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ABSTRACT

The status of middle grade students (grades 6, 7, and 8) was studied in the New Orleans (Louisiana) public schools. The district is faced with major challenges in addressing the overall needs of middle grade students and the impact of early retention in grade that has resulted in several overage students. Most sixth graders are in elementary school, but most seventh and eighth graders attend junior high schools or senior high schools. About 17 percent of the district's students left the system after attending the sixth grade, most at the elementary school level. Suspensions and absenteeism were higher for this age group. The current grade configurations and nomenclature for types of schools serving middle grade students are confusing and should be modified to align with appropriate educational and support programs. Overage students are casualties of the practice of retention and are more likely to drop out than those never retained. This issue must be addressed in the middle grades. In addition, the district must consider why high-risk and low-risk students differ by such a large magnitude on standardized test results and to ensure that access and opportunities are equal. Thirteen tables and seven figures present study findings. Appendix A list schools with middle-grade configurations, and Appendix B contains six figures of student characteristics and achievement. (SLD)

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Major Policy and Programmatic Implications of Report

1. Overage is a factor that must be taken into consideration in addressing the challenge presented by middle grade students in the New Orleans Public Schools. The early practice of retention produces a cadre of overage youngsters who move through this system into the middle grades with very special needs, i.e., educational, social, emotional, physical, etc. For this report, middle grade students include those in the sixth, seventh or eighth grade levels.

2. The results basically show that this district is confronted with two major challenges: a) how to effectively address the needs of middle grade students and b) how to effectively address the impact of early retention.

B. Major Findings

1. Demographics

   a. The majority of current sixth graders attend elementary schools in this school district. The majority of seventh and eighth graders attend junior high or senior high with a 7-12 grade configuration.

   b. Approximately 17% of the students left this system after attending the sixth grade in 1991-92. The greatest loss of sixth grade students occurred in elementary schools as compared to middle schools. Median reading and math test scores on the California Achievement Tests for 1992 were higher for sixth graders who left than they were for sixth graders who remained in the system. In addition, approximately 10% of the students left at the end of seventh grade in 1991-92 and 12% left at the end of eighth grade.

   c. The majority of overage sixth graders attend elementary schools.

2. Behavioral Indicators

   a. Retention: Sixth grade had one of the lowest retention rates in 1991-92. However, there was a larger percent of sixth grade students retained in middle schools as compared to elementary schools. Seventh grade had the highest percent of retained of students than any other grade level. It must also be emphasized that the majority of students who were retained in the middle grades at the end of 1991-92 were overage when they began the 1991-92 school session.

   b. Suspensions: The percentage of students suspended at least once at the seventh and eighth grades was considerably higher than at any other grade level in the district. The percentage of students suspended at least once was greater at the middle, junior and senior high schools than at the elementary level. In addition, the majority of students suspended at sixth, seventh and eighth grades were overage regardless of the type of school they attended.

   c. Absenteeism: Sixth grade students in middle schools were absent, on the average, more often than their elementary counterparts. However, as a group, overage students were absent almost twice as much as non-overage students, regardless of the type of school they attended.

3. Achievement

   a. California Achievement Tests (CAT)

      1) The 1992 median reading and math percentiles of elementary sixth graders were higher than that of their counterparts in middle schools.

      2) Current sixth graders in middle schools had lower median percentiles in reading and math as fifth graders than their sixth grade counterparts in elementary schools.

3) The 1992 median reading and math percentiles of Low Risk, sixth grade students were higher than those of High Risk, sixth graders. However, the median reading and math percentiles of Low Risk, sixth graders in elementary schools were much higher than their Low Risk counterparts in middle schools. In addition, the poor achievement performance of High Risk, sixth graders in elementary schools was equivalent to that of their counterparts in middle schools. (NOTE: For purposes of this analysis, Low Risk students were defined as those students who had never been retained and had never received Chapter I services. High Risk students were defined as those students who had been retained once or had received Chapter I services for at least one school year).

4) An inverse relationship was observed between the overage variable and achievement. As a group, sixth and eighth grade overage students performed worst than non-overage students on the CAT.

b. LEAP Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRT)

1) The percent of seventh graders attaining the State's performance standards on LEAP in Language Arts, Mathematics and Written Composition was less than the percent attainment for the State as a whole.

2) Exceptions to the above results occurred at certain magnet schools.

1. Current grade configurations and nomenclature for the types of schools serving middle grade students, i.e., elementary, middle, junior high and senior high, are confusing with respect to program offerings and support services needed by these students. The district should reassess and modify this nomenclature and bring grade configuration into alignment with appropriate educational and support programs for middle grade students.

2. Overage students are "casualties" of the practice of retention and are more likely to drop out of school than those who were never retained. The overage issue must be addressed in the middle grade equation since there is a sizeable percentage of middle grade students at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels who are overage. Additionally, the vast majority of the seventh and eighth graders who left the system at the end of the 1991-92 school session were overage. This percentage was higher than that for students who remained in the system. Consequently, the district must reassess its practice of early retention and address the current needs of middle grade students regardless of what type of school they attend. Early retention produces a cadre of overage youngsters who move through the system into the middle grades with very special needs, i.e., educational, social, emotional, physical, etc. ***As a group, these youngsters are suspended more often, absent more often and perform more poorly on achievement tests than their non-overage counterparts, regardless of grade level or type of school attending.***

3. Finally, one must ask why do High and Low Risk students differ by such a large magnitude on standardized test results. The district should reassess the extent to which equity exists between High and Low Risk students. For example, are overage, High Risk students provided with the same coverage of grade level skills and concepts as their Low Risk counterparts? Are all students exposed equally to the same curriculum content with the same emphasis and time on tasks to master these skills? Are adequate instructional delivery procedures implemented for all? It is imperative that the relationship between student achievement and the questions raised above be examined.

A. Assessment of Need:

Figure 1 presents the percent of 1991-92 students who left or could not be found in the system during the 1992-93 school year.[1] As can been seen, the greatest loss occurred at the sixth grade level as compared to the other middle grades as defined in this report, i.e., seventh and eighth. Approximately 17% of the 1991-92 students left this system at the end of the sixth grade. Figure 2 shows that the majority of sixth grade students who left the system had previously attended elementary schools as compared to middle schools. Table 1 presents results from an analysis of 1992 achievement data of sixth grade students who left the system. The results show that these students had higher median percentile scores in reading and mathematics on the California Achievement Tests (CAT) than those who remained. Another important finding was that the majority of sixth grade students who left the system in 1991-92 were non-overage. However, the majority of the seventh and eighth graders who left were overage.

These results present a challenge to this district to develop strategies that will stem the yearly exodus of these students. Some would argue that this is best accomplished by expanding current, K-6 configurations to K-8 with appropriate programs and services. Others would argue that our existing middle schools should be revamped and provided with the needed programs and services; yet others would argue that this challenge can best be met by accommodating both positions. In addressing the complexity of the needs of our students, it may be that both positions will have to be accommodated. The subsequent analysis of middle grade students is provided to shed light on this subject and to provide decision makers with information on the various indicators which must be considered and incorporated into any strategies developed to address this issue.

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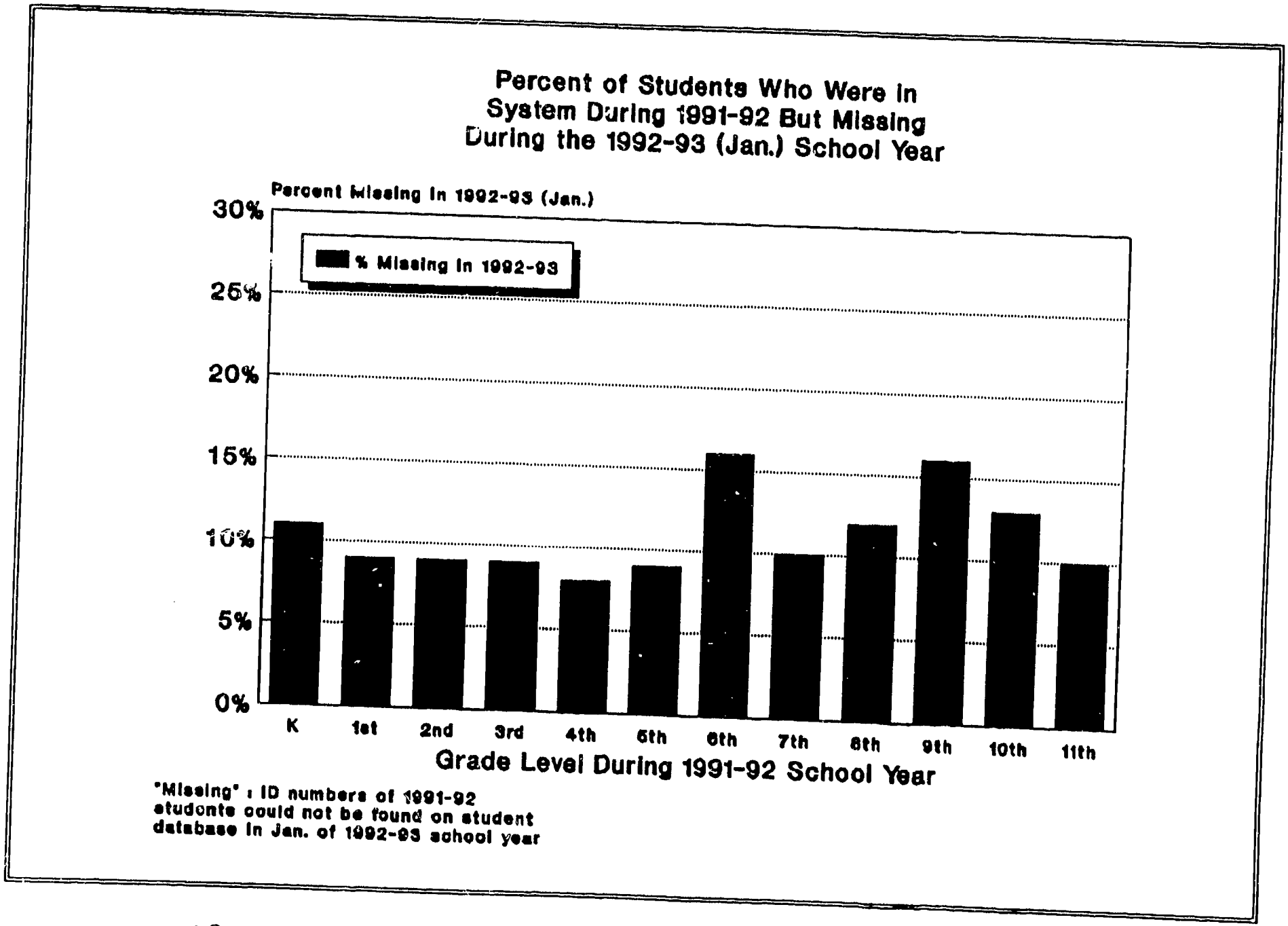
[1] These students were active in the system at the end of the 1991-92 school year. However, their ID's could not be found on the student database as of Feb. 1993. It must be emphasized that there is always an error factor associated with this type of analysis resulting from ID errors that must be taken into account. No assumptions are made at this time about the relationship between leaving the system and dropping out, especially at the seventh through twelfth grade levels. This relationship will be investigated further at a later date.


Percent of Students Who Were in System During 1991-92 But Missing During the 1992-93 (Jan.) School Year
Percent Missing in 1992-93 (Jan.)
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
% Missing in 1992-93
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
10th
11th
Grade Level During 1991-92 School Year
"Missing" = ID numbers of 1991-92 students could not be found on student database in Jan. of 1992-93 school year

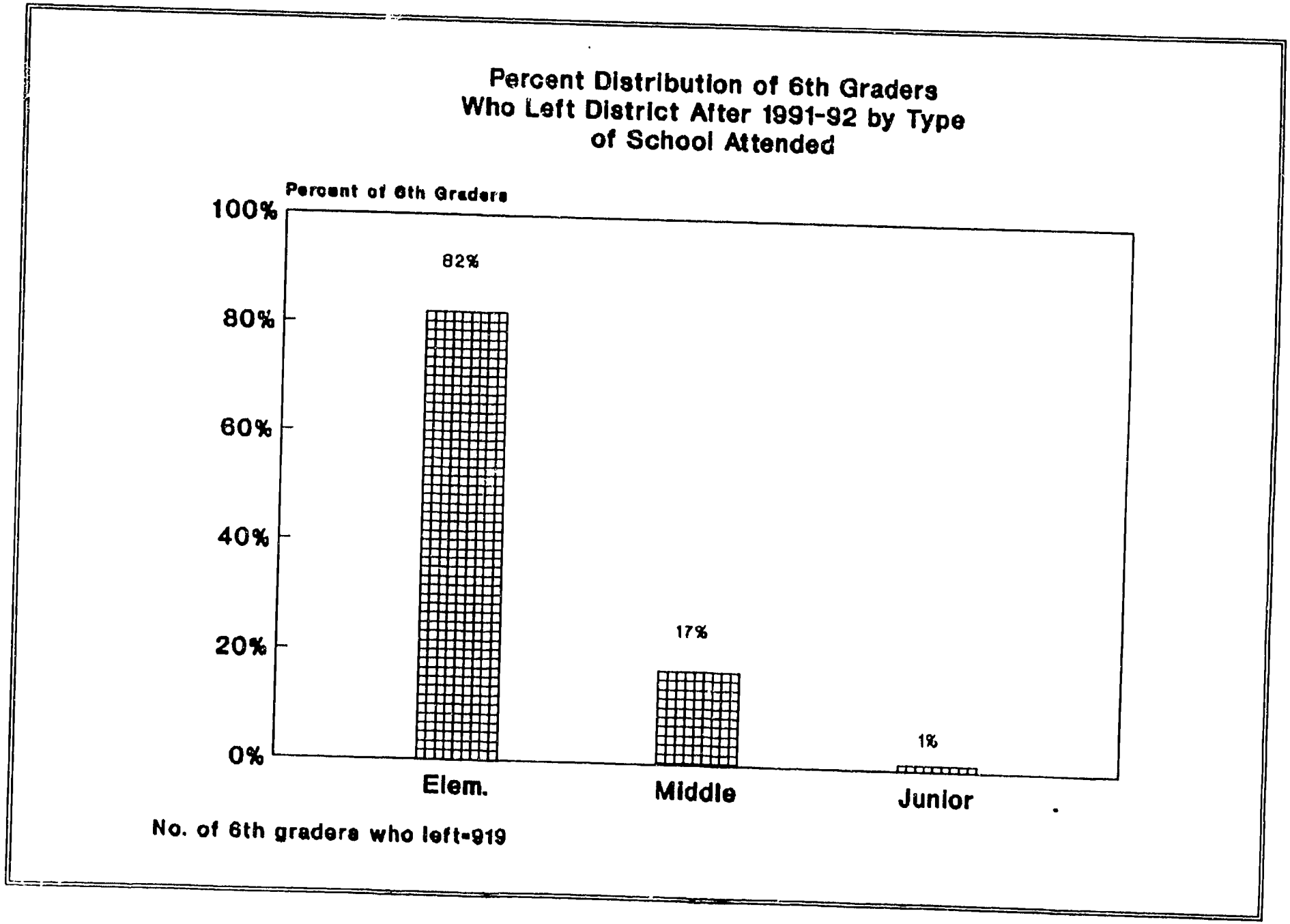

Percent Distribution of 6th Graders
Who Left District After 1991-92 by Type
of School Attended
Percent of 6th Graders
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
82%
17%
1%
Elem.
Middle
Junior
No. of 6th graders who left=919

FIGURE 2

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF 1992 MEDIAN CAT
READING AND MATHEMATICS PERCENTILES
OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS WHO DID AND DID NOT LEAVE SYSTEM

	MEDIAN READING PERCENTILE	MEDIAN MATH PERCENTILE
Did Not Leave System at End of 1991-92	32 (n=4711)	39 (n=4707)
Left System at End of 1991-92*	44 (n=857)	46 (n=854)

*Students were in system at end of 1991-92 school year but could not be found on student database as of February 1993
Note: Test scores were not available for all 6th graders

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF 1991-92 STUDENTS
WHO DID AND DID NOT LEAVE SYSTEM
WITH RESPECT TO BEING OVERAGE

	Percent of Overage Students	
Grade Level in 1991-92	Did Not Leave After 1991-92 School Session	Left After 1991-92 School Session
6th	35% (n=5016)	32% (n=919)
7th	40% (n=5256)	58% (n=557)
8th	38% (n=4464)	52% (n=612)

Overage: 6th - 13+ as of Sept., 1991
7th - 14+ as of Sept., 1991
8th - 15+ as of Sept., 1991

B. Scope of Evaluation Subcommittee's Activities:

The Evaluation subcommittee's goal was to assess the educational significance of local outcome indicators of student performance at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels, focusing on sixth grade students at the elementary and middle schools. To accomplish this goal, information was analyzed utilizing the 1992-93 Minimum Foundation Report, student database extracts, districtwide testing files and LEAP reports. Profiles of students in grades six, seven and eight were assessed with respect to demographics, behavioral indicators and achievement on the California Achievement Tests (CAT) and criterion-referenced tests from the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP). The behavioral indicators included retention, suspension, absenteeism and overage. Time constraints and existing data formats precluded the assessment of other outcome indicators, i.e., academic grades, expulsions, dropouts, safety factors, etc. It is expected that these and other indicators will be available for analysis in the near future.

III. RESULTS OF ANALYSES

A. Demographics

Table 3 shows that the majority of the current, sixth grade students attend elementary schools.[2] Only 25% of the sixth grade students attend middle schools.[3] Thirty-nine percent of the current seventh and eighth grade students attend middle schools while the majority attend either junior high or senior high schools with a 7-12 grade configuration (See Appendix A for list of schools with middle grade configurations). A relatively small number of elementary schools have seventh and eighth grades. Because of the small numbers and uniqueness of these schools, caution is advised in making generalizations between these elementary schools and middle, junior or senior high schools having the same grade levels.

TABLE 3

PERCENT OF 1992-93 SIXTH, SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADERS BY TYPE OF SCHOOL*

TYPE OF SCHOOL	GRADE		
	6TH	7TH	8TH
Elementary	73%	7%	4%
Middle	25%	39%	39%
Junior	2%	27%	30%
Senior	-	27%	28%
Total Enrollment	6212	6529	5546

*Information obtained from 1992-93 Minimum Foundation Report

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2 Elementary schools are defined for this analysis as those schools with grade configurations starting with K or pre-K, i.e., K-5, K-6, pre-K-5, pre-K-6, K-7, K-8, etc.

3 6-8 or 7-8 configurations for this analysis

One major variable that must be considered in any educational decision affecting middle grade students in this district is overage.[4] Retention produces a cadre of overage youngsters who move through this system with special needs, i.e., educational, social, emotional, physical, etc., that must be addressed (See Appendix B, Figure B-1) Figure 3 shows that the majority of these students attend elementary schools. However, as mentioned earlier, middle schools contain only 25% of the sixth graders in the system, yet the majority of these students are overage (See Figure 4). Achievement results presented later will show that the impact of the overage variable is tremendous and is probably one of the most significant variables in the middle grades equation for the New Orleans Public Schools.

[4] Overage was operationally defined for this analysis as follows: sixth grade students who were twelve or older when entering sixth grade in September; seventh graders who were thirteen or older when entering seventh in September; and eighth grade students who were fourteen or older when entering eighth in September.

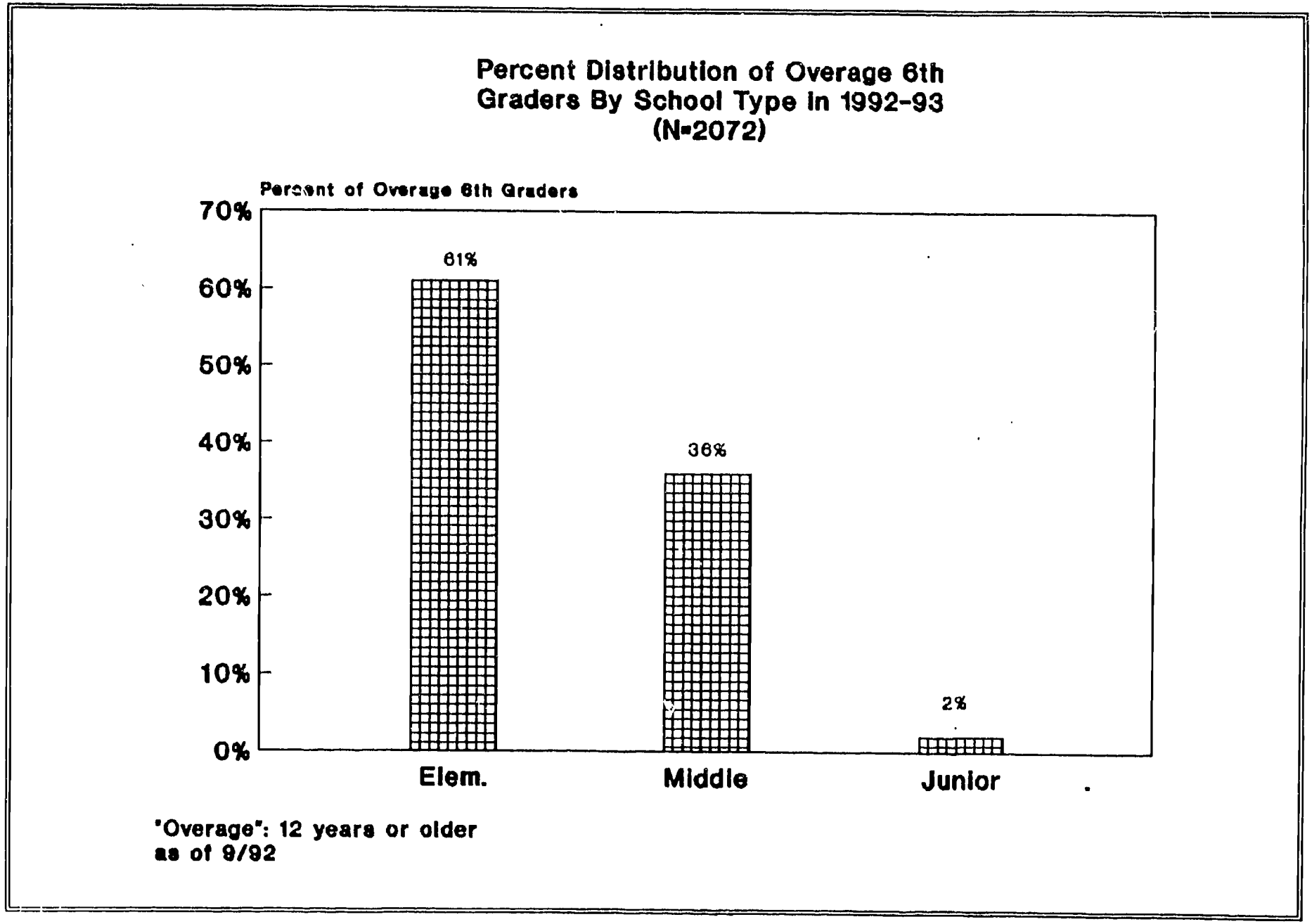
Percent Distribution of Overage 6th Graders By School Type in 1992-93 (N=2072)
Percent of Overage 6th Graders
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
61%
36%
2%
Elem.
Middle
Junior
"Overage": 12 years or older as of 9/92

FIGURE 3

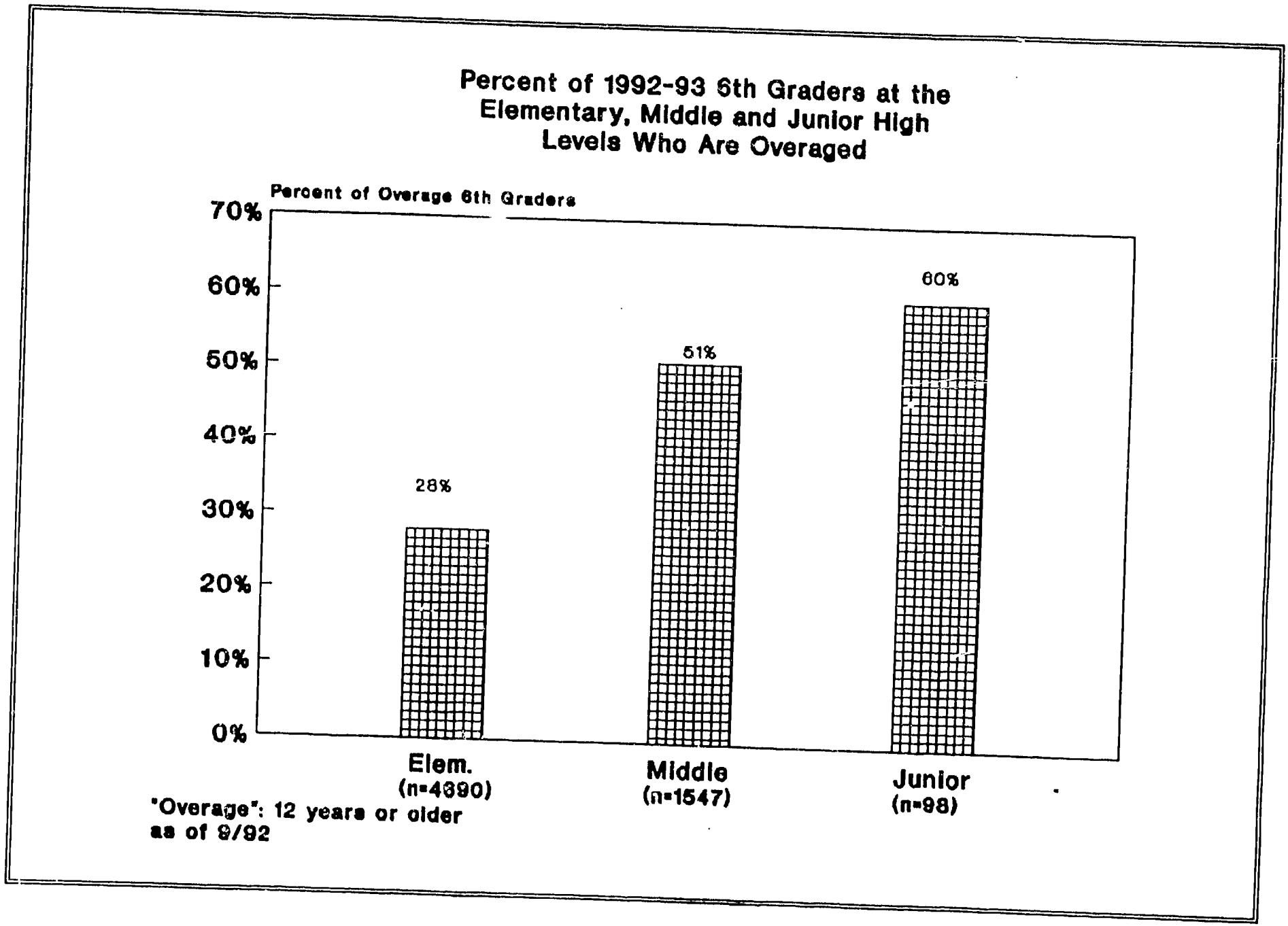
Percent of 1992-93 6th Graders at the Elementary, Middle and Junior High Levels Who Are Overaged
Percent of Overage 6th Graders
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
28%
51%
60%
Elem.
(n=4390)
Middle
(n=1547)
Junior
(n=98)
"Overage": 12 years or older as of 9/92

FIGURE 4

2. Behavioral Indicators

a. Retention: Table 4 shows that sixth grade had the lowest percent of students retained as compared to the other middle grade levels in 1991-92. In fact, with the exception of K, sixth grade had the lowest percent of students retained than any grade level in the district for 1991-92 (Appendix B, Figure B-2). However, the percent of sixth grade students retained at the middle and junior high levels was considerably higher than the percent retained at the elementary level. Seventh grade had the highest percent of students retained than any other grade level in the district, i.e., 22% (See Appendix B, Figure B-2). The retention of seventh graders in regular schools varied from a high of 28% at the junior high level to a low of 9% at the elementary. However, even at the elementary level, two of the five schools analyzed were responsible for retaining 91% of their 1991-92 seventh graders. The analysis also revealed that overage was significantly related to this variable. The majority of students retained at sixth grade and beyond were overage when they entered their respective grade levels at the beginning of the school year. (See Appendix B, Figure B-3).

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF PERCENT OF STUDENTS RETAINED IN 1991-92 BY GRADE AND TYPE OF SCHOOL*

TYPE OF SCHOOL	6TH	7TH	8TH
ELEMENTARY	2% (n=4429)	9% (n=256)	5% (n=196)
MIDDLE	15% (n=1676)	19% (n=2475)	10% (n=2172)
JUNIOR	27% (n=77)	28% (n=1651)	27% (n=1511)
SENIOR**	-	21% (n=1660)	18% (n=1372)
SPECIAL	43% (n=14)	32% (n=78)	21% (n=71)
DISTRICT	6.0% (n=6202)	22% (n=6139)	17% (n=5335)

*Information obtained from failure indicator for active students on student database at end of 1991-92 school year
**7-12 configuration includes McMain and Karr Magnet Schools

b. Suspensions: The percent of students suspended at least once in 1991-92 increased dramatically at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels (See Appendix B, Figure B-4). Table 5 presents the percent of middle grade students suspended by type of school during 1991-92. The percent of sixth grade students suspended at least once at the middle school level was almost twice as high as compared to the elementary level. The number of sixth grade students at the junior high was too small for any meaningful comparisons with elementary and middle schools. At the seventh and eighth grade levels, the percentage of students suspended at least once ranged from 17% to 32% in the middle, junior and senior high schools. This range was much smaller in the K-8 elementary schools, i.e., 8% to 9%. However, caution is advised in comparing the K-8 schools with the middle, junior and senior high schools because of the magnet schools included in this K-8 group and the relatively small number of students. Again, it must be emphasized that the overage factor is also strongly related to this variable. Figure 5 shows that the majority of students suspended at least once were overage at each grade level analyzed.

TABLE 5

PERCENT OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED AT LEAST ONCE
BY GRADE AND TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDING IN 1991-92

TYPE OF SCHOOL	6TH	7TH	8TH
ELEMENTARY	10% (n=4429)	9% (n=256)	8% (n=196)
MIDDLE	18% (n=1676)	17% (n=2475)	19% (n=2172)
JUNIOR	42% (n=77)	19% (n=1653)	21% (n=1511)
SENIOR	-	32% (n=1660)	29% (n=1372)

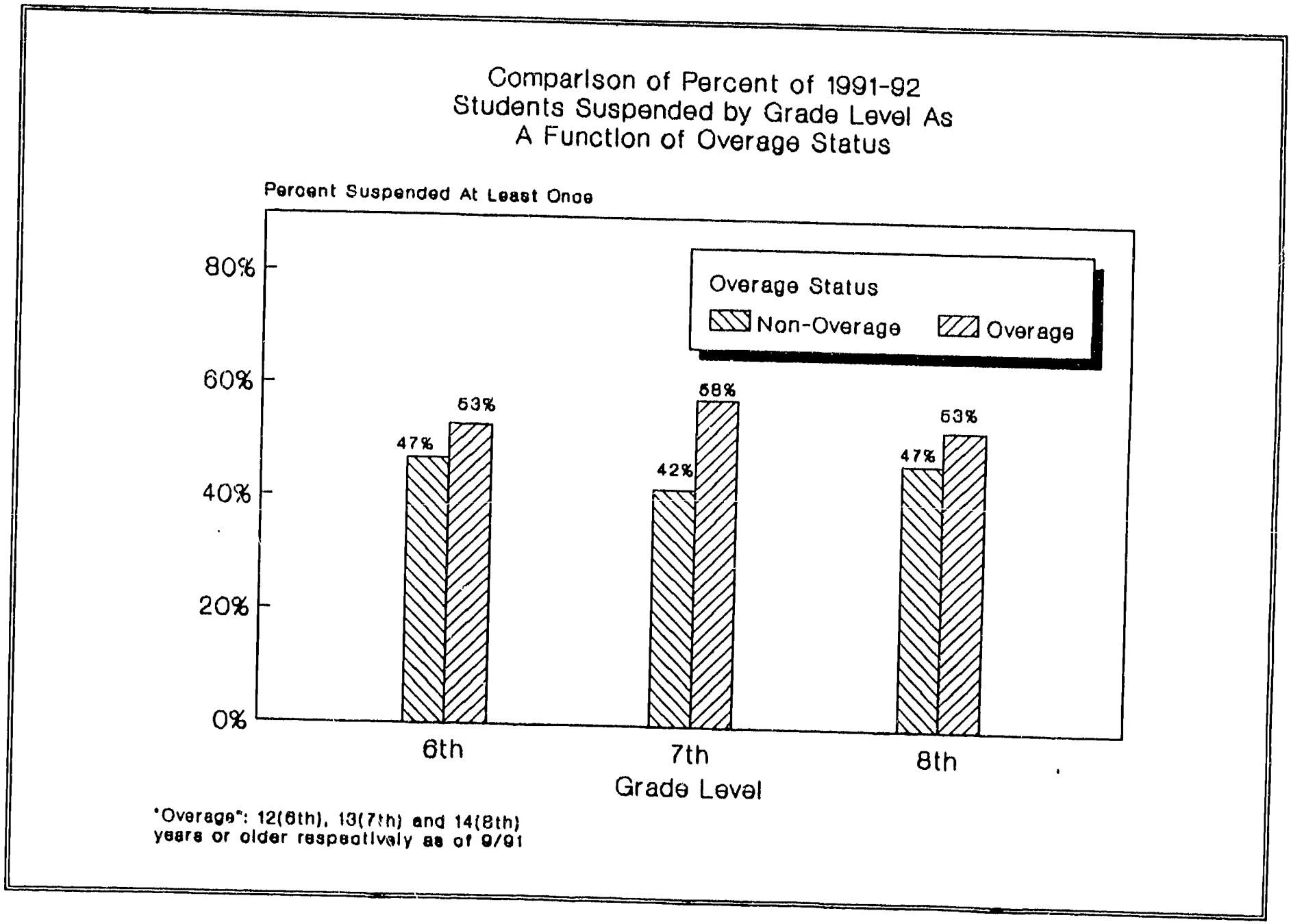

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FIGURE 5

c. Absenteeism: With the exception of K and first grades, absenteeism increased in 1991-92 as the grade levels increased (See Appendix B, Figure B-5). It also varied with the type of school students attended. Table 6 shows that sixth graders in middle schools were absent twice as much, on the average, than their elementary counterparts. Seventh and eighth grade students at the junior high level were absent more on the average than students at middle and senior high schools. However, it must be emphasized that two magnet schools were included in the senior high schools with a 7-12 configuration. Elimination of these schools from the analysis would have resulted in a significant increase in the median number days absent at these grade levels. Again, as with retention and suspension, overage was found to be directly related to absenteeism. As a group, overage students were absent almost twice as much as non-overage students, regardless of grade level (See Figure 6).

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS ABSENT IN 1991-92 BY SIXTH, SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADERS AS A FUNCTION OF TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED

TYPE OF SCHOOL	GRADE		
	6TH	7TH	8TH
Elementary	7 (n=4429)	9 (n=256)	8 (n=196)
Middle	14 (n=1676)	12 (n=2475)	12 (n=2172)
Junior	23 (n=77)	16 (n=1653)	18 (n=1511)
Senior	—	13 (n=1660)	12 (n=1372)
District	9 (n=6202)	13 (n=6141)	13 (n=5335)

Note: Results were obtained from attendance fields on the student database and are based upon records from students who were enrolled at a school for 177 days during 1991-92. District considers 18 or more days absent as excessive absenteeism. Median refers to the point in a distribution at which 50% of the students are above and 50% are blow. For example, a median of 7 days absent means that 50% of the students were absent more than 7 days and 50% were absent less than 7 days.

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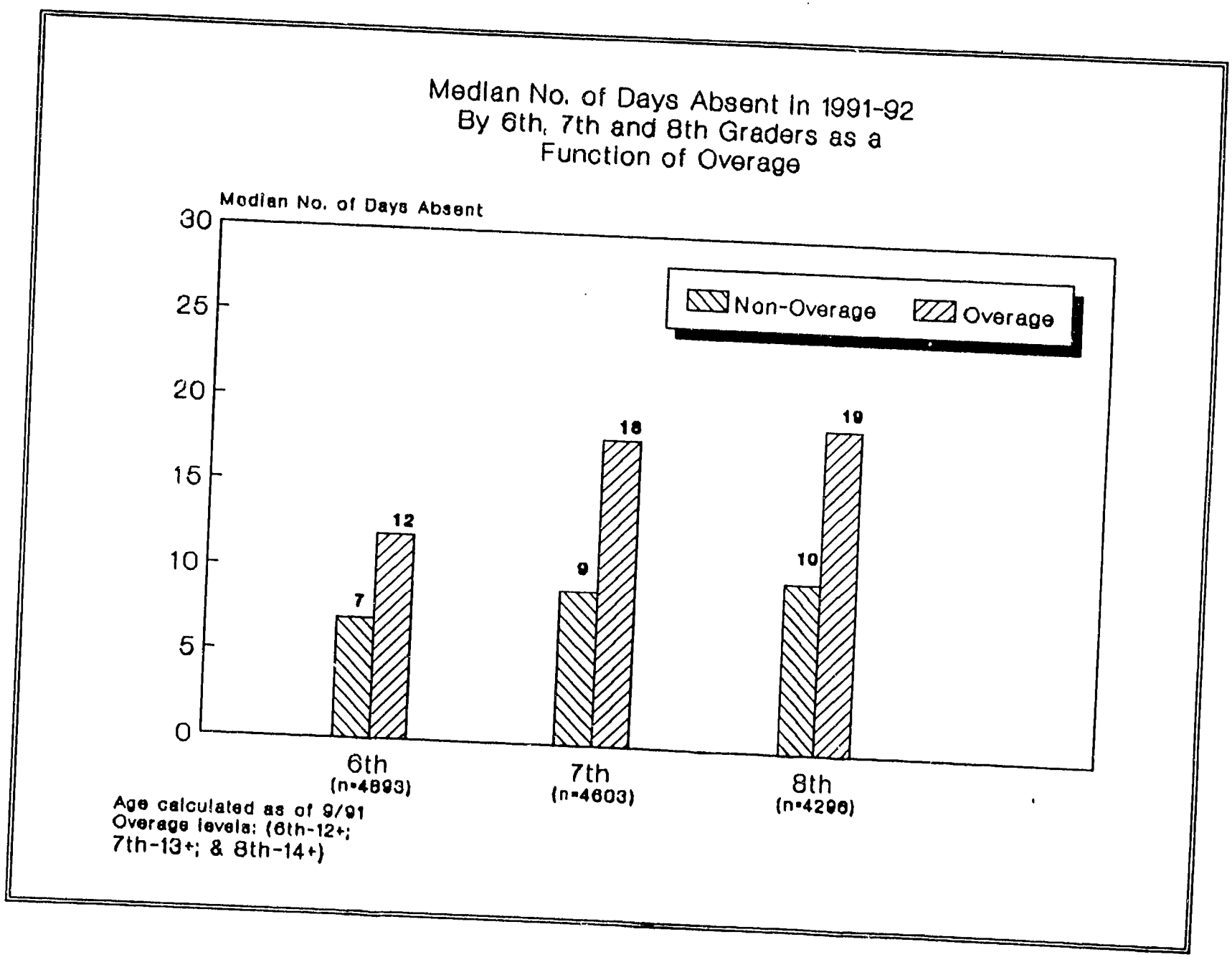

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FIGURE 6

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3. Achievement

a. California Achievement Tests (CAT): CAT results for 1992 have been previously reported by the Department of Educational Accountability in it's annual testing report. [5] The reader is referred to this report for a detailed assessment of CAT results for the district and individual schools. In addition, there is a special analysis of the relationship of test scores to major student related variables such as retention, absenteeism, free lunch status and Chapter I participation. Tables 7 and 8 present results of additional analyses of CAT scores for sixth and eight graders. These results show that the 1992 reading and mathematics percentiles for sixth and eighth graders were higher at the elementary level then at the secondary levels. Again, caution is advised in comparing eighth grade elementary to secondary schools because of the small numbers and magnet school status of certain elementary schools with K-8 configurations.

Table 9 presents a comparison of the 1992 median reading percentiles for this year's current elementary and secondary sixth grade students. Current sixth graders in middle schools had a lower, median percentile in reading as fifth graders than did their sixth grade, elementary counterparts. Test results were further analyzed to investigate the relationship between achievement, type of school attending and level of risk. In general, Low Risk students scored higher than High Risk students.[6] However, Table 10 shows that the median percentile in reading for Low Risk, sixth graders in elementary schools was much higher than that of their Low Risk counterparts in middle schools. Yet, the median reading percentile of High

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5 *"Norm-Referenced Test Results of the New Orleans Public Schools: A Comprehensive Report on Their Relationship to Major Student Characteristics"* prepared by Department of Educational Accountability, New Orleans Public Schools, 1993 - Internal Report

6 The terms High and Low Risk have been previously used by the Department of Educational Accountability in its annual testing reports as a basis for analyzing test results of New Orleans Public Schools. High and Low Risk are operational definitions used to categorize students with respect to retention and Chapter I participation: Low Risk - students who have never been retained and have never received Chapter I services. High Risk- students who have been retained once or have received Chapter I services for at least one school year. Data were analyzed from students who had been in the system continuously since kindergarten. As a result of the present analysis, the High Risk operational definition has been expanded to include overage at a given grade level as an additional characteristic that must be included in the risk equation.

Risk, sixth graders in elementary schools in 1992 was equivalent to that of their counterparts in middle schools. Why there should be such differences between Low Risk students in elementary and middle schools is not clear at this time and merits further investigation. These results must be carefully considered by the task force since there are more High Risk, sixth grade students in elementary than in middle schools in need of special programs and services. These results support the position that special services are needed to address these High Risk students, regardless of the school's grade configuration or type. Again, as with the other indicators, overage was also significantly related to achievement test results. This relationship is examined in Tables 11 and 12 which highlight the inverse relationship between overage and achievement as measured by results on the CAT. In general, the more overage a student was, the worst the achievement level became. This pattern was observed for all grade levels in the district (See Appendix B, Figure B-6).

TABLE 7

COMPARISON OF 1992 READING AND MATH CAT SCORES
OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

TYPE OF SCHOOL	MEDIAN READING PERCENTILE	MEDIAN MATH PERCENTILE
Elementary	39 (n=4142)	46 (n=4132)
Middle	22 (n=1403)	30 (n=1408)

TABLE 8

COMPARISON OF 1992 READING AND MATH CAT SCORES OF EIGHTH GRADERS BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

TYPE OF SCHOOL	MEDIAN READING PERCENTILE	MEDIAN MATH PERCENTILE
Elementary	61 (n=191)	59 (n=191)
Middle	30 (n=1897)	33 (n-2587)
Junior	24 (n=1266)	31 (n=1498)
Senior*	31 (n=1178)	34 (n=1153)

*7-12 Configuration - This category includes McMain and Karr Magnet Schools.

TABLE 9

ACHIEVEMENT PROFILE OF CURRENT SIXTH GRADERS AS A FUNCTION OF TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDING

TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDING IN 1992-93	MEDIAN 1992 READING PERCENTILES
Elementary	34 (n=3964)
Middle	21 (n=1089)

TABLE 10

ACHIEVEMENT PROFILE OF CURRENT SIXTH GRADERS AS A FUNCTION OF TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDING AND RISK CATEGORY

TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDING IN 1992-93	MEDIAN 1992 READING PERCENTILES AS A FUNCTION OF RISK CATEGORY	
	LOW	HIGH
Elementary	54 (n=974)	25 (n=1333)
Middle	34 (n=185)	20 (n=433)

TABLE 11

1992 CAT MEDIAN PERCENTILES OF SIXTH GRADERS
AS A FUNCTION OF AGE AS OF SEPTEMBER, 1991

	AGE			
	11	12	13	14+
READING	42 (n=3634)	24 (n=1210)	19 (n=431)	21 (n=80)
MATH	49 (n=3632)	30 (n=1200)	22 (n=435)	19 (n=84)

TABLE 12

1992 CAT MEDIAN READING PERCENTILES OF EIGHTH GRADERS
AS A FUNCTION OF AGE IN SEPTEMBER 1991

	AGE			
	13	14	15	16+
READING	39 (n=2829)	19 (n=1067)	14 (n=363)	21 (n=79)
MATH	42 (n=2813)	22 (n=1066)	22 (n=297)	19 (n=78)

b. Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRT) at Seventh Grade: Table 13 shows the percent of students attaining the State's standards of performance for each of the three tests administered during the Louisiana State Assessment Program (LEAP). As can be observed, the percent of seventh graders attaining was less than that for seventh graders statewide regardless of type of school they attended. Only five magnet schools, or schools with a magnet component, had a percentage attainment in all three subjects that was greater than that for the State.[7] Again, it is important to emphasize that caution is advised in comparing magnet schools to other schools because of the student profile and number of students attending magnet schools.

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7 "1992 Preliminary Schools Results The Criterion-Referenced Test Segment of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program", prepared by Department of Educational Accountability, June 29, 1992 - Internal Report Note: Seventh grade is not administered the CAT.

TABLE 13

PERCENT ATTAINMENT OF 1991-92
BY SEVENTH GRADERS ON LEAP CRT

TYPE OF SCHOOL	LANGUAGE ARTS	MATHEMATICS	WRITTEN COMPOSITION
ELEMENTARY	79% (n=252)	75% (n=247)	89% (n=248)
MIDDLE	69% (n=2145)	60% (n=2141)	82% (n=1916)
JUNIOR	61% (n=1395)	51% (n=1363)	78% (n=1325)
SENIOR	63% (n=1414)	59% (n=1429)	82% (n=1341)
DISTRICT	66%	58%	81%
STATE	85%	81%	91%

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Grade Configurations: There doesn't seem to be any educational or programmatic justification for different middle grade configurations and nomenclature. Furthermore, these existing configurations act as impediments to any detailed analysis of middle grades and program offerings. The district is urged to reassess the educational significance of its current middle grade configurations and to bring programmatic clarity and direction to this issue.

B. Behavioral and Achievement Results: In general, the results clearly reveal the long-term, negative impact of early retention in this district. Current research findings seriously question the efficacy of the practice of retention. The results in the literature question not only the effectiveness of retention on the achievement of students (Holmes, 1989; Reynolds, 1992; Shepard and Smith, 1989) but also its relationship to dropping out of school (Grissom and Shepard, 1989). These results highlight the need for a closer examination of the practice of retention in this district and of existing programs designed

to assist retained students during their second year in the same grade level. Unless schools have clearly defined and effective programs to assist such youngsters, these students will continue to be exposed to the same conditions that precipitated their retention. These results also force one to ask whether this school district should explore alternatives to retention.

One of the major results of retention is the development of a cadre of overage youngsters who move through this system into the middle grades with special needs, i.e., educational, social, emotional, physical, etc. These students are far more likely to drop out of school than those non-overage youngsters who have never been retained (Hahn, 1987). Although the majority of sixth grade students in middle schools are overage, it is important to emphasize that the majority of overage youngsters in the school district attend the elementary schools. This fact reinforces the need for the district to focus its attention more on students in middle grades, i. e., sixth, seventh and eighth, rather than on middle schools per se. The most important issue is whether the needs of the High Risk students are being met, regardless of the type of school they attend. The results suggest that they are not. Retention produces High Risk students who are overage and in need of special educational and support services. As a group, these students tend to be absent more often, suspended more often and achieve at a lower level than their non-overage counterparts.

The magnet school variable is important since there are magnet schools or schools with magnet components in at least three of the different types of schools analyzed, i.e., elementary, middle and senior high with a 7-12 configuration. Because of the profile of the students attending certain magnet schools, it is not fair to compare them with other schools in the district with similar grade levels. This is not meant to demean the successes of magnet schools as measured by achievement, low number of suspensions and low absenteeism, etc. Some of these schools are currently flagships for this system. However, one must ask why are other schools so far behind on these measures. Perhaps, the district must begin to assess these differences in terms of equity. The essential issue is whether the needs of High Risk students are truly being met in the district. Are

overage, High Risk students provided with the same coverage of grade level skills and concepts as their Low Risk counterparts? Are all students exposed equally to the same curriculum content with the same emphasis and time on tasks to master skills? Are adequate instructional delivery procedures implemented for all? The answers to these questions have yet to be clearly articulated by the district.

It is necessary that we begin the examine the relationship between student performance outcomes and the questions raised above. An examination of instructional variables (content coverage, content exposure, content emphasis, and quality of instructional delivery) must be conducted to explore what has been referred to in the literature as the "opportunity-to-learn" (Stevens, 1991). Assessing "opportunity-to-learn" remains a valid consideration for all measures of student performance using norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and alternative assessment techniques. Only with a clear understanding of the relationship between "opportunity-to-learn" and performance outcomes can strengths and weaknesses at the instructional level be identified. This information, in turn, is what must be acted upon to improve any outcome which measures student performance.

Finally, the results indicate that this district is confronted with at least two challenges: a) an immediate challenge of how to programmatically address the needs of middle grade, Low and High Risk students; b) a more long-term challenge of how to address the adverse impact of early retention. These results suggest that the retention of students in this district has long-term, devastating effects which may be precursors to dropping out of school. High school dropouts continue to increase the rolls in municipal and juvenile courts and social service programs (McMurrin, 1986; Smith, 1986). A comparison between dropout and incarceration rates reveals that eighty percent of this country's one million prisoners are high school dropouts (Hodgkinson, 1991). Accordingly, as the dropout rate increases in America, so shall the crime rate. As the crime rate increases in a community, the quality of life decreases. It is expected that the recommendations of the Middle Grades Task Force will be the catalyst for changing this pattern in this school district and community.

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APPENDIX A

List of Schools with Middle Grade Configurations in 1991-92

1991-92 SCHOOLS WITH MIDDLE GRADE CONFIGURATIONS

School	Grade Configuration
ELEMENTARY	
Audubon-Montessori	K-8
Danneel	K-8
Lusher	K-8
McDonogh #24	K-7
N. O. Free	K-8
MIDDLE	
Beauregard	7-8
Green	6-8
Live Oak	6-8
Livingston	6-8
Peters	6-8
F. C. Williams	6-8
Woodson	6-8
Wright	6-8

School	Grade Configuration
JUNIOR	
Bell	7-9
Capdau	7-9
Colton	7-9
Gregory	7-9
McDonogh #28	7-9
Phillips	6-9
SENIOR HIGH (7-12)	
Carver Senior	7-12
Karr	7-12
Landry	7-12
Lawless	7-12
McMain Magnet	7-12
B. T. Washington	7-12

APPENDIX B

General Districtwide Profile for Following Outcome Indicators:

- Retention
- Overage
- Suspension
- Absenteeism

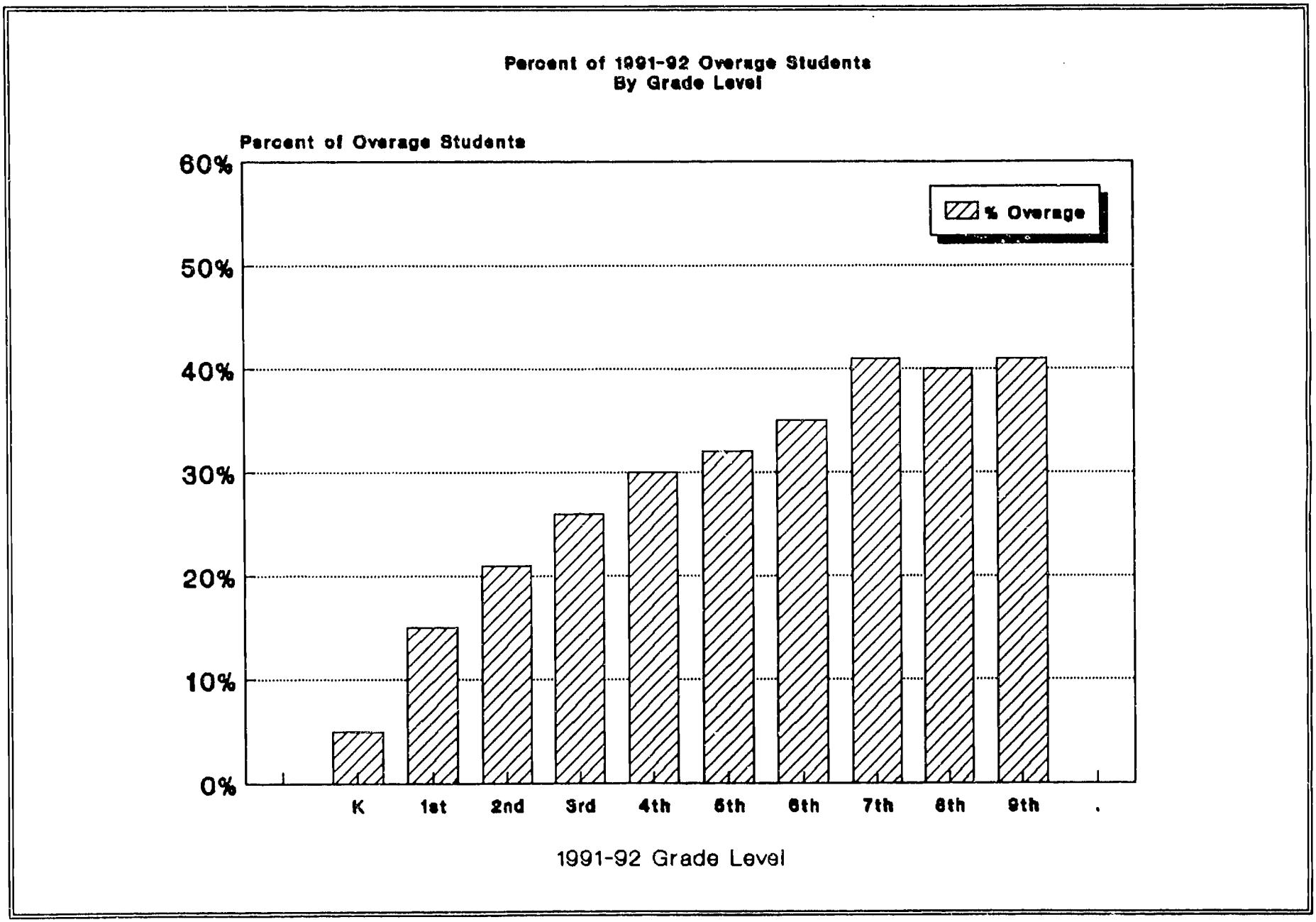
Percent of 1991-92 Overage Students
By Grade Level
Percent of Overage Students
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
% Overage
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
1991-92 Grade Level

FIGURE B-1

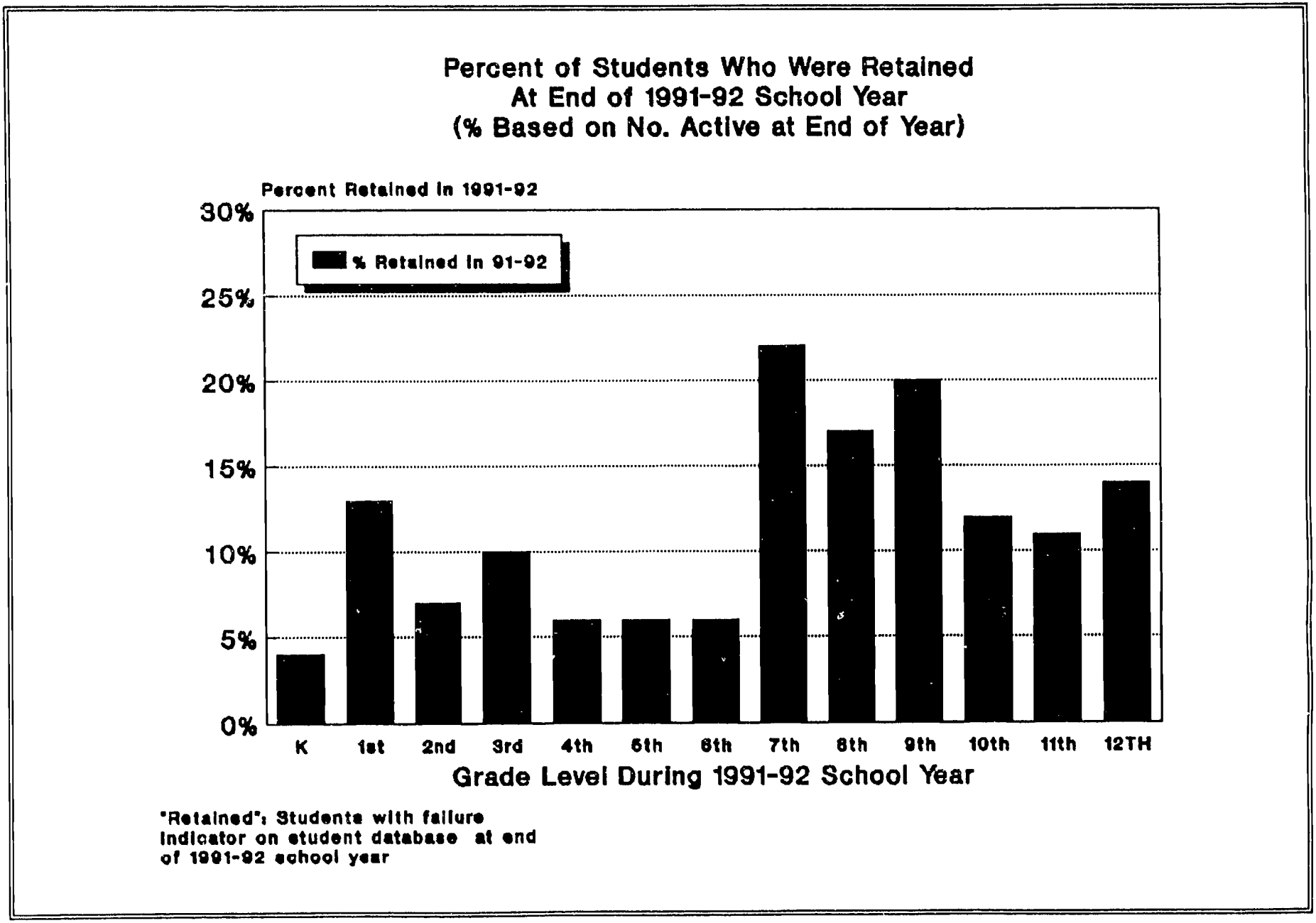
Percent of Students Who Were Retained
At End of 1991-92 School Year
(% Based on No. Active at End of Year)
Percent Retained in 1991-92
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
% Retained in 91-92
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
10th
11th
12TH
Grade Level During 1991-92 School Year
"Retained": Students with failure indicator on student database at end of 1991-92 school year

FIGURE B-2

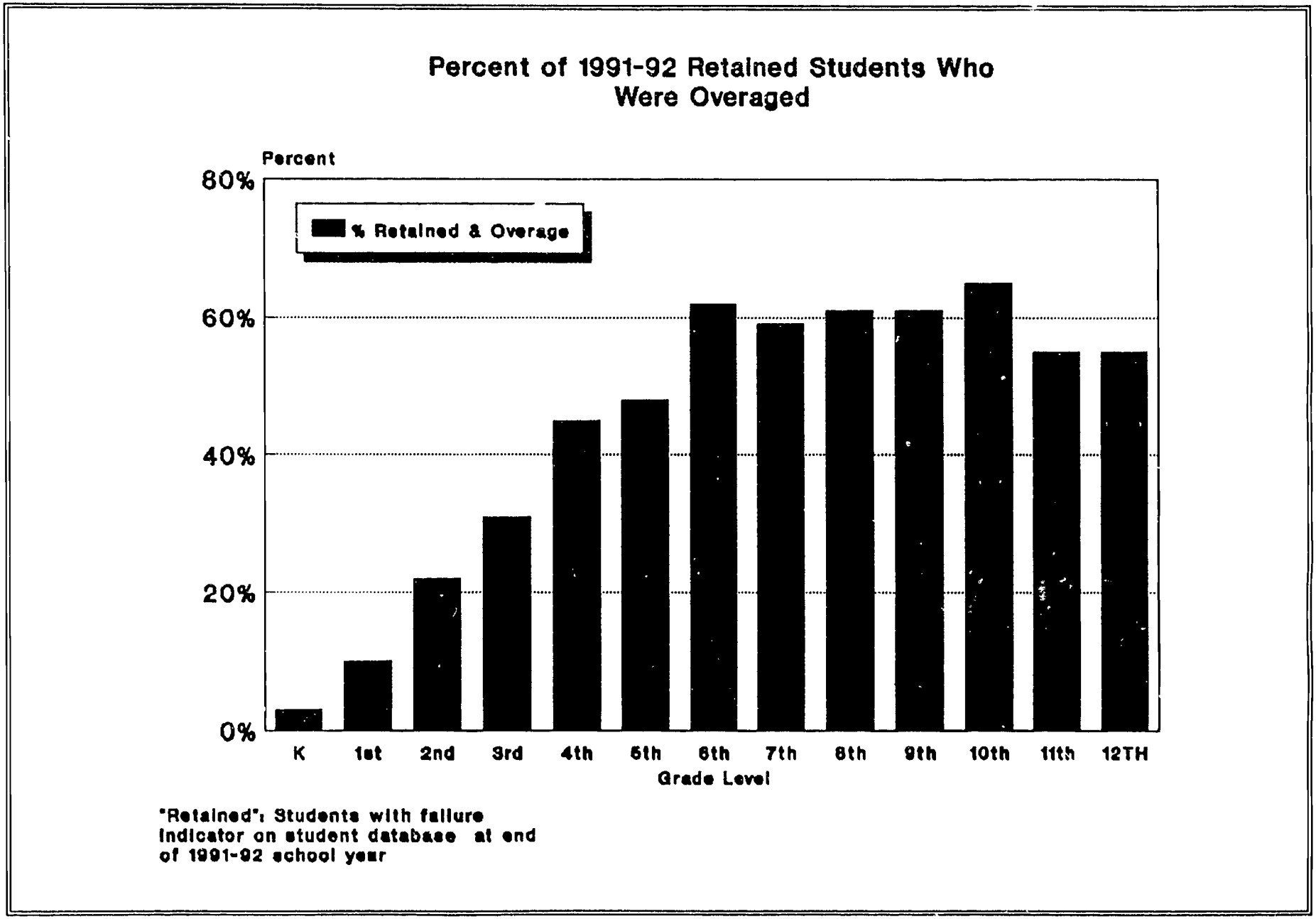
Percent of 1991-92 Retained Students Who Were Overaged
Percent
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
% Retained & Overage
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
10th
11th
12TH
Grade Level
"Retained": Students with failure indicator on student database at end of 1991-92 school year

FIGURE B-3

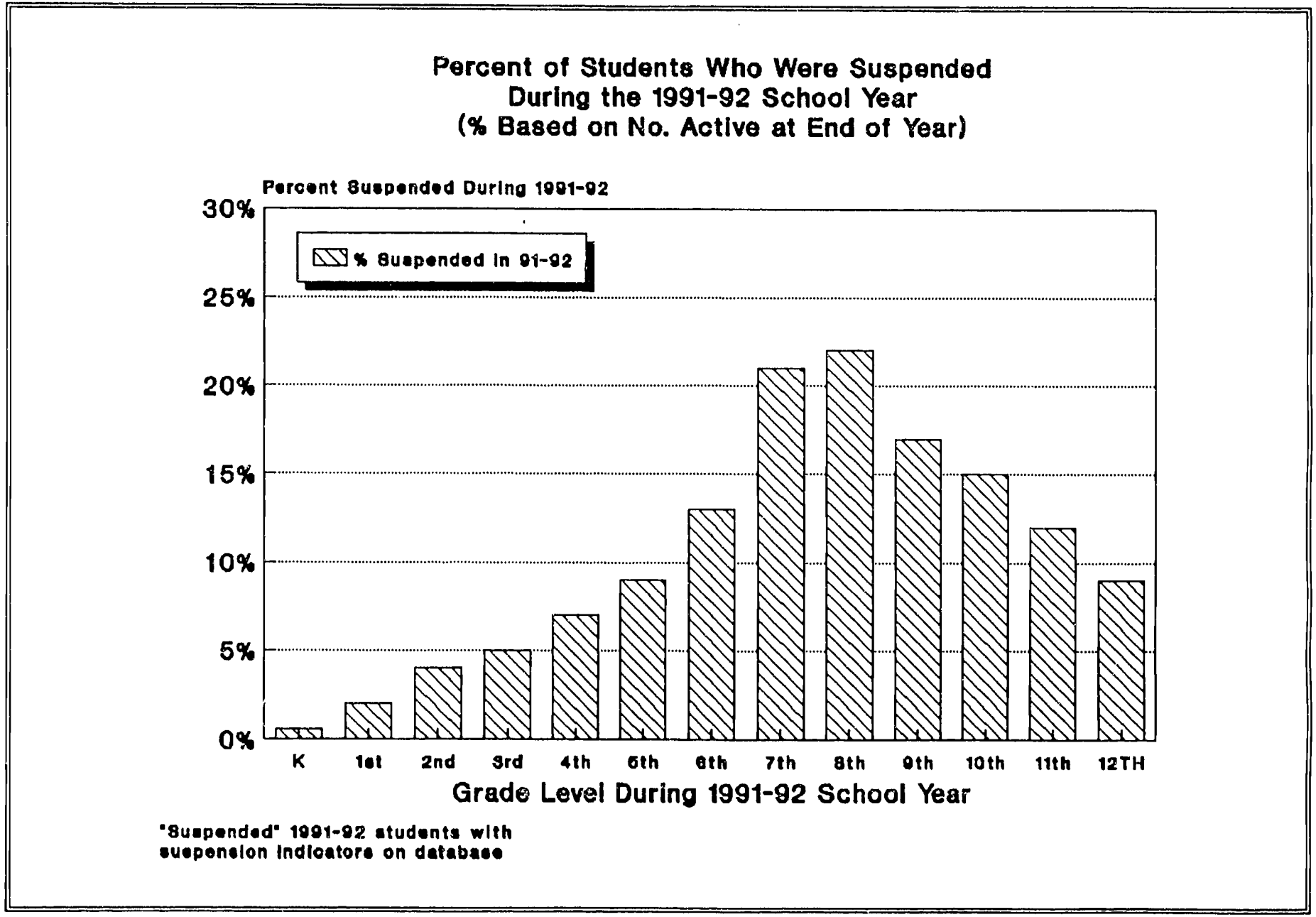
Percent of Students Who Were Suspended
During the 1991-92 School Year
(% Based on No. Active at End of Year)
Percent Suspended During 1991-92
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
% Suspended in 91-92
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
10th
11th
12TH
Grade Level During 1991-92 School Year
"Suspended" 1991-92 students with
suspension indicators on database

FIGURE B-4

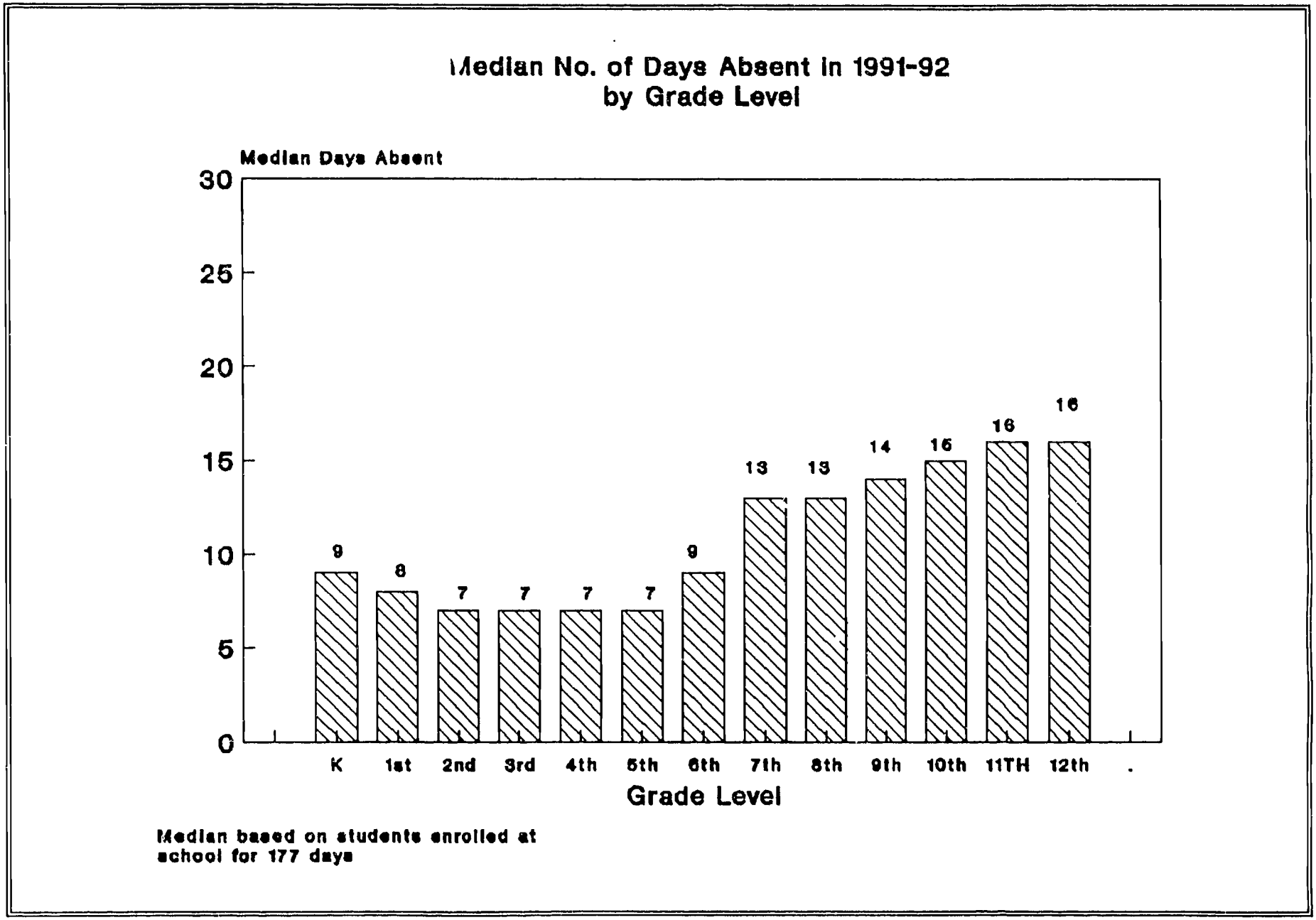
Median No. of Days Absent in 1991-92
by Grade Level
Median Days Absent
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
9
8
7
7
7
7
9
13
13
14
15
16
16
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
7th
8th
9th
10th
11TH
12th
Grade Level
Median based on students enrolled at school for 177 days

FIGURE B-5

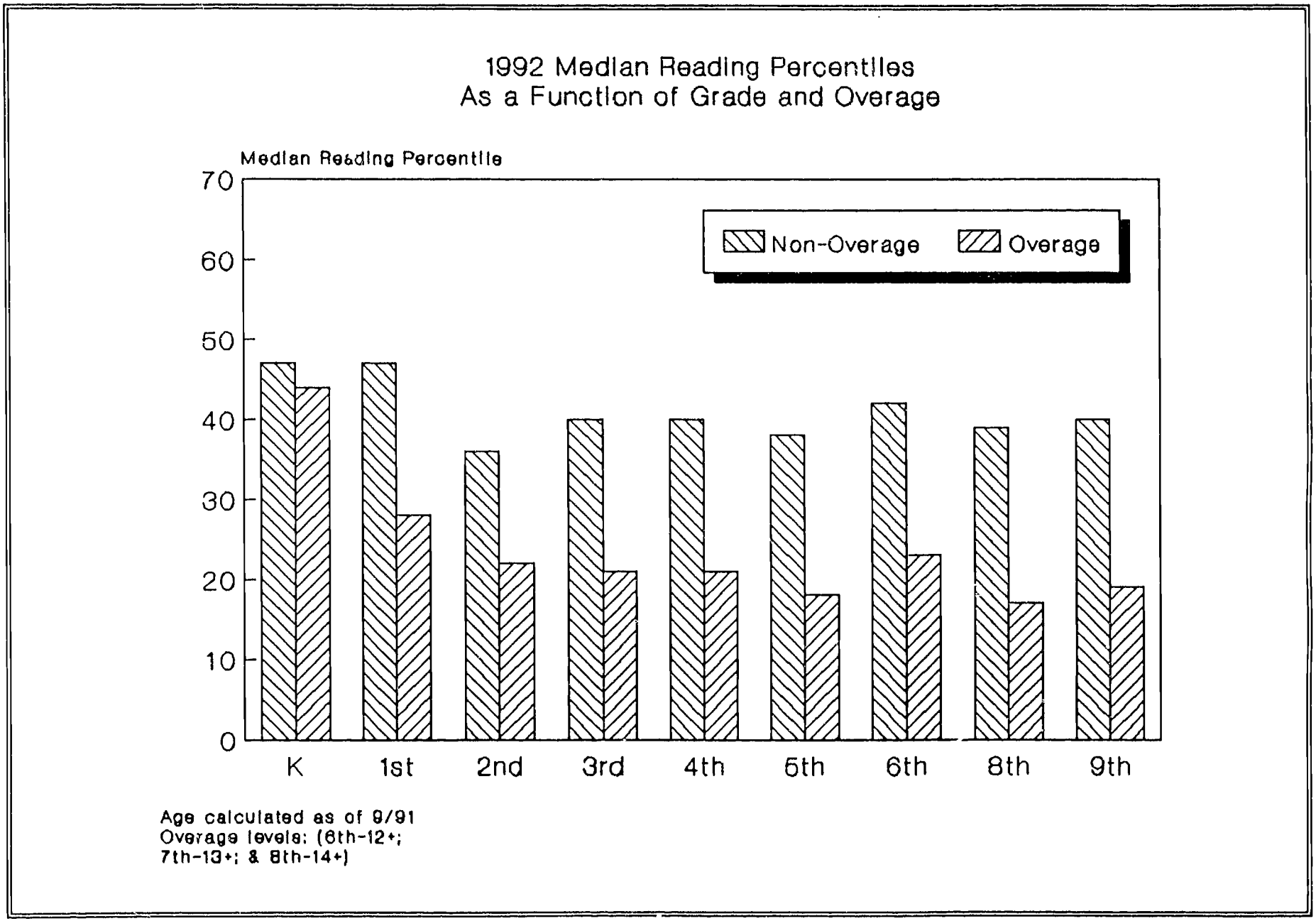
1992 Median Reading Percentiles
As a Function of Grade and Overage
Median Reading Percentile
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Non-Overage
Overage
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
8th
9th
Age calculated as of 9/91
Overage levels: (6th-12+;
7th-13+; & 8th-14+)

FIGURE B-6