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**Student mobility and teachers' grade promotion decisions**

Kapp, Ronald Charles, Ph.D.

The University of Arizona, 1989

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STUDENT MOBILITY AND TEACHERS'  
GRADE PROMOTION DECISIONS

by  
RONALD CHARLES KAPP

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
WITH A MAJOR IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY  
In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1989

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read  
the dissertation prepared by RONALD CHARLES KAPP

entitled STUDENT MOBILITY AND TEACHERS' GRADE PROMOTION DECISIONS

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement  
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I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my  
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## ABSTRACT

In recent years America has witnessed a major shift in its population to various geographic regions. Educators have speculated on the effects of this frequent migration on students' academic and social advancement. Educators have also been interested in the effects of grade retention on academic and social advancement. Despite research on each of these factors, no investigations have addressed these factors in conjunction with each other. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of high student mobility on classroom teachers' promotion-retention decisions. Additionally, other factors that may influence classroom teachers' promotion-retention decisions were examined.

Two hundred twelve elementary school teachers evaluated two case studies: one of a highly mobile student, and one of a non-mobile student. Each subsequently made a decision to either retain or promote that student. Both first grade and fifth grade students were considered. Each case study was identical for each grade level with the exception of the number of schools attended. Although the retention-promotion decisions did not differ significantly for first grade students, the teachers chose to retain the mobile fifth grade student more frequently than the non-mobile fifth grade student.

Examination of various factors on a retention questionnaire revealed that different factors emerged as most important to the teachers when making promotion-retention decisions. The factors differed for both grade level and mobility status.

The results were discussed in relation to interventions that may be warranted in an attempt to alleviate disadvantages in entering a new school. Further investigation of the mobile student-grade retention relationship was indicated. Additional investigation of the highly mobile minority student was also emphasized.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

America has become a highly mobile society. Reasons for this mobility range from moves for health reasons to moves for economic reasons. This mobility presents problems for many government institutions such as law enforcement, public health, and public education. Within public education it is not uncommon for schools located within the Sun Belt to experience a high mobility rate within any given year. This means that a high number of the children who entered a school at the beginning of the year have moved on to a different school by the end of the academic year.

From an educator's perspective, this mobility presents difficulties in three discrete areas. The first is financial. With government financial support based on Average Daily Attendance of all children, record keeping becomes difficult when attempts are made to account for the minimal number of days a student attends a particular school.

A second major concern is the effect of this mobility on the academic achievement levels of the highly mobile student. Does this high level of mobility have a detrimental effect on children's ability to achieve adequately in the areas of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics, as well as allow for adequate social

development? Initially, researchers investigating the effects of mobility on academic achievement and social adjustment had reported significant negative relationships (Levine, 1966; Levine, Weslowski and Corbett, 1966; Morris, Pestaner, and Nelson, 1967; Stuhr and Wright, 1968). However, as researchers began using more sophisticated techniques, varying results have been reported (Black and Barger, 1975; Cramer and Dorsey, 1970; Lacey and Blane, 1979; Marchant and Medway, 1987). Some researchers (Benson, Haycroft, Steyaert, and Weigel, 1979; Kealey, 1983) have concluded that the highly mobile student performs at a lower level than students who only attend one school throughout their educational career. Perrodin and Snipes (1972) have suggested that the highly mobile student excels in academics compared to the stable student. Still other researchers have reported that mobility has no effect on students' academic achievement (Cramer and Dorsey, 1970).

A third major concern is the effect of this high mobility rate on the attitudes and effectiveness of the teachers as they attempt to establish some form of accountability while enabling students to acquire knowledge at an acceptable rate. This teacher concern ultimately leads to the seeking of solutions through whatever means the education system has available. These solutions generally consist of modifications of the student's program by

modifying instructional strategies, retention in grade, tutoring, or referral for considerations of special education placement. These concerns frequently result in referrals to the school psychologist for assistance in dealing with a student's lack of academic or social progress. The School Psychologist is expected to intervene in an attempt to assist in overcoming the student's perceived weaknesses. Educators then make decisions based, in part, on the school psychologist's recommendations. However, when the highly mobile student is referred, the school psychologist frequently has no more information about the student than the referring teacher. This lack of adequate background information may adversely affect the school psychologist's ability to make informed recommendations.

Retention in grade is a frequently chosen alternative that teachers use if they feel that the student has not mastered the requirements for promotion to the next grade level. Research on the benefits of retention are inconclusive, however, with the majority of researchers suggesting that if retention is to be beneficial at all it should be accomplished in kindergarten, first, or second grade (Jackson, 1975). Retention in later grades has generally been reported to have no effect on the student's academic progress and in some cases to be actually

detrimental (Holmes, 1983). However, in spite of reported research outcomes, retention in grade continues to be considered a viable option by those teachers who are being held accountable for their students' social and academic progress.

When retention-in-grade is being considered for a student and when cumulative record data are unavailable to the teacher, the teacher will occasionally seek out the school psychologist in an effort to gain additional information that can be used to make a retention-promotion decision or to seek further investigation of the student's learning potential. When the school psychologist is consulted there is a high probability that some additional intervention in the form of assessment will be forthcoming. This assessment may be behavioral, academic, intellectual, or social emotional in nature. Occasionally, remedies for the student's failures are generated which may enable the teacher to avoid retaining the student. On other occasions, however, the classroom teacher may make a unilateral decision to retain a student without further consultation or access to previous records. In a situation such as this it is possible that only much later in the student's career is it discovered that the student has actually been retained two and sometimes three times. By adolescence the student may give up on the educational system, may drop out of

school, and could become a problem for society.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the highly mobile student and the classroom teacher's grade retention decision when this highly mobile student is considered. Differences between grade levels of the mobile student and retention-promotion decisions were also examined. These same factors were examined between urban and suburban settings. Additionally, factors which teachers consider when making retention-promotion decisions were investigated.

The implications of this research investigating the relationship between mobility and retention in grade will assist school psychologists, classroom teachers, as well as parents in attempts to ensure that the highly mobile child will have every opportunity to be successful in his new surroundings. With increased success in his new surroundings, there should be an increased probability that the student's self concept will be improved.

Additionally, by investigating the factors of primary importance to the classroom teacher when making a retention-promotion decision, the data obtained will be useful for implementing intervention strategies. The incorporation of various intervention strategies may allow the student to overcome his weakness and avoid being retained.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is aimed at summarizing the relevant literature concerning the effects of high student mobility rates on academic achievement and social adjustment. Additionally, literature concerning the effect of grade retention on academic performance and social adjustment will also be examined.

#### Student Mobility

Movement of families from one area to another, whether it be from one school district to the next, from one city to another, or from one state to another, is a recognized part of modern American life. The number of persons who moved between March 1984 and March 1985 (39.4 million) was 2 million more than that for the previous one year period. Overall rates of mobility were higher than average during the 1984-85 period for young adults, military personnel, the unemployed, and persons with relatively high levels of education (Current Population Reports, 1987). This mobile population represents a significant number of families of child bearing age. These mobile families have begun to have a significant impact on public education. The influence of this mobility on school adjustment as well as

academic achievement has been the focus of numerous studies.

Benson et al. (1979) attempted to respond to conflicting data regarding student mobility, academic achievement, and school adjustment. They reviewed data on 1007 sixth grade students enrolled in 17 elementary schools. Mobility was based on the number of schools each child had attended as reported in the student's cumulative folder. Achievement was reported as percentile rank on the Reading subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test. Adjustment was measured by school counselors completing Classroom Behavior Inventory scales. Pearson product moment correlations were used for mobility, adjustment, and achievement. Mobility was found to be negatively related to achievement ( $r = -.16$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $n = 687$ ) and adjustment ( $r = -.15$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $n = 742$ ). They also found that difficulties existed in conducting post hoc research of this nature because of the lack of uniformity of pupil records. The author concluded that although high student mobility contributes to declining achievement test scores in reading and math, this decline is a complex issue and other intervening variables cannot be overlooked as contributing factors for test score decreases.

Cramer and Dorsey (1970) reviewed data obtained on 366 sixth grade students in an attempt to determine the effects of mobility on reading achievement. Of the 366 pupils, 203 had attended the same school for five years, 11

had attended two schools, and 44 had attended three schools. Approximately 100 had attended four or more schools since kindergarten. Reading achievement was measured by the California Reading Test, Form W, elementary level. Mean raw scores were presented; however, statistical applications to determine significant differences were not discussed. The authors stated that the highly mobile student did not suffer adverse effects in the area of reading. They further stated that for some of the children who were the children of Air Force personnel, the mobility actually may have contributed to reading proficiency. Without controlling for factors such as ability levels, socio-economic status, etc. as well as specifying statistical procedures, these claims are questionable.

To further assess the impact of mobility on children's social adjustment and academic achievement for military families, Marchant and Medway (1987) investigated 40 military families with children in grades two, four, and six. The subjects had a mean mobility rate of 5.1 moves while the family was in the military. Correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between achievement and total moves, location, distance, and recency of move. Achievement was assessed from scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Total moves and achievement yielded a correlation of .26 ( $p < .10$ ). No other

relationships were significant. Social adjustment was examined by correlational analysis of the relationship between the Achenback Social Competence scores and total moves, location, distance, and recency of latest move. The authors reported that the more a child had moved, the greater was the participation in social activities ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Further, they reported that for those with low social competencies, the distance of the move was greater than 500 miles. The authors concluded that because military families typically do not experience the stress of non-military families, such as finding suitable housing, schools, etc., these children display less negative effects of mobility.

Stuhr and Wright (1968), in a report commissioned by the Toronto Board of Education, studied the effects of mobility on academic achievement in the Duke of York Public School in Toronto, Canada. They established mobility based on the number of residences occupied in the previous five years. Children from families which reported living at one address were classified as stable; those children from families which reported living at two addresses were classified as intermediate; children from families reported as having lived at three or more addresses during the previous five years were classified as mobile. Sample size for this study consisted of forty-eight students in the

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mobile group, forty-seven students in the intermediate group, and fifty-nine students in the stable group. Utilizing the chi-square statistic, the authors reported no significant difference between mobility and number of absences or number of times students were late for school. They also found no significant difference between sex distribution or grade distribution. In the second portion of the study the authors reported a significant difference between mobility and academic achievement in the subjects of reading, spelling, composition, mathematics, and music. However, the authors used obtained letter grades for comparison which suggests the results reported can be questioned based on threats to validity. They further reported that the relationship between mobility and achievement was only significant among the Anglo-Saxon subgroup of the sample. They did not reveal the size of this subgroup. The Anglo-Saxon group was described as families in which both parents were born in either Canada, the United States, or the United Kingdom. Families in which either or both of the parents were born elsewhere were classified as non-Anglo-Saxon. No reference was made to a white versus non-white population.

In a study investigating the effects of inner-city mobility, Sewell (1982) reviewed cumulative folder data on 8800 third, fourth, and fifth grade students who had migrated

between schools within Brooklyn, New York Community School District 17. Students were grouped according to number of schools attended with groups ranging from students who had attended two schools to students who had attended four or more schools. These groups were all compared to a non-mobile group of comparable size. Group test scores for Reading and Mathematics were then compared between groups. Analysis of variance techniques revealed that the more moves a student experienced, the lower were his test results in both Reading and Math. This was only statistically significant for students who had moved four or more times. Multiple regression analysis was then undertaken to ascertain the effects of other factors on this same decrease in test scores. They reported that factors such as limited English proficiency, funded educational programs, attendance, and discipline problems also contributed to the achievement test score decrease for mobile as well as non-mobile students.

In a study conducted by the Youth Development Project of Hennepin County, Murton and Faunce (1967) reported on the effects of mobility on delinquency, student achievement, and teacher attitudes for sixth grade students in inner-city Minneapolis Public Schools. Their definition of a highly mobile student consisted of any student who had changed residences three or more times in the previous six

years. They also compared urban mobile students with suburban mobile students in terms of achievement, delinquency, and aptitude. Using analysis of variance ( $<.001$ ), they reported that children who had moved three or more times had lower scores on the Reading Comprehension section of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; however, the differences were not statistically significant. Sample size was not reported. Student aptitude, as measured by the Otis Test of Mental Ability, was reported as lower for high mobility students than for stable students, regardless of economic status for both the urban and suburban students. Teacher comments were less favorable for high mobility students than for non-mobile students, although this was only statistically significant for urban students. The authors did not report on the statistical method used to make this determination. The relationship between mobility and absenteeism was not shown to be statistically significant although the authors reported consistent differences between mobile and non-mobile students. Delinquency rates were reported as greater for mobile students than for non-mobile students only in suburban schools. Although the authors reported on a multitude of variables, sample size was not reported nor were the statistical tests used for some of the variables, which leads one to question power issues as well as appropriateness of

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conclusions.

Swanson (1969) used a teacher questionnaire format to determine if transfer students into an elementary school have academic problems. Forty students who recently transferred into a school were matched with forty students who had attended the school since first grade. The control group subjects were randomly chosen from the same classroom as the experimental subjects. The only other control used required each matched pair of subjects to be of the same sex. Race, socioeconomic status, and number of school moves was not considered. The teachers reported that 40% of the experimental subjects and 32.5% of the control subjects had academic problems. This was recorded as statistically significant.

Swanson (1969), in conjunction with her study on the effects of moving on academic achievement, also investigated the effects of moving from school to school on social problems and behavior. Social problems were defined as an inability to get along with classmates and behavior problems were defined as discipline problems or inappropriate behavior. The teachers in her study reported that 42.5% of the experimental subjects had social problems and 7.5% of the control subjects had social problems. This was significant beyond the .005 level of probability. Forty-two percent of the experimental subjects and 20% of the control

subjects were reported to have behavior problems. This was also significant at the .005 level of probability.

Kroger (1980) concentrated her research efforts on the effects of residential mobility on students' self-concept. Her sample consisted of 136 students from a middle-class high school in Tallahassee, Florida. Subjects were classified according to race, sex, number of moves, recency of move, and distance of move. Each subject was administered the Berger Acceptance of Self Scale, the Elias Family Opinion Survey, and a personal data sheet. She did not use a control group for comparison purposes. She reported that there was no correlation between self-concept and number of moves; however, she reported a significant negative correlation between self-concept and distance of moves - the greater the distance of moves, the lower the self concept. She also reported no significant correlation between self-concept and recency of moves. The most recent moves were reported to be two years prior to the study and the least recent moves were reported to be seven years prior to the study. A major flaw in this study is the lack of control as well as a lack of homogeneousness of the sample.

Although the majority of research deals with the effects of mobility on achievement levels of elementary school students, there has been an attempt to ascertain the effects of high student mobility on achievement at the

secondary level. Benson and Weigel (1980) presented data collected on 643 ninth grade students enrolled in six different junior high schools in Colorado. They compared raw scores on the Stanford Achievement Test with number of schools attended during junior high. Pearson product moment correlations showed that mobility is negatively related to achievement in math ( $r = -.12$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $n = 552$ ). Other academic subjects were not reported. Using the Classroom Behavior Inventory completed by staff members, they reported mobility was negatively correlated with adjustment ( $r = -.33$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $n = 495$ ).

Goebel (1975) investigated the effects of mobility on 16 year old high school sophomores. Including mobility that occurred from preschool through their sophomore year, she established three levels of mobility: non-mobile = no moves, moderate-mobile = 1 through 3 moves, high-mobile = 4 or more moves. Incorporating a sample of 382 adolescents, she compared scores from the Iowa Tests of Education Development as well as scores from the Kuhlman-Anderson Intelligence Test with the various mobility groups. Using analysis of variance and Scheffs' follow-up tests, she reported that students who experienced high mobility as preschoolers scored significantly higher on achievement and IQ tests as adolescents. She did not emphasize the number of moves that occurred during the period when the students were

of school age which leads one to question whether this research was actually assessing the effects of moving from school to school on achievement and ability. She concluded that mobility rate is not a significant factor in how adolescents perform on measures of long term academic achievement and cognitive development.

In another report of the effects of mobility on academic achievement at the secondary level, Whalen and Fried (1973) studied differences in academic achievement based on intelligence levels and mobility. Using four city moves as indicative of high mobility, they compared 79 high mobility students with 79 students who had spent all of their school years in the same city. Subjects were divided into high IQ, low IQ, high SES, low SES, high mobility, and low mobility. Academic achievement was measured by administration of the General Vocabulary Test. They reported no significant difference between high and low mobility students and general vocabulary. They further reported that high mobility students of high IQ have higher achievement scores than low mobility students of high IQ. They also reported that high mobility students of low IQ obtained lower achievement scores than low mobility students of low IQ.

One study was reviewed that possibly could be construed as considering a relationship between student

mobility and retention in grade. Long (1975) investigated data collected from the 1970 Census of Population. The census report included information on school enrollment and current grade, state of birth, residence in 1965, and residence in 1970. "Progress in school was obtained by adjusting a child's age back to October 1, 1969 and comparing the age with grade of enrollment" (p. 370). He assumed that a six year old child should be in first grade, a seven year old child should be in second grade, etc. He then took the age of the child and his grade placement and determined whether the child was enrolled below or above the modal grade for that age. Using the census report, Long then determined if a child had lived in 1 state, 2 states, or 3 or more states and compared below mode, above mode, and at mode for each condition. Percentages of above, below, and at mode were presented for each category of mobility, i.e. number of states lived in. No statistical analysis was provided although sample size for various age groups ranged from 3000 to 10,000 students. Based on the obtained percentages Long concluded that frequent long distance migration may interfere with children's progress in school. His only measure was whether a student of a particular age was enrolled in the appropriate (modal) grade level. Variables such as academic achievement, social adjustment, etc. were not considered. Long did wonder if the reason for

under modal grade placement could have been the result of the student being retained in grade. No further discussion as to the reason for undermodal grade placement was offered.

Researchers have reviewed various studies on mobility and have reported differing conclusions. Holland-Jacobson, Holland, and Cook (1984) reviewed six studies comparing mobile and non-mobile children and the impact on academic achievement and social adjustment. The six studies reviewed incorporated different research designs with different questions being asked. Because the results of the six studies were contradictory, the authors concluded that there was no clear evidence that mobility significantly depresses achievement or social adjustment. Cornille, Bayer, and Smyth (1983), however, reported a different conclusion in their review. After reviewing six longitudinal studies dealing with mobility and social adjustment the authors reported that the average child adjusts to a new community and school system in a relatively brief time, and there do not seem to be long term problems. The important factor in all six studies that must be considered was that the mobility factor being studied was corporate induced moves and the majority of families studied had only moved one time.

In a review similar to the Holland-Jacobson, et al. (1984) report, Blair, Marchant, and Medway (1984) found

inconsistent and conflicting results regarding the long term effect of mobility. After reviewing eleven studies they found that seven studies reported no significant effects on students' achievement scores that could be attributed to the students' mobility. However, all of the studies reported depressed achievement that was related to low intelligence or low socioeconomic status. Four additional studies were reviewed that investigated the effects of moving on children's social adjustment. They reported that the four studies reviewed gave clear indications that moving represented a stressful situation and created a disruption for children.

The effect of gender on transferring students' adjustment to a new school was the focus of a study by Pillan, Jason, and Olson (1988). A peer tutoring program was implemented for twenty-six transferring first through fourth grade students. An experimental and a control group were established wherein each member of the experimental group was assigned a tutor who used computer programs to assist the transferring student with academics. The control group received no additional academic intervention other than regular classroom instruction. Using MANOVAs to analyze interaction effects for condition, gender, and time and results on the Wide Range Achievement Test, the authors reported that there was a significant increase in reading

scores over time for male being tutored,  $F(1,18) = 8.93$ ,  $p < .01$ ; however, there was no significant improvement for female reading scores.

Despite the recognition of possible detrimental effects of mobility on children, there have been minimal reports of attempts to formulate intervention strategies that address these effects. Keats, Crabbs, and Crabbs (1981) developed an intervention program entitled Summer Visitation Program designed to meet the social and emotional needs of newly entering students from other school districts. The program consisted of four phases. The first phase involved dissemination of information about the school district and community. The local Welcome Wagon as well as local radio stations encouraged new families to contact the school. The second phase involved the school counselor who visited the home of each new student and gave them information about the school. The third phase consisted of an orientation program for the students and their families. At this point teams of new students from the same grade level were formed who could provide emotional support for each other. The fourth phase involved a community activity such as a picnic or swimming party that included new students, their families, school administrators, and members of the business community. An evaluation of the program consisted of a control group of families who were new to the

school district the year before the program was implemented and an experimental group of families who had participated in the Summer Visitation Program. The authors reported significantly reduced rates of absenteeism for students who had participated in the program compared to students in the control group. They also reported that parents in the experimental group felt much more familiar with the schools policies and procedures and felt that their children were "less reluctant to attend school the first day" (p.44).

Another project designed to aid mobile children emphasized academic remediation rather than social adjustment (Panagos, Holmes, Thurman, Yard, and Spanner, 1981). The project, known as Students Assimilated into Learning (SAIL), also consisted of four basic components: parent involvement, staff development, student assessment, and SAIL learning centers.

Parent involvement consisted of an orientation program conducted for the student and his parents by the school principal, the school counselor, and the SAIL staff. Staff development consisted of workshops for teachers to upgrade their skills in assessment, remediation, and classroom management techniques. Student assessment involved pre- and post-evaluation of achievement, motivation, and behavior. Based on assessment results students were placed either in a regular class, a regular

class with special assistance from the teacher, or in a regular class with one period per day in a SAIL learning center. The success of the program was determined by using a pretest - posttest design. No control group was incorporated. Post-testing showed significant gains in reading, spelling, and arithmetic for all grade levels as measured by the Wide Range Achievement Test. The authors reported no significant impact on motivation or behavior.

Other writers have suggested strategies for assisting the mobile child; however, their suggestions were not researched based and the validity of the recommendations remains untested. Bloomfield and Holzmon (1988) suggested entire family involvement including orientation programs similar to the Panagos, et al (1981) study. Blair, Marchant, and Medway (1984) also provided suggestions for not only the relocating families, but also for the receiving schools. These consisted of open discussion with the children as well as involving the children with all aspects of the move. They suggested that the school attempt to obtain records as quickly as possible, orient the child to the new school as well as suggest that the student keep in touch with former classmates. Both of these articles had good suggestions; however, they deserve to be scientifically investigated to determine effectiveness.

### Grade Retention

Grade retention involves the repetition for one year of a particular grade level in school. The benefits of grade repetition as an education alternative have long been debated. In an effort to establish some closure on the benefits of grade retention, Jackson (1975) reviewed 44 studies that were published on the subject between the years 1929-1974. Rather than reporting a definitive answer to the grade retention question, he suggested that early research design was fraught with weaknesses. Three research designs were identified and examined. The first design is biased towards social promotion. This design compares retained and promoted children in a particular grade who have been matched on several variables. However, the design did not take into account differences that may have existed in either group prior to the promotion-retention consideration. The second design is a pre-post design in which children are tested before and after their retention. Assuming that tested children do gain something during their retained year, one could erroneously conclude that the retention was beneficial. Jackson cited two problems with this type of study: (1) there is no control for other factors that could account for the gain during the retention year, for example, regression to the mean, maturation, or emotional difficulties, and (2) no comparison group was available to

determine if the same gains would have occurred under social promotions. The third design is considered an experimental design in which students are randomly assigned to retention or promotion treatment groups. Although Jackson concluded that this design offered the most promise of detecting true differences, only 3 studies were found that incorporated this research technique. At the conclusion of his review Jackson stated that "neither the few soundly designed studies nor the major portion of the inadequately designed studies suggest that grade retention is more beneficial for pupils having difficulties in school than is promotion to the subsequent grade" (Jackson, 1975, p. 614).

Since the Jackson (1975) review, additional reviews of grade retention research have been brief and lacked comprehensiveness (Johnson, 1984; Williams, 1985), whereas others have taken an in-depth look at the retention-promotion controversy (Carstens, 1985; Rose, Medway, Cantrell, & Marus, 1983; Shepard & Smith, 1986). One researcher (Holmes, 1983) reviewed previously published research on the subject and applied his own research methods to the existing data.

Ten years after the Jackson (1975) review, Carstens (1985) emphasized the design and outcome bias present in the studies she examined and found that, although Jackson (1975) identified three types of research designs and the

weaknesses inherent in each design, research conducted after 1975 did not reveal improved methodology. Only one study incorporated an approach which Carstens felt was an experimental design. In this study Raygor (1972) randomly assigned children recommended for retention in kindergarten to attend either a regular kindergarten or a transition class during the repeated year. The transition group received intensive readiness work in language, conceptual development, and visual and auditory perception. A group of 37 children placed in a transition room was compared with a group of 25 children retained in kindergarten. These groups were also compared to a group of 30 children recommended for retention but promoted to first grade. The Stanford Achievement Test was administered at the end of the first, third, and fourth grades. At the end of one year the group recommended for retention but promoted to first grade performed significantly lower than the retained students and the transition room students. The differences, however, were not sustained after the third and fourth grades.

In concluding her review, Carstens (1985) suggested that research prior to 1960 as well as research since that time has failed to support the assumptions regarding the academic and social adjustment of the retained student. Further she states "this research has been conducted with little regard for the minimum standards of control necessary

for scientific investigation. The few studies which do make this attempt failed to support either retention or social promotion" (Carstens, 1985, p. 60).

Holmes (1983), in a follow up of Jackson's (1975) review incorporated a relatively new method of research synthesis. Using meta analysis, he evaluated eight retention studies that all incorporated a comparison of groups of retained students with groups of promoted students matched on achievement test scores. He only included studies that contained sufficient data to allow for the calculation or estimation of an effect size. He reported that when nonpromoted pupils were matched with promoted counterparts on the basis of achievement test scores at the time of retention, the retained pupils from that time on scored lower on achievement tests in reading, language arts, and arithmetic. He further reported that in the area of arithmetic achievement there seemed to be some evidence that in time the retained pupils will eventually approach the scores of their promoted counterparts. In a very strongly worded statement he concluded, "It seems that retained pupils fall behind during the year that they are retained and spend the rest of their academic careers attempting to catch up" (p. 4).

In an effort to further investigate the results of the Holmes (1983) meta-analysis, Holmes and Mathews (1984)

broadened the study to include 44 promotion - non-promotion research studies. Using meta-analysis, 575 individual effect sizes were calculated. The 575 effect sizes were grouped into five major categories which served as dependent variables: a) academic achievement, b) personal adjustment, c) self-concept, d) attitude toward school, and e) attendance. The mean effect size for the 575 effect sizes was  $-.37$  which indicated that the non-promoted pupils scored  $.37$  standard deviations below the promoted pupils on the various dependent variables. Effect sizes for four of the five dependent variables ranged from  $-.19$  to  $-.44$ . Effect sizes for the fifth variable, attendance, was not reported. Holmes and Mathews (1984) concluded that research evidence consistently points to negative effects of non-promotion and these negative effects consistently outweigh positive outcomes.

Continuing his meta-analysis approach to the retention-promotion issue, Holmes (1986) reported on a five year follow-up of his previous research. Seventeen studies which met prescribed criteria for inclusion in a meta-analysis were selected for study. The prescribed criteria included the following: a) the report presented the results of original research on the effects on pupils of grade-level retention in grades K-8, b) described an investigation with an identifiable control group, and

c) included sufficient data to allow for the calculation of effect sizes. Of the 217 effect sizes calculated the majority were measures of academic achievement. Fourteen of the seventeen studies dealt with academic achievement and of these fourteen, seven revealed negative effect sizes and seven revealed positive effect sizes. Holmes (1986) attributed the positive effect sizes to retention policies that included additional remediation that addressed the students' weaknesses.

Within the same study, Holmes (1986) also considered research reports that assessed retention effects on personal/social adjustment. Of the five studies included, effect sizes were calculated from +.06 to +.23. Holmes concluded that what appeared to be effective was a large amount of individualized remedial help.

Shepard and Smith (1986) reviewed current research on kindergarten retention only. They reported that research findings are almost uniformly negative when considering the benefits of retention versus social promotion. They basically concurred with Holmes (1983) and found that when retained children were compared to equally low achievers who were promoted, the socially promoted students were consistently ahead on both achievement and social-emotional measures. They concluded their review by stating "repeating a grade does not help students gain ground academically and

has a negative impact on social adjustment and self-esteem" (p. 84).

Since the Carstens (1985) review, research studies have continued to focus on the effects of grade retention on academic performance and social development (Peterson, DeGracie and Ayabe, 1987; Plummer and Graziano, 1987; Shepard and Smith, 1986; Walker and Medhere, 1987; Watson, Poteat, Wuensch, and McCammon, 1987). Position papers on grade retention have also continued to surface (Byrnes and Yamamoto, 1986; Overman, 1986; Riffel and Switzer, 1986).

Peterson, et al. (1987) examined the long term effects of grade retention on academic achievement of primary grade students. Using a matched pair design of promoted and retained students, the researchers compared reading, math, and language scores on the California Achievement Test over a four year period. They reported that students retained in first grade significantly outperformed their promoted counterparts in reading,  $F(1,124) = 39.3, p < .001$ , after the first year. However, the benefits of retention diminished after the second and third year. In math the results were similar and in language no significant effects were noted. They concluded that there are no long term benefits on academic achievement for students who are retained.

- In another longitudinal study designed to determine

non-promotion correlates and outcomes, Safer (1986) reviewed cumulative folder data of 93 multisuspended and 107 age and sex matched non-multisuspended eighth and ninth grade students. Intelligence, achievement, and classroom mismanagement were compared across groups for both retained and promoted students. The author reported significant correlations between grade retentions and school suspensions for all factors investigated. For students who had been suspended and also retained during elementary school, low I.Q., lower achievement and frequent classroom misconduct were prevalent. Because N's of various subgroups were not specified and because instrumentation was not identified, interpretation of the reported findings is questionable.

Plummer and Graziano (1987) investigated the effects of grade retention on social development of elementary grade children. Two hundred nineteen children were interviewed by examiners who asked questions dealing with attitudes, report card expectations, self-esteem, and social partner choice. No norm referenced assessment devices were used; therefore, validity of results can be questioned. The sample consisted of first and fifth grade students of which 46 percent had been retained at least once and 54 percent had never been retained. The authors reported that retained students were targets of peer discrimination; however, retained students' self concepts

were higher than non-retained students.

In another study attempting to assess the impact of grade retention on self-concept, Watson, et al. (1987) responded to Carstens' (1985) review and undertook a matched subject design study. A total of 50 subjects who had been retained only once were matched with 50 subjects who were never retained. They were further matched on grade placement, gender, race, and academic achievement. All subjects were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, a one item teacher rating scale and an abbreviated Health Resources Inventory. No significant difference was reported across groups on the Piers-Harris and no significant difference was reported on the single item scale. A significant difference was reported between groups on the Health Resources Inventory supporting the contention that retention is associated with lower peer relations. A correspondence between retention and decreased self-concept was not observed.

The emerging trend in the current research on grade retention appears to be a focus on kindergarten retentions (May and Welch, 1984), first grade retentions (Hagin, 1984; Sandoval, 1984), and transition classes (Gredler, 1984; Sandoval and Fitzgerald, 1985; Shepard and Smith, in press).

Shepard and Smith (in press) conducted research on the effects of two-year kindergarten programs in the

Boulder, Colorado Public School system. Their study consisted of comparing achievement scores for 40 matched pairs of first grade students of which 40 students were retained in kindergarten and 40 students were promoted. Subjects were closely matched for sex, birthdays, and socio-economic status. Matching was completed after the retention year which resulted in 40 retained students attending school for three years and promoted students attending school for two years. All students were also matched on results of the Santa Clara Inventory which was administered to all subjects prior to entry into kindergarten. The subjects were compared on a variety of outcome measures including teacher ratings and standardized tests. This was completed at the conclusion of the retention year. When scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills were compared, the retained group showed a one month greater gain in reading over the control group. "Children who repeated kindergarten were one month ahead of where they would have been (the previous year) if they had been promoted to first grade instead of spending two years in kindergarten" (p. 12). They reported no difference across groups on math achievement or teacher ratings of maturity, self-concept, or attention to school work. They also reported that parents rated the children in both groups the same in terms of relationships with peers.

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Multiple retentions were the focus of a study conducted by Walker and Medhere (1987). Academic performance and social adjustment was analyzed for 1292 students placed in a Twice Retained Program in a school district. Academic performance was assessed by students results on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills in the areas of reading and math. Social skills information was obtained from a needs assessment form. Two subgroups were identified for analysis, one whose history of multiple retentions was recent and one whose history of multiple retentions was distant. No control group of non-retained students was incorporated into the design, nor did they control for other factors such as socioeconomic status, sex, age, or language dominance. Academic and social growth was calculated on students' performance over a two year period. The researchers reported differing results for academic performance as well as social skills, with mathematics consistently showing negative growth and reading showing both positive and negative growth depending on what grade the student was in. Only students in grades one and two showed small but statistically significant gains in reading. Social maturation gains of significance were noted for children who were placed in classes consisting of only students with multiple retentions. The authors stated that results were similar to the results of Holmes (1984).

In addition to actual research on grade retention, various authors have reviewed existing grade retention research reports and then formulated retention policies to act as guidelines for assisting the classroom teacher when making a retention decision (Abidin, Golladay, and Howerton, 1971; Byrnes and Yamamoto, 1986; Elligett and Tocco, 1983; Jones and Sutherland, 1981; Lindvig, 1983; Overman, 1986; Riffel and Switzer, 1986). Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) surveyed parents, administrators, and teachers and found that each group supported different reasons for grade retention. Parents felt that academic weaknesses were valid reasons for grade retention, whereas teachers tended to focus on school attendance and maturity as important factors when making the retention decision. Administrators considered lack of basic skills, excessive absences, and parental requests as legitimate reasons for retention. Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986) also reported that very few people surveyed were aware of research reports on the effects of grade retention. Based on the variety of reasons for retentions and the lack of agreement on the importance of each factor, the authors suggested that a retention policy focus on strategies to improve academic skills and increase motivation as well as on a reevaluation of grade expectations in an attempt at preventing failure before a retention decision must be made.

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Lindvig (1983), Overman (1986), and Riffel and Switzer (1986) all stated similar positions when developing retention policies. All three reports emphasized the importance of early identification of students in jeopardy of failure, early intervention in an attempt to avoid failure, and, if a retention is still necessary, individualized attention to insure that the student is not a future candidate for another retention in a later grade. They also called for increased dissemination of published research on grade retention so educators may make more informed retention decisions.

Jones and Sutherland (1981) have suggested a policy that supports grade retention. They contend that, regardless of published research on the subject, grade retentions will continue to be practiced in public education and , therefore, should be presented as a positive educational concept rather than one associated with failure. The authors suggested non-promotion should be viewed as "redshirting," where a student is simply given an additional year to mature and develop to his greatest potential, a concept similar to that found in college athletic programs. They recommended that an action plan be developed in which students eligible for "redshirting" are identified prior to the onset of the school year and the concept be explained to students and parents as it relates to athletes who have

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"redshirted." Included in the plan is an analysis of learning strengths and weaknesses of each student which is then used to restructure the student's "redshirt" year to gain positive outcomes. The program also called for retraining instructional personnel to enable them to address the student's strengths and weaknesses.

#### Statement of the Problem

This author's review of the literature on the effects of high student mobility on academic achievement and social adjustment has revealed inconclusive results. However, the majority of researchers reported a negative relationship exists between high student mobility and academic performance, social adjustment, and teacher attitudes towards the highly mobile student. The majority of the studies reviewed addressed mobility as it pertains to moves between cities and states (Benson et al., 1979; Cramer and Dorsey, 1970). Only one study addressed the effects of mobility within one city and investigated the difference between urban and suburban mobility (Murton and Faunce, 1967). Academic achievement and social adjustment were investigated in relation to high student mobility; however, other factors such as repetition of grade were not considered. Long (1975) did allude to non-promotion as a possible reason for under-modal grade placements but did not

scientifically investigate this phenomena.

Reviews of the literature on the effects of grade retention have suggested that retention serves no educational benefit for the student. In fact, one researcher (Holmes, 1983) suggested that not only does retention in grade not serve any educational benefits to the student but may actually be harmful because of significant delays in acquisition of academic material after the retention was undertaken. Jackson (1975) and Carstens (1985) have both emphasized major research design flaws that resulted in outcome bias.

Regardless of published research on the subject of retention, however, classroom teachers continue to incorporate this concept as an educational alternative. If a student with a history of frequent school moves (high mobility) enters a new school and displays academic difficulties, do teachers have a tendency to recommend retention in grade for this student to a greater degree than the student who is considered relatively non-mobile? This question became the primary focus of this study. Secondly, in following up on the Murton and Faunce (1967) study, are highly mobile students from urban, inner city schools considered for retention at any greater rate than highly mobile students from suburban schools? Additionally, factors which are considered most important to the classroom

teacher when making grade retention decisions were examined for their predictive qualities for various mobility and grade levels.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null form were the primary foci of this study.

#### Hypothesis 1

There is no relationship between primary grade placement and intermediate grade placement when retention decisions regarding a highly mobile student are made.

#### Hypothesis 2

There is no relationship between high mobility students from an urban school setting and high mobility students from a suburban school setting when retention in grade decisions are made.

#### Hypothesis 3

Various measures obtained from the modified Light's Retention Scale will not discriminate teachers' retention - promotion decisions regarding highly mobile or non-mobile students.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHOD

This chapter is devoted to the description of methodology used to examine the hypothesized relationships. The chapter will be divided into the following sections: Subjects, Experimental Materials, Data Collection Procedure, Data Analysis, and Follow-up Study.

Subjects

Two hundred twelve teachers from ten elementary schools in a school district in the Southwestern United States participated in this study. All teachers held valid teaching credentials certifying them to teach grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The years of teaching experience of the participants ranged from Bachelor degrees to Doctoral degrees. The socio-economic status (SES) of the students attending the ten schools ranged from lower SES to upper middle SES. The school district in which all participants are employed consists of both urban and suburban neighborhoods. The participating district uses inward mobility, outward mobility, and total mobility to determine levels of mobility with the district. Inward mobility consists of late entries plus re-entries divided by starting enrollment. Outward mobility consists of the

withdrawals divided by the starting enrollment. Total mobility was computed by adding together late entries, re-entries, and withdrawals and dividing that sum by the starting enrollment. The district developed these formulas for their specific requirements after it was determined that the State Department of Education does not compute mobility rates and, therefore, does not have a state recognized mobility formula. The inward mobility for the 1986-87 academic year at the elementary level ranged from 11.3% to 43.1%. The outward mobility for the 1986-87 academic year at the elementary level ranged from 7.4% to 40.8%. Total mobility for the entire district at the elementary level was 46.8% with individual school total mobility rates ranging from 19.7% for one school located in the suburban portion of the district to 82.1% for one school located in the urban portion of the district (K. Frey, personnel communications, September, 1987). The school district in which all participants were employed has implemented a new promotion-retention policy which was recently presented to all faculties by the building principals. This new policy encourages early identification of possible retention candidates as well as intervention in the form of referral to a Retention Study Team (RST). The RST is comprised of the school psychologist, speech and language teacher, school nurse, special education teacher, as well as regular

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classroom teachers and the building principal. The responsibility of the RST is to assist the teacher in developing alternate methods of instruction or other interventions in an attempt to assist the referred student in overcoming the weaknesses that led to the consideration for retention. If the student is retained, an individual education plan for the retained year is developed.

### Experimental Materials

Materials consisted of four case studies of simulated cumulative records of students with varying mobility rates and a retention questionnaire. All students' records reflected failing and near failing grades over an extended period of time. Each record also included anecdotal notes by a classroom teacher. The case studies were of two first grade students and two fifth grade students. First grade students were chosen to determine if primary grade students are retained with greater frequency than intermediate grade students regardless of mobility factors. Fifth grade students were chosen because, historically, within the school district employed for the study, fifth graders were the most frequently retained at the intermediate level. Information used in developing the cumulative records was chosen based on this researcher's interviews with both primary and intermediate teachers in an attempt to ascertain what

information classroom teachers reported as most useful when making promotion-retention decisions for students that they have not worked with personally for an extended period of time.

Each grade level case study was identical with the exception of the number of schools attended prior to entering the student's present school. The mobility factor provided the independent variable for the study. One first grade student had attended four schools prior to entering his present school, and one first grade student had attended only one school prior to entering his present school. One fifth grade student had attended six schools prior to attending his present school, and one fifth grade student had attended only one school prior to entering his present school.

All retention questionnaires (Appendix F) were identical consisting of twenty-six factors considered important by teachers when making retention decisions. The factors were a combination of items from the Light's Retention Scale (Light, 1977) and additional factors generated by the school district in which the study was undertaken (M.R. Franklin, Jr., personal communication, March, 1987). The questionnaire was presented with five possible choices ranging from "Very Important" to "Very Unimportant."

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Two alternate packets were developed. One packet consisted of the case studies of a mobile first grade student (Appendix B) and a non-mobile fifth grade student (Appendix C) as well as the retention questionnaire. The other packet consisted of the case studies of a non-mobile first grade student (Appendix D) and a mobile fifth grade student (Appendix E) as well as a retention questionnaire. Attached to each packet was a statement explaining the purpose of the questionnaire (Appendix A).

#### Data Collection Procedure

Principals at each participating elementary school were solicited as mediums for the presentation of the packets to each teacher. Teachers were requested to complete a questionnaire at the onset of the last scheduled staff meeting for the 1986-87 academic year. The last staff meeting of the academic year was chosen because by that time all retention-promotion decisions will have been made by all classroom teachers. At the onset of the faculty meeting, the principal distributed the packets in a random manner to each teacher and stated that they should take ten minutes to complete the questionnaire. After reviewing each case study, the teacher was to select one of two choices: 1) retain student in present grade level, or 2) promote student to next grade level. After completing the case study

portion of the packet, the participants were then asked to complete the Retention Questionnaire. The completed packets were collected by the building principal at the conclusion of the staff meeting. The completed packets were then forwarded to the experimenter.

### Data Analysis

Consistent with the stated hypotheses, three types of analyses were used. These analyses were Chi-square, Mann-Whitney U, and discriminate analysis.

Recall that hypothesis one states that there is no relationship between grade placement and teacher's decisions regarding retention of highly mobile students. This study utilized the Chi-square statistic to test hypothesis one.

Hypothesis two addressed the relationship between teachers' retention decisions of highly mobile students across an urban population and a suburban population. This relationship across groups was analyzed by applying the Mann-Whitney U statistic. The Mann-Whitney U was first applied to the entire sample and, subsequently, to each case separately.

Hypothesis three addresses the discriminate qualities of the modified Light's Retention Scale and teacher's retention-promotion decisions of highly mobile as well as non-mobile students. This was analyzed by a

stepwise discriminate analysis for both first grade and fifth grade students.

#### Follow-up Study

An abbreviated follow-up study was conducted one year after the original data collection. Fifty-four randomly selected teachers were presented with packets identical to the original study. Analysis of the obtained results were similar to the results of the original study. This suggested that the research method used for this study was a valid technique and that the school district's concurrent emphasis on grade retention at the time of the original study appeared to have minimal impact on teachers' decisions.

## CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of the findings related to specific hypotheses discussed in chapters one and two. The following topics are included: 1) Chi-square statistics analyzing differences in teachers' retention decisions for highly mobile and non-mobile students for first and fifth grade students; 2) Mann-Whitney U statistic to determine retention decision differences between urban and suburban schools; 3) discriminate analysis to determine predictive qualities of the modified Light's Retention Scale items and teachers' decisions regarding retention in grade. An Alpha level of .05 was chosen to test each of the stated hypotheses.

Mobility - Retention

This study utilized the Chi-square statistic to test hypotheses one. The obtained Chi-square values were used to determine if two or more groups differ in respect to the frequency of a particular characteristic, or group of characteristics, by comparing the frequencies that fall into each group and determining whether they differ significantly. The rate of retention for a student who had attended numerous schools prior to the present placement and

the student who had attended only one school prior to the present placement was examined. Chi-square was computed for first grade highly mobile and non-mobile students as well as fifth grade highly mobile and non-mobile students.

The critical value at the .05 level of significance with one degree of freedom is 3.84. If the Chi-square statistic exceeds the critical value (3.84), then the null hypothesis may be rejected. Because the 2X2 contingency table used in this study resulted in only one degree of freedom, a Yates correction for continuity was incorporated into the Chi-square statistic. This correction consists of reducing by .5 each obtained frequency that is greater than expected and increasing by the same amount each frequency that is less than expected.

Table 1

Chi-Square Statistic of Retention-Promotion Decisions for  
First Grade Mobile and Non-Mobile Students

|                | Retained | Promoted |
|----------------|----------|----------|
| MOBILE         | 85       | 19       |
| NON-<br>MOBILE | 85       | 21       |

Critical Value at .05 = 3.841  
Chi-Square Statistic = .012 d.f. = 1

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Table 2

Chi-Square Statistics of Retention-Promotion Decisions for  
Fifth Grade Mobile and Non-Mobile Students

|                | Retained | Promoted |
|----------------|----------|----------|
| MOBILE         | 75       | 31       |
| NON-<br>MOBILE | 55       | 50       |

Critical Value at .05 = 3.841  
Chi-square Statistic = 6.772 d.f. = 1

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Hypothesis 1 states that there is no relationship between grade level and teacher's decisions regarding retention of highly mobile students. The Chi-square statistic for the first grade sample was .012 ( $df = 1, p < .05$ ) and does not exceed the critical value at the .05 level of significance (Figure 1). However, the Chi-square statistic for the fifth grade sample was 6.77 ( $df = 1, p < .05$ ) which exceeds the critical value of 3.84 at the .05 level of significance (Figure 2), therefore allowing for the rejection of hypothesis 1.

#### Urban - Suburban

To determine if the rate of retention decisions differs significantly between teachers in urban schools and teachers in suburban schools, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. Two groups, each with 5 schools, were analyzed. Five schools were located in urban settings and 5 schools were located in suburban settings. The analysis consists of ranking the number of retention decisions for each school within both the urban and suburban group. The two groups were combined and school scores were ranked in order of increasing size. The statistic for testing the hypothesis that the two groups are equal ( $H_2$ ) is the sum of the ranks for each of the two groups. If the groups have the same distribution, their sample distribution of ranks should be

similar. Mean ranks for each group, a Z statistic, and two-tailed probabilities are provided (See Table 3). The Mann Whitney U was computed for the entire sample and resulted in an obtained Z of  $-.27$  ( $p > .10$ ). This suggests no significant difference in teacher's retention decisions between urban and suburban schools.

Table 3

Group Mean Ranks, Z Score, and Two-Tailed Probability for Mann-Whitney U Analysis

|                           | Suburban<br>Mean Rank | Urban<br>Mean Rank | Z       | Two-Tailed<br>Probability |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Entire<br>Sample          | 5.45                  | 4.60               | $-.27$  | .79                       |
| First Grade<br>Mobile     | 4.82                  | 5.28               | $-.62$  | .54                       |
| First Grade<br>Non-Mobile | 5.30                  | 4.75               | .23     | .82                       |
| Fifth Grade<br>Mobile     | 4.91                  | 5.16               | $-1.16$ | .25                       |
| Fifth Grade<br>Non-Mobile | 4.73                  | 5.35               | $-.43$  | .67                       |

To further ascertain if differences existed between urban and suburban groups, the Mann-Whitney U was computed for teachers' decisions to retain students for each of the four cases, that is, the first grade mobile student, the first grade non-mobile student, the fifth grade mobile student, and the fifth grade non-mobile student. Table 3 presents the data for each of the four cases as well as the entire sample. None of the additional four analyses resulted in a Z score that was statistically significant ( $p < .10$ ). The overall direction of findings for the analysis including analysis of the four subgroups does not allow for the rejection of hypothesis two (H2).

### Rating Scale

The classroom teachers' retention decisions, as reflected by responses on the modified Light's Retention Scale were analyzed utilizing a stepwise discriminate analysis. Using decision (i.e., retention vs. promotion) as the criterion variable, the 26 items of the modified Light's Retention Scale were entered as predictors. The analysis was designed to input retention scale items in accordance with their association to the decision item based on minimizing the Wilks' Lambda. To determine if the various items discriminated differently depending on grade and mobility, a discriminate analysis was performed separately

for the four different experimental conditions, that is, the first grade highly mobile condition, the first grade non-mobile condition, the fifth grade highly mobile condition, and the fifth grade non-mobile condition.

When the first grade mobile student is considered (Case 1), Emotional Problems emerged as the best discriminator, followed by Ethnicity, Experiential Background, Education of Parents, School Attendance, Academic Achievement in Reading, and Academic Achievement in Math (Table 4). The seven Case 1 scale items, when combined, reduced lambda by .18 and yielded a statistically significant discriminant function (Chi-square [7] = 28.39;  $p < .001$ ). The canonical correlation (.49), when squared, indicates 24.8% of the variability in group membership is explained by the seven scale items. The remaining 19 scale items failed to meet minimum criteria ( $F > 1.00$ ) for inclusion in the analysis. The standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients (SDC) are also provided for each scale item. The SDC is a measure of association between the discriminant scores and the group variable. The magnitude of the coefficient indicates the relative importance of the variable. For example, a large coefficient is thought to contribute more to the overall discriminant function.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Discriminate AnalysisResults for First Grade Mobile Students (Case 1)

|              | Promoted |           | Retained |           | Wilks' Lambda * |       |
|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------------|-------|
|              | SDC**    | $\bar{X}$ | SD       | $\bar{X}$ |                 | SD    |
| Emot. Prob.  | -.67     | 3.47      | 1.24     | 4.08      | .81             | .93 * |
| Ethnicity    | .74      | 2.72      | 1.31     | 2.20      | .95             | .89 * |
| Experience   | .83      | 3.38      | 1.17     | 3.38      | 1.04            | .86 * |
| Parent Educ. | -.74     | 1.99      | .94      | 2.54      | 1.15            | .80 * |
| Attendance   | .34      | 3.97      | .83      | 3.99      | .85             | .78 * |
| Reading      | -.65     | 3.86      | .95      | 4.18      | .60             | .77 * |
| Math         | .46      | 3.76      | .87      | 3.84      | .70             | .75 * |

\* denotes stepwise statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

One item, Experience, emerged as the third item in the discriminate function; however, there was no difference in the groups' means. Additional analysis was generated to investigate this phenomenon. A Pearson correlation coefficient between the decision and the item was  $r = .00$  indicating no relationship. When decision by the item was examined by controlling for the first item in the function, Emotional Problems, a partial correlation coefficient of  $-.17$  emerged. Next the relationship between the decision and the item was examined by controlling for the second item in the function, Ethnicity. This resulted in a partial correlation coefficient of  $.00$ . Only one of these correlations, Emotional Problems, met criteria for statistical significance. The final analysis compared the decision and the Experience item by controlling both the Emotional Problems and the Ethnicity items. This resulted in a partial correlation coefficient of  $-.19$  ( $p < .05$ ). The Experience item acted as a suppressor variable to eliminate or suppress the irrelevant variance in both the Emotional Problems and Ethnicity items.

An analysis of group means for the Case 1 scale items revealed that, for the retained group, Proficiency in Reading and Math, Emotional Problems, Parent Education, and Attendance were rated towards the Very Important end of the scale, whereas Ethnicity was more important for the promoted

group. For this case, Previous Experience received approximately equal ratings across groups. Classification procedures based upon the analysis correctly identified 80 of the 105 cases (76.19%). This includes 75% of the promoted group and 76.5% of the retained group.

The item that discriminates best for the first grade non-mobile student (Case 2) was Academic Achievement in Math. This was followed by History of Delinquency, Previous Retention, History of Learning Disability, Gender of Student, School Attendance, Intelligence, and Ethnicity (Table 5). The eight Case 2 scale items, when combined, reduced lambda by .17 and yielded a statistically significant discriminant function (Chi-square [8] = 28.99;  $p < .001$ ). The canonical correlation (.50), when squared, indicates 25% of the variability in group membership is explained by the eight scale items. The remaining 18 scale items failed to meet minimum criteria ( $F > 1.00$ ) for inclusion in the analysis.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Discriminate AnalysisResults for First Grade Non-mobile Students (Case 2)

|                    | Promoted |           |      | Retained  |      | Wilks' Lambda * |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------------|
|                    | SDC**    | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   |                 |
| Math               | .44      | 3.56      | .76  | 4.03      | .64  | .92 *           |
| Delinquency        | 1.08     | 2.71      | 1.29 | 3.45      | 1.24 | .90 *           |
| Previous Retention | .59      | 4.40      | .88  | 4.58      | .54  | .83 *           |
| History of L.D.    | -.63     | 4.10      | 1.09 | 4.18      | .87  | .81 *           |
| Gender             | -.33     | 2.00      | 1.09 | 1.84      | .81  | .79 *           |
| Attendance         | -.42     | 3.99      | .93  | 3.81      | .84  | .77 *           |
| Intelligence       | .35      | 3.50      | 1.23 | 3.91      | .78  | .77 *           |
| Ethnicity          | -.25     | 2.51      | 1.30 | 2.57      | 1.31 | .75 *           |

\* denotes stepwise statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

An analysis of group means for the Case 2 scale items revealed that, for the retained group, Proficiency in Math, History of Delinquency, Previous Retentions, History of Learning Disabilities, Intelligence, and Ethnicity were rated towards the Very Important end of the scale, whereas Attendance and Gender were more important for the promoted group. Classification procedures based upon the analysis correctly identified 81 of the 107 cases (75.70%). This includes 72.7% of the promoted group and 76.5% of the retained group.

Both fifth grade cases also revealed differing discriminating items. For fifth grade highly mobile students (Case 3) School Attendance emerged as the best discriminator. This was followed by Present Grade Placement, Physical Size, Intelligence, Input from School Psychologist, Student's Age, Age of Siblings, and Emotional Problems (Table 6). When the eight Case 3 scale items are combined, lambda is reduced by .17 and yields a statistically significant discriminant function (Chi-square [8] = 25.90;  $p < .001$ ). The canonical correlation (.47), when squared, indicates 22% of the variability in group membership is explained by the eight scale items. The remaining 18 scaled items failed to meet minimum criteria ( $F > 1.00$ ) for inclusion in the analysis.

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations, and Discriminate Analysis  
Results for Fifth Grade Mobile Students (Case 3)

|                       | Promoted |           |      | Retained  |      | Wilks'<br>Lambda * |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|------|--------------------|
|                       | SDC**    | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   |                    |
| Attendance            | .51      | 4.16      | .74  | 3.71      | .87  | .94 *              |
| Grade<br>Placement    | .63      | 3.84      | 1.04 | 3.43      | .87  | .89 *              |
| Physical<br>Size      | -.91     | 3.30      | 1.26 | 3.56      | .74  | .86 *              |
| Intelligence          | -.43     | 3.69      | 1.12 | 3.88      | .78  | .84 *              |
| Psychologist<br>Input | .34      | 3.90      | .83  | 3.54      | .96  | .82 *              |
| Student Age           | .42      | 4.12      | .82  | 4.06      | .77  | .80 *              |
| Sibling Age           | .47      | 2.79      | 1.07 | 2.57      | 1.02 | .79 *              |
| Emotional<br>Problems | -.39     | 3.76      | 1.25 | 3.78      | 1.00 | .77 *              |

\* denotes stepwise statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Group means analysis for Case 3 revealed that respondents choosing retention rated three items, Physical Size, Intelligence, and Emotional Problems, closer to the Very Important end of the scale compared to their promoted group counterparts. The group choosing promotion rated five items, Attendance, Grade Placement, Psychologist Input, Student Age, and Sibling Age, closest to the Very Important end of the scale. Classification procedures based on the analysis correctly identified 74 of the 107 cases (69.16%). This includes 71.9% of the promoted group and 68% of the retained group.

For fifth grade non-mobile students (Case 4) Previous Retention emerged as the strongest discriminating item. This was followed by Motivation to Complete Tasks, Student's Age, Parents School Participation, Academic Achievement in Math, History of Delinquency, Separated or Divorced Parents, and Parents' Attitude Toward Retention (Table 7). When the seven Case 4 scale items are combined, lambda is reduced by .13 and yields a statistically significant discriminant function (Chi-square [7] = 18.61;  $p < .001$ ). The canonical correlation (.41), when squared, indicates 16.8% of the variability in group membership is explained by the seven scale items. The remaining nineteen scale items failed to meet minimum criteria ( $F > 1.00$ ) for inclusion in the analysis.

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations, and Discriminate AnalysisResults for Fifth Grade Non-mobile Students (Case 4)

|                    | Promoted |           |      | Retained  |     | Wilks'<br>Lambda * |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|------|-----------|-----|--------------------|
|                    | SDC**    | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | $\bar{X}$ | SD  |                    |
| Previous Retention | .32      | 4.50      | .63  | 4.21      | .65 | .95 *              |
| Motivation         | -.58     | 3.66      | .94  | 4.01      | .69 | .91 *              |
| Student Age        | .45      | 4.12      | .68  | 3.80      | .75 | .88 *              |
| Math               | -.36     | 3.72      | .82  | 3.93      | .64 | .85 *              |
| Delinquency        | -.44     | 3.14      | 1.23 | 3.51      | .93 | .84 *              |
| Divorced Parents   | .44      | 2.67      | 1.31 | 2.64      | .94 | .83 *              |
| Parents' Attitude  | .28      | 3.91      | 1.03 | 3.83      | .83 | .81 *              |

\* denotes stepwise statistical significance ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Analysis of group means revealed that respondents choosing retention rated three factors closer to the Very Important end of the scale than did the respondents of the promoted group. This included Motivation, Math Proficiency, and History of Delinquency. The respondents choosing promotion, however, rated Previous Retention, Student Age, Parents' Attitude Towards Retention, and Divorced Parents closer to the Very Important end of the scale. Classification procedures based on the analysis correctly identified 70 of the 105 cases (66.67%). This includes 70% of the promoted group and 63.6% of the retained group.

The discriminate analysis suggests that the modified Light's Retention Scale is sensitive to prediction across items. However, the predictability of items varied across conditions. This allows for the rejection of hypothesis three (H3). Due to the lack of consistency across cases, however, the interpretation of these results is limited to this study only. It is conceivable that if this study was conducted again different items may emerge as predictors.

CHAPTER 5  
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between student mobility and classroom teachers' decisions to retain or promote students from one grade to the next. These retention-promotion decisions were examined across primary and intermediate grade levels. This relationship was also examined for retention decisions for students from urban and suburban populations. Additional factors which teachers may consider when making retention-promotion decisions were also examined.

In light of these objectives, the emerging data suggests that teachers have a tendency to retain a highly mobile fifth grade student with greater frequency than a non-mobile fifth grade student. Although grade retention is still implemented in our schools, such practices are not supported by evidence emerging from published literature on the subject (Holmes and Mathews, 1984; Shepard and Smith, 1987). Swanson (1969) has reported that highly mobile students experience more social and academic problems than non-mobile students. The retention factor may compound these problems that the mobile student already experiences.

The data generated suggest that first grade students are retained in greater numbers than fifth grade students

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regardless of the mobility factor which did not appear to have a significant impact on teachers' decisions to retain or promote a first grade student. It appears that the respondents primarily considered academic performance as the major criterion for making the promotion-retention decision. Although the obtained results do not link first grade retention to mobility factors, it is in keeping with Carstens' (1985) suggestion that if a student is to be retained in grade it should be undertaken as early in a child's school experience as possible.

The retention decision for fifth grade students differed from the retention decisions for first grade students. Fifth grade highly mobile students were retained at a significantly greater rate than non-mobile students. Academic performance appeared to be considered secondarily to the mobility factor. Contrary to this finding, however, practice in schools reflect a different trend as significantly fewer intermediate level students are retained than primary level students. Perhaps because school districts have recently emphasized alternatives to grade retention and classroom teachers have become more aware of published research on the subject, they may feel that retention is more beneficial if accomplished at an earlier age. The difficulties of the mobile student had just begun to attract the school district's attention when this study

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was undertaken and it is doubtful that information disseminated to teachers on the subject would have had any effect on their promotion-retention decisions.

An attempt was also made to determine if differences existed across urban and suburban schools when teachers made a promotion-retention decision for students with varying degrees of mobility. The obtained data suggest that no difference exists in teachers' retention-promotion decisions across urban-suburban locations regardless of the rate of mobility of the student considered. This is contrary to Murton and Faunce (1967) who reported differences of teacher attitudes towards highly mobile students across urban and suburban settings. Closer investigation of the urban-suburban groups, however, suggests that there was one school population in each group that closely resembled the population of its opposite group; that is, there was one school in the urban group whose population more closely resembled the population of the suburban group, and one school in the suburban group whose population more closely resembled the population of the urban group.

The retention-promotion decisions across groups was further analyzed by grade level and mobility status and found to be not significantly different for urban and suburban settings. First grade mobile students were retained or promoted by teachers with similar frequency

whether they attended school in an urban setting or a suburban setting. This lack of difference was also noticed for first grade non-mobile students, fifth grade mobile students, and fifth grade non-mobile students. Although there were differences across groups in terms of socio-economic status and culture, perhaps there were enough similarities across the two groups which resulted in teachers from both groups developing similar attitudes towards the mobile student. For instance, there is a multitude of apartment complexes in the suburban neighborhoods which produce families who frequently change residences. This residence mobility may have allowed the teachers in the suburban schools to develop an acclimated approach to the instruction of their students.

In order to examine the variables that may best discriminate a retention candidate, responses to the modified Light's Retention Scale were analyzed by grade level and mobility status. For the first grade highly mobile student both Academic Achievement in Math and Reading emerged as discriminating variables; however, neither variable emerged as the single best predictor. The variable that best predicted a retention candidate for the group was Emotional Problems. Ethnicity emerged as the second strongest discriminating variable for this group. Academic Achievement in Math emerged as the best predictor of a

retention candidate for the first grade non-mobile student. Two variables that did not emerge for the first grade highly mobile sample emerged for the first grade non-mobile sample. These variables were Previous Retention and History of Learning Disability. For a school psychologist within the district in which this study was undertaken, the two most important variables to consider when consulting on promotion-retention decisions are special education status and previous retentions. Ethnicity emerged as a discriminating variable for this group also; however, it did not predict as strongly as it did for the highly mobile first grade student.

For fifth grade students, School Attendance emerged as the strongest discriminating variable for the highly mobile fifth grade student. Interestingly, Input from the School Psychologist also emerged as a discriminating variable for this group. This is the only group in which this variable emerged and possibly suggests that the only time input from the school psychologist is considered important is when the students history is not totally known by the teacher making the retention-promotion decision. Academic Achievement in Math also emerged; however, it was the fifth best discriminating variable for this population. Other discriminating variables that emerged were no surprise and were similar to the other sub-groups. These were

Intelligence, Age, and Physical Size.

Previous Retention emerged as a strong predictor for the non-mobile fifth grade student, similar to the non-mobile first grade student. Perhaps teachers feel they have more information on a non-mobile student which allows them to consider variables that they may not have available to them for the mobile student. Once again Academic Achievement in Math emerged as a discriminating variable but was fifth in order of importance.

The pattern of these findings would clearly seem to suggest that academic achievement in Reading and Math is much more important for first grade students than fifth grade students when retention-promotion decisions are made. Previous Retention appears more important for non-mobile students than highly mobile students regardless of grade level when retention-promotion decisions are made.

The findings of this research point out a number of issues related to retention and mobility that may need further investigation. One area that warrants an in-depth analysis is the social-emotional effects on the high mobility student who has been retained. Additionally, the social-emotional effects on the highly mobile student who has experienced multiple retentions should be examined. Differences of social-emotional effects between students retained in the early primary grades and students retained

in the later intermediate grades should also be investigated. Since Ethnicity was noted to be a significant variable for both first grade cases, an in-depth investigation of grade retention as it relates to students with diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds is recommended.

### Intervention

Although researchers have reported on attempts to intervene to assist the mobile student's adjustment to new surrounding (Keats et al., 1981; Ponagas et al., 1981), the intervention strategies represent outlays of monies that may not always be available to some school districts who experience high rates of student mobility. This study did not address intervention strategies; however, based on this study's findings, attempts to diminish the probability of a mobile student being retained appears justified. Perhaps in-house interventions that would not create a financial burden on the school district should be explored. The following strategies warrant investigation as to the feasibility and effectiveness in alleviating the highly mobile student's probable academic and social difficulties.

1. Assign a peer "buddy" to help the new student acclimate himself to a new environment.
2. Provide the student with access to a video tape presentation outlining school policies and procedures.

3. Provide a monthly "Welcome" inservice by significant staff members such as the principal, counselor, school psychologist, or teachers to explain the school's policies and procedures.

4. Allow the new student to observe in his assigned class before he becomes a regular member of the class.

5. Provide academic assistance via peer or cross-age tutors.

6. Educate parents about the difficulties of the mobile student through monthly workshops provided by school psychologists, counselors, or school administrators on issues surrounding student mobility.

7. Encourage teachers to contact the parents of new children to welcome them to the school and describe the academic and behavior expectations.

8. When a student leaves a school, encourage classmates to hold a farewell party to acknowledge their loss and remembrance of the fellow student.

9. Encourage the student to write to former classmates and encourage former classmates to write to the departed student.

In conclusion, it is a fact of life that student mobility will continue due to many forces beyond an educator's control. However, educational systems can take steps to alleviate some of the problems that the highly

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mobile student may experience. An in-depth analysis of promotion-retention policies with strong consideration given to published research on the subject would be a legitimate beginning. Implementation of strategies to assist the mobile student to adjust to his new surroundings should also be considered. With continued research on student mobility as well as academic retention, public education hopefully will continue to formulate effective education policies based on sound research findings.

## APPENDIX A

One of the \_\_\_\_\_ District thrusts for the 1986-87 year was the implementation of Promotion/Retention guidelines. Please assist in providing data for this thrust by completing the attached questionnaire. No identifying information of persons completing questionnaires will be used. This material may also be utilized as dissertation data for Mr. Ronald Kapp, School Psychologist.

Associate Superintendent

Ronald C. Kapp  
School Psychologist



Your School (Tucson, Arizona)

Entered: 05-12-87

Informal Testing:

Reading PP1

Math does not know all addition facts

Writing confuses capital and lower case letters

Jan transferred to your school on May 12, 1987. Jan appears to be functioning significantly below the rest of your students. Based on the student's present performance as well as the information provided in the cumulative folder, you must make a decision for the following year grade placement. Please check one.

\_\_\_\_\_ Promote to 2nd grade

\_\_\_\_\_ Retain in 1st grade



## Grade 4:

| Grades:    | 1st Quarter | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter | 4th Quarter |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Reading    | D           | D           | F           | F           |
| Math       | C           | C-          | D           | F           |
| English    | C           | C           | D           | D           |
| Soc. Stud. | D           | D-          | F           | F           |
| Science    | D           | D           | F           | F           |

Teacher Comments: "I hope Kelly can enroll in a summer school class."

## Grade 5:

| Grades:    | 1st Quarter | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter | 4th Quarter |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Reading    | D           | D-          | F           |             |
| Math       | C           | D           | D-          |             |
| English    | C           | D           | F           |             |
| Soc. Stud. | D           | D           | F           |             |
| Science    | D           | D           | F           |             |

Teacher Comments: Kelly is a loner--has few friends.

Withdrew: 04-21-87

## Your School (Tucson, Arizona)

Entered: 05-06-87

## Informal Assessment:

|                |                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Reading        | poor comprehension skills      |
| Math           | has not memorized times tables |
| Writing Sample | lacks punctuation skills       |

Kelly entered your school on May 6, 1987. Kelly appears to be functioning significantly below the rest of your students. Based on the student's present performance as well as the information provided in the cumulative folder, you must make a decision for the following year grade placement. Please check one.

\_\_\_\_\_ Promote to 6th grade

\_\_\_\_\_ Retain in 5th grade





## Grade 4: Gerald Ford Elementary (Glendale, Arizona)

Entered: 08-27-85

Withdraw: 05-26-86

| Grades:    | 1st Quarter | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter | 4th Quarter |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Reading    | D           | D           | F           | F           |
| Math       | C           | C-          | D           | F           |
| English    | C           | C           | D           | D           |
| Soc. Stud. | D           | D-          | F           | F           |
| Science    | D           | D           | F           | F           |

Teacher Comments: "I hope Kelly can enroll in a summer school class."

## Grade 5: Seneca Elementary (Tucson, Arizona)

Entered: 08-19-86

Withdraw: 04-21-87

| Grades:    | 1st Quarter | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter | 4th Quarter |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Reading    | D           | D-          | F           |             |
| Math       | C           | D           | D-          |             |
| English    | C           | D           | F           |             |
| Soc. Stud. | D           | D           | F           |             |
| Science    | D           | D           | F           |             |

Teacher Comments: Kelly is a loner--has few friends

## Grade 5: Your School (Tucson, Arizona)

Entered: 05-06-87

Informal Assessment:

|                |                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Reading        | poor comprehension skills      |
| Math           | has not memorized times tables |
| Writing Sample | lacks punctuation skills       |

Kelly entered your school on May 6, 1987. Kelly appears to be functioning significantly below the rest of your students. Based on the student's present performance as well as the information provided in the cumulative folder, you must make a decision for the following year grade placement. Please check one.

\_\_\_\_\_ Promote to 6th grade

\_\_\_\_\_ Retain in 5th grade

APPENDIX F

Code # \_\_\_\_\_

Retention Questionnaire -

I Please indicate to what extent you feel each of the following factors is "important" for consideration in promotion/retention decisions. Please place an "X" on each line to indicate the "importance" of each factor.

a) Age Of Siblings

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

b) Education Of Parents

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

c) Emotional Problems

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

d) Ethnicity

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

e) Experiential Background

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

f) Gender Of Student

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

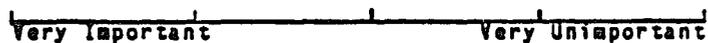
g) History Of Delinquency

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

h) History Of Learning Disability

Very Important ----- Very Unimportant

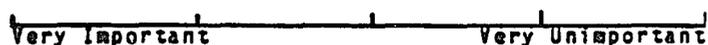
1) Immature Behavior



j) Intelligence



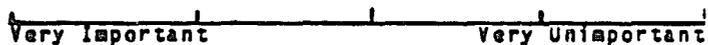
k) Input From The School Psychologist



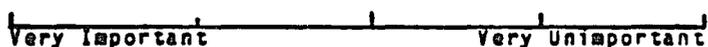
l) Knowledge Of English Language



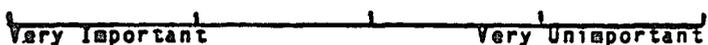
m) Motivation To Complete School Tasks



n) Number Of Siblings



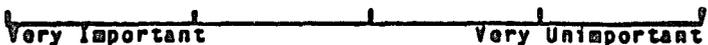
o) Parent's Attitude Toward Retention



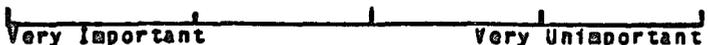
p) Parent's School Participation



q) Physical Size



r) Present Grade Placement





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