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An Examination of the Perceptions of Elementary School Counselors Regarding Grade Retention

Mariellen Kerr

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
COUNSELORS REGARDING GRADE RETENTION

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS
REGARDING GRADE RETENTION

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Abstract

The role of the professional school counselor encompasses a variety of responsibilities, each contributing to the ultimate objective of student success. Grade retention is an intervention often utilized by educators to remediate students' lack of success. Elementary school counselors are often involved in the retention decision-making process and yet there is a dearth of research connecting elementary counselors to the vast body of research that exists on grade retention. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary school counselors' regarding grade retention. The Grade Retention Survey, developed by Manley (1988) and used in previous studies to investigate perceptions of teachers and administrators, was utilized. A nationwide sample of 131 urban, suburban, and rural elementary counselors completed the survey via an internet survey tool. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis found participants perceived grade retention to be an acceptable educational practice. Item analysis revealed the responses of participants were not consistent with the research findings on the effectiveness and potential effects of grade retention. A number of items elicited "undecided" responses from elementary counselors. Participants reported extensive involvement in the grade retention decision-making process. The classroom teachers' opinions of grade retention were twice as likely to influence the opinions of elementary counselors as the findings from research. The opinions of the principal and school psychologist were least likely to influence the opinions of participants. No significant differences in perceptions were found based on gender, urban, suburban, or rural settings, years of experience, or previous teaching experience. Implications for practice as it relates to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) position statement on

grade retention and ethical guidelines for standards of practice are discussed.

Additionally, recommendations for emphasizing research and evidence-based practice within counselor education programs are offered.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the millions of students across our nation who have been “left behind.” May you succeed in spite of the message of failure, having replaced it instead with a stronger, deeper belief in your ability and power to overcome the many roadblocks and detours along the path to success in life.

If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning. Mahatma Gandhi

They are able who think they are able. Virgil

Whether you think you can or you can't, you're usually right. Henry Ford

Abraham Lincoln went into war as a captain and returned as a private. Later he failed as a businessman and was too temperamental and impractical to be a successful lawyer. He was defeated in his first attempt to enter the legislature and again in his attempt to enter congress. He failed to be elected as a commissioner of the General land Office, failed in the senatorial race of 1854, the vice presidency in 1856, and the senatorial race of 1858. The rest is history as we know it.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The role of the professional school counselor encompasses a variety of responsibilities. One responsibility is serving as a member of a multidisciplinary team, sometimes referred to as an instructional support team, child study team, child find team, or pupil personnel team, the function of which is to make decisions relative to students' academic programming and placement. During the course of the school year, the team implements an improvement plan for students who are experiencing academic difficulty. Effectiveness of strategies is evaluated by assessment of student progress at regular intervals. Adaptations to instructional methods, preferential seating, extended time to complete tasks, peer tutoring, and study skills sessions are just a few examples of strategies employed to improve student achievement.

When students fail to respond to an intervention plan, grade retention invariably surfaces as a proposed strategy to ameliorate the lack of achievement for the student under consideration. Seasoned educators, classroom teachers, and principals make strong arguments in favor of the effectiveness of this intervention without regard to the growing body of evidence to the contrary which states the practice of grade retention is not empirically based (Dawson, 1998; Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001; Larabee, 1984; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Tanner & Combs, 1993; Tanner & Galis, 1997). As members of the multidisciplinary team, school counselors encounter professional dilemmas when retention is recommended for a student.

Since the mid-1990s, the school counseling profession has undergone a transformation that parallels the call for change in the schools (Education Trust, Transforming School Counseling, 1999). Stone and Dahir (2006) note, that over a decade ago, *The School Counselor's Role in Educational Reform* (ASCA, 1994), encouraged school counselors to become catalysts for educational change and to assume and accept a leadership role in educational reform. Through a leadership and social advocacy role, school counselors make sure all students have equal access to quality academic programs and the needed support to ensure success. It is the role of the school counselor to advocate for empirically validated practices and to identify educational practices in the schools that are defeating to students and create barriers to academic achievement. A prime example of a common educational practice that is utilized without research to support its effectiveness is grade retention (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005).

Grade retention has fallen in and out of favor with educators since it was first conceived. The practice of grade retention in the United States dates back to the emergence of the graded system during the middle of the 19th century (Larabee, 1984). The justification for introducing the graded system was for teachers to be able to teach a group of students who were similar in age, ability, and developmental level (Knezevich, 1975). According to Larabee (1984), the graded system of education was developed to accommodate large numbers of students efficiently. Prior to this time, the instruction in a one-room schoolhouse was individualized, as students completed books and mastered material at their own rate (Lehr, 1982; Medway & Rose, 1986). Educating the masses would not allow for individualization. Along with the introduction of the graded classroom, educators began to rely heavily upon grade retention as the intervention of

choice for academic underachievement (Cunningham & Owens, 1976). Estimates range between 50% and 70% of all school children had been retained at least once by the eighth grade (Karweit, 1991; Larson, 1955).

Historically, retention data has not been recorded although some examples indicate retention rates ranging from 7.5% to 75.8%. In the early 1900s nearly 50 percent of students were retained each year in Iowa schools (Karweit, 1991). A Massachusetts school district reported to have retained 7.5 percent of its students while a Tennessee school district reported a retention rate of 75.8 percent (Karweit, 1991). Nationally, the average retention rate during this same period of time is estimated to have been 16% to 20% (Medway, 1985). A great many students were retained twice before dropping out, and over 50 percent of all students dropped out before the eighth grade (Thomas, 1992).

The practice of grade retention created cause for concern in the early 1900s as educators and researchers challenged the practice based on the negative consequences retention had on intellectual and social development. As a result social promotion policy was introduced during the 1930s and 1940s (Rose, Cantrell, Marus, & Medway 1983; Sandoval & Fitzgerald, 1985). Up until the 1960s, low-achieving students were promoted to the next grade with their age-mates. Students were grouped within grades according to ability and given supplementary instruction and the retention rate declined during this time. Those students who were retained tended to be individual cases where academic under-achievement existed along with factors such as, emotional immaturity, poor attendance, young chronological age, home background, or a combination thereof (Rose, et al., 1983).

The value of social promotion came into question during the early 1960s. According to Rose, et al. (1983), social promotion was viewed by many educators as the culprit of relaxed standards and the decline in students' standardized test scores. Educators advocated for reinstatement of stricter promotion standards in order to ensure academic mastery. Despite the concerns of educators, social promotion prevailed during this decade and into the early 1970s.

During the 1970s and 1980s, increased public demand for educational accountability surfaced in response to declining test scores (Sandoval & Fitzgerald, 1985). With the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) came a call for higher standards and advancement to the next grade based on specific academic progress (Thomas, 1992). Many high schools responded to the call for higher standards by requiring students to master grade level content, as measured by competency tests, in order to be promoted to the next grade. As a result, minimum competency tests were implemented in the majority of the states (Rose, et al., 1983). Grade retention once again became a popular intervention for low-achieving students. Medway and Rose (1986) argued that public pressure opposing social promotion and the high cost of remedial programs made retention an increasingly popular educational practice. According to Smith and Shepard (1987), retention rate estimates during this time were between 15% and 19%. The authors concluded that "Retention practices in the U.S. most closely resembled those in countries such as Haiti and Sierra Leone. The much admired Japanese system, like the educational systems of most European countries, has a retention rate of less than 1%" (Smith & Shepard, 1987, p. 130).

Current political rhetoric and education policy in the United States has contributed immensely to the rise in the rate of grade retention. For example, as standards and accountability measures assumed a greater role in education, President Clinton (1997, 1998, 1999) called for an end to social promotion in each of his State of the Union addresses. This led educators to interpret this as a directive to retain low-achieving students. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), designed to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain an education, has contributed to the rising retention rates. Along with NCLB came increased high-stakes testing with student assessments beginning in grade three. Since the passage of NCLB, more states are requiring students to pass mandated proficiency tests in order to move from one grade to the next. Despite the intention of NCLB, millions of students are literally being “left behind,” marking the 21st century as the new era of grade retention (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005).

Although there are no national statistics on the rate of retention, recent estimates cite at least 2 million (Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000) and as many as 7 million (Denton, 2001) students are retained each year. Grade retention has increased dramatically in the United States in the past 25 years despite evidence that fails to support its effectiveness as an intervention aimed at closing the achievement gap (Jimerson, 2001). Ironically, NCLB legislation mandates that educational practices be evidence based (McLoughlin, 2003). Given the evidence to the contrary, the continued use of grade retention as the intervention of choice for low-achieving students demands intense scrutiny. This mandate creates an ethical responsibility for public schools to thoroughly examine the effects of grade retention.

A review of the literature reveals the practice of grade retention has been researched for more than 100 years. Perhaps no topic in education experiences a greater divide between the findings of researchers and the views of educators. Grade retention, also known as nonpromotion, being retained, flunking, and being held back refers to the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade for a full school year to remain at that level for a subsequent school year (Jackson, 1975). Although it is thought to give students the “gift” of another year in the same grade to provide time and instruction needed to improve academic skills, retention has been associated with a number of deleterious effects (Jimerson, 1999, 2001). As noted in Jimerson, Kerr, and Pletcher (2005), the negative effects of retention include diminished self-concept, fewer friends, greater likelihood of attendance issues, and increased risk of dropping out of school. Additionally, results reported by Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002) from a study examining students’ perceptions of stressful life events reveal sixth graders report retention to be one of the most stressful life events, greater than the loss of a parent or going blind.

The results of a study of fourth grade students conducted by Johnson, Merrell, and Stover (1990) indicate grade retention was ineffective as an academic intervention. No significant differences were found in academic achievement levels between the retained and recommended for retention but not retained groups. Temple, Ou, and Reynolds, (2001) found students who were retained fell further behind their similarly low-achieving former classmates as early as kindergarten and first grade. By the end of their eighth grade year, retained students were one to two years behind their former classmates. The conclusion of several meta-analyses of the research are consistent in their findings that

there is overwhelming evidence supporting the finding that research has failed to demonstrate grade retention benefits students with academic or adjustment difficulties (Alexander, Dauber, & Entwisle, 1994; Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, Carlson, Egeland, Rotert, & Sroufe, 1997; Niklason, 1984, 1987; Rose, Cantrell, Marus, & Medway, 1983).

An intervention, if ineffective, should at the very least do no harm. Several longitudinal studies reveal no evidence that retention has either a positive effect on long-term achievement or adjustment (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005). Results from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (Temple, Ou, & Reynolds, 2001), reveal students who had been retained were 1 to 2 years behind similarly low-achieving students. The dropout rate for these students was 25% higher than that of promoted students. In another study conducted by Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2001), the researchers found that by adolescence, grade retention is predictive of emotional distress, low self-esteem, poor peer relationships, smoking, alcohol use, drug abuse, driving or engaging in sexual activity while under the influence, early onset of sexual activity, suicidal ideation, and violent behaviors. Jimerson et al. (2001) found in a recent, systematic review of research exploring students who drop out of high school that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out of high school. Arguably, one of the most serious effects of retention is the propensity for those who have been retained to drop out during high school. Dropout rates for retained students often exceed those for comparable promoted students by 50% or more (Temple, Ou, & Reynolds, 2001). Students who have been retained once have a 40 % to 50% likelihood of dropping out of school. Students

who have been retained a second time increase the risk of dropping out of school to 90% (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 1997)

The findings from a study conducted in Baltimore by Alexander, Dauber, and Entwisle (1994) with 728 students who had been retained in elementary school, identified several characteristics of their sample population. Students who had been retained tended to be minority males, poor, and frequently the children of high school dropouts. These students scored poorly on tests, experienced behavior problems and were more likely to have transferred between schools during kindergarten and first grade.

Carte, Hinshaw, Mantzicopoulos, and Morrison (1989) found students who were retained to be younger males of low socio-economic status, less popular, more behavioral problems, higher incidence of attention, visual-motor and perceptual problems, and significantly lower scores on measures of cognitive ability and academic achievement. Although there was no difference between the proportion of minority or Caucasian students who had been retained, the number of Caucasian students was limited.

Research conducted by Jimerson, Carlson, Egeland, Rotert, and Sroufe (1997) revealed a number of common characteristics of the 29 students retained in their investigation. Students tended to be significantly less confident and less engaging than their peers. The teachers reported these students to be less popular, socially competent, and displaying more maladaptive behaviors than similarly low-achieving students who had been promoted.

An analysis of data from 1972 to 1998, conducted by Hauser, Pager, and Simmons (2000), revealed students who were retained tended to be from a low socio-economic status, male, minority, and from the South. The major finding in this study was

socioeconomic status and geographic location accounted for nearly all of the race-ethnic differentials. Although the likelihood of a minority student being retained is twice that of a White student, the odds of retention tended to even out when controlling for socioeconomic status.

Despite the evidence that retention is “an unjustifiable, discriminatory, and noxious” policy (Abidin, Golladay, & Howerton, 1971), grade retention has increased over the past 25 years (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1966, 1990). There is a significant cost incurred whenever a student is retained. The estimated cost whenever a student is retained is estimated at \$5,028 per student nationally (Dyer & Binkney, 1995). A number of studies estimate between 5% and 20% of students have been retained annually in the United States at a cost of between \$2 and \$14 billion a year (Dawson, 1998; Light, 1991, 1998). Education policies aimed at increasing standards and emphasizing accountability have resulted in increased retention rates. Recent evidence indicates 40% to 50% of students nationally will be retained at least once by the ninth grade as a result of mandated proficiency tests (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 1999; Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999).

Rationale

The continued use of grade retention is affected by the high level of support derived from many educational professionals, parents, and the public in general (Byrnes, 1989; Tanner & Combs, 1993). Research findings are typically undervalued, if acknowledged at all, and most individuals who are in a position to make decisions rely on

anecdotal evidence to support their assertions (Rafoth & Carey, 1991; Tanner & Galis, 1997).

Most teachers believe retention is an effective intervention for helping students to improve academically (Tanner & Combs, 1993). The researchers found teachers' attitudes about retention were based on inferred knowledge rather than research. Similarly, Edson (1990) found that beliefs about retention were not related to knowledge of educational research. Teachers tended to focus on the positive effects retention appeared to have on the student during the retention year. Some students were found to function somewhat better than they had the previous year. Teachers, however, are not able to track the progress of students beyond the retention year. According to Edson, when short term benefits of retention are realized they tend to diminish in subsequent years. At this point the teachers are unaware of the academic performance of these students and the deleterious effects of the earlier retention decision they supported.

School counselors are the educational specialists poised to follow the progress of the student well beyond the grade in which retention occurred. The elementary counselor monitors progress throughout elementary school. Consultation between elementary and secondary counselors facilitates educational planning for a student transitioning into middle school. Consequently, school counselors are uniquely situated to bear witness to the long-term effects of retention upon the student as well as the ineffectiveness of the intervention. However, there appears to be no evidence in the literature indicating school counselors' knowledge of the research on retention.

According to a position statement on grade retention (ASCA, 2006), "Professional school counselors have a professional and ethical obligation to protect students from

practices that harm academic, career and personal/social development.” It is incumbent upon the school counselor to advocate against a policy that not only is potentially harmful to students and is an ineffective educational practice, but one, which according to Hauser, Pager, and Simmons (2000) is discriminatory, most often affecting students of color and low socio-economic status. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative of the Education Trust (1997) states:

Every student, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, or socio-economic status is entitled to a successful school experience that will ultimately increase their economic potential and positively impact their quality of life. School counselors must examine their behaviors and accept the responsibility to work towards the common goals of eliminating the achievement gap and assure all students equity in educational opportunity.

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model: A Framework for Comprehensive Guidance Programs (2002), embraces the themes of the Education Trust’s National Initiative for Transforming School Counseling(1997): leadership, advocacy, collaboration and teaming, and systemic change. Professional school counselors participate as members of the educational team and use the skills of leadership, advocacy and collaboration to promote systemic change as appropriate.

Transformed school counselors are educational leaders called upon to advocate for the academic success of *all* students. DeVoss and Andrews (2006) state “this translates into developing strategies for removing barriers to student success.” DeVoss and Andrews view data collection and analysis by counselors as activities critical to removing the barriers to student success. Data regarding student academic achievement, attendance,

student placement, and drop-out rates offer insight for school counselors and other educational leaders into target areas for systemic change. Clearly, grade retention is an area in dire need of systemic change. Professional school counselors are the educational leaders uniquely poised and qualified to effect this change.

Typically the teacher is the person to initiate the retention decision-making process and therefore the research has focused on teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding retention. However, retention decisions are commonly made by a multidisciplinary team comprised of the teacher, administrator, school psychologist, school counselor, and other support staff as needed. In a limited number of studies the attitudes and beliefs of administrators and the school psychologists have been examined (Gates, 1983; Hesse, 2002; Kirby, 1996; Midgett, 1999; Rogers, 1995). Though school counselors have been referenced in studies by Kirby (1996) and Rogers (1995), no studies have been found that systematically focus on school counselors' attitudes and beliefs regarding retention. It is important to investigate this line of inquiry as it is the school counselor's responsibility to advocate for academic programming that is in the best interest of the student and against systemic barriers that interfere with closing the achievement gap.

Teachers tend to support the use of retention as an effective intervention for struggling students (Tanner & Galis, 1997). Although counselors participate in the decision-making process, there appears to be little evidence indicating whether school counselors support an intervention that is not empirically based and has a history of negative consequences. Whereas teachers track the short-term progress of a student, school counselors are in a position to monitor the long-term progress and work with students on issues that result from grade retention. The purpose of this study is to

examine the attitudes and beliefs of school counselors regarding retention as they are in a unique position to monitor student progress beyond the retention year and to advocate for systemic change.

Statement of the Problem

Grade retention has long been employed as an intervention in response to academic under achievement. Meta-analyses of the related research found retention to be both ineffective and harmful to students (Jackson, 1975; Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005). Despite the abundance of research evidence to the contrary, teachers and, to a lesser degree, administrators tend to maintain attitudes and beliefs that retention is neither harmful nor ineffective (Hesse, 2002; Manley, 1988; Midgett, 199; Rogers, 1995; Tanner & Galis, 1997).

Retention rates are rising and millions of students are suffering the fallout from this educational practice (Jimerson, 2001). These are the very students with whom school counselors spend much time and yet there appears no studies have been found that examines school counselors' perceptions of grade retention despite the role they play in the decision-making process. According to Hesse (2002), the majority of grade retentions occur during the primary grades, specifically kindergarten and first grade. Therefore, this study is designed to focus on an examination of the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention. Unlike elementary teachers, counselors are in a unique position to follow the student beyond the retention year. Counselors are also the educational

specialists identified to work with students who present with problems which may be related to retention. Despite the involvement of counselors in the retention process, scant evidence exists that school counselors' perceptions regarding grade retention have been examined. This study seeks to add the perspective of the school counselor to the literature on retention as prior research has yet to focus on the perceptions of this integral member of the Pupil Personnel team.

Research Questions

In order to assess the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by gender?
3. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by district classification as urban, rural, or suburban?
4. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by previous experience as a classroom teacher?
5. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by grade level assignment?
6. Is there a relationship between the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention and their years of experience?
7. To what extent are elementary counselors involved in the grade retention decision-making process?

8. What sources of information most strongly influence an elementary counselor's perceptions regarding grade retention?

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the literature by providing data to describe how elementary school counselors view grade retention. This adds a new perspective on the continued use of this controversial educational practice as the counselors' perceptions of grade retention have yet to be examined. This is an important perspective to gain as the school counselor is the educational specialist designated to monitor student progress and to help students with the very issues that research indicates can be the result of grade retention. School counselors have an ethical obligation to advocate on behalf of evidenced-based educational practices, particularly as they relate to students of color and low socio-economic status. The ASCA position statement on grade retention informs school counselors of the effectiveness and effects of grade retention and their responsibility to advocate on behalf of alternatives to retention.

School districts could benefit from this research by using the results of this study to direct topics for professional development workshops offered to teachers, administrators, and pupil services personnel. Counselor education programs have the potential to benefit from this research by using the results to inform decisions regarding an evaluation of courses that comprise school counselor preparation programs. Particular attention to determining appropriate emphasis on utilizing research to guide practice is warranted given the parameters of the No Child Left Behind law. Grade retention can be used as an example by counselor educators teaching ethics courses to demonstrate application of ethical obligations of school counselors toward education law, policies,

procedures, and practices. Additionally, the results from this study can serve to improve the evaluation criteria used by supervisors in school districts and at universities to judge competency levels of school counselor trainees by including knowledge, skills, and application of research to practice during supervision.

Professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), as well as state and local affiliates are potential beneficiaries as results may be published and used for the professional development of members. Given ASCA's position statement regarding grade retention and the ethical standards of practice, ASCA may be interested to learn the extent to which elementary counselors are practicing accordingly. The Education Trust, having proposed the transformation of the school counselor's role may find the results of this study particularly useful in supporting best practices for elementary school counselors and advancing their mission toward closing the achievement gap for all students, particularly students of color and low socio-economic status. Finally, this research has the potential to positively impact the lives of countless students if the results are able to be used to abolish policies and laws mandating grade retention and advocate on behalf of evidence-based alternatives to grade retention.

Definitions

Grade retention is the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that level for another school year (Jackson, 1975).

Social promotion is the practice of automatically advancing all students of an age cohort from one grade to the next without regard to academic achievement (Larabee, 1984).

Perceptions are a set of attitudes and beliefs, negative or positive, about grade retention to be measured by responses on the grade retention survey (Appendix A).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature concerning various aspects related to the educational practice of grade retention. The review contains seven sections: 1) historical overview, 2) short-term effects, 3) long-term effects, 4) meta-analyses, 5) teachers' perceptions, 6) administrator's perceptions, and 7) summary.

Historical Overview

The practice of grade retention in the United States dates back to the emergence of the graded system during the middle of the 19th century (Larabee, 1984). The justification for introducing the graded system was for teachers to be able to teach a group of students who were similar in age, ability, and developmental level (Knezevich, 1975). According to Larabee (1984), the graded system of education was developed to accommodate large numbers of students efficiently. Prior to this time, the instruction in a one-room schoolhouse was individualized, as students completed books and mastered material at their own rate (Lehr, 1982; Medway & Rose, 1986). Educating the masses would not allow for individualization. Along with the introduction of the graded classroom, educators began to rely heavily upon grade retention as the intervention of choice for academic underachievement (Cunningham & Owens, 1976). It was estimated that during this period nearly half of all school children had been retained at least once by the eighth grade (Larson, 1955). In some instances nearly 70 percent of students were retained yearly (Karweit, 1991).

Historically, retention data has not been recorded although some examples exist. In the early 1900s Iowa reported nearly 50 percent of students were retained each year

(Karweit, 1991). A Massachusetts school district reported to have retained 7.5 percent of its students while a Tennessee school district reported a retention rate of 75.8 percent (Karweit, 1991). Nationally, the average retention rate during this same period of time is reported to have been 16 percent (Medway, 1985) while Doyle (1989) estimated the retention rate to be closer to 20 percent. A great many students were retained twice before dropping out, and over 50 percent of all students dropped out before the eighth grade (Thomas, 1992).

The practice of grade retention created cause for concern in the early 1900s as educators and researchers challenged the practice based on the negative consequences retention had on intellectual and social development. As a result social promotion policy was introduced during the 1930s and 1940s (Rose, Cantrell, Marus, & Medway, 1983; Sandoval & Fitzgerald, 1985). Up until the 1960s, low-achieving students were promoted to the next grade with their age-mates. Students were grouped according to ability and given supplementary instruction and the retention rate declined during this time. Those students who were retained tended to be individual cases determined by chronological age, emotional maturity, attendance, and home background (Rose, et al., 1983). In the 1960s however, social promotion was viewed by many educators as the culprit of relaxed standards and the decline in students' standardized test scores (Rose, et al. 1983).

During the 1970s and 1980s increased public demand for educational accountability surfaced in response to declining test scores (Sandoval & Fitzgerald, 1985). With the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) came a call for higher standards and advancement to the next grade based on specific academic progress (Thomas, 1992). Many high schools responded to

the call for higher standards by requiring students to master grade level content, as measured by competency tests, in order to be promoted to the next grade. As a result, minimum competency tests were implemented in the majority of the states (Medway & Rose, 1896). Grade retention once again became a popular intervention for low-achieving students. Medway and Rose (1986) argued that public pressure opposing social promotion and the high cost of remedial programs made retention an increasingly popular educational practice. According to Smith and Shepard (1987), retention rate estimates during this time were between 15% and 19%. The authors concluded that “Retention practices in the U.S. most closely resembled those in countries such as Haiti and Sierra Leone. The much admired Japanese system, like the educational systems of most European countries, has a retention rate of less than 1%” (Smith & Shepard, 1987, p. 130).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed into law on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush, was designed to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain an education. Along with NCLB came increased high-stakes testing with students being assessed beginning in grade three. Since this Act, more states are requiring students to pass mandated proficiency tests in order to move from one grade to the next. Despite the intention of NCLB, millions of students are being left behind marking the 21st century as the era of grade retention (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005). Although there are no national statistics on rate of retention, recent estimates cite at least 2 million (Hauser, Payer, & Simmons, 2000) and as many as 7 million (Denton, 2001) students are retained each year. Grade retention has increased dramatically in the United States in the past 25 years despite evidence that fails

to support its effectiveness as an intervention aimed at closing the achievement gap. Ironically, NCLB legislation mandates that educational practices be evidence based (McLoughlin, 2003). Given the evidence to the contrary, the continued use of grade retention as the intervention of choice for low-achieving students demands intense scrutiny. This mandate creates an ethical responsibility for public schools to thoroughly examine the effects of grade retention.

A review of the literature reveals the educational practice of grade retention has been researched for more than 100 years. Conceivably, no other educational practice has garnered as much controversy as that of grade retention. The inadequate data in support of retention has been the basis for the long-standing debate within the field of education as to the appropriateness of this practice. The research published between 1900 and 1989 produced mixed results. Concerns with the quality of a number of these studies has been reviewed by several researchers (Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Niklason, 1984, 1987; Rose, Cantrell, Marus, & Medway, 1983) and cited in recent publications (Alexander, Dauber, & Entwisle, 1994; Jimerson, Carlson, Egeland, Rotert, & Sroufe, 1997). Although there has been contradictory evidence regarding the short-term effects of grade retention in individual studies, meta-analyses have consistently demonstrated no long-term benefits to this practice (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Rose, et al. 1983).

Short-term Effects

One might expect that retained students would naturally perform better the second time in a given grade and at times, such is the case. Though the majority of the studies conducted consistently reveal no significant effectiveness to the practice of grade

retention, isolated studies in earlier years report some positive, short-term effects. A study conducted in 1911 by Keyes (as cited in Bocks, 1977) reported 20% of retained students performed better academically while 80% performed worse or with no significant improvement. The study was conducted over seven years in a school district of 5,000 students with a reported high incidence of grade retention.

In a rare experimental study conducted in 1929, Klene and Branson, (as cited in Abidin, Golladay, & Howerton, 1971) took students recommended for retention, controlled for chronological age, mental age, and gender, and then randomly assigned half of the children to a promoted group and half to a retained group. In the majority of cases, the academic achievement of the students who were promoted was higher than those that were retained. This study raises ethical concerns as to the random assignment of students to promotion and retention groups.

Wright (as cited in AlKrisha, 1994) conducted a study in 1979 with 90 third grade students, half of whom had been retained and the other half promoted. The students were matched for gender, IQ, parent education levels, attendance, and achievement scores. Results indicated higher achievement scores for the retained group compared to the promoted group. However, when controlling for chronological age the differences were not statistically significant.

One well-controlled study, conducted over a three year period by Turley and reported in 1979 (as cited in Mantzicopoulos, 1997), found retention to be academically advantageous for kindergarten students. Students at the end of the retained year were eight months ahead of peers who had been recommended for retention but promoted. It is not known, however, if the advantage was maintained in subsequent years.

Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (1992), conducted similar research but extended the examination of progress through the end of second grade. Although a significant academic gain was found for retained kindergarten students the second time around as one might expect, it was not maintained over time. Additionally, the data suggested early retention may have a positive impact on social adjustment.

Shepard and Smith (1987) examined the impact of retention on the academic progress of kindergarten students. A comparison of 40 retained and 40 promoted students, matched for age, gender, socioeconomic level, initial readiness, and second language revealed no significant difference between the groups. The researchers concluded “Kindergarten retention was ineffective regardless of whether children had been placed for developmental immaturity or different academic skills” (p. 105).

Pomplun (as cited in Thomas et al., 1992) reported students retained in first, second, third, and fourth grade showed significant improvement in the areas of reading, math, and language as measured by standardized achievement tests, when compared with non-retained students, but not on measurements of self concept. No difference in achievement was found for grades seven and eight.

Although there is some evidence to indicate that some students experience short-lived success in the year of repetition, such is not the case for the majority of the students. Indeed many students experience a widening of the achievement gap. The educational practice of grade retention was intended as an intervention designed to promote both short-term and long-term beneficial outcomes, therefore longitudinal studies may provide a more accurate portrayal of the impact of grade retention.

Long-term Effects

Although the short-term benefits of retention were not found in this study, Raygor (1972) reported limited long-term benefits to retention. Raygor conducted one of the few studies utilizing an experimental design. He randomly assigned kindergarten students who had been recommended for retention to either a transitional kindergarten or a regular kindergarten during the repeated year. Raygor compared both groups of students with the students who had been regularly promoted to first grade and those who had been promoted with a poor prognosis for success. Results indicate that there were no differences at the end of first and third grades, as measured by Stanford Achievement Test scores. However, at the end of fourth grade; the reading achievement of the retained group was higher than that of the potential for failure but promoted group. It was concluded, therefore that retention enabled students to compete more favorably with their peers while students in the potential to fail group continued to experience lower achievement than their chronological peers. Dawson and Ott (1991) report that students retained in early grade may show some initial academic gains compared to similar students who are promoted however, long-term studies reveal the gains to be lost within two to three years.

A study conducted in 1987 by Peterson, DeGracie, and Ayabe (as cited in Thomas et al., 1992) reported students retained in first grade performed better on standardized tests of reading and math, but not language, than nonretained students in the first year following grade retention based on same-grade comparisons . By the third year, however, group differences no longer existed. According to Mantzicopoulos (1997) this particular study is notable for addressing the issue that students who have been retained

are a year older than non-retained students in their grade. This difference may bias results in favor of students who have been retained. The Peterson et al. study compared retained students to matched students within the same age group and within the same grade. Same age comparisons compare retained students with students who are the same age and have had the benefit of a year of instruction in the next grade and whose scores are derived from a different level of the test. Mantzicopoulos notes that same-grade comparisons are most commonly used in retention research and although both same-age and same-grade comparisons pose challenges, analyses utilizing both comparisons present a more balanced view of the issue.

The Chicago Longitudinal Study is an ongoing, federally funded research study of 1,539 minority (93% African American), low income students who attended kindergarten at one of 25 Chicago public schools in the 1985 – 1986 school year. According to Temple, Reynolds, and Ou (2001), the strength of this study is found in the inclusion of a number of pre-retention control variables such as controlling for pre-retention achievement growth and considering achievement as various intervals. Findings reveal that regardless of when retention occurs, it is associated with significantly lower levels of school achievement and higher rates of school dropout. Retained students fell further behind similarly low-achieving peers as early as kindergarten and first grade. At the end of eighth grade retained students were 1 to 2 years behind similarly low-achieving former classmates. The dropout rate for retained students was 25% higher than that of the promoted students. Statistics reveal 78% of the students who were retained in 8th grade dropped out by the time they turned 19.

One of the longest studied groups of retained students, The Beginning School Study (BSS) conducted by Alexander, Dauber, & Entwisle, (1994), examined the effects of retention on over 800 children in grades 1 –8 throughout 20 public schools in Baltimore, Maryland beginning in 1982. According to McCoy and Reynolds (1999), the BSS is notable for its use of “multiple comparison groups and its inclusion of a comprehensive set of control variables, including academic performance prior to retention and later special education placement” (p. 275). Academic progress and attitudes were monitored from the beginning of first grade before any retention occurred through the seventh grade for students who had been retained and the eighth grade for students who had not been retained. Nearly 17% of the students were retained at the end of first grade and by the end of fifth grade 40% of the students had been retained at least once, many had been retained twice.

According to an article discussing their earlier research, Alexander, Dauber, Entwisle, and Kabbani, (1999) write:

...though the results were complex, it was concluded that repeaters in most instances were doing better in elementary school after retention than they had been doing before, and that these advances generally held up for a number of years, although in diminishing measure. The experience certainly did not set them back academically (as reflected in achievement test scores and report card marks). Nor was there evidence of great stigma attaching to grade retention. Instead, in most of the comparisons, repeating a grade was associated with improved attitudes toward self and school. These findings contradicted the results

of most similar contemporary studies (p. 3).

In a review by McCoy and Reynolds (1999), the authors cite the major finding of the BSS that had been undocumented in previous studies, was that although achievement levels of retained students remained lower than that of both same-age and same-grade comparison groups, the achievement gap between retained and promoted students narrowed up to the eighth grade year, although according to Alexander et al. (1999), “in diminishing measure” (p. 3). This was particularly the case for students retained in second and third grades, but not for those retained in first grade. This led Alexander et al. to interpret the evidence as indicating that retention has modest positive effects and conclude that “...retention appears to be a reasonably effective practice” (p. ix). Furthermore, Alexander et al. (1994) argue that although repeating a grade does not bring these students up to acceptable levels of achievement, most students perform much better the second year and for several years afterward “they continue to show improvement over their standing before retention” (p. ix). In a discussion of this study found in Tanner and Galis (1997), it is noted that Alexander et al. (1994) report they are “especially eager to free educators of the falsehood that retention leads to problems that drag disadvantaged youth down” (p. 107).

Perhaps the strongest argument for reconsidering the educational practice of grade retention as an effective means for ameliorating academic achievement is made by the very researchers who sought to “free educators of the falsehoods of retention.” Five years later, in a paper presented at The National Center on Inner City Education at Temple University, Alexander, Dauber, Entwisle, and Kabbani (1999) argue for alternatives to retention based on the results of their longitudinal study as it followed the students who

had been retained in elementary school through high school. The researchers of the BSS extended their investigation into the effectiveness of retention by examining the dropout rates of students who had been retained and students who had been promoted. Results indicated that students who had been retained were three to eight times more likely to drop out before completing their high school education. This finding caused the researchers to question:

...is improvement sufficient...even if that improvement does not bring poor performing students up to desired levels?

One principle seems fundamental: an intervention intended to help should 'do no harm,' and there can be no doubt that elevated dropout risks of the magnitude seen in these results qualifies as "harm."

This challenges earlier conclusions on the merits of grade retention (p.3).

The extension of the BSS into the high school years provided valuable longitudinal data that was lacking in the literature up until this time.

Meta-analyses of Retention Research

A great many studies on the topic of grade retention appear in the literature and several researchers have conducted intensive meta-analyses of the research in an attempt to evaluate the quality of the research and summarize the results. Jackson (1975) provided the first comprehensive review of the research evidence on the effects of grade retention. The review included 30 studies published between 1911 and 1973. Although there were limited studies reporting academic improvement in the year retained, these gains declined two to three years after retention. Jackson concluded, "There is no reliable

body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties” (p. 627).

Nearly a decade later, Holmes and Matthews (1984) conducted a meta-analysis including 44 studies published between 1929 and 1981, totaling 4,208 retained and 6,924 promoted students. Eighteen studies included comparison samples matched on various combinations of IQ, achievement tests, socioeconomic status, gender, and grades.

Holmes (1989) performed another meta-analysis of 19 studies, thus totaling 63 controlled studies published between 1925 and 1989. Holmes reported 54 studies indicated overall negative effects. Of the nine studies yielding short-term positive results, the benefits diminished over time.

The previous meta-analyses were conducted on research data collected 30 to 40 years ago. Jimerson (2001) conducted a meta-analysis focusing on studies published between 1990 and 1999 resulting in findings consistent with the previous researchers. Of the 20 studies analyzed, the authors of 16 concluded that retention is an ineffective and potentially harmful intervention. The results of this meta-analysis reinforce the importance of considering the longitudinal effects of retention. Short-term gains in the year of retention often disappear and sometimes reverse during later years (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson et al., 1997; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992). Jimerson (2001) recommends that educational professionals “move beyond the question of ‘to retain or not to retain?’ (p.435) and use the results of his study and that of nearly a century of research to advocate that students are neither retained nor socially promoted but rather attention be directed toward alternative remedial interventions with demonstrated effectiveness.

According to Shepard (2001), the key reviews of research on retention have continually demonstrated that no reliable body of evidence exists showing retention to be an effective intervention for students with academic or adjustment difficulties. In a review of 47 studies measuring academic outcomes, students who were matched for low academic achievement revealed retention had a negative effect on the achievement of retained students compared to promoted students. Shepard utilizes the analogy of medicine to illustrate the researcher's model for evaluating and weighing evidence on retention and is based on the premise that grade retention is intended to "cure (or at least improve) academic achievement" (p.20). Shepard further states:

If retention were evaluated by the Federal Drug Administration, would it be judged to be a safe and effective treatment?" The FDA approval process asks two questions: Do the results of well-controlled studies provide substantial evidence of effectiveness?; and Do the results show the product is safe – which means that the benefits of the drug appear to outweigh the risks? By FDA standards, grade retention would not be approved for use. At best, controlled studies show that retention does not harm achievement. But, retention has not been proven effective in improving achievement in subsequent grades. And, it has serious negative side-effects, namely students' poorer attitudes toward school and substantially increased risk of dropping out of school. (p.20)

There is an overwhelming body of evidence to suggest that grade retention is both ineffective as a means of improving the achievement levels of most students and has the potential to be harmful to students in a variety of ways. There is, however, enough

contradictory evidence to confuse decision-makers and leave them to resort to their own biases.

Attitudes and Beliefs of Teachers

The classroom teacher can be the single most influential person in the retention decision-making process, perhaps due to the previously established relationship with the student. Smith (1989) and Tomchin and Impara (1992) agree with this statement. Although according to AlKrisha (1994) “little attention has been paid to the role of the beliefs of the classroom teacher in the practice of grade retention” (p. 38), several studies have been conducted to examine the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding grade retention (Kirby, 1996; Manley, 1988; Tanner & Combs, 1993; Tomchin & Impara, 1992).

According to Manley (1988) the studies conducted examining teacher attitudes toward retention indicate that teachers as a group supported retention for students who were experiencing academic difficulty and overwhelmingly opposed retention for students with behavioral issues. Results also indicated that teachers in the earlier grades had more favorable attitudes toward retention and that teachers who had been there the longest had stronger attitudes toward retention whether positive or negative.

Similarly, Byrnes (1989) found 85% of the 200 teachers surveyed in a large, southwestern U.S. city indicated that students should always be retained if they do not attain grade level standards. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Tomchin and Impara (1992) who found 82% of the teachers believed that grade retention is an effective intervention for low-achieving students and prevents future academic failure.

Finally in 1993, a national study examining the perceptions of grade retention of 880 elementary school teachers was conducted by Tanner and Combs. Results revealed teachers agreed that retention was an effective means of helping students to improve academic achievement (Tanner & Combs, 1993). In a discussion of the results, the researchers note that the findings of their study contradicted the findings of the research reported in the literature; that retention had little, if any effect on improving achievement of retained students. Teachers' perceptions of grade retention were not reflective of the vast body of evidence indicating retention is an ineffective means of closing the achievement gap.

Several studies have attempted to explain teachers' disagreement with the findings of research. Shepard and Smith (1990), Smith (1989), and Manley (1988) concluded teachers' attitudes regarding retention were based on tacit knowledge or knowledge from the classroom rather than on knowledge from research. Edson (1990) revealed through interviews that kindergarten teachers' beliefs about retention were not related to knowledge of research. A recent study by Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) found elementary teachers attribute the majority of their knowledge regarding retention to personal experience and talking with colleagues was the second most frequent source of knowledge. This is consistent with the earlier research of Smith and Shepard (1989) who reported teachers are likely to share their beliefs about retention with other teachers in their school. The predominant view was that grade retention is beneficial to the student. Teachers also reported believing retention prevents the following: struggle, frustration, stress, general difficulty in school, future retention, peer pressure, and later drug use.

Smith and Shepard attribute the positive attitudes toward retention to the fact that the teacher is comparing the retained student who is more competent in the material already presented to students one year or more younger who are exposed to the material for the first time. The teacher lacks the comparison of how the student would have fared upon promotion. The teacher also lacks the knowledge of how the student performs beyond the year of retention.

Attitudes and Beliefs of Administrators

The decision-making process for a student under consideration for retention typically involves the building principal to ensure that procedures are followed according to policy. Although the literature on administrators' attitudes toward grade retention is limited, as most researchers have focused on the classroom teacher, the results of existing studies are interesting. Patterson (1996) conducted a study for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. He examined the beliefs of 169 administrators in addition to 140 teachers and found responses varied tremendously between the two categories of respondents. Teachers believed retention was beneficial and outweighed the detrimental effects whereas principals believed the practice was both ineffective and harmful. Rogers (1995) surveyed superintendents and principals in Sioux City, Iowa and found they did not support retention and felt alternatives should be incorporated before retention. A study conducted with principals in Washington by Shreeve and Songaylo (1993) revealed 60% of the principals believed retention was not helpful to students, 25% believed it was sometimes appropriate, and 15% believed it was helpful to students who are not meeting their academic goals.

By contrast, Kiner and Vik (1989) conducted a study examining the perceptions of 100 elementary principals in South Dakota who demonstrated strong support for the practice of grade retention. The overwhelming majority of principals felt retention was an appropriate intervention with only 1% indicating it was never appropriate. Nearly 59% believed that retention results in greater academic success while 49% believed retention was socially beneficial for students. Results from Byrnes' (1989) study revealed 74% of principals support grade retention to remediate lack of basic skills due to immaturity or absenteeism. Kirby (1996) examined the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding grade retention and found both groups of educators held similarly positive attitudes toward grade retention.

Summary

The inadequate data in support of retention has been the basis for the long-standing debate within the field of education as to the appropriateness of this practice. The research published between 1900 and 1989 produced mixed results. Concerns with the quality of a number of these studies has been reviewed by several researchers (Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Niklason, 1984, 1987; Rose, Cantrell, Marus, & Medway, 1983) and cited in recent publications (Alexander, Dauber, & Entwisle, 1994; Jimerson, Carlson, Egeland, Rotert, & Sroufe, 1997). Although there has been contradictory findings regarding the short-term effects of grade retention in individual studies, meta-analyses have consistently demonstrated no long-term benefits to this practice.

The body of research presented illuminates the controversial and emotional issue of grade retention. Despite the preponderance of evidence indicating it is both ineffective and can have detrimental effects on students, the practice is increasing at an alarming

rate. Perhaps the most notable effect of retention is the increased risk for dropping out. The perceptions of the two main decision-makers, teachers and administrators have been examined and a great divide exists between the two. Teachers' perceptions tend to be influenced by experience with the student during the year of retention and conflict with the findings of the overwhelming majority of the research. Administrators, on the other hand, tend to possess attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with the preponderance of research.

The school counselor is often a member of the decision-making team and yet this appears to be an area where little, if any research has been conducted. Recommendations made by several researchers, AlKrisha, (1994), Kirby, (1996), and Manley, (1988) suggest that perceptions of other school personnel such as the school counselor and school psychologist warrant examination. The first step is examining the attitudes and beliefs of elementary counselors toward grade retention. Are they more likely to support or reject the practice of retention? An answer to this question is vital to determining the direction of future research in this grossly neglected area.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding the educational practice of grade retention. This study also examined demographic data relating to the extent to which respondents report involvement in the retention process, grade level assignment of respondent, number of years of employment, gender, district classification of the respondent's school district, and whether the respondent had previously been a classroom teacher. This investigation was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by gender?
3. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by district classification as urban, rural, or suburban?
4. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by previous experience as a classroom teacher?
5. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by grade level assignment?
6. Is there a relationship between the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention and their years of experience?
7. To what extent are elementary counselors involved in the grade retention decision-making process?

8. What sources of information most strongly influence an elementary counselor's perceptions regarding grade retention?

Design

According to Gay (1996) and Desselle (2005) surveys are an excellent means for collecting perceptual data and an indispensable instrument for the academic researcher. Therefore, this research used a descriptive design, specifically the grade retention survey instrument (Appendix A) to examine the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention. Respondents were also asked to provide the following demographic information: grade level assignment; the number of years employed as an elementary counselor; whether they had prior experience as a classroom teacher; gender; whether the school district in which respondent was employed is classified as rural, suburban, or urban; level of involvement in the grade retention process; and the source of influence regarding respondent's perceptions toward grade retention.

Participants

The participants included a sample consisting of elementary school counselors from various regions of the United States and representative of urban, suburban, and rural districts. Additionally, participants are elementary counselors who subscribe to a national elementary counselor listserv, elementary counselors across the nation who participate in the elementary counselor chat room (<http://www.schoolcounselor.org>) as members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and elementary counselors who are members of the Allegheny County Counselor Association (ACCA), in Pennsylvania, as well as any other elementary counselor to whom the survey link may have been forwarded by another counselor, and who chose to complete the grade retention survey.

The moderator of the elementary counselor listserv reported nearly 1,100 subscribers throughout the U. S. at the time of the survey. The ASCA website (<http://www.schoolcounselor.org>) reports a national membership of more than 20,000 school counselors, approximately 7,000 of whom are elementary counselors. The 2006-2007 directory of the ACCA reports membership of 388 school counselors, 149 identified themselves as elementary counselors.

Procedure

A proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of Duquesne University to seek permission to conduct this study. Upon approval of the IRB, an invitation to participate in the research study (Appendix B) was distributed in an email to a national sample of elementary school counselors who subscribe to the listserv elementary-counselors@yahoogroups.com. Permission was sought and granted from the moderator of the listserv (Appendix C). Participants were directed to click on a link and follow the instructions for informed consent (Appendix D) and for completing the grade retention survey. The instrument reformatted for hosting at the site of the internet-based survey tool, SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). A link to the grade retention survey was also posted in the elementary counselor chat room of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) website (<http://www.schoolcounselor.org>) and on the website of the Allegheny County Counselor Association (ACCA) (<http://www.twuclan.net/acca>). Daily reminders were emailed to the members of the listserv for a period of five days. Reminders were discontinued after the response rate had surpassed the adequate sample size for statistical analysis (66) and the return had diminished.

Documentation (Appendix E) outlining the security and privacy policy of SurveyMonkey have been included to address any issues arising related to interactions with participants and participant's rights. The internet provider, or IP addresses of respondents are recorded by SurveyMonkey, but cannot be used to identify an individual user. In addition, a higher level of optional security was purchased from SurveyMonkey, SSL Encryption, to protect the security of participant data during the transmission of the survey.

Instrument

The grade retention survey instrument (Appendix A) was used to assess the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention. This survey was developed by Manley (1988) from similar surveys used in research conducted by Frazier (1978) and Faerber (1984), as cited in Manley (1988), to assess teachers' attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of research regarding grade retention. The 35 items address such topics as the effects of retention on academic success, self-concept, and maturity, what non-academic factors should be considered in the decision-making process (behavior, physical size, and number of absences), when retention should occur and who should ultimately make the decision. Manley (1988) surveyed 318 elementary teachers in a Midwestern, metropolitan school district and received 258 responses. Content validity was established by field testing the grade retention survey with teachers, school psychologists, and administrators who were not a part of the Manley study and minor changes were made as a result. Reliability was established at .72 using Cronbach's Alpha which yields a measure of internal consistency.

AlKhrisha (1994) and Kirby, (1996) utilized the same instrument but included vignettes to extend the research to include an assessment of the attitudes of preservice teachers and principals in addition to elementary teachers. Field studies and pilots were conducted to establish content validity. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of .85 was reported in the AlKhrisha study and assumed by Kirby (1996) from results reported in Manley (1988). Cronbach's Alpha was established for the data collected in the current study of perceptions of elementary school counselors toward grade retention and resulted in a reliability coefficient of .77.

The grade retention survey instrument used in this investigation is comprised of two sections. In the first section participants respond to statements reflecting attitudes toward retention on 35 items arranged in a five-point Likert scale consisting of "strongly agree," "agree," "undecided," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." An item with a response of "strongly agree" was coded as a "1"; a response of "agree" was coded as a "2"; a response of "undecided" was coded as a "3"; a response of "disagree" was coded as a "4"; and a response of "strongly disagree" was coded as a "5." The second section presents questions designed to yield demographic information including gender, years of experience, grade level assignment, prior teaching experience, district classification of participant's school district as urban, suburban, or rural, extent of involvement in the decision-making process, and sources of influence on participants' perceptions regarding grade retention. The survey was reformatted (Appendix F) for use with the internet-based survey tool, SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>).

Statistical Analysis

A quantitative methodology was used to garner insight into the perceptions of

elementary school counselors regarding grade retention. Data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, Version 11.5 and reported using descriptive and inferential statistics. A summary of descriptive statistics identifying the mean and standard deviation was generated for each of the 35 items. Frequency distribution of demographic information described the data for gender, years of experience, grade level assignment, district classification, the degree to which respondents report the level of involvement in the retention decision-making process, and respondents' source of influence regarding grade retention perceptions. Results from the descriptive analysis of the data were used to answer Research Questions 1, 7, and 8. Research Questions 2,3,4,5 and 6 examined the possibility that perceptions toward grade retention might be related to demographic information. An analysis of variance (*ANOVA*) was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in perceptions regarding grade retention gender, district classification, grade level assignment, or having previously been a teacher. An analysis of variance is statistical technique by which the variance is partitioned in a distribution of scores to test for differences between the means (Gay, 1996). The .05 level of significance was used for all analyses. Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the perceptions of elementary counselors regarding retention and years of experience.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of the study. The purpose of the chapter was to describe the research conducted, the design, the population and sample, the instrumentation, the data collection, and the data analysis procedures employed.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding the educational practice of grade retention. Additionally, this study examined demographic data relating to: (a) gender, (b) district classification of respondent's school as urban, rural, or suburban, (c) whether respondent had previous experience as a classroom teacher, (d) grade level assignment of participant, (e) years of experience, (f) the extent to which respondent is involved in the retention decision-making process, and (g) the source of influence upon respondents' opinion of grade retention. The following research questions directed the review of the literature, the methodology used to collect and analyze the data, and the subsequent findings of this investigation:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by gender?
3. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by district classification as urban, rural, or suburban?
4. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by previous experience as a classroom teacher?
5. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by grade level assignment?

6. Is there a relationship between the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention and their years of experience?
7. To what extent are elementary counselors involved in the grade retention decision-making process?
8. What sources of information most strongly influence an elementary counselor's perceptions regarding grade retention?

Response Rate

The target population for this investigation is elementary school counselors. The sample consisted of a subset of the target population, specifically, elementary school counselors who subscribe to the listserv elementary-counselors@yahoogroups.com, elementary school counselors who participate in the elementary counselor chat room (<http://www.schoolcounselor.org>) as members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and elementary school counselors who are members of the Allegheny County Counselor Association (ACCA), in Pennsylvania, as well as any other elementary counselor to whom the survey link may have been forwarded by another counselor, and who chose to complete the survey.

An invitation to participate in the study was emailed to members of the listserv, posted in the ASCA chat room and on the ACCA website (<http://www.twuclan.net/acca>). Morning reminders were emailed to the members of the listserv for a period of five days. At the end of the first day, 19 responses to the grade retention survey had been received. The response rate peaked on days two and three, nearly tripling the number of responses of day one. Daily checks indicated a drop in completed surveys over the next several days. A total of 137 responses were acquired by the end of the first week and remained

unchanged for the second week. Following the directions on the SurveyMonkey website (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), the data file was first exported into an Excel file and then into an SPSS file for analysis. Of the 137 respondents, six were eliminated; five due to incomplete surveys and one because the respondent indicated he/she was a high school counselor. There were a total of 131 participants in this investigation.

Characteristics of Participants

A summary of the demographic data obtained from the second section of the grade retention survey is presented in this section. Initially, the results from the demographic data were analyzed to describe the characteristics of the participants. These data were generated by computing frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and standard deviations from the responses of the elementary counselors to items requesting demographic information. An analysis of variance (*ANOVA*) and Inferential statistical analysis will presented in the following section provide a response to the research questions.

Gender

The gender distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1. The findings are consistent with the fact that female teachers exceed male teachers, particularly at the elementary level as reported by the National Education Association (NEA, 2003). Current statistics reveal that a scant 9% of elementary teachers are male, marking a 40-year low. No specific data for elementary school counselors appeared in the literature but female-to-male ratios are implied from the statistics presented for elementary teachers.

Table 1

Gender of Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Females	117	89.3%
Males	14	10.7%

Note. Sample size, $N = 131$.

District Classification

Table 2 displays the results for whether participants' were employed in an urban, rural, or suburban school district. Over half of the respondents were elementary school counselors who reported employment in suburban school districts while counselors from urban school districts represented the lowest percentage of participants.

Table 2

Classification of Participants' Schools

School District	Frequency	Percent
Urban	19	14.5
Suburban	70	53.4
Rural	42	32.1

Note. Sample size, $N = 131$.

Counseling experience

The distribution of respondents' experience as an elementary school counselor ($M = 9.1908$, $SD = 7.60351$) is presented in Table 3. Slightly more than 40% of the respondents had 5 years or less of elementary counseling experience. The median for

years of experience as an elementary counselor was 7.0000. The mode for years of experience was 1.00.

Table 3

Experience as a School Counselor

Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 year	15	11.5	11.5
2 years	7	5.4	16.8
3 years	10	7.6	24.4
4 years	10	7.6	32.1
5 years	11	8.4	40.5
6-10 years	38	29.0	69.5
11-15 years	17	12.9	82.4
16-20 years	13	10.0	92.4
20-35 years	10	7.6	100.0

Note. $M = 9.1908$, $Mdn = 7.0000$, $SD = 7.60351$. Sample size, $N = 131$.

Previous teaching experience

The number of elementary school counselors reporting previous experience as a classroom teacher ($M = 7.3478$, $SD = 5.12604$) was 46, or 35.1% of the sample. The median for years of prior teaching experience was 6.00. Teaching experience, as shown in Table 4, ranged from a minimum of <1.00 year to a maximum of 21.00 years.

Table 4

Experience as a Teacher

Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
.5 – 5 years	*20	43.5	43.50
6 – 10 years	15	32.6	76.10
11 - 15 years	6	13.0	89.10
> 15 years	5	10.9	100.00

Note. Sample size, $n = 46$. *Student teaching experience of 1 participant.

Total Years of Experience

In order to gain a more in depth analysis of the variable, years of experience, the total years of experience in education acquired by the elementary counselor was computed. Table 5 depicts the participants' total years of experience in education. For the participants indicating previous teaching experience ($n = 46$), total years in education ($M = 20.8696$, $SD = 9.9300$, $Mdn = 20.000$) was computed by combining the years of experience as a classroom teacher with years of experience as an elementary counselor. For the participants indicating no previous teaching experience ($n = 85$), total years in education is equivalent to years of counseling experience ($M = 6.8471$, $SD = 5.30780$, $Mdn = 5.00$).

Table 5

Total Years of Experience

Counselors with Teaching Experience <i>n</i> = 46		Counselors without Teaching Experience <i>n</i> = 85	
<i>M</i>	20.8696	<i>M</i>	6.8471
<i>Mdn</i>	20.0000	<i>Mdn</i>	5.0000
Mode (4)	11.0000	Mode (14)	1.0000
<i>SD</i>	9.93000	<i>SD</i>	5.3078
Min	6.00000	Min	1.0000
Max	38.0000	Max	20.000

Grade level assignment

The results of respondents' reported grade level assignment, as shown in Table 6, did not provide for distinct categories of lower versus upper elementary classifications anticipated in this study. However, since all elementary counselors are certified to work with students up through the eighth grade, this allows for a high degree of variability in the manner in which grade level assignments are determined. For the purposes of this investigation, lower elementary was identified as pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades 1 – 3. Upper elementary was identified as grades 4 – 8. A limited number of participants indicated an exclusive grade level assignment; (*n* = 9) for lower elementary and (*n* = 10) for upper elementary. The majority, (*n* = 100), of participants indicated a grade level assignment of either pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through grade 5. The remaining participants, (*n* = 12), indicated a grade level assignment of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through grade 8.

Table 6

Grade Level Assignment

Category	Frequency	Percent
Lower Elementary	9	6.9
Upper Elementary	12	7.6
Pre-K/K – Grade 5	98	76.4
Pre-K/K – Grade 8	12	9.1

Note. Sample size, $N = 131$.

Research Questions

The findings from an analysis of the data obtained from the responses of elementary counselors to the 35 attitudinal items in the first section of the grade retention survey are presented in this section. Results from these data were analyzed separately in the form of an item analysis and in conjunction with the results from the demographic data previously presented and organized by the research questions posed in this study.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention?

A response to the first research question was generated by computing frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations from the data provided by the respondents. Participants were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were undecided about, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each of the statements pertaining to grade retention. Table 7 describes the results for each item.

Following the summary of the descriptive statistics, a one-way analysis of variance (*ANOVA*) was conducted to determine whether perceptions of elementary school

counselors concerning grade retention are significantly related to gender, district classification, grade level assignment, or previous experience as a classroom teacher. The dependent variable in this case was the total attitude score; the independent variables were gender, district classification, grade level assignment, and previous experience as a classroom teacher. Finally, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to determine whether the perceptions of elementary counselors regarding retention, as measured by the total attitude score were related to years of experience.

Table 7

Response of Elementary Counselors to Attitudinal Survey

Item	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Retaining students in the primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades.	87%	11%	2%	1.83	.913
2. Students should be retained if they are behind in on major subject.	4%	81%	15%	3.98	.718
*3. Retention will stifle students' desire to learn.	13%	63%	24%	2.44	.824
4. Students with 30 days of unexcused absences should automatically be retained.	14%	54%	32%	3.51	.915
5. Promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements.	65%	22%	13%	2.44	1.008
6. Immature students benefit from retention.	43%	27%	30%	2.82	.951
7. The primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade.	70%	19%	11%	2.38	1.005
8. The threat of retention makes students work harder.	11%	69%	20%	3.78	.905

Table 7 (continued)

Item	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
9. Students in special education programs should not be retained.	51%	32%	17%	2.71	1.154
10. The decision to retain students should be made solely by the teacher.	2%	97%	1%	4.58	.644
*11. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement.	19%	60%	21%	2.53	.963
*12. Retention promotes behavior problems.	13%	70%	17%	2.36	.804
13. Retention can have a positive effect on students' learning.	79%	7%	14%	2.13	.779
14. Students who are considered for retention share many common characteristics	61%	18%	21%	2.50	.863
*15. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' self concept.	37%	37%	26%	3.05	1.022
*16. Retention increases the probability that a student will drop out of high school.	32%	46%	22%	2.93	1.104
17. A teacher can determine within the first two months of school which students will need to be retained.	6%	88%	6%	4.20	.808
18. Retention provides students with time to grow and mature.	68%	13%	19%	2.43	.775
19. Retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success.	83%	6%	11%	1.99	.809
20. Students' parents should immediately decide whether to retain their children.	2%	88%	10%	4.07	.635

Table 7 (continued)

Item	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
*21. Retention discourages rather than encourages learning	12%	64%	24%	2.40	.830
22. Retaining students will help them catch up academically.	51%	19%	30%	2.68	.862
23. Students being considered for retention should be included in the decision making process.	32%	32%	36%	3.04	.923
24. Competency testing and proficiency testing will increase the number of students retained.	38%	41%	21%	3.04	1.011
*25. Students who have been retained are rejected by their peers.	18%	80%	12%	2.14	.742
26. Classroom behavior is an important consideration in determining whether to retain students.	40%	46%	14%	3.11	1.097
27. Retention reduces the range of academic levels in a classroom.	6%	77%	17%	3.82	.699
28. Retention provides incentive for students to try to do better at academic tasks.	24%	53%	23%	3.37	1.003
29. All students who are retained should be referred for psycho-educational valuation.	38%	51%	11%	3.12	1.190
30. Promotion should depend upon attending school a certain number of days during the school year.	21%	56%	23%	3.43	.945
31. Students who are larger than their classmates should not be retained.	15%	57%	28%	3.49	.871
32. Repeating a subject will promote mastery of that subject.	15%	51%	34%	3.42	.832

Table 7 (continued)

Item	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
*33. It is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade.	32%	34%	34%	2.93	.970
34. In making a retention decision, students' maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement.	97%	2%	1%	1.67	.661
*35. Students should never be retained.	5%	84%	11%	1.89	.825

Note. * These items reverse scored. $M = 2.9200$, $SD = .30542$. $N = 131$.

These data indicate that although elementary counselors responding to this survey support the practice of grade retention, they also tend to exhibit a considerable degree of indecision ($M = 2.9200$, $SD = .30542$), as evidenced by the frequency and magnitude of “undecided” responses. An item analysis was performed to identify the items in which the percentage of participants choosing the “undecided” response was the greatest. Items 3, 4, 6, 15, 21, 22, 23, 31, 32, and 33 (shown in Table 7 and described below) ranged between 24% and 36% of the sample having chosen the “undecided” response. These items reflect statements regarding benefits of retention, detrimental effects of retention, as well as decision-making considerations.

Item #23 addressed whether the student under consideration of retention should be included in the decision-making process and produced the greatest degree of indecision at 36%. The “undecided” response was the most frequently chosen response for this item. The second item for which “undecided” was the most frequently chosen response (34%), was item #33, “it is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade.” This was followed by statements

reflective of the benefits of retention such as items #32, “repeating a subject promotes mastery of that subject,” and #33, “it is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade,” both with 34% of the participants indicating “undecided.” Elementary counselors responding to the grade retention survey were also considerably undecided (30%) about item #6, “immature students benefit from retention,” and item 22, “retaining students will help them catch up academically” (30%). Finally, 26% of the elementary counselors were undecided as to whether “retention has a detrimental effect on students’ self-concept.”

The next step in the item analysis focused on those items yielding the highest degree of agreement. The results shown in Table 7 indicated elementary counselors tended to agree with those items which were reflective of positive attitudes toward grade retention (5, 7, 13, 18, 19, and 22). These include items #5, “promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements,” #18, “retention provides students with time to grow” (68%), and #13, “retention can have a positive effect on learning” (79%). Respondents also strongly agreed with item # 7, “the primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade” (70%), and item #19, “retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success” (83%). Respondents agreed most strongly (97%) with item #34, “in making a retention decision, students’ maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement.”

The final step in the item analysis focused on items indicative of the highest degree of disagreement. Respondents tended to disagree with those items which reflected negative attitudes toward grade retention (3, 11, 12, 16, 21, 25, and 35). These items

included item #21, “retention discourages rather than encourages learning” (64%), item #3, “retention will stifle students’ desire to learn” (63%), item #25, “students who have been retained are rejected by their peers” (80%), and item #35, “students should never be retained” (83%). Elementary counselors also disagreed (60%) with item #11, “retention has a detrimental effect on students’ academic achievement,” with item #16, “retention increases the probability that a student will drop out of high school” (.

Respondents also disagreed most strongly (81%, 97%, and 88%) with items regarding the decision-making process (2, 10, and 20 respectively). Item 2 asserted that students should be retained if they are behind in one major subject; item 10 stated that the decision to retain a student should be made solely by the teacher; and item 20 declared that parents should immediately decide whether to retain their student. A summary of those responses indicate elementary counselors favor a team approach over a teacher or parent being the sole decision maker.

Table 8 summarizes the perceptions of subgroups of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention as measured by the average total score on the grade retention survey. The average total attitude score for all of the participants along with a breakdown of the average total attitude score for each of the dependent variables is given. Grade level assignment is not included because of the widespread variability in clustering reported by respondents.

Table 8

Attitude Scores of Elementary Counselor Subgroups

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Males	14	2.8592	.08797
Females	117	2.9272	.09418
Urban	19	2.8857	.33005
Suburban	70	2.9290	.31696
Rural	42	2.9204	.27962
Teacher (Yes)	46	2.9416	.29680
Teacher (No)	85	2.9082	.31109
Total Sample	131	2.9200	.30542

Research Question 2: Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by gender?

The average total scores for elementary school counselors by gender are ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .094$) for females and ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .088$) for males. The result of the *ANOVA* indicated no significant difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors toward grade retention by gender $F(1, 129) = .619$, $p = .433$.

Research Question 3: Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by district classification as urban, rural, or suburban?

The average total score on the grade retention survey for elementary school counselors by district classification are ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .330$) for urban, ($M = 2.92$, $SD =$

.280) for rural, and ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .317$) for suburban. The result of the ANOVA revealed no significant difference in the attitudes of elementary counselors regarding retention by district classification as urban, rural, or suburban, $F(2, 128) = .148$, $p = .863$.

Research Question 4: Is there a difference in attitudes of elementary counselors regarding grade retention by previous experience as a classroom teacher?

The average total scores for counselors who reported prior teaching experience (Yes) was ($M = 2.94$, $SD = .297$) and ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .311$) for those elementary counselors who reported no prior teaching experience (No). The result of the ANOVA $F(1, 129) = .355$, $p = .552$ indicated there was no significant difference in the attitudes of counselors toward grade retention between counselors with or without prior teaching experience.

Research Question 5: Is there a difference in attitudes of elementary counselors regarding grade retention by grade level assignment?

The data necessary to answer this question could not be derived from participants' responses. Average total scores and an analysis of variance for grade level assignment could not be performed because of the high degree of variability among participants' responses to the question regarding their grade level assignment. As a result, the data did not cluster into distinct categories.

Research Question 6: Is there a relationship between the attitudes of elementary counselors regarding grade retention and their years of experience?

Pearson product-moment correlations were performed to determine if there was an association between years of experience and the perceptions of elementary counselors toward grade retention. Results show no significant correlation between attitudes of

school counselors toward grade retention, as measured by the average total attitude score, and years of experience, $r(N = 131) = .131, p = .136$ (two-tailed), alpha level .05, when years of experience ($M = 9.1908, SD = 7.60351$) corresponds to the number of years as an elementary counselor.

To provide a more in-depth analysis of the data, years of experience was divided into two subcategories: (a) years of experience for participants who were classroom teachers before becoming elementary counselors ($n = 46, M = 20.8696, SD = 9.9300$), and (b) respondents who indicated they were not former teachers ($n = 85, M = 6.8471, SD = 5.30780$). A weak, negative correlation at the .05 significance level, $r(n = 46) = -.151, p = .318$, (two-tailed) was shown for average total attitude score and total years of experience for those counselors who also had classroom teaching experience. For those counselors with prior teaching experience, the greater the number of years the counselor had been in education ($M = 20.8696$), the more likely they were to have slightly more positive attitudes toward grade retention. It is important to note, however, that the results were not statistically significant.

Results of the correlation between average total attitude score and years of experience for the group of elementary counselors with no prior classroom teaching experience, though moderately weak, were found to be statistically significant, $r(n = 85) = .281, p = .009$, (two-tailed), alpha level .01. The longer the respondents had been in education ($M = 6.8471, SD = 5.30780$), all of that time solely as an elementary counselor, the more likely they were to have slightly less positive attitudes toward retention.

Question 7: To what extent are elementary school counselors involved in the decision-making process?

Categories for responses included: (a) not at all; (b) minimally, process paperwork only; (c) moderately, add requested information to paperwork and process; and; (d) extensively, present for team approach and shared decision-making model. A response to this question was generated by computing a frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and a standard deviation from the responses to items requesting demographic information. As shown in Table 9, of the 131 elementary counselor participants, the majority of respondents, 58% indicated an extensive level of involvement in the decision-making process ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.095$)

Table 9

Level of Involvement in Decision-making Process

Involvement	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	20	15.3	15.3
Minimally	18	13.7	29.0
Moderately	35	26.7	55.7
Extensively	58	44.3	100.0

Note. Sample size, $N = 131$.

Research Question 8: What sources of information most strongly influence elementary school counselors' attitudes toward grade retention?

Categories for responses included: (a) teacher's opinion; (b) principal's opinion; (c) school psychologist's opinion; (d) personal experience with a retained student; (e) research; and (f) other. A response to this question was generated by computing a

frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and a standard deviation from the responses to items on the grade retention survey requesting demographic information.

The results, as presented in Table 10, indicated the classroom teacher’s opinion represented the strongest source of influence upon respondents’ opinions of grade retention ($M = 3.3511$, $SD = 1.89300$). The second strongest source of influence upon participants’ opinions regarding grade retention was personal experience with a student who had been retained. Research was the third leading influence upon respondents’ opinions of grade retention while the category of “other” was fourth. The school psychologist and the principals’ opinions were reported to be the least influential.

Table 10

Influence Affecting Attitudes Toward Grade Retention

Source of influence	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Teachers’ Opinion	45	34.4	34.4
Principal’s Opinion	3	2.3	36.6
School Psychologist	5	3.8	40.5
Personal Experience	36	27.5	67.9
Research	23	17.6	85.5
Other	19	14.5	100.0

Note. Sample size, $N = 131$.

Summary

The findings presented in this chapter resulted from the analysis of data obtained from the responses of elementary school counselors to the 35 attitudinal items in the first section of the grade retention survey and the demographic information requested in the

second section of the survey constructed for this study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to describe characteristics of the participants and answers to the research questions.

The majority of the elementary counselors participating in this study reported an extensive level of involvement in the grade retention decision-making process. Respondents tended to exhibit a high degree of neutrality in their perceptions of grade retention. Despite the degree of indecision, clusters of agreement and disagreement emerged from the data. Areas of strongest agreement related to statements reflecting positive attitudes toward grade retention and the importance of considering students' maturation and emotional well-being in addition to academic achievement in the decision-making process. Areas of strongest disagreement also reflected positive attitudes toward retention in that elementary counselors tended to disagree with statements reflecting negative outcomes of retention reported in the literature. There was no significant difference between the relationship of perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention and gender, district classification, previous teaching experience, or for years of experience as an elementary counselor. A weak positive correlation between years of experience for those counselors who were not previously classroom teachers was found to be statistically significant. Results show the classroom teacher's opinion regarding grade retention was the strongest source of influence affecting respondents' opinion regarding grade retention while the opinion of the school psychologist and the principal were the weakest sources of influence. The results further revealed that the perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention were not

reflective of the evidence from research on this topic. Only 17.5% of the respondents indicated their opinions of grade retention had been influenced by research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the attitudes of elementary counselors regarding grade retention and the factors associated with those perceptions. A summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, a discussion of the findings and recommendations emerging from this study will be presented in this chapter.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention. This study also addressed the demographic data relating to gender, district classification, years of experience, grade level assignment, previous teaching experience, level of involvement in the decision-making process, and sources of strongest influence regarding respondents' opinion of grade retention. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by gender?
3. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention by district classification as urban, rural, or suburban?
4. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by previous experience as a classroom teacher?
5. Is there a difference in the attitudes of elementary school counselors by grade level assignment?

6. Is there a relationship between the attitudes of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention and their years of experience?
7. To what extent are elementary counselors involved in the grade retention decision-making process?
8. What sources of information most strongly influence an elementary counselor's perception

In order to contextualize the results of this investigation into the perceptions of elementary school counselors regarding grade retention, related literature and research were examined. The review began with an examination of historical accounts of the practice of grade retention and the investigation of the effectiveness of the educational practice of retention. This was followed by a review of the long and short-term effects of retention upon students. Characteristics of retained students were reviewed next along with criteria for grade retention. Finally, the perceptions of teachers and administrators were reviewed.

The sample for this study was comprised from a national population of elementary school counselors who subscribe to an elementary counselor listserv (elementary-counselors@yahoogroups.com), counselors who access the ASCA elementary chat room (<http://www.schoolcounselor.org>), elementary counselor members of Allegheny County Counselors Association, and elementary counselors to whom the link to the survey may have been forwarded by another counselor. In this study, 137 elementary counselors responded to the grade retention survey within the first week of the posting. Of the 137 participants, six did not complete the entire survey and were eliminated from the study.

The grade retention survey instrument (Appendix A), used previously in research on perceptions of teachers, administrators, and pre-service teachers regarding grade retention was employed for the collection of data for this study. The survey utilized a five-point Likert scale to measure elementary school counselors' agreement/disagreement level with probable outcomes and decision-making factors associated with grade retention. Demographic data were also collected with the instrument. The survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey tool (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>).

Data gathered in this investigation were analyzed and reported using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to report the responses to individual items, gender composition, classification of respondents' school district, years of experience, and grade level assignment. Descriptive statistics, including means, medians, modes, and standard deviations were computed along with a series of *ANOVAs* to compare the perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention with gender, school district classification, and whether they had previously been a classroom teacher. Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to examine if a relationship existed between the perceptions of elementary counselors and years of experience. Finally, frequency distribution and percentages were used to answer Question 7 and Question 8.

Findings

Based on the analyses of the data gathered in this study, the following research findings were noted:

1. Overall, elementary school counselors exhibited a tendency toward indecision regarding their perceptions of grade retention. The neutrality of their opinions

included decision-making factors such as physical size of the student (28% undecided), whether students should be retained for a certain number of unexcused absences (32% undecided), or if students who are being considered for retention should be included in the decision-making process (36% undecided). Many elementary school counselors were also undecided about whether it is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed requirements for a grade (36%) or if repeating a subject would promote mastery of that subject (34%) and helps them to catch up academically (30% undecided). Finally, elementary school counselors also expressed indecision about the effects retention is reported to have upon students such as, stifling the desire to learn (24% undecided), diminished self-concept (26% undecided) and dropping out of school (24% undecided).

2. Areas of strongest agreement among elementary school counselors were shown in their responses to items that mainly reflect positive attitudes toward grade retention. The majority of elementary school counselors (70%) believed the primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade and 79% agreed that retention can have a positive effect on students' learning. More than two-thirds of respondents, (68%) believe retention provides students with time to mature and grow. Elementary counselors further agreed (83%) that retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the greatest success and 87% believed retaining students in the primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades. Nearly all elementary counselors (97%) believe students'

maturity and emotional health are as important to consider as their academic achievement when making a retention decision.

3. Elementary school counselors tended to disagree most strongly with items that mainly reflected negative attitudes toward grade retention. The majority of counselors (83%) disagreed that students should never be retained. Additionally, the majority of counselors (60%) disagreed that retention has a detrimental effect on student's academic achievement while (64%) disagreed that retention discourages rather than encourages learning and 63% disagreed that retention will stifle students' desire to learn. Elementary school counselors disagreed that retention promotes behavior problems (70%) or that retained students are rejected by their peers (80%). Nearly all elementary counselors (97%) disagreed that the decision to retain a student should be made solely by the teacher.
4. The perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention, as measured by the total attitude score, did not differ significantly when compared on the basis of gender, district classification, and whether they had previously been a classroom teacher. It could not be determined if a difference existed on the basis of grade level assignment. Elementary counselors reported a wide span of grade level (K – 5 and K – 8) responsibilities and could not be clustered into primary and intermediate groupings. This may be due to student-counselor ratios of 882:1 at the elementary level (ASCA, 2007).

5. An examination of the relationship between perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention and the number of years of counseling experience revealed a slightly positive, but statistically insignificant relationship. When years of teaching experience was combined with years of counseling experience, there was some evidence of a slightly negative, but again, statistically insignificant relationship between perceptions of grade retention and years of experience for the group of elementary counselors who previously had been classroom teachers. For the group of elementary counselors who had not previously been classroom teachers, a moderately weak positive, yet statistically significant relationship existed between years of experience and perceptions of grade retention.
6. The majority of elementary school counselors reported an extensive level of involvement in the decision-making process of a student under consideration for grade retention. This response category was defined as present for team meetings and taking a shared-decision making approach.
7. Elementary school counselors reported that the strongest source of influence affecting their perceptions of grade retention was the opinion of the classroom teacher. Personal experience with a student who had been retained was the second strongest source of influence followed by research and the classification of “other.” The opinions of the school psychologist and the principal were the weakest sources of influence.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based upon the analyses of the data and the reported findings of this study.

1. Elementary school counselors are considerably undecided as to their perceptions regarding grade retention as indicated by the frequency and magnitude of the “undecided” responses selected by the participants. Nearly half of the items (17) elicited “undecided” responses from more than 20% of the respondents. The “undecided” response was the most frequently chosen response in 2 of the 35 items on the grade retention survey and the second most frequently chosen response in 11 of the 35 items. This is a significant amount of items where the respondent could not decide if they agreed or disagreed.
2. Setting aside the element of indecision, elementary counselors demonstrated support for the educational practice of grade retention as evidenced by the level of agreement with statements reflective of the purported positive aspects of the practice and the level of disagreement with the negative outcomes reported in the literature on grade retention.
3. Elementary counselors feel grade retention is most effective and less traumatic for students in the primary grades as indicated by the degree of strong agreement from respondents (83% and 87% respectively) when asked to indicate their opinion regarding these statements.
4. Elementary counselors’ opinions regarding grade retention are reflective of the opinions of the classroom teacher as evidenced by a comparison of the

results of this survey with those conducted previously with teachers in the review of literature on grade retention reported in this study. Respondents to the grade retention survey indicated the strongest source of influence upon their opinions of grade retention was the opinion of the classroom teacher.

5. Elementary counselors' opinions are not reflective of the research on grade retention as indicated by the data generated from the survey question dedicated to this topic. Evidence to support this conclusion can also be found by comparing responses to individual questions with the findings of the major investigations conducted in the area of grade retention and the meta-analyses of the studies reported in this study. The degree of "undecided" responses may indicate a lack of awareness of the research findings in the area of grade retention.

Discussion

Historically, the voice of the elementary school counselor has been absent from the literature on grade retention. Studies have focused primarily on teachers' opinions regarding grade retention (Edson, 1990; Gates, 1983; Hesse, 2002; Manley, 1988; Midgett, 1999; Rogers, 1995; Tanner & Combs, 1993; Tanner & Galis, 1997) and reveal that teachers tend to support the educational practice of retention as an effective intervention for students who struggle academically. The results of this study reveal that, although the opinions of elementary school counselors currently tend to reflect those of teachers reported in the literature, a substantial amount of indecision exists, leaving room for school counselors' opinions to change.

Although elementary school counselors report extensive involvement in the decision-making process for a student under consideration of grade retention, they may believe the day-to-day experience the classroom teacher has with the student is a more important factor in the decision than the opinion rendered by a school counselor who has more limited contact with the student. This may explain why more counselors indicate the teacher's opinion has the greatest influence upon their own opinions of grade retention. Elementary school counselors readily admit their perception of grade retention is based upon the opinions of the classroom teacher, as evidenced by the results of the data from this study.

The views of elementary school counselors mirror those of the elementary teachers surveyed in several studies (Kirby, 1996; Manley, 1988; Patterson, 1996; Tanner & Combs, 1993; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). Results from these studies indicate teachers believe, and elementary counselors agree, retention gives students the "gift" of time to grow and mature resulting in improved academic performance, particularly for students in the primary grades. Retention is thought to be an effective strategy to bolster students' achievement and the benefit outweighs the cost of any detrimental effect, if indeed any are thought to exist. Both educational professionals report "experience with a student who has been retained" as a far more powerful influential factor affecting their perception of grade retention than the results from research (Tomchin & Impara, 1992).

The disparity between the findings of research and the increased reliance upon grade retention by educators as the intervention of choice for low-achieving students is alarming. Tanner and Combs (1993) suggested that many educators are either unaware of the results of research or choose to disregard the findings in lieu of relying upon their

own beliefs regarding the efficacy of grade retention. This study and those of AlKhrisha, 1994; Gates, 1983; Hesse, 2002; Kirby, 1996; Manley, 1988; Midgett, 1999; Rogers, 1995; Smith, 1989; and others support the findings of Tanner and Combs. Results from this study indicate only 17.4% of the respondents chose “research” as the strongest source of influence upon their opinions of grade retention, while 27.5% chose “personal experience with a retained student.” The responses to items reflective of the findings of research validate this point. The meta-analyses of over a hundred years of research (Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001; Holmes, 1989) reveal retention is not an effective intervention for poor achievement and has potentially harmful side effects, such as diminished self-concept, fewer friends, and most notably, the increased propensity for dropping out of school (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005). Only 12% of elementary counselors believed retention discourages, rather than encourages learning. Only 19% of school counselors disagreed that retention would help students to catch up academically. Only 20% of participants believed retained students suffer rejection from peers while 37% believed retention was detrimental to self-concept. Nearly one-half of the respondents disagreed that retention increased the probability that a student would drop out of school.

Current local and state standards-based and proficiency test policies resulting from the No Child Left Behind law has dramatically increased the retention rate, mandating virtually millions of children be *left behind* as a result. Forty-one percent of elementary school counselors disagreed that competency testing would cause an increase in grade retention. It seems apparent both from their responses and self report, that the opinions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention might change if they were

informed by the research on this topic. Less than one-fifth, (17.4%), of the elementary counselors indicated their opinions of grade retention were based on the evidence from research. Tanner and Combs (1993) speculated that the great divide between educational practice and the results of research on grade retention are attributable to either a lack of knowledge or disregard for the findings on the part of educators. The degree of indecision expressed by elementary school counselors, coupled with the evidence of their opinions reflecting those of teachers' opinions regarding grade retention, and the admission by more than four-fifths of the respondents that research does not inform their opinion, it seems apparent that a lack of knowledge is more likely to be the culprit than disregard for the findings.

Perhaps part of the reason why elementary school counselors, teachers, and other educators continue to support grade retention is that there is no other choice available other than promotion. Alternatives to grade retention such as smaller class size, tutoring and mentoring programs, before and after school programs, and extended school year programs require additional funding (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005). Retaining a student is a costly option as well, particularly in large, urban districts where additional students in the system require additional faculty. However, in smaller districts where the number of students retained does not necessitate additional teachers, retention may be seen as the most economical intervention to remediate a lack of achievement.

Ironically, the very law (NCLB) that requires students to be retained in a grade if they do not pass proficiency tests, is the same law that requires educational professionals to employ research-based interventions to close the achievement gap. Additionally, school counselors of all levels have a professional standard of practice and an ethical

obligation (ASCA, 2004, 2006) to employ the findings of research to guide best practice. Clearly, the results from this study reveal elementary school counselors, as well as other educators discussed in this study, are supporting an educational practice that the evidence has demonstrated to be ineffective, and potentially harmful to students. ASCA has adopted the Transforming School Counseling (TSC) philosophy as the basis for the National Model (ASCA, 2002). The transformed school counselor recognizes inequities in educational practices and advocates for systemic change at a policy level to guard against discrimination, particularly for students of low income and color, and to protect the well-being of all students (Education Trust, 1999). Minority students from low-income families are most likely to be retained once, and often, two or three times (Alexander, Dauber, & Entwisle, 1994; Jimerson, Carlson, Egeland, Rotert, & Sroufe, 1997). Elementary school counselors need to be made aware of the findings of the research on grade retention to enable them to act in accordance with the professional ethics and standards of practice when developing intervention plans for students who are struggling by promoting those that have proven to be effective.

Millions of students will be retained at the end of this school year at a cost of billions of dollars to taxpayers, but more importantly, at the cost of untold negative outcomes for those who will be retained. As Jimerson (2001) points out, the time for ending the debate concerning the merit of grade retention is long past due, as the evidence has failed to support the effectiveness of this practice. Rather it is time for educators, for elementary counselors in particular, to use the findings of research and begin advocating for interventions that are in the best interest of their students, to begin advocating for evidence-based alternatives to grade retention.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study the following recommendations for practice are offered:

1. There is a need for professional elementary school counselors to avail themselves to the research on grade retention and implement the findings to guide best practice. Professional publications should include the topic of grade retention along with other educational practices to disseminate the research findings to school counselors in the field. Credentialing bodies might consider requiring a prescribed number of hours in professional development on the topic of research related to educational practice, or evidence-based practice. Counselor education programs could offer professional development workshops to practicing school counselors on the same topic. Individual districts should consider conducting follow-up measures to track the effectiveness of decisions made to retain students and to monitor the effects it may have upon these students. Results from district studies should be used to inform future decision-making teams considering retention for a student. School counselors are uniquely poised and trained to carry out such an investigation.
2. There is a need for professional school counselor organizations to provide professional development opportunities for school counselors on the topic of grade retention at a national, state, and local level. ASCA, state and local affiliates might consider focusing conferences around the theme of evidence-based educational practices where the topic of grade retention could be offered as a workshop.

3. It is incumbent upon the professional school counselor to take an active approach toward fulfilling their professional obligation to act in accordance with the standards of practice and ethical guidelines of the profession which state that decisions made in the best interest of the student should be grounded in evidence-based educational practice and advocate on behalf of protection for students who are victims of educational practices that are discriminatory. School districts should consider employing a counselor with supervision training and certification to provide clinical supervision in addition to administrative supervision to address the ethical and professional standards of practice with counselors in the district. Performance evaluation forms could include these areas to identify the need for improvement and supervisors could help to develop action plans to address these areas of improvement.
4. School counselors need to take a leadership role in the decision-making process and refrain from deferring to the opinion of the teacher as the most influential factor in deciding on a course of action for the student. School counselors can advocate on behalf of the best interest of the student by presenting the research findings on grade retention, particularly the longitudinal evidence the classroom teacher fails to witness. School counselors could also present the research findings at building meetings or inservices.
5. School counselors need to exercise their leadership skills and knowledge of the educational system and student well-being to encourage the implementation of evidence-based alternatives to retention such as: early identification and outreach programs such as bridge programs for kindergartens, district-funded preschools,

extended school days, before and after school programs to include tutoring and mentoring opportunities, more parental involvement outreach programs thereby utilizing the school as a community center, extended school year (district-sponsored summer school), and smaller class sizes. School counselors are uniquely situated within the school to communicate with administration throughout the district and members from the community to plan and develop partnerships that support the students who need more than what can be offered during the school day as we know it presently.

6. Elementary school counselors should take an active role to identify students who are skill deficient and recommend remediation programming prior to beginning school. This can be accomplished by communicating with the early intervention programs that service school districts such as DART and Head Start. Efforts should be made by elementary counselors to identify siblings of children enrolled in their school who may need the benefit of early intervention programs and provide assistance to families who may not recognize the need or are aware of services available to them to address their needs.
7. School counselor trainee programs need to place a stronger emphasis on research and evidence-based practice as they prepare counselors to practice in the schools of the 21st century. Research courses should be among the first in the rotation of courses taken by counselor trainees and high expectations should be set for student performance. These courses should consist of students from all education training areas, teaching, school psychology, special education, and administration. Subsequent courses in the curriculum should infuse rigorous research projects at

every opportunity so that students become fluent in the language and application of research methods. Additionally, school counselor preparation programs need to make certain that students are well aware of the diagnostic criteria and methods for determining learning disabilities so that low-performing students may be accurately diagnosed and given the appropriate services to meet their specific educational needs.

Recommendations for Further Study

The following recommendations are proposed to advance the research on the topic of grade retention.

1. This study should be replicated to include different wording with regard to grade level assignment in order to determine if an answer to the research question investigating whether there was a difference in attitudes toward grade retention based on grade level assignment is possible. This question may be irrelevant as the data revealed there is no distinct clustering of grade level assignments for elementary school counselors but results could be due to the wording of the question in this study.
2. This study should be replicated with a larger national sample that is representative of elementary counselors other than those who subscribe to an elementary counselor listserv, participate in chat room discussions on ASCA's website, or are members of a regional counseling organization. A survey conducted during the national conference of the American School Counselor Association may provide a more representative sample of the population.

3. This study has provided baseline data from which results of future studies may be compared. Researchers might consider pre-testing school counselors, conducting training workshops on grade retention research, and post-testing to determine the effect such a workshop may have on the perceptions of school counselors toward grade retention. Retention data for the school districts participating in the data should be collected to determine if there is a difference in the rate of retention before and after such a workshop.
4. A qualitative investigation of the perceptions of elementary counselors regarding grade retention to capture data not recorded by the survey used in this quantitative inquiry. The present survey does not provide an opportunity for respondents to list exactly what are the “other” sources of influence upon their opinions of grade retention. The opportunity for participants to qualify their responses may provide insight into this question and also why certain questions provoked “undecided” responses to the degree reported in this study.
5. The voice of the student who has been retained needs to be heard and added to the literature on grade retention so that educators and policy makers may gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of a child left behind.
6. Additional studies are needed to determine the effectiveness of various alternatives to retention such as extended school days, extended school years, mentoring and tutoring programs, smaller schools, and smaller class sizes. Comparative studies need to be conducted to find the most effective means of reducing the rate of grade retention.

Limitations of the Study

The following factors limit validity and/or generalizability of the results of this study.

1. This study was restricted to elementary counselors who have access to the internet, more specifically, elementary counselors who are ASCA members and accessed the posting for the grade retention survey on the organization's chat room, or either subscribe to the national elementary counselor listserv or are ACCA members who received an email invitation to participate in this research study. The results may not be generalized beyond the specific population from which the sample was drawn.
2. The researcher is known to potential participants; therefore prior acquaintance may be influential. Counselors with whom the researcher has spoken with regarding this topic may have been influenced as a result.
3. This study did not ask respondents to describe the influences indicated by the response of "Other" or what respondent meant by "Experience with a retained student" when asked to indicate source of strongest influence to respondents' opinion regarding grade retention. Adding a field to gather more specific information could contribute additional insight into sources of influence upon elementary school counselors' perception of grade retention.
4. This study did not provide a field within the internet survey for respondents to indicate ethnicity or specific geographic location. This information could provide a more in depth analysis of the perceptions of elementary counselors toward grade retention.

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Appendix A

Grade Retention Survey Instrument

Grade Retention Survey

This survey is designed to assess practitioners' opinions about grade retention. Please respond to each item according to your attitude. There is no right or wrong answer. Use the following scale for these items.

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

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. Retaining students in the primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades. | SA A U D SD |
| 2. Students should be retained if they are behind in one major subject. | SA A U D SD |
| 3. Retention will stifle students' desire to learn. | SA A U D SD |
| 4. Students with 30 days of unexcused absences should automatically be retained. | SA A U D SD |
| 5. Promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements. | SA A U D SD |
| 6. Immature students benefit from retention. | SA A U D SD |
| 7. The primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade. | SA A U D SD |
| 8. The threat of retention makes students work harder. | SA A U D SD |
| 9. Students in special education programs should not be retained. | SA A U D SD |
| 10. The decision to retain students should be made solely by the teacher. | SA A U D SD |
| 11. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement. | SA A U D SD |
| 12. Retention promotes behavior problems. | SA A U D SD |

13. Retention can have a positive effect on students' learning.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. Students who are considered for retention share many common characteristics.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' self concept.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16. Retention increases the probability that a student will drop out of high school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17. A teacher can determine within the first two months of school which students will need to be retained.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18. Retention provides students with time to grow and mature.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19. Retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20. Students' parents should immediately decide whether to retain their children.	SA	A	U	D	SD
21. Retention discourages rather than encourages learning.	SA	A	U	D	SD
22. Retaining students will help them catch up academically.	SA	A	U	D	SD
23. Students being considered for retention should be included in the decision making process.	SA	A	U	D	SD
24. Competency testing and proficiency testing will increase the number of students retained.	SA	A	U	D	SD
25. Students who have been retained are rejected by their peers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
26. Classroom behavior is an important consideration in determining whether to retain students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
27. Retention reduces the range of academic levels in a classroom.	.SA	A	U	D	SD
28. Retention provides incentive for students to try to do better at academic tasks.	SA	A	U	D	SD

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|---|-----|---|---|---|----|
| 29. All students who are retained should be referred for psycho-educational evaluation. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 30. Promotion should depend upon attending school a certain number of days during the school year. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 31. Students who are larger than their classmates should not be retained. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 32. Repeating a subject will promote mastery of that subject. | .SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 33. It is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 34. In making a retention decision, students' maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 35. Students should never be retained. | SA | A | U | D | SD |

Please provide the following information.

1. Please indicate all grade levels to which you are assigned as an elementary counselor.

Kindergarten 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
2. Number of years employed as an elementary counselor: _____
3. Gender: _____
4. If you were a classroom teacher previously, how many years did you teach? _____

5. Indicate which one best represents your level of involvement in the grade retention decision-making process?

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Extensively
	Process paperwork only	Add requested information to paperwork and process	Present for team approach and shared decision-making model

6. Indicate which one best represents the strongest influence on your opinion of grade retention.

Teachers' Opinion	Principal's Opinion	School psychologist's Opinion	Personal Experience with a retained student	Research	Other
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7. Have you ever been retained? _____

8. Please indicate the classification of your school district.

Urban

Suburban

Rural

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate in the Research

Appendix C

Permission from Moderator of Listserv

Appendix D

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Appendix E

Security and Privacy Policy of SurveyMonkey

Appendix F

Reformatted Grade Retention Survey Instrument