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School Psychologists' Perceived and Ideal Role in Grade Retention Decisions

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School Psychologists' Perceived and Ideal Role in Grade Retention Decisions

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ABSTRACT

This study examined school psychologists' reports of their perceived and ideal roles in retention making decisions. A random national sample of 231 school psychologists completed a questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the rates and trends of retention in their school, as well as their perceived and ideal role in grade retention decisions. The majority (86.6%) of respondents indicated that their school practices retention, whereas 19% noted an increase in the amount of retentions. The rate at which respondents agreed that school psychologists should be involved in retention decisions was significantly higher (91.5%) than the percentage of school psychologists that perceived that they had a role in the retention decision making process (52.5%). In addition, one-third (32%) indicated that they were part of a retention decision making team and 62% agreed that staff members seek out their opinion on issues regarding retention. A large majority (96.5%) agreed that retention should be a team decision. Finally, there was a significant association ($p < .01$) between having a role in the retention decision making process and feeling that their current involvement is with "Best Practices" for a school psychologist. Approximately two-thirds (67%) of the responding school psychologists disagreed with retention as an appropriate intervention.

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INTRODUCTION

Reynolds and McCoy (1999) stated that if the purpose of grade retention is to promote academic success, then grade retention must be found superior to grade promotion or other alternative programs to be considered an effective academic intervention. Unfortunately, contrary to popular belief, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that grade promotion is not an effective intervention (e.g. Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003; Holmes, 1989; Holmes and Mathews, 1984; & Jimerson, 2001). Nonetheless, grade retention is still a widely practiced intervention in the United States (e.g. Hauser, 1999; Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000; McCoy & Reynolds. 1999; Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

The term "grade retention" refers to the repeating of an academic year of school. The term is often juxtaposed to the term "social promotion" or the practice of allowing a student to pass along to the next grade regardless of achievement levels or whether that student meets set standards (US Department of Education, 1999). The decision process for these two terms may be identical in some school systems. However, for the purposes of the current study, retention will be the focus. There are numerous reasons why a student may be retained. These may include developmental immaturity, missing readiness skills for the next level, lack of achievement, and frequent or multiple absences (Jackson, 1975; Jimerson 2001).

School psychologists are in a unique position to impact the practice of grade retention in the United States (e.g. Fagan & Wise, 2000; Jimerson, 2001; Rafoth & Carey, 1995). Much of the research on retention is published in school psychology journals (e.g. School Psychology Review, Journal of School Psychology, and Psychology in the Schools) providing school psychologists with information vital for making informed decisions regarding student retention. Much of the research also calls for active involvement of the school psychologist (Jimerson,

2001; Rafoth & Carey, 1995; Schnurr, Kundert, & Nikerson, 2004). For example, school psychologists are actively involved with students who are struggling academically and therefore may be considered for retention. School psychologists are then able to examine the educational and developmental history and the effectiveness and appropriateness of instruction for these students (Rafoth & Carey, 1995). Furthermore, school psychologist are advocates for appropriate programming for all at-risk students and for using empirically based interventions aimed at the individual child's needs (Fagan & Wise, 2000; Reschly, 2000). Schnurr, Kundert, and Nickerson (2004) emphasize that the school psychologist's role is to provide information regarding retention and consult with teachers, parents, and administration regarding retention of individual students.

Little is known about the actual role of school psychologists in this process, despite the call for increased participation. Moreover, there are few empirical research studies exploring this question (i.e. Gates, 1983; Rafoth & Carey, 1991; Schnurr, 2004). Gates (1983) in a dissertation examined actual and desired involvement, perception, and training needs of New Jersey school psychologists in the retention process. Two thirds of the respondents stated that they were moderately involved in the grade retention process. Their roles primarily consisted of evaluation, placement decisions, and consultation. In another study, Rafoth and Carey (1991) surveyed state level coordinators of school psychological services about their perceptions of the actual and ideal roles of school psychologist's involvement in grade retention decisions. The findings of this survey indicate that the perception of the school psychologist was that of psychometrician (e.g. administering ability and achievement tests). In a dissertation completed in 2004, Schnurr found that a majority of school psychologists were unaware of retention rates within their schools. In regards to their involvement in the process, over 20% indicated that they

were "almost always" or "often" involves, in contrast to less than 5% who indicated that they were never involved. Schnurr added that their role most often consisted of "advising educators on the developmental level and/or maturity of individual students and consulting with parents and teachers on the effects of retention." (p. 193).

Purpose of Study

The study sought to add to this research base by examining school psychologists' perceived and ideal roles regarding grade retention decisions and to determine if the two are significantly associated. Furthermore, this study examined the relationship of respondent demographics with retention rates and trends. A number of specific research questions were addressed by the study. The first research question addressed in this study was to determine the current involvement of the school psychologist in the grade retention process. In addition, this study examined which demographic factors most significantly affect the practice of retention, as well as the school psychologist's involvement in the retention decision making process. Finally, this study examined the relationships between the actual perceived role and the ideal or preferred role.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The argument against grade retention has traditionally been a difficult one. Many school professionals assume that repeating the same academic material increases an individual's ability to comprehend the material (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Unfortunately, the reason the student fails to learn the material the first time is rarely addressed (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). On the other hand, one must argue against the gut, retention "feels" like it works. Initial progress overshadows long-term disadvantages, opinions lag far behind research, and anecdotal evidence carries far too much weight in these decisions.

Grade retention is still a popular and widely practiced intervention in the United States. A 1986 poll (Gallup) indicated that 72% of the public felt that the standards for promotion should be stricter. Whereas there is no systematic documentation of the extent of grade retention (Jimerson, 2003) a number of studies do exist that have examined the incidence of retention (e.g. Hauser, 1999; Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000; McCoy & Reynolds. 1999; Meisels & Liaw, 1993). Between 5-15% of students are retained each year, with the number reaching 30-50% retained at least once before entering the 9th grade. (Jimerson, 2003; Dawson, 1998; Edie & Showalter, 2001; Jimerson, 2001; Rafoth, 2002; Roderick, 2005; Sheppard & Smith, 1989). This translates into approximately 2.4 to 3 million students each year; a steady increase over the past 25 years (Dawson 1998; Hauser 1999; Merrick, McCreery, & Brown, 1998). Other studies (Alexsander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2003; McCoy and Reynolds, 1999) suggest that 22-28% of students are retained by the age of 14. Furthermore, a majority of students who are retained by third grade are retained a second time by middle school (Alexsander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2003)

The increase in retention rates has been attributed to many factors. One is that as schools are held more accountable for student performance, grade retention is viewed as a key instrument of school reform (e.g. Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005; Hartke, 1999; Holmes & Saturday, 2000; May, Kundert, Brent, 1995; Sarason, 2001). However, when retention occurs, it does not only signal a student's failure to master a given curriculum, but represents a breakdown of the child's primary educational environment as a whole (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999).

Studies also show that retention also varies by socio-economic status, race, and gender (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). Boys are more likely to be retained or receive delayed entry into school (Sheppard & Smith, 1989; May, Kundert, & Brent, 1995; Meisels & Law, 1993). For example, May, Kundert, and Brent found in an examination of students who were delayed entering school that 70% were boys whereas 30% were girls.

In terms of ethnic background, Hauser and colleagues (1999 & 2000, as cited in Jimerson, 2003) found that a large share of minority children experience grade retention during elementary school. For example, between 25-30% of children 9-11 years old were below the expected grade level for their age. Furthermore, at ages 15-17, 40-50% of African American and Hispanic students were below their expected grade level, compared to only 25-30% of White students. Within metropolitan school districts as many as 50% of student are retained at some point in their school career (Hauser, 1998). In a national study of eight grade students Meisels and Liaw (1993) found that for 30% of African American, 25% of Hispanic, and 20% of White students, parents reported that their child has been retained. In addition, Alexsander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2003) reported that 56% of African American and 41% of White students in an urban setting were retained by the eighth grade.

In a study examining the variables that may contribute to the higher number of African American males being retained, Rodney et. al. (1999) found three significant variables. The strongest predictor was the number of suspensions from school. The nature and frequency that African American students are suspended appears to create a greater negative impact than intended. Conduct disorder and lack of discipline in the home were also predictors of grade retention. It was hypothesized that the higher impact on education and rates of grade retention is due to the economic and social pressures placed on the African American family, in addition to the increased numbers of fathers away from home and lack of male role models. These students also unfortunately have less exposure to quality education and highly skilled teachers than do White students (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Students with learning disabilities are particularly at risk for retention (McLeskey & Grizzle, 1992). In their investigation of Indiana public schools, approximately 58% of all students with learning disabilities were retained before they were labeled. This was approximately twice as many students than those being retained without learning disabilities. Furthermore, those students who are chronologically young, developmentally delayed, or have attention problems are also more likely to be retained (Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997; NASP, 2003). Students with delays in reading or speech, especially English Language Learners, are also more likely to be held back (Byrd & Weitzman, 1994; NASP, 2003). Children perceived as having poor peer relationships, poor emotional well being, and adjustment problems are more likely to be retained (Reynolds, 1992; Jimerson & Schuder, 1996). Low birth weight, exposure to household smoke, and enuresis were also found to be significant factors in increased rates (Byrd & Weitzman, 1994).

Parental characteristics, such as completion of high school or college, are also related to retention rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabanni, 2003). Seven percent of children from low income families or have parents who do not have a high school education are two or more years older than their classmates. On the other hand, only 2% of children from high income families are two or more years older than their classmates (US Department of Education, 1999). Other characteristics that contribute to increased grade retention rates include being from a single parent household, low maternal education level, or having parents who are less involved in their education show higher retention rates (Bryd & Weitzman, 1994). Students who have changed schools or homes frequently are also more likely to be retained (Reynolds, 1992).

Students exhibiting these risk factors are commonly the same students that school psychologists are likely to work with on a daily basis. For many of these students retention is the least effective intervention. Students who have the greatest number of academic, emotional, and behavioral problems are most likely to experience negative consequences from retention (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2004). Furthermore, after these students are retained, additional academic and behavioral problems may arise (NASP, 2003).

History and Policy Effecting Retention

In the later half of the 19th century one room schoolhouses transformed into schools that grouped students by age, with promotion to the next grade contingent on mastery of set content (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Thus began the practice of retaining students who did not meet these criteria. This practice continued to be a common policy throughout the 20th century, despite research as early as the 1930s highlighting its negative effects (e.g. Ayer, 1933; Kline, 1933). In the 1960s there was a pushback against retention and social promotion became a more popular policy within schools. This trend did not last however, and by the 1980s public opinion

had swayed back to retention. Moreover, with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), many lost confidence in public school policies. School systems once again turned to more strict promotion policies (Roderick, 1995). In fact this position became so popular, that by 1985, thirty-one states had mandated stronger promotion policies (Pierson & Connell, 1992).

Much of the drive for currently rethinking the role of retention comes from recent legislation. The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004 emphasizes the prevention of students' academic failure by requiring "scientific research-based interventions" to help students succeed (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C., 2004). It strives to reduce the lack of appropriate instruction through "high quality research-based instruction" and also opens to door for the use of the evaluation of a students response to research-based interventions to determine whether a student meets the criteria for a disability. Grade retention is not consistent with either appropriate instruction or researched-based intervention. According to §300.35 of the legislation; scientifically based research involves:

> (a) research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and
>
> (b) Includes research that:
>
> > (1) Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
> >
> > (2) Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

(3) Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;

(4) Is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;

(5) Ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and

(6) Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

IDEA aligns with other notable legislation, specifically the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C., 2002). NCLB challenges schools to increase their efforts to improve academic achievement of the nation's at-risk groups and to close the achievement gap. NCLB also requires the use of proven education methods for students who are struggling educationally, once again, eliminating retention as a useful intervention.

The NCLB legislation also targets the achievement gap between socio-economic majority and minority sub-groups. As noted, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to be retained. These are the very same

populations identified by NCLB as subgroups of children where the achievement gap must be eliminated (Silberglitt, Appleton, Burns, & Jimerson, 2006).

NCLB has also added accountability requirements, forcing states and schools to report on whether or not student are making adequate yearly progress towards reducing the achievement gap. Schools that do not show adequate progress are forced to make drastic changes. This has created an environment in which the district's compliance with federal legislation leads to ineffective practices.

Due to its emphasis on showing progress, NCLB encourages the use of high stakes testing adding political pressure to districts to increase scores at the expense of effective interventions (Hartke, 1999; Sarason, 2001). These developmentally inappropriate demands result in high failure rates and unnecessary referrals to special education (May, Kundert, & Brent, 1995). Teachers are also required to teach within the narrow skills areas dictated by the tests, therefore limiting their ability to meet students' individual needs (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Instead of reducing the practice of ineffective methods, this pressure has lead to an increase in student retentions (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005). Furthermore, in some areas, promotion policy has become strictly based upon individual performance on standardized tests (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). The fastest way to raise district test scores is to retain children, moving the retained children from their norm group to a norm group of younger children (Holmes & Saturday, 2000). When this occurs the school psychologist has a responsibility to express concerns and recommend alternative solutions (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2004).

In addition to federal legislation, budget concerns often drive a school district's policy on grade retention. Grade retention requires a student to repeat the grade level, therefore doubling

the cost to educate that student for each grade retained. When 2.4 million students are retained a year at a cost of $6,000 each, the national cost of retention reached over 14 billion dollars a year. When the student remains in school to graduate, the cost of educating the retained student is 8% more (Dawson, 1998). During the 2002-2003 academic year in Florida alone over 190,000 students were retained in kindergarten through third grade, costing the state over one billion dollars (Florida Association of School Psychologists, 2004). These numbers do not include the additional costs that increased dropouts and poor educational and vocational outcomes have on society (Eide & Showalter, 2001). This money could otherwise be spent on remedial programs and other academic interventions to assist at-risk students.

Effectiveness of Retention

Through recent legislation, such as IDEA, lawmakers have required the use of empirically based interventions and practices to assist children who are not succeeding in school. Therefore, if grade retention is to be used to aid student progress or increase achievement levels, it should be supported by research. This is not the case however, as the NASP position paper on grade retention and social promotion cites an overwhelming base of research that does not support the effectiveness of such practices, no matter how widely accepted or popular this policy may be (NASP, 2003).

Numerous researchers have examined the educational outcomes of students recommended for retention at all grade levels (e.g. Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabanni, 2003, Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Mathews, 1984; Jimerson 2000; Rafoth, 2002; Thomas et. al., 1992). Many school professionals believe that retention for preschoolers or early elementary students is more effective than for students in later grades (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). At the kindergarten level students are often retained due to the lack of basic readiness skills such

as reading. According to the US Census approximately 60% of children who are three to four years old attend school (US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2003). The other 40% of children are at risk for entering school with little exposure to academics, routines, and other skills typically learned in preschool. These students may become early candidates for retention (Rafoth, 2002).

Children are retained at the kindergarten level, often called "delayed entry," when a child is judged to be "developmentally immature" (Rafoth, 2002). This immaturity is demonstrated by delayed social growth, motor skills, or being physically small when compared to their peers. Although parents and teacher believe that this extra time will allow a child to catch up with peers, Laidig (1991) found that delayed entry created significantly lower achievement scores in high school, even when ability was controlled for. These children are also more likely to be placed in special education later on in their academic career. May, Kundert, and Brent (1995) found that 17.5% of delayed entry students received special education services in elementary school, compared with only 7% of the general population. They also showed that students with delayed entry were equally as likely to be retained again later than their peers who started school on time. Furthermore, Bryd, Weitzman, and Auigner (1997) found that these children were also 70 percent more likely to display extreme behavior problems. In a national study, Borowsky, Ireland, and Resnick (2002) found that the 20% of girls and 28% of boys who reported that they had repeated a grade where at a heightened risk for serious interpersonal violence perpetration later in life.

In addition, Meisels and Liaw (1993) found that students who were retained had lower standardized test scores, academic grades, and higher rate of special education placement then

their non-retained peers. Moreover, students who were retained in kindergarten-third grade were more likely to experience academic decline than those who were retained in fourth-eight grade.

When examining the long-term academic effects of retention on a sample of kindergarten-third grade students, Jimerson and Schuder (1996) found that initially first and second graders showed significant gains in math achievement compared to non-retained peers. However, by the time these students reached the sixth grade their emotional well being was significantly lower and by high school, their academic achievement was also significantly lower than non-retained peers. In another longitudinal study, McCoy and Reynolds (1999) investigated the effects of retention on school achievement and students' social-psychological behavior that were retained and followed from kindergarten to eight grades. The retained group had significantly lower achievement in both reading and mathematics achievement.

In examining the reading growth trajectories of first through eight graders Silberglitt, Appleton, Burns, and Jimerson (2006) showed that retention did not produce any advantage for retained students. Furthermore, when compared to their growth rate from the previous year, their reading performance showed no significant difference during the repeated year. They also showed no benefit when compared with similarly promoted students and significantly lower than a randomly selected group of students. The examiners concluded that due to the lack of positive effects shown by retention coupled with the negative outcomes discussed in the literature, "it is disconcerting that the practice of retention persists (p. 268)."

A number of meta-analyses have examined the efficacy of retention starting in the elementary grades (e.g. Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Mathews, 1984; Jimerson 2001; Thomas et. al., 1992). Holmes and Mathews examined 44 studies that investigated factors such as achievement, adjustment, and self-concept. The overall effect sizes indicated that retained

students score significantly lower than promoted students on achievement measures. On average, the retained students scored .44 standard deviations below their promoted peers. In addition, when grouped by grade level, they found negative effects at each level (Grades 1-6). Holmes and Mathews also calculated the effect of retention on personal adjustment. They found that social adjustment, emotional adjustment, behavior, and self-concept were all negatively effected. Furthermore, in subsequent meta-analyses, Holmes (1989) and Thomas et. al. 1992 indicated overall negative effects related to retention. Holmes examined 63 studies and found 54 indicating lower academic achievement among children who were retained. The average negative effect for the retained students was .30 standard deviations below their promoted peers. The remaining nine studies yielded initial positive effects, though these effects diminished over time.

Jimerson (2001) examined 175 studies that examined the impact of retention on academic achievement and socio-emotional development between 1990 and 1999. Of the analyses 47% favored the promoted group, only 5% favored the retained group, and 48% showed no difference between groups. Similar to the findings of Holmes and Mathews (1984) a majority of the analyses showed that the promoted comparison groups outperformed their retained peers on achievement measures. The results also indicated that all areas of achievement including reading, math, and language were affected. On the socio-emotional and behavioral outcomes (i.e. peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviors, and attendance) the retained student had overall lower ratings of adjustment and self concept and lower school attendance than the promoted group. Overall, 12 of the 19 examined studies found negative outcomes for retention. The four that showed positive effects agreed that retained children were still not successful in school. Retention only lessened incompetence but did not create competence. Jimerson also

noted that all of the authors emphasized the use of additional remedial strategies to help students succeed. Consistent with Rafoth's (2002) statement that retention without additional supports cannot prevent academic failure and could possibly cause harm to the student.

When students reach the secondary level, the question of retention becomes a determination of who lacks a sufficient number of credits or is unable to pass mandated minimum competency exams (Rafoth & Carey, 1991). These students often have delays in effective reading or inadequate organizational, metacognitive, and study skills (Rafoth, 2002). Retention rates consistently rise after seventh grade (Rafoth & Carey, 1991). Initial achievement gains may occur during the year the student is retained, however research consistently shows that these gains decline within two to three years and these students either do no better or perform more poorly than similarly promoted peers (NASP, 2003; Rafoth 2002; Rafoth & Carey, 2002).

The majority of secondary level research has focused on examining dropout rates in relation to grade retention (e.g. Allensworth, 2005; Jimerson, 1999; Mann 1987; Roderick, 1995). Students who drop out are five times more likely to have repeated a grade that students who graduate (Shepard & Smith, 1990). Concurrently, the risk for dropping out has been found to be two times greater for those who have been retained between kindergarten and sixth grade compared to non-retained peers (Roderick, 1995). Grade retention alone has been determined to be the single most powerful predictor of school dropout and when a student is retained twice virtually guarantees that student will dropout (Mann, 1987; Roderick, 1995; Rumberger, 1995; Rafoth, 2002).

In other studies, achievement rates have been held constant to focus solely on these two factors (e.g. Jimerson, 1999, Roderick, 1995). It has been found that dropout rates are appreciably higher in retained students than promoted students when controlling for

achievement. Grissom and Sheppard (1989) conducted three large scale studies including 20,000 to 80,000 students examining the dropout rates for retained students compared to similar poor achieving students. They found that the retained students were 20-30% more likely to drop out of school.

Furthermore, in a 21-year longitudinal study, Jimerson (1999) also found that students who had been retained had a greater probability of poor educational and vocational outcomes in late adolescence than similarly low achieving but promoted peers. Students who are retained had lower levels of academic achievement, rate of receiving a high school diploma by age 20, enrollment in postsecondary education, education/employment status, wages, and poorer competence employment ratings (Jimmerson, 1999; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). Jimerson and Schuder (1996) found when compared to their low achieving, but promoted peers, retained students have a higher enrollment rate in alternative educational programs and only 24% of retained students graduated compared to 52% in the promoted group.

Not all studies discount the efficacy of retention. Many of these studies have focused on comparing elementary and secondary retention. Consequently, there has been evidence that children retained at the primary or kindergarten levels may initially do better (Crosser, 1991; Kundert, May, & Brent, 1995). For example, Graue and Diperna (2000) found that children who were delayed entrants into kindergarten had similar skills to their peers and early-retained students had higher academic skills than students who were retained later in their academic careers. Whereas, these initial differences in achievement created by retention do exist, difficulties tend to diminish or disappear by middle school. Furthermore, research indicates that retention in kindergarten is associated with poorer academic and social functioning throughout the elementary school and into young adulthood (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabanni, 2003;

Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson et. al. 1997). Notable for the school psychologist is the fact that many children who are retained show multiple deficits and needs indicating that the re-exposure to the same curriculum is ineffective (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabanni, 2003).

In a subsequent study, Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, and Appleton (2006) examined the differences between the students who had been retained earlier (K-2) versus later (3-5). There were no significant differences between the growth curves of the two groups. The later retained group displayed a larger negative bend in the reading growth curve, indicating a possible greater impact of grade retention in the later elementary years. However, the researchers emphasized that the results did not indicate a benefit from earlier retention.

In an examination of the impact of grade retention on the self-perceptions, academic performance, and school engagement of students from middle class families, Pierson and Connell (1992) found that retention was not harmful. Students who were retained showed better academic performance two years later than comparable promoted students. The retained students in their study also showed less adaptive strategies for achieving success and avoiding failure. The authors suggest that grade retention can be used as an effective academic intervention. However, this is only compared to social promotion which is the equivalent of no intervention, a strategy not approved of by the majority of researchers.

Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabanni (1994) highlight evidence of some benefit for grade retention at the secondary level. However, the benefits appear to be limited to a halt in continuous skill degradation among low-achieving students. Pierson and Connell (1992) also showed more positive effects than most previous studies. Additionally, Gottfredson et. al. (1994) found that retained children ranked higher in school attachment, school adjustment, and rebellious behavior.

Nonetheless, researchers believe that group differences over time tend to favor the promoted groups (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999) and reductions in initial negative behavior may be due to placement with younger students where they may have enjoyed higher status, delaying later problems (Gottfredson et. al, 1994). Dawson (1998) adds that this outcome may have been merely an artifact of the research design, further detracting from the significance of this study. Same age comparisons tend to show that the effects of retention are definitely not positive and quite possibly harmful, especially in the early grades.

When comparisons are conducted by grade, short-term positive effects are often seen, however most dissipate over time (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). The initial benefits that are observed in many of these studies may come from positive treatment of retained students from peers (Plummer & Graziano, 2007). This is possibly due to their experience with academic tasks. This positive treatment possibly increased the students' self-concept. The students also initially experience academic success due to having previously seen the material

Reasons for Negative Impact of Retention

In general, the results of these studies do not support retention as a useful intervention for struggling students. Most researchers agree that retention has a negative long term effect on academic achievement and socio-emotional functioning. Retention also does not appear to increase long term student performance and increases the threat of adverse outcomes such as higher drop out rates. This reality holds true even when compared to similarly low achieving peers who have been promoted (Jimerson, 1999, 2001; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Mathews, 1984; Edie & Showalter, 2001).

Furthermore, there is clear evidence that being chronologically older for a grade is a risk factor in itself (Rafoth, 2002). Medical research indicates that problems such as smoking,

chewing tobacco, drinking alcohol, and using drugs, emotional distress, drinking while driving, early onset of sexual activity, use of alcohol/drugs during sexual behavior, suicidal intentions, and violent behavior increases when students are developmentally mature for their grade (Bryd, Weitzman, & Auinger, 1997; Resnick, et. al. 1997; NASP, 2003). As adults, individuals who were retained are more likely to be unemployed, living on public assistance, or in prison (NASP, 2003).

NASP (2003) highlighted a number of reasons that may explain the negative outcomes of grade retention. One may be the absence of remedial strategies that enhance social or cognitive competence. Also, failing to address a student's specific risk factors is another crucial piece to the retention puzzle. Based on knowledge of this evidence, if school psychologists wish to abide by a best practices standard, they must be aware of the findings on the negative effects of retention and use their knowledge to guide recommendations (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2004).

There is a small body of research that suggests that some students may in fact benefit from being retained. However, just who these students are is still debatable. Sandoval and Hughes (1981) recommend that students who have average levels of intelligence and achievement should be the only candidates for retention. Students under consideration should also be socially well adjusted and demonstrate a positive self-concept. Furthermore, the students who are more likely to benefit from retention are those who have had additional educational interventions and a specific remedial plan (Dawson, 1998). Borowsky, Ireland, and Resnick (2002) found that high grade point average and school connectedness appears to reduce violence involvement for retained students. The results suggest that positive school climate and successful academic experiences can be a powerful protective factor in retained youth. Active

family involvement in their child's academic program can also serve as a vital piece for reducing future problems. The presence of these protective factors makes it difficult to determine whether any potential benefit is a result of retention, implemented interventions, or the student's intrinsic characteristics. Therefore, participation in developing specific plans of action and interventions for remediate deficits is a crucial skill this position possesses becomes and important aspect of the role of the school psychologist (Rafoth, 2002).

Continuation of Retention as a Common Practice

Despite the large base of research highlighting its ineffectiveness, retention continues to be practiced. This practice is largely influenced by those who make the decision of whether or not to retrain. The proportion of youths promoted from one year to the next is largely determined by a school system's promotion policies laid out by administration and by teacher attitudes towards the benefits of retention (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Roderick, 1995). The student's teacher appears to be the most important person in the decision to retain (Tanner & Galis, 1997). In addition, parents and principals seem to play a crucial role in the decision making process, and generally a veto from any of these team members can result in promotion instead of retention, regardless of performance on other measures (e.g. competency tests) (Niklason, 1984).

Many teachers view retention as a positive practice that deceases daily school failure and motivates students to work harder (Tanner & Combs, 1993; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). Many teachers believe that early grade retention gives immature students a chance to catch up with peers and has little negative effect on their self-esteem. They also believe that it is the way retention is implemented that causes a poor outcome and if implemented in its ideal form it would be beneficial (Smith, 1989).

Teachers also cannot conduct controlled experiments within the classroom (Shepard & Smith, 1990). The promoted student often ends up in the lower third of the class (Holmes, 1989) causing the teacher to feel that if the student had been retained, his or her performance would have improved. At the same time the repeating student does better in some areas of performance. This anecdotal evidence bolsters the teachers' belief that retention does indeed help (Shepard & Smith, 1990).

Martinez and Vandergrift (1991) add that students are also retained in the early grades to prevent future failure in the early grades and to prevent the graduation by students who lack the basic skills needed for post-school success. This gives the impression that retention is a protective measure, however, retention is a permanent intervention and the message it sends to students who are retained has long-term effects on self-esteem and school connection that may override the short term academic benefits (Roderick, 1995). Johnson (1991) hypothesized that these students show learned helplessness and begin to attribute failure to internal factors and deny responsibility for success.

Teachers often overestimate the potential benefits of retention and it hold an intuitive appeal despite the lack of support from the literature (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Smith (1989) and Smith and Shepard (1987) hypothesize that when teachers believe that a child's development unfolds in a series of changes independent from instruction they are more likely to support retention. They may feel that the instructional problem resides within the child and he or she is not ready for grade-level content, this justifying retention. Therefore retention would be viewed as a preventative measure or an early intervention (Martinez & Vanergrift, 1991). On the other hand, a teacher who views children as having the capacity to learn appropriately presented material is less likely to promote retention. These individuals see the

instruction as inappropriate and are more likely to seek alternatives that will meet the students' needs (Smith & Sheppard, 1987).

Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) found that kindergarten through fourth grade teachers indicated that retention was an effective practice that increases student success. However, most respondents agreed that students should not be retained twice in elementary school. These beliefs varied by the age group the teachers taught. Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis reported that kindergarten through second grade teachers strongly disagreed that retention was a useful strategy to maintain grade level standards, that students who did not demonstrate effort should be candidates for retention, and that older, retained students had more behavior problems than their peers. The factor that teachers indicated as the most influential in deciding whether a student should be retained was the students lack of academic achievement.

In comparison to teacher views, students view retention as a punishment or stigma and rank it higher than the "shame of wetting one's pants in class" and "being caught stealing" (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986). Byrnes and Yamamoto also reported that retention was only ranked behind the loss of a parent and blindness as a stressor. Moreover, Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2005) found that sixth-grade students reported that retention was the most stressful experience they could have. Byrnes (1989) found that 87% of children interviewed about being retained made them feel "sad," "bad," "upset," or "embarrassed." Only 6% of these children expressed positive feelings about retention.

The practice of retention does not solely rest on teachers' shoulders. As noted earlier, schools and administration continue to be under pressure from the government. Public pressure also exists to maintain high promotion standards (Shepard & Smith, 1990). Furthermore, the literature on the negative effects of retention often does not reach parents. The school

psychologist has the difficult job of explaining why poor performing students are more likely to achieve and stay in school if they are not retained.

School Psychologists' Role

The role of the school psychologist is diverse, yet consistently involves working with students who are not succeeding academically, emotionally, and socially (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2004). Furthermore, the emphasis on the use of empirically based interventions, and the school psychologist's expertise in the evaluation of services and application of the science of psychology in school only provides further support for involvement in the retention process. (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; McLoughlin, 2003; Sarason, 2001; Upah & Tilly, 2002). Using their knowledge of applicable research, school psychologists can at the very least perform in an advisory role to disseminate information on empirically based findings, which retention is not (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Jimerson, 2001). Despite the logical assumption that the school psychologist is a vital part of the retention versus promotion decision making process, little research exists about the extent to which school psychologists are involved.

Much of the research on retention is published in school psychology journals (e.g. School Psychology Review, Journal of School Psychology, and Psychology in the Schools). These articles provide school psychologists with information that allow them to be informed participants in the decision making process. The problem is that there is little information to date regarding the role of school psychologists in the grade retention process (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2002). Though there is limited information regarding the actual school psychologist role in grade retention decisions, there have been a number of calls for school psychologists to become actively involved in retention decision (Jimerson, et. al., 1997; Rafoth, 2002; Rafoth & Carey, 1995; Smink, 2001; Tanner & Galis, 1997; NASP, 2003). These calls stem from the fact

that the active involvement in this process is consistent with the school psychologists' ideal role and function. School psychologists are actively involved with students who at-risk for retention. In addition, school psychologists are trained to identify and assess these students (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2004). It has been recommended that when retention is a consideration, school psychologists should complete a systematic review of the students educational records, help determine underlying causes of the student's difficulties, and develop individualized interventions (Smink, 2001; Tanner & Galis, 1997). School psychologists are also able to examine the educational and developmental history of students, along with the effectiveness and appropriateness of previous instruction (Rafoth & Carey, 1995). In addition, familiarity with retention research the school psychologist may advocate for appropriate programming for all at-risk students using empirically based interventions geared towards the individual child's needs (Fagan & Wise, 2000; Reschly, 2000). Schnurr, Kundert, and Nickerson (2004) add that an essential part of the school psychologists' role in these decisions is providing information regarding retention and consulting with teachers, parents, and administration regarding retention of individual students.

Noting that merely repeating a grade or even simply promoting a student in need does not provide the necessary support to improve skills, NASP (2003) posits several recommendations encouraging education professionals to consider well-researched and effective alternatives. Specifically NASP recommends; 1) actively encouraging parental involvement, 2) adopting age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies, 3) establishing multi-age groupings in classrooms and training teachers to work with mixed age and ability populations, 4) providing effective early reading programs, 5) implementing effective school-based mental health programs, 6) identifying specific learning and behavioral problems and creating effective

interventions, 7) providing appropriate special education programs, 8) implementing tutoring programs, and 9) establishing full-service schools to provide a community-based method to meet the needs of at-risk students. School psychologists may also become involved in this process at a systems level by keeping abreast on local grade retention policies and trends (Rafoth & Carey, 1995). This also includes becoming involved in associations that advocate for policy changes at the state and federal level.

Rafoth (2002) adds that school psychologists can have an impact on the level of state education agencies and state policies and practices. Through the use of state school psychology associations retention policies can be influenced. It is best practice for these associations to share the outcomes of research on retention with state education agencies and other professional groups such as administrator and superintendent groups. Rafoth also encourages the use of lobbying resources to influence legislation, funding for alternatives to retention, or decreasing the rigidity of competency requirements.

The research on the school psychologist role in grade retention decisions is made up of three important studies (i.e. Gates, 1983; Rafoth and Carey, 1991; and Schnurr, 2004). Gates (1983) in a dissertation examined actual and desired involvement, perception, and training needs of New Jersey school psychologists in the retention process. Two thirds of the respondents stated that they were moderately involved in the grade retention process. Their roles primarily consisted of evaluation, placement decisions, and consultation. Furthermore, a number of respondents indicated that retention is a justifiable practice if used early in a child's school career (kindergarten through third grade) to allow these students to mature. The results indicated school psychologists desired increased involvement, however most respondents indicated that

they wished to maintain their current level of involvement. Parents, teachers, and principals were viewed as the primary decision makers.

In another study, Rafoth and Carey (1991) surveyed 26 state level coordinators of school psychological services about their perceptions of the actual and ideal roles of school psychologist's involvement in grade retention/promotion decisions. The findings of this survey indicate that the coordinators perception of the school psychologists' role was that of psychometrician. Respondents indicated their perception of the actual involvement of the school psychologist in administering achievement and ability tests as ranging from 48% to 61% across the age levels (kindergarten, elementary, and secondary). In comparison, 65% to 74% of the state coordinators felt that the school psychologist ideally should spend of their time on administering tests. The study also found that the state-level administrators believed that school psychologists were minimally involved in making specific recommendations regarding retention and could ideally provide more information to school staff and parents. Specifically, the respondents perceived the actual levels as 22% to 35%. Those indicating that school psychologist should be involved in making specific recommendations ranged from 57% to 61% across age levels.

The researchers also assessed the actual and ideal role of school psychologists in advising staff on the developmental level and overall maturity of a student. Results indicated that 35% to 57% state level contacts perceived school psychologists as being involved in this aspect of the retention decision making process. In comparison, 74% to 91% felt that this would be an ideal aspect of the school psychologists' role. Finally, Rafoth and Carey (1991) also surveyed whether school psychologists had a role in advising parents on the academic and emotional effects of retention/early promotion. State-level contacts indicated that 35% to 43% of school

psychologists were involved in this role. In comparison 70% to 83% felt that school psychologists should be involved at each of these levels with advising parents. In general these results indicate a significant gap between the actual and ideal roles of the school psychologist in grade retention decisions as perceived by the state level contacts.

In a dissertation, Schnurr (2004) surveyed 250 school psychologists (52.6% response rate) regarding their knowledge and beliefs regarding grade retention and their actual and ideal roles in this process. The results showed that a many of school psychologists were unaware of retention rates within their schools, and those that did reported a wide range (0-50%). The overall average of grade retention was 2.5% per grade. In addition, nearly 20% of the respondents were unsure if their district had a formal retention procedure and 17% were unsure if progress monitoring of retained students was in place. Typically, the school psychologists reported decisions were made collaboratively among teachers, administrators, and parents. Child study or other support teams were used approximately 20% of the time.

In terms of school psychologist involvement, 20% indicated that they were "almost always" or "often" involved, whereas less than 5% indicated that they were never involved. The school psychologists also reported that their role most often consisted of "advising educators on the developmental level and/or maturity of individual students and consulting with parents and teachers on the effects of retention" (Schnurr, p. 193). In terms of the respondents perception of their participation in specific aspects of grade retention decisions, common roles included advising on the development and maturity of individual students (58.2%), consulting with teachers and parents (61%), making specific retention recommendations (59.4%), administering standardized assessments (44.0%), and develop/implementing programs to

increase academic achievement (42.5%). On the other hand, a majority (77.5%) perceived that they never contribute to policy development.

Schnurr also found that more than 75% of the respondents indicated that they would like involvement in the decision making process to be part of their role. This was significantly higher than the school psychologist's view of their actual participation. The respondents also indicated a significant difference between actual and ideal involvement in all specific role related to grade retention expect for participation in policy development. Across all roles that were significant, Schnurr found that over 90% of school psychologists indicated an increased desire for involvement.

Although generally denouncing the effectiveness of retention, many of the responding school psychologists demonstrated only a moderate understanding of retention literature, endorsing commonly misunderstood aspects of retention (e.g. retention gives immature students a chance to grow). For example, their knowledge of effective alternatives was also assessed and respondents indicated that they were most familiar with tutoring, summer school, after-school tutoring, team teaching, cooperative learning, and screening programs.

Rationale for Study

Although there has been a significant amount of research showing the ineffectiveness of grade retention on numerous educational and socio-emotional outcomes little is known about the actual role of the school psychologist in the retention process. The previous three studies provide vital information to the profession, however significant gaps remain. The overall lack of peer-reviewed literature on this subject highlights the gap between current practice and research-based practice with regards to retention.

A more detailed survey of practicing school psychologists is needed to examine the perceived and actual role functioning of the school psychologist in retention decisions. Rafoth and Carey (1991) focused solely on a small sample of state level contacts for school psychology services, whereas, Gates (1983) examined the roles of only New Jersey school psychologists. Schnurr's (2004) examined the actual and perceived roles of the school psychologist, however, Schnurr assessed large number of areas related to the school psychology profession than this study addresses. In contrast this study provides a more in depth exploration of school psychologists' perceptions of their actual and ideal roles with regards to retention.

A number of specific research questions are to be addressed by the study. It is important to determine the perceived rate at which the schools where school psychologists work practice retention. This is important to determine due to the fact a school or district's policy on retention will greatly impact the school psychologist's role (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Roderick, 1995). This also includes an assessment of how practicing school psychologists perceive current trends in those schools that do practice retention to determine whether there is an increase or decrease in the amount of schools that practice retention. Changes in trend may be affected by federal policies (e.g. No Child Left Behind) or local policies. Retention rates and trends across demographic variables (e.g. region or school size) are also important to determine in order to examine whether or not they are impacting current practice. Furthermore, with only one of the cited studies completed within the past fifteen years, along with the changes that have occurred in policies and legislation in that time, the need for an examination is only increased.

The second important aspect of this study is to determine the current perceived role of the school psychologist in the grade retention process. More information is needed about their involvement in this process, such as participating in assessment, retention teams, consultation,

and advocacy. Much of what has been explored focuses on the traditional roles of consultation and psychometric testing. How the responding psychologists see their ideal role in the grade retention process will also be explored. This will include examining the perception of their current role (e.g. involved too much or too little?), as well as the perception of the ideal role of the school psychologist profession as a whole in this process (e.g. should the school psychologist be involved?). There is also a need to determine whether the perceived level of involvement equal to that of their ideal role. Do school psychologists feel that their current involvement in the grade retention process is within "Best Practices" for a school psychologist? Finally, the rate at which school psychologists agree with retention as an appropriate intervention will be examined.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine the current self-reported role of the school psychologist in grade retention decisions and whether or not current involvement of school psychologists in the grade retention process coincide with best practices level of involvement indicated in previous research. The main rationale of the overall methodology was to survey school psychologists to determine their involvement in the retention process and their perceptions of retention.

Participants

The participants consisted of 231 nationwide school psychologists currently practicing in public schools. A random sample of 500 school psychologists from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) was generated through the mailing list firm which services the association.

Surveys were returned by a total of 231 of the 2006 NASP members, resulting in a return rate of 46.2% (See Table 1 for demographics). The majority of school psychologists responded from the East North Central, Middle Atlantic, and South Atlantic regions. The majority of respondents indicated a school psychologist to student ratio between 1 to 500-1000 (32.5%) and 1 to 1000-2000 (40.7%) students. The most frequent response for setting was suburban (50.2%) and age group was elementary (77.9%). The number of years of experience as a school psychologist ranged from 1 to 37 years, with the mean number of years 12.7 years working as a school psychologist. School psychologists' level of education was determined by highest degree received for which the majority of responses were Masters +30 (34.2%) and Specialist (32.0%) degrees.

Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to examine school psychologists' perception of their role in the retention process (See appendix B). Items were adapted from a survey on the role of school psychologists in the prereferral intervention process conducted by Pedro (1999) and reviewed by a panel of graduate level school psychology students. The items were assigned into four categories related to:

(1) demographics, (state of practice, school psychologist to student ratio, school type, highest degree completed, years of experience, and age group(s) working with)

(2) current retention practices within school (does retention occur, retention trend)

(3) perceptions of own role (items 1-12), and

(4) preferred or ideal roles of the school psychologist (items 13-22).

In the second section, the current retention practices within schools in which the school psychologists work where examined. This section consisted of two questions. The first question inquired whether or not the school psychologist's school currently practices retention. The purpose of this question was to estimate the current levels of retention and also as a transition point for the survey. Survey questions after this point did not apply to a school psychologist in a setting which retention is not practiced. The school psychologists in this position ended the survey at this point, while school psychologists who answered yes to this question were asked to complete the remainder of the survey. The second question in this section sought to determine if these individuals had noticed an increase, decrease, or no change in the levels of retention in their schools.

In sections three and four, the survey questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert-type scale, where 1=Strongly Agreed (SA), 2=Agreed (A), 3=Neutral (N), 4=Disagreed (D), and

5=Strongly Disagreed (SD). Section 3, examined the current perceived role each respondent has in the grade retention process. Section 4, on the other hand, sought to discover current attitudes among practicing professionals on the practice of grade retention. The questionnaire was estimated to take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

Procedure

A random sample of 500 school psychologists practicing in public schools was selected through the National Association of School Psychologists membership database. The names of the potential respondents were made available through a private mailing list firm. Questionnaires were mailed to the school psychologists in two sets of mailings, with the first mailing sent with a cover letter explaining the survey in May of 2006 (See Appendix C). Each survey was coded with the a number and the letter "A" linked to an individual's name to identify it as the first mailing and a number to determine which potential respondents would receive a second mailing. The coding held no other identifying purpose and names were destroyed once a survey was received. A total of 182 surveys were returned after the initial mailing.

The second mailing was sent with a cover letter to those who did not respond in October 2006 (see Appendix D). These surveys were coded with the letter "B" to identify them as the second mailing. The deadline for completed surveys was set as November 2006 and an additional 54 surveys were returned for a total of 236. The returned surveys were then sorted and examined for missing data. Six surveys were removed due to missing data or a respondent that was not currently working within a school.

The timing of the mailings were arranged whereby the first mailing occurred during summer and a follow-up mailing occurred during the fall of the school year. This was done to maximize the return rate by allowing for various schedules nationwide. It was also done to

maximize the amount of potential respondents who received the survey at the proper address (i.e. work versus home).

RESULTS

Retention Rates

A primary purpose of this study was to examine the perception of the rate at which schools practice grade retention as well as current trends in the rate of retention. Of the 231 respondents to this survey, 86.6% indicated that their current school practices retention. Of those who responded yes (n=200), 26.0% indicated a decrease, 41.6% no change, and 19.0% an increase in the amount of retentions.

Retention rates, as perceived by the school psychologists, were also compared across demographic characteristics of the schools in which the respondents practiced (See Table 2). School psychologists from East South Central and West North Central both reported that 100% of their current schools practiced retention. The Middle Atlantic (26.2%) and Pacific (17.9%) reported the highest amount of schools that did not practice retention. In terms of school psychologist to student ratio, those schools with less that 500 students per psychologist had the lowest percentage that practiced retention (75.0%) and those schools with 2000 plus had the highest (97.2%). Schools in county school districts (100%) and rural school districts (94.1%) were the most likely to practice retention, while suburban schools were the least likely (80.2%).

To determine the rates of retention by age group, only those respondents who selected one age group were included (n=150). School psychologists working in elementary school (n = 120) indicated 87.5% of their schools practiced retention, those in middle/junior high (n= 17) indicated 70.6%, and at the high school level (n = 13) the rate was 46.2%.

Retention trends were similarly compared across demographic characteristics (See Table 3). Percentages for the trend versus demographic items were calculated from respondents who answered 'Yes' to the retention item. The largest increase in retention rates reported by

respondents was in the South Atlantic (36.4%). The largest decrease was in New England (40.7%) and no-change in West North Central (70.0%). Retention trends in relation to school psychologist to student ratio showed the largest increase in schools with a ratio greater than 2000 students per school psychologist (28.6%), and largest decrease (38.9%) and no-change (61.1%) in schools with a ratio less than 500 students per school psychologist. Rural schools demonstrated both the highest perceived decrease (37.5%) and increase (29.2%), while county school demonstrated the highest perceived no-change (71.4%). In terms of age group, school psychologists working in middle school/junior high perceived the greatest increase (33.3%), while high school showed the greatest perceived decrease (33.3%) and no-change (66/7%).

Perceived Roles of the School Psychologist

School psychologist's perception of their own role in the grade retention process was examined. Variables were collapsed from the five item Likert format into three (Agree, Neutral, and Disagree) in order to assess whether a significant amount of respondents answered the items in a similar manner (See Table 4).

Specific roles in the retention process to which a majority of respondents answered "Strongly Agree/Agree" to included; consultation (84%), advocacy (75.5%), report assessment findings (83.5%), staff members seek out psychologists' opinion regarding retention (62.0%), and being involved in pre-retainment decisions for at-risk students (70.5%). The only item to which respondents answered "Strongly Disagree/Disagree" to sixty percent or greater was that they had the final say in which students are retained (89.5%)

Ideal Roles of the School Psychologist

The next area examined was the school psychologist's ideal role in the grade retention process. The questionnaire items assessed what levels of involvement were preferred by the

respondents. Percentages were calculated with the 200 respondents that indicated that their current school practices retention. Variables were collapsed from the five item Likert format into three (Agree, Neutral, and Disagree) in order to assess whether a significant amount of respondents answered the items in a similar manner (See Table 5).

Items to which a majority of respondents answered "Strongly Agree/Agree" to included; the school psychologist should have a role in the grade retention process (91.5%), the school psychologist should have be an advocate for students at-risk for being retained (92.5%), be involved with this issues at the policy making level (89.0%), advocate for interventions to be attempted before other steps are taken (97.5%), that there should be a clearly defined set of decision making procedures (89.5%), and retention should be a team decision (96.5%). The items to which respondents answered "Strongly Disagree/Disagree" to 60% or greater were feeling that current participation was too much (88.5%) and agreeing with retention as an appropriate intervention (67.0%).

Relationships Between Perceived and Ideal Roles

The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether the school psychologists' relationship between the current perceived roles and ideal roles. Comparisons were made using bivariate Pearson Correlations to determine 2-tailed significance on a number of matched items to examine if the responses were significantly related (See Table 6). Matched items topics included the school psychologists' participation in retention and whether the respondents felt the school psychologist should be involved in grade retention decisions ($r = .117$, $p = .098$). Perceived participation was matched to whether school psychologists' felt there involvement was too much ($r = .109$, $p = .123$) or too little ($r = -.502$, $p < .001$) compared to ideal. Ideal involvement was also matched against whether the school psychologists took the role of a

consultant in the grade retention process ($r = .299$, $p = .001$), role as a reporter of assessment findings ($r = .341$, $p < .001$), and being a member of a retention team ($r = .188$, $p = .008$).

Other matched topics included perceived versus ideal role in advocacy for those being considered for retention ($r = .330$, $p < .001$), being part of a decision making team ($r = .134$, $p = .058$), and involvement in pre-retention interventions ($r = .210$, $p = .003$). Whether the school psychologists' felt that retention procedures should be clearly defined and current practice within their school was also compared ($r = .068$, $p = .341$). Feeling that there should be a clearly defined set of decision making procedures for retention was compared to actually having a clearly defined procedures in current school ($r = .068$, $p = .341$) and having procedures that are followed ($r = -.038$, $p = .589$).

Significant correlations were also found between a number of perceived role items with whether the school psychologist felt their role fit "Best Practices." Having a part in the retention making process was positively correlated with feeling that their involvement was within "Best Practices" ($r = .435$, $p < .001$). Other items that were positively correlated included being a member of a retention decision making team ($r = .426$, $p < .001$), having final say in which students are retained ($r = .142$, $p = .044$), having members of staff that seek out the school psychologists' opinion ($r = .397$, $p < .001$), and being involved in pre-retainment interventions with at-risk students ($r = .220$, $p = .002$). Meanwhile finding oneself ignored or overruled in these decisions ($r = -.422$, $p < .000$) and having an ambiguous grade retention process within their current school ($r = -.282$, $p < .000$) were negatively correlated.

The relationship between the agreement that retention was an appropriate intervention and the school psychologists' current role was also explored. Agreement this item was found to be positively correlated with being involved in the retention process ($r = .152$, $p = .031$).

However, it was negatively correlated with those who had a role of advocacy for students at risk for being retained ($r = -.178$, $p = .012$) and those who find themselves ignored or overruled on retention decisions ($r = -.210$, $p = .003$).

Two items examined the respondents' feelings about the ideal level of involvement in retention; feeling current involvement was too much or too little compared to the ideal. Feelings that retention involvement was too much was positively correlated with part of a retention team ($r = .141$, $p = .046$) and having final say in which students are retained ($r = .142$, $p = .045$). This item was negatively correlated with feeling ignored ($r = .162$, $p = .022$) and having clearly defined retention procedures ($r = -.217$, $p = .002$). Meanwhile feelings of having too little involvement compared to the ideal was positively correlated with feeling ignored ($r = .472$. $p < .001$) and having an ambiguous role ($r = .520$, $p < .001$). There were a number of items that were negatively correlated with this item including; role in consultation ($r = -.202$, $p = .004$), being a member of a team ($r = -.599$, $p < .001$), having final say in retention decisions ($r = -.185$, $p = .009$), having staff seek out opinion ($r = -.386$, $p < .001$), having clearly defined retention procedures ($r = -.166$, $p = .019$), retention procedures that are followed ($r = -.164$, $p = .020$), and being involved in pre-retainment interventions ($r = -.230$, $p = .001$).

Further Analysis

In addition to exploring the relationships between items that were designated at perceived role and ideal role, an examination of the relationships within the two groups was also completed. Similar to the between group analysis, comparisons were made using bivariate Pearson Correlations to determine 2-tailed significance (See Tables 7 and 8).

Whether the school psychologist had a part in the retention decision making process was compared with all other perceived role items. These comparisons where made in order to

determine what activities school psychologists involved in retention decisions participated in. Items demonstrating a significant positive relationship included having a role of consultation ($r = .350$, $p < .001$), being a member of a decision making team ($r = .644$, $p < .001$), having final say in which students are retained ($r = .266$, $p = .001$), having member of the staff seek out the school psychologist's opinion on issues regarding student retention ($r = .636$, $p < .001$), and being involved with pre-retainment interventions ($r = .221$, $p = .002$). Those with a negative relationship to being involved in retention decisions included being ignored or overruled ($r = -.474$, $p < .001$) and having an ambiguous role ($r = -.328$, $p < .001$).

Whether the school psychologist had a part in a retention team was compared with all other perceived role items. These comparisons where made in order to determine what role the school psychologists had on these teams. Significant positive relationships included having a role of consultation ($r = .272$, $p < .001$), having final say in which students are retained ($r = .478$, $p < .001$), and being involved in pre-retainment decisions ($r = .232$, $p = .001$). Those with a negative relationship to being involved in retention decisions included being ignored or overruled ($r = -.357$, $p < .001$) and having an ambiguous role ($r = -.355$, $p < .001$).

Three items regarding the clarity of the retention decision making process within the school psychologist's current setting were compared. Having clearly a defined set of procedures regarding retention was positively correlated to having procedures that were followed ($r = .597$, $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with the school psychologist having an ambiguous role ($r = -.333$, $p < .001$). Having an ambiguous role was also negatively correlated with having retention procedures that are followed ($r = -.185$, $p = .009$)

In regards to the respondents ideal role, there was no significant correlation between whether they felt their role in the retention process was too much versus too little ($r = -.119$, $p =$

.093). The responses to these two items were also compared with whether the respondents felt school psychologist should be involved in grade retention decisions and whether they felt their current involvement was within "Best Practices." Feeling that one had too much involvement compared to the ideal was negatively correlated to feeling that the school psychologist should be involved ($r = -.165$, $p = .019$). While those feeling there participation was too little compared with ideal showed no significant correlation ($r = .015$, $p = .830$). Feeling one participated too little was negatively correlated with feeling one's involvement is within "Best Practices" ($r = -.444$, $p < .001$). There was no significant relationship to those who felt their level of participation was too much compared to the ideal ($r = .040$, $p = .571$).

Finally, the relationship between feelings that the school psychologist should be involved in grade retention decisions was compared with items measuring specific roles in this process. Feeling that the school psychologist should have a role in the grade retention process was positively correlated with feeling that the school psychologist should be an advocate for students at-risk for being retained ($r = .273$, $p < .001$), be involved at the policy making level ($r = .171$, $p = .012$), and that retention should be a team decision ($r = .229$, $p < .001$). There was not a significant relationship with the school psychologist being an advocate for interventions to be attempted before other steps in the retention process ($r - .008$, $p < .215$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined school psychologists' reports of their perceived and ideal roles in retention making decisions. The majority of respondents indicated that their school practices retention. The findings indicate that although almost all the school psychologists who responded believe that they should have a role in the retention making process, only half reported that they do have a role in the retention process. Approximately two-thirds of the responding school psychologists disagreed with retention as an appropriate intervention. In addition, one-third indicated that they were part of a retention decision making team and two-thirds agreed that staff members seek out their opinion on issues regarding retention. A large majority agreed that retention should be a team decision. There was also a significant correlation between having a role in the retention decision making process and feeling that their current involvement is within "Best Practices" for a school psychologist.

Similar to the finding of this study that a majority of school psychologists want to be involved in the retention team decision making process, Schnurr (2004) found that the majority of school psychologists who responded to his survey indicated that they would like to be involved in the decision making process. The desire to be involved was significantly higher than actual reported roles. This continued discrepancy indicates that barriers that prevent school psychologists from performing their role to the ideal level still exist. This may indicate a lack of understanding from other school professionals on the usefulness of including school psychologists in grade retention decisions.

The finding that over 86% of the respondents indicated that their current school practices retention indicates that retention continues to be a widespread practice. In contrast to previous studies, however, the respondents in this study reported that they believed there was no change

or a decrease in the amount of retentions. In comparison Schnurr (2004) reported that a majority of school psychologists were unaware of retention rates within their schools. In addition, other studies have documented that the retention rate have steadily increased over the past 25 years (Dawson 1998; Hauser 1999; Merrick, McCreery, & Brown, 1998). The current results may be a reflection of the reaction of school professionals against the negative aspects high stakes testing. The results may also reflect the move towards researched based interventions and the realization that retention is not one of these practices.

In terms of school psychologist to student ratio, those schools with less than 500 students per psychologist had the lowest percentage that reported they practiced retention and those schools with 2000 per psychologist plus had the highest reported practice of retention. Those districts that have higher ratios may also be the districts that are larger or those districts that are tapped for resources in many areas. For example, Lee (2005) noted that urban districts spend less per student and this causes problems such as lagging behind in access to educational technology or programs. In addition, funding problems in large schools often are worsened by financial mismanagement (Lee, 2005). It is possible the higher retention rates in those districts with a higher school psychologist to student ratio are also those districts that lack other staff that are available to provide pre-retention interventions. Those schools psychologists who indicated a school psychologist to student ratio of 1 to 500 indicated no increase in retention rates. It must be noted however, that majority of school psychologists indicated no change in retention rates at all ratio groups except for 2000 plus. Therefore, these larger districts may be beginning to implement policies that indirectly influence retention rate such as instructional support teams that are providing pre-retention interventions or even direct policies aimed at reducing grade retention. NASP recommends a school psychologist to student ratio of 1:1000 (NASP, 2000)

and most schools around the nation do not meet this goal, in fact the national average ratio is 1:1600 (Charvat, 2005). Quality services become harder to deliver when the ratio of school psychologist to students is higher than this recommended amount (Thomas, 2000).
School psychologists who worked in county school districts and rural school districts reported that they were the most likely to practice retention, whereas school psychologists who worked in suburban schools were the least likely. Interestingly in this study urban schools were not found to have the highest retention rates, as indicated by the respondents, despite the research indicating that minority children were at greater risk for being retained (Hauser, 1998). Hauser (1998) found that within metropolitan school districts as many as 50% of students are retained at some point in their school career. Furthermore, Hauser and colleagues (1999 & 2000, as cited in Jimerson, 2003) showed that a large share of minority children experience grade retention during elementary school.

The majority of school psychologist's in this study indicated having a retention role of consultation, reporting assessment findings, and advocacy. In comparison Gates' (1983) found that school psychologists responded that their roles primarily consisted of evaluation, placement decisions, and consultation. Furthermore, Schnurr (2004) reported that their role most often consisted of advising and consultation. In contrast, Rafoth and Carey (1991), reported that state level school psychology contacts felt that they believe that role of school psychologist in grade retention decisions is that of psychometrician (e.g. administering ability and achievement tests) and that they are minimally involved in making specific recommendations regarding retention and could ideally provide more information to school staff and parents. The current results along with those of Schnurr (2004) show a promising change towards an expanding role in the grade retention process that goes beyond merely testing students to determine if they are candidates for

retention. Advocacy for those at risk for being retained and consultation with teachers and parents are key roles if the use of unproven or possibly destructive practices is to be eliminated.

Respondents indicated that the ideal role of the school psychologist in grade retention decisions should include being an advocate for students at risk for being retained and for interventions to be attempted before other steps in the decision making process are made. These results provide evidence that whereas school psychologist may not be involved at the ideal level, many are aware of the need to be involved. In comparison, Rafoth and Carey (1991) reported that state-level school psychology contacts felt that the ideal role would include advising staff on the developmental level and overall maturity of a student, consultation, data collection, and coordination/creation of alternative services.

One quarter of the respondents indicated that they are often ignored or overruled on retention decisions. As noted in the research, much of the decision making is determined by a school system's promotion policies and by teacher and administrator attitudes towards the benefits of retention (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Roderick, 1995). The student's teachers, parents, and school play a crucial role in the decision making process, and generally a veto from any of these team members can result in promotion instead of retention, regardless of input from the school psychologist (Niklason, 1984; Tanner & Galis, 1997). These numbers indicate that this practice may still be occurring despite the research disproving its effectiveness.

Approximately half of the respondents indicated that the retention procedures were not clearly defined and 40.0% indicated that their role in the process in their buildings was ambiguous. Furthermore, only 38.5% indicated that the retention procedures in their buildings were followed. In comparison, Schnurr (2004) reported that nearly one fifth of school psychologists were unsure if their district had a formal retention procedure. These results

indicate that many schools do not have a clearly defined set of policies regarding which students are retained or how retention decisions are made. This may also include a lack of a clear determination of who (e.g. school psychologist, teacher, administrator, parent) is capable of making such decisions. Furthermore it appears that in a many cases where procedures are outline, they are not followed.

Just over half of respondents felt that their involvement was within "Best practices." Furthermore, having a part in the retention making process was positively correlated with feeling that their involvement was within "Best Practices." This is a logical relationship considering the a number of calls for school psychologists to become actively involved in retention decision (Jimerson, et. al., 1997; Rafoth, 2002; Rafoth & Carey, 1995; Smink, 2001; Tanner & Galis, 1997; NASP, 2003). Other items that were positively correlated with "Best Practices," included being a member of a retention decision making team, having members of staff that seek out the school psychologists' opinion, and being involved in pre-retainment interventions with at-risk students. Again these items follow suggestion that have been commonly provided by researchers, so those who were involved in these activities would be following researched based practices.

Two-thirds of the responding school psychologists disagreed with retention as an appropriate intervention. Anecdotal information provided by a number of respondents who agreed or were unsure often reflected that in most cases retention was ineffective and their answer reflected the small percentage of cases where it could work. Others indicated that it was only effective in "extreme" or "rare" cases and those in which other supports were provided. A few respondents also qualified their responses by including that it was only appropriate in kindergarten through first grade. This indicates that some school psychologist subscribe to the

common misconception that early retention is in some way better than later retention. This was also seen in Gates' (1983) survey where a number of respondents indicated that retention is a justifiable practice if used early in a child's school career (kindergarten through third grade) to allow these students to develop. Schnurr (2004) also found that although they generally denounced the effectiveness of retention, many school psychologists demonstrated only a moderate understanding of retention literature, endorsing commonly misunderstood aspects of retention (e.g. retention gives immature students a chance to grow).

The relationship between the respondents' endorsement that retention was an appropriate intervention and the respondents' current role in the retention process was also explored. Agreement that retention was appropriate was found to be positively correlated with being involved in the retention process. This positive correlation may reflect school psychologist who agree with retention as an appropriate intervention and also are part of the retention process. This correlation may also indicate that school psychologists that do not agree with retention and are facing opposition they may disengage from this process. For example, a school psychologist who is constantly overruled in retention decision may elect to not be involved at all. On the other hand, School psychologists who reported that they had a role of advocacy for at-risk students were also less likely to endorse that retention was an appropriate intervention. It is possible that the role of advocacy of students at risk for retention stems from the belief that it is indeed a harmful practice. Therefore, these school psychologists' involvement

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There are a number of limitations that exist in the current study. The first is the limitations inherent in survey research, particularly those sent by mail, including sampling, non-coverage non-response, and measurement errors (Dillman, 1991). It is also difficult to ascertain

the respondents understanding of each item. There were a number of instances where respondents wrote in a question mark or added qualifiers for their answers in the margins. It also cannot be assumed that all of the respondents interpreted the questions in the same manner. A prime example of this would be the "Best Practices" question that was purposely created to measure personal opinion and did not provide a clear definition of what "Best Practices" was. Another example was seen in the roles that the school psychologist participated in (e.g. consultation or advocacy) were not clearly defined. After examining the data, it was noted that some of the respondents may have interpreted this to mean this to be part of their role in general and not specifically to retention. The data provided by this study also provides the perceptions of the responding school psychologists and not the actual rates. It can only be assumed that the response provided (e.g. "I have noticed a decrease in retention") reflects the actual occurrence.

Furthermore, survey research limits the way in which a researcher can format questions. One option would be to allow for open ended responses and then create a coding system to categorize common answers. This would have allowed for a broader and more detailed analysis of the school psychologists' roles and allowed for more insight into current retention practices. This method is time consuming however, and would make it difficult to use a larger sample size like that of the current study. Therefore, a Likert scale was used to allow for easier data analysis and a larger sample size. The Likert scale forced respondents to choose a response between strongly agree and strongly disagree. Questions that were not answered in this manner were discarded from the data analysis. Additionally, one individuals interpretation of the degrees of the scale (e.g. strongly agree versus agree) may differ from the next. Therefore, for a majority of the analyses, data was collapsed to eliminate this concern. Since this study as well as the

previous examinations of the school psychologists role in retention have used surveys to gather data, future research may wish to examine this topic utilizing different means such as interviews.

Although the respondent rate was high (46.8% were returned) over half of the school psychologists did not respond. Schnurr (2004) in a similar study hypothesized that non-respondents may have been "too busy to complete the survey and therefore too busy to become involved in retention decisions or conversely too busy with retention decisions to complete the survey (p. 205)." Another possible difference between the too groups may have been the interest in the topic of retention or school psychology research in general. Those who responded may have been more likely to be well read in current research and practices, including retention.

The second limitation was the makeup of the sample. In sum, the sample was made up of school psychologists who practiced in public schools and were members of the National Association of School Psychologists. There may be significant differences between public and private schools and the way they approach retention. Furthermore, differences between school psychologists who are NASP member and non-members cannot be ignored. NASP members have increased access to current research provided by the association. NASP also publishes its own position statement on grade retention and social promotion that may impact the respondents personal feelings on the topic (NASP, 2003). Future research may seek to survey a wider range of practicing school psychologists (e.g. private schools, non-NASP members). The school psychologists' role should also be examined through questionnaires of other school professionals. School administrators and teachers may provide valuable information on how they perceive the school psychologists current role and how they ideally see the school psychologist being involved in retention decisions.

There are also limitations inherent in correlational research despite it common use in the behavioral sciences. The current study utilized correlations to provide preliminary data on the relationships of many variables in order to provide information for later, more targeted analyses. The most significant downfall of correlations is the difficulty determining causality and ruling out third variables. Future research should focus on more targeted topic areas (e.g. retention policies), as well as utilizing more powerful statistical procedures.

The final limitation of this study was the depth at which many of the issues related to retention were studied and the inability to have respondents elaborate on their responses. This issue arose a number of times during interpretation of the results and provides guidance for future research. School psychologists should be surveyed about their perceptions of the appropriateness of retention. Specifically, when and for which students do they feel it is useful. Furthermore, what do practicing school psychologists perceive as the major barriers to involvement in grade retention procedures? A more in depth examination of the reasons for the discrepancy between the perceived and ideal role is needed.

This study examined whether school psychologists believed retention procedures existed. To explore what retention policies actually exist and how they are practiced school administrators and school districts need to be surveyed as well as corresponding school retention numbers examined. Along the same lines, a determination of how many schools have retention decision making teams and who is on these teams is needed. In addition, future research may focus on who is making retention decisions and how are they making the decisions.

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Table 1
Demographic Characteristics

General Characteristics	n	Percent
Geographic Location		
New England	32	13.9
Middle Atlantic	42	18.2
South Atlantic	35	15.2
East South Central	6	2.6
East North Central	47	20.3
West South Central	13	5.6
West North Central	10	4.3
Mountain	18	7.8
Pacific	28	12.1
School Psychologist to Student Ratio		
Less Than 500	24	10.4
500 to 1000	75	32.5
1000 to 2000	94	40.7
2000 Plus	36	15.6
Missing	2	0.9
School Setting		
Rural	51	22.1
Suburban	116	50.2
Urban	48	20.8
County	14	6.1
Other	2	0.9
Age Group(s)* Which School Psychologists Work		
Preschool	59	25.5
Elementary	180	77.9
Middle/Junior High	76	32.9
High School	53	22.9
Missing	2	0.9
Educational Level		
Masters	20	8.7
Masters +30	79	34.2
Specialist	74	32.0
All but Dissertation (ABD)	13	5.6
Doctorate	44	19.0
Other	1	0.4

n=231
*Respondents able to check all options that apply.

Table 2
Rates of retention by demographic characteristic

General Characteristics	Percent (n) Yes	No
Geographic Location		
New England	84.4 (27)	15.6 (5)
Middle Atlantic	73.8 (31)	26.2 (11)
South Atlantic	94.3 (33)	5.7 (2)
East South Central	100.0 (6)	0.0 (0)
East North Central	87.2 (41)	12.8 (6)
West South Central	92.3 (12)	7.7 (1)
West North Central	100.0 (10)	0.0 (0)
Mountain	94.4 (17)	5.6 (1)
Pacific	82.1 (23)	17.9 (5)
School Psychologist to Student Ratio		
Less Than 500	75.0 (18)	25.0 (6)
500 to 1000	85.3 (64)	14.7 (11)
1000 to 2000	86.2 (81)	13.8 (13)
2000 Plus	97.2 (35)	2.8 (1)
School Setting		
Rural	94.1 (48)	5.9 (3)
Suburban	80.2 (93)	19.8 (23)
Urban	91.7 (44)	8.3 (4)
County	100.0 (14)	0.0 (0)
Other	50.0 (1)	50.0 (1)
Age Group*		
Elementary	87.5 (105)	12.5 (15)
Middle/Junior High	70.6 (12)	29.4 (5)
High School	46.2 (6)	53.8 (7)

n=231
* Included only those who responded to one age group

Table 3
Retention trends† as perceived by school psychologists

General Characteristics	Percent (n) Decrease	No Change	Increase
US Census Division			
New England	40.7 (11)	40.7 (11)	18.5 (5)
Middle Atlantic	38.7 (12)	45.2 (14)	16.1 (5)
South Atlantic	12.1 (4)	51.5 (17)	36.4 (12)
East South Central	33.3 (2)	50.0 (3)	16.7 (1)
East North Central	34.1 (14)	39.0 (16)	26.8 (11)
West South Central	33.3 (4)	58.3 (7)	8.3 (1)
West North Central	20.0 (2)	70.0 (7)	10.0 (1)
Mountain	23.5 (4)	58.8 (10)	17.6 (3)
Pacific	30.4 (7)	47.8 (11)	21.7 (5)
School Psychologist to Student Ratio			
Less Than 500	38.9 (7)	61.1 (11)	0.0 (0)
500 to 1000	29.7 (19)	50.0 (32)	20.3 (13)
1000 to 2000	25.9 (21)	48.1 (39)	25.9 (21)
2000 Plus	37.1 (13)	34.3 (12)	28.6 (10)
School Setting			
Rural	37.5 (18)	33.3 (16)	29.2 (14)
Suburban	30.1 (28)	51.6 (48)	18.3 (17)
Urban	27.3 (12)	47.7 (21)	25.0 (11)
County	14.3 (2)	71.4 (10)	14.3 (2)
Other	0.0 (0)	100.0 (1)	0.0 (0)
Age Group*			
Elementary	29.5 (31)	48.6 (51)	21.9 (23)
Middle/Junior High	25.0 (3)	41.7 (5)	33.3 (4)
High School	33.3 (2)	66.7 (4)	0.0 (0)

n=200
† Calculated from those who responded 'Yes' to retention item.
* Included only those who responded to one age group.

Table 4
School Psychologist Responses to Perceived Role Items (Collapsed Data)

Item	Percent (n) Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1) I have a role in the retention decision making process:	52.5 (105)	14.0 (28)	33.5 (67)
2) My role is one of consultation:	84.0 (168)	9.0 (18)	7.0 (14)
3) My role is one of advocacy:	75.5 (151)	12.0 (24)	7.0 (14)
4) My role is to report assessment findings:	83.5 (167)	9.5 (19)	7.0 (14)
5) I am a member of a retention decision making team:	32.0 (64)	13.5 (27)	54.5 (109)
6) I have final say in which students are retained:	4.0 (8)	6.5 (13)	89.5 (179)
7) Members of the staff seek out my opinion on issues regarding student retention:	62.0 (124)	17.5 (35)	20.5 (41)
8) I find myself ignored or overruled on such decisions:	24.0 (48)	34.0 (68)	42.0 (84)
9) Retention procedures in my building are clearly defined:	30.5 (61)	19.0 (38)	50.5 (101)
10) Retention procedures in my building are followed:	38.5 (77)	41.0 (82)	20.5 (41)
11) My role in the grade retention process in my building is ambiguous:	40.0 (80)	17.5 (35)	42.5 (85)
12) I am involved in pre-retainment interventions with at-risk students:	70.5 (141)	13.5 (27)	16.0 (32)

n=200
χ^2 Sig. < .01 on all items.

Table 5
School Psychologist Responses to Ideal Role Items (Collapsed Data)

Item	Percent (n) Agree	Neutral	Disagree
13) I feel the level I participate in the grade retention process is too much compared to the ideal:	2.0 (4)	9.5 (19)	88.5 (177)
14) I feel the level I participate in the grade retention process is too little compared to the ideal:	57.5 (115)	12.5 (25)	30.0 (60)
15) The school psychologist should be involved in grade retention decisions:	91.5 (183)	6.0 (12)	2.5 (5)
16) The school psychologist should be an advocate for students at risk for being retained:	92.5 (185)	6.0 (12)	1.5 (3)
17) The school psychologist should be involved with this issue at the policy making level:	89.0 (178)	9.0 (18)	2.0 (4)
18) The school psychologist should advocate for interventions to be attempted before other steps in the decision making process are made:	97.5 (195)	2.0 (4)	0.5 (1)
19) I feel there should be a clearly defined set of decision making procedures that should be followed:	89.5 (179)	8.0 (16)	2.5 (5)
20) Retention should be a team decision:	96.5 (193)	2.0 (4)	1.5 (3)
21) I feel my involvement in the grade retention process is within Best Practices for a school psychologist:	57.5 (115)	15.5 (31)	27.0 (54)
22) I agree with retention as an appropriate intervention:	11.5 (23)	21.5 (43)	67.0 (134)

n=200
χ^2 Sig. < .01 on all items.

Table 6

Correlations of perceived versus ideal roles of the school psychologist

	Ideal Items									
	Item13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20	Item 21	Item 22
Perceived Items										
Item 1	.109	-.502**	.117	-.026	.013	.032	-.110	.057	.435**	.152*
Item 2	.005	-.202**	.229**	-.030	.091	.073	-.022	.022	.092	.070
Item 3	-.109	.011	.110	.330**	.191**	.138	.096	.137	.046	-.178*
Item 4	-.037	.098	.341**	.153*	.133	.026	.151*	.148*	-.037	.050
Item 5	.141*	-.599**	.188**	.016	.002	.102	-.067	.134	.426**	.040
Item 6	.142*	-.185**	.034	-.112	.050	-.063	.021	-.022	.142*	.034
Item 7	.044	-.386**	.147*	-.028	.076	.047	-.080	-.041	.397**	.081
Item 8	-.162*	.472**	.001	.090	.118	-.098	.083	.073	-.422**	-.210**
Item 9	-.023	-.166*	.009	.041	-.003	.081	.068	.041	.113	.031
Item 10	-.217**	-.164*	-.018	.005	-.091	.138	-.038	.091	.070	.000
Item 11	-.032	.520**	-.037	.026	.005	-.116	.100	-.005	-.282**	-.062
Item 12	.055	-.230**	.017	-.043	.054	.210**	-.096	.011	.220**	.091

* p<.05, **p<.01

Table 7
Correlations within perceived of the school psychologist

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10	Item 11	Item12
Item 1	--	.330**	.064	.019	.644**	.266**	.636**	-.474**	.029	.016	-.328**	.221**
Item 2	.350**	--	.332**	.176*	.272*	.072	.320**	-.149*	-.174*	-.032	-.050	.201**
Item 3	.064	.332**	--	.199**	.090	.059	.193**	-.003	-.089	-.084	.041	-.016
Item 4	.019	.176*	.199**	--	.053	.094	.038	.106	.026	-.006	.028	.078
Item 5	.644**	.272**	.090	.053	--	.264**	.478**	-.357**	.069	.075	-.355**	.232**
Item 6	.226**	.072	.059	.094	.264**	--	.150*	-.137	.061	-.003	-.150*	.062
Item 7	.636**	.320**	.193**	.038	.478**	.150*	--	-.438**	.018	.009	-.245**	.187**
Item 8	-.474**	-.149*	-.003	.106	-.357**	-.137	-.438**	--	-.117	-.089	.327**	-.154*
Item 9	.029	-.174*	-.089	.026	.069	.061	.018	-.117	--	.597**	-.333**	.104
Item 10	.016	-.032	-.084	-.006	.075	-.003	.009	-.089	.597**	--	-.185**	.092
Item 11	-.328**	-.050	.041	.028	-.355**	-.150*	-.245**	.327**	-.333**	-.185**	--	-.265**
Item 12	.221*	.201**	-.016	.078	.232**	.062	.187**	-.154*	.104	.092	-.265**	--

* p<.05, **p<.01

Table 8
Correlations within ideal of the school psychologist

	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20	Item 21	Item 22
Item 13	--	-.119	-.165*	-.210*	-.016	-.140*	-.109	-.211**	.040	.146*
Item 14	-.119	--	.015	.049	.002	-.066	.141*	-.025	-.444*	-.101
Item 15	-.165*	.015	--	.273**	.171*	.088	.230**	.299**	.011	.034
Item 16	-.210*	.049	.273**	--	.178*	.110	.135	.166*	-.112	-.173*
Item 17	-.016	.002	.171*	.178*	--	.143*	.146*	.032	.087	-.045
Item 18	-.140*	-.066	.088	.110	.143*	--	.076	.154*	.170*	-.012
Item 19	-.109	.141*	.230*	.135	.146*	.076	--	.120	-.144*	.064
Item 8	-.211**	-.025	.229**	.166*	.032	.154*	.120	--	.042	.012
Item 9	.040	-.444*	.001	-.112	.087	.170*	-.144*	.042	--	.091
Item 10	.146*	-.101	.034	-.173*	-.045	-.012	.064	.012	.091	--

* p<.05, **p<.01

Appendix A

US Divisions as per US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census

New England	Middle Atlantic	South Atlantic
• Maine • New Hampshire • Vermont • Massachusetts • Rhode Island • Connecticut	• New York • New Jersey • Pennsylvania	• Delaware • Maryland • Virginia • West Virginia • North Carolina • South Carolina • Georgia • Florida
East North Central	**East South Central**	**West North Central**
• Ohio • Indiana • Michigan • Illinois • Wisconsin	• Kentucky • Tennessee • Mississippi • Alabama	• North Dakota • South Dakota • Minnesota • Iowa • Nebraska • Kansas • Missouri
West South Central	**Mountain**	**Pacific**
• Oklahoma • Arkansas • Louisiana • Texas	• Montana • Idaho • Wyoming • Utah • Nevada • Colorado • Arizona • New Mexico	• Washington • Oregon • California • Alaska • Hawaii

Appendix B

SURVEY OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ROLE IN GRADE RETENTION DECISIONS

The following questionnaire explores the current and preferred involvement of the school psychologist in grade retention decisions. All information on the questionnaire will be kept confidential.

Please answer the following to the best of your knowledge:

State in which you practice: _____

School Psychologist to Student Ratio: ❑ < 500 ❑ 500-1000 ❑ 1000-2000 ❑ 2000+

School Type: ❑ Rural ❑ Suburban ❑ Urban ❑ County ❑ Other_____

Highest Degree Completed: ❑ Masters ❑ Masters + 30 Semester Hours
❑ Specialist ❑ Doctorate ❑ ABD ❑ Other_____

Approximate Number of Years Experience as a School Psychologist: _____

Age Group(s) with which you work the most: ❑ Preschool ❑ Elementary
❑ Middle/Junior High ❑ High school

Does your current school practice retention? ❑ Yes ❑ No
(If no, discontinue survey at this point and return survey in self addressed envelop – Thank you
If yes, please continue with survey)

Have you noticed an (❑ Increase ❑ Decrease ❑ No change) in the amount of retentions?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements regarding your building's policies on grade retention. Please try to respond to all of the items based on your own experience and opinion.

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neutral
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

1) I have a part in the retention decision making process:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
2) My role is one of consultation:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
3) My role is one of advocacy:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
4) My role is to report assessment findings:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
5) I am a member of a retention decision making team:
❑S ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD

Please Continue Onto Back of the Page – Thank You

6) I have final say in which students are retained:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
7) Members of the staff seek out my opinion on issues regarding student retention:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
8) I find myself ignored or overruled on such decisions:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
9) Retention procedures in my building are clearly defined:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
10) Retention procedures in my building are followed:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
11) My role in the grade retention process in my building is ambiguous:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
12) I am involved in pre-retainment interventions with at-risk students:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD

Please indicate the extent to which you agree the following statements coincide with your ideal perception of the school psychologist involvement in the retention process. Please try to respond to all of the items based on your own experience and opinion.

13) I feel the level I participate in the grade retention process is too much compared to the ideal:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
14) I feel the level I participate in the grade retention process is too little compared to the ideal:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
15) The school psychologist should be involved in grade retention decisions:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
16) The school psychologist should be an advocate for students at risk for being retained:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
17) The school psychologist should be involved with this issue at the policy making level:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
18) The school psychologist should advocate for interventions to be attempted before other steps in the decision making process is made:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
19) I feel there should be a clearly defined set of decision making procedures that should be followed:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
20) Retention should be a team decision:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
21) I feel my involvement in the grade retention process is within Best Practices for a school psychologist:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD
22) I agree with retention as an appropriate intervention:
❑SA ❑A ❑N ❑D ❑SD

Thank You Very Much for Your Time!

Email Address (For Optional Mailing of Preliminary Results):

_____

Appendix C

May, 2006

Dear Fellow School Psychologist:

Enclosed you will find a survey examining current trends in grade retention. This confidential survey explores the current and preferred involvement of the school psychologist in the retention process. This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes and will provide us with vital information in not only understanding our role but allow for insight into how this role can benefit the students we work with. When completed the survey may be returned using the enclosed self-addressed envelope. If you wish to be informed of the preliminary results, please include an email address by which you can be reached. Your time is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

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Appendix D

October, 2006

Dear Fellow School Psychologist:

This letter is a follow-up to a request sent earlier this year in order to maximize our return rate. We have had a wonderful response and the more valuable insight we gather in the area of retention, the more effective we can be in assisting all of our students. If you have received this second mailing in error, please disregard it and thank you again for your time. Furthermore, if the issue of grade retention does not impact you in your current position, feel free to forward it to a school psychologist within your district for which it does.

Enclosed you will find a survey examining current trends in grade retention. This confidential survey explores the current and preferred involvement of the school psychologist in the retention process. This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes and will provide us with vital information in not only understanding our role but allow for insight into how this role can benefit the students we work with. When completed the survey may be returned using the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Participation is voluntary, and you can decline to take part, stop participating, and choose not to answer questions without penalty. If you wish to be informed of the preliminary results, please include an email address by which you can be reached.

Your time is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

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