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A Study of Grade Retention & Social Promotion in the McLean County, Kentucky School District

John Settle Jr.

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Settle,

John C., Jr.

1980

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

A STUDY OF GRADE RETENTION AND SOCIAL PROMOTION
IN THE McLEAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY
SCHOOL DISTRICT

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

BY
JOHN C. SETTLE, JR.

APRIL 1980

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A STUDY OF GRADE RETENTION AND SOCIAL PROMOTION
IN THE McLEAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Recommended 4-17-80
(Date)

W. J. Christenson
Dr. W. J. Christenson

H. Phillip Constans
Dr. Phillip Constans

Gene C. Farley
Dr. Gene Farley

David W. Shannon
Dr. David Shannon

Approved 5-13-80
(Date)

Elmer Gray
Dean of the Graduate College

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A STUDY OF GRADE RETENTION AND SOCIAL PROMOTION IN THE
McLEAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, SCHOOL DISTRICT

John C. Settle Jr.

April 1980

72 pages

Directed by: Dr. Victor Christenson, Dr. Phillip Constans,
Dr. Gene Farley and Dr. David Shannon

Department of Educational Leadership Western Kentucky University

Samples from two populations, students socially promoted into McLean County High School in the years 1976-1979, who had not been retained, and students who entered McLean County High School during the same years who had been retained at one or more grade levels, 1-8, were compared. Comparisons of differences which existed in the two student groups selected for the sample were in five areas: (1) reported attitude toward school, (2) attendance, (3) number of discipline offenses, grades 9-11, (4) scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, in the subtests of reading and math as measured at the eighth grade level and (5) scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, in the subtests of reading and math as measured at the twelfth grade level. Statistical analysis was by means of a t test of significance of the mean scores of the two subject groups. Mean expanded scale scores for the two groups were further analyzed using academic aptitude as a covariate.

The findings of the study indicated no significant difference between socially promoted and retained students

in the areas of attitudes toward school, attendance, number of discipline offenses, grades 9-11, achievement scores in reading and math at the eighth grade level, or achievement scores in math at the twelfth grade level. Achievement scores in reading did, however, differ significantly for the two groups at the twelfth grade level, with the retained group scoring higher.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The American educational system has always faced, as one of its many problems, the question of how to deal with those students who do not keep pace with their peers in the acquisition of academic knowledge. Beginning about the middle of the last century, schools were divided into grade levels. As students mastered the academic content of one grade level, they were moved to the next higher level or grade. It was believed that by requiring that a child remain at a particular grade level until mastery of subject matter was achieved, a more uniform system of education resulted which allowed a child to move from one school to another with relative ease. Thus the practice of promotion and non-promotion, or retention, arose as a logical consequence of the grade structure.

The problem of retention soon became a major concern to educators. Leonard Ayres reported that by 1909 "the percentage of retained students ranged from a low of 7.5 percent in the Bedford, Massachusetts school system to a high of 75.8 percent in the Memphis, Tennessee system." ¹ Be-

¹ Leonard Ayres, "Laggards in Our Schools," (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1909), pg. 64.

cause of these high percentages of retentions, programs gradually were adopted which paid more attention to individual student differences.

Homogeneous grouping and various remedial programs came into existence as attempts to deal with the problem. Essentially three approaches to promotion developed in American education; grade standard, automatic promotion and continuous progress.² The "grade standard" approach stated that children must master a predetermined amount of academic subject knowledge before being promoted to the next grade. The "automatic promotion" policy held that children should be kept with their own age group and passed regularly through the grade structure, regardless of academic achievement. The "continuous progress" policy was based on the theory that each child's progress should be considered on the basis of all the factors affecting his total adjustment.³ This policy often is referred to as "social promotion."³ Eventually many school districts shifted from a policy of promoting only on the basis of achievement, "grade standard", to one which considered factors such as age and maturity of students, "continuous progress."⁴

² William F. Hall and Ruth Demarest, "Effect on Achievement Scores of a Change in Promotional Policy," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 58, (May 1958,) pg. 208-211.

³ Ibid.

⁴ William G. Cunningham and Ray C. Owen, "Social Promotion: Problem or Solution?," NASSP Bulletin, October 1976, pg. 25-29.

Many variations of these three basic approaches to the problem of the non-achieving student have been attempted. Remedial programs, non-graded schools and alternative schools are all attempts, in part, to deal with the student who does not acquire mastery of academic knowledge.

Social promotion and grade retention, however, remain as two widely used alternatives to the problem of the non-achieving student in the American educational system. This statement can be substantiated by a review of current educational research and observation of the numbers of recent studies related to these two educational practices.

Both practices, grade retention and social promotion, create additional problems for both the student involved and for the school. The child who is retained in the same grade often feels that he is a failure, and, given this self-concept, he often fulfills the expected behavioral patterns associated with failure. Secondly, the child who is retained frequently outdistances his peers in terms of physical and social development. This can cause the child to feel that he is a misfit, adding to a self-concept of failure. The child frequently compensates for this feeling of inadequacy by becoming a behavior problem. Thirdly, failure has a detrimental economic effect on both the child and the school. A double expenditure per pupil in average daily attendance takes its toll not only on the school and taxpayers, but also on the retained child's family in terms of the incidental costs inherent in school attendance.

The socially promoted child also often experiences difficulty. When a student is socially promoted through the grade structure without the required skills, he often feels lost and different from the other children. The same self-concept of failure often is acquired by the socially promoted child. In addition, the socially promoted student, who is deficient in skills, puts an added burden on teachers who are already hard pressed to provide adequate instruction to students with different need levels. Hence, the socially promoted child often ends up neglected, ignored, or simply tolerated.

For the school, social promotion and retention create essentially the same administrative problems. Either alternative may contribute to overcrowding in the classroom and cause problems in scheduling and teacher assignment. Both alternatives often contribute to behavioral problems, placing an added burden on faculty and administration.

The question of which is better, to retain the student who is achieving below grade level or to place him in the next grade with his peer group, still remains a serious problem in American education. The pendulum of educational thought swings back and forth on this issue, as it does with most educational issues. With today's emphasis upon basic education and competency-based promotion requirements, there is renewed public concern over students who fail to achieve mastery of subject matter. Social promotion and retention are educational policies which again are being examined by the profession and the public.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine how students socially promoted to McLean County High School and who have been retained prior to the ninth grade differ from students socially promoted to McLean County High School who have not been retained prior to the ninth grade.

Purpose and Justification of Study

The problem of how to deal with students who do not keep pace with their peers in terms of academic knowledge long has been recognized in American education. As early as the beginning of this century, studies were conducted to determine the best method for dealing with the problem.⁵

Recent literature is replete with studies which deal with the same problem. Gregg B. Jackson, writing in 1975, described some forty-four separate studies conducted between 1929 and 1973 which compared social promotion to grade retention. In addition to the studies directly described, Jackson reported on over 150 articles and research contained in the literature in those years.⁶ Analysis of Jackson's bibliographical list reveals that of the 157 studies found by the author relating to grade retention and social promotion,

⁵

Ibid.

⁶

Gregg B. Jackson, "The Research Evidence on the Effects of Grade Retention," Review of Educational Research, Fall 1975.

five were sponsored by the National Education Association, three by state educational associations, thirteen by state departments of education and five by agencies of the Federal Government.⁷ This analysis indicates that the problem has a national scope and that concern is widespread.

Because social promotion and grade retention are recognized problems confronting American educators, and since it is an authentic and controversial issue in the schools of McLean County, research of this problem as it exists in the McLean County School District will be both timely and important.

Value of the Study

A study of the differences which exist in socially promoted students who have been retained prior to the ninth grade and socially promoted students who have not been retained prior to the ninth grade in the McLean County School District should be valuable in three areas.

1. It should assist the McLean County Board of Education in the development of a promotion policy for McLean County elementary schools.

2. The results should be helpful to teachers of McLean County by providing insight into a problem which has been quite controversial in this system.

Ibid.

3. The results should be helpful to the administration of McLean County schools in providing a sound basis for decisions concerning promotion and non-promotion of students within the district.

The Sample

The subjects in the sample were students socially promoted to McLean County High School from the four elementary and middle schools of McLean County in the years 1976 through 1979. Omitted from the sample were those students who had been placed in special education programs in any of the elementary years and students who had transferred to the McLean County system from other school districts.

The Instrument

A questionnaire was developed by the author as an attempt to measure students' attitudes toward school in general, students' self-concepts in terms of ability and academic performance, and students' attitudes toward grade repetition in the elementary school. The questionnaire was distributed to students who were selected for the sample and who are presently enrolled in McLean County High School. Those students selected for the sample who had withdrawn from school were mailed a copy of the questionnaire. Accompanying each mailed questionnaire was a cover letter and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to facilitate returns. A more detailed description of the instrument is found in Chapter Three.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, terms will be defined as follows:

1. Socially promoted students - those students who scored in the lower three stanines in reading or math at one or more grade levels, 1 - 8, as measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S; and who entered McLean County High School with their appropriate age group.

2. Retained students - those students who scored in the lower three stanines in reading or math at one or more grade levels, 1 - 8, as measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S; and who entered McLean County High School one or more years behind their appropriate age group.

3. Minor discipline offenses - acts of misbehavior committed in the classroom or general school setting which are corrected by faculty or staff and which do not fall under the provisions of major disciplinary offenses.

4. Major discipline offenses - obscene language or gestures, disrespect to teachers and/or insubordination, fighting, stealing, vandalism, possession or use of drugs or alcohol, possession or use of firearms, explosives or weapons, the sounding of false alarms, and the accumulation of three minor offenses.

Delimitation

This study was intended to provide information concerning students' perceived differences and differences as measured by a standardized achievement test between

students socially promoted and students retained in the McLean County Schools. Due to the relatively small size of the sample the results of the study may or may not generalize to other districts.

Limitations

The results of the study were limited by the use of a questionnaire in obtaining data. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were not established and the problem of non-returns was a limiting factor in the study.

Data concerning the reliability and validity of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills is found in Chapter Three.

The small size of the sample population was unavoidable due to a lack of available records for the years prior to 1976 and due to the number of students selected for the sample who have withdrawn from the system. The sample size was a limiting factor in the study.

Due to a change in testing policy in McLean County schools in the years 1976-1979, not all students selected for the sample were tested at the same grade levels with the same achievement test instrument. This created a problem for this study in that comparison of student scores, as measured by achievement instruments, could not be done consistently with the same students and instruments at all levels. While this problem was considered in the design of the study, it represents a limiting factor in the interpretation of overall findings.

Hypothesis

Students socially promoted to McLean County High School during the years 1976 through 1979 who had been retained prior to the ninth grade differ significantly from students who entered McLean County High School during the years 1976 through 1979 who were socially promoted and not retained prior to entry in the following areas:

1. reported attitudes toward school
2. attendance
3. number of discipline offenses at the secondary level
4. scores on Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in areas of math and reading as measured at the eighth grade level
5. scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in the areas of math and reading as measured at the secondary level.

CHAPTER II

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of previously conducted studies relating to the subject of social promotions and/or grade retention. Current Index to Journals in Education, Readers Guide to Periodic Literature, Educational Index Dissertation Abstracts International and bibliographies of research reviewed were consulted to gather literature relevant to this study. More than 160 studies concerning the effects of social promotion and/or grade retention were listed in various bibliographies and in the reference works consulted. Those reviewed here are intended to represent a cross section of the research which has been conducted in the area of promotion policy. Particular emphasis was given to those studies which closely paralleled the design or aims of this work. Research involving student attitude or self-concept, as a result of promotion policies, and studies involving student achievement, as measured by standardized achievement tests, resulting from such policies were of special concern. A study conducted in the schools of Kentucky also was located and is presented in this chapter. Although two works are reviewed which are of a descriptive nature, the remainder are examples of original research into the problem of social promotion and grade retention.

A study conducted in 1975 in the Salinas Union High School district of Salinas, California, centered on forty-six seventh grade students who were socially promoted to the ninth grade in the spring of 1974. These students were selected for social promotion using the following criteria: scholastic performance, test scores, personal acquaintance and age at time of selection. All students selected for social promotion were over-aged, that is, they would be at least nineteen years old upon high school graduation if they followed the usual one-to-one birth year to school year correspondence.

The study evaluated the experience of the forty-six socially promoted students in the following areas: attendance, scholastic performance, and need for counseling and guidance.

The study found that social promotion seemed to work to the benefit of the students involved. As a whole, the socially promoted students did not appear to place a greater strain upon high school resources than the non-socially promoted high school students.¹

A study conducted in 1975 by the Office of Research, U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, and authored by Gregg B. Jackson, analyzed and compared the results of earlier studies of grade retention and promotion. Jackson reviewed

¹"Follow-Up Study of Average Seventh Grade Junior High School Students Promoted to the Ninth Grade in High School for the School Year 1974-74," Salinas Union High School District, California, (Ed. 120-658.)

over 150 studies and articles concerning grade retention which appeared in education literature between 1929 and 1973. In his work Jackson divided the literature into three design types. Design type I included studies where students retained under normal school policies were compared with students promoted under normal school policies. This type of study, Jackson found, was biased against grade retention because it was a comparison of retained students who were having academic difficulty with promoted students who were succeeding.

Design type II were studies which compared the condition of retained students after promotion with their condition prior to promotion. Jackson found studies of this design type to be biased toward indicating that pupils benefited from grade retention. The author felt this bias resulted from a lack of control in the study of those factors which could account for improvement in performance, other than the retention experience.

Design type III involved studies which employed a purely experimental design. These studies, of which Jackson found only three, compared students experiencing academic difficulty and who were randomly assigned to promoted or retained groups. These studies, which Jackson believed were free of bias, indicated no significant difference in the effects of grade retention or social promotion on the students involved.

The general conclusion reached by Jackson in his review of studies was "there was no reliable body of evidence

to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties."²

A study conducted in 1958 in the elementary schools of Phoenix School District Number 1, Phoenix, Arizona, examined the effect of promotion policy on pupil achievement in reading. The Phoenix School District Number 1 made an administrative decision in 1948 to change from a policy of promoting children on the basis of academic achievement only to a policy which took into consideration all the factors affecting a pupil's total adjustment. The author defined the former policy as a "grade standard" approach and the latter as a "continuous progress" policy.

The study examined the average reading scores of 12,422 fourth grade students reported between the years 1946-1947 and 1955-1956, a ten year span. The district tested fourth grade students annually with the Iowa Every Pupil Achievement Test and the Kuhlmann-Anderson Group Intelligence Test. An average of 1,240 fourth grade students were tested annually.

The authors of the study found that there was no significant difference in average reading scores or average intelligence quotients in the fourth grades of the Phoenix

²
Gregg B. Jackson, "The Research Evidence on the Effects of Grade Retention," Review of Educational Research, Vol. 45, No. 4, (Fall 1975), pg. 613-635.

elementary schools over a period of ten years, in the course of which the change in promotion policy was made. The total average of the two tests also indicated that children in the district were reading close to the level which would be expected in the light of their capacity throughout the ten year period. A study of average age of fourth-grade students over the ten year period indicated a decline from nine years and nine months in 1946-1947 to nine years and two months in 1955-1956.

The overall conclusion reached by the authors was that regular promotion of children did not result in a lowering of academic achievement in the grade schools of Phoenix District 1.³

An article which appeared in the February, 1962, edition of Education reviewed research in the area of pupil promotion. The author found that the problem of non-promotion long had been recognized in American education. Studies dating from 1907 were cited in the article. The author found that the percentage of pupils who were non-promoted in the nation's school had declined since 1907 from a high of 8.7 percent to 4.0 percent in 1941. The article also pointed out that research indicated almost twice as many males were subject to non-promotion, or retention, as females.

³
William F. Hall and Ruth Demarest, "Effect of Achievement Scores on a Change in Promotion policy," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 58, (1958), pg. 204-207.

In general, the author found that research does not support the practice of grade retention or non-promotion in terms of increased academic learning by pupils.⁴

The only study done in the schools of Kentucky related to the problem of grade retention and social promotion, which this author was able to locate, appeared in Educational Digest in 1968. This study encompassed fifty Kentucky school districts and was designed to investigate the relationship between non-promotion and dropout rates. The study analyzed data over a four year period, 1963 to 1966, and attempted to measure relationships between socio-economic status, non-promotion and dropout rates. Several significant relationships were observed. First, it was found that as non-promotion increased, dropout rates also increased in the districts studied.

Secondly, as economic deprivation of students increased, non-promotion increased. Thirdly, the study found that as the educational level of the adult population increased, non-promotion of students decreased.

This study also found that in the Kentucky school districts included in the research, the highest rate of non-promotion occurred at the first grade level. The author attributed this high level of non-promotion at first grade

⁴
S. Josephina, "Promotion, A Perennial Problem," Education, Vol. 82, No. 6, (February 1962), pg. 373-376.

to the greater variance of pupil maturity found in the first
⁵
 year of school.

In general the author found that non-promotion does not enhance pupil learning and contributes significantly to dropout rates in the higher grades.

A study conducted in 1972, in New Zealand, attempted to measure the effect of academic failure on student self-concept. This study utilized university students as subjects with a control and experimental group composed of sixty-six second year undergraduate psychology students. The experimental group was assigned failing scores on a semester exam given in psychology, while the control group was allowed to pass the exam with acceptable scores. The two groups had been matched prior to the study for personality factors, using the Bills IAV Personality Inventory. Immediately after returning the scores exams to the subjects, the experimenter required each student to complete a second Bills IAV Personality Inventory. The experimenter found no significant difference in the experimental group's self-concept after experiencing failure. The author feels that the lack of change in self-concept following failure may be explained in terms of psychological defense mechanisms which prevented the "failure" group from internalizing
⁶
 their failure.

⁵
 Jim Peyton, "Non-Promotion, Related Factors Noted in Kentucky Study," The Educational Digest, September 1968, pg. 36-39.

⁶
 Roger Boshier, "Effect of Academic Failure on Self-concept and Maladjustment Indices," Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 65, (April 1973), pg. 347-351.

C. T. Kowitz and C. M. Armstrong conducted a longitudinal study of two New York state districts which has similar enrollments and socio-economic conditions, but opposite promotion policies. The authors consulted past school records to determine the effect of such policy on student achievement. Using a random sample of grade seven students, retained and non-retained, the authors found that in reading and arithmetic the achievement of students that had not been retained was well above the achievement of the group that had been retained. The authors' conclusion from the study was that academic achievement of students apparently responds to school policy. A policy of "achieve or fail" (ie., grade retention) seemed to cause more change among pupils who are promoted than among pupils who are retained. While the authors found a trend toward increased achievement in the school with a grade retention policy, the increase was largely limited to pupils who were in no real danger of being retained.

A study conducted in 1977 used a longitudinal approach to measure the effect of non-promotion on the self-concept of students in primary grades. The author followed children

⁷
C. T. Kowitz and C. M. Armstrong, "The Effect of Promotion Policy on Academic Achievement," Elementary School Journal, Vol. 61, (1961), pg. 435-443.

through the 1973-1974 and 1974-1975 school years. The initial sample consisted of 585 first grade students in two suburban school districts near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During the second year of the research, groups of non-promoted, borderline and promoted students still enrolled in the two school districts were studied. Each group included twenty-five students, since this was the number subject to non-promotion. The pupils' self-concept was measured on four separate occasions using the FACES Scale of Self-Concept Development. All pupils initially selected were given the FACES Scale in October, 1973. Subsequent measurements were made in May 1974, October, 1974 and May 1975.

The author found that the non-promoted group of pupils continued to increase their self-concept scores significantly while scores of the borderline and promoted group dropped slightly, although not significantly, during the second year of the study.⁸ At the fourth and last measurement period, the self-concept scores of the non-promoted and promoted groups were virtually identical. The author concluded that the fact of non-promotion with the subsequent repetition of the first grade experience did not negatively affect the self-concept of the experimental primary-grade pupils.⁹

⁸ Harry J. Finlayson, "Non-Promotion and Self-Concept Development," Phi Delta Kappan, Nov. 1977, pg. 205-206.

⁹ Ibid.

In addition to the attitude measurement of the students themselves, the author sampled attitudes of the teachers and parents concerning the effect of non-promotion. He found that teachers viewed the self-concepts of the non-promoted children as either remaining stable or becoming more positive in ninety-six per cent of the cases during the repeated school year.¹⁰ Parents responding to the survey also indicated support for the non-promotion of their children. A majority (79.2 percent) viewed their non-promoted child as being more confident and successful in school during the repeated school year than the year before.¹¹ Well over half (62.5 percent) of the non-promoted students were perceived by their parents as being happier during the non-promoted year than in the initial year.¹²

A study conducted in the public schools of Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1969 was designed to measure significant factors in determining the academic progress of retained students. The sample consisted of fifty-seven boys who were repeating a grade for the first time and who were enrolled in grades one through three. Each child was evaluated in terms of academic achievement and academic progress made during the year of retention. Academic achievement referred to attainment of standards commensurate with grade level while academic progress was defined as a measure of the

10
Ibid.
11
Ibid.
12
Ibid.

child's rate of growth in relation to his previous level. The authors attempted to identify those factors which were associated with satisfactory progress and achievement.

The authors found that level of maturity, the grade at which the child was retained and parental attitude toward retention were the primary factors affecting progress and achievement. A large portion of the children characterized as immature showed satisfactory achievement during the retained year compared to children with less evidence of immaturity. The authors found a significant association between the grade at which the child was retained and satisfactory achievement. Eighty-four percent of the first graders showed satisfactory achievement while more than fifty percent of the second and third graders showed fair or poor achievement.

The authors also found that parental attitudes toward retention were more positive for first grade students than for those in the second or third grade. The parents of the older children in the study had generally been exposed to a longer course of school difficulties and thus tended to be less hopeful and positive.

An unexpected finding of the study was that the chronological age of the child at school entry was not significantly related to academic achievement or progress at the end of the retained year. Overall, the findings of the study indicated that a policy of retention should be based on a study of individual need and probably should be confined to

13

the first school year.

The effect of failure to be promoted upon self-concept of elementary school pupils was the subject of a research project conducted in North Carolina in 1970. The subjects in the study were sixth grade students chosen from both urban and rural school districts in North Carolina. The subjects included 292 boys and 332 girls. Student self-concept was measured by means of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale which contained 100 self-descriptive statements to which the subjects responded according to agreement or disagreement. The subjects were classified according to the number of times they had been retained. Of the 614 subjects, 519 had never failed a grade, 73 had failed once, and 22 had been retained two or more time.

The study indicated that failure to be promoted affected self-concept of the subjects in a significant manner. In each case the highest mean scores on the self-concept scale were obtained by those students who had experienced no grade promotion failures. When one grade promotion failure had been experienced, the mean scores were lower. Findings from the study also indicated that there was no significant difference between sixth grade boys and girls on any of the self-concept measures. Promotion failure affected boys and girls in the same manner. The overall finding of the study was that the most severe and consis-

13

Carol Sue Griffin and Helen Reinherz, "The Second Time Around: Achievement and Progress of Boys who repeated One of the First Three Grades," The School Counselor, January 1970, pg. 213-218.

tent effects of school promotion failure on self-concept¹⁴
 occurred between no failures and two or more failures.

Summary

A review of the literature concerning grade retention and social promotion indicates a wide variance of findings concerning the respective values of the two policies. Jackson felt that the differing results could be attributed to the difference in design of the research and the resulting bias.¹⁵

If any strands of agreement can be noted it would seem to be that, in general, the research does not indicate that non-promotion or grade retention is more beneficial, in terms of student achievement or mastery of subject matter, than social promotion. In fact, the literature indicates that grade retention may have negative effects upon student achievement. Four of the studies reviewed indicate that non-promotion is a contributing factor to student dropout.¹⁶

In terms of the effective results of retention and social promotion, three of the studies reviewed indicate that non-promotion does not significantly affect student self-concept. The work of Armstrong and Kowitz suggests that if grade retention has any motivational value it is

¹⁴
 James Lee Howard and Kinnard White, "Failure to be Promoted and Self-concept among Elementary School Children," Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, Vol. 7, No. 3, (1972), pg. 182-187.

¹⁵

Ibid.

¹⁶

Ibid.

for those students who are promoted rather than those retained.¹⁷ The North Carolina study, on the other hand, found that failure to be promoted affected the self-concept¹⁸ of students in a significant manner.

In general the literature indicates that the question of promotion policies and their respective merits is still open. Perhaps it is significant that the results of the research varies widely according to design, time and geographic location. The ultimate answer to the question of which type of policy is superior may not be absolute, but rather dependent upon the characteristics of the school, parents and the children involved.

17

Ibid.

18

Ibid.

CHAPTER III

Introduction

Throughout the last century of American public education, the problem of how to deal effectively with students who do not keep up with their peers in terms of academic progress has remained unsolved. Various methods of grouping, remedial programs, and promotion policies have been created by local school districts in search of an answer to the problem of the student who does not achieve at the expected rate. Many attempts have been made through educational research to find the decisive answer to the question of which type of approach is best, both for the students involved and for the institution. While many generalizations have been made, the central question of what is the best approach for dealing with the problem of non-achieving students, in a particular local school system, remains unanswered.

The general purpose of this study was to research the issue of grade retention and social promotion policies in the McLean County, Kentucky, School District. More specifically, this study was designed to answer the question of how students who were retained in the elementary schools of McLean County differed from students with the same academic difficulties who were not retained and socially promoted into McLean County High School.

The Sample

The students selected for this study were those students who entered McLean County High School in the years 1976 through 1979 who scored in the lower three stanines in reading or math at one or more grade levels, 1-8, as measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, or the California Achievement Test, Form A.

Students who entered McLean County schools after grade one and students who left the district prior to grade nine were excluded from the sample. Also omitted were students who had been placed in special education programs in any of the elementary school years.

Instrumentation

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, (CTBS/S), has been used by the McLean County School district as a basic test of achievement since the 1976-77 school year. Prior to 1976-77 the California Achievement Test, (CAT), was utilized by the district for the purpose of measuring student achievement. Both instruments contained subtests of academic aptitude which were used as measures of mental ability.

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills is a series of batteries designed for kindergarten through grade twelve, published by CTB/McGraw-Hill. The CTBS/S was developed following a carefully formulated rationale which required that each test measure systematically those skills prerequisite

to study and learning in subject matter courses. The tests were developed for national use, for students who had been taught by various approaches.

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, was standardized in 1970 on a large national sample of students from kindergarten through grade twelve, randomly selected from all states and regions of the United States. The sample included public and private school students proportionate¹ in number to actual enrollments.

Complete data concerning standardization of the CTBS/S can be found in the Technical Manual published by CTB/McGraw-Hill.

The California Achievement Test, (CAT), is a series of test batteries for kindergarten through grade twelve and is published by CTB/McGraw-Hill. The CAT was designed to measure the skill with which the student performs select curricular tasks which are basic to the learning process. The CAT has been published since 1957 and the latest standardization was done in late February and March, 1970, on a nationwide sample. A stratified random sample of school districts was drawn from the fifty states and the District of Columbia. School districts were grouped according to size of enrollment, community types, and geographic region. Public school districts enrolling fewer than three hundred

¹Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, Examiner's Manual, CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1974, pg. 1-2.

students and non-Catholic private schools were excluded from the sample. Catholic schools were sampled separately. In order to develop an articulated scale for all levels of the test, each level was standardized at each grade level for which it was to be used and adjacent levels were administered to the same grade where they overlapped.²

Complete normalitive and standardization data is available in the Technical Manual for the California Achievement Test, Form A, published by CTB/McGraw-Hill.

The Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test is a carefully designed instrument intended to provide comprehensive, articulated assessment of the general mental ability, or academic aptitude, of pupils in American schools. The Otis-Lennon Test was developed in six levels to ensure comprehensive, efficient measurement of the range of ability commonly found in kindergarten through grade twelve.

The Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test has been carefully screened for reliability and validity using samples and statistical techniques. The test was standardized, using approximately 0.4 percent of the total United States school population, kindergarten through grade twelve, in the 1967 - 1968 school year. Samples were chosen from all the states and were selected using the variables of enrollment, private

²
California Achievement Test, Examiner's Manual, CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1970, pg. 5-7.

or public school systems, socio-economic index,³ and geographic region.

Complete data regarding the standardization process can be found in the Otis-Lennon Technical Manual.

The survey instrument utilized in this study was prepared by the author for the purpose of sampling student attitudes toward school. The survey consisted of nine questions designed to sample student attitudes in four general areas: (1) student attitude toward school in grades one through twelve; (2) student assessment of native academic ability as compared with academic progress in the subject areas of math, reading, and science; (3) student attitude toward retention and/or social promotion; and (4) student attitude toward natural ability and progress in school in general.

The author did not attempt to measure the validity or reliability of the survey instrument, as it was designed as a simple descriptive measure of student attitude. The instrument was presented to personnel in the Educational Leadership Department of Western Kentucky University for examination and all suggested changes were made.

A complete copy of the survey instrument can be found in the appendices.

³
Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test, Forms J - K, Manual for Administration, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967, pg. 4 - 23.

Procedures

The records of student performance as measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, (CTBS/S), are retained by the McLean County School District and are available for grades one through eight for the year 1976-1977, 1977-1978 and 1978-1979. Prior to 1976-1977 records of student achievement as measured by the California Achievement Test, Form A, (CAT), for grades one through eight are available. These records were searched for those students who scored in the lower three stanines in reading or math at one or more grade levels, one through eight. This search yielded a total of one hundred four students who were selected as subjects for the study.

Scores in the subtests of reading and math, as measured by the CAT given at the eighth grade level, were obtained for the subjects who entered McLean County High School in 1976-1977. Scores in the subtests of reading and math, as measured by the CTBS/S given at the eighth grade level, were obtained for the subject group entering McLean County High School in the 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 school years.

Student achievement scores as measured by the CTBS/S administered at the high school level were available for the subject group entering McLean County High School in the 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 school years. Scores for the subject group entering McLean County High School in 1978-1979 were unavailable due to a district testing program which provides for the testing of all high school students at the

tenth grade level in the month of April. Student achievement scores for the 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 entering subject group were obtained for the subtests of reading and math.

Permanent record folders for each student enrolled are maintained by the McLean County School District. From this source a record of student retention was obtained for the sample group. Those students selected for the study who were not retained at any grade level one through eight were considered, for the purposes of this study, to have been socially promoted.

Age and sex data for the sample group was also obtained from the permanent record folders.

Academic aptitude for the subjects selected for the study was obtained from the Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test, Intermediate Level, Form J. These scores are recorded on the students' permanent record folders and are reported in terms of deviation intelligence quotient scores, (DIQ).

Attendance records are maintained by the district for each pupil enrolled. The records were searched for the sample group for the period of 1968 to 1979, an eleven year span. Since the school year was not of uniform length for each of the years reported, attendance data was reported in terms of annual absences.

Disciplinary offenses for each student in grades nine through twelve are documented in a disciplinary file kept and maintained by the high school principal. This record

is available for the school years 1977-1978, 1978-1979 and was searched for students selected for the sample. The McLean County Disciplinary Policy defines disciplinary offenses as "major" and "minor" and this definition was utilized in the gathering and organization of the data.

The data from this record was broken into the two categories, (major, minor), and reported in terms of average annual offenses.

After selection of the sample group the survey developed by the author was given to the students in the sample population who remained enrolled in McLean County High School. Students surveyed in this matter were advised that their participation was voluntary. Students selected for the sample who had withdrawn from McLean County High School since 1978-1979 were mailed a survey instrument. Accompanying the instrument was a cover letter and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope to facilitate returns.

Analysis of Data

1. Average annual absences for the students selected for the sample in the two groups, socially promoted not retained and socially promoted retained, (SP,R), were compared. Comparisons were by a t test of significance between the mean annual absences for each group in grades one through eight and nine through twelve. Significance was interpreted at the 0.05 level for all analyses.

2. Average annual discipline offenses for the two groups selected for the sample, (SP,R), for the years 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 were compared. Discipline offenses were divided into two categories, major and minor, and comparison was by a t test of the mean number of offenses in each category for each sample group, (SP,R).

3. The performances of the students selected for the sample in the subtests of reading and math, as measured by the CTBS/S and given at the eighth grade level in the years 1976-1977 and 1977-1978, were compared. Comparisons were for the two groups, (SP,R). The subtest of math was further analyzed in the categories of math computation, math concepts, and math application. The score from the subtest of reading was reported as a total reading score. Scores used for analysis consisted of expanded scale scores for each subtest and category. Comparisons were by a t test of the mean scores of the two groups, (SP,R), in each subtest. Academic aptitude scores for the two groups, (SP,R), were compared in terms of deviation intelligence quotient mean scores. In order to adjust for differences in academic aptitude for the two groups, (SP,R), an analysis of variance was computed on the mean CTBS/S achievement scores using academic aptitude as a covariate.

Due to the difficulty of converting expanded scale scores from the CAT administered to 1975-1976 eighth grade subjects to the same measure used in the CTBS/S given at the

eighth grade level in 1976-1977 and 1977-1978, the 1975-1976 eighth grade subject group was omitted from this analysis. Although this procedure reduced the number of subjects sampled, there is no reason to believe the 1975-1976 eighth grade sample differed significantly from the two groups used in the sample. The availability of data retained by the district dictated this procedure.

4. Student achievement scores, as measured by the CTBS/S in the subtests of reading and math administered at the secondary level, were compared for students selected for the sample who entered McLean County High School in the 1976-1977 school year. Comparisons were of the mean expanded scale scores of the two groups, (SP,R), in that year of testing. The scores from the subtest of math were further analyzed in the categories of math computation, math concepts, and math application. The scores from the subtest of reading were reported as a total reading score. Comparisons were by a t test of the mean expanded scale score of the two groups, (SP,R). In order to adjust for differences in academic aptitude for the two groups, (SP,R), an analysis of variance was computed on the mean CTBS/S achievement scores, using academic aptitude as a covariate. While CTBS/S expanded scale scores at the secondary level are available for the subject group entering McLean County High School in 1977-1978, the test was administered at the tenth grade level. The 1976-1977 entering group was tested at the twelfth grade level. The fact that expanded scale scores

for the CTBS/S increase for each year of school experience made combining the two different years of testing impossible. For this reason comparisons of high school CTBS/S expanded scale scores were for the 1976-1977 entering subject group. Although it would have been possible to analyze expanded scale scores for the 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 entering subject groups separately, the 1977-1978 subject group consisted of only six retained and six socially promoted students. This small sample size was considered to be statistically insignificant.

5. Reported student attitudes, as measured by the survey instrument prepared by the author, were compared for the two groups, (SP,R), and were reported in terms of frequency of responses to each question and category of questions.

CHAPTER IV

Introduction

The general purpose of this study was to research the comparative merit of grade retention and social promotion, as administrative policies, in the schools of McLean County, Kentucky. Specifically this study was designed to answer the question of how students retained in one or more grades in the elementary schools of McLean County differ from students with similar academic difficulties, but who were not retained and who were socially promoted into McLean County High School. Five measures were designed to explore the differences which exist between the two student groups, (SP,R), which entered McLean County High School in the 1976-1979 school years.

The findings from this study are organized into two parts. Part one deals with descriptive data obtained from the survey instrument prepared by the author and from student permanent record folders. Part two of the findings is concerned with statistical analysis of the differences which exist between the two subject groups, (SP,R), in disciplinary offenses, broken into the categories of major and minor, committed in the 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 school years. Also reported is a statistical analysis of the average annual absences of pupils between the two subject groups, (SP,R), in grades one through eight and nine through

eleven. Part two also contains findings of statistical analyses of the two subject groups, (SP,R), in terms of mean expanded scale scores in two subtests of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, given at the eighth grade level to subjects entering McLean County High School in the 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 school years. Findings are reported for a similar analysis of the mean expanded scale scores in two subtests of the CTBS/S given at the twelfth grade level to subject groups who entered McLean County High School in the 1976-1977 school year.

Findings

Part I

Descriptive Data

The subjects selected for the sample consisted of those students who entered McLean County High School in the years 1976 through 1979 who scored in the lower three stanines in the subtests of reading or math at one or more grade levels, 1-8, as measured by the CTBS/S or the CAT form A. Students who entered McLean County schools after grade one or left prior to grade nine were excluded from the sample. Also omitted from the sample were students who had been placed in special academic programs in any of the elementary grades. This procedure produced a sample of 104 students who were included in the study.

Table I

Number and Sex of Sample

The subject group was found to be composed of 72 males and 32 females. The sample was divided into two groups: (1) socially promoted and retained at one or more grade levels, 1-8, and (2) socially promoted and not retained at any grade level, 1-8. This procedure resulted in a sample of 49 students retained at one or more grade levels, and 55 students not retained at any grade, 1-8. The socially promoted group was found to contain 35 males and

20 females, while the retained group consisted of 37 males and 12 females.

Table I

Number and Sex of Sample Groups

Group	Number Selected	Number Female	Number Male
Socially Promoted	55	20	35
Retained	49	12	37
Total	104	32	72

Table 2Age of Sample Subject Groups

The socially promoted sample group had an age range of 13 years 5 months through 15 years 10 months. The median age for the socially promoted group was 14 years 1 month. The retained group had an age range of 13 years 6 months through 15 years 10 months. The median age for the retained group was 14 years 11 months.

Table 2

Group	Age Range		Median Age	
	years	months	years	months
Socially Promoted N=55	13	05	14	01
	15	10		
Retained N=49	13	06	14	11
	15	10		

Table 3Retentions by Grade Levels

An analysis of the retained group selected for the sample revealed that 34 retentions occurred in grades 1-4 while 18 retentions occurred from grade 5 through 8. No retentions occurred at the fifth grade level. The total number of retentions was greater than the number of retained students selected for the sample, due to three students being retained at more than one grade level.

Table 3

Grade Level	Number of Retentions	Percent of Total Retentions
1	10	19%
2	10	19%
3	8	15%
4	6	12%
5	0	0%
6	10	19%
7	7	13%
8	1	2%

Table 4Academic Ability of Sample Groups

Academic aptitude scores for the subjects selected for the study was obtained from the Otis-Lennon Mental Ability test, Intermediate level, Form J. These scores are reported as deviation intelligence quotient scores, (DIQ). The DIQ score range for the total retained group was 73 through 133. The DIQ score range for the total socially promoted group was 69 through 103. The mean DIQ score for the total retained group was 89.6 with a standard deviation of 9.96 and a median score of 89.7. The socially promoted group had a mean DIQ score of 85.7 with a standard deviation of 7.88 and a median score of 85.3.

Table 4

Subject group	Range	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Socially Promoted N=55	69-103	85.7	85.3	7.88
Retained N=49	73-133	89.6	89.7	9.96

Table 5Student Response To Survey

The survey developed by the author for the purpose of sampling student attitudes toward school was given to all students included in the sample population. Those students selected for the sample who remained enrolled in McLean County High School were given the survey and advised that their participation was voluntary. Eighty-one students were given the survey in the school setting; 74 surveys were returned. Students selected for the sample who had withdrawn from McLean County High School were mailed a survey instrument. Accompanying the instrument was a cover letter and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope to facilitate returns. A total of 33 students were mailed surveys; nine were returned.

Table 5

Student Group	Number Given	Surveys Returned	Percent Returned	Total Percent Returned
Students In School	81	74	91%	79%
Students Withdrawn	33	9	27%	

Table 6

Reported Student Attitudes Toward School

Section one of the survey instrument consisted of a series of questions concerning student attitude toward school in grades 1-12. Students were asked to respond to one of five choices concerning their general attitude toward school in grades, 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, and at the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. Not all students returning surveys responded to choices at all grade levels.

Table 6

Grade Levels	Liked School Very Much		Liked Somewhat		Neither Liked Or Disliked		Disliked Somewhat		Disliked Very Much	
	R	SP	R	SP	R	SP	R	SP	R	SP
1-3	18	27	13	6	2	8	2	2	2	0
4-6	9	18	15	15	9	7	2	2	2	0
7-9	11	11	16	20	4	4	3	5	2	3
10	7	14	16	12	4	9	1	3	6	4
11	3	10	9	4	1	5	0	1	2	1
12	3	4	5	6	0	1	0	1	2	2

Table 7

Frequency of Reported Student Assessment of
Ability as Compared to Progress In
Reading, Math and Science

Survey questions 2-4 were designed to sample students' assessments of their own academic ability as compared to academic progress in reading, math and science. Students surveyed were instructed to indicate their attitude by checking one of three statements in each subject area. Survey questions 2-4 consisted of the following statement: When you consider how much natural ability you have in (reading, math, science), would you say: (1) you are doing better than can be expected, (2) you are doing as well as can be expected, (3) you are doing worse than can be expected.

Table 7

Reading		Math		Science		
SP	R	SP	R	SP	R	
1	5	7	5	4	3	Better than can be expected.
42	33	32	25	35	31	As well as can be expected.
6	1	26	9	11	4	Worse than can be expected.

Table 8

Frequency of Reported Student Assessment of
Overall Academic Ability

Survey question 5 was designed to gauge student-reported attitude concerning overall academic ability as compared with general academic progress. Students were asked to respond to the statement: When you consider how much overall natural ability you have, would you say: (1) you are doing better in school than can be expected; (2) you are doing as well as can be expected; (3) you are not doing as well as you could.

Table 8

Socially Promoted	Retained	
6	2	Better than can be expected.
26	25	As well as can be expected.
11	10	Not as well as I could.

Table 9

Frequency of Reported Student Response Toward
Success in School

Survey question 9 was designed to measure reported students' attitudes toward success in school. Students were asked to choose the statement which best described their situation: (1) Overall, I feel I have done well in school; (2) I think of myself as a failure in school.

Table 9

Socially Promoted	Retained	
39	29	I feel I have done well in school.
5	7	I think of myself as a failure in school.

Table 10

Frequency of Reported Socially Promoted Students'
Response to Retention

Survey question 7 was formulated to measure reported socially promoted students' attitude toward grade retention. Socially promoted students were asked to choose one of the following statements: (1) I am glad I did not repeat any grades, 1-8; (2) I wish I had been allowed to repeat one or more grades.

Table 10

Socially Promoted Students' Response	
7	Wish I had been retained
32	Glad I did not repeat any grades

Table 11

Frequency of Reported Retained Students'
Response to Retention

Question 8 was designed to measure reported attitudes of retained students toward retention. Retained students were asked to respond to one of the following statements: I believe repeating one or more grades (1) helped me to learn more in school; (2) did not cause me to learn more in school; (3) was responsible for my not learning more in school.

Table 11

Number of Retained Students Responding	
19	Retention helped me to learn more
12	Retention did not cause me to learn more
4	Retention was responsible for my not learning more

Part II

Statistical DataTable 12Discipline Offenses, Minor

Average annual minor disciplinary offenses committed by the two sample groups, (SP,R), in the years 1977-78 and 1978-79 were computed and compared with a t test of significance. The t analysis of the mean number of offenses committed by the two groups indicates a t of 0.12 significant at the 0.27 level.

Table 12

Sample Group	Mean Offenses	Standard Deviation	
Socially Promoted N=55	1.18	2.90	t=0.12 significant at the 0.27 level
Retained N=49	1.90	3.62	

Table 13Discipline Offenses, Major

Average annual major disciplinary offenses committed by the two sample groups, (SP,R), in the years 1977-78 and 1978-79, were computed and compared with a t test of significance. The t analysis of the mean number of offenses committed by the two groups indicates a t of -0.43 significant at the 0.67 level.

Table 13

Sample Group	Mean Offenses	Standard Deviation	
Socially Promoted N=55	0.18	0.48	t= -0.43* significant at the 0.67 level
Retained N=49	0.14	0.46	

*indicates socially promoted group had higher mean number of offenses

Table 14Average Annual Absences, 1-8

Average annual absences in grades 1-8 were computed for the two groups, (SP,R), selected for the sample. The mean number of annual absences in the two groups was compared with a t test of significance. The analysis of the mean annual absences for the two sample groups, (SP,R), indicates a t of 1.80 significant at the 0.08 level.

Table 14

Sample Group	Mean Absences, 1-8	Standard Deviation	
Socially Promoted N=55	8.15	5.38	t=1.80 significant at the 0.08 level
Retained N=49	11.10	10.77	

Table 15Average Annual Absences, 9-11

Average annual absences for grades 9-11 were computed for the two groups, (SP,R), selected for the sample. The mean number of annual absences in the two groups was compared with a t test of significance. The analysis of the mean annual absences for the two sample groups, (SP,R), indicates a t of 1.05 significant at the 0.30 level.

Table 15

Sample Group	Mean Absences 9-11	Standard Deviation	
Socially Promoted N=54	12.46	09.03	t=1.05 significant at the 0.30 level
Retained N=44	15.80	21.21	

Table 16t Test of Significance of Mean Expanded Scale Scores on
CTBS/S Given At The Eighth Grade Level

The performance of students selected for the sample in the subtests of reading and math as measured by the CTBS/S and given at the eighth grade level in the years 1977 and 1978 were compared. Comparison was by a t test of the mean scores of the two groups, (SP,R), in the subtests of reading and math. Scores for the subtest of math were further analyzed in the categories of math concepts, math computation and math application. The present tenth grade students who were chosen for the sample were excluded from this sample since they were tested at the eighth grade level with the California Achievement Test.

Table 16

Means, Standard Deviation and t Test of
Significance for the CTBS/S in Subtests
of
Reading and Math Given at the Eighth
Grade Level in 1977 and 1978

Subject Area	Socially Promoted N=19		Retained N=19		t Test	Level of Significance
	Mean Expanded Scale Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Expanded Scale Score	Standard Deviation		
Reading	453.84	106.37	443.84	44.90	0.36	0.71
Math Concepts	445.11	83.67	480.53	92.35	1.24	0.22
Math Computation	463.89	66.16	479.42	60.92	0.75	0.46
Math Application	480.76	62.05	504.94	59.57	1.14	0.26

Table 17

Analysis of Variance for Scores on CTBS/S, Given
at the Eighth Grade Level in 1977 and 1978, to
Socially Promoted and Retained Students
Selected for the Sample, Using
Academic Aptitude as a
Covariate

Since the mean DIQ score of the retained group exceeded the mean DIQ score of students in the socially promoted group, an analysis of variance was computed for the two groups, (SP,R), using academic aptitude as a covariate. This analysis was necessary because it was impossible to match the two groups, (SP,R), for intelligence.

Table 17

Subject Area	Socially Promoted N=19	Retained N=19	F test	Significance Level
Reading	Mean	Mean	0.11	0.75
	445.48	453.20		
Math Concepts	447.07	478.57	1.25	0.27
Math Computation	464.16	479.16	0.51	0.48
Math Application	480.84	504.85	1.48	0.23

Table 18

Test of Significance of Mean Expanded Scales Scores on
CTBS/S Given at the Twelfth Grade Level

The performances of students selected for the sample in the subtests of reading and math, as measured by the CTBS/S and given at the twelfth grade level to the subject group entering McLean County High School in 1976-1977, were compared. Comparison was by a t test of the mean expanded scale scores of the two groups, (SP,R), in the subtests of reading and math. Expanded scale scores in the subtest of math were further analyzed in the categories of math concepts, math computation and math application.

Table 18

Subject Area	Socially Promoted N=19		Retained N=19		t Test	Level of Significance
	Mean Expanded Scale Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Expanded Scale Score	Standard Deviation		
Reading	533.71	53.16	611.43	59.89	3.03	0.01
Math Concepts	564.86	44.23	586.43	63.10	0.91	0.37
Math Computation	527.93	55.97	520.57	72.90	*-0.26	0.80
Math Application	546.50	80.96	577.29	94.56	0.78	0.45

*indicates mean for retained group was lower

Table 19

Analysis of Variance of CTBS/S Expanded Scale Scores, as
Measured at the Twelfth Grade Level for Socially Pro-
moted and Retained Students Entering
McLean County High School in
1976-1977, Using Academic Aptitude as a
Covariate

Since the mean DIQ score of the retained group selected for the sample exceeded the mean DIQ score of the socially promoted group, an analysis of variance was computed for the two groups, (SP,R), using academic aptitude as a covariate. This analysis was necessitated because of the impossibility of selecting sample groups with equal DIQ scores.

Table 19

Subject Area	Socially Promoted N=14	Retained N=7	F test	Level of Significance
	Mean Expanded Scale Score	Mean Expanded Scale Score		
Reading	539.28	600.29	6.54	0.02
Math Concepts	571.09	573.97	0.20	0.89
Math Computation	533.96	508.52	*-0.90	0.36
Math Application	547.17	575.93	0.46	0.51

*indicates mean for retained group was lower

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare students socially promoted into McLean County High School in the years 1976-1979, who had not been retained, with students who entered McLean County High School during the same years but who had been retained at one or more grade levels, 1-8. Students selected for the comparison were those who had scored at or below the third stanine at one or more grade levels, 1-8. Comparisons of differences which existed between the two student groups, (SP,R), selected for the sample were in five areas:

- (1) reported attitudes toward school
- (2) attendance
- (3) number of discipline offenses, grades 9-11
- (4) scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in areas of reading and math as measured at the eighth grade level
- (5) scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in the areas of reading and math as measured at the secondary level.

The data resulting from this study was divided into two parts. Part one described differences which existed between the two groups, (SP,R), selected for the sample in reported attitudes toward school. Part two consisted of a statistical analysis of the mean scores of the two subject groups, (SP,R), in the subtests of reading and math as measured by the CTBS/S given at the eighth grade level and again at the secondary level. Part two also contained analyses of the differences which existed in the two groups, (SPR), in the areas of mean annual absences, grades 1-11, and mean disciplinary offenses, 9-11.

Descriptive Data

The subjects selected for the sample consisted of 55 students socially promoted, not retained at any grade level 1-8, and 49 students retained at one or more grade levels, 1-8. The retained sample was composed of 12 females and 37 males, while the socially promoted group consisted of 20 females and 35 males. For the eleven year time span, 1968-1979, included in this study the number of females socially promoted in McLean County elementary schools was nearly twice (20 SP vs 12 R) as great as the number retained. Male students, however, for the same time period remain almost constant in both categories (35 SP, 37R). The total sample consisted of 32 females and 72 males.

In terms of mean age, the retained sample was found to be eleven months older than the socially promoted group. This difference was expected due to the fact of grade retention. The mean age of the retained group was also affected by three students who were retained at more than one grade level, 1-8.

An analysis of the retained group revealed that the highest percent of retentions, (43%), occurred in grades 1-3, while 34% occurred in grades 6-8. No retentions occurred at the fifth grade level.

Academic aptitude scores for the two sample groups, (SP,R), reported in terms of deviation intelligence quotient scores, revealed that the retained group had a mean DIQ score 4.4 points higher than the socially promoted group. While it was not possible to determine if this difference in measured academic aptitude affected the performance of the two subject groups, (SP,R), in achievement measures, academic aptitude was used as a covariate in comparing the mean expanded scale scores of the two groups, (SP,R), at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Reported Student Attitude

Reported student attitude toward school and personal achievement, as measured by the survey prepared by the author, varied little between socially promoted and retained students selected for the sample. A total of 39 retained students responded to the survey while 44 socially promoted

students returned survey instruments.

Both groups, (SP,R), indicated a positive feeling toward school in grades 1-6 while an exactly equal number, (11), reported they liked school at the 7-9 grade levels. More socially promoted students reported a positive attitude toward school in grades 10-12 than did retained students; however, the difference (28 SP, 13R) was not significant.

In terms of intense dislike for school, both groups, (SP,R), responded almost equally at all grade levels.

Student responses to survey questions concerning assessment of ability as compared to academic progress in reading, math and science also were similar for both the retained and socially promoted groups. The majority of students in both groups, (SP,R), responded by indicating that they felt they were achieving at a level equal to their ability. This similarity of response may be attributed to a poor design of questions or to the fact that students were reluctant to express their true feelings concerning achievement.

When asked to respond to the question of overall academic ability as compared to overall school progress, both the socially promoted and retained groups responded in a similar manner. The majority of students in both groups, (SP,R), indicated that they considered their performance to be about equal to their ability.

Socially promoted students overwhelmingly (80%) indicated they were glad they had not been retained in the

elementary years, while retained students were nearly equally divided in their opinion of retention. Of the 35 retained students responding to the question of their feelings toward retention, 19 felt it had been beneficial, while 16 felt it either had not helped their academic progress or, in fact, had hindered them in school.

Responding to the question of overall assessment of success in school, both socially promoted and retained students indicated similar feelings. Of the students responding to this question, 85% felt they had been successful, while 15% indicated a feeling of failure. Those students indicating a feeling of failure were divided almost equally in the categories of retention and social promotion.

Based on student responses to the survey prepared by the author, it was concluded that no significant difference existed between socially promoted and retained students selected for the sample in terms of reported attitudes toward school.

Analysis of Discipline Offenses

Student discipline offenses in the years 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 were compared for socially promoted and retained students selected for the sample. The comparison was of the mean number of offenses committed in the categories of major and minor offenses. A t test of the mean number of offenses committed by each group revealed that there was no significant difference in the number of offenses committed by the socially promoted and retained groups in either the major or minor category.

Analysis of Annual Absences

Average annual absences for the socially promoted and retained students selected for the sample were compared in grades 1-8 and 9-11. The comparison was by a t test of the mean number of annual absences for each group, (SP,R), in the two categories. The comparison revealed no significant difference in the two groups, (SP,R), in annual absences, at either 1-8 or 9-11 grade levels.

Analysis of Achievement Scores,

Eighth Grade Level

The performances of students selected for the sample in the subtests of reading and math, as measured by the CTBS/S given at the eighth grade level in the years 1977 and 1978, were compared. The comparison was by a t test of significance of the expanded scale scores means of the two groups, (SP,R), in the subtests of reading and math. Math scores were further compared in the areas of math computation, math application and math concepts.

The findings indicated no significant difference between socially promoted and retained students in terms of expanded scale scores in math and reading at the eighth grade level.

When expanded scale scores on the subtests of math and reading were further analyzed, using academic aptitude as a covariate, the findings again indicated no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups, (SP,R), as measured at the eighth grade level.

Analysis of Achievement Scores,
Twelfth Grade Level

Student performances in the subtests of reading and math, as measured by the CTBS/S given at the twelfth grade level, were compared for students selected for the sample who entered McLean County High School in the 1976-1977 school year. Analysis was by a t test of significance of the mean scale scores, in the subtests of reading and math for the two sample groups, (SP,R). Expanded scale scores in the subtest of math were further compared for the two groups, (SP,R), in the categories of math concepts, math computation, and math application. The comparison revealed no significant difference between the two groups, (SP,R), in math scores, but did indicate significance at the 0.01 level for reading scores, with the retained group scoring higher.

When expanded scale scores in the subtests of reading and math were analyzed using academic aptitude as a covariate, the findings again indicated no significant difference between socially promoted and retained students in math scores. Reading scores, however, remained significantly higher for the retained group. The analysis of variance indicated the level of significance to be at the 0.02 level.

Summary

Based on the findings of this study, it would seem that no significant differences existed between socially promoted and retained students who entered McLean County High School in the years 1976 through 1979 in the areas of attitude toward school, attendance, number of disciplinary offenses at the high school level and mean achievement scale scores in the areas of math and reading at the eighth grade level. The study does indicate a significant difference in reading scores measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Form S, given at the twelfth grade level to the segment of the sample who entered in the 1976-1977 school year.

It is interesting to note that in all achievement measures compared in this study, except math computation at the twelfth grade level, the mean scores favors the retained group. While those differences are not great enough to achieve significance at the 0.05 level, perhaps because of the small number of students included in the sample, the direction of the findings would seem to favor the retained group.

The hypothesis is rejected for:

1. attitude toward school
2. discipline offenses, 9-11
3. attendance
4. scores on the Comprehensive Test

of Basic Skills in reading and math as measured at the eighth grade level.

The hypothesis is accepted for:

1. scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in the areas of math and reading for the sample group entering McLean County High School in 1976-1977, as measured at the twelfth grade level.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for consideration:

1. A follow-up study should be conducted in the future, utilizing a larger sample of students who have been tested with the same instrument at the same grade levels.
2. Further research should be done to determine the factors responsible for higher reading scores among retained students at the secondary level.
3. A similar study should be conducted utilizing a survey instrument which has been field tested and screened for validity and reliability.

4. Further research should be done to determine the differences which exist between socially promoted and retained students in terms of dropout rates at the high school level.

5. McLean County schools should begin to test students at all grade levels, 9-12, with the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, and retain the results for future study.

APPENDIX A

McLEAN COUNTY SCHOOLS
CALHOUN, KENTUCKY 42327

November 28, 1979

Dear

McLean County Schools are participating in a study designed to help our system better educate students.

You have been chosen to participate in this study by answering the questions on the enclosed survey form.

We can assure you that your name will not be released in the study itself or the results of the study.

Please answer the questions on the survey form and return it in the pre-addressed stamped envelope. Your participation is extremely important to the success of this project and we urge you to help us by returning the questionnaire. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Anthony, Superintendent
McLean County Schools

JS/lm

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH REPORT
OUTWARD TO U.S.A.
COTTON FIBER

MCLEAN COUNTY STUDY

1. For each grade, indicate how well you liked school.

	I liked school <u>very much</u>	liked school <u>somewhat</u>	neither liked or disliked <u>school</u>	I disliked school <u>somewhat</u>	I disliked school <u>very much</u>
1st--3rd grade	()	()	()	()	()
4th--6th grade	()	()	()	()	()
7th--9th grade	()	()	()	()	()
10th grade	()	()	()	()	()
11th grade	()	()	()	()	()
12th grade	()	()	()	()	()

2. When you consider how much natural ability you have in reading, would you say:

- you are doing better than can be expected.
- you are doing as well as can be expected.
- you are doing worse than can be expected.

3. When you consider how much natural ability you have in math, would you say:

- you are doing better than can be expected.
- you are doing as well as can be expected.
- you are doing worse than can be expected.

4. When you consider how much natural ability you have in science, would you say:

- you are doing better than can be expected.
- you are doing as well as can be expected.
- you are doing worse than can be expected.

5. When you consider how much overall natural ability you have, would you say:

- you are doing better in school than can be expected.
- you are doing as well in school as can be expected.
- you are not doing as well as you could.

6. Please check one of the following:

- 1. I repeated one or more grades in grades 1-8.
- 2. I did not repeat any grade 1-8.

7. If you checked item (1) in question six above, please check one of the following:

- I believe repeating one or more grades, 1-8:
- helped me to learn more in school.
- did not cause me to learn more in school.
- was responsible for me not learning more in school.

8. If you checked item (2) in question six, please check one of the following:

I wish I had been allowed to repeat one or more grades, 1-8.

I am glad I did not repeat any grades, 1-8.

9. Please place a check beside the statement which you feel best describes your situation.

Overall I feel I have done well in school.

I think of myself as a failure in school.

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