THE EFFECT OF THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE ON

DROPOUTS AND STUDENT RETENTION AT A DISTRICT IN THE

NORTHEAST AREA OF HARRIS COUNTY

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Jesus B. Acosta

May, 2012

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DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my mother Ana Hilda Figueroa, who at the age of eleven was taken out of school by her parents. My mother was taken out of school because out of the nine children she was the best at doing the chores. My mother never went back to school, but she instilled in me the importance of an education. Gracias madre por tu apoyo!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acosta, Jesus B. " The Effect Of The Texas Student Success Initiative On Dropouts And Student Retention At A District In The Northeast Area Of Harris County" Unpublished Doctor of Education Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, March, 2012.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) on retention rates and dropouts in a district located in the Northeast area of Harris County. The Texas Student Success Initiative known as SSI requires students in the third, fifth and eighth grades to pass the state mandated exam in Mathematics and Reading in order to be promoted to the next grade. Students who do not pass the exams may be promoted via a grade placement committee with required interventions. In this study the researcher compared nine years' worth of empirical data comparing two different cohort groups. The two cohort groups consist of the graduating classes of 2010 and 2011. The class of 2010 was not required to meet the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) standards for promotion while the class of 2011 was the first class required to meet all the requirements.

The State of Texas compares dropout rates based on an entering ninth grade cohort. This study compares the retention and dropout rates between the class of 2010 and 2011. The comparison found that students in the class of 2011 had a higher dropout rate than the class of 2010. The class of 2010 did not have to meet the SSI requirement. Retention rates for the third, fifth and eighth grade classes were examined. The retention rates for the class of 2011 were higher at the third and eighth grades.

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Introduction

During his 1998 State of the Union Address President William Clinton called for an end to social promotions (Clinton, 1998). In response the 1999 Texas seventy-six state legislature passed the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI). The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) was gradually implemented and required third graders to pass the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test to be promoted to the fourth grade and for fifth graders to pass the reading and mathematics portions of the TAKS test to be promoted to the sixth grade. Beginning in the spring of 2008, eighth graders were also included in the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) requirement for promotion. Eighth graders have to pass the reading and mathematics portions of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test to be promoted to the ninth grade.

The passing of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) marks what was supposed to be the end of social promotions in the state of Texas. Social promotion is when a student is promoted from one grade to the next due to their age in order to keep them on pace with their peers. This promotion occurs even if the student has not achieved the academic proficiency required for promotion. Opponents of social promotion argue that allowing students to move on without grasping the required academic knowledge creates an achievement gap in learning that students will not overcome.

On January 8, 2002 the 107th Congress passed Public Law 107-110 described as "An Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind." (NCLB, 2002). The law became known as the No Child Left Behind Act. This law amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Title I of the law is titled "Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged." The purpose

of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain high-quality State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. This purpose can be accomplished by—

> (1) ensuring that high-quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials are aligned with challenging State academic standards so that students, teachers, parents, and administrators can measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement;

> (2) meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance;

> (3) closing the achievement gap between high- and low performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers;

> (4) holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low-performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education;

> (5) distributing and targeting resources sufficiently to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where needs are greatest;

(6) improving and strengthening accountability, teaching, and learning by using

State assessment systems designed to ensure that students are meeting challenging

State academic achievement and content standards and increasing achievement

overall, but especially for the disadvantaged;

(7) providing greater decision making authority and flexibility to schools and

teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance;

(8) providing children an enriched and accelerated educational program, including

the use of school wide programs or additional services that increase the amount and

quality of instructional time;

(9) promoting school wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective,

scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content;

(10) significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff in

participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development;

(11) coordinating services under all parts of this title with each other, with other

educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with other agencies providing

services to youth, children, and families; and

(12) affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the

education of their children.

Similar goals have been incorporated into past federal legislation, but NCLB exceeds these earlier attempts to raise standards in its specificity and the high stakes attached to failure to meet established goals.

For instance, state plans must identify concrete annual performance targets or milestones for attaining their long-term goals—that is, they must meet an established

definition of adequate yearly progress, or AYP. Failure to meet performance goals for adequate yearly progress (AYP) in successive years will result in the imposition of progressively more severe sanctions. These include: public dissemination of annual school report cards and identification of schools not meeting AYP goals as "in need of improvement"; restrictions on the use of certain federal funds; making available to students in failing schools the option of transferring to another public school not identified as in need of improvement (i.e., public school choice); offering students from low income families the option of using Title I funds to secure supplemental educational services (e.g., tutoring) from an approved public- or private-sector provider; and additional sanctions that might include changes to staffing, administration, or curriculum and eventually more fundamental school restructuring.

These standards of performance-based accountability must be established for states, districts, and schools. Within each of these units, goals for adequate yearly progress (AYP) must be High School Graduates and six met separately for specific segments of the student population defined on the basis of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and level of English language proficiency. (Swanson & Chaplin, 2003).

Texas has been considered an example for high stakes testing and many of the policies in NCLB were generated by President George Bush who was a former Texas governor. The history of high stakes testing began in 1979 with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) test. The legislature passed a bill requiring basic skills competencies in mathematics, reading, and writing for the third, fifth and ninth grades. Due to the lack of a state-mandated curriculum at that time, the learning objectives for the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) tests were created by committees of Texas educators.

In 1983, the Texas legislature began requiring retesting. Although the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) test was not a "diploma-denial test," ninth grade students who did not pass the test were required to retake the exam each year thereafter while in school. Due to the fact that results on the test were reported, the TABS test was the beginning of "high stakes" accountability for school districts.

In 1984 the state of Texas transitioned to the next state mandated exam that exam was called the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test. The legislature changed the wording of the Texas Education Code, requiring the assessment program to measure "minimum skills" rather than "basic skills competencies." The Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test began in the 1985-86 school year, replacing the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) test. The Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test sought to increase the rigor of the state assessment and added individual student sanctions for performance at the exit level. The Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) tested mathematics, reading, and writing, and was administered to students in the first, third, fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh grades with the eleventh grade testing being the "exit level" assessment. The class of 1987 became the first class in which students were required to pass the exit level exam in order to receive a Texas high school diploma.

After the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test, in 1990 the Texas legislature introduced the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. Changes in state law required the implementation of a new criterion-referenced program. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test shifted the focus from minimum skills to academic skills, which represented a more comprehensive assessment of the state-

mandated curriculum, the Essential Elements. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test assessed higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving in mathematics, reading and writing for the third, fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh grades with eleventh grade being the exit level.

The board considered the following factors when establishing the levels of satisfactory performance. First, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test assessed a broader range of the Essential Elements than the previous Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test did. Second, in comparison to TEAMS, the TAAS test items were more difficult. Third, the TAAS served multiple purposes by providing scores and consequences at the student level, the school level, and the district level. Due to these factors, the board set a one-year interim standard for satisfactory performance. In1992-1993 the TAAS transitioned from a fall to a spring testing program, and in 1993-1994 the assessment was expanded to include all grades from the third to the eighth grades in reading and mathematics. The writing test was moved to the fourth and eighth grades, and the exit level test was moved from the eleventh grade to the tenth grade.

In 1993 the legislature enacts the creation of a new statewide-integrated accountability system that includes the rating of campuses and districts. The inclusion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test in the accountability system, the public release of performance results, and the exit level requirement for graduation makes TAAS the most "high stakes" assessment in Texas history.

The following year, the board voted to align the passing standards at the third through eighth grades, with the standard being established at the exit level. This new standard, the Texas Learning Index (TLI), allowed comparisons of achievement across

grades while maintaining the same passing standards for exit level students. The Texas Learning Index (TLI) helped districts to determine whether each student was making the yearly progress necessary to meet minimum expectations on the exit level reading and mathematics test in the tenth grade. In 1995 Science and social studies were added to the eighth grade Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test.

Nine years after the introduction of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test was introduced in 1999. Previously the legislature passed bills ending social promotion and creating a more rigorous testing program (Texas Education Code, Chapter 39 and 28 respectively). As mandated by the 76th Texas Legislature, the Texas Education Agency began to develop a new assessment program, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), to be aligned with the state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Under the new law, students in the third grade (reading), fifth grade and eighth grade (reading and mathematics) will be required to demonstrate proficiency on a state assessment test, and achieve passing grades in order to advance to the next grade level. At the eleventh grade (reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies) students must pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, in addition to receiving the required number of credits, in order to receive their high school diploma. The Texas Education Code (TEC) charges the State Board of Education with establishing the passing standards (performance standards) on the new TAKS test. In the spring of 2002 was the last administration of the TAAS test. Exit level students who fail any subject area test will continue to retest.   In 2003 TAKS became the new statewide assessment.

In the spring of 2007, with Senate Bill 1031 the Texas legislators repealed TAKS in favor of End of Course exams in high school. This change will happen gradually. The next state mandated assessment program was introduced in 2009 and called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test. The Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3 in 2009 mandating a new, more rigorous state testing and accountability system. This new round of state assessments will create a more rigorous testing system with greater emphasis on alignment to college and career readiness. House Bill 3 defines college readiness as the level of preparation a student must attain in English language arts and mathematics courses to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry-level general education course for credit in that same content area for a baccalaureate degree or associate degree program (Section 39.024a, HB 3).

In the third through eighth grade the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests are in the same grades and subjects as previous Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Students enrolled in High School will be taking part of an end-of-course (EOC) system. High School students will take twelve end-of-course assessments in the four foundation content areas. To graduate, a student must achieve a cumulative score at least equal to the product of the number of assessments taken in that content area and the scale score that indicates satisfactory performance. Whereas previously students were required to meet the eleventh grade exit level exam to graduate now students must pass a number of tests throughout their high school enrollment and their cumulative score will determine if they are able to graduate.

Students who enter ninth grade in the 2011-2012 school year will have to take end-of-course exams in the core academic subjects. Students who entered ninth grade before

2011 will still have to pass the eleventh grade exit level Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test to graduate. End-of-course (EOC) exams will require students taking either the recommended or advanced curriculum to take three end-of-course exams in each of the four academic core subjects: English I, English II, English III; Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry; Biology, Chemistry, Physics; World Geography, World History, U.S. History.

The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) pronounced the same as star, will be used for the 12 end-of-course assessments mandated by SB 1031 in 2007 and the new third through eighth grade assessments mandated by HB 3 in the 2009 legislative session. The new tests will be used beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. Students in the graduating Class of 2015 will be the first students who must meet the end-of-course testing requirements, as well as pass their classes, in order to earn a diploma. The new tests will be significantly more rigorous than previous tests and will measure a child's performance, as well as academic growth.

The third through eighth grade State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests in reading and mathematics, by law, must be linked from grade to grade to performance expectations for the English III and Algebra II end-of-course assessments. Recently the commissioner of education announced that the first ninth grade class will have their end of course requirement for graduation waived. The first ninth grade class taking the end of course test will not have their score count toward graduation. Across the state of Texas as of this date are still unclear of the expectations for grading and how the end of course exams are to be implemented in the grading system.

The Problem Statement

The implementation of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) creates several problems for educators and students. One of the major issues created by the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) is that it forces situations where students who are overage are required to be in the same grade as younger students. Bullying has come to the forefront of education as a critical issue in schools, students have taken their own lives and violence has increased in schools forcing legislators to create laws to address bullying. Requiring students who are overage to share the same classrooms with younger students creates a prime atmosphere for bullying to occur.

There is clear research stating that retention increases the likelihood of dropping out of school. Bogden and Purnell (2000) found that dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than high school graduates. When a student repeats a grade twice it makes the probability of dropping out nearly one hundred percent. The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) creates the possibility of retention at several grade levels and may exponentially increase the likelihood that a student may drop out of school.

The average student enrolls in the first grade at the age of six years old. In the state of Texas 23,170 first graders were retained in 2006 (TEA, 2009). If the student is retained in the first grade, then the student will be eight years old by the time they are in the second grade. In the state of Texas 12,132 second graders were retained in 2007 (TEA, 2009). If the student performs well in the second grade then the student is promoted to the third grade at the age of nine years old. The third grade is where the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) begins to affect the possibility of student retention.

A nine year old third grader can have an excellent year in the third grade and pass all his classes. However, if that student fails the mandated Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test this student will have to repeat the third grade now at ten years old. In the state of Texas 10,366 third graders were retained in 2004 (TEA, 2009). If this ten year old is successful on his second attempt in the third grade and passes the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test the following year then he will be promoted to the fourth grade at eleven years old. If the student is successful in the fourth grade the student is promoted to fifth grade at the age of twelve years old. In the state of Texas 5,665 fourth graders were retained in 2005 (TEA, 2009).

A fifth grade twelve year old student must now pass both the reading and mathematics portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test to be promoted to the sixth grade. You can imagine the testing anxiety that this student must feel. Regardless of how good he has performed all year the determining factor for his promotion is this one moment in time. The test does not care if you were retained previously or if you had a bad day on your way to school. If he fails either one of these portions then he is retained in the fifth grade. In 2004 the state of Texas retained 11,159 fifth graders (TEA, 2009).

This student is now thirteen years old in the fifth grade for the second time. If the student is successful and passes both portions of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test then he will be promoted to the sixth grade at fourteen years old. What has been created by this situation is that now we have a fourteen year old student entering Middle School in the sixth grade siting in the same classroom with eleven year olds, when in all actuality the student should be starting high school as a freshman.

Our fourteen year old sixth grader is successful and passes to the seventh grade at the age of fifteen years old. He was able to pass to the seventh grade in the state of Texas 4,901 sixth graders were not promoted to the seventh grade (TEA, 2009). Again our student is successful and passes to the eighth grade at the age of sixteen years old. In the state of Texas 7,710 seventh graders were retained in 2004 (TEA, 2009).

At the eighth grade once again the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) comes into play to determine if he is worthy to be promoted to the next grade level. This sixteen year old eighth grader must pass both the reading and mathematics portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) at the eighth grade requires students who fail be provided three opportunities to successfully take the exams. In between each opportunity schools are required to provide interventions to improve the chances of passing on the next administration.

If our sixteen year old eighth grader fails this test he will be seventeen years old in the eighth grade for the second time. If he is successful the second time in eighth grade at seventeen years old he will be promoted to the ninth grade at the age of eighteen years old. In the state of Texas 6,323 eighth graders were not promoted to the ninth grade in 2007 (TEA, 2009). Although we have several eighteen year olds in the ninth grade, to this student the fact that he just made it to High School at the age of eighteen and has to sit in the same class as fourteen year olds may affect his self-esteem. Also the probability of this student remaining in high school for the next four years is unlikely and will cost him tuition after the age of twenty one.

An eighteen year old ninth grader enters high school and now they have to earn credits to be promoted to the next grade level it is no longer a year to year automatic

promotion. In order to receive a High School Diploma you must earn 26 credits and pass

all four portions of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test in the

eleventh grade. This eleventh grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)

tests are known as the exit level exams.

Most schools operate on a seven period day and each class is worth half a credit per

semester. In a year if the student receives a passing grade in all their classes they can earn

seven credits toward graduation. The high school were this research is being performed

requires students to earn six credits to be classified as a tenth grader, thirteen credits to be

classified as an eleventh grader and nineteen credits to be classified as a twelfth grader.

If a student is partly successful in the ninth grade failing one course he will have six

credits and will be promoted to the tenth grade at the age of nineteen years old. Our student

will be in a situation where he must pass every class if he wants to be promoted to the

eleventh grade because he needs thirteen credits. If our student makes it and passes every

class he will be a twenty year old eleventh grader. At the eleventh grade our student will

begin to take the exit level exams.

If our student fails any one of the exams he will need to continue taking the failed

exam until he is successful in order to receive a Texas High School Diploma. It is possible

that by this time our student is an expert test taker so he passes all four exams on his first

attempt. Our student will have to pass his classes to be promoted to the twelfth grade. If he

passes and is promoted he will be twenty-one years old in the twelfth grade. Eventually

our student would graduate at the age of twenty-two years old.

This is an example of a tenacious student who was able to go through the system

and finish. Unfortunately, many students put in this situation are unlikely to be as

tenacious and are more likely to drop out of school. At the third, fifth and eighth grades there are grade placement committees (GPC) to determine if the student should be promoted to the next level. The question we have to ask is how is the determination to promote a student made? Would it be made on the basis of age? Most likely the student would be promoted because no one wants a thirteen year old fifth grader in their class and Middle Schools do not want a seventeen year old eighth grader in their school. In some cases students who are overage in the seventh grade are being promoted to the ninth grade to avoid the eighth grade testing and the possibility that they will be retained another year.

If a student makes it through this process and continues on to High School they will find themselves at the age of eighteen years old sitting in a classroom alongside fourteen and fifteen year olds. Having an eighteen year old boy in the same class with a fourteen year old girl has the potential of creating a whole different set of problems if they become romantically involved.

Retention at the high school increases exponentially in comparison to the lower grades. The retention numbers in the state of Texas go from about 4,500 students in the eighth grade to 40,000 students in the ninth grade. At the high school level the retention numbers go from 40,000 in the ninth grade to over 100,000 in the twelfth grade. Table 1 shows retention numbers across the state of Texas for the school year 2009-10 in the first through twelfth grade.

Table 1

Grade Level Retention, Grades 1-12, By Grades, Texas Public Schools 2009-10

Year	1 Retained	2 Retained	3 Retained	4 Retained
2009-10	19,138	10,830	7,307	3,988
	5 Retained	6 Retained	7 Retained	8 Retained
2009-10	4,713	2,692	3,712	4,503
	9 Retained	10 Retained	11 Retained	12 Retained
2009-10	40,200	18,436	15,916	102,922

Note: Texas Education Agency, Grade level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2009, p 20

According to the Texas Education Agency retention data for the 2009-10 school year a total of 234,357 students were retained in the first through twelfth grade. The average cost of educating a child in Texas public schools is 6,455 dollars per year. When taking the average cost of 6,455 dollars per student to educate a child and multiply it by the number of students retained (234,357) it will cost taxpayers approximately 1.5 billion dollars for students to repeat a grade.

Students who repeat a grade and are overage are more likely to become dropouts. The state of Texas evaluates dropout rates beginning in the seventh grade. The High School dropout rate is calculated based on when the student enters the ninth grade. Texas determines a high school's dropout rate based on the cohort model. Students are assigned to a cohort when entering the ninth grade and if all the students graduate on time with their same peer group they are a successful graduate.

Significance of the Study

Public and scholarly attention to high school dropouts and completion rates has

returned to the forefront in recent years as handfuls of states and large districts around the

country have introduced new educational accountability systems. This interest has been

largely motivated by the fear that imposing high stakes testing, exit exams for graduation,

and policies ending social promotion would create pressure for low-performing students to

exit (or be removed from) the system and produce increased dropout rates (Lillard &

DeCicca 2001; Herbert & Hauser 1999; Bonsteel & Rumberger 1999; Haney 2000). In

addition, the trend toward more systematic forms of accountability on a national scale

further raises the stakes for measuring high school completion accurately and consistently.

Specifically, new federal educational legislation authorized in the No Child Left

Behind Act requires that all high schools explicitly take completion rates into account

(along with achievement test scores) when measuring their current level of performance

and the progress they have made towards reaching their long-term performance goals.

Although Texas is making great strides toward reducing drop outs based on their

calculation beginning in the seventh grade and the ninth grade cohort tracking, this study

wants to focus on a specific school district and a tracking of nine years' worth of empirical

student data.

This study analyzed the effect of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) on

retention and dropouts beginning with the third grade level. There is a significant amount

of research proving the argument against student retention. Retention negatively affects

students and does not improve academic skills, yet we now have a law that dictates when

students should be retained based mainly on testing. We also have a law that refuses to

award a high school diploma to students who cannot pass four tests at the eleventh grade level, regardless of their achievements in high school. A student can statistically be the top graduate of his class based on their grade point average (GPA) and if they fail to be successful in any one of the four tests, they will not receive a high school diploma in the state of Texas.

This study is focused on the manner in which the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) has affected students in one school district in regards to retention and dropouts. The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) is a tool designed to end social promotion. Students must successfully complete exams in Mathematics and Reading to be promoted to the next level. As part of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) there is an accelerated instruction instrument. When a student is unsuccessful they must receive interventions prior to the next administration of the exam. If the student is promoted to the next grade by the grade placement committee (GPC) there is also a requirement to provide this intervention at the next grade level. Accelerated instruction at the next grade is designed to keep students from failing on their next test administration, and to close the academic gaps which led to the student not meeting the academic requirements for promotion.

Background Information

This study is conducted in a district located in the Northeast area of Harris County. As shown in table 2 this school district currently has a student enrollment of 6,525 Students. 7 are in Early Childhood Education, 394 Pre-Kindergarten, 499 Kindergarten, 559 in the first grade, 526 in the second grade, 539 in the third grade, 517 in the fourth grade, 469 in the fifth grade, 458 in the sixth grade, 452 in the seventh grade, 479 in the

eighth grade, 505 in the ninth grade, 380 in the tenth grade, 392 in the eleventh grade, 349

in the twelfth grade.

Table 2

District Student Grade Population Distribution.

Grade Level	Student Count
Early Childhood	7
Pre-Kindergarten	394
Kindergarten	499
1st Grade	559
2nd Grade	526
3rd Grade	539
4th Grade	517
5th Grade	469
6th Grade	458
7th Grade	452
8th Grade	479
9th Grade	505
10th Grade	380
11th Grade	392
12th Grade	349
Total Student Population	6,525

Note: Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) 2009.

The demographics of the student population are twenty three and a half percent African American, fifty nine percent Hispanic, fourteen point one percent White, one point nine percent Native American, point six percent Asian/Pacific Islander (AEIS, 2009-2010). Seventy eight point one percent of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. A student is identified as economically disadvantaged when their family income qualifies them for free or reduced lunch. Twenty eight point nine percent are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). A student is considered LEP if their home language is a language other than English and meet requirements under the language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC).

Twenty percent of the students have been placed in a disciplinary placement in 2008-2009. Sixty one point seven percent of the students in the district are considered to be at risk for dropping out of school (AEIS, 2009-2010). A student is designated at risk if they meet one of the thirteen identifiers designated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that put students at-risk for dropping out of school, including failing two or more core subjects, pregnant or parenting, placed in an alternative education program.

According to the Academic Excellence Indicator System report (AEIS) for 2009-2010 the district's total student population consists of students in the following demographics. Table 3 shows the demographics identified by the academic excellence indicator system (AEIS) report for the school year 2009-10. Included in the demographics are the percentage of students at-risk of dropping out, economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient (LEP).

Table 3

Campus Population from the Academic Excellence Indicator System Report for 2009-10.

Category	Ethnicity	Population
Ethnic Distribution:	African American	23.5%
	Hispanic	59.9%
	White	14.1%
	Native American	1.9%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	.6%
At-Risk		61.7%
Economically Disadvantage		78.1%
Limited English Proficient		28.9%

Methodology

This study is a quantitative descriptive research study using archival data. Quantitative research is "formal, objective, systematic processes in which numerical data are utilized to obtain information about the world" (Francis, 2001, p.40). Therefore, objectivity and numbers are features often associated with quantitative research. Quantitative research is inclined to be deductive; it tests theory. Quantitative research tends to produce results that can be generalized and uses data that are structured in the form of numbers or can be immediately transferred into numbers (Francis, 2001).

The research is a comparative study of two cohort groups. One group will be the graduating class of 2011. Data for the class of 2011 was collected starting when the students were in the third grade in the year 2003. The other group is the class of 2010.

Data for the class of 2010 was also collected starting when they were in the third grade in the year 2002. These two groups were chosen due to the fact that the graduating class of 2010 was not required to meet the standards of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI), while the class of 2011 was the first class required to meet all the standards of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) in order to graduate from high school.

This quantitative research is designed to determine if the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) along with the threat of student retention and accelerated instruction had a significant effect on the retention and dropout rate of the two groups. The treatment administered to the class of 2011 is the requirements of the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI). The main focus of this treatment is that students in the class of 2011 were under the pressures associated with the threat of retention. The class of 2010 did not face the pressures of retention at the lower grade levels in the same manner that the class of 2011 did under the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI).

The two groups analyzed for this study are the class of 2010 and 2011 respectively in comparison to each other. Due to the mobility of students in the nine year period, a modified simple sampling was used. The modification in the sampling is that students who left the district were not counted. The entire third grade population in the year 2002 was selected as the sample group for the class of 2010. The population selected for the class of 2011 was the entire third grade student population in the year 2003.

To ensure the validity of the data collected and to determine if the results of the class of 2010 in regards to retention were not an anomaly the researcher also analyzed retention data for the years 2009, 2008 and 2007. The data for the three previous years was averaged and compared to the class of 2010 and 2011. Table 4 shows the data collected for

the years 2007, 2008 and 2009 and the average retention rates for the third, fifth and eighth

grades.

Table 4

Retention Rates for the Classes of 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Class	Third Grade	Fifth Grade	Eighth Grade
2007	0.8	0.7	0.0
2008	4.0	0.4	0.9
2009	2.2	1.5	0.3
Average	2.2	0.7	0.4

Note: The retention rates were acquired from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and reflect the numbers for when the particular graduating class was at the specified grade level.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

In this study the researcher explores the three major themes that are in effect when considering the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI). The themes are retention, high stakes testing and dropouts. The review of related literature includes literature in the areas of retention, high stakes testing and dropouts.

Retention

Nationally, retention has been a recurring theme for the last 30 years. The pendulum swings back and forth between retention and social promotion as one decade's legislatures and policy makers are in favor of retention and the next decade, of legislatures are in favor of social promotion (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999). Unfortunately retention is looked to be the only alternative to social promotion which politicians have opposed as a sign a failing education system.

Overall, neither social promotion nor retention leads to high performance. If the goal is to bring low-performing students up to the higher standards now being asserted across the nation, neither retention nor social promotion is effective. In different studies, one or the other has been found to offer an advantage, but neither has been found to offer a large, lasting advantage, and neither leads to high performance (Thompson and Cunningham, 2000).

Although simply promoting students is not likely to enhance educational success, the confluence of research examining the effectiveness of grade retention on academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment does not support this strategy as an educational intervention (Jimerson, et al., 2002, p.2). The highest retention rates are

found among poor, minority, and inner-city students (Goldberg, 2004). Owings and Kaplan (2001) agree with Goldberg in stating that retained students are typically minority, male, and from the lowest quartile of socio-economic rank. These students are also at risk of dropping out of school.

Four consistent findings of retention appear throughout research. First, retention does not have a positive impact on student achievement. Second, when matching students who were retained with similar students who were promoted, promoted students show higher achievement gains than those who had been retained. Third, retained students have a greater tendency to drop out of school in the later years. Fourth, retained students tend to experience more discipline problems than students who have not been retained (Owings and Kaplan, 2001). In addition to poor performance, Grissom and Shepard (1989) state retained students are typically male, small for their age, young for their grade, immature, or members of a school culture that practices retention at a greater rate.

Despite the current emphasis on grade retention as an educational policy designed to help low-achieving students, the majority of empirical studies suggest that grade retention typically does not benefit the students it is designed to help (Walberg, Reynolds, Wang, 2004, p. 35-36). Walberg, et al. (2004) argue that retention is not beneficial for the students that are most affected by it. "With few exceptions, the existing literature finds moderately strong associations between grade retention and lower levels of academic achievement later in school (Walberg, Reynolds, Wang, 2004, p.35-36).

Holmes (1989) examined effects on academic achievement of retained students versus promoted students. Holmes did a meta-analysis of 63 controlled studies of grade retention in elementary and junior high school through the mid-1980s. He found retained

students' average level of academic achievement, from one to three years after the year of retention, were at least 0.4 standard deviations below those of promoted students. For this comparison, retained and promoted students were the same age. The only difference being promoted students had one additional year of schooling completed. Holmes (1989) also found any initial positive effects of retention were completely gone after three or more grades. "On average, retained students are worse off than their promoted counterparts on both personal adjustment and academic outcomes" (p.27).

Karweit (1999) followed a cohort of 10,000 first grade students for three years and examined academic achievement at the end of second grade. By following these students for three years, it allowed some students to be retained in first grade and then go on to complete second grade. Karweit found the retained students in first grade had substantial gains over the previous year in first grade. However, by the end of second grade, gains had decreased. Retained students' academic achievement in second grade was not as high as the promoted group however the gap in achievement was smaller than it had been at the end of the initial first grade year.

In Meisels' and Liaw's (1993) study, they examined the difference between an early retention (kindergarten through third grade) with a late retention (fourth grade through eighth grade). The results showed that nineteen point three percent of the 16,623 student sample was retained at least once between kindergarten and eighth grade. Minority students (twenty nine point nine percent African American and twenty five point two percent Hispanic) were retained at a higher rate than Whites (seventeen point two percent). Boys significantly outnumbered girls, twenty four percent and fifteen point three percent respectively, and students from low socioeconomic families were retained

at a rate of thirty three point nine percent as compared to high socioeconomic families,

eight point six percent. The largest numbers of retentions occurred during kindergarten

through third grade years. Table 5 shows Meisels' and Liaw's results of retention

demographics in their study.

Table 5

Meisels' and Liaw's Results of Retention Demographics

African American	29.9%	Girls	15.3%
Hispanic	25.2%	Boys	24%
Whites	17.2%	High SES	8.6%
K-8 grade retention	19.3%	Low SES	33.9%

Anderson (1994) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth

for more than 5,500 students. School attendance for these students was followed from

the 1978-1979 school year to the 1985-1986 school years. What he found, after statistical

control for sex, race/ethnicity, social background, cognitive ability, adolescent deviance,

early transitions to adult status, and several school-related measures, was that students

who were currently repeating a grade were seventy percent more likely to drop out of

high school than students who were not currently repeating a grade.

Rumberger and Larson (1998) did a study on retention and dropping out of

school. They examined longitudinal data from the National Educational longitudinal

Study of 1988 and controlled data for social and family background, school

characteristics, student engagement, and academic achievement in the eighth grade (test

scores and grades). They found an in grade retention before eighth grade increased the

rate of drop out by the twelfth grade. "Students who were held back before the eighth grade were more than four times as likely as students who were not held back to not complete high school or receive a GED by 1994" (p.27).

Retained students are at a higher risk of dropping out of school later in life, and a second retention along the way, makes dropping out of school almost a certainty (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). According to Kenneady (2004), students who have been retained once are fifty percent more likely to drop out of school than non-retained students. Two retentions increase the drop out probability to ninety percent. A study of students at risk done by Phi Delta Kappa showed seventy one percent of principals regularly retained students in grade but only twenty six percent of these principals found retention to be effective (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989).

The nation pays out, on average; 10 billion dollars a year to have students repeat a grade (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999). In the 2008-09 school years, four percent (177,701) of students in kindergarten through Grade twelve were retained. The rate decreased by point five percentage points from the previous year. The retention rate for females was three point three percent, and the rate for males was four point seven percent. Male students made up sixty point two percent of all students retained.

As in 2007-08, retention rates for African American and Hispanic students were over twice that for White students. In the 2008-09 school years, two point four percent of White students were retained, compared to five point one percent of both African American and Hispanic students. Retention rates for African American and Hispanic students decreased from the previous year by point eight and point six percentage points, respectively. The retention rate for white students decreased by point three percentage

points compared to other groups. Although sixty one point three percent of students

enrolled in Texas public schools were African American or Hispanic, seventy seven point

four percent of students retained in the public schools were from one of these two ethnic

groups. Table 6 shows the grade level retention by grade and ethnicity for the school

years 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Table 6

Grade-Level Retention, by Ethnicity, Economic Status, Gender, and Grade Span, Texas

Public Schools, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

	2007-08			2008-09		
Group	All students	Retained	Rate (%)	All students	Retained	Rate (%)
African American	608,653	35,821	5.9	616,787	31,280	5.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	149,293	2,587	1.7	159,382	2,580	1.6
Hispanic	2,013,773	114,248	5.7	2,089,897	106,229	5.1
Native American	14,861	598	4.0	15,338	595	3.9
White	1,537,924	41,012	2.7	1,532,116	37,017	2.4
Economical Disadvantaged	2,281,662	127,408	5.6	2,237,090	99,520	4.4
Not economically disadvantaged	2,042,842	66,858	3.3	2,176,430	78,181	3.6
Female	2,108,476	78,572	3.7	2,150,878	70,779	3.3
Male	2,216,028	115,694	5.2	2,262,642	106,922	4.7
Grades K-6	2,437,172	68,792	2.8	2,490,851	64,223	2.6
Grades 7-12	1,887,332	125,474	6.6	1,922,669	113,478	5.9
State	4,324,504	194,266	4.5	4,413,520	177,701	4.0

Note: Texas Education Agency, Grade level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2009, p 13

According to the grade level retention in Texas Public Schools (2009) manual, 234,357 students were retained. When taking the average cost of $6,455 per student to educate and multiplying by the number of students retained (234,357), it will cost taxpayers approximately $1.5 billion dollars for students to repeat the grade.

According to the Texas grade level retention manual (2009) over 6,800 students, or one point nine percent of all promoted third graders, had not passed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading test, or were missing results for the test, but were promoted by decisions of grade placement committees (GPCs) as shown in table 7.

Table 7

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) 2009 Performance and Promotion

Status 2008-09, Test Results Combined, Grade 3, Texas Public Schools.

Reading and Mathematics performance

| | TAKS Total | | Promotion status | | | | | |
| | | | Promoted | | Retained | | Unknown | |
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Passed reading and passed mathematics	279,663	86.3	279,156	99.8	505	0.2	2	<0.1
Passed reading and failed mathematics	41,919	12.9	40,669	97.0	1,250	3.0	0	0.0
Passed reading and missing mathematics	2,413	0.7	2,370	98.2	43	1.8	0	0.0
Total	323,995	100	322,195	99.4	1,798	0.6	2	<0.1
Failed reading and failed mathematics	11,011	70.0	6,773	61.5	4,238	38.5	0	0.0
Failed reading and passed mathematics	3,546	22.5	2,634	74.3	912	25.7	0	0.0
Failed reading and missing mathematics	1,178	7.5	1,048	89.0	130	11.0	0	0.0
Total	15,735	100	10,455	66.4	5,280	33.6	0	0.0

Note: Texas Education Agency, Grade level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2009, p 92

In fifth grade, eighty three point six percent of all promoted students had passed the TAKS reading and mathematics tests. Nearly 20,000 students, or five point nine percent of promoted fifth graders, had not passed the TAKS reading and mathematics tests, or were missing results for the tests, but were promoted by GPCs. See table 8.

Table 8

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) 2010 Performance and Promotion Status 2009-10, Grade 5, by Test, Texas Public Schools

	TAKS				Promotion status			
	Total		Promoted		Retained		Unknown	
Results	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English-version Grade 5 reading								
Passed	302,437	93.0	301,281	99.6	1,156	0.4	0	0.0
Failed	19,247	5.9	16,716	86.8	2,531	13.2	0	0.0
Not tested	3,566	1.1	3,268	91.6	298	8.4	0	0.0
Total	325,250	100	321,265	98.8	3,985	1.2	0	0.0
English-version Grade 5 mathematics								
Passed	306,921	93.4	305,810	99.6	1,111	0.4	0	0.0
Failed	18,361	5.6	15,726	85.6	2,635	14.4	0	0.0
Not tested	3,474	1.1	3,128	90.0	346	10.0	0	0.0
Total	328,756	100	324,664	98.8	4,092	1.2	0	0.0
Spanish-version Grade 5 reading								
Passed	5,764	84.8	5,675	98.5	89	1.5	0	0.0
Failed	958	14.1	761	79.4	197	20.6	0	0.0
Not tested	74	1.1	68	91.9	6	8.1	0	0.0
Total	6,796	100	6,504	95.7	292	4.3	0	0.0
Spanish-version Grade 5 mathematics								
Passed	2,389	69.1	2,367	99.1	22	0.9	0	0.0
Failed	916	26.5	765	83.5	151	16.5	0	0.0
Not tested	150	4.3	141	94.0	9	6.0	0	0.0
Total	3,455	100	3,273	94.7	182	5.3	0	0.0

Note: Texas Education Agency, Grade level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2009, p 97

In eighth grade, eighty point eight percent of all promoted students had passed the TAKS reading and mathematics tests. Nearly 22,000 students, or six point five percent of promoted eighth graders, had not passed the TAKS reading and mathematics tests, or were missing results for the tests, but were promoted by GPCs.

Table 9

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) 2010 Performance and Promotion Status 2009-10, Grade 8, by Test, Texas Public Schools

| | TAKS Total | | Promotion status | | | | | |
| | | | Promoted | | Retained | | Unknown | |
Results	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English-version Grade 8 reading								
Passed	300,655	93.9	298,800	99.4	1,855	0.6	0	0.0
Failed	14,556	4.5	13,006	89.4	1,549	10.6	1	<0.1
Not tested	5,014	1.6	4,911	97.9	103	2.1	0	0.0
Total	320,225	100	316,717	98.9	3,507	1.1	1	<0.1
English-version Grade 8 mathematics								
Passed	281,887	88.4	281,315	99.8	572	0.2	0	0.0
Failed	31,565	9.9	28,798	91.2	2,766	8.8	1	<0.1
Not tested	5,459	1.7	5,298	97.1	161	2.9	0	0.0
Total	318,911	100	315,411	98.9	3,499	1.1	1	<0.1

Note: Texas Education Agency, Grade level Retention in Texas Public Schools, 2009, p 103

High Stakes Testing

High-Stakes testing is the practice of attaching important consequences to standardized test scores, and it is the engine that drives the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The rationale for high-stakes testing is that the promise of rewards and the threat of punishments will cause teachers to work more effectively, students to be more motivated, and schools to run more smoothly –all of which will result in greater academic

achievement for all students, but especially for those students from poverty and minority backgrounds (Nichols and Berliner, 2008). Surely, no one can argue with the idea of "no child left behind." The reality of the effects of the prescription offered by the law negates the idealism (Tevis and McBride, 2008)

Although it is certainly arguable, Nichols and Berliner (2008) believe that, to date, there is no convincing evidence that high-stakes testing has the intended effect of increasing learning. By contrast, there is growing literature suggesting that the unintended consequences are damaging to the education of students (Nichols and Berliner, 2008).

The changing demands of an unpredictable world require an educational system capable of delivering world-class learning to all students. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110) was created in response to such demands, with the intention of reforming public education and improving student achievement throughout the United States (Altshuler and Schmautz, 2006).

Five years into NCLB, researchers found that 62 percent of a nationally representative sample of all districts in the United States—and 75 percent of districts with at least one school identified as needing improvement—increased the amount of time spent on language arts and mathematics in elementary schools. These increases were substantial: a forty seven percent increase in language arts and a thirty seven percent increase in mathematics. The study also found these districts decreased time allotted to other subjects and activities, including science, social studies, art, music, physical education, and recess (McMurrer, 2007).

The achievement gap between white and black students has been well documented for years. There have also been many methods developed to try to close that gap. Unfortunately, the academic gap continues to puzzle high schools across the country. When the *No Child Left Behind Act* was enacted, the achievement gap sprung to the forefront of school concerns once again. Success of all students was the premise of that document (Hennessy, 2011).

Taking from the book "Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools, Nichols and Berliner (2008) use Donald Campbell's law to illustrate how the high-stakes testing provision of NCLB has wreaked havoc with our education system causing irreversible harm to many of our nation's youths and educators. "Campbell's law states: "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures, and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor." (Nichols and Berliner, 2008).

Nichols and Berliner (2008) also offer five reasons and their thoughts on why high-stakes testing so easily has become a part of contemporary American life. The first of these reasons is "The Business of Education". As the influence of business on government has risen, so have business' interest in the skill set possessed by graduates or our schools and its concern for how tax dollars are used to support education. Basic business models were applied to our schools. Ways were found first to monitor productivity, then to increase it, and finally to do so without spending any more money.

Second many believe that future jobs will depend on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers. The fact is that the profile of future jobs

will depend on service industries. Creating a rigorous, high-quality science and math curriculum for those who will not be majoring in one of the STEM fields may be a better goal than putting all high school students through courses designed for the future college majors in these fields (Nichols and Berliner, 2008).

Third Nichols and Berliner (2008) state is the changing demographics of the nation. An older citizenry, much whiter than the youths of the nation and relatively well off financially, is now likely to outlive its resources and is beginning to act politically in its own best interests. They will not want to spend much on youths, especially youths of color, whom they perceive as lazy and unappreciative. For many in this category, high-stakes testing separates the deserving poor from the undeserving poor. It becomes in effect, a mechanism to preserve social status more than to improve our schools (Nichols and Berliner, 2008).

Fourth Nichols and Berliner (2008) believe that the power elite's children are generally unaffected by high-stakes tests. High-stakes testing has gone partly unnoticed because it hits our poorest, most racially diverse student body hardest and thereby forces the kind of education on the children of the poor that ensures that they cannot compete successfully with the children of the wealthy. The drill-and-test-prep education we see in schools for the poor does not prepare them for the knowledge workers' jobs or for the best universities (Nichols and Berliner, 2008).

Fifth Nichols and Berliner (2008) believe there are numerous similarities between sports and testing explains the country's fascination with testing. A match in the sport of cricket is called a test. Professional athletes practice hours and hours, repeating the same activities endlessly so that their responses at "test" time will be automatic. Teachers also

engage their students in endless repetitive activities to better ensure that students'

responses are accurate and automatic come test time. In professional sports, teams with

the highest paid athletes are more likely to have winning seasons. Similarly, schools with

more resources and those that serve the most affluent students tend to perform better

academically (Nichols and Berliner, 2008).

While assessment may be an essential component to ensure that certain academic

requirements are met, ironically, the excessive assessment of student achievement belies

the intention of institutions of education. Teaching for the purpose of learning, as

opposed to teaching for the purpose of increasing test scores (Franklin-Guy, 2010).

In order to begin to answer the question of whether or not testing is fair, simply

consider the ramifications for students who experience test anxiety. For example, a high

school student denied a diploma as a result of failing to pass an exit exam (as a result of

test anxiety) may find it difficult, if not nearly impossible, to procure post-secondary

employment. What might be the cost to the community and society? The deleterious

effect of exit exams, then, may transcend the classroom (Franklin-Guy, 2010).

According to Harlen (2003) the claims for testing are hollow; increase in test

scores is not the same as increase in achievement. Research into testing programs

suggests that an increase in scores is due to greater familiarity of the teachers and pupils

with the tests rather than increase in real learning.

A study of a large urban district from 2001 to 2005 (Valli & Buese, 2007) found

that as worries about adequate yearly progress increased, teachers matched the content

and format of what they taught to the state tests. These researchers concluded that the

content of the tests had effectively become the learning goals of students (David, 2011).

Teachers under pressure to reach goals expressed in terms of increase in test scores tend to focus their teaching on what is required in the tests. These teachers spend time on practice tests and often unconsciously value test performance rather than genuine learning (Harlen, 2003).

The need to make test performance the first priority has forced many teachers to push topics and activities that do not appear on the test to the end of the school year, after testing is finished (David, 2011). Teachers also talk about the growing number of children they see who do not like to come to school. Young children throw up on test days, the deletion or marginalizing of playground/PE/recess/art/music, their fear of the rising dropout rates, and the rules that affect the waivers for special education and Limited English Proficient (LEP) children (Tevis and McBride, 2008).

The focus on motivation was in recognition of its role and in particular that "lifelong learning" on which the government places much emphasis requires that outcomes of schooling must include enjoying learning and knowing how to learn. It is not difficult to realize that test-oriented classrooms are not conducive to enjoyment for the majority of pupils (Harlen, 2003).

There has been evidence from several studies that an impact of testing on those who do not do well is that it lowers their self-esteem. Brember and Davies (1998) conducted research studies on children aged seven before the introduction of national tests showed no correlation between self-esteem and achievement, indicating the lower achieving children could have the same level of self-esteem as their higher achieving peers. After the introduction of national testing, however, there was a positive correlation, indicating that the self-esteem of the lower achieving pupils was lower than

that of the higher achievers (Brember and Davies 1999). Northern Ireland also reported the devastating impact of the tests on the self-esteem of those who did not match up to their own or others' expectations (Harlen, 2003).

Madaus and Clarke (2001) concluded that "high stakes tests do not motivate the unmotivated" and that "high stakes testing programs have been shown to increase high school drop-out rates particularly among minority student populations". McNeil and Valenzuela (2001) also showed that the curriculum was virtually replaced by test preparation: "a regular education has been supplanted by activities whose sole purpose is to raise test scores".

Dropouts

Bogden and Purnell (2000) found that dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than high school graduates. Repeating a grade twice makes the probability of dropping out nearly 100 percent. The term "dropout" emerged in the early 1960s to describe those students who left school early before receiving a high school diploma. Prior to 1960, the phrases "elimination from school" or "leaving school" was used interchangeably when referring to those students who left school before graduation.

The dropout problem was created by education and social critics instead of it being discovered as a phenomenon. As a social construction, the premise of dropping out is based on the assumption that schools are accountable for and have the responsibility to socialize adolescents, prevent delinquency and dependency, and to keep students in school until they graduate. Subsequently, students dropping out became an indictment on the effectiveness of schools as their dropping out cast school systems as failures because they did not achieve their primary goal of educating all children (Dorn, 1996).

By the 1970s, the student dropout problem was no longer a front burner issue as school systems nationwide focused on desegregation suits, and busing mandates. According to Dorn, in the 1970s, The Children's Defense Fund and the Southern Regional Council sought to frame the exclusion of Black children in a civil rights context. They argued that students were being pushed out of school through discriminatory discipline practices that unfairly denied American students of African descent their right to an education. As a result of forced desegregation, the rates that these children were suspended and pushed out of schools by public school officials were much higher than those of their White counterparts (Dorn, 1996).

In the 1980s, conservatives espoused two positions that some believed would increase the dropout rate. The first suggested that society needed to socialize and train all adolescents; the other recommended that some children should drop out to make schools safer for those students who were more concerned with obtaining an education. They saw potential dropouts as being a behavioral problems that had an impact on the school's ability to raise its academic standards (Dorn, 1996). It seemed that some were satisfied with removing these children from school rather than addressing the main reasons for these students dropping out of school.

Samuels (2007) cites two types of dropouts. The first type he identifies as leaving school as a result of life events. These life events may include pregnancy or bullying from other students. The second type of drop out has a history of academic failure. Attendance is relevant because as the attendance of these students decreased, their academic failures increase to where they finally stop attending school altogether (Samuels, 2007).

Kranic & Hargis (1998) describe several types of dropouts.

- Quiet or Invisible dropout – these students go unnoticed until they have dropped out of school. They are low achievers who have experienced failure throughout their school career. This is the largest group of dropouts.

- Low achievers with low learning abilities – Because of their abilities they continually fail courses and repeat grades. These students react to failure by being disruptive and annoying in the classroom setting. They constantly call attention to themselves in ways that make teachers and administrators notice them. They don't like to fail and they avoid failure by avoiding school. They are the truants that are purged from the school's rolls by being pushed out through suspension or expulsion. The irony is that these students are punished for their behavior while in school and punished if they avoid school.

- Adequate student with average or above-average potential. These students can be creative in many ways that place them in conflict with the structured curriculum. For too many of these students the work is boring and bears little relevance to them. The courses may be too easy; they may have personal financial or family problems that override the importance of school. The source of their issues is outside of school. This group has the lowest membership.

- Informal dropout. These students continue to attend school but have dropped out of learning anything academic. These students are low academic performers who are out of sync with the rigors of the academic curriculum. Because they consider the work as being "hard" they make little, if any, academic progress. These students don't experience success and rarely achieve their academic potential.

Even with these factors, they somehow manage to continue in spite of prior performance and failures. Some of these students have a higher tolerance for coping with failure experience. They seem to be more durable, self-centered and skilled at making or hiding their real feeling toward the failure barriers. Some of these students have skills that get them through such as athletic ability. Some cheat their way through the barriers.

- Survivors –These students have adequate academic ability and they can do well academically because of their abilities. They drop out because of problems unrelated to school.

In an effort to provide a complete profile regarding dropouts, the National Center for Education Statistics defines and provides data for the following three types of dropouts: (a) event dropout; (b) status dropout; and (c) cohort dropout. The event dropout is defined as the student who leaves school each year without completing a high school program. The status dropout is the young adult between the ages of 16 and 24 years old who is out of school and who has not earned high school credentials. The cohort gives an estimate of how many students fail to complete high school (Schargel, 2004, p. 30-32).

Definition of Terms

Accelerated Math Instruction (AMI): Accelerated instruction in Mathematics area for a student who fails to perform satisfactorily on a math assessment instrument (Texas Education Agency Grade Placement, 2006)

Accelerated Reading Instruction (ARI): Accelerated instruction in the Reading area for a student who fails to perform satisfactorily on a reading assessment instrument (Texas Education Agency Grade Placement, 2006).

Adult Correctional Institution- A facility in which person (including persons under 21 years of age) are confined as a result of a conviction for a criminal offense. [as defined by Title I, Part D, Section 1432 (1)]

Beginning Teacher- A teacher in a public school who has been teaching less than a total of three complete school years.

Core Academic Subjects- English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography.

Distance Learning- The transmission of educational or instructional programming to geographically dispersed individuals and groups via telecommunications.

Dropout -A dropout is a student who attends Grade 7-12 in a public school in a particular school year, does not return the following fall, is not expelled, and does not: graduate, receive a General Educational Development certificate (GED), continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die.

Elementary School- A nonprofit institutional day or residential school, including a public elementary charter school, that provides elementary education, as determined under state law.

English Language Learners (ELL): A student who is learning the English Language. English Language Learners speak a language other than English in the home (Texas Education Agency Grade Level, 2005)

Exemplary Teacher- A teacher who; is a highly qualified teacher such as a master teacher;

- has been teaching for at least five years in a public or private school or institution of higher education;

- is recommended to be an exemplary teacher by administrators and other teachers who are knowledgeable about the individual's performance;

- is currently teaching and based in a public school; and

- Assists other teachers in improving instructional strategies, improves the skills of other teachers, performs teacher mentoring, develops curricula, and offers other professional development.

Grade Level Committee Manual: A manual written by the Texas Education Agency to be used by the grade placement campus committee members when making decisions pertaining to promotion or grade retention (Texas Education Agency Grade Placement, 2006).

Grade Retention: Repetition of a grade that applies primarily to Grades K-8. The same grade level in successive years in high school does not necessarily represent the repetition of a full year's curriculum as it does in elementary (Texas Education Agency Grade Level, 2005)

Highly Qualified-

a. When used with respect to any public elementary school or secondary school teacher teaching in a state, means that –

- the teacher has obtained full state certification as a teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification) or passed the

state teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such state,
except that when used with respect to any teacher teaching in a public charter
school, the term means that the teacher meets the requirements set forth in the
state's public charter school law; and

- the teacher has not had certification or licensure requirements waived on
an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis;

b. When used with respect to –

- An elementary school teacher who is new to the profession, means that the
teacher-

  - Holds at least a bachelor's degree; and

  - Has demonstrated, by passing a rigorous state test, subject knowledge and
    teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the
    basic elementary school curriculum (which may consist of passing a state
    required certification or licensing test or tests in reading, writing,
    mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum);
    or

  - A middle or secondary school teacher who is new to the profession, means
    that the teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated a
    high level of competency in each of the academic subjects in which the
    teacher teaches by-

    - Passing a rigorous state academic subject test in each of the
      academic subjects in which the teacher teaches (which may consist
      of a passing level of performance on a state required certification

> or licensing test or tests in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches); or

- Successful completion, in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches, of an academic major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an undergraduate academic major, or advanced certification or credentialing.

c. When used with respect to an elementary, middle, or secondary school teacher who is not new to the profession, means that the teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree and –

-has met the applicable standard in paragraph B, which includes an option for a test; or

-demonstrates competence in all the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches based on a high objective uniform state standards of evaluation that-

- is set by the state for both grade appropriate academic subject matter knowledge and teaching skills;

- is aligned with challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards and developed in consultation with core content specialists, teachers, principals, and school administrators;

- provides objective, coherent information about the teacher's attainment of core content knowledge in the academic subjects in which a teacher teaches;

- is applied uniformly to all teachers in the same academic subject

and the same grade level throughout the state;

- takes into consideration, but not be based primarily on, the time

the teacher has been teaching in the academic subject;

-is made available to the public upon request; and

- may involve multiple, objective measures of teacher competency.

Highly Qualified Paraprofessional-

A paraprofessional who has not less than two years of –

- experience in a classroom; and

- postsecondary education or demonstrated competence in a field or

academic subject for which there is a significant shortage of qualified teachers. [as

defined by Title II, Part A, Section 2102 (4)]

Historically Underserved Population-

Students such as students from low-income families, limited English proficient

students, students with disabilities, or students who have low literacy skills. [as defined

by Title V, Part D, Section 5474]

Instructional Staff- Individuals who have responsibility for teaching children to read; and

includes principals, teachers, supervisors of instruction, librarians, library school media

specialists, teachers of academic subjects other than reading, and other individuals who

have responsibility for assisting children to learn to read. [as defined by Title I, Part B]

Parental Involvement- The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful

communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including

ensuring that-

-parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;

-parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;

-parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): On January 8, 2001, the Congress passed Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which took the form of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under ESEA due to high local rates of poverty. NCLB focuses on reform accountability, flexibility and local control, increased parental choice and scientifically sound educational programs (U.S. Department of Education, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Professional Development-

Includes activities that-

-improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach and enable teachers to become highly qualified;

-are an integral part of broad school wide and district wide educational improvement plans;

-give teachers, principals, and administrators the knowledge and skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging State academic content standards and student academic achievement standards;

- improve classroom management skills that are high quality, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom; and are not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences;

-support the recruiting, hiring, and training of highly qualified teachers, including teachers who became highly qualified through state and local alternative routes to certification;

Advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies that are—

    a. Based on scientifically-based research; and

    b. Strategies for improving student academic achievement or substantially increasing the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers; and

-are aligned with and directly related to –

a. State academic content standards, student academic achievement standards, and assessments; and

b. the curricula and programs tied to the State academic content standards and student academic achievement standards;

-are developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, parents, and administrators of schools to be served under the No Child Left Behind Act;

-are designed to give teachers of limited English proficient children, and other teachers and instructional staff, the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and appropriate language and academic support services to those children, including the appropriate use of curricula and assessments;

- to the extent appropriate, provide training for teachers and principals in the use of technology so that technology and technology applications are effectively used in the classroom to improve teaching and learning in the curricula and core academic subjects in which the teachers teach;

- as a whole, are regularly evaluated for their impact on increased teacher effectiveness and improved student academic achievement, with the findings of the evaluations used to improve the quality of professional development;

- provide instruction in methods of teaching children with special needs;

-include instruction in the use of data and assessments to inform and instruct classroom practice; and

-include instruction in ways that teachers, principals, pupil services personnel, and school administrators may work more effectively with parents; and may include activities that-

-involve the forming of partnerships with institutions of higher education to establish school-based teacher training programs that provide prospective teachers and beginning teachers with an opportunity to work under the guidance of experienced teachers and college faculty;

- create programs to enable paraprofessionals (assisting teachers employed by a local educational agency receiving assistance under Title I, Part A) to obtain the education necessary for those paraprofessionals to become certified and licensed teachers; and

-provide follow-up training to teachers who have participated in activities that are designed to ensure that the knowledge and skills learned by the teachers are implemented in the classroom.

Reading- A complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following-

-skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print;

-ability to decode unfamiliar words;

- ability to read fluently;

-Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension;

-Development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print; and

-Development and maintenance of a motivation to read [as defined by Title I, Part B]

Response to Intervention (RTI): It is the paradigm proposed in the Individuals with Disabilities Act as amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004. It proposes the use of scientifically-based high quality instruction and interventions matched to the needs of all students. Student progress must be monitored frequently in order to make instructional decisions about students who are and are not responding to the interventions provided in the general education setting (U.S. Department of Education, Federal Register, 2006).

Scientifically Based Research-

Research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and

objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education

activities and programs; and

-Includes research that-

a. employs systematic, empirical methods that draw observation or experiment;

b. involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses

and justify the general conclusions drawn;

c. relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid

data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and

observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;

Social Promotion: Student promoted without meeting required academic proficiency

levels to be promoted to the next grade level (Texas Education Agency Grade Level,

2005).

Student Success Initiative (SSI): Grade advancement requirements enacted by the 76th

Texas Legislature in 1999 (Texas Education Agency Grade Placement, 2006).

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): Criterion reference test to measure

student performance in core areas with results provided to the Texas Education Agency

by Pearson Educational Measurement (Texas Education Agency Comprehensive, 2005).

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): The curriculum that the Texas Education

Agency requires schools to follow to ensure that all students gain sufficient

understanding and knowledge (Texas Education Agency Grade Placement, 2006).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The research methodology in this study was longitudinal and quantitative in nature, utilizing components that fulfilled the needs and purpose of the research study. Quantitative methods are succinct, clear-cut, and measurable (Neuman, 2000). They offer information to assist in determining general causation of a research question, but provide no personal data and no room for perceptions of the subjects studied. If the researcher concludes that more detail is required in order to fully explore a research question, then they may consider moving from a quantifiable, measurable approach—as in quantitative studies—to the area of qualitative research, which allows for more description and personal interaction with the subjects of interest.

Purpose

The purpose of this longitudinal quantitative research was to determine if the Texas SSI has had an effect on retention and dropouts in a district located in the northeast area of Harris County. This study compared the results of the class of 2011—which was the first graduating class required to complete all portions of the Texas SSI—and the class of 2010, which was not required to meet the Texas SSI standards at the third, fifth and eighth grade levels.

Quantitative research involves "formal, objective, systematic processes in which numerical data are utilized to obtain information about the world" (Francis, 2001, p. 40). Therefore, objectivity, generalization, and numbers are features often associated with quantitative research. Quantitative research is inclined to be deductive; it tests theory. Quantitative research tends to produce results that can be generalized and uses data that

are structured in the form of numbers or can be immediately transferred into numbers (Francis, 2001).

The research consisted of a comparative study of two cohort groups. One group was the class of 2011, who were in the third grade in the year 2003. This is the year when third graders were required to pass the reading and math areas of the TAKS in order to be promoted to the next grade. The other group was the class of 2010, beginning when they were in the third grade in the year 2002. This class was not required to meet the requirements of the Texas SSI.

The Texas SSI resulted from the increasing concern, on the part of legislative policy makers, about ending social promotion. Social promotion occurs when students are allowed to advance to the next grade even when they have not mastered the academic prerequisites in their current grade. Normally, social promotion is based on the students' age and the choice to keep the student with their peer group. The alternative to social promotion is mandatory retention, requiring students to repeat the grade when they have not demonstrated mastery of the required content.

The intent of this chapter is to describe the design of the research study. The description includes the research question, the research methodology, the design of the study, the population and sample, and the instrumentation and specific procedures used to conduct the research. Additionally, a description of how the data was collected, recorded and analyzed—as well as the method by which the trustworthiness of the data can be assured—is provided.

Research Questions

The study sought to address the following research questions:

1.   Does a difference in third grade student retention rates exist between third
       graders in the class of 2010 and third graders in the class of 2011 who
       participated in the Texas SSI?

2.   Does the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the fifth grade level
       increase the retention rate for the class of 2011?

3.   Does the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the eighth grade level
       increase the retention rate for the class of 2011?

4.   Does the success rate on the eleventh grade exit level exam increase for
       students required to meet the Texas SSI throughout their educational
       career?

5.   Are students required to meet the Texas SSI during their educational
       career more likely to drop out of school than students who did not need to
       meet the Texas SSI?

Population and Sampling

The population used in this study included all members of the specified Texas SSI grades in the district being studied. Those grades were the third, fifth and eighth for the classes of 2010 and 2011, respectively. Included were the entire eleventh grade population and the graduates from both classes. The sample population is indicated in Table 10.

Table 10

Sample Population Being Studied

Grade	Year	Class of 2010	Year	Class of 2011
Third Grade	2001	320 Students	2002	324 Students
Fifth Grade	2003	336 Students	2004	355 Students
Eighth Grade	2006	436 Students	2007	408 Students
Eleventh Grade	2009	396 Students	2010	392 Students
Graduates	2010	262 Students	2011	345 Students

Procedure and Time Frame

District AEIS data was collected for the years 2001 to 2010. The data extracted was used to compare the performance in the areas of dropouts and retention. Dropout data was determined based upon the dropout rate assigned by the State of Texas.

Texas has adopted the definition of "dropout" used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Under this definition, a dropout is a student who is: enrolled in public school in Grades 7-12; does not return to public school the following fall; is not expelled; and does not graduate, receive a GED certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die (TEA, 2010).

The annual dropout rate measures the percentage of students who drop out of school during one school year. The longitudinal rates reflect the percentage of students from a class of beginning ninth graders who, by the fall following their anticipated graduation date, graduate, remain enrolled, receive General Education Development (GED) certificates, or drop out.

Retention rates were compared at each grade level required of the Texas SSI

grades. The grades monitored by the Texas SSI at the time of data collection were grades

three, five and eight. The 81st Texas Legislature, in 2009, eliminated the requirements

related to testing at the third grade level (GPC, 2009-10).

The Texas SSI grade advancement requirements applied only to the TAKS

mathematics and reading tests at grades 5 and 8. If a student did not demonstrate

proficiency on one or both of these tests, the student might have advanced to, or been

placed in, the next grade level only if (1) they completed all accelerated instruction

required by the GPC, and (2) the GPC determined, by unanimous decision, that the

student was likely to perform at grade level at the end of the next school year if given

additional accelerated instruction during the course of the year. In making promotion

decisions, the GPC was required to consider the recommendations of the student's

teachers, the student's grades, the student's TAKS scores, and any other relevant

academic information (GPC, 2009-10).

Student data collected in this study was also divided by schools. At the time of

this study, students attended three different elementary schools. The data was collected

individually for each campus and combined to provide district data. The campuses are

identified by the designations A, B and C. In addition, all the students attended the same

intermediate campus during the fifth and sixth grade. These students then transitioned to

the same middle school campus and, eventually, to the same high school campus.

Analysis Plan

This study employed descriptive statistics. The researcher used longitudinal

quantitative data to determine if a relationship existed between students who were

required to meet the Texas SSI and students who did not need to meet the requirements. The retention rates for the third, fifth and eighth grade levels were analyzed to answer the research questions. Dropout rates assigned by the TEA were analyzed and compared to determine successful student high school completion rates. The results were then used to answer the research questions regarding dropouts. These data were compared between students who had to meet the Texas SSI requirements and the students who were not required to meet those requirements at the particular district being studied.

Scope and Limitations

Several limitations of this study have been identified. One limitation is that students who withdrew from the district were not included in the study. The data on retention included all students enrolled in the grade assigned at that specific time. Students who left their cohort were counted as non-completers and were not included in the final data collection, since they might have still been enrolled in school and not necessarily have met the definition of a dropout according to the standards set by the State of Texas. The scope of this study did not allow for the inclusion of those students who departed in the research period. Due to the small population, the conclusions and data drawn can only be applied to the district being studied. The study can be replicated at a larger scale or can also be focused on a smaller population, if desired.

Another limitation of the study was that, although all the students eventually attended the same high school, while at the elementary level, they attended three different campuses. Each school's specific grade placement committee determined whether the student would be retained or promoted. Since this was a study of the district as a whole, the data for the three campuses were combined to determine the final result. Some data

however, are shown by individual campus, and are identified by the aforementioned A, B and C designators.

Another limitation of this study was how to define a dropout. Defining a dropout is a complicated process. The State of Texas has a definition of a dropout that includes several factors. For the purposes of this study, a dropout was synonymous with what is usually referred to as non-completer. A non-completer is a student who did not graduate at the same time as his peers due to any number of reasons. Some of the students may have continued their education via a GED or may still be enrolled in school; however, they have dropped back from their original cohort group.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter includes a review of the purposes of the study, a description of the

population that was the focus of the study, and the results of the research questions.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of the Texas SSI on

dropouts and retention rate on a district in the northeast area of Harris County. The

researcher has studied nine years' worth of student data on two graduating classes. In

this study, the testing data for the 2011 class at the Texas SSI grades of third, fifth, and

eighth were compared to the data for the class of 2010, which did not need to meet the

requirements of the Texas SSI.

In addition, the dropout rate for the class of 2010 was compared to that of the

class of 2011, along with the success rate of the students on the eleventh grade exit-level

exam for both classes. In this study, the treatment for the control group was the threat of

retention if they did not meet the requirements of the Texas SSI in the areas of English

and Mathematics administered at the third, fifth, and eighth grade levels. Although both

classes were required to take the exams, only the class of 2011 had the threat of retention

if they were not successful on the exam. At the eleventh grade exit-level, both the class

of 2010 and 2011 faced the threat of not receiving a high school diploma if they were not

successful in passing all four portions of the exam. The exams consisted of English

Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

The population in this study was taken from the graduating class of 2010 and

2011 beginning at the third grade. Data were analyzed at the third grade, fifth grade,

eighth grade, eleventh grade, and at the point of graduation. A limitation of this study—

regarding student mobility—has been addressed in the previous chapter. Only students enrolled and continuing in the district were counted in the study. Any student who moved out of the district was not included in the data collected. Another limitation of the study was the identification and definition of a dropout; this limitation was also addressed in the previous chapter.

The students in this study attended three separate elementary schools at the third grade. The elementary schools are identified as Elementary A, B and C, respectively. At the fifth grade, all students attended an intermediate campus, where fifth and sixth graders attended. The fifth and sixth grade campus is identified as the Intermediate Campus. All students attended the eighth grade at the same middle school, which is identified as the Middle School Campus. The participants all attended the same high school, identified as the High School Campus.

In comparing the data for retention at each grade level, a description of the data is provided, followed by a table describing the data collected. The data begins in a chronological order, with the third grade, fifth grade, eighth grade, eleventh grade, and, finally, the graduation and dropout rates. The data for the class of 2010 is provided first, followed by the data for the class of 2011. A comparative analysis between both the class of 2010 and 2011 is provided in descriptive form, as well as via a table with the identified findings.

Results

The demographic composition of the class of 2010 in the third grade consisted of 320 students in three different elementary schools. Elementary A had an enrollment of 142 students in the third grade. This school had a diverse student population. Students attending this school were in the following ethnic groups and demographics: thirty-six point three percent were African American; thirty-five point two percent were Hispanic; twenty-eight point two percent were white; and point three percent were identified as belonging to other groups. Sixty-nine points four percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunches, and were, therefore, identified as economically disadvantaged. Table 11 provides the demographic information for Elementary A.

Table 11

Elementary A Third Grade Population Class of 2010

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
142 Students	36.3%	35.2%	28.2%	.3%	69.4%

Elementary B had a population of eighty-six total students in the third grade. The student demographics at Elementary B were: one point five percent of the total student population was African American; seventy-one point seven percent of the student population was identified as Hispanic; twenty-five point one percent of the student population was white; and one point six percent was identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-five percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, and were consequently identified as economically disadvantaged, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Elementary B Third Grade Population Class of 2010

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
86 Students	1.5%	71.7%	25.1%	1.6%	75%

Elementary C had a population of eighty nine total students in the third grade. The student population at Elementary C was made up of the following demographics: eighteen point two percent was identified as African American; thirty-one point eight percent of students were identified as belonging to the Hispanic ethnic group; forty-nine point six percent were identified as white; and point four percent were classified as belong to another ethnic group. Sixty-one point eight percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch under federal guidelines, and were identified as economically disadvantaged. The demographic information for Elementary C is shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Elementary C Third Grade Population Class of 2010

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
89 Students	18.2%	31.8%	49.6%	.4%	61.8%

Students in the class of 2010 all attended the same fifth grade campus. The students attended an intermediate campus which housed fifth and sixth graders. The total fifth grade population for the intermediate campus was 336 students. Demographics for the total campus are shown in Table 14. Twenty point nine percent of students were identified as African American; forty-three point nine percent of the students were classified as Hispanic; thirty-five percent were identified as white; and point four percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Sixty-eight point one percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch under federal guidelines, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 14

Intermediate Fifth Grade Population Class of 2010

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
336 Students	20.9%	43.5%	35%	.4%	68.1%

All students in the district attended the same middle school campus for the seventh and eighth grade. The total eighth grade student population was 434 students. Demographics for the entire middle school campus are included on Table 15. Thirty-one point three percent of the students were identified as African American; forty-six point seven percent of the students were identified as Hispanic. Twenty-one point six percent of students were identified as white; and point three percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-five point four percent of students qualified for free and

reduced lunch under the federal guidelines, and were identified as economically

disadvantaged.

Table 15

Middle School Eighth Grade Population Class of 2010

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
434 Students	31.3%	46.7%	21.6%	.3%	75.4%

The class of 2010 attended the same high school campus; the eleventh grade

student population was 389. The demographics of the entire high school are shown in

Table 16. Thirty point eight percent of students were identified as African American;

fifty-three point eight percent of the students were identified as Hispanic; fourteen point

seven percent of students were identified as white; and point eight percent were identified

as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-three point four percent of students

qualified for free or reduced lunch under the federal guidelines, and were identified as

economically disadvantaged.

Table 16

High School Eleventh Grade Population Class of 2010

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
389 Students	30.8%	53.8%	14.7%	.8%	73.4%

The class of 2010 graduated 236 students from the original cohort. The original cohort consisted of all the students who entered the ninth grade as first time ninth graders together. Table 17 shows the demographics for the graduate population of the class of 2010. Thirty-six point four percent of graduates were identified as African American; forty-seven point five percent were identified as Hispanic; fifteen point seven percent were identified as white; and point four percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group.

Table 17

Class of 2010 Graduate Population

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other
236 Students	36.4%	47.5%	15.7%	.4%

Graduation and dropout data for the class of 2010 is shown in Table 18. The dropout rate for the high school, as calculated by the State of Texas, was four point two percent for the graduating class of 2010. The graduation rate for the original cohort of students who entered the ninth grade together was seventy-seven point seven percent. Using the definition of a dropout as provided by the State of Texas, nine point nine percent of students dropped out of school. Those students did not receive a GED and are not continuing high school.

Table 18

Class of 2010 Graduation and Dropout Data

Total Population	Cohort Graduation	Dropouts	Dropout Rate
236 Students	77.7%	9.9%	4.2%

The class of 2011 began with a third grade population of 324 students. Students attended three different elementary campuses. Elementary A had a third grade population of 142 students. The demographics for the entire campus are identified on Table 19. Thirty-seven point four percent of students were identified as African American; thirty-three point one percent were identified as Hispanic; twenty-nine percent were identified as white; and point six percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-two percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch under the federal guidelines for the school lunch program, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 19

Elementary A Third Grade Population Class of 2011

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
324 Students	37.4%	33.1%	29%	.6%	72%

Elementary B had a third grade population of 88 total students. The demographic make up for Elementary B is identified in Table 20. Point nine percent of the entire campus population was identified as African American; seventy-seven point two percent

was identified as Hispanic; twenty point four percent were identified as white; and one

point five percent was identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-eight

point nine percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch under the federal

guidelines, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 20

Elementary B Third Grade Population Class of 2011

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
88 Students	.9%	77.2%	20.4%	1.5%	78.9%

Elementary C had a third grade population of 94 total students. The campus

demographics are identified in Table 21. Seventeen point five percent of students were

identified as African American; twenty-nine point eight percent of students were

identified as Hispanic; fifty two point three percent of students were identified as white;

and point three percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Sixty-three

percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunches under the federal guidelines for

the school lunch program, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 21

Elementary C Third Grade Population Class of 2011

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
94 Students	17.5%	29.8%	52.3%	.3	63.2%

At the fifth grade, the students in the class of 2011 attended the same intermediate campus. The campus housed both fifth and sixth graders. The total fifth grade population was 355 students. Demographics for the intermediate campus are identified in Table 22. Twenty-seven point five percent of students were identified as African American; forty-eight point nine percent were identified as Hispanic; twenty-three point one percent were identified as white; and point four percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-nine point one percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunches under the federal guidelines for the school lunch program, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 22

Intermediate Fifth Grade Population Class of 2011

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
355 Students	27.5%	48.9%	23.1%	.4%	79.1%

Students in the class of 2011 attended the same middle school at the seventh and eighth grades. The eighth grade population for the middle school campus was 408 students. Demographics for the campus are identified in Table 23. Thirty point six percent of students were identified as African American; fifty-one percent were identified as Hispanic; seventeen point seven percent were identified as white; and point eight percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-eight point three percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunches under the federal guidelines, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 23

Middle School Eighth Grade Population Class of 2011

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
408 Students	30.6%	51%	17.7%	.8%	78.3%

Students in the class of 2011 attended the same high school campus for the eleventh grade. The high school campus housed ninth through twelfth graders. The eleventh grade population was 385 students. Campus demographics are identified in Table 24. Twenty-eight point seven percent of students were identified as African American; fifty-seven point five percent of students were identified as Hispanic; thirteen point two percent were identified as white; and point six percent were identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Seventy-two point three percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch under the federal guidelines, and were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 24

High School Eleventh Grade Population Class of 2011

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other	Economically Disadvantaged
385 Students	28.7%	57.5%	13.2%	.6%	72.3%

The class of 2011 graduated 301 students from the original cohort. The original cohort was comprised of all the students who entered the ninth grade at the same time as

first time ninth graders. Table 25 describes the demographics of the graduate population

for the class of 2011. Thirty-two point nine percent of the graduates were identified as

African American; forty-seven point two percent of graduates were identified as

Hispanic; seventeen point three percent were identified as white; and point eight percent

were identified as belonging to another ethnic group.

Table 25

Class of 2011 Graduate Population

Total Population	African American	Hispanic	White	Other
301 Students	32.9%	47.2%	17.3%	.8%

Graduation and dropout data for the class of 2011 is shown on Table 26. The

dropout rate for the high school, as calculated by the State of Texas, was two point two

percent for the class of 2011. The graduation rate for the original cohort group that

entered the ninth grade together was eighty point one percent. Using the definition of a

dropout provided by the State of Texas, nine point seven percent of students dropped out

of school. This means that those students did not complete a GED or are not still enrolled

in any school.

Table 26

Class of 2011 Graduation and Dropout Data

Total Population	Cohort Graduation	Dropouts	Dropout Rate
301 Students	80.1%	9.7%	2.2%

Student retention rates at the third grade level for the class of 2010 are identified on Table 27, and are compared to the statewide rates. The State of Texas had a third grade retention rate of two point five percent. The district retention rate at the third grade level was two point nine percent. Compared to the State of Texas, the district retention rate was point four percent higher. Elementary A had a third grade retention rate of six point one percent. That retention rate was over three percent higher than the district and state retention rates. Elementary B had no students retained at the third grade level. Elementary C had a third grade retention rate of two point eight percent. The retention rate for Elementary C was point three percent higher than the state, but point one percent lower than the district.

Table 27

Class of 2010 Retention Rate at the Third Grade Level

State	District	Elementary A	Elementary B	Elementary C
2.5%	2.9%	6.1%	0%	2.8%

Student retention rates at the fifth grade level for the class of 2010 are identified on Table 28. Fifth grade retention levels for the State of Texas were point seven percent. The district's fifth grade retention rate was one point five percent. The district had a retention rate point eight percent higher than the State of Texas. The intermediate campus had a retention rate of one point three percent. The retention rate for the intermediate campus was point six percent higher than the state, but point two percent lower than the district. Although the district only had one intermediate campus, the

retention rate was not the same because it included students placed in alternative and off-campus facilities.

Table 28

Class of 2010 Retention Rate at the Fifth Grade Level

State	District	Intermediate Campus
.7%	1.5%	1.3%

Student retention rates at the eighth grade level for the class of 2010 are identified on Table 29. The eighth grade student retention rate for the State of Texas was one point six percent. The district retention rate at the eighth grade level was point three percent. The district retention rate was one point three percent lower than the state. The middle school eighth grade retention rate was equal to the district retention rate—point three percent.

Table 29

Class of 2010 Retention Rate at the Eighth Grade Level

State	District	Middle School Campus
1.6%	.3%	.3%

Eleventh grade student success on all portions of the exit level exam are shown on Table 30 along with the individual demographics and their success rates. The State of Texas had, on all four portions of the exit level exam, a student success rate of seventy-six percent. At the eleventh grade level, district students in the class of 2010 held a sixty-two percent success rate on all parts of their exit level exam. The district overall had a

success rate fourteen percent lower than the State of Texas. African American students were successful at a rate of fifty-three percent. African American students had a success rate nine percent lower than the district and twenty-three percent lower than the state.

Hispanic students were successful at a rate of sixty-one percent. Hispanic students had a success rate one percent lower than the district and fifteen percent lower than the state. White students were successful on all portions of their exit level exams at a rate of seventy-seven percent. White students had a success rate fifteen percent higher than the district and one percent higher than the State of Texas.

Table 30

Class of 2010 Eleventh Grade Success Rate on All Exit Level Exams

State	District	African American	Hispanic	White
76%	62%	53%	61%	77%

Student retention rates at the third grade level for the class of 2011are shown in Table 31, along with the retention rates for the district and each of the elementary schools. The State of Texas had a retention rate of two point five percent at the third grade level. The district had a retention rate of three point eight percent. The district retention rate was one point three percent higher than the State of Texas. Elementary A had a third grade retention rate of one point seven percent. Elementary A, at the third grade level, had a retention rate two point one percent lower than the district and eight percent lower than the state.

Elementary B had a retention rate of eight point two percent. Elementary B had a retention rate four point four percent higher than the district and five point seven percent

higher than the State of Texas. Elementary C had a third grade retention rate of two point

seven percent. Elementary C had a retention rate point eleven percent lower than the

district and point two percent higher than the State of Texas.

Table 31

Class of 2011 Retention Rate at the Third Grade Level

State	District	Elementary A	Elementary B	Elementary C
2.5%	3.8%	1.7%	8.2%	2.7%

Student retention rates at the fifth grade level for the class of 2011 are identified

in Table 32. Retention for the fifth grade level for the State of Texas was point nine

percent. The district had a retention rate of one point three percent. The district retention

rate at the fifth grade level was point four percent higher than the State of Texas. The

intermediate campus had a retention rate equal to the district at one point three percent.

Table 32

Class of 2011 Retention Rate at the Fifth Grade Level

State	District	Intermediate Campus
.9%	1.3%	1.3%

Student retention rates for the class of 2011 at the eighth grade level are shown in

Table 33 along with the state retention rate. The state had a retention rate of one point

three percent at the eighth grade level. The district had an eighth grade retention rate of

one point two percent. The middle school campus had a retention rate equal to the

district at a rate of one point two percent. The district had an overall retention rate point one percent lower than the State of Texas.

Table 33

Class of 2011 Retention Rate at the Eighth Grade Level

State	District	Middle School Campus
1.3%	1.2%	1.2%

Eleventh grade student success for the class of 2011, on all four exit level exams, is shown in Table 34 along with the state rate and rates for individual ethnic groups. Students in the class of 2011 at the eleventh grade level were successful in all parts of their eleventh grade exit level exam at a rate of eighty-four percent across the State of Texas. The district had a success rate of seventy-six percent. The district success rate for the class of 2011 was eight percent lower than the State of Texas. African American students were successful at a rate of seventy-two percent on their exit level exams. African American students had a success rate four percent lower than the district. African American students also had a success rate on their exit level exams twelve percent lower than the state.

Hispanic students were successful on all portions of the exit level exams at a rate of seventy-six percent. Hispanic students had a success rate equal to the district success rate on all portions of the exit level exams. Hispanic students, however, had a success rate eight percent lower than the State of Texas. White students were successful on all portions of the exit level exams at a rate of eighty-four percent. White students had a success rate eight percent higher than the district, and equal to the State of Texas.

Table 34

Class of 2011 Eleventh Grade Success Rate on All Exit-Level Exams

State	District	African American	Hispanic	White
84%	76%	72%	76%	84%

At the third grade, the class of 2010 did not need to meet the passing standards on the state mandated reading exam, while the class of 2011 was required to pass the reading portion as a prerequisite for promotion. Students were promoted if they met the academic classroom requirements and passed the state mandated tests. Another method of promotion to the next grade was if students met the classroom academic requirements and the GPC unanimously voted to promote the student. A student promoted via the GPC was also required to receive acceleration the following year. "Acceleration" refers to additional course work that would fill the student's academic gaps to ensure academic success at the next grade level.

Research question one

The first research question this study answers is: Did a difference in third grade student retention rates between third graders in the class of 2010, and third graders in the class of 2011 who participated in the Texas SSI? To answer this first research question, the rate of retention for the class of 2010 was compared to the retention rate for the class of 2011, after the class of 2011 received the treatment of the Texas SSI. The third grade level of the class of 2010 had a retention rate of two point nine percent. The class of 2011 had a retention rate of three point eight percent. This comparison yielded a difference of point nine percent.

In the class of 2011, eighteen point two percent of third grade students required acceleration. Students require acceleration when they failed to meet the Texas SSI requirements. Out of the eighteen point two percent of students requiring acceleration, sixty-seven point four percent of the students met the standard on their second administration. As a result, two point four percent of students were promoted via the GPC without meeting the requirements of the Texas SSI. Without using the GPC to promote students, the class of 2011 had a retention rate of six point two percent, which was three point three percent higher when compared to the class of 2010, which had a retention rate of two point nine percent. This comparative data is detailed in Table 35.

Table 35

Third Grade Retention Rate Comparison Between The Class of 2010 and 2011

2010 Retention Rate	2011 Retention Rate	2011 w/o GPC	Retention difference
2.9%	3.8%	6.2%	+3.3% Class of 2011

Research question two

The second research question this study sought to answer was: Did the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the fifth grade level increase the retention rate for the class of 2011? To answer this research question, the retention rate at the fifth grade level for the class of 2010 was analyzed and compared to the class of 2011, which received the treatment of the Texas SSI.

At the fifth grade level, the class of 2010 had a retention rate of one point five percent. The class of 2011, after receiving the treatment of the Texas SSI, had a retention

rate of one point three percent. Thirty nine percent of fifth graders in the class of 2011 required acceleration.

Out of the thirty nine percent of students in the class of 2011 who required acceleration, seventy-four percent met the standard on the exams after their second administration. As a result, eleven percent of students in the class of 2011 were promoted via the GPC without meeting the requirements of the Texas SSI for promotion. Without using the GPC to promote students, the class of 2011 would have had a retention rate of twelve point three percent. The class of 2010 had a retention rate of one point five percent. In comparison, the class of 2011 had a retention rate ten point eight percent higher than the class of 2010 without the GPC promotions, as shown in Table 36.

Table 36

Fifth Grade Retention Rate Comparison Between The Class of 2010 and 2011

2010 Retention Rate	2011 Retention Rate	2011 w/o GPC	Retention difference
1.5%	1.3%	12.3%	+10.8% Class of 2011

Research question three

The third research question was: Did the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the eighth grade level increase the retention rate for the class of 2011? To answer this research question, the retention rates of the class of 2010 were compared with the retention rates of the class of 2011 after the treatment of the Texas SSI was administered.

In comparison, at the eighth grade level the class of 2010 had a retention rate of point three percent. The class of 2011 had a retention rate of one point two percent. Thirty percent of the students in the class of 2011 required acceleration. Out of the thirty

percent of students requiring acceleration, eighty-nine percent met the standard on their second administration. As a result, three point nine percent of students in the class of 2011 were promoted via the GPC without meeting the requirements of the Texas SSI for promotion. Without using the GPC to promote students, the class of 2011 would have had a retention rate of four point five percent. The class of 2010 had a retention rate of point three percent. The class of 2011, without the GPC promotions, had a retention rate four point two percent higher than the class of 2010, as shown in Table 37.

Table 37

Eighth Grade Retention Rate Comparison Between The Class of 2010 and 2011

2010 Retention Rate	2011 Retention Rate	2011 w/o GPC	Retention difference
.3%	1.2%	4.5%	+4.2% Class of 2011

Research question four

The fourth research question asked: Did the success rate on the eleventh grade exit level exam increase for students required to meet the Texas SSI throughout their educational career? To answer this, the success on the eleventh grade exit level exam was compared between the classes of 2010 and 2011. The class of 2011 had received the treatment of the Texas SSI at the third, fifth and eighth grade levels. The class of 2010 only received the treatment effects of the Texas SSI at the eleventh grade level; both classes had the threat of not receiving a high school diploma if they did not pass the state mandated exams. This is the only grade level where both classes had the same pressure regarding the successful navigation of the exams. Only students in the class of 2011 had these pressures in grades previous to the exit level.

The class of 2010 had an eleventh grade exit level exam success rate of sixty-two percent in all exams, whereas the class of 2011 had a success rate of seventy-six percent in all exit level exams. The class of 2011 was fourteen percent more successful on all the exams administered at the eleventh grade, as shown in Table 38.

Table 38

Eleventh Grade Success Rate Comparison Between The Class of 2010 and 2011

2010 Success Rate	2011 Success Rate	Success Rate Difference
62%	76%	+14% Class of 2011

Research question five

The final research question this study sought to answer was: Were students required to meet the Texas SSI during their educational career more likely to drop out of school than students who did not need to meet the Texas SSI? To answer this fifth research question, a comparison of the cohort graduation rate, the percent of student dropouts, and the assigned dropout rate between the classes of 2010 and 2011 was made.

Graduation comparisons between the classes of 2010 and 2011 were based on the graduating cohort group, the percentage of students who dropped out, and the dropout rate as defined by the State of Texas. The class of 2010 had a cohort graduation rate of seventy-seven point seven percent. This meant that, out of one hundred percent of the students in the class of 2010 who entered high school in the ninth grade, seventy seven point seven graduated four years later. It is possible that some of those students are still continuing high school, but have dropped back from their original cohort.

The dropout percentage of the class of 2010 was nine point nine percent. This percentage rate was assigned by the State of Texas for students in the original cohort group who were not continuing to attend high school or had received a GED. The dropout rate assigned by the State of Texas for the class of 2010 was four point two percent.

The class of 2011 had a cohort graduation rate of eighty point one percent, and the dropout percentage was nine point seven percent. The dropout rate assigned by the State of Texas was two point two percent. The class of 2011, which was administered the treatment of the Texas SSI throughout their high school career, had a cohort graduation rate two point four percent higher than the class of 2010. The class of 2011 had a dropout rate point two percent lower than the class of 2010. The dropout rate assigned by the State of Texas was two percent lower for the class of 2011 than the class of 2010, as shown on Table 39.

Table 39

Graduation and Dropout Rate Comparisons Between The Class of 2010 and 2011

	Cohort Graduation	Dropouts	Dropout Rate
Class of 2010	77.7%	9.9%	4.2%
Class of 2011	80.1%	9.7%	2.2%
Difference	+2.4% Class of 2011	-.2% Class of 2011	-2% Class of 2011

These data were gathered for each subgroup within the two cohorts. The data for each grade level for the class of 2010 and 2011 respectively were examined. Comparative data analysis and illustrations are provided in chapter five for both cohort groups.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations

for further research.

Summary

This study examined nine years of empirical state testing data and retention rates

for two cohort groups. The cohort groups consisted of students who graduate in the class

of 2010 and the graduating class of 2011beginning in the third grade. The class of 2011

was the first class required to meet the requirement of the Texas SSI at the third, fifth and

eighth grade level. The Texas SSI required students to pass the third grade level reading

exam and both the reading and mathematics portion of the state mandated exams at the

fifth and eighth grades in order to be promoted to the next grade.

Students who failed to meet the requirements of the Texas SSI were required to

receive interventions prior to retaking the exams. Any student that fails to be successful

on any one of the exams would be retained in the same grade. Students are given three

opportunities to retake the exams. When a student fails all the retest opportunities,

parents had the option of requesting that their child be retained or go before the GPC to

be considered for promotion. A student promoted by the GPC is required to receive

academic acceleration the next school year to help the student reach the proper

performance levels equal to their peers.

The Texas SSI is a policy designed to end social promotion. The Texas SSI also

provided students with a negative motivator to do well on the state mandated exam, and

added a consequence for failing the state mandated exam. The consequence students at

the third, fifth and eighth grade levels faced was the threat of retention for failing the exam. Students who failed to meet the requirement were promoted with the recommendation of a campus committee unanimously voting to socially promote the student.

Student retention and graduation data was collected from a district in the northeast area of Harris County. Harris County is located in the Houston, Texas, metropolitan area. The data collected was gathered from the Texas Education Agency for the class of 2010, which was not required to meet any of the Texas SSI requirements at the third, fifth and eighth grade level. The data collection for the class of 2010 included data beginning in the year 2002, when students were enrolled in the third grade. The next nine years of testing data were analyzed at the third, fifth, and eighth grade levels for retention. Data for success at the eleventh grade exit level and graduation were also collected.

Data for the class of 2010's success rate on the eleventh grade exit level exam were examined. The analysis determine if the added pressures of having to pass this exit level exam increased the success rate when there were no previous pressures to pass exams at the earlier grades. The class of 2010 was not required to successfully perform at the third, fifth and eighth grade level in order to be promoted to the next grade. The eleventh grade exit level exam was the first exam that had serious consequences for this group of students. The consequence the class of 2010 faced at the eleventh grade level for failing the exit level exam was that they would not receive a high school diploma unless they were successful on all portions of the exam. Data regarding dropout rates and dropout percentages for the class of 2010 were also collected.

Similar data sets for the class of 2011 were collected to compare against the graduating class of 2010. The difference between the class of 2010 and the class of 2011 was that the class of 2011 was administered the treatment of the Texas SSI at the third, fifth and eighth grade levels. This treatment included the consequence of retention for students who were unsuccessful on the state mandated exams. Data at the third, fifth and eighth grade levels were collected and analyzed to determine retention rates. These retention rates were compared to the class of 2010, who did not need to meet the Texas SSI requirement.

Students in the graduating class of 2011 had to face the consequence of retention if they were not successful on the reading and mathematics test at the third, fifth and eighth grade level. To determine if these years of pressure to perform made the students better test takers compared to the class of 2010, the eleventh grade exit level exam data were also collected. Although the class of 2010 did not need to meet the requirements of the Texas SSI at the third, fifth and eighth grade levels, they did have to pass the eleventh grade exit level exam to receive a high school diploma—just as the class of 2011. This analysis assisted in examining if the threat of retention and the requirements of the Texas SSI to perform at the earlier grades would result in more students passing at the eleventh grade.

The final data set collected were the graduation rates and dropout data for the classes of 2010 and 2011. Dropouts in American schools are a complicated issue, and there are several factors that may determine if a student drops out of school, as related in the literature review. The researcher is unable to determine if the Texas SSI is the direct causal effect of the dropouts in these two groups of students. However, one can make the

assumption that the other causes of student dropouts for the class of 2010 would be similar to the class of 2011. All other issues aside, the treatment administered, which is the Texas SSI, to the class of 2011 can have an effect on the dropout data.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Did a difference in third grade student retention rates exist between third graders in the class of 2010 and third graders in the class of 2011 who participated in the Texas SSI?

2. Did the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the fifth grade level increase the retention rate for the class of 2011?

3. Did the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the eighth grade level increase the retention rate for the class of 2011?

4. Did the success rate on the eleventh grade exit level exam increase for students required to meet the Texas SSI throughout their educational career?

5. Were students required to meet the Texas SSI during their educational career more likely to drop out of school than students who did not need to meet the Texas SSI?

In responding to the first research question, data from three different elementary schools within the school district were analyzed. This data included all retentions for the third grade in the district. Data were compared between the classes of 2010 and 2011 when each group of students was in the third grade level, respectively.

In responding to the second research question, the data from the intermediate campus was analyzed to determine the retention rates for all fifth grade students.

Although all the students attended three different elementary schools, they all attended the same intermediate campus. The intermediate campus housed fifth and sixth graders. The data were compared between the classes of 2010 and 2011 at the time each group was attending the fifth grade.

To answer the third research question, data were collected from the middle school campus and analyzed to determine the retention rates. All students attended the same middle school campus, which housed seventh and eighth grade. Those retention rates were compared between the classes of 2010 and 2011 at the time they were enrolled in the eighth grade, respectively.

To assist in answering the fourth research question, the exam data were collected to determine the number of students who successfully navigated all four exit level exams. Students who failed any portion of the exam were given the opportunity to retake the failed portion until they were successful. For the purposes of this study, only data for the first administration was analyzed.

The eleventh grade exit level exam was required for both classes, and this exam had the added pressure of being a requirement for graduation. This was the first exam where the class of 2010 had to be successful on a state mandated exam with the threat and added pressure of not receiving a high school diploma if they were unsuccessful. The class of 2011 was previously exposed to the pressure and threat of retention at the third, fifth and eighth grade level if they were unsuccessful on a state mandated exam.

To answer the fifth and final research question, student graduation rates and dropout data were collected from the high school and the dropout rate assigned by the

TEA was analyzed and used as a comparison data point between the classes of 2010 and 2011.

Conclusions

Research question number one examined if a difference in third grade student retention rates existed between third graders in the class of 2010 and third graders in the class of 2011 who participated in the Texas SSI: When the retention rates of the class of 2010 and the class of 2011 were compared, the class of 2010, at the third grade level, had a retention rate of two point nine percent, while the class of 2011 had a retention rate of three point eight percent. Initially, it seemed that there was a difference of point nine percent between the two groups. When comparing the true retention rate without the GPC promotions, the retention rate for the class of 2011 was six point two percent—a difference of three point three percent. The results of this study showed the class of 2011 at the third grade level had a retention rate—without the GPC—three point three percent higher than the class of 2010.

Included in Figure 1 is the three year average retention rate for the graduating classes of 2007, 2008 and 2009. The class of 2007 in the year 1998 had a third grade retention rate of point eight percent. The class of 2008 in the year 1999 had a third grade retention rate of four percent, and the class of 2009 in the year 2000 had a third grade retention rate of two point two percent. The average retention rate for the three year period was two point two percent. This average was used to determine a baseline average retention rate prior to the class of 2010.
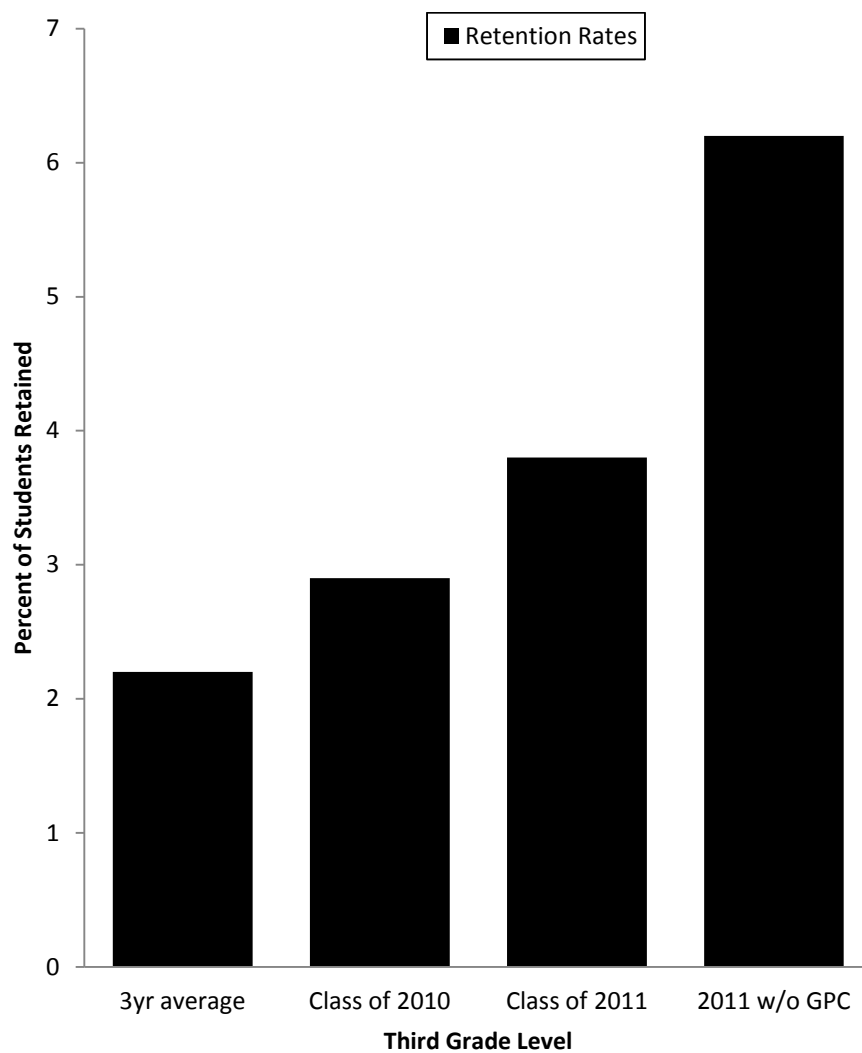
Figure 1

Third Grade Retention Rate Comparison

Figure 1. This is the third grade retention rate comparison between the three year average

for the class of 2007, 2008 and 2009 combined, the class of 2010, the class of 2011, and

the class of 2011 without the use of the GPC to promote students.

Research question number two examined if the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the fifth grade level increased the retention rate for the class of 2011: The retention rate at the fifth grade level between the class of 2011and the class of 2010 was compared. The class of 2010 had a retention rate of one point five percent. The class of 2011 had a retention rate of one point three percent. Eleven percent of the students in the class of 2011 were promoted via the GPC. The results of this study showed that the class of 2011 had a retention rate of twelve point three percent without the GPC promotions. The retention rate of the class of 2011 without the GPC was ten point eight percent higher than the class of 2010 at the fifth grade level.

Figure 2 shows the three year average retention rate at the fifth grade level for the graduating class of 2007, 2008 and 2009. The class of 2007 in the year 2000 had a fifth grade retention rate of point seven percent. The class of 2008 in the year 2001 had a fifth grade retention rate of point four percent. The class of 2009 in the year 2002 had a fifth grade retention rate of one point five percent. The average retention rate for this three year period is point eight percent. This average is used to determine a baseline average retention prior to the class of 2010.
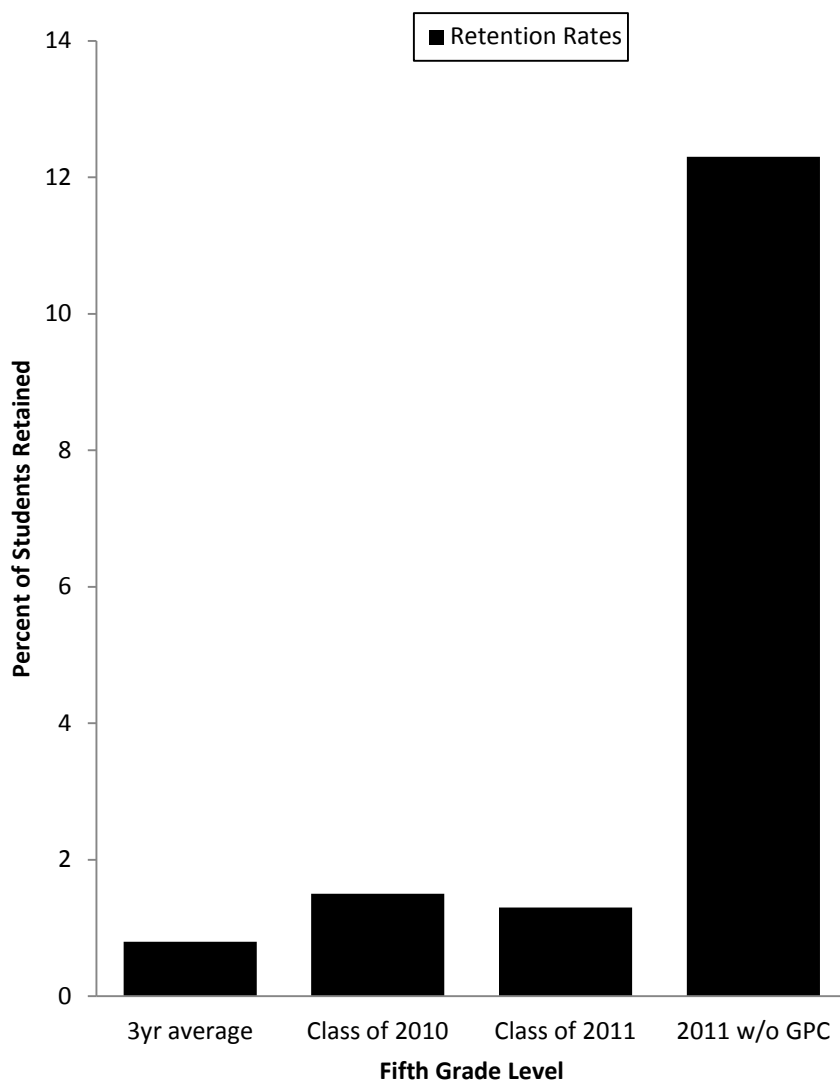
Figure 2

Fifth Grade Retention Rate Comparison

Figure 2. This is the fifth grade retention rate comparison between the three year average

for the class of 2007, 2008 and 2009 combined, the class of 2010, the class of 2011, and

the class of 2011 without the use of the GPC to promote students.

Research question number three examined if the requirement of meeting the Texas SSI at the eighth grade level increased the retention rate for the class of 2011: The class of 2010 had a retention rate of point three percent. The class of 2011 had a retention rate of one point two percent at the eighth grade level. The class of 2011 had three point nine percent of its students in the eighth grade promoted via the GPC. The actual retention rate of the class of 2011 without the GPC promotions at the eighth grade level was four point five percent. This study showed that the class of 2011 had a retention rate without the GPC four point two percent higher than the class of 2010 at the eighth grade level.

Figure 3 shows the three year average retention rate at the eighth grade level for the graduating classes of 2007, 2008 and 2009. The class of 2007 in the year 2003 had an eighth grade retention rate of zero; all students were promoted. The class of 2008 in the year 2004 had an eighth grade retention rate of point nine percent. The class of 2009 in the year 2005 had an eighth grade retention rate of point three percent. The average retention rate for this three year period was point four percent. This average was used to determine a baseline average retention prior to the class of 2010.
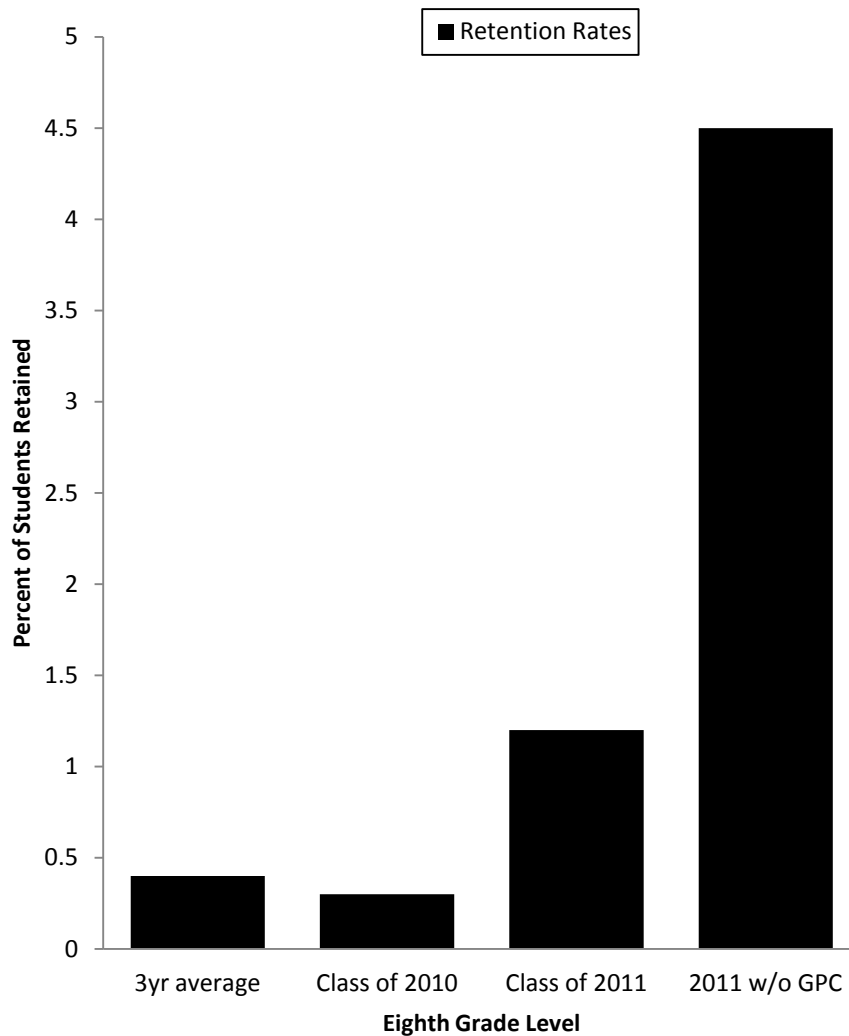
Figure 3

Eighth Grade Retention Rate Comparison

Figure 3. This is the eighth grade retention rate comparison between the three year

average for the class of 2007, 2008 and 2009 combined, the class of 2010, the class of

2011 and the class of 2011 without the use of the GPC to promote students.

Research question number four examined if the success rate on the eleventh grade exit level exam increased for students required to meet the Texas SSI throughout their educational career: The basic premise of this question was: are our students becoming better test takers, and is the continuous threat of retention during the third, fifth and eighth grade level increasing their success rate at the eleventh grade exit level? The class of 2010 only faced the additional pressure of receiving a consequence at the eleventh grade and not in the lower grades. In comparing the data from both classes, the class of 2010 had a success rate of sixty-two percent in the first administration of all four exit level exams. The class of 2011 had a success rate of seventy-six percent on the eleventh grade exit level exam. This study showed that the class of 2011 had a fourteen percent higher success rate on the first administration of the exit level exams at the eleventh grade.

Research question number five examined if students required to meet the Texas SSI during their educational career were more likely to drop out of school than students who did not need to meet the Texas SSI: The study compared the cohort graduation rate. In addition the percent of dropouts and the assigned dropout rate between the classes of 2011 and 2010. This study showed that the class of 2010 had a cohort graduation rate of seventy-seven point one percent. The class of 2011 had a cohort graduation rate of eighty point one percent. The class of 2011 had three point four percent more students complete high school once they entered the ninth grade than the class of 2010.

In the category of dropouts: the class of 2010 had nine point nine percent of students drop out of school, while the class of 2011 had nine point seven percent of students drop out. The class of 2010 had a point two percent higher drop out percentage

than the class of 2011. The dropout rate assigned by the TEA for the class of 2010 was four point two percent. The class of 2011 had a dropout rate of two point two percent. The class of 2010 had a two percent higher dropout rate than the class of 2011.

This study was unable to show if students who were required to meet the requirements of the Texas SSI during their educational career were more likely to drop out of school than students who did not need to meet the Texas SSI. The reason this question was not conclusively answered is due to the number of factors that affect dropouts. The Texas SSI could not be linked as a direct causal factor in determining a student's decision to drop out of school. To answer this question would take additional in-depth research outside the scope of this study.

In conclusion, this study shows that, for the district studied, the Texas SSI had a negative effect on student retention. Students required to meet the Texas SSI were retained at higher levels. Also, a larger percentage of students were promoted via the GPC without meeting the academic requirements set by the Texas SSI. The Texas SSI was designed to end social promotion; however, the trend shown in this study is that more students are socially promoted via the grade placement committee GPC after failing to meet the requirements for promotion.

This study only focused on one district in the northeast area of Harris County and the results may not be indicative of all districts across the state. Recently, the Texas legislature decided to exclude the third grade in the Texas SSI as of the year 2009. The decision to exclude the third grade level in the Texas SSI suggests that these additional pressures are not academically beneficial to students. It is safe to assume that if

demanding that students meet the third grade level Texas SSI requirements was beneficial, the state would continue to include the third grade in this standard.

The threat of retention has created a system of high stakes testing for students with real consequences to the children who take these exams. Regardless of the quality of instruction that the children are receiving, they are all held to the same standard for passing the state mandated exam. Students who are continuously unsuccessful have an option or a chance to be promoted by the GPC. This chance at promotion is not specifically standardized, and differs from committee to committee, just as the individual members of the committee differ in personality and personal views. The committee must have a unanimous vote to promote a child who does not meet the standards. Even in the same district, the different committees view retention and promotion differently, and students who may be promoted in one school may not be promoted in another school.

The GPC contributes to the failed system of the Texas SSI. The Texas SSI was designed to end social promotions, but more students are socially promoted by the committees. Students placed by the GPC are not always receiving the appropriate interventions and acceleration required by the Texas SSI. The trend shown in this study is that the retention rate—without using the GPC—continues to rise, which is a direct reflection of failed interventions. Students who fail the exam are provided interventions and acceleration. When the retention rate continues to increase after receiving those interventions, one is led to assume that either the interventions are not being implemented with fidelity, or that they simply do not work. These failed interventions increase the likelihood that a student may be retained multiple times during their educational career and increase the probability of their dropping out of school.

Retention is not an effective academic intervention, and the threat of retention as prescribed in the Texas SSI has not had a positive effect on student success at the lower grade levels. The student who is promoted via the GPC is likely overage and has academic gaps. When a student who has been unsuccessful is placed at the high school level, the learning gaps and the overage factors create a reality for students that are difficult to overcome. Socially overage students at the high school level are unlikely to graduate on time—if they graduate at all.

Further research is needed to determine if the Texas SSI has a direct effect on students dropping out of school. Research is also needed to determine if the Texas SSI is a productive initiative to help students succeed academically in post-high school endeavors. This study has shown that, for this particular district, the Texas SSI has had a negative effect on student retention at the third, fifth and eighth grade levels. The data in this study also suggest that students required to meet the Texas SSI become better test takers and are more likely to be successful on the exit level exam. This study, however, was not able to determine if those students are more academically proficient or if those students are more likely to graduate from high school with the skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education.

Recommendations for further research

1.   In 2009 the Texas legislature did away with the requirement that the third graders be included in the Texas SSI. Students in the third grade are no longer required to pass the reading exam to be promoted to the next grade. It would be an interesting study to determine how this affects those students in comparison to the ones required to meet the requirements at the third grade level.

2.   A similar study focused on qualitative data might provide an inside look at the emotional effects of high stakes testing and retention on students who were required to meet the Texas SSI standards.

3.   A replication of this study should be conducted using data for the entire state of Texas.

4.   Longitudinal studies should be conducted to monitor dropout rates of students retained or socially promoted via the GPC.

5.   During this study, some of the data suggest that more students are being promoted via the GPC. A study can be conducted to determine if this phenomenon has increased social promotions—which is the very thing that the Texas SSI was designed to end.

6.   As the state of Texas ends the TAKS test and begins the STAAR and EOC, it would be interesting to find out how these new tests, and their requirement for a cumulative score for high school graduation, compare to the previous exit level requirement of TAKS.

7.   During the collection of retention data, it was noticed that, although the first grade level did not have any state mandated exam for promotion, students in the first grade were retained at higher levels than any other grade. A study could be conducted to research the issue of first grade retention and determine how it affects students' academic and socio-emotional status in the later grades and, eventually, graduation.

8.   As we develop a focus on post-secondary success, a research study may be able to determine how retained students performed in college in comparison to students promoted by the GPC.

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

February 16, 2012

Mr. Jesus Acosta
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
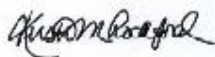Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Mr. Jesus Acosta,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "THE EFFECT OF THE TEXAS STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE ON DROPOUTS AND STUDENT RETENTION AT A DISTRICT IN THE NORTHEAST AREA OF HARRIS COUNTY" was conducted on 02/01/2012.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Kirstin M. Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **January 1, 2017**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 12463-EX