The implementation of a promotion/retention policy to effect change in student achievement in third grade reading/language arts

By

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achievement in third grade reading/language arts

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For decades there has been an ongoing push to increase student achievement through large-scale policy reform and yet far too many students in the United States still perform below proficiency levels with achievement gaps according to race and socio-economic status. Choctaw County School District (CCSD) was no different, as low performance, especially in reading/language arts, and achievement gaps according to race and SES were present. To address these issues, CCSD implemented a K-2 promotion/retention policy in 2008 to improve student achievement. The primary purpose of the study was to investigate how a school district’s implementation of a K-2 policy for promotion and retention with specific strategies may have influenced academic achievement in the area of reading/language arts.

A mixed method research design was used to conduct the study. A narrative approach was used to provide a response to the first research question. A 1-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a Sheffe’ post-hoc test was used as the primary means of analysis for the second research question to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores.
according to the length of time under the policy. A 2-way ANOVA was used as the primary means of analysis for the 3rd-5th research questions to determine whether there were interaction effects between length of time under the policy and gender, race, and/or SES.

Analysis of the results from the first research question revealed themes that emerged from studying the leadership change process of the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion retention policy. The emergent themes were aligned to the steps of Kotter’s Change Theory. Statistically significant differences were found between Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores between no time under the implementation of the policy and three years and between 1 year and 3 years under implementation of the policy. Statistically significant differences were found for the main effect of time under policy, gender, race, and SES. However, no statistically significant differences were found for interactions of length of time under the policy and gender, race, or SES.

Key words: promotion, retention, literacy, policy, change theory, student achievement
DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated to my daddy, my husband, and my children. I love you all so very much. It was because I felt my Lord’s call that I pursued this degree, but it was my love for each of you that helped get me through the times that I wanted to give up. You each mean the world to me; thank you for your love and support.

Daddy, it was always very important to you that your girls get an education. We saw you as the utmost professional and aspired to be like you. You are such a kind, selfless, and loving man.

Chris, you have been so supportive and have helped me manage home, work, and school. You have been a constant source of encouragement. You have listened to me, held me through tears, and helped me to get back up and continue on when I wanted to give up.

Kole, Tanner, Baley, Anna Kate, and Kayson, I pray that you will seek and follow our Lord’s guidance every day. Please do not be afraid to follow your dreams, for with God all things are possible. I pray that you will each seek our Lord’s purpose for your life and allow Him to fulfill the purpose for which He created you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I have witnessed Your hand of guidance throughout my entire life. You have opened and closed doors within my life and have always been faithful to take what the enemy meant for my harm and instead to use it as a blessing. Thank you, my Lord, You are my Rock and My Salvation; without You, none of this would have been possible.

I am also forever grateful for my mentors who have pushed me along, inspired me to continue, included me in professional works, and supported me throughout my program of study. Dr. Jayroe, you planted the first thought that a Ph.D. was within my reach and you inspired me to seek this degree. If it had not been for you, I would not have embarked upon this journey. Dr. Jayroe, thank you for your support and encouragement. Dr. Blendinger, I have felt your support and encouragement ever so strongly. Dr. Williams, you have spent hours reading and helping me with edits. You have encouraged me to continue on, and I sincerely appreciate your support.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .................................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... iii

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................ vii

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... ix

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................1
   Statement of the Problem ...................................................................................2
   Purpose of the Study ..........................................................................................6
   Research Questions ............................................................................................7
   Research Methodology ......................................................................................7
   Delimitations .......................................................................................................8
   The Theoretical Framework .............................................................................9
   Definition of Terms ..........................................................................................11
   Conceptual Framework of the Study ...............................................................13
   Organization of the Study ................................................................................14

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .................................................................................16
   Policy as a Means of Educational Reform .......................................................16
   Retention and Promotion Policies ................................................................18
   Ill effects of social promotion and grade retention ........................................19
   Grade retention and literacy ............................................................................21
   Bias in grade retention and promotion research ..........................................22
   Positive effects of retention .............................................................................23
   Importance of Reading Related to Promotion/Retention Policies ..............26
   Change Theory Related to Promotion/Retention Policy and Student
   Achievement .....................................................................................................30
   Kotter’s Change Theory ....................................................................................31
   Chapter Summary .............................................................................................33

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ...............................................35
   Research Questions ...........................................................................................35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Researcher</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Setting</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Participants</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables in the Study</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of Data</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data Collection</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Data Collection</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Data</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Data Analysis</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Data Analysis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESULTS</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Information</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings for Research Question 1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings From Administrators’ Responses</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings from Teachers’ Responses</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Results for Research Question One</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings for Research Question Two</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings for Research Question Three</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings for Research Question Four</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings for Research Question Five</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Results for Research Questions 2-5</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. IHE PROMOTION/RETENTION POLICY AS AMENDED IN 2008</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. IRB APPROVAL</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM CCSD SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
LIST OF TABLES

1. Percentage of CCSD Students Scoring Below Proficiency on Reading/Language Arts MCT .................................................................4
2. Percentage of All CCSD Students Scoring Below Proficiency in High School Subject Area Tests .................................................................4
3. Percentage of CCSD Black and White Students Scoring Below Proficiency on High School Subject Area Tests ................................5
4. Number of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT Scores and Length of Time Under Policy Implementation ...........................................41
5. Coding Scheme for Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 ........................................44
6. Test of Homogeneity of Variances ........................................................................46
7. Change Process of Administrators in Developing and Implementing a Promotion/Retention Policy with Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory .................................................................57
8. Change Process of Obstacles Faced by Administrators with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory .............................60
10. Change Process For Obtaining Parental Buy-in Faced by Administrators with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory ....64
11. Change Process of What Administrators Would Have Done Differently in Developing and Implementing a Promotion/Retention Policy with Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory ............66
12. Teachers’ Recollection of Change Process in Developing and Implementing a Promotion/Retention Policy with Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory ...........................................68
13. Teachers’ Response to Measures Taken to Gain Stakeholder Buy-in with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory ........70
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Obstacles Teachers Faced in Implementing the K-2 Promotion/Retention Policy With Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Change Process of Teachers’ Perceptions of What Should Have Been Done Differently With Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Summary Emergent Themes Found in the Analysis of the Change Process in Developing a K-2 Promotion/Retention Policy Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>One-Way ANOVA of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Scheffe’ Post Hoc Test of Grade Three Reading/ Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and Gender</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Two-way ANOVA of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and Gender</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and Race</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Two-way ANOVA for Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and Race</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Scheffé Post Hoc Test of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length for Time Under Implementation of Policy and Race</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Policy and SES</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Two-way ANOVA of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and SES</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1  Conceptual Framework of the Study.................................................................13
2  Score Distribution for Length of Time Under the Policy...................................45
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There has been a continuing pursuit to improve the American K-12 public education system through reforms brought about through educational policies (Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Finn, 2013). These policies, which are created at the local, state, and federal levels, are comprised of rules and guidelines that are intended to help students learn efficiently, fairly, and safely (Evans & Hornberger, 2005). Moreover, these rules and guidelines provide the policies and structures for how students are expected to learn, and how schools are expected to manage students and school personnel (Evans & Hornberger, 2005).

One of the most far-reaching federal policies in an effort to improve public education was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which was a major component of President L. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” (Finn, 2013). ESEA was enacted to address the education challenges of children living in poverty and the achievement gaps between different socioeconomic status (SES) groups (Evans & Hornberger, 2005). The goals of ESEA were to require equal access to education, to increase academic standards, and to increase accountability for schools and districts. In general, ESEA authorized various programs that supported education within public schools across the nation (Finn, 2013). These programs were designed to lend support to all students, but especially for those students with disabilities (physical or academic).
and/or who lived in poverty and/or for whom English was their second language (Finn, 2013).

Another major policy, which was the reauthorization of ESEA, was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB was enacted to address the continued under-performance in literacy and numeracy and the ongoing achievement gaps between race and SES in both literacy and numeracy (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). NCLB required increased accountability for all public school districts and afforded parents school choice if they lived in an under-performing school or district. Increased accountability occurred mainly through the gauge of student performance on standardized tests of which results were tied to district, school, and teacher with the requirement that results be reported to the public (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

As seen in ESEA and NCLB, most policies revolve directly around standards and practices of learning. As well school districts must also create and enforce policies to administer and manage students’ progress (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). School districts develop most of these related policies through collaborative efforts of school boards, faculty, and administration (Land, 2002). This research study sought to investigate the impact of one school district’s development and implementation of a promotion and retention policy on its students’ achievement specifically in the area of reading.

Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the federal, state, and local policies implemented over the last decades to help improve education, 37% of fourth grade students in the United States do not read well enough to complete grade-level assignments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Simmons, Baker, and Peyton (2009) explained that reading trajectories
are established early in K-2 and are difficult to change once established. Children must be
given a firm foundation in literacy in early elementary grades in order to successfully
move from learning to read to reading to learn (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Snow et al. (1998) stated, “Reading is essential to success in our society” (p.1).
These researchers explained that there is evidence to indicate that a significant number of
reading problems are preventable. Further, Torgesen (2000) estimated that as many as
half the number of children who are found to be most at-risk for reading failure can be
reached and brought to normal levels with early detection, instruction, and individualized
intervention. Gersten and Keating (1987) found that the more successful students are in
everal elementary, the greater the probability that the success will continue throughout
their school career. Currently, far too many children advance from pre-kindergarten
through 12th grade (P-12) without the necessary skills to excel at the next level (Gersten
& Keating, 1987). Far too many teens either drop out of school or graduate from high
school without the necessary skills for postsecondary education or for the workforce
(Torgesen, 2000).

Academic performance was found to be no different in Choctaw County School
District (CCSD), located in the state of Mississippi, when compared to national data. As
noted in the Table 1, far too many students scored below proficiency on the
Reading/Language Arts MCT. Table 1 provides a display of the percentage of students in
the district scoring below proficiency on the Reading/Language Arts MCT over a 4-year
period prior to implementation of a local school board K-2 promotion/retention policy.
By eighth grade, almost 50% of the students were scoring below proficiency on
Reading/Language Arts MCT.
Table 1

Percentage of CCSD Students Scoring Below Proficiency on Reading/Language Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likewise, Table 2 provides a display of the percentage of students scoring below proficiency on the Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) over 4 years prior to implementation of a local school board K-2 promotion/retention policy. Nearly 60% of the students scored below proficiency each year on the English II Subject Area Test.

Table 2

Percentage of All CCSD Students Scoring Below Proficiency in High School Subject Area Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Algebra</th>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>English II</th>
<th>U.S. History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>*NA</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>*NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not Available

There was a noted gap in achievement between Black and White students on Mississippi’s Subject Area Tests as shown in Table 3. The highest percentage of Black and White students scoring below proficiency is seen in the area of English II.
### Table 3

**Percentage of CCSD Black and White Students Scoring Below Proficiency on High School Subject Area Tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td><em>NA</em></td>
<td><em>NA</em></td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>*NA</td>
<td>*NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not available

In general, far too many students in the United States do not read at proficient levels (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005), and will likely end up as high school dropouts, unable to find employment, living in poverty, receiving government assistance, and/or incarcerated (Reynolds, 2001). Harris and Herrington (2006) stated, “The gap in achievement has shifted steadily from being an indicator of educational inequality to being a direct cause of socioeconomic inequality” (p. 210). Darling-Hammond (2000) pointed out that the work of several scholars document how this nation has done a complete 360-degree turn as we have moved from segregation within our schools, to integration, and then back to segregation. Further, the achievement gaps along the lines of race and SES have been documented in almost every measure of academics (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Williams, 2011). Researchers and scholars have contended that the substantial gap in educational achievement according to race and SES represent one of the most iniquitous problems facing American society (Cartledge & Lo, 2006; Hecht & Close, 2002; Lo, Wang, & Haskell, 2009; Lutkus, Rampey, & Donahue, 2005; Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005; Nichols, Rupley, Rickelman, & Algozzine, 2004). Despite all of the research on the topic, little headway has been made in reducing these gaps. Research
findings consistently show that achievement gaps that are present between students before they enter kindergarten remain in effect to adulthood (Williams, 2011).

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate how a school district’s implementation of a K-2 policy for promotion and retention (Appendix A) with specific strategies may have influenced academic achievement in the area of reading/language arts. Specific strategies within the policy included the administration of diagnostic tests at the end of each school year to determine promotion/retention decisions in K-2. Additionally, administrators were encouraged to have strong lines of communication between parents and teachers with constant progress monitoring of each child throughout the school year with communication to parents of each child’s progress. Also, administrators were encouraged to have teachers to set goals for each child and to celebrate progress toward meeting goals. The major goal of the study was to explore the impact of a K-2 promotion/retention policy on third grade student achievement as measured by the Grade 3 Reading/Language Arts Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT2), Second Edition. More specifically, the study sought to determine the school leadership change process related to the policy’s development and implementation, and its effect on academic achievement. This study will provide important insight for schools and school districts looking for ways to address student achievement.
Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study. The researcher investigated the effects of the implementation of a promotion/retention policy on third grade students’ scores as measured on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2.

1. How did the leadership change process impact the development and implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy in a local school district?

2. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy?

3. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and gender?

4. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and race?

5. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and socio-economic status?

Research Methodology

This research study included an investigation of how a K-2 promotion/retention policy was created and implemented in 2008. The study used existing data prior to
implementation and after implementation of the promotion/retention policy. Because of
the nature of the research questions, the researcher chose a mixed method research
design, which included both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A qualitative
design was used to answer the first research question and a quantitative design was used
to answer the remaining research questions. The data were analyzed and reported using
descriptive narrative with emergent themes and analysis of variance ANOVA.

**Delimitations**

The data for this study relied on existing documents, interviews, and an existing
data set. The variables were confined to those related to the implementation of the K-2
promotion/retention policy that was implemented in CCSD in 2008. Although the K-2
promotion/retention policy addressed both reading and math, the study focused on
reading due to the significance of reading throughout students’ educational career.
Numerous studies have revealed that far too many students who advance to third grade
lacking those necessary skills end up, (a) dropping out of school, (b) with truancy and
behavior issues, (c) on social assistance, and/or (d) in prison for part of their life (Perie et
al., 2005). This study considered the main effect of time under the implementation of a
policy, gender, race, and SES on test scores. No external, non-school-related factors such
as family and parental or community variables were considered. The data set for this
study was derived from three schools within one specific school district. The K-2
promotion/retention policy required the use of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early
Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), or Standardized Test for
the Assessment of Reading (STAR) Reading for end of the school-year
promotion/retention decisions for first and second grade. Researcher chose to use Grade
Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores as the dependent variable instead of these three diagnostic tests for several reasons. First, it would be very time-consuming for the district to provide de-identifiable data for first and second grade students from five school years for DIBELS, SRI, and STAR. This would have required that a representative search back through individual student files that are kept in individual teacher’s classrooms. Second, the chance of human error would have been increased as students’ scores were taken from files and transferred to a document that would have been shared with the researcher. Additionally, it is very likely that the district would not have been willing to provide these data due to the tremendous amount of time that it would have taken to pull the data together. Since the researcher chose to use Grade 3 Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores, one district representative was able to modify the Excel spreadsheets of data that were sent to the district from the Mississippi Department of Education with their third grade students’ scores from each school-year and simply delete the columns that held identifiable information other than what the researcher needed. The researcher was then able to copy and paste the data directly into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis, thus decreasing the chance for human error in data manipulation.

**The Theoretical Framework**

The study was underpinned by school leadership change theory. Kotter’s (1996) educational change theory was selected to help explain the process of the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy for the local school district in the study. Kotter’s (1996) model for educational change calls for beginning with a creation of a sense of urgency in order to increase the motivation of stakeholders to
accept and take part in the change. Kotter views every stakeholder as a participant in educational change. According to Kotter (2008), there is enormous potential for deep lasting change when there is a sense of urgency along with a coalition within groups who understand and embrace the vision and change strategy.

Kotter (1996) summarizes successful change in eight steps and says that his model is a starting point for developing organizational change strategies. The eight steps are: (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create guiding coalitions, (3) develop the change vision, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower broad-based action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (8) anchor new approach in culture.

According to Kotter (2002), successful change does not happen easily, but instead, must go through certain steps. Some of the many barriers to change that Kotter lists include: (a) products are not good enough, (b) costs are too high, (c) paralyzing bureaucracy, (d) politics, (e) lack of teamwork, (f) arrogant attitudes, and (f) human fear of the unknown. Kotter maintains that in order to effect deep lasting change barriers to change must be recognized and addressed.

In the many success stories that Kotter (1996) analyzed, he found two important patterns. First, in all of the success stories he found that the leaders of the organization utilized a multi-step process for change that produced a force strong enough to overcome all sources of inertia. Second, he found that exceptional leadership was a must and that even the most outstanding management was not enough.

Kotter’s (1996) change theory was used to guide this investigation of how a local district created and implemented the K-2 promotion/retention policy. The assumption is
that the change process included a connection between research and practice of professionals. By recognizing that educational professionals are the best to share their voices in the implementation of effective strategies to facilitate student success, the researcher focused on the role of the leader in the change process.

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are useful in clarifying terms used throughout the study. Operational definitions of terms include the following:

*Promotion/retention policy* describes promotion when a student is passed from one grade level to the next based on a prescribed criteria, whereas retention is when a student is kept back in the same grade level to repeat the school year based on a prescribed criteria (CCSD Policy, IHE, September 2008).

*Reading/Language Arts MCT2* is a state mandated test of reading and language arts skills called Mississippi Curriculum Test of Language Arts, Second Edition, revised 2008-2009, in which students are scored as advanced, proficient, basic, or minimal according to the number of questions answered correctly. The test is used as a measure to hold P-12 schools and districts accountable when taken into account with other MCT2 grade level tests and subject area tests in high school (Mississippi Statewide Assessment System, 2008).

*Advanced* level on MCT2 refers to the level when “students are able to perform in a manner clearly beyond that required to be successful in the grade or
course in the content area. The students perform at a high level of
difficulty, complexity, or fluency as specified by the grade-level content
standards” (2013 Interpretive Guide for Teachers & Administrators, 2013,
p. 4).

*Proficient* level on MCT2 refers to the level when “students demonstrate solid
academic performance and mastery of the knowledge and skills required
for success in the grade or course in the content area. The students are
able to perform at the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency as
specified by the grade-level content standards” (2013 Interpretive Guide
for Teachers & Administrators, 2013, p. 4).

*Basic* level on MCT2 refers to the level when “students demonstrate partial
mastery of the knowledge and skills in the course and may experience
difficulty in the grade or course in the content area. The students are able
to perform some of the content standards at a level of difficulty,
complexity, or fluency as specified by the grade-level content standards”

*Minimal* level on MCT2 refers to the level when “students inconsistently
demonstrate the knowledge and skills that define basic level performance.
The students require additional instruction and remediation in the
knowledge and skills that are necessary for success in the grade or course
in the content area” (2013 Interpretive Guide for Teachers &
Administrators, 2013, p. 4).
Socioeconomic status (SES) is the participation or nonparticipation in free or reduced lunch program (Hoffman, 2012).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 provides a visual display of the conceptual framework of the study. The essential elements of the study are included in the display.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Components of the study include existing students’ Grade 3 Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores from 2009-2013; some of which were under a promotion/retention policy for 0, 1, 2, or 3 years. Other components include interview transcripts and documents related to the creation and implementation of the policy. The focus of the study was placed on how the leadership change process impacted the development and implementation of the policy and how time under the implementation of the policy impacted the students’ scores and how the interaction of time under the implementation
of the policy and race, gender, and SES influenced the scores. The student achievement data included MCT2 scale scores on third grade reading/language arts.

**Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter includes (a) an introduction to the study, (b) statement of the problem, (c) purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) methodology, (f) delimitations, (g) theoretical framework, (h) definition of terms, and (i) conceptual framework.

Chapter Two includes a review of literature with the following sections, (a) policy as a means of educational reform, (b) importance of reading related to promotion/retention policies, and (c) change theory related to promotion/retention policies and student achievement. A summary of the chapter concludes chapter Two.

Chapter Three contains a discussion of the methodology used in the study. The study consists of a mixed research design. Included in this chapter are (a) research questions, (b) research design, to include a description of the setting, participants, and variables in the study (c) an explanation of data collection, (e) a description of the process of data analysis, and (f) preliminary data analysis.

The findings from the data analysis are presented in chapter Four. Findings for research question one involved qualitative inquiry and are presented in a narrative format. Findings for research questions two through five involved quantitative inquiries and are presented in terms of statistical significance. This chapter includes (a) background information, (b) participants, (c) findings for each research question, and (d) a summary of findings for research questions.
A summary of the study can be found in Chapter Five. Chapter Five also includes conclusions and a discussion of conclusions as well as limitations. Additionally, implications drawn from the study and recommendations for further research are also presented in chapter Five.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature related to the impact of a K-2 promotion/retention local school board policy on student achievement in the area of reading/language arts. This chapter provides related literature on (a) policy as a means of educational reform, (b) importance of reading related to promotion/retention policies, and (c) change theory related to promotion/retention policies and student achievement. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Policy as a Means of Educational Reform

Large-scale national policy reforms have been unsuccessful at increasing literacy achievement or at decreasing achievement gaps (Lee & Reeves, 2012). According to Datnow and Stringfield (2000), a synthesis of the findings of 16 longitudinal studies of significant reform efforts related to specific policies concluded that efforts to reform education and improve student achievement have been largely unsuccessful. For example, a comparison of pre-and post-NCLB reading outcome trends indicated that state averages remained the same or declined after implementation of NCLB (Lee & Reeves, 2012). In contrast, math gains continued to accelerate post-NCLB, though the magnitude of the gains was small. In reading, the states experienced a setback from the earlier progress made in narrowing achievement gaps. According to Lee and Reeves (2012), it is
noteworthy that the “magnitude of post-NCLB changes in the gaps is not only short of meeting NCLB achievement targets for all students, but also particularly insufficient to redress setbacks to the earlier national progress in narrowing racial achievement gaps” (p. 224).

Lee and Reeves (2012) asserted that a major consequence of NCLB has been that of producing high stakes tests, the main criteria by which student knowledge, teacher efficacy, and school quality are assessed. McQuillan and Salomon-Fernandez (2008) stated that student achievement would not improve unless a critical mass of school personnel actively embrace reforms their schools undertake. The researchers quoted Fullan (2001) who wrote, “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think--it’s as simple and complex as that” (p.115; as cited in McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008, p. 28).

Research studies have also shown that large-scale policy has been ineffective at decreasing achievement gaps in race, gender, and SES (Lee & Reeves, 2012). On the whole, there is a gap in the scholarly literature according to how the implementation of local school board policy, which requires diagnostic tests to be utilized to determine grade promotion/retention decisions might affect student achievement, especially in literacy and thus, potentially decrease achievement gaps in race, gender, and SES (Center for Mental Health in School at University of California, Los Angeles [CMHS-UCLA], 2008). If implementation of local school board policy were shown to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps, it would have huge implications for reaching children across the nation and in closing long-standing achievement gaps (CMHS-UCLA, 2008). For the possibility of increasing student achievement and closing the
achievement gap in a local school district in the state of Mississippi, a K-2 promotion and retention policy was implemented in 2008.

**Retention and Promotion Policies**

The development and implementation of promotion and retention policies began in the mid-19th Century with the movement of graded classes in small schoolhouses across the nation (Harvey, 1994). In the early 20th Century, social promotion became a predominant practice lasting for several decades (Jimerson, 2001). This practice continued until the release of *A Nation at Risk* declared the poor academic performance of the nation’s children and the practice of social promotion was partly to blame (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). After the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the pendulum swung in favor of grade retention, which became a commonly used but much debated practice (Dawson, 1998; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Smalls, 1997). Subsequently, research has shown ineffectiveness and even ill effects of grade retention and social promotion on the welfare of children (Ehmke, Drechel, & Carstensen, 2010; Martin, 2011).

Recent literature showed that school districts have practiced grade retention for the past 25 years without decline (Jimerson, 2004). The increasing demands of accountability cause considerable pressure to be placed upon teachers to cover objectives and for students to keep up (Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, & Kabbani, 2004). For students who continue to have difficulties keeping up, schools often respond with grade retention requiring students to repeat another year with exactly the same material and instructional strategies that were not successful the previous year (Grantham, 2004).
Notably, some states have implemented reading gates at certain grade levels (usually third), which require that children pass a state assessment to show adequate literacy levels in order to be promoted to the next grade (Stamm, 2014). Mississippi joined in the state assessment requirement in April 2013 when Governor Bryant signed into law Senate Bill 2347 which has been labeled the “Third Grade Gate” (Stamm, 2014, p. 2). Prior to this, 14 states plus the District of Columbia had signed into law similar bills. The spirit behind these laws was to improve literacy achievement by putting a stop to students advancing through elementary grades without the necessary literacy skills to read on grade level (Stamm, 2014). Legal challenges to students retained due to their failure to show minimum proficiency on standards based tests have generally been unsuccessful (Penfield, 2010).

**Ill effects of social promotion and grade retention.** According to Reynolds, Temple, and McCoy (1997), in the late 1800s discipline and academic achievement problems increased when children were promoted without the necessary skills for achieving at the next grade level. Thompson and Cunningham (2000) concluded that social promotion leads to frustration and failure and sends the child a message that hard work is not necessary for success.

Prior research studies showed the practice of grade retention to be ineffective as an intervention for struggling students and in fact detrimental (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jimerson, 2001; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Thomas, 1992). Smith and Shepard (1987) concluded that students may feel shame and depression over being a failure after being retained. Strong beliefs of the ill effects of grade retention on low-performing students were found to stem from studies by Holmes
and Matthews (1984) and Jimerson (2001). In a synthesis of 44 studies addressing the effects of grade retention on students, Holmes and Matthews (1984) concluded that retained students compared to never-retained students exhibited negative attitudes towards school, lower self-concept, decreased academic performance, and decreased social adjustment. Holmes (1989) aggregated findings from 63 separate retention studies from 1960-1987 and found negative outcomes when retained students moved to a subsequent grade level and short-term positive effects decreased over time with retained students demonstrating anti-social behaviors, increased discipline referrals, poor attitudes toward school, and decreased school attendance. Jimerson (2001) reviewed 22 research articles published during the 1990s in synthesis research on effects of grade retention on achievement, social-emotional adjustment, and long-term outcomes. Jimerson (2001) found that grade retention is not an empirically supported practice and found no statistically significant difference between retained and matched comparison students in a majority of studies. The characteristics of children retained in early elementary were examined and the researchers found that the children were less confident as compared to their peers and their teachers reported that they had poor social skills (Jimerson, 2001).

Jackson (1975) reviewed 44 research studies performed from 1911-1973 and concluded that there was a lack of research-based evidence to support the efficacy of grade retention. McBrien (1998) conducted a study at the University of Georgia of 11,000 student participants and found that repeating a year negatively impacted academic performance and that students tended to fall farther behind in their second year in a grade.

Martin (2011) performed a quantitative survey-based study of 3,261 high school students and found that grade retention was positively correlated with maladaptive
motivation, increased absenteeism, and decreased incidence of homework completion. Ehmke et al. (2010) found that retention often resulted in a decrease in self-concept coupled with a negative effect on peer relationships due to the fact that retained students lost peers and had to join a new group. These researchers also found a positive correlation between increased dropout rate and increased conduct problems and grade retention.

Martin (2009) conducted a statistical comparison of 3,684 high school students’ academic motivation, engagement, and performance across age-within-cohort, grade-retention, and delayed-school-entry groups and found the effects of retention were mainly negative regardless of whether the retained student was male or female or older or younger than peers. Overman (1986) conducted a study with over 6,000 students who had been retained and found that approximately 1/4 of the students had increased learning with the repetition of a grade but that 2/5 of the students learned less.

**Grade retention and literacy.** A crucial study investigated the effects of grade retention on 784 first grade children who were labeled academically at-risk on the growth of the Woodcock-Johnson broad mathematics and reading scores over three years. These researchers found no significant correlation between grade level retention and growth rate in reading (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). In another study, Silberglett, Appleton, and Jimerson (2006) examined the reading growth trajectories of students from first through eighth grades and found no significant correlation of retention with reading growth rate. Gleason, Kwok, and Hughes (2007) conducted a longitudinal comparison of peer acceptance and achievement for 350 students in first and second grade and found that students scored significantly lower than promoted peers on reading and math standard scores.
Bias in grade retention and promotion research. More recent research studies have disclosed flaws in the research design of much of the former research that revealed the ill effects of grade retention (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). At odds with the negative impact of grade retention, Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (2003) questioned the conclusions from the Holmes and Matthews (1984), Holmes (1989), and Jimerson (2001) meta-analyses and argued that a majority of earlier retention studies were flawed and should not be considered as sound research (as cited in Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Chafe (1984) reported that a great deal of research on grade retention suffered from poor methodology. The researcher went on to explain that a great deal of the research on grade promotion versus retention demonstrated a bias toward one practice or the other. Chafe (1984) further questioned whether studies that focused on student self-concept and social adjustment exemplified the classic chicken-egg paradox since they failed to determine a cause and effect relationship, i.e., retainees may have a low self-concept because they fail or they may fail because they have a low self-concept (Chafe, 1984).

Lorence and Dworkin (2006) examined individual published studies to assess the quality of the 63 studies that Holmes (1989) included in his work assuming that published studies were of higher quality than unpublished works. The extent to which research designs controlled for rival hypotheses was also assessed. The basis of comparison, which was usually age or grade, was investigated. Comparability measures scales of tests given were assessed, as were sample size and statistical power. In their analyses, Lorence and Dworkin (2006) found the adequacy of the methodology of the 63 studies to be highly suspect. They found that peers had reviewed only 10 of the studies, and in most of the studies the researchers had not controlled for initial differences between the groups.
They also found that in the studies where there were no controls for initial differences mixed-results were obtained. Two studies that controlled for student differences existing prior to retention found that academically challenged students who repeated a grade outperformed their socially promoted peers (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Lorence and Dworkin also found sample sizes so small that statistical significance could not be reached in 10 of the studies. According to Lorence and Dworkin (2006), the Holmes meta-analysis was flawed and should not be used to support any criticism of the strategy of grade retention to assist academically struggling students. Lorence and Dworkin (2006) also examined the results of Jimerson’s (2001) meta-analysis of 22 published studies, which examined academic achievement and found Jimerson’s results to be questionable. As found in Holmes’ analysis, few of the studies adequately adjusted for initial differences between retained and promoted students. Also, Lorence and Dworkin (2006) found sample sizes so low that a null hypothesis could not be rejected. Lorence and Dworkin (2006) concluded that neither Holmes’ (1989) nor Jimerson’s (2001) review of grade retention studies utilized sound research practices and thus should not be accepted as conclusively demonstrating the ineffectiveness or damaging effects of the practice of grade retention.

**Positive effects of retention.** Conversely, Lorence and Dworkin (2006) compared reading scores between retained students and their socially promoted peers and found positive effects of retention persisted over time regardless of race. Several studies have shown that grade retention seemed to boost test scores, at least in the short-term (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994; Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004; Karweit, 1999; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Pomplum, 1988). Jacobs (1999) found that students retained in their
present grade after failing a reading section of curriculum-based exams were more likely to pass future exams than students who were socially promoted. Peterson, DeGracie, and Ayabe (1987) performed a longitudinal study and found retained students continued to improve in reading as measured by group achievement tests. Rust and Wallace (1993) examined academic achievement differences between retained and low-achieving promoted students and noted significant improvements in the grade point average of both groups during first and second years after retention but found a statistically significant difference in the retained group’s achievement scores in the third year with the retained group out-performing the low-achieving promoted group.

Elligett and Thomas (1983) studied the effects of the promotion/retention policy in Pinellas County, Florida, and found substantial improvements in rank in percentile of their class in reading comprehension of retained students following a year of retention and a year of regular enrollment, which very likely indicated a genuine increase in achievement that is directly related to the benefits of a year of retention. Patterson (1996) contended that students should be retained until they meet adequate grade standards in order to provide more homogenous classes and enable teachers to teach grade level curriculum. Halliman (1997) conducted a study analyzing effects of retention on students in Baltimore City Public Schools and concluded that retention increases academic performance and noted that retainees demonstrated long-term academic gains. Pierson and Connell (1992) examined effects on a student’s feelings of self-worth compared randomly selected socially promoted students to randomly selected retained students and concluded that there were no differences between the two groups in perceived self-worth.
DiMaria (1999) surveyed teachers and found that they viewed kindergarten and first grade as the foundation for future academic achievement and that teachers viewed retention in kindergarten and first grade emotionally and socially appropriate. Robertson (1997) found similar results in teachers’ beliefs that retention in kindergarten or first grade positively impact future academic achievement thus reducing the chances of failing later which would carry a stigma. Faeber and VanDusseldorf (1984) surveyed elementary school teachers attending a graduate school and found that 97% of them felt that retention positively impacted a child’s educational achievement. Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) surveyed parents, teachers, and principals in a large city and found that the majority of each group of stakeholders believed children should be retained when they fail to meet grade level requirements.

Researchers have continued to focus on the question as to repeat or not to repeat? A study conducted in a school district in Arizona suggests that retention is successful when students received extra assistance in the second year in a grade. The school district required teachers to prepare individual plans to address each student’s needs for the students who repeated a grade (Peterson et al., 1987). Findings from the Arizona study showed positive results for retained students. Additionally, a similar study was conducted in a large Texas school district where retained students were given individual attention and assistance in their area/s of weakness and positive results were obtained (Hill et al., 1999). Hill et al. (1999) found that students retained in third grade not only caught up to, but statistically out-performed, their low-performing promoted peers in subsequent years. Many educational researchers have maintained that the practice of grade retention would not be necessary if teachers would identify students’ areas of weakness and differentiate
instruction meeting the individual needs and addressing learning gaps for low-performing students thus preventing students from being found to be lacking the necessary literacy skills at the end of the year (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Morris, 2001; Shepard, 2002).

Despite conflicting views and much debate, the practice of grade retention continues to be the chosen response to under-achievement (Jimerson, 2004; Stamm, 2014). Karweit (1991) conducted comparative analyses and found neither practice (social promotion nor grade retention) to be adequate to meet the needs of low performing students. Reynolds et al. (1997) agreed and argued for the need for other strategies for adequate skill acquisition and maintained that social promotion nor retention was the answer.

**Importance of Reading Related to Promotion/Retention Policies**

As society moved into the information age, literacy demands increased (Morrison, 2012). Technology assisted with this increase and with the 21st Century demands that a literate person possesses a wide range of abilities and competencies (National Council of Teachers of English, 2014). Morrison (2012) reported that what was considered an acceptable level of literacy in the mid-20th Century is no longer enough in the world today. According to Murphy (2004), many experts paint a bleak picture of the state of reading achievement in America. Morrison (2012) explained, “Approximately 25% of elementary school students in America currently are not adequately learning to read…” (p. 41). Not only is a child’s ability to read a standard by which this country measures and judges its schools (Morrison, 2012), but literacy serves as the door to each child’s future (Perie et al., 2005). According to Stamm (2014), research shows that if a child is
not reading on grade level by the end of first grade, he or she has only about a 10% percent chance of reading on grade level at the end of fourth grade.

Various studies have been conducted which demonstrate the importance of obtaining literacy skills in the early elementary grades (Meyer, 1984; Nores, Belfield, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2005; Reschley, 2010; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1999). Meyer (1984) examined the effects of Project Follow Through (PFT), which was conducted in one of the most economically disadvantaged areas in the United States. In PFT, students received extra support, including literacy support, for either 3 years (first-third grade) or 4 years (K-third grade). Meyer found that students’ reading performance at the end of third grade was highly correlated with literacy performance at the end of ninth grade. Meyer concluded that these results lend support for the importance of creating a firm foundation in literacy in the early grades (Meyer, 1984). This also lends support for Reschley’s (2010) claims that children promoted without the necessary literacy skills for the next grade level fall farther behind with time whereas children who receive necessary support to reach grade-level literacy demands before promotion are more likely to stay on grade-level. The participants who received the extra support in the PFT study were significantly more likely to graduate high school with the necessary college and career readiness skills (Reschley, 2010).

The Perry Preschool Project (PPP) was implemented within a 2-year pre-school program in an area of extreme poverty in Michigan. Researchers identified significantly positive effects of the program as program participants were found to possess increased school readiness skills, increased achievement throughout their school career (elementary, middle, and high school), an increased likelihood of graduating from high
school, and improved post-school outcomes (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1999). PPP participants were less likely to be retained or to receive special services. The PPP results lend even more support for the need for children to have literacy programs that provide early support in order for children to obtain a firm literacy foundation (Nores et al., 2005). The economic benefits of the PPP, “originally estimated at $7.16 returned for each dollar invested in the program, were updated as participants reached the age of 40 to an estimated return of $6.87 to $16.14 for each dollar invested” (Nores et al., 2005, p.247). Evidence indicates that early literacy support results in a decrease in the number of special education referrals (Coyne, Kame’enui, Simmons, & Harn, 2004; Lennon & Slesinks, 1999; Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2007).

The Chicago Longitudinal Study investigated the Child-Parent Center Education Program (CPCEP) with cohorts of 1,539 low-income minority three- and four-year olds who lived in high poverty neighborhoods in Chicago (Reynolds, 1999). Children who participated in the CPCEP, attended preschool and were provided additional support services up to the age of nine. Reynolds (1999) conducted a study and found a decreased rate of grade retention in children who participated in CPCEP as well as a decreased incidence of identification for special services, thus further demonstrating the benefits of creating an early foundation in literacy. Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, and Mann (2002) explained:

Economic estimates of the return to society in terms of increased tax revenues and reduced public spending for education (e.g. grade retention, special education), incarceration, and crime victims were $7.14 for each dollar invested in the
CPCEP preschool program, $61 for each dollar invested in the extended program, and $1.66 for each dollar invested in the school-age portion of the program (p.72).

Reschley (2010) recounts Stanovich who hailed the effect of early reading skills on later reading and cognitive development described as a “Matthew effect.” Alluding to the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew effects can be found in almost all disciplines and alludes to the fact that initial differences are compounded over time (Reschley, 2010). For instance, one example is that the rich tend to get richer and the poor tend to get poorer. Children who are behind in reading in early elementary and yet are promoted tend to fall farther and farther behind. Reschley (2010) stated:

As students develop skills and expertise in reading, they get better at reading and develop more expertise; greater expertise leads to greater knowledge, which in turn leads to the acquisition of knowledge at a faster rate, creating ever-diverging spiraling paths between good and poor readers (p. 74).

Gersten and Keating (1987) conducted a study of students who received literacy support in early elementary grades and found that students who received support were less likely to be retained, more likely to graduate high school college and career ready, and more likely to have increased attendance in high school. Numerous studies reveal that far too many students who advance to third grade lacking literacy skills end up (a) dropping out of school, (b) with truancy and behavior issues, (c) on social assistance, and/or (d) in prison for part of their life (Perie et al., 2005). There is a dire need for literacy programs with more attention paid to data at the student level to ensure that all students have the necessary foundational literacy skills as they move from K-2 where
they are learning to read to third grade where they are reading to learn (Simmons et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, studies show that grade retention policies coupled with early and intense literacy intervention and ideally with continued support in middle and upper elementary can have lasting positive results for children (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Research shows that constant progress monitoring utilizing standard diagnostic measures can positively affect academic achievement (Daeschner, 2004; McGee, 2004; Simmon, Stoolmiller, Coyne, & Harn, 2003). Data-driven instruction utilizing data from both teacher-made assessments and standard diagnostic measures has been shown to be effective at bringing students to grade-level literacy skills (Gersten & Keating, 1987; Torgesen, 2000). Other studies have shown that children tend to receive the firm foundation that they need in literacy when their areas of weakness are identified and targeted with highly individualized differentiated instruction and constant progress monitoring in early elementary (Coyne, et al., 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; DeCicca & Smith, 2013; Morris, 2001). Researchers reported that unfortunately, this practice happens only haphazardly across the nation (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1999). In most cases, Moreau (2014) reported that teachers all too often pass children along to the next grade based solely on the end of the year average of teacher-made assessments.

**Change Theory Related to Promotion/Retention Policy and Student Achievement**

According to a review of research commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2014) wrote that after teaching, leadership is the second most important factor to influence student learning. According to the Wallace Foundation, “There are no “leader-proof” reforms and no effective reforms
without good leadership” (Morrison, 2012, p.1). There have been extensive case studies on schools that have high poverty and high minority enrollment and yet low achievement gaps with high achievement for all students (Daeschner, 2004; McGee, 2004).

Daeschner (2004) conducted case studies of three high-poverty racially mixed elementary schools in Louisville, Kentucky, and found teacher quality to be the single most important factor influencing student achievement. Daeschner (2004) found that each school used disaggregated data at the school, classroom, and student level to inform decisions and drive change. The schools Daeschner (2004) studied used a school-wide assessment plan that involved all staff in analyzing test results to determine needed change and the utilization of benchmarks of student progress via scrimmage tests and analysis of work samples. McGee (2004) investigated commonalities among 54 school designated as Golden Spike Schools. Golden Spike Schools are schools that have high-poverty, racially-mixed student bodies with a low achievement gap with high academic performance of all children (McGee, 2004). McGee (2004) found capable, hard-working teachers who believed that every child could learn in the majority of the Golden Spike schools. McGee (2004) also found strong parental support with a focus on early literacy. Daeschner (2004) and McGee (2004) found that all schools in their studies employed embedded professional development for staff.

**Kotter’s Change Theory**

According to Kotter (1996), in order for change to be lasting and become incorporated into the culture of the organization, there are deliberate steps that one must go through. Kotter’s (1996) model for educational change is comprised of eight steps and Kotter says that his model is a starting point for developing organizational change.
strategies. The eight steps are: (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create guiding coalitions, (3) develop the change vision, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower broad-based action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (8) anchor new approaches in culture (Kotter, 1996).

According to Kotter (2008), the first step to bring about lasting change is to create a sense of urgency. People generally feel more compelled to join in reform efforts if they feel a sense of urgency to do so (Kotter, 2008). Kotter (1996) views every stakeholder as a participant in educational change and speaks of the importance of forming a guiding coalition. According to Kotter (2002), there is enormous potential for deep lasting change when all stakeholders understand and embrace the vision and change strategy. Kotter says that communication is key and stakeholders must be empowered to play their part in bringing about the change (Kotter, 2006). Leaders should create opportunities for short-term wins, which are communicated to all stakeholders thus building momentum towards bringing about the change (Kotter, 1996). As momentum is established and more wins are consolidated, eventually the change will become incorporated into the culture of the organization (Kotter, 1996).

According to Kotter (1996), successful change does not happen easily and leaders must purposefully guide the organization through certain steps. Some of the many barriers to change that Kotter lists include: (a) products are not good enough, (b) costs are too high, (c) paralyzing bureaucracy, (d) politics, (e) lack of teamwork, (f) arrogant attitudes, and (f) human fear of the unknown (Kotter, 2002). Leaders must recognize and address barriers to change in a proactive way, instead of being reactive (Kotter, 1996).
In the many success stories that Kotter (1996) analyzed, he found two main findings. First, in all of the success stories that he analyzed he found that all leaders utilized purposeful steps that were able to produce a force great enough to overcome resistance to change. Second, he found exceptional leadership and concluded that management was not enough to effect deep lasting change.

**Chapter Summary**

Large-scale policy promulgation efforts, such as ESEA and NCLB, have been used as a reform effort for many years (Lee & Reeves, 2012). However, research has shown that achievement gaps and decreased achievement in literacy still exist according to race and SES despite the large-scale state and national policy reform efforts (Evans & Hornberger, 2005). Research has shown that while some progress has been made towards closing achievement gaps and increasing literacy achievement there is still much work to be done (Evans & Hornberger, 2005).

Promotion/Retention policies have also been utilized to effect student achievement (CMHS-UCLA, 2008). A plethora of research has been conducted as to the effects of promotion/retention policies on students and their academic achievement (Grantham, 2004). Research has shown conflicting findings as to the effects of promotion/retention policies, but more recent research has revealed bias in much of the former research in this area (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). There is a gap in the literature as to how local promotion/retention policy might affect literacy achievement (CMHS-UCLA, 2008).

Former research has revealed the importance of reading related to promotion/retention policies (Meyer, 1984; Reschley, 2010; Schweinhart & Weikart,
Prior studies have shown that students behind in literacy achievement in lower elementary do not catch up to grade level and tend to fall farther behind as they progress through the grades with an increased incidence of dropping out, becoming incarcerated, and/or of receiving social assistance (Perie et al., 2005; Reschley, 2010).

Research has shown certain leadership practices to be associated with increased student achievement and with closing achievement gaps according to race and SES (Evans & Hornberger, 2005). Change theory can be used to illustrate how school districts can move from the development of assessing a need to developing a plan of action to address the need (Kotter, 1996). Kotter’s Change Theory can be utilized to effect long-lasting change through creating a change in culture when administrators develop and implement policy through purposeful action following Kotter’s eight steps: (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create guiding coalitions, (3) develop the change vision, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower broad-based action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (8) anchor new approaches in culture.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and methodology chosen to investigate the leadership change process of the development and implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy and the effects of time under the implementation of the policy, gender, race, and SES in a local school district in the state of Mississippi. The chapter includes a description of the procedures used to conduct the investigation. The chapter is divided into the following sections: research questions, research design, setting, participants, variables in the study, collection of data, and analysis of data.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study. The researcher empirically investigated the effects of the implementation of a promotion/retention policy on third grade students’ scores as measured on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2.

1. How did the leadership change process impact the development and implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy in a local school district?
2. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy?

3. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and gender?

4. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and race?

5. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and socio-economic status?

**Research Design**

This research study included an investigation of how a promotion/retention policy was developed and implemented in 2008 in a school district located in the state of Mississippi. Because of the nature of the research questions, the researcher chose a mixed method research design, which included both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The study used existing quantitative data prior to implementation and after implementation of the promotion/retention policy.

A qualitative research approach was viewed most appropriate to answer the first research question, which sought to determine how individuals in school leadership roles were involved in the change process for the development and implementation of a promotion/retention policy. As advocated by Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2007),
qualitative research provides a means for systematically answering questions about the people in the particular social context, including what they reported as their experiences. As in most qualitative studies (Locke et al., 2007), interviews, observations, and various forms of document reviews are the common means of data collection. Data are usually collected from these different sources within a setting and triangulation of the data provides for cross checking information (Locke et al., 2007). Merriam (2009) suggested it is common when conducting qualitative research to have an interest in identifying and understanding the social processes by which particular end results are created, rather than simply describing the results themselves. Accordingly, the researcher sought to investigate the development and implementation of the local school district’s promotion/retention policy through interviews and document reviews.

For this study, the interviews and document reviews were guided by Kotter’s (1996) change theory, which he summarizes successful change in eight steps. The eight steps include (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create guiding coalitions, (3) develop the change vision, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower broad-based action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (8) anchor new approaches in culture.

A quantitative research design was selected to answer the remaining research questions. Creswell (2003) noted that quantitative methods employ strategies to identify variables to study, verify theories, or collect data to test hypotheses. For this study, strategies for determining student achievement were used to identify the variables of study (Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores, length of time under policy implementation, race, gender, and SES). Statistical analysis of student test scores as
measured by the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test was employed as the outcome variable to determine the effects of time spent under implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy and gender, race, and SES.

**The Researcher**

The researcher was employed as the school district superintendent during the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. The researcher was cognizant of the inherent bias and fought to limit any bias. At the time of the study, 6 years had passed since policy implementation and the researcher had been employed in a different position outside of CCSD for 3 years.

**The Setting**

The setting for the research study included a local school district. Inquiries with school district staff and document reviews were conducted in CCSD, located in central Mississippi. The school district is composed of three elementary schools, two high schools, and a vocational center with an average student population of approximately 1500. A K-2 promotion/retention policy was developed and implemented in 2008 for the school district. Existing data from Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores from 2008-2009 through 2012-2013 were analyzed. All scores were included within this study.

**The Participants**

The participants for the study included administrators and teachers employed in the CCSD in 2008-2009 during the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. The researcher analyzed existing Grade Three
Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores for 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. The scores for the third grade students were included from each of the three elementary schools for 5 years (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013). According to public records, the number of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores for 2009 were 128, for 2010 were 116, for 2011 were 123, for 2012 were 109, and for 2013 were 109.

Variables in the Study

The outcome (dependent) variable in this study is third grade students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2. The independent variables include length of time under the K-2 promotion/retention policy (0 year, 1 year, 2 years, and 3 years), gender (female, male), race/ethnicity (Black, White, Other), and SES (high SES, low SES). High SES is defined as those students not eligible and not participating in free and reduced meals, and low SES is defined as those students eligible and participating in free and reduced meals. The K-2 promotion/retention policy is provided in Appendix A.

Collection of Data

After Mississippi State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix B), the researcher requested permission to conduct interviews and review documents related to the creation and implementation of the promotion retention policy. Letters were sent to the school district requesting existing student achievement data and seeking permission to schedule interviews with administrators and teachers. Once permission was obtained from the superintendent (Appendix C), third grade MCT2 Reading/Language Arts data were placed in a format for use with SPSS. The researcher sought to schedule interviews and conduct document reviews by emailing administrators
to request interviews and attached a consent form for their information and/or for them to share with teachers.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

Semi-structured interview questions were used to collect the participants’ responses regarding their experiences during the leadership change process of creating and implementing the policy. Two former principals, one assistant principal, and two teachers were interviewed. The K-2 promotion/retention policy, email correspondence, the superintendent’s notes, agenda and minutes from relevant meetings, and announcements of the policy implementation were reviewed.

The following interview questions were used for administrators:

1. What steps did you take in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy?
2. What obstacles did you face?
3. What did you do to ensure “buy-in” from your teachers?
4. What did you do to ensure “buy-in” from parents?
5. What would you do differently if you could go back and start over?

The follow interview questions were used for teachers:

1. What steps were taken in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy?
2. Did teachers and other stakeholders have input into the implementation?
3. What obstacles did you face?
4. What would you suggest should be done differently if you could go back and start over?
Quantitative Data Collection

Existing student data from CCSD included third grade students’ scores as measured by the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MTC2 for 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. In addition, data included the students’ gender, race/ethnicity, and SES.

Table 4 provides a display of the number of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores for 2009 through 2013. The length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy for each group is also shown in the display.

Table 4

Number of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT Scores and Length of Time Under Policy Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Length of Time Under Policy Implementation</th>
<th>Number of 3rd Grade Students with MCT2 Reading/Language Arts Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Data

The analysis of data included both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were determined for all quantitative data.
Qualitative Data Analysis

For the first research question regarding the leadership change process in creating and implementing the promotion/retention policy, the following steps as recommended by Merriam (2009) were taken in analyzing interview notes, documents, and field notes. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative data are emergent. Merriam suggested that the researcher should conduct the first interview using the interview questions that were written and with the broad goal of answering the research questions. The researcher used the aforementioned questions for the first participant. Merriam suggested that questions asked of other participants might change depending on the answers of the one before. The researcher did not see the necessity to change the questions and instead used the same questions for each participant according to their positions as former administrators or former teachers. The researcher followed the preferred way of qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009) to analyze the data simultaneously with data collection. Data analyses included making sense of data by grouping and looking for emergent themes.

All responses from the participants were grouped using open codes according to Kotter’s change process. According to Merriam (2009), the process of grouping open codes is called axial coding or analytical coding. Transcripts from each interview were studied to find commonalities that were grouped into the categories based on Kotter’s eight step process: (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create guiding coalitions, (3) develop the change vision, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower broad-based action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (8) anchor new approaches in culture. A rich, thick narrative was constructed to describe
the leadership change process guided by Kotter’s eight steps, and emergent themes were presented to further describe the leadership change process.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Descriptive and inferential statistics ANOVAs were used to analyze the data collected for research questions two through five. The steps used in completing the quantitative data analysis included the following.

1. All data were coded for the third grade students’ scores on the MCT2 in Reading/Language Arts, length of time under promotion/retention policy, gender, race/ethnicity, and SES.
2. Data were analyzed using SPSS 18 for Windows to generate descriptive statistics.
3. Preliminary analyses of data were conducted to determine independent groups, normality (data within each cell of the design are assumed to be normally distributed) of data and (3) equal variances (the population variances within each combination of factors should be equal).
4. One-way ANOVA and two-way ANOVA computations were completed using alpha at .05. Post hoc analyses were conducted for significant findings.
5. The results were analyzed and interpreted as each related to the five research questions and literature reviewed for the study.

Table 5 provides a display of the coding scheme for the existing data for time under implementation of policy, gender, race, and SES. The data were used to compute the ANOVA statistics.
Table 5

Coding Scheme for Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Year under policy</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>*SES</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. (SES) = socioeconomic status. Low-- receive free or reduced lunch. High--do not receive free or reduced lunch.

Preliminary Data Analysis

A preliminary/exploratory analysis was conducted to examine the data for performing ANOVA computations (independent samples and normally distributed with equal variances). The data met the assumptions for four groups consisting of data from independent samples. In addition, the data were found to be normally distributed with equal variances.

Skewness statistics provided preliminary information about the existence of outliers in determining normality. Skewness values outside of -1 and 1 suggest that outliers may be present. The data for MCT2 scores and length of time under policy showed that skewness values for all four independent groups based on years under policy fell within -1 to 1 range, suggesting no outliers. Figure 2 shows a histogram of the four groups based on the Length of Time under the policy and Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores.
The normality assumption means that the residual errors were assumed to be normally distributed, roughly in the shape of a normal curve. Figure 1 above shows the distribution of scores for each length of time under the policy as normal, thus normality of distribution was met. According to the Test of Homogeneity of Variance shown in Table 6 below, the homogeneity of variance assumption was met (i.e., $p = .248$, which is greater than 0.05).
Table 6

*Test of Homogeneity of Variances*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.380</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>.248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levene’s test assesses the assumption of equal variances by testing the null hypothesis that the population variances are equal (called *homogeneity of variance* or homoscedasticity). If the resulting *p*-value of Levene’s test is less than 0.05, the obtained differences in sample variances are unlikely to have occurred based on random sampling from a population with equal variances. Thus, the null hypothesis of equal variances is rejected and it is concluded that there is a difference between the variances in the population. Since the *p*-value of .248 is greater than α level at .05 for this test, then we fail to reject H₀, which increases our confidence that the variances are equal and the homogeneity of variance assumption has been met.

For the second research question, the one-way ANOVA was used to determine if there were differences among the group (length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy) means of the students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2. A significance level of alpha at .05 was used and when significance was found, post hoc analyses were conducted.

For the third through fifth research questions, the two-way-between-groups ANOVA was used. For the third research question, the hypotheses were tested for the main effect of time under the policy, the main effect of gender, and the interaction of time under the policy and gender. For the fourth research question, the hypotheses were tested
for the main effect of time under the policy, the main effect of race/ethnicity, and the interaction of time under the policy and race/ethnicity. For the fifth research question, the hypotheses were tested for the main effect of time under the policy, the main effect of SES, and the interaction of time under policy and SES.

Chapter Summary

The setting for this study was with the CCSD, a rural school district in central Mississippi. A mixed methods research design and data analysis were utilized for this study. The participants for the study included administrators and teachers employed in the CCSD in 2008-2009 during the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. Existing data were used for third grade students from the CCSD from 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013. All Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores from the five aforementioned school years were analyzed in this study. The K-2 promotion/retention policy, email correspondence, the former superintendent’s notes, agenda and minutes from relevant meetings, and announcements of the policy implementation were collected and analyzed for research question one. For research questions two through five, Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 data from 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 were collected and analyzed. For the second research question, the one-way ANOVA was used to determine if there were differences among the groups (length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy) means of the students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2. For research questions three through five, the two-way-between-groups ANOVA was used. For the third through fifth research questions, the hypotheses were tested for the main effect of time under the policy, the
main effect of gender (question three), race (question four), and SES (question five), respectively and the interaction of time under policy and gender, race, and SES.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides an analysis of the data collected for the study and presents the results of the study. First, this study investigated the leadership change process during the development and implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy. Second, the study explored the impact of the policy on student achievement. More specifically, the study sought to determine if the length of time under the policy had a positive effect on Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores and whether there were combined effects of length of time under the policy and race, gender, or SES. Both qualitative and quantitative strategies were used to analyze the data as outlined in Chapter Three. The Chapter begins with background information and the results are presented for each research question.

Background Information

The background narrative of information includes a description of the school district related to the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. A large portion of the narrative was constructed based on first-hand experience from the researcher who was employed as the school district superintendent during the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. The researcher was cognizant of the inherent bias and fought to limit any bias. Further, 6 years have
passed since policy implementation and the researcher has been employed in a different position for the past 3 years. The following is a summary of the background information.

In the spring of 2008, school district administrators began to discuss student achievement district data. As noted in the first chapter in Table 1, far too many students scored below proficiency on the Reading/Language Arts MCT and by eighth grade, almost 50% of the students were scoring below proficiency on Reading/Language Arts MCT.

Likewise, as shown in Chapter One, Table 2, nearly 60% of the students scored below proficiency each year on the English II Subject Area Test, and there was a noted gap in achievement between Black and White students on Mississippi’s Subject Area Tests as shown in Table 3 in Chapter One. Subject area test data revealed that students performed lower in English II and there seemed to be larger achievement gaps than in other subject areas. The administrative team’s collective conviction was that there should not be achievement gaps. Their philosophy was that students must receive the foundation in literacy very early so that they would have the necessary skills to move from learning to read to reading to learn. The district administrators were convinced that more attention needed to be placed on K-2 with diagnostic tests utilized at the end of the year for promotion/retention decisions and that this would cause more attention to be paid to each individual child. Additionally, the administrators’ philosophy was this would result in teachers doing more to ensure that every child received the instruction necessary to be on grade level in K-2 at each school year end. Administrators were aware of the research that shows that if children were on grade level each year, K-2, that they would each receive a better foundation in literacy that would allow them the opportunity to continue
the reading growth trajectory into middle and high school with a better chance of graduating from high school with college and career readiness skills. Prior to the K-2 promotion/retention policy, K-2 promotion/retention decisions were made based on the end of the year average from teacher made assessments.

In 2008, a K-2 promotion/retention policy (Appendix A) was developed and implemented. The promotion/retention policy implemented in 2008 in CCSD required that every first and second grade child be tested using at least one diagnostic measure at the end of the school year as well as obtain at least an 80% average. When the policy was put into place, the superintendent and school board encouraged principals to promote thorough communication of individual student progress to parents throughout the school year through monitoring the progress of students at least three times throughout the year before the diagnostics were to be given for promotion/retention decisions. Principals were encouraged to ask teachers to differentiate instruction based on individual student deficiencies. DIBELS, a paper-based assessment of reading skills, was used to identify students who needed interventions. A computer-based adaptive general reading test by STAR Reading was also used to measure literacy. When comparing the K-2 promotion/retention policy with earlier policies and practices, the researcher (as superintendent) deemed that the policy was more thorough with assessments other than the traditional teacher given end-of-the-year average per student to determine whether a student would be sent on to the next grade. The emphasis was placed on the use of other diagnostic tests given at each grade level (K-2) to determine whether students had mastered sufficient literacy skills to advance to the next grade. A team of reading specialists within CCSD met to determine what levels on DIBELS, SRI, and STAR
Reading constituted sufficient mastery for promotion to the next grade level for first and second grade. Additionally, the end of the year grade point average to be promoted from first grade to second grade and from second grade to third grade was increased from 70% to 80%.

Specific strategies within the policy included the administration of diagnostic tests at the end of each school year to determine promotion/retention decisions in K-2. Additionally, administrators were encouraged to have strong lines of communication between parents and teachers with constant progress monitoring of each child throughout the school year with communication to parents of each child’s progress. Also, administrators were encouraged to have teachers to set goals for each child and to celebrate progress toward meeting goals.

Participants

The participants in this study were principals (Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones), assistant principal (Ms. Baker), the current researcher (Ms. Connor), and K-2 teachers (Ms. Clark and Ms. Taylor) in CCSD. Pseudo names were given to protect each participant’s identity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted that lasted approximately fifteen minutes. Administrators who were principals at the time of implementation were both White males (Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones). In 2008, Mr. Smith had 5 years of experience as principal and 3 years of experience as an elementary teacher prior to administration and at the time of the interview was still the principal at the same elementary school. In 2008, Mr. Jones had 2 years of experience in administration and 5 years of experience as a teacher; at the time of the interview Mr. Jones was the superintendent of education in CCSD. In 2008, Ms. Baker, a White female who was an assistant principal at the time of
policy implementation had 6 years of teaching experience and 4 years of administrative experience; she was the CCSD Special Education Director at the time of the interview.

Ms. Connor, the researcher and superintendent at the time of implementation, had 12 years of teaching experience and 1 1/2 years of administrative experience prior to taking the office of superintendent of education in 2008. The background information provides the narrative from the researcher.

Two teachers (Ms. Clark and Ms. Taylor), both White females were interviewed. Ms. Taylor had 6 years of teaching experience in 2008 and at the time of the interview was still at the same elementary school teaching the same K-2 grade level that she was in 2008. Ms. Clark had 10 years of teaching experience in 2008 and at the time of the interview was still at the same elementary school teaching the same K-2 grade level that she was in 2008.

**Findings for Research Question 1**

How did the leadership change process impact the development and implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy in a local school district?

To answer the first research question, existing documents related to the development and implementation of the promotion/retention policy, email correspondence and superintendent notes were utilized for analysis along with the notes from interviewing the participants.

The following interview questions were used for administrators:

1. What steps did you take in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy?
2. What obstacles did you face?
3. What did you do to ensure “buy-in” from your teachers?

4. What did you do to ensure “buy-in” from parents?

5. What would you do differently if you could go back and start over?

The following interview questions were used for teachers:

1. What steps were taken in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy?

2. Did teachers and other stakeholders have input into the implementation?

3. What obstacles did you face?

4. What would you suggest should be done differently if you could go back and start over?

Findings From Administrators’ Responses

The following documents were reviewed related to the first interview question for administrators: former superintendent email correspondence and former superintendent notes. A review of these documents revealed communication between administrators, however, no input was sought from any other stakeholders. Nonetheless, in looking at Ms. Connor’s notes from the summer and fall of 2008, the researcher found that the urgency of the situation was discussed at administrator’s meetings. MCT and SATP data were discussed. The administrative team from the largest elementary school was very vocal; especially the assistant principal, that such a policy was necessary to positively affect change. The superintendent shared her frustration that in the past years before moving to administration she found far too many students reported to her biology class in ninth or tenth grade reading far below grade level. It was noted that the urgency of the situation warranted swift action and that there was no time to gain buy-in. Email
communication was found that noted that Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing showed gains at the end of the first year that MAP was in place after the policy implementation.

Each administrator was asked to respond to the following question: What steps did you take in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy? All three of the administrators overwhelmingly indicated that a change was needed to address the low student achievement for students advancing to the next grade level. In response to question one, Mr. Smith answered,

Basically just letting the parents know.... what the new policy was

...(inaudible)...we tried to let them know before the school year ended what was coming the next year. In parent involvement meetings we made sure that we informed and explained to parents the main thing was letting teachers know in first and second grade that if a child scored a true 80 that they should be able to roll into the next grade and be productive.

Mr. Jones answered,

Well we…trying to remember…umm..we tried to make sure that the parents knew what the requirements were and constantly reminded them of that and just really got the students and worked with them to see where they were and where they fell different times of the year and made intense interventions to get them to make those benchmarks. There is no doubt that if the policy was not put in place we would have kept on with the make a 70 and go on to the next grade type thing.

We’d have just done our normal because we did not have anything in place to
make sure that they were on reading level or that so….(inaudible) ..MAP testing and GAP time really helped to consolidate gains and build students’ confidence.

Ms. Baker answered,

I was the AP at the time and I worked with the principal and we were looking at data and it was not as good as it should have been. These students were not performing well in third and when we looked back they did not perform well in first or second grade, either.

Both Ms. Baker and Mr. Jones recalled that “the policy was developed from a sense of urgency” and that far too many students were progressing to high school grades reading too far below grade-level and were dropping out of school. Mr. Smith recalled that the district vision was to reach every child every chance that they could every day and to close achievement gaps. Mr. Jones recalled that he utilized MAP testing which helped students and teachers to measure student levels and progress toward reaching each level. All three administrators noted a change in teacher practices that they felt was due to implementation of the policy. Table 7 provides a summary of the administrators’ responses and documents reviewed related to the first interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.
Table 7

Change Process of Administrators in Developing and Implementing a Promotion/Retention Policy with Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative team looked at data and realized huge gaps in achievement by race and SES</td>
<td>Need for Change</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative team noted very low LA MCT2 scores that continued into high school</td>
<td>Reasons for Change</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators recalled the development of the vision statement which was Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day</td>
<td>Importance of Vision Statement</td>
<td>Develop the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators recalled gains in achievement as evidence by from MAP testing</td>
<td>Evidences of Improvement</td>
<td>Generate short-term gains and produce more change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher practices were sustained due to MAP results and the K-2 promotion/retention policy</td>
<td>New strategies with positive results</td>
<td>Anchor New Approaches in Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the participants responded to the first interview question indicating a need for change in the district resulting from achievement gaps and low scores on reading/language arts MCT. The vision statement for the district, Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day, was reiterated by all of the administrators. All administrators noted that the implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy brought about positive results with increased student achievement.
Each administrator was asked to describe what obstacles were faced during the development and implementation of the policy. In response to question two, Mr. Smith answered, “In the first year the parents of children who had a 78 or 79 did not feel that their child should fail and that was hard. We encouraged teachers to progress monitor a lot numerous times throughout the year and communicate with parents.”

Mr. Jones answered,

Well ...I think I’m remembering right…but at about Christmas of that first year when we kinda saw the benchmark of where they were and saw that about 90% if the semester ended right then would not make it and that there would be an uproar so teachers made intense interventions immediately out of panic ….it was so long ago I can’t remember.

Ms. Baker answered,

We tried to help teachers to understand that there were some students that would not make the cut to pass on but that was ok because they needed more time...it was still very hard for parents to buy-in at first.

Every one of the administrators recalled that all of the administrators and school board members were on board with the need for the policy, and Mr. Smith recalled that they were all willing to maneuver the obstacles. Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith both recalled that they knew that they had to create a sense of urgency and get teachers to realize the need for the policy. Mr. Jones recalled, “You shared data at the back-to-school district...um...uh...meeting to show achievement gaps and how many were reading below grade level by school...um...and that helped them to see… ah, to see the need.” Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith recalled that they shared data at their respective schools to help get
teachers to buy in to the need for the policy and Mr. Jones mentioned, “We even showed that our students ended up in jail or dropping out of school or couldn’t find a job to support their family cause they just kept getting passed on.” Mr. Smith, “After a short time we were able to gather faculty and parental support.” In interviewing Mr. Smith, he was found to be very proactive in getting his teachers involved in discussing the need for the policy and in helping them to have buy-in and have a voice during the process of implementation at the school-level. Mr. Smith added the topic to faculty meetings so that teachers could brainstorm solutions. Every one of the administrators recalled that they were all strong advocates for the policy and that the majority of teachers were on board with the policy, understood the need for the policy, and was willing to buy-in to the vision. Table 8 provides a summary of the administrators’ responses and documents reviewed related to the second interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.
Table 8

*Change Process of Obstacles Faced by Administrators with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers at one school realized that about 90% of students would not be promoted at year-end if extreme intervention did not occur</td>
<td>Need for Change</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most administrators noted that they immediately shared data that would show the need for urgency</td>
<td>Gain buy-in</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All administrators noted that they were on board from day one of discussion of policy development</td>
<td>Evidences of Support/Buy-in</td>
<td>Create Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators noted that most teachers understood the need for the policy and were on board with it</td>
<td>Evidences of Support/Buy-in</td>
<td>Create Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the participants responded to the second interview question indicating that all administrators and most teachers realized the need for change in the district and were supportive of the implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. Administrators responded that once teachers realized the great number of students with reading skills that were below grade level that teachers had immediate buy-in.

Each administrator was asked to respond to the following question: What did you do to ensure “buy-in” from teachers. For this interview question, email correspondence between Mr. Jones and Ms. Connor discussing that he was going to present data to show
how many students were reading below grade-level and how many would fail if extreme measures were not taken.

Mr. Smith answered,

We went to the teachers and showed them the data of how many students were falling behind in third and fourth grade and showed them the test scores. We showed them that the students were not where they needed to be and we found that the second and third grade teachers could tell us where the students were going to score. Teachers were more concerned throughout the year and they stayed in contact more because of the policy. Once a student met one of the requirements ...like their 40 words per minute… they would send a note home so happy to say, “You got it!”

Ms. Baker noted, “The principal held a lot of meetings with the teachers and they pretty much already had buy-in but the parents were a different story.” It took more effort to convince the parents that the policy was a necessity.

Table 9 provides a summary of the administrators’ responses and documents reviewed related to the third interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.
Table 9

Change Process of Obtaining Teacher Buy-in Faced by Administrators with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators showed teachers data to show how far behind in reading that many students were</td>
<td>Need for Change</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were more concerned and stayed in contact with parents</td>
<td>Evidence of Increased Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Communicate the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith spoke of joy in teachers as students met goals toward promotion and shared that progress with parents.</td>
<td>Evidence of Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Communicate the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By and large, the participants responded to the third interview question indicating that the implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy resulted in improved lines of communication between teachers and parents. Additionally, all noted that there was an increase in the sharing of data with all stakeholders in order to create a sense of urgency and gain buy-in for the policy.

Each administrator was asked to respond to the following question: What did you do to ensure “buy-in” from your parents? In reviewing email correspondence, it was found that Ms. Connor sent an email to administrators in December 2008 reminding them to make sure that teachers were monitoring progress and communicating that progress with teachers.

Mr. Smith answered,
The parents were just let know that this is the requirement...this is Choctaw County ...and we have high expectations... join our club. Then the parent would kind of …uhhh…they were like finally and it was kinda like a subject area test for high school students. Parents became more involved because of it. They are learning how to read now.

Mr. Jones answered,

...well from teachers helping them to see hey 90% are fixing to be retained and with parents just helping them see hey if your child doesn’t get to that benchmark there are no exceptions and when they got over the initial shock helping them see hey the semester is not over and there is time and they can make it and every year we saw that around Valentines there were many who were not near the benchmark but it was like someone hit a switch and boom they would all make it. We put interventionists in place and developed GAP time and knocked it down to the K-2 level and that was when all that was coming through and it worked.

Ms. Baker answered,

It seemed to put a lot of stress on the parents and took time to help them understand that just because their student was not performing did not mean that they would not ever perform on grade level... Parents were the hardest but they finally began to understand that it was actually a positive for their child. If the policy were not in place the students’ success in the classroom would not be there… teachers now have more of the same ability levels within grades and that I credit to the culture change due to this policy.
Table 10 provides a summary of the administrators’ responses and documents reviewed related to the fourth interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.

Table 10

*Change Process For Obtaining Parental Buy-in Faced by Administrators with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just before Christmas 2008, Mr. Jones communicated that approximately 90% of K-2 students were not on grade-level and would not be promoted</td>
<td>Need for Change</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith communicated to parents that CCSD has very high expectations</td>
<td>Evidence of Increased Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Develop a Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An administrator stated that teachers now have students with more of the same ability level students due to the change of culture brought about due to the policy</td>
<td>Evidence of positive results and culture change</td>
<td>Anchor Change in Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, the participants responded to the fourth interview question indicating that the implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy resulted in increased lines of communication between administrators, teachers, and parents as well as in positive results with more students per grade level at the same ability level. Administrators shared with parents that expectations had increased within CCSD.
All administrators were asked to respond to the following question five: What would you do differently if you could go back and start over? For this interview question, the participants felt nothing would be done differently. They all consistently spoke about how they were “spot on.” Mr. Jones answered, “We have maintained the course...and you (referring to Ms. Conner, the researcher) were ahead of the game and you were dead on it.” Ms. Conner (the researcher) stated, “Well, I can’t take the credit it was really y’all.” Mr. Jones stated,

…well you were right on it and look where the state is right now with the third grade test and you were right on it… (laughs)… and we were already there so we are not worried about that laugh so one less thing to worry about... laugh…Yep, there were outside people conducting the end-of-the-year tests so there were more eyes on data and others outside of classroom working with students. I don’t really know of anything we would’ve done different except maybe start a little earlier.

When Ms. Baker was asked the question, she stated,

I would definitely want the policy to go into effect…I supported it then and support it now…maybe a little more research to kinda head off some of the uncertainties about it may have helped people buy-in in a little better.

The interviews took place 6 years after policy implementation. All participants noted that there had been a change in the culture in all elementary schools within the district. All participants pointed back to the policy as the major cause for the change.

Mr. Smith stated,

Before the policy a student could sit in the back of the class and make the 70 and be passed from grade to grade… Teachers were not held accountable. If they had
the 70 average from teacher-made tests they were passed on to the next grade.

When the policy was put in place and outside people came in and tested students …uh... and administrators looked at how students performed; then teachers were forced to pay attention and to meet the needs of every student. This forced administrators to pay more attention to teachers whose students were not showing growth ... I would say that there is no doubt that our district would not be a “B” district with one “A” school if it was not for this policy and a better foundation in reading.

Table 11 provides a summary of the administrators’ responses and documents reviewed related to the fifth interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.

Table 11

| Change Process of What Administrators Would Have Done Differently in Developing and Implementing a Promotion/Retention Policy with Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory |
|---|---|---|
| Major Finding-Change Activity | Emergent Themes | Kotter’s Change Process |
| All participants noted that a complete change in culture has occurred within all of the elementary schools. | Evidence of positive results and culture change | Anchor New Approaches in Culture |
| All agreed the policy was useful in addressing the issue | Feeling policy addressed the need of promotion v. retention | Guiding Coalition |

Overall the participants responded to the fifth interview question indicating that the implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy resulted a complete culture
change. More teachers were using data to individualize instruction to meet the needs of students.

Findings from Teachers’ Responses

Teachers were asked the following question: What steps were taken in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy? Ms. Clark stated, “We made a fluency factor and made a 2.8 on the STAR so that they would not get away from us without being where they should be.” Ms. Taylor stated, “The superintendent shared student data with all district staff at a back-to-school assembly to show that poor students and Black students were not scoring as high as White students.” She recalled that the superintendent shared actual numbers of students at each elementary school who were reading below grade level. Ms. Taylor noted that her principal shared data with their staff after the Christmas holiday. Ms. Taylor said, “…the superintendent was always sending emails to appeal to the teachers’ hearts in various ways to get them to care about the kids and want to work hard to reach them.” Mrs. Clark said, “Our principal immediately held informational meetings to make parents aware of the need for the policy and the principal showed student test scores and reading levels to show that a lot of students were not on grade level.” Ms. Taylor recalled that the administrative team developed a vision of reaching Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day. Ms. Taylor noted, “There seemed to be a momentum for growth that was created in the first few years of the policy implementation as students showed growth in RIT levels according to MAP tests.”

Table 12 provides a summary of the teachers’ responses and documents reviewed related to the first interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.
### Table 12

**Teachers’ Recollection of Change Process in Developing and Implementing a Promotion/Retention Policy with Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The superintendent shared data at back-to-school meetings to show gaps in achievement and to show number of students reading below grade level at each school by grade</td>
<td>Need for Change</td>
<td>Create a Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators also shared data to show the need for urgency</td>
<td>Need for Change</td>
<td>Create a Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent sent emails to all faculty and staff to appeal to everyone’s caring side to get them to care more and want to help all students</td>
<td>Evidence of Increased Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Create a Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators held informational meetings with parents and shared data with their faculty and staff</td>
<td>Evidence of Increased Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Create a Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor recalled development of a district vision Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day</td>
<td>Importance of Vision</td>
<td>Develop the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Largely, the participants responded to the first interview question indicating a need for change in the district resulting from low scores in reading/language arts. The vision statement for the district was *Every Child, Every Child, Every Day*, was reiterated by both teachers.
The teachers were asked to respond to the following interview Question 2: Did teachers and other stakeholders have input into the implementation? There were no documents to review to support this question. Ms. Clark answered, “No, I can’t remember any.” Ms. Taylor answered, “No, not really. It was just put in place.” Ms. Taylor recalled, “The teachers and staff were provided t-shirts with ‘Every child, Every chance, Every day.’” Big banners with that statement were put up at every school and at the central office.” Ms. Clark said, “Oh, … letters were sent home to parents of kindergarten through second grade parents.” Ms. Taylor recalled that “‘Every child, Every chance, Every day’ was mentioned in emails, in faculty meetings, and in parent teacher organization meetings. Both participants noted that teachers and other stakeholders were really not given an opportunity to give feedback or to give comment.

Table 13 provides a summary of the teachers’ responses and documents reviewed related to the second interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.
Table 13

*Teachers’ Response to Measures Taken to Gain Stakeholder Buy-in with Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff were provided t-shirts with the vision statement</td>
<td>Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Communicate the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters were sent home to parents to explain the need for policy and the district vision</td>
<td>Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Communicate the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day</em> was used in emails and at meetings</td>
<td>Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td>Communicate the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the participants responded to the second interview question indicating strong lines of communication were in place between administrators, teachers, and parents and additionally that the district visions was shared at every opportunity.

Teachers were asked the following interview question: What obstacles did you face? Ms. Connor’s email correspondence documents were reviewed. There were a couple of parents who were very upset at the end of the year when their children were retained because of the policy. There were several meetings with the superintendent, the principal, and parents. Ms. Connor also recalls a statement from one of the same parents who after a year stated that he could see in hindsight that it was really what was best for his child.

Ms. Taylor answered,

Personally, at first I did not like it because I was thinking you are the teacher and you know that student and you know whether they are doing their best or not and
sometimes a 70 is the best that a student can do. But now I like it because I think that we can see a difference. This year I can really see a difference as to what is coming in from kindergarten as far as reading … The policy caused teachers to do more to help students make those cut points for the tests and it made students work harder to make the cut scores … it put a lot of pressure on students.

Ms. Clark answered, “The first year the parents were not accustomed to it and there was a lot of confusion …uh… anxiety, but the next year we sent regular reports and we have not had any trouble since then.” Ms. Taylor said, “Some teachers were very vocal in opposition to the policy fearing that the bar was set too high by the policy.” Ms. Taylor recalled that the teachers were allowed to decide how to implement the policy on an individual basis until after Christmas when it was realized that so many students were going to be retained if drastic measures were not taken. It was then, Mrs. Clark said that,… the principal implemented a plan to take blocks of time and arrange students with teachers according to each student’s reading level for intense interventions … the principal called Gap Time. During Gap Time, students were in mixed groups K-6 according to their performance level… MAP tests were used at every school … I think … to measure every student’s math and reading ability … students were grouped according to ability for Gap Time.

Ms. Taylor said that she thought all principals required teachers to set goals and then had parties and other rewards when goals were met. Table 14 provides a summary of the teachers’ responses and documents reviewed related to the third interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.
Table 14

*Obstacles Teachers Faced in Implementing the K-2 Promotion/Retention Policy With
Emergent Themes Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators were allowed to determine the specifics of how the</td>
<td>Empower all stakeholders</td>
<td>Empower Broad-based Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the policy was implemented within their school and teachers were</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allowed to determine the specifics of how the policy was</td>
<td>Celebrate Gains and Grow</td>
<td>Consolidate Gains and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implemented within their classes.</td>
<td>Positive Momentum</td>
<td>Produce More Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students MAP results from Gap-Time were small wins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, teachers noted that all stakeholders were given a certain amount of autonomy to implement the K-2 promotion/retention policy. Both teachers also recalled how most celebrated individual, class, and grade-level growth as shown on MAP results and how positive momentum was created.

Teachers were asked to respond to the following question: What would you suggest should be done differently if you could go back and start over? Ms. Taylor answered, “It would have been a good idea to have included all parents and let them know about...we needed better communication.” Ms. Clark answered,

It has been a very effective policy. When I first came into second grade they had foundational skills, they could decode, but they were not fluent readers and that was even your higher students and now when they come to second grade they are fluent readers. So now we can go straight to reading to learn instead of continue...
learning to read in second because they can all read fluently now. I think that this was due to the policy because the policy caused all teachers to step up their game and increase the rigor in their classroom and I think it started with the policy. I do ... The policy caused teachers to pay attention to every student and to make sure that every student received the interventions necessary to bring them to grade level. ... we have a complete culture change at our school and I think district-wide ... thankfully students are now coming to us reading fluently and ready to learn ... now we can teach content and build instead of having to take the time to teach them reading skills that they should have gotten in kindergarten and first grade.

Table 15 provides a summary of the teachers’ responses and documents reviewed related to the fourth interview question. Activities related to changes and emergent themes are presented and aligned to Kotter’s steps to Leadership Change.

Table 15

Change Process of Teachers’ Perceptions of What Should Have Been Done Differently

With Emergent Themes aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding-Change Activity</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One teacher said that more should have been done to let parents know and have input in the development and implementation of the policy</td>
<td>Need for Input from Parents as to Development and Implementation Process</td>
<td>Create a Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One teacher said that there should have been better communication with parents</td>
<td>Need for Input from Parents as to Development and Implementation Process</td>
<td>Create a Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, teachers noted that parents were not involved or given opportunities for input into the process of development or implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy. Teachers indicated that lines of communication with parents should have been opened during the development phase.

Summary of Results for Research Question One

Overall, data indicate that administrators and teachers perceived the implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy as an urgent need in the CCSD to address low achievement scores especially with the noted gaps based on race and SES. Change activities and emergent themes for each interview question were aligned with Kotter’s steps in his Change Theory to illustrate how the leadership change impacted the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy in the school district. All of the emergent themes gleaned from the interview questions and document reviews are aligned to the steps of Kotter’s Change Theory and can be found in Table 16.
Table 16

Summary Emergent Themes Found in the Analysis of the Change Process in Developing a K-2 Promotion/Retention Policy Aligned with Kotter’s Change Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Kotter’s Change Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Need for Change</td>
<td>Create Sense of Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reasons for Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gain Buy-in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidences of Support and Buy-in</td>
<td>Create a Guiding Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence of Increased Communication Between Administrators, Teachers, and Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feeling policy Addressed the Need of Promotion v. Retention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for Input from Parents as to Development and Implementation Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Importance of Vision Statement</td>
<td>Develop the Change Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication Between Parents, Teachers, Communicate the Change Vision and Administrators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empower Stakeholders</td>
<td>Empower Broad-based Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidences of Improvement</td>
<td>Generate Short-term Wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consolidate Gains and Grow Positive Momentum</td>
<td>Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New Strategies with Positive Results</td>
<td>Anchor New Approaches in Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence of Positive Results and Culture Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings for Research Question Two

Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy? For the second research question, the study sought to determine whether the length of time under the policy had a positive effect on grade three LA scores. The four groups of the study are displayed in Table 17. Existing data were used for 585 students in the CCSD.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SSEM</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Policy</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>149.66</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>[147.82, 151.49]</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>176.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>149.85</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>[147.98, 151.71]</td>
<td>107.00</td>
<td>186.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>151.69</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>[150.12, 153.26]</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>171.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three years</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>153.69</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>[152.21, 155.16]</td>
<td>108.00</td>
<td>188.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>151.62</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>[150.78, 152.47]</td>
<td>107.00</td>
<td>188.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval.

Descriptive statistics show the following for the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores of the third grade groups: No Length of Time ($M = 149.66, SD = 10.49, n = 128$), 1 year under the policy ($M = 149.85, SD = 10.14, n = 116$), 2 years under the policy ($M = 151.69, SD = 8.80, n = 123$), and 3 years under the policy ($M = 153.69, SD = 11.05, n = 218$).
A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if differences existed between the groups. Table 18 provides a display of the computation with the main effect being length of time under the policy.

Table 18

One-Way ANOVA of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1792.13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>597.38</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>0.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>61751.13</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>106.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63543.27</td>
<td>584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05

The one-way ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 alpha level, $F(3, 581) = 5.62$, $MSE= 10.28$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .028$. These results indicate a statistically significant difference across the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores of the four groups.

To follow up on the significant one-way ANOVA results and determine where the differences were, a Scheffé post hoc test was run using a .05 alpha. Table 19 provides a display of the post hoc analysis.
The Scheffé post hoc test (see Table 19) revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students enrolled during the year for which no policy was implemented compared to the students enrolled with the policy being implemented three years under policy ($p = .007$). Also, a statistically significant difference was found between one year under policy and three years under the policy ($p = .015$). No other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant.

Analysis of the data for research question two showed that the length of time under the promotion/retention policy had an effect on student achievement. Specifically, the results indicated that groups with longer time (3 years) under the promotion/retention policy performed better on the MCT2 than the third grade students with less time under the policy (no time under the policy or one year under the policy).

**Findings for Research Question Three**

Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/ Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the
promotion/retention policy and gender? For the third research question, the study sought
to determine main effect of time under policy, the main effect of gender, and the
interaction of time under the policy and gender. Table 20 displays the descriptive
statistics for the groups.

Table 20

*Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT Scores by Length of*
*Time Under Implementation of Policy and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Policy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>148.29</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>151.06</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149.66</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149.35</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year policy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>150.50</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149.84</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149.77</td>
<td>8.81</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two year policy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>153.35</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151.69</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>152.86</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three year policy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>154.55</td>
<td>11.02</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>153.69</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>150.50</td>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152.80</td>
<td>10.58</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151.62</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive statistics for the groups were: No Policy/Male ($M = 148.29, SD =
9.78, n = 65$), No Policy/Female ($M = 151.06, SD = 11.08, n = 63$), One Year
Policy/Male ($M = 149.34, SD = 9.50, n = 66$), One Year Policy/Female ($M = 150.50, SD$
$ = 10.98, n = 50$), Two Years Policy/Male ($M = 149.77, SD = 8.80, n = 57$), Two Years
Policymaker Females ($M = 153.35, SD = 8.52, n = 66$), Three Years Policy/Male ($M = 152.85, SD = 11.06, n = 111$), Three Years Policy/Female ($M = 154.55, SD = 11.02, n = 107$).

A two-way ANOVA was used to determine the main effect of gender and the interaction of time under implementation of the policy and gender. Table 21 provides a display of the computation with the main effect being both length of time under implementation of the policy and gender.

Table 21

*Two-way ANOVA of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>$\eta_p^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>1756.41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>585.47</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>.001*</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>719.78</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>719.78</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>.009*</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy X Gender</td>
<td>113.47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.82</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>60919.86</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>105.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63543.27</td>
<td>584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05

The two-way ANOVA (see Table 21) indicated a statistically significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 577) = 6.82, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = 0.012$. Overall, female students ($M = 152.80, SD = 10.58, n = 286$) outperformed male students ($M = 150.50, SD = 10.18, n = 299$). The interaction of time under policy and gender was not statistically significant, $F(3,577) = .36, MSE = 105.58, p = .783, \eta_p^2 = 0.002$.

**Findings for Research Question Four**

Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/ Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the
promotion/retention policy and race? For the fourth research question, the study sought to determine main effect of time under policy, the main effect of race, and the interaction of time under the policy and race. Table 22 displays the descriptive statistics for the groups.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Policy</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>144.59</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>152.0</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149.66</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year policy</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>147.21</td>
<td>10.76</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>151.16</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>149.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149.84</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two year policy</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>149.34</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>152.56</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>150.50</td>
<td>26.16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151.69</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three year policy</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>151.00</td>
<td>11.39</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>154.33</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>164.25</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>153.69</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>148.11</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>152.98</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>158.14</td>
<td>15.02</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151.62</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive statistics for the groups were: No Policy/Black ($M = 144.59, SD = 9.25, n = 46$), No Policy/White ($M = 152.5, SD=10.11, n=82$), One Year Policy/Black ($M=147.21, SD=10.76, n=38$), One Year Policy/White ($M=151.16, SD=9.69, n=77$), One Year Policy/Other ($M=149.84, SD=10.14, n=1$), Two Years Policy/Black
(M=149.34, SD=9.69, n=32), Two Years Policy/White (M=152.56, SD=7.00, n=89),
Two Years Policy/Other (M=150.50, SD=26.16, n=2), Three Years Policy/Black
(M=151.0, SD=11.39, n=54), Three Years Policy/White (M=154.33, SD=10.75, n=160),
Three Years Policy/Other (M=164.25, SD=10.31, n=4). The slight majority of the
students were White.

A two-way ANOVA was used to determine the main effect of race and the
interaction of time under the implementation of the policy and race. Table 23 provides a
display of the computation with the main effect being race.

Table 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>η²_p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>1116.64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>372.21</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.012*</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>2447.57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1223.79</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy X Race</td>
<td>687.49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>137.50</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>58359.92</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>101.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>63543.27</td>
<td>584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

The two-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant effect for race, $F(2, 574) = 12.04$, $MSE = 101.67$, $p < .000$, $η²_p = 0.040$. The interaction of time under policy and race were not statistically significant, $F(5,574) = 1.35$, $MSE = 101.67$, $p = .241$, $η²_p = 0.012$. To follow up on the significant two-way ANOVA results and determine where the differences were, a Scheffé post hoc tests was run using a .05 alpha. Table 24 provides a display of the post hoc analysis.

82
Table 24

*Scheffé Post Hoc Test of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length for Time Under Implementation of Policy and Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pairwise Comparisons</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black-White</td>
<td>-4.87</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>[-7.15, -2.59]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Other</td>
<td>-10.04</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.039*</td>
<td>[-19.68, 0.40]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Other</td>
<td>-5.16</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>[-14.69, 4.36]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05

The Scheffé post hoc test (see Table 24) revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of Black students and White students ($p = .000$). Also, a statistically significant difference was found between the mean scores of Black students and students of other races ($p = .039$). No other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant.

**Findings for Research Question Five**

Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/ Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and SES? For the fifth research question, the study sought to determine main effect of time under policy, the main effect of SES, and the interaction of time under policy and SES. Table 25 displays the descriptive statistics for the groups.
Table 25

*Descriptive Statistics of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Policy and SES*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Policy</td>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>149.96</td>
<td>10.73</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>149.45</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149.66</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year policy</td>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>150.08</td>
<td>9.61</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>149.65</td>
<td>10.64</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149.84</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two year policy</td>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>154.16</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>149.94</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151.69</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three year policy</td>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>155.68</td>
<td>10.07</td>
<td>997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>152.09</td>
<td>11.57</td>
<td>1121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>153.69</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>1218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>153.02</td>
<td>10.13</td>
<td>2253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>150.56</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>3332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151.62</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>5585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive statistics for the groups were: No Policy/High SES ($M=144.96$, $SD=1.42$), No Policy/Low SES ($M=149.45$, $SD=1.78$), One Year Policy/High SES ($M=150.08$, $SD=1.41$), One Year Policy/Low SES ($M=149.65$, $SD=1.29$), Two Years Policy/High SES ($M=154.56$, $SD=1.43$), Two Years Policy/Low SES ($M=149.94$, $SD=1.21$), Three Years Policy/High SES ($M=155.68$, $SD=1.04$), Three Years Policy/Low SES ($M=152.09$, $SD=.93$). There were slightly more students in the high SES groups within each group.

A two-way ANOVA was used to determine the main effect of SES, and the interaction of time under implementation of the policy and SES. Table 26 provides a
display of the computation with the main effect being SES and interaction of length of time under implementation of the policy and SES.

Table 26

Two-way ANOVA of Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores by Length of Time Under Implementation of Policy and SES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III SS</th>
<th>DDF MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>( \eta^2_p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>1918.55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>640.95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>.014*</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy X SES</td>
<td>396.29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.287</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>60514.34</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>104.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63543.27</td>
<td>584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( p<.05 \)

A two-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant main effect for SES \( F(1,577) = 6.11, MSE = 104.88, p = .014, \eta^2_p = .01 \). The interaction of length of time under implementation of policy and SES was not statistically significant, \( F(3,577) = 1.26, MSE = 104.88, p = .287, \eta^2_p = 0.007 \).

Summary of Results for Research Questions 2-5

In order to answer research questions two through five, a one-way ANOVA and three two-way ANOVAs were run. The one-way ANOVA for research question two showed that the length of time under the promotion/retention policy had an effect on student achievement. Specifically, follow-up tests indicated that groups with longer time (three years) under the promotion/retention policy performed better on the MCT2 than the third grade students with less time under the policy (no time under the policy or one year under the policy). Results from the two-way ANOVAs for research question three
revealed that females outscored males but indicated that the interaction of length of time under implementation of policy with gender was not statistically significant. Results from the two-way ANOVAs for research question four revealed that White students and students of other races outperformed Black students but indicated that the interaction of length of time under implementation of policy with race was not statistically significant. Results from the two-way ANOVA for research question five revealed that students from high SES outscored students from Low SES, but indicated that the interaction of length of time under implementation of policy with SES was not statistically significant.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major goal of the study was to explore the impact of a K-2 promotion/retention policy on third grade student achievement as measured by the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test. This chapter presents a summary of results, conclusions, a discussion of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

This study sought to determine the school leadership change process related to the policy’s development and implementation, and its effect on academic achievement. The variables of this study were confined to those related to the K-2 promotion/retention policy that was implemented in CCSD in 2008. Although the K-2 promotion/retention policy addressed both reading and math, the study focused on reading due to the significance of reading throughout students’ educational career. Numerous studies revealed that far too many students who advance to third grade lack necessary reading skills and end up (a) dropping out of school, (b) with truancy and behavior issues, (c) on social assistance, and/or (d) in prison for part of their life (Perie et al., 2005). This study considered the main effects of time under the implementation of a policy, gender, race, and SES on test scores and the interaction of time under the implementation of the policy
and gender, race, and SES on the scores. No external, non-school-related factors such as family and parental or community variables were considered. The data set for this study was derived from three schools within one specific school district. Existing third grade data were selected because the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores served as valid and reliable measures since there was no such measure administered prior to students’ third grade year. The state assessments began with grade three at the time of policy implementation. Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 served as a consistent measure for comparing groups’ scores used for the students who had been under the policy for no years, one year, two years, or three years.

In an effort to improve student achievement and to reduce achievement gaps in CCSD, a K-2 promotion/retention policy was implemented in the fall of 2008. The following research questions were used to guide this study. The researcher empirically investigated the effects of the implementation of the promotion/retention policy on third grade students’ scores as measured on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2.

1. How did the leadership change process impact the development and implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy in a local school district?

2. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy?

3. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and gender?
4. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and race?

5. Were there significant differences in students’ scores on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 test by length of time under implementation of the promotion/retention policy and socio-economic status?

A mixed-method research design was used to conduct the study. A narrative approach was used to provide a response to the first research question. A one-way analysis of variance ANOVA with a Sheffe’ post-hoc test was used as the primary means of analysis for the second research question to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores according to the length of time under the policy. A two-way ANOVA with Sheffe’ post-hoc tests were used as the primary means of analysis for the third-fifth research questions to determine whether there were interaction effects between length of time under policy and gender, race, and/or SES.

The study was underpinned by school leadership change theory. Kotter’s (1996) educational change theory was selected to help explain the process of the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy for the local school district in the study. According to Kotter (1996), there is enormous potential for deep lasting change when there is a sense of urgency along with a coalition within groups who understand and embrace the vision and change strategy. Kotter (1996) summarizes successful change in eight steps and says that his model is a starting point for developing
organizational change strategies. The eight steps are: (1) create a sense of urgency, (2) create guiding coalitions, (3) develop the change vision, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower broad-based action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (8) anchor new approaches in culture.

Conclusions

To answer the first research question, the participants in this study were two principals (Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones), one assistant principal (Ms. Baker), the current researcher (Ms. Connor), and two K-2 teachers (Ms. Clark and Ms. Taylor). Pseudo names were given to protect each participant’s identity. Related documents from the school district and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Activities related to the educational change as a result of the K-2 promotion and retention policy and emergent themes were gleaned from the participants’ response and documents and aligned with Kotter’s steps in the Change process. The findings for the first research question include the following.

Analysis of the data for research question one revealed that in general, the administrators and teachers perceived that the implementation of a K-2 promotion/retention policy was an urgent need of the district to address low achievement scores especially with gaps based on race and SES. Change activities and emergent themes were aligned with Kotter’s steps in his Change Theory to illustrate how the leadership change impacted the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy in the school district. The following emergent themes were found and aligned to Kotter’s Change Theory in an analysis of research question one. The following emergent themes were aligned with Kotter’s first step, create a sense of
urgency: a) need for change, b) reasons for change, and c) gain buy-in. The following emergent themes were aligned with Kotter’s second step, create a guiding coalition: a) evidences of support/buy-in, b) evidence of increased communication between administrators, teachers, and parents, c) feeling policy addressed the need of promotion v. retention, and d) need for input from parents as to development and implementation process. The following emergent theme was aligned with Kotter’s third step, develop a change vision: a) importance of vision statement. The following emergent theme was aligned with Kotter’s fourth step, communicate the change vision: a) communication between administrators, teachers, and parents. The following emergent theme was aligned with Kotter’s fifth step, empower broad-based action: a) empower all stakeholders. The following emergent theme was aligned with Kotter’s sixth step, generate short-term wins: a) evidences of improvement. The following emergent theme was aligned with Kotter’s seventh step, consolidate gains and produce more change: a) celebrate gains and grow positive momentum. The following emergent themes were aligned with Kotter’s eighth step, anchor new approaches in culture: a) new strategies with positive results and b) evidence of positive results and culture change.

Analysis of the data for research question two showed that the length of time under the implementation of the promotion/retention policy had an effect on student achievement. Specifically, a one-way ANOVA was statistically significant at the .05 alpha level, $F(3, 581) = 5.62, \text{MSE}= 10.28, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .028$, indicating a statistically significant difference across the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores of the four groups (no time under policy, one year under policy, two years under policy, and three years under policy). The Scheffé post hoc test revealed a statistically significant
difference in the mean scores of students enrolled during the year for which no policy was implemented compared to the students enrolled with the three years under policy implementation \( (p = .007) \). Also, a statistically significant difference was found between one year under policy implementation and three years under policy implementation \( (p = .015) \).

Conclusion 1: The results of the study indicated that groups with longer time (three years) under the promotion/retention policy performed better on the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 than the students with less time under the policy (no time under the policy or one year under the policy).

Analysis of the data for research question three showed a statistically significant main effect of gender, as females outperformed males. There was no interaction effect of length of time under implementation of the policy and gender.

Conclusion 2: The results of the study indicated that gender had an effect on student achievement across the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores. Females performed better on the MCT2 than males. There were no statistically significant differences across groups for the interaction of length of time under the implementation of the policy and gender.

Analysis of the data for research question four showed a statistically significant main effect of race, as White students and students of other races outperformed Black students. There was no interaction of length of time under implementation of the policy and race.

Conclusion 3: The results of the study indicated that race had an effect on student achievement across the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores. White
students and students of other races performed better on the MCT2 than Black students. There were no statistically significant differences across groups for the interaction of length of time under the policy and race.

Analysis of the data for research question five showed a statistically significant main effect of SES, as High SES students outperformed Low SES students. There was no interaction of time under policy and SES.

Conclusion 4: The results of the study indicated that SES had an effect on student achievement across the Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 Scores. Students identified with high SES performed better on the MCT2 than students with low SES. There were no statistically significant differences across groups for the interaction of length of time under implementation of policy and SES.

Discussion

Despite the ongoing efforts to improve the K-12 public school system in the United States through federal and state policy reform, very little progress toward increasing student achievement or closing achievement gaps has been made (Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Lee & Reeves, 2012). Achievements gaps according to race, gender, and SES occur in school systems across the United States in spite of the efforts to increase achievement and decrease achievement gaps made through federal and state policy reform. The results of this study are consistent with these findings in that achievement increased minimally across all groups according to gender, race, and SES.

Results of this research study supported prior research in showing that constant progress monitoring while utilizing standard diagnostic measures can positively affect student achievement (Daeschner, 2004; McGee, 2004, Simmons, Kame'enui, Stoolmiller,
Coyne, & Harn, 2003). Research question one revealed that teachers were encouraged to monitor students’ progress towards meeting literacy levels and to provide differentiated instruction throughout the year above what the policy called for. Results of this study also supported the work of Torgesen (2000) and Gersten and Keating (1987) that revealed that data-driven instruction utilizing data from teacher-made assessments combined with standard diagnostic measures has been shown to be effective at increasing student achievement in literacy. These practices were included in strategies advocated as a result of the implementation of the local school district’s K-2 promotion/retention policy.

According to Simmons, Baker, and Peyton (2009), students’ reading trajectories are established in K-2 and are difficult to change once established, so students should be given a firm foundation in literacy in early elementary. This study supports the use of local policy to assist in developing the firm foundation necessary in early elementary to better help students move from learning to read to reading to learn (Snow et al., 1998). Torgesen (2000) estimated that as many as half of the students who are found to be most at-risk for reading failures can be brought to normal levels and the results of this research supported that local policy could have a positive effect on student achievement for all students.

This study supported the findings of Simmons et al. (2003) in that when attention is given to children on an individual basis, and beginning in early elementary, with consistent progress monitoring that student achievement increases. This study supports the findings that show grade retention seemed to boost test scores (Alexander et al., 1994; Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004; Karweit, 1999; Pierson & Connell, 1992; Pomplum, 1988). The
findings of the study also indicated that groups with longer time (three years) under the promotion/retention policy performed better on the MCT2 than the third grade students with less time under the policy (no time under the policy or one year under the policy).

Limitations

The following limitations were presented in the study. One limitation was that the researcher made the assumption that the district reported accurate information to Mississippi Department of Education. The second limitation is that data were drawn from district-wide data and individual school level effects cannot be determined. This limitation is important to acknowledge when interpreting the results. These results only reflect the school district as a unit of analysis. The findings of this study do not indicate conclusions about the individual schools. The data were viewed in the collective and reflect only district-wide trends. While, research has been conducted to investigate the effects of promotion and retention on students, this study was limited in that it only considered the effects of the promotion/retention policy on a single student achievement measurement.

Implications

According to research studies, students who are promoted without the necessary literacy skills to perform at the next grade level end up struggling academically, exhibiting behavior and attendance problems, dropping out of school, and/or incarcerated (Perie et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2001; Torgesen, 2000). Unfortunately, the majority of students who are passed on, drop out, and who end up incarcerated are disproportionately from lower SES and/or are minority students (Elias, 2013). This study has significance
for minority students and students from low SES since results showed that implementation of such a policy can improve student achievement. Findings may be helpful to school districts that are struggling with low student achievement as results revealed improvement for all students. Since the results of the implementation of local school board policy were shown to increase student achievement, it serves as support for utilizing local policy to reach children across the nation to improve the educations of all children (CMHS-UCLA, 2008).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the results of the study, several areas for further research are suggested. The recommendations for future research are as follows.

1. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore various types of interventions that could be used to further support struggling students and increase academic achievement.
2. It is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted to determine long-term effects of the K-2 promotion/retention policy in CCSD.
3. It is recommended that further research should be conducted to explore the effects of local school board policy changes on student achievement.
4. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore means by which local school policies may play a role in the achievement gap according to gender, race, and SES.
5. It is recommended that further research be conducted in CCSD to determine effects of the promotion/retention policy on retained students versus promoted students.

96
6. It is recommended that further research be conducted in CCSD to determine the effects of the promotion/retention policy on math achievement.

7. It is recommended that further research be conducted in CCSD to analyze the results of DIBELS, SRI, and STAR scores for first and second grade students from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 to determine whether the findings are consistent with those found from analyzing Grade Three Reading/Language Arts MCT2 scores from the aforementioned academic years.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

IHE PROMOTION/RETENTION POLICY AS AMENDED IN 2008 IHE
PROMOTION REQUIREMENTS

**Kindergarten**—Promotion and retention shall be based on mastery of all prerequisite skills (“S” on kindergarten report card) and performing at or above grade level benchmarks according to the DIBELS assessment and mastery of 7 of the 9 Language Arts objectives listed on the kindergarten report card and mastery of 7 of the 9 Math objectives listed on the kindergarten report card.

**1st grade**—Promotion and retention shall be based upon mastery of the objectives in reading, mathematics, spelling, and language arts with 80% mastery in each subject and performing at or above grade level benchmarks according to DIBELS assessment or scoring 1.8 on STAR testing or 300 on the Scholastic Reading Inventory.

**2nd--** Promotion and retention shall be based upon mastery of the objectives in reading, mathematics, spelling, and language arts with 80% mastery in each subject and performing at or above grade level benchmarks according to DIBELS assessment or scoring 2.8 on STAR testing or 500 on the Scholastic Reading Inventory.

**3rd-8th--** Promotion and retention shall be based upon mastery of the objectives in reading, mathematics, language arts, science and social studies with 65% mastery in each subject. Promotion and retention shall be based upon mastery of the objectives with overall 65% mastery of the essential skills. Any student who fails two core subjects in which they are enrolled shall be retained. A student who fails any of the core subjects for
two consecutive years shall be retained in that grade. **Any 7th or 8th grade student who
does not attain 65% mastery in both English and Math shall be retained.

9th-12th-- Promotion and retention shall be based on the mastery of the objectives
with 65% mastery of essential skills in each subject. A pass grade of 65 or above yearly
must be obtained in each academic course in which the student is enrolled for credit.
Classification will also be determined upon the level of both English and Math completed
and the number of Carnegie units earned.
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL
Subject: Study 12-370: Can implementation of a rigorous promotion/retention policy affect student achievement?

Date: Monday, November 19, 2012 at 10:11:54 AM Central Standard Time

From: Roberts, Jodi
To: Shea, Donna

November 19, 2012

Donna Shea

RE: IRB Study #12-370: Can implementation of a rigorous promotion/retention policy affect student achievement?

Dear Ms. Shea:

This email serves as official documentation that the above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 11/19/2012 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB’s policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at http://www orc.msstate.edu/human/aahpp.php.

Please refer to your IRB number (#12-370) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at jroberts@research.msstate.edu or call 662-325-2238. In addition, we would greatly appreciate your feedback on the IRB approval process. Please take a few minutes to complete our survey at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Y7C7Q0D.

Sincerely,

Jodi Roberts, Ph.D.
IRB Officer

CC: Dwight Hare (advisor)
June 10, 2014

Donna Shes
Office of Clinical/Field-Based Instruction
Mail Stop 9710

RE: HHPP Study #12-370: Can implementation of a rigorous promotion/intention policy affect student achievement?

Dear Ms. Shes:

Your personnel modification request submitted on 6/19/14 has been approved. You are approved to proceed with your research as modified. Your recent procedural modification request is still under review at this time. A stamped copy will be sent to you in a separate email. Please use this letter and the stamped copy as verification of the approval.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact kmrvand@orc.mstate.edu or call 662-325-3324.

Sincerely,

Katie Myharm
Assistant Compliance Administrator

cc: Frankie Williams (advisor)
Mississippi State University
Human Research Protection Program

Procedural Modification Form
Version 08-01-2012

The Procedural Modification should be used by Principal Investigators to request a change in procedures.

Please note: This form may NOT be used for personnel changes or time extensions.

IRB Study#: 12-370
Principal Researcher/Investigator: Donna Shea
Study Title: The Implementation of a Promotion/Retention Policy to Effect Change in Student Achievement in Third Grade Reading/Language Arts.

1. Summarize / Itemize requested changes and provide a justification for each.

I would like to add the research question. Describe the structural process of the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy in Choctaw County School District. In order to answer this question, I will need to interview principals, assistant principals, and teachers who were employed in Choctaw County School District at the time of implementation of the policy. I have attached a letter to be sent to the superintendent of education for permission to approach the employees, a list of employees, and the interview questions.

Questions for administrators: What steps did you take in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy? What obstacles did you face? What did you do to ensure "buy-in" from your teachers? What did you do to ensure "buy-in" from parents? What would you do differently if you could go back and start over?

Questions for teachers: What steps were taken in implementing the more rigorous promotion/retention policy? Did teachers and other stakeholders have input into the implementation? What obstacles did you face? What would you suggest should be done differently if you could go back and start over?

2. Do changes require revisions to the assessment of risk of harm to the subjects?

☐ YES - if yes, explain.

☐ NO

3. Do changes require revisions to the methods of ensuring anonymity or confidentiality?

☐ YES - if yes, explain.

When interviews are recorded and transcribed, names will not be used only position titles, i.e., principal, teacher, assistant principal.

☐ NO

4. Are there new findings that may relate to a participant's willingness to continue taking part in the research study?

☐ YES - if yes, explain whether these findings need to be provided to participants, and if so, how this will be accomplished.

☐ NO

5. Do changes require a REVISED CONSENT statement or procedure?

Internal Use Only: Updated investigator training: ( )

Procedural Modification Form Page 1 of 2
X YES attach a revised consent form with the changes tracked, and a clean copy for the IRB approval stamp.

No

Name of Principal Investigator/Researcher: Donna Shea

Signature Date

Name of Advisor (if applicable): Dr. Frankie Williams

Signature Date

*Note: You must receive written notification of approval from the IRB before implementing any changes (except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject).

Date Signed: 7/2/14

[Box for Exempt, IRB, CIEB Approved by Nicole Worm]
Mississippi State University
Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: The Implementation of a Promotion/Retention Policy to Effect Change in Student Achievement in Third Grade Reading/Language Arts.

Study Site: 299 East Main St., Ackerman, MS 39735

Researchers: Donna Shea, Mississippi State University

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to determine the implementation process used to implement a more rigorous promotion/retention school board policy in 2008-2009 and to determine if 3rd grade Reading/Language Arts scores are significantly different for those students who were under the policy for more years than others.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you a few questions about the implementation of the more rigorous promotion/retention school board policy that was implemented in 2008-2009. I will record and transcribe your responses to the questions that I ask and then analyze the results of all participants in order to answer one of my research questions, which is: Describe the structural process of the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy in Choctaw County School District.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no risks or discomforts associated with this process. I will only record the position that you held in 2008-2009, i.e., teacher, principal, assistant principal and not your name.

Benefits
Benefits of this research include developing a better understanding of the process of implementation of school board policy and if implementation of such policy can show a positive effect on student achievement.

Incentive to participate
The interview process should not take more than fifteen (15) minutes of your time. Unfortunately, there is no incentive to participate.

Confidentiality
I will audio-tape your interview responses but will only include the position that you held within Choctaw County School District in 2008-2009. I will not record your name with the audio file or with my transcription of such. Once the audio file has been transcribed, I will destroy the file.
Please note that these records will be held by a state entity and therefore are subject to disclosure if required by law. Research information may be shared with the MSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Questions
If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Donna Shea at 662-285-8644, or you may contact my faculty advisor at 864-442-0085.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, express concerns or complaints, request information, or offer input, please feel free to contact the MSU Research Compliance Office by phone at 662-325-3994, by e-mail at irb@research.msstate.edu, or on the web at http://orc.msstate.edu/humansubjects/participant/.

Voluntary Participation
Please understand that your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Options for Participation
Please initial your choice for the options below:

___ The researchers may contact me again to participate in future research activities.
___ The researchers may NOT contact me again regarding future research.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature __________________ Date __________

Investigator Signature __________________ Date __________
June 17, 2014

Mr. Glen Beard & Choctaw County Board of Education,
P.O. Box 398
Ackerman, MS 39735

Mr. Beard and Board of Education,

I am currently enrolled at Mississippi State University pursuing a Ph.D. in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary School Administration. You have shared de-identifiable data for MCT2 test data for 3rd grade reading/language arts for 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 with me, which will help me to answer one of my research questions for my dissertation. However, another of my research questions deals with the steps that were taken to implement the policy. The research question: Describe the structural process of the development and implementation of the K-2 promotion/retention policy in Choctaw County School District. In order to answer this question, I will need to interview administrators and teachers.

I respectfully request your permission to approach principals, assistant principals, and teachers who were employed in 2008-2009 in order to ask them a few questions concerning the implementation of the board policy in 2008.

I sincerely appreciate your consideration of this request. Should you have questions or would like to further discuss; I can be reached at 662.325.7684 or 662.285.8844.

Very respectfully yours,

Donna Shea
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM CCSD SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
June 20, 2014

Donna Shea
299 E. Main St.
Ackerman, MS 39735

Dear Ms. Shea,

You have our permission to approach principals, assistant principals, and teachers who were employed in 2008-2009 in order to ask them a few questions concerning the implementation of the promotion/retention board policy in 2008.

Sincerely,

Stewart Gien Beard, Jr.
Superintendent of Education
October 30, 2012

Donna Shea
299 E. Main St.
Ackerman, MS 39735

Dear Ms. Shea,

We would be happy to share de-identifiable MCT2 test data for 3rd grade reading/language arts for 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 (when available) with you. Please let me know when you would like for me to send the data and specify the format in which you would like it to be sent. We are always happy to assist graduate students in their academic endeavors.

Respectfully,

Stewart G. Beard, Jr.
Superintendent of Education
Choctaw County School District