policies
- Emphasize the importance of elementary experiences on middle grades and high school success. (p. 14)

While there are many alternatives to grade retention, Jimerson, Pletcher, and Kerr (2005) warned that no single intervention effectively addresses the specific needs of all low-achieving students. They signalize that literature related to this discussion suggests that effective practices for at-risk students and best practices for regular education are very similar. The only real difference being the intensity of the intervention. Accordingly, Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) noted that no single intervention will effectively address the disparate needs of all students, but rather schools should utilize a sweeping approach containing multiple interventions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study was designed to determine whether there are significant differences in teachers' and principals' beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective educational intervention. Additionally, the study focused on significant differences in beliefs about grade retention as an effective educational intervention between teachers and principals in a county school system versus a city school system. Furthermore, the variation in differences in beliefs by grade level taught, years of experience, age, degree, and external influence was also investigated. This chapter describes the research methodology used to make these determinations. Sections included in this chapter are: research questions and null hypothesis, sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

For this study, the following research questions and corresponding null hypotheses were investigated in order determine teachers' and administrators' beliefs about grade retention:

1. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers in a county school system and teachers in a city school system?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers in a county school system and teachers in a city school system?

2. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between administrators in a county school system and

administrators in a city school system?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between administrators in a county school system and administrators in a city school system.

3. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers.

4. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of teaching experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?

Ho4: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of teaching experience.

5. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of administrator experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?

Ho5: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of administrator experience.

6. Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers who hold graduate degrees and teachers who do not?

Ho6: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers who hold graduate degrees and

teachers who do not.

Sample

This study included a self-selected sample of teachers and principals from the Northeast Tennessee region during the 2019-2020 school year. Nine school districts were selected to participate. A request for permission to conduct this study was sent to all selected districts. Eight of the nine selected districts granted permission to conduct an online survey in their district. The school districts included four county school districts and five city school districts. County school systems selected to participate were: Carter County Schools, Greene County Schools, Sullivan County Schools, and Washington County Schools. City school systems selected to participate were: Bristol City Schools, Elizabethton City Schools, Greeneville City Schools, Kingsport City Schools, and Johnson City Schools. The online database Public School Review (<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/>) was used to collect demographic data for each of the selected districts. Demographic data for each selected district is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

School Districts

System	Number of Schools/District	Enrollment	Number of Teachers	Base Salary
City				
Bristol	8	4,113	262	\$43,062
Elizabethton	5	2,554	182	\$36,819
Greeneville	6	2,854	184	\$39,335
Kingsport	12	7,618	477	\$44,300
Johnson City	11	7,978	498	\$42,139

County				
Carter	15	5,456	392	\$36,000
Greene	15	6,895	427	\$36,000
Sullivan	19	9,967	653	\$36,303
Washington	16	8,558	550	\$37,388

Note. Table 1 shows demographic data of self-selected school districts in Northeast Tennessee.

In total, 205 surveys were obtained while the survey was open to participants. All surveys were included in the analysis; however, some questions were not answered by all respondents. Unanswered questions had no impact on the results.

Participants included kindergarten through eighth grade general education teachers and elementary, intermediate, and middle school principals from both county and city school systems. Participants were divided into specific subgroup areas. Participating general educators were divided into subgroups: kindergarten through fourth grade and fifth through eighth grade general educators, type of school system: city or county, and by years of experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15). Participating principals were also divided by subgroups: elementary (K-4) and intermediate/middle (5-8), type of school system: city or county, and years of administrative experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15). Additionally, participants were grouped according to whether they held a graduate degree or did not hold a graduate degree.

Instrumentation

In order to determine the beliefs of teachers and principals regarding the practice of grade retention, a survey instrument was administered. The Grade Retention Survey developed by

Manley (1988) has been used in previous studies (Alkhrisha, 1994, Kerr, 2007, Manley, 1988 & Richardson, 2010). Manley determined reliability at .72 using Cronbach's Alpha. Validity was established with a pilot study of 20 elementary school teachers (Richardson, 2010).

For this study, the instrument included two different sections (A and B). In section A, teachers and administrators responded to 27 items relating to beliefs about grade retention. This section used a five-point Likert scale for scoring. The scale consisted of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *undecided*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Section B consisted of 7 demographic items including: county or city school system, current grade level, teaching experience and administrator experience, age, level of education, degree, and influences of beliefs. An open-ended response was provided for respondents to make any additional comments about their beliefs about grade retention.

Data Collection

Following approval from district level leaders for each of the participating districts in the Northeast Tennessee region, the dissertation committee, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), surveys were distributed. Nine school districts, representing both county and city districts, were selected to participate. Of the nine districts selected, eight districts provided permission to conduct an online survey in their school district.

District personnel distributed an invitation to participate to all kindergarten through eighth grade general education teachers and principals in each of the participating districts. This email invitation included a detailed letter about the purpose of this study, participation guidelines, and a hyperlink to the survey. Follow-up emails were sent to districts not responding as a reminder and also to encourage participation. Google Forms was used to create an online

survey. Responses were collected and stored electronically. Respondents were allotted the entirety of the specified time to complete and return the survey. Individuals had to agree to participate prior to taking the survey. No identifiable information was collected. All participants were consenting adults, therefore, no serious ethical concerns existed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this quantitative study was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). All ineligible surveys were discarded prior to entering any data in SPSS. Completed surveys were used to provide descriptive details about teacher and principal beliefs about grade retention, type of school system (city or county), current position (teacher or administrator), years of experience, and type of degree (Bachelors or Graduate). Descriptive analyses comprised of identification of means, standard deviations, frequencies, and also included percentages to summarize the data. A “belief” score was calculated for each respondent by averaging the item scores together and adjusting for reverse scored items. A series of independent t-tests was conducted to measure the differences in Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 6. A series of Analyses of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare teacher and administrator beliefs between county and city school districts in Research Questions 4 and 5. An alpha level of .05 was used for all analyses.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Chapter 4 details the results of the analysis of research questions presented in Chapters 1 and 3. This study was conducted to determine whether significant differences about the value of grade retention as an effective educational intervention existed between teachers and principals. Additionally, the study focused on significant differences in beliefs about grade retention as an effective educational intervention between teachers and principals in a county school system versus a city school system. Furthermore, the variation in differences in beliefs by grade level taught, years of teaching experience, degree, and external influence were also investigated.

Analysis of data was conducted using independent-samples t-tests for Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 6. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to analyze Research Questions 4 and 5. An alpha level of .05 was used for all analyses. Tables 2-8 show responses by demographics.

Table 2

Teachers

System	N	%
City	109	74
County	39	26

Note. Information in Table 2 includes demographic information for 205 returned survey responses. 57 respondents did not indicate a specific school system and were not included in this demographic.

Nine Northeast Tennessee School Districts were selected to participate in an online survey. Of the nine districts, eight districts provided permission for teachers to participate. 205

surveys were returned. 109 (74%) of teachers indicated that they were employed in a city school system as opposed to 39 (26%) of teachers employed in a county school system. 57 respondents did not indicate a specific school system.

Table 3

Administrators

System	N	%
City	33	58
County	24	42

Note. Information in Table 3 includes demographic information for 205 returned survey responses. 57 respondents identified themselves as administrators.

Nine Northeast Tennessee School Districts were selected to participate in an online survey. Of the nine districts, eight districts provided permission for administrators to participate. 205 surveys were returned. 33 (58%) of administrators indicated that they were employed in a city school system as opposed to 24 (42%) of administrators employed in a county school system.

Table 4

Grade Level

Grade Level	N	%
K-4	130	66.2
5-8	66	33.8

Note. Information in Table 4 includes demographic information for 196 returned survey responses. Both teachers and administrators are included in the total number due to all

respondents selecting one of the grade level choices. 9 respondents did not indicate a specific grade level and were not included in this demographic.

All teachers in grades kindergarten through eighth grade were invited to participate in an online survey. Participating teachers were separated into two different grade spans: K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers. K-4 teachers had a higher percentage of participation (66.2%) in comparison to 5-8 teachers (33.8%)

Table 5

Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Experience as a Teacher	N	%
1-5	20	9.9
6-10	41	20.3
11-15	40	19.8
Over 15	101	50

Note. Information in Table 5 includes demographic information for 205 returned survey responses. Both teachers and administrators are included in the total number due to all respondents selecting one of choices for level of teaching experience. 3 respondents did not indicate a specific experience level and were not included in this demographic.

Years of teaching experience was measured for all participants. Teaching experience was categorized into 4 groups: 1-5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and over 15 years of experience. A majority of teachers responding to the survey (101) have over 15 years of teaching experience.

Table 6

Years of Administrator Experience

Years of Experience as an Administrator	N	%
1-5	43	77
6-10	5	.09
11-15	6	.11
Over 15	2	.04

Note. Information in Table 6 includes demographic information for 56 returned survey responses.

Years of experience was measured for participating administrators. Administrative experience was categorized into 4 groups: 1-5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and over 15 years of experience. A majority of administrators responding to the survey indicated that they had 5 years or less of administrative experience.

Table 7

Level of Education

Highest Level of Education	N	%
Bachelors	45	22.1
Graduate	159	77.9

Note. Information in Table 7 includes demographic information for 205 returned survey responses. Both teachers and administrators are included in the total number due to all respondents selecting one of the levels of education choices. 3 respondents did not indicate a specific level of education and were not included in this demographic.

Participants were asked to indicate their level of education. Level of education was categorized into two groups: bachelor’s degree or graduate degree. 204 responses were received.

There was a sharp contrast between the number of respondents who have a graduate degree (78%) and respondents who have a bachelor's degree (22%).

Table 8

Influencing Factors

Factors Influencing Opinion on Grade Retention	N	%
Other teachers' opinions	9	4.4
Principal's opinion	2	1
Research	33	16.1
Personal experience with a retained student	138	67.3
Other	23	11.2

Note. Information in Table 8 includes demographic information for 205 returned survey responses.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers in a county school system and teachers in a city school system?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers in a county school system and teachers in a city school system?

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean retention value of teachers was significantly different between teachers in a city school system and a county school system. The retention value was the test variable and the grouping variable was city system or county system. The test was not significant, $t(146) = .329, p = .742$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .01, which indicated a small effect size. Teachers in the city system ($M = 3.34, SD = .429$) tended to value grade retention as an effective intervention strategy about the same as those in the county system ($M = 3.37, SD = .489$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.192 to .137. Figure 1 shows the distributions for the two groups.

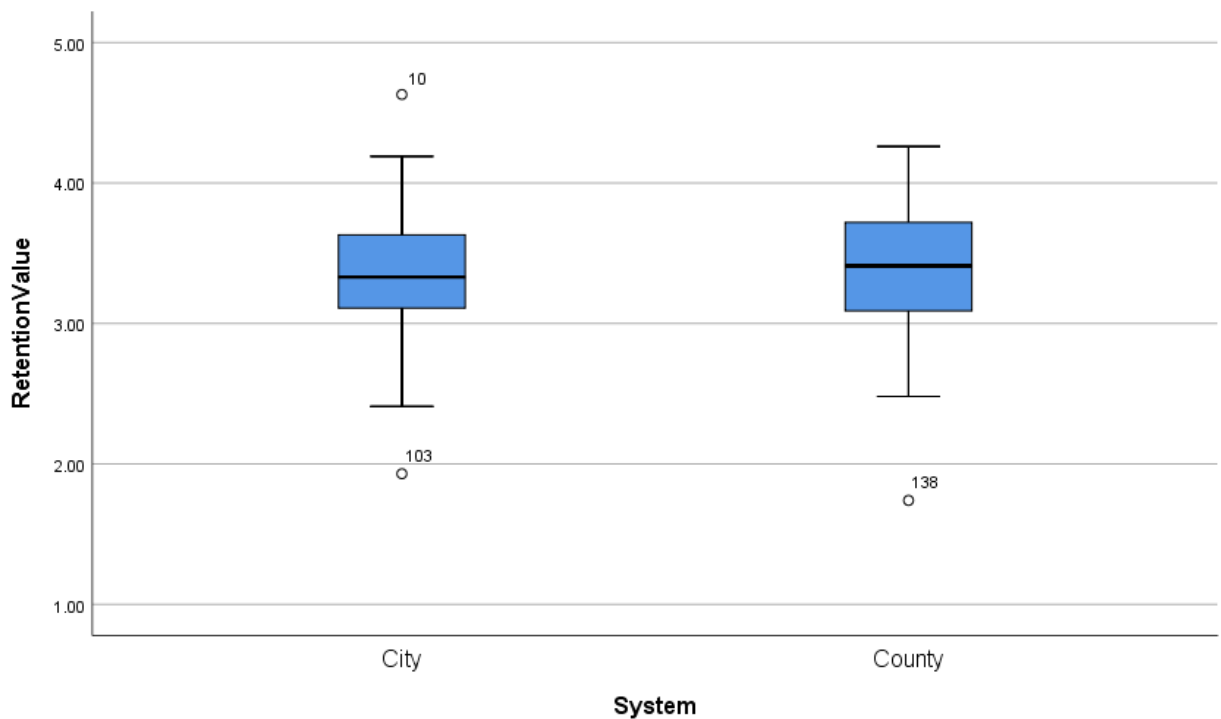


Figure 1. Retention value scores of teachers who are employed in either a city school system or county school system.

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between administrators in a county school system and administrators in a city school system?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between administrators in a county school system and administrators in a city school system.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean retention value of administrators was significantly different between administrators in a city school system and a county school system. The retention value was the test variable and the grouping variable

was city system or county system. The test was not significant, $t(55) = .498, p = .621$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .01, which indicated a small effect size. Administrators in the city system ($M = 3.25, SD = .492$) tended to value grade retention as an effective intervention strategy about the same as those in the county system ($M = 3.31, SD = .419$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .311 to .187. Figure 2 shows the distributions for the two groups.

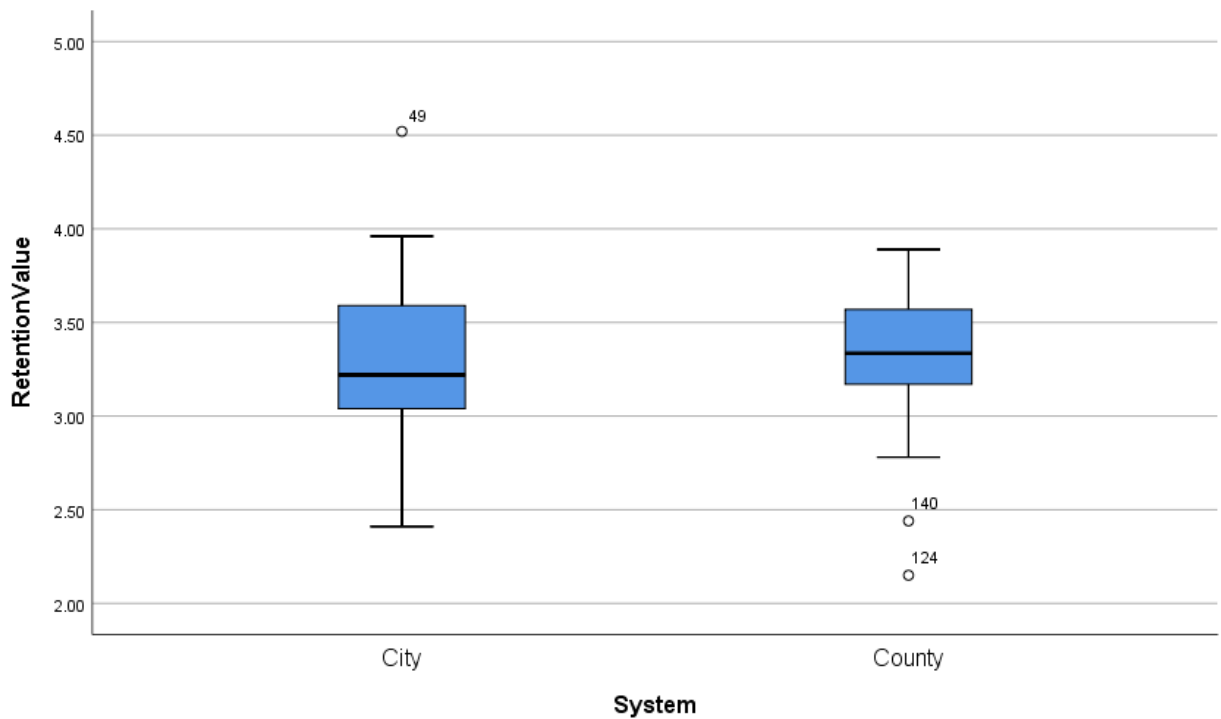


Figure 2. Retention values of administrators employed in either a city school system or county school system.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean retention value of teachers was significantly different by different grade levels taught. The retention value was the test variable and the grouping variable was K-4 or 5-8. The test was not significant, $t(140) = 1.747, p = .08$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .01, which indicated a small effect size. Teachers in the grades K-4 ($M = 3.30, SD = .400$) tended to value grade retention as an effective intervention strategy less, but not significantly less, than those in grades 5-8 ($M = 3.44, SD = .526$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .296 to .018. Figure 3 shows the distributions for the two groups.

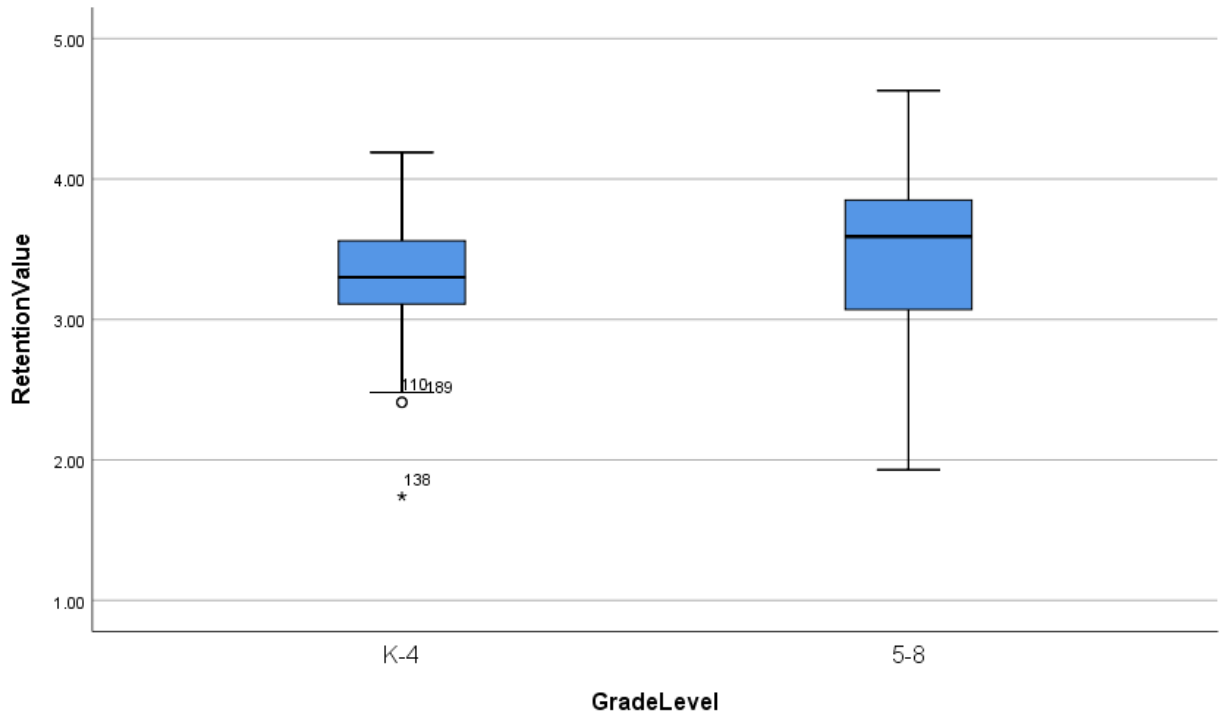


Figure 3. Retention values of teachers in grades K-4 and teachers grades 5-8

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of teaching experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?

Ho4: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of teaching experience.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between grade retention value and number of years of teaching experience. The factor variable, years of teaching experience, included four levels: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 15+ years. The dependent variable was the grade retention value of teachers. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(3,144) = .770, p = .513$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between the years of teaching experience and retention value, as assessed by η^2 , was small (.01). The results indicate that retention value was not significantly affected by differing years of teaching experience. The means and standard deviations for years of teaching experience are reported in Figure 4.

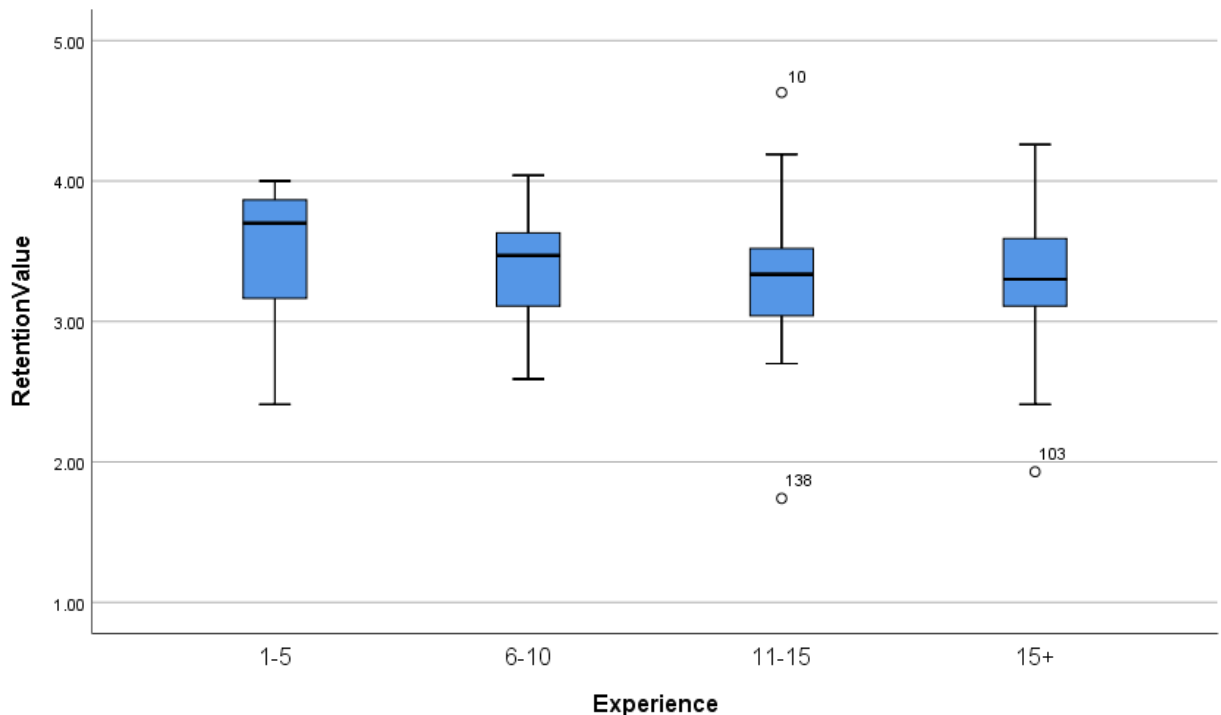


Figure 4. Grade retention of teachers with 1-5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and 15+ years of experience

Research Question 5

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of administrator experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?

Ho5: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of administrator experience.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between grade retention value and number of years of administrative experience. The factor variable, years of administrative experience, included four levels: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 15+ years. The dependent variable was the grade retention value of administrators. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(3,53) = .886, p = .454$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The strength of the relationship between the years of administrative experience and retention value, as assessed by η^2 , was small (.01). The results indicate that retention value was not significantly affected by differing years of administrative experience. The means and standard deviations for years of teaching experience are reported in Figure 5.

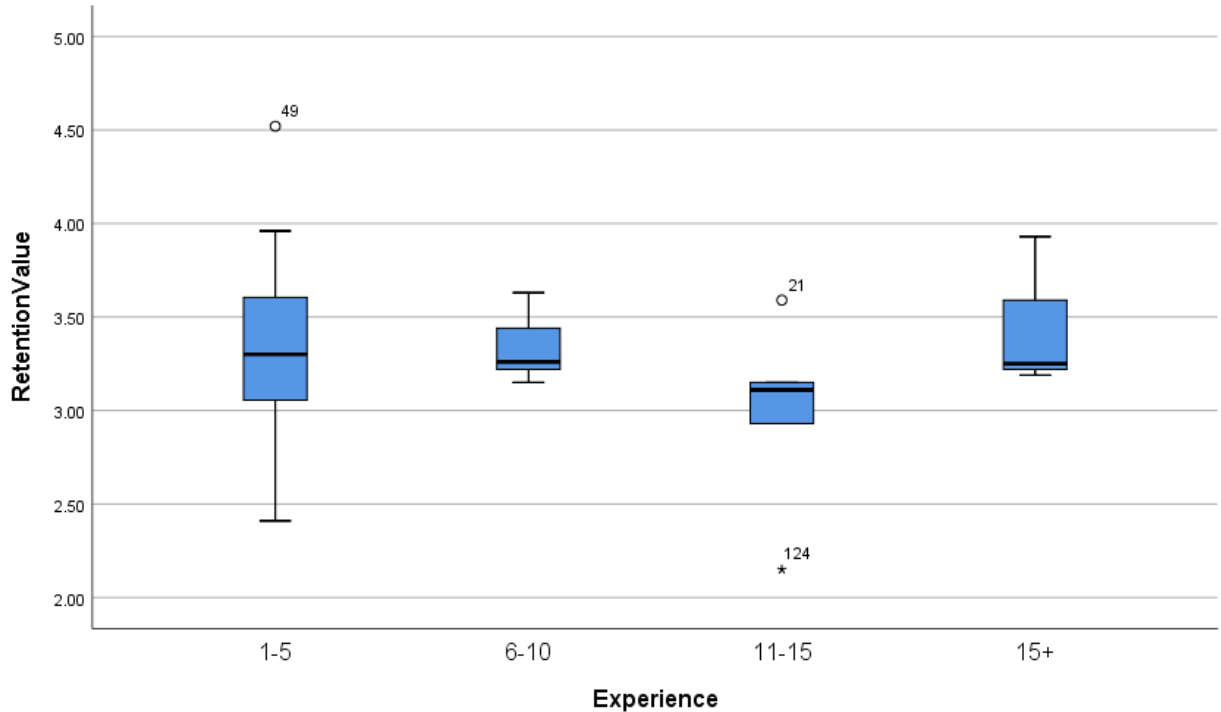


Figure 5. Grade retention of administrators with 1-5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and 15+ years of experience

Research Question 6

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers who hold graduate degrees and teachers who do not?

Ho6: There is no significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers who hold graduate degrees and teachers who do not.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean retention value of teachers was significantly different by level of degree. The retention value was the test variable and the grouping variable was graduate degree (Yes) or (No). The test was significant, $t(145) = 3.058, p = .03$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The η^2 index was .01, which

indicated a small effect size. Teachers with a graduate degree ($M = 3.53, SD = .334$) tended to value grade retention as an effective intervention strategy significantly more than those without a graduate degree ($M = 3.28, SD = .461$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .087 to .406. Figure 6 shows the distributions for the two groups.

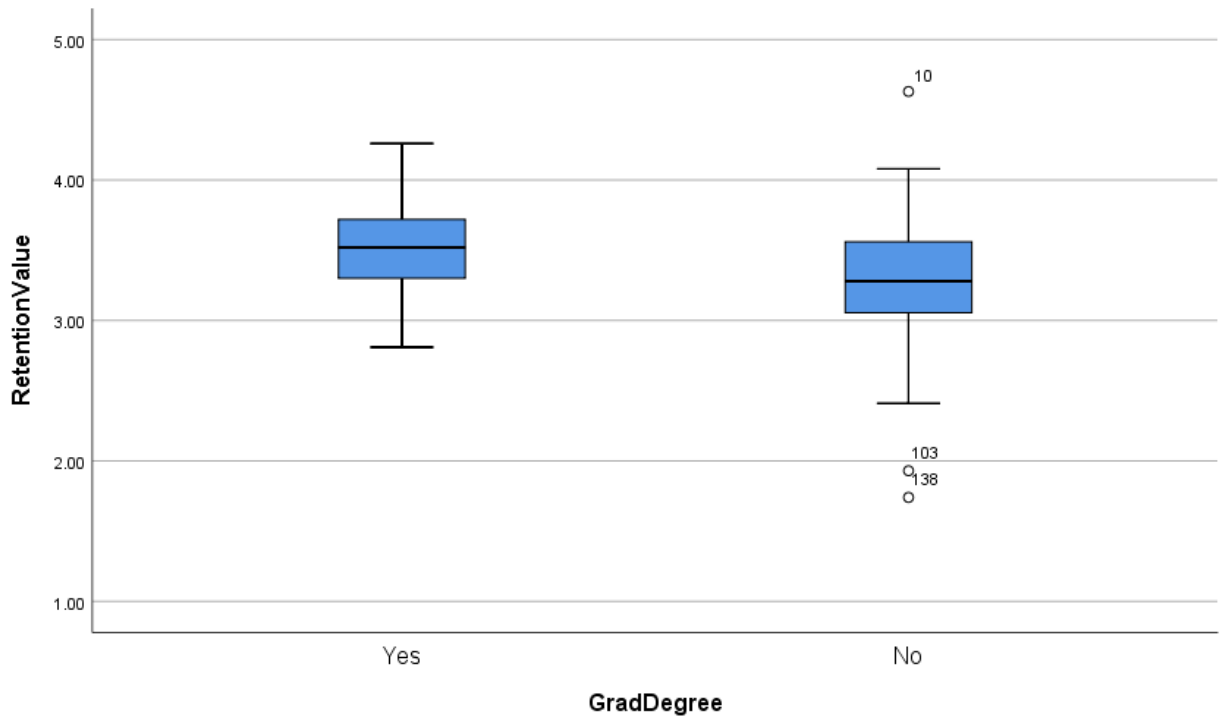


Figure 6. Retention values of teachers who have a graduate degree and teachers who do not have a graduate degree.

Open Ended Responses

In addition to Likert scale items, respondents were asked to identify specific factors that strongly influence their belief about grade retention. Influencing factors included: other teacher's opinions, principal's opinion, research, personal experience with a retained student, or other. 205 people responded to this item. Respondents who chose "other" were asked to explain their response.

As expected, individual responses were varied. A majority of respondents (67.3 %) indicated that personal experience with a retained student had the strongest influence on their opinion of grade retention. One respondent indicated that they used Light's Retention Scale in the decision-making process. They stated that, "when that scale has been used, my experience with retained students have been mostly positive ones...." Another respondent had a different view, "I do not like to retain...I have only retained one student in my six years of teaching". Although they have retained students in the past, one individual believes, "students who are retained never put effort into their education and are held back in an attempt to have that student put effort into their education and help them to learn." However, another respondent believes that "having heard the information once, they [student] are able to be a class leader and participate in class discussion where they would not have been able to do so before." According to one respondent, grade retention can be successful for some students and used their own children as an example, "I retained my son and daughter due to immaturity, and they were very successful in elementary schools". Others' cited their personal experiences as being related to having students "who have been retained and those who may have benefitted from retention".

Although substantial research indicates that grade retention can have serious negative consequences for students, only 16.1% of respondents chose research as the strongest influence

on their opinion about grade retention. Some of the consequences have been seen by one respondent who stated, “I’ve spent a lot of time with students who have been retained at some point and they never seem to recover...both academically and socially.” This respondent further stated, “They are always embarrassed by it [retention].” Similarly, this respondent suggested that, “if students are behind academically, they often feel inferior to their peers, don’t try as hard because they feel they are unable, and oftentimes cause class disruptions because they can’t complete the work.” In contrast, another respondent reported that, “Retention does not always lead to negative self-confidence issues, many times it will increase self-confidence because a student will be able to complete work like his/her peers.” Several responses contained some knowledge of research related to grade retention. One respondent is a “proponent of looking at the social circumstance, drop out red flags, and other behavioral issues” associated with grade retention, while another respondent mention having heard that “retaining a child twice increases the chance of the student dropping out of school.” Despite the research that shows the negative impacts of grade retention, one respondent stated, “I personally have taught retained children as well as retained a few of my own, and in EVERY case, it has benefitted the child beyond measure.”

The 23 respondents selecting “other” also had a variety of explanations for their choice. However, the majority of explanations had similar themes. These themes included: individualization of students, decision making, and appropriate grade level.

The majority of responders indicated that grade retention should be individualized based on student needs rather than on a system-wide retention policy. One respondent made the case for individualization by stating “I think it is a case-by-case decision” and further stated “So really it’s the individual student’s needs that influences my belief of what is right for any given

student.” Another individual stated, “...it depends on the individual student, whether they are a regular education student or a special education student.” This individual went on to say, “I’ve had some [students] that have exited special education due to retention because they simply needed more time to academically and behaviorally grow.” They elaborated further and said, “I’ve had others [students] whose teachers have retained, but have not had academic success.”, “I believe it is important to look at the individual needs of the child and the situation rather than follow a system-wide rule according to attendance or test scores” stated another individual.

Another common theme was related to decision making about grade retention. These responders believed that grade retention should be a team decision and should include multiple factors before a final decision is made. The following “multiplicity of factors” was provided by one individual:

- Can the student read on grade level?
- Was the teacher bad, good, or excellent?
- Did the teacher “peg” the student based on prior familial knowledge as someone who just can’t learn?
- Is there a diagnosed learning ability?
- Is the student gifted or bored? Do they refuse to do things they already know?
- Did the student experience any trauma?

Other factors cited by respondents include: “parent involvement,” “social awareness,” and “maturity.” Retention, as identified by one response, “is the hardest decision we make as educators. This speaks to the importance of making an informed decision when retaining a student is under consideration. Additionally, this respondent feels:

[Retention] not only affects the next school year, but the rest of the student’s life. It is

not a decision made lightly. Each retention decision is based on each individual student and all factors relating to him/her. I do not believe that retention “rules” fit all and therefore, it should be based on a student’s best interest.

When making the decision to retain or not, “A team of educators (and input from the parents) should be used to determine what is best for the student.” According to one respondent, “retention should be applied based on many different assessments including teacher recommendation.” “All parties involved have to be in agreement, without a doubt, that the student’s best interest is to have an additional year of grade level instruction” was proposed by a respondent. In the end, one respondent feels, “parents/caregivers should always have the final say.” A response from an administrator, “I rely on the opinion of my teachers to make this decision” suggests that teachers may be the ultimate decision maker in some cases.

The appropriate grade level to retain students was also a reoccurring theme. Those choosing “other” indicated that grade retention should be done as early as possible, with many citing grades K-2 as the appropriate grade span for retention. The following quotes from respondent demonstrate support for retention in the lower grades:

- “I think retention is better when it is applied early in the student’s academic career.”
- “I personally feel that retention should be done as early as possible with a child...for example, kindergarten or 1st grade.”
- “I think that retention, when it is an option, is best done in kindergarten and first grade classrooms.”
- “They [students] should be retained in K and 2nd, especially if they can’t read.”
- “K and 1 are the grades to retain – the foundation building grades.”
- “I have seen students flourish when they get a second chance in K or 1st”.

These responses seemingly have an overwhelmingly favorable tone towards retention as an intervention strategy, especially in the early grades.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant beliefs about grade retention existed between teachers and administrators based on the type of school system, grade level taught, years of experience, or type of degree. Teachers and administrators in eight school districts in Northeast Tennessee were invited to participate. Only teachers and administrators in kindergarten through eighth grade received a link to the survey which was distributed among teachers and administrators to measure their beliefs about grade retention. The grade retention survey consisted of two parts and an open-ended question. An opportunity to make any additional comments was also provided.

In section A, teachers and administrators answered 27 items relating to beliefs about grade retention using a five-point Likert scale for scoring. The scale ranged from *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *undecided*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Section B consisted of 7 demographic items detailing information such as: county or city school system, current grade level, teaching experience and administrator experience, age, level of education, degree, and influences of beliefs. Open-ended responses provided an opportunity for respondents to make any additional comments about their beliefs about grade retention or grade retention in general.

A single-samples t test was conducted to evaluate the mean retention value for all teachers and administrators, minus all other variables. Results from the test, $t(204) = 10.454$, $p < .001$ were significantly above 3 (neutral) on the Likert scale. Although there were no significant differences in the tested variables, except for level of degree, this score indicates that teachers

and administrators significantly favor grade retention as an effective intervention strategy, especially those teachers that hold a graduate degree.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Grade retention continues to be supported and practiced as an intervention strategy in education. This quantitative study was conducted in order to determine whether beliefs about grade retention were significantly different between educators in county school systems and city school systems. Responses were also broken into categories: grade levels K-4 and 5-8, years of teaching or administrator experience, and type of degree. Participants were also asked to select a factor which had the strongest influence on their belief about grade retention: other teacher's opinion, principal's opinion, research, personal experience with a retained student, or other. Those choosing other were asked to provide an explanation. Teachers and administrators in nine Northeast Tennessee School Districts were invited to participate in an online survey. Permission to distribute the survey was granted by eight of the nine districts. Two hundred five responses were received from five city school districts and three county school districts.

There were no significant differences in the beliefs about grade retention between teachers and administrators regardless of the type of system in which they were employed or grade level taught. However, significant differences in beliefs about grade retention between teachers and administrators did exist based on the highest degree an individual had obtained. There were no significant differences in beliefs about grade retention between teachers or administrators based on their years of experience.

Results did reveal overall "belief" scores for all respondents significantly above three (neutrality). This score indicates that, in spite of the research, teachers and administrators are significantly in support of grade retention as an intervention strategy. This result is in line with

previous research conducted by Tomchin and Impara (1992) and Witmer et al. (2004) who asserted that teachers tend to maintain positive beliefs about retention. According to Tanner and Combs (1993), most teachers view grade retention as an effective intervention for helping students who are struggling academically.

Research Questions and Findings

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers in a county school system and teachers in a city school system?

Analysis of the data provided by the responses indicated that no significant differences in beliefs about grade retention exists between teachers in a county school system versus a city school system. Teachers hold similar beliefs about grade retention regardless of the type of school system in which they are employed. According to open ended responses from the survey, teachers support retention as long as it is individualized based on student needs, trust that retention will have a positive impact (mainly dependent on parent involvement), and other interventions were unsuccessful (meaning retention is used as a last resort).

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between administrators in a county school system and administrators in a city school system?

Analysis of the data provided by the responses indicated that no significant differences in beliefs about grade retention exists between administrators employed in a county school system

versus administrators employed in a city school system. These results indicated that administrators in both county and city school districts hold similar beliefs about grade retention. Open ended responses indicated that administrators have a neutral stance on retention and rely on the opinion of teachers to make this decision.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between K-4 teachers and 5-8 teachers?

Results from the test showed no significant difference in beliefs about grade retention between teachers in grades K-4 or 5-8. However, K-4 teachers had slightly higher support for retention than did 5-8 teachers. Accordingly, teachers feel strongly that retention should occur as early as possible. Most teachers believe that retention should occur in grades K-2 to be more successful and less traumatic. This belief is aligned with previous research which purported advocates of grade retention claim retention in the elementary grades (K-2) is a justified exception (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Additionally, Hossler et al. (2009) reported that teachers were less likely to retain in fourth through seventh grades due to the belief that it was too late to accomplish foundational skills obtained in the primary grades.

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of teaching experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?

Results showed no significant differences about grade retention based on years of teaching experience.

Similar means indicated that teachers, whether new to the profession or seasoned veterans, hold similar beliefs about grade retention as an effective intervention strategy. A majority of the respondents (50%) indicated having 15+ years of experience. This seemingly supports the rationale that experience with a retained student is a strong influencer on their beliefs about grade retention. The likelihood of have this experience with a student increases with each year of teaching experience.

Research Question 5

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between varying years of administrator experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, Over 15)?

Results showed no significant differences about grade retention based on years of administrative experience.

Similar means indicate that administrators, whether novice or seasoned veterans, hold similar beliefs about grade retention as an effective intervention strategy. Similar to teachers, administrators who have a greater number of years of experience have increased opportunities to experience a student who has been retained. These individuals may have had such an experience in the classroom, as an administrator, or both.

Research Question 6

Is there a significant difference in beliefs about the value of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy between teachers who hold graduate degrees and teachers who do not?

Results showed a significant difference in beliefs about grade retention based on the level of degree held by teachers. Teachers who hold a hold a graduate degree favor retention as an

effective intervention strategy significantly more than teachers who hold a bachelor's degree. Teachers who have advanced degrees, in most cases, have accrued more years of teaching experience because of the length of their chosen program. This could mean that they have had more opportunities to have experience(s) with a retained student. Even if the acquired knowledge includes research on the negative effects of retention, teachers indicated that their personal experience trumps research regarding their beliefs and decision making.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study are misaligned with previous research suggesting that grade retention can and does have a negative impact on students who are retained. Therefore, it is imperative to educate teachers and administrators on the negative impact of retention and reduce the number of students retained each year. In doing so, it is recommended that:

1. In order to reduce the number of students who are retained, we must effectively identify struggling students early in their educational careers. Early identification should then be followed by intensive intervention. According to several research studies (e.g. Bowman-Perrot, 2010; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Murray et al., 2010; Range et al., 2011a) the most promising practice to decrease retention rates is early identification of low performing students followed by intense formative interventions. Literacy, especially in the early grades, has been identified as having a strong association with educational outcomes. This should be one area of intentional focus early in the identification process. Identifying struggling readers early, coupled with the right intervention(s), could eliminate the need for retention. Early reading success is not a guarantor of later school success, nonetheless, it does impede negative effects

that reading failure brings such as remediation, retention and social promotion (Owens and Kaplan, 2001).

2. As educators, we must seek alternatives to grade retention. Alternatives focusing on prevention, early intervention, and intensive targeted interventions are the most effective (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). Jimerson, Pletcher and Kerr (2005) provide examples of evidenced based strategies that should be considered. They include: age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies to accelerate progress in the classroom, systematic assessment strategies and continuous progress monitoring, reading programs that provide developmentally appropriate, intensive, and direct instruction strategies to develop reading skills of low-performing students, school based mental health programs to address the social and emotional needs of students, student support teams who can identify and assess learning and/or behavior problems, design appropriate interventions, and analyze the effectiveness of the implemented interventions, behavior management and cognitive behavior modification strategies to decrease classroom behavior problems. Differentiation is an effective intervention that could eliminate the need to retain students. Teachers should be encouraged to differentiate using a variety of response to intervention strategies based on the strengths and weaknesses of each child, instead of retaining them (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005).
3. Given the emotional and behavioral impact grade retention can have, it is critical that informed decision making be employed when retention of a student is under consideration. These decisions cannot be arbitrary and have inconsistently applied standards (Akmal & Larsen, 2004). Although the decision to retain is typically made

by the principal and teacher, this decision should involve multiple people throughout the decision-making process. School counselors should definitely be involved in this process. Jimerson (2001) contended that, with their distinctive training (research, child development, and education), school psychologists are in a notable position to participate in the retention decision making at both the individual and policy level.

4. Grade retention is associated with social, emotional, and behavior problems affecting students. There is also a high correlation between student retention and drop-out rates. Therefore, it is imperative that we provide appropriate support for students who are retained. Students in both middle and high school can have additional negative effects. Without additional support, all these effects can add barriers between the student and learning and can escalate the potential for failure (Shinn & Walker, 2012).
5. District and state retention policies should be evaluated and updated on a regular basis. Policies should be specific about appropriate criteria and procedure for retaining a student. Currently there is no formal guide to identify students whom should be retained in a grade. Retention policies vary from state to state and even district to district. According to The American Federation of Teachers (1997), many districts have written policies, however; details for standards of performance, decision making regarding retention, or alternatives for failing students are not included.
6. The decision to retain a student in grade can have a lasting impact on the student. It is crucial that educators be familiar with current research on grade retention to help make an informed decision. It is suggested that when faced with the decision to retain or not, information pertaining to the impact on achievement of students who have

been retained before would be beneficial in helping to make an informed decision (Smith & Herzog, 2014). Likewise, the emotional and behavioral implications need to be considered as well. Retention can have a destructive effect on students' self-concepts and their personal adjustment and social adjustment.

Recommendations for Further Research

Results from this study, in comparison with the literature reviewed, indicated that further research is needed to determine the impact of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy. Suggestions for further research are as follows:

1. Additional studies should be conducted in order to better ascertain identifiable factors that influence individual beliefs about retention. Conducting interviews in a qualitative study would help provide a deeper understanding of teacher held beliefs about grade retention. Teacher held beliefs about academic achievement and their retention practices are related (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999).
2. Conduct a study to compare students who have been retained and students who were provided alternate types of intervention to determine the effectiveness of each intervention.
3. Study of retained student's perception of retention as having a negative or positive impact on academics, behavior, and social/emotional well-being after being retained. Conversely, conduct a study of students who have been socially promoted to determine if their perceptions are significantly different than students who have been retained.
4. Future research should include an analysis of retention policies for effective guidelines

for making retention decisions. Retention policies should provide guidelines for who should be involved, alternatives to retention, etc.

5. The study should be replicated and expanded to include the beliefs of teachers and administrators throughout K-12 in order to see if significant differences in beliefs exist, especially since grade retention is a strong predictor of student drop-out.
6. Conduct further analysis of mandatory retention laws for either negative or positive impact on retained student's continued success.
7. Conduct a study to determine what experiences teachers and principals have had that influence their beliefs and actions on retention.
8. Conduct a study to assess how personal beliefs about retention impact individual's actions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant beliefs about grade retention existed between teachers and administrators based on the type of school system, grade level taught, years of experience, or type of degree. Teachers and administrators in eight school districts in Northeast Tennessee were invited to participate. Two-hundred and five surveys were completed. Results from this study revealed that no significant differences in beliefs about grade retention existed between teachers and administrators regardless of system type, grade level, or years of experience. Significant differences about grade retention did exist based on highest level of degree. Overall belief scores showed that, in spite of the research showing retention as a negative practice, both teachers and principals are significantly in favor of grade retention as an effective intervention strategy

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SUPERINTENDENT'S PERMISSION LETTER

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Chris Feathers and I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. I am in the ELPA program majoring in Educational Leadership. The attached survey/questionnaire is included in my dissertation research. My study is entitled "Teacher and Administrator Beliefs about Grade Retention in Northeast Tennessee School Districts".

I am writing to formally request permission to conduct dissertation research with the teachers and principals within your school system. Completed surveys will have complete anonymity. No respondents will be identifiable. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research. Participation is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without penalty.

Please consider providing consent for teachers and administrators to participate in this study. Should you have any questions about this study, you can contact me by phone at (423) 946-5155 or by email at zcafi10@etsu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Chris Feathers

APPENDIX B: SURVEY COVER LETTER

Dear Participant,

My name is Chris Feathers and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University pursuing my doctorate in Educational Leadership. As part of the requirements for this program, I am working on completion of my dissertation entitled “Teacher and Administrator Beliefs about Grade Retention in Northeast Tennessee School Districts”.

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are significant differences in beliefs about grade retention between teachers and administrators in Northeast Tennessee School Districts. I would like to invite you to participate in this study by completing the attached survey. Completion of the survey should not take more than approximately 10 min. Survey questions are related to beliefs about grade retention.

Completed surveys will have complete anonymity and the results will be kept private. No email addresses will be collected by the researcher and participants will be unidentifiable. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research. Participation is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without penalty. You can skip any questions you don't want to answer or quit at any time.

Should you have any questions about this research study, you can contact me by phone at (423) 946-5155 or by email at zcafi10@etsu.edu. My dissertation chair is Dr. Virginia Foley and she may be contacted by phone at (423) 439-7615 or by email at foleyv@etsu.edu. Additionally, you may contact the IRB chairperson at ETSU by phone at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the

research and wish to talk to someone who is not part of the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6002.

Sincerely,

Chris Feathers

Click [here](#) to take survey

APPENDIX C: GRADE RETENTION SURVEY

Grade Retention Survey

This survey is designed to assess educators' beliefs about grade retention. There are two sections to this questionnaire. *Section A* inquires about beliefs on grade retention and *Section B* requires demographic information. Please circle one response to each item. There is no right or wrong answer.

Section A

The following scale will be used to score this section:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, U = Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

1. Students should be retained if they are behind on one major subject.

SD D U A SA

2. Retention will stifle students' desire to learn.

SD D U A SA

3. Students with 30 days of unexcused absences should automatically be retained.

SD D U A SA

4. Promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements.

SD D U A SA

5. Immature students benefit from retention.

SD D U A SA

6. The primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement
in the following grade.

SD D U A SA

7. The threat of retention makes students work harder.

SD D U A SA

8. Students in special education programs should not be retained.

SD D U A SA

9. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement.

SD D U A SA

10. Retention promotes behavior problems.

SD D U A SA

11. Retention can have a positive effect on students' learning.

SD D U A SA

12. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' self-concept.

SD D U A SA

13. Retention increases the probability that a student will drop out of high school.

SD D U A SA

14. A teacher can determine within the first two months of school which students need to be retained.

SD D U A SA

15. Retention provides students time to grow and mature.

SD D U A SA

16. Retention should occur in kindergarten through the third grade for the most success.

SD D U A SA

17. Retention discourages rather than encourages learning.

SD D U A SA

18. Retaining students will help them catch up academically.

SD D U A SA

19. Competency testing and proficiency testing will increase the number of students retained.

SD D U A SA

20. Students who have been retained are rejected by their peers.

SD D U A SA

21. Retention reduces the range of academic levels in the classroom.

SD D U A SA

22. Retention provides incentive for students to try to do better at academic tasks.

SD D U A SA

23. Promotion should depend upon attending school a certain number of days during the school year.

SD D U A SA

24. Students who are larger than their classmates should not be retained.

SD D U A SA

25. Repeating a subject will promote mastery of that subject.

SD D U A SA

26. It is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade.

SD D U A SA

27. Students should never be retained.

SD D U A SA

Section B

Please provide the following demographic information by circling one answer for each question/statement.

1. Indicate what grade level you are presently assigned in your school.

Pre-K K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

2. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?

1-5 6-10 11-15 Over 15

3. How many years of experience do you have as an administrator?

1-5 6-10 11-15 Over 15

4. What is your age range?

Under 25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-54 Over 55

5. Indicate your highest level of education.

Bachelors Graduate

6. In which type of school system are you currently employed?

City School System County School System

7. Which factor strongest influences your opinion of grade retention

Other teachers' Opinions

Principal's opinion

Research

Personal experience with a retained student

Other: please explain

Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding retention?

VITA

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