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School Strains Under Effort to End Social Promotion

L.A. Unified: Extra classes, other steps yield meager results as Nightingale Middle School tries to raise Fs in English.

By LOUIS SAHAGUN, Times Education Writer

Standing at the front of a classroom, hands on hips, Principal Marylou Amato faced a group of uneasy eighth-graders. "Your ticket to this meeting was getting an F in English," she said.

The students chewed their nails and squirmed in their seats as Amato made it clear that it was time to get serious about schoolwork. The alternative, she warned, was to repeat eighth grade while their peers at Nightingale Middle School moved on to high school.

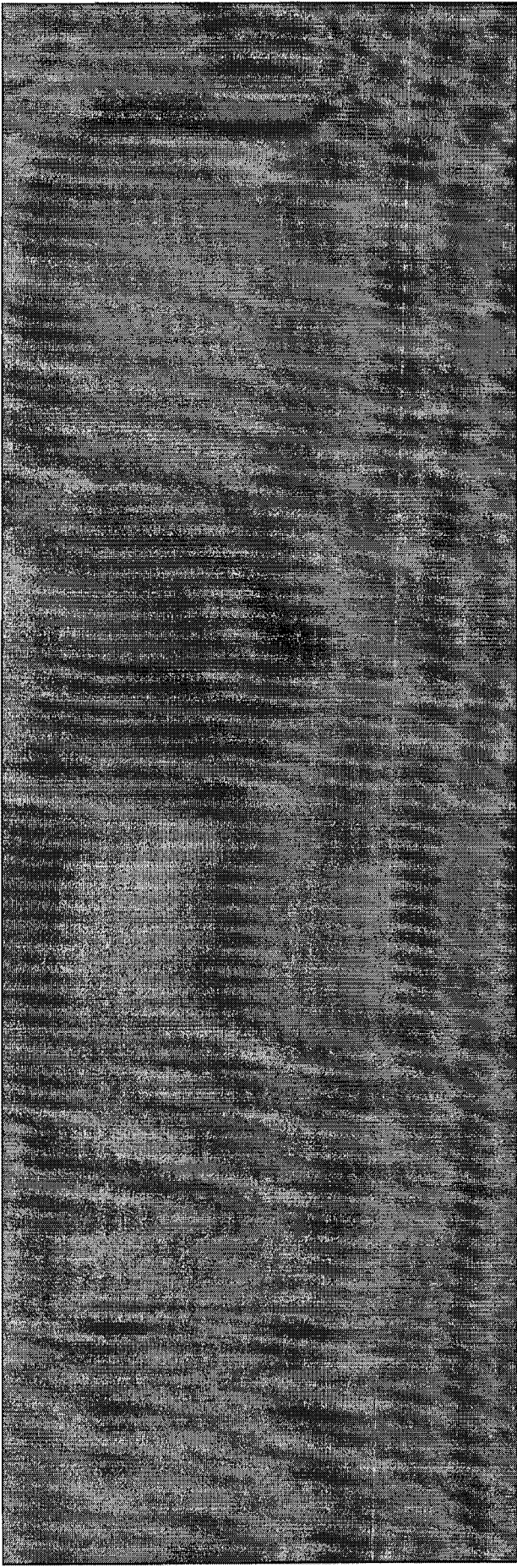
She also gave them rays of hope during the meeting in mid-February. To help them pull up their grades, the school was offering after-school and Saturday classes and summer school. They could get counseling and even medical examinations to spot emotional and health problems that might interfere with learning. Their parents, she said, would receive weekly updates on their progress.

Next year, California will require all school districts to end the practice of advancing failing students to the next grade.

Nightingale Middle School, in Cypress Park, like schools across the Los Angeles Unified School District, is in the vanguard of that statewide move, struggling to implement a new policy that requires every child in second and eighth grade who gets an F in English to be held back. District officials have estimated that thousands of children are at risk of flunking this year.

Amato closed the meeting with the Nightingale eighth-graders by issuing an order for every student to write her a letter--due the following day--listing three things they were going to do to improve their grades.

The letters dribbled in days late. One of them, submitted unsigned, underlined the challenge facing Amato and her staff: "What I am planing to do for I can go to Hischool is my homework and my class work o and I am goin to improve on my reating and raightin skills. Does are my plans"



Fifty-one eighth-graders were informed at the beginning of the semester that they would be held back if they didn't lift their English grades at least to Ds. Another 98 students who earned Ds last semester hover near the fail zone.

To step inside the lilac walls of Nightingale is to feel the weight of the challenge bearing down on Amato, her staff and similar staffs statewide. They have launched a nearly nonstop series of meetings, initiatives and programs in a rush to shore up the grades of their failing students. In the process, Nightingale has made some surprising and painful discoveries.

A reading test of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders revealed that their skills were far worse than the staff had imagined. An analysis of test data showed that no single strategy would be effective with all the students; in fact, it became clear that each failing student presented a unique set of academic and emotional issues. And apathetic parents undermine the staff's best efforts.

Retention Could Worsen Crowding

The end of social promotion has profound implications. With nearly 2,000 students, Nightingale already is so crowded that holding back even a dozen eighth-graders could mean busing an equal number of higher-achieving students to another school. Also troubling to many is how being held back might affect adolescents emotionally and academically.

Through it all, Amato and her staff search for signs of potential and improvement. But they are frustrated by a lack of time.

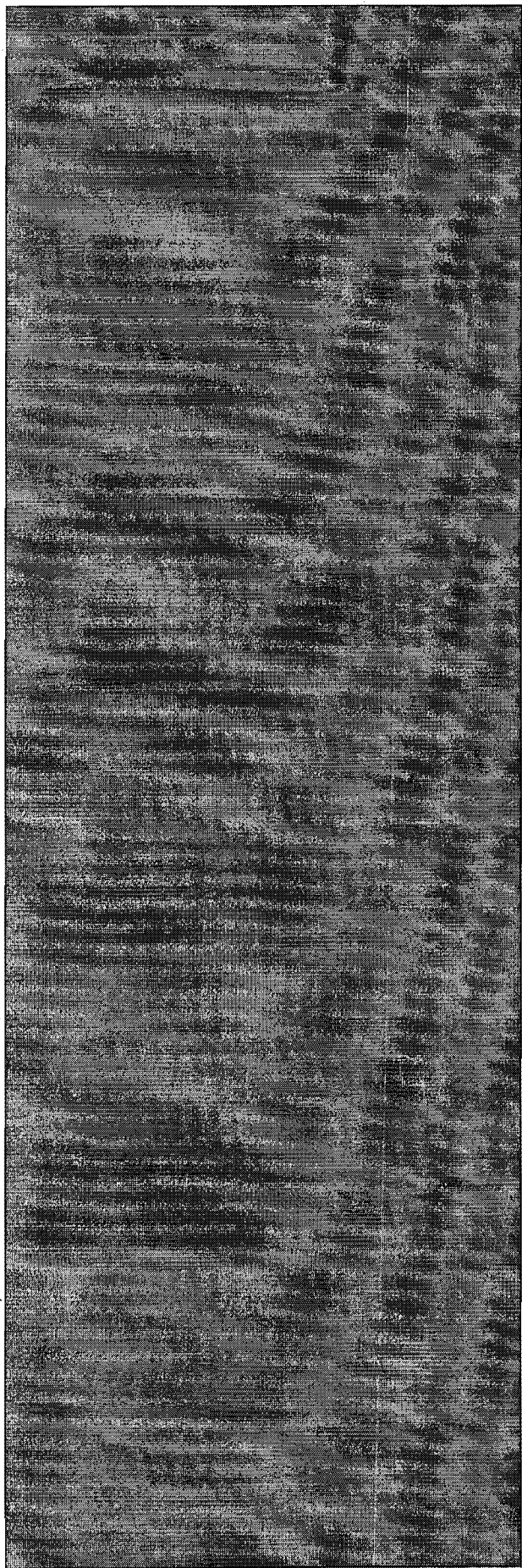
"I have every educational reform program known to man here; I have counselors and psychologists and a \$400,000 budget surplus," Amato said. "My teachers are doing their level best to help our kids promote.

"What I don't have is time to do this right," she said. "The speed at which this change is being implemented is mind-boggling."

Nightingale's war on social promotion began in November when the school administered a reading test to get a better understanding of eighth-graders' basic skills and to sharpen remedial techniques.

School officials discovered that roughly three-fourths of their eighth-graders were reading at the fourth-grade level or below--far lower than the levels suggested by their Stanford 9 test scores. The same could be said for roughly two-thirds of the sixth- and seventh-graders.

No one anticipated such abysmal reading levels in the school, which for four years has operated under the guidance and financial support of highly touted reform programs with such names as LEARN, LAAMP, Parent Learning Partners, L.A.



Bridges, Healthy Start and DELTA.

"We are astounded by the results of the reading test. They're appalling," said Assistant Principal Byron Maltez. "But, then, we now have a clear picture of the immensity of the problem we face [in] ending social promotion."

Even before the reading exam, school officials knew they had their work cut out for them.

Nightingale's ranking on the state's new Academic Performance Index is among the lowest in the city.

Four of its six eighth-grade English teachers are first-year instructors with emergency credentials and little or no training in teaching adolescents how to read.

Eager to spot patterns in the test scores of the lowest-performing eighth-graders that could help the school focus resources and teachers' attention, Assistant Principal Cynthia Cordova, who is in charge of counseling, flipped on the portable computer in her cramped office and began crunching numbers one day in early March.

But as the data for one student after another rolled past her professional eye, she grew increasingly frustrated. There were no discernible trends.

One boy tested far above average in reading, yet flunked first-semester English. A girl scored at the 21st percentile in reading in last year's Stanford 9 exam--not that far below the average 30th percentile scored by eighth-graders districtwide--but bottomed out in a separate test that pegged her reading level as early first grade.

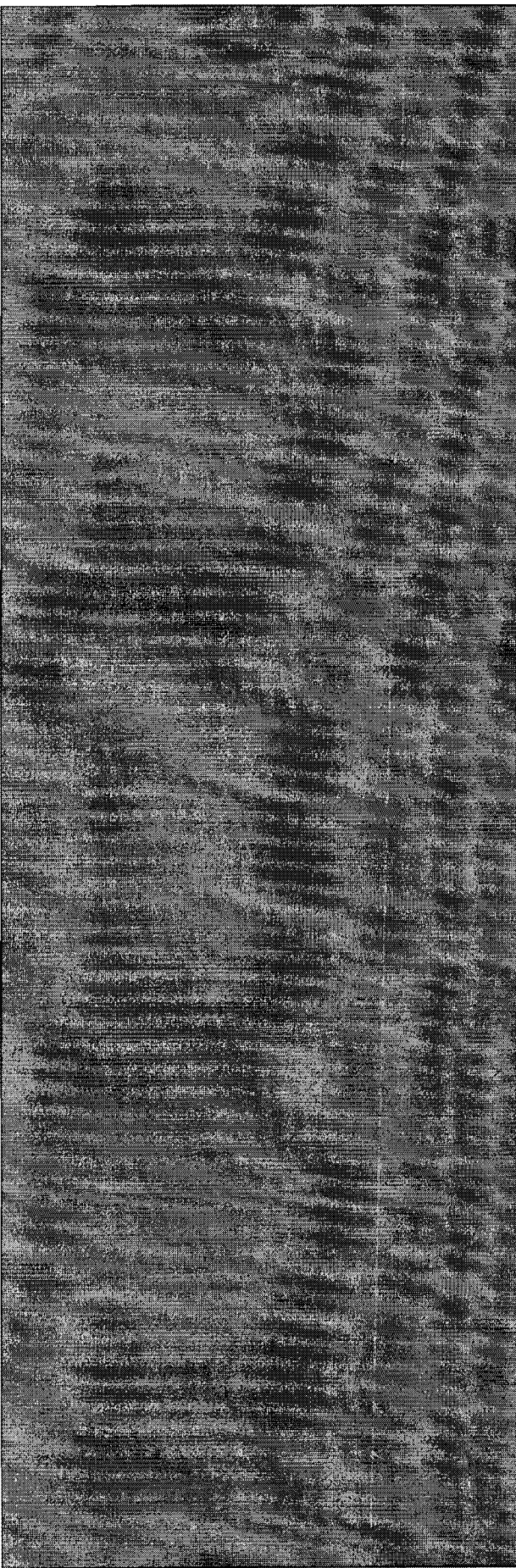
In follow-up talks with the youngsters and their parents, Cordova learned that one student's parents were in divorce proceedings. Another shared a tiny apartment in a nearby housing project with seven brothers and sisters and a mother on welfare. Several formerly above-average students were suddenly adrift in the awkward period of life that school officials referred to as "eighth-grade funk."

Getting Teachers on the Same Page

A few days later, Cordova and Amato shared the results of the data analysis with the school's eighth-grade English teachers, whose assessments would weigh heavily in deciding which students should be held back.

"Your judgment will make or break these kids," Amato said. "Therefore, I want you to prepare a syllabus detailing exactly what it will take for each student to pass your class with an A, a B, a C and a D. Parents will be given a copy and you will keep parents informed of their child's progress once a week."

"That way," Amato said, "there will be no surprises in June."



That meeting was followed by others held after school with the parents of the failing students. Only about half of those who had been invited showed up.

They were encouraged to applaud the children's efforts and to find children a quiet place to do homework. They also were reminded that, even if they struggle with math or reading, they should not give their sons and daughters the impression that these skills will be hard to learn.

In one meeting, parents sipped hot coffee and munched on Mexican pastries as Cordova handed out data sheets on their children. "You need to know what level your children are performing at so we can make a plan for improvement," she said.

The parents expressed surprise at their children's abysmal test scores and grades. One woman even asked, "My daughter says she never gets homework from her teacher. Do you ever assign homework at this school?"

Cordova shot back: "Every day."

That night, in the living room of their modest wood-frame house just down the street from Nightingale, Francisco Callejas, his wife, Sara, and their 13-year-old son Alexander faced the tough facts.

Staring into his father's eyes, Alexander confessed, "I didn't do my homework because I thought it was too hard." But he promised that "everything is different now. I'm going to intervention classes. I want to graduate."

His father, a watch repairman from El Salvador, responded with a lecture. "One of my dreams was to go to the United States and raise a family in my own home with a clean room for every child. I have all that now, but my dream is incomplete because I want you to go to college.

"But I'm worried," he added. "You don't drink, smoke or belong to a gang and you're a happy youngster--all great. But you won't do your homework! What's wrong? What can we do for you?"

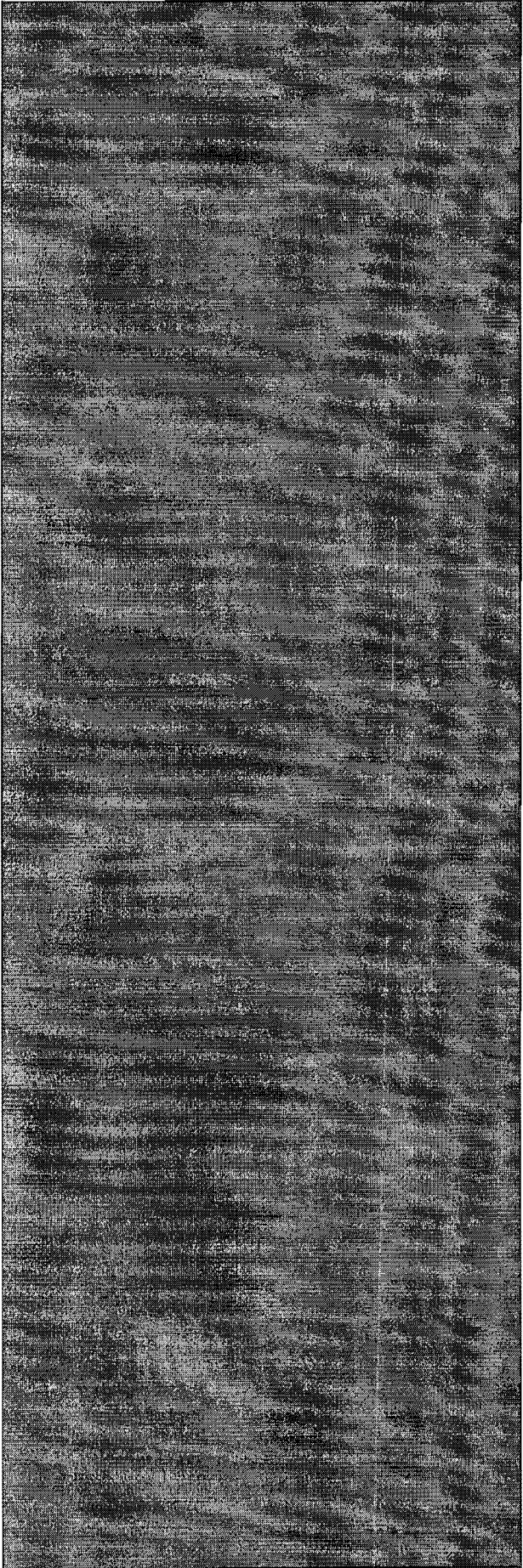
"I'm not going to stay behind, I promise" Alexander said. "I'm really trying now."

That kind of talk delights eighth-grade English teacher George Gund, one of the first-year teachers with emergency credentials. Gund has had more failing students in his classes than any of his colleagues.

Packing his briefcase at the end of a long day in a classroom that had not been swept in days, Gund said, "Sometimes it's hard to be optimistic."

Gund, 27, says he works with a surprisingly large number of students who "are not apathetic toward instruction; they're resistant to it."

He must clean up after students who spit on the floors, and Gund has to beg their parents to take an



active interest in the children's schooling. He must comfort students who come to him with tears in their eyes, pleading, "Teacher, I'm sorry, but I can't read and I'm dumb."

During a recent "Welcome back to school week" meeting, the mother of one failing student asked, "My son watches five hours of television a night. Do you think that's bad?" Gund replied, "Look at it this way: Your son is in my class less than five hours a week."

'It's Just School,' Student Says

A struggling female student strolls into class on most days about 10 minutes before class lets out. "I recently said to her, 'How long do you think you could get away with that at a job in the real world without getting fired?' " he recalled. "She looked me right in the eye and said, 'This isn't my job. It's just school.' "

Then there is the 14-year-old whose refusal to remove her backpack in class--or to read or do her homework--has led to a months-long standoff.

Overwhelmed by the generally low level of academic skills among his students, Gund has asked for advice from his mentors and principal. They suggested that he not spend so much time fighting with students over such things as backpacks, and make literacy his priority. They also urged him to take a hard look at his grading practices to ensure that he has not been holding his students to an impossibly high standard.

Applying that advice in class quickly produced results.

"In first semester, about half of my students were failing; now, I have about a dozen kids who probably aren't going to promote," he said.

"Personally, I think it's better to hold a child back a year than have them grow bitter that the school district let them down."

Mentor teacher Margaret Andrews, who is regarded as one of Nightingale's most effective intervention instructors, is opposed to retention.

As soft jazz played on a boombox behind her desk between classes, Andrews said, "One year of retention will not make up for every negative variable in a student's life.

"We run a tight ship at school, but their home life may not be so tight--but that doesn't mean I accept excuses," she said. "The parents of my after-school intervention students must sign their children's homework folders every night. And the students must arrive [in] class on time with a positive attitude."

That is, if they attend after-school intervention classes at all.

Only 18 of the 51 students who received grades of F in English last semester showed up for the first

day of such classes, which began March 6. Each of those students is required to attend at least three hours of intervention during the week or on Saturday.

Although the intervention materials that Amato had ordered months before had yet to arrive, the teachers pressed ahead with instructional tools geared to sixth- and seventh-graders.

In one of those intervention classes, where only two of the 13 students assigned to it showed up, English teacher Brenda Chan read a ghost story aloud and then discussed its plot and vocabulary.

Down the hall and around the corner, nine intervention students sipped black cherry punch and ate cookies as Dennis Greninger, department head for social studies and a mentor teacher, lectured on the ethnic history of the region.

Midway through his lecture, a boy stood up, walked to the blackboard and wrote an expletive with chalk, then drew stars around it. Greninger gently admonished the student, who returned to the blackboard and erased the marks.

In a firm yet friendly voice, Greninger ended the class with a reminder.

"Next time, I want to see you here at 3:05 sharp," he said, as the students dashed out the door.

"Attendance is really important.

"You can't get anything out of this by staying home," he said. "I don't want to see you back in the fall."

Four weeks after that mid-February meeting with the principal, 13 of the 51 failing students had nudged their English grades up to Ds.

However, an additional 14 students who had been getting Ds saw their grades slip to Fs. They're now in mandatory intervention classes.

Search the archives of the Los Angeles Times for similar stories about: Los Angeles Unified School District, Education Reform, Graduation, Students, Academic Requirements.

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PRODUCTS & SERVICES

The Heat Is On as Big Districts Expand Summer School

By Kerry A. White

Chicago

Though workbooks lie open and students sit neatly at their desks, the 8th graders assembled for the day's geometry lesson this morning at Beaubien Elementary School seem lulled.

Read our story,
"From Denver to
Norfolk, School Is
in for the Summer,"
Aug. 6, 1997.

Annmarie Enright methodically fills the blackboard before them with sketches and vocabulary words. "Can anyone tell me what 'congruent' is another name for?" the teacher asks the class, her voice straining over the hum of the air conditioning system. No hands go up. A pregnant pause passes.

"You need to know this, class," she warns the quiet, racially mixed group of about a dozen students. "You're going to be tested on it."

And the tests are going to count.

This summer, Chicago and several other big-city districts have summoned thousands of children back to school in attempts to hone the skills of students who have fallen behind.

"Promote or
Retain? Pendulum
for Students
Swings Back
Again," June 11,
1997.

Many of these programs are a crucial element in districts' efforts to hold students to higher standards and to end the "social promotion" of children who aren't ready for the next grade.

The stakes are high, both for the students, who in many cases must either show improvement or repeat a grade, and for the districts, which are under pressure to improve lagging achievement and show greater accountability.

'Targeting Resources'

In the District of Columbia, about 20,000 students who scored poorly on standardized tests are slated for the 77,000-student district's first-ever mandatory summer classes. In 89,000-student Gwinnett County, Ga., east of Atlanta, some 10,000 students were recommended for summer school. In Milwaukee, officials have revived summer school after a five-year hiatus, and some 17,000 of the district's 106,000 students are signed up.

Denver is requiring about 2,500 students who are reading below grade level to attend summer school. And administrators in the 68,000-student Boston school system are working on a large-scale plan for mandatory summer school, possibly for the summer of 2000.

In Chicago, which has the largest and perhaps most rigorous summer school program, 60,000 students have been summoned back. For these

2nd, 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 9th graders, whose low test scores, failing grades in reading or math, or excessive absences have propelled them into the city's mandatory "bridge program," lazy summer is a thing of the past.

If students in the program fail to show improvement, they'll lose their pass to the next grade. In most cases, that decision will be based on standardized tests that will be given early next month.

Robert Pavon admits that he'd rather be playing basketball. But the soft-spoken teenager says he wants to pass his 8th grade program at Sharon Christa McAuliffe Elementary School "really badly."

If he doesn't, Robert, who at 15 is too old by the district's reckoning to repeat the 8th grade in a regular classroom, will be sent to an alternative school this fall. "I'm working hard," he insists, shaking his head almost in disbelief.

Officials here say the six- and seven-week mandatory program, for which they supply detailed lesson plans, is part of the system's push for higher standards and greater accountability. ("Do or Die," Aug. 6, 1997.)

The program is not a stopgap measure, but part of a broad assault on chronically low achievement, says Paul G. Vallas, the district's chief executive officer

"It's our version of year-round schools," he explained last week. "We're taking advantage of the summer months, targeting our resources to kids who have fallen behind."

The mandatory bridge program is only one slice of the district's summer offerings. Schools are also open for special education, bilingual, and gifted programs and a variety of recreation activities. All told, about 175,000 of the system's 430,000 students are in schools this summer, administrators say.

Sweating It Out

The summer months can be a learning drain on poor and urban children, experts say. Often, they have far less access to out-of-school learning experiences than their suburban and middle-class peers.

A recent report by sociologists at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore documents that drain. Karl Alexander and Doris Entwisle followed the academic progress of 790 Baltimore students who began 1st grade in 1982.

They found that, though poor and nonpoor children have similar test scores during the school year, nonpoor students continue to make academic gains over the summer, while less advantaged children typically show declines.

High-quality year-round schooling for less affluent children, the researchers conclude, would help close that learning gap. Experts say that conclusion has long been obvious, but until recently the will and wherewithal to put those findings to good use have been lacking.

"It's a longstanding finding that poor kids lose more academic ground

over the summer months," said Michael D. Casserly, the executive director of the Washington-based Council of the Great City Schools. "These summer school programs speak to that loss."

But, as districts seek to end social promotion, Mr. Casserly worries about research showing that holding students back multiplies their chances of dropping out of school altogether.

Mr. Vallas says that Chicago's mandatory summer school, in conjunction with expanded after-school programs and remedial centers, is providing a safety net for low achievers.

"Kids are dropping out because they can't read," he said. "They're dropping out because, for so many years, they were passed along to the next grade" without having mastered the necessary skills.

'D-Day' Ahead

In Charles Saporito's reading class at McAuliffe Elementary, 8th graders read a short story that takes place in Australia's outback--far from the liquor stores, boarded-up houses, and homeless people that dot their West Side neighborhood.

"There's a lot of resentment the first week the students are here, but we turn it around pretty quickly and try to stay focused," the 31-year-old teacher says as he checks on students' work. A sign in the corner of the blackboard reads "D-Day"--testing day for these teenagers--"Aug. 3 & 4."

But grudges are not a problem in Amalia Rini's 1st and 2nd grade "early-intervention program" at Beaubien Elementary. Her seven students seem eager to participate, and most raise their hands when she asks a question. "They were excited to learn they were coming to summer school," says Ms. Rini, 28. The summer school is "a great concept," she adds. "And I think it's a good start."

On the Web

The "Online NewsHour," from PBS provides "Higher Learning?" an Aug. 12, 1997, transcript on the Chicago Public Schools' mandatory summer school to bring test scores up to par.

PHOTO: Charles Saporito drills students enrolled in Chicago's mandatory summer "bridge program" at Sharon Christa McAuliffe Elementary School. "There's a lot of resentment the first week the students are here, but we turn it around pretty quickly and try to stay focused," he says.

--Todd Rosenberg

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ceasar Soriano
U.S. Weekend Magazine

FROM: Veronica O. White
Education Program Research Analyst II

DATE: June 24, 1997

RE: Information Request

Below is information regarding your request concerning what states are doing **on student retention**. Some states have blanket legislation which does not mandate that public schools retain students, but gives to suggestion and allows the district to impose their own policies.

FLORIDA

Status: enacted 6/90

Summary: (Grade Retention Legislation) Lawmakers adopted a measure encouraging districts to abolish grade retention in the early grades. Also allows districts to apply for state funds to restructure their primary grades. Although this bill does not authorize new funding, legislators said the state could provide grants through existing programs.

Source: Education Week (6/13/90)

ILLINOIS

Summary: Superintendent for public schools announced a policy to end social promotions. To graduate from the 8th grade, Chicago students will need to attain a minimum score of 7.0, the standard for a beginning 7th grader on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Students required to attend summer school, take the Iowa Test again and if they fail repeat the eighth grade. Eighth graders who are 15 or older and who fail summer school or the Iowa Test will be enrolled in one of 12 new transitional schools in the fall. A similar requirement will fall on approximately 48 percent of ninth graders.

Source: The New York Times (6/6/97)

MASSACHUSETTS

Status: enacted 5/90

Summary: (State Retention Policy) The Massachusetts Department of Education advised districts to eliminate grade retention and pursue policies that will improve success rate for all students.

Source: USA Today (August 9, 1990)

NEW YORK

Summary: New York's policy for automatically promoting failing students is being reviewed by schools Chancellor Rudy Crew.

Source: The New York Times (6/6/97)

OKLAHOMA

Status: enacted 4/21/95

Summary: (House Bill 1056 Retention of Students) Requires a school principal to review a teacher recommendation that a student be retained at the present grade level or not passed in a course; provides for a parent conference and an appeal process; authorizes the parent to prepare a written statement to be placed in the student's permanent record stating the reason for disagreeing with the decision of the district board of education.

Source: StateNet

SOUTH CAROLINA

Status: enacted 3/7/95

Summary: (H.B. 3507 Promotion of Students) Approves regulations of the Board of Education, relating to criteria for the promotion of students to the next higher grade.

Source: StateNet

TEXAS

Status: passed by both houses of the legislatures but no governor signature, or approved by the state board.

Summary: (Promotion and Alternatives to Social Promotion; Grading/Reporting Requirements; Course Credit) Repeals rules concerning curriculum to comply with the sunset review process mandated by S.B. 1, 74th Legislatures, 1995. Repeals rules regarding grading and reporting requirements; promotion and course credit; grade level advancement and course credit; encouragement of students to take advanced courses; alternatives to social promotion; memorandum of understanding for multi-problem children and youth; and Texas advanced placement incentive program.

Status: enacted 7/96

Summary: (19 TAX 74.24 Curriculum Requirements; Credit by Examination) Establishes requirements and procedures to advancing a student without the benefit of direct instruction. Provides guidelines under which a school district must develop or select exams for this purpose.

Source: StateNet

Status: enacted 7/90

Summary: (State Retention Policy) the Texas Board of Education voted to bar state districts, beginning in 1991, from retaining students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten—an increasing practice by districts using "readiness" tests to gauge a child's preparedness for first grade.

Source: USA Today (August 9, 1990)

Student Promotion/Retention

KEY:

Proposed: Presented by governor, legislative body or other entity such as the state board of education.

Pending: Written as legislation or board policy but no final action taken.

Passed: Passed by both houses of the legislature but no governor signature, or approved by the state board.

Enacted: Passed by the legislature and signed by the governor.

Effective: Date of implementation

St	Status	Summary	Eff. Dt.
✓ FL	Enacted 06 90	Florida lawmakers adopted a measure encouraging districts to abolish grade retention in the early grades. This legislation also allows districts to apply for state funds to restructure their primary grades. Although the bill does not authorize new funding, legislators said the state could provide grants through existing programs. Title: Grade Retention Legislation Source: Education Week (June 13, 1990) AREV ID: FL*85	
FL	Proposed 03 97	Revises provisions regarding the district's comprehensive program for pupil progression; requires remedial instruction and retention of students who have not met district required and state required levels of proficiency; provides student performance standards, instruments, and assessment procedures. Title: SB 1956 Pupil Progression Author: Lee Source: Statenet AREV ID: FL*98	
✓ MA	Enacted 05 90	The Massachusetts Department of Education advised districts to eliminate grade retention and pursue policies that will improve success rates for all students. The state cannot force the policy on the locally controlled districts, but could use grant money to make districts toe the line, says dropout prevention specialist Dan French. Title: State Retention Policy Source: USA Today (August 9, 1990) AREV ID: MA*43	

St	Status	Summary	Eff. Dt.
NM	Vetoed 03 95	Gov. Gary E. Johnson of New Mexico has vetoed legislation intended to make "social promotion" of students more difficult. As approved by the legislature, the bill would have repealed a law that permits parents to block a school's decision not to promote their child. It would have required that an advisory committee composed of the student's teacher, a school counselor, the principal, and the parents make a joint decision on whether to promote a child. If no consensus were reached, the district superintendent would have final authority in the matter. In a veto message delivered March 16, Mr. Johnson said the bill would "change the focus from one of merit to one of subjectiveness." Title: N.M. Governor Vetoes School-Promotion Bill Source: Education Week (March 29, 1995) AREV ID: NM*57	
OK	Enacted 4 95	Requires a school principal to review a teacher recommendation that a student be retained at the present grade level or not passed in a course; provides for a parent conference and an appeal process; authorizes the parent to prepare a written statement to be placed in the student's permanent record stating the reason for disagreeing with the decision of the district board of education. Title: HB 1056 Retention of Students Author: Staggs Source: StateNet AREV ID: OK*30	04/21/95
OR	Proposed 03 97	Allows a student who has not met or exceeded mastery level or grade level standards to advance to next level if certain requirements are met. Title: SB 754 Author: Stull Source: Statenet AREV ID: OR*31	
SC	Enacted 3 95	Approves regulations of the Board of Education, relating to criteria for the promotion of students to the next higher grade. Title: HB 3507 Promotion of Students Author: Committee on Education Source: StateNet AREV ID: SC*26	03/07/95

St	Status	Summary	Eff. Dt.
TX	Passed 05 96	Repeals rules concerning curriculum to comply with the sunset review process mandated by Senate Bill 1, 74th Legislature, 1995. Repeals rules regarding grading and reporting requirements; promotion and course credit; grade level advancement and course credit; encouragement of students to take advanced courses; alternatives to social promotion; memorandum of understanding for multiproblem children and youth; and Texas advanced placement incentive program. Title: Promotion and Alternatives to Social Promotion; Grading/Reporting Requirements; Course Credit Source: StateNet AREV ID: TX*33	09/01/96
TX	Enacted 07 96	Establishes requirements and procedures related to advancing a student without the benefit of direct instruction. Provides guidelines under which a school district must develop or select exams for this purpose Title: 19 TAC 74.24 Curriculum Requirements; Credit by Examination Source: Statenet AREV ID: TX*37	09/01/96
TX	Enacted 07 90	The Texas Board of Education voted to bar state districts, beginning in 1991, from retaining students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten - an increasing practice by districts using "readiness" tests to gauge a child's preparedness for first grade. Title: State Retention Policy Source: USA Today (August 9, 1990) AREV ID: TX*39	
TX	Enacted 04 91	To accommodate parents seeking alternatives for children they feel need more time to mature before entering the 1st grade, the Texas Board of Education has softened its groundbreaking policy barring retention in prekindergarten and kindergarten. The new rule still disallows retention in pre-K and kindergarten, inserting the words "without parental consent." In addition, it states that, "with parental consent, 6-year-old students determined by the school not to be developmentally ready for 1st grade may be assigned to a grade as deemed appropriate by the school." To deter districts from placing children in such programs too readily, however, the new rule bars more than one retention between pre-K and 4th grade - except in "exceptional cases" and with the approval of the parent and a panel of teachers and administrators. It also encourages districts to provide "developmentally appropriate instruction for all student populations." Title: State Retention Policy (1991) Source: Education Week (April 10, 1991) AREV ID: TX*40	

St	Status	Summary	Eff. Dt.
TX	Proposed 04 97	Relates to promotion to the next grade level after completion of an extended year program. Title: SB 522 Student Promotion Author: Bivins Source: StateNet AREV ID: TX*52	
UT	Proposed 01 97	Relates to public education; provides for the administration of a reading proficiency test in the 5th grade; requires students to pass the test in order to advance to the 6th grade; provides for exemptions; provides for an assessment of emerging and early reading skills of children entering kindergarten and the 1st grade; provides that school districts make available material to parents to assist in helping their children to master emerging reading skills and early reading skills. Title: HB 67 Student Assessments of Reading Proficiency Author: Haymond Source: StateNet AREV ID: UT*61	
VA	Died 02 97	Requires school boards to establish criteria for promotion designed to require satisfactory completion of the requirements of the Board of Education and local requirements. Title: HB 1939 Students Promotion Requirements Author: Marshall Source: StateNet AREV ID: VA*103	

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December 13, 1999

VIA FACSIMILE 202-401-0596

The Honorable Richard Riley
Secretary of Education
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Riley:

It has recently come to our attention that the Department's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is investigating the Chicago Public Schools' grade retention policy to determine whether such policy has a "disparate impact" on minority students. In addition, we have heard that OCR plans to examine Massachusetts' graduation test for the same purpose.

In his State of the Union address earlier this year, the President praised Chicago's efforts to end social promotion, and subsequently modeled his Elementary and Secondary Education Act proposal on their efforts. Chicago has made tremendous progress over the last few years in student achievement, including the achievement of economically disadvantaged students and minority students. Its promotion policy is based on attendance and grades, as well as test scores. With these investigations taking place we are concerned that the Federal government is sending confusing and contradictory messages to States and school districts with respect to social promotion policies and high standards.

We want to do all we can to help and empower school districts and states in their efforts to strengthen accountability for student achievement. However, we are very concerned that these inquiries may have a chilling effect on efforts to turn around low performing schools and narrow achievement gaps.

Given that the Department has not released formal regulations or policy guidance on the issue of "disparate impact," we are requesting information to better understand OCR's policy on this matter, how these inquiries were initiated, and how these investigations will be conducted.

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The Honorable Richard Riley
December 13, 1999
Page 2

In this regard, please provide a written response to the following requests, no later than December 29, 1999:

- (1) a copy of the November 18, 1999 letter from the Office of Civil Rights to Parents United for Responsible Education regarding Chicago grade retention policies;
- (2) a copy of all written communications, including e-mail transmissions, that the Department has had or is having in each of these matters with any individuals, groups, organizations or entities regarding the Chicago and Massachusetts inquiries.
- (3) the regulatory or statutory justification(s) for OCR's investigation of Chicago's grade retention policy and the examination of the Massachusetts graduation test for disparate impact;
- (4) whether all cities with grade-retention policies that have effectively ended social promotion are subject to investigation by OCR to determine if there is a disparate impact on minority students;
- (5) whether improvements in minority academic achievement and graduation rates are taken into consideration when determining whether a policy or test has a "disparate impact" on minority students;
- (6) OCR's operational definition of disparate impact and the written criteria in place to determine whether or not an investigation is warranted; and
- (7) the precise criteria OCR will use to determine whether or not Chicago's grade retention policy or Massachusetts' graduation test have a disparate impact on minority students, and a detailed explanation of the process by which OCR will determine this.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter and should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us or Christine Wolfe (5-7101) or Kent Talbert (5-6558) of the Committee staff.

Sincerely,



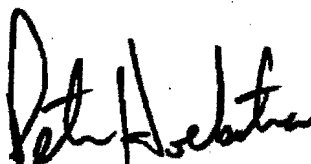
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SHOULD WE END SOCIAL PROMOTION? TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

Robert M. Hauser

Center for Demography and Ecology, The University of Wisconsin-Madison

Testing for readiness, achievement, or mastery plays a substantial—but not easily quantifiable—role in grade retention, and it is likely to play a greater role if the present movement toward test-based promotion policies should continue. Such policies might well lead to substantial increases both in the public and private costs of schooling without corresponding educational benefit.

The age at entry into graded school has gradually crept upward since the early 1970s, reversing one of the major historic trends contributing to the growth of schooling in the United States. Data on early school transitions and on the possible reasons for change in those transitions are grossly inadequate, but it would appear that retention in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten has played some role in the rise of age at entry into the first grade. Excepting the ubiquitous tendency for girls to enter (and complete) primary and secondary school at earlier ages than boys, there is little sign of social differentiation in age at school entry.

Socially differentiated patterns of grade retention develop soon after entry to graded school, and they persist through secondary school. White girls progress through school most rapidly, while African-American boys are most often held back in grade. By ages 15 to 17, about 30 percent of white girls and close to half of African-American boys are below the modal grade for their age—or have left school. Rates of grade retardation at those ages have remained high, even though school dropout has declined.

Given the high rates of retention created by current evaluation practices—and their disparate impact on minority youth—the possibility of substantially increased, test-based retention creates a number of concerns. For example, the costs of grade repetition are large—both to those retained and those who must pay for repeated schooling. Moreover, the presence of older students creates serious management problems for schools. Most important, the available evidence shows that retention has no lasting educational benefits, that it typically leads to lower achievement (than promotion) and to higher rates of school dropout. It is possible to imagine an educational system in which test-based promotion standards are combined with effective diagnosis and remediation of learning problems, yet past experience suggests that American school systems may not have either the will or the means to enact such fair and effective practices.

SHOULD WE END SOCIAL PROMOTION? TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES¹

Robert M. Hauser
Center for Demography and Ecology
The University of Wisconsin-Madison

The typical organization of American schools into grades by the ages of their students is challenged by large variations in achievement within ages and grades. The resulting tension is reduced somewhat by overlap in the curriculum from one grade to the next. It is also reduced by strategies for grouping students by observed levels of aptitude or mastery. These include special education placement, academic tracking, extended kindergarten, and grade retention. In this paper, I discuss the extent and consequences of grade retention in elementary and secondary school. Testing for readiness, achievement, or mastery plays a substantial—but not easily quantifiable role in grade retention, and it is likely to play a greater role if the present movement toward test-based promotion policies should continue. Such policies might well lead to substantial increases both in the public and private costs of schooling without corresponding educational benefit.

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¹ Prepared for a conference on Civil Rights and High-Stakes K-12 Testing, Harvard University, December 4, 1998. This draft is based largely on material in Chapter 6 of National Research Council, *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking Promotion and Graduation*, Jay M. Heubert and Robert M. Hauser, eds., Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998. Samuel Messick, Marguerite Clarke, Jay P. Heubert, and Taissa S. Hauser contributed substantially to this chapter of the NRC report.

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Given the high rates of retention created by current evaluation practices—and their disparate impact on minority youth—the possibility of substantially increased, test-based retention creates a number of concerns. For example, the costs of grade repetition are large—both to those retained and those who must pay for repeated schooling. Moreover the presence of older students creates serious management problems for schools. Most important, the available evidence shows that retention has no lasting educational benefits, that it typically leads to lower achievement (than promotion) and to higher rates of school dropout. It is possible to imagine an educational system in which test-based promotion standards are combined with effective diagnosis and remediation of learning problems, yet past experience suggests that American school systems may not have either the will or the means to enact such fair and effective practices.

SOCIAL PROMOTION, RETENTION, AND TESTING

Much of the current public discussion of high-stakes testing of individual students is motivated by calls for "an end to social promotion." In a memorandum to the secretary of education, President Clinton (1998:1-2) wrote that he had "repeatedly challenged States and school districts to end social promotions--to require students to meet rigorous academic standards at key transition points in their schooling career, and to end the practice of promoting students without regard to how much they have learned. . . . Students should not be promoted past the fourth grade if they cannot read independently and well, and should not enter high school without a solid foundation in math. They should get the help they need to meet the standards before moving on."

The administration's proposals for educational reform strongly tie the ending of social promotion to early identification and remediation of learning problems. The president calls for smaller classes, well-prepared teachers, specific grade-by-grade standards, challenging curriculum, early identification of students who need help, after-school and summer school programs, and school accountability. He also calls for "appropriate use of tests and other indicators of academic performance in determining whether students should be promoted" (Clinton, 1998:3). The key questions are whether testing will be used appropriately in such decisions and whether early identification and remediation of learning problems will take place successfully.

The president is by no means alone in advocating testing to end social promotion. Governor Bush of Texas has proposed that "3rd graders who do not pass the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills would be required to receive help before moving to regular classrooms in the 4th grade. The same would hold true for 5th graders who failed to pass

reading and math exams and 8th graders who did not pass tests in reading, math, and writing. The state would provide funding for locally developed intervention programs" (Johnston, 1998). New York City Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew has proposed that 4th and 7th graders be held back if they fail a new state reading test at their grade level, beginning in spring 2000. Crew's proposal, however, would combine testing of students with "a comprehensive evaluation of their course work and a review of their attendance records." A two-year delay in implementation of the tests would permit schools "to identify those students deemed most at risk and give them intensive remedial instruction" (Steinberg, 1998a).

Test-based requirements for promotion are not just being proposed; they are being implemented. According to a recent report by the American Federation of Teachers (1997b), 46 states either have or are in the process of developing assessments aligned with their content standards. Seven of these states, up from four in 1996, require schools and districts to use the state standards and assessments in determining whether students should be promoted into certain grades.² At the same time, Iowa and California have taken strong positions against grade retention, based on research or on the reported success of alternative intervention programs (George, 1993; Iowa Department of Education, 1998).

In 1996-1997 the Chicago Public Schools instituted a new program to end social promotion. Retention decisions are now based almost entirely on student performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) at the end of grades 3, 6, and 8. Students who fall below specific cutoff scores at each grade level are required to attend highly structured summer school

² The states are Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia. A report from the Council of Chief State School Officers (1998) lists five states with required testing for promotion: Louisiana, North Carolina, New York, South Carolina, and Virginia.

programs and to take an alternative form of the test at summer's end.³ At the end of the 1996-1997 school year, 32 percent, 31 percent, and 21 percent of students failed the initial examination at grades 3, 6, and 8, respectively. Out of 91,000 students tested overall, almost 26,000 failed. After summer school, 15 percent, 13 percent, and 8 percent of students were retained at the three grade levels (Chicago Public Schools, 1998a).⁴

The current enthusiasm for the use of achievement tests to end social promotion raises three concerns. First, much of the public discussion and some recently implemented or proposed testing programs appear to ignore existing standards for appropriate test use (National Research Council 1998: Ch. 6). Second, there is persuasive research evidence that grade retention typically has no beneficial academic or social effects on students.⁵ The past failures of grade retention policies need not be repeated. But they provide a cautionary lesson: Making grade retention--or the threat of retention--an effective educational policy requires consistent and sustained effort. Third, public discussion of social promotion has made little reference to current retention practices--in which a very large share of American schoolchildren are already retained in grade.

³ The 1997-1998 *Guidelines for Promotion in the Chicago Public Schools* also list minimum report card requirements and a minimum attendance requirement, but "students who score at or above grade level on both the Reading and Mathematics sections of the ITBS are exempted from the latter requirement" (Chicago Public Schools, 1997a). This use of the ITBS appears to be in conflict with the publisher's recommendations about "inappropriate purposes" of testing: "If a retention decision is to be made, classroom assessment data gathered by the teacher over a period of months is likely to be a highly relevant and accurate basis for making such a decision. A test score can make a valuable contribution to the array of evidence that should be considered. However, a test score from an achievement battery should not be used alone in making such a significant decision" (Hoover et al., 1994).

⁴ Between 2 and 3 percent of students failed the initial exam at each grade level but were ultimately "waived" into the next grade.

⁵ The failure of past programs is recognized in President Clinton's initiative to end social promotion: "Ending social promotions by simply holding more students back is the wrong choice. Students who are required to repeat a year are more likely to eventually drop out, and rarely catch up academically with their peers. The right way is to ensure that more students are prepared to meet challenging academic standards in the first place" (Clinton, 1998).

In part, this is because of sporadic data collection and reporting, but far more consistent statistical data are available about the practice of grade retention than, say, about academic tracking. It is possible to describe rates, trends, and differentials in grade retention using data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, but these data have not been used fully to inform the public debate.

TRENDS AND DIFFERENTIALS IN GRADE RETENTION

To support its analyses of high-stakes testing for promotion and retention, the NRC Committee on Appropriate Test Use assembled and analyzed data on rates, trends, and differentials in grade retention (National Research Council 1998: Table 6-1). Some of the available data were collected by state education agencies, but the most uniform, long-term data have been collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in connection with its Current Population Survey, the same the monthly household survey that produces important economic statistics, like the unemployment rate.

No national or regional agency monitors social promotion and grade retention. Occasional data on retention are available for some states and localities, but coverage is sparse, and little is known about the comparability of these data (Shepard and Smith, 1989). For example, the denominators of retention rates may be based on beginning-of-year or end-of-year enrollment figures. The numerators may include retention as of the end of an academic year or as of the end of the following summer session. Some states include special education students in the data; others exclude them. In the primary grades, retention is usually an all-or-nothing matter; in

high school, retention may imply that a student has completed some requirements but has too few credits to be promoted.

Some states do not collect retention data at all, or collect very limited data. For example, we have confirmed that 13 states--Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Wyoming--collect no state-level data on grade retention. Twenty-two states, plus the District of Columbia, provided data on retention at some grade levels, but in some cases the data were very limited. For example, New York State collects such data only at the 8th grade.

Retention rates are highly variable across states. They are unusually high in the District of Columbia, whose students are largely black. Rates are relatively low in some states, like Ohio, including states with relatively large minority populations, like South Carolina and Georgia. Retention rates tend to be relatively high in the early primary grades--though not in kindergarten--and in the early high school years. Perhaps the most striking fact from this effort to bring together available data is that--despite the prominence of social promotion as an issue of educational policy--very little information about it is available.

The best current source of information on levels, trends, and differentials in grade retention is the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Using published data from the annual October School Enrollment Supplement of the CPS, it is possible to track the distribution of school enrollment by age and grade each year for groups defined by sex and race/ethnicity. These data have the advantage of comparable national coverage from year to year, but they say nothing directly about educational transitions or about the role of high-stakes testing in grade retention. We can only infer the minimum rate of grade retention by observing

changes in the enrollment of children below the modal grade level for their age from one calendar year to the next. Suppose, for example, that 10 percent of 6-year-old children were enrolled below the 1st grade in October of 1994. If 15 percent of those children were enrolled below the 2nd grade in October of 1995, when they were 7 years old, we would infer that at least 5 percent were held back in the 1st grade between 1994 and 1995.

Extended Kindergarten Attendance

Historically, there has been great variation in age at school entry in the United States, which had more to do with the labor demands of a farm economy and the availability of schooling to disadvantaged groups than with readiness for school. The variability declined as school enrollment completed its diffusion from middle childhood into younger and older ages (Duncan, 1968; National Research Council, 1989). Over the past two decades, attendance in kindergarten has been extended to two years for many children in American schools,⁶ with the consequence that age at entry into graded school has gradually crept upward and become more variable. There is no single name for this phenomenon, nor are there distinct categories for the first and second years of kindergarten in Census enrollment data. As Shepard (1991) reports, the names for such extended kindergarten classrooms include "junior-first," "prefirst," "transition," and "readiness room." Fragmentary reports suggest that, in some places, kindergarten retention may have been as high as 50 percent in the late 1980s (Shepard, 1989, 1991). The degree to which early

⁶ Another relevant factor is change in state or local requirements about the exact age a child must reach before entering kindergarten or first grade.

retention decisions originate with parents, e.g., to increase their children's chances for success in athletics, rather than with teachers or other school personnel is not known. Moreover, there are no sound national estimates of the prevalence of kindergarten retention, and none of the available state indicate exceptionally high kindergarten retention rates.

The Census Bureau's statistics on grade enrollment by age show that, from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, entry into 1st grade gradually came later in the development of many children, but for the past decade there has been little change in age at school entry. Figure 1 shows percentages of 6-year-old children who had not yet entered the 1st grade as of October of the given year.⁷ Among 6-year-old boys, only 8 percent had not yet entered the 1st grade in 1971,⁸ but 22 percent were not yet in the 1st grade in 1987, and 21 percent were not yet in the 1st grade in 1996. Among 6-year-old girls, only 4 percent had not yet entered the 1st grade in 1971, but 16 percent were not yet in the 1st grade in 1987, and 17 percent were not yet in the 1st grade in 1996. While boys are consistently more likely than girls to enter 1st grade after age 6, there are only small differences between blacks and whites in age at entry into graded school, and these differences consistently favor black children. That is, 6-year-old black children are slightly less likely than white children of the same age and sex to be enrolled below the 1st grade or not enrolled in school. Also, 6-year-old Hispanic boys are consistently more likely than white boys to

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, "School Enrollment: Social and Economic Characteristics of Students" for various years. Unpublished data for 1996 were generously provided by Census Bureau staff. Percentages shown in Figure 1 are 3-year moving averages and do not agree exactly with the annual estimates reported in the text.

⁸ The percentages include those enrolled below 1st grade level and a small share of 6-year-olds who were not enrolled in school. The data are virtually unchanged if non-enrolled children are eliminated from the analysis. Neither the trends nor the differences by race-ethnicity and sex are affected.

have entered the 1st grade, but 6-year-old Hispanic girls are less likely than white girls to have entered the 1st grade.

One of the contributing factors to the rising age at entry into 1st grade has been a rising age at entry into kindergarten, which need have nothing to do with kindergarten-level retention and would presumably reduce rates of developmental immaturity among kindergartners.⁹ Since the early 1970s, as shown in Figure 2, enrollment of 5-year-olds below the kindergarten level, that is, in nursery school, grew from about 2 percent in 1972 to 7 percent in 1992.¹⁰ During the same period, the percentage of non-enrolled children fluctuated around 8 percent, so the combined percentages of 5-year-olds who were either not enrolled or who were enrolled in nursery school grew in parallel with nursery school enrollment. However, there is no firm relationship between these trends and enrollment below the 1st grade at age 6. Children may enter first grade without first attending kindergarten, and in many of the early years, the share of 5-year-olds who were not enrolled or in nursery school exceeded the share of 6-year-olds who were enrolled below the 1st grade in the following year.

National statistics do not tell us exactly how much extended kindergarten has contributed to the rise in age at entry into graded school because they do not provide direct information about transitions between grade-levels (or retention in grade) from year to year. However, there is a clear downward trend in the ratio of 1st grade enrollment of 5-year-olds in each October to the kindergarten enrollment of 4-year-olds one year earlier. For example, among white males, this

⁹ However, the possibility of retention in kindergarten could lead some parents to hold their youngsters in nursery school a year longer.

¹⁰ There is a very large increase in the enrollment of 5-year-olds below kindergarten in 1994, but this may be attributable to changes in the mode of data collection in the Current Population Survey.

ratio declined almost linearly from 0.9 in 1972 to 0.4 in 1987. There is reason to doubt the accuracy with which parents report kindergarten rather than nursery school attendance, but the declining ratio suggests that kindergarten retention has increased.

The Census enrollment data are even less informative about the rate at which children who entered kindergarten at age 5 were retained for an additional year at age 6. For example, in 1996, 15 percent of 6-year-old boys and 12 percent of 6-year-old girls were enrolled in kindergarten. The Census data on enrollment of 5-year-olds in 1995 and of 6-year-olds in 1996 are consistent with the possibility that all of the 6-year-old kindergartners in 1996 were in their second year. The enrollment data are equally consistent with the possibility that all of those children had been in nursery school or had not attended school at all in the fall of 1995. That is, all we can learn from national statistics is that retention in kindergarten affected no more than 15 percent of 6-year-old boys and no more than 12 percent of 6-year-old girls in 1996.¹¹

Although it is not known how widely tests are used in assigning students to extended kindergarten, there is substantial professional criticism of the practice. According to Shepard (1991), such decisions may be based on evidence of "immaturity or academic deficiencies." Shepard adds, "Tests used to make readiness and retention decisions are not technically accurate enough to justify making special placements Readiness tests are either thinly disguised IQ tests (called developmental screening measures) or academic skills tests Both types of tests tend to identify disproportionate numbers of poor and minority children as unready for school"

¹¹ These inferences are based on the assumptions that immigration and mortality between ages 5 and 6 can be ignored and that no children move down in grade between school years, i.e., from kindergarten to nursery school or from 1st grade to kindergarten or nursery school.

(1991:287). Other educators, however, believe that such tests may appropriately be used for placement decisions about young children.

An advisory group of the National Educational Goals Panel has recommended against the use of standardized achievement measures to make decisions about young children or their schools: "Before age 8, standardized achievement measures are not sufficiently accurate to be used for high-stakes decisions about individual children and schools" (Shepard et al., 1998). At the same time, the advisory group encouraged one type of testing of young children: "Beginning at age 5, it is possible to use direct measures, including measures of children's learning, as part of a comprehensive early childhood system to monitor trends. Matrix sampling procedures should be used to ensure technical accuracy and at the same time protect against the misuse of data to make decisions about individuals" (1998:27).¹² With young children, it is especially important to distinguish between uses of tests to monitor the progress of large groups and to make decisions about the future of individual students.

Research on kindergarten retention suggests that it carries no academic or social benefits for students. Shepard's (1991:287) review of 16 controlled studies found "no difference academically between unready children who spent an extra year before first grade and at-risk controls who went directly on to first grade." She did, however, find evidence that most children were traumatized by being held back (Shepard, 1989, 1991; Shepard and Smith, 1988, 1989). Shepard further reports that "matched schools that do not practice kindergarten retention have

¹² In matrix sampling, each child takes part of a test, and performance levels are estimated statistically for groups of students.

just as high average achievement as those that do but tend to provide more individualized instruction within normal grade placements' (Shepard, 1991:287).

In some cases, even with special treatment for retained students, they were no better off than similar students who had been promoted and given no exceptional treatment. Leinhardt (1980) compared at-risk children in a transition room who received individualized instruction in reading with a group of at-risk children who had been promoted and received no individualized instruction. The two groups performed comparably at the end of first grade, but both performed worse than a second comparison group that had been promoted and given individualized reading instruction.

Retention in the Primary and Secondary Grades

Age-grade retardation refers to enrollment below the modal grade level for a child's age (and no broader meaning is either intended or implied). We have looked at national rates of age-grade retardation by age, sex, and race ethnicity for three-year age groups at ages 6 to 17 from 1971 to 1996 and, also, at parallel tabulations for young children by single years of age, 1971 to 1996. In each case, we have organized the data by birth cohort (year of birth), rather than by calendar year, so it is possible to see the evolution of age-grade retardation throughout the schooling of a birth cohort, as well as changes in age-grade retardation rates from year to year.¹³

¹³ These data have been assembled from Historical Statistics, Table A-3, "Persons 6 to 17 Years Old Enrolled Below Modal Grade, 1971 to 1995," which is available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census at www.census.gov/population/socdemo/school/report95/aba-3.txt, and from selected publications in the P-20 series of *Current Population Reports*, "School Enrollment: Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (Nos. 241, 260, 272, 286, 303, 319, 333, 346, 360, 400, 408, 413, 426, 439, 443, 452,

The recent history of age-grade retardation is summarized in Figure 3. It shows age-grade retardation at ages 6 to 8, 9 to 11, 12 to 14, and 15 to 17 among children who reached ages 6 to 8 between 1962 and 1996. The horizontal axis shows the year in which an age group reached ages 6 to 8, so vertical comparisons among the trend lines at a given year show how age-grade retardation cumulated as a birth cohort grew older.

For example, consider children who were 6 to 8 years old in 1987 — the most recent cohort whose history can be traced all the way from ages 6 to 8 up through ages 15 to 17. At ages 6 to 8, 21 percent were enrolled below the modal grade for their age. By 1990, when this cohort reached ages 9 to 11, age-grade retardation grew to 28 percent, and it was 31 percent in 1993, when the cohort reached ages 12 to 14. By 1996, when the cohort reached ages 15 to 17, the percentage who were either below the modal grade level or had left school was 36 percent. Almost all of the growth in retardation after ages 12 to 14, however, was due to dropout (4.8 percent), rather than grade retention among the enrolled.

One could read the rate of enrollment below the modal grade at ages 6 to 8 as a baseline measure, that is, as if it did not necessarily indicate that grade retention had taken place. Relative to that baseline, increases in enrollment below the modal grade at older ages clearly show the net effects of retention in grade. This reading of the data would suggest that, in most birth cohorts, retention occurs mainly between ages 6 to 8 and 9 to 11 or between ages 12 to 14 and 15 to

460, 469, 474, 479, 487, and 492). Unpublished data for 1996, as well as corrections in the Historical Statistics, Table A-3, were kindly provided by Census Bureau staff.

17.¹⁴ This way of looking at the data surely understates the prevalence of grade retention, for much of it occurs within or below ages 6 to 8.

The series for ages 15 to 17 includes early school dropout, which is also shown as a separate series along the bottom of the figure. Dropout, rather than retention, evidently accounts for a substantial share of the increase in age-grade retardation between ages 12 to 14 and ages 15 to 17.

The trend in age-grade retardation at ages 6 to 8, 9 to 11, 12 to 14, and 15 to 17 can be read across Figure 3 from left to right. Age-grade retardation increased in every age group from cohorts of the early 1970s through those of the middle to late 1980s. Age-grade retardation increased at ages 15 to 17 after the mid-1970s despite the slow decline in its early school dropout component throughout the period. That is, grade retention increased while dropout decreased. Peak rates occurred earlier at older than at younger ages, suggesting that policy changes occurred in specific calendar years, rather than consistently throughout the life of successive birth cohorts. Among cohorts entering school after 1970, the percentage enrolled below the modal grade level was never less than 10 percent at ages 6 to 8, and it exceeded 20 percent for cohorts of the late 1980s. The trend-lines suggest that age-grade retardation has declined slightly for cohorts entering school after the mid-1980s, but rates have not moved back to the levels of the early 1970s.

¹⁴ We ignore the logical possibility that age-retardation at younger ages could be counter-balanced by double-promotion at older ages.

Overall, a large share of each birth cohort now experiences grade retention during elementary school. Among children aged 6 to 8 from 1982 to 1992, age-grade retardation has reached 25 to 30 percent by ages 9 to 11.

Retention after School Entry

Enrollment below the 1st grade at age 6 is a convenient baseline against which to assess the effects of later grade retention. The comparisons of age-grade retardation at ages 7 to 9 with that at age 6 are shown in Figure 4. There are two main patterns in the series. First, grade retention continues through the elementary years at each successive age. Retention cumulates rapidly after age 6. For example, among children who were 6 years old in 1987, enrollment below the modal grade increased by almost 5 percentage points between ages 6 and 7 and by 5 more percentage points between ages 7 and 9. Second, there appears to have been a decline in retention between ages 6 and 7 after the early 1980s. That is, comparing Figure 1 with Figure 4, we can infer a shift in elementary school grade retardation downward in age from the transition between ages 6 and 7 to somewhere between ages 4 and 6.

How much grade retention is there after ages 6 to 8? And does the recent growth in grade retardation by ages 6 to 8 account for its observed growth at older ages? Figure 5 shows changes in age-grade retardation between ages 6 to 8 and each of the three older age groups.¹⁵ Age-grade retardation grows substantially after ages 6 to 8 as a result of retention in grade. For example, among children who reached ages 6 to 8 between 1972 and 1985, almost 20 percent more were

¹⁵ Again, early school dropout (at ages 15 to 17) is counted as age-grade retardation.

below the modal grade for their age by the time they were 15 to 17 years old. Among children who reached ages 6 to 8 between the middle 1970s and the middle 1980s, grade retardation grew by about 10 percentage points by ages 9 to 11, and it grew by close to 5 percentage points more by ages 12 to 14. Relative to ages 6 to 8, age grade retardation at ages 9 to 11 and 12 to 14 increased for cohorts who were 6 to 8 years old in the early 1970s; it was stable from the middle 1970s to the middle 1980s, and it has declined since then. However, the gap between retention at ages 15 to 17 and that at ages 6 to 8 has been relatively stable--close to 20 percentage points--possibly excepting a very recent downward turn. Thus, the rise in age at entry into 1st grade--which is partly due to kindergarten retention--accounts for much of the overall increase in age-grade retardation among teenagers.

In summary, grade retention is pervasive in American schools. It is cautionary to think about the implications of "an end to social promotion" when ages at school entry are increasing, and a large share of each new cohort of youth already experiences grade retention after the early years of schooling. To be sure, the temporal location of age-grade retardation appears to have changed over time. Cumulative rates of age-grade retardation have increased for cohorts entering school since the early 1970s, but this has occurred through a combination of later entry into 1st grade--possibly involving retention in nursery school or kindergarten--reduced retention between ages 6 and 7, and variable patterns of retention in the pre-adolescent and adolescent years.

Social Differences in Retention

While there are similarities in the age pattern of grade retardation among major population groups--boys and girls and majority and minority groups--there are also substantial differences in rates of retardation among them, many of which develop well after school entry. Figure 6 shows differences in grade-retardation between boys and girls at ages 6 to 8 and ages 15 to 17. Overall, the sex differential gradually increases with age from 5 percentage points at ages 6 to 8 to 10 percentage points at ages 15 to 17. That is, boys are initially more likely than girls to be placed below the modal grade for their age, and they fall further behind girls as they pass through childhood and adolescence.

The differentiation of age-grade relationships by race and ethnicity is even more striking than that by gender. Figures 7 to 10 show trends in the development of age-grade retardation by race/ethnicity in each of the four age groups: 6 to 8 years old, 9 to 11 years old, 12 to 14 years old, and 15 to 17 years old. Here, unlike the case of gender differentiation, the rates of age-grade retardation are very similar among whites, blacks, and Hispanics at ages 6 to 8. However, by ages 9 to 11, the percentages enrolled below modal grade levels are typically 5 to 10 percentage points higher among blacks or Hispanics than among whites. The differentials continue to grow with age, and at ages 15 to 17, rates of grade retardation range from 40 to 50 percent among blacks and Hispanics, while they have gradually drifted up from 25 percent to 35 percent among whites. By ages 15 to 17, there is a differential between Hispanics and blacks, favoring the latter, and this appears to follow from high rates of early school dropout among Hispanics. Figure 11 shows the rates of school dropout among 15 to 17-year-old whites, blacks, and Hispanics. There is almost

no difference in the dropout rates between whites and blacks,¹⁶ but Hispanics are much more likely to leave school at an early age. Thus, early high school dropout contributes very little to the observed difference in age-grade retardation between blacks and whites, which is mainly due to retention in grade. Early dropout does account in part for the difference in age-grade retardation between Hispanics and whites or blacks.

In recent years, gender and race-ethnic differentials in age-grade retardation, even at young ages, are a consequence of school experience and not primarily of differentials in age at school entry. Social differentials in age-grade relationships are vague at school entry, but a hierarchy is clearly established by age 9, and it persists and grows through the end of secondary schooling. This growth can only be explained by grade-retention. By age 9, there are sharp social differentials in age-grade retardation, favoring whites and girls relative to blacks or Hispanics and boys. By ages 15 to 17, close to 50 percent of black males have fallen behind in school—30 percentage points more than at ages 6 to 8—but age-grade retardation has never exceeded 30 percent among white girls of the same age. If these rates and differentials in age-grade retardation are characteristic of a schooling regime in which social promotion is perceived to be the norm, it is cautionary to imagine what we might observe when that norm has been eliminated.

The Effects of Retention

¹⁶ Dropout by ages 15 to 17 does not indicate ultimate rates of failure to complete high school because large numbers of youth complete regular schooling through age 19 or, alternatively, pass the GED exam through their late 20s (Hauser, 1997).

Determining whether the use of a promotion test produces better overall educational outcomes requires weighing the intended benefits against unintended negative consequences for individual students and groups of students (American Educational Research Association et al., 1985; Joint Committee on Testing Practices, 1988; Messick, 1989; National Research Council, 1998). Most of the relevant research focuses on one outcome in particular—retention in grade. Although retention rates can change even when tests are not used in making promotion decisions, there is evidence that using scores from large-scale tests to make such decisions may be associated with increased retention rates (Hendrie, 1997).

Increased retention is not a negative outcome if it benefits students. But are there positive consequences of being held back in school because of a test score? Does the student do better after repeating the grade, or would he have fared just as well or better if he had been promoted with his peers? Research data indicate that simply repeating a grade does not generally improve achievement (Holmes, 1989; House, 1989); moreover, it increases the dropout rate (Gampert and Opperman, 1988; Grissom and Shepard, 1989; Olson, 1990; Anderson, 1994; Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1995; Luppescu et al., 1995; Reardon, 1996).

For example, Holmes (1989) reports a meta-analysis of 63 controlled studies of grade-retention in elementary and junior high school through the mid-1980s. When promoted and retained students were compared one to three years later, the retained students' average levels of academic achievement were at least 0.4 standard deviations below those of promoted students. In these comparisons, promoted and retained students were the same age, but the promoted students had completed one more grade than the retained students. Promoted and retained students were

also compared after completing one or more grades, that is, when the retained students were a year older than the promoted students but had completed equal numbers of additional grades. Here, the findings were less consistent, but still negative. When the data were weighted by the number of estimated effects, there was an initially positive effect of retention on academic achievement after one more grade in school, but it faded away completely after three or more grades. When the data were weighted by the number of independent studies, rather than by the estimated number of effects on achievement, the average effects were negligible in every year after retention. Of the 63 studies reviewed by Holmes, 54 yielded overall negative effects of retention, and only 9 yielded overall positive effects. Some studies had better statistical controls than others, but those with subjects matched on IQ, achievement test scores, sex, and/or socioeconomic status showed *larger* negative effects of retention than studies with weaker designs. Holmes concluded, "On average, retained children are worse off than their promoted counterparts on both personal adjustment and academic outcomes" (1989:27). A more recent study of Baltimore schoolchildren concludes that grade retention does increase the chances of academic success (Alexander et al., 1994), but a detailed reanalysis of those findings yields no evidence of sustained positive effects (Shepard et al., 1996).

Anderson (1994) carried out an extensive large-scale national study of the effect of grade retention on high school dropout rates. He analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth for more than 5,500 students whose school attendance was followed annually from 1978-1979 to 1985-1986. With statistical controls for sex, race/ethnicity, social background, cognitive ability, adolescent deviance, early transitions to adult status, and several school-related

measures, students who were currently repeating a grade were 70 percent more likely to drop out of high school than students who were not currently repeating a grade.

There are also strong relationships between race, socioeconomic status (SES), and the use of tests for promotion and retention. A recent national longitudinal study, using the National Education Longitudinal Study database, shows that certain students are far likelier than others to be subject to promotion tests in the 8th grade (Reardon, 1996:4-5):

[S]tudents in urban schools, in schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students, and schools in southern and western states, are considerably more likely to have [high-stakes] test requirements in eighth grade. Among eighth graders, 35 percent of black students and 27 percent of Hispanic students are subject to [a high-stakes test in at least one subject] to advance to ninth grade, compared to 15 percent of white students. Similarly, 25 percent of students in the lowest SES quartile, but only 14 percent of those in the top quartile, are subject to eighth grade [high-stakes test] requirements.

Moreover, the study found that the presence of high-stakes 8th grade tests is associated with sharply higher dropout rates, especially for students at schools serving mainly low-SES students. For such students, dropping out of school early--between the 8th and 10th grades--was 6 to 8 percent more likely than for students from schools that were similar excepting the high-stakes test requirement (Reardon, 1996).

What does it mean that minority students and low-SES students are more likely to be subject to high-stakes tests in the 8th grade? Perhaps, as Reardon points out, such policies are

"related to the prevalence of low-achieving students--the group proponents believe the tests are most likely to help" (1996). Perhaps the adoption of high-stakes test policies for individuals serves the larger social purpose of ensuring that promotion from 8th to 9th grades reflects acquisition of certain knowledge and skills. Such tests may also motivate less able students and teachers to work harder or to focus their attention on the knowledge domains that test developers value most highly. But if retention in grade is not, on balance, beneficial for students, as the research suggests (Shepard and Smith, 1989), it is cause for concern that low-SES children and minority students are disproportionately subject to any negative consequences.

Those who leave school without diplomas have diminished life chances. High dropout rates carry many social costs. It may thus be problematic if high-stakes tests lead individual students who would not otherwise have done so to drop out. There may also be legal implications if it appears that the public is prepared to adopt high-stakes test programs chiefly, when their consequences will be felt disproportionately by minority students¹⁷ and low-SES students.

Negative findings about the effects of grade retention on dropout rates are reported by Grissom and Shepard (1989), based on data for several localities including the 1979 to 1981 freshman classes from the Chicago Public Schools. Another Chicago study, of students in 1987, by Luppescu et al. (1995), showed that retained students had lower achievement scores. Throughout this period, the Chicago Public Schools cycled through successive policies of loose

¹⁷ For a discussion of possible claims of discrimination based on race or national origin, see National Research Council (1998 Chapter 3).

and restrictive promotion policies, and it is not clear how long, and with what consequences, the present strict policies will hold (Chicago Public Schools, 1997a).

New York City appears to be following a similar cycle of strict and loose retention policies, in which the unsuccessful Promotional Gates program of the 1980s was at first "promising," then "withered," and was finally canceled by 1990, only to be revived in 1998 by a new central administration (Steinberg, 1998a, 1998b). This cycle of policies, combining strict retention criteria with a weak commitment to remedial instruction, is likely to reconfirm past evidence that retention in grade is typically harmful to students.

Another important question is whether the use of a test in making promotion decisions exacerbates existing inequalities or creates new ones. For example, in their case study of a school district that decided to use tests as a way to raise standards, Ellwein and Glass (1989) found that test information was being used selectively in making promotion and retention decisions, leading to what was perceived as negative consequences for certain groups of students.¹⁸ Thus, although minorities accounted for 59 percent of the students who failed the 1985 kindergarten test, they made up 69 percent of the students who were retained and received transition services. A similar pattern was observed at grade 2.

In addition, there may be problems with using a test as the *sole* measure of the effectiveness of retention or other interventions (summer school, tutoring, and so on). This concern is related to the fact that the validity of test and retest scores depends in part on whether the scores reflect students' familiarity with actual test items or a particular test format. For

¹⁸ Ellwein and Glass (1989) assumed that the intervention, i.e. retention, was not as beneficial as promotion to the next grade level.

example, there is some evidence to indicate that improved scores on one test may not actually carry over when a new test of the same knowledge and skills is introduced (Koretz et al., 1991).

The current reform and test-based accountability systems of the Chicago Public Schools provide an example of high-stakes test use for individual students that raises serious questions about "teaching to the test." Although Chicago is developing its own standards-based, course-specific assessment system, it is committed to using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills as the yardstick for student and school accountability. Teachers are given detailed manuals on preparing their students for the tests (Chicago Public Schools, 1996a, 1996b). Student test scores have increased substantially, both during the intensive summer remedial sessions—the Summer Bridge program—and between the 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 school years (Chicago Public Schools, 1997b, 1998b), but the available data provide no means of distinguishing true increases in student learning from artifactual gains. Such gains would be expected from the combined effects of teaching to the test, repeated use of a similar test, and, in the case of the Summer Bridge program, the initial selection of students with low scores on the test.¹⁹

Alternatives to Retention

Some policymakers and practitioners have rejected the simplistic alternatives of promoting or retaining students based on test scores. Instead, they favor intermediate approaches: testing early to identify students whose performance is weak; providing remedial education to help such students acquire the skills necessary to pass the test; and giving students multiple opportunities to

¹⁹ In the Chicago Public Schools, each retest is based on an alternative form of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

retake different forms of the test in the hope that they will pass and avoid retention. Here, testing can play an important and positive role in early diagnosis and targeted remediation.

Intervention strategies appear to be particularly crucial from kindergarten through grade 2 (Shepard et al., 1998; American Federation of Teachers, 1997a). Some of the intensive strategies being used at this level include preschool expansion, giving children who are seriously behind their age-level peers opportunities to accelerate their instruction, and putting children in smaller classes with expert teachers.²⁰ Such strategies are being implemented in school districts across the country.²¹ Data on their effectiveness are as yet unavailable.

These alternatives to social promotion and simple retention in grade should be tried and evaluated. In our judgment, however, the effectiveness of such approaches will depend on the quality of the instruction that students receive after failing a promotion test, and it will be neither simple nor inexpensive to provide high-quality remedial instruction. At present only 13 states require and fund such intervention programs to help low-performing students reach the state standards, and 6 additional states require intervention but provide no resources for carrying it out.²²

²⁰ General intervention strategies employed throughout grades K-12, as described to the committee by James Wans of the Southern Regional Education Board, include clear core-content standards for each grade and course, clear communication of these standards to teachers and parents, having expert faculty, professional development for teachers, and extra instruction beyond the regular school day.

²¹ In the Long Beach School District in California, children are assessed beginning in kindergarten. When problems are found, interventions include parent-teacher conferences and mandatory summer school after grade 2. If after completing the 3rd grade and subsequent summer school a student has not reached the 1st grade reading level, he or she is retained in the 3rd grade until reaching the 1st grade reading level. No one test holds students back (interview with Lynn Winters of the Long Beach School District). Cincinnati uses grouping and intervention as well as intensive instruction and smaller classes to help children who appear to be having difficulty staying at grade level (American Federation of Teachers, 1997a).

²² In Chicago, there is a standard summer program for students who fail the Iowa test at designated grades. Many schools also offer extended-day programs aimed at helping students pass the test. The decision to offer these

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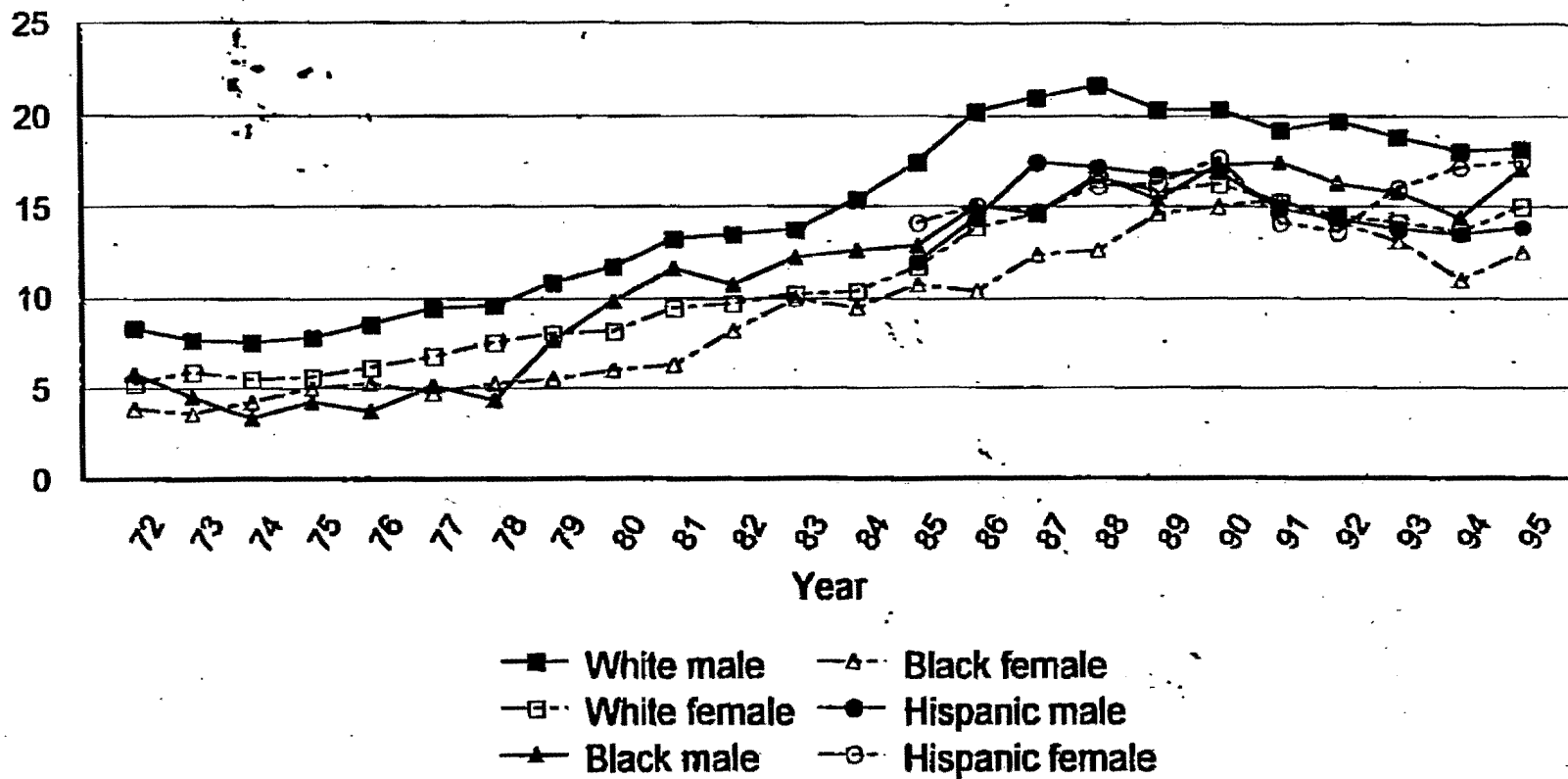
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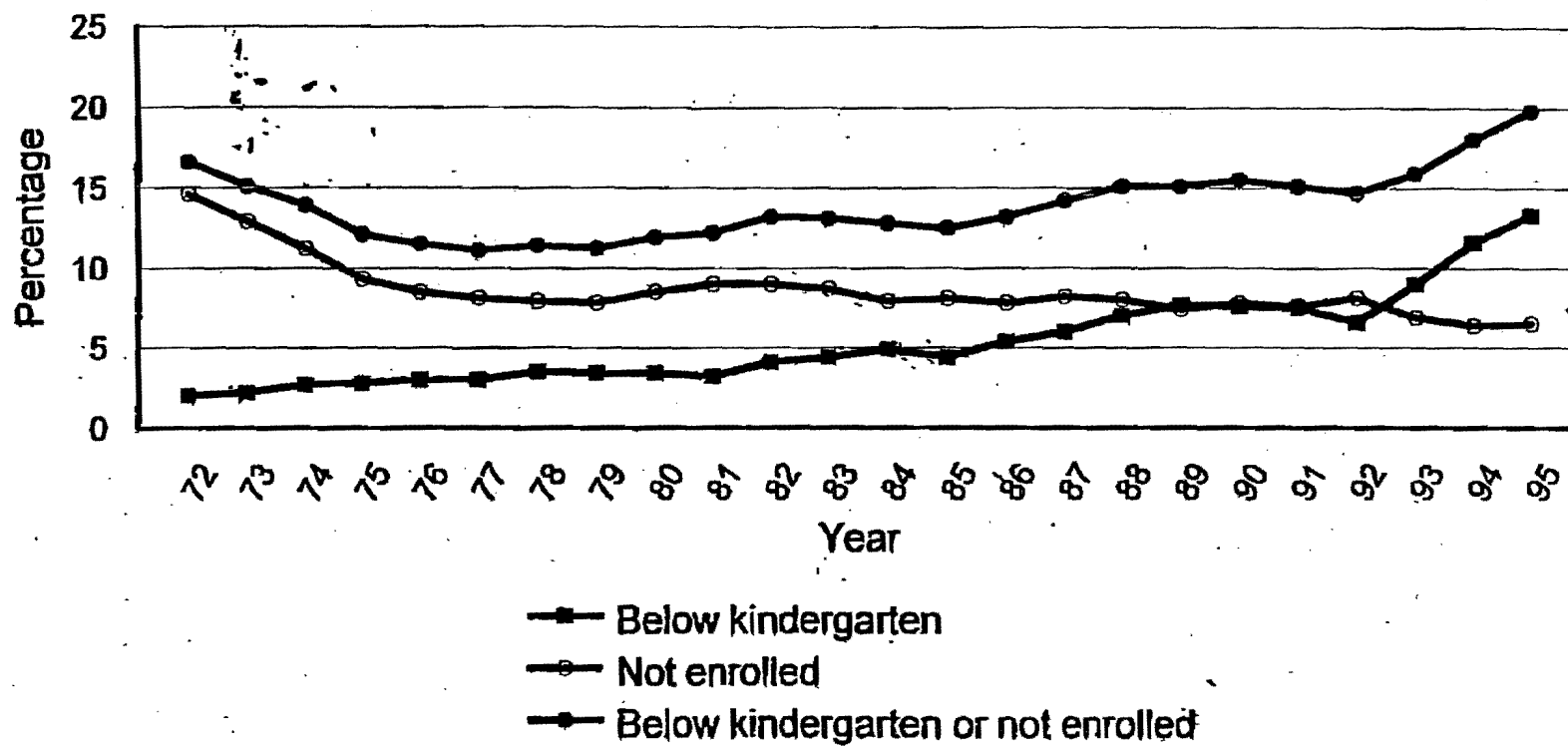
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Figure 1
Percentage of Six Year Old Children Who Have Not Entered First Grade



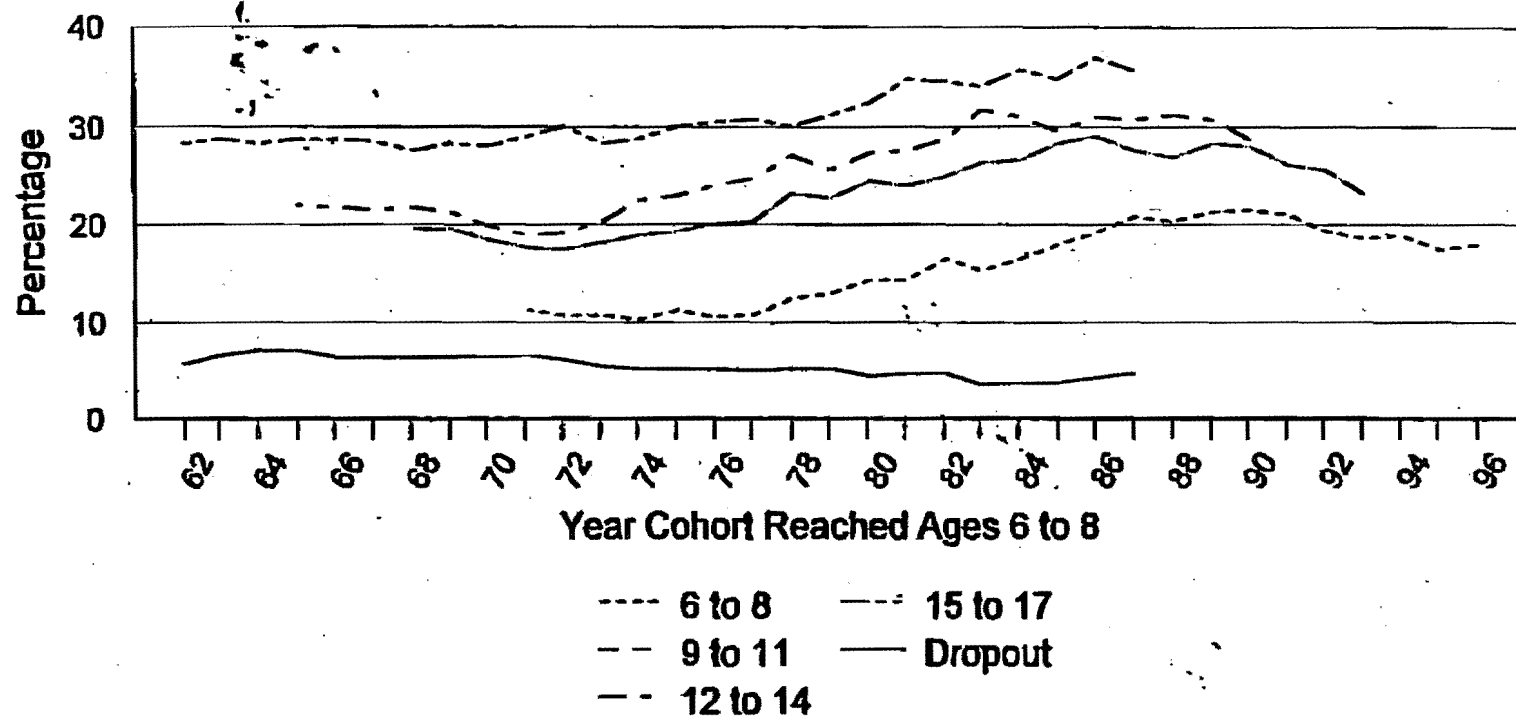
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20. Entries are three-year moving averages.

Figure 2
Percentage of Five Year Old Children Enrolled Below Kindergarten or Not Enrolled



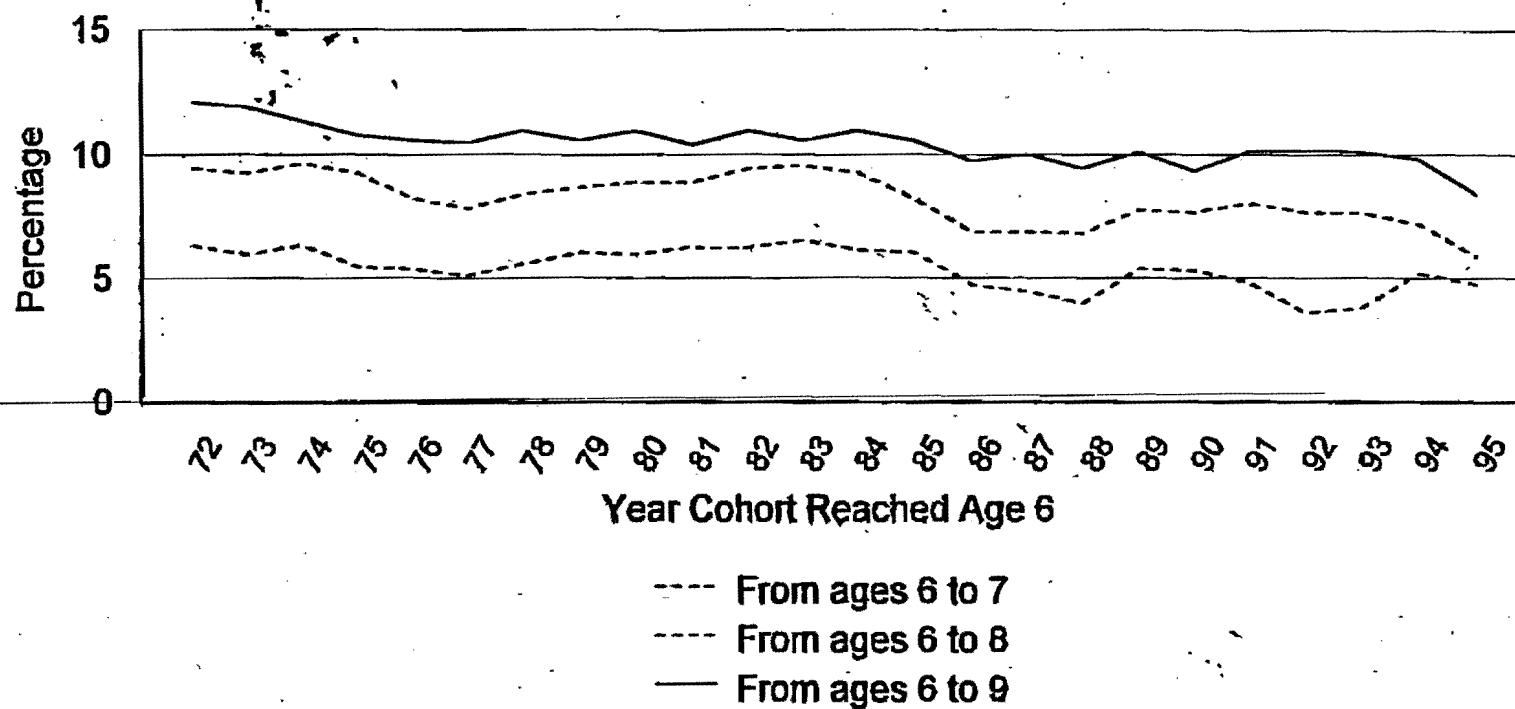
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports,
Series P-20. Entries are three-year moving averages.

Figure 3
Percentage of Children Enrolled Below Modal Grade for Age
by Age Group and Year in which Cohort was 6 to 8 Years Old



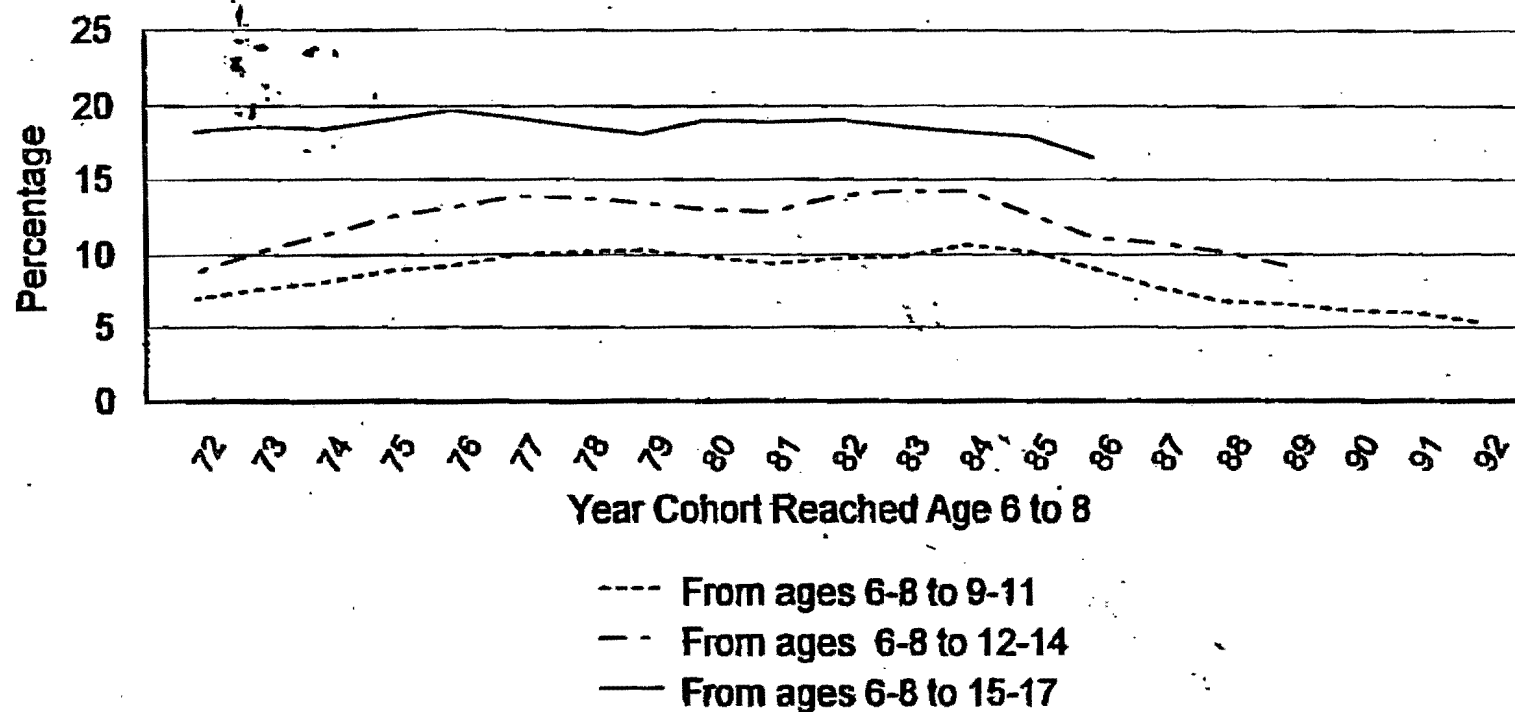
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 6 to 17.
Dropouts are included in the series at ages 15 to 17.

Figure 4
Change in Age-Grade Retardation from Age Six
to Ages Seven to Nine by Year When Cohort Was Six Years Old



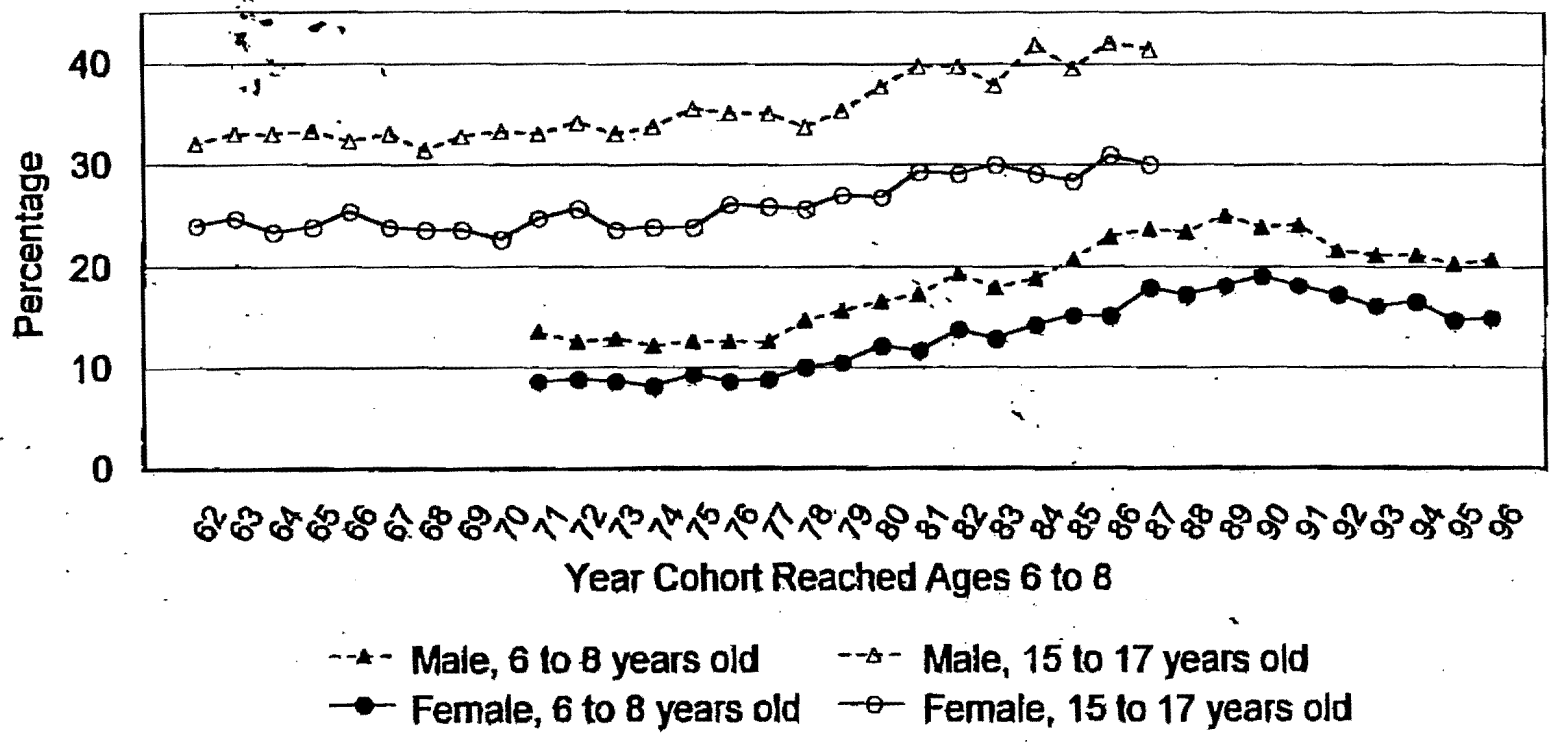
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports,
Series P-20. Entries are three-year moving averages.

Figure 5
Changes in Age-Grade Retardation from Ages 6 to 8
to Ages 9 to 17 by Year When Cohort Was 6 to 8 Years Old



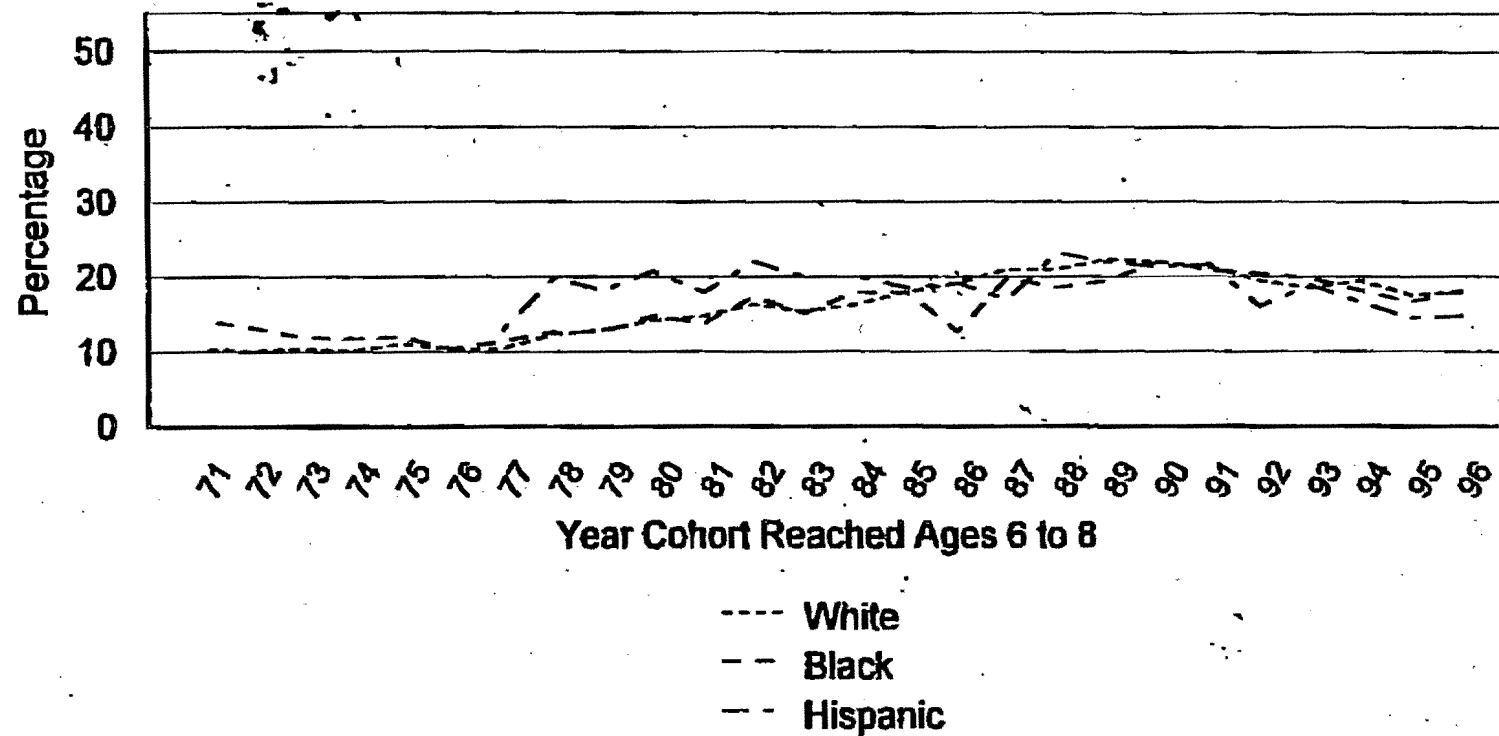
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 6 to 17.
Dropouts are included in the series at ages 15 to 17. Entries are three-year moving averages.

Figure 6
Percentage Enrolled Below Modal Grade at Ages 6 to 8 and
at Ages 15 to 17 by Sex and Year Cohort Reached Ages 6 to 8



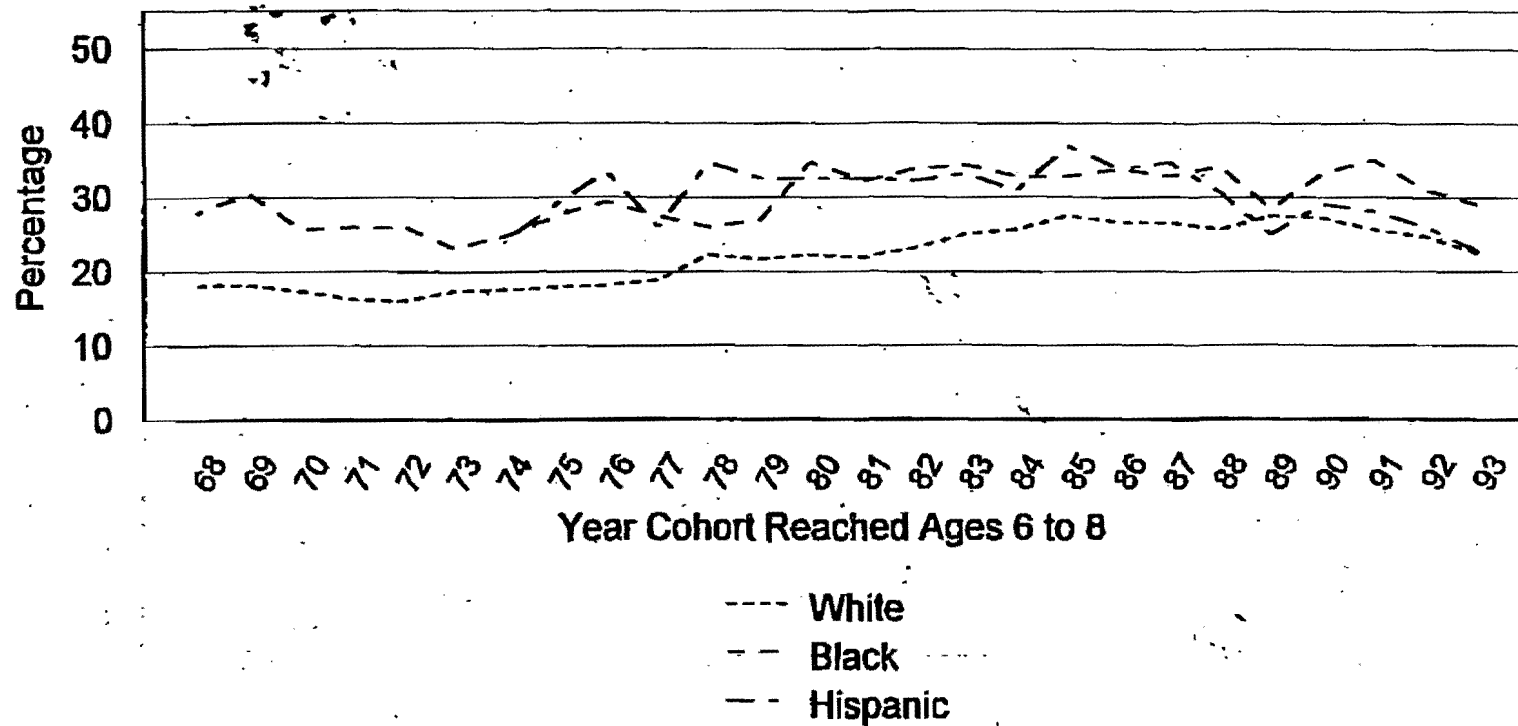
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 6 to 8 and 15 to 17.

Figure 7
Percentage Enrolled Below Modal Grade
at Ages 6 to 8 by Race-Ethnicity and Year



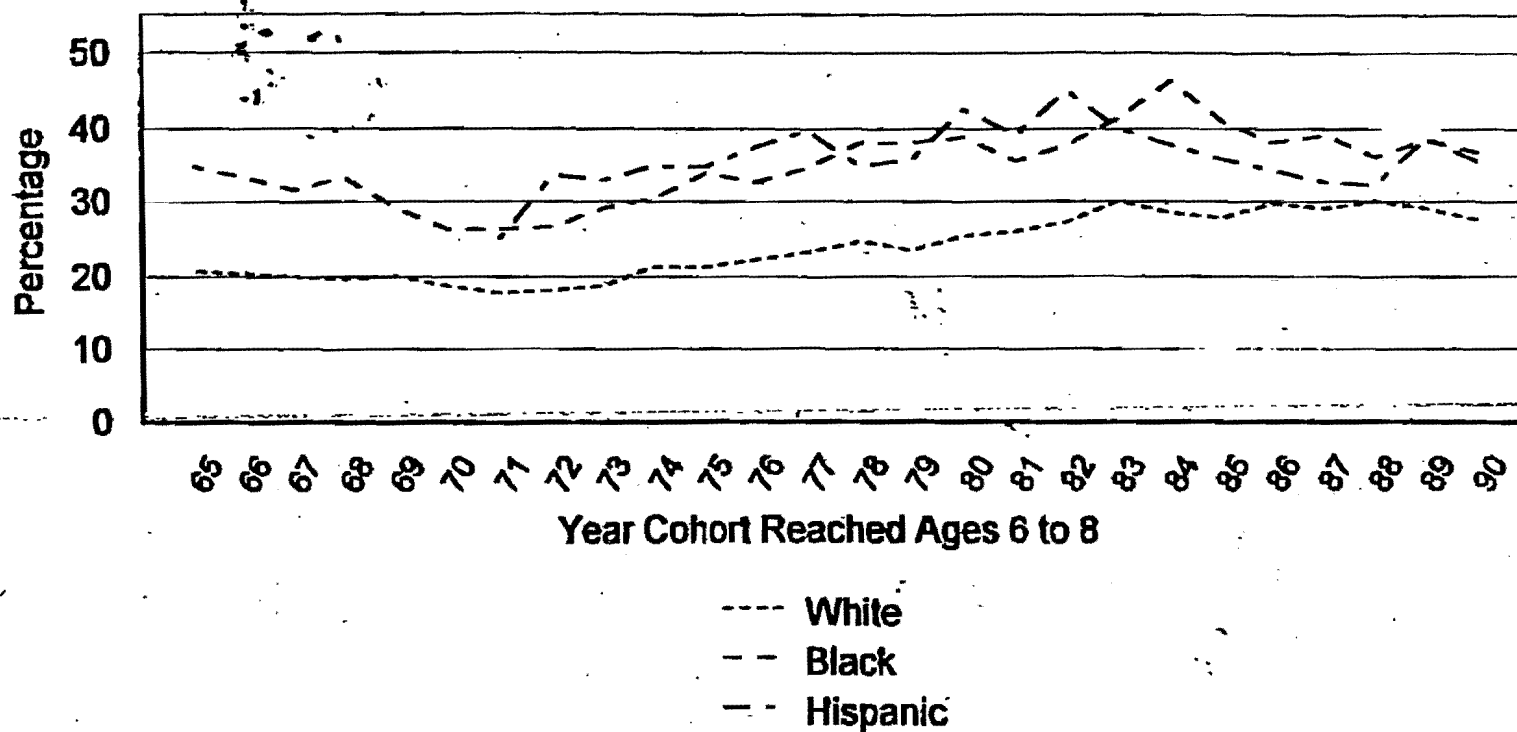
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 6 to 8.

Figure 8
Percentage Enrolled Below Modal Grade at Ages 9 to 11
by Year Cohort Reached Ages 6 to 8 by Race-Ethnicity



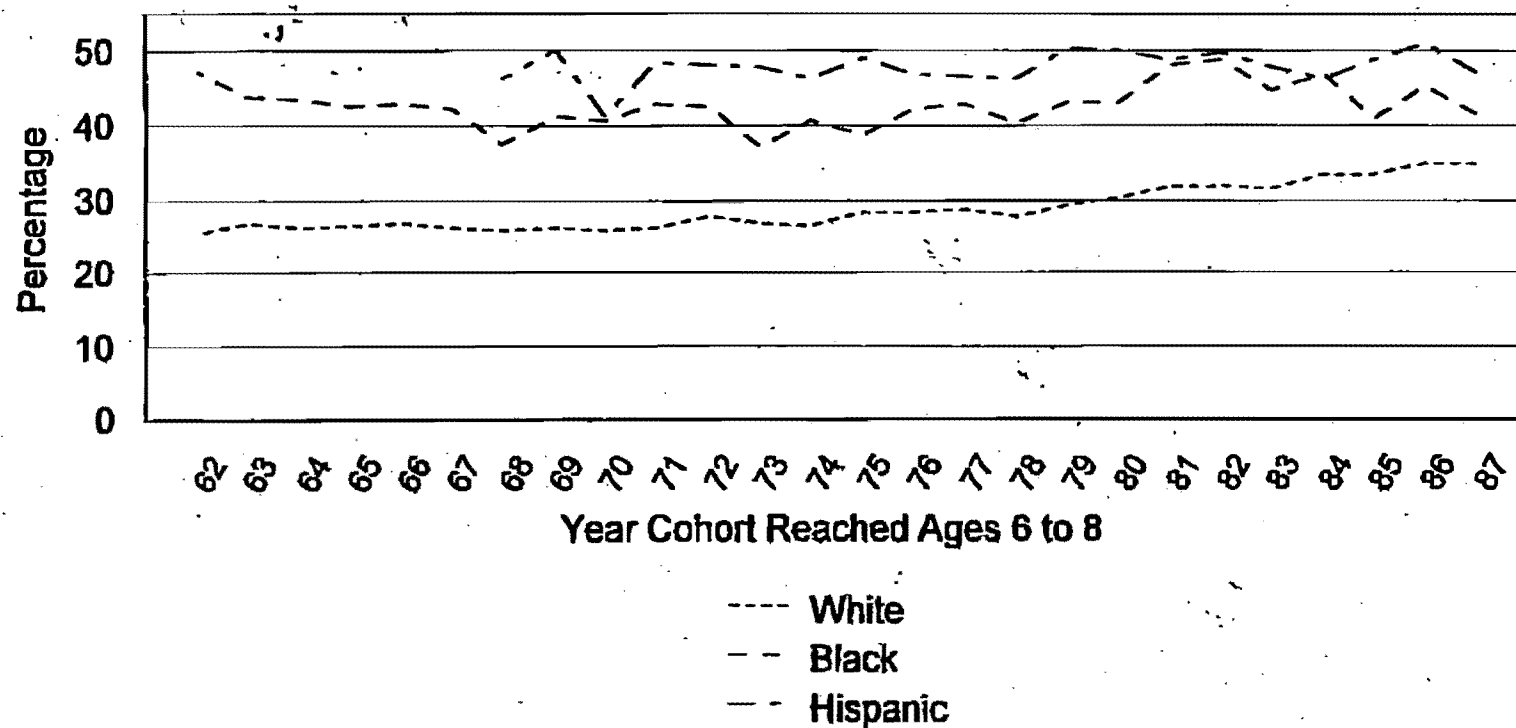
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 9 to 11.

Figure 9
Percentage Enrolled Below Modal Grade at Ages 12 to 14
by Year Cohort Reached Ages 6 to 8 by Race-Ethnicity



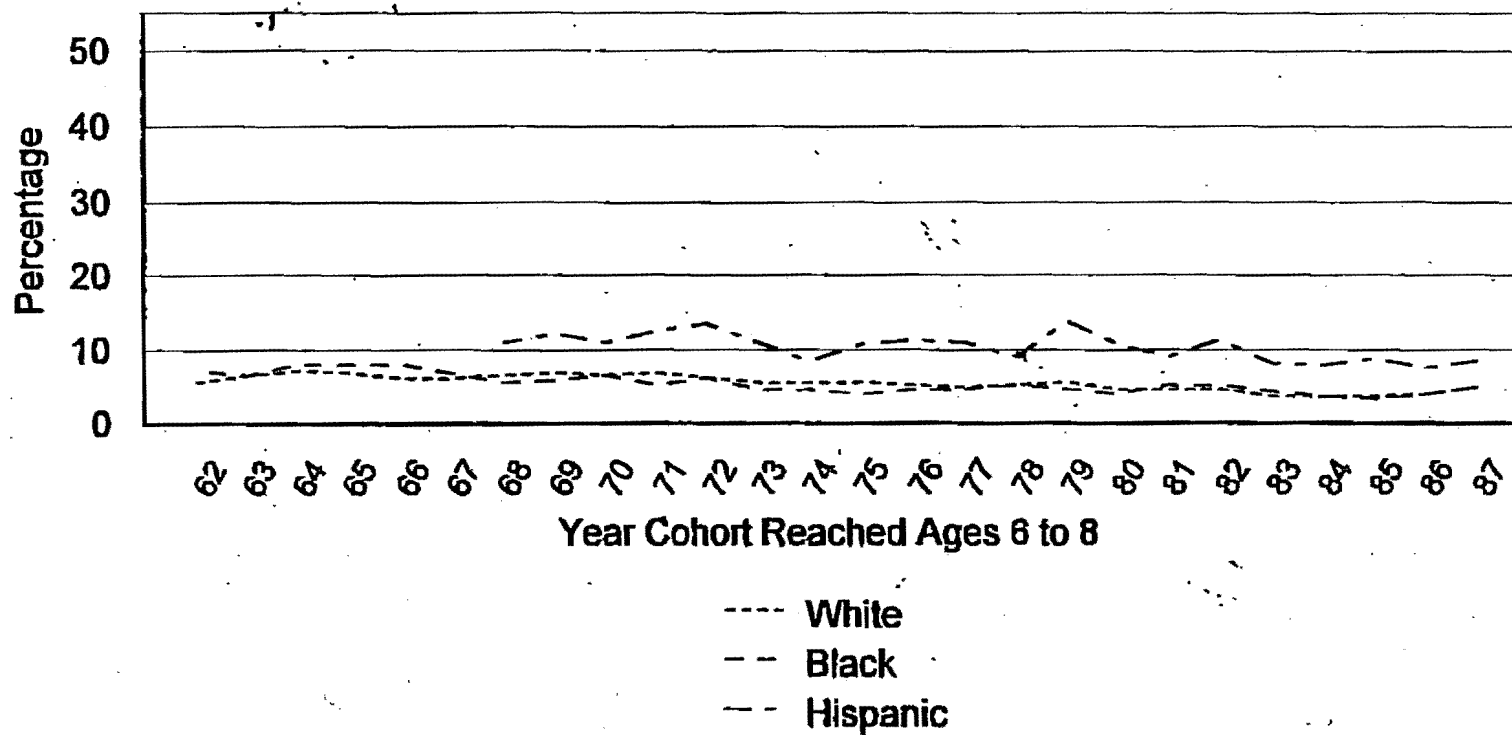
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 12 to 14.

Figure 10
Percentage Enrolled Below Modal Grade or Dropping Out by Ages 15 to 17
By Year Cohort Reached Ages 6 to 8 by Race-Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 15 to 17.

Figure 11
Percentage Dropping Out by Ages 15 to 17
By Year Cohort Reached Ages 6 to 8 by Race-Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics, Table A-3, Persons 6 to 17.

April 22, 1999

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

FROM: Bruce Reed
Tanya Martin

RE: Florida Education Reform Legislation and
Texas Education Accountability System

As you requested, we are providing this memorandum to outline the Florida education reform legislation that would, among other things, institute the nation's first statewide voucher system. We have also described below key aspects of Texas' accountability system, including recent proposals by Gov. George Bush to end social promotion and TK.

FLORIDA

In January of this year, Florida's Governor released his education reform proposal – the "A+ plan" which drew on many of his campaign themes - and called for strengthening accountability through measures such as rating schools, rewarding high-performing schools and providing vouchers for parents to move their kids out failing schools. The Governor identified this proposal as his top legislative priority and lobbied hard to move the legislation quickly through Florida's House and Senate. [TK -- The A+ Plan also called for separate bills to address standards and training for educators and school safety and anti-truancy measures – what happened to these proposals?]

In March, the Florida House approved a bill that largely mirrored Bush's plan by a vote of 79-41, split mainly among party lines. On April 16, the Florida Senate approved its own version of the education bill by a vote of 26-14, a party-line vote broken only by one Democrat. The Senate Democrats, joined by eight Republicans, were able to pass some amendments to place more restriction on the vouchers than in the House version.

Key Provisions of Legislation

- **Testing.** Students in grades 3-10, will be tested annually with Florida's new rigorous assessment. This test, first instituted by former Gov. Chiles, is currently only given to students in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10. The legislation would implement yearly tests for the remaining grades by the TK 2000-2001 school year.
- **Ratings.** Each school will be assigned a grade of A-F based on student achievement - largely measured by scores on the state assessment. Other criteria that factor into the ratings include attendance, dropout, and suspension rates, and standardized test performance for minority groups – but these would apply only for schools seeking to earn an "A" or a "B".

- Vouchers. Children in schools that receive “F” grades in two of the preceding four years will be given a choice of attending another higher-graded public schools or receiving a \$4000 “opportunity scholarship” for use at a private school of their choice – including a religious school. A private school accepting the voucher cannot collect any additional money for the student’s enrollment, or compel any participation in religious activity. Students at only four schools statewide would qualify for the vouchers next fall. However, as the new assessment test is implemented, the state education department estimates that 170 of its 3,000 public schools would be designated as failing within two years.

The Senate has proposed limiting the vouchers to only the lowest-scoring children – scoring in the bottom 25 percent on the state’s assessment tests – in the schools deemed as failing or “F” schools. News reports conservatively estimate that this would halve the number of students eligible for vouchers. The Senate would also require private schools that accept voucher students employ teachers with college degrees or experienced teachers, to teach certain topics that public schools are required to teach, e.g., the history of the Holocaust and of African-Americans, and to allow students to attend for at least three years. (TK contributions of women, African-Americans and Hispanics.)

- Failing School Intervention. Schools performing at a failing level will be given two years to improve, during which time they will receive assistance from the district and states. If the school fails to improve beyond an F in the second year, it will be subject to sanctions, including reconstitution.
- Rewards and Flexibility. Schools that either receive “A” ratings or that improve their grades by TK [one or two] levels would receive an additional \$100 per student for the school to spend as its discretion. The state will also free top-performing schools from most of the state’s regulations and allows those schools to manage their own budgets.
- Ending Social Promotion. Students will be required to meet standards in order to be promoted or to graduate. TK interventions.
- Teacher Quality. Those teachers whose students show gains in test scores will be eligible for additional pay. TK training
- Report Cards. Parents will receive report cards on how their student, and their student’s school, is performing each year.
- The legislation also covers truancy, and provides for one district to experiment with increasing the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18.

Legislative Status

Conferees have been appointed and a final bill is expected by the end of Florida’s legislative session within the next two weeks. A few Senate Republicans have publicly expressed reservations about the bill and have stated that they voted to advance the bill to

a conference with the House, but are reserving final judgment until they see the bargained bill. Bush has stated that the Senate limitations on voucher eligibility and the stricter requirements for private school participation are unacceptable to him – and many observers expect negotiators to emerge with a final bill that is closer to the House version. The Governor is expected to have the votes to secure final passage.

Public and Constituency Group Opinion

Teacher unions strongly oppose this bill and have launched a public campaign against it. They are pleased with the Senate limitations on the vouchers – but are still working hard to eliminate the voucher provisions altogether. A business-backed, Miami-based alliance has advocated the bill with their own ads and lobbyists.

The NAACP and other groups are preparing for a lawsuit over the legislation and argue that it conflicts with the state Constitution's ban against any public money, directly or indirectly, supporting religious institutions.

In a Florida voter poll, conducted while the voucher plan was under debate in the Florida legislature, showed that 45% of voters were opposed to the vouchers, 39% viewed them as very good or somewhat good and 16% did not know about the issue. In general, Democrats overwhelmingly opposed the idea while most Republicans favored it. Independent voters were almost evenly split. South Florida – with the state's largest block of Democratic voters – was the geographic region most opposed to vouchers.

TEXAS

Texas has one of the nation's most comprehensive school accountability systems. Over a decade old, the accountability system is comprised of the following key components: state-wide standards, assessments linked to standards, consequences for results, increase local control and access to data. Texas has also enacted accountability reforms to link teacher and principal assessments to student performance and to focus attention on early reading interventions. Most recently, Governor George Bush has proposed expanding the accountability system to prohibit social promotions and to allow students in low-performing schools in eight urban districts to receive vouchers.

Accountability System:

- State-wide academic standards. Texas adopted statewide academic standards for each grade and in several subjects in TK year. Efforts were made to align textbooks and curriculum with the statewide standards. These standards were recently revised (see below)
- Assessments linked to standards. A new statewide assessment (TAAS) tied to standards was implemented in 1993-94. The assessment is given in grades 3-8.
- All students held to same standards. The only students exempted from state standards are children with significant disabilities who are held to their individual education plan. Texas requires TAAS results to be disaggregated by race, ethnicity and socio-economic status. To meet the accountability requirements, each subgroup in a school

or district must meet performance targets. In 1998-99, for the first time, state assessment reports will also include results from students taking the Spanish language and Tk versions of the state assessments.

- School Ratings. Texas rates schools based on their performance on the TAAS. Schools are rewarded financially for improved performance and both school districts and principals can be penalized for poor performance. The system takes into account both absolute scores as well as year-to-year gains in scores.
- Local control. Strategic plans implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s give district administrators and principals more control over budget, and flexibility in determining how to meet standards.
- Reports and Data. State assessments are graded centrally in Texas. Test scores are provided to students, parents, teachers, schools and school districts. Access to school level results is provided on the Internet. Teachers have access to summaries and individual tests of students entering their classes. Test items are made available to the public after each test.
- Targeting. TK something about failing schools or schools with high-poverty populations.

Recent changes:

- Revised academic standards. TK – TEKS. New standards, assessments aligned with revised standards.
- Teacher evaluation. Last year, Texas instituted the first – and very controversial -- state teacher evaluation program that linked teacher appraisals to student performance. Teachers are evaluated in eight areas, including one section that rates teachers based on the schools' rating. The schools rating is derived from attendance, dropout rates, and scores on TAAS. All teachers at a particular school receive the same score on this component based on how their school rated. A similar model for principals took effect during this current school year. A plan for superintendents is still a year away.
- Early Reading Intervention. Last fall, Texas began requiring that districts assess the reading skills of K-2 students. The state issued model reading assessments, but districts are free to use their own.
- College teacher certification. Under rules implemented last fall, programs will be rated on their graduates' scores on certification exams. Low-performing programs will receive technical assistance. Persistent low-performers will lose their state accreditation.

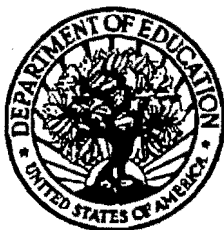
Proposed Changes:

- Vouchers -- TK
- Social Promotion -- TK

Notes:

TAAS implemented in 1993. Problem – many students exempted from TAAS. Pass rates should reflect students enrolled, not just students taking the test.

TEKS became effective for all content areas in Sept 98. Spring 2000 fine tuning done make sure tests reflect TEKS, students have learned, and that non-TEKS items dropped from TAAS.

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20202-6100

Telephone: 202-401-0113 Fax: 202-205-0303

FAX TRANSMITTALDate: 9/10/15Number of Pages, Including Cover Sheet: 4Telephone Number of Receiving Fax Machine: 456-7028ADDRESSEE: Janya Martin

Organization: _____

Telephone #: _____

FROM: Ellen Conaway

Telephone #: _____

MESSAGE:

White House Social Promotion Meeting

- Invitation List

(Letter faxed 8/7/98)

1. Dr. Eric J. Smith
 Superintendent
 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
 701 E. 2nd Street
 Charlotte, NC 28230
 phone: (704) 379-7135
 fax (704) 379-7315

2. Dr. Gerry House
 Superintendent
 Memphis City Schools
 2597 Avery Avenue, Room 214
 Memphis, TN 38112
 phone: (901) 325-5444
 fax (901) 325-5578

3. Paul G. Vallas, CEO
 Chicago Public Schools
 Central Service Center
 1819 West Pershing Road
 Chicago, IL 60609
 phone: (773) 535-3700
 fax (773) 535-8461

4. Arlene Ackerman
 Superintendent
 District of Columbia Public Schools
 415 12th Street, NW, Suite 1209
 Washington, DC 20004
 phone: (202) 724-4226
 Fax (202) 724-8855

5. Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick
 Superintendent of Education
 Maryland State Department of Education
 200 W. Baltimore Street
 Baltimore, MD 21201
 phone: (410) 767-0462
 fax (410) 333-6033

6. Dr. Judith Rizzo
 Deputy Chancellor for Instruction
 New York City Board of Education
 110 Livingston Street
 Brooklyn, NY 11201
 phone: (718) 935-2800
 fax (718) 935-3383

7. Dave Hornbeck

Superintendent
 Philadelphia School District
 Administration Building, Room 218
 21st Street South of the Parkway
 Philadelphia, PA 19103-1099
 phone: (215) 299-7823
 fax (215) 299-4687

(Need to Invite Following Meeting with Mike Smith)

8. Nancy Karweit
 Johns Hopkins University
 Center for Research on Effective Schooling for
 Disadvantaged Students

9. Karl Alexander
 Professor of Sociology
 533 Mergenthaler
 Johns Hopkins University
 3400 N. Charles St.
 Baltimore, MD 21218
 (410) 516-7626
 kla2@jhu.edu

10. Nancy L. Karweit
 Principal Research Scientist
 Center for Social Organization of Schools 3505
 N. Charles St.
 Baltimore, MD 21218
 (410) 516-0370
 nkarweit@csos.jhu.edu

11. Samuel J. Meisels

Professor of Education
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

✓ Samuel Meisels

OK 3210 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
(734) 763-7306
smeisels@umich.edu (out until August 19)

OK 12. Lorrie A. Shepard
Dean, School of Education
Box 249
University of Colorado-Boulder
Boulder, CO 80309
(303) 492-6937
Lorrie.Shepard@Colorado.EDU

H:\ESDMARGO\ISOCPRO\SUPERS.DOC
<date>

Tanya:

Also on the list of potential invitees are:

A representative from NEA

A representative from AFT

A representative from Council of Great City Schools

A representative from MALDEF or its equivalent

Let me hear from you ASAP on alternative dates for the Conference.

Thanks so much.

Ellen Conaway

260-1922

Agenda For Kick-Off Meeting On Ending Social Promotion

April 1, 1998

10:00

OEOB

- Purpose of Guide--Relationship to Administration initiatives, proposals
- Audience and Level for Guide --State & local policy makers, school officials & staff, parents
- Timing--Schedule and "Back to School" activities
- Specific issues that need to be discussed:
 - Problem of ending social promotion while not promoting grade retention (research shows poor prognosis for students from both social promotion and grade retention)
 - Problem of not placing blame on students and parents while conveying some responsibility
 - Problem of high-stakes testing and differential impact on minorities
 - Recommending specific gates in students' academic career vs. interventions when appropriate
 - Other substantive issues

Time Line for President's Directive on Helping Schools End Social Promotion

- 2/23 President announces that ED will produce within 6 months: (1) guidelines for educators and policymakers on effective approaches to ending social promotions; (2) a plan and an inventory that identifies how federal funds can be used to assist states, districts and schools in this effort.
- 3/20 Team requests literature search of the research evidence on social promotion and retention.
- 3/27 Team meets with White House staff to identify scope of the guidelines and audience.
- 3/27 Kickoff meeting with senior officers. Discuss nature of plan to assist schools and districts. Discuss and approve protocol for case studies. Identify federal programs for inventory, and sources of information for guide. Discuss the look of the report.
- 3/27 Team meets with Susan Frost's Thursday afternoon group.
- 4/3 Team sends out protocol for listservs and requests 2-week turnaround.
- 4/3 Team procures task order for focus groups with administrators, teachers, parents, and students.
- 4/24 Team completes literature search and compiles review. Examples of effective approaches received.
- 5/8 Team develops and revises outline of report and plan.
- 5/22 Team researches sources, makes external contacts, chooses sites for examples. Writes up inventory of federal funds.
- 5/29 Team meets with White House staff to present evidence, outline, and examples.
- 6/12 Team writes up case studies of effective practices.
- 6/26 Team drafts the report.
- 6/26 Team works with 1-800-USA-LEARN and Kickbush/Winters to establish dissemination process and website. Drafts Secretary's letter. Arranges graphic design, copy editing, and publication.
- 7/10 Team sends products to reviewers: Mike Smith, Terry Peterson, and external people (to be identified).
- 7/31 Team revises products based on comments.
- 8/14 Team sends products out for final review
- 8/21 Team finalizes report, prepares press copies with OPA, installs guide on Web.
- 8/28 Secretary transmits report to President. Press conference. Guide is on Web, copies are available for press, big distribution plan is announced.

Opinions of the American Public and Teachers on Social Promotion

- The public overwhelmingly favors setting “higher standards than are now required about what students should know and be able to do” in “math, history, English and science for promotion from grade to grade”: 87% are in favor, and 10% are opposed. And 65% favor requiring public school students in their community “to pass standardized, national examinations for promotion from grade to grade” (32% are opposed)(Gallup, 1995b).
- More than two-thirds (70%) of the public and 62% of teachers want to raise standards of promotion from grade school to junior high and require students to pass a test showing they have reached these standards (Public Agenda, 1994 & 1996).
- Fully 84% of the public supports requiring public school students in their community “to meet higher standards than are now required in math, English, history, and science in order to graduate from high school” (13% are opposed) (Gallup, 1995b).
- The public favors “stricter requirements for high school graduation, even if it meant that significantly fewer students would graduate than is now the case” (65% favor; 29% would be opposed) (Gallup, 1995b). Moreover, there is strong support for “having students pass an academic examination in order to graduate from school” (67% strongly favor, 20% favor, 6% oppose, 5% oppose strongly) (us News/World Report, 1996b).
- Almost nine in ten members of the public (88%) and 83% of teachers support not allowing students to graduate from high school unless they demonstrate they can write and speak English well (Public Agenda, 1994 & 1996).
- Teachers believe that automatic (social) promotion is “the single biggest cause of the tremendous disparities in student preparation,” and while teachers believe the practice should end, “54% acknowledged that they have promoted unprepared students during the past year”; 6 in 10 “say they fear that students repeating the same grade might create social and disciplinary problems for a class” (AFT, 1996).

Mike Cohen
COPY FOR YOUR
INFORMATION

BELDEN RUSSONELLO & STEWART
RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS

MEMO

TO: Judith Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
US Department of Education

FROM: Nancy Belden

RE: Enclosed summary of focus group research

DATE: July 13, 1998

*[Soc
Prom]*

Attached is a summary of the focus groups on social promotion. It was gratifying for me to lead these groups, as it gave me an opportunity to concentrate on an issue which comes up so often in other focus groups and has so much bearing on education reform. I hope that the ideas the research generated will be useful to you as you develop guidelines, and would be happy to come over and discuss findings and the application with you at any point. We will also be sending you transcripts of the entire discussions -- but knowing that you all were anxious for quotes, we excerpted a bunch and attached them in an appendix. Also there are video tapes enclosed.

Please give me a call when you have a chance.

Regards.

BELDEN RUSSONELLO & STEWART
RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Seeking Remedies to Social Promotion in American Schools

Summary of Findings from Focus Group Research
For the United States Department of Education

Introduction

The Department of Education (DOE) is developing a Presidential Directive to help schools reduce social promotion, that is the practice of promoting students to the next grade level regardless of their academic readiness. Belden, Russonello & Stewart (BR&S) conducted focus group research in Philadelphia and Houston on June 29 and July 2, 1998, respectively to provide perspective on American public opinion in this area. In each city one group each was conducted among parents of public school children and one among public school teachers. In Houston, a third group ~~was~~ conducted in Spanish among limited English proficiency (LEP) parents. A diversity of viewpoints was sought for these groups: participants represented a spectrum of race, ethnicity, education, and income. The parent groups represented a mix of grades of children and the teachers represented a range of grades taught and years of experience. (Please refer to the table in Appendix A which lists characteristics of the parent and teacher groups.)

The discussion guide was prepared in consultation with Judith Johnson and the working committee on the Directive. All groups were led by partner Nancy Belden. The sessions were audio and videotaped and transcripts of these discussions are currently being prepared.

In using this analysis, readers should keep in mind that focus groups are qualitative research and are not intended to quantify public attitudes on issues. The findings of this research are not projectable to the population. Rather, our purpose in focus group research is to understand fundamental reactions and concerns people bring to the topics at hand, examine attitude formation, gather reactions to materials and language for communication purposes, and examine the different ways in which people react to and evaluate specific pieces of information. The review of existing survey research which accompanies this analysis provides some quantitative data on the topic of social promotion and related issues.

Key points

Advocating reductions in social promotion is a very worthy step. according to our focus group research. The parents and teachers alike are negatively disposed toward social promotion and are very receptive to policies to reduce the practice by instituting interventions that bring students up to grade level.

Good practices are beneficial to weak and strong students. Social promotion is not a burning issue with many of the teachers and parents we interviewed, however, they recognize the problem easily and see every reason why it should be tackled. Talking solutions to social promotion with the target audiences is facilitated by the fact that they appreciate the solutions as being good for *all* children, not just students who are failing. So the parents and teachers are delighted to endorse policies that help strong or adequate students be even more successful while helping weak students advance.

It is necessary to frame the issue for the public. The teachers and parents bemoan retention as an imperfect solution but do not spontaneously, themselves suggest interventions to solve the underlying causes for student failure.

Several recommended policies are quickly appreciated by the parents and teachers. When asked to think of ways to reduce the dilemma of social promotion, we found much agreement among groups in Philadelphia and Houston, among LEP and English fluent parents and among the teachers. We tested a series of possible policies and practices developed by the Department. (Please see Appendix B for tallied reactions to specified alternatives.) Those four perceived as most useful are these:

- **Providing summer school, tutoring, and after-school programs:** Supplying more instruction via tutors, summer school, and other means is a very popular idea among participants. The parents and teachers believe that a direct response to the particular needs of individual students is extremely effective in bringing them back up to grade level.

The teachers and parents indicate that programs such as direct tutoring should be especially effective because students can receive the individual attention they need. Also, they may offer a chance to work with a new teacher who may be able to connect with the student in a better way. The parents and teachers in our groups believe that since many parents are not involved in their child's education, one-on-one programs offer an alternative forum for students to receive help with homework and concepts they find difficult. In Philadelphia,

parents and teachers are concerned that summer school is not free to students who need it. In Houston, parents and teachers are concerned that there is no transportation for students who are recommended for summer school. In order to make it feasible, it must be accessible to students who need it.

- **Helping families develop skills to help students succeed:** Parental involvement is the highest ranked item among the teachers in both cities. The teachers state that involving parents more effectively would help develop a culture that supports education in the community.

The parents in Philadelphia are more skeptical that there would be much to gain from the creation of these types of programs. Though the parents agree that the programs could be beneficial, they also argued that the people who want to be involved already are and that offering new programs is unlikely to stimulate new interest.

- **Reducing class size:** The idea that smaller classes will result in more attention to each child and thus in more achievement is familiar and spontaneously suggested by all groups. Participants are quick to add that reducing class size is not a cure-all, but that it should be kept in the forefront as part of any package to reduce social promotion in the schools.
- **Early childhood programs:** The teachers and parents are receptive to the creation of early childhood programs in their school districts. Participants emphasize that these programs need to be open to all students. Support is less enthusiastic among Philadelphia parents who argue that many of these programs are either too much pressure for children or that they can be simply playtime and of no academic value.

Other policies receive more mixed reviews and would require more explanation before the teachers and parents like those in our research would endorse them enthusiastically.

- **Improving diagnosis:** The parents and Philadelphia teachers endorse the idea of better testing to help pinpoint students' weak areas and intervene more effectively to meet students' needs. In Houston, however, the teachers argue that an experienced teacher can just as effectively assess student deficiencies and that there are already so many tests required of students it would be a waste of instructional time. The word "assessment" needs to be monitored and possibly replaced to convey the meaning the Department intends.
- **Ability grouping -- pulling promoted, but failing, students out of class during the day to address individual instructional needs:** The teachers and parents in both cities told us that pulling students out of the class to address their instructional needs is something that works very effectively at present in their schools. The main draw of this approach is that it provides

students with individual attention that is often not available in a classroom full of students and allows a chance to focus on the particular obstacles faced by that student.

- **Setting high academic standards:** Setting high academic standards generates less interest among the parents in part because they do not see low expectations as a defining factor of their schools and partly because many fail to see how expectations drive improved learning. The public generally prefers direct intervention (as encompassed in the earlier, popular policies) over the more overarching principles of higher standards.
- **Different grouping strategies:** The most controversial suggestion is multi-age classes and ungraded schools, and it met with the most resistance from focus group participants. The teachers have some positive experiences with this policy, but the parents fail to see the benefits or to be convinced by the argument that children learn differently enough to make multi-age classes an effective solution. This is the only suggested policy that receives more negative assessments than positive.

The participants in our focus groups recommend three other types of solutions to social promotion that we had not proposed.

- **Address the psychological and discipline issues:** Participants conceive of the roots of the social promotion/academic failure issue to be in the psychological needs of students rather than as a function of their intellectual failings.

This is important because the proposed solutions tend to be expressed in terms of addressing academic problems. We suggest developing a conceptual overlay to the social promotion policies that acknowledges the belief or fact that failure to thrive academically among students is often a breakdown in personal, family, and general social supports rather than a breakdown in the academic programs and instructional skills of school systems.

Also, it would also be useful for the Department to consider what kinds of specific policies or practices to address psychological and behavioral problems could be included in guidelines to reduce social promotion.

- **Professional development for teachers:** The parents and teachers agree that today's student is very different than the student of twenty years ago. To meet the new challenges associated with the modern student, participants recognize the need for professional development to keep teachers up-to-date with solutions to current problems.
- **Alternate sites:** In every group, parents and teachers suggest that one possible solution would be to offer a way to move failing students out of classrooms and out of schools, into

special settings. Focus group participants acknowledge that this might be a throwback idea, but also suggest ways of adapting alternate sites to be more acceptable.

Addressing social promotion is good policy. The focus groups suggest that the Department is on the right track with both parents and teachers in addressing social promotion. The parents and teachers alike believe that interventions such as those highlighted by the DOE would be effective at bringing students up to standards. The teachers and parents spontaneously suggest many of the items on the DOE list and some ideas not on the list. The discussion is fueled by the frustration with social promotion and the inadequacy of retention as the only means for coping with students who are not ready to move ahead.

Participants also believe that implementing these programs is financially feasible if school districts are willing to make them a priority.

Finally, the parents and teachers are receptive to leadership on this issue coming from the federal level. Participants know the President has focused on education as one of his policy priorities while in office and these parents and teachers believe advocating for increased student achievement by reducing social promotion is a very worthwhile endeavor for the Administration.

Appendix A:

Composition of Focus Groups

	Parents	Teachers
Total	23	20
Gender		
Females	15	14
Males	8	6
Age		
23 yrs to 29 yrs	2	2
30 yrs to 39 yrs	11	3
40 yrs to 49 yrs	9	6
50 yrs to 59 yrs	1	8
60+		1
Race		
White	4	9
Black	11	10
Hispanic	8	1
Education		
Less than HS	2	
HS grad	8	
Some college	9	
College graduate	4	20
Income		
0-25K	8	
25-50K	6	
51-100K	9	
Grade of children/taught		
Elementary school	9	9
Middle school	7	5
High school	11	6
Primary Language		
English	19	20
Spanish	4	
Location		
Philadelphia	10	10
Houston	13	10
Years in teaching		
0-5		6
5-10		1
10-20		6
20+		7

Appendix B:

Participants rate alternatives to social promotion offered by the DOE¹

	Parents		Teachers		Total ²
	Good idea	Bad idea	Good idea	Bad idea	
a. Reducing class size	22	2	15	2	33
b. Setting challenging academic standards for students and outlining specific proficiency levels expected of all students	14	2	12	1	23
c. Developing better testing so teachers and principals can identify problems earlier and use that information more effectively to identify and address student needs.	21	1	11	2	29
d. Creating more early childhood programs such as Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start so that preschoolers are prepared to learn when they come to Kindergarten and first grade.	17	0	17	0	34
e. Providing summer school, tutoring, or after-school programs for students who need extra help.	20	2	19	0	37
f. Using different grouping strategies such as multi-age classes or ungraded schools.	4	10	9	5	-2
g. Ability grouping, that is leaving children who are having trouble in their grade, but pulling them out periodically during the day to address their individual instructional needs.	17	3	14	1	27
h. Creating programs that help families develop skills to help their children with homework, discipline and other developmental needs.	18	4	20	0	34

¹Focus group participants were given a list of alternatives to social promotion prepared by BR&S in consultation with the DOE. Twenty-three parents and twenty teachers were asked to mark those they felt were good ideas with a check and those they felt were bad ideas or useless with an x.

²The total column represents the sum of the teachers and parents who checked the item as a good idea minus the sum of teachers and parents who marked the item a bad idea.

Appendix C:

Quotes from focus group participants arranged by subject

Social promotion defined

"That you promote the child basically due to age. My daughter's been promoted constantly and I was told that they wouldn't leave her back because it would be detrimental to her age." -- Philadelphia parent

"If you're such and such an age, you have to be in such and such a grade. No matter what, even if you are not within the ability." -- Philadelphia parent

Standards

"If we can do anything to...hold students feet to the fire to make them rise up to the standards that they need to have then we are moving in the right direction. But I don't know how the district is going to fund it because it is an enormous amount." -- Houston teacher

"If you're sitting there saying to this child, 'If you don't do this, if it doesn't meet these requirements you will be retained.' And some of those children may say, 'If I want to get out of this grade, I am going to have to meet this requirement. I'm going to do it.'" -- Philadelphia teacher

"They're excellent, they are excellent. But in practice it doesn't always work out that way." -- Philadelphia teacher

"I don't see what's different. I mean, they always had standards. Setting the standards doesn't mean anything if you don't make students stick to the standards or the teachers or whoever the standards are set for. It's like making a law and not enforcing it." -- Philadelphia parent

"If everybody knows what the agenda is then it's up to those three [parents, teachers, students]" -- Philadelphia parent

"I think all kids need to have a goal to reach for 'cause they need to know what's expected of them." -- Houston teacher

"I think it's just setting it up so if the kids don't get there it's like, 'Who's the failure in it all?'" -- Houston parent

"That's life. You have a job, you meet the standards." -- Houston parent

"But I think that...if they'd begin at age four or five with this greater firmness with their studies and qualifications they'd have to have 100 percent doing better, then everybody would do better. Now. But much earlier, no...it wasn't like that." -- LEP parent

"Because one has to know first where a child is going to end up for him to get there." -- LEP parent

Social Promotion is negative

"She's not working on the seventh grade level. Why would you push her on?" -- Philadelphia parent

"He just doesn't have the skills to even fill out an application for anything because of them just passing him along, passing him along. It really was really bad for him." -- Philadelphia parent

"But in certain subjects where you need the basics, like math, and the next course is based on the previous one they are going to do the same mistakes as in the previous year. They are going to fail again." -- Philadelphia parent

"If they are just going to pass them to the next grade they are dooming them to fail. They need that background to go onto the next level and you're not helping them socially or academically. Definitely not!" -- Philadelphia teacher

"I think there should be some kind of program to send those kids to because they are not ready. I mean, they actually lack skills that'll hurt them in the future. They may not be able to read a job application in the future. I just don't think social promotion is appropriate at any level." Philadelphia teacher

"It's supposed to get tougher at each grade and they're already behind. How can just moving them on possibly do them any good at all." -- Houston parent

Social promotion can be appropriate

"There are children that really try hard and need that little extra something to maybe get them over the hump. If they've demonstrated through the course of the year that they've done their homework, they actively participate, but, God help them, they just can't do well on tests or their projects aren't quite the way they should be. But you see the effort compared to the other kids who aren't even trying. I think to leave this child down would be a sin." -- Philadelphia teacher

"Well you can have a fifteen year old in seventh grade and it can just be more socially appropriate. That's the rationale." -- Philadelphia teacher

"It depends on the individual child." -- Houston parent

"I think that we have to analyze what is wrong with the child. If the child is taking five classes, and of these five classes, there are three or four in which the child isn't doing anything, this child needs to repeat a year. But if it's a child having problems in one class out of five, then, they should give him the opportunity to go to summer school and help him..." -- LEP parent

Environment distracts students from achieving

"If it's based strictly on grades then fine. But sometimes other things play into why a kid got retained..." -- Philadelphia parent

"Well you know how some people become complacent. They're just not in tune with what's going on and maybe a new subject could boost their interest and maybe they're [teachers socially promoting a child] doing it with the hope that they will grasp it. Or maybe they think there is something wrong within their life that is holding them back from learning and push them on. Like maybe this is just a bad year and it might not be that they can't do the work... And sometimes teachers can sense that." -- Philadelphia parent

"We're talking here about schools that are in the communities where sometimes the children have to work and go to school. These students have a much harder life than those in another community that only have to go to school and study." -- LEP parent

"The parents lots of times don't know about the problems that their children are having in school, and the children don't know that the parents can help. And, sometimes it could be that the parents have problems, and those problems affect the children." -- LEP parent

Social promotion as a district policy

"I believe the district is going through some policy changes with this issue -- from my understanding. So they are going to do away with social promotion. What they are going to instill I don't know." -- Philadelphia teacher

"There have been times when it has been strongly suggested to you that 'this child needs on should move on and let the world and the community take care of the needs that are missing. We have done as much as we can do. So it is advisable -- and I'm not telling you what to do -- but I would strongly take a look at that, Ms. ____' And I go back and I say, 'No, this is not what I think we should do.' And maybe I am wrong but I do not believe in social promotion." -- Houston teacher

"Twenty years ago the principal I had said, 'You make sure you flunk at least ten... Now, a year after that I failed seven or eight and he said, 'Seven or eight! You failed seven or eight?!' And I said, 'Well you told me to fail at least ten!' And he said, 'Oh no, oh no -- it's all been changed. Now it's one or two. It's all been changed...It's a question of money and it costs a lot of money to fail a child.'" -- Philadelphia teacher

"And if you fail too many kids, they're going to look at you and they're going to wonder what happened." -- Philadelphia teacher

"It runs in cycles. Thirty years ago it was one thing, then ten years later it was something totally different, then fifteen years later it was a new program and then it all comes back again." -- Philadelphia teacher

"You just do the best you can...they do it, they still do it [socially promote students]. They're not really supposed to." -- Houston teacher

"And then they [students] get to me in the eleventh or twelfth grade and it's the last semester before they graduate and you are expected to help this student to exit..." -- Houston teacher

"Then it makes us look bad, like we don't have any control and I get real angry...we get overridden by [the administration]" -- Houston teacher

"They don't challenge the kids that [are] laid back...that need that little push. They don't really challenge them and academically...and if you don't come to school, if you want to cut, that's on you and they don't say and force that education is important: you're going to need this someday. They don't really instill it in the kid's mind to make them see they're really going to need it. The ones that sit there and don't do anything -- they just let them!" -- Philadelphia parent

"I think they do it so they don't look bad...They don't want to look like they're doing a bad job." -- Philadelphia parent

"It's an assembly line...Let's push them through and then get paid." -- Philadelphia parent

"The administration expresses their personal feelings to the teachers to keep a certain percentage of kids passing...[If you fail a student] it's saying to your administrator that you're not doing your job as a teacher." -- Houston parent

"...administrators just basically come down and tell their teachers, 'Look you know, we just can't have that failure rate because if we do, I look bad. And if I look bad, you look bad. They're [teachers] more or less powerless. They are more or less passing the problem onto the next teacher.'" -- Houston parent

Parental involvement

"If you have parents who are concerned and anxious to succeed then they are there and they support the children. And the children succeed." -- Houston teacher

"There are some programs. Not enough." -- Philadelphia teacher

"Yeah but it would only help those people that come." -- Philadelphia teacher

"I don't think it's a realistic expectation that you're going to be able to teach some of these adults enough math to be helpful to a student. What would be helpful are the other issues, the underlying issues. If you could help them with discipline and developmental needs then they could be tutored to handle with the math and the homework piece... If you take care of those other two things with an intervention with the guardian or whatever then the academic stuff can be worked out in the framework of school." -- Philadelphia teacher

"A lot of it stems from their family backgrounds. There was a lot more involvement with the home years ago. You saw the parent, the parent saw you, there was a constant go between. Nowadays, I can't find some of the parents." - Philadelphia teacher

"The people that want to do it are going to do it anyway regardless of a policy." -- Philadelphia parent

"Outreach to parents. Say, 'Hey! we need your input. Please come to these meetings. Not everyone is going to come but at least some will get involved..." -- Philadelphia parent

"You have some parents that can't participate because they are a single parent and they have to work. It's not that they don't care but they are the sole provider in their home and they just cannot get up to their schools to participate. If you could set it to a schedule for that parent, or to their individual needs...yeah, I think that would be great." -- Philadelphia parent

"You see how you have parents who are involved with their own children. Since they have time to be involved with their own children why can't you develop a group for those parents who have the time to donate the time to kids whose parents don't have time...And it's not even time sometimes. Some parents are on the same education level as their child." -- Philadelphia parent

"It's not just the parents, it's the whole community." -- Houston teacher

"Just like I think we should take into consideration the individual needs of the individual children, we also need to take into account the needs of the parents. Even though we really wish it was like it used to be and all that, it's really not. So if we could have different kinds of parent things and to help the parents and bring them up to where are standards are." -- Houston teacher

"A parents return to school program...be in the school where they can learn the things their students are learning, refresh themselves, become familiar with the language. Whatever they need." -- Houston teacher

"Some of the things their kids are doing in school they can't do. They can't help them with those skills and they really would like some help to help their child." -- Houston teacher

"It would be a good thing just at certain levels to explain to parents what techniques you're using." -- Houston parent

"You have some parents who didn't finish school. You have parents who can't even read." -- Houston parent

Alternate sites

"The only solution that I can see is to go ahead and keep kids who are on track or within a few years of track at their home school and then to make alternative sites, alternative schools for kids who are off track -- letting them move into a much slower paced program." -- Houston teacher

"When you get into high school and not elementary and middle school, would you want your child going to school with someone who's an adult and thinks like an adult and you have a ninth grader with a twenty-one year old. So, I think there should be a program for them; but I don't think they should be in high school." -- Philadelphia parent

"Just like they have magnet schools they can have special education school." -- Philadelphia parent

"A school where they hire teachers who can teach them because I think the average teacher can't." -- Philadelphia parent

"They should be able to get a child who will not do, who is a problem, out. They should not have to deal with it." -- Philadelphia parent

"We could do charter schools that focus on one way that children learn or you could do the format system in which every way the child learns the child is exposed to. Alternative school does not need to have a negative connotation." -- Houston teacher

"It could be an alternate site on campus." -- Houston teacher

"They expect for the teacher to take her time out from twenty to twenty-five kids to modify this student here, to help this student... the teacher, she just can't take time out just because this student is not on grade level!..." -- Houston parent

"Send him to a different school and have a specialized school for kids with learning problems." -- Houston parent

"Alternate education...like trade school." -- Houston parent

"I think they should have a center: a special place where they concentrate on whatever..." -- Houston parent

Retain at what age?

"If they could do something prior to high school, that's different." -- Philadelphia parent

"I think the problem becomes the more years you promote someone, the more years you do that, you can't retain them because you compound the problem every year as that child falls farther and farther behind and we are not going to accomplish anything. If you don't do it in the beginning and get that child up to speed, you go six, seven, eight years and each year they lose more and more." -- Philadelphia parent

"It's usually going to start in the lower grades." -- Philadelphia teacher

"There is another break point -- it seems to be between sixth, seventh, eighth grade where adolescence kicks in and I see, especially a lot of boys, are getting left down during that period of time because of the changes and so forth that they must be going through. So, there's more to it than just academics there's a whole physiological and psychological thing going on here that impacts on the kids and that is not being addressed." -- Philadelphia teachers

"When you are [grades] one to three or one to four these are not things kids think about. But moving from fifth to sixth -- it becomes a social thing." -- Houston parent

Retention and its connection to dropping out

"We have fewer children drop out if we can keep them into school... that's what I keep hearing: that if we keep them with their group they will stay in school longer." -- Houston teacher

"When those kids get retained then they get in High School and they are nineteen, twenty years old!" -- Houston teachers

"There is also a psychological factor when you fail.. It can be so detrimental to you...That failing could ruin a child's whole life." -- Philadelphia teacher

"I think [social promotion] at the higher level, it deters drop outs." -- Houston parent

"It seems to me that this practice of retaining the child one or two years can really affect the student a lot because, logically, his classmates pass and he is left behind, I think that that can affect the child a lot, psychologically. And in the future he could say that he's leaving school, because he doesn't want to feel ashamed that all of his classmates passed on to the next grade while he was left behind. Me, I think that it's something that a child at this age, who wants to be popular, I think there is a large emphasis on the child's psychological state and what is done." -- LEP parent

Other options

"Is there another alternative? Can't you intervene before retention and can you extend time periods so you spend more time with these children? Does it [retention] have to be your only option?" -- Houston teacher

"What I would rather see, instead of socially promoting this child, is like you're saying, the other alternative. There should be other alternatives for... the ones who are too old and shouldn't be in there because they might hurt the little ones and the others one when he's really trying hard and just isn't quite there. He's not quite ready to go to the

next grade so he shouldn't really go to the next grade. There should be some alternative like summer school, where he can go and pick it up and then go to the next grade..." -- Philadelphia teacher

"It is not a solution. There have to be other alternative places for students to meet the standards and the benchmarks." -- Philadelphia teacher.

Funding

"It's reconsidering and looking at things again and rerouting it." -- Philadelphia teacher

Feasibility of solutions

"I don't think any of these on an individual basis is going to solve the problems. They're all pieces of the puzzle that can be put together and collectively they might answer the problem. But I don't think any one of these is going to answer the problem in and of itself." -- Philadelphia teacher

"It depends on how they prioritize it. For me it would be a priority." -- Houston teacher

"It's more expensive, but we're growing. There are more people here now than we have had in the past. We are growing...everyone is coming here. There is more money." -- LEP parent

Class size

"Nobody would object to it, that's for sure!" -- Philadelphia teacher

"I think a big issue is class size. Until classes are made smaller...so many other things could be put into place if the class size was smaller." -- Philadelphia teacher

"Class size is not the answer to everything, though...Adjusting class size in and of itself is not the answer. There are a lot more parts to it" -- Philadelphia teacher

"I think with the stream of children that's coming through schools now you need smaller classes because they need more attention to be able to learn. And the teacher doesn't really have the opportunity to get those who really need her help because she has thirty-five kids." -- Philadelphia parent

"When there are more students you have a higher chance of disciplinary problems." -- Philadelphia parent

"It's not a cure-all." -- Houston parent

"It should be kept in the forefront." -- Houston parent

"Smaller classes is more individuality." -- Houston parent

"There isn't enough time...for each course, to explain and answer questions and keep order, or explain something if there is a problem. There isn't enough time." -- LEP parent

Assessment and developing new testing

"It has no purpose. We see no benefit. That's where I come from." -- Philadelphia teacher

"The school district uses it for funding purposes." -- Philadelphia teacher

"They don't have to develop them, they already exist...the stuff is out there. There don't need to reinvent the wheel." -- Philadelphia teacher

"The only reservation I have is some students don't test well. They may be a very good student but they don't test well..." -- Philadelphia parent

"It really depends on the child's environment, it depends on what district you are in. I don't think we can make a general, blanket statement like one test for all tenth graders." -- Philadelphia parent

"We want our children to be successful and a lot of things that make them successful in the world cannot be tested on a traditional test. So we need to look, and see." -- Houston teacher

"I'm so tired of testing these kids! They've been tested, tested, tested!" -- Houston teacher

"And experienced teacher knows within a week what that child's weaknesses are. Better diagnostic testing may or may not be beneficial. It may just take up more time." -- Houston teacher

"At the high school level we have the Stanford 9 test, the TOS test, the end of course exams for biology, algebra, etc. And to add another test when we have lost so much instructional time already may not be beneficial for the students." -- Houston teacher

"Sometimes, the children suffer from dyslexia, and they can't learn--they can't. With all of them, in Kindergarten, in first and second grade, and they can't. And the teacher repeats that they can every two years, three years the child is there, and nobody ever knew that the child had dyslexia. And they deal with these children, and they acquire problems because nobody ever thought... 'Oh! What's happening with this child?'" -- LEP parent

Early childhood programs

"That's an excellent, excellent idea." -- Philadelphia teacher

"I think by the time they get into first grade they would be ready to learn." -- Philadelphia parent

"I think it would have a long-term effect because it would let them mature a little more." -- Philadelphia parent

"Some of the parents now don't take the time with their children...this kind of program would help a lot." -- Houston teacher

"If a child starts out in Head Start, by the time they get to third grade they pretty much have it." -- Houston parent

"A lot of them [early childhood programs] are like baby-sitting...There's no education in there at all. It's like daycare." -- Houston parent

"They can teach them other things, like how to behave. Because when they are very small, sometimes if there are a lot of children, and they are in a program, they can learn how to behave themselves, or listen to someone, or how to act with a group, all of this. This is important in the program." -- LEP parent

Ability grouping

"It's like tutoring and mentoring...and all that other stuff." -- Philadelphia teacher

"It starts with ability grouping but the movement, especially at the middle school, is toward heterogeneous grouping." -- Philadelphia teacher

"It's just not the PC thing right now though it's been done for years and may come back." -- Philadelphia teacher

"Some children might put a stigma on those children..." -- Philadelphia parent

"We do that sort of thing and it's been really successful." -- Houston teacher

"I don't think they should be isolated. I think the young adults should be identified and possibly place, the ones that [are] almost on the same level, together so they don't feel inferior. Those should be taken out of the normal classroom." -- Houston parent

"They do that a lot." -- Houston parent

"It's realistic. Ours already does it." -- Houston parent

Special populations

"There are a lot of the same strategies we use." -- Philadelphia teacher

"...my son had a teacher, but the teacher moved and he didn't have a teacher. And they had to wait a month or more for a bilingual teacher because they didn't have one. And he was falling behind in his classes." -- LEP parent

Extra help

"Remedial programs, things that get the student up to grade." -- Philadelphia parent

"Sometimes their achievement is based on their relationship with their teacher and so a new teacher can cause them to excel." -- Philadelphia parent

"We've been trying to beef up the program. One of the things we have this year that works nicely and supports those people who are having such a hard time is a one-on-one reading program." -- Houston teacher

"There are jump-start programs for kids who are borderline...so for a child that has been retained, get them the extra help they need and it will maybe get them back on grade level." -- Houston teacher

"...if the mother is informed about the programs that the school has that they can find out about...I think that the schools have a lot of programs, that if the children investigated them from the beginning, they're going to make use of them..." -- LEP parent

Summer school

"They were able to go to summer school, to kind of make it up and then they went to Star Academy for the first semester. If they tested out, they were sent on with their class." -- Houston teacher

"We need to include transportation in that. One of the problems with the programs now is that transportation is not extended to the children who need it." -- Houston teacher

After-school programs

"You tell a child to stay off the corner and get an education but what are you giving them afterwards...they don't have anything interesting to do. They [are] in school all day and you want something to do afterwards." -- Philadelphia parent

"They get that help they didn't get while they were in school." -- Houston parent

Multi-age grouping

"I taught in a school that was ungraded for three years and it was not successful...And the parents could not handle it at all." -- Houston teacher

"I think it's going to be a hard community sell." -- Houston teacher

"I think kids need to be with their peers...Socially a fourteen year old doesn't belong with a ten year old or a nine year old." -- Houston parent

"Maybe that happened in days past, in a one room schoolhouse." -- Houston parent

"It does happen in high school." -- Houston parent

Professional development

"Teach the teachers how to handle certain problems...the kids are different than they were when we were kids. So they can't use the tactics they used in the '50s." -- Philadelphia parent

Presidential role

"The President says that education is very important and he is putting a couple of policies in that he felt were important to education and I think that if he promotes it then the rest of the people down the ladder will fall in place with it if he really lets them know that it's important to help our children better themselves." -- Philadelphia parent

Other

"The school and the surrounding area -- you have people hanging out around the area, around the schools. And sometimes its not heated right...And when you get into warmer days they have to open the windows and there is stuff going on outside." -- Philadelphia parent

"The ratio of student to counselor should be real low. Not 700 to one." -- Philadelphia parent

"Put an extra teacher in there, or a teacher aide." -- Houston parent

"Talk to the children. Ask them what's on their mind." -- Houston parent

Appendix D: Handout

For English dominant groups

Name: _____

Date: _____

- a. Reducing class size. _____
- b. Setting challenging academic standards for students and outlining specific proficiency levels expected of all students. _____
- c. Developing better testing so teachers and principals can identify problems earlier and use that information more effectively to identify and address student needs. _____
- d. Creating more early childhood programs such as Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start so that preschoolers are prepared to learn when they come to Kindergarten and first grade. _____
- e. Providing summer school, tutoring, or after-school programs for students who need extra help. _____
- f. Using different grouping strategies such as multi-age classes or ungraded schools. _____
- g. Ability grouping, that is leaving children who are having trouble in their grade, but pulling them out periodically during the day to address their individual instructional needs. _____
- h. Creating programs that help families develop skills to help their children with homework, discipline and other developmental needs. _____

For Spanish dominant group

Nombre: _____

Fecha: _____

- a. Reducir el número de estudiantes por clase. _____
- b. Dar a conocer de antemano los niveles de desempeño y estándares académicos que cada estudiante debe alcanzar. _____
- c. Desarrollar técnicas de evaluación que permitan a los profesores y directores identificar los problemas que enfrentan el estudiante y responder a sus necesidades. _____
- d. Establecer un mayor número de programas a nivel preescolar que proporcionen las herramientas necesarias para que al ingresar al Kindergarten o primer año escolar. _____
- e. Provenir escuelas de verano, tutores, o cursos extras, después del día escolar, para los estudiantes que necesitan ayuda especial. _____
- f. Utilizar estrategias diferentes para agrupar a los estudiantes, por ejemplo clases con edades mixtas. _____
- g. Agruparse de habilidades, es decir, mantener en el curso a estudiantes con dificultades y ofrecerles asistencia adicional a través de reuniones periódicas en las que se acometen sus necesidades de aprendizaje. _____
- h. Crear programas de capacitación para enseñar a la familia a apoyar al estudiante en sus tareas, en disciplina, y en otras necesidades de desarrollo. _____