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## A study of Failure and Non-promotion in the Yakima Elementary Schools

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A STUDY OF FAILURE AND NON-PROMOTION  
IN THE YAKIMA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by  
Willis Gayer Graham

A study submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master  
of Education in the Graduate  
School of the Central  
Washington College  
of Education

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APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the incidence of pupil failure and non-promotion of a group of elementary school children. This can be determined by (1) finding the number and percentage of pupils who failed at some point from First Grade through Fifth Grade, and who now are enrolled in the Sixth Grade of the elementary schools of Yakima, Washington, (2) finding the annual rate of failure of this group of children, (3) determining the number of pupil failures that occurred, including a record of failing pupils who failed once, twice, or three or more times, and (4) ascertaining the age distribution of this group.

There has been for many years a difference of opinion among educators in regard to promotional practices and procedures in the elementary schools of the United States. Various studies have been made of the problem involved, with some of the original differences yet prevailing.

Two sharply-drawn theories of educational procedure dominate all discussions of pupil progress through the elementary schools. These two theories, and varied phases of them, will undoubtedly oppose each other for some time to come. First and oldest among these theories is what

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may be called the "grade-standards" method of school operation. This method involves the setting up of norms for each of the six elementary grades, with a body of essential knowledge for each which can be parceled out.

Directly opposing the grade-standards theory is one which Elsbree<sup>1</sup> terms "the modern theory of school progress."

According to this, pupils should be taken at the age of six years, and for six years receive educational opportunities<sup>2</sup> suited to their needs. Elsbree points out that pupils fail to understand the chain of events leading up to the experience of non-promotion. Age-grouping and normal progress are more consonant with sound mental hygiene principles than the old grade concept which still prevails in American schools. The modern trend is to treat children as individuals and evaluate their progress in terms of the pupils' capacities, not by comparing them with others.

While agreeing, in substance, with those who believe that non-promotion as a practice causes more ills than it

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1. Elsbree, W. S., Pupil Progress in the Elementary School. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943, p. 23.
  2. Elsbree, W. S., "School Practices That Help and Hurt Personality." Teachers College Record, 43: 24-34, October, 1941.



<sup>1</sup>  
cures, Stroud is inclined to sound a word of warning. He believes that since non-promotion as a practice actually exists each case should be settled on the basis of all available facts.

As an instance, the decision for non-promotion may depend upon its acceptance by the pupil to the extent that he can live with his family without threat to his sense of security in the home. It is possible that in some cases the pupil has formed close friendships and is otherwise closely integrated with the social life of its members both in school and at home. Such an event would be an argument in favor of promoting him. In other cases a pupil might have no such attachments or might even welcome other classmates. It is such factors as these which the teacher, principal, school psychologist, and the visiting teacher<sup>2</sup> should consider in promotion and non-promotion.

<sup>3</sup>  
LeBaron divides promotional theory in the elementary schools into those based on grade-standards (grade hurdles),

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1. Stroud, James B., Psychology in Education. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, Inc., 1946, pp. 423-24.
  2. Ibid., pp. 423-24.
  3. LeBaron, Walter A., "Some Practical Techniques in Developing a Program of Continuous Progress in the Elementary School." Elementary School Journal, 46: 89-96, October, 1945.

those concerned with the continuous progress of the child, and those concerned with his continuous promotion. Further<sup>1</sup> confirming this disparity of thought, Otto and Melby believe the problem of pupil failure or non-promotion in school has been a crucial issue in school administration throughout the history of elementary education in the United States and Anfinson<sup>2</sup> confirms this.

Thus the policy of promotion and non-promotion, or some type of periodic re-classification of pupils has<sup>3</sup> apparently long been in existence. Otto comments upon its establishment in elementary school practice in the same schools of the Colonial period. The problem before those charged with the educational welfare of America's youth is thus phrased by Bossing:<sup>4</sup>

When education was restricted to the few, and these somewhat selected, there was little consciousness of peculiar learning difficulties.

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1. Otto, H. J., and Melby, E. C., "An Attempt to Evaluate the Threat of Failure as a Factor in Achievement." Elementary School Journal, 35: 588-96, April, 1935.
  2. Anfinson, R. D., "School Progress and Pupil Adjustment." The Elementary School Journal, 41: 507-14, March, 1941.
  3. Otto, H. J., Elementary School Organization and Administration. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1941, p. 198.
  4. Bossing, Nelson L., Teaching in Secondary Schools. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942, p. 602.

As the democratic conception of education began to crowd our elementary and secondary schools with youth of every sort, attention was called to the disparity in learning achievement, and the excessive mortality among the students who started in school, but finally dropped by the wayside.

1

Robinson speaks of this early period as one in which failure was something to be taken for granted. No defense was required on the part of the school. Teachers firmly believed that without the threat of failure, the quality of school work would depreciate and standards of achievement reach zero. Failing was an insurance against low standards and used as an essential motivating device. With the appearance of secular Sunday schools in the United States in 1891, and the establishment of four "classes" of public primary schools in Boston in 1818,<sup>2</sup> Otto credits the concept of grading and promotion as becoming an essential characteristic of the educational program. The same writer also comments, "It is likely that, with the establishment of the graded school in 1848 and its subsequent universal adoption, the segregation in separate grades and separate classrooms of

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1. Robinson, B. B., "Failure Is Too Costly for the School Child." *Parents' Magazine*, 11: 22-23, 55-57, January, 1936.
  2. Otto, H. J., Elementary School Organization and Administration. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1941, pp. 199-200.

pupils of about the same age and attainments gave greater significance to the promotional policies of a school."

In Ayres' classic, "Laggards in Our Schools"<sup>1</sup> is further brought out the strength of the popular conception of grading and promotion upon the educational mind.

There is a feeling among school workers, not always or even often expressed, but generally more or less forcibly present, that retardation is a symptom of good schools. There are many teachers and some principals who feel that to promote few of their pupils is a sign that their standards of work are so high that none but the best pupils can attain them.

Terming non-promotion to be the "center of the progress system,"<sup>2</sup> Caswell gives some of the major assumptions underlying non-promotion to be that it maintains high achievement standards, that it makes instruction easy by having all the children in class approximately equal in achievement, that it makes pupils work harder and achieve more than they otherwise would, and that it protects society from individuals who are supposed to be educated but are not.

That these individuals, educated or uneducated, are members of society, as equal in the eyes of the law, as rightfully possessed of the franchise and as rightfully

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1. Ayres, Leonard P., *Laggards in Our Schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1909, p. 199.
  2. Caswell, Hollis L., Education in the Elementary School, Field Studies No. 4, Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1933, p. 261.

allowed to cast it for minister or gangster, or any degree of public servant between, seems not to have occurred to the early proponents of the policy of non-promotion.

<sup>1</sup>  
Bunker reveals:

Of every one hundred children annually entering the first grade of our schools, practically all reach the end of the fifth grade. Between this point and the first year of high school, from 60 to 70 per cent of those reaching the fifth grade will be lost, leaving but from seventeen to twenty-five of the original one hundred pupils who will reach the second year of high school. Out of this number, only from eight to ten will finally complete the high school course.

An added factor in confusing the total picture of pupil-failure in the elementary schools is the common method of indicating failure by grades. Stroud takes note<sup>2</sup> of this in making an analysis of failures in the rural elementary schools of Iowa, with the following results:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Failure Rate</u>
I. ....	6.20
II. ....	4.37
III. ....	4.55
IV. ....	4.78
V. ....	4.66
VI. ....	2.79
VII. ....	3.44
VIII. ....	2.51

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1. Bunker, Frank, F., quoted from Gruhn, William T., and Douglass, H., The Modern Junior High School. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1947, pp. 31-32.
  2. Stroud, James B., "How Many Pupils Are Failed?" Elementary School Journal, 47: 316-22, February, 1947.

1

The figures as shown by Stroud indicate the rate of failure in each grade for one school year and in themselves do not seem high. Averaging these, a rate is obtained for a particular school year only; but these pupils have been, or will be in seven other grades, in each of which a certain percentage have failed, or will fail. Assuming 1,000 pupils as entering Grade I on the basis of the table given it may be expected there would be sixty-two failures in that grade. Added to the remaining 938 pupils promoted are forty-four pupils who failed in Grade II, for a new total of 982. Again using the indicated percentage figure and carrying this procedure throughout the eight grades, there are 328 failures per thousand pupils who enter Grade I. This indicates the number of "pupil failures," but not the number of "different pupils failed," since a considerable proportion of pupils who fail, fail more than once. From the point of view of the administrator, it is important to know how many pupils are failed each year, as trends can thus be assessed, the comparative rate of failure in the different grades may be determined, or one school system or state or region may be compared with another.

Data concerning pupil-failure and non-promotion of the subjects concerned in this study were gathered from the cumulative records which were filed in the central offices

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1. Stroud, James B., op. cit.

of each of the nine elementary schools. These cumulative records were of sixth grade pupils, and their records were traced backward to the time of their entrance. Information gathered from these cards included, (1) name, (2) age of the student as of October 1, 1949, (3) date of birth, (4) promotion and failure information as indicated on a year-to-year basis for each student as he advanced from first grade through the fifth grade. These cumulative records indicated whether the child was promoted or retained. This data furnished the investigator with information concerning the incidence of pupil failure and non-promotion on a year-to-year basis for each pupil.

So that the reader will understand what the investigator is trying to convey, a definition of terms is given:

Non-Promotion. This may be defined as, non-acceptable work done by a pupil in consequence of which he is required to repeat the grade.

Retardation. The extent to which a pupil is behind the grade in which he would normally fall by chronological age.

Acceleration. The opposite of retardation, this may be considered to be the extent to which a pupil is ahead of the grade in which he would normally fall by chronological age.

Under-Age--Over-Age. The definitions given by Yeager<sup>1</sup> are used for the purpose of this study. They are as follows:

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1. Yeager, William A., Administration and the Pupil. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 196.

If he (the child) is under six years of age when admitted to the school and has advanced through more than one grade during any one year, he is said to be under-age or accelerated. If admitted later to first grade, or detained in any grade for more than a year, he is over-age or retarded.

Over-ageness may also be used as a tentative basis for estimating the percentage of pupils failed, though there are two opposing sources of error. Some pupils are retarded for other reasons than failure, such as entering school at a later age, or may be failed for one or more semesters and yet be in normal grades for their ages because of having entered school at an early age or catching up with their grade after having failed.

It is believed a study of this kind will have educational significance since actual determination of pupil failure and the percentage of failure as they are part of public school promotional policies will become apparent. The schools can then develop a constructive pattern and policy concerning promotion, since it has been shown that schools which have a high percentage of pupil-failures are doing no better job of instruction than those which have a low percentage of pupil-failure.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Stroud, J. B., Psychology in Education. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, Inc., 1946, p. 424.



## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO THE PROBLEM

The literature which appeared to be pertinent to the problem has been surveyed from the time of Ayres' classical study to the present year. The abundance of literature dealing with failure and non-promotion deemed it wise to list these materials surveyed in chronological development. This was done to illustrate that the problem of failure and non-promotion has been one of long standing, and one that will in all possibility not be solved overnight.

The earliest comprehensive investigation of non-promotion and failure in city school systems was made by Leonard Ayres<sup>1</sup> in 1907-1908. From this study Ayres concluded that the rate of non-promotion in the city school systems varied from ten to thirty-four per cent, with the average rate of non-promotion for all grades being sixteen per cent. The rate of non-promotion was significantly higher in the first grade than in the others, and was significantly higher for boys than for girls. Ayres introduced the factor of population into the picture of pupil progress by quoting the annual death rate for ages

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1. Ayres, Leonard P., Laggards in Our Schools. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

five to fifteen years as 3.7 per 1000. At that time this population factor would cause a decrease of from twenty-six or twenty-seven children in the progress of 1000 pupils from the first to the eighth grade. Joined with this and equally operative are the factors of elimination--the dropping out or removal from school--and of retardation or non-promotion--the halting of orderly progress from grade to grade.

It is well to note here that the vital statistics from which Ayres made his deductions no longer prevail, but the procedures are worthy of note in future studies of the kind. In addition to bringing forward the problem of the retarded child, Ayres called attention to the fact that there were many who were accelerated--that is, completed the course of eight elementary grades in less than normal time. It has been argued that this is the successful converse of retardation, and that between the two there is an average group which adequately performs the requirements of the eight elementary grades in eight years. This is an unsafe assumption, as the number of children who make slow progress is far greater than the number who make rapid progress.

Ayres believed there were also economic conditions to consider in the problem of non-promotion and failure in the

elementary schools. Among the 1,900,000 children in the cities included in his study, there were 300,000 retarded. Some administrators view the falling off in numbers from grade to grade as a test of the efficiency of school systems; but it could as well be considered evidence of a failure on the part of the schools to do the job for which they were designed. There is also the danger of confirming the pupil in the habit of failure so that he expects nothing else but failure.

Success is necessary to every human being. To live in an atmosphere of failure is tragedy to many. . . The boys and girls. . . who are resolute, who are determined to do and sure that they can do, will do more for themselves and for the world than those who come out with far greater intellectual attainment, but who lack confidence, who have not established the habit of success but within whom the school has established the habit of failure.<sup>1</sup>

2

The New York City survey of 1912 showed the rate of non-promotion to be approximately 11 per cent, with the rate of non-promotion in Grade One significantly higher than in the other grades. The rate of non-promotion was found to be higher for boys than for girls.

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1. Ibid., p. 220.

2. Report of Committee on School Inquiry, Board of Estimate and Apportionment, City of New York, 1911-1913, Vol. I, pp. 560-562, summarized. As quoted from Caswell, Hollis L., Education in the Elementary School, 1942.

1

In Berry's investigation of 227 cities and towns in Michigan, he found 6.5 per cent of the pupils under-age, 65.5 per cent at age, and 24 per cent over-age. The percentage of retardation was found to be almost four times that of acceleration. This investigator noted that the first grade had the largest number of repeaters. Nearly 14 per cent of the group failed. The fourth grade had nearly 10 per cent of its pupils repeating. A significant point Berry mentions is that much of the acceleration is due to early entrance. He believed that a similar or larger per cent of repeaters should cause the principal or superintendent to analyze his promotional policies to determine where the real cause of failure existed.

In an experiment of trial promotion of 1276 pupils who might otherwise have failed, Buckingham reports only fifty-nine of the entire group had to be placed on probation as much as three times. He believed such a program would offer interesting and important possibilities

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1. Berry, Charles Scott, "A Study in Retardation, Acceleration, Elimination and Repetition in the Public Elementary Schools of Two Hundred Twenty-Five Towns and Cities of Michigan." Seventy-Ninth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Michigan.

in administration. The school policy called for a definite program of aid for these pupils who might otherwise have<sup>1</sup> been failed.

<sup>2</sup>  
Mort says:

The standard percentage of failure should be zero, and every teacher should feel called on to explain, in terms of the failure of the school in placing the individual, the failure of a pupil to do his best, or in terms of his own instruction the cause of the failure of any pupil. If it is the school's fault in placement, the course of the pupil should be altered. If it is the pupil's fault, he should become a case for careful clinical investigation. If it is the teacher's fault, he should take steps to improve his instruction, or to find work where his failures will be of less consequence to others.

<sup>3</sup>  
Heck's study of failure and non-promotion concluded that the median of failure was 9.1 per cent in twenty-five cities which reported. Failure was highest in Grade I, and the least in Grade IV in seventeen of these cities.

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1. Buckingham, B. R., "An Experiment in Promotion." Journal of Educational Research, 3: 326-335, May, 1921.
  2. Mort, Paul R., The Individual Pupil in the Management of Class and School. New York: American Book Company, 1928, pp. 173, 182.
  3. Summarized from Arch O. Heck, Administration of Pupil Personnel, pp. 357-60, Ginn and Company, Boston, 1929. As quoted from Caswell, Hollis L., Education in the Elementary School, 1942.

Speaking from the standpoint of the psychiatrist,  
<sup>1</sup>  
 Bassett argues for provisions for early care of maladjustments. Exposing children to repeated failures may permanently warp their personalities and outlook on life, and may even result in mental disease. All school efforts should be pointed toward giving the child a sense of social value, and habits of cheerful, persistent effort.

<sup>2</sup>  
 In Adams' study forty-one teachers were requested to submit to the superintendent's office written statements giving explanation and justification for the various percentages of failure in their classes for the first semester of 1929-30. It was found that one-third of the causes given by teachers for excessive failure were not the sole responsibility of teachers. Of the other two-thirds, 56 per cent relate to standards of pupil-work being too high. Almost no evidence was offered to show that the proficiency of the pupils was low, or that standards set were reasonable. The opinion of the teacher therefore became the sole criterion.

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1. Bassett, C., "School Success, an Element in Mental Health." Journal of the National Education Association. 20: 15-16, January, 1931.
  2. Adams, W. L., "Why Teachers Say They Fail Pupils." Educational Administration and Supervision. 18: 594-600, November, 1932.

Lack of interest on the part of pupils, is in the minds of teachers a large cause for excessive failure, and evidence was found that teachers still use failure as an inducement to better work. The investigator concluded that teachers were not using sufficient objective criteria to substantiate and supplement their own subjective opinions regarding pupil abilities and accomplishments. He took this to indicate that tests and measurements courses in training schools were not functioning in every-day school practice. Further, since a large amount of failure is caused by forces entirely outside the reach of the teacher and the pupil, Adams recommends that training courses should be offered which cover remedial work on these causes.

In a comparison of studies grouped in an editorial in the Elementary School Journal, the writers note that the average slow learners are failed occasionally because it is believed that otherwise they would merely skim work. As a matter of fact the pupil may not have the mental ability to master the work in any amount of repetition. The four studies made by Cheyney and Boyer are cited to show that schools with high promotion rates are more efficient than those with low promotion rates. Higher promotion and lower retention schools have pupils who

learn more per year of school life. It was also found that it is the pupil's low rate of learning, and not his low level of achievement which is a barrier to his success.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>  
Mort and Featherstone studied the same problem in Grades I, V, VII, X, and XII in thirty-six communities, eighteen of which employed annual promotion and eighteen semi-annual promotion. They found the tendency to fail more boys than girls, with failures for both sexes higher in the first grade, diminishing steadily toward the upper grades. The mid-year entrance classes showed a higher ratio of repeaters. Mort questioned awareness of individual differences of the teachers who had a high failure-rate in their classes. He maintains it is difficult to justify failing a pupil when all the facts are known, for often errors of the most serious nature occur in judging achievement and ability.

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1. Elementary School Journal, "Is Non-Promotion a Defensible School Policy?" 33: 647-651, May, 1933.
  2. Mort, Paul R., and Featherstone W. B., Entrance and Promotion Practices in City School Systems: Standards and Accounting Procedures, pp. 46-49, summarized. Teacher College, Columbia University, New York, 1932. Quoted from Caswell, Hollis L., Education in the Elementary School, 1942.



1

Caswell found that grade groups in schools with high rates of slow progress tended to be no less variable in achievement than grade groups in schools with lower rates of slow progress. Also, schools with a rather large amount of retardation could be reorganized at once to eliminate all retardation without materially affecting normal school procedures. It was found that psychologists generally agreed that economical and effective learning requires that the learner have a purpose which he believes he can achieve, a clear idea of what he needs to do to realize his purpose, and opportunity to observe the success or failure of his activities.

Non-promotion of elementary school children often violates these requirements. These violations are indicated not only by reasoned deductions, but both by the observation of competent educationists and by experimental studies which show that non-promotion influences unfavorably achievement in school subjects. Non-promotion not only affects unfavorably, as a rule, the subsequent school work of children, but when repeated, often affects unfavorably their personality, causing them to develop undesirable defense mechanisms against failure. In a word, non-promotion is a type of failure that tends to deaden, disillusion, and defeat the child.<sup>2</sup>

Caswell shows that non-promotion is not an individual administrative problem but leads into the whole field of classifying pupils and regulating progress. This should

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1. Caswell, Hollis L., Non-Promotion in Elementary Schools. Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1933, pp. 66-67.
  2. Ibid., p. 81.

lead into a larger perspective of a truly democratic education which provides boys and girls educational opportunities adapted to their respective needs. Steps that may be taken are as follows:

1. Determine the status of pupil progress in the given school system.

2. Study the theories that may be employed in regulating pupil progress.. Upon the basis of this study decide what theory should be accepted for guidance in the given school or school system and evaluate in the light of this theory the condition found in Step 1.

3. Formulate progress policies growing out of the accepted theory, such policies to be used as guides in the given school or school system in regulating pupil progress.

4. Determine what data are needed for the intelligent application of the policies stated under Step 3. Collect these data, arrange them in usable form, and make them available for use.

5. Apply policies, observe their operation, test the results and revise as need is indicated.<sup>1</sup>

In his analysis of seven states and thirty-seven cities in 1933, Caswell found a variation in failure-rate of from 2 to 20 per cent, with the average for all grades approximating 10 per cent. He reported regional differences in the use of non-promotion and that in schools in the same system differs by as much as 30 per cent. The rate of non-promotion was also found to be higher in Grade One

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1. Ibid., p. 93.

than the other grades, higher in "B sections" than "A sections," and higher for boys than for girls. Though the major characteristics of non-promotion practice remain in numerous schools the amount of non-promotion has been somewhat lowered during recent years. This investigator also reports on the effects of non-promotion on personality traits.

Evidently non-promotion often results in depression and discouragement. This emotional state leads in turn, to distrust of ability and very often to expectation of further failure. The vicious circle thus started is apt to lead to increased gloom and attitudes of failure. This results particularly when an individual cannot discover relationships between activities and outcomes and hence sees no road to success. Non-promotion as we have pointed out, is this type of failure.<sup>1</sup>

2

It is claimed by Wilson that newer elementary education practices are designed to coddle the child; while Tildsley is of the opinion that abolition of non-promotion practices is a step in this direction since it removes a means of developing in the pupil a sense

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1. Ibid., pp. 288-89.

2. Wilson, L., "Training or Coddling." School and Society, Vol. 42: 742-744, November, 1935.

3. According to Tildsley in the New York Sun, as quoted by McAndrews, W., "Service or Sieve." School and Society. Vol. 42: 609, 1935.

of responsibility for his acts. Goodman further points  
 out the need for perfect performance and adherence to  
 grade standards. Francis and Templin claim in their  
 reports that non-promotion is not so tragic as supposed,  
 and that pupils develop new confidence, become more  
 emotionally stable, and are happier as a result of re-  
 adjustment.

Lane in formulating a "Charter for the Elementary  
 School," reveals several important points regarding ele-  
 mentary school organization. He says that the elementary  
 school should be organized as to provide for the continuous  
 growth of children; the child should be advanced from one  
 group to another whenever his growth level exceeds that of  
 his classmates; and home reports should be positive in  
 spirit instead of negative. Since elementary teachers  
 come from the middle-class part of the social order as do

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1. Goodman, J. N., "The Importance of Perfect Performance." Journal of the National Education Association, Vol. 28: 9-10, January, 1939.
  2. Francis, E. B., "A Follow-Up of Non-Promotion." Journal of Education, Vol. 122: 187-88, June, 1939.
  3. Templin, R. S., "A Check-Up of Non-Promotion." Journal of Education, Vol. 123: 259-60, November, 1940.
  4. Lane, Robert Hill, The Teacher in the Modern Elementary School. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941, pp. 8-11, 35-36.

most of her pupils, they need to be able to manage kindly and intelligently the lower third of the pupils.

The average teacher is likely to be too greatly impressed by native intelligence. She must remember, Lane further comments, that it is not all certain that tests can measure intelligence, but more probably the number and quality of experiences the child has had. Also, leadership in the modern world depends upon a great variety of factors, of which intelligence may be only one.

1

Kyte believes frequent readjustment of children to approximate a homogeneity based upon several criteria to be the most promising of modern variations in promotion schemes.

It provides for the individual adjustment of children through a series of groups--chronological age, social age, mental age, and achievement age being taken into account. Both the individual child and the group thus are given careful consideration. This practice can be applied together with periodical promotion, if adjustments of individuals are made whenever the total evidence indicates individual changes to be sound.

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Otto also noted that the largest percentage of failure occurred in the first grade, and that reading

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1. Kyte, George, The Principal at Work. New York: Ginn and Company, 1941, p. 154.
  2. Otto, Henry J., Elementary School Organization and Administration. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1941.

was the subject of greatest difficulty. He had also commented upon the puzzling issues of then-current practice, such as the unreliability and variability of teachers' marks, absence of uniformity and specificity in promotional standards, use of differentiated standards for pupils of varying ability, the place and function of standardized achievement tests and their accompanying grade and age norms, and the nature and application of general principles relative to pupil promotion.

It has been only natural that inquiry should be made into the high rate of non-promotion in the first grade. <sup>1</sup> Otto calls attention to the stress on reading ability in this grade, and that it is too difficult for nearly 50 per cent of the six-year-old children. In 1930, studies were made showing that a mental age of 6 or 6.5 years was essential for success in first-grade reading. These findings led to the extension of nursery schools, kindergartens, and adjustment of materials, methods and curriculum so that first-grade children of all levels of ability could be successful.

For a time semi-annual promotions were believed to be the solution to the school problem of excessive

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1. Otto, Henry J., "Elementary Education--Organization and Administration." Encyclopedia of Educational Research. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950, p. 370-378.

retardation. Otto reports that in 1938, 48.9 per cent of 366 cities of all sizes had annual, and 47.8 per cent had semi-annual promotions. The semi-annual plan was found in 65.1 per cent of the cities above 100,000 in population, and in 22.6 per cent of the cities under 30,000 in population. Though each year a number of cities change from one plan to the other, more cities have changed to the annual promotion plan in the last fifteen years than to the semi-annual. As an answer to the problem of retardation is concerned, semi-annual promotion has not been successful since nearly twice as much over-ageness is found in programs exercising semi-annual promotion as there is in the annual promotion.

<sup>1</sup>  
Saunders' study on stated causes of non-promotion grouped them under seven headings. These were insufficient achievement, inadequate mentality, insufficient attendance, imperfect health, out-of-school causes, lack of emotional stability, and inappropriate administrative practices. Saunders concluded that non-promotion is not a justifiable procedure since many children who repeat a grade learn less than what they might have, had

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1. Saunders, Carleton M., Promotion or Failure for the Elementary School Pupil? New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1941, pp. 23-24.

they been advanced. Non-promotion does not bring about homogeneity of achievement, nor can it be justified in terms of discipline. Non-promotion usually intensifies emotional instability of children, and may be an admission of inefficient teaching, inappropriate administrative practices, and inadequate educational planning. Inadequate mentality, insufficient attendance, imperfect health, or lack of emotional stability are not always valid causes for non-promotion. The investigator says, . . . "The teacher is the most important person in the elimination of pupil-failure. It is chiefly his opportunity and challenge."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>  
Goetting brings up a phase of the controversy on promotion and non-promotion, with the comment that emphasis has heretofore been placed upon the quantitative rather than the qualitative conception of education. He maintains that no differentiation is made in standards of achievement among the pupils. All are required to learn the same things. Failure, Goetting says, in agreement<sup>3</sup> with opinions already quoted, can be a very serious thing for the child. Though considered a tragedy, in reality

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1. Ibid., p. 69.

2. Goetting, M. L., Teaching in the Secondary School. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1942, p. 75.

3. Goetting, M. L., Ibid., p. 75.



it may be the most reasonable thing to expect, as it is an indication of existing maladjustments, that conditions are not normal for the pupil. Failure-causes are many in number and kind, some easily discernible, others rather obscure.

Failure is an indication of needed adjustment on the part of either the pupil, his program, or the circumstances under which he is working. Preliminary to making adjustments is the task of adequate diagnosis. Thorough and complete diagnosis helps to assure that the real causes for failure are located, and that adjustments are made in the light of the findings. It is a challenge to the teacher to discover and remove causes for failure. This work of adjustment may involve studying the environment, motivating interest, improving study skills, overcoming deficiencies in preparation, or improving relationship with the teacher. A large number of cases of failure may be located by locating them in time. Others may be corrected by making proper adjustments.

The most serious aspect of failure is its effects upon the pupil. Continued and repeated failure is apt to produce results that are lasting in their effect upon the personality development. It may result in an attitude of defeat which the pupil will carry throughout life. Nothing succeeds like success. Success begets a feeling of confidence and security which increases the ability to overcome other emotional stresses which one is apt to meet.

1

Elsbree shows the discrepancies between the causes teachers give for failing pupils and the facts as found by investigation.

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1. Elsbree, W. S., Pupil Progress in the Elementary School. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943, pp. 12-18.

Reason Given for FailureFact by Investigation

Insufficient achievement

Pupils do little better upon repeating a grade. 53% made no improvement, 12% poorer. (McKinney)

Pupil would have achieved less if promoted.

On six weeks' probation, three-fourths of possible repeaters were allowed to continue the grade. (Buckingham)

Pupil retained in grade for individual attention.

Such individual attention prevented by size of class, with no sign of class-sizes decreasing.

Inability of pupil to learn.

Slow learners, as do normal learners improve little through repetition, possibly because of disappointment, chagrin and boredom.

Retained because of irregular attendance.

Up to twenty-five days missed in a school year.

Pupils were able to maintain grade in 60% of the cases studied.

Absent twenty-five to forty-five days.

Pupil has one chance in two of avoiding failure. (Some believe the pupil can make up to 50% of the work lost through absence.)

Failure is a stimulus to the pupil.

It is necessary that the pupil understand the cause of failure, and see what needs to be done. There are also many chances within classwork to give failure-stimulation, and if it is discouraging and destructive, it is not desirable. The degree of failure is significant, as is the pupil's resilience to it, as children often react as would an adult to a devastating failure. Success has been shown to be a more powerful incentive than failure.

## 1

Elsbree brings up the question of marking systems and the report card as mechanical means of indicating the pupil's promotion or failure. By their lack of objectivity these often fore-doom a child to failure. No consistency is evident among teachers as to the meaning of marks and there is no indication as to what "achievement" may mean. Many schools are now taking into account personal-growth considerations where marks were commonly based on subject-matter mastery. As a means of rendering evaluation of the pupil's work more objective, Elsbree suggests the following proposals:

1. Irrelevant factors should be excluded in the marking.
2. Accurate and frequent measure of achievement should constitute the basis of the marks recorded.
3. The measures should be adequately weighed.
4. A particular mark should carry consistently approximately the same meaning.
5. Measures should be made in terms of the objectives of the course or program as defined by the teacher.

## 2

As to means of eliminating failure, Elsbree advised that a study of the fundamental causes of non-promotion be made at all levels of the school system. The teacher should become thoroughly acquainted with pupils in class

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1. Elsbree, W., Ibid., pp. 62-63.
  2. Ibid.

early in the school year, and also list preventives which might have kept pupils from failing the previous year. As the school year progresses, inadequacies should be analyzed in the achievement of individual pupils.

<sup>1</sup>  
Sandin points out that undesirable characteristics of the slow-progress children may have been present before non-promotion, and again might have occurred if the pupil had not been retained. Sandin's findings indicated non-promotion as creating a situation in which differences between regularly-promoted children and their slow-progress classmates was a barrier to good social relations. For the most part, the slow-progress children were placed with children who were younger, smaller, and physically less mature. Sandin concludes that non-promotion does not materially help the average child in his academic progress, and that the majority of repeaters have been found to show no improvement, and in many cases do worse after non-promotion. They were also liable to criticism from teachers and parents, and in many instances ridiculed by their younger classmates.

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1. Sandin, Adolph A., Social and Emotional Adjustments of Regularly Promoted and Non-Promoted Pupils. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1944, pp. 134-36.

## 1

Some principles in the future which underlie a sound philosophy of pupil progress are the elimination of grade-standards in skill subjects, progress of the child through the curriculum at his optimum rate, placement of adolescents in high school in the majority of cases, and special classes for the mentally subnormal. The length of time each child spends in the elementary school will be determined by a careful estimate of his needs in the light of his chronological age, mental age, achievement, physical development, and social and emotional maturity. There should be new methods of reporting pupil progress to parents, and of enlisting their support.

## 2

Stroud reports wide variations in the average rate of non-promotion from system to system, attributing it in part to the degree of social and economic stratification. While concurring with Ayres' opinion regarding the effect of failure on the child, Stroud points out that the child does not necessarily profit from group contacts merely because he is a physical member of a group.

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1. LeBaron, Walter A., "Some Practical Techniques in Developing a Program of Continuous Progress in the Elementary School." Elementary School Journal, Vol. 46: 89-96, October, 1945.
  2. Stroud, James B., Psychology in Education. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1946, p. 419.

1

Baxter believes that teachers should be given time and help to understand the failing child, and that possibly the best treatment for him is a regular class, small enough for him to receive help. With the present backward status of federal aid to education in mind, the writer's comment is peculiarly fitting that the armed services would not have considered time or expense wasted to prepare a young man for service, yet our educational system is refusing or failing to make him into a peacetime citizen.

2

Garland in a recent study of the failure-rate in the first six grades of consolidated schools in Iowa found that the per cent of over-age pupils was 36.5 per cent. The percentage of pupils who failed one and only one grade was 17.69 per cent, and of those who failed two or more times, 3.58 per cent. The investigator also found the per cent of pupils who failed one or more times in the first six grades to be 23.96 per cent, with the annual failure-rate, 3.99 per cent.

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1. Baxter, L. C., "Plea for Tommy." Journal of Education. 129: 132-3, April, 1946.
  2. Garland, Earl Smith, "The Percentage of Pupils Who Fail in the First Six Grades in Consolidated Schools in Iowa." Unpublished Master's Thesis, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1946.

In a study of 1586 pupils in the Omaha elementary schools,<sup>1</sup> Skinner found that 339, or 16.3 per cent were failed before reaching the sixth grade. The failure rate of the sixth grade examined was 7.1 per cent, and the percentage of pupils failed, 21.3 per cent. The highest rate of failure occurred in the first and second grades, which is in agreement with previously-mentioned investigations.

<sup>2</sup>  
Bond and Bond believe extreme care should be taken to prevent failure in reading and the resultant confusion and frustration in the after-school life of the child.

The child who has got into difficulty with reading tends to avoid reading and thereby gets into more serious difficulty unless steps are taken at the outset to correct the trouble. Such failure not only has deleterious effects upon progress in learning to read, but also upon the personal and social adjustment of the child. If he is allowed to get into difficulty, and if that difficulty is allowed to persist over a period of time, a reading disability case of a serious nature has been allowed to develop. There is a good chance that such a poor reader may grow into a serious psychological problem, which will be apt to become too difficult for the teacher to correct. It is important, then, for the teacher to take care to prevent any difficulties at the outset and to be sure that none persist.

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1. Skinner, Eugene W., "Studies in Failure: I. Non-Promotion in the Omaha Elementary Schools." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1946.
  2. Bond, Guy L., and Bond, Eva, Teaching the Child to Read. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

1

Strang believes arbitrary standards of accomplishment are gradually being replaced by placement for best adjustment to individual needs and capacities. In this view retardation is seldom the best adjustment to make for a child.

Either the repeating experience is itself unfortunate or the factors responsible for failure, such as unfavorable comparison with siblings, visual and other physical handicap, home tradition of failure, poor beginnings in other school systems, are not eliminated. Better results have been obtained when the children were permitted to go ahead from the point at which they had left off.

In giving causes for pupil failure, Strang notes, teachers emphasize factors within the pupil. While they recognize home conditions as possible causes of failure, they tend to ignore faults in the school system and especially in their own teaching. Teachers should recognize the fact that some children are slow to learn and should not expect the impossible of them.

In a listing of reasons for failure "laziness" and "orneriness" were included. The relationship of these to failure is not valid. <sup>2</sup> Of the million service men who were rejected because of below-normal reading ability, only seven per cent were found to be subnormal

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1. Strang, Ruth, An Introduction to Child Study. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947, pp. 318-319.
  2. Lees, H., "Bright Kids Can Fail." Collier's, Vol. 122: 58, 60-61, October, 1948.



mentally. From the point of view of the psychiatrist, the boy who gets all A's but has no friends is as much a problem as the "bad" boy who can't add two and two. There is no such thing as a good child and a bad child; there are simply comfortable children and uncomfortable ones.

In a study of Grades three to six in the public schools of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bental<sup>1</sup> concluded that a threat of failure is a potent force toward achievement, but that its greatest danger lies in its becoming a pattern of life. This investigator concurs with others who have favored readiness programs for pupil entrance into school, and that when a child falls behind, he should immediately be given the help he needs. There should be more corroborative test material of an objective nature to eliminate the variables of teacher-opinion. Neither should the child be put in a failing group because of a behavior maladjustment.

<sup>2</sup>  
Lafferty sharply comments that the American teacher has a rather flexible vocabulary when it comes to explaining Harry's or Harriet's failure at school. Prime factors

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1. Bental, G., "Failure and Conditional Promotion Among Elementary School Children of Normal Intelligence." Journal of Exceptional Children, 14: 138-39, February, 1948.
  2. Lafferty, H. M., "Reasons for Pupil Failure--A Progress Report." American School Board Journal, 117: 18-20, July, 1948.

of pupil mortality are given as irregular attendance, low mentality, lack of interest, poor health and physical defects, and insufficient effort. The question arises as to which of these listed causes for failure the pupil is capable of taking responsibility. It is believed that teachers should adopt a policy of "stop, look, and listen" before stopping a pupil's progress through school.

<sup>1</sup>Yeager observes that many children feel a loss of status, frustration, and distaste for school. The same writer separates causes of non-promotion into four groups: causes traceable to the pupil and his individual nature, those traceable to the teacher and his procedures, those traceable to the organization and administration of the school system, and causes traceable to the out-of-school environment. It is believed that initiative for the study of failure rests with the teacher, as she is the one who has a direct point of contact with the child. With acceleration, as with retardation, the first step is determination of its nature and extent. After individual study is made of the child as to his physical, mental and emotional status, if no enrichment is provided in his

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1. Yeager, William A., Administration and the Pupil. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949, pp. 159-161, 200.

program, he should then be placed where his progress is most probable. In order to facilitate the solution of promotional problems, Yeager suggests four specific remedies. Trial promotion on a short-period basis has been about 75 per cent successful. The study of promotion periods might prove that a shorter or longer promotion span than the semi-annual might be found, as effort to reduce lost time by this method have not been too successful. Curriculum adjustments may take the form of some type of homogenous grouping, and a study of individual needs. Individual methods of pupil adjustment suggested have taken the form of more adequate guidance procedures, as transfer to another teacher, special periods for assistance, or repeating a subject for better foundation and study habits.

1

Arkola and Jensen consider failure to be a threat to the total life adjustment of the child, costly both in terms of time and money. Responsibility for adjustment to the many causes of his failure are left entirely up to the child. The writers likewise note the "withdrawal" child is often in as much need of attention as others who are more obviously maladjusted.

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1. Arkola, A., and Jensen, R. A., "Cost of Failure." Educational Leadership, 6: 495-9, May, 1949.

McGrath, as others, notes that teachers who fail pupils can seldom determine the cause. Having failed the pupils, it is to set themselves up as perfect testing authorities and as fully competent judges of work-quality. With a curriculum-lag of a half-century, we have little authority to fail without scientific total evaluation. Our methodology could without doubt be improved, as its net result has been the thousands of failures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>  
Sumption and Phillips assert that retardation practices do not increase a slow rate of learning, make for better student morale, assure mastery of subject matter, increase variability of achievement in certain classes, nor increase grade-achievement averages. Any claimed personality adjustment of the retained pupil is not increased by such retention. In short, previously-claimed advantages of the policy of non-promotion and failure are found to be non-existent. In fact there is

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1. McGrath, G. D., "Pupil Failure, Our Greatest Challenge and Opportunity." Peabody Journal of Education, Vol. 26: 290-94, March, 1949.
  2. Sumption, M. R., and Phillips, T. A., "School Progress." Encyclopedia of Educational Research. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950, 1123.

a growing belief that actual placement of the pupil is not material as long as his needs are adequately met. For those under-age pupils who are socially and physically immature in relation to the group in which they find themselves, it is believed there should be a minimum age for school entrance which conforms to normal first grade entrance, and an enriched program in place of acceleration.

<sup>1</sup>  
Swenson gives a summation of opinion regarding the grade-level theory of learning:

The fallacy of the rigid grade-level concept is apparent to anyone who has knowledge concerning individual differences among the children to be found in any particular grade. It is especially important that primary-grade teachers divest their minds and practices of its connotation. A good start in school is an individual matter. Results of instruction cannot possibly be improved by trying to make children do what they are not ready to do at any specified point in their schooling.

In conclusion it seems apparent that the majority of investigators have called attention to the harm done both to the child and the community by a policy of strict "grade-standards" which results in non-promotion and failure. It has been pointed out that the most

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1. Swenson, Esther, "Applications of Learning Principles to the Improvement of Teaching in the Early Elementary Grades." Forty-Ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I. Learning and Instruction. N.S.S.E., p. 277.

frequent reasons given by teachers for failing pupils are not valid as indicated by research. Extreme variations in percentage of failure have been indicated as existing from school system to school system and from school to school. Emphasis has been placed upon greater teacher awareness of individual differences among children as a component of wiser policies of pupil advancement through our elementary schools. It has been shown that an initial step in this awareness is the construction or alteration of the curriculum to take into account these individual differences to the extent that maximum advantage is obtained for the pupil's learning rate, aptitudes and abilities.

### CHAPTER III

#### ORGANIZATION OF DATA

The data obtained from the 587 cumulative records of the pupils enrolled in the Sixth Grade as of October 1, 1949 was organized in tabular forms. These tables indicate (1) the ages of the pupils enrolled in each of the sixth grades, (2) the number of pupils of normal age, under-age, and over-age, (3) and the number of "pupil failures" as they occurred from Grade I through Grade V. The data for each school of the nine elementary schools was then organized in a Summation Table.

This information is followed by the Summation Table which indicates the distribution of the ages of all the sixth grade children of the nine elementary schools, the number of normal age, under-age, and over-age pupils, the total incidence of "pupil failures" for each grade, and the per cent of failure for each grade. It was interesting to note that there were no under-age pupils.

Forty-nine records were not used since they lacked complete information. The records concerning the forty-nine students whose records lacked complete information relative to failure or promotion were handled separately.

An age-grade table was completed for this group since most of them were transfer students and no information was available on them. The age-grade distribution will allow for some conclusions about this group.

The incidence of failure for this group of pupils was completed in reverse of the usual method in which failure and promotion studies are conducted. This was done because failure studies completed in studying the failure at any one grade do not give a composite picture of "pupil failures," but merely indicate the number who failed in that grade without consideration for subsequent failure by the same pupil.

The tables for each school appear on the subsequent pages.



TABLE I: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
ADAMS SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½	2	2				1		
12	7	7						
12½	24		24		1			
13	13		13	1		1	1	1
13½	13		13	1	1		2	1
14	7		7	1	2			1
14½	2		2			2	1	1
15								
15½								
TOTAL	68	9	59	3	4	4	4	4

TABLE II: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
BARGE SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½	1	1				1	1	
12	12	12						
12½	23		23		1	1		
13	6		6	1	2	1	1	
13½	6		6				1	
14	3		3					
14½	1		1					
15								
15½								
TOTAL	52	13	39	1	3	3	3	

TABLE III: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
GARFIELD SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½	3	3						
12	22	22						
12½	20		20					
13	12		12		1	2		1
13½	5		5		1			
14	2		2		2			
14½	1		1				1	
15								
15½								
TOTAL	65	25	40		4	2	1	1

TABLE IV: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
HOOVER SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½								
12	11	11					1	
12½	14		14					
13	2		2	1	1			
13½	1		1					
14	4		4	1	1		2	
14½	1		1	1				
15								
15½								
TOTAL	33	11	22	3	2		3	

TABLE V: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
JEFFERSON SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½	4	4						
12	6	6						
12½	16		16					
13	14		14	1		2	1	1
13½	10		10	2	1	2	1	
14	5		5			1		
14½	2		2	1				
15	1		1					1
15½	1		1			1	2	
TOTAL	59	10	49	4	1	6	4	2

TABLE VI: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
MADISON SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½								
12	5	5						
12½	17		17					1
13	3		3	1		1	1	1
13½	2		2	1				
14								
14½	1		1	1				
15								
15½								
TOTAL	28	5	23	3		1	1	2

TABLE VII: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
McKINLEY SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½	4	4						
12	26	26						1
12½	47		47	1				1
13	17		17	1		1		
13½	14		14	2	2	6		
14	7		7	4	2	2	1	
14½	4		4	2	1	2	1	2
15	1		1	1	1	2		
15½								
TOTAL	120	30	90	11	6	13	2	4

TABLE VIII: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
NOB HILL SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½								
12	13	13				1		
12½	18		18					
13	3		3					
13½	3		3	1		2		
14								
14½								
15								
15½								
TOTAL	37	13	24	1		3		



TABLE IX: INCIDENCE OF FAILURE  
AND AGE-GRADE DISTRIBUTION  
ROOSEVELT SCHOOL

PRESENT AGE	TOTAL AT AGE	NORMAL AGE 11, 11½, 12	OVER-AGE	FAILURE AT GRADE LEVELS				
				GRADE I	GRADE II	GRADE III	GRADE IV	GRADE V
10½								
11								
11½	5	5						
12	34	34						
12½	28		28					
13	6		6		3	3		
13½	1		1					
14	2		2	2	1	1	2	
14½								
15								
15½								
TOTAL	76	39	37	2	4	4	2	

The results determined from analyzing the nine tables indicating the incidence of pupil failures as they occurred from Grade One through Grade Five for the nine schools are given in Table X.

TABLE X  
PER CENT EQUIVALENT OF  
FAILURES TO ENROLLMENT  
FOR EACH SCHOOL

SCHOOL	ENROLLMENT	TOTAL FAILURES	PER CENT FAILURE
ADAMS	68	19	27
BARGE	52	10	19
GARFIELD	65	8	12
HOOVER	33	8	24
JEFFERSON	59	17	28
MADISON	28	7	25
McKINLEY	120	36	30
NOB HILL	37	4	10
ROOSEVELT	76	12	15
TOTAL	538	121	

A further breakdown which indicates the per cent of pupil failures for each school is given in Table XI.

TABLE XI  
PER CENT OF FAILURES FOR  
EACH SCHOOL

ADAMS	27
BARGE	19
GARFIELD	12
HOOVER	24
JEFFERSON	28
MADISON	25
McKINLEY	30
NOB HILL	10
ROOSEVELT	15

Table XII shows the complete data of the incidence of pupil failure for the entire nine schools used in the study.

TABLE XII SUMMATION TABLE											
SCHOOL	Number of Cases	F A I L U R E S A T G R A D E					Total Failures in Class	Failures as Per Cent of Class	Number of Pupils Who Failed	Class Failures as Per Cent of Total Enrollment	Class Failures as Per Cent of Total School Failures
		I	II	III	IV	V					
ADAMS	68	3	4	4	4	4	19	27	13	3	15
BARGE	52	1	3	3	3	-	10	19	9	1	8
GARFIELD	65	-	4	2	1	1	8	12	8	1	6
HOOVER	33	3	2	-	3	-	8	24	6	1	6
JEFFERSON	59	4	1	6	4	2	17	28	13	3	14
MADISON	28	3	-	1	1	2	7	25	4	1	5
McKINLEY	120	11	6	13	2	4	36	30	23	6	29
NOB HILL	37	1	-	3	-	-	4	10	4	.7	3
ROOSEVELT	76	2	4	4	2	-	12	15	5	2	9
TOTALS	538	28	24	36	20	13	121		85		

Table XII shows that the incidence of failure in Adams School was twenty-seven per cent, which represented nineteen pupil failures distributed among thirteen students in an enrollment of sixty-eight. These pupil failures constituted fifteen per cent of all failures experienced by the pupils in the nine elementary schools during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

In Barge School the incidence of failure was nineteen per cent, which represented ten pupil failures distributed among nine students in a class enrollment of fifty-two. These pupil failures made up eight per cent of all failures experienced by pupils during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

The incidence of failure in Garfield School was twelve per cent, which represented eight pupil failures distributed among eight students in a class enrollment of sixty-five. These pupil failures were six per cent of all failures experienced by the pupils in the nine elementary schools during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

Hoover School had an incidence of failure of twenty-four per cent, which represented eight pupil failures distributed among six students in a class enrollment of

thirty-three. These pupil failures constituted six per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in the nine elementary school during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

The incidence of failure at Jefferson School was found to be twenty-eight per cent, which represented seventeen pupil failures distributed among thirteen students in a class enrollment of fifty-nine. These pupil failures made up fourteen per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in the nine schools during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

Madison School had an incidence of failure of twenty-five per cent, which represented seven pupil failures distributed among four students in a class enrollment of twenty-eight. These pupil failures constituted five per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in the nine elementary schools during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

The incidence of failure at McKinley School was thirty per cent, which represented thirty-six pupil failures distributed among twenty-three students in a class enrollment of 120. These pupil failures made up twenty-nine per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in

passing through the first five grades of the nine elementary schools.

Incidence of failure in Nob Hill School was found to be ten per cent, which represented four pupil failures distributed among four pupils in a class enrollment of thirty-seven pupils. These pupil failures constituted three per cent of all failures experienced by the pupils in the nine elementary schools during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

Roosevelt School had an incidence of failure of fifteen per cent, which represented twelve failures distributed among five pupils in a class enrollment of seventy-six. These pupil failures made up nine per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in the nine elementary schools during their progress from Grade One through Grade Five.

The cumulative records of forty-nine pupils in the central offices of the nine elementary schools were not complete and were not used in the percentage calculations obtained in this study. The majority of these forty-nine cases were transfer students whose past promotional records were not available, yet the age-distribution for these students indicated they had experienced failure at some time in this progress from Grade One through Grade Five.



## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the incidence of pupil failure and non-promotion of a group of elementary school children. This was determined by (1) finding the number and percentage of pupils who failed at some point from First Grade through Fifth Grade, and who now are enrolled in the Sixth Grade of the elementary schools of Yakima, Washington, (2) finding the annual rate of failure of this group of children, (3) determining the number of pupil failures that occurred, including a record of failing pupils who failed once, twice, or three or more times, and (4) ascertaining the age distribution of this group.

It was noted that a difference of opinion has existed among educators in regard to promotional practices and procedures in the elementary schools of the United States. This difference of opinion has centered upon two co-existent theories or phases of them. First and oldest among these theories is the "grade-standards" method of school operation, involving the setting up of norms of accomplishment for each of the six elementary grades. Directly opposing it is the theory of "continuous



progress," which consists of taking pupils at the age of six years and for six years give them educational opportunities suited to their needs.

The literature in the field indicated an extreme variation in percentage of pupil failures from school system to school system and from school to school within a system. Incidence of failure was found to be highest in the primary grades with the majority of failures occurring in the first grade. Validity and objectivity was not in evidence in the majority of reasons given by teachers for failing pupils, nor were the pupils directly responsible for the chief reasons given for their failures. The failure rate was found to be higher for boys than for girls, with the experience of failure constituting a serious handicap to the personality development of the child. Schools with high rates of slow progress and retardation were found to be no more educationally efficient than schools with a low incidence of pupil failures. Gains of significant amounts were not evident as a result of a pupil being required to repeat a grade. Low reading ability was most often given as a reason for failure in the first grade.

Percentages of failure as given from grade to grade did not constitute a reliable index of the total amount

of pupil failures, as many were failed more than once. There was little apparent recognition of the facts established by research regarding individual differences. Either actual or tacit recognition of the "grade-standards" theory was a dominant factor in administrative policy.

### Procedure

The cumulative record cards of 587 Sixth Grade pupils in the central offices of nine elementary schools were examined. These were separated according to schools and placed in tabular form which indicated (1) the ages of the pupils enrolled in each of the sixth grades, (2) the number of pupils of under-age, normal age, and over-age, (3) and the number of "pupil failures" as they occurred from Grade One through Grade Five. This was followed by a Summation Table which indicated the age-distribution of all sixth grade children in the nine elementary schools, the number of under-age, normal age and over-age pupils, the total incidence of "pupil failures" for each grade and the per cent of failure for each grade.

Forty-nine records of transfer students were not used since their records lacked complete information relative to failure and promotion. The over-ageness of these students indicated that pupil failure had occurred

at some point in their progress from Grade One through Grade Five. These records were analyzed separately as to extent of over-ageness and the results are given in Table XIII.

### Results

Analysis of the 538 cases used for the purpose of the study revealed an extreme variation in percentage of non-promotion and failure from school to school and from grade to grade. A large percentage of actual over-ageness exists in the nine elementary schools examined, with no existent evidence of under-ageness. There was evidence of incomplete data in the cumulative records and lack of objectivity in teacher evaluation of causes for failures administered to pupils.

The incidence of failure in Adams School was twenty-seven per cent, which represented nineteen pupil failures distributed among thirteen students in an enrollment of sixty-eight, and constituted fifteen per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in the nine elementary schools. In Barge School the incidence of failure was nineteen per cent, which represented ten failures among nine students in a class enrollment of fifty-two, and made up eight per cent of all failures experienced by pupils as they progressed from Grade One through Grade

Five. There was an incidence of failure in Garfield School of twelve per cent, which represented eight pupil failures among eight students in an enrollment of sixty-five, and was six per cent of the failures experienced by all pupils in the nine schools. Incidence of failure in the Hoover School was twenty-four per cent, which represented eight pupil failures distributed among six students in a class enrollment of thirty-three, and constituted six per cent of all pupils to whom failure was administered. Jefferson School had a failure-incidence of twenty-eight per cent, which represented seventeen pupil failures distributed among thirteen students in a class enrollment of fifty-nine, and made up fourteen per cent of all pupil failures in the schools. The incidence of failure in Madison School was twenty-five per cent, which represented seven pupil failures among four students in a class enrollment of twenty-eight. These pupil failures constituted five per cent of all pupil failures experienced in the school enrollments. McKinley School had an incidence of failure of thirty per cent, which represented thirty-six pupil failures distributed among twenty-three students in a class enrollment of 120, and made up twenty-nine per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in passing through the five grades of the nine

schools. Incidence of failure at Nob Hill School was ten per cent, which represented four pupil failures distributed among four pupils in a class of thirty-seven, and was three per cent of all failures experienced by pupils in the schools. Roosevelt School had an incidence of failure of fifteen per cent, which represented twelve failures distributed among five pupils in a class enrollment of seventy-six, and made up nine per cent of all failures administered to pupils in the nine elementary schools during their progress through the five grades.

The percentage of pupil failures by grades as related to the total number of pupil failures is shown below.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Per Cent of All Failures</u>
I .....	12
II .....	19
III .....	29
IV .....	16
V .....	10

Further information regarding the incidence of failure is gained from the following table which relates the percentage of pupil failures by grades to the total enrollment.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Per Cent of Total Enrollment</u>
I .....	5
II .....	4
III .....	6
IV .....	3
V .....	2

Of the total of 121 pupil failures which were administered in the nine schools in grades one through five, thirty-four were girls and fifty-one were boys. An analysis of the extent of normal and over-ageness present in the nine schools does not include the age of twelve and one-half year pupils. Exclusive of this age of twelve and one-half years the percentage of normal-ageness as related to total school enrollment was twenty-eight per cent, and the per cent of over-ageness as related to total school enrollment was thirty-two per cent. No under-ageness was present in the nine elementary schools in the Sixth Grade.

#### Limitations

There was a lack of clear, complete and accurate data on the cumulative record cards in the central office

of the nine elementary schools. An inadequacy of information existed as to previous records of pupils who transferred into the elementary school system. The cases of pupils who were placed in special or ungraded classes were not examined in this study.

### Educational Implications and Recommendations

The following educational implications and recommendations as a result of the study seem apparent:

- A. That the curriculum should be so adjusted and enriched that each pupil may reach and maintain his maximum learning rate.
- B. That inquiry should be made into the validity of teacher reasons for non-promotion.
- C. That the teacher and school be required to justify administration of failure to the child, rather than that the child should prove his right to promotion.
- D. That an accurate, objective system of cumulative records be maintained for each child.
- E. That a summarization of such record precede the transfer of the child to another school.
- F. That non-promotion and failure should be dispensed with as an instrument of administrative policy.
- G. That failure should be administered to the pupil only after thorough examination of his home background, his mental and physical health and his social adaptability.
- H. That further and more extensive investigations be made into the problem of non-promotion and failure.

- I. That the goal of elementary education should be the continuous progress of each child.
- J. That the block (ungraded) system of education be established for the primary grades of the elementary schools.
- K. That the curriculum be adjusted to take into consideration the individual differences of the child.
- L. That each school should review and revise if necessary its objectives and philosophy of education to assure the continued growth and progress of the individual child.



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