DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 904 TM 870 696

AUTHOR Schuyler, Nancy B.; Turner, Belinda O.
TITLE Retention or Promotion: Have Policies Passed or Failed? 1986-87.
INSTITUTION Austin Independent School District, Tex. Office of Research and Evaluation.
REPORT NO AISD-ORE-86-31
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Academic Failure; *Academic Standards; Dropout Rate; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Grade Repetition; *Low Achievement; School Districts; School Holding Power; School Statistics; Special Programs; State Legislation; Student Needs; *Student Promotion
IDENTIFIERS *Austin Independent School District TX; House Bill 72 (Texas 1984)

ABSTRACT

The number of students retained in grade in the Austin (Texas) Independent School District (AISD) has increased dramatically since new promotion policies were instituted in 1981 and Texas House Bill (HB) 72 was passed. Elementary school promotion is now tied to mastery of essential skills; secondary students must meet attendance requirements, as well as maintain an average of 70 in all courses and a minimum of 70 in certain required courses. In AISD in 1986-87, 4,118 students are repeating part or all of a grade, especially in grades one, seven, and nine. AISD spends approximately $3,500 per student to provide an extra full year of instruction. Research shows that retention has not helped most elementary students overcome their deficit in learning in the long run. It appears best to provide alternative instruction without retaining most low achievers. Special programs such as summer school, transitional classes, Transitional Academic Program, and Academic Incentive Program could help to reduce the number of retainees. If retained, students also need special instruction. At the secondary level, minimizing the number of credit units repeated, providing intense remediation in basic skills, and promoting students as soon as possible may decrease the dropout rate. (Author/JGL)

86.31

PROMOTION OR RETENTION--HAVE POLICIES PASSED OR FAILED?
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUTHORS: Nancy S. Schuyler, Belinda O. Turner

OTHER CONTACT PERSON: David Doss

Determining the best way to help very low achievers learn is a perennial issue. Texas House Bill 72 brought changes in the criteria for promotion and retention at both the elementary and secondary levels. Elementary promotion is now tied to mastery of the essential elements. Secondary students must earn a grade of 70 and meet attendance requirements to pass their courses. In addition, they must maintain an average of 70 in all courses and a minimum of 70 in certain required courses to be promoted.

In AISD in 1986-87, 4,118 students are repeating part or all of a grade--2,150 elementary and junior high students are repeating a full grade, 170 junior high students are repeating one semester, and 1,798 senior high students are repeating one credit unit or more. AISD spends approximately $3,500 per student to provide an extra full year of instruction. Prorating this amount and assuming students will not drop out, a conservative estimate of the overall cost to AISD in 1986-87 is $9,081,100.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Most elementary retainees fail to show long-term improvements in achievement. Over time, elementary retainees show significantly lower achievement scores than similar low achievers who are promoted.

2. The number of elementary students actually retained more than doubled (from 573 to 1,251) after AISD adopted a new policy in spring, 1981. The full impact of House Bill (HB) 72 will not be felt until spring, 1987.

3. The number of secondary students actually retained increased 46% (from 1,956 to 2,864) between 1985-86 and 1986-87, largely at the junior high level as a result of the stricter requirements of HB 72.

4. Summer school helped 300 secondary students to avoid repeating an entire grade; 170 junior high students were promoted after the first semester through the Transitional Academic Program (TAP) and the Academic Incentive Program (AIP).

Retention has not helped most elementary students overcome their deficit in learning in the long run. It appears best to provide alternative instruction without retaining most low achievers. If retained, students also need special instruction. At the secondary level, minimizing the number of credit units repeated, providing intense remediation in basic skills, and promoting students as soon as possible may decrease the likelihood of dropping out.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROMOTION OR RETENTION
FINAL REPORT

HOW ARE RETENTION DECISIONS MADE?

ELEMENTARY POLICY

AISD Policy: Before and After 1981-82

Prior to 1981-82, AISD's elementary retention policy was very general. A revised policy was adopted in April, 1981, which officially went into effect during the 1981-82 school year. It was more specific than the old policy in indicating that:

- All students at least one year behind in reading basals at grades one through six and/or mathematics competencies at grades four through six were to be considered for retention.
- Students generally were to be retained only once in grades K-3 and once in 4-6.
- Teachers and principals had the final responsibility for retention decisions. Parents had to be notified and conferred with at least two months before school ended regarding possible retentions.

The Impact of House Bill 72

The State Board of Education rules based on the House Bill were not in effect until this year (1986-87). These rules indicate that:

- To be promoted, a student must master the essential elements necessary to be successful at the next grade level;
- No student may be retained more than once in grades one through four or once in grades five through eight (except in very unusual cases with parent permission); and
- A student may be placed in the next grade if he or she is achieving at maximum ability and alternative program provisions are made. The student's instructional level is to be indicated on the report card.

SECONDARY POLICY

AISD Policy Before 1985-86

Junior high. Students were promoted based on a point system. A full-year course earned one point; four points were needed for promotion. Students one or two points short could be promoted if they took and passed one or two summer school courses. Placement in the next grade was possible in unusual circumstances (previous retentions, age, social, or other factors) but generally students were retained.

Senior high. Students were promoted based on successful completion of 5, 10, or 15 credits. One semester of a course counts for .5 of a credit.

The Impact of House Bill 72: 1985-86

The full impact of House Bill 72 was felt at the secondary level in 1985-86. New State Board of Education (SBOE) rules specified that:

- To be promoted, students shall attain an **overall** average of 70 or above in all courses. In addition, students must attain an average of 70 or above in three of the four following subject areas: language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.
- No student shall be retained more than once in grades 5-8 (except in unusual cases with parent permission).
- Students in grades 7 and 8 who fail to meet promotion requirements shall be retained or provided alternative programs.
- Alternative placements involve changes in a student's instructional schedule to allow them to meet promotion standards. Examples include:
  - A transfer to another school;
  - An assignment to a self-contained remedial class; or
  - Enrollment in an alternative instructional program.

HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE RETAINED?

The changes in retention policies have had a profound impact on the number of students retained.

In years past, the number of students recommended for retention in the spring of each year was reported. However, this did not reflect the number actually repeating the next grade because of factors such as student mobility (students leaving AISD), grade changes, and summer school. The figures reported are reflect the number of students listed in the same grade in the spring of two

subsequent years. For 1986-87, those in the same grade in May and October of 1986 are included. Therefore, in this report, **retainees are being defined as those actually repeating part or all of a grade.** At the high school level, students repeat only credits failed but are listed in the lower grade.

FIGURE 1
AISD STUDENTS REPEATING K-6 IN 1986-87

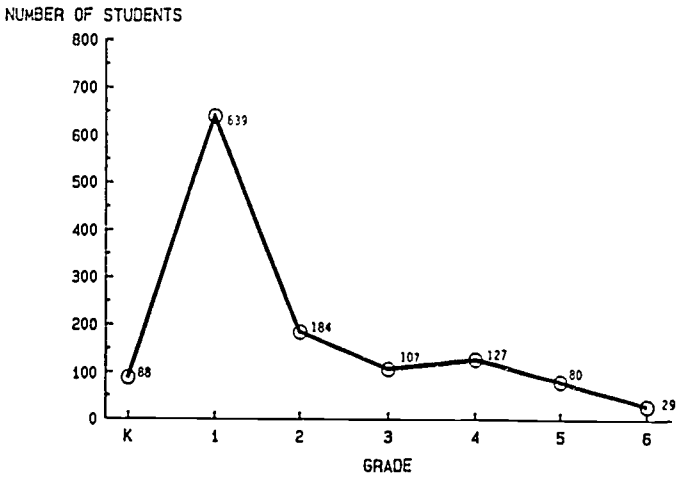
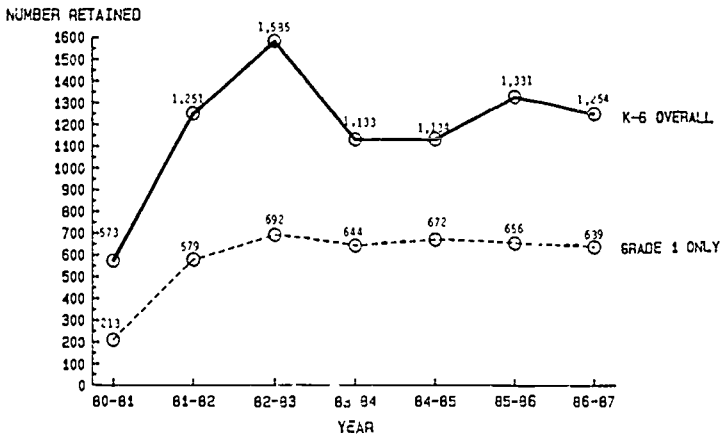


FIGURE 2
STUDENTS REPEATING K-6
1980-81 THROUGH 1986-87



ELEMENTARY LEVEL

- The number of elementary retainees **doubled** between 1980-81 and 1981-82 with the adoption of the revised retention policy. The number retained rose again, to its highest point, in 1982-83 when the revised policy was first put into effect. The number of retainees has decreased and stabilized since then. The impact of House Bill 72 will be felt this spring; implications for next year's rates are not clear as yet.

- Grade 1 has had the highest retention rate at the elementary level throughout this period. First graders have represented 37% (in 1980-81) to 59% (1984-85) of those retained. First graders represent 51% of the elementary students retained this year. The **number** of first graders repeating a grade has been around 600 students since 1981-82.

- The number retained at the primary grades (1-3) exceeds the number retained at the intermediate level (4-6).

FIGURE 3
STUDENTS REPEATING 7-12 IN 1986-87

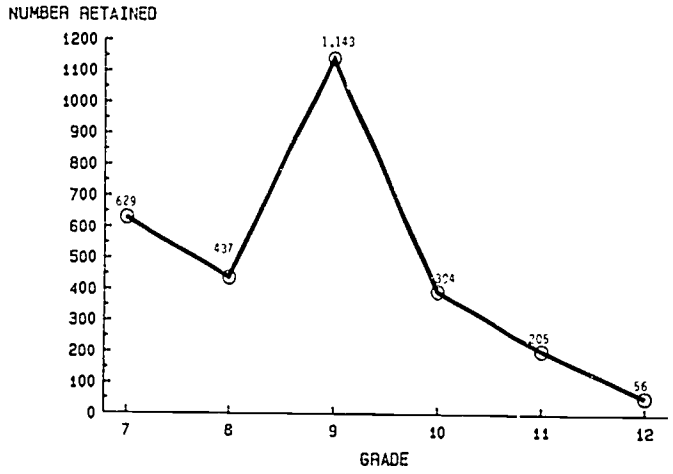


FIGURE 4
STUDENTS REPEATING 7-8
FROM 1980-81 THROUGH 1986-87

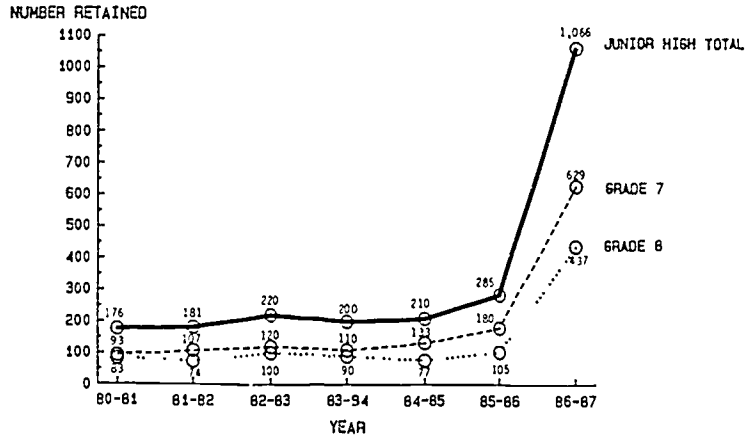
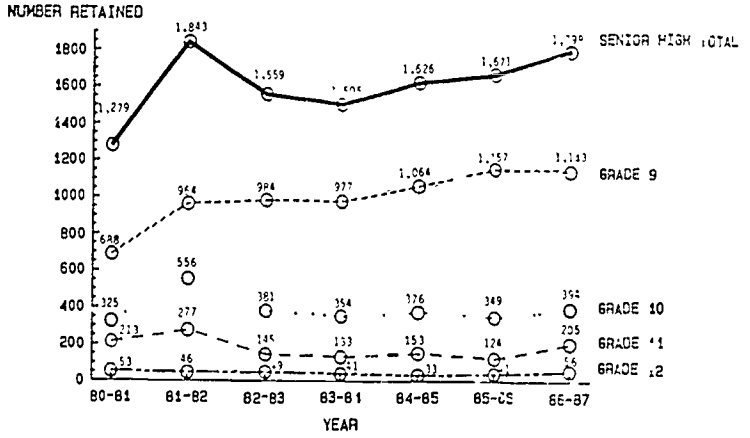


FIGURE 5
STUDENTS REPEATING 9-12
FROM 1980-81 THROUGH 1986-87



JUNIOR HIGH LEVEL

- The number of junior high school students repeating a grade was fairly stable from 1980-81 to 1985-86. However, the rate rose **dramatically** (374%) between 1985-86 and 1986-87 with the implementation of new rules associated with HB 72.
- Seventh graders have higher retention rates than eighth graders. In 1986-1987, the number retained at seventh grade (629) and first grade (639) were about the same.

SENIOR HIGH LEVEL

- The number of senior high students who failed to meet promotion criteria has been rising slowly since 1983-84. The increase between 1985-86 and 1986-87 was 7.6%.
- **By far, grade 9 has the highest number of students retained** at any grade level K-12. The number of ninth graders failing to meet promotion standards in 1986-87 is 1,143.

OVERALL

- The total number of students failing to meet promotion standards has doubled in AISD from 1980-81 (2,028) to 1986-87 (4,118).
- Secondary retention rates increased 46% between 1985-86 and 1986-87 (from 1,956 to 2,864).
- If kindergarten is excluded, the first grade in each grade span (1-6, 7-8, 9-12) has the highest number of retainees.
- Most elementary and junior high retainees (about 2,150) repeat a full grade; new programs started in 1986-87 at the junior high level allowed mid-year promotion for 170 students. High school retainees (1,798) repeat only credit units failed.

Thus, retention affects a large number of AISD students--a number on the rise in recent years. Given this, some key questions merit careful consideration.

- Is retention effective?
- What is the financial cost of retention?
- Can the number of students retained be reduced?
- What instructional approaches are most likely to help these students?

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF RETENTION?

IMPACT ON STUDENTS--PAST NATIONAL AND AISD RESEARCH

AISD conducted research from 1981-82 through 1983-84 on students retained at the elementary level from 1979-80 through 1982-83. A great deal of research has also been done nationally.

Short-Term Effects

One-year retainee gains. In AISD, retainees' average ITBS grade equivalent (GE) gains were greater in reading (.85) than in mathematics (.65) during the year repeated. The amount of achievement growth by individual retainees varied greatly, from actual losses in GE scores to gains of over two years.

Success study. About three in four of the teachers and parents of a sample of 121 AISD 1983-84 elementary retainees thought the child had been successful by the end of the grade repeated. However, ITBS reading results showed only half of these students gained .8 GE (the national average for low achievers) or more after a year of instruction. One fifth of the retainees were considered successful by only one or none of the three information sources.

Promoted versus retained low achievers. Both national and local research found that low achievers who were promoted made significantly greater gains than those retained after one year. (These studies generally matched students on as many factors as possible, but the comparisons are not perfect. In AISD, however, we found a wide variation in retention rates. This made it more likely that retained students were similar to promoted students in other schools.)

Attitudes and self-concept. A review of the research nationwide by Holmes and Mathews found that retention generally hurts students' self-esteem and attitude toward school (although some individual students might improve).

Long-Term Effects

Dropping out. National and AISD research has found retention and dropping out to be highly correlated. Students older than average for their grade level were found to be 2.7 times more likely to drop out than those on grade level in a recent AISD ORE study. Students with low grade point averages were also more likely to drop out than other students.

A recent study in California urban districts indicated that most of those retained in grades 1 and 2 failed to graduate. They found dropouts were five times more likely than nondropouts to have been retained.

While a causal link cannot be proven, a strong relationship has been found between dropping out and retention.

Patterns of achievement growth. The growth of retained students tends to increase in **reading** (from an average of six months to eight months for a year of instruction) during the grade repeated. However, reading gains decline once again when the students are promoted. This suggests that retention in itself is not enough; students need continued support once promoted.

The pattern in **mathematics** is the opposite. Students' growth declines (from almost eight to six months gains per year of instruction) during the year repeated. Growth increases once again when the students are promoted. This suggests students are not adequately challenged during the retention year, and their mathematics progress is hurt by retention.

Achievement followups. Most students retained fail to show enough growth in subsequent years to keep up with even their new younger agemates. They may advance to the "middle" group for a year or two, but eventually most end up right back in the "low" group.

Comparisons after two and three years of the progress of elementary low achievers retained in AISD with similar students promoted generally shows significantly greater progress for those promoted. Differences are greater in mathematics than reading (but present in both areas).

IMPACT ON STUDENTS--AISD RESEARCH 1986-87

Five-Year Follow-up

This study focused on the progress of 243 students repeating first grade in 1981-82 and matched low achievers. They were followed through 1985-86 in terms of subsequent promotion and achievement. Over the years, the findings of differences between retained students and a group of similar students not retained have been challenged by persons who believe that the fact that some students were retained and others promoted means that they are not similar in some key way. ORE does not discount this issue totally. However, analysis of retention patterns and rates across AISD schools indicates that retention decisions are made differently in different schools. Therefore, we conclude that students similar to the retainees on all factors other than school assignment do exist. In addition, the consistency and extent to which achievement differences are evident between retainees and similar nonretainees is convincing evidence to support the conclusions reported here. Research at the national level has also found the same patterns.

Promotion status. The status of the 243 students in each of the reading groups (retained and not) was checked as of February, 1987. About three fourths of each group were still enrolled. If students were not retained after grade 1, the retainees would now be in grades 6 (for those retained) and 7 (for those promoted). In reality, 12.5% of the retainees were retained subsequently (one was retained twice); 38.6% of the matched group was retained subsequently (two were retained twice).

FIGURE 6
1986-87 GRADE ASSIGNMENT OF STUDENTS RETAINED IN 1980-81 AND THEIR MATCHES.

Grade in 1986-87	Retainees		Matches	
	#	%	#	%
4	1	.5%		
5	22	12.0%	2	1.1%
6	156	85.2%	69	37.5%
7	4	2.2%	113	61.4%
Total	183	100.0%	184	100.0%

Special education and other characteristics. Figure 7 shows other characteristics of the two groups by February, 1987. Differences in the two groups did emerge over the five-year period. Students retained in 1980-81 did appear more likely to be subsequently placed in special education programs (perhaps because retention had already been tried). Matched students were more likely to be subsequently retained.

FIGURE 7
CURRENT (FEBRUARY, 1987) STATUS OF LOW ACHIEVERS
RETAINED AND PROMOTED AS FIRST GRADERS IN 1980-81

CHARACTERISTICS	RETAINED %	PROMOTED %
Special Education	21.3%	10.3%
Ethnicity		
Black	33.9%	39.1%
Hispanic	55.2%	44.0%
Anglo/Other	10.9%	17.9%
Sex		
Male	58.5%	59.2%
Female	41.5%	40.8%
Low Income	73.0%	60.0%

Achievement status. The original groups of retainees and matches, which were matched separately for reading and mathematics, were used as a starting point. To be included in the achievement sample, students had to have valid ITBS Reading Total and/or Mathematics Total scores for spring, 1986. Of the original groups, 186 first grade retainees and 189 promoted low achievers met these criteria. Characteristics of the two groups were similar to those discussed above except that special education students were excluded. Pretest scores in reading and mathematics for the two groups were found to be very close.

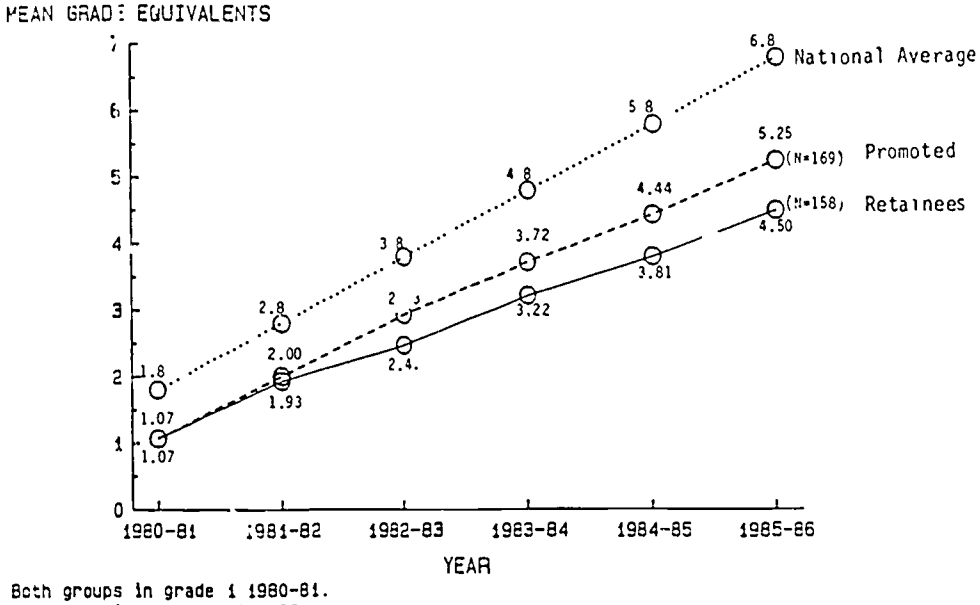
Mean scores were determined for each year for the two groups and compared to the national average (see Figures 8 and 9). Regression analyses were also run to compare the 1985-86 achievement of the two groups in reading and mathematics. Results revealed that:

- In reading, retainees gained .86 GE during the repeated year but gained less thereafter. In mathematics, retainees gained .63 GE during the repeated year with generally slightly greater gains thereafter. Growth rates were not high enough in either area to keep students up to the class average--even with younger classmates.

- In both reading and mathematics, the students promoted in first grade were found to show significantly ($p < .01$) higher scores than those retained by 1985-86. Differences in both areas were about .75 of a grade equivalent (GE) year by 1985-86.

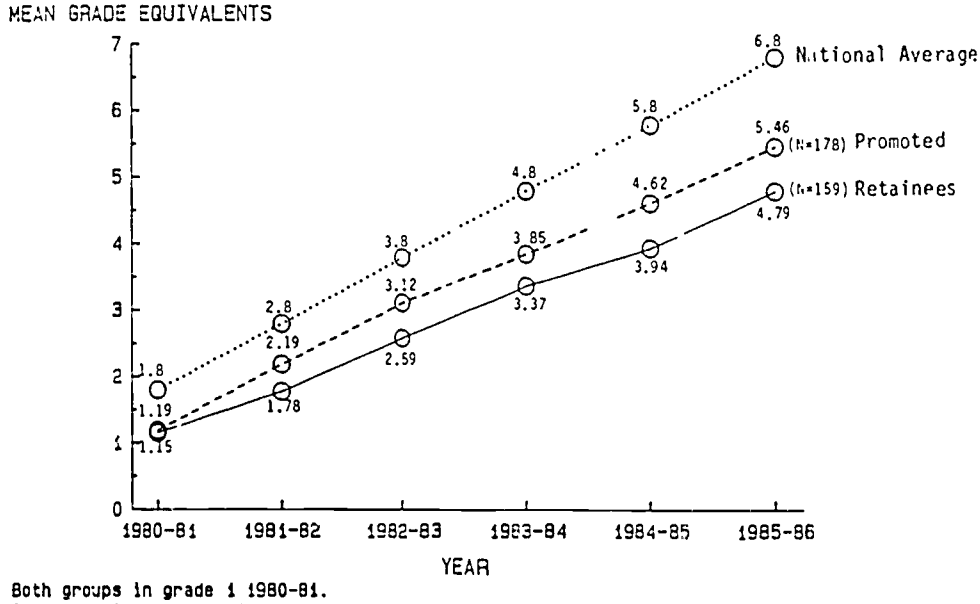
- Both retainees and promoted low achievers still scored well below the national average for their age (with retainees further behind) and their grade (with both groups about 1.4 years below average).

FIGURE 8
ITBS READING TOTAL SCORES OF FIRST GRADERS REPEATING A GRADE IN 1981-82 AND MATCHED PROMOTED LOW ACHIEVERS



Both groups in grade 1 1980-81.
Retainees in grade 1 1981-82;
matches in grade 2.

FIGURE 9
ITBS MATHEMATICS TOTAL SCORES OF FIRST GRADERS REPEATING A GRADE IN 1981-82 AND MATCHED PROMOTED LOW ACHIEVERS



Both groups in grade 1 1980-81.
Retainees in grade 1 1981-82;
matches in grade 2.

- In reading, both groups appeared to gain about .9 GE year in 1981-82 regardless of whether they were retained in first grade or promoted. Retainees' average GE gains were smaller than those of promoted low achievers in subsequent years. The difference between groups therefore broadened.

- In mathematics, those retained in grade 1 fell behind promoted students in 1981-82 (their retention year) and stayed behind subsequently. The gap again broadened slightly across the years.

These results suggest that retention does not meet its goal of helping students catch up to grade level and staying there. Retainees' growth rates are not improved in the long run so they fall behind their younger classmates. Those promoted showed better growth in both reading and mathematics than those retained in first grade. This is most dramatically shown for mathematics but also appears in reading after the retention year. Both groups seem to occupy a low position relative to their classmates after first grade. The level of challenge in the material presented to each group may be a crucial variable. Factors such as teacher and student expectations and student learning strategies also play a part. **This research supports the position that placement with special help is a better alternative for most low achievers than is retention.**

IMPACT ON THE SYSTEM--FINANCIAL COSTS

Given the fairly negative findings regarding the impact of retention on student achievement, the financial cost of retention becomes an important consideration. Most (2,175) elementary and junior high students repeat a full year; 170 junior high participants in a new alternative program (Transitional Academic Program) were promoted after one semester. AISD spends approximately $3,500 per student to provide an extra full year of instruction ($1,750 for one semester). Senior high students repeat only courses they fail, so the amount of time lost varies. The 1,798 senior high students are therefore reflected conservatively in this cost estimate as repeating .20 of a year (two courses or $700). **Assuming these students will not drop out, the minimum overall cost of 4,118 retainees to AISD in 1986-87 will be $9,081,100.**

OVERALL IMPACT OF RETENTION

Thus, the impact of retention on most students and the school system overall generally appears negative. Research supports the position that placement with special help is a better alternative for most low achievers than is retention.

The key to success for very low achieving students appears to be providing a different approach to instruction.

Figure 10
Retention Costs and Benefits

Costs for Most Students	
• Achievement growth rate in mathematics & reading does not improve long-term. Therefore, students fall behind again.	• Loss of peer group
• Loss of a year--an extra year is needed to graduate	• High risk of dropping out
• More negative attitudes toward school and self	• About $9,081,100 for 4,118 retainees for the school system

Benefits for a Few Students
• Better grasp of concepts, increased rate of learning
• More success experiences--better attitudes toward school and self-esteem
• Better TEAMS mastery

CAN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS RETAINED BE REDUCED?

ELEMENTARY

At the elementary level, students who fail to master essential elements for their grade level can be retained or placed in the next grade. Given the research results, placement with special help appears to be a better option for most students than retention. Research provides information on students who appear to benefit from retention and alternative instructional approaches.

Students Likely to Benefit

Predicting who will benefit is difficult. However, some research is relevant.

- One national study (Sandoval and Hughes) found that first graders who benefited from retention tended to be those who were **relatively stronger initially.** They had:
  - Some academic skills (had made some progress in first grade initially),
  - Good self-concepts,
  - Adequate social skills,
  - Parents who accepted retention and worked with the school, and
  - Teachers confident in the retention decision.
- Medway reviewed retention research and concluded that the best retention candidates were primary students, chronologically young, not opposed to retention, with parents willing to work with them.
- Twelve interviews with AISD teachers of retainees who had shown very large versus small achievement gains suggested that retainees who showed large gains after one year had **identifiable problems and teachers who developed and implemented specific plans to address them** (often showing great perseverance).
- An AISD and a national study attempted to identify a pattern of characteristics of successful retainees from centralized computer files--no pattern emerged in either study.

Prevention

Prekindergarten programs in AISD and nationwide have been found to have positive short-term effects on student achievement. National studies have shown long-term benefits of pre-K programs on retention, special education, and discipline rates.

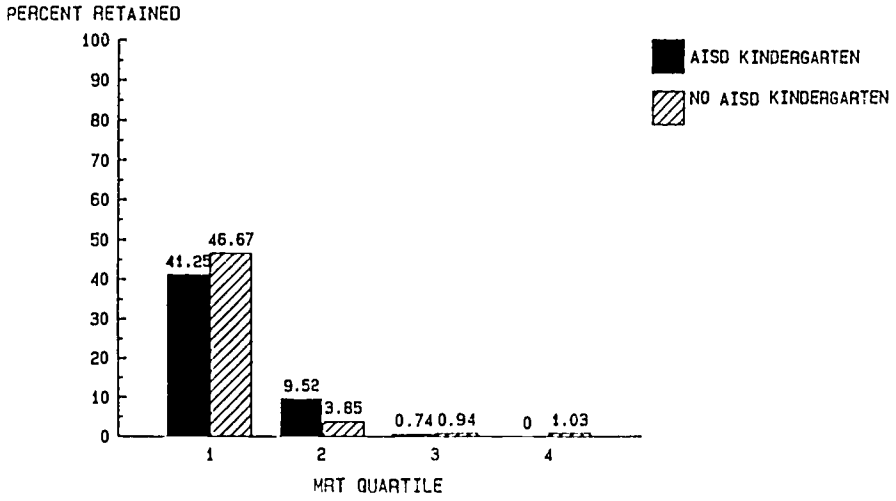
The question of whether participation in AISD's **kindergarten** program helped to prevent first-grade retention was investigated this year. The retention rates of AISD students in first grade for the first time in 1985-86 were examined for those who did and did not attend AISD's kindergarten program in 1984-85. A previous study of kindergarten participation showed that almost all AISD first graders have some kindergarten experience. Therefore, this comparison is mostly AISD kindergarten attenders versus attenders of other kindergarten programs. The Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT), given in the fall of first grade, was used to control for differences in achievement levels. The retention rates of students scoring in each quartile were compared.

Figure 11 illustrates the percentage and number of students with and without AISD kindergarten who were retained (by MRT quartile). Analyses revealed that:

- There was no significant difference in the percentage of those attending and not attending AISD kindergarten who were retained.
- Most of those retained as first graders scored in the first quartile on the MRT (regardless of kindergarten participation). Almost all others retained scored in the second quartile on the MRT.

Thus, participation in AISD's kindergarten program did not reduce the chances of retention. Again, almost all of those students who did not attend an AISD kindergarten did attend kindergarten elsewhere. Some type of school experience at this grade level may indeed be beneficial.

FIGURE 11
RETENTION RATE OF 1985-86 FIRST GRADERS
ATTENDING AND NOT ATTENDING AISD KINDERGARTEN



MRT - Metropolitan Readiness Test
Fall, 1985

Instructional Interventions

Doing something different with very low achievers seems to be the most important key to improvement. New AISD policy emphasizes special attention be given to retainees' instructional program whether retained or placed. Options include:

- Compensatory reading and/or mathematics programs (e.g., Chapter 1, Chapter 1 Migrant, SCE, bilingual, Teach and Reach),
- Transition classes (K-1 or 1-2),
- Special education,
- Special curriculum groupings (across or within grades),
- Tutoring (by teachers, older students, parents, peers),
- Motivational instructional techniques,
- Extended school day, and
- Summer school.

The least familiar approaches may be transition classes and special classroom groupings; a description of these may be helpful.

Transition classes select students who are not ready for the next year's curriculum and provide a combination of material from the curriculums of the two grades. Most programs have been at the K-1 and 1-2 level. Casis, Langford, and Oak Hill presently have such programs. Models vary across schools. Students are placed at the next grade level for the program. Students who make sufficient progress may be promoted to the next grade (e.g., K-1-2); others will be retained (e.g., K-1-1). While it must be recognized that these classes still cost some students and the school system an extra year, at least the curriculum is paced and tailored to students' needs, avoids repetition, and provides the possibility of promotion.

FIGURE 12
1986-87 K-1 TRANSITION CLASSES

	Casis	Langford	Oak Hill
Students Identified:	Fall, 1987	Spring, 1987	Spring, 1986
Criteria:	MRT, mathematics diagnostics; teacher recommendation; lack prerequisite skills	ITBS less than 30%ile; behind academically, not socially	Developmentally not ready for regular grade 1. Used Gesell identification criteria.
Number of Students:	17-20	14	14
Curriculum	Served in language arts and/or math. Students pulled for areas of need from other first grade classes in a.m. Upgrades kindergarten program in language-rich environment. Emphasis reading; strong teacher.	Gears down regular first grade curriculum and supplements; attend art, music, PE with others; strong teacher; program runs most of the day.	Regular first-grade curriculum plus Super Kids. Use Math Their Way, Addison-Wesley, plus Math cubes. Students stay in all day. Strong teacher.
Expectation	Retention or promotion possible	Retention or promotion possible	Retention probable, promotion possible

Special curriculum groupings generally involve mixing students across classes or grades. Children can thus receive appropriate instruction in each subject according to their needs and stay with their age-peers at least part of the day.

Research results. Compensatory programs are the only ones studied fairly thoroughly to date; these have been found to help many low achievers if well implemented. Informal research provides support for the other approaches; all hold promise. Aumsville, Oregon reports fewer behavior problems in their smaller transition classes and good progress once students enter the regular curriculum. More stringent research is needed on the success of these approaches. ORE plans to study this issue in 1987-88 based on approaches used this year--especially transition classrooms.

AISD had summer school programs for retainees for several years. However, students were not promoted because of participation. Short-term mastery learning results were very positive. However, the ITBS achievement of retainees who did and did not attend summer school was not significantly different by the following spring. It may be that a summer school program that led to promotion, with modified curriculum, structure, and length (longer school days or number of weeks) might be worth consideration.

SECONDARY

State law and local policy prescribe that students in grades 7 and 8 who fail to meet promotion requirements be retained or provided alternative programs. Secondary schools have been focusing on ways to help students avoid retention altogether (by reducing the number of F's earned) and to move on to the next grade as soon as possible. Tutoring, remediation, teacher training, equalization of grading standards across teachers, counseling, attendance checks--all could help students pass courses and avoid retention. Our focus here, however, will be on two specific alternatives designed to avoid retention (summer school) and shorten retention time (the Transitional Academic Program/TAP and Academic Incentive Program/AIP).

Summer School

Junior and senior high students who are short one or two courses for promotion can attend summer school to earn this credit (.5 per course). A check was done to see how many of those who failed to meet promotion criteria attended summer school and passed. This rate was compared to the promotion rate of those who did not attend summer school.

Junior high. Overall, 1,970 students had not met promotion criteria by May, 1986--400 attended summer school and 1,570 did not.

FIGURE 13
FALL, 1986 STATUS OF JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS
NOT ELIGIBLE FOR PROMOTION AS OF SPRING, 1986

Summer School Status	Total Number	Promoted #	Promoted %	Retained #	Retained %	Left AISD #	Left AISD %
Attended	400	315	79%	40	10%	45	11%
Did not attend	1,570	300	19%	808	52%	462	30%

- Most of those attending summer school were promoted (315 or 79%), but some who did not attend were also promoted (300 or 19%).
- A larger percentage of those not attending summer school failed to re-enroll in AISD this fall (30% versus 11%).

Those promoted who did not attend summer school were probably promoted because of grade changes or unexcused absence appeals. It appears those with appeals pending may have been less likely to attend summer school.

Senior high. Overall, 1,350 students had not met promotion criteria by the end of 1985-86 -- 363 attended summer school and 987 did not.

FIGURE 14
FALL, 1986 STATUS OF SENIOR HIGH STUDENTS
NOT ELIGIBLE FOR PROMOTION AS OF SPRING, 1986

Summer School Status	Total Number	Promoted #	Promoted %	Retained #	Retained %	Left AISD #	Left AISD %
Attended	363	189	52.1%	168	46.3%	6	1.7%
Did not attend	987	115	11.7%	848	85.9%	24	2.4%

- The success rate for high school was 52%, lower than the junior high rate of 79%.
- Of those not attending high school summer school, 12% were promoted--probably because of grade changes and attendance appeals.

Alternative Placement Programs

AISD has implemented two new programs at the secondary level this year designed to provide alternative instructional programs and faster progress and promotion for seventh and eighth graders.

The **Transitional Academic Program (TAP)** allows students to enroll in eighth or ninth grade courses while they repeat failed seventh or eighth grade courses. The program is available at Rice and Robbins secondary schools (grade 7-12). Students who remain at the regular junior highs do not have the opportunity to take the next grade's courses and therefore take more grade level courses than necessary. To be promoted, TAP students enrolled must meet the promotion standards for their grade. Frequent progress reports on performance are provided to students.

TAP is designed to be a one semester placement for seventh and eighth graders. Fall, 1986, enrollments and success rates are shown below.

FIGURE 15
SUCCESS OF FALL, 1986 TAP ENROLLEES

Status	Robbins #	Robbins %	Rice #	Rice %
Passed	103	89.6%	42	87.5%
Withdrew	10	8.7%	5	10.4%
Failed	2	1.7%	1	2.1%
Total Enrolled	115	100.0%	48	100.0%

Most students at both campuses (87%) were able to successfully complete the program and move on to ninth grade mid-year. Only three students who stayed the entire semester failed to successfully complete the program. Of those who withdrew, some returned to their home campus while others left AISD or the city. TAP enabled students to repeat one semester (or less since most took some higher grade level courses) rather than an entire year. In this way, students benefitted and AISD saved $253,750 (145 students times $1,750 each). This semester, 235 students (almost all new) are enrolled in TAP--40 at Rice and 135 at Robbins. Chapter 2 is funding two extra teachers at Rice for the program this semester. It will be interesting to watch the long-range success of the TAP program.

The Academic Incentive Program (AIP) is available to students who are two or more years below grade level in reading or mathematics or have a history of non-performance and failing grades for a majority of their courses. The program provides intensive remediation designed for rapid progress in English, reading, and mathematics. Time and subject requirements may be adjusted for other subjects. Promotion is based on a review of all grades earned.

AIP was first piloted in fall, 1986, at Martin with seventh graders. Of the 28 students involved, 25 successfully completed the program. One was unsuccessful and two withdrew. Overall, 89% were promoted. The program has been expanded to other junior high campuses this spring.

WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN?

Conclusions	Recommendations
Most students do not benefit from being retained.	Retain fewer students. Provide special help for those placed or retained--transitional classes, compensatory programs, tutoring, cross-grade or within-grade grouping, intense remediation, etc.
The number of students retained can be reduced.	Special programs such as summer school, transitional classes, TAP, and AIP could help to reduce the number retained.
The effectiveness of interventions need further study.	Interventions should be designed in a way that allows research on their effectiveness whenever possible.

References

Arocena, Martin (1984). Kindergarten nonattenders: Starting out behind (ORE Pub. No. 83.41). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 252 588)

Association of California Urban School Districts (1985). Dropouts from California's urban school districts: Who are they? How do we count them? How can we hold them (or at least educate them)? Los Angeles, Ca.

Aumsville School District (1985). Aumsville School District's readiness program: Helping first graders succeed. Aumsville, OR.

Baenen, N. (1982). Retention and promotion study. In 1981-82 evaluation findings (ORE Pub. No. 81.30). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation. (ERIC No. ED 228 249)

Holmes, C. T. and Mathews, K. M. (1984). The effects on nonpromotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 54 (2).

Medway, F. J.,(1986) Grade retention. Advances in School Psychology, V, T. R. Kratochiwill (ed.) Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sandoval, J. and Hughes, P. G. (1980). Success in nonpromoted first grade children: final report. Davis, CA: Dept. of Education, Univ. of California at Davis. (ERIC No. ED 212 371)

Schuyler, N. B. (1983). A Matter of Time: Retention or promotion (ORE Pub. No. 82.88). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Schuyler, N. B. (1984). Promotion or retention: An individual decision (ORE Pub. No. 83.07). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation. (ERIC No. ED 252 594)

Schuyler, N. B. (1985). Does retention help? perspectives after three years (ORE Pub. No. 84.35). Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Schuyler, N. B. and Sailor, P. (1984). Summer school pilot 1983: Third report to the Texas Education Agency (ORE Pub. No. 83.05). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Research and Evaluation.

A complete bibliography of AISD's reports on retention and promotion is available from the Office of Research and Evaluation.

Austin Independent School District

Department of Management Information

Dr. Glynn Ligon, Director

Office of Research and Evaluation

Dr. David A. Doss, Assistant Director

Nancy Baenen Schuyler, Evaluator

Belinda Olivárez Turner, Evaluation Associate

John Fry, Data Analyst

Leonila M. Gonzalez, Secretary

Board of Trustees

Nan Clayton, President

Bernice Hart, Vice President

Lidia M. Perez, Secretary

John Lay

Ed Small

Dr. Gary R. McKenzie

Abel R. Ruiz

Superintendent of Schools

Dr. John Ellis

Publication Number 86.31