

1991

## Kindergarten Retention

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KINDERGARTEN RETENTION

by

Wanda Elaine Gallmon

A project submitted to the  
Division of Curriculum and Instruction  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Education (Primary)

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Spring, 1991

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The most  
precious gift  
you can  
give a  
child  
is time.



## DEDICATION

This thesis and the resulting degree is dedicated to my husband Freeman and my daughter ShWanda. Thank you for your encouragement, patience, love, and driving me from Gainesville to Jacksonville (SMILE). If it was not for your support, this degree would not have been a reality. To God who has given me the strength and insight to accomplish this very important goal in my life! I would like to quote this scripture, "Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" Praise The Lord!!!! (Matthew 19:26)

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, kindergarten was a year of informal education designed to help a child develop some readiness skills, adjust to school, adjust socially and learn through play. Readiness for elementary education was defined in terms of attitude and motivation rather than in specific academic achievements.

The hazards of the academic model for young children is supported by recent research. Elkind (1986), for example, confirms that young children do not learn in the same ways as older children and adults. Because the world of things, people, and language is so new to infants and young children, they learn best through direct encounters with their world rather than through formal education.

During the '80s there has been an increase in the number of high-risk children entering kindergarten who may not be ready for that experience. Perhaps in response to this trend, kindergarten, rather than serving as a readiness program for future schooling, has become an experience for which children need to be prepared entering kindergarten. The National Association of Early Childhood (1987) notes that expectations have become increasingly high and unrealistic, as the curriculum from upper grades has been

pushed down to lower levels, thus doom large numbers of young children to the increased possibility of failure.

As a result of this change, there has been quite a controversy over the policy of kindergarten retention. Although grade retention is widely practiced at all levels, research suggests that it does not help children to "catch up." While retained children may appear to do better in the short term, they are at much greater risk for failure than are their non-retained peers (Shepard and Smith, 1990).

The provision of an extra year of schooling prior to first grade is intended to protect unprepared children from entering too soon into a demanding academic environment where, it is thought, they will almost surely experience failure. Yet Shepard and Smith (1988) note that, "depending on the philosophical basis of kindergarten retention, which differs profoundly from one district to the next, the extra year is meant either to be a time for immature children to grow and develop learning readiness or a time to work on deficient prereading skills" (p. 34).

So the criteria by which retention decisions are made are critical. The question of which criteria determine a child's kindergarten retention becomes paramount. The study examines this question by addressing the following issues:

1. Current practices regarding kindergarten retention;



2. The percentage of kindergartners retained each year (locally and statewide);
3. The effects of kindergarten retention;
4. The ways in which teacher pressure, parents, standardized tests, and basal reading programs contribute to kindergarten retention; and
5. Alternatives to kindergarten retention.

There will always be a group of children who lag behind their kindergarten classmates. Before we create a new program, however, we need to examine the effects of kindergarten retention. It is the intent of this study to provide county school supervisors and others with information which would enable them to take action to reverse the negative effects of past practices. This information can assist those responsible for decision-making as they struggle to make the correct decisions regarding the placement of young children.

### Definition of Terms

Academic Kindergarten: A kindergarten classroom whose curriculum is determined by a set of academic goals contained within a predetermined curriculum guide.

At-Risk Students: Children with potential learning problems, including lack of readiness in emotional, social, cognitive and/or physical growth, premature births, physical or mental handicaps, often accompanied by low SES.

Chronological Age: Age determined in years and months since birth.

Developmental Kindergarten: A program where the curriculum is adjusted to the level of children's emerging mental abilities and developmental age.

Failure: The inability to meet acceptable standards of competence or to attain major goals as set by educational placement.

Gift of Time: The allowance of an extra year in an early childhood classroom based on developmental age, during which time developmental age will come more closely in alignment with chronological age.

Immaturity: A condition characterized by a child's inability to assume the appropriate role as a learner.

Multi-Age Classroom: An ungraded or mixed age classroom, in which students develop at their own pace and help one another.

Prefirst Grade: The provision of an extra year of school between kindergarten and first grade. This placement is intended to grant extra developmental time for children deemed unready for the demands of first grade.

Project Head Start: An alternative launched in 1965 by the Office of Economic Opportunity, funded by the federal government, and designed to help communities address the needs of disadvantaged preschool children. This program attempts to break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs.

Retention: The practice of keeping a child in the same grade for a second year.

Transition Room or Junior Kindergarten: A plan whereby extra time is provided for designated children, who are

separated from the regular class in order to make adequate academic progress. This transitional experience is provided to help children mature emotionally, socially, and intellectually, so that they will be better able to cope with the academic tasks of first grade. The transition room does not repeat instruction provided in kindergarten. Instead the transition room system resembles a short-duration intensive remedial help experience. Transition class placement is, in effect, another name for retention.

CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Florida Legislature has traditionally required schools to meet the individual needs of children. Section 230.2312(1)(a), Florida Statutes, is explicit in this regard:

It is the intent of the Legislature that the elementary program be a comprehensive improvement of public education in kindergarten through grade three and provide appropriate educational opportunities for students in the critical early years that more fully meet the unique needs, talents, interests, and abilities of each student (Technical Assistance Paper, 1989).

Mandated messages such as these from our government officials have subtly influenced the current practices in the assessment and retention of young children. These practices in education today have been driven by two different sets of forces: (1) mandated messages from policymakers and the public; and (2) the coping behaviors and supporting beliefs of teachers and principals (Schultz, 1989).

During the 1980s, the policymaking community became convinced that declining levels of school performance stemmed largely from two factors: low standards of achievement and educators' low expectations for students. Policymakers saw the principle of social promotion; that is,

the advancement of students from grade to grade regardless of their achievement, as misguided. Teachers and principals may support retaining children early in their school careers for a number of reasons. For educators seeking to appease public concern about low standards, retaining rather than promoting a child conveys the message that standards are being upheld. In addition, retaining a child helps teachers and administrators maximize test scores by reducing the number of children who may be unsuccessful if promoted. Retention can also serve as a "safety valve" for teachers who wish to shield their students from what they may regard as inappropriate methods and expectations in the following grade (Schultz, 1989).

Schools are under considerable political pressure to maintain acceptably high levels of grade retention as proof of high standards. Public belief in the efficacy of retention creates a powerful mandate: retain poor-achieving students for their own good as well as for the good of society. Without a simple way to explain to the public that at-risk students are more likely to learn and stay in school if not retained, schools may sacrifice the best interests of individual children to appease popular demands (Shepard and Smith, 1990).

Retention practices are poorly documented, because there are no standardized and reliable national longitudinal data for what has always been a local or state issue

(Shepard and Smith, 1987). The problem is also localized-- policies vary from region to region. The following are examples of the retention criteria in two counties.

In Alachua County public schools, decisions regarding pupil promotion and special placement are primarily the responsibility of professional staff members of the individual school; final decisions regarding grade placement are the responsibility of the school principal. Consideration is also given to other factors, such as general progress, attendance, sense of responsibility, mental and physical health, maturity, work habits, and attitude. Finally, students achieving one-half year or more below grade level in reading and/or math on standardized measures are considered candidates for retention.

The following data are provided from the Alachua district to give an example of how many kindergartners are retained per year (Table 1).

In Duval County public schools, promotion is based on a combination of teacher judgment and the student's progress, as reflected in their IMS (Instructional Management System) skills record (see Appendix A for a copy of this document). The IMS was designed for documenting student's progress in learning basic skills. It also assists teachers on instructional planning to assure student's mastery of skills needed for promotion requirements in Duval County. In the

TABLE 1. KINDERGARTNERS RETAINED PER YEAR.

School	Kindergarten		
	87/88	88/89	89/90
Alachua	5	0	0
Archer	4	2	2
Duval	11	4	6
Finley	1	3	0
Foster	2	2	4
Glen Springs	4	0	0
Hidden Oak	---	4	1
High Springs	2	3	1
Idylwild	2	4	4
Lake Forest	16	15	3
Littlewood	2	2	2
Metcalfe	10	11	4
Newberry	5	5	3
Prairie View	7	3	0
Rawlings	11	6	8
Shell	7	0	0
Talbot	3	0	0
Terwilliger	4	2	0
Waldo	0	5	0
Wiles	15	2	0
Williams	7	0	0
<b>Total Retained</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>38</b>



'88-'89 school year, Duval County retained 1,246 kindergarten students.

While policies vary, the practice of retaining kindergarten students is widespread. Table 2 shows the number of kindergartners retained statewide in Florida during the '88-'89 school year.

The data in this table confirm that a significant number of children were retained in kindergarten, for one reason or another, in the State of Florida over the 1988-89 school year. "To retain or not to retain" should not be the issue. The issue should be how to improve the academic skills of numerous children and ultimately prevent their failure (Byrnes and Yamamoto, 1986).

A number of scholars have charged that more and more schools are using the results of tests and screening instruments to delay the enrollment of children in kindergarten; to retain children for a second year of kindergarten; or to create "extra-year" programs, such as junior kindergartens, developmental first grades, and "transition" classes, all of which are designed to delay the normal promotion of children along with their agemates (Schultz, 1989).

Two very popular readiness batteries, the Gesell School Readiness Tests and the Metropolitan Readiness Tests, are used in some states to help in screening children into developmental or two-year kindergarten programs. Many

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF KINDERGARTNERS RETAINED STATEWIDE IN FLORIDA DURING THE 1988-89 SCHOOL YEAR.

District/ Region	PK	K	District/ Region	PK	K
Bay	4	118	Brevard	1	1,346
Calhoun	0	32	Indian River	0	139
Escambia	27	242	Lake	0	262
Franklin	0	13	Okeechobee	0	87
Gadsden	21	55	Orange	13	356
Gulf	0	20	Osceola	0	342
Holmes	0	20	St. Lucie	0	402
Jackson	3	106	Seminole	0	612
Jefferson	4	23	Sumter	0	16
Leon	6	250	Volusia	30	106
Liberty	0	4	Region Total	44	3,668
Madison	0	46	Charlotte	5	39
Okaloosa	0	66	DeSoto	2	51
Santa Rosa	12	74	Glades	0	2
Taylor	0	28	Hardee	0	10
Wakulla	0	49	Hernando	0	86
Walton	0	39	Highlands	0	191
Washington	0	3	Hillsborough	32	54
Region Total	77	1,188	Lee	1	256
Alachua	0	75	Manatee	0	315
Baker	0	101	Pasco	32	721
Bradford	0	70	Pinellas	15	606
Citrus	0	119	Polk	0	646
Clay	0	236	Sarasota	28	201
Columbia	3	92	Region Total	115	3,178
Dixie	1	12	Broward	41	2,865
Duval	0	1,246	Collier	0	137
Flagler	0	42	Dade	833	1,243
Gilchrist	0	23	Hendry	0	13
Hamilton	1	18	Martin	5	134
LaFayette	0	8	Monroe	0	62
Levy	0	47	Palm Beach	7	1,673
Marion	14	147	Region Total	886	6,127
Nassau	0	69			
Putnam	37	58			
St. Johns	0	203			
Suwannee	0	11	Final Totals	1,178	16,750
Union	0	11			
Region Total	56	2,589			

reviewers have stated that the Gesell tests do not meet the standards of the American Psychological Association for validity or reliability (Kaufman, 1985; Shepard and Smith, 1985), yet the tests are used in hundreds of different school districts to make placement decisions. Although the Metropolitan Readiness Tests are technically among the best measures available (Ravitch, 1985), they were not developed for the purpose of diagnostic placement. Rather these measures were intended to help teachers organize for instruction. For example, a kindergarten teacher might plan different activities for children who are ready to learn letter sounds than for children who are not yet ready (Shepard and Smith, 1986). Kindergarten students are also expected to make high achievement scores on the MAT (Metropolitan Achievement Test) or CAT (California Achievement Test) in order to be considered for first grade.

Many early childhood educators believe that hands-on experiences, acceptance of each child's level of maturation, and pacing of instruction, especially in beginning reading, help accommodate individual differences among children (Technical Assistance Paper, 1989). Young children learn by doing. The works of Piaget (1950, 1972), Montessori (1964), Erikson (1950), and child development theorists and researchers (Elkind, 1986; Kamii, 1985) confirm that learning is a complex process that results from the interaction of children's own thinking and their experiences

in the external world. Maturation is a necessary condition for learning because it provides the cognitive and psychomotor structures from which children's learning proceeds. As children get older, they acquire new skills and experiences that facilitate the learning process. For example, as children grow physically, they are more able to manipulate and explore their own environment. In addition, they are more able to understand the point of view of other people. Since children acquire knowledge about the physical and social worlds in which they live through playful interaction with objects and people, they do not need to be forced to learn. Instead, they are motivated by their own desire to make sense of their world (Accreditation Criteria and Procedures of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, 1984).

Another aspect of this issue that has been explored is the effects of retention. Exactly what does kindergarten retention do to a child? Regardless of what it is called, the extra year creates a social stigma for children. Children are locked into being a year behind their classmates for the rest of their school days. Retention brings no subsequent academic advantage and may be emotionally damaging to children (Shepard and Smith, 1988). Recent findings confirm that there is no difference in academic achievement among students who were retained, compared to similar students who were not retained. Curry

(1982) notes that, with his/her self-confidence and self-esteem battered by a succession of small failures, the child begins to dread school.

The social and personal stigma of retention is well-documented. In a much-quoted study of child stressors Yamamoto (1980) found that children rated the prospect of repeating a grade as more stressful than "wetting in class" or being caught stealing. Going blind or losing a parent were the only life events that children identified as more stressful than being retained. When Byrnes (1989) interviewed children to ask their opinion about spending two years in the same grade, even first graders said, "Oh, you mean flunking?" (p. 85). Eighty-seven percent of the children interviewed said that being retained made them feel "sad," "bad," "upset," or "embarrassed." Only six percent of retained children gave positive answers about how retention made them feel, like, "you learn more," or "it lets you catch up." Interviews from both high achieving students and retained students revealed a widely shared perception that retention is a necessary result of being bad in class or failing to learn. So many children perceive retention as a punishment and a stigma, not as a positive event designed to help them.

Holmes (1989) found that students who are retained perform more poorly than their peers in social adjustment, attitudes toward school, behavioral outcomes, and

attendance. Over the long term, kindergarten retention has one final negative consequence. Children who are over age for their grade have a much greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Johnson, 1988). Researchers studying the dropout phenomenon have consistently found a significant relationship between a grade retention and dropping out: dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school graduates.

Hammack (1986) reports that it is difficult to keep adults in a public school program, and those who study the dropout problem note that the tendency to drop out prior to graduation is increased for the students who make average grades in their level. "Holding students back a year or more in elementary school increases the probability of [their] dropping out" (p. 131).

Because kindergarten retention can have such long-lasting effects, it is important to examine carefully why students are retained. Indeed, many elements contribute to retaining kindergarten students, and each has been studied. Some critics feel that factors such as age, teacher pressure, parents, the use of standardized tests and basal readers have all contributed to kindergarten retention. Educators are still wrestling with the problem of children's readiness for school. To date, chronological age has been the most widely used criterion in determining entry. But another factor, virtually ignored in recent years, is now

receiving belated attention: maturational level. One might argue that many failures in our schools are the result of overplacement, and that the failure rate might be reduced by achieving a better match between a youngster's grade assignment and his or her developmental age. In contrast to chronological age, which is based solely on date of birth, developmental age is determined by factors such as gender and the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of the child.

The research literature offers much support to the proposition that overplacement is a significant cause of school failure. For example, Robert Hall (1963) found that the older a pupil was at school entrance, the greater his chances of academic, social, and emotional success. Charlotte Meyer (1961) found that in nearly all instances included in her study, it was the younger children who had the highest incidences of failure, grade-repeating, and adjustment problems. Paying attention to birth age does help. If a parent has no way of getting an evaluation of their child's maturity level, the chances are very good that if he or she is on the older side (fully five for girls, fully five and a half for boys before entering kindergarten), he/she will succeed in school.

The differing maturational development of boys and girls is well-documented. In her book, Don't Push Your Preschooler, Louise Ames (1914) observes that

On the average, boys tend to be some six months slower in their development than girls. Ideally, when it comes time for school, they should start kindergarten and first grade a good six months later than girls do. If they did this, not only would they be more successful in school, but they might avoid that awkward time in the early teens when girls are so much more mature than boys in their same school grade, both physically and socially (p. 172).

Her research also suggests that even the small disadvantage of age eventually disappears, usually by about third grade, for most students (Frisen, 1984). It is the policy in many states that a child be five years of age by September 1st when entering kindergarten. The state apparently believes that if children were five years old, that would help to reduce the needs and problems attendant upon immaturity.

In addition to testing, there are ways to observe maturity levels in children. According to Curry (1982), immaturity stands out like a case of measles. Some symptoms are: easy distractibility (the tick of the clock, for example, can distract the child from his/her work), short attention span (he/she rarely can complete a task, lack of large muscle control (he/she has trouble with such things as skipping, hopping and catching a ball) and small motor control (he/she is clumsy with scissors and crayons), social retardation (he/she has not yet learned, for example, to share or take turns), and under-developed visual perception and eye-hand coordination (he/she can't copy letters and numerals from samples provided).



In addition to maturational level as a cause for retention, David identifies a second important cause for this practice: a rigorous and overly demanding curriculum. "The typical kindergarten today is what used to be taught in the second half of first grade" (Dr. Uphoff, p. 13). So five year olds are being asked to perform mental tasks that were once asked of six and seven year olds. The current practice of retaining children in kindergarten is frequently the product of inappropriate curriculum designs. Over the past 20 years, there has been a persistent escalation of academic demands in kindergarten and first grade. If a first-grade teacher is visited by the principal and reprimanded for any child who is below national norms on standardized tests, this teacher in turn often communicates to the kindergarten teacher an unwillingness to accept children for first grade who are not ready to read (Shepard and Smith, 1988).

Kindergarten teachers also describe the demands imposed by parents. Many parents whose children had been enrolled in preschools with academic curricula or who were instructed at home have pressured kindergarten teachers to accelerate the academic pace of their classrooms. If children already know the alphabet when they enter kindergarten, these parents believe, they should learn to read in kindergarten. Otherwise, the parents believe that the kindergarten experience is wasted (Shepard and Smith, 1987).

Many middle-class parents visit school and convey to teachers that their only criterion for judging that person's effectiveness is her success in advancing their child's reading accomplishments (Shepard and Smith, 1988). Harrington-Lueker (1989) reports that today's parents do not always look at what is best for their children. In fact, they often want more than what the child can produce, especially academic achievement. Toddlers in other generations toyed in sandboxes and played with blocks. Today's toddlers attend computer class. They often read before they reach kindergarten, swim before they can walk, and are enrolled in Gymboree just days after they've first rolled over and held up their heads.

In his book, The Hurried Child, David Elkind argues that the children of the '80s are being forced, more so than any previous generation, to achieve earlier and to grow up too fast. "The desire of parents to have their children read early is a good example of parental pressure to have children grow up too fast generally" (pp. 32, 34). He writes, "This pressure reflects parental need, not the child's need or inclination" (p. 34). Among the studies he cites to support his conclusions is one by Dora Phinney, who found that delaying kindergarten had positive effects on the children she observed. The work of pediatrician Berry Brazelton confirms this: "Everyone wants to raise the smartest kid in America rather than the best adjusted,

happiest kid" (Newsweek article, "Bringing up Super Baby," p. 65).

The literature confirms that increased pressure to achieve plus more and more inappropriate academic expectations are being placed on young children. Their childhood seems to be disappearing, as they are pressured to grow up before their time (Doremus, 1986; Elkind, 1987; Postman, 1981). Kindergarten teachers are finding it harder and harder to provide a developmentally appropriate program for their students, in light of the pressures from first grade teachers, advisors, and parents (Shepard and Smith, 1986).

#### Summary

The 1980s have seen an increased number of children repeat kindergarten. An extra year before first grade is now offered in a variety of different ways: developmental pre-kindergarten, transition classrooms before first grade, and repeating kindergarten.

Most studies do not support the benefits claimed for kindergarten retention. For example, when researchers followed retained children to the end of first grade or to fifth grade and compared their performance to children who were promoted and never retained, the retained child performed no better academically despite being a year older for their grade. The conclusion of "no benefit" holds even

for studies where children were selected on the basis of immaturity rather than for academics.

Although the majority of kindergarten teachers believe that retention in kindergarten does not carry a social stigma if handled properly, retained children are more likely to have a lower self-concept and poorer attitudes toward school (Shepard, 1989). Parents report short-term and long-term stress associated with the retention decision such as teasing by peers, crying when friends are promoted, and a sense of failure at an early age in retained children.

Various professionals have suggested that kindergarten retention is an educational fad, because of the apparent need to protect unprepared children from the increasingly academic demands of first grade. The problem can only be solved with a more developmentally appropriate curriculum in the early grades, something that many national associations have called for, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Association for Childhood Education International, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the International Reading Association, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Until this problem of kindergarten retention is addressed on a national scale, educators must deal with the consequences, which will continue to negatively affect children (Shepard and Smith, 1990).

### CHAPTER 3 PROCEDURES

The educational trends of the 1980s called for promotion from grade to grade on the basis of mastery of grade-level curriculum and maturation of kindergarten students. A review of related literature suggested that children were retained either due to maturational level or academic failure on grade level. There was a substantial amount of literature asserting that young children are required to understand too much material at an early age--more than they can absorb. Many teachers were forced to retain young children against their better judgment, as a result.

Based on the literature documenting these practices, a survey was administered to a population of 84 kindergarten teachers and selected administrators, in order to ascertain their professional perspective regarding what grounds were sufficient for a kindergarten student to be retained. The issues of both academic and maturational decisions were addressed by the survey. This instrument was a simple one-page survey designed to assess teachers' beliefs about kindergarten retention.\* This survey was pilot-tested with

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\*See Appendix B for a copy of this instrument.

a small sample of kindergarten teachers in Clay County. Once the teachers were selected, they were asked to complete the survey. Piloting the survey established its validity and reliability.

Following the pilot test, the survey instrument was refined prior to its dissemination in Alachua County. The survey was mailed through Alachua County's internal mailing system. A self-addressed envelope was enclosed for return of the completed instrument. The survey polled professional kindergarten teachers from all 21 elementary schools in Alachua County. Six of the schools were in the rural areas surrounding Gainesville and 15 others were located in the City of Gainesville, Florida. In addition to kindergarten teachers and principals, county supervisors were included in the sample.

The survey contained five items. The Likert scale developed provided for a yes, no, or undecided response. The following questions were included:

1. In 1991, the Florida Legislature considered mandating, by law, promotion in grades K-5. It was removed from consideration and it never was voted on. If you had a chance to vote, would you support a law requiring automatic promotion in grades K-5?

2. In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained on the basis of his/her academic progress?
3. In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained on the basis of his/her maturation?
4. In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained based on both academic and maturation factors?
5. If your response was "No" to questions 2, 3, and 4, in your professional opinion, is there any justification for retaining a kindergarten student? If yes, explain.

Finally, the results of the survey were analyzed using simple percentages to interpret the responses. The results were shared with county supervisors and principals to enable these persons to reexamine county policies regarding kindergarten retention.

CHAPTER IV  
RESULTS

The population of kindergarten teachers, principals, and county supervisors were asked to complete a simple survey on their general opinion of kindergarten retention. The respondents were asked to mark one of the following terms: "yes," "no," or "undecided" in response to four questions on the survey. Out of 84 people contacted, 46 responded.

The first question was "In 1990, the Florida Legislature considered mandating, by law, promotion in grades K-5. It was removed from consideration and it was never voted on. If you had a chance to vote, would you support a law requiring automatic promotion in grades K-5?"

As shown in Table 1, two percent of the population answered "yes," eighty percent of the population answered "no," and seventeen percent answered "undecided."

TABLE 1

---

Do you support automatic promotion in grades K-5?

---

Yes	No	Undecided
2%	80%	17%

---



The second question was "In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained on the basis of his/her academic progress?"

As shown in Table 2, forty-seven percent of the population answered "yes," thirty-two percent of the population answered "no," and ten percent answered "undecided."

TABLE 2

Would you retain on the basis of his/her academic progress?		
Yes	No	Undecided
47%	32%	10%

The third question was "In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained on the basis of his/her maturation?"

As shown in Table 3, fifty-eight percent of the population answered "yes," twenty-three percent of the population answered "no," and six percent answered "undecided."

TABLE 3

---

Would you retain on the basis of his/her maturation?

---

Yes	No	Undecided
58%	23%	6%

---

The fourth question was "In your professional opinion, should a decision to retain a kindergarten child be based on both academic and maturation factors?"

As shown in Table 4, sixty-nine percent of the population answered "yes," nineteen percent answered "no," and four percent answered "undecided."

TABLE 4

---

Would you retain based on both academic and maturation factors?

---

Yes	No	Undecided
69%	19%	4%

---

#### Summary

It is apparent from the results of the survey that there were mixed feelings in regards to kindergarten retention. The majority of the population felt that kindergarten students should not be automatically promoted

to the first grade. In the population's opinion, academics and maturation play an important part in a young child's success in school, which is due to the academic demand placed on kindergarten students today.

## CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the past few years, concern has grown regarding increased pressure and more and more inappropriate academic expectations being placed on young children. Childhood seems to be disappearing, and children are being forced to grow up before their time (Doremus, 1986; Elkind, 1987a; Postman, 1981). Kindergarten teachers find it increasingly difficult to provide developmentally appropriate programs due to the pressure to "get through" the workbooks. First grade teachers pressure kindergarten teachers to teach skills and use materials that have conventionally been designed for first grade teachers.

The primary consideration should be what is best for young children, not the school systems, principals, county supervisors, teachers, and parents. The case has been made that children do no benefit from the traditional form of retention. Children are placed in double jeopardy when they are denied the same educational opportunities as their peers.

To some, retention is a way of demonstrating rigorous standards. To children, retention is flunking, an indication that they themselves are deficient. For the system of public schools, retention functions as a way to

preserve the structure of efficient and grade-level production. But because retentions do nothing to promote the achievement of the affected individuals or the average of the group as a whole, and because the disadvantaged and minority children are most apt to be affected, retention should best be thought of as educational waste and a denial of life chances to those who most need the benefits of education. Retention has high cost and virtually no value. Those children who are retained or otherwise failed by public schools are thereby deprived of rightful learning opportunities and, more important, opportunities to succeed in life beyond school.

To achieve appropriate education for kindergarten students, education must think of ways to prevent kindergarten failure. Recommendations for preventing kindergarten failure include the following:

1. A belief that the classroom environment can have a supportive effect on every child's growth and development.
2. Flexible promotion standards that do not lock children into meeting strict and often unrealistic requirements in order to progress to the next grade.
3. An opportunity for children to benefit from a rich school experience before formal assessment is

incorporated into the program. Standardized testing using conventional achievement tests should be held off until after the primary grades. (See NAEYC Position Statement on Standardized Testing of Young Children 3 through 8 Years of Age, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1988.)

4. Adoption of the NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines for the kindergarten class.
5. Provisions for parent support, education, and involvement.
6. Provision of support services that enhance opportunities to learn and prevent failure such as speech and language therapists, psychologists, parent education, guidance services, social workers, tutoring, summer school, and individualized instruction.
7. Government continuation in providing pre-K and headstart programs for low income students.
8. School system incorporation of a more developmental kindergarten.
9. Classrooms staffed with teachers who have strong educational backgrounds in early childhood education and child development.
10. Principals who understand and support appropriate educational practices for young children.

11. A variety of curricula and the use of instructional practices that take into consideration natural variations in achievement, ability, linguistic competence, and background.
12. School system enforcement of the entrance age for kindergarten students to be five years old. Whatever the entrance age, there will always be younger and older children entering school each year and there will always be a wide range of maturity and prior life experience. Again, if the program offered is developmentally appropriate, entrance age is not a problem, as long as every child is allowed to enter by the eligibility date.

Whichever method is selected for dealing with the risk of kindergarten failure, the program needs to fit the child's learning style. The truly developmental classroom offers concrete materials and experiences, choices, and an emphasis on children being allowed to construct their own knowledge through their own actions most of the time. If the kindergarten classroom is more developmental and less academic, the child stands a better chance to succeed!

**APPENDIX A**



**Survey instrument deleted, paper copy available upon request.**

**APPENDIX B**

Dear Colleague,

My name is Wanda Gallmon. I am a kindergarten teacher at Waldo Community School. I am presently working on my master's thesis on Kindergarten Retention. I would appreciate it if you will take a few minutes to complete the following survey. Please return together in the self-addressed envelope provided.

SURVEY

1. In 1990, the Florida Legislature considered mandating, by law, promotion in grades K-5. It was removed from consideration and it never was voted on. If you had a chance to vote, would you support a law requiring automatic promotion in grades K-5?

A. Yes                      B. No                      C. Undecided

\*\*\*If you circle "A" STOP here and kindly return the survey.

2. In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained on the basis of his/her academic progress?

A. Yes                      B. No                      C. Undecided

3. In your professional opinion, should a kindergarten child be retained on the basis of his/her maturation?

A. Yes                      B. No                      C. Undecided

4. In your professional opinion, should a decision to retain a kindergarten child be based on both academic and maturation factors?

A. Yes                      B. No                      C. Undecided

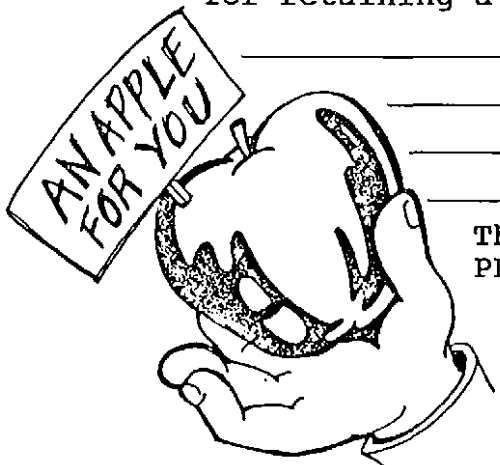
5. If your response was "NO" to questions 2, 3, and 4, in your professional opinion, is there any justification for retaining a kindergarten student? If yes, explain.

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Thank you very much for your cooperation.  
PLEASE return by the end of this week.

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