

2000-2001



**PROMOTION/RETENTION
OF STUDENTS IN GRADES K-8**

**Author:
Kristopher Kaase**

**Report No. 02.08
Department of Evaluation & Research
<http://www.wcpss.net/evaluation-research>**

January 2002

WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

PROMOTION/RETENTION OF STUDENTS IN GRADES K-8 2000-01

REPORT SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The 2000-2001 school year marked the first year of implementation of the Wake County Board of Education's Promotion and Intervention policy at grades K-8. It also coincided with the first year of implementation of the State Board of Education's Student Accountability Standards requiring students in grades 3, 5, and 8 to demonstrate grade level proficiency on the state End-of-Grade (EOG) tests in reading and mathematics, defined as scoring at Achievement Level III or IV. While both policies require the use of End-of-Grade tests to help determine grade level proficiency, it is important to note that additional local standards for promotion continued in effect and that EOG tests are just *one* of the ways that proficiency is determined. This report provides results of implementation of the Promotion and Intervention policy for students in grades K-8 in 2000-01.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Requiring students to master the content of one grade level before being promoted to the next grade level sounds simple enough. Implementing the policy, however, turned out to be complex. For example, an evaluation of Summer Academy (for students who had not yet scored at Achievement Level III or IV) is discussed in a separate report (E&R Report 02.07). As shown in the appendix of this report, administrators and policymakers could not have anticipated the many unique paths that students would follow once the policy was in place. Readers might be surprised to learn that 73 students chose to attend Summer Academy in 2001, although they were not *required* to attend (because they had already met the EOG standard.) Another 42 students skipped the first EOG retest opportunity, skipped Summer Academy, and yet took advantage of the second EOG retest opportunity.

Final outcomes for WCPSS students during this first year of the new policy remained somewhat in a state of flux until Fall 2001. By mid-September of the 2001-02 school year, most students had been assigned to their grade level for the year, and data on the number of students who were promoted or retained became more reliable. The first year of implementation of the WCPSS Promotion and Intervention Policy resulted in a slightly higher rate of retention than in the past, but lower than the estimated doubling of the retention rate based on the pilot of seven schools in 2000-01 (see E&R Report No. 01.11). Other overall findings include:

- 89.1% of students in grades K-8 were promoted, 5.1% were retained, and 5.7% withdrew from WCPSS.

- The rate of retention was highest among students in grades K-2 (7.5%). Of the students in grades 3-8 who took the EOG tests, 3.7% were retained, versus 5.1% of students at those grade levels who did not take EOG tests.

The vast majority (89.4%) of the 47,741 WCPSS students in grades 3-8 took at least one End-of-Grade test. There were a number of significant findings particularly related to grade levels, gender, race, students' free/reduced lunch status, and students' participation in Special Education:

- 91.9 % of students in grades 3-8 eventually “passed” or met the EOG standard. A small percentage of these students were retained, however, because they did not meet other requirements for promotion.
- Records show that 4,284 students did not meet the EOG standard for promotion and subsequently had their promotion status considered by a waiver review committee. The rate of agreement between the committee recommendation and the principal's final decision to promote or retain was quite high (94.7%). The waiver review committee and the principal disagreed only 3.7% of the time, with the principal more likely to promote than the committee. (A waiver committee review recommendation was not provided for 1.7% of students.)

Among the demographic factors that were related to whether students were promoted:

- Grade Level. Within both elementary and middle schools, the rate of promotion increased as the grade level increased. Across elementary and middle schools, fifth grade students had the highest rate of promotion at 98.6%; the lowest was sixth grade at 94.7%.
- Race or Ethnicity. White and Asian/Pacific Islander students' rate of promotion were about the same (92.8% and 92.5%, respectively) and both were about six percentage points higher than the promotion rate of African American/Black (85.8%), Alaskan/American Indian (86.7%), and Hispanic students (86.7%).
- Gender. Female students' rate of promotion (91.5%) was slightly better than male students' rate (89.8%). This gender pattern was found within ethnic groups as well, except for Asian/Pacific Islander students.
- Special Education Status and Type of Service. Three-fourths of the 7,930 students with disabilities in grades 3-8 took at least one EOG test. Overall, students with disabilities' rate of promotion was lower than the rate for students without disabilities (87.4% vs.91.2%). Students with disabilities who were served in a regular classroom had the highest rate of promotion (89.6%), followed by students served in a self-contained classroom (86.7%), and students that received some or supplemental instruction from a special education teacher (82.3%).
- Socioeconomic Status. Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch had a much lower promotion rate than students *not* eligible for lunch assistance (83.6% vs.

92.5%). The gender gap between females and males was even greater for free/reduced lunch students than for females and males who were not eligible.

Based on these patterns, it is not surprising that the lowest rate of promotion was for male free/reduced students (81.4%), followed by African-American/Black males (83.8%). White females had the highest rate of promotion (93.4%). Among students who had not met the Achievement Level III or IV standard on the EOG tests, White females had a much higher rate of promotion (71.6%) compared to White males who had not met the standard (63.8%, a difference of 7.8%). In fact, White males who had not met the EOG standard had promotion rates similar to males of other racial ethnic groups.

IMPLICATIONS

In almost every comparison, males' rate of promotion was lower than females'. The gender difference was particularly pronounced for students with lower achievement (i.e., not meeting the Achievement Level III standard after all retests) and for free/reduced lunch eligible students. Additional strategies to specifically address low-achieving males and males from low-income families need to be developed to increase their performance on the EOG tests and retests, and to address their comparatively low rate of promotion.

While there is improvement in the rate of promotion as students move up grade levels within elementary and middle schools, this improvement is not consistent across the entire K-8 span. This is most evident in the fact that fifth grade students had the highest rate of promotion and sixth grade the lowest. The school system has begun to look at the issue of the drop in performance from fifth grade to sixth grade, based on the ABCs results. These promotion results underscore the importance of that effort.

One of the goals of special education programs is to have students with disabilities participating as much as possible in the regular classroom environment. To accommodate the varying needs of students, different levels of special education services are provided. These results indicate that EOG tested students with disabilities receiving resource services had a lower rate of promotion than students with disabilities served wholly in a regular classroom, or those in a self-contained classroom—students who are usually more severely disabled. This was true even though students receiving resource services had a much higher rate of meeting the Achievement Level III standard (61.0%) than students in a self-contained classroom (39.8%). Further study is needed to determine the reason for this discrepancy.

PROMOTION/RETENTION OF STUDENTS IN GRADES K-8 2000-01

The 2000-2001 school year was the first year of implementation of the Wake County Board of Education's Promotion and Intervention policy at grades K-8. The policy requires students to demonstrate proficiency in grade level competencies in English/language arts and mathematics to be promoted. The goal of this policy is to ensure that all students master basic skills before advancing to the next grade level. Implementation of this policy coincided with the first year of implementation of the State Board of Education's Student Accountability Standards requiring students in grades 3, 5, and 8 to demonstrate grade level proficiency on the state End-of-Grade tests in reading and mathematics. The state policy only applied to fifth graders in 2000-01 and will apply to students in grades 3, 5, and 8 beginning in 2001-02.

As with the State Board of Education's policy, a key component of the implementation of the Wake County Board of Education's Promotion and Intervention policy is the use of standardized assessments as *one* of the ways to determine grade level competency. In grades K-2, teachers regularly assess the progress of students based on guidelines developed by Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) instructional services staff. In grades 3-8, grade level competency in English/language arts and mathematics is determined in part by student performance on the state End-of-Grade tests (grades 3-8) and Writing Assessments (grades 4 and 7). In addition, students in grades 6-8 must attain a passing course grade in English/language arts, mathematics, either social studies or science, and a minimum of 50% of remaining courses taken.

There are a number of other key components of the Wake County Promotion and Intervention policy. They include:

- early detection and intervention for students at risk of failure
- continuous, quarterly, and end-of-year grade level assessment to document student progress
- timely notification of student progress to parents, availability of intervention opportunities, standardized test results, and procedures for requesting waivers from promotion and intervention requirements
- for grade K-8 students who do not meet the established requirements, multiple opportunities for retesting and timely intervention services
- for grade K-8 students scoring below grade level proficiency after retesting and intervention, review by a committee to make a placement recommendation to the principal

The WCPSS policy recognizes the statutory authority of the principal to make all final promotion decisions. Additional details regarding the Promotion and Intervention policy can be found on the WCPSS web site (<http://www.wcpss.net/promotion-intervention>) or refer to Board Policy 5530.

The promotion/retention results for all Wake County Public School System students in grades K-8 enrolled in May 2001 are included in this report. The main focus of this report, however, is the promotion/retention status of students in grades 3-8 that participated in the End-of-Grade reading and mathematics testing. In addition to this report, there are detailed evaluations of two principle programs implemented to assist students in meeting the Promotion and Intervention policy standards: the Accelerated Learning Program (see E&R report number 02.09) and Summer Academy (see E&R report number 02.07).

RESULTS

Overall Results

For the 72,534 students in grades K-8 at the end of the 2000-01 year, there were three possible outcomes for a student as a result of implementing the Promotion and Intervention policy. A student could be a) promoted to the next grade; b) retained; or c) withdrawn from enrollment in the Wake County Public School System. Each student's final status was determined by comparing the student's grade level in May of 2001 with the student's grade level in September of 2001. This length of time was necessary to allow for retesting, Summer Academy intervention, waiver committee reviews, and for students to return to school with a grade level placement decision that accurately reflected the students' grade level for 2001-02.

As shown in Figure 1, 89.1% of students in grades K-8 were promoted, 5.1% were retained, and 5.7% had withdrawn as of September 2001. The rate of promotion was higher for students that were tested with the End-of-Grade (EOG) tests in reading and/or mathematics (90.6%) than students not tested with the EOG tests (87.0%). Correspondingly, EOG tested students had a lower rate of retention than students not tested with EOG tests. The 11% (5,047) of students in grades 3-8 that did not take an EOG test were not tested for a variety of reasons. Some students were excluded from EOG testing because they had limited English proficiency and had been in the WCPSS

Figure 1
Promotion/Retention Status for Students in Grades K-8

	All Students		EOG		Not EOG Tested Students					
			Tested Students ¹		Total Not Tested		K-2 Students		Gr. 3-8 Students	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Promoted	64,662	89.1	38,697	90.6	25,965	87.0	21,518	86.8	4,447	88.1
Retained	3,717	5.1	1,592	3.7	2,125	7.1	1,868	7.5	257	5.1
Withdrawn	4,155	5.7	2,405	5.6	1,750	5.9	1,407	5.7	343	6.8
Total	72,534	100.0	42,694	100.0	29,840	100.0	24,793	100.0	5,047	100.0

¹Students in grades 3-8 who took the End-of-Grade test in at least one subject.

Note: Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

for less than two years. Some students with disabilities participated in alternative assessments provided by the state when the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) indicated the EOG tests were inappropriate. Finally, a few students are absent from testing and cannot be rescheduled for makeup testing. For detailed information on students not tested, see E&R Report No. 02.03 Progress Toward the 95% Goal: 2001.

The rate of retention was highest among students in grades K-2 (7.5%). The K-2 students were likely retained more often because of the generally held belief that it is more effective to retain students at early grades than later grades where physical and social differences can be more significant.

EOG Tested Students

Students in grades 3-8 that took the EOG reading and/or mathematics tests and scored at Achievement Level III or IV were eligible for promotion depending on whether or not they met other requirements. Students that scored at Achievement Level I or II on one or both EOG tests were given the opportunity to retest prior to the end of the school year. (Students were only retested on the test on which they scored a Level I or II.) If students scored at Achievement Level III or IV on the retest, they were eligible to be promoted. If students scored at Achievement Level I or II on the retest, they were given the opportunity to attend Summer Academy. Following Summer Academy students were again given the opportunity to retest. Finally, students scoring at Achievement Level I or II on the retest given after Summer Academy could have a committee review their progress and make a recommendation regarding promotion or retention to the principal. While students that did not score at Achievement Level III or IV on the EOG tests would have ideally followed the path of retest–Summer Academy–retest–review committee, in reality students took a number of different paths to reach a final promotion/retention status. These diverse paths to promotion and retention are illustrated in Figures 1-5 in the Appendix.

As show in Figure 1 of the Appendix, of the 47,741 students in grades 3-8, 89.4% (42,694) took at least one EOG test. Of these students, 85% were eligible for promotion based on meeting the Achievement Level III or IV standard on all EOG tests taken after the initial EOG test administration (see Figure 2 of Appendix). Ninety-three percent of students that were eligible for promotion based on the initial EOG test administration were actually promoted and only one percent were retained.

The remainder of Figure 2 and Figures 3-5 of the Appendix show the diverse paths through which students that took at least one EOG test reached their final status of promoted, retained, or withdrawn. Of the 6,358 students in grades 3-8 that took at least one EOG test and scored at Achievement Level I or II on the *initial* EOG test administration, 4,798 (75.5%) were promoted, 1,100 (17.3%) were retained, and 460 (7.2%) withdrew by the beginning of the 2001-02 school year.

After initial EOG testing, retesting, Summer Academy, and review committee opportunities, 92.2% of promoted students were promoted because they met the Achievement Level III or IV requirement as well as other requirements (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Reasons for Promotion for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8
After All Retests and Summer Academy

	Number	Percent
Met Achievement Level III Standard and other requirements*	35,693	92.2
Substantial Progress in Summer Academy	571	1.5
IEP Goals Met or Substantially Met	6	0.0
Classroom Performance	6	0.0
Student Previously Retained/Overage for Grade	419	1.1
Limited English Proficiency	75	0.2
Unusual Personal Circumstance (including medical)	127	0.3
Other	583	1.5
Reason Not Given	1,217	3.1
Total Promoted	38,697	100.0

*Goal 2003 is measured based on the first EOG students take in a given year.

Table 3
Reasons for Retention for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8
After All Retests and Summer Academy

	Number	Percent
Did Not Meet Achievement Level III Standard	253	15.9
Failure to Meet Local Standards	472	29.6
Attendance	13	0.8
Academic	274	17.2
Poor Test Performance	120	7.5
Parent/Principal Decision to Retain	47	3.0
Medical	1	0.1
Discipline	5	0.3
Other	15	0.9
Reason Not Given	392	24.6
Total Retained	1,592	100.0

*Goal 2003 is measured based on the first EOG students take in a given year.

Another 1.5% were promoted based on making substantial progress in Summer Academy. Just over 1% were promoted because they had been previously retained or were overage for the grade level. One and one-half percent were promoted based on unique circumstances not described by one of the other categories.

The main reason students were retained (29.6%) was due to failure to meet local standards independent of their performance on the EOG tests (see Figure 3). The next most frequently cited reason for retention was academic performance (17.2%), followed by students not meeting the Achievement Level III or IV standard on the EOG tests (15.9%).

Waiver review committees examined the EOG test performance, academic performance, and other relevant information such as disabilities or limited English proficiency of 4,284 students. The rate of agreement between the recommendation of the waiver review committee and the principal’s decision to promote or retain was 94.7% (see Figure 4). They disagreed 3.7% of the time, with the principal more likely to promote than the waiver review committee.

Figure 4
Agreement Between Waiver Review Committee Recommendation and Principal’s Decision to Promote or Retain for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8

Principal's Decision		Committee Recommendation			Total
		Promote	Retain	Not Provided	
Promote	Number	3,121	112	45	3,278
	Percent of all decisions	72.9	2.6	1.1	76.5
Retain	Number	45	935	26	1,006
	Percent of all decisions	1.1	21.8	0.6	23.5
Total	Number	3,166	1,047	71	4,284

Grade Level Results

There were small differences in the rates of promotion, retention, and withdrawals when comparing grade levels to each other, and compared to the overall rates for grades 3-8 combined (see Figure 5). Of the elementary grades (3-5), third grade had the highest rate of retention (4.7%). Third graders also had the lowest rate of meeting the Achievement Level III or IV standard on all EOG tests taken after all retests (left side of Figure 5):

90.5% for third graders, compared to 92.0% for fourth graders, and 95.1% for fifth graders.

Middle school (grades 6-8) students had the same pattern of performance on the EOG tests as elementary school, with students in the lowest grade level not doing as well on the EOG tests as students in the higher grade levels. Sixth graders had the lowest rate of meeting the Achievement Level III or IV standard on all EOG tests taken after all retests at 88.0%, followed by seventh graders at 91.4%, and eighth graders at 94.5%. Also like elementary school students, the lowest grade level (6th) had the highest rate of retention (5.1%) and the highest grade level (8th) had the lowest retention rate (3.3%). Unlike elementary school students, however, students at the highest middle school grade level (8th grade) had the lowest rate of promotion at 89.2%, followed by seventh graders at 90.4%, and sixth graders at 90.6%. How is it that eighth grade students could have both the lowest rate of retention *and* the lowest rate of promotion among middle school students? The answer lies in examining the percent of students withdrawn. Eighth grade had the highest rate of withdrawals at 7.5%. This rate is more than one and one-half times greater than sixth and seventh grade. If the rate of promotion and retention is recalculated with the withdrawn students excluded, then eighth grade students do have the highest rate of promotion and the lowest rate of retention (see Figures 6 and 7). This raises the question, however, of why the rate of withdrawal is so much higher for eighth grade than for other grades.

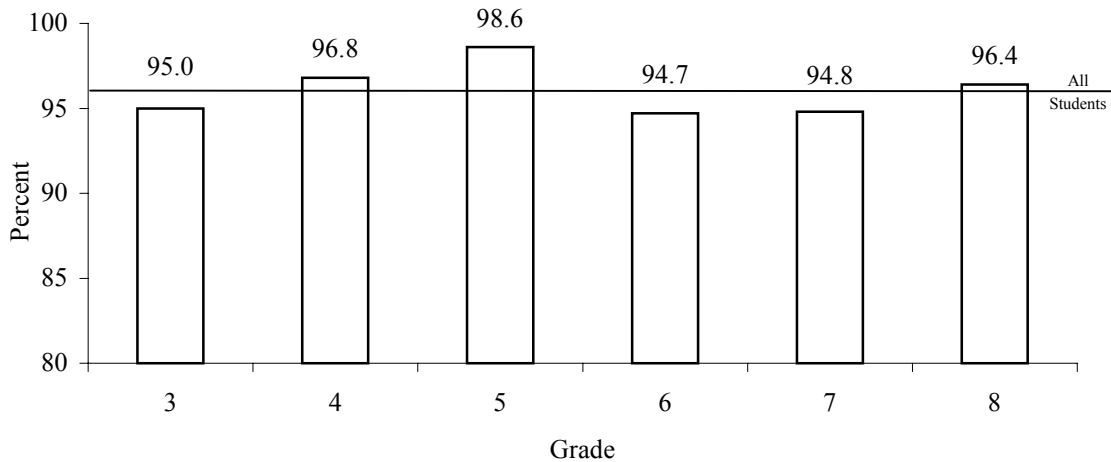
Figure 5
Meeting Achievement Level III Standard Status After All Retests and
Promotion/Retention Status for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8 by Grade

Grade	Total	Met Achievement Level III Standard		Did Not Meet Achievement Level III Standard		Promoted		Retained		Withdrawn	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
3	7,372	6,675	90.5	697	9.5	6,589	89.4	346	4.7	437	5.9
4	7,346	6,755	92.0	591	8.0	6,759	92.0	226	3.1	361	4.9
5	7,170	6,818	95.1	352	4.9	6,609	92.2	91	1.3	470	6.6
6	7,144	6,285	88.0	859	12.0	6,471	90.6	364	5.1	309	4.3
7	7,010	6,407	91.4	603	8.6	6,337	90.4	345	4.9	328	4.7
8	6,652	6,284	94.5	368	5.5	5,932	89.2	220	3.3	500	7.5
Total	42,694	39,224	91.9	3,470	8.1	38,697	90.6	1,592	3.7	2,405	5.6

Figure 6
Promotion/Retention Status for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8 by Grade
Excluding Withdrawn Students

Grade	Total	Promoted		Retained	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
3	6,935	6,589	95.0	346	5.0
4	6,985	6,759	96.8	226	3.2
5	6,700	6,609	98.6	91	1.4
6	6,835	6,471	94.7	364	5.3
7	6,682	6,337	94.8	345	5.2
8	6,152	5,932	96.4	220	3.6
Total	40,289	38,697	96.0	1,592	4.0

Figure 7
Percent of EOG Tested Students Promoted in Grades 3-8 by Grade
Excluding Withdrawn Students



Ethnic and Gender Results

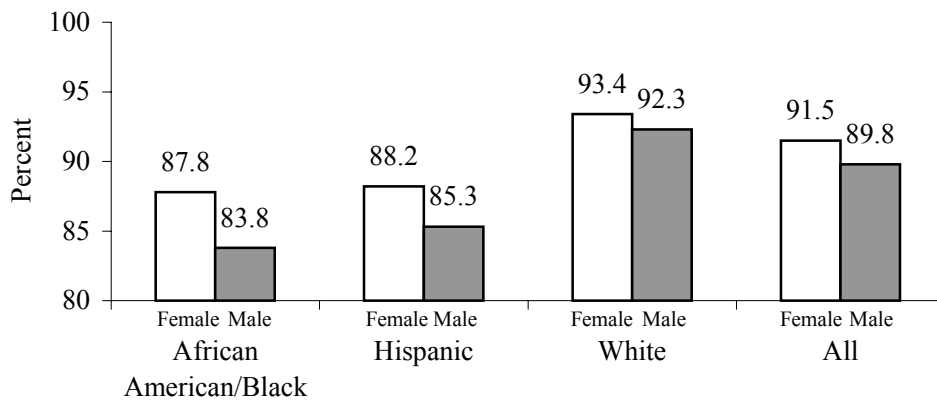
White and Asian/Pacific Islander students’ rates of promotion were about the same and both were about six percentage points higher than the promotion rate of African American/Black, Alaskan/American Indian, and Hispanic students (see Figure 8).

Figure 8
Promotion/Retention Status for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8 by Ethnic and Gender Group

		Total	Promoted		Retained		Withdrawn	
		Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Asian/Pacific Islander	All	1,590	1,471	92.5	20	1.3	99	6.2
	Female	766	702	91.6	6	0.8	58	7.6
	Male	824	769	93.3	14	1.7	41	5.0
African American/Black	All	11,353	9,745	85.8	943	8.3	665	5.9
	Female	5,829	5,118	87.8	382	6.6	329	5.6
	Male	5,524	4,627	83.8	561	10.2	336	6.1
Alaskan/American Indian	All	128	111	86.7	3	2.3	14	10.9
	Female	75	66	88.0	2	2.7	7	9.3
	Male	53	45	84.9	1	1.9	7	13.2
Hispanic	All	1,604	1,391	86.7	107	6.7	106	6.6
	Female	802	707	88.2	50	6.2	45	5.6
	Male	802	684	85.3	57	7.1	61	7.6
White	All	27,344	25,381	92.8	488	1.8	1,475	5.4
	Female	13,486	12,593	93.4	158	1.2	735	5.5
	Male	13,858	12,788	92.3	330	2.4	740	5.3
Other	All	675	598	88.6	31	4.6	46	6.8
	Female	338	300	88.8	13	3.8	25	7.4
	Male	337	298	88.4	18	5.3	21	6.2
Total	All	42,694	38,697	90.6	1,592	3.7	2,405	5.6
	Female	21,296	19,486	91.5	611	2.9	1,199	5.6
	Male	21,398	19,211	89.8	981	4.6	1,206	5.6

Female students' rate of promotion (91.5%) was slightly better than male students' rate (89.8%). Female students having a higher rate of promotion than male students was a pattern within ethnic groups as well, except for Asian/Pacific Islander students. The difference between female and male students was largest for the ethnic groups with the lowest rates of promotion (i.e., African American/Black, Alaskan/American Indian, and Hispanic). The largest difference between female and male students within ethnic group was between African American/Black female and male students (a difference of 4.0 percentage points). This difference was approximately one percentage point greater than the difference between the other ethnic groups with lower rates of promotion (Alaskan/American Indian and Hispanic) and more than two percentage points greater than the difference between Asian/Pacific Islander and White females and males (see Figure 9).

Figure 9
Percent of EOG Tested Students Promoted in Grades 3-8 by Ethnic and Gender Group



The difference between females and males within ethnic group changes when comparing students that met the Achievement Level III or IV standard on the EOG tests after all retests with students that did not meet the Achievement Level III or IV standard. For students that met the Achievement Level III or IV standard, the difference between females and males was less overall and less within ethnic groups except for Asian/Pacific Islander. The difference between Asian/Pacific Islander females and males increased slightly from the overall difference of 1.7 percentage points in favor of males to a difference of 2.2 percentage points in favor of males. The difference between females and males rate of promotion was greater for students that did *not* meet the Achievement Level III or IV standard (see Figure 10) than the overall difference in the rate of

Figure 10
Promotion/Retention Status for Tested Students in Grades 3-8 by Ethnic and Gender Group for
Students That Did Not Meet the Achievement Level III Standard After All Retests

		Total	Promoted		Retained		Withdrawn	
		Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Asian/Pacific Islander	Female	14	10	71.4	4	28.6	0	0.0
	Male	25	16	64.0	7	28.0	2	8.0
African American/Black	Female	1,003	649	64.7	274	27.3	80	8.0
	Male	1,345	834	62.0	410	30.5	101	7.5
Alaskan/American Indian	Female	4	3	75.0	1	25.0	0	0.0
	Male	1	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0
Hispanic	Female	134	89	66.4	36	26.9	9	6.7
	Male	150	100	66.7	38	25.3	12	8.0
White	Female	299	214	71.6	62	20.7	23	7.7
	Male	453	289	63.8	112	24.7	52	11.5
Other	Female	15	8	53.3	6	40.0	1	6.7
	Male	27	16	59.3	6	22.2	5	18.5
Total	Female	1,469	973	66.2	383	26.1	113	7.7
	Male	2,001	1,255	62.7	574	28.7	172	8.6
Total		3,470	2,228	64.2	957	27.6	285	8.2

promotion of females and males. Most dramatic is the difference between White females and males. White females that did not meet the Achievement Level III or IV standard were promoted at a rate of 71.6% compared to 63.8% for males (a difference of 7.8%). This difference is much greater than the difference between females and males in the other two ethnic groups with a sizeable number of students. The difference between African American/Black females and males was 2.7% in favor of females. The difference between Hispanic females and males was only 0.3% in favor of males. In fact, for Hispanic students the difference between females and males was greater for students that met the Achievement Level III or IV standard (92.5% for Hispanic females compared to 89.6% for males).

The general advantage of females over males in rate of promotion, as well as the specific advantage of White and African American/Black females, may be related to conduct. Studies have found that conduct and student work habits are an important determinant of course grades in both elementary and middle school (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1981; Farkas et al., 1990). Males and White, African/American, and Hispanic males in particular have more conduct problems (Farkas et al., 1990; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). These behaviors did not have an affect on standardized test results, but did affect course grades *even when standardized test performance was the same as other students* (Farkas et al. 1990). Conduct and work habits may have a similar influence on promotion decisions as has been documented for course grades.

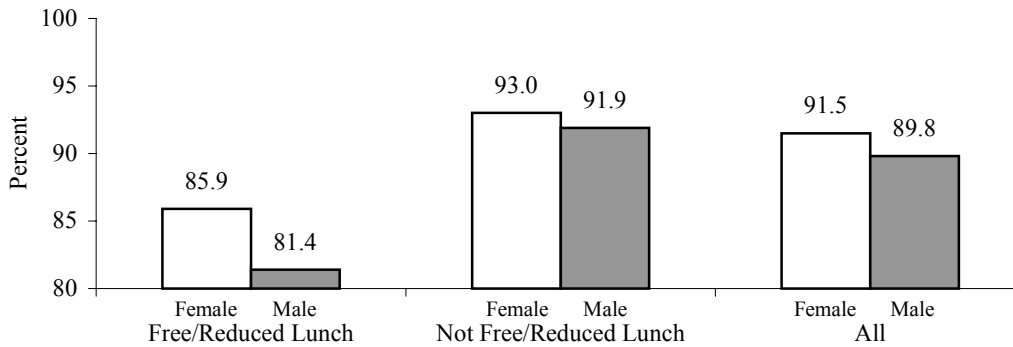
Free/Reduced Lunch Results

Students eligible for free/reduced lunch had a much lower promotion rate than students *not* eligible for free/reduced lunch (83.6% vs. 92.5%). As shown in Figure 11, free/reduced lunch males had the lowest rate of promotion at 81.4%. Relative to free/reduced eligible males, free/reduced lunch eligible females' rate of promotion was much better (4.5% better). The promotion rate of females and males *not* eligible for free/reduced lunch was nearly the same (93.0% vs. 91.9%). See Figure 12.

Figure 11
Promotion/Retention Status for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8 by
Free/Reduced Lunch Status

		Total	Promoted		Retained		Withdrawn	
		Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Free/Reduced Lunch	All	8,802	7,362	83.6	854	9.7	586	6.7
	Female	4,426	3,802	85.9	349	7.9	275	6.2
	Male	4,376	3,560	81.4	505	11.5	311	7.1
Not Free/Reduced Lunch	All	33,892	31,335	92.5	738	2.2	1,819	5.4
	Female	16,870	15,684	93.0	262	1.6	924	5.5
	Male	17,022	15,651	91.9	476	2.8	895	5.3
Total		42,694	38,697	90.6	1,592	3.7	2,405	5.6

Figure 12
Percent of EOG Tested Students Promoted in Grades 3-8 by Free/Reduced Lunch Status and Gender Group



Disabled Status Results

Three-fourths of the 7,930 students with disabilities in grades 3-8 took at least one EOG test. Those that did not take at least one EOG test took one of three alternate assessments provided by the state unless the student was excluded from testing due to being the student’s first or second year of limited English proficiency. Overall, students with disabilities’ rate of promotion was 3.8 percentage points lower than the rate of 91.2% for students without disabilities (see Figure 13). There were differences in the rates of

Figure 13
Promotion/Retention Status for EOG Tested Students in Grades 3-8 by Disabled/Non-Disabled Status

		Total	Promoted		Retained		Withdrawn	
		Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Disabled	All	6,033	5,271	87.4	416	6.9	346	5.7
	Regular Classroom	3,831	3,433	89.6	195	5.1	203	5.3
	Resource	1,437	1,183	82.3	155	10.8	99	6.9
	Self-Contained	728	631	86.7	59	8.1	38	5.2
	Home or Temporary	37	24	64.9	7	18.9	6	16.2
Non-Disabled		36,661	33,426	91.2	1,176	3.2	2,059	5.6
Total		42,694	38,697	90.6	1,592	3.7	2,405	5.6

promotion of students with disabilities by the type of service they received. Students with disabilities in a regular classroom had the highest rate of promotion at 89.6%. These students are of course those that need the least assistance with their disability. Among students needing more assistance, students in a self-contained classroom with a special education teacher responsible for providing all instruction had a higher rate of promotion (86.7%) than students that received some or supplemental instruction from a special education teacher for part of the school day or school week (82.3%). While the promotion rate of students receiving services at home or on a temporary basis was the lowest (64.9%) among students with disabilities, the results for this group should be interpreted cautiously given the small number of students.

SUMMARY

Overall Results

Requiring students to master the content of one grade level before being promoted to the next grade level sounds simple enough. Implementing the policy, however, turned out to be complex. For example, an evaluation of Summer Academy (for students who had not yet scored at Achievement Level III or IV) is discussed in a separate report (E&R Report 02.07). As shown in the appendix of this report, administrators and policymakers could not have anticipated the many unique paths that students would follow once the policy was in place. Readers might be surprised to learn that 73 students chose to attend Summer Academy in 2001, although they were not *required* to attend (because they had already met the EOG standard.) Another 42 students skipped the first EOG retest opportunity, skipped Summer Academy, and yet took advantage of the second EOG retest opportunity.

Final outcomes for WCPSS students during this first year of the new policy remained somewhat in a state of flux until Fall 2001. By mid-September of the 2001-02 school year, most students had been assigned to their grade level for the year, and data on the number of students who were promoted or retained became more reliable. The first year of implementation of the WCPSS Promotion and Intervention Policy resulted in a slightly higher rate of retention than in the past, but lower than the estimated doubling of the retention rate based on the pilot of seven schools in 2000-01 (see E&R Report No. 01.11). Other overall findings include:

- 89.1% of students in grades K-8 were promoted, 5.1% were retained, and 5.7% withdrew from the WCPSS.
- The rate of retention was highest among students in grades K-2 (7.5%). Of the students in grades 3-8 who took the EOG tests, 3.7% were retained, versus 5.1% of students at those grade levels who did not take EOG tests.

EOG Tested Students

The vast majority (89.4%) of the 47,741 WCPSS students in grades 3-8 took at least one End-of-Grade test. There were a number of significant findings particularly related to

grade levels, gender, race, students' free/reduced lunch status, and students' participation in Special Education:

- 91.9 % of students in grades 3-8 eventually “passed” or met the EOG standard. A small percentage of these students were retained, however, because they did not meet other requirements for promotion.
- Of the 4,284 students requiring a waiver committee review, the rate of agreement between the recommendation of the committee and the principal’s decision to promote or retain was 94.7%. The waiver review committee and the principal disagreed 3.7% of the time, with the principal more likely to promote than the committee. (A waiver committee review recommendation was not provided for 1.7% of students.)

Among the demographic factors that were related to whether students were promoted:

- Grade Level. Within both elementary and middle schools, the rate of promotion increased as the grade level increased. Across elementary and middle schools, fifth grade students had the highest rate of promotion at 98.6%; the lowest was sixth grade at 94.7%.
- Race or Ethnicity. White and Asian/Pacific Islander students’ rate of promotion were about the same (92.8% and 92.5%, respectively) and both were about six percentage points higher than the promotion rate of African American/Black (85.8%), Alaskan/American Indian (86.7%), and Hispanic students (86.7%).
- Gender. Female students’ rate of promotion (91.5%) was slightly better than male students’ rate (89.8%). This gender pattern was found within ethnic groups as well, except for Asian/Pacific Islander students.
- Special Education Status and Type of Service. Three-fourths of the 7,930 students with disabilities in grades 3-8 took at least one EOG test. Overall, students with disabilities’ rate of promotion was lower than the rate for students without disabilities (87.4% vs. 91.2%). Students with disabilities who were served in a regular classroom had the highest rate of promotion (89.6%), followed by students served in a self-contained classroom (86.7%), and students that received some or supplemental instruction from a special education teacher (82.3%).
- Socioeconomic Status. Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch had a much lower promotion rate than students *not* eligible for lunch assistance (83.6% vs. 92.5%). The gender gap between females and males was even greater for free/reduced lunch students than for females and males who were not eligible. Free/reduced lunch eligible males had the lowest rate of promotion at 81.4%, or 4.5% lower than females.

Based on these patterns, it is not surprising that the lowest rate of promotion was for male free/reduced students (81.4%), followed by African-American/Black males (83.8%). White females had the highest rate of promotion (93.4%). Among students who had not

met the Achievement Level III or IV standard on the EOG tests, White females had a much higher rate of promotion (71.6%) compared to White males who had not met the standard (63.8%, a difference of 7.8%). In fact, White males who had not met the EOG standard had promotion rates similar to males of other racial ethnic groups.

IMPLICATIONS

In almost every comparison, males' rate of promotion was lower than females'. The gender difference was particularly pronounced for students with lower achievement (i.e., not meeting the Achievement Level III standard after all retests) and for free/reduced lunch eligible students. Additional strategies to specifically address low-achieving males and males from low-income families need to be developed to increase their performance on the EOG tests and retests, and to address their comparatively low rate of promotion.

While there is improvement in the rate of promotion as students move up grade levels within elementary and middle schools, this improvement is not consistent across the entire K-8 span. This is most evident in the fact that fifth grade students had the highest rate of promotion and sixth grade the lowest. The school system has begun to look at the issue of the drop in performance from fifth grade to sixth grade, based on the ABCs results. These promotion results underscore the importance of that effort.

One of the goals of special education programs is to have students with disabilities participating as much as possible in the regular classroom environment. To accommodate the varying needs of students, different levels of special education services are provided. These results indicate that EOG tested students with disabilities receiving resource services had a lower rate of promotion than students with disabilities served wholly in a regular classroom, or those in a self-contained classroom—students who are usually more severely disabled. This was true even though students receiving resource services had a much higher rate of meeting the Achievement Level III standard (61.0%) than students in a self-contained classroom (39.8%). Further study is needed to determine the reason for this discrepancy.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the rates of retention did not double from 1999-2000, as originally predicted. There are several possible reasons the rates of retention were lower than predicted.

- The low Achievement Level III passing score set by the state on the new EOG mathematics test.
- The experience of the seven schools that piloted the Promotion and Intervention policy in 1999-2000. The experience of these schools may have helped these and other schools adjust their expectations of what was required for students to meet the new standard.
- The extensive support provided to students throughout the school year through the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) and other programs likely were important.

- The support provided to teachers through curriculum support materials and professional development were likely significant in improving instructional effectiveness.
- The greater involvement of parents and the community through individual efforts and through PTAs and other organizations as a result of the implementation of this policy.
- The focus of the entire school community as a result of the 95% by 2003 goal and the Promotion and Intervention policy.

Nevertheless, the rate of retention did increase over previous years as result of the Promotion and Intervention policy. Students in the earlier grades in both elementary and middle schools had higher rates of retention than students in the later grades. This practice is consistent with the idea that early intervention and retention is more effective than waiting until students have advanced several grades.

Significant differences were found for ethnic and gender groups, for students eligible for free/reduced lunch, and for students with disabilities. The findings highlighted in this report should be the basis for further discussion and research. These results should continue to be monitored over time.

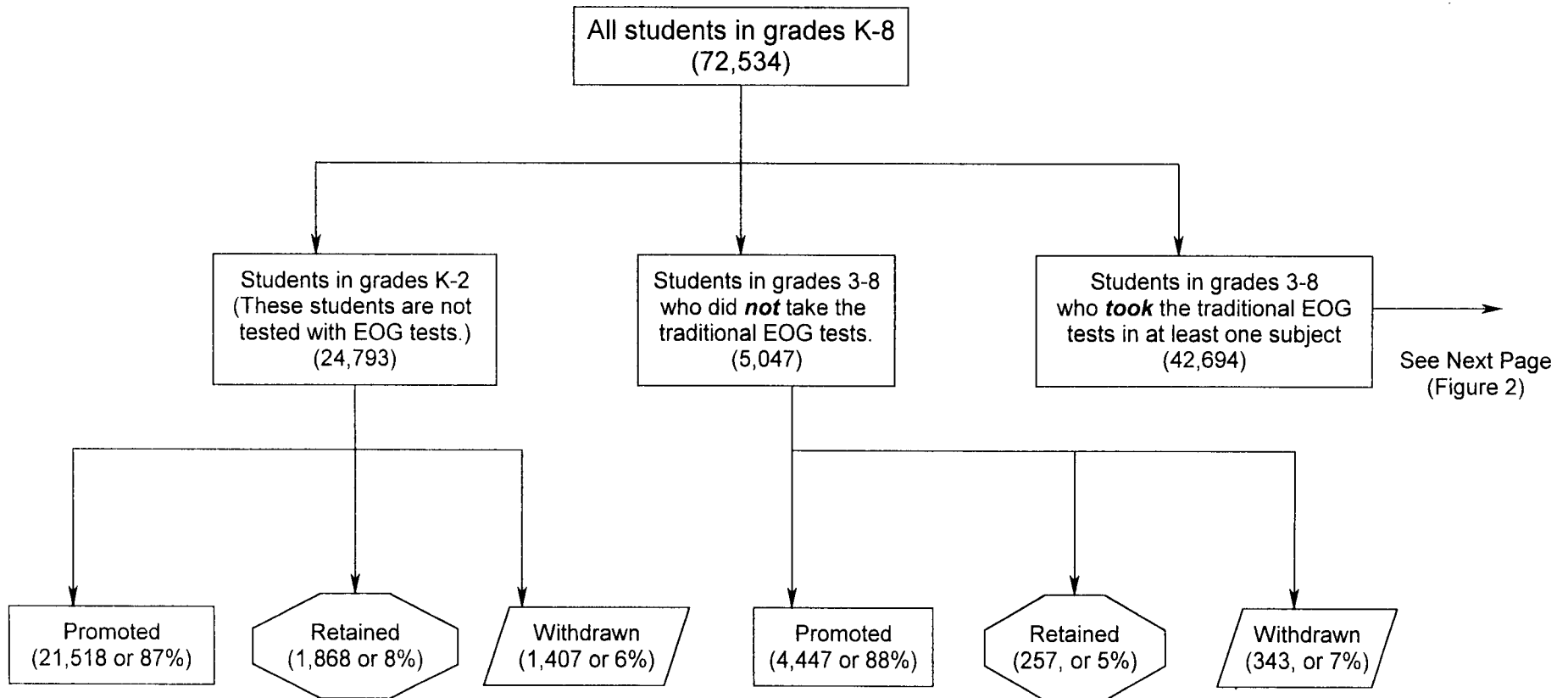
REFERENCES

- Baenen, N. (2002). The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) 2000-01: Student Participation and Effectiveness. (Evaluation and Research Report No 02.09) Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System.
- Banks, K.E. (2000). Estimating the Impact of the New Promotion/Retention Policy. (Evaluation and Research Report No 01.11) Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System.
- Dulaney, C. (2001). Progress Toward the 95% Goal: 2001. (Evaluation and Research Report 02.03) Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System.
- Entwisle, D.R., & Hayduk, L.A. (1981). Academic expectations and the school attainment of young children. Sociology of Education, 54, 34-50.
- Farkas, G., Grobe, R.P., Sheehan, D., & Shuan, Y. (1990). Cultural resources and school success: Gender, ethnicity, and poverty groups within an urban school district. American Sociological Review, (55), 127-142.
- Holdzkom, D. (2002). Summer Academy in the Wake County Public Schools: An Evaluation of the Program. (Evaluation and Research Report No. 02.07) Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System.
- McCoy, A.R., & Reynolds, A.J. (1999). Grade retention and school performance: An extended investigation. Journal of School Psychology, 37(3), 273-298.

THIS PAGE LEFT BLANK FOR DOUBLE SIDED PRINTING

APPENDIX

Figure 1
WCPSS Students in Grades K-8
Spring 2001



Note: Percents may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

2,125 retained
at this stage

Figure 2
Students Who Took the Traditional EOG Tests

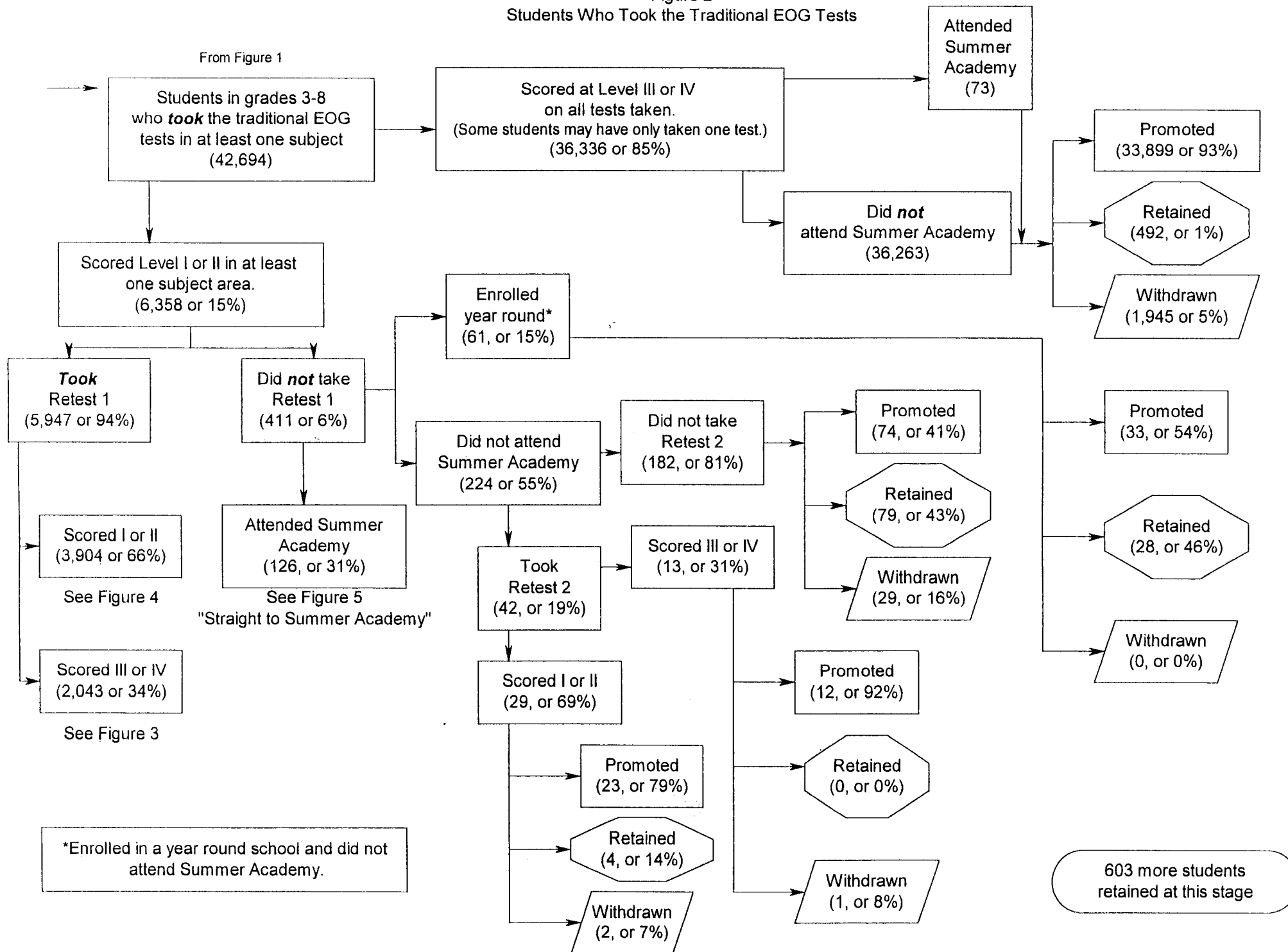
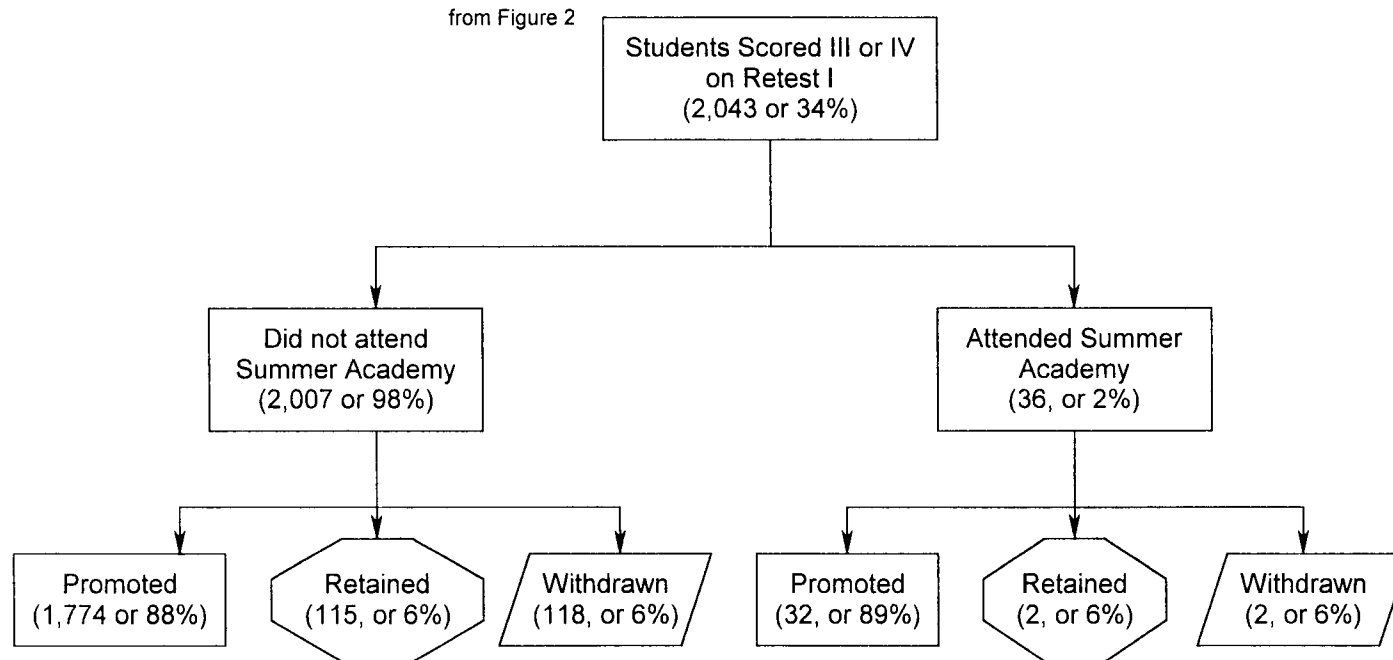


Figure 3
Students Who Took the Traditional EOG Tests
and Scored Level III or IV



117 retained
at this stage

Figure 4
Students Who Scored I or II on EOG Tests

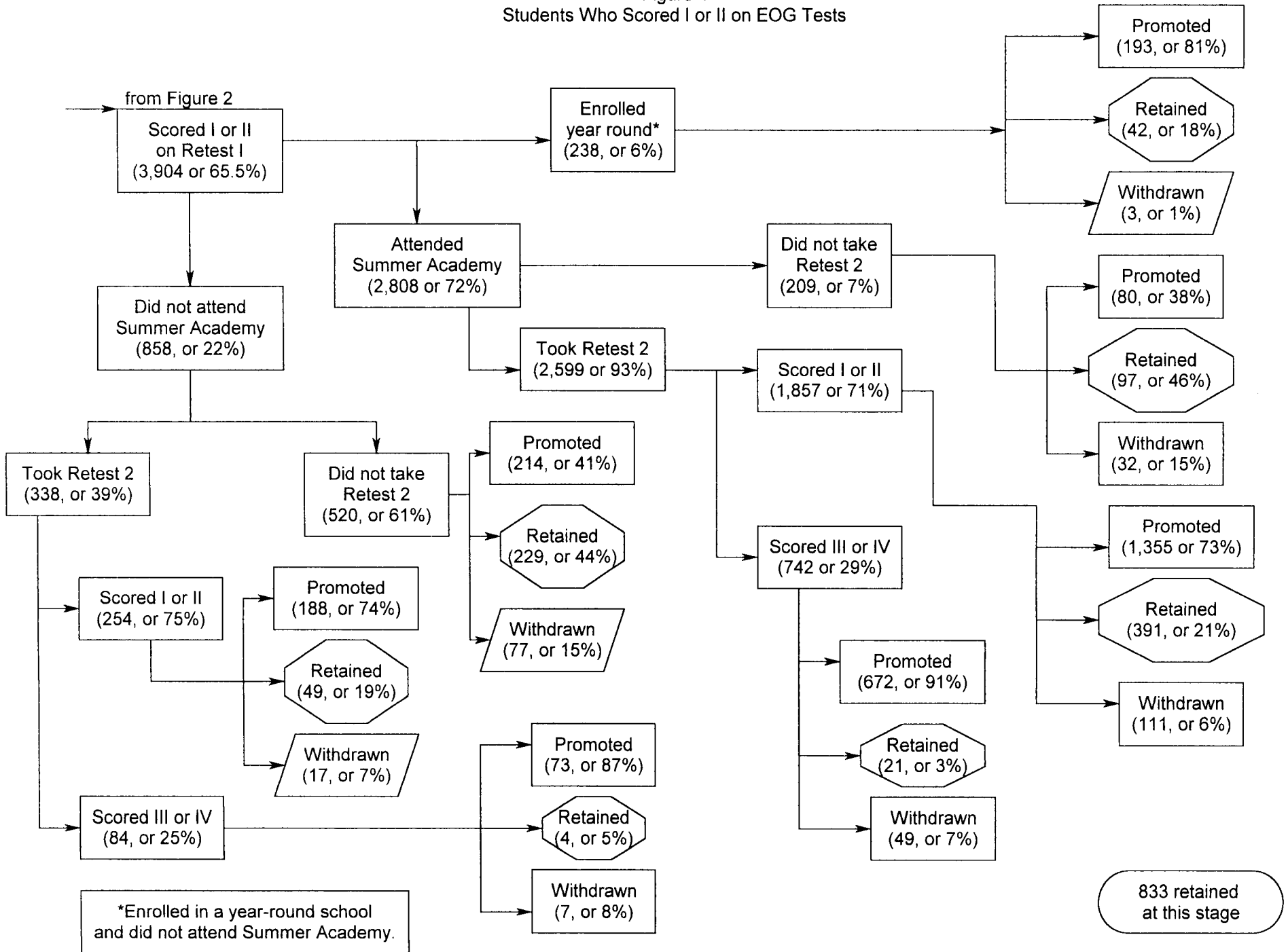
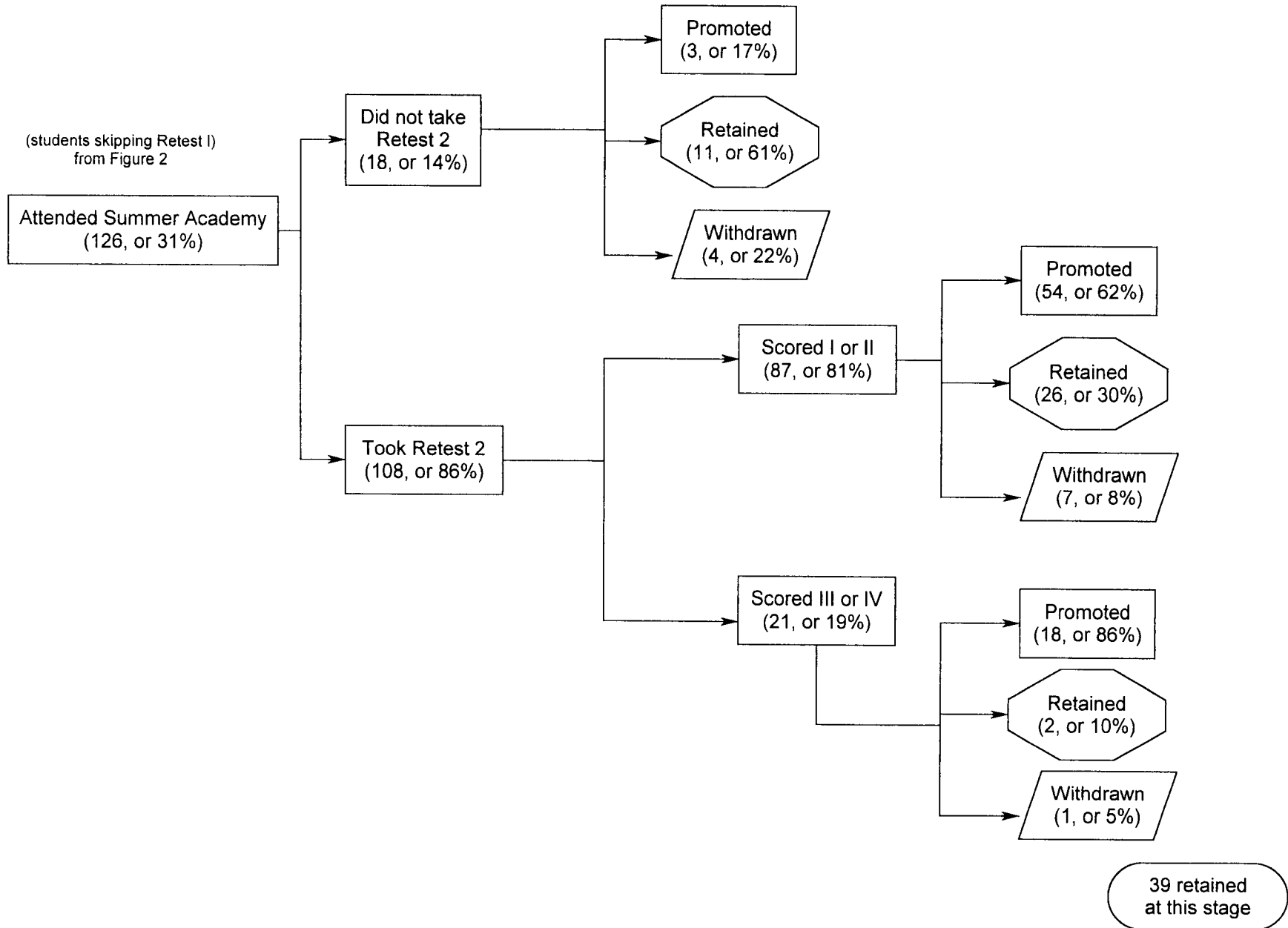


Figure 5
 Students Who Scored I or II
 Did Not Take Retest 1
 ("Straight To Summer Academy")



**PROMOTION/RETENTION OF STUDENTS IN GRADES K-8
2000-01**

Author

Kristopher Kaase
Evaluation Specialist

Contributing Staff

Karen Banks
Assistant Superintendent, Evaluation & Research

Chuck Dulaney
Senior Director, Evaluation

Mark Lindblad
Data Analyst

Iris Senzig
Lead Secretary

E&R Report No. 02.08
January 2002

Department of Evaluation and Research
Wake County Public School System
Raleigh, North Carolina
<http://www.wcpss.net/evaluation-research>
(919) 850-1903