

Chapter 4

The Study

All of the students who were interviewed experienced retention during their early elementary years. Three students were retained in the third grade; six in the second grade; seven in the first grade; and six kindergarten. All of the retentions occurred between 1985 and 1990. Since each of the students was enrolled in the school district at the time of his or her retention and are still students in that system, some information about the building organization of the school district, grading practices, retention practices, and graduation requirements within the district will clarify some of the information presented in the student descriptions.

Within the school district there is one high school with grades 9 - 12. The middle school has grades 6 - 8, and there are eight elementary schools for students in grades K - 5. At the elementary level, students attend a given building based on established boundaries, but exceptions to this practice are made to accommodate babysitting and other individual needs. Also, three of the elementary buildings have two classes at each level and the other five buildings normally only have one classroom per grade. For this reason, some of the students had different teachers for their repeat year, while other students

had the same teacher. Several students in the study changed elementary schools at the time of retention. All eight of the elementary schools in the district had retained students in this study.

The profiles on some of the students made reference to participation in the Developmental Kindergarten (DK) program. For students who were verified for special education services or deemed to be at risk in their kindergarten year, a second daily session of kindergarten was offered by the school district. This class was taught by a special education teacher and paraeducator at a separate facility. Ten of the students in the study received special education services during at least some part of their school years. Of the ten students verified for special education, eight were verified to receive services prior to being retained.

Students in grades K - 3 are graded on the following subject areas: reading, language, spelling, arithmetic, social studies, physical education, music, and citizenship. Some teachers also include grades on work habits and social adjustment. Grades are marked as Commendable, or Satisfactory, or Needs Improvement for students in kindergarten through third grade. Fourth and fifth grade students are given grades in the same subject areas as the younger elementary students, but "A, B, C, D, and F" letter

grades are used. Students in grades 6 -12 also receive letter grades in their courses.

The Board of Education for the school district does not have a written policy on retention. Each recommendation for retention at the elementary and middle level is discussed at a student assistance team (SAT) meeting. There are no specified number of failing grades for recommending grade level retention. In addition to grades, the student assistance teams consider other factors in making a recommendation for retention. These factors may include the student's age/maturity level, social skills, work/study habits, attendance, aptitude and achievement scores, and/or home environment. At the elementary level, parental approval is obtained for the retention, while at the middle level the final decision rests with the building principal.

At the high school level, students are not retained in grade as they are in the lower grades. Students must earn at least 240 credit hours at the high school level to graduate. Thus, the student needs to earn a minimum of 60 credits each year to maintain freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior status. The indicated grade levels of the high school students who participated in this study are based on their years at the high school rather than on the number of credits earned. Of the 240 credits needed to graduate, there are also specific

requirements in regard to the number of hours in specified content areas.

The following are the grade levels during the 1994-95 school year of the high school students who participated in the study: one student was a junior; four students were sophomores; and six students were freshmen. At the middle level, four 8th graders, three 7th graders, and two 6th graders were interviewed. Two 5th grade students also participated in the interview process.

For the purposes of this study, each student was arbitrarily assigned an alphabet letter as a means of designating each individual student without identifying the student. If the student's parent was interviewed, his or her parent was given the same assigned alphabet letter. Information gained from the parent interview was used in conjunction with the descriptive narrative about the student.

Each description and analysis incorporated data from several sources. Students' school records were examined and information was obtained from grades, aptitude and achievement test scores, attendance records, participation in special programs, teachers' comments, and demographic data. The researcher was also able to observe some of the students during structured and unstructured school times, including classes, study halls, lunch periods, and before and after school.

The transcripts of the interviews provided most of the information on the students' and parents' attitudes and feelings. The transcripts can be found in Appendix A. Follow-up telephone calls to students and parents as needed also contributed additional or clarifying information. Other information and perceptions were sometimes gained in visiting personally with the students and parents before and after the taped interview sessions.

A final source of information came from the fact that the interviews were conducted in person. The researcher gleaned impressions from voice tone, facial expressions, and body language that expand the descriptions of feelings and attitudes beyond the words of participant responses. The description and analysis of the students' retention stories are presented individually because each student's story is a personal and unique study on retention. Interspersed in the descriptions are comments from the researcher for clarification of the information. Following each description is the researcher's analysis of each retention experience.

Descriptions and Analyses

Student A

Student A has the distinction of being the youngest student involved in the study. She completed the fifth grade this school year. She was retained in kindergarten. In her family she is the youngest of two girls. Her parents both work at manufacturing plants in the community.

Student A began kindergarten at a parochial elementary school a month before she turned five. During that year her mother transferred her to kindergarten with the public school system. Parent A had the following to say about her decision to transfer her daughter:

She had been in parochial school and the teacher had no patience with the slower children. If they couldn't keep up, she left them behind. We moved [Student A] to the public school system mid-semester and had better results.

Student A received satisfactory grades in all areas, but she did miss seven days of school during the second semester. The following year she repeated kindergarten at her parents' request. Parent A indicated, "We had a meeting with the teacher to discuss how she was doing. She wasn't failing, but wasn't progressing as well as we would like, so per our

request, she repeated the grade." Student A had the same teacher for the repeat year. According to her mother, "[Student A] liked the teacher very much." She received satisfactory grades in all areas during the following years in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. She had a grade of "C" in all subjects in both fourth and fifth grades.

While her classroom grades have remained stable, Student A's achievement test scores showed a statistically significant drop in language and math on the fifth grade testing from the previous years. In Student A's case there are only three years of test scores available, so there is insufficient data to determine if the statistically significant drop in scores is meaningful in relation to Student A's educational growth or merely the reflection of the student having a bad testing day.

Student A stated, "I didn't like it [being retained] because now I'm a grade behind where I should be." Her mother's perception of Student A's feeling was that "at the time she didn't care." Student A provided essentially the same responses to the questions of why she had been retained and if the retention had been good for her. She indicated that she "wasn't ready to go on to first grade" and that staying in kindergarten was good "because I needed it, because I might not have been ready." Likewise, in response to how retention helped her to do better in the following grades, she said, "It

helped me to be ready for the next grade." When asked what was a good thing about not passing, she said, "Now I think I'm in the right grade."

Student A's mother believes it was a good idea that her daughter repeated kindergarten stating, "She had one more year of review that helped somewhat." Yet, she doesn't really feel that the retention helped her daughter to do better in later grades. However, she attributes the fact that her daughter hasn't done better to the school's change in reading programs. Student A's mom believes that her daughter has reading and/or learning problems and said,

Her reading problems have really impaired her learning ability. When she has a problem with reading, and we tell her to sound it out, she doesn't even know where to start. If she can't read well, I can't really expect her to do other things well.

Student A's achievement tests indicate that she scores in the average to low average range in reading. Neither the parents nor the school have referred Student A for evaluation of a possible learning disability.

When asked how she felt about herself now as a fifth grade student, Student A stated, "I think I'm doing pretty well." In response to the same question about her daughter, Parent A

said, "She thinks she's doing as well as she can." She perceives that her daughter has very big self-esteem problems, but does not relate this to her daughter's retention. It was the researcher's impression that Student A had more confidence in herself than her mother did. Parent A also shared that Student A has an older sister who "gets straight A's [at the parochial school] and she [Student A] won't even try to compete with her, . . ." The researcher's impression was that Student A's mother would like Student A to try to compete with her older sister.

Parent A had verbalized her feelings of concern at the time of the retention decision, "I felt really bad about having to make the decision to hold her back." She had been most worried that other children would make fun of her daughter. But Student A's mom also stated, "Now, I don't have any negative feelings about it at all." Parent A fully supports the concept of retention as beneficial for students. When asked if it is a good idea to keep students in the same grade, she responded, "Yes. If they are not keeping up with the current class, and have a lot of trouble learning the required material. I see no reason not to hold them back. It can only be to their benefit."

Student A's mother is also indicated that retaining her daughter now might be good,

Actually, it might be a good idea to hold her back in the fifth grade. I really don't feel she's ready for the middle school experience. She has not matured as quickly as some of her other classmates. I'm worried that she'll have even more trouble than in elementary school.

Student A would not agree with her mother's thoughts on retention in the fifth grade. When asked how she would feel about being held back now, she replied, "I wouldn't really like it because my friends would jump ahead of me again and I'd have to start over again." The loss of friends was the focus of her response to the question of the worst thing about not passing. She declared, "My friends were all a grade ahead of me and I didn't see them." Although Parent A has no negative feelings about having held her daughter back in kindergarten, Student A indicated that while she does not spend much time thinking about her retention, when she does think about it, "I feel sad because I could be with my other friends who are ahead of me."

Student A - Analysis

- Parent A requested the retention.
- Student A was young for kindergarten.
- Student A had the same teacher and this was positive.

- Student A has predominantly positive feelings about the retention being helpful to her.
- Student A has maintained satisfactory grades since her repeat year.
- The loss of friends was the most difficult aspect of retention for Student A.
- Student A did not appear to remember much from the time when she was retained and many of her responses seemed to reflect her mother's perception of Student A's lack of readiness to move to the next grade. It sounded like Student A had been often told that she had been retained because she wasn't ready for the next grade and needed to get ready.
- This was essentially a "red shirt" retention, such that Student A was given another year to get ready for school at the request of her parents. Based on Student A's grades, test scores, and Parent A's assessment, Student A may have benefited from the additional year of kindergarten in both maturity and primary level skills, but the research indicates that she would probably have gained more by going on to first grade.
- Parent A did not feel that the retention really helped her daughter in later grades, but she did not perceive the lack of benefit reflecting directly on the practice of retention.

Parent A's perception was that the reading instruction hindered her daughter's progress.

- Parent A's feelings and attitudes about the concept of retention were all positive to the point of thinking about a second retention for her child.
- Student A would not agree with her mother and does not want to be retained again.
- Children do not develop self confidence in themselves as students in the schoolhouse alone. Parental expectations and support are also critical factors. Parent A indicated her support for her child, but it is possible that there are some underlying expectations for Student A to be the type of student that the older sister is.

Student B - Description

Student B just completed his first year of high school. He was held back in first grade. Student B has an older sister and a younger brother. His parents own and run a local retail business.

Student B had attended a private pre-school. The pre-school teacher had indicated to his parents that his attention span was short. Parent B then visited with their pediatrician about Student B's attention span, but no medical diagnosis was made at that time. When Student B was in kindergarten, his

mother "noticed his unfinished work." His teacher "indicated that he was slow, but it was okay."

Student B then went to first grade. According to Parent B the first grade teacher had "worked with [Student B] all the time, but she knew he was in trouble. She approached me with the problem." Parent B took her son to the pediatrician again and Student B was referred for further medical evaluation. According to Student B's mother, "after testing in Lincoln he was diagnosed with attention deficit and absentee epilepsy." Due to these medical problems, Student B was absent from school 10 days and tardy 28 days during the first grade.

Student B's parents "decided to have him take first grade over again" and Parent B requested that the school retain her son. The school system offered Parent B a choice of two different schools where Student B could repeat the first grade. Parent B actively involved her son in the decision about where he would go to school for his repeat year. She took him to the schools and had him visit with the first grade teachers and then he made the choice.

Student B's grades for his first grade year indicated that he needed to improve in reading, spelling, arithmetic, and citizenship. No grades were given for work/study habits or social adjustment. The remainder of his grades were at the satisfactory level. During the retention year and the year

after, Student B's grades were satisfactory in all areas. Grades 4 and 5 showed a slight downward trend with below average grades in language areas. Work/study habits and social adjustment were graded as "needs improvement" both years.

In middle school and for his first year in high school, Student B maintained a strong "C" to "C+" grade point average. On the Cognitive Abilities Tests, the scores indicate that his nonverbal skills are in the average range and very definitely his strength area, while quantitative scores are in the low average range and verbal skills are his weakest area. His achievement test scores have fluctuated yearly showing as much as a 47 percentile point difference from one year to the next in a given subtest. This variance in scores could reflect Student B's attention problems. Despite the wide variance in scores from year to year, there was consistency in math scores being higher than language scores, which is also consistent with his scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test.

Student B was referred for evaluation to determine if he qualified for special education services in kindergarten, 5th grade, and again in 8th grade. The evaluations indicated that Student B had difficulty in staying on task, which would have been expected given his medical problems of Attention Deficit

Disorder, but he did not qualify for services in that his achievement levels were commensurate with his ability.

Student B completed his first year of high school with a "C+" grade point average. He has a strong interest in vocational classes. He plans to go to Platte College after graduation and wants to work with metals. He enjoys classes with "hands-on" learning much more than the classes where teachers lecture.

While Student B indicated "it would not be a very good idea " to hold him back again, he verbalized a positive attitude about having repeated first grade, "It was a good idea." Both Student B and his mother indicated that the retention had been beneficial. The tough part, according to Student B, was "I didn't want to leave my friends in that grade, but I coped with it."

Student B's mother talked a lot about the importance of caring and understanding teachers in working with students who have difficulties in school. With the exception of one teacher who Parent B felt was "not real forceful," Parent B was positive about her son's teachers. She expressed an understanding of the fact that the retention provided her son with a "good base to start with," but she had not expected the retention to cure the situation. In talking about her son's difficulties in school, she stated, "He has to struggle all the

time. He is an oral learner. This is a problem in the classroom with his reading. His attention deficit is a real problem." On a more positive note, Parent B also related, "Now he has really taken on the responsibility of doing his own grades and homework." She also pointed out that "his grades are a lot better this year." In response to the question of how he feels about himself as a student now, Student B declared "very good."

Student B - Analysis

- Retention was requested by the parents.
- Both Student B and his parent have positive feelings and attitudes about the concept of retention and their personal experience of retention.
 - Student B had a different teacher at a different school, and he made the choice of where he would attend school.
 - Student B has maintained satisfactory grades since his repeat year.
 - Student B's family has the highest socio-economic level of any of the study participants. The family's economic circumstances permitted Student B to attend a private pre-school where his difficulties in learning were identified even prior to beginning kindergarten. Their financial situation also allowed them to pursue necessary medical evaluations.

- Student B also had emotional support from his family in regard to his retention.

- Parent B has been consistently involved with her son's education throughout his school career. She has frequently acted as an advocate for her child with the school system.

- Student B has done well in school through his own efforts and the efforts of his parents and teachers.

Student C - Description

Student C has completed two years of high school. She was held back in first grade. Student C has both an older brother and an older sister. Her parents are employed at local industries.

Student C entered kindergarten when she was five and a half years old. She was verified for special education services early in her kindergarten year. Her overall scores were in the low average ability range, but she was considered to be handicapped in her learning ability because of very weak auditory memory skills. She attended the developmental kindergarten program in addition to the regular kindergarten class. She was recommended for retention in first grade. Student C had satisfactory grades in arithmetic, social studies, science, and social adjustment, "needs improvement" grades in writing and work/study habits, and "unsatisfactory"

grades in reading, language, and spelling. Student C's mother was the one who told her she would be "retaking that same class over again." Student C indicated that she had "wanted to know why." Her mother told her that she "had some work to catch up on." When asked if her mother had been angry about the retention, Student C said, "No. It was just something we were going to do."

Student C remained in the same school for the repeat year and had the same teacher. She was very clear about not liking the teacher and stated, "the teacher that I had - I didn't like her." When questioned as to the worst thing about the retention, her response was "probably the teacher." Student C did earn satisfactory marks in all areas for the repeat year. When questioned if the repeat year was easier, she replied, "I think it was probably the same." Her friends moving on was also an issue, "The kids that went on to the second grade, they kept asking why I wasn't with them. And I made some new friends, but I just didn't want to be there."

Through the rest of her elementary school years she maintained average and below average grades. At middle school she continued this grade pattern, but did receive a few failing grades on her report cards. During her freshman year of high school she failed three classes, but during her sophomore year she took those classes again with passing grades. She has

earned sufficient credits to achieve junior status for the upcoming school year with a two year grade point average of 1.9, which reflects both her grades in her regular and special education classes. She was also enrolled in Spanish during the first semester of 10th grade, but "withdrew failing" from that course so it was not included in her grade point average. Throughout her years of schooling, Student C has received special education support. Her below average ability has been reflected in yearly achievement test scores that have been consistently in the bottom quartile.

While attendance was not a specific concern during the first year of first grade, medical problems have caused her to miss an average of 21 days of school each year since the fourth grade. Surgery during her eighth grade year caused her to be absent even more than usual. Her required physical education classes were medically waived at the high school.

Student C's response to the retention was very clear, "I didn't want to do it." Further, she did not feel that it really helped her at the time of the repeat grade or in subsequent years. Her remark was, "I don't think it really helped. Either way, I would be where I am right now." Student C was not enthusiastic in her response to a question about liking school. Her reply was "kind of." When asked if she had confidence in herself as a student, she replied, "Yeah," but there was a lack

of confidence in her voice tone and she shrugged her shoulders while verbally responding.

In further questioning Student C indicated that she just didn't see the point in repeating the grade and that it still bothers her, stating, "It bugs me. I don't think I needed to be held back in that grade. . . . What was the point of making me go an extra year?" In regard to the concept of retention being of any benefit to students, Student C had this to say, "I don't think first or second grade; you don't learn much. Maybe in third or fourth grade."

She stated that she was not uncomfortable in answering the interview questions. However, when questioned if she would feel uncomfortable if another student brought up that she had been retained, she said, "It used to bug me because I would have fights over it. I would get mad." While Student C used the past tense in responding to the question, she gave the impression that it is still an issue for her.

Student C - Analysis

- For Student C school has not been a very positive experience. In addition to being retained, she has had the stigma associated with being labeled a special education student throughout her school career.

- Student C's grades have been predominantly "average" and "below average" since her retention.
- It was clear that Student C did not feel she should have been retained and she did not perceive any long term benefits from the retention.
- Not liking the teacher was a major issue to Student C. She had the same teacher for both years of second grade.
- Student C can best be described as someone who is apathetic about school. She is a potential drop-out.

Student D - Description

Student D will be a junior in high school next year. He was retained in the first grade. Student D is the youngest of three children and his sisters are 10 and 12 years older than he. His parents both work for local industries.

Student D had turned five in June before starting kindergarten. He was identified as having a learning disability before the end of his first month at school, so he attended both regular and developmental kindergarten. His kindergarten grades indicated that he needed improvement in reading, language, spelling, and writing. His teacher recommended that Student D repeat kindergarten, but his father disagreed. He continued to have difficulties in the reading and language areas and was held back in the first grade. He indicated that

his parents were the ones who explained to him that he was going to be held back. When questioned about what he thought his parents' feelings were about the retention, he said, "It didn't bother them too much."

When questioned directly, Student D's mother indicated that she felt that "If it was going to help him, then it was good." She responded affirmatively when questioned if her son should have been retained. She had met with his classroom teacher and the special education teacher and they had talked about Student D's progress. It was felt that Student D was becoming frustrated "because he could not keep up with the regular class program." His mother's concern was that she hoped "the other kids would not pick on him about it."

Student D stated that he was retained because he couldn't read, but added, "Teacher didn't take enough time with me." He had the same teacher for the repeat year. When asked how he had felt about that, he responded, "It didn't bother me. It didn't matter." Student D's response regarding the worst thing about repeating was "my peers." When questioned about making new friends, he said, "I went though elementary school by myself. I didn't have very many friends. It made me work harder I guess." Student D's remark about the lack of friends was surprising to the researcher. Student D has a big smile and a very outgoing personality. When he was observed in

unstructured settings at school, there were always other students interacting with him.

Student D indicated that repeating the first grade didn't really do much to help him because he didn't feel "that he really improved his reading skills much until his middle school years." Upon further questioning Student D pointed out that despite the retention, "I was always in resource." He received satisfactory grades during the repeat year and in grades two and three. In grades four and five, he earned "A's" in his resource room subjects (reading, language, spelling, and math) where he was being taught by the special education teacher. He received satisfactory grades from the regular education teacher in writing, science and social studies.

At middle school Student D's grades were very good in both special education and regular education classes. By eighth grade he was taking all regular education classes and maintained a "B+" average. As previously pointed out, Student D did not feel that the retention helped him until middle school. He remembers that his reading improved at this level. The researcher believes that no longer being in resource classes in eighth grade is significant in Student D's perspective that this is when his reading improved.

During his two years at high school he has carried a "B" average, failing only first semester Spanish in 10th grade.

Student D takes all regular education classes, but has a resource study hall for support. When Student D's mother was asked how she thought her son felt about himself as a student, she replied, "I think he feels proud of himself." Student D said he felt okay about himself as a student and said further, "my sister is pushing me to go to college."

In talking about the benefits of retention for other students, Student D stated, "It depends on the kid, and how far behind he is." Student D was also asked if he thought much about his own retention. His response was, "I just kind of blocked it out." When he was asked what he would think if the school said he needed to be held back now, he indicated, "I would ask them why. I might drop out. I know my grades are okay." In the opinion of the researcher, Student D spoke about his grades with a lot of confidence.

When asked if he liked school, he said, "I like playing sports. Sports is what keeps me in school." Of the students in the study, Student D is the most actively involved in extra-curricular school activities participating on the football, wrestling, and track teams. Student D fits the physical image of a football player.

While Student D didn't feel that there was anything really good in repeating the first grade, his mother believes that it helped him then and in later years. Her perspective was that

the retention "helped him understand other kids' problems and it helped him to try his very best." On the other hand, she did not think that retention now would be good. She had indicated that she didn't think repeating first grade had made him unhappy, but in regard to retention now, she said, "This late into his education, I don't think it would help him. I think it would make him feel bad now."

Student D - Analysis

- Student D was young when he began kindergarten.
- Student D does not hold negative feelings about his retention, but neither does he attribute any benefits to it. He is not opposed to the concept of retention, but thinks it should be considered on an individual basis.
 - Student D pointed out that the teacher did not take enough time with him during the first year in first grade, but did not perceive having the same teacher again negatively.
 - Parent D perceives that retaining her son was beneficial to him.
 - In contrast to Student C, Student D seems confident in himself despite both the retention and the special education label. He is motivated to do well in school and his desire to play sports is a part of that motivation. He has maintained good grades since his retention.

- He has a solid support system at home and from his older sisters.

Student E - Description

Student E has attended high school for two years. He was retained in the second grade. He has two younger sisters. He and the elder of his two sisters have been in the same grade since his repeat year. Student E's parents are employed at local industries.

At the time of the interview, Student E had just returned to school after having been suspended. He was pleasant to visit with, but in the opinion of the researcher, verbalized the greatest degree of negativity of all the students who participated in the interview process. He indicated that he had been retained twice. He had repeated the second grade, but also this was his second year as a 9th grader since he only earned 35 credits during his first freshman year. As a second year freshman he took several sophomore classes, but only earned a total of 30 credit hours for the year. Student E will begin his third year of high school having earned just enough credits to be considered a sophomore student. These two years represent his lowest grade achievement during his school career, including the year he was retained.

Student E was held back in second grade where he had received "needs improvement" grades in arithmetic, writing, and work/study skills. In social adjustment and each of his other academic areas, he received "satisfactory minus" grades. Attendance was not an issue in regard to the retention. In looking at Student E's grades compared with the other students who were retained in this study group, his were not as low.

Because of the retention he changed schools and had a new teacher for the repeat year. He received a "commendable" in reading and satisfactory grades in all other areas. Through the remainder of elementary school his grades continued to be in the high average range. During middle school he maintained the "C+" average overall, but did fail two semesters of English.

Student E's achievement test scores in the third grade through the tenth grade showed a steady decline in all areas. His early scores were in the low average range, but scores in the last few years have placed in the below average range. The tenth grade testing indicated that he was lacking minimum competency (as defined by the typical eighth grade student) in both math and reading.

Prior to the recommendation for retention in second grade, the classroom teacher had referred Student E for psychological evaluation to determine if he qualified for special education services in addition to help he was receiving

in the area of speech articulation. The teacher had indicated that Student E "struggled in all academic areas, had difficulty with fine motor skills, and demonstrated some immature behaviors." She also pointed out that she thought Student E would be easier to work with if he "felt at ease to express his feelings or verbalize what he knows academically." He was not verified for additional services.

Student E indicated that his second grade teacher told him he was going to be held back. When he was asked why he was held back, he said, "Teacher said it was because I couldn't tell time." He stated that his mom had not been angry about the retention, but that he had been angry "at first." Student E stated that he "didn't think he should do that grade again," but he also pointed out that "it was easier" and the repeat year teacher "was a lot better." Student E's response to the question of whether repeating the grade helped him was, "maybe a little bit, but not very much." He thought the hardest part of repeating second grade was the "new people" since he had changed schools, but when he was asked if it was hard to make new friends, his reply was "It was easy."

He also said that he "does think about the retention" and that "it irks me a little." Yet, he indicated that he thinks the retention helped him down through the years and he does think it is a good idea for kids to repeat grades. Student E has had

some very successful years academically, but has been on a downward spiral over the last few years. When he was questioned about how he feels about himself as a student, his reply was, "Not very good. I just try." His study hall teacher had a differing opinion indicating that "Student E doesn't try when he's there and that absenteeism is also a problem."

Student E - Analysis

- Student E has negative feelings about his retention, but he also expressed the perception that the retention had helped him. His general attitude about retention is not negative.
- While he pointed out that the teacher for the repeat year was "a lot better," he did not make negative comments about the first teacher.
- Student E overall maintained good grades from the repeat year on until he started high school; however, his achievement test scores have steadily declined over the years.
- Student E is a strong candidate for dropping out of school based on his present negative attitude and grades.
- While there does not appear to be any direct correlation between the second grade retention and his potential for dropping out now, the research indicates that there is a correlation between being retained and dropping out. His

attitude and failure to earn credits at high school puts him at high risk for dropping out.

Student F - Description

Student F completed the eighth grade this year. She was held back in third grade. Student F has one younger sister. Her father is a maintenance supervisor and her mother works at an office in the community.

Student F began kindergarten four days after her fifth birthday and just after her family's move to Columbus. Several years later when retention was recommended during third grade, her parents thought back to her start of school and her mom said, "I felt a little guilty for maybe starting her too early in kindergarten." Dad mentioned that Student F had to adjust to their move. In response to the question about her being young, he stated that "[it was] obvious the first day." So, at the time of the retention, Student F's parents were dealing with their own feelings of having made a mistake in starting her to school when they did. They felt that their daughter needed time to gain maturity and responsibility and believed the retention to be a good decision. However, Student F's mother pointed out that, "it is just that it was one of those things that was good, but you had to deal with some negative things with it."

From the perspective of grades, Student F did fine. She received satisfactory marks every year including third grade when the teacher recommended retention. Furthermore, her achievement test scores were all in the high average range. Student F's parents were surprised when retention was suggested in the second semester of third grade,

I was a little shocked at the time it was brought up to us at a parent/teacher conference and I wasn't expecting it though we knew she was having troubles and you know, I guess I just really never had any expectation that they would suggest that.

The teacher had also asked the building principal talk to the parents at that conference. The school's concern was not focused as much on academics as it was on maturity. The principal felt that the structure of the school (primary grades on one side of the building and intermediate grades on the other side) would help Student F handle the retention from a social perspective.

The experience of being retained was either the most traumatic for Student F as compared to the other students in the study, or she was simply the most emotionally expressive. She recalled that "[she] cried a lot." Explaining her feelings she said, "it wasn't being held back that made me mad, it was not being with my friends." She verbalized an understanding

now of why she had been retained, but indicated "I really didn't comprehend it was for my benefit until sixth grade." She stated, "for me it [the retention] was a good idea." She believes it helped her academically during the year of retention and later. She commented, "I comprehended it more, and I think I comprehend things more than most kids in my class now do because of being held back."

Despite her understanding of the benefits of having been retained, she also expressed a lot of emotional baggage from the retention, crying frequently during the interview. During fifth grade she seemed to have had the most painful feelings about the retention. She verbalized it this way, "fifth grade I got so mad at myself. I thought about it all the time. . .and I figured out that it was my fault that I got held back. That is when it hurt." Her pain seemed to stem from not understanding the why of her retention. When asked if she had been confused, she replied, "Yes, I was for a long time and I'm glad I talked to [a guidance counselor] because I know exactly why they did it."

Following the interview Student F did visit more with the counselor and her parents about how she had felt about the retention. Student F's father reported to the researcher that he and his wife felt that it had been a good process for her to work through the painful feelings that she still carried with her.

Student F - Analysis

- Student F was the most emotional of the students interviewed - a combination of her feelings about the retention, her personality, and her age.
- Not being with her friends was Student F's major concern during her repeat year.
- Not understanding why she was retained has been her long-term difficulty with the retention.
- Student F had not liked the first teacher and was much happier with her teacher for the repeat year.
- Student F has had good grades throughout her school career including the year she was retained. Her achievement test scores have always been in the above average range. Student F has the ability to continue to do well in school.
- Student F has had, and will continue to have, strong parental support to have confidence in herself and to do well in school.
- Student F gained increased understanding from the interview process and the steps she took as a result of being interviewed.
- Student F's parents believe being retained was a good decision and that it was beneficial for their daughter.

- Parents F support the concept of retention, but would not be accepting of retention at this point in their daughter's life.

Student G - Description

Student G was retained in third grade. He has been a student at the high school for three years. Student G has an older sister, a younger brother, and a younger sister. His parents are both employed by industries in the community.

Despite having completed his third year at the high school, Student G did not attain senior status because of excessive absenteeism and failing grades. Of the 70 credit hours he took during his junior year, he gained 30 hours of credit. During his entire high school career he has had only one semester where he gained full credit for the courses taken with a grade point average of 1.28 for that semester.

Student G referred to his third grade retention in fairly positive terms indicating that it had been okay. He was then able to be with his friends because, "everybody that I hung around with was in a grade below me." When questioned as to his maturity at that time and needing to have younger friends, Student G further explained, "Everybody in my neighborhood seemed to be a grade below me and they were my friends." When asked what kinds of problems he had been having in

school, he responded, "Nothing much, I wasn't getting along with the kids in my class."

His grades for the first year of third grade included "satisfactories with minuses" in arithmetic, social studies, and reading. In spelling and writing, Student G had "needs improvement." The third grade teacher had visited with Student G's mother about holding him back. When Student G's mother was asked how she felt about him being retained, her response was, "I was for it as soon as the teacher saw he needed more help." In regard to whether or not her child should have been retained, she further indicated that her son should have been retained because "he was not up to doing higher grade work and would have got lost."

Together, the third grade teacher and Parent G told Student G that he was going to be held back. Student G verbalized that his mother thought the retention "would be the best for me." He had the same teacher for the repeat year. When questioned if it was a good idea to have the same teacher again, he replied, "Yes." He did receive satisfactory grades in all content areas during the repeat of the third grade year. His mother indicated that "he didn't seem to mind" repeating and she thought he "tried harder." Parent G stated, "nothing," in response to what was the worst thing about the retention. She completely supported the concept of retention saying, "It helps

them to be equal as they are in the same level as the grade moving up."

Through the sixth grade Student G maintained average grades, but in seventh grade his marks began dropping and his grade point average in 7th and 8th grades was at the "D" level. On his Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in grades 3 - 8, Student G has scored consistently in the below average range in all subtest areas except math, where he scored in the average range. On the Cognitive Abilities Test that he took in fifth grade, Student G scored in the below average range also. The researcher was puzzled by the fact that Student G had never been referred for psychological evaluation.

Despite the level of his grades now, Student G's mother thought the retention helped him in later grades because, "he understands what he reads more." Parent G's thoughts about her son's retention are "good ones." When questioned about how she would feel if her son had to be retained now, she replied, "Okay. If that's what he needs, then it's what will be."

Student G also indicated that repeating a grade helped him at the time and later through school. His response to the question of whether retention is a good idea for students in general was, "Yes, if they are not doing too good." Student G stated, "not really," when questioned if he ever thought about

his retention and indicated that he was not uncomfortable talking about having been retained.

Student G - Analysis

- Student G has somewhat positive feelings about his own retention and a positive attitude toward the concept of retention.
- Parent G also positive feelings about her son's retention and a positive attitude about retention being beneficial to students.
- He repeated third grade with the same teacher, but that was good from Student G's perspective.
- Student G maintained satisfactory grades from the time of the repeat year through sixth grade. Since that time his grades have been on a downward spiral.
- It does not appear that the school system has provided much support for this student. It would seem that a psychological evaluation might have provided additional information about this student. Or, a "504 Plan" could have been developed to address his academic needs.
- Student G started school when he was five and a half years old. With the retention year added, he will be 18 1/2 years old when he returns to school in the fall. Given the number of credits he still must earn, Student G will be at least

20 years old before he could possibly graduate. That he will graduate seems unlikely.

Student H - Description

Student H will begin high school next year. He was retained in kindergarten. Student H is the youngest of three children. He has two older sisters. Both parents work for local businesses.

"It took a long time to feel good about myself" was Student H's comment regarding his retention in kindergarten. He reported being "angry and upset" at the time his mother told him that he was going to be held back. He indicated that while he was angry, his parents were not. When questioned as to his understanding of why he was to be retained, he responded, "as a punishment." He further stated, "well, I just didn't think it was fair." Student H also indicated that he and the teacher had not gotten along well.

In kindergarten Student H had satisfactory marks in social studies, science, and social adjustment. He needed to improve his grades in reading, language, arithmetic, and work/study habits. He also attended the Developmental Kindergarten class because he had been verified to receive special education services in speech and language. The kindergarten teacher recommended retention at the end of the

year because "another year in kindergarten might possibly help him develop his skills in fine motor, listening, and maturity."

Upon repeating kindergarten at the same school, he did receive satisfactory grades in all areas. When asked if he thought repeating kindergarten had helped him, he said, "not really. . . . I already knew what was being taught." He described "making new friends" as the worst thing about the retention, but indicated that "meeting new people" was the best thing about repeating.

When asked if he had had the same teacher for kindergarten again, Student H replied, "yes, I did." He was asked if he and the teacher got along better the second year and he replied, "a little, but not much." In actuality, Student H did not have the same teacher. Employment records from the school district verified that while he attended his second year of kindergarten in the same school, he had a new teacher.

Upon repeating kindergarten, Student H did receive satisfactory grades in all areas. In first grade, his marks were not as good with "needs improvement" in spelling, writing, and work/study habits, "satisfactory minus" in reading, and "satisfactory" in language, arithmetic, social studies, science, and social adjustment. He did, however, report more positive feelings about his first grade year and that he and the first grade teacher got along. In second and

third grades he received satisfactory marks in arithmetic, science, and social adjustment. All other areas were graded as "needs improvement." During the repeat year, first, and second grades, Student H had received minimal special education support since he qualified for services in speech only. In third grade when he was again evaluated, he qualified to receive additional special education services. Despite the assistance, his report card grades were below average in all areas during the remainder of elementary school.

During the first two years at middle school, Student H maintained a solid "C" average, but in eighth grade his grades dropped and he ended the year with "Ds" in all academic subjects. His achievement test scores throughout his school years place him in the bottom quartile which is consistent with his ability scores as measured by the Cognitive Ability Test.

When Student H was asked if he still thought about the retention now as an eighth grader, he said, "yes, I do." His reply to the question, "How do you feel when you think about the retention?" was again "angry and upset. . . it just wasn't fair." On the other hand, in regard to his feelings about school, he stated, "I like going to school" and declared, "I feel good about myself as a student." His teachers indicated that "Student H becomes frustrated with his school work if

appropriate modifications are not made. When he is feeling frustrated, he will avoid his assignments."

Student H further indicated that he "would really be upset" if he were to be retained again and that he "doesn't really think retention is a good idea" for any student. When questioned as to how he felt in answering the questions about retention, Student H said, "Better. I expressed my feelings." While Student H verbalized anger and expressed his feelings, he did so in a conversational manner and did not demonstrate his angry feelings in an aggressive manner.

Student H - Analysis

- Student H still carries a lot of negative feeling about his retention. He appears to have tied those feelings directly to the teacher who recommended retention. He was the only participant in the study who verbalized the perception of retention as a punishment.
- Student H demonstrates clearly that it is not so much what actually happened, but how it is perceived or remembered by the individual that is the critical issue. This is illustrated by his memory of having the same teacher for the repeat year, when in fact he did not have the same teacher. This error in his memory could represent simply that - an error in memory,

or could reflect deeper, unresolved feelings about his retention.

- Making new friends was the major negative at the time of retention.
- Student H's grades have not been strong throughout his school career. He will continue to struggle in school because of his ability level. Unless appropriate modifications are made at the high school level, there is a strong possibility that he will become very frustrated and drop out.

Student I - Description

Student I will begin middle school in the fall. He was held back in kindergarten. His parents are divorced and his father lives in another town. Student I has a younger sister.

Prior to beginning kindergarten, Student I participated in a kindergarten screening of readiness skills. He had difficulty with many of the tasks so the school recommended that he be evaluated by the school psychologist. While he did not qualify for special education services, the multidisciplinary team did recommend that he attend both kindergarten and developmental kindergarten as an "at-risk" student. Despite satisfactory marks in reading, language, social studies, and science and "needs improvement" grades in arithmetic and writing, it was recommended that he be retained in kindergarten. He repeated

kindergarten the following year with the same teacher and earned satisfactory grades in all areas, but he did not attend the DK program during his second year of kindergarten.

"It didn't really bother me at the time because I didn't really know what was going on," was Student I's response to how he felt about being retained. And he truly does not seem to remember much about it, even though his retention was in kindergarten and he just now completed the fifth grade. When he was asked who had told him he was going to be held back, he answered, "I don't remember." In regard to how his parents felt about the retention, he said, "I don't know." Student I stated, "I needed help," as to why he was retained. He was affirmative in his response to the retention helping him in later grades stating, "I guess I knew how to do things better." For Student I the good thing about not passing was, "I'm the oldest in the class and I knew some of the stuff ahead of the other kids." Student I answered "yes" to whether students should be retained. For Student I the worst thing about repeating a grade was, "I couldn't be with the kids I knew."

Student I's mother had been told by the teacher at parent/teacher conferences that she thought he should be retained. Parent I stated that her son was retained because "he didn't have the social skills the teacher thought he would need for the first grade. He kept to himself and didn't join

discussions." While Student I verbalized that he had not really been bothered by the retention, his mother felt that at the time "he seemed confused and disappointed." Mom shared that she had felt "guilty and confused."

When questioned whether her child should have been retained, Parent I said, "At the time, with the information I was given, it seemed like a good idea." She later emphatically stated, "I don't think there is a good thing about [Student I] being held back." She stated that the worst thing about her son being held back was " I feel I did irreversible damage to his self-esteem." Nor did she feel that the retention helped her son do better in following grades, " I really don't think it helped at all; however, it wasn't a 'hard' grade to repeat."

As previously indicated, Student I had been evaluated for special education services prior to kindergarten, but had not qualified. During first grade Student I was once again evaluated for special education services and was verified as having a learning disability. He has received special education services since that time. His grades have been in the low average range while he has been in the bottom quartile on his achievement test scores. Student I was re-evaluated by the school psychologist this past year and continues to qualify for special education services. The multidisciplinary team also

recommended medical evaluation in regard to attention problems.

His mother indicated that Student I presently "doesn't have a very high opinion of his academic abilities," yet Student I stated, "I think I am better," when he was asked how he felt about himself as a student now. In the opinion of the researcher, it would be very difficult for Student I to have a high opinion of his academic abilities given his grades in elementary school. However, Student I was accurate in his assessment that he is [doing] better in that his grades for this past school year were better than he had received in the last couple of years.

Student I responded, "No, I really can't remember it," when asked if he spent much time thinking about the retention now. However, Parent I indicated that she does think about the retention and feels "guilt and regret." She went on to explain, "He says he was never made fun of and I believe some of that, but it's followed him all the way through every grade. Sometimes I think it's 'branded' him."

Student I stated that he would feel "bad" if he were to be retained now. Parent I was more emphatic in her response, "I would never let it happen. There would have to be another option." Student I indicated that he felt "fine" answering the

retention questions. His mother replied, "Relieved, although I'm not sure why!"

Student I - Analysis

- Not being with friends was the most negative aspect of retention for Student I.
 - Student I had the same teacher for his repeat year, but that did not appear to be a problem for Student I or Parent I.
 - Student I has continued to have below average grades during his school career even with special education support since the first grade.
 - If Student I tries, he will do well at middle school.
- In philosophy, organization, and application, the middle level of schooling offers the greatest opportunity for student success.
- Parent I's concern about branding should be eliminated at the middle level. While Student I may well have been branded, it would be difficult to separate the cause of the branding from the retention and the labeling of special education. The reality of a small elementary school is that children's reputations and labels precede them.
 - Student I does not verbalize negatives about having been retained, other than not being with the kids he knew.

- Parent I's feelings and attitudes on retention are very negative perceiving no benefits to retention. Again the issue presents itself as to how to separate the retention from the special education verification in regard to Parent I's perception of her son's damaged self-esteem. And in spite of whatever the reality may be, it is Parent I's perception that is important.

Student J - Description

Student J will be a sophomore in high school in the fall. She was retained in second grade. Her father is employed at a local industry and her mother is a homemaker. She has one younger sister.

The second grade teacher recommended retention to Student J's mother. Student J stated that "my mother told me about it and they gave me the choice of whether or not to stay back." She indicated that she felt "okay about it" and that she "decided to repeat the grade because her best friend was also repeating."

Student J had begun kindergarten at age five with a July birthday, which made her younger than many of her classmates. She felt that her parents "started me too early in school." Student J's concern about being both the youngest and the smallest in her class was prevalent throughout the interview

in conjunction with the retention and her present perspective on herself as a student. She is one of the shortest girls at the high school.

While Student J did not mention grades as a reason for the retention, she did have "needs improvement" grades in reading, language, spelling, arithmetic, and work/study habits. Despite entering school somewhat younger than others, her social adjustment grades had been satisfactory. During the repeat year with the same teacher, she earned satisfactory grades in all areas.

Student J pointed to social adjustment, "making friends and fitting in with new kids," as the worst thing about repeating at the time. Despite the need to adjust, Student J indicated that it was a "good idea" that she repeated and in the end she "learned more and felt like I fitted in better because I was so little."

Student J believed that the retention helped her academically because "the class before thought of me as younger, and the new class just treated me better and I concentrated more." She maintained average grades during the remainder of her elementary years. Student J was referred by her fifth grade teacher for evaluation by the school psychologist. The teacher was concerned about Student J's distractibility and incompleteness of work. Student J was not

identified as needing special education services. For the three years at middle school, she had a "B+" grade point average. At the end of her freshman year she has a "C" average, but lost five credits when she failed the second semester of Spanish I.

Student J had above average scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test taken in fifth grade, but her achievement test scores were below average to average in grades 3 - 7. Her strongest achievement scores were in grade 8 with all scores being in the average to above average range.

When questioned if she had confidence in herself as a student now, Student J responded, "Yes, I like it a lot better being with my own age group. Before I was the youngest and shortest." Student J thinks that retention has benefits for students depending "if they want it or not. I think they should have a choice." If she were asked to repeat a grade in high school, Student J isn't certain how she would feel, "I don't know how I would feel about that because it would be different, but I would probably adapt."

Student J said that she doesn't think much about her own retention, but does think about an issue that was related to the retention stating, "I don't really think about repeating the grade, I think more about the teacher because she was my worst teacher." Student J stated, "the teacher and I didn't get along." She further stated, "I later found out that the teacher

got fired for abuse." In the opinion of the researcher, it is evident that this teacher stands out negatively in Student J's memory.

After this interview the researcher visited with the principal of the elementary school that Student J attended. The principal was "astounded" when questioned about the teacher being fired for abuse. She stated,

There were never any abuse charges against this teacher. She was not fired. She did retire a few years later. She was not the most warm and caring type person. She was all business and that did cause some concern with some parents. But no, nothing as extreme as what you are asking.

The researcher is certain that Student J believed what she said about the teacher to be true, but the researcher believes what the principal had to say to be the accurate version.

In the researcher's opinion, Student J wanted to impress the researcher and this was not a feeling that was felt with any of the other students who participated in the interviews. As previously pointed out, she had not mentioned her grades or academics at all in reference to her being held back or in regard to later benefits of the retention. This may simply be the way she remembers it or it may reflect the researcher's feeling that Student J wanted to impress. Further, she was the

only student who did not respond in a completely negative manner about retention in the present, stating "I would probably adapt." In response to being asked if she was uncomfortable talking about the retention, she said, "No, I am a very open person." Also, Student J's body language, voice tone, and facial expression contributed to this impression. While this student verbalized confidence in herself, she seemed more like an insecure person "acting confident," so she may well have been trying to be impressive to herself.

Student J - Analysis

- Student J was young when she entered kindergarten.
- Student J stated that she was given the choice of repeating or not.
 - Student J verbalized only positive feelings about her retention experience, but her responses referred only to the fact of no longer being the youngest and fitting in better. She did not address school work at any time.
 - Student J pointed out the issue of making new friends as one of the difficulties of being retained. In her case, it seemed to become one of the benefits of being retained as she became more comfortable.
 - Not liking the second grade teacher was a major issue, but Student J chose to repeat the year with the same teacher.

- Student J's attitude toward retention is positive if the student has the choice.
- Student J has done well academically in the years following her retention.

Student K - Description

Student K just completed the ninth grade. He was held back in first grade. His parents are divorced and he lives with his mother who is employed at an industrial plant. He has one younger brother.

Upon meeting Student K, one might assume that he doesn't have a care in the world. He smiles a lot and makes good eye contact. He gives the appearance of being relaxed and comfortable. In the interview his attitude was one of "hey, I was retained - these things happen, but it is done now - no big deal." He did not remember who had told him he was going to repeat the first grade. He did recall that his parents supported the decision, "They thought it would be better for me."

When asked how he had felt about it, he replied, "I really didn't care. I moved to a different school." He further verbalized that he thought it had been a good idea for him because he hadn't "liked the first teacher" because "she was a disciplinarian teacher and would pull your arm when you did something wrong."

Shortly after Student K began kindergarten, the teacher recommended evaluation for learning problems. He qualified for special education services and began attending the DK program in addition to his regular kindergarten session. He received satisfactory grades in all subject areas. In grade 1 he had "needs improvement" grades in reading, spelling, arithmetic, and writing. While Student K was absent only once during the year, he was tardy 23 times. Because the amount of time for each tardy is not recorded, it is difficult to tell if the tardies represent a meaningful amount of lost school time.

He repeated the first grade with a new teacher at a different school. Student K indicated that there were no problems with changing schools and making new friends. He earned all satisfactory grades for that year. Regarding the teacher for the repeat year, student K stated, "I liked her." He thought the retention had been good for him because "I didn't learn anything the first time. Student K felt that retention could be good for other students depending "on what age." From his perspective it was critical that it be in the "lower grades."

Student K's grades were satisfactory during the remainder of his elementary years. He did receive a minor amount of special education help up to the middle of his third grade year. He was re-evaluated at this time and no longer qualified for the services. All of Student K's ITBS scores were

stable in the average to above average range in grades 3 - 8. In middle school he had average and above average grades for all three years. As a freshman he had a "C" average for the first semester, but his second semester grades fell to a "D" average.

Student K stated that he feels "pretty good" about himself as a student now. He indicated that he doesn't really think much about the retention explaining, "the only time I think about it now is because I'm 16 and have a car and the other freshman don't." He says he has "only positive feelings" about his first grade retention. He would not be so positive about a retention now saying, "Can I buy a gun? I really didn't care back then." The words alone of Student K's response of "Can I buy a gun?" present a far more negative impression than that which was evident in person. Student K is often the "clown" in the classroom from the researcher's observations. Thus, in the opinion of the researcher, Student K wanted to express his displeasure with the concept of a second retention, but a literal reading of his words would not be appropriate.

Student K - Analysis

- Student K verbalizes no pain from his experience of retention, perceiving it as a benefit to him.
- Student K did not like the first grade teacher.

- Student K had a different teacher for his repeat year and he liked her.
- From the time of his retention until his freshman year, Student K had been doing well academically.
- Student K's attitude about retention for other students is positive if the retention is done at the early elementary level.

Student L - Description

Student L repeated the second grade and is now preparing to start high school. His parents are divorced and he lives with his mother. He is an only child. Student L's mother is employed at a local manufacturing plant.

Student L appeared to have struggled academically in kindergarten getting "needs improvement" grades in reading, language, spelling, writing, and citizenship. In first grade he received all satisfactory marks, although the first grade teacher had made a referral to the school psychologist for evaluation of possible learning problems. The teacher had noted that Student L was "having a great deal of trouble with first grade work." She also indicated that student L "was distractible." The evaluation did not indicate a need for special education services.

His grades in second grade were a duplicate of the marks from kindergarten with "needs to improve" in reading, language, spelling, writing, and citizenship. Student L indicated that the retention was his mother's idea, "she was the one who suggested it to my teacher." When asked why he thought he had been held back, Student L said, "It was, I think it was writing and my math." The researcher was curious about this response because the first grade teacher had indicated that math skills were a strength, and the second grade teacher had graded math as satisfactory. Perhaps that is the student's memory of the difficulty in second grade, but it is interesting to note that at the time of the interview Student L was failing math after a history of average to above average grades in math. And Student L did pull up his math grade to a "C" by the end of the grading period.

Student L stated that the bad things about retention were that "all of my friends got to go ahead. I had to meet all new kids." When questioned about being teased by other students because he had been retained, he indicated that it hadn't been a problem because "I went to a different school and teacher." Student L repeated the second grade with all satisfactory grades. He had satisfactory grades again in the third grade. Since fourth grade he has maintained "B" and "C" averages in his classes. Likewise his achievement test scores have been

consistently in the average range throughout the years of testing in grades 3 - 8.

While Student L indicated that the retention had been a "good idea" and that it helped in the school years that have followed, he also shared that "two of my cousins were in my grade and I wanted to graduate with them. So that bothers me." And he stated that he "would be mad" if someone wanted to retain him at middle school. Student L indicated that he thought repeating a grade was helpful to students. While he indicated that he was not uncomfortable talking about the retention, Student L is a quiet and reserved young man. He was cordial and did appear to be comfortable, but he was not very talkative.

Student L - Analysis

- Retention was at parent's request.
- The worst thing about the retention was that all of Student L's friends went ahead and he had to make all new friends.
- Student L was not negative about the fact of being retained, but would have liked to graduate on schedule with his cousins. He may have some "retention pains" when his cousins graduate.

- Student L had a different teacher for the repeat year because he went to a different school for his repeat year. Student L did not indicate any difficulties with either teacher.
- Student L's attitude is that retention can be helpful to students.
- Student L has done very well academically since his year of retention.

Student M - Description

Student M was retained in kindergarten. He has one younger brother. He and his brother have been in the same grade since Student M's retention. Student M's parents are divorced and his mother has remarried. Through this marriage Student M gained three older step-brothers. Both mother and step-father are employed by local industries.

Student M has just completed his first year in high school. He did not participate in any extra-curricular activities. He is a loner and not part of the mainstream of the high school. In the opinion of the researcher, Student M would not have agreed to participate in the interview with someone he didn't know. Student M already knew the researcher from when he had been a middle school student.

When Student M began kindergarten he was five years and seven months old. He was absent 11 days of school and had

"needs improvement" grades in reading, arithmetic, and writing. No grades were given for work/study habits or social adjustment. Language, spelling, science, and social studies were rated satisfactory. According to Parent M, "the kindergarten teacher, counselor, and principal held a meeting with me" and the school recommended the retention. Parent M stated, "I had mixed emotions [about the retention] - but I knew that it would be best for him."

When Student M was asked about how he found out he was going to be retained, he indicated that he "couldn't remember," but said, "I think they told me in school." When Student M was asked if being held back made him feel bad about himself, he replied, "No, but it was hard at first, but it got better." Parent M also indicated that she saw the need to retain her son because,

His father and I were going through a 'bad' divorce and his father had major drinking problems. [My son] withdrew into himself and wouldn't participate in class and he didn't feel comfortable around strangers.

During his second year of kindergarten with the same teacher, Student M was absent 13 days of school, but he received satisfactory grades in all content areas. Student M's memory was that school was "easier" for him the second year, but more difficult for his mother because, "she didn't like the extra

running around because I was going to a different school in the afternoon to catch up." The different school in the afternoon refers to Student M's participation in the developmental kindergarten program. When asked how her son felt about repeating kindergarten, Parent M explained,

At the time and even up till he was about 12, he thought he was stupid and it wasn't until he understood then he accepted that it was our family problems at the time that affected him that he got over being so hard on himself.

Student M stated in a positive manner, "Repeating wasn't that bad and I didn't really care because I was in the same grade as my brother." In contrast to his view, when Parent M was questioned about the worst thing about the retention, she indicated that it was having her sons in the same grade. She explained that there was a disadvantage to "having another child one year younger so then they both ended up in the same class. At times we had a lot of competition and tattling."

From the perspective of the retention being a help to him, Student M stated, "not really, I was stuck with younger kids." And again his response was "not really," to the retention being a help to him in later grades. His mother disagrees with Student M's interpretation of the benefits. She believes it was a good idea and the retention gave him "an extra year to become more comfortable with people - [Student M] started to

feel better about himself." Parent M also saw the retention as a help in later grades and said, "It made it a little easier for him to open up and try different things instead of standing in a corner and watching." Further, Student M's mom indicated that when she now thinks about the retention, she has good feelings "because I knew [Student M] needed this extra time to adjust emotionally."

Through the primary grades Student M made satisfactory grades in all areas. In grades 4 - 7 he maintained a "B" average and a "C" average in eighth grade. His achievement test scores through his elementary and middle years have been in the average to high average range on all subtest areas. He has for many years demonstrated that he is a capable student. When questioned about liking school, Student M said, "yes, but some of the classes are boring like science and computers. He was also asked if he was a good student. He replied, "okay, but some of the classes I don't put a lot of effort into." When his mother was asked how she thinks he feels about himself as a student, she replied, "At times I think he still thinks he's not as 'smart' as other kids, but overall he has adjusted well. And when he wants to do well, he is fully capable of doing so."

As a freshman in high school Student M appeared to have chosen not to do well. He earned only 35 credits for the year due to failing grades in seven of his semester classes. These

are the classes that he talked about as not putting a lot of effort into, because there is nothing to indicate that he was deficient in ability or skills for these classes and, in essence, he has created his own second retention. The researcher observed Student M in his study hall on several occasions. During only one observation was Student M doing school work. On three occasions he was sleeping and one time he was observed reading a car magazine.

Student M had indicated that while his kindergarten retention "isn't something I think about," retention in high school would not be acceptable to him. His option was, "I'll go to summer school." Student M is not completely in favor of retention stating, "It really depends on the kids. They ought to talk to the kids about it first." Student M's mother had indicated that she didn't think a retention now would be good for her son, "At his age now, 16, with peer pressure and all, he would probably quit school. He embarrasses easily." Since at the high school level students are not actually retained in grade, hopefully Student M will continue in school.

Student M - Analysis

- While Student M does not really have negative feelings about his retention, he does not see that there were any benefits.

- Student M repeated kindergarten with the same teacher, but this was not a problem to him or his mother.
- Student M's attitude about retention is that the students should be involved in the decision.
- Student M has had good grades and test scores following his retention until his freshman year in high school.
- Student M will very likely not finish high school, but his retention in kindergarten does not appear to be a direct link to whether or not Student M completes his schooling. However, as previously pointed out, while there does not appear to be a direct link, the research shows that the fact of having been retained does increase the probability of dropping out.
- While Student M attended high school this past year, he has in many ways already "dropped out."
- Parent M supports the concept of retention and feels that it was a beneficial experience for her son.
- As Parent M pointed out, there were family problems that contributed to the decision to retain.

Student N - Description

Student N will be a junior in high school in the fall. He has an easy going manner and appears to get along well with others. He repeated the second grade. Student N has both a

younger brother and an older brother. His father works construction and his mother is a homemaker.

Student N began his school career successfully making satisfactory grades in all areas in kindergarten and first grade. During the second semester of second grade his teacher requested an evaluation for special education services because he was "having trouble with vocabulary and spelling." The evaluation showed that Student N had above average ability with significant discrepancies in achievement. He therefore qualified for special education services as a student with a learning disability. Additionally, the Individual Education Plan (I.E.P) team recommended that Student N repeat the second grade.

Student N verbalized very little interest and/or feeling about his retention, indicating that it was "fine" that he had been retained, and that "yes" he should have been retained, and that "yeah" it was a good idea. He was unable to recall who it was that told him he was being held back beyond the fact that "some guy came and talked [to me]." Through discussion with the researcher, he determined that probably "he was a counselor." He thought he had been retained because "I was bad at spelling." While he was not especially talkative, Student N appeared to be comfortable and was seated in a

relaxed body position. He also did a lot of smiling and nodding throughout the interview.

During the repeat of second grade Student N had all satisfactory grades. He indicated that the worst thing about the repeat year was "a little bit of teasing," but the good part was that he "made new friends and better grades." His opinion was that repeating was a good thing for him. In third grade Student N had satisfactory grades in all areas. Grades of "C" and "D" were earned in grades four and five, but he maintained a strong 'C+' average during his middle school years. High school grades have been less consistent, varying from "A" to "F" but maintaining a "C+" grade point average. Student N takes all regular education classes. His study hall is in the resource room. In his first semester of tenth grade he had the lowest grades of his school career followed up by the highest grades of his school career in the second semester. It was during this most successful semester that Student N was interviewed about his retention.

Student N's achievement test scores have been stable over the years, but also reflect his learning disability such that he scores well above average in some areas while scoring below average in language subtests. His strength areas are math and science, and Student N plans to gain skills in computer

technology. At this time he is uncertain about his educational plans after high school.

Student N believes the retention was a good idea for him and that it did help him, stating "[it] seems like I need to be in this grade." However, regarding retention now, he stated, "I wouldn't want to now." Student N felt that it "depends on the kid" as far as retention being beneficial in general. When asked if he thought much about the retention now, he said, "No, but my older brother does. It wasn't good for him and he really hated it." Only one other student in the sample group had a sibling who had been retained. Neither of their siblings were retained during the established study group years, so the researcher did not pursue further information on their retentions.

Student N - Analysis

- Student N gives the appearance of being comfortable with himself and not carrying any emotional scars from his retention.
- Student N has maintained solid grades since his repeat year.
- Student N had a different teacher for his repeat year since he was at a double track school. Student N did not have any difficulties with his teacher.

- Student N's attitude on retention being beneficial for other students is that it will depend on the student. He has had the opportunity to gain this perception from his own first hand experience at home.

Student O - Description

Student O has just finished the seventh grade. He was retained in first grade. His father is self-employed and mother is a homemaker who works part time at her children's school. Student O has an older half-brother from mother's previous marriage. He also has three younger brothers and a younger sister.

Student O stated that he "did not remember very much about the retention." He indicated that he did not remember who told him about the retention, but did recall that his mom "thought it was a good idea." His feeling on the retention was "I really didn't care," and his understanding of why he was held back was "cause I was really little and younger." He did recall that he "made some new friends."

Student O's mom felt that the retention was a good idea, "we thought it was for his best interest that he was retained. We didn't see anything wrong with it and we thought he needed to be." Her concern was that perhaps her son should have been

retained after kindergarten instead of repeating the first grade,

The only thing is that it should have been done earlier. I think he should have repeated kindergarten and not waited till. . . . Looking back I saw the problems that maybe he should have repeated kindergarten and prevented some of the first grade problems. That might have helped.

Student O did not turn five years old until after he had been in kindergarten for almost two months. Student O's mother expressed concern that he may well have been too young to begin school when he did despite what school staff had suggested,

He was an early, he was ah four and turned five after he started school, so and I think that might have been a mistake. . . . They had that kindergarten testing and they said yes you have lots of kids at home, he might not get as much help as he, you know as if he would have started. So go ahead and start him and it might have been the wrong choice. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Student O's grades in first grade were all satisfactory except in reading and writing where he received "needs improvement" grades. His grades during the second year of first grade were the same except writing had improved and spelling needed improvement. Student O remarked that first

grade "was easier" the second time. In response to the question of how the repeat year helped her son, Parent O said, " It did help him because I think he would have really been struggling had he not repeated and got that basics." Her response to what was the worst thing about the retention was, "I really don't think there was, there wasn't, we didn't have a bad experience."

Since fourth grade when he started receiving letter grades, he has been getting predominantly "Cs" and "Ds" in the academic subjects. His achievement test scores consistently place him in the bottom quartile compared to other students at his grade level. Parent O recognized that her son would always struggle in school saying, "He was always borderline low. He is kind of a daydreamer and not a really ambitious student so that has always been part of his problem." Thus, she perceived the retention as a help, but not a fix, stating, "It did help, but didn't completely solve the problem, but I think it would have been worse if we wouldn't [have held him back]."

Student O's mother didn't think being retained "bothered her son," and thought that he was "more comfortable with the kids of his own age." She did point out a side issue to the retention outside of school,

It did not seem to bother him. Not that he let us know.

The only problem being that in church we did not retain him so he has always been in two peer groups so to speak.

It never seemed to be a big problem, but it did kind of make the situation noticeable. So I might have changed that if I had to do it again.

Student O was cooperative, but rather hesitant during the interview. He appeared to be unsure of himself. Parent O spoke about her son's lack of confidence in himself saying,

He has really low self-esteem and he does have problems with that and he is kind of a loner, but I don't think he ever associates it with having to repeat a grade or anything. That has really never, never come up. He has never said anything that it bothered or why did you let them do that to me or any of those kinds of things.

Student O responded affirmatively that it was a good idea as he looks back upon it now, but his response to the possibility of retention now was a very clear "no." Likewise, his mother would have concerns about retention at this age saying, "I don't know. I guess I wouldn't totally be against it, but I would probably really see if there was other alternatives to do it or maybe tutoring before I would say. It would be a big decision now."

Student O - Analysis

- From the perspective of Parent O, Student O was not ready to begin school when he did and the retention put him

with a more appropriate age group, as well as providing a better foundation of skills. However, there is no way to measure this against how he might have done if he had not been retained.

- Student O did not have the same teacher for his repeat year, but indicated that "it didn't matter" in regard to the teacher.

- Student O perceives his retention as beneficial.

- Student O has maintained average and below average grades since his repeat year. School will continue to be hard for him because of his ability level.

- Parent O believes the retention helped her son and supports the concept of retention.

- Parent O has a good understanding of her child's capabilities and did not expect the retention to fix everything.

- Parent O brought out an issue that is not often pointed out: Retention of a child has implications for other aspects of a child's life outside of school.

- Because of the time Parent O spends at school, she has opportunities to see and work with a lot of children and teachers. This offers her a perspective that most parents do not have available to them. In her particular case, the association with the school seems to support her faith in the school and the teachers making the right decisions.

Student P - Description

Student P was retained in kindergarten. He has now completed the sixth grade. Student P has two older sisters. His parents were divorced when he was very young. His mother remarried and Student P was recently adopted by his step-father. His mother works in a retail store office.

Student P participated in the developmental kindergarten program during his first year in kindergarten since he had been verified for special education services at the end of the first semester. While he received satisfactory grades in language, arithmetic, social studies, and science, he needed to improve in reading and writing.

The kindergarten teacher had brought up the possibility of retention at parent/teacher conferences explaining that Student P "was having trouble with reading." Student P's mother supported the kindergarten teacher's recommendation to retain her son. She indicated that she felt that the school had her son's best interests in mind, stating, "I listened to the teachers. I thought they were doing what they thought best."

He completed his second year of kindergarten at the same school with the same teacher and earned satisfactory marks in all areas. He did not participate in the DK Program during his second year of kindergarten, but did receive special education

services in the area of speech and language. By the end of the year he no longer qualified for special education services.

While in first and second grades he received satisfactory marks in all areas except reading, his mother requested that he be evaluated again for special education services. He did again qualify for services and received support during second, third, and fourth grades and some of fifth grade. When he was re-evaluated in fifth grade, he no longer qualified for services. Student P's grades in second and third grade were satisfactory and he maintained a "B" average in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. His achievement test scores over the years have all been below average.

When Student P was asked if he remembered having trouble in school, he replied, "I don't know," and declared, "Yes" when asked if he is a good student now. He believes that the retention was "good" for him. Student P was asked if he thought much about his retention, and he replied, "I have thought about it, but it doesn't bother me." As to the possibility of retention now, he stated, "I don't think I would like it now."

Student P exudes energy, confidence, and friendliness with lots of smiles, flashing eyes, and a positive voice tone. His mother describes him as "a really neat kid." He is smaller than most sixth graders, but his sisters and mother are also

petite. He uses his size to his advantage in his favorite sport, gymnastics.

Based on the researcher's observation of Student P at school, he appears to be popular with other students. Notations made by the kindergarten teacher indicate that Student P was popular with classmates from an early age. She had written, "Liked by peers and gets along well with others." Likewise, having friends appeared to be very important to Student P. When asked how he had felt about the retention, Student P said, "I don't remember. It didn't really bother me that much because I had a lot of friends and I made new friends. I like my new friends even more now."

Parent P still believes it was a good idea and that it helped her son along the way, "he got another year and a good foundation with his skills" and that she "didn't think repeating had bothered him." When questioned if he should have been retained, she pointed out that Student P "has always had trouble in school." Parent P's response to the question as to how her son feels about himself as a student now was, "He has to work hard, but his self-concept is good." When questioned if would retain Student P now if the school recommended it, she replied, "I would really have to think about it now."

Student P - Analysis

- Student P appears to have no lingering negative feelings or attitudes about his retention.
- His attitude is that retention is beneficial.
- Student P has maintained solid grades since his repeat year, but school will not be easy for him and he could qualify again for special education services if his achievement levels decline.
- Student P's personality is one of his major strengths.
- Parent P has positive feelings about her son's retention. She supports the concept of retention.
- Student P has had, and will continue to have, strong parental support to have confidence in himself and to do his best in school.

Student Q - Description

Student Q repeated kindergarten. He has now completed the sixth grade. At the time of the retention, Student Q lived with his mother and a younger sister. Since that time, Parent Q has remarried. Mother is employed at a manufacturing plant.

Student Q's mother requested that the school hold him back in kindergarten because she didn't think "he was mature enough for school." He had started kindergarten just two weeks after becoming five years old. He was referred by the

kindergarten teacher in October for evaluation to determine if there were learning problems. While he did not qualify at that time for special education services, he did qualify and received services in grades 2, 3, and 4. Upon re-evaluation in grade 5, Student Q no longer qualified to receive services.

During the first year of kindergarten, Student Q had received "needs improvement" grades in reading, spelling, arithmetic, and writing. He received all satisfactory grades during the repeat year. The family moved at the end of the first year of kindergarten so Student Q had a new teacher and a new school for the repeat year. Parent Q indicated that she did not think that repeating kindergarten "bothered" her son.

In grade one, Student Q had "needs improvement" grades in reading and math, satisfactory grades in all other areas. In grades 2, 3, and 4, his grades were in the average range. In 5th grade his grades were stronger with a "C+" average, and he held on to the "C" average during 6th grade. Likewise, Student Q's achievement test scores have remained stable throughout his school years with the scores being in the low average range.

Parent Q doesn't feel that the retention helped her son. When asked why being retained didn't help her child in the following grades, her response was, "He doesn't seem to have any interest in doing good in school." Yet, Parent Q also stated affirmatively that it was a good idea to retain her son and that

he should have been retained. She further indicated that she does not think about the retention now, but when she does her feelings are "the same as I felt at the time."

Student Q stated that he thought repeating "helped" him and that he thought it was a good idea. He indicated that his mom had talked to him about staying back before she talked to his teacher. When asked why his mom had wanted him to repeat, he responded, "I needed help and I went to a resource room." He indicated that he doesn't think about the retention now that he is older.

While Student Q was not directly uncooperative, he seemed to be having trouble staying focused on the interview. His body language, facial expressions, and manner of speaking seemed to be saying that he was not particularly interested in this activity and needed to get going. A few of his responses did not seem to go with the questions or he passed on the question. For example, he was asked if it was hard to meet new friends when he repeated kindergarten and his response was "at first it was hard in second grade," and when asked what was the worst thing about repeating, he replied, "I can't drive my car." He has been described by school staff as impulsive, distractible, and hyper-active, so his behavior in the interview was not atypical. Further, Student Q's physician

has prescribed medication for suspected "Tourette's Syndrome."

In terms of a future retention, both Student Q's and his mother's attitudes were negative. Student Q stated, "I wouldn't like it." His mother said simply, "not good." She had previously mentioned that she didn't think it was a good idea to keep students in the same grade, "especially not in later years." Student Q indicated that he "kind of" likes school, but did not respond to the question of how he feels about himself as a student. Parent Q's thought was that as a student her son "needed a lot of guidance and reassurance"

Student Q - Analysis

- Student Q verbalized positive feelings about the benefits of retention.
- Student Q may well have started school before he was developmentally ready, but a repeat of kindergarten was not the cure for all of his academic difficulties. With support he has made satisfactory grades since his repeat year. While he should continue to do all right at middle school, he will probably have a tough time being successful at the high school level. As his mother pointed out, he needs "guidance and assurance" which is integral to the middle level philosophy, but not a given at the high school level.

- Parent Q requested retention.
- Parent Q verbalized fairly positive feelings about her son repeating kindergarten, but does not perceive long-term benefits from the retention.

Student R - Description

Student R will be an eighth grade student in the fall. He repeated the first grade. Student R lives with his mother, step-father, and younger sister. His mother is employed at a retail store.

Student R had difficulty in kindergarten particularly with auditory learning. He suffered from frequent ear infections and fluid in both ears. According to notations of the kindergarten teacher, she met with Student R's mother in the fall of the school year and discussed Student R's school difficulties. She requested that his mother work with him at home and provided her with reinforcement materials. A couple of months later the teacher visited with the mother again, and at that time Student R's mother indicated that she just didn't have time to work with him. The kindergarten teacher's notes also included her concerns about the amount of time that Student R spent at daycare. At the time Student R's mother was a single parent with two children.

The teacher also requested an evaluation for special education services, but Student R did not qualify for services since his achievement scores were commensurate with his ability level. His kindergarten grades were satisfactory in all areas except reading and arithmetic which needed improvement. Student R was tardy ten days and absent 12 days during kindergarten. At the end of the school year school staff met with Student R's mother again and it was decided that he would begin first grade in the fall, but basic academics would be supplemented in the kindergarten if necessary.

Student R's first grade marks were the same as in kindergarten except that the teacher indicated that he also needed to improve in his work/study habits. Student R indicated that he knew he was having "trouble in reading." Attendance was not a problem in first grade. The decision was made by the school and parent to hold him back. Parent R indicated that her feeling at the time was that "the retention was fine if it were in the best interests of her child." She further pointed out that it was a good idea "because he wasn't able to keep up with the work." Student R was unable to recall who had talked to him about repeating first grade, but did remember that his mother "thought it was a good idea." He repeated first grade at the same school with a different teacher the following year and earned all satisfactory grades.

Student R was asked, "Can you remember anything that you did not like about doing it?" His reply was, "I can remember going back to kindergarten." Student R's mother reported that her son "had not felt good" about repeating. While she believes it was a good decision "because it gave him time to mature a little more and hopefully understand things better," she stated that the worst thing about the retention was "dealing with my son." She went on to point out, "It is still hard on him now. He has a hard time understanding it."

Student R maintained satisfactory grades through his elementary school years. At the end of fifth grade Student R's mother requested that her son be evaluated again in preparation for his entrance to the middle school. She had indicated concerns about Student R's "poor study habits, failure to study, and indifferent attitude." The testing yielded the same results as the previous evaluation. For the first semester Student R had a "C" average, but second semester his grades began to fall. The sixth grade teachers met with Student R and his mother to develop a "Section 504 Plan" to address the academic difficulties. During the summer he was evaluated for Attention Deficit Disorder, but it was determined not to be present.

A "Section 504 Plan" was again developed at the start of school to provide support in the seventh grade. His grades for

the first semester were average. For the second semester he had "D" and "F" grades. Student R stated in his interview conducted during the second semester, "I'm not doing so good this year." When asked what the problem was, he replied, "Some of it is hard. I ask for help, but the teachers holler at me so I don't ask anymore."

While Student R was pleasant to visit with in the interview, he seemed to have difficulty answering questions about his own retention. He had indicated that he was not uncomfortable with the interview process, but when the researcher said, "You don't remember a lot about the retention," he responded, "No, I don't." Student R indicated that it was a "good idea" for him to repeat the first grade. He went on further to declare, "I think that when you are little it is good because you don't remember." For students who are not little, Student R said, "I think that summer school is better than repeating a grade."

Parent R supports the concept of retention "depending on the child, the situation, and the time." She believes that she "made the right decision" in retaining her son. She explained that retaining her son "made us sit back and realize that we needed to work harder." Regarding her son as a student now, Parent R stated, "[My son] still struggles a lot with school, but each year is getting better. He knows that school is difficult

for him," but she feels that retention now "would probably hurt him." She indicated that she would worry now because she doesn't "know if he would go on."

Student R - Analysis

- Student R genuinely does not remember, or does not want to remember much about his retention. There is no way to verify if was due to his age, or if he made a conscious or unconscious decision not to remember. Based on his mother's responses, it would appear that he does not want to remember.
- Student R did not verbalize hurt or angry feelings, but there are indications from his nonresponsiveness and his mother's answers that he does have bad feelings about his retention.
- Parent R believes it was good that her son was retained, but would have concerns with retention now.
- Compared to the general entry age for kindergarten in Columbus, Student R was young when he began school.
- The additional year of school did not solve Student R's learning difficulties, but that did not seem to be expected by the parent.
- Student R does not appear to have had a lot of home support with his school work.

- Student R is definitely an at-risk student. He will need a great deal of support both at home and at school over the next few years to be successful.

Student S - Description

Student S will be a freshman in high school in the fall. He was held back in the second grade. He has an older sister who no longer lives at home. Student S lives with his mother, step-father, and two younger step-brothers. His mother works at a manufacturing plant.

Student S had received satisfactory grades in all subjects during kindergarten, but in the spring of the year the kindergarten teacher recommended to Student S's mother that he be held back "to give further time for maturation and gain more foundational pre-academic skills." He had not turned five years old until he had been in kindergarten a few weeks. In conjunction with this recommendation to retain, the teacher recommended that Student S be evaluated by the school psychologist. He was evaluated and found not to qualify for special education services.

His parents chose not to retain, and Student S attended first grade the following year. In the fall he was evaluated by the speech therapist and qualified to receive speech/language services due to delays in language development. He received

all satisfactory grades in first grade, but in the spring the teacher requested evaluation by the school psychologist again. The teacher had indicated that Student R was " a slow worker with a short attention span and needed close supervision to work." The results of the evaluation did not qualify him for any additional special education services.

In second grade he only had satisfactory grades in science and social studies with "needs improvement" marks in all other areas. He missed 15.5 days of school in second grade, and had been absent for ten days in both the kindergarten and first grade years. Student S indicated that his teacher told him he was going to repeat the second grade. As to why he was held back, Student S said, "I couldn't keep up with the writing skills." When asked how his mother had felt about him being held back, he replied, "It didn't bother her." He pointed out that he "didn't like the second grade teacher" he had his first year, but did like the second grade teacher he had during the repeat year.

According to Student S, he "switched schools" at the time of the repeat year because his family moved. He indicated that the worst thing about the retention was that he "had to meet all new people." For the repeat year of second grade he earned all satisfactory marks, but did miss nine days of school that year. Student S spoke in positive terms about the retention

indicating that "it didn't bother me because of my age." He stated that it had helped him and the best thing about the retention was "getting ahead of everybody." Student S received satisfactory and above average grades through the rest of elementary school. While Student S only attended two schools during his elementary years, he switched back and forth between the two schools four times. Student S continued to earn average and above average grades during his middle school years. His Iowa Tests of Basic Skills scores from third grade through eighth grade have been in the average to above average range.

During a school observation of Student S, the researcher noted that Student S has a disheveled appearance, moves slowly, and has trouble keeping his school work organized. In the opinion of a middle school staff member who has worked with Student S and his mother, Student S "acts immature compared to his classmates." The staff member feels that Student S's mother contributes to lack of maturity by "not allowing Student S to make any decisions on his own."

During the interview he appeared to be comfortable with the questions. In response to how he feels about himself as a student now, he said, "pretty good." He indicated that he thought it did help him to repeat and that he "was glad he did it," but in regard to retention for other students, his comment

was, "It depends on what kind of trouble they are having." He indicated he was comfortable talking about his second grade retention, but if someone told him he had to repeat now, he "would be mad."

Student S - Analysis

- Student S was young when he began kindergarten.
- Student S has done very well academically since his retention.
- Student S does not appear to have emotional scars from his retention experience and has only positives to say about the long-term benefits.
- Student S did not like his first teacher for second grade.
- In spite of being a year older than his classmates, Student S does appear to be younger and does not seem to fit in socially with many of his classmates.

Student T - Description

Student T has attended high school for one year. He was retained in the second grade. Student T has a younger sister. His parents own and run their own business.

Student T began his school career in the school system. His kindergarten grades indicate that he was having difficulty

in reading, spelling, math, and writing. He then attended another school system for first grade. That school system recommended retention in the first grade. The first grade teacher had noted that Student T was "immature, easily distracted, and had a short attention span." His parents requested a psychological evaluation to assist them in determining Student T's educational placement. He did not qualify for special education services and his parents returned him to the school system for second grade.

Second grade was an academic struggle and Student T received "needs improvement" grades in all subject areas. Student T's teacher referred him for evaluation during the second semester of second grade. Once again he did not qualify for special education services and the school recommended retention in the second grade. The second grade teacher had indicated that Student T "lacked reading skills and had difficulty under timed pressure." This time his parents agreed with the retention recommendation. Student T stated that his "parents told him he was being retained," but that his teacher also talked to him about it. Student T was the only student to indicate that his parents had been angry with him because of the retention. When asked how he had felt about being held back, his response was "disappointed." His response to the question of why he thought he had been held back was, "I had

tonsillitis and I missed a lot of school and not too good at reading." He did in fact miss 8.5 days of school in second grade, but was absent 11.5 days during the repeat year and 9.5 days in rd grade. In the researcher's opinion, it is doubtful that the absences were truly an issue in the retention recommendation.

Student T repeated second grade with the same teacher. He had said that he "didn't like the teacher" so he did not like "having her again," but admitted that the teacher was "helpful and positive," so it was "a little better the second time." On the negative aspects of retention, Student T mentioned "getting teased" by other students. On the positive side, Student T pointed to "feeling better about entering third grade after the repeat year" and that he "kept the same friends and made new friends also." Student T earned all satisfactory grades during the repeat year, as well as during the remainder of his elementary and middle school years. Student T's achievement test scores in grades 3 - 8 were predominantly in the low average to average range. Student T responded affirmatively when asked if he perceives himself to be a strong student now as a ninth grade student; however, he failed two of the required classes in 9th grade and will not have sufficient credits to move to sophomore status next year.

Student T stated that he "does think about his retention now because I am older than the other kids and I am old enough to drive and I can take the other kids around." When he was asked if he was angry when he thought about it, he replied, "a little bit, but not really." His response to the possibility of retention now was that he would be "disappointed" and "more upset." The researcher asked, "How does talking about this make you feel?" Student T responded, "It does not upset me, not really."

Student T - Analysis

- Student T gave a lot of mixed messages in the interview, verbalizing that the retention was beneficial, but voice tone and facial expression did not always match his words.
- He does appear to have "unhealed wounds" from his retention experience.
- Student T had the same teacher for his repeat year. He had indicated that he did not like the teacher, but it was a little better the second year.
- Student T has done well academically since his year of retention until he entered the high school level.
- Student T is potentially at risk for not completing high school.

Student U - Description

Student U just completed her freshman year in high school. She was retained in the third grade. She is an only child and her parents both work at local businesses.

She began kindergarten having had her 5th birthday at the end of July. She received satisfactory grades in all areas during kindergarten and first grade, but both the second and third grade teachers indicated that she needed to improve in reading, language, spelling, arithmetic, and work/study habits.

Student U remembered her parents talking to her about repeating the third grade. She did not recall that they were angry and that "they said it was a good idea." She said that her teacher also talked to her about the retention, but she did not remember that she had been given a reason for the retention. She said that she thought it was because she "had been having a hard time with reading." Her scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in both elementary and middle school years show reading comprehension to be an area of weakness with scores in the low average range except in 5th grade. Student U's 5th grade scores stand out in all areas with a reading score at the 97th percentile and a complete composite score of double what she normally attained. Based on the 5th grade scores, Student U was recommended for participation in the gifted program.

Student U went to a different school and had a different teacher for the repeat year because her family moved within the school district. During the repeat year she received satisfactory grades in language, social studies, and science, and "S+" in both reading and arithmetic. Student U indicated that she "felt better the second time." She felt the worst thing was "not having your friends with you," but the good thing was getting "to meet new people.'

Since the repeat year Student U has had very good grades maintaining a "B+" grade point average, while her achievement test scores once again have been in the low average range. Her fifth grade scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test placed her in the average range in verbal ability; high average in nonverbal ability; and well above average range in quantitative ability.

When asked if she had confidence in herself as a student, she replied that she did. In the opinion of the researcher, she demonstrated confidence in herself in her manner of speaking, voice tone, and facial expression during the interview. The researcher also had opportunities to observe Student U in the classroom and in the hallway between classes. These observations supported the impression of Student U being a confident individual. Student U is obviously a good student based on her report card grades. She indicated that if someone asked her to stay back now she "would be scared." She said

that she regrets that she "will graduate a year later," but also felt that "repeating a grade is helpful if there are problems." She stated that "it doesn't bother me that other people know" that she repeated a grade, but that she "doesn't really think about her retention." When asked how she felt about answering the questions, she stated "it didn't affect me."

Student U - Analysis

- Student U has done very well in school since her repeat year.
- She perceives her retention as beneficial to her later school success.
- Student U did point out the loss of friends as the worst thing about the retention; however, since she also moved at the time, there would have been the loss of friends without the retention.
- She does not seem to have emotional scars from her retention.

Student V - Description

Student V has just completed the seventh grade. He was held back in first grade. Student V lives with his mother, step-father, and older sister. His mother is employed at a manufacturing plant on the night shift.

Student V's mom had said that her son would bring the signed consent forms to participate in the study to middle school and the researcher could pick them up from him. While Student V did return the forms, it was nearly three weeks later. This is not atypical behavior for middle school students, but the researcher found it to be interesting because while Student V did return the forms to participate in this study, he was the only seventh grade student at Columbus Middle School who did not return his eighth grade registration form. The registration form is the only way students can choose their elective classes and club sections for the next year. Now, according to his counselor, Student V will have to take what classes and clubs he is assigned.

As a kindergarten student, Student V received academic support through the DK program. In kindergarten he received all satisfactory grades except that he "needed to improve" in the area of reading. In first grade he no longer qualified for special education services. His marks declined and the teacher indicated that he had "needs improvement" grades in reading, arithmetic, spelling, and writing. In January of the first grade year the teacher recommended retention. Student V's mother was opposed to the retention at that time, but later in the year supported the decision to retain.

Student V's mother was the one who told him he was going to be held back. He indicated that mom had not been angry and that she thought it was a good idea. Student V didn't think it was a good idea, "I didn't want to go because it would be boring." He also stated that he was held back, "because I was getting bad grades," and verbalized that what gave him the most trouble in first grade was "mostly reading."

In his second year of first grade, Student V remained at the same school but had a different teacher. Upon questioning, Student V said that "he had liked the second teacher best," that his grades "were getting better," and that he "felt ready when he got to second grade." Student V said the best thing about repeating first grade was that "it was easy." His grades were once again satisfactory in all areas except for reading where he continued to struggle in the second year of first grade, as well as in second and third grades. By the last two years of elementary school, he was making "B-" grades in reading and math, but "Cs" and "Ds" in the rest of the academic areas. Upon re-evaluation for special education services in the second year of first grade and again in third grade, he did not qualify. Student V did have reading support through Chapter 1 services during that time.

Student V entered sixth grade at Columbus Middle School and earned a "B-" average for the first semester. However, he

began to struggle, and with the academic difficulties came frustration and behavior problems from this normally shy and quiet student. He was once again evaluated for special education services during the second semester of seventh grade and qualified to receive services. With the additional support Student V's grades have improved, while "blow-ups" and other behavior problems have diminished.

In Student V's opinion repeating a grade is a good idea in general if students are having problems, but he doesn't see that his repeating a grade has helped him to do much better in school stating, "I don't think it made that much difference." When asked if he ever thinks about the retention, he responded, "I don't even think about it now." Student V said that he feels "good" about himself as a student now. He indicated that he "sometimes" likes school, and especially likes "math and science."

Student V - Analysis

- Student V verbalized that repeating a grade was a good idea if students were having problems. He also knows that he did better academically his second year of first grade, but does not perceive long-term benefits to retention.

- Student V did not volunteer any negative comments about the first teacher for first grade, but did comment that he liked the second teacher best.
- Student V's school records have shown that he does better academically with special education support. However, with the support of special education services, he shows achievement gains and then when he is reevaluated, he no longer qualifies for services. He has shown that without support services, he struggles with his school work and becomes frustrated.
- What Student V indicated liking about his year of retention was that the work was easy. In observing Student V in study hall, he did not appear to be motivated to work very hard.