THE VALIDITY OF GRADE 5 AND 8 PLACEMENT COMMITTEE DECISIONS FOR PREDICTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

Grade-level retention and social promotion are complex issues which have long-lasting repercussions for children. Policy development and implementation for grade-level retentions have been the subject of reform efforts at the international, national, and state levels. As a response to national political trends in favor of halting social promotion, Texas responded by instating strict guidelines for grade-level retention at Grades 5 and 8. The Student Success Initiative (SSI) mandated the implementation of the Grade Placement Committee (GPC). The GPC determines whether to advance a student to the next grade who had unsuccessfully attempted the state assessment three times. The research on the GPC decision and its link to high school graduation is limited. The purpose of the study was to determine the criterion-related validity of GPC decisions in 5th and 8th grades in predicting high school graduation, controlling for selected demographics and special programs. The following research questions guided this study: (1) To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 5th grade predict high school graduation?; and (2) To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 8th grade predict high school graduation? The study employed a correlational design and was predictive in nature. Due to non-experimental nature of the study, no causal inferences were drawn. A sample of Grade 5 (2009–2010) and Grade 8 (2012–2013) students was obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Two Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) (Field, 2018) analyses were performed to examine the unique contribution of the GPC in predicting graduation after controlling the demographics and special programs variables. After controlling for the confounding variables of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education status, and limited English proficiency status, the GPC decision was a

statistically significant predictor of the outcome measure, which was not surprising because of the large sample sizes that enabled the detection of small effects; however, its practical significance/explained variation was limited. The GPC promotion decision seemed to be a better predictor of graduation at 8th grade compared to 5th grade. The implications of the study are substantial for practitioners because the GPC policy continues to be implemented in Texas in Grades 5 and 8 even though the majority of students are promoted. The theoretical framework selected for the study was Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) (Young & Diem, 2017). The results are discussed in the context of this framework. Immediate and sustained systemic changes are needed, specifically an overhaul of the GPC process should be considered.

DEDICATION

Throughout this process, my family has been unwavering in their support of my education. My parents, Robert “Bob” and Judie Richardson raised me to value education. Their dedication to learning inspired me. Over the years, they changed diapers, read stories to grandbabies, and filled our bellies with warm meals. Each act of service helped me to accomplish my goals and provide for my family. For all of their sacrifices, I am forever grateful. I would be remiss if I did not mention my three brothers — that statement explains so much about who I am. Love you guys and your families.

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This is dedicated to US! Without US, there would be no me.

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This journey was a challenge for me. Throughout my entire career as a student, I was devoted to working hard. Some very unexpected difficulties came my way while I was working on my dissertation, and they brought me to my knees. With the support that I received, I was able to persevere. I count it a blessing that each struggle has molded me into a better person who strives to understand and listen to others.

I want to leave you with my final thoughts said best by Eleanor Roosevelt, “It is not fair to ask of others what you are unwilling to do yourself.”

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background and Setting

Grade-level retention and social promotion have garnered considerable attention from educators, researchers, and policymakers alike. These complex issues have long-lasting repercussions for children in the United States. In order to thoroughly study the issues related to grade-level retention and social promotion, it is imperative to explicitly define the terms. Dombek and Connor (2012) defined grade-level retention as "requiring a student who has completed a grade level to repeat that grade for an additional year" (p. 568). Other terms commonly used to describe grade-level retention include flunking, being held back, non-promotion, keeping back, and horizontal placement (Eide & Showalter, 2001; Light, 2015).

Social promotion is often described as the only alternative to grade-level retention. The term implies that factors other than academics determine whether or not the student is moved to the next grade level. Picklo and Christenson (2005) stated that social promotion is the placement of a student in the next grade level in spite of the student not being sufficiently prepared academically. The U.S. Department of Education (1999) defined social promotion as "the practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards and academic requirements to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements" (para. 8).

Researchers (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 1998; Karweit, 1991; Norton, 2011) have consistently contended that neither retention nor social promotion are satisfactory responses, and there are no positive outcomes for students when using either practice. Retention studies have shown that students' behavior, attitude, and attendance are negatively impacted (Lynch, 2013). As a result, retention often leads to students' failure to graduate from high school as a result of

social and emotional consequences (Light, 2015; Picklo & Cristenson, 2005). Whereas, students who are socially promoted generally lag academically behind their peers, failing to develop critical study and job-related skills, thus undermining their futures (Lynch, 2013; NASP, 2011).

Still, retention and social promotion decisions are determined by educators throughout the United States and in other countries (e.g. Spain, Greece, and Belgium). When grade-level retention is chosen as an intervention strategy, the student repeats an entire school year. From an educator's perspective, the logic of a grade-level retention intervention is to help the struggling student learn the skills needed to be academically successful in school (Norton, 2011). Research indicates that the antithesis is true. Grade-level retention, holding a student back for an additional year of instruction in the same grade, causes the student to fall even further behind his peers and significantly increases the risk of dropping out of school (Holmes, 2006; Jimerson et al., 2005; Light, 2015; Xia & Glennie, 2005).

Social promotion is chosen by teachers, parents, and administrators for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons for social promotion include previous grade-level retentions, parental opposition to grade-level retention, the student's age, physical size, gender, attendance, learning disabilities, language barriers, motivation, and behavior (Light, 2015). Some educators base the decision about social promotion on the fear that students will lack self-esteem if retained in the same grade for an additional school year. However, the results of placing a student in the next grade level without being academically prepared also have dire consequences, such as ongoing struggles with grade-level academic work, negative social and emotional outcomes, and inability to focus (Lynch, 2013).

Researchers such as Carifio & Carey (2010) contended that emotional, social, and behavioral repercussions were linked to grade-level retention. Students' motivation and feelings

about school influences their level of engagement and academic achievement. When students are retained, their social and emotional adjustment is likely to suffer. Jimerson et al. (2005) reported that students had difficulty with peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behavior, and attendance. During adolescence, retained students engage in risky behavior at a higher rate than their peers. Some of these behaviors include smoking, alcohol abuse, sexual activity, and violent behaviors (Jimerson et al., 2005).

The issues surrounding both grade-level retention and social promotion have been the subject of legislation and reform efforts at the international, national, and state levels. Despite research not supporting the practice of retention (Huddleston, 2014), there remains a "popular belief in the efficacy of retention [which] creates a powerful mandate to hold both schools and students accountable to ensure educational quality. The demand for high educational accountability puts schools under considerable political pressure to hold back students" (Xia & Glennie, 2005, p. 3).

While in many European countries, the practice of grade-level retention is seen as a last provision of educational support (Eurydice, 2011), the number of students being retained differs from country to country. For instance, in Norway, grade retention is not allowed. Rather, students have a right to an automatic transfer to the next grade level. Whereas, in other countries early elementary students cannot be retained. In Poland, children in the first three grades of school cannot be retained. In Greece, the first two grades are exempt from retention. Other countries (e.g. Belgium and France) cap the number of students who can be retained or how often a student can be retained. Eurydice (2011) goes on to state that most European countries set policy criteria for retention at the central level. Academic progress is often the decisive criterion; however, behavior and absenteeism may also be used. Relatively few exceptions (e.g.

Netherlands, Denmark, and United Kingdom) permit this decision to be determined at the local level.

On the national stage, education policies have undergone numerous reform efforts influencing both retention and promotion policies. Retention and promotion policies are often set against the larger backdrop of stringent accountability mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with a focus on student proficiency and annual goals for school progress (McCombs, Kirby, & Mariano, 2010). An abbreviated listing of national influences and reform efforts include: *A Nation at Risk* report, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (USDE, 2019; USDE, 2004; USDE, 1999; USDE, 1983). All of the sitting presidents over the last three decades, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, have amended or modified policies introduced by their predecessors (Peterson & Hughes, 2011; Stewart, 2012; USDE, 2019). The grade-level retention policies have varied depending on each president's education policy. Some presidents (e.g. George W. Bush) have been in favor of strict requirements regarding state assessments and benchmarks at certain grade levels while others (e.g. Donald Trump) have been in favor of leaving education issues to the individual states to make decisions. At the state level, individual states have responded to the national policies by implementing a variety of state criteria that vary from students being required to pass assessments at benchmark grades to grade-level retention policies developed by local education agencies (Diffey, 2018; Huddleston, 2014).

Texas, in particular, has taken an aggressive approach to dealing with grade-level retention and social promotion. The inception of the accountability system was enacted in 1979 (TEA, 2009). Since that time, the demands placed on students and educators and the emphasis

placed on accountability has increased. The Student Success Initiative (SSI) pertains to grade advancement requirements for students in Grades 5 and 8. Students are required to meet the minimum assessment standards in reading and mathematics to be promoted to the next grade level (TEA, 2019h). If they fail to meet the minimum requirements on their STAAR reading and mathematics assessments, a Grade Placement Committee (GPC) is convened. The committee is tasked with developing accelerated instruction plans for students, hearing parental appeals, and determining if students are retained or promoted to the next grade level (TEA, 2019i). A more thorough explanation of national, state, and Texas policies, including historical context, is located in Chapter 2.

Methodological Concerns

Conducting research related to grade-level retention and social promotion is problematic at best. Traditional methodological practices are difficult to employ when studying grade-level retention and social promotion (Warren & Saliba, 2013). Empirical discussions about retention and social promotion are wrought with challenges due to lack and scope of data. For instance, randomized control trials cannot be utilized due to the fact that grade-level retention is a nonreversible intervention. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to place students in equivalent groups because there are a multitude of other factors involved (Light, 2015).

Another barrier to gathering accurate data is the lack of a national system for tracking grade-level retentions because several states do not report their data (NCES, 1995). Researchers are forced to rely on proxy methods and national estimates (Warren & Saliba, 2013). The calculation and reporting of retention rates are two examples. While the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported annual retention rates ranged from 1.70% to 2.70% for all grades in 2016 (NCES, 2019), others estimated combined retention rates for Grades KG–12

varied between 10% and 30% depending on the age of the students, time period, and data source (Bianchi, 2019; Corman, 2003). Studies estimated as many as 2 to 3 million children are held back on an annual basis across the United States (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018; Jimerson et al., 2005). This discrepancy in retention reporting has been attributed to ways in which states (and districts) define and report retention (Frederick and Hauser, 2008). In fact, Warren and Saliba (2013) reported that not only do "national estimates rely on imperfect proxies" (p. 320) but most states do not report retention rates at all; those who do use different methods of calculation. They go on to suggest that "grade retention is a malleable social policy" and an "intentional practice that can be used or not used with more or less frequency" (p. 320).

Studying social promotion data is also challenging. At the state level, Texas calculates retention rates for students attending Texas public schools, i.e. "measuring the percentage of students enrolled in the fall of a given school who were enrolled in the same grade the previous school year" (TEA, 2019e, p. viii). What is not reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) or the TEA is the number of students who are placed in the next grade level without meeting the academic criteria, otherwise known as social promotion (NCES, 2019). There are some aspects which are reported, but that data is misleading as well. School districts reported that they considered a number of relevant factors such as attendance, test results, teacher recommendation, and grades when making grade-level retention and social promotion decisions; however, there is not a standard protocol for making those decisions. When teacher surveys were conducted by unions, teachers admitted to promoting students who were struggling with current grade-level content (Doherty, 2004).

Despite the lack of national grade-level retention data and previously flawed empirical designs, the need for research is critical. Current research practices often focus on propensity

matching or regression discontinuity designs (Light, 2015). With the exception of survey data, other research about social promotion, especially in regard to specific students or cohorts of students, is very limited. The majority of studies on the subject focused on grade-level retention data analysis. Initial research about grade-level retention indicated that there was limited evidence proving it had a long-term impact on student achievement (NASP, 2011). Xia and Glennie (2005) pointed out gaps in the research including lack of a comparison group. Huddleston (2014) summarized several meta-analyses and reported methodological errors: sample size, lack of follow up with subjects, and statistical methods to control for selection bias. Research done in the last decade, with more rigorous methodological practices, indicated that there are short-term gains from grade-level retentions. However, those short-term gains disappeared after two years (Wu et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) is an essential element of Texas' accountability system. While its stated goal is to ensure that all students meet or exceed reading and mathematics standards in Grades 5 and 8 (TEA, 2019h), its fundamental premise is to block the practice of social promotion by requiring students meet assessment requirements at benchmark grade levels. As a result of not meeting minimum standards on the state assessments, the SSI requires that a GPC meet to implement interventions and prepare for a recommended course of action (grade-level retention or social promotion) after the third testing attempt by the student (TEA, 2019i). Aside from a unanimous GPC decision to promote or a parental appeal to the GPC (an appeal does not guarantee that a student will be promoted), the recourse is grade-level retention. Hence, social promotion and grade-level retention are intertwined.

If a student is retained, he or she becomes at-risk of not graduating (Light, 2015). When the opposite approach is taken, moving a student to the next grade level without being academically prepared, the student has not demonstrated the skills needed to be promoted. Therefore, these dichotomous choices are often presented together as the only alternative to dealing with a struggling student (NASP, 2011). Researching retention and social promotion in regard to their impact on high school graduation is critical to better understanding the implications of the Texas SSI policy. Retention and promotion research, which took into consideration student graduation cohort data impacted by GPC decisions, was limited.

The focus of the SSI is to ensure that students are academically successful in reading and mathematics (TEA, 2019h). The question of how children, who are retained or promoted by a GPC decision, perform in comparison with those who met the state standard remains relevant in a policy environment that favors test-based accountability. Since the goal of the SSI is to ensure academic success, it is imperative that a cohort be followed from the GPC decision through high school to determine the predictive validity of a GPC decision on high school graduation. The long-term impact of GPC decisions on graduation had not been studied.

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework is grounded in Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) as defined by Young and Diem (2017). The foundation of CPA considers how contextual and social factors, including systematic institutional and individual-level oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, xenophobia), influence policy development, implementation, and outcomes. Young and Diem (2017) contended that education policy encompasses complex systems, environments, historical context, and cultural background; however, it has traditionally been analyzed through a positivist approach. They went on to argue that a positivist approach to policy analysis is traditional

(describes educational changes or reforms as a linear process). The traditional approach assumes rational individuals will carefully consider all aspects of the advantages, disadvantages, and consequences of a behavior; infers that policy solutions can be planned, implemented, and evaluated as well as be conveyed to other people; and believes through policy evaluation, a problem can be identified and remedied. In contrast, CPA research examines a broader lens, incorporating a variety of perspectives and alternate strategies. Instead of focusing on the impact of the policy itself, CPA explores the deeper infrastructure of the policy (Young & Diem, 2017).

Even though this study could be aligned with the positivist approach, CPA was chosen as a theoretical framework because it is a comprehensive approach that offers a broader perspective for studying this issue. Young and Diem (2017) outlined five critical concerns:

1. Concern regarding the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality
2. Concern regarding the policy, its roots, and its development (e.g., how it emerged, what problems it was intended to solve, how it changed and developed over time, and its role in reinforcing the dominant culture)
3. Concern with the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge as well as the creation of policy "winners" and "losers"
4. Concern regarding social stratification and the broader effect a given policy has on relationships of inequality and privilege
5. Concern regarding the nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of nondominant groups (p. 4).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the criterion-related validity of Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions in 5th and 8th grades in predicting high school graduation,

controlling for selected demographics and special programs. The GPC has the authority to retain or promote students in Grades 5 and 8 based on the student's performance on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in reading and mathematics (TEA, 2019h). Research suggests that the practice of grade-level retention is problematic at best (Huddleston, 2014). Social promotion also comes at a cost; there are consequences to moving students to the next level when they are not performing on grade level (Lynch, 2013). Grade-level retention is a predictor variable that a student will not complete high school (Light, 2015); however, it is not known if GPC decisions have a similar impact.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 5th grade predict high school graduation?

2. To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 8th grade predict high school graduation?

Grades 5 and 8 were chosen because the Student Success Initiative (SSI) requires that students meet or exceed reading and mathematics standards in order to be promoted to the next grade level (TEA, 2019h). Demographics and special programs were studied to determine if these independent variables have any statistical significance in the study. The demographic data included gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The special programs indicators included special education and limited English proficiency.

The student data analyzed for the purpose of this study was as follows: Grade 5 in 2009–2010 (assessed with TAKS) and Grade 8 in 2012–2013 (assessed with STAAR). In order to

gather a comprehensive data set, Grade 5 and Grade 8 students in Texas were selected. These students met the criteria for a GPC.

The outcome variable was binary, which indicated whether or not a student graduated from high school. The research included graduation data from two years after the student was expected to finish high school.

Definition of Terms

Ethnicity: The construct definition of ethnicity in the Public Education Information Management Systems (PEIMS) Data Standards is Non-Hispanic (0) or Hispanic (1) (TEA, 2019e). The operational definition is the formal designation of Non-Hispanic or Hispanic in each student's record according to the district.

Gender: The construct definition of gender in the Public Education Information Management Systems (PEIMS) Data Standards is Male (0) or Female (1) (TEA, 2019e). The operational definition of male and female is the formal designation provided by the school district as male or female according to each student's record.

Grade Placement Committee (GPC) Decision: The construct definition of the GPC decision is the task of determining whether a student is retained in the same grade (0) or promoted to the next grade level (1) after a student fails three administrations of reading and mathematics state assessments (TEA, 2019i). The operational definition is a committee decision that allows a group of people (school administrator, teacher, and parent) to make a decision if a student is retained in the same grade level or promoted to the next grade level in Grades 5 and 8.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP): The construct definition of a Limited English Proficiency student is "a student whose primary language is other than English and whose English language skills are such that the student has difficulty performing ordinary classwork in

English. The terms LEP and English Learners (ELs) are used interchangeable" (TEA, 2019e, para 2). Students who are English proficient are coded as (0), while students with limited English proficiency are coded as (1). The operational definition of a LEP student is a student who qualifies for services as a bilingual or ESL student through the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC).

Socioeconomic Status: The construct definition of economically disadvantaged is defined as one who is eligible for free or reduced-priced meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program (TEA, 2019e). Students are coded as (0) for not economically disadvantaged or (1) for economically disadvantaged. The operational definition of economically disadvantaged is the income eligibility criteria set by the federal poverty guidelines for a household.

Special Education: The construct definition of special education in the Texas Education Code (TEC) §89.1040 is "To be eligible to receive special education services, a student must be a 'child with a disability,' as defined in 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), §300.8(a), subject to the provisions of 34 CFR, §300.8(c), the Texas Education Code §29.003, and this section. The provisions in this section specify criteria to be used in determining whether a student's condition meets one or more of the definitions in federal regulations or in state law" (TEA, 2017, p. A–3). Students who are coded as (0) for not participating in the special education program or (1) for participating in the special education program. The operational definition of special education is a student who qualifies for special education services under one of the eligible disabilities.

A complete Glossary of Terms and Glossary of Acronyms is located in Appendix A.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of this study was the time that it took to conduct a study of this magnitude. The study was limited to the sample that was chosen for this particular study. The Texas assessments have changed significantly over the course of four decades. The Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) was the original assessment, which was implemented in 1980 (TEA, 2009). Another limitation was in regard to the instruments which were utilized for the study, which include both the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). These assessments are criterion referenced tests, which have strengths as well as weaknesses. Readers should keep the limitations of the study in mind when drawing conclusions.

The study was delimited to Grade 5 and Grade 8 students in Texas (who met the criteria for a GPC meeting) and the outcome measures of graduation. Due to the non-probability nature of the sampling, external validity was limited to the study participants. Since the study was non-experimental in nature, no causal inferences were drawn.

Assumptions

The study used existing data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Electronic student data files were maintained in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). It was assumed that all of the PEIMS files were accurately collected and complete. Another assumption was that the theoretical framework for the study, the Critical Policy Analysis (CPA), was a sound foundation (Young & Diem, 2017). Finally, it was also assumed that the researcher maintained objectivity while conducting the study.

Significance of the Study

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) requires that students are retained in their current grade level if they do not meet the state assessment standards in Grades 5 and 8. Therefore, its main goal is to limit the practice of social promotion (TEA, 2011b). While local education policies may utilize other practices to support students who are not successful on the state assessments, they must defer to the SSI when addressing promotion and retention requirements. A committee (the GPC) is convened at Grades 5 and 8 if a student fails to meet assessment criteria on the reading or mathematics tests. The GPC decides if the student is expected to perform at grade level the following school year (TEA, 2019i). The committee decides if the student is retained in the same grade or promoted to the next grade level.

Research on grade-level retention indicates that it can be harmful to students both academically and emotionally (Abbott, 2014; Carifio & Carey, 2010; Wu et al., 2008; Xia & Glennie, 2005). Furthermore, conducting studies on grade-level retention and social promotion is fraught with methodological challenges (Light, 2015), which are described in further detail in Chapter 2. Although there are no data to support its outcomes, the SSI policy continues to be implemented. This study explored the gap in the research regarding GPC decisions and their predictive validity on high school graduation.

Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of the study, the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision, in addition to providing an overview of the background and setting, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, research questions, definition of terms, limitations and delimitations, assumptions, and significance of study.

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) policy mandates student grade-level retentions at Grades 5 and 8 if students fail to meet the standardized assessment passing criteria.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

To understand the influence Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions have in predicting higher school graduation, it is critical to review the literature surrounding grade-level retention and social promotion policies and practices. The review begins by addressing the historical context of the education system in the United States as a means to provide insight as to why grade-level retention or social promotion is favored depending on the sociopolitical climate of the era. For instance, Miller (1990) reported that as the education system shifted from the one room schoolhouse to the accountability system, social promotion became frowned upon. Literature is then presented to show the consequences of grade-level retention and social promotion are far reaching, including impacting a student's trajectory towards high school graduation.

Next, in order to understand the evolution of national policy as it relates to grade-level retention and social promotion, policy literature is presented relative to the development of the assessment system in Texas (USDE, 2019; USDE, 2004; USDE, 1999; USDE, 1983). The policy framework at the national level has influenced Texas to develop legislation surrounding grade-level retention and social promotion issues such as the Student Success Initiative (SSI). The SSI requires the implementation of a Grade Placement Committees (GPC). The committees make grade-level retention and social promotion decisions, which is the topic of this research (TEA, 2019i).

The review of literature is followed by the theoretical framework. Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) as defined by Young and Diem (2017) was selected as a theoretical frame to study GPC decisions relative to high school graduation. The policy development and

implementation surrounding these issues is certainly not a linear progression. Although grade-level retention and social promotion have traditionally been analyzed through a positivist approach, CPA is a comprehensive approach to analyzing these issues. It provides a framework for analyzing deeper issues that impact policy. Issues such as practiced reality, the policy process and changes, power differentials between the dominant and non-dominant culture, and social relationships are all considered (Young & Diem, 2017).

Grade-Level Retention and Social Promotion

Historical Context

Simplistically viewed, grade-level retention and social promotion are often regarded as two dichotomous options (NASP, 2011). Reviewing the historical context of grade-level retention and social promotion demonstrates that the education system seems to favor one or the other depending on the current state of sociopolitical affairs. Initially, the one-room schoolhouse reigned supreme in the mid-1800s. Students were grouped together in multi-grade and multi-age classrooms. Even though Horace Mann introduced the concept of grades based on age in the mid-1800s, roughly 70% of public schools were still organized as one-room schoolhouses in the beginning of the 20th century (Miller, 1990). Instead of a system that favored grade-level retention or social promotion, student coursework was individualized by design. Students were educated together in a multi-age and multi-grade classroom.

Once the factory model of education became prevalent, it became common practice to retain students (Rose et al., 1983). When researchers began highlighting the negative outcomes of grade-level retention in the late 1950s through the 1970s, social promotion was widely accepted (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Following the Sputnik launch and the focus on America's failing schools, *A Nation at Risk Report* was published (USDE, 1983). As a result, the

pendulum swung towards accountability and social promotion became frowned upon. The current national sociopolitical context is based on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as well as the state of Texas accountability system continue to politicize and demonize social promotion (TEA, 2019h; TEA, 2019i; USDE, 2019; USDE, 2004). Instead of relying on schools and educators to make decisions for students, national policies like Common Core (Conley, 2014) and the NCLB emerged (McCombs, Kirby, & Mariano, 2010). Those policies led to changes in the Texas accountability system including the implementation of the SSI (TEA, 2019h).

A Closer Look — International, National, and Texas Policy Approaches

Opposition to and liberal application of grade-level retention and social promotion policies and practices are not unique to the United States. Different societies and cultures view the effectiveness of retention in different ways (Cockx et al., 2018). Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain liberally apply grade repetition policies. More than 30% of students in those countries have repeated a grade prior to the age of 15 (OECD, 2016). Other countries such as Japan and Norway do not retain students while Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom are conservative about retaining students (González-Betancor & Lopez-Puig, 2016; Holmes, 2006; OECD, 2016). Less than 4% of students have been retained prior to the age of 15 in the latter two countries. The United States ranks near the middle at 11% of students repeating a grade prior to the age of 15 (Choi et al., 2018; OECD, 2016). Over the last few years, the French government has held schools accountable for the overuse of grade-level retention while the United States appears to have revived grade-level retention policies and benchmarks in a multitude of states (Cockx et al., 2018).

One major contrast of education policy between the United States and European countries is how students progress in school. Some school systems use a tracking model to group students into academic or vocational preparation; whereas, the United States has a public-school system for all students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 (Cockx et al., 2018; OECD, 2016). The number of students served by public and private school in the United States is 56.6 million (NCES, 2020). There is not a standardized national tracking system for grade-level retention in the United States, so any statistics gathered from states must be matched as closely as possible to patch together a comprehensive overview (NCES, 1995).

The estimated percentage of students who have experienced at least one grade-level retention (Grades KG–12) in the United States is between 7% to 11% (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018; OECD, 2016). Some states had annual grade-level retention rates as low as 2% while others had rates as high as 15% (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018). Even if the percentage seems miniscule, the actual number of students retained annually is between two and three million across the United States (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018; Jimerson, 2005). States such as Florida require students to pass assessments in benchmark grades; yet, there are a number of exemptions that allow students to be socially promoted without meeting the standard (Tavassolie & Winsler, 2019). In Georgia, 90% of students were moved to the next grade level despite not meeting standard on the reading assessment and 96% were promoted without demonstrating proficiency in mathematics (Caton et al., 2019). At the other end of the spectrum, the annual grade-level retention rates exceeded 10% in Mississippi and Oklahoma while Louisiana had a rate of 15% (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).

Grade-level retention decisions can be made at all grade levels for reasons which do not pertain to the GPC. Before investigating the GPC decision implications, an overview of grade-level retentions for the past decade is represented in the Tables 1 and 2 (TEA, 2019d).

Table 1

Grade-Level Retention, Grades K–6, Texas Public Schools, 2007–08 Through 2017–18

	K		1		2		3	
Year	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)
2007–08	11,457	3.3	21,852	5.9	12,132	3.4	8,918	2.6
2008–09	11,036	3.1	20,970	5.6	11,288	3.1	8,418	2.3
2009–10	10,490	2.9	19,138	5.1	10,830	2.9	7,307	2.0
2010–11	10.271	2.8	19,139	5.0	10,934	2.9	6,864	1.9
2011–12	9,828	2.6	18,314	4.8	11,139	3.0	7,480	2.0
2012–13	9,804	2.5	18,208	4.7	11,395	3.0	8,115	2.2
2013–14	9,610	2.5	18,378	4.6	11,471	3.0	8,150	2.1
2014–15	9,265	2.4	17,532	4.3	11,163	2.8	7,570	1.9
2015–16	8,609	2.3	16,329	4.1	9,837	2.4	6,153	1.5
2016–17	8,230	2.2	14,405	3.7	8,552	2.1	5,289	1.3
2017–18	7,752	2.1	12,852	3.4	7,270	1.9	4,183	1.0

	4		5		6		Total K–6	
Year	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)
2007–08	4,505	1.3	6,746	2.0	3,182	1.0	68,792	2.8
2008–09	3,984	1.1	5,735	1.7	2,792	0.8	64,223	2.6
2009–10	3,988	1.1	4,713	1.3	2,692	0.8	59,158	2.3
2010–11	3,609	1.0	4,230	1.2	2,594	0.7	57,641	2.2
2011–12	3,650	1.0	2,004	0.5	2,481	0.7	54,896	2.1
2012–13	4,585	1.2	5,548	1.5	2,951	0.8	60,606	2.3
2013–14	4,226	1.1	4,773	1.3	2,686	0.7	59,294	2.2
2014–15	3,884	1.0	3,486	0.9	2,409	0.6	55,339	2.0
2015–16	2,986	0.8	1,784	0.5	2,186	0.6	47,884	1.7
2016–17	2,561	0.6	2,572	0.7	2,082	0.5	43,691	1.6
2017–18	2,114	0.5	1,970	0.5	1,739	0.4	37,880	1.4

Table 2

Grade-Level Retention, Grades 7–12, Texas Public Schools, 2007–08 Through 2017–18

	7		8		9		10	
Year	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)
2007–08	5,052	1.5	6,323	1.9	54,831	14.7	22,214	7.2
2008–09	4,267	1.3	5,165	1.5	45,016	12.3	21,125	6.8
2009–10	3,712	1.1	4,503	1.3	40,200	10.8	18,436	5.9
2010–11	3,513	1.0	4,164	1.2	36,243	9.7	17,303	5.4
2011–12	3,618	1.0	2,900	0.8	37,250	10.0	18,720	5.7
2012–13	3,726	1.0	4,128	1.1	36,648	9.6	19,085	5.8
2013–14	3,854	1.0	3,718	1.0	34,498	8.9	19,959	5.8
2014–15	3,162	0.8	3,205	0.8	34,644	8.6	20,200	5.6
2015–16	2,784	0.7	2,111	0.6	37,091	9.0	21,851	5.9
2016–17	2,598	0.7	2,355	0.6	35,150	8.5	20,899	5.5
2017–18	2,240	0.6	1,846	0.5	31,968	7.7	20,411	5.4

	11		12		Total 7–12	
Year	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)	Retained	Rate (%)
2007–08	15,530	5.7	21,524	8.0	125,474	6.6
2008–09	15,855	5.6	22,050	7.8	113,478	5.9
2009–10	15,916	5.4	20,155	6.8	102,922	5.2
2010–11	15,046	5.1	18,516	6.1	94,785	4.8
2011–12	15,830	5.2	16,709	5.5	95,027	4.7
2012–13	15,660	5.1	16,010	5.1	95,257	4.6
2013–14	13,462	4.3	16,188	5.1	91,679	4.3
2014–15	13,546	4.2	14,849	4.6	89,606	4.1
2015–16	13,755	4.2	14,975	4.5	92,567	4.2
2016–17	13,351	3.9	14,559	4.2	88,912	3.9
2017–18	13,517	3.9	14,837	4.1	84,819	3.7

For the purpose of this study, two cohorts from Texas were examined. The students attended Grade 5 in 2009–2010 and Grade 8 in 2012–2013. If they remained with their cohort, their expected graduation was in 2017. During 2017, there were 5,385,012 students in Texas (TEA, 20202b). The percent of grade-level retentions in Grades KG–6th was 1.40%, Grades 7–12 was 3.70%, average across all grade levels was 2.60%. This number translates to 122,699

students retained in the 2016–2017 school year (TEA, 2020b). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018) reported that Texas retained between 7%–10% of students between Grades KG–12.

To gain a macro perspective, it is important to study international data on grade-level retention. Just as the variance from country to country revealed inconsistent policies at the international level, the identical phenomenon could be seen by reviewing the difference between state policies in the United States. By honing in on the state of Texas, a micro perspective of the issue of grade-level retention was studied. The statistical analyses are reported in Chapter 4.

Empirical Studies

A plethora of research concerned with grade-level retention, social promotion, and academic achievement exists. However, the findings about the causal effect of grade retention policies on academic achievement and school dropouts yielded mixed results (Choi et al., 2018; Dong, 2009; Lorence, 2014). Early studies found positive effects, but they have been criticized for their methodology (Cockx et al., 2018) (Eide & Showalter, 2001). A 14-year prospective study found that retention in Grades 1–5 led to a significant likelihood (odds ratio = 2.61) of dropping out of school (Hughes et al., 2018). Cockx et al. (2018) reported that the short-term effects on academic achievement were neutral, and the long-term effects on schooling outcomes were adverse. When short-term gains are achieved, they disappeared after two years (Huddleston, 2014; Wu et al., 2008). The subsequent literature presented provides other empirical studies connecting grade-level retention to elements such as the timing of the retention, predictors, subpopulations, and repercussions.

Numerous factors influence retention decisions. The timing of the grade-level retention has been debated. Silberglitt et al. (2006) asserted that the outcomes of early retentions were comparable to those of later grades. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP,

2011) argued the opposite. They stated that the timing of the retention was linked to whether the student decided to drop out of school. Their premise was that students retained in elementary school were less likely to drop out than students who were retained in upper grades. Further studies reported when students struggled with academics in their early years, they had a higher probability of repeating a grade (Choi et al., 2018).

Another example of a timing issue was redshirting, defined as delaying a student's entry into kindergarten for reasons not related to academics (Bassok & Reardon, 2013). Non-academic concerns such as peer relationships, age, previous retentions, self-esteem, and athletic eligibility can influence decision making about grade-level retention and social promotion (Abbott, 2014). For example, parental requests to retain a student in a grade level, despite the student's academic success, have been known to occur for athletic purposes. Redshirting, albeit a purposeful decision by parents, also had implications for students.

Isolating predictors of grade-level retention is a challenge. Research studies are "unable to determine whether grade retention is the direct cause of poor academic achievement/school failure, or if it is the result of the students' prior characteristics that increase their probability of failure" (Choi et al., 2018, p. 25). Student ages and development play a role in determining the need for grade-level retention (González-Betancor & Lopez-Puig, 2016). Issues facing parents such as maternal education (Tavassolie & Winsler, 2019), health issues, and incarceration (Hinojosa et al., 2019) were correlated to grade-level retention rates in children. Yang et al. (2018) examined maternal hardship and low school engagement. The study reported that these characteristics were associated with dropping out of school. Furthermore, vulnerable groups were marginalized as a result of high-stakes retention policies (Tavassolie & Winsler, 2019).

Specifically, Hinojosa et al. (2019) researched adverse childhood experiences (ACE). Particular ACEs equated to worse educational outcomes. Some of the most traumatic ACEs included victims of child abuse, children and mothers with poor health, witnessing domestic violence, and economic hardship. Structural disadvantages like those mentioned above, in conjunction with trauma, created an accumulation of risk (Hinojosa et al., 2019).

The repercussions of grade-level retention and social promotion are far reaching. Subpopulations are impacted in a multitude of ways. Males are retained at a rate twice that of females (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015; TEA, 2014). Race/ethnicity and poverty are also risk factors when it comes to repeating a grade (Aud et al., 2010; Locke & Sparks, 2019). Students with special needs and limited English proficiency had a disproportionate number of retentions as well (NASP, 2011). Huang (2014) contended that "young-for-grade" (students who enter school earlier than their peers) impacted socioemotional skills, which was a factor leading to grade-level retention. Choi et al. (2018) studied grade-level retention data in Spain, which has one of the highest international retention rates. They concluded "not only is it [grade-level retention] an ineffective policy, it is also unjust, as it has a discriminatory effect by SES" (p. 35). Other studies also support these findings. Researchers in Florida found that maternal education and socioeconomic status affected third grade retention. Mothers who were more educated (bachelor's degree) pushed for exemptions such as teacher portfolios, and their child was more likely to be promoted (LiCalsi et al., 2019).

The cost of grade-level retention is staggering. In addition to repeating a grade level, retention can lead to long-term financial burdens. Postponed entry into the workforce, reduction in taxes, and decreased earning power of an individual are fiscal outcomes (Xia & Glennie, 2005). Long-term costs of crime, unemployment, public assistance, and prison expenses are also

a factor albeit difficult to calculate (Jimerson et al., 2005; Xia & Glennie, 2005). Another concern is the impact of a grade-level retention in delaying access to postsecondary education (Eide & Showalter, 2001). The increase in costs on an already under resourced and constrained institution further weakens the education system (Caton et al., 2019).

The resolute belief, that grade-level retention is an effective practice to ensure educational outcomes and hold schools accountable, places political pressure on schools to retain students who are not performing (Xia & Glennie, 2005). Research about long-term academic gains did not support the practice of retention (Huddleston, 2014). Additionally, gaps exist in the literature about how retention and social promotion are implemented (NASP, 2011). Collectively, these dynamics continue to give cause to question the practice of grade-level retention.

Assessment Policies: The Decline of Social Promotion

Educational issues have long been at the forefront of legislative and regulatory policymaking at the state and national levels. *A Nation at Risk* was released in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education under Ronald Reagan's administration. The report documented the lack of student progress using international assessment scores and College Board data as indicators of American students' inability to compete with their peers in other nations. The first paragraph of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) concluded that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity" (p. 1). The report called for "constructive reform" to halt what was perceived as "a period of long-term decline in educational achievement" (USDE, 1983, p. 8).

The subsequent administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump also focused on education issues, albeit from different

perspectives. The first national education goals in U.S. history were passed in 1989 during the George H. W. Bush era. In 1994 Congress passed two additional education goals, which were added to the original six National Education Goals (Stewart, 2012). In his State of the Union addresses in 1997, 1998, and 1999, President Bill Clinton emphasized academic accountability for students through achievement testing in addition to advocating that social promotion practices cease (Peterson & Hughes, 2011).

George W. Bush championed for strong accountability focused on core academics with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The United States Department of Education (USDE) (2004) emphasized that "The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (para. 2). The NCLB legislation insisted that all students achieve minimum standards on standardized testing. Sanctions were established for schools that failed to close the gaps for economically disadvantaged and minority student populations (USDE, 2004). In spite of the NCLB's charge to close the gaps for disadvantaged students, this policy contradicts research findings on grade-level retention. "The highest retention rates are found among poor, minority, and inner-city youth" (NASP, 2011, p. 1).

Another revision of the ESEA was scheduled for 2007 under the George W. Bush administration. However, tensions remained high over accountability and college readiness standards. As a result of the education reform movement and a report released in 2008 entitled *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*, the governors and chief state school officers developed national standards. A draft of the Common

Core State Standards was released in June 2009. Public comments and feedback were accepted. The final version was given to states in June 2010 (Conley, 2014). Texas was one of four states that did not adopted the Common Core Standards (ASCD, 2014). In 2010 the Obama administration publicly supported the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which emphasized preparing students for college and careers. Eight years after the re-authorization was predicted, President Obama signed the ESSA on December 10, 2015 (USDE, 2019).

According to the current administration's official policy, the goal of Trump's education policy is to ensure that students can compete in a global economy (The White House, 2020). The reform policies aim to hold higher education institutions accountable to taxpayers and students in addition to passing reform measures in the student aid sector. The White House (2020) also unabashedly supports school choice for parents. Another change from the previous administration is the policy perspective that states should control educational policy instead of the federal government (USDE, 2020).

Individual states have responded to federal legislation and reform efforts by developing policies concerning grade-level retention and social promotion. For instance, twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have retention policies in place designed to ensure students are on grade level by the end of third grade (Diffey, 2018). Some states (e.g. Maine and Oklahoma) allow local education agencies to determine retention criteria while other states such as Florida and Georgia utilize state assessment standards, in addition to local policies, to determine if students pass or fail pre-determined grade levels. Overall, seventeen states have established grade promotion standards that include assessment criteria (Jacob, 2017).

The accountability system in Texas mirrors the theoretical principles set forth by national legislation. The Texas state assessment program was enacted in 1979 by the 66th Texas

Legislature requiring students to demonstrate basic skills in reading, mathematics, and writing at grades 3, 5, and 9 (TEA, 2009). Over the years, the assessment and accountability system has become a fundamental component of the education system in Texas. The goal of the assessment and accountability system is to track student achievement and progress towards mastery of the state curriculum. The accountability systems are the cornerstone of the model utilized to determine if students are making progress on an annual basis (TEA, n.d.).

Since the inception of state testing, tremendous changes have occurred. The first statewide assessment, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), was introduced in 1980. Beginning in 1986, students were assessed using the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS). For the first time, students were required to receive a passing score to be eligible for a high school diploma. When the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test was introduced in 1990, students in grades 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 participated in fall assessments. Later, the assessments were moved to the spring. During the TAAS era, End of Course (EOC) examinations appeared, Spanish tests were offered, and special education students could take the State-Developed Alternate Assessment (SDAA). By the time that the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) appeared on the horizon in 2003, the structure of the assessment changed dramatically. The state reported that the test was designed to measure the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum more extensively than the previous tests. Under the TAKS system, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and the Linguistically Accommodated Testing (LAT), and the TAKS-Alternate (TAKS-Alt) emerged (TEA, 2009).

Initially, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test, which was introduced in 2011, mandated new tests for grades 3–8 as well as 12 EOC exams. Prior to

releasing the STAAR exams, the state released detailed information about changes in the rigor and scope of the testing requirements. Students were expected to solve problems that were at a higher level of complexity. Furthermore, the emphasis shifted to college and career readiness, increased writing expectations, progress indicators, and a tiered accommodation chart (TEA, n.d.). The allowable tests under the STAAR generation included STAAR, STAAR Spanish, STAAR L, TELPAS, STAAR-Alt 2, and a specific test for students with disabilities, STAAR-Accommodated (STAAR-A) (TEA, 2019g). Since the lineup was introduced, STAAR-A has been eliminated and the high school assessments (TEA, n.d.).

Groups across the state including Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA) (also called Moms Against Drunk Testing), a grass roots parent group, successfully lobbied the legislation for changes in the amount of assessments administered, especially to high school students (Stanford, 2013). In addition to changing credit requirements for graduation in 2013, House Bill 5 (HB 5) limited the number of EOC tests required for high school graduation to five: English 1, English 2, Algebra 1, Biology, and U.S. History (TEA, n.d.).

Student Success Initiative

A cornerstone of Texas' accountability is the Student Success Initiative (SSI). While its aim is to ensure that all students meet or exceed reading and mathematics standards (TEA, 2019h), its intent was to stop the practice of social promotion by requiring students to meet assessment requirements at benchmark grade levels. Originally introduced in 1993 during the 76th Texas Legislative Session under Senate Bill 4, the SSI was not signed by the Governor until 1999 (Texas Legislature Online, n.d.).

The requirements of the SSI are outlined in the Texas Education Code (TEC) §28.0211, Satisfactory Performance on Assessment Instruments Required; Accelerated Instruction.

> The TEC §28.0211(a) mandates that a student may not be promoted to (1) the sixth grade program to which the student would otherwise be assigned if the student does not perform satisfactorily on the fifth grade mathematics and reading assessment instruments under Section 39.023; or (2) the ninth grade program to which the student would otherwise be assigned if the student does not perform satisfactorily on the eighth grade mathematics and reading assessment instruments under Section 39.023 (TEA, 2019i, p. 4).

Consequently, passing the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests in Grades 5 and 8 is mandatory in order to meet promotion requirements. In theory, the Student Success Initiative (SSI) policy was supposed to end the practice of social promotion.

Grade Placement Committee

According to the SSI policy, each school district must establish a Grade Placement Committee (GPC). The committee is tasked with developing accelerated instruction plans for students, hearing parental appeals, and determining if students are retained or promoted to the next grade level (TEA, 2019i).

If a student fails to meet the assessment standards on the first administration of the reading and mathematics STAAR tests in Grades 5 and 8, the school is required to provide accelerated instruction for the student (Grade 3 students were initially included, but later exempted from the requirements). If a student fails to perform satisfactorily on the assessments after two attempts, then a GPC is convened to implement interventions and review the student's accelerated instruction plan prior to the next testing opportunity (TEA, 2019i). A student can attempt the reading and mathematics assessments a third time in the summer. If a student fails all three attempts of reading and mathematics, the student is automatically retained.

However, the parent can appeal the decision and request a GPC meeting. The GPC's role is to review the student's progress, assessment results, grades, other relevant information, and teacher input to determine if student is likely to perform satisfactorily at the next grade level. In order for the student to advance to the next grade level, the GPC decision must be unanimous. Otherwise, the student remains in the same grade level for a second time (TEA, 2019i).

One serious concern is that interventions are not consistently applied throughout the state of Texas. They can be defined as programs, strategies, or services given to students. Each campus determines the intervention and specified period of time that the interventions should occur. After interventions occur for the specified time frame, they should be monitored. If the interventions are not successful, adjustments are required. Unfortunately, there is no consistency across the state and often from campus to campus within one school district in regard to academic interventions.

Even though the policy requiring a grade-level retention at Grades 5 and 8 might appear to be straightforward, there are numerous mitigating factors that can also impact student performance. Some of those issues include attendance, at-risk status, discipline history, an identified disability, number of previous retentions, and socioeconomic status (Light, 2015). The policy does not allow the committee to review these factors and determine if they affect student performance.

The sole responsibility for the decision of grade-level retention lies with the GPC. "According to the TEC §28.0211(e), a student may be promoted only if the GPC decision is unanimous and if the student has completed all required accelerated instruction" (TEA, 2019i, p. 21). The loophole that allows the GPC to promote students despite their performance on the state

reading and mathematics assessments circumvents the purpose of the policy to end social promotion.

Impact on High School Graduation

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) policy continues to be implemented across the state of Texas despite the lack of research on the effectiveness of grade-level retention as a consequence of failing to meet minimum standards on the Grades 5 and 8 reading and mathematics assessments. Even though the SSI has evolved over time, grade-level retention is the foundation of the policy. Individual students are undoubtedly affected by assessment policies enacted by the Texas Legislature, especially in regard to grade-level retention and social promotion policies addressed by the SSI (TEA, 2011b). If a student is retained for any reason, the student then becomes at-risk for dropping out of school.

Before studying the impact of the GPC decision on graduation, it is important to review a synopsis of longitudinal graduation data in Texas (TEA, 2019f). When reviewing the results of this study, this overview serves as a reference point for looking at trends based on gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Table 3

Grade 9 Four-Year Longitudinal Graduation and Dropout Rates, Excluding Individual Graduation Committee Graduates, by Race/Ethnicity, Economic Status, and Gender, Texas Public Schools, Class of 2018

		Graduated		Continued		Received TxCHSE[a]		Dropped out		Graduated, continued, or received TxCHSE	
Group	Class	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)
African American	46,075	39,544	85.8	2,330	5.1	196	0.4	4,005	8.7	42,070	91.3

Group	Class	Graduated		Continued		Received TxCHSE[a]		Dropped out		Graduated, continued, or received TxCHSE	
		Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)	Number	Rate (%)
American Indian	1,309	1,103	84.3	74	5.7	5	0.4	127	9.7	1,182	90.3
Asian	15,531	14,964	96.3	322	2.1	15	0.1	230	1.5	15,301	98.5
Hispanic	179,500	157,254	87.6	8,562	4.8	710	0.4	12,974	7.2	166,526	92.8
Pacific Islander	547	469	85.7	27	4.9	3	0.5	48	8.8	499	91.2
White	110,294	103,114	93.5	2,787	2.5	690	0.6	3,703	3.4	106,591	96.6
Multicultural	6,957	6,348	91.2	248	3.6	38	0.5	323	4.6	6,634	95.4
Econ. disad.[b]	189,018	163,680	86.6	9,225	4.9	967	0.5	15,146	8.0	173,872	92.0
Not econ. disad.	171,195	159,116	92.9	5,125	3.0	690	0.4	6,264	3.7	164,931	96.3
Female	178,143	163,658	91.9	5,573	3.1	578	0.3	8,334	4.7	169,809	95.3
Male	182,070	159,138	87.4	8,777	4.8	1,079	0.6	13,076	7.2	168,994	92.8
State	360,213	322,796	89.6	14,350	4.0	1,657	0.5	21,410	5.9	338,803	94.1

Note. Parts may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
[a]Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency. [b]Economically Disadvantaged.

When students are retained multiple times, the likelihood of them leaving school before graduation is significantly higher (Light, 2015). The SSI policy requires students be retained if they fail to meet minimum standards on their state assessments in reading and mathematics. When the SSI policy is implemented and students face the GPC, they can be retained multiple times prior to entering high school (TEA, 2019i). Retentions, especially multiple grade-level retentions, jeopardize a student's prospect of graduation from high school. While the research on the impact of grade-level retention and social promotion is extensive, "there are several

unresolved empirical questions about the effects of retention on academic achievement, developmental outcomes, high school completion, and post-secondary outcomes" (Warren & Saliba, 2013, p. 321).

Texas Education Code and Texas Administrative Code

The Texas Education Code (TEC) is comprised of enacted legislation, while the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) encompasses agency rules promulgated by the Texas Education Agency. The TAC expounds upon the TEC legislation. The Student Success Initiative (SSI) policy is addressed in both the Texas Education Code (TEC) (Education Service Center (ESC) Region 18, 2019) and the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) (TEA, 2002a). The regulations on the SSI policy are comprehensive, detailed, and warrant further explanation. Texas Education Code §28.0211 specifies the requirements for the SSI in regard to promotion requirements, accelerated instruction, number of additional assessment opportunities, parent notification, authority of the grade placement committee, student-teacher ratio for accelerated instruction groups, special education program guidelines, funding for accelerated instruction, and teacher qualifications (ESC Region 18, 2019, p. 1–3). Several key points are defined in the TEC §28.0211. The commissioner is responsible to "provide guidelines to districts on research-based best practices and effective strategies that a district may use in developing an accelerated instruction program" (ESC Region 18, 2019, para. a–3). Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions are also addressed. If a student fails to meet proficiency standards on the reading and mathematics assessments, the committee's decision must be unanimous. Furthermore, the GPC may only decide in favor of a student's promotion if the committee determines "the student is likely to perform at grade level" in the future (ESC Region 18, 2019, para. e). Finally, the code does not prohibit grade-level retention for students who meet the assessment standards. Students

may still be retained “in accordance with state law or school district policy” (ESC Region 18, 2019, para. g).

Texas Administrative Code Chapter 101. Assessment, Subchapter BB also expounds upon the SSI policy, grade advancement testing requirements, test administration and schedule, accelerated instruction, role of the grade placement committee, communication to parents, alternative assessment, parental waivers, scoring and reporting, and credit for high school graduation (TEA, 2002a, p. 1–8). Unlike the TEC §28.0211, the TAC Chapter 101 explains test administration and schedule information including specifics regarding students with one or more absences. “Each eligible student who is absent or does not receive a test score for all three test opportunities and is consequently retained shall receive other appropriate means of evaluation” (TEA, 2002a, para. §101.2005 c (1)). School districts are given the option for alternative assessments, which “shall include national recognized instruments for obtaining valid and reliable data” (TEA, 2002a, para. §101.2011 a). In addition to mentioning special education students, the TAC Chapter 101 also summarizes the mandatory procedures for English Learners (ELs). “The student's language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) shall determine the appropriate assessment and accelerated instruction for each eligible student” (TEA, 2002a, para. §101.2003 e). In closing, the TAC Chapter 101 gives school districts the flexibility to place students in age-appropriate environments. “This policy may specify the age by which a retained student should be placed on the next level campus though not yet promoted to the grade of that campus” (TEA, 2002a, para. §101.2019 b).

Both the TEC §28.0211 and the TAC Chapter 101 outline the minutiae of the SSI policy. Although some policy issues are mentioned in both regulations, they differ in a few areas (already mentioned in the latter two paragraphs). One commonality is their adherence to the

grade advancement criteria requiring students in Grades 5 and 8 to meet the assessment standards on the reading and mathematics exams. Despite the extensive provisions that outline the grade-level retention requirements in the SSI policy, the research does not support grade-level retention as the best option for students (Light, 2015). A copy of the TEC §28.0211 and the TAC Chapter 101 in their entirety is located in Appendices B and C.

The procedures for the SSI policy have been refined since it became effective on September 1, 1999. If a student performs satisfactorily on the Grade 5 or 8 standardized assessments, the local school district policy is applied to determine grade-level advancement. If a student does not perform satisfactorily, the Student Success Initiative Manual contains a flowchart outlining the process that should be followed in regard to the SSI policy. The flowchart outlines the specific procedures and steps that are required for grade advancement. It was developed to clarify the process, and the chart evolved as the process changed over time (TEA, 2019i). For example, the requirement for Grade 3 students to meet the standard for promotion was eliminated when the policy was changed to exclude third grade students from the grade advancement criteria (TEA, 2009). The chart provides guidance for administrators and teachers. In addition to the flowchart, the manual also includes several forms for use at the campus level (TEA, 2019i). A copy of the flowchart is located in Appendix D.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Policy Analysis

The theoretical framework for this study is Critical Policy Analysis as defined by Young and Diem (2017). Traditionally, education policy has been analyzed through a positivist approach. The Stage Model explains the policy process as six stages: (a) issue definition; (b) agenda setting; (c) policy formulation; (d) policy adoption; (e) implementation; and (f) evaluation (Fowler, 2013). Critics argued that the focus of the policy-making process from the

positivistic viewpoint is the implementation and impact of the policy (Ball, 1994). In contrast, the value of CPA is attempting to understand "the complex connections between education and the relations of dominance and subordination in the larger society – and the movements that are trying to interrupt these relations" (Apple, 2019, p. 276). Critical Policy Analysis considers how contextual and social factors, including systematic institutional and individual-level oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, xenophobia), influence policy development, implementation, and outcomes (Young & Diem, 2017). Young and Diem (2017) contended that education policy encompasses complex systems, environments, historical context, and cultural background.

The positivist approach assumes rational individuals will carefully consider all aspects of the advantages, disadvantages, and consequences of a behavior; infer that policy solutions can be planned, implemented, and evaluated as well as be conveyed to other people; and believe through policy evaluation, a problem can be identified and remedied. In contrast, CPA research examines a broader perspective incorporating a variety of perspectives and alternate strategies (Young & Diem, 2017). Apple (2019) described the process as "employ[ing] critical approaches to document the interruptions, actions, and movements that continually challenge the dominant forms of policy and practice that generate and reproduce inequalities" (p. 285).

Young and Diem (2017) outline five critical concerns:

1. Concern regarding the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality
2. Concern regarding the policy, its roots, and its development (e.g., how it emerged, what problems it was intended to solve, how it changed and developed over time, and its role in reinforcing the dominant culture)
3. Concern with the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge as well as the creation of policy "winners" and "losers"

4. Concern regarding social stratification and the broader effect a given policy has on relationships of inequality and privilege
5. Concern regarding the nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of nondominant groups (p. 4).

Even though this study aligns with the positivist approach, CPA was chosen as a theoretical framework because it is a comprehensive approach that offers a broader perspective for studying this issue. The historical context of grade-level retention and social promotion presented in this chapter along with the history of national and Texas assessment policies provide a context for how the policy has changed and developed over time. Whereas, the background information on the Student Success Initiative (SSI) and the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) highlight the stark contrast between policy and practiced reality. Meanwhile, the literature review brings to the forefront that substantial inequalities exist between the policies governing grade-level retentions and social promotions. Undoubtedly, specific populations and subgroups are adversely impacted by the inextricable link marrying policy and practice.

Summary

Grade-level retention and social promotion are issues of grave concern and not just in the. United States. The political agendas at the national and state level have dictated changes in policies over the past four decades (TEA, 2009; TEA, n.d.; USDE, 2019; USDE, 2004; USDE, 1999; USDE, 1983). In particular, Texas legislation stemming from the Student Success Initiative (SSI) and Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions attempt to halt social promotion (TEA, 2011b). The research indicates that the repercussions of decisions about grade-level retention and social promotion are severe, which can affect a student's high school

graduation (Light, 2015). In order to conduct a thorough study befitting of these issues, the theoretical framework of Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) was chosen (Young & Diem, 2017).

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine the criterion-related validity of Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions in 5th and 8th grades in predicting high school graduation, controlling for selected demographics and special programs. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 5th grade predict high school graduation?

2. To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 8th grade predict high school graduation?

Research Design

The study employed a correlational design. Correlational research is often conducted in applied behavioral sciences when the manipulation of variables is difficult or impossible. The purpose of correlational research is to determine if relationships exist between or among variables (Vogt et al., 2012). There are two types of correlational inquiries, namely, relationship studies and prediction studies. Relationship studies explore/explain associations between/among the variables, utilizing correlational techniques. Prediction studies are conducted to predict future behavior(s) based on predictor variables, which should be measured before the behavior occurs (Gall et al., 2015). This study was predictive in nature. Due to non-experimental nature of the study, no causal inferences were drawn.

The data included the GPC decision, which was the predictor variable, three student demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status), and two special program variables (special education and limited English proficiency) as potential confounding

variables. The study was conducted to examine the link(s) between the predictor variable and the binary outcome measure of graduation, controlling for the selected demographic characteristics and special programs. Unique contributions of all variables were examined.

Independent/Predictor and Confounding Variables

There was one major predictor variable, the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision, which was coded as (0) retained in the same grade level, or (1) promoted to the next grade level. The confounding variables of demographic characteristics and special programs were also binary in nature. Specifically, gender was coded as (0) for male and (1) for female. Ethnicity was categorized as Non-Hispanic (0) or Hispanic (1). Socioeconomic status was operationalized as not economically disadvantaged (0) or economically disadvantaged (1). Special education and limited English proficiency were all coded as either 0 = No or 1 = Yes.

Dependent Variables/Outcome Measures

There was one dependent variable: graduation. Graduation was coded as (1) earned a high school diploma, or (0) did not earn a high school diploma.

Instrumentation

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) assessment was utilized when the Student Success Initiative (SSI) policy was initially put into effect. In 2011, the assessment changed to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). For the purpose of the study, the students' TAKS (5^{th} graders) and STAAR (8^{th} graders) scores in mathematics and reading were used to determine if the GPC committee must convene. If a student failed to meet standard on all three administrations of the reading and mathematics assessments, the committee was required to make a GPC decision. The GPC decision (0 = retained in the same grade level,

or 1 = promoted to next grade level) was derived from student performance on the state assessment in reading and mathematics.

Subject Selection

The subjects were Texas students in Grade 5 (2009–2010, n = 17,451) and Grade 8 (2012–2013, n = 25,199) who met the criteria for a GPC. During the 2009-2010 school year, there were 361,103 students in the 5th grade (TEA, 2020a). Of those students, 4,713 students or 1.30% were retained (TEA, 2011a). During the 2012-2013 school year, there were 376,252 students in the 8th grade (TAPR, 2020c). Of those students, 2,900 or 0.80% were retained (TEA, 2015). Due to masking of data provided by the TEA, the cases in the study were a sample of the total number of students in Texas during those school years.

These groups were chosen because they represented the cohorts of students who were required to meet minimum standards for reading and mathematics in 5th and 8th grades in order to be promoted to the next grade level. Due to the non-probability nature of the sampling, external validity/generalizability of the results was limited to the study's participants (Gall et al., 2015). Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (Appendix E).

Data Collection

The study used existing data that were obtained from the TEA. The researcher contacted the TEA Public Information Office to request the abovementioned raw data. The TEA sent the researcher two Excel spreadsheet files, which were imported into the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The IRB granted permission to use the data for the purpose of the study (Appendix F).

Data Analysis

The SPSS (IBM Corp, 2017) was used to manipulate and analyze the data. The dependent and independent variables, as described earlier, were binary in nature. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and organize the data (Field, 2018). Univariate and multivariate inferential statistics were used to answer the research questions. The level of significance was set at 0.01, a priori.

A series of Chi-Square Test of Independence (Field, 2018) was performed to examine the associations between the outcome measure and the predictor and confounding variables. The test involves inferences about the independence of the modes of classification in a contingency table (a two-way table showing the contingency between two variables where the variables have been classified into mutually exclusive categories and the cell entries are frequencies). The null hypothesis is that the two modes of classification on which the contingency table is based are independent of each other.

To answer the research questions, two Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) (Field, 2018) analyses were performed to examine the unique contribution of the GPC in predicting graduation after controlling the demographics and special programs variables. The purpose of the BLR is to regress a dichotomous dependent (criterion) variable on a set of independent (predictor) variables in order to estimate the probability of an event occurring, using a non-linear model. The BLR assesses the likelihood of each of the independent variables contributing to the prediction of the criterion variable while controlling for all other variables in the model. The dichotomous dependent variable is transformed, using a logistic transformation, which allows it to range from minus infinity to plus infinity (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2013). The Likelihood-ratio Chi-square test was used to test the statistical significance of the prediction model (Field, 2018). The

statistical significance of the individual predictor variables was examined, using the Wald statistic. The Nagelkerke R^2 and classification tables were employed to examine the practical significance and the power of the model. The predictor variables of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education indicator, and limited English proficiency program were entered into the prediction equation first, followed by the GPC decision in the second step. The Hosmer-Lemeshow Chi-square was performed to determine the goodness-of-fit of the model (Field, 2018; Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2013).

The probability (p) of the event (graduation) occurring was estimated by p (event) = 1 / (1 + e^{-z}), where z = Constant + B1 (gender) + B2 (ethnicity) + B3 (socioeconomic status) + B4 (special education indicator) + B5 (limited English proficiency program) + B6 (GPC decision), and e = the base of the natural logarithms, 2.718 (Field, 2018; Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2013). If p is greater than 0.50, the event will occur. The odds of the event can be computed by the odds = p / (1-p); if it is greater than one, then the odds are in favor of the event.

The odds ratios (OR) for two by two contingency tables were computed to better understand the contributions of the confounding and predictor variables. An example of OR is the probability that a child with eczema will also have hay fever. Out of 561 with eczema, 141 had hay fever and 420 did not, resulting in the odds of 141/420 = 0.34. Among the 14,453 that did not have eczema, 928 had hay fever and 13,525 did not have hay fever, resulting in the odds of 928/13,525 = 0.07. Both odds are low, but their ratio is 0.34/0.07 = 4.86, meaning that a person with eczema is 4.86 times as likely to have a hay fever as is a person without it (Bland & Altman, 2000).

Summary

This study employed existing data. No causal inferences were drawn due to the non-experimental nature of the study. The non-probability sample was not representative of all grade 5 or grade 8 students. Descriptive, univariate, and multivariate statistical techniques were utilized to analyze the data. The practical significance of the findings was investigated.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine the criterion-related validity of Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions in 5th and 8th grades in predicting high school graduation, controlling for selected demographics and special programs. The study used existing data for Grade 5 (2009–2010) and Grade 8 (2012–2013) cohorts. The GPC decision (promotion to the next grade or retention in the same grade) was the main predictor variable. Gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), special education (SPED) indicator, and limited English proficiency (LEP) program were the confounding variables. Graduation was the outcome measure. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and organize the data. Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) analysis was performed to formulate the prediction equation. The odds ratios were computed to examine the practical significance of the findings. The level of significance was set, a priori, at 0.01.

Grade Five

A Profile of Subjects

In 2009-2012 the total number of 5th grade students who participated in a GPC was 30,242, however, the 5th grade sample used in this study consisted of 17,451 students. The majority of the students were male (53.40%), Hispanic (71.70%), economically disadvantaged (88.60%), not in special education (88.00%), and English proficient (59.20%). These demographic and special program characteristics were the confounding variables. The overwhelming majority of the students (90.80%) had been promoted to the next grade, which was the operational definition for the GPC for the purpose of this study. All were treated as binary variables; specifically, the GPC decision (0 = retained, 1 = promoted), gender (0 = male,

1= female), ethnicity (0 = Non-Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic), socioeconomic status (0 = not economically disadvantaged, 1 = economically disadvantaged), special education (0 = no, 1 = yes), and limited English proficiency (0 = no, 1 = yes). Results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Demographic and Special Program Characteristics of the Subjects, 5th Grade, n = 17,451

Variable	F	%
Gender		
Male	9,327	53.40
Female	8,124	46.60
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	12,505	71.70
Non-Hispanic	4,946	28.30
Socioeconomic Status		
Disadvantaged	15,455	88.60
Not Disadvantaged	1,996	11.40
Special Education		
Not in Special Education	15,351	88.00
Special Education	2,100	12.00
Limited English Proficiency		
English Proficient	10,334	59.20
Limited English Proficient	7,117	40.80
GPC Decision		
Promoted	15,846	90.80
Retained	1,605	9.20

Dependent Variable

The outcome variable was graduation, which was coded as either 0 = no or 1 = yes. More than half of the 5th grade students (54.40%) had graduated.

Prediction of Graduation

A BLR was performed. The confounding variables of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education program, and limited English proficiency program were entered into the

model first and accounted for 2.70% of the variation, which was statistically significant, χ^2 (5, N = 17,451) = 350.35, $p < 0.01$ and correctly classified 57.20% of the cases. The GPC decision was entered next. The six variables together accounted for 2.80% of the variation, which was statistically significant, χ^2 (6, N = 17,451) = 373.23, $p < 0.01$. The unique contribution of the GPC decision (0.10%) was trivial. The model with the six variables correctly classified 57.20% of the cases. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test showed that the model fit the data, χ^2 (8, N = 17,451) = 11.30, $p = 0.18$. The prediction equation was: Graduation = -0.03 + 0.37 (GENDER) + 0.16 (ETHN) – 0.41 (SES) – 0.29 (SPED) + 0.23 (LEP) + 0.26 (GPC). Results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Logistic Regression Model for Graduation, 5th Grade, n = 17,451

Predictor	B	Wald	p
Gender	0.37	138.01	< .01
Ethnicity	0.16	17.40	< .01
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	-0.41	67.68	< .01
Special Education (SPED)	-0.29	37.41	< .01
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	0.23	40.68	< .01
GPC Decision	0.26	22.92	< .01
Constant	-0.03		

Coding: Gender (0 = Male, 1= Female), Ethnicity (0 = Non-Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic), SES (0 = Not Economically Disadvantaged, 1 = Economically Disadvantaged), Special Education (0 = No, 1 = Yes), Limited English Proficiency (0 = No, 1 = Yes), GPC Decision (0 = retained, 1 = promoted)

A series of corrected-for-continuity Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed to better understand the contributions of the predictor and confounding variables in explaining graduation. It was followed by the computation and interpretation of the odd ratios for the two by two contingency tables. As can be seen in Table 6, the associations were statistically significant. With respect to the confounding variables, the odds ratios showed that females, Hispanics, not economically disadvantaged, not in special education programs, and those with limited English

proficiency were respectively 1.45, 1.30, 1.38, 1.48, and 1.32, times more likely to graduate than were the students in the comparison groups. Regarding the major predictor variable, the GPC decision, students who had been promoted in 5th grade were 1.21 times more likely to graduate than did the students who had been retained.

Table 6

Predictors of Graduation, 5th Grade, n = 17,451

	Graduation				
	Yes		No		
	F	%	F	%	χ^2
Gender					
Female	4,823	50.80	3,301	41.50	
Male	4,678	49.20	4,649	58.50	148.18*
Ethnicity					
Hispanic	7,038	74.10	5,467	68.80	
Non-Hispanic	2,463	25.90	2,483	31.20	59.81*
Socioeconomic Status					
Disadvantaged	8,276	87.10	7,179	90.30	
Not Disadvantaged	1,225	12.90	771	9.70	43.31*
Special Education					
No	8,537	89.90	6,814	85.70	
Yes	964	10.10	1,136	14.30	69.79*
Limited English Proficiency					
No	5,339	56.20	4,995	62.80	
Yes	4,162	43.80	2,955	37.20	78.65*
GPC Decision					
Promoted	8,695	91.50	7,151	89.90	
Retained	806	8.50	799	10.10	12.54*

*$p < 0.01$

Grade Eight

A Profile of Subjects

In 2012-2013 the total number of 8th grade students who participated in a GPC was 47,060, however, the 8th grade sample used in this study consisted of 25,199 students. The majority of the students were male (53.90%), Hispanic (71.40%), economically disadvantaged (79.20%), not in special education (87.60%), and English proficient (80.20%). The overwhelming majority of the students (97.90%) had been promoted to the next grade. All variables were binary in nature. Results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

Demographic and Special Program Characteristics of the Subjects, 8th Grade, n = 25,199

Variable	F	%
Gender		
Male	13,575	53.90
Female	11,624	46.10
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	17,992	71.40
Non-Hispanic	7,207	28.60
Economically Disadvantaged		
Economically Disadvantaged	19,967	79.20
Not Economically Disadvantaged	5,232	20.80
Special Education		
Not in Special Education	22,073	87.60
Special Education	3,126	12.40
Limited English Proficiency		
English Proficient	20,214	80.20
Limited English Proficient	4,985	19.80
GPC Decision		
Promoted	24,661	97.90
Retained	538	2.10

Dependent Variable

Graduation was the outcome variable, which was coded as either 0 = no or 1 = yes. The majority of the 8th graders (63.20%) had graduated.

Prediction of Graduation

Another BLR was performed. Gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education program, and limited English proficiency program (the confounding variables) were entered into the model first and accounted for 3.20% of the variation, which was statistically significant, χ^2 (5, N = 25,199) = 587.96, $p < 0.01$. The prediction power of the model was 62.80%. Next, the GPC decision was entered into the prediction equation. The six variables together accounted for 5.50% of the variation, which was statistically significant, χ^2 (6, N = 25,199) = 1,034.77, $p < 0.01$. The GPC decision had a unique contribution of 2.30%. The model with the six variables correctly classified 64.10% of the cases. The goodness-of-fit test was statistically significant; thus, the model did not fit the data, χ^2 (8, N = 25,199) = 54.05, $p < 0.01$. The prediction equation was: Graduation = -1.38 + 0.28 (GENDER) + 0.36 (ETHN) – 0.41 (SES) – 0.31 (SPED) – 0.44 (LEP) + 2.04 (GPC). Results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Logistic Regression Model for Graduation, 8th Grade, n = 25,199

Predictor	B	Wald	p
Gender	0.28	107.37	< .01
Ethnicity	0.36	136.49	< .01
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	-0.41	135.03	< .01
Special Education (SPED)	-0.31	61.21	< .01
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	-0.44	159.01	< .01
GPC Decision	2.04	337.63	< .01
Constant	-1.38		

Coding: Gender (0 = Male, 1= Female), Ethnicity (0 = Non-Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic), SES (0 = Not Economically Disadvantaged, 1 = Economically Disadvantaged), Special Education (0 = No, 1 = Yes), Limited English Proficiency (0 = No, 1 = Yes), GPC Decision (0 = retained, 1 = promoted)

The practical significance of the findings was investigated. As can be seen from Table 9, the simple associations were statistically significant. The odds ratios (OR) for the confounding variables showed that females (OR = 1.39), Hispanics (OR = 1.21), not economically disadvantaged (OR = 1.56), not in special education programs (OR = 1.37), and being English proficient (OR = 1.43) were more likely to graduate than did the students in comparison groups. Students who were promoted in 8th grade were 7.47 times more likely to graduate, compared to students who had been retained.

Table 9

Predictors of Graduation, 8th Grade, n = 25,199

	Graduation				
	Yes		No		
	F	%	F	%	χ^2
Gender					
Female	7,828	67.30	3,796	32.70	
Male	8,100	59.70	5,475	40.30	158.28*
Ethnicity					
Hispanic	11,600	72.80	6,392	68.90	
Non-Hispanic	4,328	27.20	2,879	31.10	43.05*
Socioeconomic Status					
Disadvantaged	12,212	76.70	7,755	83.60	
Not Disadvantaged	3,716	23.30	1,516	16.40	173.01*
Special Education					
No	14,160	88.90	7,913	85.40	
Yes	1,768	11.10	1,358	14.60	67.56*
Limited English Proficiency					
No	13,118	82.40	7,096	76.50	
Yes	2,810	17.60	2,175	23.50	124.65*
GPC Decision					
Promoted	15,824	99.30	8,837	95.30	
Retained	104	0.70	434	4.70	453.20*

*$p < 0.01$

Summary

This chapter presented the analysis of data, which was conducted to answer the study's research questions: (1) To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 5th grade predict high school graduation? (2) To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 8th grade predict high school graduation? After controlling for the confounding variables of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education status, and limited English proficiency status, the GPC decision was a statistically significant predictor of the outcome measure, which was not surprising because of the large sample sizes that enabled the detection of small effects; however, its practical significance/explained variation was limited. The GPC promotion decision seemed to be a better predictor of graduation at 8th grade compared to 5th grade. The odds ratios showed that students who had been promoted by the 5th grade GPC decision were 1.21 times more likely to graduate than did the students who had been retained, while 8th graders who had been promoted were 7.47 more likely to graduate, compared to the comparison group.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study examined the link between 5th and 8th Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions and high school graduation. The predictor variables included demographic data (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status), special programs (special education and limited English proficiency, and the GPC decision. The research analyzed 17,451 cases from 5th grade and 25,199 cases from 8th grade who met the criteria for a GPC.

This chapter contains a summary of the results and conclusions in order to help answer the research questions:

1. To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 5th grade predict high school graduation?

2. To what extent does the Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decision in the 8th grade predict high school graduation?

The significance of the study investigates whether the Student Success Initiative (SSI) requirement of grade-level retention for Grade 5 and 8 students, who are unable to pass the state of Texas assessments in reading and mathematics, is effective. If a student fails to meet the criteria after three attempts, a Grade Placement Committee (GPC) convenes to make a decision about student promotion or grade-level retention (TEA, 2019h).

Conducting grade-level retention research is challenging because of methodological concerns (Cockx et al., 2018; Eide & Showalter, 2001; Light, 2015). Researching the alternative option, social promotion, is nearly impossible. Not only are there no national tracking systems of social promotions (NCES, 1995), states do not require schools to report which students are

promoted at every grade-level after they fail to meet standards on assessments and do not master the curriculum. Even though the findings about the effect of grade retention policies report mixed results (Choi et al, 2018; Dong, 2010; Huddleston, 2014; Lorence, 2014; Wu et al., 2008), it is clear that grade-level retention can be harmful to students both academically and emotionally (Abbott, 2014; Carifio & Carey, 2010; Wu et al., 2008; Xia & Glennie, 2005). Long-term studies have found that grade-level retentions lead to a significant likelihood of dropping out of school (Hughes et al., 2018).

Although there are no data to support its efficacy, the SSI policy continues to be implemented in Texas. As a result, students must attempt the state assessment as many as three times for the reading and mathematics assessments in Grades 5 and 8. If the student fails to meet standard, a GPC decides whether the student will be retained in the same grade or promoted to the next grade (TEA, 2019i). Ultimately, grade-level retention automatically impacts high school graduation because students lose their peer group, are older than their classmates, and are on a path to graduate later (Caton et al., 2019).

Summary of the Results

The study used existing data for Grade 5 (2009-2010) and Grade 8 (2012-2013) students who met the criteria for a GPC. The number of cases analyzed for this study were 17,451 Grade 5 students and 25,199 Grade 8 students. This sample represented the population of Grade 5 and 8 students in the state of Texas due to masking that occurred when obtaining the data from the TEA. Tables 10 and Table 11 in the conclusion section show the comparison of the two groups.

Univariate and multivariate inferential statistics were used to analyze the categorical data and to answer the research questions. After controlling for the confounding variables of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education status, and limited English proficiency status,

the GPC decision was a statistically significant predictor of the outcome measure, which was not surprising because of the large sample sizes that enabled the detection of small effects; however, its practical significance/explained variation was limited. The GPC promotion decision seemed to be a better predictor of graduation at 8th grade compared to 5th grade.

When predicting grade-level retention in Grade 5, more females, Hispanics, students who were not economically disadvantaged, not in special education programs, and those with limited English proficiency were respectively 1.45, 1.30, 1.38, 1.48, and 1.32, times more likely to graduate than were the students in the comparison groups. The binary logistic regression prediction equation for Grade 5 is Graduation = -0.03 + 0.37 (GENDER) + 0.16 (ETHN) – 0.41 (SES) – 0.29 (SPED) + 0.23 (LEP) + 0.26 (GPC).

When predicting grade-level retention in Grade 8, more females, Hispanics, students who were not economically disadvantaged, not in special education programs, and those with limited English proficiency were respectively 1.39, 1.21, 1.56, 1.37, and 1.43, times more likely to graduate than were the students in the comparison groups. The binary logistic regression prediction equation for Grade 8 is Graduation = -1.38 + 0.28 (GENDER) + 0.36 (ETHN) – 0.41 (SES) – 0.31 (SPED) – 0.44 (LEP) + 2.04 (GPC).

Conclusions

The TEA annual publication "Grade-Level Retention in Texas Public Schools" gives the exact figures for grade-level retention at all grade levels (TEA, 2014a; TEA, 2011a). Due to masking techniques to protect the confidentiality of students, not all students in Grade 5 and 8 were included in the data file that was analyzed for the purpose of the study. Tables 10 and 11 demonstrate that the percentages of retained and promoted students were closely aligned with the case sets provided in the data file from the TEA.

Table 10

GPC Decisions: Side by Side of All Texas Students and the Study Sample, 5th Grade 2009–2010

Reporting Agency	N	Promoted	%	RT	%
TEA	30242	26573	87.90	3,669	12.10
Study	17451	15846	90.80	1605	9.20

Table 11

GPC Decisions: Side by Side of All Texas Students and the Study Sample, 8th Grade 2012–2013

Reporting Agency	N	Promoted	%	RT	%
TEA	47060	44294	94.10	2,766	5.90
Study	25199	24661	97.90	538	2.10

In order to conduct the study, the TEA matched the graduation outcomes with each student case represented in the data. The majority of the students in both Grades 5 and 8 were promoted by the GPC decision even though they failed to meet standard on the state assessment in reading and mathematics after three attempts. It is also critical to point out that by the very nature of being held back in the same grade that students did not graduate with their cohort. Of all the students who were retained due to the GPC decision (both Grades 5 and 8), not one was able to graduate with their cohort in 2017.

There was one notable difference between Grade 5 and Grade 8. When the odd ratios (OR) were calculated for both grades, the odds ratio (OR) for 8th grade indicated that students who were promoted in 8th grade were 7.47 times more likely to graduate, compared to students who had been retained. The GPC decision, promoting a student, appeared to have a significant impact on graduation at the 8th grade.

Discussion

The studies that have been conducted continue to show discrepancies in the findings about the results of the practice of grade-level retention (Choi et al., 2018; Dong, 2010; Lorence, 2014); they have also been scrutinized for methodological challenges (Bianchi, 2019; Frederick and Hauser, 2008; Light, 2015; Warren & Saliba, 2013). In the state of Texas, grade-level retention rate has steadily declined over the past 10 years. During this decade, three grades have consistently been at the top of the list with the highest percentage of students retained are 9th (14.70%–7.70%), 10th (7.20%–5.40%), and 1st (5.90%–3.40%) grade in that order. Grade 5 and Grade 8 fall toward the bottom of the list. The latest data available reveal that both grade levels had a grade-level retention rate of 0.50% in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019d). Despite the low grade-level retention rates in Grades 5 and 8, the state of Texas continues to implement the GPC policies mandating grade-level retention these grades for students who are unsuccessful on the state assessments after three attempts in reading and mathematics.

When seeking to understand policy, the traditional method of analyzing it has been to choose a positivist framework. That viewpoint assumes that policy can be viewed as a linear process. Therefore, education changes or reforms will be evaluated by carefully considering all aspects of the advantages, disadvantages, and consequences of a behavior. To solve problems, solutions can be planned, implemented, and evaluated as well as be conveyed to other people. After evaluation results are completed and feedback is given, a problem can be identified and remedied (Fowler, 2013; Young & Diem, 2017).

The truth of the matter is that education policy is messy and complicated. It is not a neat, orderly process. For this reason, the Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) was selected as the theoretical framework to evaluate the GPC policy. Young and Diem (2017) argued education

policy encompasses complex systems, environments, historical context, and cultural background. Instead of focusing on the policy itself, CPA studies the deeper infrastructure of the policy. Critical Policy Analysis explores how contextual and societal factors, including systematic institutional and individual-level oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, xenophobia), influence policy development, implementation, and outcomes (Young & Diem, 2017). In this study, social factors influenced the development of the SSI policy. The outcomes of grade-level retention continue to disproportionately affect individuals from several subpopulations, especially students that are economically disadvantaged.

Based on the five critical concerns expounded upon by Young and Diem (2017), the GPC policy can be effectively dissected using the results of the study as a backdrop. Each concern will be elaborated upon:

(1) "Concern regarding the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality" (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 4). According to the TEA, the stated goal of the SSI is to ensure that all students meet or exceed reading and mathematics standards in Grades 5 and 8 (TEA, 2019h). And yet, the practiced reality is not the same as the GPC policy rhetoric. In the most recent year reported (2017–2018), 97.30% (Grade 5) and 98.20% (Grade 8) of students who participated in a GPC were promoted even though they did not meet the state standard on reading and mathematics assessments (TEA, 2019d). In the sample provided for this study, 90.80% of Grade 5 students were promoted and 97.90% of Grade 8 students were promoted.

(2) "Concern regarding the policy, its roots, and its development (e.g., how it emerged, what problems it was intended to solve, how it changed and developed over time, and its role in reinforcing the dominant culture)" (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 4). Chapter 2 described in detail how the political climate in the United States and Texas progressed over time resulting in

political pressure on the education system at both the national and state level to impede the practice of social promotion by requiring students to meet assessment requirements at benchmark grade levels. The results of this study show that there are no significant differences between grade-level retention or promotion in Grades 5 and 8. The policy was designed to halt the practice of social promotion; yet, the majority of students are promoted by the GPC. Nor did it solve the problem of students being unprepared for the next grade level. Hence, the policy did not solve the problem it was intended to fix. What is unclear from the study is if the SSI policy in Grades 5 and 8 impacted the grade-level retention trends across the state of Texas, which have been steadily dropping over the past decade (TEA, 2020d). Further research on this subject is warranted because the GPC is only one aspect of grade-level retention.

(3) "Concern with the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge as well as the creation of policy 'winners' and 'losers'" (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 4). The SSI has created a clearly delineated line that is akin to choosing teams in an elementary PE class. The students who are the most vulnerable are on the losing side. The results of this study indicate that students who have the following characteristics are more likely to be impacted: male, low socioeconomic status, students in the special education program, and students who are limited English proficient.

(4) "Concern regarding social stratification and the broader effect a given policy has on relationships of inequality and privilege" (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 4). Choi et al. (2018) concluded "not only is it [grade-level retention] an ineffective policy, it is also unjust, as it has a discriminatory effect by SES" (p. 35). At the same time, when students are promoted, there exists a social stratification, the students are labeled, inequalities become entrenched. The results

of this study show that students from a low socioeconomic background are disproportionately affected by grade-level retention.

(5) "Concern regarding the nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of nondominant groups" (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 4). Vulnerable groups are marginalized as a result of high-stakes retention policies (Tavassolie & Winsler, 2019). There are other concerns in this area that relate to the composition of the GPC. There are several questions that need further investigation such as (1) Does the ethnic background of the school personnel (teacher and administrator) impact their decisions? (2) How does a parent's education obtainment relate to their involvement in the process?

Any discussion about the GPC policy must include a conversation about the accountability system. Because the American school system is stratified into grade levels, the accountability system school ratings factor into the grade-level retention decision-making process. Since most students transition after 5^{th} and 8^{th} grade to another campus, holding a student back would mean there would be a potential accountability implication for the campus as well as at the district level. This phenomenon might help researchers understand why there are high numbers of promotions at those grade levels despite the SSI policy rules.

In this study, there were four tiers of students in Grade 5 and Grade 8 in terms of the GPC decision. Those tiers in Grade 5 were as follows: (1) A graduate that was promoted; (2) a graduate that was retained; (3); a dropout that was promoted; and (4) a dropout that was retained. There were 17,451 students in Grade 5 (1) 15,846 students graduated who were promoted – 91.50% ; (2) 806 students graduated who were retained – 8.50% ; (3) 7,151 students dropped out who were promoted – 89.90% ; and (4) 799 students dropped out who were retained – 10.10%. Those tiers in Grade 8 were as follows: (1) A graduate that was promoted; (2) a graduate that

was retained; (3); a dropout that was promoted; and (4) a dropout that was retained. There were 25,199 students in Grade 5 (1) 15,824 students graduated who were promoted – 99.30% ; (2) 104 students graduated who were retained – 0.70% ; (3) 8,837 students dropped out who were promoted – 95.30% ; and (4) 434 students dropped out who were retained – 4.70%. These tiers help clearly define the outcomes of the four groups of students. The literature supports the results that are shown by the four tiers. The majority of students were promoted, and the majority of students graduated whether they were promoted or retained by the GPC committee. However, there are two tiers of students that did not graduate. Those students are the struggling students at the crossroads that require more intentional intervention and support.

Implications

There is no national tracking system required that can merge grade-level retention statistics from the different states. It would be beneficial to have standards for monitoring this issue that apply to all states. On the other hand, social promotion is a widely-used practice when the intervention of grade-level retention is not applied. Gathering data on social promotion is even more difficult if not impossible. Another significant issue related to tracking students is the use of correct terminology. Instead of labeling students as "promoted" when they do not meet state assessment or curriculum standards, student records should be labeled accurately with terms such as "placed" as well as coded in the student information systems. Comparable systems and procedures are needed to accurately detail what is happening to students in the school system as they move from kindergarten to 12th grade.

The implications for research about grade-level retention are profound (Light, 2015). Political pressure to hold schools accountable and to retain students who are not successfully performing is a closely held conviction (Xia & Glennie, 2005). The research preceding this study

focused on grade-level retention but did not investigate the link to high school graduation. The ramifications of this practice are significant. Grade-level retention automatically impacts high school graduation because students lose their peer group, are older than their classmates, and are on a path to graduate later (Caton et al., 2019). It also delays entry into postsecondary education (Eide & Showalter, 2001). Thus, impacting fiscal outcomes as well as correlating with other problematic societal issues (Caton et al., 2019, Jimerson et al., 2005; Xia & Glennie, 2005).

The antithesis of grade-level retention is social promotion. The old adage "lesser of two evils" fits this scenario. If a student is moved to the next grade level lacking a foundation in curriculum or skills, the success of the student in the next grade level is still in jeopardy. When meetings are held, school administrators and teachers have student data; ultimately, the decision to promote or retain in a grade level is often a "gut feeling." Parent involvement in the decision-making process also plays a role. This study reports that there is not a difference in graduation rates among retained or promoted students. Consequently, the focus needs to be on strengthening the process when considering GPC decisions, especially when deciding to retain a student. One definitive recommendation would be that teachers and administrators utilize a rating scale or instrument to determine the research-based characteristics of the success of grade-level retentions and their impact on an individual student (these scales already exist) before committing to a decision about a retention.

Before tackling the specific implications of the GPC decision, it would be an egregious omission not to briefly address the subject of grade-level retention in Texas as a whole. Tables 1 and Table 2 in Chapter 2 summarized the grade-level retention data in Texas over the last decade. The trends are easily observed and follow a pattern. The number of retained students steadily dropped in every grade level over the ten-year period. Another noticeable trend is that

the grade levels with the highest number of retentions are consistently 9th grade, 10th grade, and 1st grade. Since grade-level retention can be chosen as an intervention option for a number of reasons other than the GPC (e.g. attendance, grades, social skills, behavior, etc.), it is vital to understand the context of grade-level retention as a whole.

Not only do the prediction equations from this study show which students are more likely to graduate, but on a practical level, they help educators understand which students are at-risk for not completing high school. The profile includes students with the following characteristics: males, low socioeconomic status in addition to students who participate in a special education or limited English proficient program. Part of the GPC process requires that students be placed on an individualized acceleration plan. It is not known if those plans are implemented with fidelity for either group of students, nor is it clear which type of interventions best suit these struggling students. Beyond the GPC process of making the decision to promote or retain students, there are a host of school practices that should be re-considered and studied in future research. For example, designing course schedules, making teacher assignments, assigning student mentors, and soliciting ongoing and genuine parent input are a few of the factors that educators should take into consideration when designing a learning plan for individual students.

In most cases, the student will attend a different campus after being promoted to the next grade level. That alone brings another set of challenges. The staff at the new campus should quickly identify which students were promoted by the GPC. According to policy, individualized interventions should be provided. The committee decision and recommendations will continue to have consequences for the student regardless of his trajectory. Unfortunately, a gap exists between policy and practice. During the transition, some of the students who are at-risk are not accounted for.

Immediate and sustained systemic changes are required to make a difference. An overhaul of the GPC process should be considered, especially the requirement for students to test up to three times in reading and mathematics. The vast majority of students who did not meet the standard on the state assessment were still promoted (TEA, 2019d). That begs the question why students are forced to take state assessments up to three times in Grades 5 and 8 if they are most likely to be promoted anyway.

Reviewing overall trends in grade-level retention at the state level lead to other questions. Did the Student Success Initiative (SSI) at Grades 5 and 8 contribute to the overall drop in grade-level retentions at the state level? What are the implications of moving the GPC to a grade-level that has a higher percentage of retentions? For example, what are the implications for holding GPC meetings at 1st grade or 9th grade, albeit without the required state assessment component. Would tracking students who are socially promoted change their likelihood of graduating from high school? If a student is socially promoted should the school be required to implement an individual plan for that student at every grade level?

There are also several thoroughly researched processes that may already lessen the impact of this policy: earlier identification of at-risk students; universal screeners; research-based process to review potential grade-level retention candidates; early, targeted, and monitored intervention and accelerated programs; a multi-tiered intensive intervention model that addresses academic, behavioral, social, and emotional concerns; supplemental services and resources for students receiving special program services; flexible student grouping: looping, multi-age grouping; teacher quality guidelines; individual/and group tutoring; increased instructional time; and remediation plan for all students who are retained instead of only for students who fail a state assessment (Choi et al., 2018; González-Betancor & Lopez-Puig, 2016; Light, 2015;

Jimerson et al., 2005; NASP, 2011; Yang et al. 2018). When these options are specifically applied to struggling students, the correlation between their use and the impact on struggling students' needs to be investigated further.

Recommendations for Further Research

When conducting future research, it is imperative that researchers thoughtfully consider the methodology that is utilized to collect and analyze the data. Otherwise, there will continue to be inaccuracies in reporting the results (Warren & Saliba, 2013). Due to the challenges related to studying grade-level retention, longitudinal studies and meta-analysis are comprehensive ways of examining the research. Since grade-level retention has a social and emotional impact on students (Abbott, 2014; Carifio & Carey, 2010; Wu et al., 2008; Xia & Glennie, 2005), qualitative and mixed methods studies would be useful in learning more about grade-level retention from students and their families as well as school personnel including teachers and administrators.

Due to the grade level system design of K–12 education, students can be retained multiple times during their schooling. Undoubtedly, the outcome of multiple retentions impacts a student's ability to graduate from high school (Light, 2015). Simply keeping track of students who have been retained more than one time often becomes challenging in a school environment. Teachers and administrators stumble upon the number of student retentions based on the students age or by reviewing their records. Unfortunately, the reality is that there are students in the school system that have been retained multiple times, but no plan has been implemented to target their needs. Often, the number of grade-level retentions is not taken into consideration until the end of the school year when decisions need to be made about retaining the student at the end of the next school year. To further complicate matters, other issues such as poverty, mobility,

learning disabilities, limited English proficiency, family issues, self-esteem, and motivation also play a role in how the intervention of grade-level retention is inconsistently applied to students. It is imperative that more research be done in regard to students who are retained multiple times. It stands to reason that a second grade-level retention would not be warranted if the intervention was successful the first time.

Student mobility refers to transferring to different schools. This can happen periodically or frequently within a school year. Students from families experiencing poverty are put in a situation where they have to move often. Military families are also impacted by mobility issues. The research on mobility is scarce, in particular how it related to grade-level retention. Federal policies have been enacted to protect homeless and migrant students. However, research addressing mobility is insufficient. Research on the effect of mobility on high school graduation is inadequate.

It is well documented that teacher performance can have a positive or negative impact on student achievement. In fact, students who do not receive adequate instruction for two years in a row have poor outcomes in school. This is one area that has a substantial amount of research; however, the correlation to grade-level retention warrants more attention. Not only is the quality of a teacher an issue, but the type of professional development experiences that are provided to them to support struggling students in also a challenge. What is clear is that teachers need training on the best strategies for early and sustained intervention with struggling students as well as methodology on how to best monitor those plans.

This study about grade-level retention and social promotion only briefly examined factors related to high school graduation. Critical Policy Analysis addresses the disconnect between the policy and the actual practice (most students are promoted in Grade 5 and 8). It is critical that the

GPC policy continues to be systematically examined. Grade-level retention and social promotion researchers have a host of meaningful topics to consider in the future. There is a quote from a satirical military movie, *The Pentagon Wars*, that accurately describes the current policy, "Whatever problems there are, we'll fix them in the field … after it's deployed. That's the way things are done around here" (Benjamin, 1998). That cannot continue to be the standard. Educators care deeply about the success of their students. In order for them to provide the research-based outcomes, more studies about grade-level retention and social promotion are essential. Practices must change as a result.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX PAGE

APPENDIX 1

Glossary of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure clarity and understanding of these terms used in the study:

Grade Placement Committee (GPC): the committee that convenes after a student fails the state assessment at grades 5 or 8. The committee includes a parent, a teacher, and an administrator. If a student fails the test after the third attempt, the committee can unanimously promote the student despite his/her inability to meet passing standards (TEA, 2019i).

Grade-Level Retention: the practice of keeping a student in the same grade level in order to improve his/her academic achievement or lack of school readiness (NCES, 1995).

Social Promotion: sending a student to the next grade level even if the student failed to master the curriculum or assessment criteria required to be promoted (NASP, 2011).

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR): the standardized tests in Texas that measure students' performance in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades 3-12 from 2012-present.

Student Success Initiative (SSI): the policy enacted by the Texas legislature that currently requires students in grades 5 and 8 (initially, students in Grade 3 had to pass reading) to pass the state reading and mathematics assessments in order to be promoted (TEA, 2019h).

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): the standardized tests in Texas that measured students' performance in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades 3-12 from 1990-2002 prior to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): the standardized tests in Texas that measured students' performance in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies in

grades 3-12 from 2003-11 prior to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

Texas Education Agency (TEA): agency responsible for oversight of students' education in Texas public schools.

Glossary of Acronyms

BLR: Binary Logistic Regression

CFR: Code of Federal Regulations

CPA: Critical Policy Analysis

EL(s): English Learners

EOC: End of Course

ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act

ESL: English as a Second Language

ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act

GPC: Grade Placement Committee

IRB: Institutional Review Board

LAT: Linguistically Accommodated Testing

LEP: Limited English Proficiency

LPAC: Language Proficiency Assessment Committee

NASP: National Association of School Psychologists

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics

NCLB: No Child Left Behind (Act)

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OR: Odds Ratio

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

PEIMS: Public Education Information Management Systems

SDAA: State-Developed Alternate Assessment

SES: Socioeconomic Status

SPED: Special Education

SPSS: IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences

SSI: Student Success Initiative

STAAR: State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness

TAAS: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills

TABS: Texas Assessment of Basic Skills

TAC: Texas Administrative Code

TAKS: Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

TAKS-Alt: TAKS-Alternative

TAMSA: Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment

TEA: Texas Education Agency

TEAMS: Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills

TEC: Texas Education Code

TELPAS: Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System

USDE: United States Department of Education

APPENDIX 2

TEC § 28.0211. Satisfactory Performance on Assessment Instruments Required; Accelerated Instruction

TEC § 28.0211. Satisfactory Performance on Assessment Instruments Required; Accelerated Instruction

(a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) or (e), a student may not be promoted to:

(1) the sixth grade program to which the student would otherwise be assigned if the student does not perform satisfactorily on the fifth grade mathematics and reading assessment instruments under Section 39.023; or

(2) the ninth grade program to which the student would otherwise be assigned if the student does not perform satisfactorily on the eighth grade mathematics and reading assessment instruments under Section 39.023.

(a-1) Each time a student fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under Section 39.023(a) in the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, the school district in which the student attends school shall provide to the student accelerated instruction in the applicable subject area. Accelerated instruction may require participation of the student before or after normal school hours and may include participation at times of the year outside normal school operations.

(a-2) A student who fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) and who is promoted to the next grade level must complete accelerated instruction required under Subsection (a-1) before placement in the next grade level. A student who fails to complete required accelerated instruction may not be promoted.

(a-3) The commissioner shall provide guidelines to districts on research-based best practices and effective strategies that a district may use in developing an accelerated instruction program.

(b) A school district shall provide to a student who initially fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) at least two additional opportunities to take the assessment instrument. A school district may administer an alternate assessment instrument to a student who has failed an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) on the previous two opportunities. Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, a student may be promoted if the student performs at grade level on an alternate assessment instrument under this subsection that is appropriate for the student's grade level and approved by the commissioner.

(c) Each time a student fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a), the school district in which the student attends school shall provide to the student accelerated instruction in the applicable subject area, including reading instruction for a student who fails to perform satisfactorily on a reading assessment instrument. After a

student fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument a second time, a grade placement committee shall be established to prescribe the accelerated instruction the district shall provide to the student before the student is administered the assessment instrument the third time. The grade placement committee shall be composed of the principal or the principal's designee, the student's parent or guardian, and the teacher of the subject of an assessment instrument on which the student failed to perform satisfactorily. The district shall notify the parent or guardian of the time and place for convening the grade placement committee and the purpose of the committee. An accelerated instruction group administered by a school district under this section may not have a ratio of more than 10 students for each teacher.

(d) In addition to providing accelerated instruction to a student under Subsection (c), the district shall notify the student's parent or guardian of:

(1) the student's failure to perform satisfactorily on the assessment instrument;
(2) the accelerated instruction program to which the student is assigned; and
(3) the possibility that the student might be retained at the same grade level for the next school year.

(e) A student who, after at least three attempts, fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) shall be retained at the same grade level for the next school year in accordance with Subsection (a). The student's parent or guardian may appeal the student's retention by submitting a request to the grade placement committee established under Subsection (c). The school district shall give the parent or guardian written notice of the opportunity to appeal. The grade placement committee may decide in favor of a student's promotion only if the committee concludes, using standards adopted by the board of trustees, that if promoted and given accelerated instruction, the student is likely to perform at grade level. A student may not be promoted on the basis of the grade placement committee's decision unless that decision is unanimous. The commissioner by rule shall establish a time line for making the placement determination. This subsection does not create a property interest in promotion. The decision of the grade placement committee is final and may not be appealed.

(f) A school district shall provide to a student who, after three attempts, has failed to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) accelerated instruction during the next school year as prescribed by an educational plan developed for the student by the student's grade placement committee established under Subsection (c). The district shall provide that accelerated instruction regardless of whether the student has been promoted or retained. The educational plan must be designed to enable the student to perform at the appropriate grade level by the conclusion of the school year. During the school year, the student shall be monitored to ensure that the student is progressing in accordance with the plan. The district shall administer to the student the assessment instrument for the grade level in which the student is placed at the time the district regularly administers the assessment instruments for that school year.

TEC § 28.0211. Satisfactory Performance on Assessment Instruments Required; Accelerated Instruction

(g) This section does not preclude the retention at a grade level, in accordance with state law or school district policy, of a student who performs satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a).

(h) In each instance under this section in which a school district is specifically required to provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student, the district shall make a good faith effort to ensure that such notice is provided either in person or by regular mail and that the notice is clear and easy to understand and is written in English or the parent or guardian's native language.

(i) The admission, review, and dismissal committee of a student who participates in a district's special education program under Subchapter A, Chapter 29, and who does not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) and administered under Section 39.023(a) or (b) must meet before the student is administered the assessment instrument for the second time. The committee shall determine:

(1) the manner in which the student will participate in an accelerated instruction program under this section; and

(2) whether the student will be promoted in accordance with Subsection (i-1) or retained under this section.

(i-1) At a meeting of the admission, review, and dismissal committee of a student under Subsection (i), the committee may promote the student to the next grade level if the committee concludes that the student has made sufficient progress in the measurable academic goals contained in the student's individualized education program developed under Section 29.005. A school district that promotes a student under this subsection is not required to provide an additional opportunity for the student to perform satisfactorily on the assessment instrument.

(i-2) Not later than September 1 of each school year, a school district must notify the parent or person standing in parental relation to a student enrolled in the district's special education program under Subchapter A, Chapter 29, of the options of the admission, review, and dismissal committee under Subsections (i) and (i-1) if the student does not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument.

(j) A school district or open-enrollment charter school shall provide students required to attend accelerated programs under this section with transportation to those programs if the programs occur outside of regular school hours.

(k) The commissioner shall adopt rules as necessary to implement this section, including rules concerning when school districts shall administer assessment instruments required under this section and which administration of the assessment instruments will be used for purposes of Section 39.054 .

TEC § 28.0211. Satisfactory Performance on Assessment Instruments Required; Accelerated Instruction

(l) Repealed by Acts 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1058, Sec. 17, eff. June 15, 2007.

(l-1) The commissioner may adopt rules requiring a school district that receives federal funding under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. Section 6301 et seq.) to use that funding to provide supplemental educational services under 20 U.S.C. Section 6316 in conjunction with the accelerated instruction provided under this section, provided that the rules may not conflict with federal law governing the use of that funding.

(m) The commissioner shall certify, not later than July 1 of each school year or as soon as practicable thereafter, whether sufficient funds have been appropriated statewide for the purposes of this section and Section 28.0217. A determination by the commissioner is final and may not be appealed. For purposes of certification, the commissioner shall consider:

(1) the average cost per student per assessment instrument administration;

(2) the number of students that require accelerated instruction because the student failed to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument;

(3) whether sufficient funds have been appropriated to provide support to students in grades three through 12 identified as being at risk of dropping out of school, as defined in Section 29.081(d); and

(4) whether sufficient funds have been appropriated to provide instructional materials that are aligned with the assessment instruments under Sections 39.023(a) and (c).

(m-1) For purposes of certification under Subsection (m), the commissioner may not consider Foundation School Program funds except for compensatory education funds under Section 48.104. This section may be implemented only if the commissioner certifies that sufficient funds have been appropriated during a school year for administering the accelerated instruction programs specified under this section and Section 28.0217, including teacher training for that purpose.

(n) A student who is promoted by a grade placement committee under this section must be assigned in each subject in which the student failed to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under Subsection (a) to a teacher who meets all state and federal qualifications to teach that subject and grade.

(o) This section does not require the administration of a fifth or eighth grade assessment instrument in a subject under Section 39.023(a) to a student enrolled in the fifth or eighth grade, as applicable, if the student:

(1) is enrolled in a course in the subject intended for students above the student's grade level and will be administered an assessment instrument adopted or developed under Section 39.023(a) that aligns with the curriculum for the course in which the student is enrolled; or

(2) is enrolled in a course in the subject for which the student will receive high school academic credit and will be administered an end-of-course assessment instrument

TEC § 28.0211. Satisfactory Performance on Assessment Instruments Required; Accelerated Instruction

adopted under Section 39.023(c) for the course.

(p) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, a student described by Subsection (o) may not be denied promotion on the basis of failure to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument not required to be administered to the student in accordance with that subsection.

Last Amended: 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 943 (H.B. 3), Sec. 3.022, eff. June 12, 2019
Entered: July 17, 2019

APPENDIX 3

TAC Chapter 101. Assessment, Subchapter BB. Commissioner's Rules Concerning Grade Advancement and Accelerated Instruction

Chapter 101. Assessment
Subchapter BB. Commissioner's Rules Concerning Grade Advancement and Accelerated Instruction

Statutory Authority: The provisions of this Subchapter BB issued under the Texas Education Code, §§28.021, 28.0211, 28.0213, 28.0217, 29.081(b-1), 39.023, and 39.025(b-1), unless otherwise noted.

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§101.2001. Policy.

(a) School districts shall implement grade advancement requirements in accordance with this subchapter and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) procedures outlined in the official Student Success Initiative manual, published annually by the TEA. As specified in §101.2009 of this title (relating to Notice to Parents or Guardians), school districts will make public at the beginning of the school year grade advancement requirements as determined by the school district.

(b) In addition to local policy relating to grade advancement, except in cases where a student is testing above grade level as specified in the Texas Education Code (TEC), §28.0211(o), a student in Grade 5 or Grade 8 shall demonstrate proficiency in reading and mathematics as required by the TEC, §28.0211(a), in order to advance to the next grade. The assessment grade promotion requirements of the TEC, §28.0211(a), shall be in effect beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. Demonstrated proficiency is defined under this section as meeting the satisfactory passing standard on the appropriate assessment instruments specified by §101.2003(a) of this title (relating to Grade Advancement Testing Requirements) or on a state-approved alternate assessment authorized in §101.2011 of this title (relating to Alternate Assessment). The standard in place when a student first takes a Grade 5 or Grade 8 mathematics or reading assessment is the standard that will be maintained for all subsequent retest opportunities for that student. A student who does not demonstrate proficiency as described in this section may advance to the next grade only if:

(1) the student has completed the required accelerated instruction under §101.2006 of this title (relating to Accelerated Instruction);

(2) the student's Grade Placement Committee (GPC), as specified in §101.2007 of this title (relating to Role of Grade Placement Committee), determines by unanimous

decision, in accordance with the standards for promotion established by the local school board, that the student is likely to perform at grade level at the end of the next year given additional accelerated instruction. In accordance with the TEC, §28.021, to determine grade promotion, a school district is required to consider the recommendation of the student's teacher, the student's grades, the student's assessment scores, and any other necessary academic information; and

(3) in accordance with the TEC, §28.0211(n), the school district will ensure that a student who is promoted by a GPC under §101.2007 of this title shall be assigned in each subject in which the student failed to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under the TEC, §28.0211(a), to a teacher who meets all state and federal qualifications to teach that subject and grade.

(c) Students shall be provided accelerated instruction required by the TEC, §28.0211 and §39.025(b-1), as specified in §101.2006 of this title.

(d) A student in Grade 5 or Grade 8 may not be denied promotion to the next grade on the basis of failure to perform satisfactorily on a reading or mathematics assessment instrument intended for use above the student's grade level.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2001 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective April 19, 2010, 35 TexReg 3030; amended to be effective June 4, 2012, 37 TexReg 4040; amended to be effective February 26, 2014, 39 TexReg 1149.

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§101.2003. Grade Advancement Testing Requirements.

(a) Except in cases where a student is testing above grade level as specified in the Texas Education Code (TEC), §28.0211(o), each school district and charter school shall test eligible students in accordance with the grade advancement requirements for the grades and subjects specified in the TEC, §28.0211(a). The assessment grade promotion requirements of the TEC, §28.0211(a), shall be in effect beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. These requirements apply to the following assessment instruments under the TEC, §39.023(a), (b), and (l):

(1) the reading and mathematics assessments at Grade 5; and

(2) the reading and mathematics assessments at Grade 8.

(b) An eligible student is subject to all of the grade advancement requirements under the TEC, §28.0211, including automatic retention, if the student is enrolled in a local school district or

charter school on any day between January 1 and the date of the first administration of the grade advancement assessments, unless a student is administered an assessment instrument intended for use above the student's grade level as specified in the TEC, §28.0211(o). A student is only eligible to take an assessment instrument intended for use above the student's grade level if the student is receiving instruction in the entire curriculum for that subject.

(c) An eligible student who does not meet the criteria specified in subsection (b) of this section but enrolls in a local school district or charter school at any time after the date of the first administration of the grade advancement assessments is not subject to the grade advancement requirements. In accordance with §101.2001(b) of this title (relating to Policy), a school district or charter school must provide this student with the opportunity to test and access to required accelerated instruction.

(d) A student receiving special education services under the TEC, Chapter 29, Subchapter A, enrolled in Grade 5 or Grade 8 who is receiving instruction in the essential knowledge and skills in a subject specified under subsection (a) of this section is eligible under this section as outlined in the official Student Success Initiative manual published annually by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In accordance with the TEC, §28.0211(i), the student's admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee shall determine appropriate assessment and accelerated instruction for each eligible student. Assessment decisions must be made on an individual basis and in accordance with procedures established by the TEA. These decisions shall be documented in the student's individualized education program.

(e) An English language learner (ELL), as defined by the TEC, Chapter 29, Subchapter B, who is administered an assessment in English or Spanish for a grade and subject specified in subsection (a) of this section, except as provided by §101.1005 of this title (relating to Assessments of Achievement in Academic Content Areas and Courses), is eligible under this section. In accordance with §101.1005(a) of this title, the student's language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) shall determine the appropriate assessment and accelerated instruction for each eligible student. The Grade Placement Committee, as specified in §101.2007 of this title (relating to Role of Grade Placement Committee), shall make its decisions in consultation with a member of the student's LPAC. Assessment decisions must be made on an individual basis and in accordance with procedures established by the TEA.

(f) As specified in §101.1005 of this title, decisions regarding assessments for ELLs who receive special education services shall be made by the ARD committee in conjunction with the LPAC.

(g) In accordance with the TEC, §28.021(b), decisions regarding a student who has dyslexia and is eligible under this section shall consider the student's potential for achievement or proficiency in the assessed subject.

Chapter 101. Assessment
Subchapter BB. Commissioner's Rules Concerning Grade Advancement and Accelerated Instruction

Source: The provisions of this §101.2003 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective February 24, 2005, 30 TexReg 842; amended to be effective April 19, 2010, 35 TexReg 3030; amended to be effective June 4, 2012, 37 TexReg 4040; amended to be effective February 26, 2014, 39 TexReg 1149.

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§101.2005. Test Administration and Schedule.

(a) The Texas Education Agency (TEA) shall establish the test administration procedures in the applicable test administration materials. The superintendent of each school district and chief administrative officer of each charter school shall be responsible for following these procedures and maintaining the integrity of the test administration and the security and confidentiality requirements, as specified in Chapter 101, Subchapter C, of this title (relating to Security and Confidentiality).

(b) The TEA shall provide three opportunities per year for the tests required for grade advancement as specified in the Texas Education Code, §28.0211(a). The commissioner of education shall specify the dates of these administrations in the assessment calendar. Additional test opportunities will not be provided.

(c) The superintendent of each school district and chief administrative officer of each charter school shall establish procedures to ensure:

(1) that each eligible student who is absent or does not receive a test score for any test administration shall receive appropriate accelerated instruction as warranted on an individual student basis; and

(2) that each eligible student who is absent or does not receive a test score for all three test opportunities and is consequently retained shall receive other appropriate means of evaluation, including the administration of an alternate assessment, as provided under §101.2011(a) of this title (relating to Alternate Assessment), so that the Grade Placement Committee has sufficient evidence for its review upon appeal by a parent or guardian.

(d) A campus or district must accommodate the request of an out-of-district student to participate in the third administration of a test required for grade advancement if that campus or district is testing one or more local students on the applicable test and if the out-of-district student has registered to take the test by a date determined by the TEA.

Chapter 101. Assessment
Subchapter BB. Commissioner's Rules Concerning Grade Advancement and Accelerated Instruction

Source: The provisions of this §101.2005 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective February 24, 2005, 30 TexReg 842.

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§101.2006. Accelerated Instruction.

(a) Each time a student fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under the Texas Education Code (TEC), §39.023(a), (b), or (c), the school district or charter school shall provide the student with accelerated instruction in the applicable subject. A student failing to perform satisfactorily on an end-of-course assessment under the TEC, §39.023(c), must be provided the appropriate accelerated instruction before the next administration of the applicable assessment as specified by the TEC, §29.081(b-1).

(b) Accelerated instruction may require participation of the student before or after normal school hours and may include participation at times of the year outside normal school operations. Each school district and each charter school shall be responsible for providing transportation to students required to attend accelerated instruction programs if these programs occur outside of regular school hours.

(c) A school district must accommodate the request of an out-of-district student to participate in any established, on-campus summer accelerated instruction program, provided the student is living away from his or her home district and the program matches the accelerated instruction prescribed by the student's Grade Placement Committee.

(d) Accelerated instruction shall be based on, but not limited to, guidelines on research-based best practices and effective strategies as outlined in the Student Success Initiative manual, published annually by the TEA, which districts may use for developing accelerated instruction.

(e) In addition, for students who are administered state assessments specified under the TEC, §28.0211(a):

> (1) a student who fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under the TEC, §28.0211(a), shall be provided accelerated instruction before the next administration of the applicable assessment as specified by the TEC, §28.0211. A student shall be assigned to an accelerated instruction group that does not have a ratio larger than ten students for each teacher; and
>
> (2) a student who fails to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument specified under the TEC, §28.0211(a), after the first, second, and third testing opportunities and

who is promoted to the next grade level must complete, in accordance with state and local school board policy, all the accelerated instruction required under this section before placement in the next grade level. A student who fails to complete all the required accelerated instruction may not be promoted.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2006 adopted to be effective April 19, 2010, 35 TexReg 3030; amended to be effective June 4, 2012, 37 TexReg 4040; amended to be effective February 26, 2014, 39 TexReg 1149.

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§101.2007. Role of Grade Placement Committee.

(a) In accordance with the Texas Education Code (TEC), §28.0211, the superintendent of each school district and chief administrative officer of each charter school shall establish procedures for convening a Grade Placement Committee (GPC) for each eligible student who fails to demonstrate proficiency on the second administration of the assessment required for grade advancement. In accordance with §101.2006(d) of this title (relating to Accelerated Instruction), decisions by the GPC shall be made on an individual student basis, address required participation of the student in accelerated instruction, and ensure the most effective instruction to support the student's academic achievement on grade level.

(b) The GPC shall be composed of the principal or principal's designee, the student's parent or guardian, and the student's teacher(s) of the subject of the grade advancement assessment(s) on which the student has failed to demonstrate proficiency. If this teacher is unavailable, the principal shall designate to serve on the GPC a teacher certified in the subject of the assessment on which the student failed to perform satisfactorily and who is most familiar with the student's performance in that subject area. If more than one parent or guardian has the authority to make educational decisions regarding the student, a good faith effort must be made to notify both parents, but participation of any one parent or guardian is sufficient. Either parent or only one guardian may initiate an appeal. If both parents or guardians serve on the GPC but do not agree, either may agree to promote the student if the remaining members of the GPC also agree to the promotion. The district may accept a parent's or guardian's written designation of another individual to serve on the GPC for all purposes. The district may accept a parent's or guardian's written and signed waiver of participation in the GPC and designation of the remaining members of the GPC as the decision-making entity for all purposes.

(1) If a parent or guardian or designee is unable to attend a meeting, the district may use other methods to ensure parent participation, including individual and conference telephone calls. The district may designate an individual to act on behalf of the student

in place of a parent, guardian, or designee if no such person can be located. A surrogate parent named to act on behalf of a student with a disability shall be considered a parent for purposes of the TEC, §28.0211.

(2) The district shall make a good faith effort to notify a parent or guardian to attend the GPC. If a parent or guardian is unavailable, the remaining members of the GPC must convene as required by this section and take all necessary actions, except that the GPC may not agree to promote a student under the TEC, §28.0211(e), unless a parent, guardian, or designee has appealed. A district may allow an appeal to be filed in writing in lieu of attending the GPC.

(c) Within five working days of receipt of student assessment results for the second administration of the assessment required for grade advancement, the district shall notify the campus principal of student assessment results for each eligible student who fails to demonstrate proficiency. Upon receipt of this notice, the principal shall notify the teacher and parent or guardian of the assessment results. This notice shall include a description of the purpose and responsibilities of the GPC and the time and place for the GPC to hold its first meeting.

(d) In accordance with §101.2006(d) of this title, the GPC is responsible for prescribing the accelerated instruction the student is to receive before the third testing opportunity. The GPC shall also decide at this time whether the student shall take the assessment specified in §101.2003 of this title (relating to Grade Advancement Testing Requirements) or the alternate assessment, as authorized by §101.2011 of this title (relating to Alternate Assessment). In the absence of unanimous agreement, the student shall take the assessment specified in §101.2003 of this title.

(e) The GPC must convene again if a student fails to demonstrate proficiency on the third administration of an assessment required for grade advancement and is thereby automatically retained at the same grade level. Within five working days of receipt of student assessment results for this administration, the district shall notify the principal or principal's designee of student assessment results for each eligible student who fails to demonstrate proficiency. Upon receipt of this notice from the district, the principal shall inform the teacher and parent or guardian of the time and place for the GPC to hold a meeting. This notice shall inform the parent or guardian of the opportunity to appeal the automatic retention of the student. The district shall establish a procedure to ensure a good faith effort is made toward securing the parent's or guardian's receipt of the retention notification. The parent or guardian may appeal the retention by submitting a request to the GPC within five working days of receipt of this retention notification.

(f) If an appeal has been initiated by the parent or guardian, the GPC may decide in favor of promotion only if the GPC concludes, upon review of all facts and circumstances and in

accordance with standards adopted by the local school board, that the student is likely to perform on grade level given additional accelerated instruction during the next school year. A student may be promoted only if the GPC's decision is unanimous and the student has completed all required accelerated instruction specified in §101.2006 of this title. The review and final decision of the GPC must be appropriately documented as meeting the standards adopted by the local school board and made in conformance with procedures specified in the Student Success Initiative manual and as required by §101.2001(b) of this title (relating to Policy). These standards must include consideration of the following:

(1) the recommendation of the student's teacher;

(2) the student's grades;

(3) the student's assessment scores; and

(4) any other necessary academic information as determined by the district.

(g) In accordance with the TEC, §28.0211(e), the placement decision by the GPC shall be made before the start of the next school year or, if applicable, upon reenrollment of a student after this date.

(h) A student who has been promoted upon completion of a school year in a school other than a Texas public school may be enrolled in that grade without regard to whether the student has successfully completed an assessment required under the TEC, §28.0211. This subsection does not limit the authority of a district to appropriately place a student under the TEC, Chapter 25, Subchapter B.

(i) In addition to the placement decision, the GPC shall develop an accelerated instruction plan for each student who does not pass after three testing opportunities, regardless of whether the student has been promoted or retained. This plan shall include the accelerated instruction that the district must provide during the next school year. The plan must be designed to enable the student to perform at the appropriate grade level by the end of the next school year. The district shall establish a policy for monitoring the student during the school year to ensure that the student is progressing in accordance with the plan. The accelerated instruction plan must provide for interim progress reports to the student's parent or guardian and the opportunity for consultation with the teacher and principal as needed.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2007 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective February 24, 2005, 30 TexReg 842; amended to be effective April 19, 2010, 35 TexReg 3030; amended to be effective February 26, 2014, 39 TexReg 1149.

§101.2009. Notice to Parents or Guardians.

(a) The superintendent of each school district or chief administrative officer of each charter school shall notify parents or guardians of the grade advancement requirements at the beginning of the school year.

(b) The district shall provide early notice to parents or guardians of students identified in a preceding grade to be at risk of failure on the first administration of the assessment required for grade advancement the next year. The superintendent must establish the instruments/procedures to be used to make this determination. This notice shall include accelerated instruction participation requirements as stipulated by §101.2006 of this title (relating to Accelerated Instruction) and be provided before the end of the school year preceding the grade advancement requirements.

(c) The district shall establish procedures to notify the parent or guardian of a student who has failed to demonstrate proficiency on the first administration of a grade advancement assessment. This notification should be made within five working days of district receipt of student assessment results from this administration. This notice shall include the student's assessment results, a description of the grade advancement policy, the required accelerated instruction to which the student has been assigned under §101.2006 of this title, and the possibility that the student might be retained at the same grade level for the next school year. In addition, the notice shall encourage parents or guardians to meet immediately with the student's teacher to outline mutual responsibilities to support the student during accelerated instruction.

(d) Whenever the district is required to notify a parent or guardian about the requirements related to promotion and accelerated instruction under §101.2006 of this title for students at risk of retention, including the notification requirements for the Grade Placement Committee under §101.2007 of this title (relating to Role of Grade Placement Committee), the district shall make a good faith effort to ensure that the notice is provided either in person or by regular mail, is clear and easy to understand, and is written in English or in the parent's or guardian's native language.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2009 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective April 19, 2010, 35 TexReg 3030; amended to be effective February 26, 2014, 39 TexReg 1149.

Chapter 101. Assessment
Subchapter BB. Commissioner's Rules Concerning Grade Advancement and Accelerated Instruction

§101.2011. Alternate Assessment.

(a) On the third testing opportunity, each school district and charter school may establish by local board policy a district-wide procedure to use a state-approved alternate assessment instead of the statewide assessment instrument specified in §101.2003(a) of this title (relating to Grade Advancement Testing Requirements). The commissioner of education shall provide annually, to school districts and charter schools, a list of state-approved group-administered achievement tests, if available, certified by test publishers as meeting the requirements of the Texas Education Code, §28.0211. This list shall include nationally recognized instruments for obtaining valid and reliable data, which demonstrate student competencies in the applicable subject at the appropriate grade level range. The district shall select only one test for each applicable grade and subject to be used under this section.

(b) The alternate assessment must be given during the period established in the assessment calendar by the commissioner of education to coincide with the date of the third administration of the statewide assessment.

(c) A company or organization scoring a test defined in subsection (a) of this section shall send test results to the school district for verification within ten working days following receipt of the test materials from the school district and shall send a copy of those results to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in a format specified by and on a schedule established by the TEA.

(d) To maintain the security and confidential integrity of group-administered achievement tests, school districts and charter schools shall follow the procedures for test security and confidentiality delineated in Subchapter C of this chapter (relating to Security and Confidentiality).

Source: The provisions of this §101.2011 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective February 24, 2005, 30 TexReg 842; amended to be effective June 4, 2012, 37 TexReg 4040.

§101.2015. Parental Waiver.

The superintendent of each school district and chief administrative officer of each charter school shall establish a waiver process by which a parent or guardian may request that a

student not participate in the third test opportunity due to potential harm to the student. The waiver must provide documentation of potential harm, student need, and other appropriate information. If a parental waiver is granted, the student must still participate in all required acceleration and is subject to retention based on the failure on the second test administration.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2015 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337.

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§101.2017. Scoring and Reporting.

In accordance with §101.3014 of this title (relating to Scoring and Reporting), the scoring contractor will provide school districts with the results of the assessments required by the Texas Education Code, §28.0211, or, if applicable, the results of the alternate assessment specified in §101.2011 of this title (relating to Alternate Assessment), within ten working days following the receipt of the test materials from the school district or charter school.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2017 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337; amended to be effective June 4, 2012, 37 TexReg 4040; amended to be effective February 26, 2014, 39 TexReg 1149.

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§101.2019. Credit for High School Graduation.

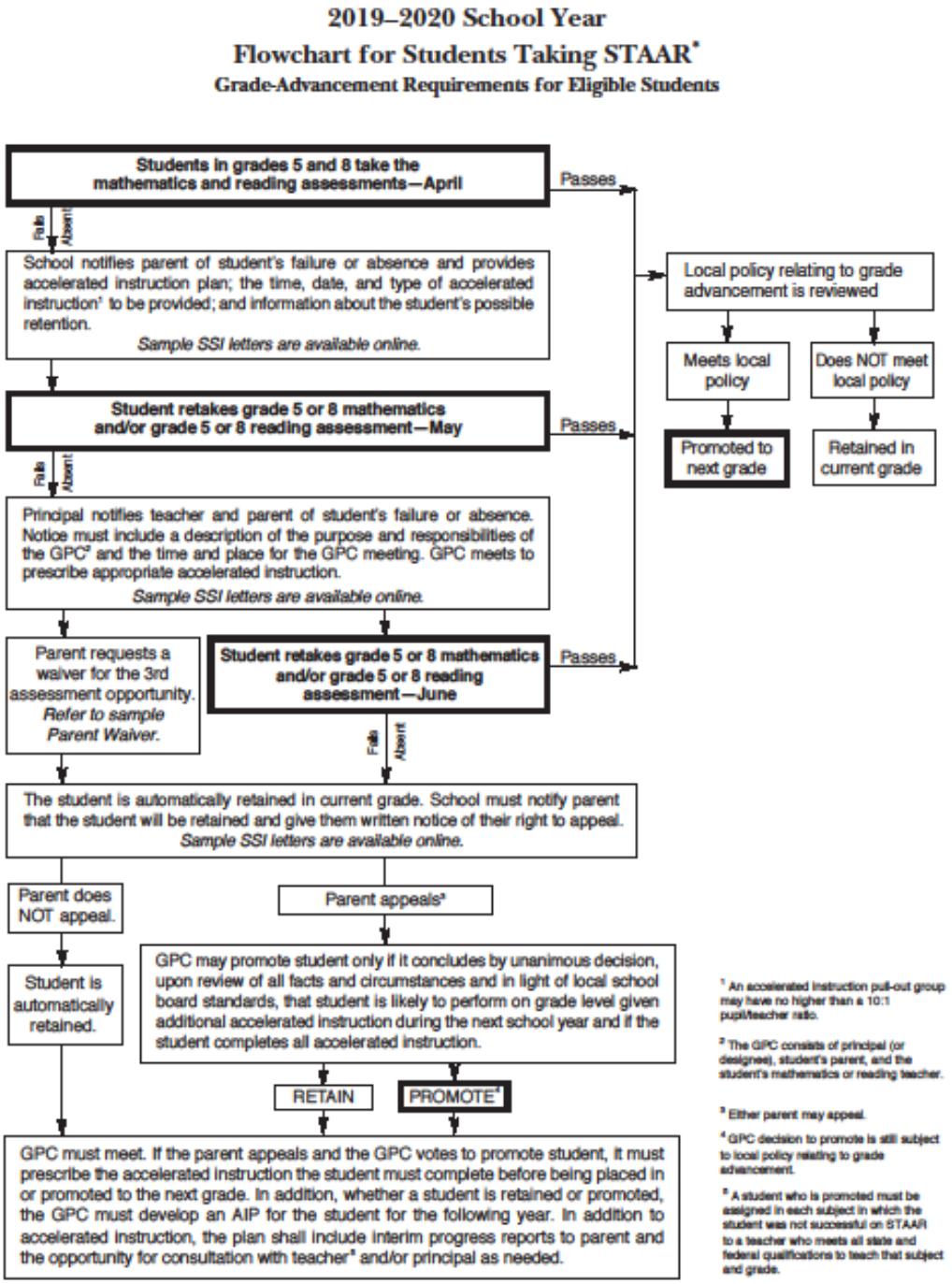
(a) Students who have been retained in Grade 8 in accordance with the grade advancement testing requirements may earn course credit for high school graduation during the next school year in subject areas other than the required courses in the subject area which caused the student to be retained.

(b) The school board of each district and each charter school may establish a policy that provides for the placement of retained students in an age-appropriate learning environment. In accordance with local grade configurations for elementary, middle, and high school campuses, this policy may specify the age by which a retained student should be placed on the next level campus even though not yet promoted to the grade of that campus.

Source: The provisions of this §101.2019 adopted to be effective May 26, 2002, 27 TexReg 4337 (TEA, 2015, p. 1-8).

APPENDIX 4

2019-2020 Flowchart for Students Taking STAAR



APPENDIX 5

IRB Application (Amendment and Original)

OCR USE ONLY	
HSRP #:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Amendment #:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Date received:	Click or tap to enter a date.

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI

Amendment to Human Subjects Research Protocol

Instructions
(Failure to follow these instructions may result in delays in processing)

Investigators **must report to the IRB any changes** in IRB-approved research. Complete this form if **changes** will be made to the research.

No changes may be initiated without prior approval of the IRB, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. Failure to secure approval for an amendment prior to implementing a change to approved research will be considered non-compliance.

If new risks are identified and the amendment is to add those risks to the consent form, depending on the risk, enrollment should either be stopped until the amendment is approved or describe in the amendment submission the plan to inform the subjects of the new risks.

What should I include in the amendment submission?

- Amendment form (this form)
- Revised study documents
  - Tracked changes version
  - Clean version

By submitting this Amendment, the Principal Investigators (PIs) attest:

1) They have read and reviewed this Amendment;
2) The information submitted is accurate;
3) Attest that no changes have been or will be implemented until the amendment is approved (unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards); and
4) Ensured all changes requested are included in attached supporting documents (e.g., recruitment script, informed consent, parental consent, etc).

After completing this form, submit the Amendment with supporting documentation via email to the IRB Mailbox: irb@tamucc.edu

For questions, email: Office of Research Compliance at irb@tamucc.edu.

OCR USE ONLY	
HSRP #:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Amendment #:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Date received:	Click or tap to enter a date.

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI

Amendment to Human Subjects Research Protocol

HSRP Overview

HSRP #: 119-19 Maestro # (if funded): Click or tap here to enter text.
Principal Investigator Name: Dr. Lynn Hemmer
Project title: Grade Placement Decisions (Grades 5 and 8) and Their Predictive Validity on High School Graduation and Completion

Select the current enrollment status for the study: N/A

- ☐ Enrollment has not begun yet
- ☐ Actively enrolling subjects
- ☐ Enrollment temporarily closed; plan to re-open in the future
- ☐ Enrollment complete; Subjects remain active
- ☐ Enrollment complete; Subjects in follow-up
- ☐ Enrollment complete; Data analysis only

Type of Amendment (If making multiple changes, select ALL that apply for this amendment)

- ☒ Protocol Changes
- ☐ Informed Consent Changes
- ☐ Advertisement/Recruitment Changes
- ☐ Study Instrument Changes
- ☐ Personnel Changes (Skip to Personnel Change Section)
- ☐ Adding Translated Documents (include translated documents and translator certificate)
- ☐ Change in funding

Rationale for Changes

1) Provide a detail description for why the changes is needed:

Existing data for this study are being obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The IRB committee approved that data be obtained for students in Education Service Center Region 2. After a phone conference with the TEA analyst team, the TEA recommended changing the original request from ESC2 to all Grade 5 and Grade 8 students in Texas to preserve student confidentiality. The original request predicted approximately 16,000 cases. If all Grade 5 and 8 students are selected for the study, the data sets would include 17,452 cases for Grade 5 students and 25,200 cases for Grade 8 students.

Demographic and special program information was also requested, specifically, At-Risk Status (Grades 5 and 8) and Career and Technology Education program enrollment (Grade 8 only). The codes are not available without masking a large number of cases. Therefore, an analysis will not include these two codes.

The differences between urban, suburban, and rural students was going to be studied. However, the TEA categorized school district classifications into nine categories. This is not feasible to explore in the scope of this study.

OCR USE ONLY
HSRP #: Click or tap here to enter text.
Date received: Click or tap to enter a date.

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION OUTREACH

Amendment to Human Subjects Research Protocol

2) Does the change affect study risks? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   2a) If yes, describe how risks are affected:
   Click or tap here to enter text.

3) Will subjects be informed of this change? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   3a) If yes, how?
   ☐ Reconsent with revised consent form ☐ Letter sent to participants
   ☐ Other: Click or tap here to enter text.

Instructions: If not making a personnel change, end here.
- Make changes to the affected study documents and provide revised documents along with this form.
- Email this completed form and revised study documents to irb@tamucc.edu.

OCR USE ONLY
HSRP #: Click or tap here to enter text.
Date received: Click or tap to enter a date.

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION OUTREACH

Amendment to Human Subjects Research Protocol

Personnel Change

☐ **Deleting Research Staff.** Fill in the information below for departing staff.
To add additional staff, click on the + at the end of the last row on right-hand side.

Name of Departing Staff	Date Last Active on Study
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap to enter a date.

☐ **Adding Research Staff**: 700.04 FAQ. When Do I List Persons on the IRB Protocol
If adding staff,
1. Fill in the information in the table below for new research staff.
   To add additional staff, click on the + at the end of the last row on right-hand side.

Researcher's Name	Department	Roles (Answer both)	Responsibilities	Conflict of Interest
Click or tap here to enter text.	Choose an item.	Choose an item. Choose an item.	☐ Recruits Subjects ☐ Consents Subjects ☐ Performs Study Interventions ☐ Data Analysis ☐ Statistics ☐ Monitors/Manages study progress ☐ Other: Click or tap here to enter text.	☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Describe qualifications of research personnel or attach CVs. ☐ See attached CVs
   New staff will need to complete CITI Training.

PI Attestation for Added Study Personnel: Review and mark to the right.

Attestation Statement	Check if "Yes"
I reviewed 700.04 Investigator and Staff Qualifications and attest added personnel are appropriately trained and experienced to perform delegated tasks.	☐
I verified the accuracy of the conflict of interest information for each staff added.	☐
I understand I am ultimately responsible for maintaining proper supervision and oversight of the duties assigned to research staff.	☐
By emailing this form to the IRB, I attest the information in this form is accurate.	☐

ORC USE ONLY	
HSRP #:	
Date Received:	
Level of Review	

Human Subjects Research Protocol for Exempt, Expedited, or Full Board Review

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI
RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION OUTREACH

Instructions and Researcher Certifications (Failure to follow may result in a delay in processing)

Projects considered research involving human subjects require prior IRB approval. This applies regardless of whether the project is funded or unfunded.

Failure to secure IRB review prior to performing research involving human subjects is a serious non-compliance issue. A finding of non-compliance may result in suspension of the project, publication retraction, revocation of research privileges, and reporting to the project sponsors and/or sponsors.

Please submit your project with plenty of time to complete the review process. Please see our website for suggested submission deadlines.

What should I include in the submission?

- **IRB Initial Submission Form (this form) – Now only requires PI signature.**
- **Study staff:**
  - **A complete list of all persons who will be performing research involving human subjects.**
  - **Verification of human subjects training (700.04 FAQ, CITI Training Requirements)**
- **Recruitment Materials (flyers, advertisements, recruitment scripts)**
- **Informed consent forms (unless asking for a waiver)**
- **Copies of all study instruments, such as survey or interview questions included in the study, and/or other materials the participants will read, see, and/or hear/be told as part of the study.**
- **If performing the project at non-TAMU-CC locations, a letter of support from the site where the project will be performed.**
- **If performing research internationally, Cultural Evaluation of International Research**
- **If performing research with non-native English speaking persons or persons who have limited English-language literacy:**
  - **Translation Certificate Form**
  - **Interpreter Certificate Form**

By submitting this IRB application, the Principal Investigator (PI) attests:

1. **They have read and reviewed the form and all supporting documents;**
2. **The information submitted is accurate;**
3. **Attest that no research activities have or will begin until notification is received the study is approved; and**
4. **All personnel listed on this form have received human subjects training and accurately declared whether they have a conflict of interest for this study.**

After completing this form, submit this form with supporting documentation via email to the IRB Mailbox: irb@tamucc.edu

For questions, email: Office of Research Compliance at irb@tamucc.edu

Researchers (all persons listed below must have CITI training completed)

	Name	Email (use TAMUCC email)	College	Category	Conflict of Interest
PI	Lynn Hammar	lynn.hammar@tamucc.edu	Education	Faculty	No
Researcher (1)	Kendra Richardson-Contrucha	kendra.richardson@islander.tamu	Education	Graduate Student	No
Researcher (2)	Kenier Konnbanani	kenier.konnbanani@tamucc.edu	Education	Faculty	No
Researcher (3)					
Researcher (4)					
Researcher (5)					

Overview

A. Research Classification: **Doctoral Dissertation** Other:

B. Externally funded: **No** Award Start Date: Maestro #:

C. Title: **Grade Placement Decisions (Grades 5 and 8) and Their Predictive Validity on High School Graduation or Completion**

D. Anticipated Start Date: *(Use pending IRB approval if date is <6 weeks in future)* **Upon IRB Approval**

E. Estimated Completion Date: **March 2020**

Purpose and Objective

A. Describe the purpose of the research **in layman's terms.**

The purpose of the study is to determine the validity of 5th and 8th grade Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions in predicting high school graduation controlling for selected demographics and special programs.

The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) requires the implementation of Grade Placement Committees (GPC) if a student fails to meet assessment standards on the 5th or 8th grade reading or mathematics state assessments. The committee (comprised of an administrator, teacher, and parent) determines if a student is retained or promoted to the next grade level. The purpose of this study is to determine if those decisions impact high school graduation.

B. Describe the objective(s) and/or research questions **in layman's terms.**

The study is guided by the following questions:
1. To what extent does the 5TH GRADE GPC decision predict high school graduation.
2. To what extent does the 8TH GRADE GPC decision predict high school graduation.

Participants; Recruitment

Participants

A. Indicate whether any of the following populations will be **specifically targeted** for inclusion in the research. Each category must be answered. *Additional protections for participants may be required.*

Adults over the age of 18 (**able** to legally consent)	No	Prisoners (adults or minors)	No
Minors under the age of 18	Yes	Individuals whose primary language is not English or who have limited English-language literacy (adults or minors)	Yes
Persons with mental disabilities (adults or minors)	Yes	Students enrolled in a researcher's courses (adults or minors)	No

Persons with economical disadvantages (adults or minors)	Yes	Employees under the direct supervision of a researcher	No
Persons with educational disadvantages (adults or minors)	Yes	Pregnant women, fetuses, and/or neonates	No
Other potentially vulnerable populations depending on the circumstances of the research (describe in "IF")	No	If other, please specify:	

B. Describe the criteria to determine who is included or excluded in the final participant population *(e.g., minimum age, grade range, physical characteristics, learning characteristics, professional criteria, etc).*

The subjects for the study are students are ALL TEXAS Grade 5 STUDENTS in 2009-2010 (assessed with TAKS) and ALL TEXAS Grade 8 STUDENTS in 2012-2013 (assessed with STAAR). These groups are chosen because they represent students who were required to meet minimum standards for 5th and 8th grades reading and mathematics in order to be promoted to the next grade level by the GPC decision. In order to gather a comprehensive data set, ALL TEXAS GRADE 5 STUDENTS (2009-2010) AND ALL TEXAS GRADE 8 STUDENTS (2012-2013) has been selected. The differences between urban, suburban, and rural students will be studied.

Demographics and special programs will also be studied to determine if these independent variables have any statistical significance in the study. The demographic data includes economically disadvantaged, ethnicity, and gender. The special programs indicators include limited English proficiency (LEP), and special education.

C. Target number of participants *(The minimum number should be the minimum number you need to obtain statistically significant findings. The maximum number is the most amount you will be allowed to enroll without submitting an amendment to the IRB to ask for additional participants.*

The existing data for ALL 5th and 8th graders IN TEXAS will be obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), delimited to 2009-2010 and 2012-2013 school years, and may contain 18,000 cases FOR GRADE 5 AND 26,000 CASES FOR GRADE 8. We will not know the exact number until receiving the data.

D. Non-TAMUCC Participants or Facility
Complete this section only if the research will be conducted at a third-party facility or participants will be recruited from a third-party site (non-TAMUCC).

☒ *Not applicable*

Provide the non-TAMUCC location or non-TAMUCC participants to be recruited here *(include letter of support as an attachment)*.

Not applicable.

Recruitment

Recruitment Methods. Describe methods that will be used to identify the potential participants.

Not applicable, existing data will be used. Specifically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will provide the data for students in Grades 5 and 8. There are no identifiers.

Recruitment Materials. Describe how potential participants will be recruited, what materials will be used *(include as an attachment)*, and how they will be distributed *(i.e., who, what, when, where, and how)*.

Not applicable, existing data will be used. The data from 2009-2010 (Grade 5) and 2012-2013 (Grade 8) FOR ALL TEXAS STUDENTS will be used. The students' graduation and completion data from 2017, 2018, AND 2019 will also be analyzed.

Incentives. If applicable, provide the amount, type, and time of distribution of any payment/incentive to participants.

Not applicable, existing data will be used. The data from 2009-2010 (Grade 5) and 2012-2013 (Grade 8) FOR ALL TEXAS STUDENTS will be used. The students' graduation and completion data from 2017, 2018, AND 2019 will also be analyzed.

Data Collection Methodology

Describe the method(s) or procedure(s) for data collection **in step-by-step, layman's terms** *(include who will be collecting the data, frequency, duration, location, etc).* The use of audio or video recording must be justified by the research purpose/objective or future research.

The data will be obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), including GPC PROMOTED OR RETAINED CODE FOR Grade 5 and Grade 8 as well as demographic (economically disadvantaged, ethnicity, and gender) and special program data (limited English

proficiency (LEP), and special education). Students graduation and completion data from 2017, 2018, and 2019 will be also be obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Specifically, two Excel data files be will be sent to the Researcher (1), KRG. No identifiers are included.

Identification of Participants; Data Collection and Storage; Equipment; Records Retention and Destruction

A. Identification of Participants. Indicate whether the data collected may contain individual identifiers (need for "confidentiality"), or whether the data will be collected anonymously.

Confidential

B. Equipment. Describe any equipment to be used (*e.g., audio, visual*), ownership (*e.g., TAMUCC; personal*), and methods of storage (*e.g., password, location*).

The PI's (LH) and Researcher 1 (also known as Co-PI) (KRG) and Researcher 2 (EK) computers will be used to store the data and perform the data analysis. The PI's (LH) computer is university owned and located in her Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi office, FC 217, which is locked and password-protected when not in use. Researcher 1's (KRG) personal computer is locked and password-protected when not is use; it is located in her home. Researcher 2's (KE) university owned computer is located in his TAMUCC office, FC 213, which is locked and password-protected when not in use.

C. Data Storage. Describe how the data collected will be stored, location(s), how the confidentiality of individually identifiable information will be maintained (if applicable), and who will have access. (*For audio and video recordings, address recordings and transcripts*).

The data sent to the co-PI (KRG) by TEA and will be saved in her and the PI's (LH) password-protected computers.

D. Records Retention and Destruction. For data collected, describe how records will be maintained, duration (*weighed by research design and/or future research*), destruction mechanism, and responsible party for each. (*Include audio and video recordings and applicable transcripts*).

The coded data will be stored electronically in the PI's (LH) and co-PI's (KRG) password-protected computers for a minimum of three years beyond the completion of the doctoral dissertation. Only the PI and co-PI will have access to the raw data.

Risk to Participants; Mechanism of Protection; Outside Assistance

A. Risk to Participants. Indicate the level of risk to participants.

Minimal risk Definition: the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.	**Yes**
Greater than minimal risk	**No**

B. Mechanism of Protection. Describe <u>every potential risk</u> to human subjects that may result from participation in the research ("Risk"), and indicate the method or procedure to be used to mitigate the potential risk ("Protection Mechanism"). Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks (*e.g., breach of confidentiality, injury, psychological distress, pressure to conform, pressure to participate, etc*).

	Risk	Protection Mechanism
1.	Breach of Confidentiality	Only the PI (LH) and co-PI (KRG) will have access to the existing data from TEA. The electronic version of all data will be stored in the PI's and co-PI's personal computers. Backup copies will be stored on the Microsoft OneDrive cloud-based storage system, which is password-protected with 2-factor authentication. Microsoft provides randsomware and other protections against hackers to OneDrive users. Both computers are kept locked and password-protected when not in use. The data received from TEA should not include any identifiers. All data will be kept confidential.

	Risk	Protection Mechanism
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

C. Outside Assistance. If applicable, describe any outside assistance available to participants to mitigate the Risks stated above and how it will be provided *(e.g., medical care, counseling, etc)*.

Not applicable

Benefits to Participants; Benefits to Society

A. Benefits to Participants. If applicable, describe the potential benefits to participants as a result of taking part in the research *(exclude payments/incentives)*. If there are no benefits, then state so.

There are no direct benefits to the participants.

B. Benefits to Society. Describe the potential benefits to society or contribution to generalizable knowledge as a result of the research.

Results of the study will be used to examine the link between GPC decisions and high school graduation or completion, which will be of theoretical and practical importance to educators and other concerned individuals.

Waiver of Informed Consent; Waiver of Signed Informed Consent; Informed Consent Process

A(1). Is a waiver or alteration of informed consent process requested? (i.e., entire process is waived, or basic element(s) are altered). If "yes," go to C.	No	A(2). If "no," is a waiver of documentation of informed consent requested? (i.e., informed consent will be obtained without participants' signatures). If "yes," go to C. If "no," go to B.	No

B. Informed Consent Process. Unless yes to "A1", describe step-by-step the informed consent process.

Not applicable.

C. Waiver of Informed Consent; Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent. If "yes" to either A(1) or A(2), describe below why a waiver or alteration of informed consent and/or a waiver of documentation of informed consent is requested and how the applicable criteria are met based on the circumstances of the research.

Existing data, which do not include any identifiers, will be obtained from TEA, utilizing public information request. Therefore, waiver of informed consent requested.
(1) The research involves no more than minimal risk to subjects;
(2) The research could not be carried out practicably without the waiver or alteration;
(3) The waiver or alteration would not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; and,
(4) Where appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional information about their participation.

Researcher Qualifications

A. Describe qualifications for all personnel listed on the HSRP or attach CV or resume documenting experience.

Dr. Lynn Hemmer is the PI, faculty advisor, and an associate professor in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. The first co-PI, Kandee Richardson-Guartuche, is a doctoral student at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. Dr. Kamlar Kouzekanani is the second co-PI, a professor of quantitative methods in the College of Education & [redacted] and co-PIs have all completed the CITI course on the protection of human research [redacted]

Researcher Signature

By signing this form, the PI attests:

- They have read and reviewed the protocol as planned and the information provided is accurate.
- Confirm that no research activities have or will begin until notification is received that the study is approved.
- All personnel listed on the study have or will be trained on the protocol and human subject protection requirements.
- All personnel listed on this form have accurately declared whether they have a conflict of interest for this study.

	Name	Conflict of Interest (select one)	Date
PI	Lynn Hemmer	No conflict of interest with this project	
	Signature:	Hemmer, Lynn Digitally signed by Hemmer, Lynn Date: 2019.11.08 16:54:07 -06'00'	

ORC USE ONLY	
IRBP #:	
Date Received:	
Level of Review	

Human Subjects Research Protocol for Exempt, Expedited, or Full Board Review

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI
RESEARCH COMMERCIALIZATION OUTREACH

Instructions and Researcher Certifications (Failure to follow may result in a delay in processing)

Projects considered research involving human subjects require prior IRB approval. This applies regardless of whether the project is funded or unfunded.

Failure to secure IRB review prior to performing research involving human subjects is a serious non-compliance issue. A finding of non-compliance may result in suspension of the project, publication retraction, revocation of research privileges, and reporting to the project sponsors and/or sponsors.

Please submit your project with plenty of time to complete the review process. Please see our website for suggested submission deadlines.

What should I include in the submission?

- **IRB Initial Submission Form (this form) – Now only requires PI signature.**
- **Study staff:**
  - **A complete list of all persons who will be performing research involving human subjects.**
  - **Verification of human subjects training (700.04 FAQ, CITI Training Requirements)**
- **Recruitment Materials (flyers, advertisements, recruitment scripts)**
- **Informed consent forms (unless asking for a waiver)**
- **Copies of all study instruments, such as survey or interview questions included in the study, and/or other materials the participants will read, see, and/or hear/be told as part of the study.**
- **If performing the project at non-TAMU-CC locations, a letter of support from the site where the project will be performed.**
- **If performing research internationally, Cultural Evaluation of International Research**
- **If performing research with non-native English speaking persons or persons who have limited English-language literacy:**
  - **Translation Certificate Form**
  - **Interpreter Certificate Form**

By submitting this IRB application, the Principal Investigator (PI) attests:

1. **They have read and reviewed the form and all supporting documents;**
2. **The information submitted is accurate;**
3. **Attest that no research activities have or will begin until notification is received the study is approved; and**
4. **All personnel listed on this form have received human subjects training and accurately declared whether they have a conflict of interest for this study.**

After completing this form, submit this form with supporting documentation via email to the IRB Mailbox: irb@tamucc.edu

For questions, email: Office of Research Compliance at irb@tamucc.edu

Researchers *(all persons listed below must have CITI training completed)*

	Name	Email (use TAMUCC email)	College	Category	Conflict of Interest
PI	Lynn Hammar	lynn.hammar@tamucc.edu	Education	Faculty	No
Researcher (1)	Kendra Richardson-Contreras	kendra.richardson@islander.tamucc.edu	Education	Graduate Student	No
Researcher (2)	Kamiar Kouhestani	kamiar.kouhestani@tamucc.edu	Education	Faculty	No
Researcher (3)					
Researcher (4)					
Researcher (5)					

Overview

A. Research Classification: **Doctoral Dissertation** Other:

B. Externally funded: **No** Award Start Date: Maestro #:

C. Title: **Grade Placement Decisions (Grades 5 and 8) and Their Predictive Validity on High School Graduation or Completion**

D. Anticipated Start Date: *(Use pending IRB approval if date is <6 weeks in future)* **Upon IRB Approval**

E. Estimated Completion Date: **March 2020**

Purpose and Objective

A. Describe the purpose of the research **in layman's terms.**

The purpose of the study is to determine the validity of 5th and 8th grade Grade Placement Committee (GPC) decisions in predicting high school graduation or completion, controlling for selected demographics and special programs.

The Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI) requires the implementation of Grade Placement Committees (GPC) if a student fails to meet assessment standards on the 5th or 8th grade reading or mathematics state assessments. The committee (comprised of an administrator, teacher, and parent) determines if a student is retained or promoted to the next grade level. The purpose of this study is to determine if those decisions impact high school graduation or completion.

B. Describe the objective(s) and/or research questions **in layman's terms.**

The study is guided by the following questions:
1. To what extent does the GPC decision based on 5th grade mathematics and reading scores predict high school graduation or completion.
2. To what extent does the GPC decision based on 8th grade mathematics and reading scores predict high school graduation or completion.

Participants; Recruitment

Participants

A. Indicate whether any of the following populations will be **specifically targeted** for inclusion in the research. Each category must be answered. *Additional precautions for participants may be required.*

Adults over the age of 18 (**able** to legally consent)	No	Prisoners (adults or minors)	No
Minors under the age of 18	Yes	Individuals whose primary language is not English or who have limited English-language literacy (adults or minors)	Yes

Persons with mental disabilities (adults or minors)	Yes	Students enrolled in a researcher's course (adults or minors)	No
Persons with economical disadvantages (adults or minors)	Yes	Employees under the direct supervision of a researcher	No
Persons with educational disadvantages (adults or minors)	Yes	Pregnant women, fetuses, and/or neonates	No
Other potentially vulnerable populations depending on the circumstances of the research (describe in "B")	No	If other, please specify:	

B. Describe the criteria to determine who is included or excluded in the final participant population *(e.g., minimum age, grade range, physical characteristics, learning characteristics, professional criteria, etc).*

The subjects for the study are students from Grade 5 in 2009-2010 (assessed with TAKS) and Grade 8 in 2012-2013 (assessed with STAAR). These groups are chosen because they represent students who were required to meet minimum standards for 5th and 8th grades reading and mathematics in order to be promoted to the next grade level by the GPC decision. In order to gather a comprehensive data set, the Education Service Center Region 2 in Texas has been selected. The differences between urban, suburban, and rural students will be studied.

Demographics and special programs will also be studied to determine if these independent variables have any statistical significance in the study. The demographic data includes at-risk, economically disadvantaged, ethnicity, and gender. The special programs indicators include career and technology education (CTE) (Grade 8 only), limited English proficiency (LEP), and special education.

C. Target number of participants *(The minimum number should be the minimum number you need to obtain statistically significant findings. The maximum number is the most amount you will be allowed to enroll without submitting an amendment to the IRB to ask for additional participants.*

The existing data for 5th and 8th graders will be obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), delimited to 2009-2010 and 2012-2013 school years, and may contain 16,000 cases. We will not know the exact number until receiving the data.

D. Non-TAMUCC Participants or Facility
Complete this section only if the research will be conducted at a third-party facility or participants will be recruited from a third-party site (non-TAMUCC).

☒ *Not applicable*

Provide the non-TAMUCC location or non-TAMUCC participants to be recruited here *(include letter of support as an attachment)*.

Not applicable.

Recruitment

Recruitment Methods. Describe methods that will be used to identify the potential participants.

Not applicable, existing data will be used. Specifically, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will provide the data for students in Grades 5 and 8. There are no identifiers.

Recruitment Materials. Describe how potential participants will be recruited, what materials will be used *(include as an attachment)*, and how they will be distributed *(i.e., who, what, when, where, and how)*.

Not applicable, existing data will be used. The data from 2009-2010 (Grade 5) and 2012-2013 (Grade 8) in the above mentioned region will be used. The students' graduation and completion data from 2017 and 2018 will also be analyzed.

Incentives. If applicable, provide the amount, type, and time of distribution of any payment/incentive to participants.

Not applicable, existing data will be used. The data from 2009-2010 (Grade 5) and 2012-2013 (Grade 8) in the above mentioned region will be used. The students' graduation and completion data from 2017 and 2018 will also be analyzed.

Data Collection Methodology

Describe the method(s) or procedure(s) for data collection **in step-by-step, layman's terms** *(include who will be collecting the data, frequency, duration, location, etc).* The use of audio or video recording must be justified by the research purpose/objective or future research.

The data will be obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), including passing status for each of the three TAKS attempts in reading and mathematics (Grade 5) and each of the three STAAR attempts in reading and mathematics (Grade 8) as well as

demographic (at-risk, economically disadvantaged, ethnicity, and gender) and special program data (career and technology education (CTE) (Grade 8 only), limited English proficiency (LEP), and special education). Students graduation and completion data from 2017 and 2018 will be also be obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Specifically, two Excel data files be will be sent to the Researcher (1), KRG. No identifiers are included.

Identification of Participants; Data Collection and Storage; Equipment; Records Retention and Destruction

A. Identification of Participants. Indicate whether the data collected may contain individual identifiers (used for "confidentiality"), or whether the data will be collected anonymously.

Confidential

B. Equipment. Describe any equipment to be used *(e.g., audio, visual)*, ownership *(e.g., TAMUCC, personal)*, and methods of storage *(e.g., password, location)*.

The PI's (LH) and Researcher 1 (also known as Co-PI) (KRG) and Researcher 2 (KK) computers will be used to store the data and perform the data analysis. The PI's (LH) computer is university owned and located in her Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi office, FC 217, which is locked and password-protected when not in use. Researcher 1's (KRG) personal computer is locked and password-protected when not is use; it is located in her home. Researcher 2's (KK) university owned computer is located in his TAMUCC office, FC 223, which is locked and password-protected when not in use.

C. Data Storage. Describe how the data collected will be stored, location(s), how the confidentiality of individually identifiable information will be maintained (if applicable), and who will have access. *(For audio and video recordings, address recordings and transcripts).*

The data sent to the co-PI (KRG) by TEA and will be saved in her and the PI's (LH) password-protected computers.

D. Records Retention and Destruction. For data collected, describe how records will be maintained, duration *(justified by research design and/or future research)*, destruction mechanism, and responsible party for each. *(Include audio and video recordings and applicable transcripts).*

The coded data will be stored electronically in the PI's (LH) and co-PI's (KRG) password-protected computers for a minimum of three years beyond the completion of the doctoral dissertation. Only the PI and co-PI will have access to the raw data.

Risk to Participants; Mechanism of Protection; Outside Assistance

A. Risk to Participants. Indicate the level of risk to participants.

Minimal risk Definition: the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.	Yes
Greater than minimal risk	No

B. Mechanism of Protection. Describe **every potential risk** to human subjects that may result from participation in the research ("Risk"), and indicate the method or procedure to be used to mitigate the potential risk ("Protection Mechanism"). Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks *(e.g., breach of confidentiality, injury, psychological distress, pressure to conform, pressure to participate, etc).*

	Risk	Protection Mechanism
1.	Breach of Confidentiality	Only the PI (LH) and co-PI (KRG) will have access to the existing data from TEA. The electronic version of all data will be stored in the PI's and co-PI's personal computers. Backup copies will be stored on the Microsoft OneDrive cloud-based storage system, which is password-protected with 2-factor authentication. Microsoft provides ransomware and other protections against hackers to OneDrive users. Both computers are kept locked and password-protected when not in use. The data received from TEA should not include any identifiers. All data will be kept confidential.

	Risk	Protection Mechanism
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

C. Outside Assistance. If applicable, describe any outside assistance available to participants to mitigate the Risks stated above and how it will be provided *(e.g., medical care, counseling, etc)*.

Not applicable

Benefits to Participants; Benefits to Society

A. Benefits to Participants. If applicable, describe the potential benefits to participants as a result of taking part in the research *(exclude payments/incentives)*. If there are no benefits, then state so.

There are no direct benefits to the participants.

B. Benefits to Society. Describe the potential benefits to society or contribution to generalizable knowledge as a result of the research.

Results of the study will be used to examine the link between GPC decisions and high school graduation or completion, which will be of theoretical and practical importance to educators and other concerned individuals.

Waiver of Informed Consent; Waiver of Signed Informed Consent; Informed Consent Process

A(1). Is a waiver or alteration of informed consent process requested? (i.e., entire process is waived, or basic element(s) are altered). If "yes," go to C.	Yes	A(2). If "no," is a waiver of documentation of informed consent requested? (i.e., informed consent will be obtained without participants' signatures). If "yes," go to C. If "no," go to B.	No

B. Informed Consent Process. Unless yes to "A1", describe step-by-step the informed consent process.

Not applicable.

C. Waiver of Informed Consent; Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent. If "yes" to either A(1) or A(2), describe below why a waiver or alteration of informed consent and/or a waiver of documentation of informed consent is requested and how the applicable criteria are met based on the circumstances of the research.

Existing data, which do not include any identifiers, will be obtained from TEA, utilizing public information request. Therefore, waiver of informed consent requested.
(1) The research involves no more than minimal risk to subjects;
(2) The research could not be carried out practicably without the waiver or alteration;
(3) The waiver or alteration would not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; and,
(4) Where appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional information about their participation.

Researcher Qualifications

A. Describe qualifications for all personnel listed on the HSRP or attach CV or resume documenting experience.

Dr. Lynn Hemmer is the PI, faculty advisor, and an associate professor in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. The first co-PI, Kandee Richardson-Guartuche, is a doctoral student at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. Dr. Kamlar Kouzekanani is the second co-PI, a professor of quantitative methods in the College of Education & [redacted] co-PIs have all completed the CITI course on the protection of human research

Researcher Signature

By signing this form, the PI attests:

- They have read and reviewed the protocol as planned and the information provided is accurate.
- Confirm that no research activities have or will begin until notification is received that the study is approved.
- All personnel listed on the study have or will be trained on the protocol and human subject protection requirements.
- All personnel listed on this form have accurately declared whether they have a conflict of interest for this study.

	Name	Conflict of Interest (select one)	Date
PI	Lynn Hemmer	No conflict of interest with this project	
Signature:	Hemmer, Lynn	Digitally signed by Hemmer, Lynn Date: 2019.11.08 16:54:37 -06'00'	

APPENDIX 6

IRB Approval (Amendment and Original)

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
CORPUS CHRISTI

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
Division of Research and Innovation
6300 Ocean Drive, Unit 5844
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412
Office 361.825.2497

Human Subjects Protection Program — Institutional Review

DATE: June 1, 2020

TO: Lynn Hemmer

CC: Kandee Richardson-Guartuche

FROM: Office of Research Compliance

SUBJECT: Amendment Approval

On 6/1/2020, the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Amendment
Protocol Title:	Grade Placement Decisions (Grades 5 and 8) and Their Predictive Validity on High School Graduation or Completion
Investigator:	Lynn Hemmer
IRB ID:	119-19
Funding Source:	Internal Funding (Department or Unit Funds)
Documents Reviewed:	Amendment Submission Form Amendment COPY for KRG 600.01 Form, Initial Submission 2 012820[1]
Description of Change:	Protocol change: Data parameters changed based on TEA recommendations

TAMU-CC IRB confirmed the study as changed still satisfies the exempt category: 45 CFR 46.104(d)(4) (Secondary research for which consent is not required).

Approved changes may now be implemented.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Compliance with any questions at irb@tamucc.edu or 361-825-2497.

Respectfully,
Rebecca Ballard, JD, MA, CIP
Digitally signed by Rebecca Ballard, JD, MA, CIP
Date: 2020.06.01 14:36:30 -05'00'
Office of Research Compliance

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
CORPUS CHRISTI

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
Division of Research and Innovation
6300 OCEAN DRIVE, UNIT 5844
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS 78412
O 361.825.2497

Human Subjects Protection Program | Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 5, 2020

TO: Lynn Hemmer, College of Education and Human Development

CC: Kandee Richardson-Guartuche, Student

FROM: Office of Research Compliance

SUBJECT: Exempt Determination

On February 5, 2020, the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Exempt
Title:	Grade Placement Decisions (Grades 5 and 8) and Their Predictive Validity on High School Graduation or Completion
Principal Investigator:	Lynn Hemmer
IRB ID:	119-19
Funding Source:	None
Documents Reviewed:	KRG 600.01 Form, Initial Submission 2 012820 CITI verification

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board reviewed the project and based on the information provided has determined the research meets exempt category: 45 CFR 46.104(d)(4) (Secondary research for which consent is not required).

Therefore, this project has been determined to be exempt from IRB review. You may proceed with this project.

Reminder of Investigator Responsibilities: As principal investigator, you must ensure:

1. **Informed Consent: Ensure informed consent processes are followed** and information presented enables individuals to voluntarily decide whether to participate in research.
2. **Amendments:** This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. **Any planned changes require an amendment** to be submitted to the IRB to ensure that the research continues to meet criteria for exemption. The Amendment must be approved before being implemented.
3. **Completion Report: Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted.**
4. **Records Retention: All research related records must be retained for three (3) years** beyond the completion date of the study in a secure location. At a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to participants, all correspondence to or from the IRB or Office of Research Compliance, and any other pertinent documents.
5. **Adverse Events:** Adverse events must be reported to the Research Compliance Office immediately.
6. **Post-approval monitoring:** Requested materials for post-approval monitoring must be provided by dates requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Compliance with any questions at irb@tamucc.edu.

Respectfully,

Matthew R. Gaynor, J.D.
Digitally signed by Matthew R. Gaynor, J.D.
Date: 2020.03.05 12:35:21 -06'00'

Office of Research Compliance