

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

by

Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2023

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES
OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

by Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

APPROVED BY:

Gail Collins, EdD, Committee Chair

Kathy A. Keafer, EdD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. The theories guiding this study are Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. The self-determination theory was used to examine the motivation of high school students after being socially promoted, and the social cognitive theory was used to examine self-efficacy as it relates to academic performance and long-term goals. These theories are relevant to this study because they identify components that students require in order to be academically successful after being socially promoted. Most research has looked at how retention has impacted students' academic performance; however, limited research has been conducted on the overall impact of the social promotion on their motivation. The central research question of this study asked, How do high school students describe their lived experience of social promotion? Data collection consisted of face-to-face interviews, online discussion board forums, and a hypothetical letter written by participants to potential socially promoted students. This study's participants included five high school students and five teachers. Data analysis strategies included horizontalization, clustering, and coding. The results of this study revealed even though socially promoted high school students faced challenges as they transitioned into high school, they experienced positive results in their academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals. The success of the students occurred due to their ability to adapt to a new learning environment, their drive/desire to achieve success, the availability of academic and familial support, and their ability to overcome the socioemotional aspects of their situation.

Keywords: phenomenology, transcendental, social promotion, academic motivation

Dedication

I would like to first and foremost express my sincere gratitude to God. I could not imagine how I would have made it through this journey without you. I have leaned on you for strength and guidance. There were times when I did not think I would make it, but I would have to remember what it says in Jeremiah 29:11 (New Living Translation), “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Then I also had to remember what it said in Proverbs 3:5–6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” I have had many moments where my commitment to this journey was decreasing, but I realized I had to trust you and know that it was you and only you who has directed me in the way I should go. I will be forever grateful.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my family. To my husband, who has encouraged me every step of the way. Thank you for never letting me give up and telling me to “suck it up and do what you have to do.” To my kids, thank you for understanding that this journey has not only been for the betterment of mommy but for you as well. Thank you for allowing me to demonstrate what perseverance, hard work, and determination look like, even in the moments when I wanted to give up. To my mom and sister, you two have encouraged me from day one. From watching Paris so I could go to classes on campus to listening to me vent and allowing me to release my frustration, you have helped me so much. To my brother, unknowingly, you provided me a moment of laughter in moments when I needed my mood to be lightened up. Thank you for the “want to hear something funny” phone calls or silly Instagram video. I have been blessed to have such an amazing

support system who has had my back the entire way through this journey. I am forever grateful!

I wanted to also take a moment and dedicate this work to my late nephew, JaQuan Yulee. You are the reason I chose to focus on social promotion. You were my inspiration. You did not have the best beginning, but you made sure that “your dash” had meaning. You were the epitome of resilience, determination, strong will and perseverance. I know life was not always easy, but through all your trials and tribulations you always shined bright and wore a smile. You showed the naysayers that if you trusted God and had faith that he would provide you what you needed when you needed it. God never let you down. I believe you were sent to Earth to show how wonderful God’s love was and is. You were our angel here on Earth, and now you are our angel in heaven. Thank you for being a tough act to follow and just being Quan! You will forever be in my heart and on my mind! I love you!

Acknowledgements

Dr. Gail Collins: When I reached out to you to ask if you would be my committee chair, I just knew you were going to say “no,” but you did not. I know God picked you for me. He knew the exact person I needed to reach the finish line. You took me on and immediately told me what you expected. I realized early on that you were “about your business” and expected a certain caliber of work. You pushed me to do better! Thank you for being patient with me but at the same time being true to hard deadlines. By nature, I am a procrastinator, and overcoming that is something I am working on. Thank you for providing me with timely feedback and helping me improve my writing. Dr. C, you are one “tough cookie” and I am so glad our paths crossed in this chapter of my life. You are amazing at you what you do, and you know your stuff. Even though I have been frustrated and shed a few tears along the way, your feedback has always been for the betterment of my study, and I appreciate your honest feedback and suggestions. I could not have asked for a better chair. I pray God continues to bless you with good health and allows you to do the things you love, like camping with your husband and spending time with your kids and grandkids. After realizing all that being a committee chair entails, you deserve your time!

Dr. Kathy Keafer: Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my dissertation committee. The feedback and encouragement you provided in the beginning when I defended my proposal was appreciated. You prepared me for what it would be like to get the participation I needed, but you gave me your best wishes and expressed your excitement to see what insight my study would bring. I think that the combination of you and Dr. Collins was the right match for me. Both of you have been nothing but honest with me from the beginning, expressing concerns, feedback, encouragement, and offering prayers on my behalf. I am grateful for the feedback that you have

provided in my manuscript. Thank you for expecting greater of me and helping me to produce a worthy final product. I feel blessed to have worked with you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Dedication	4
Acknowledgements	6
List of Tables	13
List of Abbreviations	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	15
Overview	15
Background	16
Historical Context	16
Social Context	18
Theoretical Context	19
Situation to Self	20
Philosophical Assumption	22
Research Paradigm	23
Problem Statement	24
Purpose Statement	25
Significance of the Study	25
Research Questions	26
Central Research Question	27
Sub-Questions	27
Definitions	29
Summary	29

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	31
Overview	31
Theoretical Framework	32
Self-determination Theory	32
Social Cognitive Theory	35
Related Literature.....	43
Retention	44
Interventions/Academic Support	45
Professional Development	51
Parental Involvement	53
Future Aspiration and Goals	55
Dropout Rates	57
Socioemotional Impact	58
Student–Teacher Interaction	60
Summary	62
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	63
Overview	63
Research Design.....	63
Research Questions.....	65
Central Research Question.....	65
Sub-Questions	65
Setting	65
Participants.....	66

	10
Procedures.....	66
The Researcher's Role.....	69
Data Collection	70
Face-to-Face Interviews.....	71
Student Online Discussion Board	77
Teacher Hypothetical Letter	79
Data Analysis	79
Trustworthiness.....	81
Credibility	81
Dependability and Confirmability	83
Transferability.....	84
Ethical Considerations	84
Summary	85
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	86
Overview.....	86
Participants.....	86
Student Participants	87
Teacher Participants	91
Results.....	95
Theme Development.....	96
Research Question Responses.....	108
Summary	112
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	113

Overview.....	113
Discussion.....	113
Interpretation of Findings	113
Implications for Policy or Practice	117
Theoretical and Empirical Implications	120
Limitations and Delimitations.....	123
Recommendations for Future Research	124
Conclusion	125
References.....	127
Appendices.....	152
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	152
Appendix B: Adult Student Recruitment Letter	153
Appendix C: Adult Student Consent.....	154
Appendix D: Parent Of Minor Child Recruitment Letter	157
Appendix E: Parental Consent	158
Appendix F: Child Assent To Participate In A Research Study.....	161
Appendix G: Teacher Recruitment Letter.....	163
Appendix H: Teacher Consent Form	164
Appendix I: Teacher Screening Survey	167
Appendix J: Notification Letters.....	168
Appendix K: Teacher Consent Form	169
Appendix L: Student Interview Questions.....	171
Appendix M: Teacher Interview Questions	172

Appendix N: Online Discussion Questions	173
Appendix O: Reflexive Journal	174
Appendix P: Audit Trail.....	177

List of Tables

Table 1. Student Participants	87
Table 2. Teacher Participants.....	91
Table 3. Significant Statements, Phrases, Themes, and Subthemes	96

List of Abbreviations

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Standards of Learning (SOL)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In an era of high-stakes testing, educational researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders have grown increasingly concerned about the harmful effects of both social promotion and retention of students (Mawhinney et al., 2016). Social promotion is defined as the practice of promoting over-age students to the next grade level even when they have not learned the material they were taught or achieved expected learning standards (Ahmed & Mihiretie, 2015; An, 2015; Tani, 2018; Winters & Greene, 2012). Social promotion and no fail policies, despite their prevalence, do not have universal support from educators and the public as a whole (Vallett & Annetta, 2014).

By eighth and ninth grade, students have lost years of academic instruction by being passed on to the next grade without mastering the skills of the years prior to social promotion (Mawhinney et al., 2016). King et al. (2016) suggested that promoting unprepared students does little to increase their academic achievement or life chances. As noted by Lorence (2014), unless a student has learned the required material, allowing a child who failed a grade to advance to the next grade will cause the student considerable frustration and eventually will result in further failure. However, having students repeat a grade—retention—often has negative educational consequences as well (Doherty, 2004; Dziurzyński & Duda, 2018). Retention, especially repetitive retention, also increases the likelihood of students dropping out (Andrew, 2014; McMahan, 2018).

Most researchers have examined how retention has impacted students' academic performance; however, limited research has been conducted on the overall impact of social promotion on students' academic motivation (Klapproth et al., 2016; Vandecandelaere et al.,

2016). Furthermore, there is a lack of research giving a voice to how students experienced being socially promoted and how they described their emotional well-being and academic success. This study has provided insight on the overall experiences of those students and described their lived experience with social promotion. This chapter provides a framework for the study on social promotion. It includes an explanation of the background, theoretical framework, situation to self, problem and purpose statements, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions needed to fully understand this study.

Background

Education policymakers have long debated the relative benefits of social promotion versus grade retention (King et al., 2016). Grade retention in U.S. schools has an extensive history characterized by fluctuations in the frequency and application of this educational practice as a result of shifts in educators' and policymakers' beliefs about the effectiveness of grade retention and the conditions under which it should be applied (Crepeau-Hobson et al., 2016). In many situations, school officials have decided to adopt either grade repetition or an automatic promotion policy based on its presumed effects on academic achievement, school attitudes, adjustment, and completion (Ahmed & Mihiretie, 2015). In this section, the historical, social, and theoretical context is discussed.

Historical Context

The accountability movement in the United States culminated with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), which required all states to test K–12 students regularly in the core subjects of math and reading as well as using other academic standards to measure student academic proficiency and to evaluate schools based on whether their students were making adequate progress toward achievement benchmarks (Deming & Figlio, 2016). As a

result, more districts began retaining students. Policy that was to be implemented to improve children's academic achievement resulted in the retention of students who appeared to be falling behind in order to give them the chance to meet the requirements of their current grade level (Davoudzadeh, et al., 2015). In 2015, the Obama administration enacted the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), which granted flexibility to states regarding specific requirements of NCLB (2002) in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students. The Trump Administration issued an updated template for the ESSA which ensured greater flexibility for state and local education leaders to do what they know is best for children while also maintaining important protections for economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English learners (ESSA, 2015).

Even with legislation being passed to ensure quality education for all students, children across the nation are still being socially promoted in elementary and middle schools without the necessary knowledge required to be successful in the next grade. As students transition into high school, they are faced with real accountability for their education. At the high school level students are no longer allowed to move on to the next class without passing a class or to graduate without the specified credentials that include passed classes and verified Standards of Learning credits. Ultimately, this impacts the graduation and dropout rate. According to the latest report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), the high school status dropout percentage across the United States has decreased from 9.7% in 1990 to 5.4% in 2017. NCES (2019) also noted that during the 2016–2017 school year, the adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students was 85%, which was the highest it has been since the rate

was first measured in 2010–2011. This value only accounts for students who graduated on time and not those who had been retained or socially promoted.

Social Context

Education policymakers have long debated the relative benefits of social promotion versus grade retention (King et al., 2016). Ahmed and Mihiretie (2015) posited that promoting low achieving students in the absence of an appropriate support system resulted in low interest to attend classes and poor learning, which eventually led to those students dropping out of school. While social promotion may be common in some middle schools, it is not the practice in high schools, and students are required to repeat courses until they receive a passing grade (McMahon, 2018). Consequently, such students may experience failure when they begin high school because they are unprepared for the high school experience. All students quickly realize that the academic expectations on the high school level are different from those in the lower levels of education. While in the lower levels, student academic accountability is not enforced and students are moved on despite not meeting grade level minimum requirements, which results in students developing the mindset of receiving something for nothing (McMahon, 2018). King et al. (2016) posited that promotions that are not correlated with measured student cognitive attainments have a much smaller positive impact on the probability of school continuation or persistence. Furthermore, if a child's ability to learn in future years is reduced by being placed in a grade for which the child is unprepared, then promotion could lead to increased dropout (King et al., 2016).

With respect to retention, there are still mixed conclusions from researchers. By having more time to develop the skills needed in subsequent grades, retained students would be less at risk of failure in the future and may even, relative to the counterfactual of promotion to the next

grade, increase competencies and earnings in the long run (Eide & Showalter, 2001). Even though grade retention in the elementary grades does not harm students in terms of their academic achievement or educational motivation at the transition to high school, retention increases the odds that a student will drop out of school before obtaining a high school diploma (Hughes et al., 2018).

Theoretical Context

Theoretically, retention could have positive effects on psychosocial indicators such as self-concept, academic efficacy, peer acceptance, or school belonging if retained students engage in social comparison with their new, younger classmates and experience a subsequent boost in confidence (Marsh & Craven, 2002). The theories that guided this study were Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. In this study, the self-determination theory was used to examine the motivation of high school students who were socially promoted in elementary and/or middle school and the social cognitive theory to examine self-efficacy as it relates to academic performance and long-term goals. These theories were relevant to this study because they identified components that students require in order to be academically successful after being socially promoted.

The self-determination theory is a broad theoretical framework of motivation that has been used to explain school-related outcomes as well as highlighting a comprehensive taxonomy of motivation based on reasons that energize behavior (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This theory identified two basic types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from within, and extrinsic motivation requires an external stimulus to occur. While intrinsic motivation does not require stimuli to occur, it is fueled by three basic needs: competence,

relatedness, and autonomy. This theory is relevant to this study because it identifies components that students require in order to be academically successful after being socially promoted.

The second theory guiding this study, Bandura's (2018) social cognitive theory, not only addresses how people acquire knowledge and competencies but also how they motivate and regulate their behavior and create social systems that organize and structure their lives. Bandura (2006) posited that people are contributors, or agents, to their life circumstances, not just products of them (Bandura, 2006). This theory accounted for agentic properties in psychosocial functioning, which manifested through three properties: forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2018).

Based on these properties, Bandura (2012) pointed out that people set goals for themselves and predict the possible outcomes for different actions that provide direction, coherence, and meaning to one's life. As individuals work towards achieving their goals, they actively monitor and regulate their actions by use of self-evaluation in accordance with personal standards they have set. Furthermore, they respond with positive or negative evaluative self-reactions depending on how well their behavior measures up to their adopted standards (Bandura, 1991). Finally, using self-reflectiveness, individuals can reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits, and try to make corrective adjustments if necessary (Bandura, 2018). This theory helps examine how students who are socially promoted remain self-motivated and adjust to their academic and social environments and reach their academic goals

Situation to Self

During my years as a high school teacher, students moved to the next grade based on their performance in class and on the Standards of Learning (SOL) test they completed at the end

of the school year. Both teachers and students are held accountable for the students' academic performance and success. If students did not pass the class and SOL, they had to repeat the class and retake the SOL test to receive the verified credit to graduate.

When I transitioned to the middle school level, student accountability as I had known it was no longer a priority. With NCLB (2002) replaced by ESSA (2015), testing requirements had been lowered and more implementation power had been returned to the state. Students were promoted to the next grade regardless of whether or not they had passed the class. As an educator, this was the first time I had experienced such a promotion policy. Students were being promoted without regard to their academic performance and with a lack of required skills to be successful in the next grade. Students could do less than expected and be rewarded with moving on to the next grade, yet teachers are still held accountability for student performance and adequate yearly progress. As noted by McMahon (2018),

Social promotion changed the paradigm of the school from: (a) an emphasis on merit to an emphasis on efficiency, (b) a focus on individual to group learning, (c) a belief in different capability to equal capability, (d) adjusting student to school to adjusting the school to the student, and (e) a focus on the best students to the average students.
(pp. 500–501)

As an eighth-grade teacher, I was constantly reminding my students about the difference in the expectations of high school and how they must adjust their mindset to have a smoother transition. I was interested in learning how students who have been socially promoted adjust to the new environment and expectations. I was motivated to conduct a study on the lived experiences of social promotion of high school students to gain insight on their views and experiences of the phenomenon.

Philosophical Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined a philosophical assumption as a stance taken by the researcher that provides direction for the study. There are four philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. This study was guided by the ontological and axiological belief. In the following paragraphs, these two assumptions are discussed.

In conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, my goal was to develop subjective meaning to the experiences of the participants and rely as much as possible on their views of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this study, my aim was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in Southeastern Virginia. Having an ontological mindset, I was cognizant that as I explored the lived experiences of the participants, there would be different perspectives obtained from each participant. My goal was to identify the common themes among the participant experiences in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological Assumptions

In conducting a qualitative study, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. They emphasized the importance of conducting the study where the participants live and work. Throughout this study, interviews and discussion board posts were conducted or completed within the school building where participants attended. Even though I had not taught all of the participants, I have worked in the school district and at the middle school they once attended. As a result, I had a sense of familiarity with the school culture and community the participants experienced. I have not experienced firsthand being socially promoted; however, I have witnessed the experiences of

relatives who have either been socially promoted, retained, or both.

Axiological Assumptions

In a qualitative study, researchers should make their values known (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When I began teaching at the middle school level over 10 years ago, my personal position about social promotion developed. It was apparent to me that students were not held academically accountable. Even when students failed two or more of the core classes, to include reading, math, science, and social studies, they were promoted to the next grade. Even though I did not agree with the policy, there were times I would be required to sign a “promotion with exception” form for students who did not earn the right to move on to the next grade. It was apparent to me we were setting students up for failure as they transitioned into high school. It is my belief that students should have academic accountability in elementary and middle school. They should not be promoted to the next grade without meeting the grade level requirement. Being aware of my own beliefs as it relates to the study, I bracketed my personal views and focus on the experiences of the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Paradigm

The paradigm that guided me through this study was social constructivism as I examined the perceptions of high school students and their experiences of social promotion. In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this study constructivism was incorporated by using open ended questions in interviews, focus groups, and discussion board forums. Using broad and open-ended questions allowed the participants to elaborate on their experiences without me guiding them through their answers. It also allowed them to express themselves more freely. Using social constructivism as the paradigm provided an avenue to interpret related experiences

and gain subjective meaning of the experiences of high school students who have been socially promoted (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Problem Statement

In an era of high-stakes testing, educational researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders have grown increasingly concerned about the harmful effects of both social promotion and retention of students (Mawhinney et al., 2016). Although retaining students who fail to meet grade level standards has limited empirical support, promoting students to the next grade when they have not mastered the curriculum of their current grade, a practice termed social promotion, is not an educationally sound alternative (Crepeau-Hobson et al., 2016). Social promotion and “no fail” policies, despite their prevalence, do not have universal support from educators and the public as a whole (Vallett & Annetta, 2014). This study provided insight into the overall experiences of social promotion for those high school students. In order to determine the overall essence of the participants’ experience of the phenomenon, the lived experiences of high school students who have been socially promoted was explored and insight was gained on how social promotion in elementary and middle school impacts the academic performance and motivation. There has been a lack of research addressing the phenomenon, social promotion, that gives a voice to the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students. Most research explored the short-term effects of social promotion and retention, but little is known about the long-term effects of these practices on students (Mawhinney et al., 2016). The problem of this study was to understand high school students’ experiences with social promotion as it relates to their academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals. Additionally, including teachers who have taught socially promoted students in this study provided insight from the teacher’s

perspective of social promotion as it relates to their observations of their students' academic performance and long-term goals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. Social promotion is defined as the practice of advancing students to the next grade with their peers of the same age despite not having met the grade level academic standards (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Struggling children who are promoted anyway are more likely to suffer from repeated experiences of academic failure (Vandecandelaere et al., 2016). The theories guiding this study were Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory that focuses on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of humans and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory which examines how people acquire knowledge, sustain motivation, and adjust their behavior to function within their social environment.

Significance of the Study

Educational professionals often debate the merits and limitations of (social) promotion versus grade retention (King et al., 2016; Klapproth & Schaltz, 2015). Empirically, since there is a lack of current research on the phenomenon of social promotion, through this study, I provided the foundation for further exploration of social promotion. Also, this study may ignite an interest for future researchers to delve deep into the experiences of social promotion on other types of communities and groups. This study provides current insight into how students live through being socially promoted and provides valid evidence of their life. With future studies, the findings that relate to the academic performance and motivation of socially promoted high school students and their lived experiences can be compared to studies that address related topics

with respect to the phenomenon of retention. Furthermore, the findings have filled in some of the gaps in literature as it relates to the experiences of students who have been socially promoted or retained to a grade. Stone and Engel (2007) suggested future research should focus on more intensive explorations of student and teacher perspectives and experiences of retention, as well as on larger contextual variables at the classroom, school, district, and state levels.

Theoretically, by examining the perception of high school students who have been socially promoted, this study has helped educational leaders understand the impact of social promotion on students' academic performance, motivation, and long-term aspirations. The findings have demonstrated how each of the noted areas are impacted and have been reinforced by Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory and Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. These theories will provide the foundation to explain the outcomes of the study.

Practically, the findings from this study may change the way educational leaders and other stakeholders view social promotion. The experiences of the high school students may provide educators with insight into how to support students who have been socially promoted both academically and emotionally. Policymakers and professional educators should take notice of these findings and should engage in collaborations with scientists, school psychologists, and other related personnel in order to design, apply, and evaluate additional strategies and academic support (Klapproth & Schaltz, 2015).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study. These questions provided a foundation for describing the lived experiences of high school students who have been socially promoted in the southeastern region of Virginia. The central research question focused on the primary purpose of the study and the three sub-questions address different areas related to Ryan

and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. Using these theories to formulate the sub-questions allowed the participants who have been socially promoted to provide their perception of their lived experiences of the phenomenon, social promotion.

Central Research Question

How do high school students and their teachers describe the lived experience of students who were socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years?

Students provide a unique picture of school because it is their life and their reality. McMahon (2018) examined social promotion and retention from the viewpoint of the student to determine whether students saw social promotion or retention helping them. His study revealed that students felt that the transition from middle school to high school was difficult and both levels should work together to make the transition easier and smoother. Even though students are molded and subjected to the world around them, they understood in high school they needed to assume responsibility for their actions (McMahon, 2018).

Sub-Questions

SQ1: How do high school students and their teachers describe academic performance on the high school level as it relates to social promotion?

The social cognitive theory addresses the key aspects of perceived self-efficacy and includes origins of efficacy beliefs, their structure and function, their diverse effects, the processes through which they work, and the modes of influence by which a resilient sense of efficacy can be created and strengthened for personal and social change (Bandura, 1997, 2012). Fall and Roberts (2012) noted that students' perceived control positively influenced academic engagement and achievement, while identification with school negatively influenced

achievement and positively influenced academic and behavioral engagement. Furthermore, their findings suggested that students' self-systems affect their school engagement and academic achievement, and that behavioral and academic engagement and academic achievement are key variables to consider when predicting high school dropout (Fall & Roberts, 2012).

SQ2: How do high school students and their teachers describe motivation on the high school level as it relates to social promotion?

Ahmed and Mihiretie (2015) posited that automatic promotion affects interest and motivation to learning. They found that although some parents and teachers appreciated the importance of promoting students, automatically promoted students often faced difficulties when trying to meet the standards required in the next grade level, which in turn decreased their interest and motivation to learning. In another study where Vansteenkiste et al. (2009) focused on how autonomy relates to students' motivation and the behaviors they choose in the academic setting, they concluded that high school students with high autonomous motivation and low controlled motivation showed low levels of test anxiety, procrastination, cheating, and high grade point average. The self-determination theory noted that the satisfaction of competence, along with the other basic needs of autonomy and relatedness, leads to the development of more autonomous forms of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). With this question, students were able to discuss how being socially promoted affected their motivation to achieve more.

SQ3: How do high school students and their teachers describe long-term goals of students who were socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years?

Deci and Ryan (2008) posited that intrinsic aspirations include such life goals as affiliation, generativity, and personal development, whereas extrinsic aspirations include such goals as wealth, fame, and attractiveness. Vansteenkiste et al. (2004) noted that an emphasis on

intrinsic goals, relative to extrinsic goals, is associated with greater health, well-being, and performance. With respect to academic performance, a study in Brazil revealed that automatic promotion may have a negative effect in several grades and the overall impact of the automatic promotion regime may lead to considerable loss of academic achievement over the 8 years of primary school (Foureaux-Koppensteiner, 2014).

Definitions

1. *Social Promotion* - The practice of promoting students to the next grade level even when they have not learned the material they were taught or achieved expected learning standards (Ahmed & Mihiretie, 2015; An, 2015; Winters & Greene, 2012).
2. *Self-Determination Theory* – The theory represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality (Ryan & Deci, 2016).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. This study provided insight into the overall experiences of social promotion for those high school students and described how social promotion in elementary and middle school relates to their academic performance and motivation. Additionally, this study may ignite an interest among future researchers to delve deeper into the experiences of social promotion on other types of communities and groups. Furthermore, the findings from this study may change the way educational leaders and other stakeholders view social promotion. The theories guiding this study were Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, which focused on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of humans and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory, which examined

how people acquire knowledge, sustain motivation, and adjust their behavior to function within their social environment.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), states were faced with enforcing educational accountability within their school districts. In order to meet the federal educational mandates of raising educational achievement and closing the racial/ethnic achievement gap, state and local education boards had to implement strategies that focused schools' attention on raising student performance test scores, securing qualified teachers, and providing educational choices to their students (Darling-Hammond, 2007). As school districts strove to meet the mandated minimum achievement benchmark, students were faced with high-stakes standardized testing, and teachers found themselves teaching to a test. Ultimately, in the state of Virginia, if the schools did not meet the performance and adequate yearly progress benchmarks for their state's proficiency goals, they would be labeled as "accredited with conditions" or "accreditation denied," face school restructuring where the state takes control of the building, or lose federal funding (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009). Many school districts resorted to the threat of grade retention to motivate students to pass the high-stakes standardized test.

This literature review provides a theoretical understanding of social promotion and highlights a literature gap that exists as it relates to social promotion regarding the motivation, self-efficacy, and the long-term goals of students. Two theories guided this study: Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, which is also called the theory of motivation, and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. The self-determination theory highlights a comprehensive taxonomy of motivation based on reasons that energize behavior (Gagné & Deci, 2005). It discusses how motivation shapes who we are and how we behave (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Additionally, the social cognitive theory is related to the impact of socially promoted students'

self-efficacy or capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment.

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that lays the foundation for the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study. Discussion of the theoretical framework will provide direction to the study and an explanation of why individuals have certain experiences or perceptions with respect to the phenomenon. Following the theoretical framework, the literature related to social promotion, retention, academic support, and long-term consequences is discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on two theories. The first theory is Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, which identifies levels of motivation that impacts the individual's ability to accomplish specific goals and be a self-regulated learner. The second theory, Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory, provides an understanding of an individual's behaviors and responses to various academic and social situations. The social cognitive theory also provides the foundation for the idea of self-efficacy, which describes the confidence a person has as it related to completing a task, regardless of the challenge that it presents. Both of these theories will guide this study and help explain the experiences of socially promoted high school students.

Self-determination Theory

Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory is a broad theory on motivation that has been used to explain school-related outcomes as well as highlight a comprehensive taxonomy of motivation based on reasons that energize behavior (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This

theory identifies three categories of motivation as it relates to the self-determination theory; they are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

Intrinsic, or autonomous motivation, occurs when one freely chooses to engage in a behavior and fully endorses this choice either out of interest or personal importance (Close & Solberg, 2008). Individuals with higher levels of autonomous motivation for attending school had more confidence (i.e., self-efficacy) in their academic ability, and perform better academically (Isik et al., 2018). The more students feel responsible for their behavioral choices, the more they tend to be intrinsically motivated (Terrier, et al., 2018). They are more engaged in activities out of a sense of personal agency, for the interest and satisfaction derived from the activity itself, or its concomitant outcomes, and in the absence of any externally referenced contingencies (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2016), which are strongly associated with persistence on self-directed learning activities.

On the other hand, controlled or extrinsically motivated students require an external stimulus to spark their interest in completing tasks. Low levels of self-determination are reflected in behavior that is extrinsically motivated by the desire to comply or to avoid negative consequences (Luginbuhl et al., 2016). Even though extrinsically motivated students demonstrate low levels of self-determination, there are situations such as doing assignments to secure good grades or to enact a “good” student identity where they show higher levels of self-determination. In these instances, they may choose engaging behaviors to obtain valued rewards or to maintain a perceived and valued identity (Luginbuhl et al., 2016). According to self-determination theory, autonomous motivation will be associated with positive academic outcomes and well-being, while controlled motivation will be associated with less academic engagement and distress (Ryan & Deci, 2016).

Amotivation is defined as a lack of intention or value for behavior that results in either no action or passive behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Amotivation is considered the most external and least self-determined form of motivation in the self-determination theory (Garn et al., 2010). Individuals who lack motivation are completely non-autonomous and do not desire to have any of their needs met. Jackson-Kersey and Spray (2016) identified an amotivated individual as someone who lacks self-determination, which could result if the individual lacks competence, devalues the activity, or is deficient in his or her abilities to achieve desired outcomes. Students falling into this category would not exhibit intrinsic or extrinsic behaviors. They would not find relevancy in completing assignments and may not participate in class at all. Furthermore, amotivated students or students experiencing low levels of motivation would likely develop "weak coping strategies in the case of failing" (Alt, 2015, p. 32), which could negatively affect student perceptions of education and their motivation to learn in the future (Anderson & Peart, 2016).

According to the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), human well-being and healthy motivation (e.g., intrinsic motivation) are nourished by the fulfillment of three fundamental psychological needs: the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Autonomy is defined as the need to experience a sense of control and volition, competence as the feeling to mastery and effectiveness, and relatedness as a connection with others such as teachers and classmates in a social context (Chu & Zhang, 2018). The social determination theory focuses on how social-contextual factors support people's basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2016).

Students' feeling of competence can be affected by grade retention because retained students may come to believe that they are the least academically competent students within their

peer group (Mathys et al., 2019). As a result, a level of disconnect could result as their peers are promoted to the next grade and they are retained. The students' fulfillment of the need for relatedness in the peer and school settings could be affected. Additionally, students' autonomy may be affected because they feel they do not have control over the situation.

The self-determination theory is the basis for the research questions as it addresses the topics of concern related to students who are socially promoted. By using the self-determination theory, I examined students' lived experiences of social promotion and provided an understanding of their experiences by relating them to the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to others. This study examined the overall lived experiences of social promotion from the viewpoint of high school students and their teachers and how it relates to their academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory was used to help understand how social promotion influenced the behavior and experiences of high school students with respect to academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals.

Social Cognitive Theory

Determinism is the idea that everything in the world has a cause and that because everything has a cause, everything is explainable in principle (Dahlbeck, 2017). This means that all actions occur as a direct result of another event or decision being made. Human behavior has often been explained in terms of one-sided determinism. For example, the behaviors exhibited by disruptive students or other individuals are directly shaped or controlled by either environmental influences, such as issues at home, or by internal dispositions, such as their genetic code. However, Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory suggests that behaviors are based on the foundation of triadic reciprocal determinism, which is a three-way, dynamic, reciprocal model in which

personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior continually interact or influence one another. Triadic reciprocal determinism describes how an individual regulates relative changing environmental circumstances in order to gain desired outcomes (Lo Schiavo, et al., 2019).

Even though most external influences affect behavior through cognitive processes, Bandura (1986) suggested that there is no one factor that contributes to human behavior; rather, it is a combination of influences that impact the behaviors exhibited. Behavior, cognition, and environment influence and are influenced by each other (Williams & Williams, 2010). Each factor contributes to how the individual chooses to behave. However, it is important to note that the factors do not influence the individual's behavior in equal amounts or occur at the same time. Cognitive factors partly determine which environmental events will be observed, what meaning will be conferred on them, whether they leave any lasting effects, what emotional impact and motivating power they will have, and how the information they convey will be organized for future use (Bandura, 1989).

Bandura (1989) posited that personal or cognitive factors such as knowledge, expectations, self-perception, and attitude give shape and direction to behavior. He also noted that what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986). When students are socially promoted to the next grade, their views of knowledge and expectations change. As they enter into the next grade level and experience new expectations, depending on the level of knowledge attained from the previous grade and their competence, their self-perception may be impacted. When students do not see themselves as competent, their achievement is lower (Kirby et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2015). Some students may have developed a belief that academic outcomes do not correlate with effort or that school achievement is not

important (Kenny et al., 2010), and as a result, they may not put forth the effort necessary to be successful in the current grade.

Environmental factors, such as social norms, access in the community and influence on others, and behavioral factors, to include skills, practice, and self-efficacy, can influence how individuals behave as well. The social cognitive theory suggests that in addition to learning through one's own experiences, individuals are vicarious learners, or learn by observing the actions of others (Glanz, 2020). Students look to the actual as well as perceived behaviors of their peers to guide their own behaviors and are motivated to align their behaviors with those of their peers to build and maintain close relationships (Bandura, 1989; Meisel & Colder, 2015). The social cognitive theory encompasses the key aspects of observational learning, reinforcement, self-control, and self-efficacy. Bandura (1989) noted that human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents, and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modeling, instruction, and social persuasion.

Observational Learning

In the social cognitive theory, Bandura (1989) posited that humans have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of information conveyed by modeling influences. Observational learning is defined as the capacity to learn by observation only, without immediate reenactment (Nadel et al., 2011). During the process of observational learning, even if it occurs in social environments, cognitive processes are still involved. Learners internalize and make sense of what they see to reproduce the behavior themselves (Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018). Learning from models may take varied forms, including new behavior patterns, judgmental standards, cognitive

competencies, and generative rules for creating new forms of behavior (Bandura, 1989).

Observational learning consists of four phases: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

During the attention phase the learner observes or notices the behavior exhibited by the model and processes their behavior. Then, during the retention phase, the learner internalizes the behavior and stores it in his or her memory. While internalizing the behavior, the learner uses cognitive processes to mentally rehearse the behavior or action (Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018). The internal simulation involves not only action programming but also the generation of a copy of the movement to be reproduced (Raos et al., 2007).

During the reproduction phase, when an opportunity presents itself, the learner puts what he or she learned in the attention phase and how they processed it in the retention phase into action. During the final stage, motivation, learners weigh their options to determine if the modeled behavior warrants imitation in other situations. Learners will not always demonstrate the modeled behavior. Whether or not the learner performs the observed behavior depends on incentive motivators or reinforcements (Bandura, 1989; Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018).

Reinforcement

Social cognitive theory distinguishes between acquisition and performance because people do not perform everything they learn (Bandura, 1989). The performance of the behavior is influenced by direct, vicarious, and self-produced reinforcements. Direct reinforcements or motivators relate to the perceived reward or outcomes. Learners will perform the modeled behavior if there is a valued reward or positive consequence rather than if they perceive a negative consequence or punishment. Learners are motivated vicariously by observing the successes of others who are similar to themselves but are discouraged from pursuing courses of behavior that they have seen result in adverse consequences (Bandura, 1989). Self-produced

reinforcements, or motivators, relate to the learner's personal beliefs about how to behave in different situations. How learners react is based on their own evaluation of the situation, and they are able to identify the self-satisfying behavior and the behavior they disprove of (Bandura, 1989). In general, when learners are encouraged by the feedback given with respect to the modeled behavior, they will internalize the skill and use the strategy independently and in various contexts (Groenendijk et al., 2013).

Self-Control

The human capacity to exert self-control is viewed as one of the most powerful and beneficial adaptations of the human psyche (Tangney et al., 2004). Self-control is defined as the "ability to override or change one's inner responses, as well as to interrupt undesired behavioral tendencies and refrain from acting on them" (Tangney et al., 2004, p. 275). Bandura (1991) noted that people possess self-reflective and self-reactive capabilities that enable them to exercise some control over their thoughts, feelings, motivation, and actions. As individuals activate or increase the amount of self-control they have, they may see or experience a more positive outcome.

Individuals who have an increased ability to self-regulate are able to motivate themselves and utilize strategies to control their behavior, which plays a major role in self-direction and continuing behavior change (Bandura, 1997). In their investigation of the relationship between self-control and various outcomes in life, such as adjustment, academic performance, and interpersonal success, Tangney et al. (2004) concluded that individuals with high self-control attain better grades, adjust better to change, had better interpersonal skills and relationships, and had more optimal emotional lives than other people. However, in the cases of students who have been socially promoted or retained, many may have low levels of self-control and have different

outcomes. An inquiry of secondary students in a rural New York community found that those who had been retained showed lower educational expectations for themselves, more disruptive behavior, less impulse control, and an external locus of control when compared to a group of matched-ability peers who had not been retained (Hagborg et al., 1991).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy has been acknowledged as an important and comprehensive idea in accounting for people's learning behavior (Wang & Degol, 2016). Self-efficacy is defined as one's perceptions of whether they can accomplish certain goals or tasks, and it has been a fairly accurate indicator of student persistence and academic performance (Dell et al., 2018). Students who believe that they are capable of performing certain tasks (self-efficacy), value learning intrinsically, and have a low level of test anxiety, tend to be more engaged academically, use more cognitive strategies, and are more likely to persist in learning (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Efficacy beliefs, therefore, affect how much effort people apply to an activity, how long they will continue when encountering obstacles (persistence), and how resilient they are when confronted with difficult situations (Juan et al., 2018).

Bandura (1997) posited that when people believe in what they can achieve, this belief has positive effects and influences performance. How individuals perceive their ability or level of competence to complete tasks, whether academic or social, plays an important role in identifying or predicting their behavior in various circumstances (Usher, 2009). With respect to student academic achievement, Bandura (1986) theorized that students' beliefs about themselves, their environment, and the requirements for intellectual success can influence their motivation and, as a result, their performance in school. He concluded that personal self-efficacy beliefs assist

individuals to face difficult tasks, persevere, and achieve desirable outcomes (Laurencelle & Scanlan, 2018).

Bandura (1997) asserted that self-efficacy beliefs are formed from four different sources to include mastery and vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and beliefs that are formed during emotional and physiological states. Enactive mastery experiences are often the most powerful source of self-efficacy beliefs because they provide firsthand evidence of capability (Bandura, 1997). Sometimes referred to as “enactive mastery,” mastery experiences allow students to demonstrate their ability through events and activities, such as performance, written work, or examinations (Beatson et al., 2018). Mastery experiences provides situations or activities where students can demonstrate their ability to complete a performance task and receive immediate feedback. The more that students receive confirmation of their enactive mastery of material, the more their self-efficacy beliefs are likely to grow (Beatson et al., 2018).

Another source where self-efficacy beliefs can be formed is through vicarious learning experiences. Learning vicariously is described as the process humans utilize to gain knowledge just by watching others model the behavior and the respective consequence (Bandura, 1989). Depending on the consequences issued or not issued, observers will then decide if they will exhibit the same behavior when they experience the same scenario. Self-efficacy provides a foundation for this study as it describes how students’ self-efficacy influences how they process information and how they make judgments about their own capability (Laurencelle & Scanlan, 2018).

Verbal persuasion is an additional way self-efficacy belief can be formed, which relates to receiving positive feedback, praise, and encouragement from the teachers and other students. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) noted that encouragement motivates individuals to

believe that they have the ability to achieve a high level of performance. Emotional arousal refers to psychological reactions and feelings towards the activity (Alshahrani & Rasmussen-Pennington, 2019). For example, if a student is not a good test taker, he or she may become nervous or have anxieties while completing a test. Emotional arousal can create psychologically stressful situations for individuals, depending on the circumstances (Bandura, 1977).

For some socially promoted students, being unequipped with the prerequisite skills from the previous grade may impact their self-efficacy as they enter into their new grade. When students do not see themselves as competent, their achievement is lower (Kirby et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2015). As students are faced with the challenge of increased academic expectations, many may fear they are not fully prepared for the requirements of the coursework and may develop a lowered self-efficacy. However, self-doubt does not have to be their reality. Even though socially promoted or lower performing students may have lower self-efficacy beliefs in the beginning, it can change over time.

Usher and Pajares (2008) shared that when students persevere and face their academic challenges, they will eventually increase their self-efficacy. As they acquire new information and experiences during task performances, their negative view of their ability could change to positive (Park & John, 2014). In reference to the personal, environmental, and behavioral factors that influence an individual's self-efficacy, there may be additional opportunities to cause a change in how they perceive their abilities. For example, Usher (2009) pointed out that students' self-efficacy beliefs can be enhanced when they alter their emotions and thoughts (personal factor), when their teachers use effective classroom structures (environmental), and when students improve their self-regulatory practices (behavioral). Trujillo and Tanner (2014) posited that by increasing socially promoted or lower performing students' self-efficacy, not only will

their capacity to self-regulate their learning increase but the potential to tackle more challenging goals will as well.

Related Literature

Social promotion is a practice of advancing students to the next grade with their same age peers despite not having met the grade level academic standards (González-Betancor & López-Puig, 2016; Reschly & Christenson, 2013). As an alternative to grade retention, social promotion is an educational strategy that allows students to continue to the next grade despite not meeting the grade level goals with the hopes that they will gain momentum and perform better.

According to the 2017 National Assessment of Education Progress, 37% of high school seniors test proficient in reading and only 25% are proficient in math (Fiore et al., 2017). Data show a decline in students' performances as they transition from elementary to middle and then high school. In his study, McMahon (2018) discovered that while social promotion has the aim of keeping students with their age group peers, 90% of students who had been socially promoted twice were still in high school while their peers had graduated. Of the 10% who were no longer in school, 7% graduated on time with their peers and the other 3% dropped out. Even though students are socially promoted in elementary and middle school, it does not mean students graduate high school on time with their age group or at all. The academic expectations are different in high school, and academic accountability is required to move on to the next grade. As a result, students who were socially promoted at least twice may graduate, but it will take them longer and it will not be with peers their own age (McMahon, 2018).

González-Betancor and López-Puig (2016) posited that students may have future difficulties in the learning process as being promoted automatically may lead to grade retention during secondary education from learning gaps that make it difficult for them to achieve the

academic competences of secondary education. While social promotion may be common in some middle schools, it is not the practice in high schools, and students are required to repeat courses until they receive a passing grade. Consequently, such students upon beginning in high school may immediately experience failure because they are unprepared for the high school experience (McMahon, 2018). Vandecandelaere et al. (2016) encouraged policy and practice to provide additional support for at-risk children who are promoted, which could have a positive impact on psychosocial developments as well as interventions that remedy academic failure.

Retention

Grade retention refers to the practice of requiring students to repeat a year of schooling when they did not meet certain educational, or in some cases, social (maturational) standards (González-Betancor & López-Puig, 2016; Reschly & Christenson, 2013; Vandecandelaere et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2014) and has been implemented as a means to improving low-achieving students' academic performance (Warren & Saliba, 2012). Proponents of retention advocate granting students more time to develop, preventing failure and frustration later on in life and giving educators the opportunity to address students' shortcomings as early as possible by implementing relevant instructional strategies (Vandecandelaere et al., 2016). Studies have shown the positive benefits of retention as repeaters experience academic success in areas they may not have experienced had they been promoted. This educational practice is assumed to help homogenizing academic achievement in the classroom despite the heterogeneity of age (Klapproth et al., 2016). When low achieving students are retained in a grade, the academic status of children becomes more homogeneous and hypothetically makes it easier for the teachers to adequately deliver instruction (Manacorda, 2012) and meet the learning needs of all students.

Some initial positive academic effects have been found for retained students during the retention year; however, those effects fade fairly quickly (Klapproth et al., 2016; Reschly & Christenson, 2013). In a longitudinal study that compared the long-term outcomes for retained students, promoted but low achieving counterparts, and a control group revealed evidence that retained students had low academic and employment outcomes (Jimerson, 1999). Jimerson (1999) found that retained students were 20–25% more likely to have dropped out of high school when compared to a group of similarly low-achieving but promoted students. While in the short term retained students can show a boost in their academic achievement, in the long term this improvement tends to decrease, disappear, or even reverse when comparing these students with their socially promoted peers (X. Chen et al., 2010; Jimerson, 1999; Moser et al., 2012). Although grade retention appears as a viable solution to ensure academic success, several studies have shown no positive effect of grade retention on academic achievement (Wu et al., 2010).

Interventions/Academic Support

Education policymakers have long debated the relative benefits of social promotion versus grade retention (King et al., 2016). Neither practice, grade retention, nor social promotion closes the learning gap for low-achieving students, and none of them are an appropriate response to the academic needs of students who have trouble mastering required coursework. The real issue is to analyze what strategies should be followed with students who do not meet certain educational or social standards, advancing other complementary proposals like giving carefully monitored instructions and supplementary interventions that address the student's learning needs (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Holding schools accountable for student progress requires effective intervention strategies that provide educational opportunities and assistance to promote the social and cognitive development of students.

With respect to retention, one of the major concerns is the exposure of students to the same curriculum, which includes areas that the student may have already mastered. As a result, students will be deprived of access to meaningful, age-relevant curriculum challenges, which can disrupt their development of self-regulation and academic skills (Vandecandelaere et al., 2016). Instead of promoting continual learning and building on content students already know from the previous year, they are settled in a review or refresher mode of learning, which could result in boredom and behavioral disruptions. In contrast, proponents of retention argue that by repeating the same grade, low-achieving students have extra time to catch up to the grade-level requirements, both in terms of knowledge and emotional maturity (Cockx et al., 2019). From this perspective, students will be allowed more time to develop the skills needed in subsequent grades and be more successful in future grades.

Although repeating a year in the same curriculum is common to most definitions, less clear is the role of modifications in instruction or adaptation of curriculum and instruction to fit the needs of the individual learner (Abbott et al., 2010). Returning students to the same low levels of general education with insufficient intensity and duration of intervention fails to produce accelerated learning (Abbott et al., 2010). To address or combat this issue, educators should have interventions in place that will increase rigor and provide enrichment or extensions to the content already mastered. Instead of implementing failure or retention as a motivating factor, schools should utilize alternative intervention opportunities that allow students the chance to redeem their academic status.

Student Academic Support

School districts should consider offering more academic support opportunities to reduce dropout rates and increase students' self-efficacy. The best alternative to grade retention and

social promotion is early identification of students who are not meeting grade expectations and the provision of individualized, accelerated instruction utilizing evidence-based instructional practices and frequent progress monitoring (Crepeau-Hobson et al., 2016). Students should be given academic options that will assist them with achieving academic success, such as after school tutoring (Nelson-Reyes, 2018), peer tutoring (Song et al., 2018), Saturday school (Drake, 2017), summer school (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009) and credit recovery. Additionally, Klapproth et al. (2016) noted that intervention studies of the effects of interventions tend to diminish as a function of time; therefore, educators should implement relevant interventions that students can remember and utilize in the years to come. For example, for students who do not meet grade-level benchmarks in reading, they should be provided with intensive reading interventions in school and during an after-school program over several months during the subsequent academic year (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Interventions should be relevant and specific to the student's learning deficiency.

Tutoring

One-on-one tutoring with a teacher or cross-age tutoring with an older student could be utilized to increase student learning and motivate achievement. Even though tutoring is the major type of teachers' support to improve academic performance of students (Ahmed & Mihiretie, 2015), peer tutoring is another intervention that could be used to support low achieving students. Peer tutoring is a structured, collaborative approach that encourages children to learn from each other (Tsuei, 2017). "Peer tutoring," "peer-assisted learning," and "near-peer teaching" are all terms used currently in the literature to describe a collaborative teaching and learning strategy where learners are active equal partners (Secomb, 2008). Peer tutoring is a methodology that fosters inclusion in the classroom as it promotes collaborative learning (Shirani-Bidabadi et

al., 2019). In a meta-analysis of mathematics interventions for students with mathematics difficulty or disability in Grades 4 through 12, Stevens et al. (2018) found there was significant improvement in students' mathematics outcomes and confirmed the academic benefits of peer tutoring in middle school (12 to 15 years old) or secondary education (12 to 18 years old).

Duran et al. (2019) stated that many times students can be better mediators than teachers or adults in academic environments because they have fresh knowledge of the content taught by the teacher and recognize the areas their peers will have difficulty understanding. This is because peer tutors have the ability to relay the information using more direct speech with respect to cultural and linguistic aspects (Alegre et al., 2019). In addition to increasing academic performance, utilizing peer tutoring and social interactions among students may have a rippling affect and cross over into other settings throughout the students' day and help to promote maintenance and generalization of positive behavior change (McCurdy & Cole, 2014). This result would be indicative of Bandura's social cognitive theory with respect to vicarious learning. In other settings throughout the day, students may guide their actions by observed consequences, which enable them to profit from the successes and mistakes of others as well as from their own experiences (Bandura, 1989). As a result, they will choose the behavior that warrants a positive outcome instead of a negative one.

Credit Recovery

Students who have been retained or socially promoted have demonstrated at-risk or low-achieving academic behaviors at some point during their academic career and, as a result, have an increased chance of failing classes in the future. For many school districts, students tend to fail core academic courses during the first year of high school (Heppen et al., 2017). With high school students failing during their freshman year, the likelihood for them graduating on time or

at all lessens. To combat this likelihood, school districts are providing students the opportunity to recover the academic credit to encourage them to stay on the graduation track. School districts across the United States are offering credit recovery online courses to students to retake failed classes in an effort to help get students back on track and keep them in school (Powell et al., 2015). By utilizing online credit recovery opportunities, students will be able to retake the course while learning the content at their own pace and in a different format (Archambault et al., 2010). Additionally, with many online programs including diagnostic assessments to personalize the content to match the student's cognitive level, online instruction will be more individualized (Heppen et al., 2017; Panigrahi et al., 2018).

Three Tier Academic Support Model

Other interventions include adding an extra period in the problem subject area, providing consultation by school teams, offering individualized education plans, and giving special assistance and targeted services for students with learning disabilities and other special needs. Ekstam et al. (2015) identified a three-tier academic support model used by Finnish educators to support lower performing students which includes the previously mentioned academic intervention strategies. The academic model states the following:

The first tier, general support, would be mainly provided by the general education teacher through educational differentiation in adjusting the context or means of learning. If the student is still struggling with in the content area, then the second tier, or intensified support is provided to the student. While in tier two, the special education teacher, the general or subject teachers, the student and the students' guardians work collaboratively and created a student academic plan which would be implemented for a limited amount of time and evaluated regularly to determine if the support is effective. If the student's

academic performance and understanding did not improve, the educators transition the student into tier three, or special support which would require an individual educational plan. (Ekstam et al., 2015, p. 78)

An individualized education plan provides an important “road map” for students with disabilities to receive appropriate services for effective educational outcomes (Trahan et al., 2018).

Individualized education plans direct schools' implementation of interventions and assessments that promote meaningful participation in the general education curriculum (Sacks & Halder, 2017).

Similar to the three-tier academic support model used in Finland, response to intervention (RtI), an intervention program that is used in the United States, was created to support early intervention in the general education setting for all students regardless of their abilities (Abou-Rjaily & Stoddard, 2017). RtI is a school-wide, empirically validated approach that requires educators and counselors to offer universal interventions to all students while identifying and delivering more intensive interventions and support to students who need specific services (Shepard et al., 2013). Like the three-tier academic support model, RtI is an early detection, or proactive, intervention rather than a reactive intervention. Use of intervention strategies, such as three-tier academic support models and RtI holds a great deal of promise for many students who experience difficulties in learning (van Kraayenoord, 2010).

Differentiated Instruction

Hamre and Pianta (2005) posited that the quality of schools is largely determined by how teachers deal with cognitive differences between students and by how they adapt their instruction to individual needs. Differentiated instruction is defined as an approach to teaching in which teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and

student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom (Tomlinson et al., 2003). This instructional strategy or intervention is important in settings where there is a significantly different level of student cognitive abilities within a classroom. Even though grade retention is said to generate more homogeneous classrooms, differentiation can still be used to accommodate or modify the curricula to meet the learning needs of the students and can be implemented in classes that contain socially promoted students as well. Recognizing that socially promoted students were promoted to the next grade level even though they did not demonstrate mastery in the previous grade, the implementation of differentiation may prove to be beneficial in increasing their understanding and mastery of the content.

Whether students are retained or socially promoted, teachers should utilize differentiated instructional strategies to meet the needs of the student. Differentiation is an overall approach to teaching and can include combinations of many practices, like flexible (heterogeneous or homogeneous) grouping, detailed progress monitoring, using adaptive computer programs or learning materials, modifying learning content, adapting instruction for weaker students, and providing opportunities for acceleration for stronger students (Deunk et al., 2018). Additionally, researchers have recommended that educators embed differentiation on a broader level by combining the strategy with other educational practices such as cooperative learning, regular assessment, remedial instruction, and flexible grouping to maximize student understanding, engagement, and academic performance (Deunk et al., 2018).

Professional Development

With the constant evolution of instructional strategies, interventions, curricula, and technology, school districts should be providing learning opportunities for their teachers on a

regular basis. Harris and Sass (2011) posited that students will learn more during the course of a year when their teacher has participated in content focused professional development.

Additionally, Kempen and Steyn (2017) expressed that the most successful way to improve teacher efficiency is by involving teachers in high quality professional learning. Meeting the professional needs of the educational staff should be a priority to attain the student performance outcomes the district desires. Districts should not only prepare and support their educational staff to develop knowledge and skills necessary to effectively implement new instructional strategies within the classroom but also follow-up and provide feedback on how teachers incorporate those strategies in their classrooms (Andrews et al., 2011). By providing quality professional development opportunities to their staff, school districts can help to develop and enhance skills of their educators to meet their personal growth needs through self-development and continuous learning (De Pater et al., 2009). Furthermore, being up to date on new and innovative ways to deliver instructional content is especially important in situations that require differentiation and meeting the instructional needs of a classroom of students on different cognitive levels.

Researchers have reported that low-performing students, to include socially promoted and retained students, may make better progress if the teacher is highly educated and knowledgeable of effective strategies to utilize within their content area (Curran-Neild et al., 2009). As teachers strive to meet the needs of their students, being involved in continuous learning opportunities is essential to creating fun and engaging activities for students which will ultimately improve student outcomes. Not only will student achievement or performance outcomes improve as a result of teachers participating in continuous learning opportunities, but teachers will be empowered. By providing effective and continuous teacher professional

development, Bantwini (2012) shared teachers will be empowered and have the necessary confidence, knowledge, and skills to perform their tasks effectively.

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory expresses that there is a potential positive effect of individuals' perception of their own competence and capabilities in a specific area of interest for continual growth and feeling of mastery in that same field and similar fields of interest. When teachers have an increased sense of self-efficacy, they believe that they are more than capable and equipped to attain or demonstrate the desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even in settings that include students who may be difficult or unmotivated (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Holzberger et al. (2013) also noted that teachers with high efficacy beliefs may provide more student-centered instruction and stronger classroom management and put more effort into implementing new teaching methods, strategies, and learning support.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is considered an effective strategy to ensure a student's academic and social-emotional success and to increase academic performance (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Researchers have found that there is a positive relationship between parental involvement in education and academic achievement (Pérez Sánchez et al., 2013; Tárraga García et al., 2018), improving children's self-esteem and their academic performance (Garbacz et al., 2017) as well as school retention and attendance (Ross, 2016). Consistent parental presence is important especially for students who have had a history of low achievement, to include grade retention or social promotion, or have had discipline problems in previous grades. These students may be more prone to negative outcomes, such as grade failure and school dropout, warranting the provision of additional support (W. Chen & Gregory, 2010).

When parents are engaged in educational activities with their children at home, whether with homework, reading, or modeling positive academic behaviors, they are communicating their expectations for achievement to their child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). By being involved in their child's academic activities at home, the child has multiple opportunities to observe and learn from their parents' modeling of attitudes, knowledge, and skills pertinent to learning, to receive reinforcement and feedback on personal performance and capability, and to engage in instructional interactions related to homework content and learning processes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Additionally, Fan and Williams (2010) found in their longitudinal study of the effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement, and intrinsic motivation that students who perceived that their parents valued their education and had high expectations for their academic success were likely to feel interested, engaged, and confident towards their academic endeavors.

In order for parents to fully engage in their child's educational activities at home, being comfortable with content covered in assignments or confident in their ability to assist their child is important. Ramirez et al. (2014) posited that some parents need support because they may lack the experience and knowledge of school systems to guide their children academically. Others may need assistance supporting their high school student with exploring diverse career possibilities and making more informed decisions about post-secondary training options or education. To ensure parents have an increased self-efficacy as it related to assisting their child with academic or career-related goals, there needs to be an open line of communication between the parent and school, preferably the teacher. Establishing family-school partnerships, to include the quality of communication between parents and teachers, has been shown to have a substantial impact on students' success in and out of school (Mautone et al., 2015).

In order to increase parental involvement, teachers must build a relationship with the parents of their students. The establishment of a teacher–parent relationship will provide a strong foundation to support the socially promoted or retained student in school and at home. In addition to supporting the student, the teacher can support the parent by discussing how they can share their respective tasks and responsibilities, as well as the expectations of how parents can effectively support their children at home (Iruka et al., 2011). Leenders et al. (2018) stressed children have the ability to learn more when parents understand both school culture and the school’s expectations regarding home learning activities. The partnership between the teacher and the parent will provide the academic support system the student needs at home and school because the adults will be working together.

Future Aspiration and Goals

Students who are retained have poorer long-term outcomes and drop out more frequently than their matched low achieving but socially promoted peers (Tingle et al., 2012). Retained students were five times more likely to drop out of high school, and the evidence shows that grade retention can be harmful to students in the long-term, yet it is still practiced at alarming rates (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015). According to the latest report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), there were 2.1 million status dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 and the overall status dropout rate was 5.4%. NCES (2019) defined status dropout rate as the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED certificate).

In the long term, there is a disconnect between the social and academic needs of the retained students and the learning requirements given in the retained grade (Klapproth et al., 2016), which may lead to a disruption of the retained students’ academic and psychosocial

growth. The Self-System Model of Motivational Development (SSMMD) reported by Fall and Roberts (2012) posited:

Individuals possess an innate need to connect with others and interact effectively with their environment. It also asserts that the relationship of a given social context (e.g., family support, teacher support, peer support) and an individual's self-system processes (e.g., perceived identification with school, perceived control) is influenced by the extent to which the social context meets or ignores (fulfills or neglects) these basic needs.

Further, self-system profiles differentially influence engagement-related behaviors, which directly contribute to educational outcomes such as student achievement and dropping out. (p. 788)

Schools should keep in mind that putting children back into an environment of inadequate intervention will only leave them behind, with poor educational and employment prospects for the future (Abbott et al., 2010). In a longitudinal study, Jimerson (1999) found retained students were less likely to receive a diploma or GED by the age of 20, had received less post-secondary education, and had lower paying jobs than a comparison group of low achieving but promoted peers. Eide and Showalter (2001) confirmed those results in their analysis of the High School and Beyond and National Educational Longitudinal Survey datasets, finding that retained students earned significantly less money in the post-high school labor market than did non-retained students. McMahon (2018) added that schools need to do something, or students will continue to fail and leave school shortchanged and unprepared for college and the real world.

Dropout Rates

The decision to retain a student has repercussions that extend well beyond the repeated year (Jimerson et al., 2006). Failing to achieve expected educational outcomes by pre-determined ages can have a significant impact on an individual's life chances and opportunities (Anderson & Peart, 2016). The experience of grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropout (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson et al., 2002) as well as low academic performance (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Earlier research suggested that among other factors, students who have been retained are more likely to drop out of school (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Roderick, 1993; Rumberger, 1995). The practice of having students repeat a grade—retention—often has negative educational consequences, such as increasing their chances of dropping out of school (Doherty, 2004).

There are several studies that predict the likelihood of retained students eventually dropping out of school (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2018; Klapproth et al., 2016; Reschly & Christenson, 2013; Rumberger, 1995). Hughes et al. (2018) concluded that even though grade retention in the elementary grades does not harm students in terms of their academic achievement or educational motivation at the transition to high school, retention increases the odds that a student will drop out of school before obtaining a high school diploma. Additional studies found that initially, retained students appear to have positive academic effects, they faded fairly quickly (Klapproth et al., 2016; Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Rumberger (1995) indicated that students who were retained were 11 times more likely to drop out. Furthermore, Davoudzadeh et al. (2015) reported that students who are retained in school are more likely to suffer from depression and drop out of school.

Socioemotional Impact

When asked about the events that they found most stressful, children typically mention difficulties with school as among the top three challenges they faced in addition to peer problems and issues with parents (Skinner et al., 2013). Being socially promoted or retained can be a stressful or traumatizing event in the lives of adolescents and impact their socioemotional well-being. Their perception of the situation, whether social promotion or retention, and their future will determine how they react to the situation. As noted by Skinner et al. (2013), when students are able to engage completely, react to a stressful situation in a mature and healthy manner, and bounce back from obstacles and setbacks in their academic work, their academic performance and participation increase.

Reschly and Christenson (2013) noted that the impact of retention on students' socioemotional well-being did not appear to be as negative as previously thought. In some cases, elementary-retained students may possibly have a more positive self-image because they will be more mature and more knowledgeable of the content over their grade-level peers. In their 9-year study of a cohort of kindergarteners, Vandecandelaere et al. (2016) concluded that there was a positive effect on well-being when students perceive themselves as slightly better off than others and as a result perform better academically.

With respect to social interactions with their peers, while all students entering a new class face challenges in building new friendships, retained students' adaptation may be even harder because of the stigma of retention (Demant & Van Houtte, 2016; Hong & Yu, 2008). While the impact of grade retention may differ with the age of the student, researchers have argued that retention is especially stigmatizing at later ages, such as in adolescence (Demant & Van Houtte, 2013; Wu et al., 2010). Children who are isolated from their peers may come to think about

themselves in negative terms, and their negative self-evaluations may extend beyond the social domain to include internalized negative beliefs about their core self-worth (Graham & Juvonen, 1998). As predicted by the labeling theory, repeaters are more likely to withdraw from social activities and have lower levels of self-confidence and self-esteem (Hong & Yu, 2008).

Furthermore, even though retention researchers believe grade retention creates more homogeneity within the classroom with respect to learning levels, it also increases the age variation in the classroom (Foureaux-Koppensteiner, 2014). With repeaters being left behind by their peers, Goos et al. (2013) posited that those students may be socially rejected or bullied by their new classmates or age-mates moving ahead to the next grade. Repeaters are no longer with their age group and are forced to build new relationships with their new peers, which could impact their social stamina and self-esteem. They may find it difficult to connect with their younger peers, or they may become victims of targeted discrimination and bullying (Klapproth et al., 2016). Additionally, Flook et al. (2005) posited the following:

The negative feedback retained students receive from peers may color their view of their abilities, such as when another child calls them names that demean their ability (e.g., stupid or dumb). Children who lack acceptance from peers may also be excluded from group activities and harbor negative attitudes about school. Consequently, such children may lack motivation and confidence and disengage from classroom activities. Thus, socially maladjusted children may form a poor academic self-concept that adversely affects their performance in the classroom. (p. 320)

The frustration self-esteem model predicts that academic failure increases children's likelihood of having lower school-related self-esteem, resulting in frustration, problematic behavior, and eventually dropping out (Finn, 1989; Vandecandelaere et al., 2016). Furthermore,

there is a concern that there is a stigma associated with grade retention and that may also cause a decrease in the student's self-esteem and commitment to school (Klapproth et al., 2016).

Even though there have been a number of studies conducted that conclude the negative impact to the socioemotional state of retained students, Smith and Ronan-Herzog (2014) found that there are some positive experiences to note. In their study, participants who were held back during kindergarten or first grade did not have a recollection of how they felt about being retained; however, those who were retained in later elementary grades, such as Grade 4 or 5, recalled feeling angry and sad. They recalled being worried about their friendships with those who had move on to the next grade, but some pointed out that being held back enabled them to find a different and often better group of friends that positioned them on a positive trajectory (Smith & Ronan-Herzog, 2014).

Student–Teacher Interaction

Within the classroom setting, Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) noted that teachers must have high expectations and facilitate student learning while designing a good learning environment to meet individual students' needs for approval, participation, and challenges. The social determination theory states that in order for students to become motivated, three basic psychological needs must be fulfilled: the needs for relatedness, for competence, and for autonomy (Dietrich et al., 2015; Kirby et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2015; Roorda et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Researchers have suggested that individuals seek experiences that fulfill their fundamental needs and identities through their interaction with the environment (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Since teachers have an interactive or hands-on role in the education of students, much of the responsibility of meeting the basic needs of students falls to them. As teachers give more positive attention, especially in the form of academic interventions, the students have more

success in school (Smith & Ronan-Herzog, 2014). Shim et al. (2013) pointed out that in an emotionally supportive and caring school environment, students are more willing to open ideas up for discussion, demonstrate more positive attitudes toward academic studies, and express feelings of enjoyment as they can freely express themselves and count on teachers for support with a range of problems. It is a key assumption in educational research that characteristics of the classroom shape students' behaviors, feelings, cognitions, and more generally their success at school (Dietrich et al., 2015).

While research has shown that a positive perception of the classroom environment is generally positively related to student outcomes, the amount of teacher support students receive within a classroom appears to be one especially important influence that can shape the development of students' motivation (Chohan, 2018; Roorda et al., 2011). Roorda et al. (2011) posited that teachers can increase student motivation and provide an accommodating academic environment by showing involvement (i.e., caring for and expressing interest in the student), providing structure (i.e., setting clear rules and being consistent), and supporting autonomy (i.e., giving students freedom to make their own choices and showing connections between schoolwork and students' interest). Teachers may look to implement a student-centered approach in their classroom, which shifts some learning responsibility to the learners and allows them more ownership in the learning process (Nguyen, 2015; Zulkifli & Kulinna, 2018). The implementation of this type of learning environment creates a climate that encourages the learners to internalize their motivation of externally regulated activities and be more successful (Anderson & Peart, 2016). Additionally, when teachers create student-centered learning environments, they enable learners to make adaptive attributions for “success” and “failure” in learning, provide an opportunity for mastery of curriculum content, and incorporate meaningful

choice and involvement in learning activities that promote positive self-beliefs, and thereby support the development of a healthy self-concept (Valentine et al., 2004).

In their study to investigate possible effects of teacher support on the development of students' intrinsic value and effort within and beyond the borders of a specific subject, Dietrich et al. (2015) found even though there was a decline in the motivation of students as they transition from primary to secondary school, the perceptions of high teacher support acted as a buffer and related positively to the development of students' intrinsic value and effort for individual students and at the classroom level. This result is indicative of the social determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which states that a positive teacher–student relationship contributes to fulfillment of the basic need for relatedness which, in turn, is a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation.

Summary

The call for an end to social promotion has generated a variety of recommendations and legislation regarding promotion policies. School districts across the nation are struggling with the decision of retaining or promoting students who have not met the minimum requirement in their current grade. Research suggests that promoting unprepared students does little to increase their achievement or life chances. At the same time, research also shows the practice of having students repeat a grade—retention—often has negative educational consequences (Doherty, 2004). While social promotion may be common in some middle schools, it is not the practice in high schools as students are required to repeat courses until they receive a passing grade (McMahon, 2018). This qualitative study explored how social promotion affects the motivation, self-efficacy, and socioemotional status of high school students. Additionally, the dropout rate was examined.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for five high school students in addition to five core subject teachers in the southeastern region of Virginia. The theories that guided this study were Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory that focuses on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of humans and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory which examines how people acquire knowledge, sustain motivation, and adjust their behavior to function within their social environment. This chapter provides discussion of the research design, a detailed description of the participant selection process, and information about the sites selected for the study. Additionally, information regarding data collection and analysis methods is discussed. The various components of trustworthiness are discussed, and the chapter concludes with ethical considerations that are relative to this study.

Research Design

Qualitative research is conducted because a problem or issue needs to be explored. Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that there is a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices. Conducting qualitative research empowers individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between researchers and the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research answers questions pertaining to what the experience is like and provides the reader with an understanding and enables others to make sense of reality (Cypress, 2019). Qualitative research considers why individuals think or behave the way that they do and

how they come to understand these complex thoughts and actions within their lives (Denny & Weckesser, 2019).

This study incorporated phenomenological research design. This approach involved a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). It is not the researcher's goal to explain why the participants experienced the phenomenon, but to present the participants' perspective of what they experienced and how they experienced it. Moustakas (1994) posited phenomenology is an appropriate tool for exploring and describing shared experiences related to phenomena.

This study followed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design. Transcendental phenomenology is a form of inquiry that seeks to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994). When transcendental phenomenology is utilized in a study, researchers aim to describe the essence of the experience with respect to the phenomenon and examine it in its totality. Transcendental phenomenology is the appropriate research design for this study because it investigates how related phenomenon is experienced (Moustakas, 1994) and describes how the participants experience the phenomenon using their descriptions. In the current study, the phenomenon is social promotion; I sought to describe the lived experiences of social promotion of high school students at high schools in the southeastern region of Virginia. Through this study, I gained insight into what students who have been socially promoted have experienced academically, socially, and emotionally.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do high school students and their teachers describe the lived experience of students who were socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years?

Sub-Questions

SQ1: How do high school students and their teachers describe academic performance on the high school level as it relates to social promotion?

SQ2: How do high school students and their teachers describe motivation on the high school level as it relates to social promotion?

SQ3: How do high school students and their teachers describe long-term goals of students who were socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years?

Setting

The setting for this research study includes one high school located in the southeastern, Tidewater area of Virginia. The school was selected based on its percentages for chronic absenteeism, dropout rates, minority enrollment, and economically disadvantaged students. The selected high school provided valid and valuable data from the experiences of the students.

Countryside School District (a pseudonym) is small, consisting of one elementary, middle and high school. At Roosevelt High School (RHS, a pseudonym), there is one administrator covering the building with one instructional specialist and a math specialist. RHS has an enrollment of 304 students with 85% total minority enrollment. The percentages of ethnicities or races include 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1% Asian, 78% Black, 0.3% Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic, 15% White, and 3% two or more races (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). The enrollment includes the gender distribution of 46% female

and 54% male. The school services a majority of economically disadvantaged students as 99% participate in the free lunch program.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, which involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample included high school core subject teachers and their students who were socially promoted in elementary and middle school even though they had failing grades in core classes and did not score at least a 400 on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Criterion sampling procedures were used and involved selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001, p. 238)

Additionally, because the study sought to understand the experiences of a specific group of students, it worked well when all participants had experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2014). The study sample included five socially promoted students and five core subject teachers. The teachers selected were required to have at least two socially promoted students in their class. Sampling continued until information rich data were attained and a representative sample of the population was achieved. The students shared their experiences as a socially promoted student from the academic and emotional aspect, and the teachers provided insight on their experiences or observations of socially promoted students in the general classroom setting.

Procedures

Prior to requesting approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I submitted a letter to the superintendents of the school districts requesting permission to conduct the study within their district. Of the 17 school districts contacted, only one agreed to participate:

Countryside School District. After IRB approval (Appendix A) was received, a pilot study was conducted in a setting similar to the settings of the actual study. During the pilot study, the same procedures were incorporated. Participant information and data collected during the pilot study were not included in the actual study. As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), conducting a pilot study will refine the interview questions and the procedures for data collection. In addition, the pilot study afforded me the opportunity to practice my interviewing skills.

Purposeful sampling was conducted within the identified school district. I requested that the schools' administrators or guidance counselors identify possible participants. Socially promoted students included those students who received "F" in core subjects, such as reading, math, science and social studies, and did not score a minimum of 400 on the SOL assessment but were advanced to the next grade during their elementary or middle school years. Once those students were identified, administrators or guidance counselors were asked to distribute the recruitment packet to the parents of students who met this study's criteria. The packets included the recruitment letter (see Appendix B), a parent consent form (see Appendix E), and a child assent form (see Appendix F). Signed consent and assent forms were returned to the assistant principal who then delivered them to me.

Additionally, administrators were asked to distribute recruitment letters (see Appendix G) to all core teachers for these same students. The recruitment letter included a Google Form link to a screening survey (see Appendix I) for them to complete if they agreed to participate. Utilizing the screening survey ensured the teachers taught core subjects in a general education classroom and that they had at least two students who were socially promoted when they were in elementary or middle school. Once all teachers were identified, a notification letter/email (see Appendix J) informing them that they were selected to participate in the study was sent out.

Within the email of selected teachers were instructions on completing the teacher consent form (see Appendix H). The consent form discussed the teacher's role in the study. They participated in a 45–60-minute virtual interview and reviewed the transcription of their interview to ensure their perspective was adequately noted. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face interviews were not permitted by the school district; therefore, online interviews were conducted via Google Meet or Zoom. After interview sessions were scheduled, links to Google Meet or Zoom were emailed to the participants so that they had access to the meeting room.

After all consent and assent forms were obtained, the interview process began. Virtual interviews with students were conducted in the conference room within the school building during the school day. Each student participant was provided a hall pass with the designated date and time of his/her interview. Online interviews were conducted in a quiet location and students accessed the meeting room via the designated link from their electronic device. The recorded interview sessions were 45–60 minutes long and consisted of open-ended questions.

For the student online discussion board, alias Edmodo accounts were set up to protect the identity of the participants. During his/her interview, each student participant selected an Edmodo information handout that included a username and password that they used for the purpose of completing the discussion board questions and engagement with other participants. Upon the conclusion of the study, the Edmodo Classroom was archived, and students no longer have access to it. After the student participants completed the required data collection components and reviewed their individual transcript, they were given a \$10 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study.

To complete the hypothetical letter component, teachers utilized Microsoft Word to develop their letter. Upon completion of the letter, the teacher participant attached the letter to an

email to my Liberty University email address. In the subject line, they included the following: “Hypothetical Letter and their complete name.”

The Researcher's Role

As a middle school educator who has taught an SOL-assessed subject, I had major concerns as it relates to student accountability and social promotion. Having worked in a school district that practiced social promotion instead of retention with academic support, I have witnessed how students' academic motivation and performance were impacted. Students who were not prepared for the eighth grade were moved on and struggled to meet the academic expectations for that grade level. When I asked administration and guidance counselors why retention was replaced with social promotion or promotion with exception, the only response given was research says it is not beneficial. As an educator who encourages academic growth and success, my view is that it has been more important to school districts to maintain a positive appearance for the stakeholders and Department of Education instead of thinking of the long-term effects social promotion would have on the lives of students. Instead, some students were being set up for failure.

For this qualitative study, only one school district agreed to participate. As a result, this study consists of one high school located in the southeastern region of Virginia. This high school is in a school district where I worked for 10 years between 2008–2019. It is possible that some of the participants may have crossed paths with me as their eighth-grade science teacher. I feel this provided a level of comfort for them as they engaged in the interview process. During this study, I conducted the interviews, and as the interviewer, it was my responsibility to ensure the participants were in an inviting environment that reduced their anxieties.

In this qualitative study, I served as the human instrument as data were collected; therefore, it is important to identify my motivation to conduct the study. The research was based on the ontological assumption which relates to the nature of reality. Additionally, evidence of multiple realities includes uses of different forms of evidence in themes using the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants shared their experiences differently (Moustakas, 1994) even though they were impacted by the same phenomenon of social promotion.

Entering into this study, I believed the education system had reduced the academic accountability of students, which has impacted their academic motivation. Students have been permitted to do less than expected and still be promoted to the next grade. It is my belief that while student accountability has decreased, teacher accountability has increased. Teachers are still held accountable for student performance and adequate progress even when students are socially promoted with the academic foundation required for the grade level. Social promotion has changed the paradigm of the school from an emphasis on merit to an emphasis on efficiency, a focus on individual to group learning, a belief in different capability to equal capability, adjusting student to school to adjusting the school to the student, and a focus on the best students to the average students (McMahon, 2018).

Data Collection

In qualitative research, researchers engage in a series of activities in the process of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that researchers execute a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions. This study utilized face-to-face and/or virtual interviews and online discussion boards with students as well as face-to-face and/or virtual interviews and hypothetical letters with

teachers as methods of data collection. Data collection did not begin until IRB approval was received.

Face-to-Face Interviews

Typically, in a phenomenological investigation, the long interview is the method through which data are collected on the topic and question (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) noted that conducting long interviews provides deeper descriptions of the participants' experiences. The interview evokes descriptions of lived-through moments, experiential anecdotal accounts, remembered stories of particular experiences, narrative fragments, and fictional experiences (Patton, 2015). During the interview process, I utilized open-ended questions to get information-rich responses from the participants. This method created a situation that enabled the participants to talk about their experiences and that also foregrounds each person's particular way of making sense of those experiences (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). I had interview questions prepared to obtain answers about specific topics; however, I was also prepared to interact with the participants and asked additional questions related to their responses to get more in-depth accounts of their experiences.

In addition to asking the participants open-ended questions, Moustakas (1994) suggested asking two broad, general questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? These two questions focus attention on gathering data that will lead to a textual and structural description of the experiences and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During phenomenological interviews, Moustakas (1994) stated that interviews should begin with a social conversation aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere that reduces

the participants' anxieties. The researcher must create a climate in which the participant feels comfortable and responds honestly and comprehensively (Moustakas, 1994). The establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of information, particularly when investigating issues in which the participant has a strong personal stake (Lester, 1999). Furthermore, the researcher must ensure that he/she is able to set aside any bias and past experiences and not let them direct the flow of the interview. To accomplish this, I used a reflexive journal (see Appendix O).

In this study, students were interviewed using one-on-one interview techniques. Participant responses were recorded using an audio recording device as well as notetaking. Each session ranged from 45–60 minutes and was transcribed. The open-ended questions that were used to conduct the interview are provided below.

Student Interview Questions (See Appendix L)

1. Please state your name and age.
2. What is your high school classification or grade level?
3. What types of extracurricular activities are you involved in at school?
4. What subjects are your favorite and why?
5. What does the phrase “automatically promoted to the next grade” or socially promoted mean to you?
6. Describe an experience during elementary or middle school where you struggled to make passing grades in your core subjects.
7. Describe an experience during elementary or middle school when you recall not passing your SOL tests.

8. Describe a moment where you remember being in a grade and feeling like you were going to fail, or be retained, but ended up being promoted instead.
9. How did you feel when you realized you were socially promoted? Explain why.
10. After being socially promoted, what were your experiences academically?
11. After transitioning to high school, what has been your experience as a socially promoted student?
12. How would you compare your motivation to succeed in school before and after being socially promoted?
13. Academically, describe your successes and challenges.
14. When you reflect on your academic career, what would you do differently and why?
15. Looking towards the future, discuss your future aspirations and goals.

Questions 1–4 are introductory questions. Moustakas (1994) posited that the beginning of the interview should be a social conversation that creates a relaxed and trusting environment. The questions asked are about noncontroversial present behaviors, activities, and experiences (Patton, 2015) that allowed the participant to relax before the study-related questions are asked. After the introductory questions were completed, Moustakas (1994) suggested moving toward questions that have the participants focus on the phenomenon and the experience they had. Questions 5–8 gauged the participants' understanding of the phenomenon, social promotion, and provided transition into questions related to their experience of social promotion.

The self-determination theory emphasizes that human well-being and healthy motivation (e.g., intrinsic motivation) are nourished by the fulfillment of three fundamental psychological needs: the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Ahmed and Mihiretie (2015) found that students who were promoted through automatic promotion displayed low interest to

learning, classroom participation, attendance, and academic success and became stressed trying to meet educational standards as they moved up the grade levels. Questions 9–10 sought to answer the research question, “What are the experiences of students who are socially promoted?”

Youths’ academic self-efficacy is considered fundamental to academic success and overall well-being (Ansong et al., 2016). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. Bandura’s (1989) social cognitive theory addresses self-efficacy and how it impacts how people acquire knowledge, sustain motivation, and adjust their behavior to function within their social environment. Students’ academic self-efficacy is fundamental to their learning because each person's perception of his or her academic ability can influence personal motivation for completing work and performing well in school (Ansong et al., 2016). Questions 11–13 examined how students who have been socially promoted describe their motivation as high school students and if being socially promoted had contributed to any changes in their motivation.

According to Bandura (2001), subjective belief in one’s own abilities and one’s ability to handle a situation is the most significant factor behind successful behavior. Self-efficacy thus relates to individuals’ systems of beliefs that they have the capacity to organize and implement the actions necessary for achieving certain results or goals (Vukman et al., 2018). Questions 14–15 examined participants’ system of beliefs, how they interpreted their experiences as a socially promoted student, and their examination of how they organized and implemented action to achieve their goals in the past, present, and future.

In addition to student interviews, teachers who have taught these same socially promoted students were interviewed. Participant responses were recorded using an audio recording device

as well as notetaking. Each session ranged from 45–60 minutes and were transcribed. The open-ended questions that were used during the interview are provided.

Teacher Questions (see Appendix M)

1. Briefly introduce yourself by providing your name, position, years of teaching experience and your grade level or content area.
2. From your perspective, how do students who have been socially promoted perform academically?
3. What have been some successes and challenges of the socially promoted students you teach?
4. What has been your experience with students who have been socially promoted as it relates to their motivation?
5. In what ways has the student's self-efficacy contributed to their academic achievement or lack thereof?
6. In your class, how have you provided support for those students who were socially promoted? How did it influence the student's academic performance, motivation, and self-efficacy?
7. If students are socially promoted, how are lower performing students effectively supported to be successful?
8. Understanding that most classrooms include a diverse range of cognitive levels, how do you meet the needs of all your students so that everyone has an opportunity to learn?
9. As instructional strategies, interventions and technology have evolved, how do you stay current with the new methods to engage your students?

10. Consider the academic options available to socially promoted students in your school districts. Identify them and explain how students benefited from them.
11. What do you believe are the major factors that contribute to the success or failure of socially promoted students? Explain why.
12. What advice would you give to a novice teacher who will be teaching socially promoted students? What would be your best practices that you would share on how to support socially promoted students?

Research has shown that social relationships such as bonding with teachers and peers, academic opportunities such as a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with school, and school connectedness such as attachment and building social bonds to school tend to be essential to creating the school climate, which impacts student achievement and motivation (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). Positive perceptions of school climate may sustain high academic performance while strengthening the grades of average and low academic performers (Daily et al., 2020).

Student motivation is important to consider; in order for support to have an effect, students must accept and be willing to use that support (Jönsson, 2018). Students have to be receptive to the supplemental support offered to them by the teacher. The self-determination theory suggests that learning environments supporting certain general needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) will positively affect students' motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Questions 2 and 4 provided the teachers' perspective of their students' academic performance and motivation. Additionally, Question 3 provided the teachers' overall experience with teaching students who have been socially promoted.

Muijs et al. (2014) posited the classroom level is more important than the school level in terms of explaining the variance in student achievement. Student–teacher relationships have the greatest effect on students’ academic performance (Zullig et al., 2015). When middle school students have positive learning experiences, supportive relationships with adults and peers, and reaffirmations of their developmental needs in learning contexts, they are more likely to remain actively engaged in school (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Without effective teacher guidance and instruction in the classroom, learning cannot be achieved. Questions 6–10 and 12 provided insight on how academic support and intervention are made available to socially promoted students from the teachers and the school district. Teachers have a frontline view of students’ academic motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement and can impact each area directly.

Student Online Discussion Board

Technology has made it possible to link people who are scattered across very broad geographic regions and to conduct interviews with groups that might be difficult to assemble in a single location (Stewart et al., 2017). Using the internet environment reduces participants’ anxiety about what the researcher thinks of them and makes it easier for them to share embarrassing or sensitive information (Patton, 2015). This qualitative study included participants from different grade levels at one high school located in a city in the southeastern region of Virginia. Using online discussion boards enabled me to overcome various challenges related to cost, location, and attracting specific types of participants, especially teens (Stewart et al., 2017). This discussion board allowed me to gain additional clarity and understanding of the participants’ perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that might not have emerged from a one-on-one interview (Harmsen et al., 2013).

The online format that was used is Edmodo and took place over the course of 5 days. The participants selected an Edmodo information handout that included the username and password that they used to access the online platform and answer the four open-ended discussion board questions about the phenomenon. To protect their identity, each participant had an alias name which I created through the Edmodo platform, and that information was included on the information handout as well. Each day, one prompt or question for the day was posted. After each participant posted their responses to the prompt, they interacted with the other participants by responding to each of their initial posts as well as responses to their personal post. Upon completion of the discussion board questions and review of their individual interview transcript, participants were given the \$10 Amazon gift card for their participation in the study. After all the transcripts were reviewed, the Edmodo Classroom was archived.

Online Discussion Board Questions (see Appendix N)

1. As a high school student, what academic barriers have you encountered after being socially promoted? What successes or challenges have you encountered as a high school student that you would be willing to share?
2. As a high school student, describe your level of preparedness for the academic coursework you have taken or will be taking? Describe a situation that illustrates what you have experienced or are experiencing in a class and your level of motivation to be successful in that class.
3. On the high school level, how have you adjusted to meet the expectations or requirements of your current classes? How have your high school teachers provided academic support to encourage academic success in their content area?

4. From a high schoolers' perspective, what advice would you give to another student who has been socially promoted and is preparing to enter high school?

Teacher Hypothetical Letter

Teacher participants wrote a hypothetical letter to the parent of a student in elementary or middle school who was being considered for social promotion. Each teacher provided his/her perspective about social promotion from the viewpoint of a high school teacher. Participants concluded their letters by providing advice to the parents on what their child can expect when he or she gets to high school and how they could better support their child through the transitions. Once the teachers completed their letters, they emailed them to my email address.

Data Analysis

There are four major processes that must occur in a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). They are *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Understanding the nature, meaning, and essences of these four processes is necessary in order to conduct a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 101). Before, during, and after data collection, I practiced *epoche*, which is the process of allowing a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86). As I collected data, I did not take sides but attempted to have a clear or fresh mindset and was open to the truth and new knowledge that was presented in the study. I kept a reflexive journal throughout the data collection and analysis period to help me table or put aside my own views and preconceptions.

I completed the transcription of the interviews. Each participant reviewed and verified their individual transcript. After the transcript was confirmed, I began analyzing the participants' responses. Moustakas' (1994) seven steps was used to analyze data of the transcribed interview

of each participant. The process began with horizontalization, where statements from the interviews are listed that are relevant to the experience or phenomenon studied. During the next step, reduction and elimination, statements that overlap or are repetitive or vague were removed. Significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon were isolated and the meaning of each was listed.

Once significant statements were identified, the meanings were clustered into common categories or themes and then used to develop the textual descriptions of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Textual descriptions describe what the participants experienced, which are used to develop the structural description. Structural description describes the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As descriptions were developed, I understood there is no one right answer but multiple possibilities that connected with the essences and meanings of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The last process or component of a phenomenological study was integration of the structural and textual description to create an overall description of the essence of the phenomenon.

Additionally, the process of coding is central to qualitative research and involves making sense of the text collected from interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed data by going through the data collected and highlighting “significant statements” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79), sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding for how the participants experienced the phenomenon through the process of horizontalization. As the transcripts and field notes were reviewed, I wrote notes or memos in the margin to reveal emergent ideas and then classified reoccurring words into categories or codes. Then the codes were reduced into themes and related to each other to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.

Ultimately, the themes were used to explain the essence of the participants' experience with the phenomenon of social promotion.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that trustworthiness is an important component that researchers demonstrate within their study to persuade their readers and themselves that their findings are worth paying attention to or worth taking account of. Trustworthiness is a vital component within the research process (Amankwaa, 2016). Trustworthiness or truth value of qualitative research and transparency of the conduct of the study are crucial to the usefulness and integrity of the findings (Cope, 2014). Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that "all research must have truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality in order to be considered worthwhile" (p. 187). This section discusses how trustworthiness was demonstrated as it relates to credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as confidence in the truth of the findings (Amankwaa, 2016) and can be obtained by using multiple sources to collect the most accurate data possible. In demonstrating credibility, I used triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, data were collected through student and teacher virtual interviews, student online discussion boards, and teacher hypothetical letters. When multiple sources were used, the data were integrated and triangulated. Researchers see triangulation as a method for corroborating findings and as a test for validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistency

of findings across different types of data will increase confidence in the confirmed patterns and themes (Patton, 2015).

Additionally, member checking was utilized as a technique for exploring the credibility of results. After the interviews of each participant were transcribed, each participant reviewed their individual interview transcript to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking provides many purposes, to include the following:

providing participants the opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what are perceived to be wrong interpretations, giving the participant the opportunity to volunteer additional information, and as well as providing an assessment of the overall adequacy in addition to confirming individual data points. (p. 314)

Finally, I used prolonged engagement as a method to address credibility. Prolonged engagement is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes, learning the "culture," and building trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the data collection and analysis phases, I spent an extensive amount of time interacting with the student and teacher participants. In addition to conducting interviews and monitoring the progress of the online discussion board posts, regular communication occurred through email correspondence. I was also in contact with the administrator who assisted throughout this process. Keeping her updated on the progress of each student participant helped to keep them focused and on task. Additionally, I was able to gain the adult and student participants' trust as we progressed through the data collection and analysis phases, which was evident when they reached out to me for clarification of certain aspects of the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is defined as showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Amankwaa, 2016) and increases with the use of an audit trail (Appendix P). Each process during the study was reported in detail to enable an external researcher to repeat the inquiry and achieve similar results, which enables researchers to understand the methods and their effectiveness. Notes of all activities that happen during the study were recorded as well as decisions about aspects of the study.

Another method that increased dependability is peer review. As posited by Lincoln and Guba (1985), a peer review is a "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and to explore aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). Having a disinterested individual provide feedback serves as an external check of preliminary findings and interpretations against raw data. I secured the assistance of two individuals to examine the data and findings of the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Upon completion of their review of the data and findings of the study, they confirmed that the findings were accurate and well supported by the data collected.

Confirmability is defined as a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Amankwaa, 2016). To establish confirmability Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested reflexivity, which was recorded in the reflexive journal (Appendix O). I used a reflexive journal throughout this study. The reflexive journal is a technique like a diary in which the researcher records a variety of information about self (hence the term "reflexive") and methods as needed throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Incorporating a reflexive journal (Appendix O) allowed me to

recognize my personal feelings and thoughts as well enhance my knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Amankwaa, 2016). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) mentioned that during the process of transferability,

the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The researcher cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do. Researchers must provide sufficient rich descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible. (p. 298)

It is essential that the original researcher supplies a highly detailed description of their situation and methods. Memoing was utilized to ensure detailed information was recorded. In addition, to enhance the transferability of the initial conclusion, an audit trail (Appendix P) was completed throughout the study to demonstrate how each decision was made.

Ethical Considerations

During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and to plan how these issues may be addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prior to conducting the study, approval was requested by the Institutional Review Board and then local approvals for the site and participants. At the beginning of the study, the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. While collecting data, I used open-ended questions that did not lead the participant towards a specific response. Additionally, to protect the privacy of the participants and to maintain the confidentiality of data, hard copies of data collected, notes, and a

password-protected flash drive were stored in a fire-protected safe and will remain there for 5 years. Once the storage time expires, hard copy records and notes will be shredded and the flash drive destroyed. While analyzing the data, participants were assigned pseudonyms to avoid inclusion of identifiable information in the analysis files (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This study provided insight into the overall experiences of socially promoted students and how social promotion impacted their lives. This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study focused on how high school students within a rural high school in the Tidewater/southeastern Virginia area experienced life after being socially promoted. It described the common meaning or experiences of a social promotion for several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study utilized teacher and student interviews, student online discussion boards, and teacher hypothetical letters as methods of data collection; I analyzed data by going through data collected and highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding for how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After further analysis, themes were identified to describe the essence of the participants' experience with the phenomenon of social promotion.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. Throughout the study, I was able to attain the experiences of 10 participants, five high school student participants who were identified as being socially promoted at some point in their elementary or middle school years and five teacher participants who taught at some point in high school. Both teachers and students participated in individual virtual interviews. Additionally, student participants were involved in an online discussion board, and teacher participants submitted hypothetical letters. In this transcendental phenomenological study, data were collected, organized, analyzed, and interpreted using Moustakas' (1994) model. All of the participants' quotes given in this manuscript, including grammatical errors in speech and/or writing, are presented verbatim to accurately depict their voices.

Participants

This section introduces the 10 individuals who participated in the study. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, which involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample included high school core subject teachers and their students who were socially promoted in elementary and middle school even though they had failing grades in core classes and/or did not score at least a 400 on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Additionally, the student participants were not socially promoted because they failed a middle school grade and then were just allowed to go to the next grade anyway. They had failed a grade earlier, were held back and then, they were allowed to skip a

grade later in the school career. There were three male and two female student participants and four female and one male teacher participant.

Student Participants

The student participants of this study attended Roosevelt High School (pseudonym). Their ages ranged between 15 and 17 years old. Each participant had been retained early on in elementary school and experienced being socially promoted during their middle school years or from elementary to middle school. As high schoolers, they shared their initial experiences after being socially promoted as well as residual experiences in the high school level.

Table 1

Student Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Social Promotion Grade	Current Grade
Zoiee-Ann	15	Female	6	9
Amber	15	Female	6	9
Archie	15	Male	6	9
Timothy	17	Male	4 or 5	10
Jonathan	17	Male	7	10

Zoiee-Ann

Now a freshman in high school, Zoiee-Ann recalled being socially promoted from seventh grade to the eighth grade. As she reflected on the emotions she felt after realizing that she would go from finishing the sixth grade to moving directly to the eighth grade the next school year, Zoiee-Ann expressed, “I was a little nervous because I did not know what was gonna to happen. I didn’t know why. I was scared of not knowing the materials that was gonna be taught.” She shared that her fears became reality when she began struggling in her math class.

She explained, “Some of the work that we did was harder than some of the others.” She was able to get the extra help needed, since she pointed out that in middle school after school tutoring was available.

As a high schooler, Zoie-Ann was able to participate in extracurricular activities: “I did basketball.” Additionally, she shared that her favorite subjects included “ecology because you get to learn new things in that class and history because you get to learn about all the wars that happened.” Her future aspirations include attending Old Dominion University and obtaining a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice: “I wanna be a detective.”

Amber

With a quiet demeanor, Amber was a 15-year-old freshman who spoke softly as she responded to my questions. She shared that she began the school year off in the seventh grade and was then notified that she would be moved to the eighth grade within the first week of the school year. Transitioning into eighth grade after only spending two days in seventh grade, Amber explained that “it was like easy and hard at the same time ‘cause like I still ain’t know most of the [new grade level] information.” She shared that even with being socially promoted she was still expected to take Spanish, which was a high school class. During that time, schools had been shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and she began the school year taking classes through Zoom sessions held by her teachers. Eventually instructional sessions moved back to in-person school days, which she shared, “made it easier for her to learn.” As a high schooler, her favorite subject was “Algebra ‘cause it’s like the easiest.” Additionally, Amber shared that she had the desire to participate in an extracurricular activity when the season came around. She said, “Well, I’m going to do track when they come back up.” Amber’s future

aspirations include graduating from high school and going to college: “I wanna take cooking classes and become a chef.”

Archie

In his freshman year of high school, Archie was very active in the athletics program for his school. He shared that during the first half of the school year, he participated in football and wrestling and was about to start the spring sports of soccer and baseball. His favorite subjects were reading and ecology. When asked about what he knew about being socially promoted, he shared, “I think it means like a group of people decided to push me up, like the school board or something. I think they just pushed me up because I won’t in my right grade or something.” He experienced some delays early on and had been retained in first grade. He shared that the principal had “talked to it [social promotion] in second grade but didn’t nothing happen then. They made it happen in middle school.” At that point, Archie commented, “I was ready to see what it was gonna be like for the most part, but I was a little hesitant about like me not knowing the stuff.”

Timothy

As a 17-year-old student in his sophomore year of high school, Timothy could not remember the exact year he was socially promoted, but he recalled it was during elementary school. He commented that he “truly did not have a feeling” about being socially promoted that he “felt indifferent about it.” He viewed being socially promoted as occurring because “they [administrators and teachers] have faith in the student’s ability to move onto the next grade because they feel the student would do fine.” Academically, Timothy was an independent learner. Even in moments where he struggled during the beginning of his sophomore year, Timothy expressed, “I did not receive any extra help, nor did I ask for any.” Even though there

were opportunities for additional individualized help, such as after school tutoring and Saturday Academy, he preferred to figure it out on his own. As for extracurricular activities, Timothy had not participated in any school-related activities or clubs, but he expressed that he enjoyed walking during his free time. When asked about his favorite subject, he said, “I'd say science is the easier one to remember and get.” Timothy expressed that his future aspirations include having “a stable life and a stable income.” He shared that if he can afford college, he would like to attend and study to become an engineer.

Jonathan

In his sophomore year of high school, Jonathan, a 17-year-old student athlete, was actively involved in extracurricular activities at school. When asked about the extracurricular activities he participated in, he shared,

Like right now, I'm doing 7-on-7. It's not really a school thing, but it's a sport that's associated with AAU and um, I like it as of right now 'cause it reminds me of football when football seasons start. I like track and a little bit of baseball.

In addition to participating in sports, he expressed that he enjoyed the culinary arts classes he was taking: “I like, I like cooking. Like I like knowing that I could make my own food. I don't know. I just feel like that's something you need in life anyway.”

Academically, Jonathan shared that he had repeated a grade in elementary school and then when he was in middle school, he was doing well in seventh grade, then “I ended up catching pneumonia and was out of school for a month and couple of days.” Even after returning, “I still ended up getting held back and my grades dropped tremendously.” He noted that “it was so much so many things that we went over that I did not have to knowledge of to move forward.” When given the opportunity to skip eighth grade and get closer to being in his correct grade, he

shared, “I didn’t want to mess up this opportunity to get ahead.” Jonathan has set up a considerable list of goals for himself, both short and long term. He shared, “I want to get into welding class and start my mobile lawn business. Uh, for long term, I’d say getting into the shipyard, get me a 401K set up and start building credit.” He also shared he wants to “go to college and get his commercial driver’s license.”

Teacher Participants

The teacher participants included teachers from the core subjects of math, science, English, and history. The teachers had a wide range of teaching experience including experience teaching students who have been socially promoted. At some point, each teacher has had at least one of the five student participants in their class. As they participated in this study, they shared their experiences of teaching socially promoted students and their observations of how they perform academically post-social promotion.

Table 2

Teacher Participants

Pseudonym	Teaching Experience (years)	Current Subject(s) Taught
Deborah	11	English
Justin	10	Biology, Earth Science, Chemistry
Karrington	20	Algebra, Geometry, AFDA
London	12	History
Catherine	25	Algebra, Geometry

Note. AFDA = algebra, functions, and data analysis

Deborah

Having come to the school district as a career switcher, Deborah began her career in education as a middle school teacher. She values building relationships with her students. She is a licensed teacher with certifications to teach English and history in Grades 6–12. As a middle school teacher, she taught many of the socially promoted students and when she transitioned to the high school, she had multiple opportunities to teach some again in the high school English classroom. She shared that in her ninth and 10th grade classes, “I did not want to draw attention to the socially promoted students so I would give everyone the preassessment so they would not feel singled out.” Devoted to the success of all students, she shared that she would “give up her planning period to tutor socially promoted students who were preparing to take an alternative English assessment” since they could not master the SOL tests. During her interview, she shared her view of social promotion, saying, “It is done to maintain the integrity of a child’s development and ability to remain motivated to complete their education requirements.” She continued by sharing, “For students who have been socially promoted, it can be difficult, and many will face challenges both academically and socially.”

Justin

Most students must take science classes when they enter high school. Justin had the opportunity to teach many socially promoted students in their freshman and sophomore year. However taxing his instructional duties were, he made an honest effort to support students and give them the opportunities to improve their progress in his class. At the time of the interview, Justin shared that he had taught for 10 years and had also worked in another rural school district. Due to a lack of teachers in the district, Justin has had to teach most of the sciences offered in high school. He shared, “I’m the only full-time science teacher at the school and am teaching all

of biology, earth science and all chemistry. Okay. So, I am doing all of it.” In his interview, Justin shared why he “is not a big fan of social promotion,” saying,

For some [students], being advanced to the next grade, they get that confidence that they’re advancing and year on year, they’re improving their score or grades. Whereas the other students who are just kind of promoted that don’t know anything, I mean, we have to know that we’re setting them up for failure. For example, some can’t read. Like we put them in something that’s way more advanced than they are and we don’t give them the tools they need. I think it only works for those who are actually motivated and for those who aren’t motivated, it’s essentially a death sentence in their education.

Despite his views of social promotion, Justin shared that he wanted to provide engaging activities and motivate students to participate in the learning experience. He noted in his interview, “Every year, I attend VAST [Virginia Association of Science Teachers] conference” to engage in content specific professional development and activities presented by other Virginia teachers and those activities he would bring back to his classroom. He added,

I am a member of a number of education based social media groups, mainly on Facebook that relate to biology, chemistry, and AP chemistry. I look at updates of what other science teachers have done and see if I can incorporate it into my class. It kind of keeps me current on some ideas that are out there.

Karrington

Karrington has been employed by Countryside School District for about 10 years as a math teacher, specialist, and coach. She has a fervent desire to see students succeed, so much so that she travels from out of town to teach in this school district. Throughout her career, she has taught in two states on both the middle and high school levels. As a high school teacher, the

classes in which she encounters socially promoted students are algebra and geometry. Karrington shared in her hypothetical letter,

It is my professional opinion that social promotion will hinder your child academically if they aren't on track before leaving middle school. It is great to skip a grade or two and get promoted to the grade you should be in, but if your child is not ready, they may need to demonstrate they are ready before jumping into a faster paced academic environment with higher academic performance expectations.

Even though she questions the value of social promotion, her passion drives her to do all that she can for her students. She has devoted 20 years to the education field and shares, "I just love what I do. It is my duty to share my passion for math with students and help them better understand the concepts necessary to be successful in the classes I teach."

London

In the 12 years London has been an educator, she had taught history on the middle and high school levels in rural and metropolitan areas. While in the Countryside district, she teaches Grades 9–12. While London is not a supporter of socially promoting students due to the possibility of there being a huge learning gap and lack of maturity for some, she recognizes that it is beyond her control. As the educator, it is her duty to give her students the best education possible regardless of the circumstances that got them into her classroom. It has been her experience that it is important that educators build relationships with their students, especially socially promoted students. She posited that teachers should not "make them [socially promoted students] feel less than because they are socially promoted." She continued by advising, "Let them know that you believe in them and their abilities, give them assistance, help them as much as you possibly can."

Catherine

With 25 years of experience in the field of education, Catherine has had continual exposure and interaction with socially promoted students. She has taught algebra and geometry on both the middle school and high school levels. Even though she expressed that she does not feel that social promotion benefits the student, Catherine added that she “just wants her students to be successful, regardless of if they were socially promoted or not.” To contribute to the positive academic performance experiences of the socially promoted student she currently teaches or has taught, she pointed out that “in addition to providing afterschool tutoring opportunities, I would give up my planning period to provide more time for remediation sessions and I also teach summer school.” By doing so, she adds, “Many students gain a better understanding of the content” and the chances for them becoming overwhelmed or frustrated is reduced. In addition, Catherine explained how she builds relationship with her students: “I try hard to let my students know that I believe in them, and I really want to help them be successful.”

Results

In this section, the theme development will be presented, and each of the themes and their corresponding subthemes will be identified and discussed. Four themes with their subthemes emerged from the data analysis. The first theme is adaptability to a new learning environment with its subthemes of academic expectations and adjustments. The second theme is drive/desire to achieve success with its subthemes of motivation and adjusted skills. The third theme is support availability with its subthemes of in school and at home. The fourth theme is socioemotional aspects with its subthemes of internal and external views.

Theme Development

This transcendental phenomenological study described the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in southeastern Virginia. The foundation of the data analysis was based on Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory which focuses on the motivation of high school students after being socially promoted and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory which examines self-efficacy as it relates to academic achievement and long-term goals. Table 3 organizes the significant statements and phrases from the discussion boards, hypothetical letters, and interviews of the participants. From those statements and phrases, themes and subthemes emerged and are included in the data table as well.

Table 3

Significant Statements and Phrases, Themes, and Subthemes

Significant Statements/Phrases	Theme	Subthemes
Fast-paced Attendance Gaps in knowledge Different style of teaching A lot of work Discover my learning style in that class Graduation requirements Course credits SOL	Adaptability to a new learning environment	Academic expectations Adjustments
Push through Do what I have to do More independent review Access online tutorial Time management Organization Motivation/more effort On task/focus Extracurricular activities Long-term goals Reach goals Good grades	Drive/Desire to achieve success	Motivation Adjusted skills

Significant Statements/Phrases	Theme	Subthemes
Remediation Tutoring Available More help Extra chances Didn't give up on me Encouraged Supportive Active Engaged Expectations	Support availability	School Home
Ashamed Self-confidence Being judged Overwhelmed Difficult journey Scared Challenging Prove myself Let my work speak for me	Socioemotional aspect	Internal External

As noted in Table 3, four themes and eight subthemes emerged from the study. Each theme along with its corresponding subthemes are discussed in this section. To support the themes and subthemes, the participants' individual responses will be noted within the discussion.

Adaptability to a New Learning Environment

During data analysis of the interviews, discussion boards, and hypothetical letters, I observed that overall, the student participants agreed that there was a period of adaptability that had to take place as they transitioned from middle school to high school. The student participants discussed how the high school expectations were more different than middle school as well. In his interview, Jonathan said, "The teachers in high school have high expectations. I felt like it was too much at first. I wasn't used to teachers jumping right into teaching on the first day." Zoie-Ann shared the same sentiment in a discussion board entry when she expressed that "high

school is way faster than middle school and teachers were ready to start teaching on day one or two.” In her discussion board entry, Amber shared,

I feel like I was prepared for academics. There are just certain things that make me uncomfortable like public speaking. I am taking Spanish and I don't like [public speaking] but my teacher is making us talk in front of people and I don't like doing that.

Additionally, the student participants expressed how they had to make mental and physical adjustments to be successful during their transition. London, a history teacher, mentioned in both her interview and hypothetical letter that “in high school, teachers will not ‘spoon-feed’ students and its highly likely that a new lesson will be taught every day. They [students] need to manage their time and be organized so they can stay on top of their assignments.” Realizing that a change in environment is accompanied by a change in expectations, in her discussion board entry, Zoie-Ann shared, “It took time to adjust but after a week I got used to it.” In his interview, Timothy shared, “During my first year of high school, I had horrible grades because I was procrastinating doing my work. I had to refocus and pay attention in class and, by the second semester my grades were pretty good.”

Academic Expectations. When transitioning into a new learning environment, the student participants were aware it would be different. However, they did not understand the degree of difference until they entered high school and began their various classes. In previous experiences at the middle school level, students were accustomed to failing an SOL test or core class but still moving on to the next grade. However, that was not the case at the high school level. In one of her discussion board entries, Amber, a student participant, recalled, “In eighth grade, my teachers always said high school was faster than middle school and we would have to pass our classes and SOLs or repeat the class or SOL until we finally passed them.” In her

hypothetical letter, Catherine, a high school math teacher, also noted, “Students are required to pass not only the course but the corresponding SOL test for the course as well, and whichever they do not pass, they will have to repeat it until they pass it.” Archie, a ninth-grade student, stated in his interview, “It was too much to take in at one point.” Jonathan, a tenth-grade student, shared similar views in his interview:

It was overwhelming at first because I wasn’t used to teachers discussing their expectations and then jump right into teaching a lesson on the first day of school. High school teachers expected me to be responsible and if you did not show them that you cared about your education, they’re not gonna put forth the effort there either. Your teacher’s not gonna always be behind you treating you like a baby, ‘cause you’re not in middle school anymore.

Adjustments. After being socially promoted and entering high school, students had to make adjustments to accommodate the higher academic expectations and change in school routine. London, a teacher participant, shared in her hypothetical letter how academic accountability is implemented in high school. She noted, “High school is a fast-paced learning environment, where students are on a 4 x 4 schedule which means they take four classes one semester and change to four new courses the second semester.” Zoie-Ann commented,

I have adjusted very well. Adjusting to high school is not as hard as I thought but middle school made stuff easy. I was nervous thinking I wouldn’t know what to do or how to do it but I’ve learned.

In some instances, students had to change their mindset. In his discussion board entry, Jonathan commented,

My freshman year was an adjustment. I just had to get used to the schedule and work on using my time better. The classes were longer, and we learned a lot of stuff in one class.

It was hard to keep up and I had to study more on my own.

Timothy shared in his student interview, “When I got better with time management, my grades got better.” Attendance was also noted as a necessary adjustment to be present as in previous years it was not stressed, and many participants missed a considerable amount of instructional days. In his interview, Archie shared, “Sometimes I would miss the beginning of classes or be absent. If I could do something differently, I would be present and on time so I wouldn’t miss so much information and have to get caught up.” Amber also mentioned the same sentiment in her interview about attendance, saying she “would’ve like stayed in school more and not been absent a lot. Like I missed a lot of work.” When Timothy reflected on why he was not doing well in his English class in his discussion board entry, he noted, “I am failing because I missed a couple of weeks of school and got behind. I have to make up my assignments so that I can maintain my GPA [grade point average] of 3.1 which has never happened before.”

Drive/Desire to Achieve Academic Success

The theme of drive/desire to achieve academic success emerged as participants spoke of actions they needed to take or had taken to be successful in their classes. As student participants pursued their academic goals, they shared significant statements that revealed the subthemes of motivation and work ethic. The theme and subthemes relate to SQ1, which pertains to academic performance, and SQ2, which deals with the motivation of the student.

Motivation. From the teacher’s perspective, Karrington shared in her interview that “I think one of the key components that contribute to the success or failure of a student is the drive

of the student.” She went further into detail as she compared the motivation of the socially promoted students:

Of the few that are socially promoted that take advantage of the opportunity, they are driven to improve themselves and are motivated to do better. They want to be academically successful and put forth the effort to reach their goal. On the flip side, those students that lack motivation or drive to push themselves have a hard time reaching their academic goals and expect teachers to just push them along or make everything easy.

During the student interviews, I asked how the student participants would describe their motivation before and after being socially promoted. When referring to before being socially promoted, Zoiee-Ann shared her motivation was “not strong.” Archie shared, “I wasn’t highly motivated in middle school.” Jonathan shared, “I’ve always been motivated but after I got sick, it decreased when I got behind on schoolwork.” Timothy rated his motivation “5 out of 10.”

When reflecting on their post-social promotion motivation as a high school student, each responded that it had increased so much. One student noted how just knowing that he had the chance to begin taking courses to secure employment after graduating was a big deal. In a discussion board entry and during his interview, Timothy explained that his motivation increased when “I saw all the special opportunities I’d get like taking college classes. I want to take the welding class at the community college next school year.” Deborah shared in her interview that socially promoted students are “not only motivated academically but probably more social motivated because they want to continue school without dropping out.” This was confirmed by something Timothy shared in his interview, referencing how his motivation level increased from a five to a seven. He stated, “I’m motivated to graduated high school. I’d rather not be in school while I’m 20.”

In some cases, it appeared that teachers were taking every measure to keep students motivated to do well. During his interview, Justin, shared how he would bargain with his students to encourage them to be present and stay motivated. He stated,

I try to give them motivated. Grades to me are not a big deal. I just want my kids to be able to pass the SOL and graduate at this point and get out of high school and have options. If they [the students] are willing to come on board and do the review, it will all work in their favor. If [the students] did the work and still failed the test they would still have grades to support them passing this class.

With respect to the students that had attendance issues, Justin continued in his interview, “I even told those students if they passed the SOL regardless of how many days they missed, I would give them a 100 for the quarter grade.”

Work Ethic. Most students expressed their desire to do well in school and maintain the good grades they were accustomed to. Even in the most difficult situations such as having to catch up because they missed prerequisite content needed for their current class or classes, they still expressed a desire to take the necessary steps to get caught up. Many of the student participants became advocates for their education. In a discussion board entry, Timothy shared, “I had to study more on my own to keep up.” In her interview, Amber stated, “I had to work extra hard to get the information. I stayed focused and motivated.” Additionally, with the majority of the student participants expressing a desire to continue or begin participating in extracurricular activities, the student participants mentioned doing better with time management and organization. In a discussion board entry, Zoie-Ann, who plays basketball, shared, “I had to figure it out because I wanted to play sports too. My grades had to be good so I could play and the more time I put into it, the easier it gets.” In his interview, Jonathan, who participates in

football, track, and baseball, posited, “I just had to study more to keep my grades up to play sports. I did what I had to do to do after school activities. Being involved in sports helps me stay focused and motivated.”

Support Availability

It had been said that it takes a village to raise a child. For any student, having a good support system available may increase the chances of the student being successful in his or her endeavors to reach academic success. Though it is solely the responsibility of students to reach their academic goals, having resources available when they need them is a good thing to have. Having a strong support system in place at school and at home provides a structural foundation for students to achieve academic goals. In his interview, Archie mentioned, “Having people around you that help you makes going through something easier.” Thus, the subthemes of academic support and familial support emerged.

Academic Support. In a fast-paced high school classroom, many students can get overwhelmed and frustrated when they cannot connect with the content or understand what the teacher is trying to teach them. For the socially promoted students in this study, knowing their teachers were there to help them resonated with them. In a discussion board entry, Zoie-Ann expressed, “Some teachers give me confidence to do better than I did in middle school. They show me this is why I got it wrong to help me understand what to do to get it right the next time.” Having teachers who set aside time to provide remediation, tutoring, or extra opportunities for them to perform better and gain a good understanding of the content embodied genuine care and concern for their students’ educational success. In his interview, science teacher Justin shared,

I try to give them whatever support they need in terms of whether they need Zoom in the evening, Zoom in the afternoons. Uh, if they need to be pulled from an elective class to get extra tutorial, help, or something. Um, if they have a resource class with one of the SPED [special education] teachers, I try to give them support and work with the SPED teacher more closely. I try to make myself way more present or check in with them constantly to how they're doing.

The academic support provided by teachers does not go unnoticed. When student Jonathan reflected on the extra support and opportunity his science teacher gave him, the impact it made on him was noticed. He shared,

When I had missed a lot of days of school when I was sick, my science teacher would give me chances to get caught up instead of failing me. I passed both his class and the SOL for his class. Mr. Justin did not give up on me and it meant a lot.

London, a history teacher, explained about the importance of providing an environment where students are encouraged to learn and feel comfortable seeking extra help from teachers. In her interview, she shared,

It is important to have supportive learning environments for students. I make sure my students have the materials they need. I have conversations with them to encourage them to study. I welcome students to come to me for extra help during their free bell, lunch, and before and after school. Students need to know that you will work with them.

During their teacher interviews, Karrington and Catherine share that being flexible allows students the opportunity to select remediation or tutoring times that work with their schedules. Karrington pointed out that she “gives additional time to the socially promoted students and provides one-on-one assistance during the bell as well as after school tutoring.” Catherine also

mentioned in her interview that “I give up a portion of my planning period to work with students who cannot stay for afterschool students as well as allow students to come back during the first fifteen minutes of the bell for extra assistance while other students work independently on their warm-ups.” Additionally, Deborah shared in her hypothetical letter that “moving up a grade can cause gaps in knowledge and skill sets normally learned that will have to be bridged through extra instruction, remediation, additional focus in the classroom.” In addition to providing extra help opportunities, Deborah mentioned in her interview other ways she supports her students, such as “tier groups, tracking their progress, monitoring them more on what their efforts are, as well as hold sessions during Saturday Academy.”

Familial Support. Having a strong support system at home helps reinforce the academic component for socially promoted students. Archie, a ninth-grade student, shared that if there was something in a specific class that he could not understand, he could get help from his sibling. During his interview, he expressed, “My teachers would talk fast, and I still could not catch on. So, like I would have to get the information from my sister, like the notes and stuff.” He also added, “I had friends that have helped me out. I had people help me out during the weekend and stuff.”

Parental support is necessary, so students remain encouraged and motivated to continue. In a discussion board post, Amber, a ninth-grade student, shared, “My parents expect me to make good grades. My dad helps me if I don’t understand my homework.” Deborah stressed the importance of parents being actively engaged in their child’s education. She posited in her hypothetical letter, “Participate in school events, develop relationships with teachers to better support your son/daughter, and advocate for your child’s education.” Karrington pointed out in her interview,

I think the “village” or the support system the child has at home plays a major role in the success of the socially promoted student. When a student has a strong support system that lays the foundation of motivation, encouragement, and additional help for the student.

Socioemotional Aspects

Socially promoted students experience a range of emotions that are impacted by their personal views and the views of others. They must maneuver through each day while filtering out what everyone else thinks of how they received the opportunity to advance or questions if they deserved the chance to be socially promoted. These views include not only their own feelings, but those of family, peers, and teachers. Because of the different views socially promoted students encountered, the subthemes of internal views and external views emerged.

Internal Views. How one feels about themselves can impact how one navigates throughout the day or in a situation. When asked how students felt when they realized they were going to be socially promoted, there were a variety of emotions shared. In her interview, Zoie-Ann said she “felt normal and happy because I will be with my friends.” Because it had been mentioned while in second grade but never happened, Archie stated, in his interview, he felt “excited because it was finally going to happen, anxious to see what it was like, and hesitant because I won’t know the information.” Jonathan also shared in his interview, “I felt a sense of relief because I had a chance to make up for the time I had pneumonia and for having a late birthday.” In Timothy’s interview, he shared, “I felt relieved because I wasn’t gonna fail a second time.” Lastly, in her interview, Amber mentioned, “I was scared at first because I wasn’t gonna know nobody, but when I got there it seem easier.”

When student participants were asked about their preparedness for the academic coursework in the discussion boards, Archie and Amber shared they were comfortable moving

forward. Archie stated, “I feel like I worked hard to be in high school. I felt like I was mentally prepared for it [social promotion]. I was really up for the challenge because I knew that [challenges] come with being moved up.” Amber also shared in the discussion board post,

I feel like I was prepared for the academics. There are certain things that I feel uncomfortable with like public speaking, but I get my work done. I am expected to get all A’s and B’s. I want them to stay that way.

Zoie-Ann, Timothy, and Jonathan all expressed their lack of preparedness for high school math classes in the discussion board posts. Zoie-Ann shared she “had been struggling in math a little bit and got frustrated, but after sticking with it and getting help, now I get it.” Timothy shared, “I struggled to understand the material in math class as I often distract myself with something. I often think that I will accomplish what I need to do when the time comes for it, so I put it off until a later date.” Jonathan stated, “I realized that I don’t like geometry. It’s a little harder than the other math classes I have taken. Even though I don’t care for the class I still put in 100% effort to be successful.”

External Views. When big events occur in a person’s life and it becomes public knowledge, outside people can and will form their own opinions and express their views. In the case of socially promoted students’ experience, many of them felt they had to prove themselves. In his discussion board post, Archie shared, “It was almost like I had to prove myself to be in my new class. I feel like people were judging me on how I got moved up to a different grade.” Amber also shared in her interview, “People just did not know how much effort I put into getting moved up. I had to show my teachers that I was ready. It wasn’t just given to me. I had to work hard.” In a discussion board response, Timothy posited, “If they do judge you for moving up then you need to find a new group of friends.” He continued in a different post, “I would say not

to worry about what others think of your situation. You were given the opportunity to catch up and you need to focus on what you need to do to keep reaching your goals.” Timothy, who was socially promoted in another school district before transferring to Countryside, shared, “I myself never had an issue about being judged about being socially promoted.”

Research Question Responses

As a preview of the discussion in Chapter Five, this section provides concise answers to the research questions that guided this study. Short and direct narrative answers are provided for each of the research questions, focusing mainly on the themes developed in the previous section. The central research question and sub-questions are addressed individually in this section. Select participant quotes are used to support the responses to the research questions.

Central Research Question

The central research question that guided this study asked: How do high school students and their teachers describe the lived experience of students who were socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years? The participants’ perceptions and lived experiences revealed that being socially promoted in elementary or middle school years comes with its challenges. Realizing there will be “gaps in knowledge and skill sets,” as noted by Deborah in her teacher interview, the desire to overcome the deficit in knowledge and continue to reach individual academic goals was a shared experience of the student participants. Amber summed up her fellow student participants’ sentiments in her interview when she said,

I have always been motivated to succeed even in not so good times. After being socially promoted, I felt like I didn’t know a lot of what they [teachers] were talking about, but it got easier once I got extra help from the teachers.

With access to academic support before, during, and after school and even on the weekends, students found that taking advantage of the extra tutoring and remediation opportunities helped increase their self-efficacy. Zoie-Ann stated in her student interview,

It was hard at first but then I got used to it. High school teachers give you more confidence to do better. They showed me what I did wrong and explained it to me, so I didn't get it wrong again.

SQ1

The first sub-question asked, How do high school students and their teachers describe academic performance on the high school level as it relates to social promotion?

The academic performance of high school students who have been socially promoted depends on the effort they put into being successful. In her interview Karrington, a math teacher, expressed that “socially promoted students that take advantage of the opportunity are driven to improve themselves and motivated to do better. They want to be academically successful and put forth the effort to reach their goal.” In her hypothetical letter, English teacher Deborah shared her concern for “the gaps in knowledge and skill sets” she witnessed. She shared, “through extra help, remediation and grit, those socially promoted students that take advantage of the resources have demonstrated increasing progress academically” in her classes. Academically, for the most part, none of the students expressed concern for having to catch up in in English class; however, math appeared to be the content area they struggled the most with as noted in a previously discussed section.

During the interview sessions, when asked about their academic experiences since being socially promoted and transitioning into high school, Zoie-Ann shared, “Even though I struggled in math because I missed seventh-grade math skills, I have been able to get As and Bs in my

classes.” Even though Archie did not specify his what his grades were, he did share, “I have been able to keep my grades up so that I can participate in afterschool sports.” He also mentioned, “Seeing the outcomes from my tests and quizzes keep me motivated to keep my grades up and I even passed my Earth Science SOL and class.”

For some socially promoted students, adjusting to the coursework expectations can be overwhelming. Math teacher, Karrington, stated,

I teach two SOL tested classes. A lot of socially promoted students are given a “D” in middle school so they can move even though they maintained an “F” the entire year.

When they get into high school, enter the classroom, and find out what the expectation is they are not ready for the challenge. Their motivation level is very low.

While adjusting to high school was a process for Jonathan, he shared, “I went from Algebra 1 to Algebra 2 without grasping the Algebra 1 and my first semester was terrible and I managed to get Cs and Ds. After that, I had to improve my grades.” Timothy shared the same sentiment in his interview: “I had to figure some things out. My grades were horrible in my first semester because I wasn’t doing work, then they got better, then they started going down again and now I have a 3.1 GPA.” Amber noted, “I have good grades in high school. I take a medical aide class and have passed all my classed and SOLs, even Algebra.”

SQ2

The second sub-question asked, How do high school students and their teachers describe motivation on the high school level as it relates to social promotion?

As long as the students have the support they need at school and at home, the socially promoted students will remain motivated. In the student discussion board, Zoie-Ann shared, “High school teachers give you more confidence to do better. They show what I did wrong and

explained it to me, so I don't get it wrong again." Student participant Timothy noted in his discussion board post,

The more people I had to help me the easier it was to understand. At school, I had the teachers and at home, I had my mom, my brother, and my sisters. I just had to ask questions in class or get extra help after school.

In her interview, student participant Amber stated, "My parents expect me to maintain good grades. I am motivated to make honor roll." During her teacher interview session, Catherine shared, "I try really, really hard to let my students know that I believe in them to keep them motivated to do more."

SQ3

The third sub-question asked, How do high school students and their teachers describe long-term goals of students who were socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years?

Most students aspire to do better and be better. English teacher Deborah pointed out in her interview,

Most socially promoted students want to get out of school. They want to be done with it and move on. They're always envisioning what they're going to do next when they get out of school. They have a lot of imagination about it too.

Each of the student participants has set goals beyond high school. Some have plans to go to college or trade school, while others have plans of getting into the workforce and creating a comfortable life for themselves. During the student interview session, Timothy shared that he wants "to have a stable life and a stable income that means having a good job and saving up money to get a good decent house and eventually go to college if I can afford it."

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the participants involved in this study and how they experienced social promotion as high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. Through data analysis of the student and teacher interviews, student online discussion boards, and teacher hypothetical letters, the shared experiences and perceptions of the socially promoted high school students and teacher participants resulted in four themes and eight subthemes. The themes that emerged include the following: (a) adaptability to a new learning environment, (b) drive/desire to achieve success, (c) support availability, and (d) socioemotional aspects. Additionally, subthemes were identified. Respectively, they are as follows: (a) academic expectations and adjustments, (b) motivation and adjusted skills, (c) at school and at home, and (d) internal and external views. Within the theme development discussion, participant responses were included to support each identified theme and subtheme. Additionally, participant responses were identified to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. This study provides insight into the overall experiences of social promotion for those high school students and describes how social promotion in elementary and middle school relates to their academic performance and motivation. This chapter provides interpretations and ideas that refine the findings of this study and interpret them for the reader.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings in light of the developed themes. As the expert on the topic, I discuss my interpretation of the findings supported by empirical and theoretical sources along with hard evidence from the study's participants. The discussion section has five major subsections including (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy or practice, (c) theoretical and empirical implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

After reviewing and analyzing the data collected from the interviews, online discussion boards, and hypothetical letters from the participants, I identified the significant statements and phrases. Through an analysis of the significant statements and phrases, four themes emerged. The themes that emerged included adaptability to a new learning environment, drive/desire to achieve success, support availability, and socioemotional aspects. Corresponding subthemes were also identified for each of them. Under adaptability to a new learning environment the subthemes were academic expectations and adjustments. Motivation and adjusted skills were

identified as subthemes for drive/desire to achieve success. For support availability, academic support and at home support were noted as the subthemes. Internal and external views were identified as subthemes for socioemotional aspects.

As it relates to the academic success, motivation, and long-term goals of the socially promoted high school students, both the teacher and student participants felt that the availability of academic and familial support was important to the motivation of the student. In the next sections, I will discuss a summary of the findings from this study.

Adaptability to a New Learning Environment

The social cognitive theory addresses the key aspects of perceived self-efficacy and includes origins of efficacy beliefs, their structure and function, their diverse effects, the processes through which they work, and the modes of influence by which a resilient sense of efficacy can be created and strengthened for personal and social change (Bandura, 1997, 2012). When entering a new environment, students must acclimate to the new expectations. From an academic standpoint, when students transition to totally different levels of education, they are going to be met with new and sometimes higher, more rigorous expectations. It is at that point they must make the decision to either sink or swim. Susan, a teacher participant, shared how academic accountability is implemented in high school. Even though high school can be a challenging environment to transition into, the academic and graduation requirements are there to position students to have the best opportunities in college, trade school, or the workforce.

Drive/Desire to Achieve Success

Students' academic self-efficacy is fundamental to their learning because each person's perception of his or her academic ability can influence personal motivation for completing work and how well the student performs in school (Ansong et al., 2016). Bandura (1989) posited that

personal or cognitive factors such as knowledge, expectations, self-perception, and attitude give shape and direction to behavior. He also noted what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986). Just knowing that he had the chance to begin taking courses to secure employment after graduating, Timothy explained that his motivation increased when “I saw all the special opportunities I’d get like taking college classes. I want to take the welding class at the community college next school year.” Additionally, most students expressed their desire to do well in school and maintain the good grades they were accustomed to. Even in the most difficult situations such as having to catch up because they missed prerequisite content needed for their current class or classes, they still expressed a desire to take the necessary steps to get caught up. Many of them became advocates for their education.

Support Availability

It had been said that it takes a village to raise a child. Many students mentioned the support they received at school and at home. Archie stated, “Having people around you that help you makes going through something easier.” For any student, having a good support system available may increase the chances of the student being successful in their endeavors to reach academic success. Though it is solely the responsibility of the students to reach their academic goals, having resources available when they need them is a good thing to have. Students should be given academic options that will assist them with achieving academic success, such as after school tutoring (Nelson-Reyes, 2018), peer tutoring (Song et al., 2018), Saturday school (Drake, 2017), summer school (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009), and credit recovery.

Socioemotional Aspect

There are factors that can impact how individuals behave in certain situations. Both environmental factors (e.g., social norms, access in the community, and influence on others) and

behavioral factors (e.g., skills, practice, and self-efficacy) can influence how a socially promoted student may respond in the academic setting. From a teacher's perspective, Deborah shared in her hypothetical letter that "socially promoted students face challenges both academically and socially." Catherine also noted in her letter that being socially promoted can impact students' self-confidence. Bandura (1997) posited that when people believe in what they can achieve, this belief has a positive effect and influences performance.

Usher (2009) posited that how individuals perceive their ability or level of competence to complete tasks, whether academic or social, plays an important role in identifying or predicting their behavior in various circumstances. When students are socially promoted to the next grade, they must wrestle with internal and external situations that could impact their academic success. An external factor that Archie experienced was the judgement of his peers and some teachers. He shared in one of his discussion board posts,

It was almost like I had to prove myself to be in my new classes. I feel like people were judging me on how I got moved up to a different grade. I still stayed focused and motivated. I just do what I got to do in class and let my grades speak for me.

Amber added, "People just did not know how much effort I put into getting moved up. I had to show my teachers that I was ready. It [the opportunity to be socially promoted] wasn't just given to me."

Even while experiencing the external issue of judgement, Zoie-Ann noted that having the support of her teachers helped build her self-efficacy, which had a direct impact on her self-confidence and self-motivation to continue to achieve her academic goals. She expressed in her student interview, "Sometimes you must focus on yourself and not worry about what other people got to say. I just continue to work hard." Laurencelle and Scanlan (2018) posited that

personal efficacy beliefs assist individuals to face difficult tasks, persevere, and achieve desirable outcomes. Zoie-Ann continued by mentioning how her teacher kept her encouraged to achieve more. She shared in another discussion board post, “My high school teachers gave me more confidence to do better because they showed me what I did wrong, so I don’t get it wrong again.”

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings from this study provide implications for policy and practice when implementing social promotion. As education policies and procedures continue to evolve, educational policymakers and leaders should work to be more specific in outlining how to implement social promotion within school districts. This section will discuss how educational leaders and policymakers should develop specific guidelines to address social promotion processes.

Implications for Policy

To my knowledge, Countryside School District did not have a document specifying guidelines for student selection for social promotion. The findings of this study have led me to conclude that there should be policies specifying the guidelines for the implementation of social promotion. As an educator with almost 20 years’ experience, I believe educational policymakers on all levels of legislation should be more specific about when it is appropriate to socially promote students. Additionally, there should be guidelines detailing which students warrant social promotion. I feel the privilege of social promotion should be granted to students who have demonstrated that they are capable of not only excelling in their current grade level but in the next grade level as well. Therefore, being over-age should not be the only criteria to be a candidate for social promotion. I feel policy should include attendance guidelines and grade

requirements in the subjects of math, science, reading, and history for a consistent amount of time.

In addition to attendance and grade requirements, selected students should demonstrate mastery of the grade they are “skipping.” Evaluation of SOL performance data from the prior year should be included to support or oppose whether a student is a good candidate. By doing so, educators and administrators will not only have data to support or oppose the social promotion of a student, but information will be provided regarding gaps in knowledge in content areas. Knowing this information will help educational leaders and educators identify areas where additional academic support can be provided to bridge the gap in knowledge. Finally, policy should require school districts to develop academic plans of support for students who are selected to be socially promoted. School districts cannot just promote students and allow them to find their way. Reschly and Christenson (2013) posited that strategies should be followed with students who do not meet certain educational or social standards, advancing other complementary proposals like giving carefully monitored instructions and supplementary interventions that address the student’s learning needs. Policy should require students, parents, and educational leaders to sign an academic contract to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the expectations that come with being socially promoted. Policy should require the administration to monitor progress of the student, check-in regularly with the parent to discuss the student’s progress, and require the student to attend mandatory academic support sessions. As noted by van Kraayenoord (2010) the use of intervention strategies holds a great deal of promise for many students who experience difficulties in learning. I believe that with adequate academic and familial support, students will have the resources they need to be successful.

Implications for Practice

Although the empirical literature did not address the implication for practice given here, I feel that based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions for future practice are warranted. As noted previously noted, social promotion is defined as the practice of promoting students to the next grade level even when they have not learned the material they were taught or achieved expected learning standards (Ahmed & Mihiretie, 2015; An, 2015; Tani, 2018; Winters & Greene, 2012). In Countryside School District, social promotion is used to move overage students to either age-appropriate grade or close to it. In many cases, school districts seem embarrassed to admit to practicing social promotion. Granted, implementation of social promotion has its advantages and disadvantages. However, if universal procedures and guidelines are in place, everyone will practice implementation the same way. For those school districts who may choose to practice social promotion, additional support must be provided to all stakeholders. Administrators and guidance personnel can have regular conferences with the parents to discuss the progress of the student as well as offer the parent additional educational support. School districts can host monthly parent support sessions where they provide the parents with strategies to better help their child.

With respect to the student, districts should require each socially promoted student to participate in an academic transitional period to ease them into the grade to which they are being socially promoted. This can occur during the summer or the semester prior to the school year the student will be social promoted. While engaging in the transitional session, socially promoted students will become familiar with the expectations of the next grade level and be introduced to some of the content of the new classes. Being exposed to this information will allow the student to have a smoother transition into high school. Additionally, as educational leaders support the

parents and students, they should also consider providing professional development opportunities to the educators. Presenting opportunities for educators to enhance their knowledge and learning new strategies to support socially promoted students will result in better learning experiences for the students.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The findings that resulted from this investigation have theoretical and empirical implications. The theories that supported this study were Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. In this section, the relationship between the findings of this study and the theoretical and empirical literature is discussed.

Theoretical Implications

The theories guiding this study were Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory and Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. This transcendental phenomenological study focused on the lived experience of socially promoted high school students as it relates to their academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory was used to examine the motivation of high school students who were socially promoted in elementary and/or middle school. Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory was used to examine self-efficacy as it relates to academic performance and long-term goals. The findings suggested that the student participants' degree of academic success and long-term achievement was dependent upon the presence of certain key factors such as their motivation or desire to achieve, how they adjusted to the high school academic expectations, and the support available in and out of the school building. Ryan and Deci's (2000) social determination theory identifies levels of motivation that could impact the individual's ability to accomplish specific

goals and be a self-regulated learner. The student participants in this study were mainly intrinsically motivated, which means they choose to engage in behaviors out of interest or personal importance (Close & Solberg, 2008).

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory was also included in the foundation for this study as it provided a way to examine how personal or cognitive factors such as knowledge, expectations, self-perception, and attitude give shape and direction to the behavior of the socially promoted student. What socially promoted students think, believe, and feel can affect how they behave in the new academic setting. Zoie-Ann shared during her interview session that "high school teachers give you more confidence to do better." As a result, she explained, "I passed more tests, learned more new things, and had better success in my world history class." The social cognitive theory also noted that individuals may learn vicariously or by observing the actions of their peers. Observational learning enables individuals to expand their knowledge and skills based on information conveyed by modeling influences. As socially promoted students adjusted to high school scheduling and academic expectations, they observed how their peers maneuvered throughout the day and took note of strategies they used to be successful in their classes such as incorporating the use of organizational tools. In her hypothetical letter, London stressed the importance "using organizational tools, writing down assignments and due dates, as well as checking off completed work." Amber shared,

I noticed some of the people in my class had organized binders and used the agendas the school provided to write down the classwork, homework, and due dates daily. Over time, I began using my agenda more and it help me stay on top of my assignments.

Empirical Implications

Most research has been conducted to investigate how retention impacts students' academic performance; however limited research has been conducted on the overall impact of social promotion on students' academic motivation (Klapproth et al., 2016). There has been much debate amongst education policymakers on the benefits of social promotion. In previous literature, Ahmed and Mihiretie (2015) posited that promoting low-achieving students in the absence of appropriate support systems resulted in low interest to attend classes and poor learning, which eventually led to those students dropping out of school. McMahon (2018) found that even though the purpose of social promotion was to keep students with their age group peers, 90% of students who had been socially promoted twice were still in high school while their peers had graduated. This study does not confirm or corroborate his findings; however, it demonstrated that many students do continue to graduate on time. The participants in this study were socially promoted once. Even though the socially promoted students faced academic and social challenges, each of them was able to adapt to the expectations of their classes and made increased progress. Amber, Archie, and Zoie-Ann have maintained honor roll status during their freshman year. Jonathan is taking community college classes and is projected to graduate on time. Even though Timothy struggled a little, he made the adjustments necessary to bring his GPA to a 3.1.

Results from the González-Betancor and López-Puig (2016) study indicated that students may have future difficulties in the learning process and being promoted automatically may lead to grade retention during secondary education. They continued by noting that “students may have a learning gap that makes it difficult for them to achieve the academic competences of secondary education” (González-Betancor & López-Puig, 2016, p. 3). Teacher participants in this current

study expressed similar concerns in their interviews and letters. In her interview, Karrington observed, “Socially promotion hinders students academically if they are not on track before leaving the previous grade.” Deborah shared, “Socially promoted students face both academic and social challenges.” Academically, she noted that “being socially promoted could cause gaps in knowledge.” Although the student participants in this current study experienced moments of difficulties, they persevered and sought the necessary academic support through tutoring, asking questions within class, accessing online content-specific videos, or increasing independent study time at home to reach their academic goals. The socially promoted students in this study took advantage of the available academic, familial, and peer support made available to them.

This study contributes to the education field as it provides insight into how socially promoted students have experienced the phenomenon. Vandecandelaere et al. (2016) encouraged policy and practice changes to provide additional support for at-risk children who are socially promoted, which could have a positive impact on psychosocial developments as well as interventions that remedy academic failure. Reschly and Christenson (2013) argued that the real issue is to analyze what strategies should be followed with students who do not meet certain educational or social standards, advancing other complementary proposals like giving carefully monitored instructions and supplementary interventions that address the student’s learning. Knowing the challenges that socially promoted students face, this study provides possible strategies that should be implemented to better support students so that they are able to graduate on time.

Limitations and Delimitations

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) posited that research limitations are the aspects of methodology or design that influence the interpretation of the findings and are possible

weaknesses usually out of the researcher's control. Limitations for this investigation include my inability to select the student participants. The recruitment process was based on the assistance of the assistant principal and school guidance counselor. Because I could not view student academic files, I was limited only to those students that they deemed as qualifying participants. Using a transcendental phenomenological qualitative research design, participants had the opportunity to provide detailed descriptions of their perceptions and experiences as it related to the phenomenon of social promotion. This study was limited due to the location as well as the number of persons who participated in the study. The finding from this study represents a specific group of participants located in a specific region in Virginia.

In this study, delimitations included participation of a specific type of teacher and student in my sample. To gain insight into the experiences of the socially promoted students, high school core teachers of the students were included. The teachers taught the participants for at least one subject. Additionally, with respect to student participation, high school students who were socially promoted during either elementary or middle school were accepted.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study's findings, limitations and delimitations, recommendations for future research are discussed in this section. The findings from this study indicate that high school students who have been socially promoted are able to positively transition into the high school setting. This study was conducted in one school district; however, future research should include participation from at least three school districts from the same region to provide information rich data. Additionally, another research study could include the perspectives and experiences of the parents as it relates to how their child transitioned into high school after being socially promoted. Furthermore, as it relates to the graduation rate, research can be conducted to measure if social

promotion is an effective academic strategy. Previous research conducted by McMahon (2018) indicated that while social promotion has the aim of keeping students with their age group peers, students who were socially promoted at least twice may graduate, but it will take them longer and it will not be with peers their own age. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022) uses the examines the percentage of U.S. public high school students who graduate on time, as measured by the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR). Future researchers can determine the percentage of socially promoted students that graduate on time and/or dropout. Additionally, they can look at the graduation completion index to track what happens to the cohorts of socially promoted students after graduation. Lastly, it would be a valuable study to examine the voices/experiences of students who have been socially promoted, but are still struggling academically, although recruiting participants for such a study would be very difficult. As this study provides insight on the lived experiences of high school students who were socially promoted, additional research and studies will not only enhance this study's results but expand the knowledge of educational leaders and policymakers as they develop plans and policies to better serve socially promoted students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. While social promotion is a hard practice for school districts to admit they utilize, it would be of great service for the school and community to examine how students experience the phenomenon. Based on this study, it is my belief that educational policymakers and all stakeholders involved may gain some insight into the shared experiences of students who have been socially promoted. Based on the data and finding from my study, stakeholders will have a

better understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of individual students who are selected to “skip” a grade or two. Furthermore, this study also provides strategies for supporting students who are transitioning into school settings that implement academic accountability. As presented in previous chapters, it is noted that for socially promoted students to have a better opportunity to reach their goals, educational leaders must ensure that vital resources are made available to them. Some examples of academic support resources include more flexible tutoring sessions, mentor relationships, and check in sessions. It is my recommendation that educational plans are developed to document the progress of socially promoted students in order to monitor their progress. Overall, this study lays the foundation from which all stakeholders can begin discussing how to better serve and support socially promoted students so that they can reach their academic goals, stay motivated, and pursue long-term goals.

References

- Abbott, M., Wills, H., Greenwood, C. R., Kamps, D., Heitzman-Powell, L., & Selig, J. (2010). The combined effects of grade retention and targeted small-group intervention on students' literacy outcomes. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 26(1), 4–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560903396876>
- Abou-Rjaily, K., & Stoddard, S. (2017). Response to intervention for students presenting with behavioral difficulties: Culturally responsive guiding questions. *International Journal of Multicultural Education.*, 19(3).
- Ahmed, A. Y., & Mihiretie, D. M. (2015). Primary school teachers and parents' views on automatic promotion practices and its implications for education quality. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 43, 90–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.05.003>
- Alegre, F., Moliner, L., Maroto, A., & Lorenzo-Valentin, G. (2019). Peer tutoring in algebra: A study in middle school. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 112(6), 693–699.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2019.1693947>
- Alshahrani, H., & Rasmussen-Pennington, D. (2019). “How to use it more?” Self-efficacy and its sources in the use of social media for knowledge sharing. *Journal of Documentation*, 76(1), 231–257. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2019-0026>
- Alt, D. (2015). College students' academic motivation, media engagement and fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 49, 111–119.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.02.057>
- Amankwaa, L. (2016). Creating protocols for trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 23(3), 121.

- An, J. (2015). Micro-study reveals flaws in pedagogy: A study of social promotion in Tianjin, China. *International Education*, 44(2), 23–43.
- Anderson, N., & Peart, S. (2016). Back on track: Exploring how a further education college re-motivates learners to re-sit previously failed qualifications at GCSE. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 21(3), 196–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2016.1196978>
- Andrew, M. (2014). The scarring effects of primary-grade retention? A study of cumulative advantage in the educational career. *Social Forces*, 93(2), 653–685.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou074>
- Andrews, T. M., Leonard, M. J., Colgrove, C. A., & Kalinowski, S. T. (2011). Active learning not associated with student learning in a random sample of college biology courses. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*, 10(4), 394–405. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.11-07-0061>
- Ansong, D., Eisensmith, S. R., Masa, R. D., & Chowa, G. A. (2016). Academic self-efficacy among junior high school students in Ghana: Evaluating factor structure and measurement invariance across gender. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53(10), 1057–1070.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21975>
- Archambault, L., Diamond, D., Coffey, M., Foures-Aalbu, D., Richardson, J., Zygouris-Coe, V., Brown, R., & Cavanaugh, C. (2010). *INACOL research committee issues brief: An exploration of at-risk learners and online education*. International Association for K–12 Online Learning.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.

- Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of child development*. Vol. 6. *Six theories of child development* (pp. 1–60). JAI Press.
- Bandura, A. (1991). Self-regulation of motivation through anticipatory and self-reactive mechanisms. In R. A. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Perspectives on motivation: Nebraska symposium on motivation* (Vol. 38, pp. 69–164). University of Nebraska Press.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), 164–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2006.00011.x>
- Bandura, A. (2012). Social cognitive theory. In P. A. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 349–374). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249215.n18>
- Bandura, A. (2018). Toward a psychology of human agency: Pathways and reflections. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(2), 130–136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617699280>
- Bantwini, B. D. (2012). *Primary school science teachers' perspectives regarding their professional development: Implications for school districts in South Africa*. *Professional Development in Education*, 38, 517–532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2011.637224>
- Beatson, N. J., Berg, D. A. G., & Smith, J. K. (2018). The impact of mastery feedback on undergraduate students' self-efficacy beliefs. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 59, 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.03.002>

- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Chen, W., & Gregory, A. (2010). Parental involvement as a protective factor during the transition to high school. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(1), 53–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670903231250>
- Chen, X., Liu, C., Zhang, L., Shi, Y., & Rozelle, S. (2010). Does taking one step back get you two steps forward? grade retention and school performance in poor areas in rural China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(6), 544–559. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.12.002>
- Chohan, B. I. (2018). The impact of academic failure on the self-concept of elementary grade students. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 40(2), 13.
- Chu, T. L., & Zhang, T. (2018). Motivational processes in sport education programs among high school students: A systematic review. *European Physical Education Review*, 24(3), 372–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X17751231>
- Close, W., & Solberg, S. (2008). Predicting achievement, distress, and retention among lower-income Latino youth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72(1), 31–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.08.007>
- Cockx, B., Picchio, M., & Baert, S. (2019). Modeling the effects of grade retention in high school. *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 34(3), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jae.2670>
- Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(1), 89–91. <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.89-91>

- Crepeau-Hobson, F., Nickerson, A., & Cook, E. (2016). *Grade retention and social promotion*. National Association of School Psychologists.
- Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Curran-Neild, R., Farley-Ripple, E. N., & Byrnes, V. (2009). The effect of teacher certification on middle grades achievement in an urban district. *Educational Policy, 23*(5), 732–760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808320675>
- Cypress, B. S. (2019). Qualitative research: Challenges and dilemmas. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing, 38*(5), 264–270. <https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000374>
- Dahlbeck, J. (2017). Education and the free will problem: A Spinozist contribution. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 51*(4), 725–743. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12271>
- Daily, S. M., Mann, M. J., Lilly, C. L., Dyer, A. M., Smith, M. L., & Kristjansson, A. L. (2020). School climate as an intervention to reduce academic failure and educate the whole child: A longitudinal study. *Journal of School Health, 90*(3), 182–193. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12863>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). The flat earth and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future. *Educational Researcher, 36*(6), 318–334.
- Davoudzadeh, P., McTernan, M. L., & Grimm, K. J. (2015). Early school readiness predictors of grade retention from kindergarten through eighth grade: A multilevel discrete-time survival analysis approach. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 32*, 183–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.04.005>

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology, 49*(3), 182–185.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012801>
- Dell, E., Verhoeven, Y., Christman, J. S., & Garrick, R. D. (2018). Using self-determination theory to build communities of support to aid in the retention of women in engineering. *European Journal of Engineering Education, 43*, 344–359.
- Demanet, J., & Van Houtte, M. (2013). Grade retention and its association with school misconduct in adolescence: A multilevel approach. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 24*, 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2012.727834>
- Demanet, J., & Van Houtte, M. (2016). Are flunkers social outcasts? A multilevel study of grade retention effects on same-grade friendships. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(3), 745–780. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216646867>
- Deming, D. J., & Figlio, D. (2016). Accountability in US education: Applying lessons from K–12 experience to higher education. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives, 30*(3), 33–56.
<https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.3.33>
- Denny, E., & Weckesser, A. (2019). Qualitative research: What it is and what it is not: Study design: Qualitative research. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 126*(3), 369–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.15198>
- De Pater, I. E., Van Vianen, A. E. M., Fischer, A. H., & Van Ginkel, W. P. (2009). Challenging experiences: Gender differences in task choice. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 24*(1), 4–28. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940910922519>
- Deunk, M. I., Smale-Jacobse, A. E., de Boer, H., Doolaard, S., & Bosker, R. J. (2018). *Effective differentiation practices: A systematic review and meta-analysis of studies on the*

cognitive effects of differentiation practices in primary education. Elsevier Ltd.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.02.002>

Virginia Department of Education. (2019). *Student records*.

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/programs-services/student-services/student-records>

Dietrich, J., Dicke, A., Kracke, B., & Noack, P. (2015). Teacher support and its influence on students' intrinsic value and effort: Dimensional comparison effects across subjects.

Learning and Instruction, 39(39), 45–54.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2015.05.007>

Doherty, K. (2004, September 21). Social promotion. *Education Week*.

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/social-promotion/index.html>

Drake, K. (2017). Competing purposes of education: The case of underschooled immigrant students. *Journal of Educational Change*, 18(3), 337–363.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-017-9302-3>

Duran, D., Flores, M., Oller, M., & Ramírez, M. (2019). Reading in pairs, description and results of a peer tutoring program for English as a foreign language. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 13(4), 303–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2018.1462370>

Dziurzyński, K., & Duda, E. (2018). Grade repetition as a consequence of school failures.

Journal of Modern Science, 38(3), 133–148. <https://doi.org/10.13166/jms/95080>

Eide, E. R., & Showalter, M. H. (2001). The effect of grade retention on educational and labor market outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 20(6), 563–576.

Ekstam, U., Linnanmaki, K., & Aunio, P. (2015). Educational support for low-performing students in mathematics: The three-tier support model in Finnish lower secondary

- schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 30(1), 75–92.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.964578>
- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 (2015).
- Fall, A., & Roberts, G. (2012). High school dropouts: Interactions between social context, self-perceptions, school engagement, and student dropout. *Journal of Adolescence*, 35(4), 787–798. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.11.004>
- Fan, W., & Williams, C. M. (2010). The effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement and intrinsic motivation. *Educational Psychology*, 30(1), 53–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410903353302>
- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(2), 117–142. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543059002117>
- Fiore, S. M., Graesser, A., Greiff, S., Griffin, P., Gong, B., & Kyllonen, P. (2017). *Collaborative problem solving: Considerations for the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Tech. Rep. National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/researchcenter/collaborative_problem_solving.pdf
- Flook, L., Repetti, R. L., & Ullman, J. B. (2005). Classroom social experiences as predictors of academic performance. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(2), 319–327. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.41.2.319>
- Foureaux-Koppensteiner, M. (2014). Automatic grade promotion and student performance: Evidence from Brazil. *Journal of Development Economics*, 107, 277–290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2013.12.007>
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331–362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>

- Garbacz, S. A., Herman, K. C., Thompson, A. M., & Rinke, W. M. (2017). Family engagement in education and intervention: Implementation and evaluation to maximize family, school, and student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology, 62*, 1–10.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2017.04.002>
- Garn, A. C., Matthews, M. S., & Jolly, J. L. (2010). Parental influences on the academic motivation of gifted students: A self-determination theory perspective. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 54*(4), 263–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986210377657>
- Glanz, K. (2020). *Important theories and their key constructs – Social and behavioral theories – E-Source Book – OBSSR E-Source*. Esourceresearch.org. Retrieved on May 3, 2020, from <http://www.esourceresearch.org>
- Goldschmidt, P., & Wang, J. (1999). When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 36*(4), 715–738.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1163518>
- González-Betancor, S. M., & López-Puig, A. J. (2016). Grade retention in primary education is associated with quarter of birth and socioeconomic status. *PloS One, 11*(11), e0166431.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0166431>
- Goos, M., Van Damme, J., Onghena, P., Petry, K., & de Bilde, J. (2013). First-grade retention in the Flemish educational context: Effects on children’s academic growth, psychosocial growth, and school career throughout primary education. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*(3), 323–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2013.03.002>
- Graham, S., & Juvonen, J. (1998). Self-blame and peer victimization in middle school: An attributional analysis. *Developmental Psychology, 34*, 587–599.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.34.3.587>

- Groenendijk, T., Janssen, T., Rijlaarsdam, G., & van den Bergh, H. (2013). The effect of observational learning on students' performance, processes, and motivation in two creative domains. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(1), 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2011.02052.x>
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hagborg, W. J., Masella, G., Palladino, P., & Shepardson, J. (1991). A follow-up study of high school students with a history of grade retention. *Psychology in the Schools*, 28(4), 310–317. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(199110\)28:4<310::AID-PITS2310280405>3.0.CO;2-J](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(199110)28:4<310::AID-PITS2310280405>3.0.CO;2-J)
- Hagger, M. S., & Chatzisarantis, N. L. D. (2016). The trans-contextual model of autonomous motivation in education: Conceptual and empirical issues and meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(2), 360–407. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315585005>
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2005). *Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure?*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00889.x>
- Harmsen, I., Mollema, L., Ruiters, R., Paulussen, T., de Melker, H., & Kok, G. (2013). Why parents refuse childhood vaccination: A qualitative study using online focus groups. *BMC Public Health*, 13(1), 1183–1183. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-1183>
- Harris, D. N., & Sass, T. R. (2011). Teacher training, teacher quality and student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 95(7), 798–812. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.11.009>

- Heppen, J. B., Sorensen, N., Allensworth, E., Walters, K., Rickles, J., Taylor, S. S., & Michelman, V. (2017). The struggle to pass algebra: Online vs. face-to-face credit recovery for at-risk urban students. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *10*(2), 272–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2016.1168500>
- Holmes, C. T. (1989). Grade level retention effects: A meta-analysis. In L. A. Shepard & M. L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention* (pp. 16 – 33). Falmer Press.
- Holzberger, D., Philipp, A., & Kunter, M. (2013). How teachers' self-efficacy is related to instructional quality: A longitudinal analysis. *The Journal of Educational Psychology*, *105*(3), 774–786. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032198>
- Hong, G., & Yu, B. (2008). Effects of kindergarten retention on children's social-emotional development: An application of propensity score method to multivariate, multilevel data. *Developmental Psychology*, *44*, 407–421.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Battiato, A. C., Walker, J. M. T., Reed, R. P., DeJong, J. M., & Jones, K. P. (2001). Parental involvement in homework. *Educational Psychologist*, *36*(3), 195–209. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3603_5
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M. T., Jones, K. P., & Reed, R. P. (2002). Teachers involving parents (TIP): Results of an in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *18*(7), 843–867. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(02\)00047-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00047-1)
- Horsburgh, J., & Ippolito, K. (2018). A skill to be worked at: using social learning theory to explore the process of learning from role models in clinical settings. *BMC Medical Education*, *18*. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-018-1251-x>

- Hughes, J. N., West, S. G., Kim, H., & Bauer, S. S. (2018). Effect of early grade retention on school completion: A prospective study. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 110*(7), 974–991. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000243>
- Isik, U., Wilschut, J., Croiset, G., & Kusurkar, R. A. (2018). The role of study strategy in motivation and academic performance of ethnic minority and majority students: A structural equation model. *Advances in Health Sciences Education, 23*(5), 921–935. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-018-9840-3>
- Iruka, I., Winn, D., Kingsley, S., & Orthodoxou, Y. (2011). Links between parent-teacher relationships and kindergartners' social skills: Do child ethnicity and family income matter? *The Elementary School Journal, 111*(3), 387–408. <https://doi.org/10.1086/657652>
- Jackson-Kersey, R., & Spray, C. (2016). The effect of perceived psychological need support on amotivation in physical education. *European Physical Education Review, 22*(1), 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X15591341>
- Jacob, B. A., & Lefgren, L. (2009). The effect of grade retention on high school completion. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 1*(3), 33–58. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.1.3.33>
- Jimerson, S. R. (1999). On the failure of failure examining the association between early grade retention and education and employment outcomes during late adolescence. *Journal of School Psychology, 37*, 243–272.
- Jimerson, S. R., Anderson, G. E., & Whipple, A. D. (2002). Winning the battle and losing the war: Examining the relation between grade retention and dropping out of high school. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(4), 441–457. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10046>

- Jimerson, S. R., Pletcher, S. M. W., Graydon, K., Schnurr, B. L., Nickerson, A. B., & Kundert, D. K. (2006). Beyond grade retention and social promotion: Promoting the social and academic competence of students. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*(1), 85–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20132>
- Jönsson, A. (2018). Meeting the needs of low-achieving students in Sweden: An interview study. *Frontiers in Education, 3*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2018.00063>
- Juan, A., Hannan, S., & Namome, C. (2018). I believe I can do science: Self-efficacy and science achievement of grade 9 students in South Africa. *South African Journal of Science, 114*(7/8), 48–54. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2018/20170269>
- Kempen, M. E., & Steyn, G. M. (2017). An investigation of teachers' collaborative learning in a continuous professional development programme in South African special schools. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 52*(2), 157–171.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909615570950>
- Kenny, M. C., Walsh-Blair, L. Y., Blustein, D. L., Bempechat, J., & Seltzer, J. (2010). Achievement motivation among urban adolescents: Work hope, autonomy support, and achievement-related beliefs. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 77*(2), 205–212.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.02.005>
- King, E., Orazem, P., & Paterno, E. (2016). Promotion with and without learning: Effects on student enrollment and dropout behavior. *The World Bank Economic Review, 30*(3), 580–602. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhv049>
- Klapproth, F., & Schaltz, P. (2015). Who is retained in school, and when? Survival analysis of predictors of grade retention in Luxembourgish secondary school. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 30*(1), 119–136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-014-0232-7>

- Klapproth, F., Schaltz, P., Brunner, M., Keller, U., Fischbach, A., Ugen, S., & Martin, R. (2016). Short-term and medium-term effects of grade retention in secondary school on academic achievement and psychosocial outcome variables. *Learning and Individual Differences, 50*, 182–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.08.014>
- Kirby, S., Byra, M., Readdy, T., & Wallhead, T. (2015). Effects of spectrum teaching styles on college students' psychological needs satisfaction and self-determined motivation. *European Physical Education Review, 21*(4), 521–540. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X15585010>
- Laurencelle, F., & Scanlan, J. (2018). Graduate students' experiences: Developing self-efficacy. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship, 15*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijnes-2017-0041>
- Lee, J., & Bowen, N. K. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(2), 193–218. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043002193>
- Leenders, H., Haelermans, C., de Jong, J., & Monfrance, M. (2018). Parents' perceptions of parent–teacher relationship practices in Dutch primary schools: An exploratory pilot study. *Teachers and Teaching, 24*(6), 719–743. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1456420>
- Lester, Stan. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research*. Stan Lester Developments.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lorence, J. (2014). Third-grade retention and reading achievement in Texas: A nine-year panel study. *Social Science Research, 48*, 1–19.

- Lo Schiavo, M., Prinari, B., Saito, I., Shoji, K., & Benight, C. C. (2019). A dynamical systems approach to triadic reciprocal determinism of social cognitive theory. *Mathematics and Computers in Simulation, 159*, 18–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.matcom.2018.10.006>
- Luginbuhl, P. J., McWhirter, E. H., & McWhirter, B. T. (2016). Sociopolitical development, autonomous motivation, and education outcomes: Implications for low-income Latina/o adolescents. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology, 4*(1), 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lat0000041>
- Magnusson, E., & Marecek, J. (2015). *Doing interview-based qualitative research: A learner's guide*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107449893>
- Manacorda, M. (2012). The cost of grade retention. *The Review of Economics and Statistics, 94*(2), 596–606. https://doi.org/10.1162/REST_a_00165
- Marsh, H. W., & Craven, R. (2002). The pivotal role of frames of reference in academic self-concept formation: The “big fish little pond” effect. In F. Pajares & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Adolescence and education* (Vol. 2, pp. 83–123). Information Age.
- Mathys, C., Véronneau, M.-H., & Lecocq, A. (2019). Grade retention at the transition to secondary school: Using propensity score matching to identify consequences on psychosocial adjustment. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 39*(1), 97–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431617735651>
- Mautone, J. A., Marcelle, E., Tresco, K. E., & Power, T. J. (2015). Assessing the quality of parent-teacher relationships for students with ADHD. *Psychology in the Schools, 52*, 196–207.

- Mawhinney, L., Irby, D. J., & Roberts, E. S. (2016). Passed along: Black women reflect on the long-term effects of social promotion and retention in schools. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 25(2), 154–169.
- McCurdy, E. E., & Cole, C. L. (2014). Use of a peer support intervention for promoting academic engagement of students with autism in general education settings. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 44(4), 883–893. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-013-1941-5>
- McMahon, T. (2018). Despite our best intention: Students relate how social promotion hurt them and what changes they believe will help them. *Interchange*, 49(4), 499–519. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-018-9344-3>
- Meisel, S. N., & Colder, C. R. (2015). Social goals and grade as moderators of social normative influences on adolescent alcohol use. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 39(12), 2455–2462. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.12906>
- Moser, S. E., West, S. G., & Hughes, J. N. (2012). Trajectories of math and reading achievement in low achieving children in elementary school: Effects of early and later retention in grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(3), 603–621. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027571>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publishing.
- Muijs, D., Kyriakides, L., Van der Werf, G., Creemers, B., Timperley, H., & Earl, L. (2014). State of the art – Teacher effectiveness and professional learning. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 25(2), 231–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2014.885451>

- Nadel, J., Aouka, N., Coulon, N., Gras-Vincendon, A., Canet, P., Fagard, J., & Bursztejn, C. (2011). Yes they can: An approach to observational learning in low-functioning children with autism. *Autism, 15*(4), 421–435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361310386508>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2019, February). *Indicator 17: High school status dropout rates*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_RDC.asp
- Nelson-Reyes, A. M. (2018). Tutors can improve students' reading skills. *Reading Improvement, 55*(1), 32.
- Nguyen, G. T. (2015). A case study of students' motivation in college algebra courses. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 39*(8), 693–707. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2013.824394>
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002).
- Panigrahi, R., Srivastava, P. R., & Sharma, D. (2018). Online learning: Adoption, continuance, and learning outcome—A review of literature. *International Journal of Information Management, 43*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.05.005>
- Park, J. K., & John, D. R. (2014). I think I can, I think I can: Brand use, self-efficacy, and performance. *Journal of Marketing Research, 51*(2), 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0532>
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Pérez Sánchez, C. N., Betancort Montesinos, M., & Cabrera Rodríguez, L. (2013). Family influences in academic achievement. A study of the canary islands. *Revista Internacional De Sociología, 71*(1), 169–187. <https://doi.org/10.3989/ris.2011.04.11>

- Pintrich, P. R., & De Groot, E. V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82*, 33–40.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2014). *Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice* (8th ed.). Wolters Kluwer/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Powell, A., Roberts, V., & Patrick, S. (2015). *Using online learning for credit recovery: Getting back on track to graduation*. International Association for K–12 Online Learning.
<https://www.inacol.org/resource/using-online-learning-for-credit-recovery-getting-back-on-track-to-graduation/>
- Ramirez, L., Machida, S. K., Kline, L., & Huang, L. (2014). Low-income Hispanic and Latino high school students' perceptions of parent and peer academic support. *Contemporary School Psychology, 18*(4), 214–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-014-0037-3>
- Raos, V., Evangeliou, M. N., & Savaki, H. E. (2007). Mental simulation of action in the service of action perception. *Journal of Neuroscience, 27*(46), 12675–12683.
<https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.2988-07.2007>
- Reschly, A. L., & Christenson, S. L. (2013). Grade retention: Historical perspectives and new research. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*(3), 319–322.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2013.05.002>
- Roderick, M. R. (1993). *The path to dropping out: Evidence for intervention*. Auburn House.
- Roorda, D. L., Helma, M. Y., Koomen, H. M. Y., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(4), 493–529. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311421793>

- Ross, T. R. (2016). The differential effects of parental involvement on high school completion and postsecondary attendance. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 24*, 30.
<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.24.2030>
- Rumberger, R. W. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of students and schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 583–800.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003583>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68–78.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2016). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.
- Sacks, L. H., & Halder, S. (2017). Challenges in implementation of individualized educational plan (IEPs): Perspectives from India and the United States of America. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing, 8*(9), 958–965.
- Santangelo, T., & Tomlinson, C. A. (2012). Teacher educators' perceptions and use of differentiated instruction practices: An exploratory investigation. *Action in Teacher Education, 34*(4), 309–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2012.717032>
- Secomb, J. (2008). A systematic review of peer teaching and learning in clinical education. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 17*(6), 703–716. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2007.01954.x>
- Shepard, J. M., Shahidullah, J. D., & Carlson, J. S. (2013). *Counseling students in levels 2 and 3: A PBIS/RTI guide*. Corwin Press. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452285009>

- Shim, S. S., Cho, Y., & Wang, C. (2013). Classroom goal structures, social achievement goals, and adjustment in middle school. *Learning and Instruction, 23*, 69–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2012.05.008>
- Shirani-Bidabadi, N., Nasr-Esfahani, A. R., Mirshah-Jafari, E., & Abedi, A. (2019). Developing a mathematics curriculum to improve learning behaviors and mathematics competency of children. *The Journal of Educational Research, 112*(3), 421–428.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2018.1547960>
- Skinner, E., Pitzer, J., & Steele, J. (2013). Coping as part of motivational resilience in school: A multidimensional measure of families, allocations, and profiles of academic coping. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 73*(5), 803–835.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164413485241>
- Smith, C. M., & Ronan-Herzog, M. J. (2014). Elementary school grade retention: High school seniors provide perceptions of being held back. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, 80*(4), 58.
- Song, Y., Loewenstein, G., & Shi, Y. (2018). Heterogeneous effects of peer tutoring: Evidence from rural Chinese middle schools. *Research in Economics, 72*(1), 33–48.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rie.2017.05.002>
- Stevens, E. A., Rodgers, M. A., & Powell, S. R. (2018). Mathematics interventions for upper elementary and secondary students: A meta-analysis of research. *Remedial and Special Education, 39*(6), 327–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932517731887>
- Stewart, D. W., Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. (2017). Online focus groups. *Journal of Advertising, 46*(1), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1252288>

- Stone, S., & Engel, M. (2007). Same old, same old? Students' experiences of grade retention under Chicago's ending social promotion policy. *American Journal of Education*, *113*(4). <https://doi.org/10.1086/518490>
- Tangney, J. P., Baumeister, R. F., & Boone, A. (2004). High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success. *Journal of Personality*, *72*(2), 271–324 .
- Tani, M. (2018). The effective implementation of the policy of automatic class promotion in Cameroon public primary schools: The case of north west and south west regions. *Bulgarian Journal of Science and Education Policy*, *12*(1), 63–100.
- Tárraga García, V., García Fernández, B., & Ruiz-Gallardo, J. R. (2018). Home-based family involvement and academic achievement: A case study in primary education. *Educational Studies*, *44*(3), 361–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1373636>
- Terrier, L., Terrier, L., Rech, A., Marfaing, B., & Fernandez, S. (2018). How to deal with amotivated students? Using commitment to reduce amotivation as applied to hospitality training. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, *30*(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2017.1413379>
- Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, *83*(3), 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483907>
- Theofanidis, D., & Fountouki, A. (2019). Refugees and migrants in Greece: An ethnographic reflective case study. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, *30*(1), 26–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659618781699>

- Tingle, L. R., Schoeneberger, J., & Algozzine, B. (2012). Does grade retention make a difference? *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 85(5), 179–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2012.679325>
- Tomlinson, C. A., Brighton, C., Hertberg, H., Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., Brimijoin, K., & Reynolds, T. (2003). Differentiating instruction in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile in academically diverse classrooms: A review of literature. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 27(2-3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/016235320302700203>
- Trahan, A. K., Wolsey, J. A., & Clark, M. D. (2018). Experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse parents with deaf children during the individualized educational plan process. *Psychology*, 9(3), 427–459. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2018.93027>
- Trujillo, G., & Tanner, K. D. (2014). Considering the role of affect in learning: Monitoring students' self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and science identity. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 13(1), 6–15. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.13-12-0241>
- Tsuei, M. (2017). Learning behaviors of low-achieving children's mathematics learning in using of helping tools in a synchronous peer-tutoring system. *Interactive Learning Environments: Learning Analytics*, 25(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2016.1276078>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Johnson, D. (2011). Exploring literacy teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: Potential sources at play. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(4), 751–761. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.12.005>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: Four professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and implementation of a new

- teaching strategy. *The Elementary School Journal*, 110(2), 228–245.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/605771>
- Usher, E. L. (2009). Sources of middle school students' self-efficacy in mathematics: A qualitative investigation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(1), 275–314.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831208324517>
- Usher, E. L., & Pajares, F. (2008). Sources of self-efficacy in school: Critical review of the literature and future directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 751–796.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308321456>
- Vallett, D. B., & Annetta, L. (2014). Re-visioning K–12 education: Learning through failure—Not social promotion. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(3), 174–188.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033651>
- Valentine, J. C., DuBois, D. L., & Cooper, H. (2004). The relation between self-beliefs and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review. *Educational Psychologist*, 39(2), 111–133. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3902_3
- Vandecandelaere, M., Vansteelandt, S., De Fraine, B., & Van Damme, J. (2016). The effects of early grade retention: Effect modification by prior achievement and age. *Journal of School Psychology*, 54, 77–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2015.10.004>
- van Kraayenoord, C. E. (2010). Response to intervention: New ways and wariness. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45(3), 363–376.
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315422657>

- Vansteenkiste, M., Sierens, E., Soenens, B., Luyckx, K., & Lens, W. (2009). Motivational profiles from a self-determination perspective: The quality of motivation matters. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(3), 671–688. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015083>
- Vansteenkiste, M., Simons, J., Lens, W., Sheldon, K. M., & Deci, E. L. (2004). Motivating learning, performance, and persistence: The synergistic effects of intrinsic goal contents and autonomy-supportive contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*(2), 246–260. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.2.246>
- Virginia Department of Education. (2019). *Virginia school quality profiles*. Available at <http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/>
- Vukman, K., Lorger, T., & Schmidt, M. (2018). Perceived self-efficacy and social anxiety changes in high school students with learning disabilities (LD) during first year of secondary vocational education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 33*(4), 584–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1410320>
- Wang, M., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review, 28*(2), 315–352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1>
- Wang, M., & Eccles, J. (2013). School context, achievement motivation, and academic engagement: A longitudinal study of school engagement using a multidimensional perspective. *Learning and Instruction, 28*, 12–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2013.04.002>
- Wang, M., & Fredricks, J. A. (2014). The reciprocal links between school engagement, youth problem behaviors, and school dropout during adolescence. *Child Development, 85*, 722–737. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12138>

- Warren, J. R., Hoffman, E., & Andrew, M. (2014). Patterns and trends in grade retention rates in the United States, 1995–2010. *Educational Researcher*, *43*(9), 433–443.
- Warren, J. R., & Saliba, J. (2012). First- through eighth-grade retention rates for all 50 states: A new method and initial results. *Educational Researcher*, *41*(8), 320–329.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12457813>
- Williams, T., & Williams, K. (2010). Self-efficacy and performance in mathematics: Reciprocal determinism in 33 nations. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *102*(2), 453–466.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017271>
- Winters, M., & Greene, J. (2012). The medium-run effects of Florida’s test-based promotion policy. *Education Finance and Policy*, *7*(3), 305–330.
https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00069
- Wu, W., West, S. G., & Hughes, J. N. (2010). Effect of grade retention in first grade on psychosocial outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *102*, 135–152.
- Zulkifli, A. F., & Kulinna, P. (2018). Self-efficacy, soccer skills and the influence on students’ learning experience. *Biomedical Human Kinetics*, *10*(1), 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/bhk-2018-0001>
- Zullig, K., Collins, R., Ghani, N., Hunter, A., Patton, J., Huebner, E., & Zhang, J. (2015). Preliminary development of a revised version of the School Climate Measure. *Psychological Assessment*, *27*(3), 1072–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000070>

Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 21, 2022

Janis Fulgham-Faulk
Gail Collins

Re: Renewal - IRB-FY20-21-129 A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

Dear Janis Fulgham-Faulk, Gail Collins:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY20-21-129 A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED.

Decision: Approved

This study has been approved for an additional year ending April 20, 2023.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Adult Student Recruitment Letter

[Date]

Adult Student

Dear [Adult Student]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to explore the individual experiences of high school students who have been socially promoted and how it relates to their academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals. In this study, being “socially promoted” is defined as the process of being promoted to the next grade level even though grade level learning standards or achievement benchmarks were not mastered or passed. At this time, I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be between the ages of 14-19 years old, attend one of the Southeastern Virginia high schools (grades 9-12) designated for the study, and have been socially promoted in middle or elementary school even though they failed their core classes and/or fail Standards of Learning standardized test. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview which will be audio-recorded and will take place at the participant’s school or through an online conferencing tool, such as Zoom or Google Meet. Participants will review the transcription of their interview to ensure their experiences were accurately described. This process should take 15-30 minutes to complete. Participants will also participate in a weeklong online discussion board with other student participants in an online platform called Edmodo. This activity should take 30-45 minutes per day for a total of 5 days. Each participant will be required to join the platform and engage in open-ended discussion board questions about the phenomenon. In order to protect their identity, each participant will be provided a pseudonym to use throughout their discussion board participation. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.


In order to participate, please sign and return the attached consent form to your school administrator by [date]. After I have received your signed consent form, I will contact you to schedule your interview.

Upon completion of the required study activities, participants will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Janis Fulgham-Faulk

Doctoral Student



Appendix C: Adult Student Consent

Title of the Project: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

Principal Investigator: Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be between the ages of 14-19, a current high school student who attends a public Southeastern Virginia high school and have been socially promoted in elementary or middle school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. In this study, being “socially promoted” is defined as the process of being promoted to the next grade level even though grade level learning standards or achievement benchmarks were not mastered or passed. This study will help educational leaders understand the impact of social promotion on students’ academic performance, motivation, and long-term aspirations. The findings from this study may change the way educational leaders and other stakeholders view social promotion.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 45-60-minute interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will take place at your school or through an online conferencing tool, such as Zoom or Google Meet.
2. Review the transcription of the interview to ensure your experiences were accurately described. This process should take 15-30 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in a 5-day online discussion board group with other student participants. The online platform will be Edmodo and the participant will be required to join the platform and engage in open-ended discussion board questions about the being socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years. You will answer the daily discussion board question and respond to the posts of two other participants. This procedure should take 30-45 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include insight on how students live through being socially promotion and provide valid evidence of their life. The findings from this study may change the way educational leaders and other stakeholders view social promotion. The experiences of the high school students can provide educators with insight on how to support students who have been socially promoted both academically and emotionally.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Your responses will be kept confidential through the use of the alias selected during your interview. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Edmodo.com, the platform for the online discussion board, is a secure online tool that will only be available to the participants and the researcher.
- Data will be stored on a password protected flash-drive and in a fire protected safe and may be used in future presentations. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, the flash drive will be destroyed, and all hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password protected flash-drive and in a fire protected safe for five years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the online discussion board format. While discouraged, members of the online discussion board group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

You will be compensated for participating in this study. You will receive a \$10 gift card from Amazon for fully participating and completing all required components of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Whether you participate in this study or not will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or current school district. If you decide to participate, you have the right to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from online discussion board group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. The online discussion board group data will not be destroyed, but your contribution to this group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Janis Fulgham-Faulk. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Gail Collins, Ed.D., at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix D: Parent Of Minor Child Recruitment Letter

[Date]

[Student Participant]

Dear [Parent of the Student Participant]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to explore the individual experiences of high school students who have been socially promoted and how it relates to their academic performance, motivation, and long-term goals. In this study, being “socially promoted” is defined as the process of being promoted to the next grade level even though grade level learning standards or achievement benchmarks were not mastered or passed. At this time, I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

In order to participate in this study, your child must be between the ages of 14-19 years old, attend one of the Southeastern Virginia high schools (grades 9-12) designated for the study, and have been socially promoted in middle or elementary school even though they failed their core classes and/or fail Standards of Learning standardized test. Your child, if willing, will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview which will be audio recorded and will take place at their school or through an online conferencing tool, such as Zoom or Google Meet. Your child has the opportunity to review the transcription of their interview to ensure their experiences were accurately described. This process should take 15-30 minutes to complete. Your child will also participate in a weeklong online discussion board with other student participants in an online platform called Edmodo. This activity should take 30-45 minutes per day for a total of 5 days. Your child will be required to join the platform and engage in open-ended discussion board questions about the phenomenon. In order to protect your child’s identity, he or she will be provided an alias name to use throughout their discussion board participation. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order for your child to participate, please sign and return the attached parental consent form to your child’s school administrator by [date]. The consent document contains additional information about the study. After you have read the consent form, please sign the document to acknowledge your consent to allowing your child to participate in this study. Additionally, please have your child provide their assent to participate in this study by signing the same document in the designated space. After I have received the signed parental consent form, I will contact you to schedule your child’s interview.

Upon completion of the required study data collection activities, participants will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,
Janis Fulgham-Faulk
Doctoral Student



Appendix E: Parental Consent

Title of the Project: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

Principal Investigator: Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be between the ages of 14-19, a high school student who attends a public Southeastern Virginia high school and have been socially promoted in elementary or middle school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. In this study, being “socially promoted” is defined as the process of being promoted to the next grade level even though grade level learning standards or achievement benchmarks were not mastered or passed. This study will help educational leaders understand the impact of social promotion on students’ academic performance, motivation, and long-term aspirations. The findings from this study may change the way educational leaders and other stakeholders view social promotion.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I will ask him or her to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 45-60-minute interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will take place at the participant’s school or through an online conferencing tool, such as Zoom or Google Meet.
2. Review the transcription of the interview to ensure their experiences were accurately described. This process should take 15-30 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in a 5-day online discussion board group with other student participants. The online platform will be Google Classroom and the participant will be required to join the platform and engage in open-ended discussion board questions about the being socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years. Each participant will answer the daily discussion board question and respond to the posts of two other participants. This procedure will take 30-45 minutes per day to complete.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include insight on how students live through being socially promotion and provide valid evidence of their life. The findings from this study may change the way

educational leaders and other stakeholders view social promotion. The experiences of the high school students can provide educators with insight on how to support students who have been socially promoted both academically and emotionally.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your child would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of an alias selected by the student during his/her interview. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Google classroom, the platform for the online discussion board, is a secure online tool that will only be available to the student and the researcher.
- Data will be stored on a password protected flash-drive and in a fire protected safe and may be used in future presentations. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, the flash drive will be destroyed, and all hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password protected flash drive for five years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the online discussion board format. While discouraged, members of the online discussion board group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will participants be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a \$10 gift card from Amazon for fully participating and completing all required components of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your or his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or current school district. If you decide to allow your child to participate, she or he is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting these relationships.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your child from the study or your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should your child choose to withdraw, data collected from your child, apart from online discussion board group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. The online discussion board group data will not be destroyed, but your child's contributions to this group will not be included in the study if your child chooses to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Janis Fulgham-Faulk. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Gail Collins, Ed.D., at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record my child as part of his/her participation in this study.

Printed Child's/Student's Name

Parent's Signature

Date

Minor's Signature

Date

Appendix F: Child Assent To Participate In A Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?

The name of the study is A Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative Study of the Lived Experiences of High School Students Who Were Socially Promoted, and the person doing the study is Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk.

Why is Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk doing this study?

Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk is completing a research study as part of the requirements for her doctorate degree. In this research study she is seeking to learn how high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia describe their lived experiences of having been socially promoted when they were in elementary or middle school.

Why am I being asked to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a southeastern Virginia high school student who has been socially promoted in elementary or middle school.

If I decide to be in the study, what will happen and how long will it take?

If you decide to be in this study, you will participate in a 45-60-minute interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will take place at your school. Then you will review your interview transcript to ensure their experiences were accurately described. This process should take 15-30 minutes to complete. Finally, you will participate in a five-day long online discussion board with other student participants in Google Classroom. You will answer one open-ended question each day for five days about the being socially promoted in their elementary or middle school years. You will create an alias during your interview to protect their identity throughout they process. You will answer the daily discussion board questions and respond to the posts of two other participants, which will take 30-45 minutes to complete each day.

Do I have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

What if I have a question?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child/Witness

Date

Janis Fulgham-Faulk

Gail L. Collins, Ed.D.



Liberty University Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515
irb@liberty.edu

Appendix G: Teacher Recruitment Letter

[Date]

[Teacher Participant]

Dear [Teacher Participant]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to explore the individual experiences of high school students who were socially promoted when they were in elementary or middle school and how that relates to their academic performance, motivation in high school, and their long-term goals. In this study, being “socially promoted” is defined as the process of being promoted to the next grade level even though grade level learning standards or achievement benchmarks were not mastered or passed. At this time, I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a teacher at one of the Southeastern Virginia high schools designated for the study and will be required to have experienced teaching socially promoted students in past school years or currently teaching socially promoted students. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview that will be audio recorded and will take place at the participant’s school. Participants will review the transcription of their interview to ensure their experiences were accurately described. This process should take 15-30 minutes to complete. Participants will also be asked to write a hypothetical letter to the parent of a student in elementary or middle school who is being considered for social promotion. This procedure should take 45-60 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click here [link] and complete the screening survey by [date]. Once the survey process is completed, you will receive an email letter notifying you of your selection for the study.

If you are selected to participate, you will receive a link to the consent form by email. The consent form contains additional information about my research. Participants will be asked to electronically sign and return the consent form to the researcher one (1) week prior to their scheduled interview. Please contact me by email at [redacted] or phone at [redacted] to schedule your interview and for more information.

Participants will receive \$10 Amazon gift card upon completion of the required data collection activities.

Sincerely,
Janis Fulgham-Faulk
Doctoral Student
[redacted]

Appendix H: Teacher Consent Form

Title of the Project: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

Principal Investigator: Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a teacher from one of the southeastern Virginia high schools who has had experience teaching socially promoted students in previous school years or currently teaching socially promoted students. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. For the purpose of this study, being “socially promoted” is defined as the process of being promoted to the next grade level even though grade level learning standards or achievement benchmarks were not mastered or passed. This study will provide insight on the overall experiences of social promotion for those high school students. Additionally, by including teachers who have taught socially promoted students in this study, insight from the teacher’s perspective of social promotion as it relates to their observations of their students’ academic performance, motivation and long-term goals will be obtained.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a face-to-face interview session at your school or through an online conferencing tool, such as Zoom or Google Meet. Interviews will be audio recorded and last approximately 45-60 minutes.
2. Review the interview transcript to ensure your perspective is accurately noted. This process should take 15-30 minutes.
3. Write a hypothetical letter to the parent of a student in elementary or middle school who was being considered for social promotion. This process should take 45- 60 minutes to complete and will be submitted via email to the researcher.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected flash-drive and in a fire protected safe and may be used in future presentations. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, the flash drive will be destroyed, and all hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected flash-drive for five years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your current school district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Janis Fulgham-Faulk. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Gail Collins, Ed.D., at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix I: Teacher Screening Survey

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email address?
3. What grade(s) do you teach?
4. What subject do you teach?
5. During your teaching career, are you aware of having students in your class who were socially promoted in elementary or middle school?
6. Do you currently teach students who were socially promoted in elementary or middle school, or do you have experience teaching socially promoted students in previous school years?
7. Please indicate your first and second choice for day availability. Please indicate your choice by selecting the preference number in the dropdown box.
 - a. Monday _____
 - b. Tuesday _____
 - c. Wednesday _____
 - d. Thursday _____
8. Please indicate your first and second choice for time availability.
 - a. Before school _____
 - b. During school day (planning period) _____
 - c. Immediately afterschool _____

I appreciate your time in completing the survey. You will receive a follow-up email with information of whether you have been selected to participate in the study. Thank you.

Appendix J: Notification Letters

Dear {Teacher},

Thank you for completing the screening survey for this study. I appreciate your time and consideration to take part in my study. Upon completion of examining the survey, I am excited to inform you that I have been selected to participate in my study. In order to continue in this study, you are required to complete a consent form. A link to the consent form has been provided below. Please click on the link and complete the required form. Once you have completed the form and click submit, the submitted form will be electronically delivered to my email. Consent forms must be returned a week before interviews begin. If there are any questions or concerns, please contact me at [REDACTED].

Teacher Consent Form {link}

Thanks again,
Janis Fulgham-Faulk

Dear {Name of Individual Not Selected},

Thank you for completing the screening survey for this study. Upon completion of examining the survey, I regret to inform you that I am unable to use you as a participant in this study. I appreciate your time and consideration to take part in my study. If there are any unexpected changes and I can include you in this study, I will contact you via email.

Thanks again,
Janis Fulgham-Faulk

Appendix K: Teacher Consent Form

Title of the Project: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

Principal Investigator: Janis M. Fulgham-Faulk, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a teacher from one of the southeastern Virginia high schools who has two socially promoted students in their classes. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the lived experiences of social promotion for high school students in the southeastern region of Virginia. This study will provide insight on the overall experiences of social promotion for those high school students. Additionally, by including teachers who have taught socially promoted students in this study, insight from the teacher's perspective of social promotion as it relates to their observations of their students' academic performance, motivation and long-term goals will be obtained.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a face-to-face interview session that will be audio recorded and range from 45-60 minutes.
2. Review the interview transcript to ensure your perspective is accurately noted. This process should take 10-15 minutes.
3. Write a hypothetical letter to the parent of a student in elementary or middle school who was being considered for social promotion. This process should take 45- 60 minutes to complete and submitted via email to the researcher.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life."

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be anonymous. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three

years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Janis Fulgham-Faulk. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Gail Collins, Ed.D., at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name _____

Signature & Date _____

Appendix L: Student Interview Questions

1. Please state your name and age.
2. What is your high school classification or grade level?
3. What types of extracurricular activities are you involved in at school?
4. What subjects are your favorite and why?
5. What does the phrase “automatically promoted to the next grade” or socially promoted mean to you?
6. Describe an experience during elementary or middle school where you struggled to make passing grades in your core subjects.
7. Describe an experience during elementary or middle school when you recall not passing your SOL tests.
8. Describe a moment where you remember being in a grade and feeling like you were going to fail, or be retained, but ended up being promoted instead.
9. How did you feel when you realized you were socially promoted? Explain why.
10. After being socially promoted, what were your experiences academically?
11. After transitioning to high school, what has been your experience as a socially promoted student?
12. How would you compare your motivation to succeed in school before and after being socially promoted?
13. Academically, describe your successes and challenges.
14. When you reflect on your academic career, what would you do differently and why?
15. Looking towards the future, discuss your future aspirations and goals.

Appendix M: Teacher Interview Questions

1. Briefly introduce yourself by providing your name, position, years of teaching experience and your grade level or content area.
2. From your perspective, how do students who have been socially promoted perform academically?
3. What have been some successes and challenges of the socially promoted students you teach?
4. What has been your experience with students who have been socially promoted as it relates to their motivation?
5. In what ways has the student's self-efficacy contributed to their academic achievement or lack thereof?
6. In your class, how have you provided support for those students who were socially promoted? How did it influence the student's academic performance, motivation, and self-efficacy?
7. If students are socially promoted, how are lower performing students effectively supported to be successful?
8. Understanding that most classrooms include a diverse range of cognitive levels, how do you meet the needs of your all your students so that everyone has an opportunity to learn?
9. As instructional strategies, interventions and technology has evolved, how do you stay current with the new methods to engage your students?
10. Consider the academic options available to socially promoted students in your school districts. Identify them and explain how students benefitted from them.
11. What do you believe are the major factors that contribute to the success or failure of socially promoted students? Explain why.
12. What advice would you give to a novice teacher who will be teaching socially promoted students? What would be your best practices that you would share on how to support socially promoted students?

Appendix N: Online Discussion Questions

1. As a high school student, what academic barriers, if any, have you encountered after being socially promoted? What successes or challenges have you encountered as a high school student that you would be willing to share?
2. As a high school student, describe your level of preparedness for the academic coursework you have taken or will be taking? Describe a situation that illustrates what you have experienced or are experiencing in a class and your level of motivation to be successful in that class.
3. On the high school level, how have you adjusted to meet the expectations or requirements of your current classes? How has your high school teachers provided academic support to encourage academic success in their content area?
4. From a high schoolers' perspective, what advice would you give to another student who has been socially promoted and is preparing to enter high school?

Appendix O: Reflexive Journal

Date	Reflection
2/19/2020	I am aware of my bias about social promotion and high school students who have experienced it. My views about social promotion are not positive. I believe social promotion negatively impacts students' academic motivation and performance as well as gives them a false sense of reality. As I conduct this study, I will be cognizant of my responses and be diligent in removing personal views and be open to interpreting data with a clear viewpoint.
January-April 2021	Even though I am fully aware that social promotion takes place in all school districts, I was frustrated that most of the school districts tried to say they don't practice social promotion. I know firsthand that one practices social promotion because my nephew and another family friend's son were socially promoted from middle school to high school. I did have one district say if the state wasn't in their district, they'd participate but could not commit to my study because they already were obligated to do things the state brought to them.
10/19/2021	Why is this process taking so long? I just don't understand. Some students have turned in their consent forms, but we are waiting for a few more. The assistant principal said she'd remind the students to return the forms as soon as possible. I can't begin teacher recruitment until I know who the students are. Oh my goodness!
2/12/22 Amber interview	For my first interview, it was okay. I felt like she was nervous, and some answers were short and sweet. I made a note to include additional follow up questions to get more information-rich responses. Overall, she provided good information. She seems very motivated to succeed and has set goals that she plans to achieve.
2/18/22 Zoie-Ann and Archie interviews	Zoie-Ann had the same demeanor as Amber. She was very soft spoken but was able to express her ideas clearly to deliver her response. She seems to be motivated and goal oriented. She even wants to play sports. I feel that is a good idea. Being involved in extracurricular activities tends to keep you focused on academics more. Archie's interview was very informative. He is very articulate, goal oriented, and focused. Oh, and busy. He plays so many sports and still manages to maintain good grades. The more I interview, the more I realize that socially promoted students can be successful. Ultimately, they must desire success and work hard to attain it. Not all socially promoted students are looking for an easy way out. Some work hard.
3/1/22 Timothy Interview	Timothy seemed really nonchalant. Everything was a matter of fact. His answers were straight and to the point. Of the students I have interviewed so far, he might be the one the raises a red flag for me. It appears his motivation fluctuates.
3/10/22 Jonathan Interview	I must say the guys did an awesome job interviewing. They were so honest and provided detail in their responses. Jonathan was like a

	<p>superhero. He had so many short-term goals he wanted to achieve and they would allow him to reach the long term goals he has. He was hard to catch up with.</p>
<p>3/2022 – 9/2022 Student Online discussion board</p>	<p>This has been the longest process EVER!!! No one understands the sense of urgency. I understand that they have academic and extracurricular commitments; however, I don't understand how they could not take time during their study hall, downtime during school, or at home to submit their responses and replies. As I read their responses, I observed that for the most part everyone was extremely motivated and determined to take advantage of the opportunity given to them. No, they were not "perfect" students and had some moments where they were frustrated but they persevered and never gave up on themselves.</p>
<p>4/8/22 Teacher Interview with Deborah</p>	<p>When she said that social promotion ensures education equity, I thought that might be true, but how does an equity opportunity serve the student when they expect to be moved on regardless of if they demonstrate mastery of their current grade level. The statement, "to whom much is given, much is required" is something that should be a replayed statement for these students.</p>
<p>4/12/22 Teacher Interview with London</p>	<p>There are moments when socially promoted students must be an advocate for their education. They cannot expect the teacher to constantly pour into them and they don't pour into themselves. I agree with her as she said you can teach and encourage until you are blue in the face but at some point they (the students) have to desire to grow and achieve in order to reach their academic goals. For the students that are motivated, she adjusts her schedule to ensure they receive the additional academic support they desire. My opinion is there is nothing worse than to give your all to someone who does not respect your time and effort.</p>
<p>4/2022 – 11/2022 Teacher Hypothetical Letter submissions</p>	<p>I personally have a "in the middle" opinion on social promotion. I have personally observed how social promotion can be a successful practice, but I have also witnessed firsthand how it can be a train wreck. I agree with all of the teachers with respect to their opinions. Students should have to demonstrate they are ready for the expectations of the new grade. Moving on a student just because of their age is not enough reason to set a child up for academic failure. Now, if resources are made available to support students, okay. However, the student still has to be motivated to achieve success. They say, "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink."</p>
<p>5/24/22 Teacher Interview with Catherine</p>	<p>I admire her strong will to demonstrate her genuine care for the education of her students. I feel all students whether socially promoted or not deserve the same "energy" from all teachers. I am a strong believer that building relationships with students where they feel relevant, present, and encouraged makes an impact on their self-efficacy.</p>

<p>6/6/2022 Teacher Interview with Justin</p>	<p>As a fellow Science teacher, I totally understand where he is coming from when he speaks on how some socially promoted students should not have the opportunity. To be moved on just because you have aged out of a grade is not smart, especially when that student has not demonstrated that they are motivated enough to engage in the increased rigor of the grade they are being moved to. Students already dread science classes to begin with and when lack of motivation is coupled with it, nothing good can come out of it.</p>
<p>8/2/22 Teacher Interview with Karrington</p>	<p>Math is a very important subject, and all the math classes are SOL tested classes for the most part. I agree with her when she shared that students should not be promoted the next grade if they haven't grasped the subject. When they are just moved on so the teachers can "get them out of their hair," it does a disservice to the student and the next grade level teacher because they have to teach a child that has no sense of prerequisite knowledge needed in the new class. There should be stricter academic accountability in elementary and middle schools.</p>
<p>9/2022</p>	<p>With students not having access to their computers/laptops during the summer, I had to pause data collection with the online discussion boards until school started back up. I sent communications to the student participants encouraging them to finish up their posts, only to be told a week later, that students had not received their devices yet because they were conducting Growth Assessments and would not have access to their issued device or the computer labs until testing was over. I just feel like every time I feel like I can see the light at the end of the tunnel, I have another roadblock to get through. I am trying to stay motivated but this is so frustrating.</p>
<p>11/2022</p>	<p>Finally receive the last teacher hypothetical letter and had the last few students finish their discussion board posts. This process has been the most stressing because I hate depending on other people's input in order for me to accomplish a task. No matter how much I emailed, texted, and reached out to assistant people, the participants completed their part in their own time. I am just grateful that they crossed the finish line.</p>

Appendix P: Audit Trail

December 15, 2021	Received IRB conditional approval
February 26, 2021	Received approval by Countryside School District
May 5, 2021	District contact information provided to Dr. Collins
May 10, 2021	IRB Approval
September 26, 2021	Principal of high school reached out to notify me that the assistant principal would be my point of contact
January 30, 2022	Teacher consent forms sent to teachers
February 12, 2022	Zoom Student Interview with Amber
February 18, 2022	Zoom Student Interview with Zoie-Ann
February 18, 2022	Zoom Student Interview with Archie
March 1, 2022	Zoom Student Interview with Timothy
March 10, 2022	Zoom Student Interview with Jonathan
March 2022 –November 2022	Student Online discussion board
April 8, 2022	Zoom Teacher Interview with Deborah
April 12, 2022	Zoom Teacher Interview with London
April 2022–November 2022	Teacher Hypothetical Letter submissions
May 24, 2022	Zoom Teacher Interview with Catherine
June 6, 2022	Zoom Teacher Interview with Justin
August 2, 2022	Zoom Teacher Interview with Karrington
January 2023	Described finding and details in Chapter 4 and 5