

# THE EFFECTS OF MANDATED THIRD GRADE RETENTION ON STANDARD DIPLOMA ACQUISITION AND STUDENT OUTCOMES OVER TIME: A POLICY ANALYSIS OF FLORIDA'S A+ PLAN

Dr. Kathleen Jasper | Dr. Cecil Carter | Dr. Rober Triscari | Dr. Thomas Valesky

## 3rd Grade Retentions

In 2003-2004, across Florida, over 23,000 3rd grade students were retained in accordance with the retention mandate in Florida's A+ Plan. In some Miami-Dade Public Schools, 50% of third graders were retained.

## Did students catch up?

In a study of third graders in Southwest Florida, 93% of the retained group in the study remained below a level 3 on the Grade 10 Reading FCAT. In addition, 67% remained at a level one on the Grade 10 Reading FCAT.

Further, 41% of the retained students did not graduate with a standard high school diploma.

## What did it cost?

Between 2003-2013, it cost Florida tax payers approximately \$587 million FTE funding for the retained students.



## Summary of the Research

In a study of first, third, and sixth graders, researchers asked students to rate a list of 20 stressful life events based on level. Researchers found students, across grade levels, rated the top three stressful life events in this order: losing a parent, going blind, and being retained in school (Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple 2005; Andrew, 2014). Sixth grade students rated grade retention as the most stressful life event, rating retention more stressful than losing a parent or going blind. (Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple 2005).

Researchers in other studies found students who were retained faced difficulty in catching up to their peers, achieving academically, and obtaining a high school diploma (Anderson, Jimerson, & Whipple, 2005; Andrew, 2014; Fine & Davis, 2003; Jimerson, 1999; Moser, West & Hughes, 2012; Nagaoka, 2005; and Ou & Reynolds, 2010).

However, in 2003-2004 approximately 23,000 third graders were retained in Florida under the third grade retention mandate outlined in the A+ Plan. This was an effort to increase student achievement by increasing the use of accountability measures.



### Standard Diploma Acquisition

The non-retained group were 14.7% more likely to graduate with a standard diploma than the retained group.

### Retention Demographics

Approximately 6% of white students were retained while 20% of nonwhite students were retained.

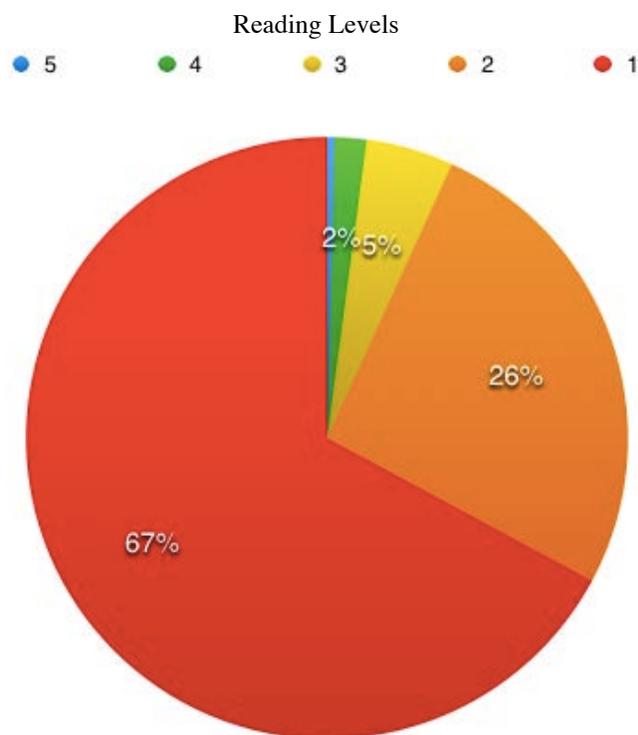
Of the students retained in 2003-2004, 69.8% were on free or reduced price lunch.

### Significance

There was a statistically significant difference between retained students and non-retained students regarding Grade 10 Reading FCAT mean scale scores (.000). There was also a statistically significant difference between ethnicity and Grade 10 Reading FCAT scores (.003).

The current study includes an examination of educational outcomes of students retained in a large southwest Florida school district under the A+ Plan in 2003-2004. Researchers used a match control group, consisting of similarly non-retained students, who scored at level one on the Grade 3 Reading FCAT. The control group was compared to the retained group. Also compared were student achievement levels on the Grade 10 Reading FCAT of the retained and non-retained group. This provided longitudinal data to examine whether or not students who were retained increased their reading achievement over time.

Longitudinal data was evaluated for both the retained and non-retained students. Researchers found 93% of the retained students continued to score below proficiency (below a level 3) seven years after retention on the Grade 10 Reading FCAT as compared with the 85.8% of the non-retained students. See chart below.



Grade 10 Reading FCAT Scores: 7 Years after Retention

Also examined in the study was standard diploma acquisition of the retained and non-retained group. The non-retained group was 14.7% more likely to obtain a standard high school diploma than the retained group.

# Economic Outcomes

Economic outcomes were extrapolated using the data from this study and the data from previous economic studies. If the averages used in this study were applied to the 23,348 retained students in 2003-2004, 41% of the 23,348, did not graduate with a standard diploma; approximately 13,730 did not receive a standard high school diploma. These students' failure to receive a standard diploma resulted in loss of wages. After evaluating the 13,730 who did not receive a standard diploma and using the 2010 U.S. Census employment by education level data, researchers found Florida students earned 33% less than they would have if they had obtained a high school diploma. The total difference in total combined loss in earnings was approximately \$141 million per year.

# Research Questions

1. How did state-mandated third grade retention policies, under the A+ Plan, impact standard diploma acquisition in retained students as compared to academically similar non-retained students?
  - ✦ Students who were not retained were 14.7% more likely to receive a standard high school diploma.
2. How did the retained group compare to the similar non-retained group on the Grade 10 FCAT Reading?
  - ✦ Both groups had difficulty catching up. In the retained group, 93% remained below proficient into their 10th grade year. In the non-retained group, 85.8% remained below proficient.
3. How did socioeconomic status and ethnicity impact retention rates of certain groups?
  - ✦ Students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to be retained than white students and students who were not from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
4. Based on the data, what was extrapolated, in terms of economic outcomes, when evaluating consequences of students who were unable to acquire a standard high school diploma as a result of the A+ Plan?
  - ✦ The district spent \$587 million on FTE for retentions between 2003-2013.
  - ✦ The total difference in combined loss in earnings was approximately \$141 million per year.