Elementary Principals' Views about Struggling Students: Insights about Perceived Interventions Including Grade Retention

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Abstract: *This descriptive study sought to understand elementary principals' beliefs about interventions for struggling students, including grade retention. An online survey was sent to 420 elementary administrators in two Rocky Mountain states. Results indicated that principals believed they struggled most in providing support to students who had poor attendance, had poor family support, and displayed poor behavior. They also indicated that neither policy nor general concern about future failure should drive grade retention. Additionally, they believed that teachers' work with struggling students is the most powerful way to prevent retention and that parent involvement is the most important way to support grade promotion and prevent retention. Finally, the principals reported considering multiple data measures in making decisions to retain students, and some principals described a systematic process in making the decision to retain students.*
Keywords: *grade retention, grade repetition, principals' attitudes, struggling students*

Grade retention, which is defined as requiring low performing students to repeat a grade, is commonly used in school districts or states that have high stakes promotion policies and is used to deter social promotion, the advancing of students to the next higher grade based on age rather than mastery of skills (Authors, 2011b; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Greene & Winters, 2007; Murray, Woodruff, & Vaughn, 2010). Although grade retention has historical roots in American schooling and has resurfaced due to state accountability systems (Fuhrman, Perry, & Shinn, 2013; Warren & Saliba, 2012), weak empirical evidence supports its use (Hughes, Kwok, & Im, 2013) and researchers argue grade retention is an ineffective, expensive intervention (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008; Bowman-Perrott, 2010; Ehmke, Dreschsel, & Carstensen, 2010; Jimerson, 2001; Tingle, Schoeneberger, & Algozzine, 2012). Estimates suggest nearly 450,000 first through eighth grade students are retained each school year (Warren & Saliba, 2012) and one in four students are considered for retention each year (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004; Dombek & Connor, 2012). The vast majority of retentions occur in the elementary grades because of state accountability policies and the supportive beliefs of elementary educators that perceive grade retention as a beneficial intervention for low

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performing students (Authors, 2011a; Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004).

The persistence of the use of grade retention despite the abundance of negative research findings (Abbott et al., 2010; Burkam, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Hong & Yu, 2007) suggests its practice is aligned to the attitudes of educators about its cognitive and social impact on low performing students (Bonvin et al., 2008). Past research suggests classroom teachers or school sites typically initiate grade retention (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004) and, as a result, future research should attempt to uncover why practitioners continue to recommend retention for low performing students (Biegler, 2000). Furthermore, because principals serve as instructional leaders for schools (Zepeda, 2007), understanding their views about grade retention and interventions for struggling learners is an important line of research (Bowman-Perrott, 2010; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Murray et al., 2010; Sansosti, Noltemeyer, & Goss, 2010). In sum, this study attempts to highlight the attitudes of elementary principals in two Rocky Mountain States about struggling students and interventions to aide those students, including grade retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on the effectiveness of grade retention in improving students' academic and social-emotional competencies is not conclusive (Chen, Liu, Zhang, Shi, & Rozelle, 2010; Jimerson, 2001; Martin, 2009; Peterson & Hughes, 2011). Some researchers suggest that retention has been found to reduce students' academic achievement (Byrd & Weitzman, 1994; Dombek & Conner, 2012; Silberglitt et al., 2006; Westbury, 1994), increase behavior problems (Hagborg, Masella, Palladino, & Shepardson, 1991; Jimerson, 1999), and accelerate students' chances of dropping out of school (Jimerson, 1999; Poland, 2009; Rumberger, 1995). Additionally, Jimerson (1999) reported that grade retention lessens the financial earnings of retainees into adulthood and Ou and Reynolds (2010) suggested that retention decreases rates of enrollment in post secondary education. Finally, Hughes et al. (2013) reported that early grade retention negatively impacted parents' educational expectations for retained students which might have long-term consequences for students' academic trajectories.

However, other researchers have argued grade retention benefits students academically, especially in passing state standardized tests (Greene & Winters, 2007, 2009; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Researchers have reported grade retention does not harm students' self concept (Hong & Yu, 2008) and might actually improve self concept and sense of school belonging (McCoy & Reynolds, 1992; Wu et al., 2010).

Although researchers tend to disagree on the consequences of grade retention, many concur that past grade retention studies have flawed research designs (Allen, Chen, Willson, & Hughes, 2009; Hong & Yu, 2008; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). The primary shortcoming of previous research designs is difficulty in creating adequate control groups with which to compare retained students' progress (Greene & Winters, 2007). Wu et al. (2010) highlighted this problem by stating:

> Because students are not randomly assigned to the intervention [retention or promotion], a failure to adequately control for pre-existing differences between retained and promoted students that may affect students' academic and social trajectories leaves open the possibility that pre-existing vulnerabilities rather than retention may be the cause of postretention outcomes. (p. 135)

Another problem with grade retention research designs is the predominance of other factors that might affect the outcomes of retention decisions, which might be hidden from researchers

(Wu et al., 2008). Although educators typically make decisions to retain students based on non-mastery of curriculum standards (Picklo & Christenson, 2005), students are retained for other reasons such as behavior issues and immaturity (Authors, 2011a; Hong & Yu, 2008; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). In other words, educators sometimes make subjective retention recommendations based on their beliefs about struggling students (Greene & Winters, 2007; Wu et al., 2008).

Some teachers suggest that grade retention is an appropriate intervention for underperforming students (Authors, 2011b; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004). At the elementary level, teachers' attitudes about grade retention are based more on short term positive outcomes some see after retaining a student, making the intervention appear successful (Xia & Glennie, 2005). However, as students move into the secondary grades, teachers report that grade retention negatively impacts students' trajectories (Authors, 2011a; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

Witmer et al. (2004) found teachers in general believed grade retention was an effective practice and kindergarten through second grade teachers were more positive about grade retention than upper elementary teachers. Finally, Authors (2012) reported elementary teachers believed grade retention prevented future failure, motivated students to attend school, and increased parent motivation to academically support their children. These findings underscore "the widely held belief [of teachers] that retention is better for students in earlier grades than it is for students in later grades" (Witmer et al., 2004, p. 185). Tomchin and Impara (1992) hypothesized primary grade teachers believe young or immature students must master basic skills before they are promoted to the next grade and teachers typically cite school academic performance, ability, or immaturity as primary rationales for supporting grade retention (Author, 2009; Authors, 2011b; Witmer et al., 2005).

Understanding principals' perceptions about interventions for students is important because their views might hold promise in understanding "how student risk can best be minimized" (Johnson, 1997, p. 446). Grade retention and principal beliefs are connected because principals serve as instructional leaders for schools mentoring teachers in addressing how instruction and intervention plans for students who struggle help teachers consider how all students can learn (Rooney, 2008). Principals convey their vision about how to best support low performing students through their interactions with and support provided to teachers (Green, 2010; May & Supovitz, 2011; Zepeda, 2007).

Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) reported half the principals in their study perceived grade retention as beneficial and indicated principals believed early grade retention was preferred to later grade retention. Principals reported that low academic performance was the primary rationale for grade retention followed closely by student immaturity and students' innate ability (Author, 2009; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Similarly, Murray et al. (2010) concluded principals made retention decisions based on students' assessment data, parental input, and grades. Both Authors (2009) and Cannon and Lipscomp (2011) found principals perceived parental involvement as the most effective intervention in reducing grade retention. More specifically, Cannon and Lipscomb reported principals believed communicating with the parents of low performing students early in the school year was critical in setting up systematic academic supports for students. Finally, early identification, especially when administered within a tiered format, like Response to Intervention (RTI), has been valued by principals as a solution to reducing grade retention rates (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Murray et al., 2010).

METHOD

The goal of this study was to illuminate the attitudes of elementary principals in two Rocky Mountain States concerning grade retention and interventions that might deter its use. Neither state had mandatory grade retention statutes. Three research questions guided the inquiry:

1. What are elementary principals' beliefs about their experiences with struggling students?
2. What are elementary principals' attitudes about grade retention and grade promotion?
3. What are elementary principals' attitudes about interventions for struggling students?

This study followed a descriptive format and used an online survey to measure elementary principals' attitudes. Principals' email addresses were downloaded from both Rocky Mountain states' department of educations' websites. An email with the link to the online survey was sent to a large convenience sample of elementary principals in a two western states (N=420), of which, 105 responded to the online survey, yielding a response rate of 25%. See appendix A for a copy of the email invitation.

INSTRUMENT

The online survey (see Appendix B) used in data collection was adapted with permission from a previous study (DelConte, 2011) and contained four main sections. Section one used a Likert scale (1=negative experience to 5=positive experience) to measure principals' attitudes concerning the academic success of students who displayed various characteristics, all of which are risk factors for retention (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Tingle et al., 2012). As a result, the purpose of this section was to find out which types of at-risk students principals struggled with the most. Student characteristics included: (a) struggles in reading, (b) struggles in mathematics, (c) young for grade, (d) small physical size, (e) poor family support, (f) English language learner, (g) poor attendance, (h) poor behavior, (i) immature, and (j) low IQ.

Section two of the survey included 14 Likert scaled (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) items designed to measure principals' attitudes concerning statements about grade retention or grade promotion. Eight items measured principals' attitudes about grade retention and included items such as retention prevents future failure, children young for grade are candidates for grade retention, and grade retention should be policy. Conversely, in section three, six items measured principals' perceptions about grade promotion and included items such as looping and multi-age classrooms deter students from being retained and experienced teachers who modify instruction prevent students from grade retention.

Section four asked principals to select one or more interventions, including grade retention, which might be used for students with characteristics described within section one of the survey. Finally, the survey concluded with general demographic questions designed to describe the sample as well as three open-ended questions. The first open-ended question asked principals to describe their school's plan to deal with students who were candidates for grade retention. The second open ended question asked principals about the history and current status of grade retention in their school. The final open ended question asked principals to describe factors they consider before retaining students.

PARTICIPANTS

Sixty-two percent of the respondents were female and 38% were male. Eighty nine percent of respondents were principals while 11% were assistant/vice principals. Respondents' years of administrative experience averaged 10.13 years, with a range of one to 30 years. Their years of teaching experience averaged 12.16, with a range of one to 36 years. Respondents reported their

school size as follows: (a) 88% worked in a school serving more than 300 students, (b) 8% worked in a school serving 201-300 students, (c) 3% worked in a school serving 101-200 students, and (d) 1% worked in a school serving 100 or less students. Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated their schools retained 5% or fewer students annually. Finally, 52% of respondents indicated their schools had specific plans to deal with students who were retained while 48% did not.

FINDINGS

Data was analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive analysis included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and inferential analysis included one-way repeated measures Analysis of Variance. Respondents' answers to the three open-ended items were open and axial coded by the researchers to create themes and coding was done individually and then together to ensure researcher agreement about the codes. Findings are organized by each research question.

BELIEFS ABOUT STRUGGLING STUDENTS

To establish which types of at-risk students principals struggled the most in providing support to, principals were asked to evaluate their experiences with students exhibiting the following characteristics: (a) struggles in reading, (b) struggles in math, (c) young for grade, (d) small physical size, (e) poor family support, (f) English language learner, (g) poor attendance, (h) poor behavior, (i) immature, and (j) low IQ. Table 1 displays principals' attitudes about their experiences with various types of students.

Table 1. *Elementary Principals Perceived Experiences with Types of Students*

	Type of Experience					
Type of Student	Negative %(n)	Somewhat negative %(n)	Neutral %(n)	Somewhat positive %(n)	Positive % (n)	No experience %(n)
Struggles in reading	20% (21)	41% (42)	11% (11)	15% (15)	14% (14)	0
Struggles in math	7% (7)	50% (51)	14% (14)	19% (19)	11% (11)	0
Young for grade	4% (4)	28% (29)	48% (49)	14% (14)	6% (6)	0
Small physical size	1% (1)	15% (15)	65% (67)	9% (9)	10% (10)	1% (1)
Poor family support	20% (21)	55% (57)	12% (12)	4% (4)	9% (9)	0
English language learner	1% (1)	38% (39)	28% (29)	13% (13)	18% (19)	2% (2)
Poor attendance	47% (48)	34% (35)	12% (12)	3% (3)	5% (5)	0
Poor behavior	37% (38)	37% (38)	13% (13)	6% (6)	6% (6)	1% (1)
Immature	8% (8)	52% (54)	29% (30)	8% (8)	3% (3)	0
Low IQ	13% (13)	36% (37)	34% (35)	7% (7)	11% (11)	0

Note. N=103

Overall, principals perceived their experiences were negative or somewhat negative with students who exhibited poor attendance (81%; n= 83), had poor family support (75%; n=78), displayed poor behavior (74%; n=76), struggled in reading (61%; N=63), were immature (60%; n=62), or struggled in math (57%; n=58). Sixty five percent (n=67) of principals indicated they had neither a negative or positive experience with students who exhibited small physical size.

Finally, a small number of principals perceived somewhat positive or positive experiences with English language learners (31%; n=32), students who struggled in math (30%; n=30), or students who struggled in reading (29%; n=29).

ATTITUDES ABOUT GRADE RETENTION

Principals were asked to respond to eight Likert items (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) concerning their perceptions about grade retention. In order to control for a Type 1 error, a one-way repeated measures analysis examined overall differences among item means. Because Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity was rejected, the Greenhouse-Geisser statistic was used for the repeated measures analysis. The statistics showed that there were differences among the eight measures of grade promotion, $F(5.35, 491.73) = 15.10$, $p<.001$. See Table 2 for Ns, means, and standard deviations of the eight items.

Table 2. *Elementary Principals' Attitudes about Grade Retention*

Item	N	M	SD
#1: Students who begin school with birth-dates close to the cut-off date are candidates for retention. (Cut-off)	98	2.67	1.07
#2: Students with no preschool experience are candidates for retention. (No preschool)	97	2.33	0.98
#3: Students who are immature should be retained. (Immaturity)	98	2.00	0.77
#4: Grade retention should be policy for students not performing at grade level. (Policy)	99	1.73	0.90
#5: Students with poor attendance should be retained. (Poor attendance)	98	2.20	0.95
#6: Students with poor academic performance in multiple areas should be retained. (Poor academic performance)	98	2.42	0.91
#7: Grade retention is an effective means for preventing future failure. (Future failure)	97	1.96	0.97
#8: Retention is mostly caused by factors outside the school's control (i.e. socioeconomic status, parental involvement, student's IQ). (Outside factors)	98	2.44	1.03

Note. Scale values are 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

Follow-up pairwise comparisons (LSD) yielded significant differences between 9 of the 28 comparisons. A Bonferroni adjustment was used to control for Type I errors, resulting in an alpha level of .002 (.05/28) for each comparison. Principals agreed significantly more strongly that children with birthdates close to the cut-off date, children without preschool experience, children who are immature, children with poor attendance, children who perform poorly academically, or children who are negatively impacted by factors outside the school are better candidates for retention compared to retention decisions that are made based on school or district policy related to poor academic performance (ps<.001). Also, principals agreed more strongly that children with birthdates close to the cut-off date, children with poor academic performance, or children who are negatively impacted by factors outside the school are better candidates for retention compared to making retention decisions as a way to prevent future failure (*ps* <.001). In other words, making retention decisions based on policy or to prevent future failure are the two reasons least agreeable to the principals.

BELIEFS ABOUT GRADE PROMOTION

Principals were asked to respond to six Likert items (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) concerning their perceptions about grade promotion. In order to control for a Type 1 error, a one-way repeated measures analysis examined overall differences among item means. Because Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity was rejected, the Greenhouse-Geisser statistic was used for the repeated measures analysis. The statistic showed that there were differences among the six measures of grade promotion, $F(4.36, 375.34) = 11.86$, $p<.001$. See Table 3 for Ns, means, and standard deviations of the eight items.

Table 3. *Elementary Principals' Attitudes about Grade Promotion*

Item	N	M	SD
#1: Experienced teachers are less likely to retain students. (Experienced teachers)	97	3.13	1.06
#2: Teachers can do a lot to help a struggling student from being retained. (Struggling students)	97	4.51	0.69
#3: Teachers who modify instruction are less likely to retain students. (Modify instruction)	97	4.03	0.92
#4: Teachers should seek out additional resources to prevent students from being retained. (Additional resources)	99	4.65	0.50
#5: Looping prevents students from being retained. (Looping)	98	3.34	0.84
#6: Multi-age classrooms are effective at keeping students from being retained. (Multi-age classrooms)	98	3.01	0.75

Note. Scale values are 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Follow-up pairwise comparisons (LSD) yielded significant differences among 11 of the 15 comparisons. A Bonferroni adjustment was used to control for Type I errors, resulting in an alpha level of .003 (.05/15) for each comparison. Principals agreed significantly more strongly that teachers who help struggling students, who modify instruction, or who find extra resources for students will help prevent retention compared to students having experienced teachers (*ps* <.001). Principals agreed significantly more strongly that teachers who help struggling students or use additional resources will help prevent retention more than teachers who modify instruction or use looping (*ps* <.001). Finally, principals agreed significantly more strongly that modifying instruction or using additional resources is more effective at preventing retention compared to the use of multi-age classrooms (*ps* <.001). In other words, according to the principals, the efforts that a teacher gives to a student who is struggling is more effective in preventing retention compared to teacher or classroom characteristics.

BELIEFS ABOUT INTERVENTIONS

Principals were asked to select interventions they deemed most appropriate for struggling students with the following characteristics: (a) young compared to other children in the same grade, (b) physical development delayed in comparison to peers, (c) social, emotional and/or behavioral difficulties, (d) poor academic performance or low ability, (e) poor attendance, (f) English language learner, and (g) not motivated. Principals could select one or more of the following interventions: (a) retain, (b) involve parents, (c) refer to special education, (d) provide additional reading time, (e) arrange for tutoring, (f) develop individualized learning plan, and (g) require summer school. Table 4 displays principals' attitudes about the most appropriate interventions for various types of struggling students.

Overwhelmingly, the intervention selected the most by principals for all types of students was *parent involvement* (N=624) and principals selected parent involvement more often regardless of student characteristics. The types of students principals believed parental involvement helped the most were students with *social, emotional, or behavior issues* (N=93), *students with poor attendance* (N=93), and *students who were not motivated* (N=93). Principals selected *developing individualized learning plans* (N=422) as the second most appropriate intervention followed by *additional reading time* (N=325). The intervention selected the least by principals was grade retention (N=50).

Table 4. *Elementary Principals Selected Interventions for Types of Students*

	Interventions						
Type of Student	Retain (N)	Involve parents (N)	Special education (N)	Additional reading (N)	Tutoring (N)	Individualized learning plan (N)	Summer school (N)
Young for grade	13	90	2	66	44	60	19
Physical delay	8	80	13	23	23	48	6
Social, emotional, behavior issues	6	93	30	20	21	73	8
Poor academics	10	88	49	81	74	81	37
Poor attendance	9	93	1	25	24	34	40
English language learner	1	87	3	80	64	64	35
Not motivated	3	93	5	30	31	62	19
TOTAL	50	624	103	325	281	422	164

Note. N=95; respondents could select more than 1 intervention for each type of student

OPEN-ENDED ITEMS

Principals were asked three open-ended questions to solicit more information about factors they consider when retaining students, the current status of retention trends in their schools, and their school plans for dealing with students who might be retained. First, principals were asked what factors they considered when making decisions to retain students. Ninety two elementary principals responded to this question. Overwhelmingly, principals reported they looked at a *body of evidence* when making the decision to retain students. Principals mentioned parental support for grade retention and mentioned the academic performance, maturity, attendance, age, size, and socio-emotional well-being of students.

Second, principals were asked whether grade retention rates had increased, decreased, or remained constant in their schools over the past few years and to explain. Ninety three elementary principals responded to this question. The majority of principals stated grade retention had remained relatively constant. For example, one principal stated, "Retentions have remained the same which is relatively low. The few that have been done in early grades have

not made much difference by the time [students] get to upper grades." Principals who believed grade retentions in their schools had decreased attributed this to adopting the RTI model. For example, one principal argued, "Decreased. We use the RTI process to consider the issues behind the difficulties rather than issue a blanket policy for all children."

Finally, 47 principals indicated their schools had plans for dealing with students who were candidates for grade retention and all 47 briefly described their plans. Principals primarily described a plan that included frequent meetings with teachers (current and future) as well as parents. At these meetings, principals explained that the team looked at student data to determine the best course of action for a student's academic trajectory. For example, one principal described the process by saying, "Teachers notify the principal by the end of January, fill out retention profile/paperwork and gather data, meet with the principal to review options, decision is finalized by April and family receives support of school counselor." More than one principal also described using Light's Retention Scale as a tool for making an informed decision about grade retention. Finally, several principals mentioned RTI as the primary method by which interventions were provided to students, ultimately leading in the decision to retain.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary principals' attitudes in two Rocky Mountain States about the characteristics of struggling students and interventions used to support those students, including grade retention. Specifically, we focused on elementary principals' beliefs about their experiences with struggling students, elementary principals' attitudes about grade retention and grade promotion, and elementary principals' attitudes about interventions for struggling students. Findings can be summarized in five general areas: (1) principals believed they struggled most in providing support to students who had poor attendance, had poor family support, and displayed poor behavior; (2) principals believed policy or general concern about future failure should not drive retention; (3) principals believed teachers' work with struggling students is the most powerful way to prevent retention; (4) parent involvement is the most important way to support grade promotion and prevent retention, and (5) principals reported considering multiple data measures in making decisions to retain students, and for those schools that had a process, described a systematic process in making the decision to retain students. The current study suggests that principals do not view retention as the most effective intervention for struggling students and instead illuminates principals' perceptions of the importance of effective teachers in supporting students who may be in danger of retention. Moreover, in line with other studies (Author, 2009; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011), principals reported that parental involvement was the most effective intervention for students displaying at-risk traits. Unlike Murray et al. (2010), the majority of principals believed grade retention rates in their schools had remained constant over the past few years. However, similar to Murray et al., principals who reported that grade retention rates in their schools had decreased attributed this to the RTI framework. When asked to describe the factors they consider when making a decision to retain students, principals described factors consistent with other studies such as parental support, academic achievement, maturity, and socio-emotional well being (Authors, 2009; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Murray et al. 2010; Witmer et al., 2004). Principals described their plans to deal with possible student retentions as a process of two-way communication with parents in which multiple data points and perspectives were considered before administering grade retention.

SUMMARY

The findings from this study, when synthesized with previous literature, provide recommendations for practicing principals. As with other studies (Author, 2009; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Murray et al. 2010), educators continue to view parental involvement as a promising intervention for struggling students, especially those in danger of grade retention. Grant (1997) described parental involvement's influence on grade retention by stating:

> When a child's parents agree that retention is in the best interests of the child, and the parents are then willing to provide emotional support and help with school work, the child is far more likely to adjust well and achieve academic success. (p. 77)

Parents need meaningful ways to participate in school processes so they understand the link between standards, assessment, and learning as well as ways they can help their child be successful in school. Principals have a responsibility to help teachers to provide guidance and support for parents, particularly parents of struggling students.

Finally, 48% of principals reported their schools had no formal plan to assist students who were retained, indicating that instruction and interventions for these students may not vary much from their retention year. As a result, our findings support others (Dombek & Connor, 2012; Gersten et al., 2008; Hartman & Fay, 1996; Tingle et al., 2012) who argue that school and district leaders should do more to advocate for policies that promote the RTI framework rather than mandate grade retention. To implement RTI with quality and fidelity, school and district leaders might enlist the help of professional development specialists to ensure those delivering the interventions receive adequate training and resources (Bowman-Perrott, 2010; Murray et al., 2010).

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APPENDIX A – EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Principals,

We are interesting in learning about your views of retention for students in the elementary grades. Specifically, we are wondering about your perceptions of the characteristics of students who are at-risk for poor academic performance as well as your beliefs about retention, promotion, and interventions.

If you are interested in participating, please be assured that you will be completely anonymous. We will only share the combined responses of all of the principals who complete the survey. And if you decide later to discontinue your participation, simply close your web browser and your responses will not be saved.

We hope that what we learn from you will help others who are interested in the advantages and disadvantages of retention. The potential risk for you is minimal; one risk might be that some of the questions on the survey cause you to feel uncomfortable.

Thanks so much for your consideration and participation. If you have questions about the study, please contact one of us. And if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the university's IRB administrator.

[link is here]

[Author information is here]

APPENDIX B – ONLINE SURVEY

Elementary Principals' Beliefs about Retention in the Primary Grades

Section One

On a scale from 1 (very negative experience) to 5 (very positive experience), please indicate your general experiences with students who have the following characteristics. If you have no experience, please check the appropriate box.

Struggles in reading
Struggles in math
Young for grade
Small physical size
Poor family support
English language learner
Poor attendance

Poor behavior
Immature
Low IQ

<u>Section Two</u>
Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about retention, using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#1: Students who begin school with birth-dates close to the cut-off date are candidates for retention.
#2: Students with no preschool experience are candidates for retention.
#3: Students who are immature should be retained.
#4: Grade retention should be policy for students not performing at grade level.
#5: Students with poor attendance should be retained.
#6: Students with poor academic performance in multiple areas should be retained.
#7: Grade retention is an effective means for preventing future failure.
#8: Retention is mostly caused by factors outside the school's control (i.e. socioeconomic status, parental involvement, student's IQ).

<u>Section Three</u>
Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about promotion, using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#1: Experienced teachers are less likely to retain students.
#2: Teachers can do a lot to help a struggling student from being retained.
#3: Teachers who modify instruction are less likely to retain students.
#4: Teachers should seek out additional resources to prevent students from being retained.
#5: Looping prevents students from being retained.
#6: Multi-age classrooms are effective at keeping students from being retained.

<u>Section Four</u>
For each of the following characteristics of young childhood, please choose the interventions you believe are the most appropriate from the following interventions:

(a) retain, (b) involve parents, (c) refer to special education, (d) provide additional reading time, (e) arrange for tutoring, (f) develop individualized learning plan, and (g) require summer school.

Young for grade
Physical delay
Social, emotional, behavior issues
Poor academics
Poor attendance
English language learner
Not motivated

<u>Demographics and open-ended questions</u>

How many students are in your building?
What is the percent of students who are typically retained each year?
Does your school have a specific plan to deal with retained students?
What is your position?
What is your gender?
How many years of administrative experience do you have?
How many years of teaching experience do you have?

What factors do you consider when making decisions to retain students?
Do you believe student retentions have increased, decreased, or remained about the same over the past few years? Please explain.
What is your school's plan for dealing with students who are candidates for grade retention.