PUBLIC SCHOOL SOCIAL PROMOTION POLICIES:
EXPLORING SOCALLY PROMOTED STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Liberty University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Tammy Burrell Knight
Liberty University
May 2014
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of public school, general education students, who have not been diagnosed with a learning disability, and who have been socially promoted, meaning that the students academically failed one or more core subjects but were allowed to advance to the next grade level. This study was a transcendental phenomenological qualitative study of students who were socially promoted at least once during their public school career. Questionnaires and individual interviews were used to gain knowledge from the participants regarding the meaning of being a socially promoted student; self-efficacy and motivation, as it pertains to being socially promoted; and how socially promoted students cope socially and academically in social promotion situations. This qualitative data was coded using horizontalization and developed clusters of meaning and from these clusters, textural and structural descriptions provided a snapshot of the lived experiences and personal voices of the participants. Through these means, the essences of the participants’ experiences were brought to light.

*Keywords*: accountability, behavior modification, classroom environment, classroom discipline, content standards, drop-out rates, grade retention, graduation rates, interventions, motivation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), parental involvement, resilience, self-determination, self-efficacy, social promotion, strategies, teaching practices, work ethic.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my precious children – Caleb and Camryn. Your undying love and support throughout this journey is immeasurable. You have accompanied me every step of the way by being there, helping in many areas of life, and encouraging me throughout this endeavor. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made as I have pursued my dream. My hope is that you will see in me the desire and drive to be a life-long learner and that the drive to excel and achieve will guide you throughout your lives. I love you to the moon and back.

To my mother and father who raised me in a loving, Christian home and instilled in me the belief I could accomplish anything if I put my all into it. Mom, thank you for your love and support as I have climbed this mountain. Daddy, I know you have been keeping tabs on me from Heaven. Thank you for providing me an excellent work ethic through example. Also, thank you for giving me the most amazing, loving brother a sister could ever ask for. I love you all.

To my Angel who has encouraged me and has shown me what it really means to be loved and cared for. You have been with me since my first doctorate-level class, and your encouragement and your belief in me has never wavered. I am forever indebted. Thank you for being you and loving me. I love you.

To my best friend and “sister,” Mary Griffin, who has been by my side and has selflessly supported my doctorate endeavor since day one. You have endured three, week-long trips to Virginia, a nine-hour drive each way, to keep me company and be my constant encourager, even when I broke down and had feelings of hopelessness. We have come a long way together throughout our teaching careers, and I will always treasure you! LYMI!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

With the introduction and implementation of the _No Child Left Behind Act_ (NCLB), (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), school districts, individual schools, and teachers continue to be held highly accountable, now more than ever, for the academic success of every student under their care and instruction. Schools nation-wide have implemented programs to assist students in their academic endeavors in an effort to meet the benchmarks established by NCLB. In addition to after-school programs, 504 plans, and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), social promotion practices are also being utilized. Social promotion is defined as “the practice of promoting a student from one grade to the next on the basis of age rather than academic achievement” (Social Promotion, 2012, p. 714).

One of the main focuses of NCLB is tackling the ever-growing high school drop-out rate. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) stated that “over a million of the students who enter ninth grade each Fall fail to graduate with their peers four years later” (p. 154). Research reveals that students who are retained have a substantially increased chance of dropping out of high school (Carifio, 2010). Therefore, there is an increased awareness of the problem as a result of increased legislative pressure to do whatever is necessary to produce academically successful students. This pressure is evident at all levels of public education. Elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools nation-wide are experiencing the effects.

There is an abundance of literature available that exhibits the negative effects students and society as a whole experience as a result of students being retained and students dropping out of high school. However, there is a significant gap in the literature focusing specifically on those students who have been socially promoted. In this study, social promotion is henceforth defined as a student earning a failing score in at least one core subject but allowed to advance to the next
grade level. The vast expanse of literature attainable regarding promotion policies discuss mostly the detrimental effects of retention and rarely gives mention to social promotion and the effects thereof.

Social promotion has an extensive history. The advancement of social promotion began in the 1930s as an antidote for the negative effects of the practice of retention (Carifio, 2010). By the 1980s, this trend slightly dwindled as a result of the onset of slipping academic performance. In 1982, New York City schools established an end to social promotion completely. Due to the onslaught of problems that rose from the retention policy, social promotion was implemented again in 1987. In 1999, New York City once again eliminated the practice of social promotion, but by 2004, more than 100,000 students joined the “club of retention,” and social promotion was once again implemented (Carifio, 2010, p. 223).

The literature demonstrates that there is a divide among scholars in regard to social promotion. Advocates argue that the practice is in place to avoid harming students’ self-esteem or to promote a student who may be weak in one subject area, but strong in other subject areas (Smirk, 2001). Those that oppose social promotion state that “placing students in grades where they cannot do the work sends the message to all students they can get by without working hard” (Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p. 262). Mostly, supporters of retention declare that retention is the lesser of the two evils (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009). Some contend that the option of retention will increase the high school drop-out rate and increase negative behaviors, such as alcohol consumption, crime, drug use, teenage pregnancy, depression, and a feeling of being left out (Stone & Engel, 2007). Other advocates state that being retained establishes and fosters an environment of bullying, having fewer friends socially, and being ridiculed by other students (Allensworth, 2005; Manacorda, 2008).
Those who oppose the practice of social promotion argue that ultimately the practice of social promotion deprives students of a quality education. Students are not academically prepared for the next grade level, thus doing much more damage and creating a perception of despair for the student in subsequent grade levels. For example, if a student does not master his or her multiplication facts at an early age, his or her middle school mathematics experience will more than likely be unpleasant and one of many struggles. Virtually all mathematics standards addressed at the middle school level need to be mastered or performance may be hindered at the high school level. Supplementary issues that arise due to social promotion of the student are the frustration that advances the interruption of other students’ educational experiences and sends a loud message to other students that they can advance through the year with putting forth little or no effort. The reality that teachers are required to reteach and address students who possess a severe deficit in the skills necessary for success in their current grade level adds to frustration on the part of the student as well as the teacher. Ultimately, a façade of a false sense of accomplishment is felt by the student and the parents (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999).

**Situation to Self**

As an educator, I desire to see all students excel and be the best that they can possibly be. It is disheartening to see students who are fully academically capable develop a void of intrinsic motivation. I have discovered, analyzed, and understood socially-promoted students’ experiences and their thoughts on social promotion practices, and now have developed a deeper understanding of the socially-promoted student’s mindset. I took an axiological perspective in regard to social promotion. Philosophical values are at the heart of my interest. The Value Theory, which encompasses a range of attempted approaches to understand why, how, and to what degree people value things, also motivates my interest, which is scientifically empirical.
Problem Statement

There is insufficient research that clearly identifies and analyzes the experiences of students who have been socially promoted within the public school system. Most encountered research relates to retention. “In terms of academic factors, grade retention was a significant ‘negative’ predictor of academic self-concept and homework completion and a significant ‘positive’ predictor of maladaptive motivation and weeks absent from school” (Martin, 2011, p. 739). Data regarding socially promoted students is not readily available, for most information is kept internal at the school level. Once a student is socially promoted, he or she tends to “blend in.” Blending in means that they continue as if they were academically promoted which many times leads to a lack of attention and academic assistance students desperately need. School districts are making some headway in solving the dilemma of students not meeting minimal academic standards. Many districts are beginning to develop and implement test-based readiness guidelines, which is a concerted effort to end the practice of social promotion for those students who fail to meet academic standards for that grade (McCombs, Sloan, Kirby, Natarai, & Mariano, 2009). This implementation of test-based readiness guidelines is also an attempt to intervene before the issue of retention or social promotion arises.

Research also suggests that students who are retained possess a substantially increased chance of dropping out of high school (Carifio, 2010). In addition to an increase in the dropout rate, some argue that prescribing retention will also increase negative behaviors, such as alcohol consumption, crime, drug use, teenage pregnancy, depression, and a feeling of being left out (Stone & Engel, 2007). Students who been retained also experience adverse effects socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009). In light of the inconsistent research
findings and unavailable data, it is important to hear the voices of students who experience the phenomenon of being socially promoted.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of public school general education students who are socially promoted. The setting was Honea Path Middle School, a rural school in upstate South Carolina. The participants were students who were promoted to the next grade level, although the students did not achieve adequate mastery of grade-level, academic standards. This practice is commonly known as social promotion.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is the findings could render a substantial impact on the way social promotion is viewed in the educational World, and in turn, impact the lives of the students who are socially promoted. A recent study shows that “nearly two-thirds of jobs in 2014 will require at least some college” (Wakelyn & National Governors Association, 2009, p. 72). Lack of preparation for higher level academia may be a driving force behind future problems with acquiring a job. Students may pass from grade to grade and graduate from high school, but upon entering college many are required to endure remedial college-level classes. Lack of preparation can negatively affect the student causing feelings of failure before he or she can get a foot in that proverbial college door (Smirk, 2001). The student is more likely to drop out of college as a result of not having the academic foundation the student needs (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009).

The study took place at Honea Path Middle School, a rural school in upstate South Carolina. The study brought to light the experiences of students who are socially promoted and why and how social promotion affects their academic and personal lives. Data collected could be
used on a wider scale to help change the views and stigmas that are currently associated with social promotion.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education? This question was central because research has shown students who do not meet minimum academic standards create an academic dilemma within the educational system. The dilemma is that a decision must be made whether the student should be socially promoted to the next grade in the hopes that somehow he or she will acquire the skills necessary for continued academic success, or if the student should be retained and repeat his or her current grade level with another chance to achieve mastery (Hughes, West & Wu, 2007). This study attempted to determine how students view their experiences after being socially promoted.

How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted? Research has shown that students who have been retained experience adverse effects socially, emotionally and cognitively, with increased high school dropout rates (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009). Since many students “blend in” once they have been socially promoted, not much attention is paid to them the following year specifically in regard to their experiences with self-efficacy and motivation. Knowing and analyzing the students’ experiences will identify common themes in the students’ mindsets and perceived expectations.

How are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations? Research has shown that there are inconsistent short-term differences in performance between students who are socially promoted and students who are retained (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009).
The research focused on finding the answer to one central question – question one. Questions two and three are Sub-questions where the current research findings and this study will determine if the participants experiencing the phenomenon of social promotion are impacted in the same manner as the participants in past research or if new themes will emerge in this study.

**Research Plan**

This study was a qualitative study following the transcendental phenomenology design described by Moustakas in 1994 (Creswell, 2007). Exploring experiences of public school, general education students, who have not been diagnosed with a learning disability, who were socially promoted was the purpose of this study. This type of design was fitting for this study, for it was an attempt to understand the phenomenon and to answer the questions of interest. A phenomenological research approach was best suited for this study because it “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon . . . describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Seeking understanding and forming meaning were the main focuses. Bracketing was implemented to negate any up-front bias in the study (Creswell, 2007). In order to adequately bracket, the researcher set aside any possible preconceptions in regard to the study. Journaling and mind mapping will used to serve this purpose. Questionnaires and individual interviews were utilized to collect the data needed for this research endeavor. Once saturation was achieved, meaning new information was no longer revealing itself, Moustakas’ model (1994) was used to categorize and analyze the data collected.
**Limitations and Delimitations**

Middle school students were selected because of the intricacies of their academic experience. Delimitation for this study intends that only students who were socially promoted as defined by current South Carolina public school district policies were selected to participate in the study. They were students who are currently in the sixth, seventh or eighth grade. The rationale for this selection was to select a purposeful sample of students who were socially promoted to identify reoccurring themes to gain a better understand of the experiences of socially promoted students.

This study presented several limitations that could not be controlled. Gender and ethnicity of the participants were random in nature. Age was only limited because of the necessity to be old enough to participate in middle school education. Students’ ages were between twelve and fifteen. Students who were from a public school background, home school background, and a Christian school background were not excluded from the participant group. Other limitations in the study were the effects that peer pressure, the onset of adolescence, and social relationships have on the students who were socially promoted. Studying the commonalities of these students brought to the forefront an understanding of the common themes and behaviors of socially promoted students.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter discusses research studies regarding promotion policies of students in our nation’s public school systems. The No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) puts forth the notion that all children must receive the best education possible, leaving no child behind. What does this mean? Basically, it means that schools need to be improved. The No Child Left Behind Act was based on four principles (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Stronger accountability for schools leads the way in this endeavor. Schools that have a poor track record in regard to student achievement are required to improve student achievement or risk losing control of their school or at risk of losing funding for their school. School districts are given greater control over the way funds are appropriated. Investing in hiring superior teachers, purchasing technology and implementing innovative programs The Federal government, through NCLB, funds scientific research to help develop and determine best educational practices Lastly, more choices for parents in regard to their children’s school have been afforded. Parents whose children attend low performing schools are given the opportunity to choose other schools that offer supplemental programs to help improve student achievement. Likewise, if a student attends what is deemed as a dangerous school or has been victimized, the parents may transfer their child to another school district to attend a safe school. With these pillars of the law put into place, one could not help but wonder about those students who have not met the criteria for mastery of their current grade level, but are socially promoted, mainly due to the provisions of NCLB?

There has been a tremendous amount of research conducted regarding the practice of retention, but very little research is available dealing with social promotion.
Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura (1977) developed this learn-by-observation theory known as Social Cognitive Theory. People learn by observing others and interacting with their world. Many times interaction and observation can lead to self-efficacy issues. Bandura (1977) stated, “People must develop skills in regulating the motivational, affective, and social determinant of their intellectual functioning as well as the cognitive aspects” (p. 136). Students at the middle school level watch other middle school students and see they observe how they act, what they do, what they wear, how they cut their hair, and even down to the self-efficacy they portray. In order to “fit in,” middle school students tend to mimic what they observe in their peers. A good example of this phenomenon can be seen in fashion. When middle school girls start carrying a certain style of handbag, before long, the majority of fashion-conscience girls are carrying the same type of handbag. When middle school boys start carrying a certain type of book bag or wearing a specific type of shoe, again, before long the majority of fashion-conscience boys start carrying the same type of book bag or wearing the same type of shoes. Why would it be much different when observing other students’ behavior in regard to academic work ethic? Many times when students see others being promoted socially rather than academically, they take on a mindset of under-achievement. Students wonder why other students put forth substandard effort or no effort at all in regard to academics, but are able to continue to the next grade level time and time again. Often students begin to exude the same type of behavior. They do not realize that minimal effort usually produces minimal results and although they may have been allowed to experience no consequences as far as being allowed to proceed to the next grade level, those students suffer consequences in the form of their lack of knowledge at the next grade level.
Resilience

Resilience is “an innate capacity that when facilitated and nurtured empowers children, youth and families to successfully meet life’s challenges with a sense of self-determination, mastery and hope ("Kings County," n.d.). Henry and Milstein (2004) discovered that helping students focus on the task at hand in a positive way can help them persevere through many situations. Many students have a difficult time focusing in the classroom setting. They become distracted over the smallest of things. When a teacher can implement strategies to assist these students in focusing they can persevere through academic struggles. But, focusing is not simply an academic issue; many students have a hard time focusing on situations outside the realm of the classroom as well. To help students focus, positive reinforcement can be utilized and is especially helpful in the public school setting. For example, incentives for displaying positive behavior instead of just behaving to avoid negative punishment, is a great tool to use to maintain a positive learning environment. A treasure chest full of prizes in the classroom is an excellent example of positive reinforcement. Many teachers use this strategy to improve performance by offering a trip to the treasure chest for achieving a pre-determined score on an assignment or being caught being good. Either way, the trip to the treasure chest is a positive reinforcement and something students can work toward and look forward to. People learn by observing others, and this behavior is the basis of social cognitive theory. When students see others with resilience, many times they will “get-on-board” and display this same trait. Typically, students are more likely to engage in behaviors that are modeled by someone in which they can identify.

Ultimately, behavior is an individual choice, and resilience takes time to acquire. Self-efficacy is students having the belief that they can achieve on any level whether it is academic or of a more personal nature. Having self-efficacy goes hand-in-hand with resilience. Most students possess
the luxury of easily acquiring and understanding academic concepts, but many others struggle on a daily basis. When these struggling students receive poor grades or fall behind, it is important that they continue. Students who struggle with academic concepts must have the willingness to try and try again. Teachers must have the ability to motivate students and foster self-efficacy and resilience. Teachers many times are the only support some students ever experience. Instilling a feeling of self-worth into students can help struggling students achieve. Once these struggling students master academic concepts, the feeling of accomplishment will continue to foster their own personal resilience. Students who are retained experience a major setback that can affect different areas of their lives. They are no longer in classes with their peers and many times experience ridicule due to their academic failures. Students who are socially promoted may lose their sense of resilience and become students who expect typically earned accomplishments to be handed to them, such as passing grades. When being passed on to the next grade without acquiring the mastery of academic standards, students may take for granted that they will be given the same pass again the next year and wonder why should they put forth the effort. Parents and teachers have addressed social promotion, and many call for an end of the practice. A Texas survey conducted in 1998 shows that 92 percent of its stakeholders are in favor of developing an “exit exam” for third grade students. Third grade students must pass the exam in order to continue on to the fourth grade. If this third grade exam were to be implemented, students would be required to know their multiplication facts prior to being promoted to the fourth grade. This one decision to implement the “exit exam” could create a major positive impact regarding the performance of students in their middle school math classes. One of the main reasons for failure in middle school math is that students have not mastered their multiplication facts. Most middle school math standards require students to be proficient in knowing their multiplication facts.
Implementing these types of benchmarks at various grade levels would go a long way in maintaining resilience throughout the educational process.

**Self-determination**

Self-determination is often a byproduct of resilience. Being resilient often requires self-determination. Wehymer (1999) spent many hours studying related traits such as self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. Researchers and curriculum developers are beginning to create curricular and instructional packages to teach self-determination (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000). Educator Anita Sakowicz (1996), thinks that self-determination should be a vital part of lessons that are taught in the classroom. “Many teachers and parents have continued to believe that if children who fail to meet grade level standards are retained, they will become stronger students” (Sakowicz, 1996, p. 27). Incorporating self-determination will promote the skills needed to set personal goals, solve problems that act as barriers to achieving these goals, make appropriate choices based on personal preferences and interests, participate in decisions that impact the quality of their lives, advocate for themselves, create action plans to achieve goals, and self-regulate and self-manage day-to-day actions (Wehmeyer, 2002, p. 3-4).

**Related Literature**

**History of Social Promotion**

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1999),

Social promotion is generally understood to be the practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements. Promoting students in this way is called social promotion because it is often carried out in the presumed interest of a student’s social and psychological well-being, without regard to achievement. (p. 5)
Proponents of the practice of social promotion believe that retaining a student vastly affects the student’s self-esteem and can lead to feelings of alienation (Jimerson et al., 2001). Since the use of social promotion in schools began in the 1930s, it has been seen as a solution for the witnessed negative effects of holding a student back, which is known as retention. Forty years later, the practice of social promotion virtually disappeared (Carifio, 2010). Dwindling academic performance prompted abolishing the practice of social promotion. Students were being socially promoted whether grade-appropriate skills were learned or not. This deficit greatly affects further success in the students’ academic career. Social promotion ended in New York City, New York in 1982. Over the next 20 years, social promotion would be implemented again, and then ended once again, based on school board recommendations. Policies continue to be fine-tuned to be of the best benefit to the child, taking into consideration their academic as well as social issues (Carifio, 2010).

The Practice of Retention

As the literature affirms, social promotion is not a stand-alone practice. Research studies rarely mention social promotion without first mentioning retention. In a literature comparison, retention is the prevalent topic of discussion. Ultimately, a broad common theme emerges. “In an era emphasizing evidence-based interventions, research indicates that neither grade retention nor social promotion is a successful strategy for improving educational success” (Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nickerson, & Kundert, 2006, p. 78).

One influence on the increasing popularity of grade retention is the current sociopolitical context emphasizing high standards and accountability. With national initiatives such as the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, there has been an increased emphasis on
closing the achievement gap between minority and nonminority students and improving
the performance of all children. (Jimerson et al., 2006)

According to researchers from the University of California and the University of Albany,
“Perhaps no topic in public education suffers from a greater divide between the views of
researchers and the views of practitioners and the public” (Jimerson et al., p. 112). There is
overwhelming research that defines the negative effects of retention, but the practice of retention
has grown over the past decade (Jimerson et al., 2006). The researchers provide some insight
regarding students’ overall perspectives regarding grade retention.

When a student experiences a fruitless effort to master grade level content, administrators
may struggle with the decision to socially promote that student. Conjointly, decisions regarding
the retention of a student are equally as difficult. A thorough review of each individual case is
necessary to ensure the best decision is made for that specific student. Family circumstance is
one factor that often has an effect on the student’s readiness to truly learn grade-level appropriate
academic content. Many students do not have an adequate support system once they leave school
grounds. There are endless situations that may be the cause of inadequate support systems
outside the school environment. Absent parents, parents working odd hours leaving children
unsupervised, parents that do not value education in general, child neglect, and child abuse are
examples of how a home support system declines, or, in some cases, never materializes.
Undiagnosed learning disabilities can also be a culprit when a student is not achieving
academically. Students are often tested for learning disabilities early in the primary grades. Many
times learning disabilities are not diagnosed at that time. There are many instances where a
student was retained in early primary grades and continued to have academic difficulties at
subsequent grade levels. For some students, the continuation of poor academic performance and
an educator’s recommendation will trigger a retest to check for a learning disability. Once a student is retested for learning disabilities, many times it is discovered that he or she qualified as having a learning disability. This outcome leads one to ponder whether these students are truly learning disabled or if the school system dropped the ball on the process.

Educators are expected to utilize interventions in order to support the success of students. “Once the needs of an individual student and/or the entire student population are understood, it is important for educators to be familiar with specific intervention strategies that are evidence based” (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000, p. 72). Research studies of long-term and short-term effects of student retention are available, and the findings are that there are numerous variables that come into play when students do not meet the mark put forth by the educational system. Retained students often possess a lower achievement rate in language arts and reading. Studies also show that parental factors play a major role in student achievement. Students who are retained are more than likely to have mothers with lower-than-average IQ scores, a negative attitude toward education in general, and virtually no involvement in the school system. The students themselves tend to display negative classroom behaviors, which affect their own learning and the learning of their peers. Confidence levels of retained students are typically low and social competence is lacking (Jimerson et al., 2006).

Students are socially promoted for a variety of reasons. Some school districts have put into place policies that mandate protocol for social promotion. Some district believe that if a student achieves “mastery” in two of the four core subjects, English, mathematics, science or social studies, then that student is allowed to proceed to the next grade. A stipulation of this policy is that the student participates in some sort of corrective action the following year to aid in their academic success, but the failure to acquire the skills necessary at any grade level or in any
subject has the potential to hurt rather than help the student in their future academic endeavors. Education is an intricate structure, and in most instances the foundation is one that is built upon over years of schooling. The early elementary years are crucial in the academic development and the academic success of a student. Education is a process that is years-long. What a student is expected to learn at one grade level is a building block for the next grade level. When a student does not meet the criterion to advance to the next grade level and is socially promoted; his or her academic foundation develops gaps. For instance, if a student does not master multiplication facts in the third grade as dictated by South Carolina State Academic Standards, the foundation for the seventh grade standards, which relies on the use of these facts, is weak, creating further gaps.

Extensive research suggests that neither the retention of nor promotion of students will foster student achievement. Studies show that retention negatively impacts students' behavior, attitude, and attendance. Social promotion undermines a student's future when he or she fails to develop critical study and job-related skills (Denton, 2001).

**Retention and High School Drop Out Rates**

Jimerson, et al. (2006) conducted studies that suggest students who are retained are more likely to drop out of high school compared to students who are socially promoted. When students are retained, many times they feel left behind and are not motivated to catch up. Some students may realize that their own actions, such as failure to turn in assignments or study for tests, caused him or her to be retained or held back a school-year and they make changes in their habits to make an academic turn around. Other students may feel like they are being punished and the retention was not their fault. In these instances blame is usually placed on the educator. Resentment on the part of the student toward the entire education process can take root. Peers
that are promoted academically or socially proceed to the next grade and continue in their
educational careers. Students that are retained are often older than their classmates. Once a
student reaches the age of 17 and is not in the age-appropriate grade, many times the student will
drop out of school. Rumberger (1995) suggested that the most obvious predictor of high school
dropout rates is retention. Retention raises the risk of high school dropout rates two to eleven
times (Jimerson, et al., 2006). Other long-term effects are also evident. Students who are
retained have lower academic adjustment which is measured by student achievement, student
classroom behavior and student attendance. By eleventh grade a substantial number of
previously retained students are more likely to drop out of high school by the age of 19. In turn,
these students are more likely not to pursue a college degree in postsecondary education
(Rumberger, 1995).

Retention: Life Events

Students who are retained often view their retention situation as stressful and hopeless.
Events that happen in the life of a student can greatly impact that student’s academic success
Students were asked to rate 20 life events that were considered stressful. These events include
losing a parent, going to the doctor, and getting a bad year-end grade in one of four core subjects,
English, mathematics, science, and social studies. In the study, students on the sixth grade level
report that only the loss of a parent and not being able to see are worse than being retained.
These responses paint a vivid picture and bring to light what some of these students fear the
most. Sixth grade is a middle school grade in most school districts. Fitting in with their peers is
very important to middle schools. They are already going through significant changes in their
lives. The physical and mental changes that accompany the onset of puberty greatly affect their
social lives. Those who are retained often deal with embarrassment, which can be a daunting task and cause undue stress. Many sixth grade students feel that the stress of grade retention could be the most significant event in their lives. In this light, socio-emotional and psychological impacts are worth noting when looking at the gains children experience when interventions are put into place.

**Interventions**

In the attempt to remedy the rising instances of retention and reduce the need for social promotion or retention, a better understanding and respect is needed in viewing cultural, linguistic, developmental, and gender differences. Intervention and preventative strategies are examined in order to meet the needs of each student. Students have differing reactions to being retained. Students who are retained tend to suffer from low academic achievement and experience issues with negative behavior, predominantly acting out or causing interruptions in the classroom setting. When a student acts out or causes disruptions in the classroom, that student is not receiving a quality education, and neither are their peers. Interventions can be individualized as mentioned above or can become a school-wide endeavor.

Interventions briefly reviewed include, preschool programs, summer school and after-school programs, looping and multi-age classrooms, school-based mental health programs, parent involvement, early reading programs, effective instructional strategies and assessment, and behavior/cognitive behavior modification. Some of the alternatives described may involve substantial changes to existing school structure. (Jimerson et al., 2006)

There is an amazing wealth of information regarding interventions to aid in abolishing grade retention and social promotion. Intensifying learning is one of the keys. If a teacher makes
an assignment easier, a solution to substandard performance is not found. Lessons that are simpler do not guarantee that students will achieve academically. “Raising the bar” for student achievement creates better results. A study conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research stresses the notion that students who are provided more challenging, higher-quality, more difficult assignments outperform less-challenged students on standardized tests (Newmann, Bryk & Nagaoka, 2001). One study conducted by the Consortium examined students in 19 Chicago elementary schools who were assigned more difficult assignments in writing and mathematics. The progress of students, over 5000 in grades 3, 6, and 8, was tracked over a three-year period of time. Those students who were given more challenging assignments produced greater-than-average gains on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in the areas of reading and mathematics. Those students also produced higher scores in reading, mathematics, and writing on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (Newmann, Bryk & Nagaoka, 2001). Students in some poor-performing Chicago schools were given challenging assignments, and despite some pre-conceived expectations, these students benefited from being exposed to such rich instruction. The study suggests that if more emphasis is given to intellectual and challenging work in the classroom, gains on standardized tests would continue to be achieved. “Raising the bar” regarding expectations for learning helps develop high-achieving schools, which will produce academically successful, high-achieving students. Schools that are high-achieving schools are rigorous. They enforce rigorous standards, a rich and meaningful curriculum, employ skilled teachers, and provide thought-provoking, meaningful learning experiences as essential elements (Wheelock, 1998).

Intervening early and often with ongoing, year-long assessments assist schools with developing strategies that can stop the ongoing cycle of substandard academic performance.
Representatives from the U.S. Department of Education (1999) have recommended that schools provide a variety of opportunities for students to meet or exceed expectations academically. If schools will make these opportunities more available, students can be held more accountable for their own academic performance.

The early identification of students who need extra help with academics is crucial to the successful implementation of intervention strategies. Students who require extra help should be given several avenues of support. An example would be early reading intervention programs. These-type of intervention programs can provide intensive support early in a student’s academic career and is helpful because the majority of students who are retained in the early grades are done so due to low gains in reading.

Early intervention programs can only be successful if the following are incorporated into the intervention: early offering of services; tied directly to the academic work students are currently working on; offered on a frequent basis; supplement instruction in the classroom; individualized and differentiated; academic help provided by someone the student knows and who is knowledgeable regarding content and the student; and create a system to ensure monitoring protocol is in place (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Intensive interventions should be offered at all grade levels. These offerings could ensure that those students who slipped through the cracks in the early grades can get help in middle school and in high school in their areas of deficit. Providing students a variety of opportunities to achieve success can help break the cycle of social promotion and retention. Research shows that interventions that are aligned with standards and that also increase instructional time for those students who are struggling, increase student achievement (American Federation of Teachers, 1997). Providing additional learning time can be accomplished by schools implementing creative
scheduling during the school day and offering before and after-school programs outside of school hours. These opportunities for additional learning time can greatly effect students’ academic achievement for the better (Denton, 2001). If schools decide to implement this strategy, they can make their own decisions regarding how extra time will be scheduled. Options for using that extra time effectively are as follows: offer classes to help students learn study skills; offer classes to help parents understand how to help their child study; include an extra period in whichever subject the student is struggling in; provide one-on-one instruction or tutoring with a teacher; provide tutoring with an older student; offer education plans that are individualized; offer assistance with students who are Special Needs students.

Preventative programs, such as early interventions implemented during the preschool years, are an attempt to help at-risk students before problems arise. For example, students that exhibit a deficit in the area of reading can take advantage of a variety of reading programs. Reading Recovery is one of these programs.

“Reading Recovery is a short-term program of one-on-one tutoring for struggling first graders, geared to rapidly bringing students up to grade level. The program serves the lowest-achieving students, who each receive a half-hour daily lesson for 12 to 20 weeks with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. Lessons include reading familiar stories, working with letters or words using magnetic letters, writing a story, and reading a new book.” (Marshall, 2004)

Reading Recovery focuses on phonics intertwined with problem-solving strategies and reading comprehension. Each lesson is individualized to meet the needs of each student. When the student has the ability to read independently at the same grade level as the average reading level of his or her class, the student is removed from the program. The primary purpose of
preschool intervention programs is generally to assist at-risk students before they experience academic challenges through enhancing the foundational skills necessary for subsequent academic success (Casto & Mastropieri, 1986; Zigler & Styfco, 2000).

Individualized intervention programs also help in areas of pro-social behavior which is how to behave socially with others. One such program is called The Comprehensive Behaviour Program. This program provides interventions to students needing assistance in succeeding in a school environment. The program is organized by four tiers or levels that address student self-control and pro-social development. The first tier of the program includes developing support systems throughout the entire school district that consist of providing learning centers, mentors, step-down groups, and individualized behaviour intervention plans. Direction and assistance by trained intervention specialist are provided to individual schools. The second tier consists of programs are mainly pull-out programs at the middle school and high school levels. These programs focus on the needs of each individual student providing specific curriculum, anger/behaviour management, and pro-social skills programs. The third tier of programs concentrate on out-of-school interventions. These interventions take place off school grounds and are strategically structured as therapeutic settings to address and work on behavioural, academic, and pro-social goals. The final tier, tier four, consists of maintenance programs that are designed to be long-term support for students that are unable to return to a general education classroom after they have completed the first three tiers of the program. Other types of individualized intervention programs include family support in the way of having resources readily available for parents and other family members that teach how to support the student, and nutrition programs to teach the basics of nutrition. Summer school and after-school programs implemented in school districts generate multiple positive effects. Summer school specifically
addresses “summer loss” head-on. “Summer loss” is another way to describe the learning loss that students experience due to the lack of participation in academic activities during the summer months. Research shows that students tend to earn lower scores at the end of summer on the same standardized tests that were taken at end of the school-year (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay & Greathouse, 1996). The most common academic “summer loss” deficits identified are mathematics facts (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) and spelling. Mathematics computation and spelling skills are considered procedural skills while problem-solving, mathematical concepts and reading comprehension are considered conceptual skills. Research brings to light that in cognitive psychology, procedural skills and facts are the most common areas of learning loss and are considered the most susceptible to forgetting (Cooper et al., 1996). Summer loss was more prevalent for mathematics than for reading based on overall results. Cooper et al. (1996) theorizes that a student’s home-life environment may afford more opportunities to read and maintain reading skills. A student’s home-life environment may not naturally lend itself to opportunities for mathematics practice without the dreaded rote practice that many students detest. Or it could be that some parents may stress the importance of maintaining reading skills while not in a school setting over the summer, so they require their children to read over summer (Cooper et al., 1996).

There are many positive aspects of after-school programs as well, and they are becoming the norm in today’s public school systems. Child safety is an extremely important issue that after-school programs address. “After-school programs are essential to the safety of our community. Keeping kids off of the streets and engaged in healthy learning activities in the hours after school helps keep them out of trouble” (Livingston, 2010, p. 7). After-school programs provide positive alternatives to help combat gangs, drugs and violence. Due to a high percentage
of parents who work outside the home, many struggle to maintain care for their children during after-school hours. (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Due to this fact, there are many students who spend time alone and unsupervised after school hours. Many times students leave the school campus at the time of school dismissal and have a lack of adult supervision once they leave the campus until they arrive home. There can be many opportunities for students to find harm when unsupervised. After-school programs help negate those opportunities. Studies have shown that the after-school hours can be dangerous for children. The Department of Justice (1997) found that 29 percent of all juvenile criminal offenses occur on school days between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. They also found that in the hour immediately following school dismissal, violent crimes tend to double (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). After-school programs are often implemented to help with child safety and provide supervision. After-school programs also can help engage students in physical, academic and social activities. As former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley said that children's minds don't close down at 3:00 p.m. (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). And due to popular demand, neither do a vast majority of the United States’ public schools. Both summer school and after-school programs are ultimately designed to assist students academically in areas where they are lacking.

When implementing summer school or after-school programs as an intervention to improve student achievement, it is important that the programs contain key elements commonly found in effective programs. Giving students additional instruction after school or in summer school, as opposed to retaining them for a year, also may reduce the risk of students dropping out due to being over-age for the grade. (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000)
Often these areas of difficulty are reading and mathematics. Additional time focusing on instruction will be highly beneficial to the students. One-on-one help with homework and projects can help students complete those assignments that normally would not be completed at home. Summer school and after-school programs can also help students get ahead. When students who are gifted and talented participate in summer school and after-school programs with the intent of enrichment, students can jump ahead in academic levels and truly excel. Many times students will go to summer school to earn credits toward their diploma so they may graduate early. Going to summer school gives them a jump start on a college career and if so motivated, could complete college earlier than anticipated.

**Classroom Environment**

Classroom structure and environment also play a critical role in student achievement. The classroom structure known as looping allows students to stay with the same teacher for two or more years. Grant, Johnson, and Richardson (1996) provide evidence that the “use of looping increases student attendance, decreases retention rates, produces a decline in discipline problems and suspensions, and increases staff attendance” (p. 12). This practice empowers teachers to truly individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student. It also enables a deeper trust to be established between teacher and student. This deeper trust is important to reach students that otherwise would not be reached. Looping grouping allows teachers and students to remain together for several years and yield many of the same benefits as from multiage grouping. Research also demonstrates that there is a positive impact on student academic achievement. In East Cleveland, Ohio, a looping research study was conducted in a school district with 99.4 percent African American students. One-half of the students lived at or below poverty. The majority were also from single-parent homes. Achievement scores in mathematics and reading
were compared between looping classes and the usual traditional classes. There were significant differences. Some cases exhibit as much as a 40-point advantage to those students in a looping classroom (Reynolds, Barnhart, & Martin, 1999).

Another learning strategy often used is smaller class size. Allowing teachers to have fewer students in their classrooms increases their effectiveness and gives the opportunity to assist students who need additional instruction. Teachers would be better able to develop a connection with each student and get to know each student and their individual needs. Individualized instruction is more feasible if student numbers are kept to a minimum in a classroom environment. Research has brought to light that a class with a roster containing 20 children or less can help improve students’ academic performance in that classroom. Small class size is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). A study conducted in Tennessee, known as Project STAR, revealed a wealth of information for educators in regard to the effects of class size on student achievement. The research shows that students who participate in a smaller classroom environment outperform students in a larger classroom environment. This learning discrepancy was determined to be true for both standardized and curriculum-based measures. These findings were consistent regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or school geographical setting. Subsequent research verifies that the same results are valid for students through the eighth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Prior to reorganizing and creating smaller classes as the norm, much thought needs to be put into the age of the students. Research has shown that smaller class size is most effective in the early, primary grades. Administrators must also provide effective, appropriate professional development for teachers so they can experience success with smaller classes by implementing effective
strategies. Smaller classes must be accompanied by additional intervention strategies to help end social promotion and retention (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Another structure type for classrooms is multi-age classrooms. This classroom structure is described as a classroom that includes students with differing ages and differing abilities. When pairing multi-age classrooms with the aforementioned looping model, student academic success can increase. Participating in a multi-age classroom environment will allow the students to learn at their own pace (May, Kundert, & Brent, 1995). The multi-age classroom is greatly utilized in the special needs classroom. This structure also allows older students to assist younger students in peer tutoring opportunities. This practice not only helps students academically, but also aids in obtaining and practicing social skills.

However, mental health issues that hinder student achievement and put students at risk of retention or social promotion are another factor to consider. According to Jimerson et al., (2006), students that deal with mental health issues, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, or depression tend to fall behind academically in comparison to their classmates that do not suffer from mental health issues.

Some schools have adopted school-based mental health programs in an effort to address the broad mental health needs of students in the most efficient manner possible. Preliminary evaluation results have suggested that school-based mental health programs are promising interventions for promoting social and emotional competence. (Armbruster & Lichtman, 1999, p. 498)

Mental Health Services are a vital support mechanism and are utilized to assist students with any mental health issues they may be experiencing. Many students have a troubled home-
life and other problems and need someone to listen to them. Having that support can help students achieve academically as well as socially.

**Parental Involvement**

Parents’ willingness to help their children navigate through their academic career is an asset. Parents can specifically assist their children by exemplifying and maintaining a positive attitude regarding education and maintaining a positive home environment. Dr. Rose T. Watson (2011) suggests that a positive home environment consists of a comfortable, positive, nurturing and calm home; children’s assigned roles in the home environment should be designed to prepare them for adult life; maintaining open communication, as opposed to coercion, is extremely important; discouraging negative behavior and name calling within the family unit; to use encouraging words to encourage feelings of security and trust; maintaining an environment that fosters openness where children are not afraid to approach their parents with a problem regardless of severity; children should be encouraged through chores to help keep the home orderly; encouraging cooperation and discouraging competition; recognizing and acknowledging that every child is a unique creation and avoid comparing one child to another; recognizing and acknowledging that each child has a unique individuality and make time to be spent exclusively with each child; and setting aside time for family activities. This description of a positive home environment may vary from family to family, but research reveals that there is greater academic success among students who are raised with these ideals (Fan & Chen, 2001). With the onset of positive parental involvement, such as making sure homework is completed and attending parent-teacher conferences, other interventions can become more effective.

In regard to cultural concerns, when parents are involved, it is important to consider cultural variations among parents/families and the ways in which cultural factors may interact
with the school’s outreach. Policy changes that encourage parent involvement, increasing understanding among administrators, teachers, and staff, are inviting (Jimerson et al., 2006).

**Teaching Practices**

Early reading interventions can make the difference between academic success and failure. Before a student falls behind in reading, many schools implement early reading programs in an attempt to diagnose problems early, prior to the need to make a decision of whether a student should be retained or socially promoted. Reading is a skill that is essential for all academic learning. Slavin and Madden (2001) found that early reading programs promote student success. Decoding and phonics are just two of the numerous early intervention strategies that are implemented in reading programs. The process of being able to translate print into speech using graphemes or combinations of letters and match them to their phonemes or sounds is called decoding. Beginning with the simplest combinations and building upon these with more complex combinations, this intervention has been a popular approach. Phonics is closely related to decoding. Phonics helps people learn to associate the letters they see with the speech sounds that the letters represent. This strategy breaks the word down into chunks instead of taking the whole word at one time. Both interventions are beneficial to beginning readers.

Other programs that are conducive to students in middle or high school are also readily available. Teaching self-regulation strategies can be beneficial in helping students achieve to their potential. Some examples of these strategies are teaching students to take notes, reciting important information out loud, developing mnemonic devices, and using graphic organizers. These strategies can help a student succeed in more than just reading (Vaughn, Wanzek, & Murray, 2012).
Teaching practices greatly impact student achievement and can make a difference in a student’s willingness and ability to achieve. There are various techniques that can be implemented that will cater to any classroom environment. Techniques such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, and using mnemonic strategies have been proven to improve academic performance (Forness, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997).

Disruptive classroom behavior does not only hinder the academic success of the student causing the disruption, but it hinders the academic success of all the students in the classroom. Behavior modification strategies can be implemented to negate behavior problems in the classroom.

Implementing strategies for behavior modification within the classroom can assist educators in alleviating or reducing undesirable behavior. These same strategies can also increase positive behavior. “Often, behavior modification strategies use token reinforcement systems and peer or adult monitors, or may involve the use of publicly posted positive group and individual behaviors” (Jimerson et al., 2006, p.22). Using a combination of behavior modifications strategies, such as feedback and modeling, can foster success in students who are otherwise struggling. Self-coping and anger control issues can be tackled by the reinforcement of cognitive approaches. One cognitive approach is using think-alouds in a whole class or small group setting. This strategy can be utilized in many different situations. “Behavior strategies have consistently been found to reduce disruptive behaviors and increase on-task classroom behavior, thus providing an opportunity to increase academic skills and achievement” (Jimerson et al., 2006, p. 23).
Meaningful Professional Development

Meaningful professional development for teachers is another way to positively affect students’ learning in the classroom. In order to improve teaching and learning, high-quality professional development for teachers is vital. Ronald Ferguson conducted studies that revealed that "every dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater increases in student achievement than did less instructionally focused uses of school resources" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 8). After a review of more than 200 studies, it is clear that teacher education is critical and that more appears to be better than less (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

"In fields ranging from mathematics and science to early childhood, elementary, vocational, and gifted education, teachers who are fully prepared and certified in both their discipline and in education are more highly rated and are more successful with students than are teachers without preparation, and those with greater training in learning, child development, teaching methods, and curriculum are found to be more effective than those with less." (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 10)

Other studies indicate that professional development proves more effective when teachers work with colleagues on updating curriculum, integrating standards and changing the types of student assessment (Darling-Hammond, 1997). When teachers get together with other teachers to update the curriculum or create student assessments, better products are produced. Individuals involved in the collaboration bring varying experiences and knowledge to the table. What one may lack, another may have an over-abundance of knowledge. Darling-Hammond (1997) recommends creating professional development opportunities for teachers that are aligned with standards for students and educators; developing mentoring programs for first-year teachers; and allocating state and local funds to provide meaningful professional development for teachers.
Since teaching is complex, it requires a great deal of time to develop and implement effective instructional techniques. Allotting time for study groups, coaching, and collaboration should be a priority for all teaching institutions (Darling-Hammond, 1997). These activities create a more cohesive and effective overall environment that will in turn positively affect student achievement.

**Individualized Strategies**

Only the surface has been scratched in regard to interventions during the review of literature. There are a variety of interventions that can enhance academic and social achievement of students in the public school setting. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to assist students in their areas of deficit. Interventions that are selected for use must be catered to each student. Many times strategies and interventions are used in combination to get the best results. When schools implement programs that cater to students who need extra help, these students are given the tools necessary to help them achieve academic success. Close monitoring of student achievement will allow interventions to be adjusted as needed.

Yamamoto and Byrnes (1987) conducted research with sixth-grade students. Each student was asked a series of questions regarding stressful life events and were then asked to rate the event according to how they perceived the level of stress. Questions include such topics as losing a parent, scoring low on a test, and going to the doctor. In regard to retention, many students felt that they would be left behind, much like they would be if they had lost a parent. The thoughts of going blind also made the students have feelings of being left behind. Again, much like if they had lost a parent. This study was replicated 18 years later by Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2002). The results indicated that a similar sample set rated the most stressful life event as being retained, even above losing a parent or going to the dentist.
The researchers in the study provide research-driven ideas for intervention that include preschool intervention programs. Intervention at the earliest age possible gives a student an extra boost and lessens the chance that the student will be retained or socially promoted. In addition to early intervention, other comprehensive programs and strategies are also utilized to promote social and academic development and growth. Some include summer school programs, after-school programs, looping classrooms, multi-age classrooms, school-based mental health programs, parental involvement, early reading programs, effective instructional strategies and assessments, and behavior modification strategies. These interventions and their descriptors give a clear picture that retention is not a viable solution for academic failure. The targeted approach is one aimed toward promoting social and academic success in students rather than the need for a retention or social promotion policy.

With the popularity and adoption of academic content standards, the practice of social promotion has come under attack. According to Frey (2005) the practice of social promotion is a practice that dilutes the quality of learning in public education. Academic content standards are standards that students are expected to learn at each grade level. With the fast ascent of accountability, districts began to instill retention policies that made it more difficult to socially promote students. Social promotion was even a topic included in the 1998 State of the Union Address: “When we promote a child from grade to grade who hasn’t mastered the work, we don’t do that child any favors. It’s time to end social promotion” (Clinton, 1998, p. 3). Clearly the debate of whether retention or social promotion must be eliminated continues, but only the experiences of retained students are considered. Most of the research available on social promotion is a smaller part of research on grade retention.
According to Jacob and Lefgren (2009), Chicago school districts implemented a policy somewhat different than most schools’ retention and social promotion policy. In the past, the decision to retain or promote a student fell on the shoulders of school administrators. The policy implemented by Chicago’s public schools was strictly test-based.

The promotion standards for third, sixth, and eighth grade were 2.8, 5.3, and 7.0 grade equivalents, respectively. Students who did not meet the standard in the spring were required to attend a six-week summer school program, after which they could retake the exams. Those who passed the August exams moved on to the next grade. Students who failed again were required to repeat the grade. (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009)

With this policy, the schools are holding the students more accountable for their own learning and offering stiff consequences. The policy also allows students to catch up to their peers that were academically promoted. It allows for options, which retention and promotion polices tend to lack. The researcher made several valid points for the support of retention. She noted that in some instances retained students may be better prepared for high school courses, thus enabling the student to “accumulate high school credits at a faster pace” (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009, p. 37).

**Differentiation**

"At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. When a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group and varies his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction." (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 2)

In the classroom, teachers can differentiate on many levels, such as content, process, products, and the overall learning environment. The way a teacher chooses to differentiate is
based on student readiness and interest (Tomlinson, 1999). Other research-based practices commonly used are brain-based learning, flexible grouping, multiple intelligences, and cooperative learning. The success of differentiation depends on several principles: differentiation must occur with high-quality curriculum and instruction; assessment and instruction are inseparable; all students participate in relevant work; and the teacher appreciates, understands, and builds upon student differences (Tomlinson, 1999).

**Expanding Learning Options**

Expanding learning options for a population of diverse learners can also help with boosting student achievement. Educators can develop alternate ways of learning by giving more learning opportunities to students. Children do not learn in the same way, or at the same pace. Offering more options when it comes to learning will enable teachers to reach more children. Schools can begin to develop varying learning opportunities through flexible scheduling. Block scheduling gives schools flexibility to meet students’ needs. There are many models of scheduling that have proven to be effective. Advantages of utilizing block scheduling include: being able to offer students instruction of a wider variety; students could experience more greatly improved grades and test scores, as well as improved attendance; students given a chance to receive extra help with their academic assignments; and teachers could have longer planning time, which gives the opportunity for collaboration.

Although educators may "raise the bar" in regard to mandated academic standards, educators must not forget to provide an educational environment that will also nurture and support all learners. Neither social promotion nor grade retention is an effective solution for low achieving students to succeed. Schools must provide a way that all students are afforded various opportunities for learning. Avenues of support must also be put in place. Worthwhile
professional development for teachers, implementation of intervention strategies, assessments that provide relevant data, and diverse learning options can give schools the tools needed to break the cycle of social promotion and retention while helping students reach their full potential. Creating this type of environment for struggling students will help them not only in their academic life, but also in their personal life. Methods for offering more learning options include reorganizing class groupings. An example of this reorganization is multiage grouping, where students of varying ages are grouped in one classroom and remain together and with the same teacher for at least two years. Another example is looping grouping, where the teacher travels with a class of students for two or more grade levels. When skilled and trained teachers participate in various groupings they can foster sustained, caring relationships (Darling-Hammond, 1998). "Studies show that children in multiage classrooms reveal academic progress over time that equals or exceeds that of their peers in same-age classrooms" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 20). Teachers that work in multiage classrooms can make the most of learning time. The teachers already know their students' learning and social and no time is wasted.

Rearranging the school-year schedule is another strategy that is gaining popularity throughout the nation. Although there are many workable models of year-round school, they all involve arranging the school calendar so that consistency in learning can be maintained throughout the school-year. The basic premise behind a year-round calendar is to shorten the lengthy summer break which inhibits learning loss, and schedule more frequent breaks throughout the year which cuts down on teacher and student burnout. Decreasing summer learning loss is the main reason that schools across the nation have implemented year-round school schedules, which in turn tends to increase student achievement (Ballinger, 1995). Year-round school scheduling also improves teacher attendance as well as student attendance. In order
for a teacher to be successful, he or she need to be present in the classroom. Likewise, students need to be diligent with attending school in order to learn. Fewer discipline problems arise when this type of scheduling is implemented. It also reduces teacher stress and increases student and teacher motivation. There is also an increase in opportunities for remediation or enrichment during the breaks throughout the school-year (Ballinger, 1995). By reorganizing and differentiating instruction, teachers can greatly expand the options available to students for delivery of instruction.

**Meaningful Student Assessment**

Another strategy used in the endeavor to abolish the need of social promotion or retention of students is for teachers to have meaningful and purposeful assessment of learning. The main purpose of assessment is to foster learning for all students (Porter, 1995) while guiding the classroom curriculum and instruction. Assessments that effectively collect information regarding the students’ academic progress which demonstrates what they know, how they learn, what they can do, and diagnose potential problems, can help further meet students’ academic instructional needs. McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, & Montes, (1999) recommend using informal assessment tools like rubrics, checklists, and anecdotal records to help create effective instruction. Assessments such as these provide insight into students’ thought processes, what and how they understand presented information, and the strategies they choose to use in their learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Performance-based assessments are popular with many educators. They feel that these type of assessments best match updated academic standards and the methods used to deliver those standards via instruction (Porter, 1995). Performance-based assessments should be administered continuously throughout the year and the results of these assessments
should drive instruction and curriculum used in the classroom. (American Federation of Teachers, 1997).

The literature yields a vast cornucopia of information and arguments against grade retention but little research is found specifically against social promotion. Student experiences are discussed at large in regard to grade retention, but nothing is found regarding student experiences of those who were socially promoted. The ultimate goal of education is for students to be successful during their academic career. If a student is having a difficulty, interventions should be put in to place to assist that student. Individualization is the key.

**Summary**

There is an obvious gap in literature that addresses the experiences of socially promoted students. The majority of literature that deals with promotion policies only deals with retention rather than social promotion. The literature researched carries a wealth of interventions and preventative/corrective measures in order to help students achieve on various levels so as to not have to experience retention. These interventions and preventative/corrective measures will help students to be academically promoted rather than socially promoted. Getting the extra help needed by students who are at-risk will make the student’s academic experience a more pleasant one. Resilience and self-determination both play a large role in the success of these interventions. If students can take full advantage of these interventions, maybe that will be the key to replacing social promotion with academic promotion and ending retention in the public school system.

There is a need for research regarding social promotion. This research will yield findings conducive to understanding socially promoted students’ experiences and their mindset in regard to social promotion. Other research could be conducted to study how students respond academically, socially, and emotionally with proven successful interventions/corrective
measures. Future curriculum could be developed to incorporate these interventions/corrective measures within the classroom setting. These types of programs show the potential to assist the teacher as well. Interventions/corrective measures can be correlated with core curriculum in all subjects within the classroom. Students’ self-efficacy is a driving force behind the success of the students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of socially promoted, public school, general education students, who have not been diagnosed with a learning disability. To understand the phenomenon, it must be known what problems are apparent. There is insufficient research that clearly identifies and analyzes the experiences of students that are socially promoted. Data regarding socially promoted students are not readily available, for most information is kept internal at the school level. Once a student is socially promoted, he or she tends to “blend in.” It is important to hear the voices of students who have experienced this phenomenon.

Design

This study warranted a qualitative research design, transcendental and phenomenological in nature. There is an abundance of research that shows the effects of retention, but there is minimal research that explores the practices of social promotion and the experiences of those who have dealt with the phenomenon. Since there is little research on this subject matter, more research is needed in regard to social promotion.

A qualitative design was chosen because qualitative research explores lived issues and addresses the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). A transcendental phenomenological approach was chosen because this approach describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon which will describe what all participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This type of study allows for rich and descriptive reflective analysis of the data to produce rich and descriptive results. This study follows the steps outlined by Moustakas (1994). The researcher needs to understand the philosophical perspectives behind the approach, especially the concept
of studying how people experience a phenomenon. The researcher wrote research questions that explored the meaning of that experience for individuals and asked individuals to describe their everyday lived experience. The researcher collected data from individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. Typically, this information is collected through long interviews. For phenomenological data analysis, the protocols are divided into statements or horizontalization. The units are transformed into clusters of meaning which tie the transformation together to make a general description of the experience. The general description will include a textural description of what is experienced and a structural description of how it is experienced. The phenomenological report ends with the reader understanding better the essential, invariant structure of the experience.

**Research Questions**

The following questions will guide this study:

What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education? This question is central because research shows students who do not meet minimum academic standards create an academic dilemma within the educational system. The dilemma is that a decision must be made whether the student should be socially promoted to the next grade in the hopes that somehow he or she will acquire the skills necessary for continued academic success, or if the student should be retained and repeat his or her current grade level with another chance to achieve mastery (Hughes, West & Wu, 2007). This study will attempt to determine how students view their experiences after being socially promoted.

How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted? Research shows those students who are retained experience adverse effects socially, emotionally, cognitively, and those experiences increases high school dropout rates (Jacob,
2009). Since many students “blend in” once they are socially promoted, not much attention is paid to them the following year in regard to their experiences with self-efficacy and motivation. Knowing and analyzing their lived experiences will make apparent the students’ mindset and perceived expectations.

How are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations? Research shows that there are no consistent differences in performance, in the short-run, of students who are socially promoted and students who are retained (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009).

The research will focus on finding the answer to one central question – question one. Questions two and three are Sub-questions where the current research findings and this study will suggest if the participants experiencing the phenomenon of social promotion are impacted in the same manner as the participants in past research who have been retained, or if new insights will be gained into the phenomenon.

Participants

Participants in this study were middle school level, socially promoted, public school, general education students, who have not been diagnosed with a learning disability. Socially promoted/social promotion means the student was allowed to continue to the next grade level although the student failed to meet academic standards in at least one of four core subjects, English/Language Arts, mathematics, science or social studies. Students who were placed, meaning allowed to continue to the next grade level although they did not meet academic standards in two or more core subjects, will be included in the study. Students, who have been academically promoted, meaning they advanced to the next grade level due to mastery of academic standards, did not participate in the study.
After Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, students were selected from students’ promotion records via the guidance counselor at Honea Path Middle School. This selection process ensured that participants met the criteria to participate in the study. Twelve students were chosen using purposeful and discriminate sampling. Two of these participants were used to pilot questionnaire and interview questions. These two participants were not included in the study. In regard to sample size, Creswell (2007) suggested between five and twenty-five participants should be selected for a phenomenological research study. Each participant was a socially promoted student during the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 school years. The investigator contacted the parents of the student participants, explained the research study, and asked for permission to include their child. Parents signed a parent consent form giving their permission for their child to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Next, the investigator met with the students in the presence of an adult faculty member and gained the students’ assent (see Appendix D). Once all forms were signed and collected, identifying information was kept locked and separate from non-identifying information. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym by the guidance counselor to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 provides a brief description of the participants involved in the study.
Table 1

*Brief Description of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Grade Level</th>
<th>Grade Socially Promoted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; &amp; 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; &amp; 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Setting**

The study was conducted within the confines of Anderson School District Two, a southeastern, rural school district in upstate South Carolina containing one high school, two middle schools, and four elementary schools. This school district was chosen due to the researcher’s interest in the state of rural education in the United States and the researcher’s concern for the students who are being left behind academically. The study will be physically conducted at Honea Path Middle School. Honea Path Middle School serves 457 students and met Annual Yearly Progress on the 2012 School State Report Card. The student-teacher ratio is 21 to 1.

The retention/promotion policy of Anderson School District Two directs high school level grades to use of the Uniform Grading Policy, which is different from middle and elementary schools. The Uniform Grading Policy does not apply to the level of students in this study. The state of South Carolina deems individual school districts responsible to compile
guidelines for retention/promotion policies for the middle and elementary grade levels. Anderson School District Two’s policy for middle and elementary level students is as follows:

Students in grades six through eight are expected to learn state English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies curriculum standards as evidenced by the following criteria for promotion. Criterion 1: The student has earned a passing grade as the final yearly average in each core content area (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). Or, Criterion 2: The student has earned a passing grade as the final yearly average in at least three of the four core content areas (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). And, the student is required to participate in an assistive program(s) provided by the school to address the area(s) of deficit (e.g. Reading Intervention Program, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, etc. as appropriate). Criterion 3: The student met attendance requirements. Criterion 2 does not apply if the student has failed the same subject two consecutive years. If the student fails the same subject (math or English language arts) for two consecutive years after being served through assistive programs, the student must be retained in his/her current grade level. (Anderson School District Two, 2009, p. 172)

The retention rate at Honea Path Middle School is 0.4%. Based on data retrieved from the South Carolina State School Report Card, the percentage is a decline from previous years. Table 2 provides information pertaining to Honea Path Middle School’s South Carolina State School Report Card.
Table 2

Honea Path Middle School’s State School Report Card Information

The State of South Carolina Annual School Report Card
Honea Path Middle School – Grades 5 through 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Absolute Rating</th>
<th>Growth Rating</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Students Retained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>0.4 % (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>1.1 % (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>0.4 % (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Suspensions &amp; Expulsions</th>
<th>Student - Teacher Ratio</th>
<th>PASS ELA Met or Exemplary</th>
<th>PASS Math Met or Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0.7 % (4)</td>
<td>27 to 1</td>
<td>79% (348)</td>
<td>79 % (348)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>0.2 % (1)</td>
<td>23 to 1</td>
<td>78 % (374)</td>
<td>74 % (355)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.0 % (0)</td>
<td>21 to 1</td>
<td>83 % (386)</td>
<td>78 % (363)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Socially promoted student statistics are not publically provided. Students who are socially promoted are required to participate in an after-school program throughout the next school year. Although the retention rates are low, the number of participants in the after-school program has increased. Data from Honea Path Middle School show an increase in after-school program participants, which is a direct result of the increase in the practice of social promotion. Social promotion is part of the criterion in order for students to be allowed to participate in the after-school program. In order for socially promoted students to pass to the next grade level, students have to agree to participate in the program. There are limited spots available in the program, and those spots are reserved for those who have been socially promoted.

**Procedures**

IRB approval was sought and obtained for the research study (see Appendix A). As part of that process, approval from the Anderson School District Two superintendent and the principal of Honea Path Middle School was also obtained. The researcher contacted the school’s
guidance counselor and scheduled a meeting and discussed the research plan. Promotion records of current middle school students were obtained and a list of 15 students who met the criteria required of the participants in the study was compiled. After contacting each parent, 12 of the 15 parents agreed to allow their child to participate in the study. Two of these participants served for piloting purposes of questions in questionnaire and interviews. A total of 10 participants actually took part in the study. A consent form to obtain parental consent for the students to participate in the study was sent home. Once parental consent and student assent had been received, participants completed questionnaires and the researcher conducted interviews with each participant. Data from interviews and questionnaires was coded using Moustakas’ (1994) procedures of horizontalization, clusters of meaning, textural and structural descriptions, and narrative of essence.

**The Researcher's Role**

The researcher played the role of interviewer, interpreter, analyst, and reporter. The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of students who have been socially promoted. As a seventh grade math teacher, the researcher has personally witnessed and has a personal interest in this phenomenon. As time goes by, it seems more and more students have been socially promoted under the school district’s retention/promotion policy without the mastery of standards that are truly needed. The researcher wanted to know why that number continues to rise. Conducting this research study gave the researcher the data needed to establish reasons and pursue a solution.

Since the researcher is employed in the school where the research study will take place, the researcher bracketed herself as suggested by Moustakas (1994). The researcher was unbiased in the analysis of the data collected. The researcher must “set aside prejudgments regarding the
phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Sitting aside prejudgments will effectively enable the researcher to be receptive and keep a pure perspective throughout the data collection process.

**Data Collection**

**Questionnaire.** A questionnaire was given to obtain knowledge of participants’ demographics, background, and views of self-efficacy and motivation. Most information requested via questionnaire was compiled from the participants’ permanent academic records prior to giving the questionnaire. The reason for having a separate questionnaire was to gage students’ honesty and to acknowledge what they remember in regard to their academic experiences.

**Individual interviews.** One-on-one interviews with another faculty member present were conducted with each participant. These one-time interviews were audio recorded to maintain accuracy. Each participant answered questions formed from the central and supportive research questions, and when willing, elaborated on their lived experiences as it relates to being socially promoted. The answers to these questions gave insight to the participants’ lived experiences. Gaps in the literature were the driving force behind the research questions as well as the questionnaire and interview questions. Face and content validity were addressed. Anastasi (1988) begins a section on face validity as follows:

Content validity should not be confused with face validity. The latter is not validity in the technical sense; it refers, not to what the test actually measures, but to what it appears superficially to measure. Face validity pertains to whether the test "looks valid" to the examinees who take it, the
administrative personnel who decide on its use and other technically untrained observers. (p.144)

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Creswell (2007) stated that phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific themes and statements, and a search for the essence of meanings. The researcher used Moustakas’ (1994) model to accurately categorize and analyze the data collected.

Data was initially collected through administering a questionnaire. Prior to the study, the questionnaire was piloted by administering the questionnaire to two students who met the criteria, but did not participate in the actual study. Piloting enabled the researcher to check for participant understanding of the questions and made sure the questions were worded with familiar vocabulary. The participants who piloted the questionnaire did not hesitate when they responded to the questions on the questionnaire. The researcher asked the students if there were any unclear questions or any words that they did not understand. Each participant agreed that the questions were straight-forward and all words were understandable. Due to the participants’ responses, the questions did not warrant revisions. The questionnaire was completed by the participants in a written format.
Table 3
Participant Questionnaire Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Didn't do what I was told to do. Yes</td>
<td>Because they thought I could do better.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Because of not completing my work. Yes</td>
<td>Because of not wanting to hold back a kid cause they failed a class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Because I could not read that well. Yes</td>
<td>Because I failed more than one or two subjects.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>To get better. Yes</td>
<td>I don't know.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Not doing my work. Yes</td>
<td>I only failed one subject.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Being bad. Yes</td>
<td>Because I did my best.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>I didn't do my work and I was bad. Yes</td>
<td>I was too old to be kept back a third time.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cause I didn't do my best. Yes</td>
<td>Cause I did better in everything but that grade.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions
Q1: What grade are you in?
Q2: How old are you?
Q3: Have you ever been held back in a grade?
Q4: What was your age at the time you were held back?
Q5: Why do you think you were asked to repeat the grade?
Q6: Have you been socially promoted, meaning being able to go to the next grade even though you failed one or more subjects, more than one year?
Q7: If yes, why do you think you were socially promoted more than one year?
Q8: Will you be willing to let me interview you about your experience?

The researcher categorized the participants’ responses by first categorizing the interview questions. The first four questions presented during the interview were written to address the first research question, what does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education? Questions five through eight were written to address the second research question, how are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted? Questions nine through 11 address the third research question, how are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations? The researcher then examined the participants’ responses. Data was also collected through narrative accounts provided by the participants through interviews. As with the questionnaire, the interview questions were also piloted. The participants who piloted the interview questions did not hesitate when they responded to the
interview questions. The researcher asked the students if there were any unclear questions or any words that they did not understand. Each participant agreed that the questions were straightforward and all words were understandable. Due to the participants’ responses, the questions did not warrant revisions. The researcher scheduled interviews with the participants. These interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy. The researcher transcribed verbatim in typed format each interview the day the interview was conducted. The researcher met with the participants after all interviews were completed and transcribed. Each participant was given the opportunity to add, delete or expand their answers based on the transcribed interviews. No changes were requested.

After final transcribed interviews had been thoroughly studied, the researcher identified common themes, keywords, and answers. The data gathered was open coded and broken down into categories and subcategories.

Once saturation was achieved, the point where participant responses neglect to yield new responses, statements from the interviews and questionnaire responses that describe the participants’ experiences were grouped using horizontalization. Horizontalization narrows down the scope of the data into categories. Once these categories were established, commonalities were examined and, in turn, narrowed down more specifically into themes. From these themes, textural descriptions were produced in an effort to understand what the participants’ experiences were like from the participants’ point-of-view (Creswell, 2007). Structural descriptions were also taken from the themes established after horizontalization. Clusters of meaning were developed and analyzed as well. These descriptions focus on how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).
Data Gathering and Recording

After IRB approval was acquired (see Appendix A), the sample of ten participants in this study was acquired from a population of middle school students at Honea Path Middle School in upstate South Carolina. This site was selected due to the researcher’s interest in the state of education in rural school districts. The participants were purposefully selected for the study; they exhibited the criterion established and required to participate in the study.

Data were collected for this study through individual questionnaires (see Appendix E) and interviews (see Appendix F). All participants were interviewed one-on-one and face-to-face at Honea Path Middle School either before or after school hours. Parents of eligible participants were contacted and a thorough explanation of the research study was given. Parents were then asked permission for their child to participate in the research study and to sign a consent form (see Appendix C). Participants were also given a thorough explanation of the research study. Participants were then asked to sign an assent form (see Appendix D) before any questionnaires were given or interviews conducted.

After all consent and assent forms were collected, appointments for interview sessions were scheduled over a two-week period of time. Only two appointments had to be rescheduled due to participants’ absence from school. As the participants, one-by-one, attended their appointments, they were met with a brief introduction of the researcher and the attending faculty member. All participants approved the attending faculty member being present. A questionnaire was given to the participant at the beginning of the interview session. The participant completed the questionnaire in written form and gave it to the researcher. The researcher placed the questionnaire in a folder.
Once the questionnaire was complete, the researcher proceeded with the interview process. An audio recorder was used to record each interview. Interviews were conducted from a list of pre-selected questions. Once the initial questions were asked and a response was given, most participants were not interested in elaborating. Only three participants chose to elaborate on any given questions. The researcher followed the list of questions in the order presented. Pseudonyms were assigned by the school’s guidance counselor to each participant to protect their identities and were maintained consistently throughout the transcriptions and in the chapters of the dissertation (see Table 1).

**Keeping Track of the Data**

The results of the questionnaires were compiled into one, password-protected, electronic, Excel file located on the researcher’s computer. Interviews were recorded with an audio recorder at Honea Path Middle School in the presence of an attending faculty member. The cassette tapes used for audio recordings were placed in a locked filing cabinet after each interview was recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions for each interview were typed the same day the interview was conducted. Participants in the study were then scheduled for a follow-up appointment with the researcher so that the participants could read, review, add or amend their statements made during the interview process. This follow-up appointment allowed participants to clarify any inaccuracies that may have been misconstrued during the interview or transcribing process. When possible the follow-up appointments were conducted the next day. There were no additions or amendments to any interview transcripts by any participants. An attending faculty member was also present during scheduled follow-up appointments.

Typed transcripts were saved in one, password-protected, electronic, Word file located on the researcher’s computer. Copies were also printed in order to more easily disseminate the
information obtained. These hard copies are kept in the same locked filing cabinet as the recordings of the transcripts.

From the aforementioned steps to findings, the essence of the phenomenon was determined. Writing in narrative, the researcher described the essence and summarize the participants’ experiences in regard to the phenomenon studied.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is essential so those who examine the research can see meaning and how those meanings were determined. Credibility ensures that the results are an accurate interpretation of what the participants meant (Creswell, 2007). The data collected during the study was recorded as-is. Dependability was maintained by collecting data using identical techniques and maintaining consistency throughout the study. To ensure transferability, all details of the study will be recorded so as replication can take place.

In this study, to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher showed credibility, transferability and dependability. Using all these aspects led to triangulation of data. The researcher will use rich data and member checks during this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure the privacy of those involved in the study, pseudonyms were used for participants in the study. Confidentiality was guaranteed orally and in writing. The qualitative data was held secure throughout the study in a locked cabinet. Electronic files were password protected. Consent forms were given for parents to sign providing permission for their child to participate in the study with the understanding that the data will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher. Assent forms were given to the students to sign
to show they agreed to participate in the study. Data was strictly used for this study and for no other reason.

A guidance counselor or a teacher was present during all data collection opportunities. Explanation of the timeline of the study, expectations of professionalism, and specific procedures were discussed. It was important that those involved in the study understand the process and what will be taking place throughout the study. Researcher influence was not in practice. The researcher did not have authority over the participants in the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapters one, two and three of this dissertation provides a detailed introduction to the problem addressed by this research, a review of literature related to the topic, and the research methodology used in this study. The research problem presented in chapter one is that there is a lack of sufficient research that clearly identifies and analyzes the experiences of students who have been socially promoted within the public school system. Most encountered research relates to retention. For example, “In terms of academic factors, grade retention was a significant ‘negative’ predictor of academic self-concept and homework completion and a significant ‘positive’ predictor of maladaptive motivation and weeks absent from school” (Martin, 2011, p. 739). Social promotion research was nearly nonexistent. Chapter two provided a review of the literature that included any mention of social promotion that had been conducted over the past 30 years. Chapter three provided a detailed description of the methodology used to select the participants, as well as the data collection process.

Chapter 4 contains an examination of the findings obtained through 10 participant questionnaires and ten one-time, one-on-one interviews all regarding the topic of social promotion in the public middle school. Also included are an overview of the participants, data collection methods, records storage, and a brief biography of each participant. Detailed accounts of each questionnaire and interview, as well as a summary of the findings are also included.

The focus of this research study was to examine the experiences of socially promoted, public school, general education students, who have not been diagnosed with a learning disability. This study was guided by three research questions: 1) What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education? 2) How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation
affected when students are socially promoted? 3) How are students coping socially and
cademically in social promotion situations?

Overview of Participants

The participants in this study ranged from ages 11 to 16. Six males (one African-
American and five Caucasian) and four females (three African-American and one Caucasian)
were represented in the sample. All of the participants lived in the town of Honea Path, South
Carolina. Participants in this study were socially promoted to the next grade level during the
2011-2012 or 2012-2013 school years. Two participants were socially promoted after their fifth
grade year. Three participants were socially promoted after their sixth grade year. Three
participants were socially promoted after their seventh grade year. Two participants were
socially promoted after their sixth and seventh grade years.

Tom

Tom is a 12-year-old African American male who is currently in the sixth grade. He was
socially promoted to the sixth grade although he did not master academic standards in fifth grade
mathematics. When asked why he thought he was socially promoted, he said that they thought he
could do better, “they” meaning his teachers and school administration. Then he experienced
retention in sixth grade. He continues to participate in the school’s after-school program, which
has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Students who are retained are also
required to participate in the school’s after-school program. Tom was also retained in his third
grade year. He felt the reason for his retention was that he did not do what he was told to do.

Tom: Thoughts regarding social promotion.

Tom made it clear that in the future, if his own child was considered for social promotion,
he would completely support the decision. His reasoning is that he would not want his child to be
held back. When asked what he would say to a friend that was socially promoted he said that he
would tell them they did a good job and passed, but they should try harder. Tom also expressed
concern with home life issues, such as being stressed or being in trouble a lot. He felt these
issues may have something to do with the poor grades that led to social promotion. He feels if
someone is socially promoted that he or she may not have “got it” all the way. Meaning he or she
may not have understood academic concepts that were taught. He thought a friend would find out
he or she was being socially promoted via report card, or the school may send a paper home.

**Tom: Effects of being socially promoted.**

Tom believes the best asset in regard to his social promotion was that he passed on to the
next grade level and was not retained. The worst consequence he identified due to his social
promotion was that in his mind he still failed a grade. When asked if it helped or hurt to be
socially promoted, his answer was the same. It helped that he was passed on to the next grade
level and not retained, and it hurt because he still failed a grade. He did not believe that being
socially promoted had any negative or positive effects in his life thus far. When asked about
short-term or long-term effects he responded that there may be some long-term effects in regard
to college entrance. He believes that colleges will investigate his academic records and see that
he failed or was socially promoted.

**Tom: Personal responsibility.**

Tom felt that he deserved to be socially promoted. His reasoning was that he worked hard
throughout the year to bring up his grade average. He mentioned that he was happy he was
socially promoted, but kind of mad also. He feels he was given something for free, that he didn’t
have to work for it.
Jan

Jan is an 11-year-old African American female who is currently in the sixth grade. She was socially promoted to the sixth grade although she did not master academic standards in fifth grade English. She participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Jan has never been retained.

**Jan: Thoughts regarding social promotion.**

Jan believes that in the future, if her child was considered for social promotion, it would have to be a decision thought about thoroughly. It would depend on his or her grades, and she would not want her child to struggle like she did. When asked what she would say to a friend that was socially promoted she said she would tell them to do better. Jan also expressed concern with home life issues. She said that parents may not be home all the time, and they might not be able to help a child study for tests. She also said that if someone is socially promoted that they may have just been given a second chance. She thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted from his or her parents. They would tell him or her that she was being socially promoted.

**Jan: Effects of being socially promoted.**

Jan believes the best asset in regard to her social promotion was getting a second chance to excel. The worst consequence she identified due to her social promotion was that she still technically failed a grade. She felt that being socially promoted could hurt, especially if the students did not know they had actually failed. She felt it helped because she was afforded a second chance. She did not know if being socially promoted would have any negative effects in her life, but she saw a positive effect as that she was given a second chance. When asked about short-term or long-term effects, she responded that there may be some long-term effects in that it
will make her study harder. She also expressed she was very happy she was not held back a
grade.

**Jan: Personal responsibility.**

Jan feels she did not deserve to be socially promoted. She knew she really failed English
and that she was given a second chance. She believes she was given something for free, that she
should have worked harder to earn a passing grade.

**Sally**

Sally is a 13-year-old African American female who is currently in the seventh grade.
She was socially promoted to the seventh grade although she did not master academic standards
in sixth grade English. She participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set
forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Sally has never been retained.

**Sally: Thoughts regarding social promotion.**

Sally believes that in the future, if her child was considered for social promotion, she
would definitely support that decision. She believes that if the child was not smart that they
would need to be passed on in order to get to the next grade. When asked what she would say to
a friend that was socially promoted she said she would tell them to try to do better. Sally
mentioned home life scenarios such as not being able to sleep well or having a death in the
family as reasons why grades were not good enough to pass. She also said that if someone is
socially promoted it may have been because he or she could not learn and the teachers knew that.
That is why the teacher let them pass on. She did not know how a friend would find out about his
or her social promotion.
Sally: Effects of being socially promoted.

Sally believes the best asset in regard to her social promotion was being able to continue to the next grade. She could not think of a worst consequence as a result of her social promotion. She did not believe that being socially promoted helped or hurt anyone. She could not identify any negative or positive effects of social promotion when asked. She explained short-term and long-term effects could be that she might not know what she needed to know, academically speaking. She also expressed she was glad to go to the next grade level with her friends.

Sally: Personal responsibility.

Sally felt she did deserve to be socially promoted. She sometimes believed she was given something for free. She was quick to let the researcher know that the interview was over by saying, “That’s all.”

Allen

Allen is a 13-year-old Caucasian male who is currently in the seventh grade. He was placed into the seventh grade instead of being socially promoted because he did not master academic standards in sixth grade mathematics and science, two core subjects. He felt he was placed because the school did not want to hold a kid back. He participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted or placed. Allen was also retained in his sixth grade year. He felt he was retained because he did not complete assigned work.

Allen: Thoughts regarding social promotion.

In the future, Allen would allow his own child to be socially promoted. He would not want his child to feel sad because he did not pass and then not to do well the next year. When asked what he would say to a friend that was socially promoted he said that he would tell them to
not do it again and to try not to do bad. Home life issues that Allen felt could affect academic performance were moving residences or someone passing away. If a relative died and the student missed a lot of days, the parent could talk to the principal and get him to move the student up. He thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted from the teacher.

**Allen: Effects of being socially promoted.**

Allen believes the best asset in regard to his social promotion was that the teachers and parents did not let him fail. He did not identify the worst consequence as it pertains to his social promotion. He felt that social promotion helped him because if he was not socially promoted he would have been bullied and would have been made fun of. He did not feel he was hurt in any way. A negative effect that he identified was other kids picking on him because he failed but still was able to pass to the next grade. He believed there was a positive effect in getting a chance to do better the next year. He did not believe that being socially promoted had any negative or positive effects in his life. When asked about short-term or long-term effects he responded that there were not any.

**Allen: Personal responsibility.**

Allen felt that he did not deserve to be socially promoted. He mentioned that he was glad his teachers did not hold him back, so he would not be made fun of at school. He felt he was given something for free, and that he felt ashamed because he should have done better.

**Jill**

Jill is a 16-year-old Caucasian female who is currently in the eighth grade. She was placed into the eighth grade instead of being socially promoted because she did not master academic standards in seventh grade mathematic, English and science, three core subjects. Jill was placed into the eighth grade also due to her age and previous bouts with retention and social
promotion. She felt she was placed because she failed more than one or two subjects. She participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted or placed. Jill was retained in fourth grade and once in seventh grade. After failing seventh grade a second time, Jill was placed into the eighth grade.

**Jill: Thoughts regarding social promotion.**

Jill believes that in the future, if her child was considered for social promotion, she would support that decision, but she would not want her child to be socially promoted if he or she were not comfortable with it. When asked what she would say to a friend that was socially promoted she said she would ask her how she would feel if her kid was just placed into the next grade. Meaning that how would her friend feel if her kid did not earn the right to continue to the next grade? Home life scenarios that Jill mentioned that could affect grades were sickness within the family or lack of ability to concentrate and focus. She did not know how a friend would find out about his or her social promotion.

**Jill: Effects of being socially promoted.**

When Jill was asked if she could identify the best asset in regard to her social promotion she said she did not know. She believes the worst consequence in regard to her social promotion is she does not understand why kids are allowed to be socially promoted to the next grade although they really failed. She did not believe that being socially promoted helped or hurt in any way. She could not identify any negative or positive effects of social promotion when asked. She explained short-term and long-term effects could be not realizing that a student just does not move on to the next course in college. She also expressed that she was scared about being placed because she would be experiencing something new.
Jill: Personal responsibility.

Jill said that sometimes she felt she should have been socially promoted, and other times she does not. She does not believe she was given something for free.

Kate

Kate is a 14-year-old African American female who is currently in the eighth grade. She was socially promoted to the seventh and eighth grades although she did not master academic standards in sixth or seventh grade mathematics. She states she does not know why she was socially promoted. She participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Kate was retained once in her sixth grade year. She felt she was retained in order to do better.

Kate: Thoughts regarding social promotion.

Kate believes that in the future, if her child was considered for social promotion, she would support that decision. She felt that since there is a law that says “no child left behind,” it would not be right that everybody else was able to go to the next grade and her child would not get to. When asked what she would say to a friend that was socially promoted she said she would tell them to not worry about what anyone says. Kate believes home life issues, such as parents coming in and out of the home or not having adequate food could affect a student’s grades. She also believes that if someone is socially promoted that the teacher felt sorry for them, and the teacher understood that the student was not stable, and it was hard on the person. She thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted when it was time to register for classes the next school year.
Kate: Effects of being socially promoted.

Kate believes the best asset in regard to her social promotion was she remained with her same friends. The worst consequence she identified in regard to her social promotion was that she missed certain teachers. She felt that being socially promoted could help because it allowed her to stay with her friends. She did not know how it could hurt. Kate believes that being socially promoted would not have any negative or positive effects in her life. When asked about short-term or long-term effects, she responded that there would be none. She mentioned that she felt she was moving with her friends and was not being left behind. She felt it was right to be socially promoted, but in some ways, it was not right.

Kate: Personal responsibility.

Kate feels she did deserve to be socially promoted based on failing just one class, but that she did not deserve it if she failed two or more classes. She believes she was given something for free when she was socially promoted.

Bill

Bill is a 15-year-old Caucasian male who is currently in the eighth grade. He was socially promoted to the eighth grade although he did not master academic standards in seventh grade English. He felt he was socially promoted because he only failed one subject. He participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Bill was also retained in his sixth grade year. He felt the reason for his retention was that he did not do his work.

Bill: Thoughts regarding social promotion.

Bill said that in the future, if his own child was considered for social promotion, he would probably not allow it. He said he had a hard time in English the year he was socially promoted.
and failed English the year before he was retained. He had trouble reading, and he would not want his child to struggle like he did. When asked what he would say to a friend that was socially promoted he said that he would tell him to study twice as hard because it will be tough. Bill said home life issues, such as parents not being home to watch or help kids with homework could be the reason for poor grades. He felt these issues may have something to do with the poor grades that led to social promotion. He felt that if someone is socially promoted that he or she may have been out of school a lot. He thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted at the end of the year on his or her report card.

**Bill: Effects of being socially promoted.**

Bill believes the best asset in regard to his social promotion was being able to stay with his friends. The worst consequence he identified due to his social promotion was having a hard time the next year after he failed English. When asked if it helped or hurt to be socially promoted, his answer was similar. It helped him by allowing him to stay with friends, but hurt him because he was not ready for the next grade. He did not believe that being socially promoted had any negative or positive effects. When asked about short-term or long-term effects he responded that there may be some long-term effects in regard to high school or college performance.

**Bill: Personal responsibility.**

Bill felt that he deserved to be socially promoted. His reasoning was that he did very well in his other classes, and he just messed up in one class. He mentioned that he was happy that he was socially promoted, but later realized he was having a harder time in English class. He feels he was given something for free.
Lee

Lee is a 14-year-old Caucasian male who is currently in the eighth grade. He was socially promoted to the seventh and eighth grade although he did not master academic standards in sixth and seventh grade mathematics. He felt he was socially promoted because he did his best. He participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Lee was also retained in his third grade year. He felt the reason for his retention was that he was being bad.

Lee: Thoughts regarding social promotion.

Lee stated that he would not allow his own child, in the future, to be socially promoted. When asked why, he responded he did not know. When asked what he would say to a friend that was socially promoted he said that he would tell him to do better. Lee believes a new baby in the house or a death in the family could be a reason for bad grades. He also felt if a student is socially promoted that the student tried to learn and do his or her work, but he or she could not do the work, or was not smart enough to do it. When asked how he thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted, he said he did not know.

Lee: Effects of being socially promoted.

Lee believes the best asset in regard to his social promotion was that he was able to go on to the next grade. The worst consequence he identified was that he did not do his best, but he was passed to the next grade anyway. When asked if it helped or hurt to be socially promoted, his answer was that it kind of hurt them, but he did not know why. He also did not know if social promotion would cause any negative or positive effects. When asked about short-term or long-term effects, he responded that there may be some long-term effects in regard to helping him realize he should do his best. He did not feel good about being socially promoted.
Lee: Personal responsibility.

Lee felt that he deserved to be socially promoted a little bit. He feels he was not given something for free, but that he should have done better.

Jacob

Jacob is a 15-year-old Caucasian male who is currently in the eighth grade. He was placed into the eighth grade because he did not master academic standards in eighth grade mathematics or English, two core subjects. He participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted or placed. Jacob was also retained in his second and third grade year. He felt the reason for his retention was that he did better in everything else except math and English.

Jacob: Thoughts regarding social promotion.

Jacob said if his own child was considered for social promotion in the future he would support it. He would want his child to be socially promoted. He said he knows how it is to be older than his friends because he was held back a grade two times. When asked what he would say to a friend that was socially promoted he said that he would tell him or her to hang in there and do the best he or she can. Jacob also felt that home life issues, such as fighting between brothers and not having a set place to do homework could affect grades. He feels if someone is socially promoted that he or she may have tried real hard but just could not do the work. He thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted from the teacher or guidance counselor.

Jacob: Effects of being socially promoted.

Jacob believes the best asset in regard to his social promotion was that he passed on to the next grade level and was not retained. The worst consequence he identified due to his social
promotion was that he did not do his best academically. When asked if it helped or hurt to be socially promoted, he thought it helped, but he did not know why. He did not know if being socially promoted had any negative or positive effects in his life. When asked about short-term or long-term effects, he responded that the short-term effect was being able to stay with his friends and the long-term effect would be having a hard time academically in high school. He mentioned that he wished he had passed on his own but was glad he was able to go ahead with his friends.

**Jacob: Personal responsibility.**

Jacob felt that he deserved to be socially promoted this time around. He did not want to be retained again. He feels he was given something for free, that he knew he did not do well.

**Sam**

Tom is a 14-year-old Caucasian male who is currently in the seventh grade. He was socially promoted to the seventh grade although he did not master academic standards in sixth grade mathematics. He felt he was socially promoted because he did better in all subjects except math. He participates in the school’s after-school program, which has been set forth as a stipulation for being socially promoted. Tom was also retained in his seventh grade year. He felt the reason for his retention was that he did not do his best.

**Sam: Thoughts regarding social promotion.**

Tom made it clear that in the future, if his own child was considered for social promotion, he would try not to let his child be socially promoted. His reasoning is that he would not want his child to go down the same road he did. He said that everyone talks about him and that it stays with him always. He did not classify it as bullying, but being made fun of. When asked what he would say to a friend that was socially promoted he said that he really did not know what he
would say, but he would try to help them out so he or she would not fail again. Sam also expressed concern with home life issues, such as being put down constantly. He felt these issues may have something to do with the poor grades that would lead to social promotion. He feels if someone is socially promoted that he or she may have had a hard time completing work or missed a lot of school days. He thought a friend would find out he or she was being socially promoted via report card, or the teacher may have told him or her.

**Sam: Effects of being socially promoted.**

Sam believes the best asset in regard to his social promotion was that he passed on to the next grade level and was not retained. He identified being behind academically as the worst consequence as a result of being socially promoted. When asked if it helped or hurt to be socially promoted, he said it helped sometimes because it will cause a student to try harder and do a little more. He did not know if it would hurt. He felt a positive effect of social promotion is moving on with friends to the next grade. The negative effect he stated was that those friends would know and say hurtful words. When asked about short-term or long-term effects, he responded that he thought sometimes there may be effects. He did not know what those effects would be. He also mentioned the social promotion he experienced was not too hard on him until some people started saying stuff about him.

**Sam: Personal responsibility.**

Sam felt that he did not deserve to be socially promoted. His reasoning was that he worked hard throughout the year to bring up his grade average. He mentioned that it was not much fun at all and that it was sometimes difficult for him. He also said that sometimes he felt he was given something for free.
The Collective Case

This study looked at ten individuals who were socially promoted, public school, general education students, who have not been diagnosed with a learning disability. They were socially promoted or placed into the next grade level during the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 year. The following is a collection of data from all of the questionnaires and interviews. Through the participants’ experiences of the same event, social promotion or placement, and after final transcribed interviews had been thoroughly studied, the researcher identified common themes, keywords, and answers. The researcher categorized the participants’ responses by first categorizing the interview questions. The first four questions presented during the interview were written to address the first research question, what does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education? Questions five through eight were written to address the second research question, how are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted? Questions nine through 11 addressed the third research question, how are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations? Experiences were then grouped using horizontalization. Horizontalization narrows down the scope of the data into categories. Once these categories were established, commonalities were examined and, in turn, narrowed down more specifically into themes. From these themes, textural descriptions were written in an effort to understand what the participants’ experiences were like from the participants’ point-of-view (Creswell, 2007). Structural descriptions were also taken from the themes established after horizontalization. Clusters of meaning were developed and analyzed as well. These descriptions focus on how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Saturation, the point where participant responses neglect to yield new responses, was reached after eighty percent of the study was complete. The researcher placed the collected data in chart format to
better analyze and present the data. They are presented below. The collective case is a look at those threads and commonalities with an attempt to answer the guiding questions of the research study.

Discussion of the Findings Related to the Research Questions

Question One: What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education?

Socially promoted students were asked if they would allow their own child in the future to be socially promoted. This question was designed to make them ponder on their future while still young enough to remember their own experiences. Seventy percent of the participants expressed that they would want their child socially promoted. Several stated that they would not want their child to feel sad or not be with their friends. Social interaction is paramount during the middle school years. Feeling sad or not being with friends, given as reasons, paints a picture of what they are currently going through or what they have experienced. Others who were for social promotion for their future child had an alternate attitude. Kate stated that since there is a law called “No Child Left Behind,” she did not think it would be right that everybody else was able to go on but her child would have to stay back. Those who would be against social promotion for their child in the future look at their own experiences and see negativity with the practice. Bill was most concerned about his future child struggling in the next grade level, just like he did in English.
Table 4

*Social Promotion for Participants’ Own Future Child and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you allow your own child in the future to be socially promoted?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes. I do not want my child to be held back</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. If he’s not smart it’s the only way he can go to the next grade.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Because of “No Child Left Behind.”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. I would not want my child to feel sad.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe. I would not want my child to struggle.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. I would not want my child to struggle.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The socially promoted student likes to be a cheerleader, so to speak, for those that are in the same situation. They would advise others who have been socially promoted to try harder, do better, and hang in there. Low self-esteem is an important issue in the middle school environment. The advice that was offered shows that the socially promoted student has experienced this type of boost from others, or they have the desire to have this type of support.

Table 5

*Advice for a Socially Promoted Friend and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What would you tell a friend who went through social promotion?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You did a good job.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try harder.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do better.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not do it again.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not worry about it.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study twice as hard.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hang in there.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Socially promoted students tend to experience problems at home that tend to lend to a negative effect on their academic performance. They express many of the same types of concerns
regarding problems at home. The absence of parents in the home and a death in the family were most mentioned. Other reasons given were being stressed out, getting in trouble a lot, fighting among family members, and moving residences can cause frustration for the student that is struggling academically. Participants expressed similar thoughts.

Table 6

*Home Issues and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think things going on at home with a socially promoted friend may have something to do with poor grades?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Stressed out or not sleeping.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Getting in trouble.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Parents not home.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. No help with homework or studying for tests.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Not being able to concentrate.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Fighting siblings.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Not being able to concentrate.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Being put down by parent.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Sickness in the family.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. New baby.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Moving residences.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Death in the family.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given for the social promotion the participants experienced varied. The socially promoted students in this study felt they were socially promoted for various reasons. Many feel their social promotion was caused by not completely understanding the academic material presented or they accumulated excessive school absences. Others felt they were given a second chance to succeed. The participants’ thoughts were centered on these three situations. They also believed that a student would find out he or she was being socially promoted via report card, letter home, or a parent or teacher would inform the student. The standard procedure for
informing a student that they will be socially promoted is on the school year-end student report card.

**Table 7**

*Reasons for Social Promotion and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What reasons do you think your socially promoted friend was socially promoted?</th>
<th>Number of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not understand material.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was given a second chance.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not learn.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close family member died.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School absences.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common themes are evident. The socially promoted student is one that typically wants to be socially promoted if the need arises. They would not choose to be retained. Remaining with their peers is very important to them. They want to be understanding and would offer pep-talks encouraging others that have experienced the same situations. Home life problems tend to contribute greatly to poor academic performance of the socially promoted student. Personal issues going on outside of school hours are many times more important than participating in learning in the school setting. They also have a problem with self-esteem and do not think highly of their academic ability. Many were not aware of, nor understood, the procedures associated with social promotion.

**Question Two: How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted?**

Participants in the study identified many common experiences as a result of their social promotion. Overwhelmingly, the most reported benefit of being socially promoted as per the research participants is they were able to progress to the next grade and stay with their friends.
Being accepted by friends is very important to middle school students. Many even measure their self-worth by how many friends they have. The worst effect of being socially promoted was that they knew they really failed and did not do their best academically. Kate, on the other hand, mentioned that she would miss certain teachers the most. Kate did not necessarily show a concern about not having a good self-image. Her motivation to do well seemed small. She has been socially promoted more than once, and she seemed to understand the routine. Bill expressed that the worst consequence of being socially promoted was having a hard time in English the next year.

Table 8

*Best and Worst Things about Social Promotion and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think a socially promoted friend would say is the best or the worst thing about being socially promoted?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The best thing is I passed.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best thing is that I got a second chance.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best thing is to advance with my friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best thing is not known.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The worst thing is that I still technically failed.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The worst thing is struggling the next school year.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The worst thing is that I did not do my best.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The worst thing is not known.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most participants agreed that being socially promoted helped them. Allen definitely believed being socially promoted helped him because if he had not been socially promoted he would have been bullied and would have been made fun of. Bill acknowledged that yes it did help, but only in the way of staying with friends. He also believed social promotion would hurt someone if he or she is not ready to go on to the next grade. This unpreparedness would result in an unnecessary struggle for the student and could damage self-esteem. An overwhelming forty percent of the participants believed it did not hurt or help to be socially promoted.
Table 9

Social Promotion Helped or Hurt and Their Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think being socially promoted helped or hurt your friend in any way?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It helped because I passed.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped because I was given a second chance.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped because I was made to try harder.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped because I would have been bullied.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped because I stayed with my friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It hurt because I still failed.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It hurt because I was not ready for the next grade.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It did not hurt or help.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Socially promoted students also felt that there would be little, if any, positive or negative effects from being socially promoted. Seventy percent did not know of any positive or negative effects, or they did not think there were any positive or negative effects. Sam mentioned as a positive effect being able to stay with friends, and as a negative effect he mentioned being picked on.

Table 10

Positive or Negative Effects and Their Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did your socially promoted friend experience any positive or negative effects from being socially promoted?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive – Given a second chance.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive – Passed to the next grade.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive – Do not know of any positive effects.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive – No positive effects.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative – Being picked on.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative – Do not know of any negative effects.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative – No negative effects.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Views of socially promoted students as it relates to short-term and long-term effects tend to center around future performance in academics. Tom felt that being socially promoted would shine a negative light when he applies to college. Jill made an interesting point by mentioning that when she takes college courses, professors will not just move her on if she did not pass the course. Others mentioned having a hard time in high school. Forty percent of the participants believed there were no short-term or long-term effects.

Table 11

*Short-term and Long-term Effects and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think there are any short-term or long-term effects of being socially promoted?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindrance of high school performance.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not learning what is needed to be learned.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages better study habits.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindrance of college admission.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindrance of college performance.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No short-term or long-term effects.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question Three: How are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations?**

Socially speaking, participants who have been socially promoted do not note that social promotion was a direct cause of how they perceived their social life. Seventy percent of participants were happy or glad that they were socially promoted. Some felt they thwarted negative social issues by being socially promoted. Allen felt glad because his teacher did not hold him back, and in turn he felt he would not be made fun of. Katie seemed to feel relieved by being socially promoted. She stated she would not want to be left behind. Bill was happy when he was socially promoted, but later he realized how much harder it was the next school year.
### Table 12

*Personal Feelings about Social Promotion and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you personally feel about being socially promoted?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy or glad.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of mad.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashamed.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not that good.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not hard until I was made fun of.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifty percent of the subjects felt they were definitely given something for free by being socially promoted. Thirty percent of participants sometimes felt they were given something for free. Twenty percent of participants felt they were not given something for free. Many felt they could have performed better academically. Lee and Jill both believed they were not given anything for free.

### Table 13

* Thoughts of Receiving Something for Free from Social Promotion and Their Frequencies *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you feel you were given something for free?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little bit.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if they believed they deserved to be socially promoted, Sam and Jan were the only participants that responded with an emphatic “no!” The other participants responded with various responses. Tom felt that he kind of deserved to be socially promoted. He stated that he worked hard to bring up his grade and that hard work, in his mind, earned him the right to be
socially promoted. Jill has mixed emotions. She responded sometimes she does and sometimes she doesn’t. Jacob felt that he deserved to be socially promoted, and his reason was that he had been held back a grade before and he did not want to be held back again.

**Table 14**

*Thoughts of Deserving Social Promotion and Their Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you feel you deserved to be socially promoted?</th>
<th># of times mentioned by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little bit.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above findings shed some light on the proposed research questions. What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in the public education system? Participants reported a variety of responses that were used to describe their experiences to, in turn, help define what it means to be a socially promoted student. How are self-efficacy and motivation affected as a result of social promotion? Participants gave insight on how their experiences affected their self-efficacy and their motivation to apply themselves and succeed academically. And finally, how are socially promoted students coping socially and academically? Participants revealed many clues to point to how they are coping with their social promotion in regard to social and academic issues.

Through the participants’ experiences of the same event, social promotion or placement, common themes were identified and answers to the research questions were revealed.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Participants in this study indicated varied thoughts and feelings in regard to their experiences as socially promoted students. Although some would not allow their child in the future to be socially promoted, the majority would. Empathy for others in the same situation as themselves is apparent in the findings. Home-life issues affect all students, but those who are socially promoted have reported negative situations have a major impact on academic performance. Placing blame on others for short-comings or mistakes is prevalent among the study participants.

Half of the participants reported that the best asset in regard to being socially promoted was that they were able to continue to the next grade. Being able to stay with friends was also high on the list. Few socially promoted students exhibit any remorse or concern with the fact that they were socially promoted. Only one participant revealed that he knew he did not do his best. Two participants mentioned that the worst consequence in regard to being socially promoted was that they knew they really failed, and they also knew they would struggle the following year.

Participants’ responses yield findings that being socially promoted neither helped nor hurt them. Seventy percent of participants also reported that there were no positive or negative effects with regard to social promotion. In regard to short-term and long-term effects of social promotion, forty percent of the participants did not see any short-term or long-term effects. Those that mentioned short-term or long-term effects felt that their high school or college performance would be hindered because they were socially promoted.

Socially promoted students show feelings of happiness about being socially promoted. Only one participant mentioned an academic element regarding being socially promoted.
Participants in the study believe that they were given something for free when they were allowed to be socially promoted. Eighty percent of participants reported that they deserved to be socially promoted.

**Discussion of Findings**

The results of this research study yielded findings to demonstrate what it means to be a socially promoted student in public education. Social promotion is defined as “the practice of promoting a student from one grade to the next on the basis of age rather than academic achievement” (Social Promotion, 2012, p. 714). The participants in the study were middle school students between the ages of eleven and fifteen. The questionnaire was given to gage the participant’s honesty. The questions for the questionnaire were developed after examining participant’s academic records and collecting data, such as age, grade retained if applicable, grade socially promoted. After analyzing the questionnaire results, it was determined that all participants were being honest with their responses. The interview questions were developed from analyzing the literature with the intent of finding the answers to the research questions posed in this study.

What does it mean to be a socially promoted student? The first question posed in the interviews asked, “Would you allow your own child in the future to be socially promoted?” This question delves into the participant’s true feelings regarding social promotion allowing them to answer truthfully by taking themselves out of the light of direct scrutiny and enabling them to comment on a potential future situation. Seventy percent of the participants would allow their child in the future to be socially promoted. There were a variety of reasons given when asked. The most popular answer was that they would not want their child to feel sad. This response acknowledges that they value what they deem to be important, being happy. Thirty percent
would not want their child to be socially promoted because they would not want their child to struggle academically. This response illustrates that some participants evidently struggled during the next school year due to being socially promoted and not mastering the standards presented during their previous year. Although the majority seemed just fine with social promotion, several did not believe that social promotion would be prudent for academic success. These participants acknowledged a deficit after being socially promoted. A Looping classroom environment could go far helping students who struggle academically and are subject to social promotion. Research reveals that as much as a 40-point advantage on standardized tests was seen from students in a looping classroom environment (Reynolds, Barnhart, & Martin, 1999).

Again, to bring the participants out of the light of scrutiny, the participants were asked what they would tell a friend who went through social promotion. As the responses were analyzed, it was easy to see a cheerleader mentality taking shape. The participants’ responses suggest an overwhelming amount of understanding and empathy in regard to those who have experienced the same situation that they experienced. Some of the responses included, “hang in there,” “do not worry about it” and “try harder.” Having empathy for others became apparent while interviewing the participants.

The empathy discovered from the participants during the research study may also flow in the responses regarding home life. When participants were asked if they thought situations at home could influence poor academic performance and lead to a social promotion situation, one hundred percent of participants responded with a definite “yes!” Some of the situations mentioned were being stressed out, getting into trouble, parents not home, homework help unavailable, hard to concentrate, being put down by a parent, a sickness in the family, a new baby in the household, moving residences, and a death in the family. All of the mentioned
scenarios paint a picture. When students are preoccupied by happenings outside the school environment, many times those students do not place a high importance on academics. In turn, they will not achieve academically, and this deficit leads to poor performance, many times in multiple subjects, which throws them in the running for being socially promoted. This consequence is demonstrated as per Anderson School District Two’s Promotion Policy (2009), there are three criteria for grade promotion. The first is to earn a passing grade in all core content subjects (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). The second deals exclusively with social promotion. It states that students must earn passing grades in at least three of the core subjects (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). In addition to the social promotion, the student must participate in an assistive academic program that is provided by the school to assist students in academic deficits.

Phrasing the question, once again, to direct scrutiny away from the participant, when asked what reasons they thought their socially promoted friend was socially promoted, the participants were reflecting upon their own experiences. Half of the participants responded that maybe their friend did not understand the material presented or just could not learn. This response brings into question student assessment during the early years. The main purpose of assessment is to foster learning for all students (Porter, 1995) while guiding the classroom curriculum and instruction. Assessments that effectively collect information regarding the students’ academic progress which demonstrates what they know, how they learn, what they can do, and diagnose potential problems, can help further meet students’ academic instructional needs. Many still fall through the cracks. Participants also made a point about how excessive absences could hinder academic achievement. The correlation between not understanding the material and acquiring excessive absences is a logical correlation. If the student is not in the
classroom, then he or she cannot master the material presented. Another possible explanation given was that the socially promoted friend was given a second chance. This response demonstrates optimism and some appreciation for the opportunity to have a second go at mastery at the next grade level without having to repeat the same grade. Having a death in the family was mentioned, and that participant had experienced the loss of his mother the year before. He was speaking from personal experience.

How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted? The participants conveyed that an asset as a result of being socially promoted was that they passed to the next grade. They were relieved that they did not have to repeat a grade. Other assets that were considered to be the best about being socially promoted were that they were given a second chance and that they were able to advance with their friends. Relief and genuine gratitude were witnessed from some. Others felt like they deserved to be socially promoted. Some of those that felt this way had been socially promoted more than once in their academic career. Participants with this mindset harbor an entitlement mentality. They come to expect to not be held accountable for their actions in regard to their academic performance.

Participants reported that the worst consequence as it pertained to being socially promoted was that they knew they still technically failed the grade. They knew they did not do their best when it came to academics. A sense of regret was shown in regard to not performing to their potential. If these are true thoughts and feelings, it may be the start of getting on the right track to academic recovery. Others noted that they struggled during the next school year. Not mastering the standards required in the previous year had an adverse effect on their academic performance the following year. For example, in mathematics, if students do not know their multiplication facts, they will struggle greatly attempting to master seventh grade mathematics
standards. Mathematic skills acquired in one grade level builds on the skills mastered in the previous grade level. If their mathematical foundation is not a strong one and they do not master skills at the appropriate time, students typically suffer a deficit in that area. Research suggests that interventions that are aligned with standards and that also increase instructional time for those students who are struggling, increase student achievement (American Federation of Teachers, 1997). If school districts revamped their programs by increasing the quality or offering varying types of interventions, the increase in student achievement that is desired may reveal itself.

When assessing whether social promotion helped or hurt the participants in the study, it was found that forty percent of the participants believed that social promotion helped them. A variety of reasons were given, such as given a second chance, made to try harder, would have been bullied, and was able to stay with friends. These participants experienced gratitude, a lesson learned, a relief that they were not put into a bullying situation, and a relief that they were able to stay with their friends. These responses emphasize what is important to a middle school student. Twenty percent of the participants in the study felt that they were hurt by being socially promoted. Reasons given were that they knew they still technically failed, and that they were not ready academically for the next grade level. Forty percent of the participants felt that being socially promoted neither helped nor hurt them in any way they could think of. This response implies that many socially promoted students are indifferent when it comes to pros and cons to being socially promoted.

Participants’ opinions regarding long-term and short-term effects of being socially promoted also varied. They foreshadowed a hindrance in high school academic performance. Some participants reported already witnessing an academic hindrance at the middle school level
due to social promotion. It is easy for one to assume an academic hindrance may follow him or her to the high school level. Some commented that social promotion could encourage an improvement in study habits. If the student truly realizes that more proactive effort is needed academically from him or her in order to succeed, maybe he or she will engage in that needed extra effort. Participants extended this notion by also mentioning that there could be a hindrance with college admission and in college performance. This response displayed an awareness of the future and an awareness of possible consequences from not achieving academically. Forty percent of the participants in the study did not acknowledge any short-term or long-term effects from being socially promoted. This response, again, implies indifference for how social promotion could exhibit short-term or long-term effects. Maybe these participants do not have the ability to predict consequences that may arise in the future.

How are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations?
Several questions were asked in order to arrive at a conclusion. When asked how they felt about being socially promoted, seventy percent of the participants reported they were happy or glad. Being a middle school student and dealing with the emotional and physical changes that are associated with students of this age, it is not surprising that not having to repeat a grade would be appealing, if not utter relief. Thirty percent of the participants collectively had the following responses: “kind of mad,” “ashamed,” “scared” and “not that good.” Socially promoted students also exhibited a glimmer of regret and apprehension when it comes to social promotion.

Were socially promoted students given something for free? Eighty percent of the participants agreed that they were indeed given something for free. They felt that they did not earn or deserve the right to go on to the next grade level, but most were perfectly fine with being promoted without real consequences. In Anderson School District Two, the policy states that a
corrective measure, such as enrollment in the After-School Program, must be taken in order to be socially promoted. Only twenty percent felt that they did not deserve to be socially promoted. This response gives a glimmer of hope that these socially promoted participants realize the importance of education and will put forth more effort to excel academically.

Do you think you deserved to be socially promoted? This question ties in to the previous mentioned question. Just as those who felt they were given something for free, eighty percent of the participants also believed that they deserved to be socially promoted. Only twenty percent of the participants believed that they did not deserve to be socially promoted. This response demonstrates that the majority of socially promoted students believe that they are entitled to be allowed to advance to the next grade level. “Placing students in grades where they cannot do the work sends the message to all students they can get by without working hard” (Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p. 262).

Socially promoted students have an overall positive experience during their social promotion process at the middle school level. Although there were some expressions of disappointment with their own academic performance, most responses reveal that students who experience social promotion feel it did not affect them in an adverse way.

One of the most prevalent reoccurring comments dealt with the ability to stay with their friends. At the middle school level, students are extremely social. More than anything else, they were relieved to be able to continue to the next grade to stay with their friends. They are empathetic to those who have experienced social promotion, which depicts a strong unification with fellow comrades. Socially promoted students experience some type of negativity in the household. This experience is truly a common thread amongst the participants. This characteristic and the shared desire to stay with friends would undoubtedly play a part in the
empathy component. Although socially promoted students exhibit empathy, they are also quick to blame situations or others for their social promotion. Taking the blame for their academic shortcomings was scarcely demonstrated.

The results of this research study also yielded findings to reveal how students’ self-efficacy and motivation are affected when they are socially promoted. Socially promoted students have a higher self-efficacy and higher motivation when socially promoted. The major key factor, once again, is their ability to stay with their friends. Although the motivation did not seem to be there when they were acquiring low grades during the year, the fact they were socially promoted and were able to stay with their friends could potentially be a motivator the following year. Socially promoted students overwhelmingly believed that social promotion neither helped nor hurt them. The neutrality of responses was very matter-of-fact. With identifying the positive and negative effects of social promotion, the results were the same. Self-efficacy and motivation can be altered by the perceived short-term and long-term effects of social promotion. Those effects identified centered on academia. Socially promoted students identify short-term effects as the potential of having a hard time in high school. Long-term effects include a hindrance in applying to college and performing in college. It is logical to assume that if the student has been socially promoted due to a lack of academic success, this trend would follow the student through his or her academic career, unless an intervention takes place.

In addition to the aforementioned, the results of this research study yielded findings to demonstrate how students are coping socially and academically in social promotion situations. Socially promoted students are happy about their social promotion. They are coping well socially as they were able to remain with their friends. Only one participant mentioned an academic
element. The lack of academic-related responses also leads one to believe that socially promoted students are coping well academically. This response may give a glimpse into why there is mostly a lack of concern when it concerns academia. Most participants did not give much feedback in regard to their academic performance. The majority agreed that they were indeed given something for free by being socially promoted and also agreed that they deserved to be socially promoted. With this outlook, it is apparent that socially promoted students are coping fine socially and academically.

**Question One: What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education?**

The findings for question one, as previously shown in Tables 4 through 7, provides great insight into what it means to be a socially promoted student in public education.

**Positive Thoughts Regarding Social Promotion.**

Seventy percent of participants in the study would allow their child in the future to be socially promoted. Thirty percent of the participants would not allow their child in the future to be socially promoted. The majority of socially promoted students seem to feel that if their child had the chance to be socially promoted, they would not have a problem with it. Answering this question gave the researcher insight as to the participants’ true feelings regarding their own social promotion. Ultimately, the majority of participants agree that they should have been socially promoted for an array of reasons.

This research puts forth that socially promoted students would allow their own child in the future to be socially promoted. This response suggests that socially promoted students believe that it is okay to socially promote students even if they are not academically ready for the next grade level.
**Socially Promoted Students as Cheer Leaders.**

All participants in the study relayed the desire to “cheer on” other students who are in their same situation of being socially promoted. This response demonstrates that socially promoted students have empathy for those going through what they may consider to be a negative situation. In turn, these students also seem to desire to have these words of support spoken to them. A bit of understanding and support can go a long way, and it can boost self-esteem.

This research reveals that socially promoted students are cheerleaders when it comes to supporting others that are in a social promotion situation. This fact gives a glimpse into the socially promoted student’s empathy of others. Socially promoted students want to succeed and receive praise, so in turn, they give it to others.

**Issues on the Home Front.**

All participants expressed concern about home-life issues that they experience on a daily basis. All students experienced a variety of situations that they felt hindered academic performance. The most commonly mentioned home-life situations were parents not being home or a death in the family. Thirty percent of participants felt this way. All situations mentioned were negative situations. Other examples of situations were getting in trouble, no help with homework or studying, fighting siblings, and not being able to concentrate. Many, if not all, socially promoted students experience situations in their home or personal lives that negatively impact their academic performance.

This research demonstrates that socially promoted students experience negative situations in the home. These negative situations can promote low self-esteem and poor performance in the academic realm.
Perceived Reasons for Social Promotion.

Socially promoted students have shared ideas of why they were socially promoted. Instances of self-blame are nonexistent. Fifty percent of the participants cited that they did not understand the material presented, and that is why they were socially promoted. Two participants mentioned that they were given a second chance. School absences were mentioned as a reason as many times as a second chance. One participant spoke of losing a close family member. In addition to losing a family member, extensive absences also resulted from that same situation. Looking at the data, it appears that the socially promoted student tends to blame others or other situations for their social promotion somewhat deflecting personal responsibility.

This research reveals that socially promoted students are quick to blame situations or others for their social promotion. They do not see being socially promoted instead of academically promoted as their fault.

Question Two: How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted?

As indicated in the Tables 8 through 11, participants reveal a glimpse into their thoughts of self-efficacy and motivation.

Best Assets and Worst Consequences regarding Social Promotion.

Fifty percent of the participants in this study who have been socially promoted agree that the best asset in regards to being socially promoted was that they passed to the next grade level. Several students have experienced several bouts with social promotion. The majority of the participants were content that they were socially promoted and exhibited little remorse or concern. One participant was excited that she was given a second chance. It was her first time being socially promoted and seemed to truly appreciate the chance to do better. Advancing with
friends was also mentioned. This apparent need to remain with friends seemed to be a major theme with the participants throughout the study.

Thirty percent of the participants could not think of anything that would be considered the worst consequence in regards to being socially promoted. One participant did mention that he knew he did not do his best. Twenty percent of participants felt knowing that they still really failed and struggling the next school year would be the worst consequence in regard to being socially promoted.

This research shows that socially promoted students believe that the best asset in regard to being socially promoted was that they were able to continue to the next grade. The worst consequence was that they knew that they still really failed and will struggle the next school year. This response indicates that self-efficacy and motivation can be harmed with the expectation of future struggle concerning academics. Self-efficacy and motivation is elevated by the fact that socially promoted students stay with their friends.

**Social Promotion Helped or Hurt.**

Responses on whether social promotion helped or hurt students vary. Forty percent of participants believed that being socially promoted neither helped nor hurt. They had a sense of neutrality. Those that believed social promotion helped them listed the following reasons: they were given the opportunity to continue to the next grade, were given a second chance to excel, were made to try harder, not bullied, and were able to stay with friends. Those that believed social promotion may have hurt them, twenty percent, mentioned that they knew they still failed, or that they were not ready to go to the next grade.
This research demonstrates that a large percentage of socially promoted students believe social promotion did not help or hurt them. With those that noted that social promotion helped them, self-efficacy and motivation can be elevated with that realization.

**Positive and Negative Effects of Social Promotion.**

Participants in the study gave few positive or negative effects of being socially promoted. Forty percent noted that they believed there were no positive or negative effects related to their social promotion. Thirty percent noted that they did not know of any positive or negative effects. Those that listed positive effects mentioned being given a second chance and passing on to the next grade level. The only negative effect mentioned was the potential of being picked on the year of social promotion.

This research shows that seventy percent of socially promoted students believe that there were no positive or negative effects or they did not know of any positive or negative effects of being socially promoted. The researcher concludes that socially promoted students do not perceive positive or negative effects when socially promoted. With overall neutrality, the measure of self-efficacy and motivation cannot be measured adequately.

**Short-term and Long-term Effects of Social Promotion**

Of students socially promoted, forty percent did not see any short-term or long-term effects. Of those who identified short-term effects, twenty percent listed experiencing a future hindrance in high school performance. Other short-term effects mentioned were not learning what is needed to be learned and that it encourages better study habits. Long-term effects included a hindrance of college admission. Two participants believed that colleges would be able to find out that they were socially promoted and that knowledge may hinder their admission to college. Once participant mentioned college performance being hindered.
This research suggests that socially promoted students believe that short-term effects of being socially promoted included having a hard time in high school. Long-term effects included a hindrance in applying to college and performing in college. Self-efficacy and motivation can be tarnished when a socially promoted student thinks ahead to high school and college. It could also boost self-efficacy and motivation if they feel they need to improve in order to succeed in high school and college.

**Question Three: How are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations?**

As indicated in Tables 12 through 14, participants reveal a glimpse of how they are coping socially and academically while experiencing social promotion.

**Personal Feelings about Being Socially Promoted.**

Participants in the study revealed few negative feelings in regard to being socially promoted. Seventy percent of the participants expressed feelings of happiness or gladness. Only one participant said he was kind of mad because he was allowed to continue to the next grade, although he was not ready. When he said “not ready” he meant academically. Other feelings mentioned were feelings of being ashamed, scared, not good, and that being socially promoted was not hard until he was made fun of.

This research suggests that socially promoted students are typically happy about being socially promoted. This response demonstrates that socially promoted students are coping well socially with social promotion. Only one participant mentioned an academic element. The lack of responses with an academic element leads the researcher to believe that coping academically is not an important issue for the socially promoted student.
Given Something for Free.

Participants in the study overwhelmingly believe they were given something for free by being socially promoted. These participants knew they neglected to earn a passing grade and being socially promoted was a free pass. Of the eighty percent that believe social promotion was a free pass, fifty percent answered with a definite “yes,” 10 percent answered “a little bit,” and twenty percent answered “sometimes.” Only twenty percent believed that they were not given something for free by being socially promoted. They felt they were entitled because of their specific circumstances.

This research reveals that socially promoted students believe they were given something for free by being socially promoted. This response suggests that socially promoted students are coping well socially with social promotion. As far as academic coping, the participants did not provide much insight. The majority of the participants did not seem to be concerned with the academic aspect of social promotion. This realization leads the researcher to believe that coping academically is not an important issue for the socially promoted student.

Deserve to be Socially Promoted.

Eighty percent of the participants in the study believe that they deserved to be socially promoted. Within that eighty percent, thirty percent answered with a definite “yes”, twenty percent answered “a little bit”, and thirty percent answered with “sometimes.” Only twenty percent believed they did not deserve to be socially promoted.

This research reveals that socially promoted students believe they deserved to be socially promoted. This response demonstrates that socially promoted students are coping well socially with social promotion. As far as academic coping, the participants did not provide much insight. The majority of the participants did not seem to be concerned with the academic aspect of social
promotion. This response leads the researcher to believe that coping academically is not an important issue for the socially promoted student.

Resilience is “an innate capacity that when facilitated and nurtured empowers children, youth and families to successfully meet life’s challenges with a sense of self-determination, mastery and hope ("Kings County," n.d.). Participants in the study have experienced many negative situations in their young lives, such as being put down or a death in the family, but they all exhibited signs of resilience. Several participants reported feelings of regret for not performing academically as well as they should have but vowed to do better next year because they knew they could do better. The cheerleader mentality discussed earlier may help with maintaining resilience at the middle school level. Other students who have experienced social promotion observe others living through the same situation. Often times help and friendship is offered, and knowing that someone cares can make all the difference in the world. Henry and Milstein (2004) discovered that helping students focus on the task at hand in a positive way can help them persevere through many situations. Having a friend that can help a student focus can help boost resilience and self-efficacy.

Self-determination is often a byproduct of resilience. Being resilient often requires self-determination. Participants in the study exhibited what seemed as a “new found” self-determination. Although they did not exude self-determination during the year prior to being socially promoted, they are quick to voice their intention to do better in their classes and study harder. If the students observe their peers engaging in these activities, they too may engage in meaningful activities, such as studying. Wehmeyer (2002) stated that mixing in self-determination promotes the skills needed to set personal goals, solve problems that act as barriers to achieving these goals. All participants expressed a desire to succeed academically. Having a
role model, whether it is a friend who has experienced the same situation or an adult that offers compassion and understanding, could make the difference between academic success and failure.

The Theoretical Framework that guided this study is the Social Cognitive Theory. Albert Bandura (1977) developed this learn-by-observation theory. People learn by observing others and interacting with their world. Bandura (1977) stated, “People must develop skills in regulating the motivational, affective, and social determinant of their intellectual functioning as well as the cognitive aspects” (p. 136). Resilience and self-determination plays a vital role in a successful academic career. Many times these traits can be subdued in students who have been socially promoted.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There are many studies that focus on the positives and negatives of retention. Few studies give social promotion much attention. This study attempted to shed light on the experiences of socially promoted students. The hope is that the completion of this research will open dialogue between scholars and policy makers to better understand the socially promoted student. Further research could include the examination of new interventions that could aid the socially promoted student. Research that studies specific populations in regards to social promotion could also be considered.

Other questions educators and policy makers should be asking are:

- Which students are best served by social promotion?
- Which socially promoted candidate should be considered for retention?
- Do students really benefit and succeed from social promotion?
- What are the long-term effects of social promotion on a child?
- What are the best early interventions to reduce the risk of repeated social promotion?
Conclusion

When reviewing the literature regarding social promotion, very little is available. This research study clearly demonstrates that socially promoted students feel that being socially promoted is an over-all positive experience, especially among those who have been socially promoted multiple times over the course of their academic career. A sense of entitlement arises from several participants while others were grateful to be given a second chance. Socially promoted students show empathy to others who have experienced similar situations. Perhaps this empathy is a reflection of what they themselves would like to experience, someone cheering for their own success which in turn will boost self-esteem. Socially promoted students tend to experience negativity on the home-front with situations that, to the student, are much more important than school. They also tend to blame situations or others for why they were socially promoted. A common theme throughout the study was the importance students place on staying with friends. Middle school students are very social and want to maintain their social situations. Students who have been socially promoted value friendships and list staying with friends as the best asset in regards to being socially promoted. The worst consequence was that they really knew they failed and were allowed to continue to the next grade level. Socially promoted students in the study gave few responses in regard to whether social promotion helped or hurt them or if there were any positive or negative effects from social promotion. The majority of those socially promoted revealed that they were concerned with possible short-term and long-term effects as it pertained to high school and college. They expressed that they may have a difficult time in high school and college-level classes. Despite this, socially promoted students are typically happy that they were chosen for social promotion and tend to cope well socially and
academically. They also feel they were given something for free by being socially promoted, and they feel they deserved to be socially promoted.

Throughout the study, the manner in which the socially promoted participants conducted themselves during the interviews also brought to light some unexpected commonalities among those socially promoted. The demeanor that was exhibited by the participants during the one-on-one interviews was one of introversion. Participants rarely made eye contact and kept responses to a bare minimum. When prompted to elaborate, many participants sat silent. Based on the academic performance that required social promotion, a bare minimum may be what they are used to providing. Participants also tended to use identical vocabulary to describe their experiences. None of the participants seemed to be truly happy about their social promotion. They rarely smiled and many seemed preoccupied with other thoughts. Minimalist responses and introverted demeanors during the interview process revealed a sense of silence. This silence may truly be a cry for help.

This study presented several limitations that could not be controlled. Participants in the study were chosen based on their qualifications to participate in the study. Gender and ethnicity of the participants were random in nature. Age was only limited due to the necessity to be the age to participate in middle school education. Students’ ages were between eleven and fifteen. Students who were from a public school background, home school background, and a Christian school background were not excluded from the participant group. Other limitations in the study were the effects that peer pressure, the onset of adolescence, and social relationships have on the students who were socially promoted.

The results of this study will help improve the understanding of the lived experiences of middle school students who have been socially promoted. Middle school students are vastly
different than elementary and high school-aged students. Socially promoted middle school students seem to have their own separate issues in addition to the usual hormonal and social issues. For example, all participants reported having negative situations taking place in the home environment. Many do not have homework help at home and several commented about the absence of a parent or not having a good role model in the home. Understanding their issues and helping them work through those issues could go far in improving their academic performance and experience.

Having the opportunity to interact with the participants in the study left the researcher pondering many other aspects and points-of-view as they pertain to the socially promoted student. One aspect that revealed itself is the relationships that the students have with other children around the same age that do not go to their school. Those friendships are many times evolved from a lack of parental guidance in the home where rules are loosely enforced and the students seem to raise themselves. Although this is not always the case, it is logical to assume that parental guidance and involvement can deter undesirable behavior and situations. Students of all ages need guidance, direction and structure. Sadly, many times the only place a student will receive guidance, direction and structure is in the school setting. More attention needs to be paid to socially promoted students and the root of their inability to succeed academically. Whether it is an undiagnosed learning disability or instability in the home that hinder academic success, these students deserve productive positive interventions.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 6, 2013

Tammy B. Knight

Dear Tammy,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair Counseling

(434) 592-4054

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

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APPENDIX B

SCRIPT FOR CONTACTING PARENT/GUARDIAN FOR CONSENT

Script: "Hello. My name is Tammy Knight and I am a math teacher at Honea Path Middle School. How are you doing today? I am also a doctoral student at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am currently working on a research study that will attempt to help understand socially promoted students' experiences after they have been socially promoted. I understand that your child has been socially promoted at some point in his academic career. I would like to ask for your permission to have your child to participate in the study. I will give your child a short questionnaire and then conduct a brief interview with your child. The interview will be recorded via audio recorder. If you agree to allow your child to participate, I will send you a letter to sign that states that fact. I will also meet with your child and explain what I explained to you. If your child agrees to participate, I will have him sign a letter that states he is willing to participate. All collected information will remain strictly confidential. If at any time you have any questions regarding the process, please give me a call."
APPENDIX C

PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Your child is invited to be in a research study to examine the experiences of public school students who are socially promoted.

Your child was selected as a possible participant because he or she has been socially promoted at least once during his or her academic career. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to let your child participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by Tammy B. Knight, doctoral candidate at Liberty University.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to find the answers to the following questions: What does it mean to be a socially promoted student in public education? How are students’ self-efficacy and motivation affected when students are socially promoted? How are students coping socially and academically in social promotion situations?

**Procedures:**

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, I would ask him or her to do the following things: complete a short questionnaire and participate in a brief interview. I would also record the interview with an audio recorder. The length of time required for your child to participate is one day.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has several risks: the risks are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are the wealth of knowledge gained to better serve public school students in the future.

**Compensation:**

Your child will NOT receive payment for participation in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The records will remain secure by locking physical files in a cabinet and password protecting electronic files. Physical files will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted after three years, as per research protocol. Data is strictly used for this study and for no other reason.
Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she will be free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Tammy B. Knight. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at (864) 608-9588 or TKnight4@liberty.edu. The research advisor for this study is James A. Swezey, Ed. D. You may contact him at (434) 592-4903 or jaswezey@liberty.edu

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, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

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.

I agree to allow my child to be recorded with an audio recorder.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: ___________________________ Date: __________________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: __________________

IRB Code Numbers: 1634
IRB Expiration Date: 08-06-14
APPENDIX D

ASSENT OF CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?
The name of the study is Public School Social Promotion Policies: Exploring Socially Promoted Students’ Experiences. The researcher is Ms. Knight.

Why are we doing this study?
We are interested in studying what you have experienced during the social promotion process and during the next school year.

Why are we asking you to be in this study?
You are being asked to be in this research study because you have experienced a type of social promotion.

If you agree, what will happen?
If you are in this study, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire, a brief interview, and write three short journal entries answering questions you will be provided.

Do you 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.

Do you have any questions?
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  Date

Tammy B. Knight
TKnight4@liberty.edu  -  (864) 369-4020

Liberty University Institutional Review Board,
Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair,
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502
or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions. If you feel uncomfortable about any of the questions, please feel free to move to the next one.

1. What grade are you in?

2. How old are you?

3. Have you ever been held back in a grade?

4. What was your age at the time you were held back in a grade?

5. Why do you think you were asked to repeat the grade?

6. Have you been socially promoted, meaning being able to go to the next grade even though you failed one or more subjects, more than one year?

7. If yes, why do you think you were socially promoted more than one year?

8. Will you be willing to let me interview you about your experience?

Pseudonym: ____________________________________________
APENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – STUDENTS WHO WERE SOCIALLY PROMOTED

1. Would you allow your child in the future to be socially promoted? Can you tell me why you feel that way?

2. What would you say to a friend that went through social promotion? How would you advise him or her?

3. Do you think things going on in a socially promoted friend’s family or home may have something to do with poor grades? What kinds of things do you think would affect the friend?

4. What reasons do you think your socially promoted friend was socially promoted?

5. How do you think your socially promoted friend would find out that he or she was going to be socially promoted?

6. What do you think your socially promoted friend would say the best and/or worst thing about socially promoted?

7. Do you think that being socially promoted helped/hurt your socially promoted friend in any way?

8. Did your socially promoted friend experience any negative/positive effects from being socially promoted that you know of?

9. Do you think there are any long-term or short-term effects from being socially promoted? 
   Probe: Did you struggle in your next grade level?

11. How did you personally feel about being socially promoted?

12. From your perspective, how do you feel about being socially promoted?

13. What else would you like to tell me about your social promotion experience?