IMPORTANT FACTORS IMPACTING GRADE PLACEMENT COMMITTEE DECISIONS: PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

by

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Abstract

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The Student Success Initiative was designed and implemented to make sure students in the state of Texas were academically prepared before moving to the next grade. If a student in the state of Texas does not pass the reading and or mathematics portion of the STAAR test in the fifth and eighth grade, that student is automatically retained. Parents have the right to appeal this retention and that appeal is conducted through a Grade Placement Committee. Grade Placement Committees are made up of school administrators, teachers, and parents. The decision of the Grade Placement Committee must be unanimous or the student will be retained.

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors administrators and teachers believed were important when making a grade placement decision. The study was conducted by using a three round Delphi study. The study

surveyed 16 administrators and 16 teachers in a large urban school district in the state of Texas.

School administrators identified 29 factors that met the minimum mean of 2.0 to be considered in the final data. Of the 29 factors that administrators identified, 21 were categorized as nonacademic while eight were categorized as academic.

Teacher identified 29 factors that they believed were important in making grade placement decisions. The factors that teachers identified were also categorized with 12 as academic and 17 as nonacademic.

The results of the study showed that school administrators were making grade placement decisions based on issues that were not academic in nature. Teachers were also using nonacademic factors to determine grade placement, but at a rate lower than administrators.

The intent of the Student Success Initiative was to end social promotion, but this study demonstrates that is not the case.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Education as we know it today in the United States of America began during the colonial times (Travers, 1983). The Act of the General Court of 1642 stated that all children were to be educated. The act was the beginning of compulsory education, but did not establish schools. In 1647 the General Court realized a more formal education was required. The General Court passed the first school law requiring any township of 50 households or more to appoint a member of the community to teach reading. . If the town had more than 100 households, a grammar school was required. Court passed the first school law requiring any township of 50 households or more to appoint a member of the community to teach

In the early days in the New England colonies, most schools consisted of one large classroom (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). Students' ages ranged from 5 or 6 up to 13 or 14. Students of different ages and different grades were all educated in one large classroom. Most teachers were not trained as teachers, but merely someone who could read and write and was willing to teach. By the 1830's, a problem became apparent (Carifio & Carey, 2010). The system was not efficient and students were suffering due to the fact that teachers were attempting to educate students at different levels in the same classroom. Each student was

given the same information, regardless of that student's academic need or level. This practice created a concern about older students being in the same class as younger students. As a result of these concerns, reformers in the early 1800's began to push for graded classrooms (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Students were placed in different grades based on the age of the student. As a student got older and finished another year of school, that student was promoted to the next grade. This is the beginning of two of the oldest questions in education. How do you determine which student is promoted to the next grade? And what should be done when a student is not promoted to the next grade? There are two opposing positions for this age- old question: social promotion and grade retention. Depending on the social and political climate of the day, students who were not academically successful were either socially promoted or they were retained.

Statement of Problem

In July 199, during the 76th session of the Texas Legislature, The Student Success Initiative (SSI) was passed. The SSI was designed to ensure that all students in the state of Texas receive the instruction and support necessary to be academically successful in both reading and mathematics (Texas Education Agency, 2010b). The initiative was designed to impact academic achievement in grades three, five and eight. SSI states that if a student does not pass either the math or the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test for the first time in the third, fifth, or eighth grade, then that student

will receive additional instruction in that subject in an effort to help the students pass the TAKS test. Students will have three opportunities to pass the TAKS test. If the student continues to be unsuccessful on the third attempt at the TAKS test, then that student will be retained in the same grade for an additional year. This retention is only in the third, fifth or eighth grades, and only if the student does not pass both reading and math portions of the TAKS test.

The SSI was updated in 2009, during the 81st Texas legislative session with the passing of House Bill 3 (Texas Education Agency, 2010b). There were two major changes that came out of the 81st legislative session. The first was changing the SSI grade to fifth and eighth; the third grade requirement was removed. The second major change was replacing the TAKS test with the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

The SSI also requires that a Grade Placement Committee (GPC) be established for each student who fails the TAKS test in reading or math for the second time in the same year (Texas Education Code, 2009). The GPC is made up of the school principal, or designee, a content teacher in the content that has not been mastered, and a parent or guardian. The GPC will then design a program of accelerated instruction that will best meet the need of the student. The accelerated instruction may take place outside of the normal school day or school year.

An additional task the statute charges the GPC with is to hear the appeal of a student that has been retained (Texas Education Code, 2009). The GPC is empowered to promote such students as long as they have successfully completed the accelerated instruction. The GPC decision must be unanimous. The GPC is the only entity that can promote a student who has not demonstrated academic achievement.

The problem all GPCs face is deciding which academically-unsuccessful student to promote and which academically-unsuccessful students to retain. The decision regarding promotion versus retention has long-term implications on each student's academic future, yet there is no training, no best practices, or no standard to guide GPC in the decision-making process for each appealing student who comes before them.

Purposes of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to identify what school administrators believe to be the most important factors when considering promotion of a student, given that that student has not passed at least one portion of the STAAR test. The secondary purpose of the study was to identify what teachers believe were the most important factors. The final purpose of this study was to compare the responses of administrators with the responses of teachers.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered:

1. What do school administrators perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?

2. What do teachers perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?

3. How similar are the perceptions of administrators to the perceptions of teachers regarding important factors to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal?

Theoretical Framework

The word transform is defined as "to change in composition or structure" (Mish, 2002). Transformative learning theory describes learning as a change in the way someone views things around them (Hodge, 2011). When a person or a group is forced to look at an issue or an idea in a different way than that person typically views the issue, there are two possible outcomes. The first is to simply ignore the different idea and continue thinking the way the individual has always thought. The second option is to re-examine the previously held idea. If the second option is selected, then transformative learning can happen (Cranton, 2011).

This Delphi study is based on the theoretical framework that individual's views are based on the experiences each has had. Educators are making decisions regarding Grade Placement Committee decisions based on previous experiences the educator has had. Transformative learning theory attempts to explain where educators' views come from.

Significance of the Study

In the spring of 2009 in Texas, 319,209 fifth grade students took the TAKS test. The fifth graders passed at a rate of 89.0 percent leaving 11.0 percent or 35,000 fifth graders who did not demonstrate academic achievement (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Of the 35,000 students that did not pass, nearly 20,000 were subsequently promoted to the sixth grade by a GPC (Texas Education Agency, 2010b). Many students were promoted to the next grade level despite the fact they had not demonstrated academic success on the TAKS test. The decision to promote was made by school administrators, teachers, and parents. What do school officials believe are the important factors that lead to a student being promoted without proof of academic success? Why is one student promoted while another is retained? These are the questions that are at the heart of this study. What do school officials perceive as the most important factors that lead to the promotion of a student?

That same year, 309,541 eighth grade students took the TAKS test. The eighth graders had an 87.1 percent passing rate, translating to 269,617 eighth

grade students who passed both portions of the TAKS test in the spring of 2009 (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Texas had 35,056 eighth grade students fail one or more portions of the TAKS test that year. Nearly 22,000 students or 65 percent of all students who did not pass both portions of the TAKS test were eventually promoted to the ninth grade via a GPC (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

Combining fifth and eighth grade promotions, more than 42,000 students were promoted to the next grade level despite the fact that these students had not proven to be academically successful in reading and math (Texas Education Agency, 2009). When many students are affected, it is imperative that the best possible decision be made regarding promotion versus retention. In most cases, this decision will have a lasting impact on the future of these students. Thus, all possible data should be used to make the best decision for each student. Hill (2010) in a correlation study stresses that any decision about grade retention must be made using only a student's achievement data such as test scores and grades. All personal opinions and feeling about a student must be removed from the decision. The problem is doing what you believe is in the best interest of the student while keeping your personal feelings out.

The study collected information from informants from a single large urban school district in the state of Texas. From this point forward, the district will be referred to as "Urban Independent School District or Urban ISD". Urban ISD

served over 80,000 students during the 2009-2010 school year. The ethnic breakdown down for Urban ISD is as follows: African-American 22 percent, Hispanic 60 percent, White 13 percent and 76 percent of students receiving free and/or reduced lunch (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

In the summer of 2007, UISD promoted 82.1 percent of fifth-grade students who did not pass the reading portion of the TAKS test but appealed to a GPC (Texas Education Agency, 2007). These students did not pass and were automatically retained in the fifth-grade. GPC decided to promote 82.1 percent of students that appealed. That same year, the state of Texas average was 78.0 percent of fifth-grade student were promoted by a GPC. UISD promoted 82.1 percent of students not passing the math portion of the TAKS test as compared to 77.5 percent being the state average (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

In 2008, UISD promoted 86.1 percent of fifth-graders not passing the reading portion of TAKS and 87.3 percent of math failures (Texas Education Agency, 2008). The state average that same year was 84.0 percent for both reading and math. Eighth-graders were promoted at an even higher rate. 96.3 percent of students not passing the reading TAKS were promoted to the ninth-grade while 98.3 percent of math failures were promoted. During the 2008 school, the state average was 88.5 percent in reading and 90.5 in math were still promoted to the ninth-grade.

During the 2009 school year, UISD served 5,759 fifth-grade students (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Of those 5,759 fifth-grade students, 102 were retained in the fifth-grade, or 1.8 percent of the fifth-grade students repeated the fifth-grade. GPC promoted 89.3 percent of students that did not pass the reading portion of the TAKS test to the sixth grade. That same year, GPC promoted 88.8 percent of math TAKS failures to the sixth grade. The state promoted 84.7 percent in reading and 84.7 percent in math.

The UISD served 5,099 eighth-grade students during the 2009-2010 school year. Less than one percent of eighth-grade students were retained in the eighth grade, or 99 students. The GPC promoted 96.5 percent of TAKS reading failures and 98.2 percent of TAKS math failures (Texas Education Agency, 2009). The state average for reading was 88.5 percent and 91.1 percent for math. The data suggests that UISD promotes student at a statistically higher rate than the state of Texas does. The question then is WHY?

Method of Procedure

This study was conducted using the Delphi Method. The Delphi method is a decision-making process that allows a group of experts to work together without physically being together (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). The Delphi method is an iterative process used to collect and analysis data. This method provides a means of getting the opinions of many experts in a specific

field. The Delphi Method can be used to research topics that do not lend themselves to precise analytical techniques.

Definition of Terms

Delphi Method: a research method designed to elicit opinions for experts in a field by repeated questioning. Panelists are asked research questions in multiple rounds in an effort to reach consensus.

Grade Placement Committee or GPC: a committee of principal, or designee, a parent or guardian, and a course or grade-specific teacher. The purpose of the committee is to determine if a student should be promoted to the next grade without passing the TAKS test.

Grade Retention: The practice of requiring a student to repeat a grade for the second time based on academic success.

Inter-Quartile Range or IQR: The range that falls between the bottom 25 percent and the top 75 percent in responses to each factor.

No Child Left Behind or NCLB: Congressional bill passed in 2001 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness or STAAR test: The state-wide assessment used in the state of Texas beginning 2011-2012 school year.

Social Promotion: The promotion of a student to the next grade without regard to academic success.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills or TAKS: The state-wide assessment used in the state of Texas.

United Independent School District or UISD: A pseudonym for a large urban school district in the state of Texas.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to school administrators and teachers in an urban school district in the state of Texas
2. Panelist had served on at least one Grade Placement Committee within the last five years.
3. The study was limited to three rounds of Delphi questionnaires sent out to panelists.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Social Promotion versus Grade Retention

One of the first major research studies examining social promotion was conducted by Holmes & Matthews (1983). Holmes and Matthews conducted a meta-analysis of available research on elementary and junior high students. The study reviewed 44 published studies and calculated 575 effect sizes. Gall, Gall, & Borg define an effect size as: "A statistical measure of the strength of an observed difference between groups on a test" (p. 639). The study calculated a mean effect size of -.37 from the studies. Holmes and Matthews calculated that students that were retained in the same grade score .37 standard deviation units below students that were socially promoted. It is the authors' conclusion that research showed that the negative effect of non-promotion or grade retention outweighs any negative outcomes from social promotion. The author argues that retaining a student will have a greater negative impact on the student in the future. The negative effects far outweigh any possible benefits that may come from grade retention. This study is the seminal study in the continued debate regarding social promotion.

Holmes (1986) revisited this issue in a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Holmes, 1986). In this paper, Holmes conducted another meta-analysis. Holmes evaluated 17

studies that looked at the effectiveness of grade retention in elementary school. Holmes evaluated means and effect size of the 17 studies. The results were consistent with Holmes's earlier study, finding that any benefits of grade retention are outweighed by the negative effects of grade retention.

Jimerson (2001) conducted another meta-analysis study that reviewing research that looked at grade retention. Jimerson reviewed 20 studies that were published between 1990 and 1999. This study concluded that grade retention does not have a positive impact on students that are retained. Jimerson found that neither grade retention nor social promotion was the answer to the problem. The author suggests that future research needs to focus on new remedial strategies that will impact students that are not showing academic success.

The policy of promoting a student to the next grade level regardless of the student's academic achievement was the classroom norm across the country (Carifio & Carey, 2010) during the early 1900's. Historically, socialization has been seen as one of the primary objectives of schools. Carifio and Carey describe the main purpose of the educational system as preparing citizens to be socially prepared to be productive members of society. Thus, keeping students in age-appropriate groups aligned with that objective. The only real exception is when a student just stops coming to school. This is done in an effort to keep the student on pace with his social group. As long as the student is attending school, the student will be promoted. This trend continued through the 1970's. Students

were promoted to the next grade level with little or no regard to academic standards (Bowman, 2005). Educators were more concerned with socialization than the academic success and preparedness of each student. There was a fear of stigmatizing a student with the label of failure, so the student was simply socially promoted to the next grade level with no regard for that student's academic achievement.

Social promotion is seen to have many positive attributes (Greene & Winters, 2006). The first and possibly the most often cited reason for social promotion is that it has a positive emotional impact on students. Supporters of social promotion claim that retaining a student will cause more long-term harm to the retained student than if a student is allowed to move to the next grade and stay with the same group of children. Students that are retained should not have a negative stigma attached to them. Social promoted students are more likely to stay in school and will be able to catch up with classmates.

The educational pendulum began to swing back to the right during the 1990's. This happened during the presidency of Bill Clinton. During each of his first three State of the Union addresses, Clinton (1997, 1998, 1999) declared it was time "to end social promotion". President Clinton believed the best way to improve the educational system was to hold the students accountable for their own academic success. President Clinton also wanted to hold schools accountable for the success or failure of students. Many state and local education

agencies began to take up the call to end social promotion. This was the beginning of the "Age of Accountability" (Guskey, 2005). Students were now required to meet more stringent requirements before they would be allowed to be promoted to the next grade level.

If a student had not acquired the requisite knowledge, then retention was seen as the best option (Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell, & Hecht, 1992). Simply requiring the student to repeat the grade level for a second time would allow the student more time to learn the material, and thus the student would reach the academic standards necessary to promote to the next grade. This has been a common practice for decades in the United States (Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell, & Hecht, 1992). Hundreds of thousands of students have been retained in the same grade for an additional year. Students are simply required to do the same work again in hopes that the additional time will make a difference for the student.

Opponents of grade retention have said that simply making a student do the same work in the same grade an additional time does not help the student (Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersley, 2010). Griffith et al.(2010) argues that retained students had lower reading achievement in the eighth grade as well as slower reading growth rates in secondary grades as compared to students that were simply promoted to the next grade The extra time and doing the same work

a second time had little or no impact on a student's achievement as compare to students that were socially promoted to the next grade level.

Another negative related to grade retention is the impact that retention has on possible post-secondary participation (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Ou and Reynolds found that students that have been retained in the same grade have lower rates of post-secondary participation than students that had not been retained. The authors also found that grade retention has a greater negative impact on post-secondary participation than even family demographics and early school achievement.

The timing of the retention also has a large impact on the future success of students. Most feel that if grade retention is going to take place, the retention should be done early in a student's academic career. Silberglitt et al. (2006) looked at the growth curve of students that were retained, comparing the two groups. The first group was students that were retained early in their academic careers, and the second group was students that had been retained later in their academic careers. Silberglitt found no significant difference in the linear slope parameters of the two groups. He did note that the later retained group a significantly larger negative bends while the earlier retained group had a more linear curve. The data showed that as time went on, later retained students began to show less growth, and demonstrated a negative bend in their academic slope.

Silberglitt determined that the data showed the negative effects of later retention as opposed to what most people felt was a benefit to early retention.

In most cases, grade retention simply does not work (Denton, 2001). There seems to be no clear-cut answer to this question. Both sides make powerful and persuasive arguments. How can we improve the educational system until we have answered this fundamental question?

Everyone has his own opinion regarding grade retention. All educators have a preconceived perception regarding the positive and negative effects of grade retention. In a paper presented at the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Patterson presented findings from a study that surveyed 169 principals and 140 teachers (Patterson, 1996). Patterson concluded that principals and teachers do not have the same perception about the impact of grade retention on students. Patterson showed that teachers believe any negative impact of grade retention is outweighed by the positives of grade retention. Principals on the other hand, believe that the negative impact far outweighs any positives that may come from grade retention. Patterson's research showed a definite split in perception between teachers and principals.

Galford (2008) found that many principals view retention as a form of educational intervention that will impact future academic achievement. Most principals base their perceptions on personal experiences and not always on research. In a study conducted by Galford (2008), principals' perceptions were

analyzed. The principals were given a survey regarding opinion relating to grade retention. The principals were then asked to read a research article that shows the many negative effects of grade retention. The principals were then given the survey for a second time. The differences were described in the paper. The research showed that 67.8 percent of the panelists believed grade retention was not an effective intervention. After the principals read the research article, 80.6 percent believed grade retention was not an effective intervention. The research revealed that principals' perception regarding grade retention changed after being exposed to research that demonstrated the negative effects of grade retention.

Gray (2010) extended Galford's (2008) research by reviewing the number of students retained in the Galford study (Gray, 2010). Gray looked at the number of students retained three years before and two years after the Galford study. She found that research-based information changed the way principals thought about grade retention, but it did not change principals' actions. The research showed no significant change in the number of students that were retained by the principals involved in the 2008 study. Even though principals believed grade retention was not a positive intervention, it was used as an academic intervention at the same rate as before.

In another study focusing on the impact of grade retention and grade placement, Medrano (2012) found that students that were retained consistently outperformed their counterparts that were not retained. Students that were

retained reported higher grades on report cards and scored higher on state assessments. The first year following retention showed the largest growth. By the fifth year of the study, improvement could no longer be seen. This study makes the case that any advantage a student gains by being retained will disappear over time.

Rodriguez (2007) conducted a qualitative study examining the policies in Texas elementary schools that pertain to social promotion and grade retention. This study was able to identify implications for both practice and policy. Rodriguez suggests that the first implication for practice is educating parents about their role in the educational process. The more parents are educated and involved, the more success students will achieve. The second implication is targeting at-risk students as early as possible in their educational career. As for policy implications, Rodriguez concludes that social promotion legislation actually has an opposite outcome. In an effort to stop social promotion by enacting academic standards, the grade placement committees are still socially promoting students. Policy must be changed or the same levels of social promotion will continue

Bali (2005) began to look at grade retention through the lens of politics. Bali attempted to explain grade retention by looking at the political landscape instead of solely focusing on student achievement. Bali found that in large urban districts that serve a high percentage of low-socioeconomic and minority students,

most people believe requiring students to meet high academic standards before being promoted to the next grade level will improve academic achievement. Bali's research found that requiring students to pass standardized tests before being promoted actually had a negative effect on student achievement. School districts are caught between what is best for students and what the political constituents want. In this study, Bali found that most constituents were conservative and also had a great deal of political power.

Penfield (2010) questioned if the use of standardized test results in decisions regarding grade promotion versus retention that grade retention were fair and equal. The results of this study indicated that many grade retention policies potentially violated standards. Penfield found that two major standards appear to be violated. The first standard states that a single test score should not be attributed to poor instruction or properties of the assessment that are unrelated to the target outcome. The second standard that is potentially violated is that test scores should lead to a consequence that is educationally beneficial. Penfield suggests that grade retention has not been proven to be a beneficial educational intervention.

Frey (2005) reviews previous research on social promotion and grade retention, but then examines a relatively new educational practice. The practice of voluntary academic "redshirting" is when parents choose to delay a young student's enrollment in kindergarten. Parents quote two reasons for making this

academic decision. The first is the child's birthday falling late in the year, and thus are young for their grade. The second is the child's maturity level. In either case, the parent is making an academic decision that the parent hopes will improve their student's academic future. As retention rates increase and social promotion has been legislated out, parents are often opting for "redshirting". Frey found that "redshirting" is most often found in white middle-class settings. Frey concludes that all practices are related to giving students more academic time is beneficial, but does not provide any definitive answers on when and which practice is best.

Xia (2005A) published a three-part series that reviewed grade retention. In the first installment, Xia reviewed the effects of grade retention. Most research fails to provide evidence that grade retention improves long-term academic achievement. Any gains that are shown early quickly disappear within a few years. Grade retention has shown to have a negative effect on student discipline and drop-out rates. The practice of grade retention also has a high cost. Schools must spend more resources on grade retention has been proven to be more cost effective then other options. Xia cautions policy makers against viewing grade retention as cure all for poor student performance.

In the second part in the three-part series, Xia (2005B) examines the cost of grade retention. Research has consistently shown that grade retention costs more money. Grade retention also leads to higher drop-out rates that in turn

costly society more money. Grade retention also impacts crime rates and substance abuse, both cost society.

In the final of the three-part series, Xia (2005C) attempts to bridge the gap between what has been written and educational practices. The general public believes that grade retention makes sense. If a student does not have the academic skills to be successful, one more year will help that student succeed. The problem is that the general public does not understand the unintended consequences of grade retention. Most teachers also favor grade retention due to the fact that teachers do not see the long-term consequences. Teachers typically only see the next few years and thus think it is a positive intervention, but it is not. Xia explains that grade retention is not the answer, but wants more research to understand what the answer is.

Abbott (2010) conducted a study that examined a matched group of kindergarteners and first-grade students. The kindergarteners were students that were simply retained in the same grade with no additional interventions. The first-graders were students that were promoted despite not being academically ready. The first-graders also received small-group interventions in the first grade. The first research question focused on the rate of growth and where the student ended the school year, using DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). Results indicated that there was no significant difference in the growth of students or the student endpoint. The second research question focused

on the students' endpoint, using the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests (WRMT). This study found that retained kindergarteners did not outperform their matched promoted first-graders on the WRMT. Abbott (2010) found that simply retaining students did not help those students academically. Abbott also found that students were better served to be promoted and then provided with small-group interventions.

Smink (2001) published a policy briefing regarding the stance of the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC). In this brief, Smink discusses 21 effective strategies regarding grade retention. The overwhelming position of the NDPC is neither grade retention nor social promotion works. Smink believes no matter what a district decides is best for students; a comprehensive plan must be in place. That plan must involve students, parents, teachers and administrators. The theme of this policy brief is "promotion with purpose."

Larsen & Akmal (2007) conducted a study that examined 10 school districts. The study reviewed district-level grade retention policies and procedures. The study was conducted by interviewing both middle school teachers and school administrators. District policy and procedures were also examined. Larsen found four related causes of grade-level retention. The first cause was determined that most school administrators and school board members do not know the research regarding grade retention. The second is teachers and school administrators find it difficult to promote students that have attendance and

academic issues when those issues are outside the control of the student. The third cause is district policy is written in an authoritative manner to give the idea that research says grade retention works. The final cause is that there are very few viable options to grade retention for many budget-restrained school districts. Another result from this study is the fact that students are more likely to be retained if parents do not have social and or economic capital. Larsen & Akmal (2007) explained that there are no simple answers when it comes to grade retention.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory was introduced in the mid-1970s by Mezirow. In 1975 Mezirow was investigating how women learned in a formal educational setting after taking time away from school. Mezirow was able to describe the experiences of these women and began to theorize how adults learn in general. Transformative learning theory is an attempt to explain how adults learn. This was the birth of transformative learning theory (Hodge, 2011).

In the book, Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress, Mezirow (1996) continues to work to improve his theory regarding adult learning Adult learning begins with a disorienting dilemma. In most cases, self-examination and a critical assessment of one's assumptions will follow. Mezirow (2000) identified the follow step in adult learning. First, the adult learner will recognize his own discontent and begin to explore new options

regarding the dilemma. Next, a plan will then be developed. Learners will then begin to acquire new knowledge and or skills in an effort to implement the new plan. Finally, the adult learner will begin to fit into the new role and build self-confidence. The final step will be integrating this new perspective into the learner's life. Mezirow believes all adult learners must go though these phases for a person's perception to change. Mezirow determined that the changing of one's perception is learning.

Transformative learning theory has become one of the dominant theories attempting to explain adult learning (Hodge, 2011). Transformative learning theory focuses on the way individuals see the world around them, and that includes other people as well as themselves. Hodge explains that this theory is not centered on a measured attainment of knowledge, but instead a changing in the way and adults see themselves and the world they live in. Transformative learning theory considers changing a person's views as a form of learning.

According to transformative learning theory, three things need to happen to cause learning (Baumgartner, Lee, Biden, & Flowers, 2003). Something happens that an individual is involved with or witnesses. The learner then must reflect critically on the incident. And the third and final stage is to be involved in reflective conversation regarding the incident in question. A person needs to have an experience, think about that experience then have some reflective discussion

about the incident to produce a change in the person's perspective on the incident. If the person's perspective changes, then transformative learning has taken place.

School administrators and teachers are both impacted by what they see and hear, thus transformative learning theory is an ideal lens to examine their perceptions of characteristics that are important in considering a Grade Placement Committee appeal. All educators have their own opinions about grade retention or social promotion. Most of these ideas are a response to the experiences in our educational careers. The next step is for educators to be involved in personal reflection on the experience (Baumgartner et al., 2003). The final step is to engage in reflective conversation about the experience.

Transformative learning theory says educators need to follow the three steps for learning to take place. Educators already witness or are involved in experiences regarding social promotion versus grade retention. Now educators need to reflect and engage in reflective conversation about grade placement versus social promotion; then learning will occur.

Delphi Method

The Delphi method was created by Norman Dalkey of the RAND Corporation in the 1950's. (Rowe, & Wright, 1999). The RAND Corporation was working with the United States Air Force on a project to forecast the number of atomic bombs that would be needed to cripple the United States military machine. The forecasting was done from the perspective of the Soviet Union.

The idea behind the Delphi method is to get a group of experts together to brainstorm an idea, without the negatives that are sometimes associated with getting the group together (Weaver, 1971). Some of the problem with getting a group of experts together is the possibility of conflicts between experts. Another problem is one dominant personality can control the conversation (Sproull, 1988). The object is to gain a reliable consensus within the group of experts (Dalkey, & Helmer, 1963). The Delphi method is designed to forecast what the future holds in a particular field of study, and allows for an "informed judgment" regarding a specific topic or future event (Dawson & Brucker, 2001). While there is no way to predict the future reliably, using the Delphi method allows experts to forecast what is most likely to occur and thus prepare for that possible outcome.

Dalkey (1969) believes the Delphi method is stronger than other methods because it already has group acceptance. The group of experts is contributing to the findings, and thus group acceptance will be strong.

Rowe and Wright (1999) describe four features that help to define the Delphi method: anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, and the statistical aggregation of group response. Anonymity is important to the method because without it many people are afraid to freely voice their opinions. Another problem with working in a group is that people are afraid to change their minds. Potential respondents' fear they will lose face in the eyes of the group. To combat this hurdle, anonymity is gained by the use of questionnaires. The questionnaires

allow panelists to express their personal opinions without fear or social pressure from the group.

The next important feature is the iterations. Iteration is defined as "a procedure in which repetition of sequence of operations yields results successively closer to a desired result" (Mish, 2002). The process of anonymous survey responses will be repeated until no new information is gained. Research has shown that the opinions of the panelists begin to converge through each additional round. There is no definitive answer to how many rounds should be conducted. The accepted criterion is to stop the process when responses show stability (Rowe & Wright, 1999). For the purposes of this study, four rounds will be conducted, or until consensus is reached.

The third feature of the Delphi method is controlled feedback (Rowe & Wright, 1999). The feedback process allows and encourages panelists to examine and review their previous iterations. Allowing panelists the freedom to change their minds based on additional information strengthens the process. During each iteration, the panelist will be allowed to, and requested to, provide feedback that will be provided to other panelists. This allows each panelist to have a better idea about what other expert panelists are considering (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The controlled feedback is a summary of what each panelist has said. By providing as much information as possible to each panelist, the group will be able to make the best possible decisions regarding the topic.

The final feature is the statistical aggregation of the group responses. After all the iterations, the group judgment is determined by performing a statistical analysis of the group's responses. This is typically achieved by calculating the mean or median of the responses. This allows each panelist to have equal input without the loudest or most experienced dominating the process (Rowe & Wright, 1999).

Another reason to use the Delphi method is that it lends itself to making policy decisions. Dalkey (1969) recommends the use of the Delphi method in many types of studies, but feels it is best served when making decisions regarding policy formation.

Brown (2011) was able to use the Delphi method to elicit the most important factors leading to English Language Learners (ELL) success in state-mandated testing. The study identified experts as members of an organization working with ELL's. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is one of the leading organizations regarding English Language Learners. Brown (2011) determined six categories for school initiatives and seven instructional practices. These 13 practices were identified using expert opinions gathered by using the Delphi method. The results indicated that these practices will have a positive impact on English Language Learner academic achievement.

In 2012, Belcher (2012) was able to use the Delphi method to investigate discipline practices in Michigan. Belcher examined the disproportionate administration of suspension and expulsion of African-American students. Belcher discovered that the experts agreed that African-American students were given the harshest possible punishment while white students were given lesser punishments. The experts attributed this to the fact that many African-American students were misunderstood by their white teachers. The panelists also agreed that many white teachers were not able to develop meaningful relationships with their African-American students. These lacks of relationship lead to an increase in discipline referrals and thus more suspensions and expulsions. Belcher (2012) was also able to use the Delphi method to develop a list of interventions that were believed would lower the suspensions and expulsions. The four interventions were as follow: increase the use of social workers and counselors in dealing with African-American students, develop a character education curriculum to be taught in school, work to develop meaningful relationships with African-American students, and work to hire and retain a diverse staff. All of these findings will lead to a decrease in the disproportionate discipline applied to African-American students in Michigan's schools.

Brister (2007) used a Delphi method to research future recommendations for a high-level physical education program. Brister was able to use a panel of experts to identify components of a high-level physical education program as well

as barriers to such a program. The experts' panel was made up of people with a direct relationship to physical education. Doctors, teachers, school administrators, exercise physiologists, and athletic trainers. The experts were able to reach consensus on 10 components of a high-level physical education program. They ranged from teachers being a role model for good physical fitness to institutional frameworks to emphasize lifelong fitness. They also agreed that fitness assessment with goals that are attainable were equally important. The study also discovered issues that would prevent such a program from being developed. These barriers range from physical education class not being valued as a real class to improved teacher quality.

Carpenter (2009) used the Delphi method to study non-traditional career opportunities for eighth-grade girls in skilled trades in an Ontario, Canada, area. The panel was made up of educational experts and experts in the non-traditional workplace. A consensus was reached by panelists on many issues. The strongest agreement was reached in the following areas: Eighth- grade girls are capable of succeeding in non-traditional workplaces, equal opportunities must exist, girls must have mentors with direct experience in the non-traditional workplace, and training programs must be available in schools. Carpenter (2009) was able to use the Delphi method to gain consensus for two different areas on expertise and produce results that will have a positive impact on student achievement.

Cortina (2011) conducted a Delphi study that examined school administrators' decisions regarding gifted and talented professional education. The panel of experts was made up of school administrators, experts in professional development, and experts in gifted and talented education. After two rounds of questionnaires consensus was reached on the following ideas: federal and state mandates, special education law, community and parental pressure, and local priorities. The panel also outlined ideas to mitigate the negative factors that impact administrators' decisions regarding professional development of general education teachers. The study identified many issues, but also provided guidance regarding the issues that are facing school administrators making decisions regarding professional development.

In another Delphi study, Dewald (2010) used the method to examine nursing education. Dewald's study looked at cultural sensitivity in nursing education. A panel of 12 experts in nursing education was selected from 12 different areas of the country. The purpose of the study was to seek opinions of the experts regarding teaching methods and strategies that would increase cultural sensitivity in future nurses. The results were categorized into 13 themes. The first of the themes was modeling, specifically, modeling cultural sensitivity nursing. The last theme was classroom teaching methods. The Delphi method proved to be an effective research tool in this area.

A Delphi method was also effectively used by Durrett (2010) to examine what differentiated instructional practices are most effective for improving student achievement. The panel of experts was made up of 24 secondary principals working at "exemplary" schools as rated by TEA. The panel developed a list of effective differentiation strategies that had a large impact on student achievement. Durrett was able to generate a great deal of practices that impact student achievement by using the Delphi method to research this issue, such as higher level questioning, problem based learning, and student choice.

Goodwin (2002) used a modified Delphi method to look at the ever-changing role of the secondary principal. The study used the Delphi method to generate a series of statements that describe the role of the secondary principal now and in the future. The second stage of the study was conducting using a survey to compare the results from the Delphi to research in the area. The panel was made up of 51 secondary principals that had been identified by the NASSP Recognition program. Results were categorized into four areas: strategic leadership, instructional leadership, organizational leadership, and political and community leadership.

Hess (2008) also used a modified Delphi to research a complex issue. The issue examined was the counseling needs of low-income Mexican-American women. Hess designed a study that was able to identify the following as issues facing low-income Mexican-American women: anger management, depression,

substance abuse, parenting skills, and family relationships. Hess (2008) then interviewed the panelists and was able to identify counseling techniques that had the greatest impact on the panelists. By using a modified Delphi method, Hess not only identified issues facing Mexican-American women in a low-economic status, but was able to identify what counseling methods had the greatest impact on these women.

Carter (2013) used a Delphi study to examine STEM or Science, Technology, Engineering and Math curriculum. Carter attempted to identify characteristics of an integrated STEM curriculum as compared to a single-discipline curriculum. The study was designed to solicit information from a group of experts in the field of STEM curriculum. Cater set out to answer four major questions. The question was to define the characteristics of an integrated STEM curriculum. The second question addressed how to establish components for an integrated STEM curriculum. The third looked at how to evaluate characteristic whether the characteristics should be considered part of an integrated STEM curriculum. The final question looked at the any differences between existing characteristics that are based on single disciplinary curriculum and integrated curriculum. Carter identified 17 essential character of an integrated STEM curriculum and found that most existing STEM curriculum is not truly integrated.

A study conducted by Young (2007) looked at the leadership characteristics of high-performing high school principals. The participants were high school principals of high schools that were considered high performing academically. The study attempted to identify characteristics that had a positive effect on student performance. The study asked 16 high school principals to rate existing characteristics of positive leadership characteristics. Young (2007) found that there was an agreement between what the participants felt were important characteristics and what previous research showed as important characteristics in leadership. The study also identified the following three characteristics as most important: a vision for the school, respect of cultural diversity, and following ethical practices.

Raehpour, (2013) used the Delphi method to gain insight into the perceptions of first-year college faculty. The study first attempted to identify what the panelists believed were important professional development activities; activities that would increase the panelists teaching. The second purpose of the study was to identify any concerns that first-year faculty would have. The final purpose of the study was to determine if any differences existed between general education faculty and occupational faculty. Raehpour (2013) was able to identify four area of professional development that first-year faculty members identified as needing additional training in. The four areas were: Instructional material, "Hands on" activities, group instruction, and presentation software.

In a study using a Modified Delphi Method, Zunker (2009) attempted to gain insight into reading comprehension by using a panel of reading comprehension experts. The study was able to identify 20 significant works. The panel of experts was also able to explain why each work was important to reading comprehension. The Delphi method was used to determine consensus within the group of experts on what existing works had the greatest impact on improving reading comprehension. Complete consensus was not reached, but on work was identified as the closest to consensus

Pruitt (2009) designed and conducted a Delphi study to examine how school administrators used data to make decisions regarding student achievement. The panel was made up of 10 school administrators that had successfully moved their schools from "needs improvement" to achieving "Adequate Yearly Progress". The panelists were asked how they used data to make academic decisions. The results were broken into three themes: use academic data to revise instructional grouping, align curriculum with standards, and achieve accountability with all stakeholders. The study also revealed that school administrators knew what needs to be done, but were often limited by outside influences.

Student Success Initiative

Ending social promotion has become a political hot button (Johnson, 1998). As Texas, Governor George W. Bush started his drive towards re-election;

the theme of social promotion came to the forefront. Governor Bush proposed requiring students in Texas to pass certain state standardized tests at certain grade levels. Texas is not the only state that is working to end social promotion: California, Michigan, Delaware, and Wisconsin have similar legislation. Governor Bush wanted all third-grade students and fifth-grade students to pass both reading and math exams. In the eighth grade, students would be required to pass reading, math, and writing test before being promoted. This is the beginning of the accountability system in Texas.

As the election season continued in Texas during 1998, Governor Bush continued to tout his plan to end social promotion by requiring students to pass state standardized tests (Unknown, 1998). Bush is quoted as stating, "The worst thing a state can do is to advance people through our educational system who cannot read, write, add and subtract."(p. 3) George Bush's plan would have retained 185,000 students statewide in 1997.

George W. Bush was re-elected in November 1998, and began to follow through with his campaign promise to end social promotion (Johnson, 1999). A bill drafted by Senator Teel Bivins was passed that would require all students in the third, fifth, and eighth grades pass state standardized test before the student could be promoted to the next grade. The bill would begin to affect students in the third grade during the 2002-2003 school year. Senator Bivins also added a provision to create a panel to hear appeals regarding grade retention for students

not passing state testing. This was the beginning of the Grade Placement Committee.

States all around the country began to look at ways to improve the academic success of students. Many states believed the best way to improve academics was to hold students and schools accountable for academic achievement. High-stakes testing became the norm in many states. Texas was one of the first states to implement a state-wide testing system. In 1987, Texas passed laws that set minimum competency tests for graduation (Heilig & Hammond, 2008). Then in 1993, Texas created a state-wide system that would not only evaluate individual students, it would also evaluate campuses on their effectiveness of teaching students. Texas' movement to hold each school accountable for success and failure of each student and campus gained national momentum when President George W. Bush championed for and won the political battle for standards-based educational reform.

In 2002, Bush signed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This bill would now become known as the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). The logic behind NCLB is that if more pressure is applied to students, students will improve (Cellitti, 2008). If more pressure is applied to teachers, teaching will improve. And if more pressure is applied to schools, schools will improve. NCLB was designed to improve the educational system in the United States by developing

and testing certain standards. All states were required to develop and adopt a state assessment. The assessment was required to measure the performance of all students and be aligned with adopted state content. The results of the state assessment must then be disaggregated. Disaggregation or breaking the data down must be done for the state, local education agency (LEA) and school. NLCB mandates that data be disaggregated based on gender, major racial group, English proficiency status, migrant status, disabilities status, and economic status. The sub-groups are: All Students, African American, Hispanic, white, American Indian, Asian, special education, economically disadvantaged, and limited English proficiency. Moreover, schools are held accountable for the performance of each of these sub-groups.

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) was passed during the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999. The Student Success Initiative was designed to guarantee that all students in the state of Texas receive instruction and the academic support needed to be successful in both math and reading (Texas Education Agency, 2010a). The SSI is actually three separate initiatives created to support on-grade level achievement in reading and math. The three initiatives are: the Texas Reading Initiative; the Texas Math Initiative; and the grade advancement requirements in reading at grade three; in reading and math at grade five; and reading and math at grade eight. (Texas Education Agency, 2010a).

The SSI establishes required academic standards that must be met before a student can be promoted to the next grade. A gatekeeper to grade promotion, the SSI establishes academic gates at the third grade, fifth grade, and the eighth grade, that must be met in order for a student to be promoted to the next grade level. The Student Success Initiative (SSI) states that all Texas students must pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading and TAKS math test in the third grade, fifth grade and the eighth grade to be promoted to the next grade. The TAKS test will be administered up to three times in math and three times in reading. This allows each student multiple opportunities to pass the test. If a student fails to pass either the math portion or the reading portion of the TAKS test for the second time, a GPC must be formed. The GPC is made up of the school principal, or his designee, a teacher within the content that was not passed, and the parent or guardian of the student (Texas Education Code, 2009).

The SSI mandates that this committee is to provide guidance and resources for a student who does not demonstrate proficiency on the second administration of the TAKS. After adding additional instruction designed to meet the needs of the individual student, the students will take the third and final attempt at the TAKS test. If the student does not pass either the reading and math portion of the TAKS test, that student will be retained in the same grade for an additional year. Parents have the right to appeal a student's retention (Texas Education Agency, 2013). That appeal is also handled by the GPC.

Sims (2008) examined the impact that the SSI had on a group of third-grade students. The study tracked the group of students for four years in an effort to determine if grade retention had any impact on future academic success. The study compared the reading scores of two groups of students. The first group was students that did not pass the 2003 TAKS reading test in the third grade, and were retained. The second group was students that did not pass the 2003 TAKS reading test in the third grade, but were promoted to the fourth grade. The results of the study showed a slight positive impact on student achievement as measured by the TAKS reading test over the next four years. The students that had been retained had greater improvement in reading scores as compared to the group that was promoted, but only slightly. In most cases, the students still did not pass the TAKS reading test. Sims (2008) concludes that retention does not equate to success in passing future test, but only produces a slight improvement in reading scores.

Gonzalez-Ramirez (2007) conducted a study that examined the impact the Student Success Initiative had on fifth-grade students regarding grade retention. The study looked at the Student Success Initiative and all the practices that went along with it. The study consisted of two groups of students. The first group was students that were in the fifth grade in 2005 and did not meet the passing standard for promotion to the sixth grade. This group was promoted to the sixth grade through a grade placement committee. The second group was students that did

not meet the passing standard and were not promoted through a grade placement committee and were retained. Results from the study indicate that students that were retained scored higher on TAKS math and reading the following year, but the increase was not statistically significant. There was no statically significant difference between the groups in attendance, discipline referrals or referrals to special education. The only real difference in the two groups was the fact that if parents were present for the GPC appeal and requested promotion, those students were promoted. The study showed the greatest factor in determining if a student was retained or promoted was the parent's request for promotion.

Another study, examining the effects of grade level retention as defined by the SSI, was conducted by Christenson (2010). Christenson examined three school districts' longitudinal data regarding elementary students that had not been successful on the TAKS test. This study concluded that students that failed the third-grade reading TAKS test and were retained showed success the following year. This success would last until the student reached the eighth-grade. By the time a student reached the eighth-grade, there was no significant difference between retained students and students that were promoted. These finding were consistent among the three districts.

Hunt (2008) looked at the effects that the SSI had on fifth-grade students' success on the TAKS test. Hunt designed the study to compare two groups of students in Texas. The first group was made up of fifth-grade students that failed

the TAKS test in math or reading but were promoted through the GPC. The second group consisted of fifth-grade students that failed the TAKS in math or reading and were then promoted via the GPC. Math and reading scores from the sixth-grade TAKS tests were compared. The promoted group took the sixth-grade TAKS test the following year while the retained group took the sixth-grade TAKS test the following year. The mean score of the retained group was slightly higher than the promoted group. In reading, the retained group outscored the promoted group and passed at a higher rate. In math, the retained group scored higher than the promoted group, but still did not reach the passing threshold. Students that were retained had an extra year to master the material, but scored only slightly higher than the promoted students. Hunt (2008) discovered that the retained group scored slightly higher, but predicts these students will continue to struggle academically.

Neblett (2007) conducted a similar study to Hunt (2008). Neblett's study consisted of three groups of students. The first group was made up of 33 third-grade students that did not meet the passing standard on the 2005-2006 TAKS tests. The second group was made up of 49 fifth graders that did not pass the TAKS test. The final group was students that did not meet passing requirements of the TAKS test during the 2003-2004 school year. All three groups had been retained based on TAKS scores. The results showed that the third-grade students showed significant improvement in reading. The fifth-grade student improved on

the math TAKS the following year. The fifth-grade students also showed improvement in reading, but still did not meet the minimum passing standard. The group of students that was retained during the 2003-2004 showed significant improvement on the math and reading portions of the 2005-2005 TAKS tests. Neblett (2007) concluded that retention has a slight improvement in some populations, but as a whole, retention does not improve academic success in students.

Despite a thorough literature review, there is very little existing research into Grade Placement Committees. No published research was found that looked into Grade Placement Committee decisions, and no research was found as to what participants believe were important in making a grade placement decision.

Chapter 3

Method of Procedure

Selection of Panelist

The primary purpose of the study was to identify what school administrators believed to be the most important factors to be considered when determining if a student should be promote to the next grade given that the student did not pass one or more sections of the STAAR test. The secondary purpose of the study was to identify what teachers believed to be the most important factors to be considered when determining if a student should be promote to the next grade given that the student did not pass one or more sections of the STAAR test. The final purpose of this study was to compare the responses of administrators with the responses of teachers.

The first step was to determine the panelists in the study. The selection of the panelists is critical to the success of the study. Random selection of the panelists is not acceptable. Ludwig states that the researcher must locate and target individuals who are "experts" in the field (Ludwig, 1997). To be considered an "expert" for this study, potential participant had to have been on a Grade Placement Committees within the past five years. Potential participant also had to work in the "Urban Independent School District" (UISD).

Based on the fact that Grade Placement Committees are made up of both school administrators and teachers, it is important that equal numbers of both

administrators and teachers be represented in the study. The study was designed to have 20 administrators and 20 teachers to make up the panelists in the study. This allowed for each member of the group to identify the group's perspectives on promotion or retention.

After receiving approval from the "Urban Independent School District" to conduct the study within the district, and email was sent to elementary principals and middle school principals within the "Urban Independent School District". This group was selected based on the fact that fifth grade and eighth grade are the grade placement years. On August 1, 2013, 93 principals were emailed a letter that explained the study (Appendix A). On August 2, 2013 an additional nine emails were sent. This second set of emails was sent due to the fact that nine emails were returned due to incorrect names or incorrect email addresses . The letter asked for names and email addresses of teachers and other administrators who had served on a GPC within the past five years. An additional 12 emails were sent to assistant principals from schools that did not respond . After receiving all responses, a list of 83 names and email addresses made up the list of potential panelists.

On September 9, 2013, a letter was emailed to 83 potential panelists explaining the purpose and details of the study. Each potential participant was asked if he or she would be interested in participating in the study. Each potential participant was also sent a copy of the Informed Consent (Appendix B) and asked

to respond by emailing back with the phrase, "I have had an opportunity to read the Informed Consent and I am willing to participate in this study."

Once all Informed Consents forms had been returned, the first-round of the Delphi Study began. The entire Delphi study was conducted electronically. SurveyMonkey was used as a tool to survey and communicate with panelists. SurveyMonkey is online survey software that allows the user to create polls and surveys and then send them to panelists. All panelists were emailed instructions that provided a link to SurveyMonkey and the website that hosted the survey. Details such as when the survey would open and the duration of the round were also explained to panelists. The first round was scheduled to last one week.

Delphi Round One

The first step in Round One as to email all school administrators and provide them with at link to the survey that was located on SurveyMonkey. (Appendix C) The next step in Round One was to ask each participant to fill out a brief survey about themselves. The survey attempted to gather demographic information about the participant's educational background, job experience, as well as experience on GPCs. A reminder email was emailed to school administrators on October 7, 2013.

The first-round questionnaire should be simple and open-ended (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2003). Each participant was asked the following open-ended question: "What are the factors to consider when making a decision regarding

grade placement as part of the Grade Placement Committee?" On October 1, 2113, 22 school level administrators were emailed a brief explanation of the survey and a link to the survey that was located on SurveyMonkey.

That same day, 23 teachers were emailed a brief explanation of the survey and a link to the survey that was located on SurveyMonkey (Appendix F). Each participant was filled out the survey on SurveyMonkey. Each teacher was asked to list as many factors as he or she believed to be important when making decisions regarding promotion or retention.

The survey window was open for one week. The first Delphi round opened on October 1, 2013, at 6:00A.M. One week later the first round closed on October 7, 2013, at 11:45 P.M. Of the 22 school level administrators that agreed to be part of the study, 19 administrators responded to the first Delphi round. Unfortunately, the sample size was now lowered to 19.

Twenty-three teachers agreed to be part of the study, and each was emailed details regarding the first Delphi round. During the first Delphi round, only 18 teachers responded. The sample size of the teacher group was now lowered to 18.

When the first round of Delphi ended and the survey was closed, all demographic information from teachers was compiled and then saved. The demographic data from administrators was also saved and compiled.

The next step was to compile all responses into one master list of administrator's responses. The same process was completed for the responses from teachers. Each master list was saved and duplicate answers were consolidated to save space and eliminate redundancy. The participant's original words and phrases were used whenever possible. This allowed each participant's voice to come out, and not be affected by the researcher's biases (Dawson & Brucker, 2001).

The master list of administrators' responses was used to develop a survey for the second round of Delphi. Administrators identified 33 factors that were most important when making a decision within the Grade Placement Committee. The 33 factors were then used to develop a survey via SurveyMonkey. Once again, the order was randomly selected to avoid any researcher bias (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2003).

After consolidation of the master list of teachers' responses, a list of 31 factors was generated. These 31 factors were identified as the most important factors to be considered when making a decision regarding grade retention versus promotion as viewed by members of a Grade Placement Committee. The 31 factors were used to develop a survey that panelists would use during the second round of the Delphi study. The survey was arranged randomly to cancel out any biases related to the order of the responses (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2003). The survey was created using SurveyMonkey.

Once each survey was completed, a copy of both the teachers' survey and the administrators' survey were then submitted to the University of Texas at Arlington's Department of Research Administration for IRB approval. Once approval was granted, the second round was ready to begin.

Delphi Round Two

The second round of Delphi began on October 22, 2013, with an email being sent to16 school administrators. (Appendix D) The second round of Delphi for administrators lasted one week and ended October 27, 2013, at 11:45 P.M., with 16 administrators completing the survey. A reminder email was sent to any administrator who had not completed the survey. The total number of administrator was now lowered to 16 for the final round. Three school administrators did not respond to the second round of Delphi, and were then dropped from the study.

Statistical calculations were conducted at the conclusion of the second round of Delphi for administrators. The mean for each response was calculated. Any response that did not meet the criteria was excluded and was not published in the final results. A mean score of 2.0 or above on a 5-point Likert scale was used to as the criteria to remain in the study (Dawson & Brucker, 2001).

The inter-quartile range for each factor was then calculated. The inter-quartile range, IQR was determined by calculating the lower quartile range, the bottom 25 percent and the upper-quartile, or top 25 percent and subtracting the

two ranges (Anderson, 2003). If the IQR decreased or stayed constant, consensus had been achieved, and the study was concluded. All statistical calculations were conducted using Microsoft Excel 2007.

A new survey was created using the data that was provided by administrators during the second round of Delphi. The new survey contained the same 31 factors that had been identified by administrators as important factors when make a grade placement decision by teachers. The new survey listed the 31 factors with the mean as calculated during the second round of Delphi. The third-round responses were created after reviewing the responses from the second round (Weaver, 1971). Once again, each panelist was asked to rate the importance of each characteristic using a five-point Likert scale. The mean for each factor from round two was calculated, and panelists were provided the mean to allow each participant to determine where their responses fit in relation to other panelists (Franklin & Hart, 2007). During the third round of Delphi, panelists were provided with additional space to provide any comment they felt were important to the study. The panelists were asked to provide reasons why they agree or disagree (Dawson & Brucker, 2001).

The second round of Delphi began on October 22, 2013, when an email was sent to teachers. The second round of Delphi lasted one week, closing on October 27, 2013, at 11:45. An email was sent to 18 teachers. The email (Appendix G) contained instructions regarding the second round and a link to the

survey located on SurveyMonkey. The survey contained 31 factors that teachers felt were important when making a decision regarding grade placement during the appeal to a Grade Placement Committee. Each teacher was asked to rate each factor using a five-point Likert scale. Teachers were asked to rate each factor within the list (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Panelists rated the importance of each characteristic using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was arranged as follows: 0 Not Applicable, 1 Not Important, 2 Somewhat Important, 3 Moderately Important and 4 Very Important. Panelists were also provided additional space for any additional comments regarding any of the characteristics.

The second round of Delphi ended October 27, 2013 at 11; 45, with 16 teachers completing the survey. Two panelists dropped out of the survey and did not respond. The total number of teachers was now lowered to 16 for the final round.

At the conclusion of the second round of Delphi for teachers, statistical calculations were conducted. The mean for each response was calculated. Any response that did not meet the criteria was excluded and was not published in the final results. A mean score of 2 or above on a 5-point Likert scale was used to as the criteria to remain in the study (Dawson & Brucker, 2001).

The inter-quartile range for each factor was also calculated. The inter-quartile range, IQR was determined by calculating the lower quartile range, the bottom 25 percent and the upper-quartile, or top 25 percent and subtracting the

two ranges (Anderson, 2003). If the IQR becomes smaller or stays constant, consensus has been achieved.

Delphi Round Three

The third round began in the same manner as the second with an email being sent to each administrator. (Appendix E) A reminder email was also sent on November 18, 2013. A new survey was generated for administrators. The data that was used to generate the new survey was provided by administrators during the second round of Delphi. The new survey contained the same 33 factors that had been identified by administrators as important factors when making a grade placement decision by administrators. The new survey listed the 33 factors along with the mean as calculated during the second round of Delphi. The third-round responses were generated after reviewing the responses from the second round (Weaver, 1971). Each panelist was asked to rate the importance of each characteristic using a five-point Likert scale, just as in the previous round. The mean for each factor from round two was calculated, and administrators were provided the mean to allow each participant to determine where their responses fit in relation to other panelists (Franklin & Hart, 2007). Administrators were provided with additional space to provide any comment they felt were important to the study. The panelists were asked to provide reasons why they agree or disagree (Dawson & Brucker, 2001).

The third round for teachers began in the same manner as the second. Each teacher participant was emailed instructions about the third-round, as well as results from the second-round. The mean for each factor was included with the factor. An email was sent on November 12, 2013, to 16 teacher panelists. (Appendix H) The email thanked the panelists and provided a brief explanation of the third-round of Delphi. A link to the survey on SurveyMonkey was included in the email. The email provided administrators with the restrictions to the survey. The survey closed on November 18, 2013, at 11:45 P.M. A reminder email was sent to any teacher that did not complete the third round.

All 16 teachers completed the survey and provided additional comments as they felt important when making a decision regarding the promotion of a student that had not passed the reading or math portion of the STAAR test, and their responses were used in the final calculations of the study.

Chapter 4

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The primary purpose of the study was to identify what school administrators believed to be the most important factors when considering promotion of a student, given that that student has not passed at least one portion of the STAAR test. A three-round Delphi study was used to solicit data from experts regarding Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions. The researcher identified expert school administrators and then asked those experts to provide what factors they used when making a grade placement decision. The study attempted to answer the following research question:

What do school administrators perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?

The secondary purpose of the study was to identify what teachers believed to be the most important factors when considering promotion of a student, given that that student has not passed at least one portion of the STAAR test. The study attempted to answer the following research question:

What do teachers perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?

The tertiary purpose of the study was to compare the response given by school administrators to the responses given by teachers in an attempt to identify

any similarities between the two groups. The study also attempted to answer the following research question:

How similar are the perceptions of school administrators to the perceptions of teachers regarding important factors to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal?

Administrators Round One

The study attempted to answer the following research question:

What do school administrators perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?

Round 1 began on August 1, 2013, with an email being sent to 22 school administrators. The email thanked the school administrators for their participation in the study and provided the administrators with a link to the website, SurveyMonkey, where the survey was hosted. (Appendix F). The survey opened on October 1, 2013, at 6:00 A. M. and remained open for seven days. The survey closed on August 7, 2013, at 11:45 P.M. A reminder email was sent on August 7, 2013, to any administrator who had not completed the survey. (Appendix H) Round 1 of the survey consisted of five questions relating to demographic information about each panelist and an open-ended question. Of the 22 administrators that had agreed to be panelists, only 16 completed all three rounds and were reported in the study. Six administrators were removed from the

study due to the fact that they missed one round. The responses from the six administrators that did not finish the study were removed from the final presentation of data.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information provided by the 16 school administrators that finished the study. The school administrators' names have been withheld to protect the anonymity of the panelists.

The study ended with 16 administrators finishing the study. Of the 16, four were men and 12 were women. Six panelists were African American, three were Hispanic and seven were white. The panelists had an average of 17.56 years in education and an average of 9.06 years as a school administrator. The group had served on an average of 17.0 GPCs.

During the first round all administrators were asked the following open-ended question: "What are the factors to consider when making a decision regarding grade placement as part of the Grade Placement Committee?" Panelists were asked to provide as many characteristics as they consider important when hearing an appeal to the GPC. All responses were recorded and consolidated into a master list of responses. All duplicate answers were removed. Responses were then categorized.

Table 1 Demographic data for administrator panelists

Panelist	Gender	Ethnicity	Years in education	Years in Administration	Number of GPC served
Panelist # 1	Female	White	19	3	8
Panelist # 2	Female	African American	18	14	15
Panelist # 3	Female	White	18	12	7
Panelist # 4	Female	African American	9	3	20
Panelist # 5	Male	White	23	15	8
Panelist # 6	Female	African American	16	5	20
Panelist # 7	Female	White	19	13	6
Panelist # 8	Female	African American	16	10	45
Panelist # 9	Female	Hispanic	25	15	25
Panelist # 10	Female	Hispanic	14	7	20
Panelist # 11	Female	African American	23	12	35
Panelist #12	Male	Hispanic	10	7	5
Panelist # 13	Female	White	25	10	20
Panelist # 14	Female	African American	22	11	10
Panelist # 15	Male	White	15	5	8
Panelist # 16	Male	White	9	3	20

Merriam (1998) says “Moving beyond basic description to the next level of analysis, the challenge is to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring patterns.”(p. 178). All responses were categorizes as “Academic” or “Nonacademic” Responses were then placed in one of the two categories.

Panelist original wording and phrases were used whenever possible. This allowed the panelist voice to be heard and not the voice of the researcher (Dawson

& Brucker, 2001). Table 2 shows the responses given by school administrators during the first round of Delphi. Table 1 also shows the short version that was used by the researcher.

School administrators developed 32 factors that they believed were important when considering an appeal for promotion to the GPC. Of the 32 factors that were identified, the researcher categorized eight as "Academic" and 24 as "Nonacademic". The categories that were developed by the researcher were: "Academic" and "Nonacademic". "Academic" characteristics were characteristics that impact grade promotion that the student had the ability to influence. "Academic" characteristics were characteristics that the student had a direct impact on within the class room. The researcher identified eight characteristics that were affected by the student within the classroom.

"Nonacademic" characteristics were characteristics that were not able to be directly impacted by the student during that school year. Characteristics such as Age and Size were not impacted by the actions of the student. Other Characteristics that were categorized as "Nonacademic" were often labels that had been applied to the student like Special education or LEP.

Table 2 Administrators' characteristic and short version

Characteristic as written by Administrators	**Short Version**
STAAR scores (current and previous)	STAAR Scores (A)
Achievement in other instructional programs	Achievement (A)
Academic growth	Academic Growth (A)
Report card grades	Report Card (A)
Student effort	Effort (A)
Attitude of student regarding retention.	Attitude Retention (A)
Progress shown on the STAAR tests, from first administration to second and third administration	Progress STAAR (A)
Classroom teacher recommendations	Teacher Recom (A)
Age of the student	Age (N)
Attendance of the student	Attendance(N)
Physical size of student	Size (N)
Special education status of student	SPED (N)
Limited English proficiency status of student	LEP (N)
Parental involvement	Parental (N)
Summer school attendance	Summer School (N)
Discipline records and history of disruptive behavior	Discipline(N)
Interventions	Interventions (N)

Table 2 continued

Tutoring attendance	Tutoring (N)
Was student ever placed in a Language Center?	Language Center (N)
Has the student been retained before?	Retained (N)
Are there any extenuating circumstances that affected the student?	Extenuating (N)
Disabilities (anything that may have hindered or challenged the student)	Disability (N)
Student input	Input (N)
Evaluated for a learning disability, but did not qualify.	DNQ LD (N)
Transient status, has student attended more than one school this year?	Transient (N)
Dyslexia.	Dyslexia (N)
RTI (Response to Intervention) process	RTI (N)
Social maturity	Social Maturity (N)
Emotional maturity	Emotional Maturity (N)
Does school have the staff to allow students to be retained, i.e. overcrowding?	School Resources (N)
Parent preference regarding retention.	Parent Preference (N)
Diagnosed medical condition that may impact education	Diagnosed (N)

Note. A = Academic N= Nonacademic

These 32 factors were used to develop a survey for the second round of Delphi. (Hsu & Sandford, 2007) describe the next step as follows: "After receiving subjects' responses, investigators need to convert the collected information into a well-structured questionnaire.

Administrators Round Two

Round 2 began on October 22, 2013, at 6:00 A. M. with an email being sent to 18 school administrators. Four administrators did not complete the first round and were removed from the study. The email that each administrator received contained a link to the website SurveyMonkey where the second round survey was hosted. The second round opened on October 22, 2013, and remained open for seven days. The survey closed at 11:45P.M. on August 29, 2013. A reminder email was sent to all school administrators that had not completed the survey on August 27, 2013. School administrators were asked to rate 32 characteristics that were generated during the first round. The responses from round two are illustrated in Table 2.

The characteristics were randomly arranged to avoid any researcher bias (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2003). Each administrator was asked to rate each factor using a five-point Likert scale. Administrators were asked to rate each factor within the list (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Panelists rated the importance of each characteristic using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was arranged as

follows: 0 Not Applicable, 1 Not Important, 2 Somewhat Important, 3 Moderately Important and 4 Very Important.

Table 2 represents the responses made by school administrators during the second round. Table 2 shows individual responses to each characteristic during the second round.

By the end of round two, only 16 administrators completed the survey. Two administrators did not respond within the seven days that the survey was open, and where thus removed from the survey.

Table 3 Administrators' responses during round one for each characteristic

Item	NA	NI	SI	MI	VI
Age	0	0	1	6	9
Attendance	0	1	3	5	7
Size	2	8	2	2	2
SPED	0	0	1	2	13
LEP	1	0	3	6	6
Parent	1	9	3	1	2
STAAR scores	0	0	2	5	9
Summer school	0	0	2	5	9
Discipline	0	4	4	5	3
Achievement	1	2	5	6	2
Interventions	0	0	4	5	7

Table 3 continued

Tutoring	0	0	7	7	2
Academic growth	0	0	4	4	8
Language center	3	3	4	3	3
Report card	0	0	3	3	10
Retained	0	0	1	3	12
Extenuating	0	0	4	4	8
Teacher recom	0	0	4	8	4
Disabilities	1	0	3	4	8
Input	2	3	6	5	0
DNQ LD	0	1	7	5	3
Transient	0	3	10	2	1
Progress STAAR	0	1	3	6	6
Dyslexia	0	2	5	5	4
RTI	0	0	4	8	4
Social maturity	1	4	7	2	2
Emotional maturity	1	4	7	2	2
Effort	0	1	2	2	11
School resources	0	5	2	4	7
Attitude retention	0	5	5	4	2

Table 3 continued

Parent preference	0	0	9	4	3
Diagnosed	0	0	3	4	9

Note. NA = Not Applicable, NI = Not important, SI = Somewhat Important, MI = Moderately Important, VI = Very Important

The mean of each characteristic was calculated by summing all the responses and dividing by the total number of responses for each characteristic. In this case, there were 16 responses for each characteristic. Any characteristic that had a mean less than 2.0 was removed from future rounds of the survey (Dawson & Brucker, 2001). Means less than 2.0 indicated that panelist did not feel this was an important factor to be considered. The higher the mean, the more panelists agree that it was an important factor to consider when deciding to promote a student.

(Dawson & Brucker, 2001) recommend that the standard deviation and the inter-quartile range of each characteristic be also calculated. (Gail, Gail & Borg, 2007) describe the standard deviation as "a measure of the extent to which scores in a distribution deviate from their mean" (p. 135). Table 3 displays the mean, standard deviation and inter-quartile range of administrators' round two responses.

Administrators Round Three

Round 3 began with emails being sent to the remaining 16 administrator panelists that completed the round two surveys within the allotted timeframe. The

emails were sent on November 12, 2013, and contained a link to the website SurveyMonkey, where the survey was hosted. Round three opened at 6:00 A.M on November 12, 2013, and closed on November 18, 2013, at 11:45 P.M. A reminder email was again sent to any administrator on November 18, 2013, at 6:00 A.M. to any administrator who had not completed the survey. Administrator panelists were asked to rate the remaining 29 characteristics. In order for a characteristic to be moved to the third round, the characteristic had to have a mean score of 2.0 or above. Three characteristics had a mean score of less than 2.0 and were removed from the survey. Once again each administrator was asked to rate each factor using a five-point Likert scale (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Panelists rated the importance of each characteristic using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was arranged as follows: 0 Not Applicable, 1 Not Important, 2 Somewhat Important, 3 Moderately Important and 4 Very Important.

During round three, administrator panelists were given the opportunity to provide additional comments for each characteristic. Panelists were encouraged to explain why they agreed with characteristics or to provide reasons they disagreed.

Table 4 represents the mean, standard deviation and inter quartile rang of responses made by school administrators during the third round. Administrator panelists were also asked to provide any additional comments about each

characteristic. Administrators were provided additional space to write comments that they felt were important about each characteristic.

Table 4 Administrators' round two data analysis

Characteristic	*M*	SD	IQR
SPED	3.75	0.58	0.00
Retained	3.69	0.60	0.25
Age	3.50	0.63	1.00
STAAR scores	3.44	0.73	1.00
Summer school	3.44	0.73	1.00
Effort	3.44	0.96	1.00
Report card	3.4	0.83	1.00
Diagnosed	3.38	0.81	1.00
Disabilities	3.33	0.82	1.00
Academic growth	3.25	0.86	1.25
Extenuating	3.25	0.86	1.25
Interventions	3.19	0.83	1.25
Attendance	3.13	0.96	1.25
Progress STAAR	3.06	0.93	1.25
LEP	3.00	1.09	1.25
Teacher recom	3.00	0.73	0.50
RTI	3.00	0.73	0.50
Tutoring	2.69	0.70	1.00
Dyslexia	2.69	1.01	1.25
DNQ LD	2.63	0.89	1.00
Parent preference	2.63	0.81	1.00
School resources	2.56	1.26	3.00
Discipline	2.44	1.09	1.25
Achievement	2.38	1.09	1.00
Attitude retention	2.19	1.05	2.00
Transient	2.06	0.77	0.00
Language center	2.00	1.41	2.00
Social maturity	2.00	1.09	1.25
Emotional maturity	2.00	1.09	1.25
Input	1.88	1.02	2.00
Size	1.63	1.26	1.25
Parent	1.63	1.15	1.00

All administrators' characteristics were identified into two categories. The categories that were developed by the researcher were: "Academic" and

Table 5 Administrators' round three data analysis

Characteristic	*M*	SD	IQR
Age	3.88	0.34	0.00
Attendance	3.75	0.45	0.25
SPED	3.69	0.60	0.25
LEP	3.63	0.50	1.00
STAAR scores	3.63	0.62	1.00
Summer school	3.63	0.50	1.00
Discipline	3.38	0.62	1.00
Achievement	3.38	0.89	1.00
Interventions	3.38	0.62	1.00
Tutoring	3.38	0.72	1.00
Academic growth	3.31	0.70	1.00
Language center	3.19	0.66	1.00
Report card	3.19	0.66	1.00
Retained	3.13	0.72	1.00
Extenuating	3.06	0.58	0.00
Teacher recom	2.99	0.85	0.50
Disabilities	2.94	1.06	2.00
DNQ LD	2.88	0.81	0.25
Transient	2.75	0.93	1.00
Progress STAAR	2.67	0.98	1.00
Dyslexia	2.44	1.15	1.00
RTI	2.44	0.73	1.00
Social maturity	2.40	0.99	1.00
Emotional maturity	2.31	0.95	1.25
Effort	2.27	1.16	2.00
School resources	2.19	0.75	0.25
Attitude retention	2.13	0.72	0.00
Parent preference	2.06	0.68	0.25
Diagnosed	2.00	0.73	0.00

"Nonacademic". "Academic" characteristics were characteristics that impact grade promotion that the student had the ability to influence. "Academic" characteristics were characteristics that the student had a direct impact on within the class room. The researcher identified eight characteristics that were affected by the student within the classroom.

1. Attitude of student regarding retention – How did the student feel about being retained versus be promoted? Administrators identified the attitude of the student as a significant characteristic to be considered, but rated it as the least important among the eight characteristic categorized as Academic. Attitude of the student was ranked as the lowest characteristic with a mean of 2.07 and a sstandard ddeviation of 0.68.
2. Achievement in other instructional programs –Administrator considered how a student was doing in other instructional programs as an important factor to be considered. This factor had a mean of 2.44 with a standard deviation 1.15. The high standard deviation indicates that the panelists' responses were not consistent, demonstrating that some panelists believe this factor was less important than other panelist believed.
3. Classroom teacher recommendations – Classroom teachers spend a large amount of time working with students, thus administrators value

those teachers' recommendations. Teachers in classes other than the math and reading are able to provide insight into how a student is doing academically. The teachers' input is invaluable to seeing the entire academic picture of the student. Administrators rated classroom teachers' recommendation as an important factor to be considered. Teacher recommendation had a mean of 2.88 with a standard deviation of .81.

4. Report card grades – Report card grade provide a longitudinal view of how a student is performing in all classes. When making a decision regarding grade placement, administrators indicated that report card grades are a valuable tool. Report card grade were rated significantly high as being important. This characteristic had a mean of 3.31 with a standard deviation of 0.7, indicating that administrators are looking at the entire picture regarding a student's academic progress.
5. STAAR scores (current and previous) – Administrators rated the use of STAAR scores as very important factors when make grade placement decisions. Using not only the most recent STAAR scores, but also looking back at the entire educational history of a student on the STAAR test is valuable. STAAR scores had a mean of 3.38 with a standard deviation of 0.62. The high mean and relatively low standard

deviation indicate that school administrators are concerned with the history of how a student performed on state testing.

6. Progress shown on the STAAR tests, from first administration to second and third administration – All students that do not pass the first administration of the STAAR test are required to take the second administration. If a student is not successful on the second administration, the student is required to take the third administration, but parents can waive the third administration (Texas Education Agency, 2014). School administrators are using the progress from first to second and second to third administration as important data to determine if a student should be promoted. One administrator stated, "If a student is showing growth from the first time they took the test to the second time, I view that as the student is moving in the right direction." Progress on the STAAR test had a mean of 3.38 with a standard deviation of 0.62. Progress on the STAAR test was rated as the third highest factor by school administrators.
7. Academic growth – This factor provides school administrators with an overall view of where the student started the school year. Academic growth, like progress on the STAAR test, shows if a student if progressing, even if they did not pass the test. Administrators indicated that using academic growth as a factor to determine grade

placement was the most important academic factor to be considered. Academic growth tied with student effort as the highest rated academic factor with a mean of 3.63 and a standard deviation of 0.62. Administrators demonstrated that in some cases, progress is just as important as passing the exam.

8. Student effort – How hard a student works in class and how dedicated that student is proved to be the most important academic factor in the minds of the school administrators. Student effort had a mean of 3.63, the same as academic growth, but effort had a standard deviation of 0.50 while growth had a standard deviation of 0.62. This indicates that there was less deviation in the mean and thus student effort is the highest rated academic factor. A school administrator put it like this, "If a student is doing everything that is asked of him and is showing progress, I feel he will get there with a little more work."

The researcher identified 21 characteristics that were categorized as "Nonacademic", that is characteristics that are not directly impact by the student or the student's actions within the classroom. "Nonacademic" characteristics are things that happen to the student, or labels that had been applied to the student, but not characteristics that are not always within the power of the student.

1. Evaluated for a learning disability, but did not qualify – Every year, many student are evaluated for a learning disability. (Lufi & Awwad,

2013) estimate that somewhere between two percent and 10 percent of the population is learning disabled. But many other students do not met the qualification to be diagnosed with a learning disability, but these students still struggle in class. School administrators identified not qualifying as an important factor that needs to be considered when making a grade placement decision. Not qualifying was rated as the lowest of the nonacademic factors in this study having a mean of just 2.0. Having a mean of 2.0 was the minimum mean score to remain in the study; so many administrators indicated it was important, but not as important as other factors in the study. This characteristic has a standard deviation of 0.73.

2. Emotional maturity – Administrator viewed emotional maturity of a student as an important factor, but very low in the list of important factors. Emotional maturity ended round 2 with a mean of 2.0 just meeting the minimum to remain in the study, but the mean increase to 2.13 by the end of the third round. The standard deviation also improved from round 2 to round 3. In round 2, the standard deviation was 1.09 and that number went down to 0.72, showing less deviation from the mean, indicating a consensus among school administrators. One administrator was quoted as saying, “Emotional maturity is

something to be considered, but there is no way to guarantee the student will mature before next year."

3. Social maturity – School administrators rated social maturity very similarly to rating of emotional maturity. Social maturity had an increase in mean from 2.0 to 2.19 in the third round. The standard deviation also had a significant decrease from 1.09 to 0.75 in the third round.
4. Was student ever placed in a Language Center? – A Language Center Program is describes as follows: (Unknown, 2013) "The programs provide specialized ESL/ESOL and reading scaffolding and linguistic accommodations as well as special material are used. Most students are at the beginning or intermediate levels of English proficiency." (p. 1) Administrators identified being in a Language Center as an important factor in making grade placement decisions. Being in a Language Center had a mean of 2.0 in round 2 and increasing to 2.27 in the third round with a standard deviation of 1.41 decreasing to 1.16 in the third round.
5. Does school have the staff to allow students to be retained, i.e. overcrowding? – School resources was the only factor that was presented by school administrators that had nothing to do with the individual student. Administrators are charged with many

responsibilities and school managing resources is just one. One administrator said, "I have to make decisions that impact the entire school." School resources had a mean of 2.31 with a standard deviation of 0.95.

6. Discipline records and history of disruptive behavior – Administrators spend a great deal of their daily time dealing with discipline, and this was evident in this study. School administrators rated discipline as an important factor to consider when make grade placement decisions. The data does not indicate if discipline is a plus or a minus, just that it is an important factor. Discipline had a mean of 2.44 in the second round and a mean of 2.40 in the final round. This indicates that school administrators' perception of the importance of discipline changed very little between rounds. The standard deviation of discipline decreased slightly from 1.09 to 0.99. The data indicates that school administrators had strong opinions about discipline and that opinion did not change from round to round.
7. Parent preference regarding retention – Parents are part of the Grade Placement Committee, so it is not surprising the school administrators rated parent preference as an important factor. All GPC decisions must be unanimous (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Parent preference had a mean of 2.44 with a standard deviation of .73. As

voting members, parents are very important to the process and school administrators understand that.

8. Tutoring attendance – Tutoring is offered before school, at lunch, after school, and on Saturday. Administrators demonstrated their belief in the importance of attending optional tutor opportunities. School administrators rated tutoring attendance somewhat high with a mean of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 0.98. One administrator was quoted to say, "If students do not take advantage of every opportunity that is given to them to learn, then promotion may not be the best decision."
9. Transient status, has student attended more than one school this year? – In 2009, UISD had a mobility rate of 4.7 percent of the students in grade 3 through grade 11 (Texas Education Agency, 2009). That means that 4.7 percent of the students taking state standardized testing moved from one school to another with the school year. Administrators indicated that this is an important factor when making a grade placement decision. Transient status generated a mean of 2.75 with a standard deviation of 0.98. One administrator said, "If a student has been forced to move from one school to another within the school year, I consider that as a huge factor when going GPC."
10. Limited English Proficiency status of student – Students are identified as LEP or English Language Learners (ELL) based on the following

two characteristics (Unknown, 2013): "who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken and who are assessed through state tests to be less than proficient in comprehending, speaking, reading, or writing English." (p.1) School administrators indicated that the status of a student being coded LEP had an impact on grade placement decision. LEP status had a mean of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 1.06.

11. Dyslexia – Administrators viewed dyslexia a factor that should be considered when making a grade placement decision. Dyslexia is generally defined as a discrepancy between ability to read and intelligence (Lavidor, 2011). Due to the fact both the reading portion and the math portions of the STAAR must be read, administrators rated dyslexia relatively high. The mean was 2.94 and the standard deviation was 1.06.
12. RTI (Response to Intervention) process – RTI is a process of providing both academic and behavioral interventions to students that are struggling. The RTI process is a tiered approach. "Tier 1 instruction is given to all students. Tier 2 is given to students who benefit from extra, more personalized instruction in small groups. Tier 3 involves the school's most effective teachers, who provide intensive, individual instruction for students who don't succeed in tier 2" (Robbins &

Antrim, 2013). Administrators rated RTI as an important factor. The mean of RTI was 3.06 and the standard deviation was 0.57.

13. Interventions – School administrators rated interventions only slightly higher than RTI. Cellitti (2008) says, "Effective educational interventions cannot exist without balancing language and content learning with helping children learn coping skills." (p. 314) These interventions would be strategies that teachers were using to impact student performance outside of the structured RTI process. Interventions showed a mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.72.
14. Attendance of the student – School administrators view a student's attendance as an important factor. Unfortunately, in many situations a student's attendance is related to family issues. Students in elementary school are at the mercy of a parent to help get them to school. If a student is not in school, they will not be exposed to the curriculum that is being provided by the teacher. One administrator viewed attendance this way, "If excessive unexcused absences, I consider this when making a grade placement decision." Attendance remained very consistent in both mean and standard deviation. The mean in the second round was 3.13 and went up slightly in the third round to 3.19, while the standard deviation was 0.96 in the second round and went

down to 0.66 by the third round. This demonstrates that administrator reached consensus by the end of the third round.

15. Disabilities (anything that may have hindered or challenged the student) – School administrators believe that any type of disability that can have an impact on the student should be considered during a GPC appeal. Disabilities had a mean of 3.19 with a standard deviation of 0.66.
16. Summer school attendance – School administrators identified summer school attendance as a very significant factor to be consider. An administrator said, "If a student doesn't attend summer school just because they didn't want to, it becomes an issue in my decision-making." Based on the rating, most administrators agreed. Summer school attendance had a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.89.
17. Are there any extenuating circumstances that affected the student? – Extenuating factors were identified as things like death in the family, a divorce, or a sudden relocation. School administrators agreed that any major life-changing event should be taken into consideration when making a decision about grade placement. This fact was demonstrated by a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.62.
18. Age of the student – The age of student is the fourth highest rated factor that was identified by school administrators. A school

administrator stated, “If the student has a late birthday, where it appears that the student is almost two years older than his/her peers, then I consider age.” School administrators appear to be very concerned with over-age students in their schools. This is reflected by the high ranking from the school administrators. The mean of age as a factor was 3.625, increase from 3.5 in the second round. The standard deviation dropped from 0.63 to 0.5. This standard deviation the third lowest among all factors presented by school administrators.

19. Has the student been retained before? – The third highest rated factor that administrators identified was previous retention. One administrator said, “If a student was retained previously and we have seen no positive effect, then what makes me think it will work better the second time?” Retention was a very consistent factor. During round 2, it had a mean of 3.69 and the mean remained the same in third round. The standard deviation also remained the same with a deviation of 0.6 in both rounds. This demonstrates that school administrators had a very strong belief that previous grade retention was an important factor to be considered, and that belief did not change from round 2 to round 3.
20. Diagnosed medical condition that may impact education – School administrators believed that some students have a medical condition

that impacts their education, and that diagnosed medical condition needs to be considered when making a grade placement decision. Diagnosed medical condition is the second highest rated factor by school administrators. The mean of 3.75 indicates that nearly all administrators rated it a 4 on the Likert scale. The standard deviation was 0.45, indicating very little variance from the mean, also demonstrating that school administrators are in agreement regarding the importance of considering a diagnosed medical condition when hearing a GPC appeal.

21. SPED – Special Education status of student – Milligan (2012) In 1990, Congress reauthorized Public Law 94-142 and changed the name to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or (IDEA). "The primary purpose of IDEA has been to provide a free, appropriate public education for children with disabilities" (p. 173). The highest-rated factor to be considered when making a grade placement decision is the special education status of the student. School administrators identified special education status of the student as the most important factor to consider. Thirteen of the 16 school administrators rated this factor with a 4 on the Likert scale, or Very Important. The mean of this factor was 3.88, or the highest mean of a factor. The standard deviation was 0.34, the lowest deviation of any factor in the study.

School administrators demonstrated a very strong belief that the special education status of the student need to be considered when deciding if a student is to be promoted or retained.

Teachers Round One

In the second phase of the study, the focus was on what teachers believed to be important factors regarding the appeal to the GPC. Round one of the study attempted to answer the following research question:

2. What do teachers perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?

Round 1 for teachers began in the same manner as round 1 for administrators. An email was sent on October 1, 2013, to all 23 teachers that had agreed to participate and had returned the informed consent email. The email thanked the teachers for agreeing to participate in the study and provided the teachers with a link to the website SurveyMonkey, where the survey was hosted. The survey opened on October 1, 2013, and remained open for seven days. The survey closed on August 7, 2013, at 11:45. A reminder email was sent to any teacher that had not completed the survey. The reminder email was sent October 6, 2013. Round 1 survey consisted of a five questions relating to demographic information about each teacher and an open-ended question. The question was "What are the factors to consider when making a decision regarding grade

placement as part of the Grade Placement Committee?" Twenty-three teachers began round one, but only 16 teachers completed all three rounds and were reported in the study. By the end of round one, five teachers did not complete the survey within the one week time period and were removed from the study. Eighteen teachers completed the first round and continued into Round 2. Of the 18 teachers starting round two, two did not complete the second round and were then dropped for the study. Table 5 summarizes the demographic information provided by the 16 teachers that completed all three rounds of the study. The teachers' names have been withheld to protect the anonymity of the panelists.

Of the 16 teacher panelists, 12 were women and four were men. Five teacher panelists were African American, four were Hispanic and the final seven were white. The teacher panelists had an average of 15.5 years in education and had been teachers for an average of 9.06 years. The group of teacher panelists had served on an average of 8.1 GPC.

As the first round began, teacher panelists were asked the following open-ended question: "What are the factors to consider when making a decision regarding grade placement as part of the Grade Placement Committee?" Teacher panelists were asked to provide all the characteristics that they consider to be important when hearing an appeal to the GPC for promotion. All responses were recorded, consolidated and categorized into a master list of responses (Merriam, 1998). All duplicate answers were removed. The original wording and phrases

that the teacher panelists provided were used whenever possible. This allowed the panelist's voice to be heard and not the voice of the researcher (Dawson & Brucker, 2001).

Table 6 displays the responses given by teachers in their original words. Table 6 also displays a short version of each characteristic that was developed by the researcher.

Table 6 Demographic data for teacher panelist

Panelist	Gender	Ethnicity	Years in education	Years in Classroom	Number of GPC served
Panelist # 1	Female	Hispanic	5	4	5
Panelist # 2	Female	White	6	3	10
Panelist # 3	Female	African American	14	12	5
Panelist # 4	Male	White	8	8	10
Panelist # 5	Female	Hispanic	15	13	4
Panelist # 6	Female	White	25	25	5
Panelist # 7	Female	Hispanic	16	16	5
Panelist # 8	Female	African American	23	7	10
Panelist # 9	Female	White	25	6	5
Panelist # 10	Female	White	17	17	8
Panelist # 11	Female	White	24	14	5
Panelist #12	Male	White	7	7	20
Panelist # 13	Female	Hispanic	12	12	5
Panelist # 14	Male	African American	15	12	15
Panelist # 15	Male	African American	15	15	10
Panelist # 16	Female	African American	21	13	8

Teachers identified 30 factors that they believed were important when considering an appeal for promotion to the GPC. The 30 factors that were identified as important were then used to develop a survey for the second round of Delphi. The researcher then categorized the 30 factors into two categories, "Academic" and Nonacademic" (Merriam, 1997). Twelve were categorized as "Academic", and 18 were categorized as "Nonacademic". The characteristics generated during Round 1, were used to create a survey to be used in Round 2 (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The new survey was then submitted to the University of Texas at Arlington's Department of Research Administration for IRB approval. Once approval was granted, the second round of Delphi began.

Round Two

Round 2 began on October 22, 2013, with 18 teachers being emailed explaining round 2. Five teachers did not complete the first round and excluded for the study. The email again thanked teachers for their participation and contained a link to the web site of SurveyMonkey, where the second round survey was hosted. Round 2 opened on October 22, 2013, and remained open for seven days. The survey closed at 11:45 P.M. on August 27, 2013. A reminder email was sent to any teacher that had not completed the survey.

Table 7 Teachers' characteristics and short versions

Characteristic as written by Panelists	**Short Version**
STAAR scores (current and previous)	STAAR Scores (A)
Student grasps of the main ideas of required content	Main Ideas (A)
Student effort	Effort (A)
Is the student "close" to being academically ready for the next grade?	Close (A)
Classroom work	Class work (A)
Classroom progress	Progress (A)
General attitude towards school and education	Attitude (A)
Did student attempt extra work on his own time?	Extra work (A)
Grades for each six weeks per content	Grades (A)
Improvement over the course of the school year	Improvement (A)
Work ethic in the classroom	Work ethic (A)
Reading level/Lexile level	Reading level(A)
Age of the Student	Age (N)
Attendance of the student	Attendance (N)

Table 7 continued

Physical size of student	Size (N)
Special education status of student	SPED (N)
Limited English proficiency status of student	LEP (N)
Parental involvement	Parental (N)
Student's behavior	Behavior (N)
Previous interventions	Interventions (N)
504 status of student	504 (N)
At-risk status of student	At-Risk (N)
Gifted and talented status of student	GT (N)
Does the student suffer from test anxiety as seen during STAAR exams?	Test Anxiety (N)
Has the student been retained before?	Retained (N)
Was student enrolled for a full school year at the same campus?	Same School (N)
Social maturity	Social (N)
Were there any major life_changing events during school year?	Life changing (N)
RTI (Response to Intervention) process	RTI (N)
Has student failed prior classes?	Failed classes(N)

Note: Academic = A Nonacademic = N

The reminder email was sent on October 27, 2013. Teachers were asked to rate 30 characteristics that were generated during the first round. The characteristics were randomly arranged to avoid any researcher bias (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2003). In this round, each teachers was asked to rate each factor using a five-point Likert scale within the list (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Panelists rated the importance of each characteristic using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was arranged as follows: 0 Not Applicable, 1 Not Important, 2 Somewhat Important, 3 Moderately Important and 4 Very Important. Table 7 represents the responses contributed by teachers during the second round.

By the end of round two, only 16 teachers completed the survey. Two teachers did not respond within the seven days that the survey was open, and were thus removed from the survey.

Table 8 Teachers' responses during round one for each characteristic

Item	NA	NI	SI	MI	VI
Age	0	1	4	6	5
Attendance	0	0	2	4	10
Size	0	4	5	3	4
SPED	0	0	2	6	8
LEP	0	2	5	6	3
Parental	1	1	5	3	6
STAAR scores	0	1	2	6	7

Table 8 continued

Main ideas	0	0	3	3	10
Behavior	0	1	5	5	5
Effort	0	0	2	2	12
Interventions	1	0	3	6	6
504	1	1	6	5	3
At-risk	0	1	5	6	4
GT	0	3	7	5	1
Test anxiety	0	3	7	3	1
Retained	0	0	2	5	9
Same school	2	1	6	6	1
Close	0	0	2	4	10
Social	0	1	5	7	3
Class work	0	0	6	2	8
Progress	0	0	5	2	9
Attitude	0	0	6	5	5
Life-changing	0	0	3	5	8
Extra work	0	0	6	5	5
RTI	0	0	3	8	4
Grades	0	0	5	5	6
Failed classes	0	0	1	8	7

Table 8 continued

Improvement	0	0	3	4	9
Work ethic	0	0	4	5	7
Reading level	0	0	7	2	7

Note. NA = Not Applicable, NI = Not important, SI = Somewhat Important, MI = Moderately Important, VI = Very Important

The mean of each characteristic was calculated by adding all the responses and dividing by the total number of responses for each characteristic. In this case, there were 16 responses for each characteristic. All characteristics had a mean of 2.0 or more during Round 2 and were thus used during Round 3 (Dawson & Brucker, 2001). Means less than 2.0 indicated that panelists did not feel this was an important factor to be considered. Rowe & Wright (1999) explain the higher the mean, the more panelists agree that it was an important factor to consider when deciding to promote a student.

Table 9 expresses the mean, standard deviation and inter-quartile range for all responses given during the second round.

Table 9 Teachers' round two data analysis

Characteristic	*M*	SD	IQR
Effort	3.56	0.73	1.00
Attendance	3.50	0.73	1.00
Close	3.50	0.73	1.00
Main ideas	3.44	0.81	1.00
Retained	3.44	0.73	1.00
SPED	3.38	0.72	1.00
Failed classes	3.38	0.62	1.00
Improvement	3.38	0.81	1.00

Table 9 continued

Life-changing	3.31	0.79	1.00
Progress	3.25	0.93	2.00
Interventions	3.20	0.77	1.00
STAAR scores	3.19	0.91	1.00
Work ethic	3.19	0.83	1.25
Class work	3.13	0.96	2.00
RTI	3.06	0.68	0.25
Grades	3.06	0.85	2.00
Reading level	3.00	0.97	2.00
Age	2.94	0.93	2.00
Attitude	2.94	0.85	2.00
Extra work	2.94	0.85	2.00
Behavior	2.88	0.96	2.00
At-risk	2.81	0.91	1.25
Parental	2.75	1.24	2.00
Social	2.75	0.86	1.00
LEP	2.63	0.96	1.00
504	2.50	1.10	1.00
Size	2.44	1.15	1.50
GT	2.25	0.86	1.00
Test anxiety	2.25	0.86	1.00
Same school	2.19	1.11	1.00

Teachers Round Three

Round 3 began on November 12, 2013, with emails being sent to the remaining 16 teacher panelist that completed the Round 2 surveys within the allotted time-frame. The emails that were sent contained a link to the web site SurveyMonkey that hosted the survey. Round 3 opened at 6:00 A.M on November 12, 2013, and remained open for one week. Round 3 closed on November 18, 2013, at 11:45 P.M. A reminder email was sent to teachers that had not completed the survey. During the third round, teacher panelists were

provided with space to comment about each characteristic. Table 10 shows the mean, standard deviation and inter-quartile range scores of the teachers' Round 3 responses.

Table 10 Teachers' round three data analysis

Characteristic	*M*	SD	IQR
Retained	3.63	0.72	0.25
Life-changing	3.50	0.63	1.00
Effort	3.44	0.81	1.00
Close	3.44	0.63	1.00
Failed classes	3.44	0.63	1.00
SPED	3.40	0.74	1.00
Main ideas	3.38	0.72	1.00
Interventions	3.33	0.72	1.00
Improvement	3.19	0.83	1.25
STAAR scores	3.13	0.96	1.25
Class work	3.13	0.74	1.00
Attitude	3.13	0.72	1.00
Grades	3.13	0.89	2.00
Work ethic	3.13	0.72	1.00
Age	3.06	0.68	0.25
Progress	3.06	0.85	2.00
Reading level	3.00	0.63	0.00
RTI	3.00	0.88	2.00
Attendance	2.94	0.93	2.00
Social	2.88	0.81	1.25
LEP	2.81	0.83	1.25
Extra work	2.81	0.91	1.25
At-risk	2.69	1.01	1.25
Behavior	2.56	0.89	1.00
Parental	2.53	0.83	1.00
504	2.43	0.94	1.00
Size	2.31	0.70	1.00
Test anxiety	2.31	1.01	1.25
Same school	2.19	0.83	0.00

Teacher panelists were asked to once again rate the remaining 30 characteristics. Each teacher panelists was asked to rate each factor using a five-point Likert. During round three, teacher panelists were given the opportunity to provide additional comments for each characteristic. Panelists were encouraged to explain why they agreed with characteristics or to provide reasons they disagreed.

Teachers identified 29 characteristics that they believed were important when making a grade placement decision as part of the GPC appeal process. One characteristic did not meet the mean threshold of 2.0 and was removed from the study. The 29 characteristics were categorized into two categories. The categories that were developed by the researcher were: "Academic" and "Nonacademic". "Academic" characteristics were characteristics that impact grade promotion that the student had the ability to influence. "Academic" characteristics were characteristics that the student had a direct impact on within the classroom. The researcher identified 12 characteristics that were affected by the student within the classroom.

1. Did student attempt extra work on his or her own time? – Teacher indicated that a student doing extra work on his or her own time was an important factor to be considered. Teachers rated extra work as an indication of the desire of the student to learn. One teacher said,

"Students need to take some responsibility for their own learning; doing extra work shows that." Extra work had a mean of 2.81 with a standard deviation of 0.91.

2. Reading level/Lexile level – A students reading level can be measured by using the Lexile system. The Lexile system places a student at different reading levels based on (Reid, 2004). Teacher indicated that the student's reading level needs to be considered when deciding grade placement. Reading level had a mean of 3.0 in the second and that mean stayed the same in the third round. This indicates a great deal of consensus. The standard deviation dropped from 0.97 to 0.63 after the third round; once again showing that consensus was reached on this factor.
3. Progress – Classroom progress – Teachers indicated that looking at the progress a student was making is a very important factor to be considered. Teachers did not only look at the end product, but also how much the student has progressed throughout the school year. Progress had a mean calculated at 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.85.
4. STAAR scores (current and previous) – Students begin taking the STAAR test in the second grade and continue testing until the 11th grade (Texas Education Agency, 2013). This longitudinal data

provides a great deal of information for teachers to use. Teachers indicated that all the data from the STAAR is important and should be used when making a grade placement decision. STAAR scores had a mean of 3.13 with a standard deviation of 0.96.

5. General attitude towards school and education – Teachers showed that the attitude of the student was an important factor to be considered. One teacher said, "The student's attitude about school plays a huge role." Attitude had a mean of 3.13 and the standard deviation was 0.72.
6. Grades for each six weeks per content – The reading and math portion of the STAAR test is the determining factor for grade retention (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Teacher believe in seeing how a student is doing in all classes is just as important at STAAR scores. Both factors had a mean of 3.13, but grades had a slightly lower standard deviation of 0.89. The data indicates that teachers are looking at the whole body of work, not just a single test result.
7. Work ethic in the classroom – Teachers identified work ethic as an important factor. Teachers demonstrated their belief in work ethic by rating it with a mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.72.
8. Classroom work – Teachers work with students every day in class, so it is not surprising that teachers consider classroom work as an

important factor to use in considering grade placement. Teachers know their students and believe the quality of classroom work is very important to the decision-making process. Classroom work had a mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.74

9. Improvement over the course of the school year – Consistent with classroom work, teachers indicated that improvement in the classroom over the course of the year is an important factor. The data shows this importance with a mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.83. Teachers appear to be concerned with the whole picture of a student's academic progress more than one single event. Teachers identified both progress on STAAR and improvement in the classroom as important factors.
10. Student's grasp of the main ideas of required content – Student are exposed to many different ideas in many different classes. Teachers indicated that the understanding of main ideas in different classes was an important factor to be considered. Main idea had a mean of 3.38 with a standard deviation of 0.72.
11. Student's effort – Teachers want students to work hard in class and this is proven by the fact that teachers rated student effort as the second highest rated academic factor. A teacher commented "Effort goes a long way in my class." This appears to be true of most panelist,

based on the fact the effort had a mean of 3.44 with a standard deviation of 0.81. Effort is something that each student can control and thus teachers believe it to be important to success.

12. Is the student "close" to being academically ready for the next grade? – A student can fail STAAR by a single question. Teacher consider how "close' a student is when making a GPC decision. Close is the highest-rated academic factor by teachers with a mean of 3.44 and a standard deviation of 0.63. Teachers seem to believe that being "close" to passing provides an insight into the student, and should be considered.

The researcher identified 17 characteristics that were categorized as "Nonacademic". That is characteristics that are not directly impacted by the student or the student's actions within the classroom. "Nonacademic" characteristics are things that happen to the student, or labels that had been applied to the student.

1. Was student enrolled for a full school year at the same campus? – Teachers appear to believe that moving from one school to another within the same school year has an impact on the student's academic achievement. This fact is demonstrated by the rating of teachers on this factor. Teachers rated being enrolled in the same school with a mean of 2.19 and a standard deviation of 0.83. Mobility rates indicate

how many student move from one school to another within the same school year. In 2009, UISD had a mobility rate of 4.7 percent of the students in grade 3 through grade 11 (AEIS, 2009). That means that 4.7 percent of the students taking state standardized testing moved from one school to another with the school year. Teachers believed that this movement is needed to be considered when making a grade placement decision.

2. Physical size of student – Teachers indicated that the physical size of a student is an important factor to be considered. A teacher said, "If a child is border line and an older child, I have a tendency to move him/her on; however, if they are very low, it doesn't matter about their size." Another teacher said, "A student can't control their height." Teacher rated the physical size as a factor by generating a mean of 2.31 with a standard deviation of 0.7.
3. Does the student suffer from test anxiety as seen during STAAR exams? – Teachers consider test anxiety as an issue to be considered. (Lufi & Awwad, 2013) describe test anxiety as one factor that prevents students from making academic achievement at the rate that is expected. They also claimed that text anxiety is caused by high expectations that cannot be met. Teachers indicated that in some cases, the results of the test do not accurately indicate how much a

student knows. Test anxiety generated a mean of 2.31 and a standard deviation of 1.01. This high deviation indicates that teachers do not agree on the importance of test anxiety.

4. 504 status of student – Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 covers many students with disabilities that are not covered by the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Shaw & Madaus, 2008). Teacher believe that the 504 status of a student had a large impact on the student's success and thus it should be considered when making a grade placement decision. 504 status had a mean of 2.43 and a standard deviation of 0.94.
5. Parental involvement – One teacher is quoted as saying, "If a school is considering GPC, it is an indicator that the student has some academic and/or social deficiencies. Parents cannot rely on schools alone to address these issues." Teacher demonstrated their belief that parental involvement is an important factor to be considered. Parental involvement had a mean of 2.53 and the standard deviation was 0.83. Teachers agree that everyone has to work together to help a student be successful.
6. Student's behavior – Teacher are on the front line everyday with students in the classroom. Thus, teachers understand how a student's behavior impacts that student's academic success. Behavior was rated

as a factor to take into consideration. Behavior had a mean of 2.56 and a standard deviation of 0.89.

7. At-risk status of student – Slavin & Madden (1989) describe at-risk as "one who is in danger of failing to complete his or her education with an adequate level of skills. Risk factors include low achievement, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students." Teachers believed at if a student was labeled as at-risk, that information was important when making grade placements. The mean of at-risk was 2.69 and the standard deviation was 1.01.
8. Limited English proficiency status of student – Students are identified as LEP or English Language Learners (ELL) based on the following two characteristics. "who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken and who are assessed through state tests to be less than proficient in comprehending, speaking, reading, or writing English"(Unknown, 2013). Teachers indicated that the LEP status of student was an important factor to be considered. One teacher said, "It depends on how limited their proficiency is." LEP status had a mean 2.81 and a standard deviation of 0.83.
9. Social maturity – Teachers identified social maturity as a factor that must be considered. One teacher said, "Some students need an extra

year to mature so they will be successful next year." Teachers hope that a student will mature into a successful student if given another year to mature. Teachers agreed that social maturity was a factor to be considered. This is proven by the mean of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 0.81.

10. Attendance of the student – Students must be in class on a regular basis in order to learn the material that is presented by the classroom teacher. Teachers agree that regular attendance is an important factor to be considered when making a grade placement decision. A teacher said, "Usually, their lack of attendance is what got them into the situation." The data shows that teachers want students to be in class, and if they are not, that will impact their academic success. Teachers rated attendance as a significant factor to consider. The mean of attendance was 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.93.
11. Response to Intervention process – RTI is a process of providing both academic and behavioral interventions to students that are not finding success. The RTI process is a tiered approach. "Tier 1 instruction is given to all students. Tier 2 is given to students who benefit from extra, more personalized instruction in small groups. Tier 3 involves the school's most effective teachers, who provide intensive, individual

instruction for students who don't succeed in tier 2 (Robins & Antrim, 2013). RTI generated a mean of 3.0 and a standard deviation of 0.88.

12. Age of the student – Teachers identified the age of the student as a determining factor that should be considered in GPC appeals. One teacher noted, "If a student is 2or 3 years older than their peers, I believe this becomes an important factor in GPC." Another teacher stated, "If a child is borderline and an older child, I have a tendency to move him/her on; however, if they are very low, it doesn't matter about their age." Age of student was consistently high. The mean in the second round was 2.94 and moved up to 3.06 in the third round. The standard deviation went down from 0.93 to 0.68, demonstrating that consensus was met.
13. Previous interventions – Teachers believed that previous intervention were important factors to be considered. Cellitti (2008) says, "Effective educational interventions cannot exist without balancing language and content learning with helping children learn coping skills." (p. 314) Previous interventions had a mean of 3.33 with a standard deviation of 0.72.
14. Special education status of the student – Milligan (2012) In 1990, Congress reauthorized Public Law 94-142 and changed the name to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or (IDEA). "The primary

purpose of IDEA has been to provide a free, appropriate public education for children with disabilities" (p. 173). Teachers believe that the special education status of a student was an important factor to use when making a grade placement decision. A teacher stated, "Having special education accommodations provides a safety net for moving to the next grade." The mean for special education was 3.4 and the standard deviation was 0.74.

15. Has student failed prior classes? – Teachers were very consistent in their ideas about looking at the whole child. This is evident by the data relating to academics and or academic progress. Teachers rated failed classes as the third most important factor to be considered. Failed classes refers to other classes that the student has not been successful in, not only the STAAR test. If a student has continually failed classes, it appears to be a pattern that teacher believed was important to consider. Failed classes had a mean of 3.38 in the second round and went up to 3.44 in the third round. The standard deviation remained constant with a 0.62 in the second round and a 0.63 in the third round.
16. Were there any major life-changing events during the school year? – Students are often affected by what happens around them, and teachers believe these life-changing events need to be considered when making

a grade placement decision. A life-changing event could be a death in the family, sudden relocation or a divorce. Teachers found this factor to be the second highest with a mean of 3.5 and a standard deviation of 0.63. With a mean that high, it is obvious that a life-changing event is an important factor that must be considered.

17. Has the student been retained before? – Teachers identified previous retention as the most important factor to consider when making a decision regarding promoting a student or retaining that student again. The mean was 3.63 and had a standard deviation of 0.72. One teacher said, "If holding a student back once didn't work, what makes me think it will the second time?'

Comparison

The tertiary purpose of the study was to compare the responses given by school administrators to the responses given by teachers in an attempt to identify any similarities between the two groups. The study attempted to answer the following research question:

How similar are the perceptions of school administrators to the perceptions of teachers regarding important factors to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal?

Both school administrators and teachers independently identified 29 factors that they believed were important to consider when making a grade

placement decision. School administrators and teachers used different wording in some cases, but had the same meaning. In an effort to maintain the voice of the participants, original wording was used and this explains some of the differences in factors (Dawson & Brucker, 2001). Administrators referred to student behavior as "Discipline records and history of disruptive behavior" while teachers used the wording, "Student's behavior". The choice of wording is different, but the meaning is the same. Another difference is wording is administrators said, "academic growth" while teachers said, "classroom progress". The wording is different but the meaning is consistent. A third example of different wording is "report card grades" by administrators but teachers referred to the same thing as "grades for each six weeks per content". The last factor that was identified by both administrators and teachers that had different wording was related to students being enrolled in the same school all year long. Administrators said, "Transient status, has student attended more than one school this year?" and teachers referred to this factor as "Was student enrolled for a full school year at the same campus?" Both groups meant the same factor, but selected different wording.

School administrators identified eight factors that were categorized as "Academic" and 21 factors that were categorized as "Nonacademic". This demonstrated that "Nonacademic" factors were perceived more often as important by school administrators then "Academic" factors.

Teachers also identified 29 factors, but 12 of the factors were categorized as "Academic" and 17 as "Nonacademic". Table 11 shows "Nonacademic" factors that were identified by both administrators and teachers. Table 11 also shows a comparison of the means of these "Nonacademic" factors.

Table 12 represents "Academic" factors identified by both administrators and teachers as important to consider when making a grade placement decisions. Only three "Academic" factors were found in both the administrators' lists as well as the teachers' list of factor to be considered when making a grade placement decision.

Table 11 Comparison of "Nonacademic" means for administrators and teachers

Administrator	*M*	Teacher	*M*
SPED	3.88	Retained	3.63
Retained	3.69	Effort	3.44
Age	3.63	SPED	3.40
Effort	3.63	Interventions	3.33
Attendance	3.19	Age	3.06
Interventions	3.13	RTI	3.00
RTI	3.06	Attendance	2.94
LEP	2.94	Social	2.88
Transient	2.75	LEP	2.81
Discipline	2.40	Behavior	2.56
Social	2.19	Same School	2.19

In total, school administrators and teachers agreed on 14 factors that they believe were important to consider when making a grade placement decision. Of the 14 similar factors, three were categorized as "Academic" while 11 were

categorized as “Nonacademic”. School administrators and teacher disagreed on 15 factors.

Table 12 Comparison of “Academic” means of administrators and teachers

Administrator	*M*	Teacher	*M*
Academic growth	3.63	Grades per six weeks	3.13
STAAR scores	3.38	STAAR scores	3.13
Report card grades	3.31	Classroom progress	3.06

School administrators identified 15 factors that were not similar to factors that were identified by teachers. The majority of the factors identified were categorized as “Nonacademic”. Administrators identified 12 “Nonacademic” factors as important, that is having a mean of 2.00 or greater. Table 13 shows the “Nonacademic” factors identified by school administrators.

School administrators were more concerned with “Nonacademic” issues when making a grade placement decision. The “Nonacademic” factor with the highest mean was “Diagnosed medical condition that may impact education.” This factor had a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviations of 0.45. This indicates that all 16 school administrators believe that a diagnosed medical condition must be considered when making a grade placement decision.

Table 13 Administrators’ “Nonacademic” factors not similar to teachers

Factor	*M*
Diagnosed Medical Condition	3.75
Summer school attendance	3.38
Extenuating Circumstance	3.38
Progress on STAAR from first to third	3.38

Table 13 continued

Disability	3.19
Dyslexia	2.94
Tutoring attendance	2.66
School resources	2.31
Language center	2.26
Emotional maturity	2.13
Did not qualify for Learning Disabled	2.00

Administrators identified only three factors that were not similar to teachers and were categorized as "Academic." The first "Academic" factor was "Achievement in other instructional programs." This factor generated a mean of 2.44 and a standard deviation of 1.15. School administrators used how a student was doing in other instructional programs as a gauge to the overall academic picture of the student. Administrators also took a holistic approach by using teacher recommendations as an important factor. Teacher recommendation generated a mean of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 0.81. The third and final "Academic" factor that administrators believed to be important was progress on the STAAR test. Particularly progress shown from the first administration to the second and then to the third administration was rated as the highest "Academic" factor that was not similar to what teachers identified as important.

Teachers identified 15 factors that were not similar to what school administrators identified. Of the 15 factors teachers identified, nine were

"Nonacademic" and six were categorized "Academic". Table 14 shows the "Nonacademic" factors that were generated by teachers.

Table 14 Teachers' "Nonacademic" factors not similar to administrators

Factor	*M*
Major life changing events	3.50
Failed prior classes	3.44
General attitude towards school and education	3.13
Work ethic in the classroom	3.13
At-Risk status of the student	2.81
Parental involvement	2.53
504 status of the student	2.43
Physical size of the student	2.31
Test anxiety	2.31

Teachers rated four of the nine factors significantly higher than the others as shown by the generated means that were above 3.0. Such high means indicated that teacher felt these factors were very important when considering making a grade placement decision. Teachers indicated that the most important factor to consider is "where there any life-changing event during the school year?" followed closely by "failing previous class".

Teachers also identified six factors that were categorized as "Academic" and were not similar to factors generated by school administrators. Table 15 presents the "Academic" factors along with their means.

Table 15 Teachers' "Academic" factors not similar to administrators

Factor	*M*
Is the student "Close"?	3.50
Student's grasp of main ideas	3.38
Work ethic in the classroom	3.13
Classroom progress	3.06
Reading level/Lexile level	3.00
Extra work on his own time	2.81

All the factors except one that were generated by teachers and were categorized "Academic" had a mean over 3.0. Five of the six factors were significantly higher as indicated by such a high mean. Teachers believe the most important factor to consider when making a grade placement decisions was "Is the student close to passing the exam?" All six "Academic" factors that were only common to teachers, the student had a direct impact on the factor. The student can affect how much extra work he does.

All school administrators are previous teachers. It is not surprising that school administrators and teachers share many similar opinions regarding grade placement. In this study, administrators and teachers agreed on 14 factors that they consider when making decisions regarding promoting or retaining a student through a Grade Placement Committee. Of the 14 similar factors, 11 were categorized as "Nonacademic" and only three were categorized as "Academic". Apparently administrators and teacher agree about the "Nonacademic" issues much more than the "Academic" ones.

School administrators developed an additional 14 characteristics that were not similar to teachers. Many of these issues appear to impact the school at large instead of the student as an individual. The one factor that only school administrators generated that demonstrates this point is "Does school have the staff to allow students to be retained, i.e. overcrowding?" This factor indicates that school administrators are making-decision about an individual student while looking at the "big" picture of the school.

Teachers also generated 14 characteristics that were not similar to what was generated by school administrators. All 14 characteristics appeared to be only focusing on the individual student. Teachers appear to take a holistic approach to making grade placement decisions. The factors that were identified as important painted a picture of the whole student. Teachers identified factors like the age of the student and any medical issues that would impact the student, but teachers also looked at the "Academic" issues that were facing the student. The factor with the highest mean in this category was "Is the student "close"?"

The data indicates that teachers were most concerned with the individual student while school administrators were looking at the student in relation to the entire campus.

Chapter 5

Summary, Findings, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

During the 2008-2009 school year, Texas had 319,209 students in the fifth grade that took the TAKS test. Nearly 35,000 fifth-graders did not pass one or more portions of the TAKS test and were subsequently retained in the fifth grade (Texas Education Agency, 2008). Many of the 35,000 students appealed to the Grade Placement Committee. Nearly 20,000 of these students were then promoted to the sixth grade by the Grade Placement Committee despite the fact that these students had not demonstrated academic success on the TAKS test.

That same year, 309,541 eighth grade students in Texas took the TAKS test, with 35,056 not passing one or more portions of the test (Texas Education Agency, 2008). Grade Placement Committees heard appeals from nearly 35,000 of these students, and promoted nearly 22,000 students that had demonstrated they were not academically prepared to go to the ninth grade.

In total over 42,000 students that did not pass one or more portions of the TAKS test were promoted to the next grade via Grade Placement Committees. The USID was following the same trend and promoting students that had not been successful on the TAKS test.

The USID promoted 89.3 percent of fifth-grade reading TAKS failures and 88.8 percent of fifth-grade math TAKS failures in 2009. That same year, 96.5 percent of eighth-grade reading TAKS failures were promoted by Grade Placement Committees and 98.2 percent of eighth-grade math failures were promoted (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

Summary

The purpose of the study was to identify what school administrators believe to be the most important factors to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal for promotion, given that that student has not passed at least one portion of the STAAR test. This was attempted to be answered by the first research question: "What do school administrators perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotions?" A three round Delphi study was designed to answer this question. School administrators that had been on a GPC within the last five years were invited to be part of the study.

The secondary purpose of the study was to identify what teachers believe were the most important factors. The research question regarding teacher's perception was: "What do teachers perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?" Once again, a three round Delphi study was conducted to elicit data from teachers that had been on a GPC within the last five years.

The final purpose of this study was to compare the responses of administrators with the responses of teachers and to answer the following research question: "How similar are the perceptions of administrators to the perceptions of teachers regarding important factors to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal?" This was done by comparing the responses from the three round Delphi studies that administrators provided with the responses provided by teachers during that three round Delphi study.

Findings

The first research question was, "What do school administrators perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotions?" The Delphi study was able to identify 29 factors that school administrators perceived to be important when making a grade placement decision. The 29 factors were categorized as either "Academic" or "Nonacademic"

School administrators identified eight "Academic" factors and 21 "Nonacademic" factors thus, demonstrating that school administrators perceived that factors not directly affected by the students' actions within the classroom to be more important in making grade placement decisions. The three highest rated "Nonacademic" factors were: special education status, diagnosed medical condition, and previous retention. All three factors are factors that the student has little to no control over.

School administrators appear to be making grade placement decisions with an eye toward the entire school and not just what is best for the student. This can be seen by the following factors: age, discipline, parent preference, and attendance. These factors have a larger impact on the school as a whole, not just on the individual student. A factor that demonstrates that the school administrator's focus was on the school before the individual student was "school resources."

The eight "Academic" factors that school administrators identified were consistent with factors that are impacted by the student. Factors such as effort, academic growth, progress on STAAR, and academic growth. These factors that were identified as important by school administrators show that school administrators are looking at the role the student has in promotion.

The second research question was "What do teachers perceive as the most important factors to be considered when hearing an appeal to a Grade Placement Committee for promotion?" Using a three-round Delphi study, teachers identified 29 factors that they perceived were important when making a grade placement decision. The 29 factors were categorized into 12 "Academic" and 17 "Nonacademic" factors. The distribution between categorized was more evenly distributed as compared to school administrators.

Teachers identified 12 factors that were categorized as "Academic" by the researcher. The three highest rated "Academic" factors were: main ideas, effort,

and being “close” to passing. The data demonstrates that teachers are using more “Academic” factors, that is, factors that the student has a direct control on to make grade placement decisions.

Teachers also identified 17 “Nonacademic’ factors. These were factors that were outside the direct affect of the student. The top three were: failed previous classes, life changing event, and previous retention.

The third research question addressed in this study was “How similar are the perceptions of administrators to the perceptions of teachers regarding important factors to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal?”

School administrators and teachers independently identified 29 factors and agreed on 14 factors that both group believed to be important factors to consider when making a grade placement decision. In some cases the wording was different, but the meaning was the same. Administrator identified 15 factors that were not similar to factors identified by teachers. Of the 15 factors, 12 were categorized as “Nonacademic” and only three were “Academic”. Teacher also identified 15 factors that were not similar to those presented by administrators. Those factors were nine “Nonacademic” and six “Academic”.

Both administrators and teachers are impacted by what they see every day. Transformative learning theory says that individuals are changed by what they experience and then reflect on what they experienced. This explains many of the

factors that both groups identified. Educators have experienced many different situations, and it is the change based on those experiences that is explained by the Transformative Learning Theory.

School administrators see how retained students impact the campus as a whole and thus make decisions based on those experiences. Teachers witness students' struggles and the impact those struggles have on both the student and the class as a whole. All of these experiences have a direct impact on the decisions educators make regarding grade placement. Transformative learning theory describes these changes as learning.

Conclusion

Every year Grade Placement Committees are asked to hear appeals regarding promotion. The Student Success Initiative was updated in 2009, during the 81st Texas legislative session with the passing of House Bill 3 (Texas Education Agency, 2010b). The intent of this House bill was to guarantee that students were academically prepared and if the student was not prepared, that student would be retained. Parents have the right to appeal that retention, and that appeal is heard by the Grade Placement Committee. School administrators, teachers, and parents make up the Grade Placement Committee.

The data from this study provides a window into the thinking of the members of a Grade Placement Committee. School administrators and teachers work together every day to educate students within the schools where they work.

Both groups agreed on many nonacademic factors. The fact that both groups are considering more nonacademic factors than academic factor demonstrates that this is not only an academic issue. Both administrators and teachers believe the special education status of a student was the most important factor to be considered. Another nonacademic factor that was most important to both groups was if the student had been retained previously. Both administrators and teachers indicated that if previous retention did not work the first time, it will not work the second.

When school administrators are making grade placement decisions, they are balancing what is best for the student with what is best for the school. The data indicates that school administrators are more often concerned with nonacademic issues when making grade placement decisions. School administrators identified nonacademic factors as important when making grade placement decisions nearly three to one over academic factors. The law was designed to end social promotion, but the data indicates that social promotion is still taking place. School administrators are considering factors that are nonacademic when making a decision that has a huge impact on future academics. School administrators are using factors that have nothing to do with the academic readiness of the student to make grade placement decisions. One of the most telling factors is basing promotion on whether the school has the resources to handle the additional students that are retained. The lack of resources has nothing

to do with the student, but is being considered when making a decision that will impact the student for the rest of his academic career.

School administrators are also using factors to determine grade placement that are completely out of the hands of the student. A student cannot control their age or their size, but these factors are being considered when making grade placement decisions. The law states that students that are not academically successful will be retained, but school administrators are using "Nonacademic" factors to determine grade placement.

Teachers appear to be much more concerned with academic factors than school administrators. The data demonstrates that teachers took a holistic approach to students by looking at more factors that students had a direct effect on. Teachers identified factors that gave an overall view of the students while not focusing on general issues that impact the school.

Teachers were much more students-focused when identifying factors to be used when hearing a grade placement appeal. Teachers identified more factors that were evident within the classroom. Factors such as the student's reading level and if the student is "close" to passing the test appear to carry more weight with teachers. The results still indicate that teachers are making decisions to promote a student to the next grade based on issues that are not academic in nature.

Both school administrators and teachers are committed to doing everything possible to help student reach their academic potential. This research study shows that administrators and teachers differ on how to accomplish this goal. School administrators are forced to balance the needs of the individual student with the needs of the entire school, while teacher are able to only focus on the individual student. In many cases, the needs of the entire school are outweighing the needs of the individual student. Unfortunately, this is counter to the intent of the Student Success Initiative.

Limitations of the Study

The Delphi method is a very effective methodology, but like all methodologies, it has its limitations. Franklin & Hart (2007) identified the follow limitations to Delphi studies:

1. Selection of expert panelists is a crucial to the reliability of a Delphi study
2. Length of time required for the study limits participants willingness to participate
3. Loss on interest from the participants as the study progresses impact accuracy of participant responses
4. Developing the first questionnaire that is a key issue
5. Researcher bias
6. Delphi method is sensitive to environment changes

Murry (1995) also identified the following as limitations to a Delphi study:

1. Difficulty in identifying expert panelists
2. The possibility of having to use purposive sampling

Hasson, Keeney & McKenna (2000) also identified the following limitations:

1. Lack of universal guidelines
2. Size of expert panel
3. Implications of lack on anonymity
4. Expert opinion
5. Level of consensus

The study also had the following limitations specific to this study:

1. The study was limited to school administrators and teachers in the United Independent School District in the state of Texas.
2. Panelist had served on at least one Grade Placement Committee within the last five years.
3. The study was limited to three rounds of Delphi questionnaires sent out to panelists.

Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

This study identified 29 factors that school administrators in a large urban school district in the state of Texas perceived as important factors to consider

when making a grade placement decision. The study also identified 29 factors that teachers in that same district believed were important to consider when making a grade placement decision. The following implications are based on this study:

Members of all Grade Placement Committees need to receive training on the role of the Grade Placement Committee and what factors should be considered when making a grade placement decision.

The results indicated that school administrators were using factors to determine grade placement that impact the overall school, more often than factors that impact just the student, and this is not what the law intended.

The data shows that teachers use both "Academic" and "Nonacademic" factors equally, but continue to promote students that are not academically ready for the next grade.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The study is significant because it provides educators with a look into the minds of members of Grade Placement Committees. The study provides factors that members of Grade Placement Committees are using when making grade placement decisions. Both school administrators and teachers can see what other Grade Placement Committees perceive as important. The following are recommendation for future research:

1. The study should look at the long-term effect of promotion via Grade Placement Committee has on future academic success.
2. The study focused on what parents perceive as important factors to be considered when making a grade placement decision.
3. A longitudinal study of students that were promoted via Grade Placement Committee to focus on the factors that were identified in this study.
4. The study replicated in another large urban district in the state of Texas.

The purpose to the study was to identify what school administrators and teachers perceived as important factors to be considered when making a grade placement decision. The study found that both school administrators and teachers identified factors that had little to do with the academic preparedness of the student. The Student Success Initiative was passed to reduce or eliminate social promotion, but the factors used to make grade placement decisions do little or nothing to that end. Educators are still promoting students that are not academically prepared. Until this practices is ended, educational achievement will continue to struggle in the state of Texas.

Appendix A

Request for Names

Dear Principal,

I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The study is titled "Important Factors Impacting Grade Placement Committee Decisions: Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers". The study will look at what school administrators and teachers believe are important factors to be used in making grade placement decisions during the appeal to the grade placement committee. It will also examine if teachers and administrator differ on their beliefs.

I am asking for your help. I need the names and email addresses of teachers and administrators that have been involved in grade placement committee appeals within the last five years. Please email me your list at the email below. The research will be conducted on-line and will be completely anonymous. The study will use the Delphi Method to gain insight from experts in the field. This research study has been approved by the Fort Worth Independent School District department of Research and Evaluation.

Each participant will be asked to fill out a brief biographic survey, and then asked to respond to the research question. There will be four rounds of questions that will only take a few minutes to respond to on-line. The entire process should take less than thirty minutes.

I realize your time is very important, thus I would like to thank you in advance for your help in this study.

David Trimble
Doctoral Candidate
University of Texas at Arlington
david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu
817-266-0469

Appendix B

Consent

Dear ,

I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The study is titled "Important Factors Impacting Grade Placement Committee Decisions: Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers". The study will look at what school administrators and teachers believe are important factors to be used in making grade placement decisions during the appeal to the grade placement committee. It will also examine if teachers and administrator differ on their beliefs.

I was giving your name as a possible participant because you have been involved in a Grade Placement Committee within the last five years.

The research will be conducted on-line and will be completely anonymous. The study will use the Delphi Method to gain insight from experts in the field. This research study has been approved by the Fort Worth Independent School District department of Research and Evaluation.

Each participant will be asked to fill out a brief biographic survey, and then asked to respond to the research question. There will be four rounds of questions that will only take a few minutes to respond to on-line. The entire process should take less than thirty minutes.

I realize your time is very important, thus I would like to thank you in advance for your help in this study.

If you would be willing to participate, please read the attached consent form and email me back. Thank you for your time.

David Trimble
Doctoral Candidate
University of Texas at Arlington
david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu
817-266-0469

Appendix C

Round One Email Administrators

To: [Email]

From: "david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>

Subject: Dissertation Survey

Body: Dear Research Participant,

First, I would like to thank you for taking time to complete this survey. The first Delphi round will open at 7:00 A.M., Wednesday, October 1, 2013. The first round will remain open for seven days. It will close Tuesday, October 8, 2013 at midnight. Please go to the following link and complete the short survey. Please list as many factors that you consider when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal.

Here is a link to the survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thank you,

David Trimble
Doctoral Candidate
University of Texas at Arlington
david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu
817-266-0469

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Appendix D

Round One Email Teachers

Dear Research Participant,

First, I would like to thank you for taking time to complete this survey. The first Delphi round will open at 7:00 A.M., Wednesday, October 1, 2013. The first round will remain open for seven days. It will close Tuesday, October 8, 2013 at midnight. Please go to the following link and complete the short survey. Please list as many factors that you consider when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal.

Here is a link to the survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thank you,

David Trimble
Doctoral Candidate
University of Texas at Arlington
david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu
817-266-0469

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Appendix E

Round Two Email Administrators

To: [Email]

From: "david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>

Subject: Round 2 of Dissertation research

Body: Dear Administrator Participant,

First I would like to thank you again for your participation in this study. The results will be part of my dissertation. The attached link will take you to a survey. Please go through and rate the 33 factors that were identified during the first round of research. Each factor was identified as an important factor to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal regarding the promotion or retention of a student. The survey should take less than 20 minutes. Thank you again.

Here is a link to the survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Appendix F

Round Two Email Teachers

To: [Email]

From: "david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>

Subject: Round 2 of Dissertation research

Body: Dear Teacher Participant,

First I would like to thank you again for your participation in this study. The results will be part of my dissertation. The attached link will take you to a survey. Please go through and rate the 31 factors that were identified during the first round of research. Each factor was identified as an important factor to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal regarding the promotion or retention of a student. The survey should take less than 20 minutes. Thank you again.

Here is a link to the survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Appendix G

Final Round Email Administrators

To: [Email]

From: "david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>

Subject: Final round of research

Body: Dear Administrator Participant,

First I would like to thank you again for your participation in this study. The results will be part of my dissertation. The attached link will take you to a survey. Please go through and rate the 33 factors that were identified during the first and second rounds of research. Feel free to add any commits you have about each factor in the provided space. Each factor was identified as an important factor to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal regarding the promotion or retention of a student. The survey should take less than 20 minutes. Thank you again.
Here is a link to the survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Appendix H

Final Round Email Teachers

To: [Email]

From: "david.trimble@mavs.uta.edu via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>

Subject: Final round of research

Body: Dear Teacher Participant,

First I would like to thank you again for your participation in this study. The results will be part of my dissertation. The attached link will take you to a survey. Please go through and rate the 31 factors that were identified during the first round of research. Each factor was identified as an important factor to be considered when hearing a Grade Placement Committee appeal regarding the promotion or retention of a student. The survey should take less than 20 minutes. Thank you again.
Here is a link to the survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Appendix I

IRB

Office of Research Administration Regulatory Services 817-272-3723
regulatoryservices@uta.edu http://www.uta.edu/research/administration

Institutional Review Board
Notification of Exemption
June 4, 2013
David Trimble
Dr. James hardy
ELPS
Protocol Number: 2013-0575
Protocol Title: *Important Factors Impacting Grade Placement Committee Decisions: Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers.*
Type of Review: **Exemption Determination**
The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, or designee, has reviewed the above referenced study and found that it qualified for exemption under the federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects as referenced at Title 45 Part 46.101(b)(2).
• (2)Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **June 4, 2013**
Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB ***any*** proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without prior IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject." Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subject Protection (HSP) Training on file with this office. Completion certificates are valid for 2 years from completion date.
The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study

procedures, please contact Robin Dickey at 817-272-9329 or robind@uta.edu. You may also contact Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu

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Biographical Information

David Gerald Trimble was born in Fort Worth, Texas. David Trimble has been in education for over 20 years. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Exercise and Sports Studies for the University of Texas at Arlington. A year later, David returned to UTA to earn his educator certification and began teaching high school English. Once again, David returned to UTA and earned a Masters degree in educational administration. While at the University of Texas at Arlington, David also gained his superintendant certification. David Trimble has been a high school teacher, middle school assistant principal, high school assistant principal, middle school principal and principal of an alternative middle school. David has been married for 16 years and two children. He continues to love working in education. David wants to continue his research into grade placement committees and how they impact student achievement. David Trimble enjoys hunting, skiing, and spending time with his family and friends.