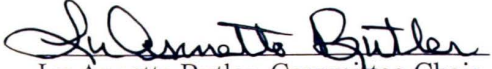


GRADUATION AND DROP OUT RATES
IN GEORGIA AND TENNESSEE

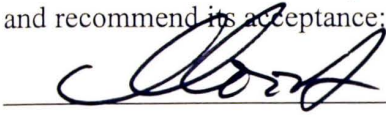
TAMMI LEMLEY

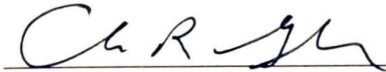
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a field study written by Tammi M. Lemley entitled "Graduation and Drop Out Rates in Georgia and Tennessee." I have examined the final copy of this field study for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Education Specialist.

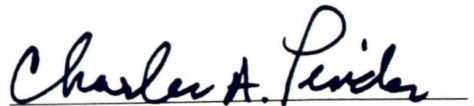

Lu Annette Butler, Committee Chair

We have read this field study
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GRADUATION AND DROP OUT RATES
IN GEORGIA AND TENNESSEE

A Field Study
Presented for the
Education Specialist Degree
Austin Peay State University

Tammi Lemley
May 2008

DEDICATION

This field study is dedicated to my husband, S. Neal Hurst, and my son Corban Hurst, who have supported, loved, and believed in me. Thank you for supporting me and believing that all of the late nights and long hours were going to be worth it in the end. Thank you for your understanding in my long journey to find out what it is what I wanted to be when “I grow up”. Without your love, support, and encouragement I know that this would not have been possible. This field study is also dedicated to my family and friends who have provided me with words of encouragement, stress relief, and reality checks and needed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Lu Annette Butler, for her patience, guidance, knowledge, and abilities, which have helped me to complete this study. She has my deepest gratitude for all of her time and commitment to this study. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Charles B. Woods and Dr. Buddy Grah for their comments, guidance, and assistance. I would also like to thank Darlene Johnson who was always willing to help me to find the information that I needed.

Abstract

This study took data from the state report cards of Georgia and Tennessee to determine if passing a standardized test in the eighth grade in order to be promoted to the ninth grade influences graduation and / or drop rates of students in those states. Research has shown that promoting a student to the next grade due to the age of the student, social promotion, or promoting based on the scores of a standardized test could have both positive and negative consequences on that student. Previous research has taken one side or the other on the topic; however, social promotion or promotion based on test scores has not been compared to see what result they have on graduation rates and / or drop out rates. The hypothesis of this study was that those states that have required that the student pass a standardized test prior to being promoted to the next grade will have a higher education rate and a lower drop out rate. The study found a statistically significant difference in graduation and drop out rates based on the state in which the student is attending high school.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades the educational system in the United States has been attempting to determine how to best help the students in its school systems to graduate from high school. Researchers have been focusing on two main topics, social promotion and promotion based on the students' results on a standardized test. It is the goal of the educational system to help students to be prepared to be productive citizens upon graduation from high school, and that every student receives a quality education. Since the conception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it has become the primary focus of the educational system to ensure that students are obtaining the best education that is possible. The focus has shifted from the student and their ability or inability to learn the material that is being presented, to that of their teachers and how teachers are now carrying the primary responsibility to ensure that every student in their classroom is learning the material that is being covered in that classroom.

In the report, *A Nation At Risk*, it is stated that in the United States that there are approximately 23 million adults that could not pass a basic standardized test that tests a persons' ability to read, write, and comprehend what they have read. These American adults are defined as being functionally illiterate, which is to say that they can not function on a day-to-day basis in the United States. The report also states that approximately 13% of 17-year-olds could also be classified as functionally illiterate. The report goes on to say that the American students' average achievement on standardized tests has continued to decline. The report also states that the number of students that score

in the advanced range on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) has also declined and that those students that are graduating from college have lower achievement scores.

According to the United Nation's Fund Organization (UNICEF), the United States is ranked as 14th out of 24 industrialized nations when comparing our educational well-being of students (Ash, 2007). When reading this report and research that states that the average student today is actually academically behind the average student of thirty years ago, it makes one question how something like this could be happening in the United States. Somewhere along the way, in the United States, we are allowing our future generations to become academically delayed. One must wonder what this will mean in thirty years from now, fifty years from now, or even a hundred years from now if nothing is done to correct the current educational trend. When the students of the United States are falling so far behind in academics, how does that translate into other areas? With so many of the careers in the future based in mathematics and science, as a society we must determine the best course of action to ensure that the students in the United States school system are receiving the best education possible.

Presidents, lawmakers, principals, teachers, parents, and the community at large have been attempting to answer the question of how to ensure that the students of the United States are receiving the best possible education in order to be successful in their future endeavors. President Clinton addressed this issue in three of his reports to the Nation, 1997, 1998, and 1999. President George W. Bush addressed the concerns of education in the United States and signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. With the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act, educators are now being held accountable for what a student is able to learn and how that student scores on standardized tests. The

scores on these tests, in many states, determines how the teacher is evaluated and if that teacher is considered to be a successful teacher. The test scores are also used as a determining factor in asking teachers to return to the teaching profession if they are not yet tenured.

With all of the technological advances that are being made in the world, and all of the advances that are being made in science, business, and many other arenas as our world becomes more of a global community, the question becomes how do we most effectively help those students that are currently struggling in the educational system. Two of the more prominent view points is to stop social promotion and to use standardized testing to ensure that the student is academically ready to be promoted to the next grade. Both of these view points have their advocates and their adversaries, with mixed findings in the research that has been conducted.

Social Promotion

Social promotion is best defined as when a student is promoted to the next grade not on their academic merit, but on their age and/or maturity level. In a survey conducted by Anagnostopoulos (2006), many educators and the general public strongly believe in social promotion. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) those students that are socially promoted to the next grade often become further behind and then drop-out of school prior to graduation (2001). Typically, those students that have struggled with meeting the academic standards for a grade the first time around, are no more likely to meet those standards the second time around without some form of intervention.

Socially promoting a student is often up to the individual teacher and the student's parent and/or guardian in elementary school. Also, in elementary school, a parent can request that a student be promoted although they have not met the academic benchmarks that their state has recommended for a student to meet prior to promotion to the next grade level. In those states in which there is some form of testing in which the student must be able to obtain a predetermined score in order to be promoted to the next grade level, there are often waivers. These waivers are typically applicable to those students that fall under English Language Learners (ELL) or Special Education students. Also, once in high school, those students that are classified as either ELL or Special Education Students may have a credit modification, which enables them to graduate with a regular education diploma with fewer credits than their regular education counterparts.

It is believed by many that when a student is socially promoted, they are going into the next grade without all of the necessary skills needed in order for them to be successful. Each grade is built upon the foundations of knowledge that were learned in the previous grade(s). And as a student is promoted from eighth to ninth grade, without the basic skills that they need to have for entering the ninth grade, they are being set up to fail if interventions are not in place and ready to be used.

Once in high school, the likelihood of being socially promoted drops significantly since a high school student must earn a specific number of credits prior to graduating. Those students who have been socially promoted from one grade to the next in their elementary and/or middle school years are now held accountable for their academics. The teachers who are teaching in the high school are then held accountable for ensuring that the student, who has not reached their grade level standards, achieves those standards and

and masters the standards of their high school classroom. However, the research conducted by Warren, Jenkins, and Kulick (2006) found that there is an overwhelming belief that due to the large number of students being socially promoted, today's high school graduates are not prepared to succeed in college and lack the necessary skills for obtaining employment.

In summary, social promotion is used on a wide-scale basis throughout the United States. Although the general public and some educators believe in the merit of social promotion (Anagnostopoulos, 2006), the limited research that has been conducted does not concur. The research that has been conducted suggests that socially promoting a student from one grade to the next could be a detriment to the student and actually be setting them up to not be academically successful in high school and in future academic endeavors (SREB, 2001; Warren, et al. 2006). It is commonly believed that when a student is socially promoted from one grade to the next, that they are lacking the necessary skills in order to be successful. From this viewpoint, once a student reaches high school, they are unable to be successful and are not likely to graduate from high school on time either due to dropping out or taking extra time in order to graduate.

Retention

The most well-known alternative to socially promoting a student is retaining a student. According to Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham (2004) retaining a student began to be used in the 1850's, once students began to receive grades in their classes. When a student is retained they are expected to repeat the grade in which they have not mastered the materials in order to academically "catch up" to the standards that have been set for that grade level. Retention has gained in popularity over the past

thirty years (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006) due to the increased attention paid to ensuring that the students are obtaining the necessary grade-level skills and meeting certain standards and benchmarks. And according to Jimerson (2001), retaining a student is becoming even more popular due to the focus on teacher accountability and state standards.

Researchers vary in their estimates of how many students are retained from 15-20% (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006) to 30-50% (Jimerson, 2001; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006) from first grade through twelfth grade. It is also estimated that approximately 5-15% of students are retained per year (Jimerson, 2001; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Anagnostopoulos (2006) found that over the past two decades, the number of 9th grade students who are retained has significantly increased. It is believed that this increase in 9th grade retention is due to those students that were socially promoted to the 9th grade who did not have the necessary academic skills in order to be successful. When it is determined that a student would benefit from being retained several assumptions are being made: (a) that all students have the ability and desire to be successful (b) that grade standards are appropriate for all students of that particular age group (c) that all students are able to obtain grade standards and benchmarks if they are given enough time, and (d) there are great differences between the linear grade levels (Beebe-Frankenburger et al, 2004).

Research has had various results on the findings of the usefulness of retention. Greene and Winters (2006) found that in Florida, those students that were retained actually showed improvement on standardized testing. In the study conducted by Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon and Easton (2000), it was found that those students who had

been previously retained were scoring higher when taking standardized tests. And Anagnostopoulos (2006) found that those students who were retained were able to increase their work effort and possibly master the content in order to be successful.

In the research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (2001), many of the students who have had difficulties in mastering the academic material required to be promoted to the next grade, will also have difficulties when they repeat that grade. In the study conducted by Roderick, et al. (2000), many of those students who were retained in the first grade were also retained in the second grade. Previous research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (2001) and Bebe-Frankenberger et al., (2004) found that those students who were retained, even once, were more likely to drop out of high school. Similarly, Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) found that 67% of high school students who were retained anywhere between the first and seventh grade dropped out of high school prior to graduation. Jimerson (2001) also found that being retained was not effective in dealing with those students who were not meeting academic benchmarks. Studies have also found that those students that have more behavioral and social issues are retained at a much higher rate than those students who are not meeting benchmarks but are not exhibiting these behaviors (Bebe-Frankenberger et al. 2004).

In summary, retention has been used since grades have been distributed to students for their school work, beginning in the late 1850's (Bebe-Frankenberger et al. 2004). Since schools and teachers are being held accountable for the success of a student, more students are being retained every year. With the current retention rates, a student has a significant chance of being retained prior to graduating from high school (Jimerson, 2001; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Although some research has shown that grade

retention has a positive impact on a student and their academic success (Greene & Winters, 2006; Roderick et al. 2000; Anagnostopoulos, 2006), the majority of the reviewed research suggests that being retained has definite negative consequences for the student (SREB, 2001; Berbe-Frankenberger et al, 2004; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). This research has shown that those students that are retained are much more likely to drop out of school prior to graduating.

High School Drop Out Rates

Policy makers have set a goal of 90% of all high school students to graduate from high school, nationwide. According to Hardre and Reeve (2003), the actual drop out rate ranges from 12-20% with as much as a 40% drop out rate in more rural areas. Leckrone and Griffith (2006) point out how these figures can also be misleading by the way in which the data is reported. One example of this misrepresentation is the town of Sharpstown, Texas. It was reported that out of a class of 1,000, there was not a single high school drop out. After a closer review by the Texas Education Agency, it was found that out of the 1,000 students, there were only 300 students who had actually graduated with a high school diploma. The *New York Times* found that the New York City graduating class of 2002 actually had a drop out rate of 60% instead of the reported drop-out rate of 49% (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006).

Previous research on high school drop outs and the reasoning for dropping out has primarily focused on the identifying of the risk factors involved in determining if a student is at high-risk for dropping out of high school according to Suh and Suh (2007). Leventhal (2004) states that research has shown that students that are low SES (socioeconomic status) are much more likely to have a variety of academic challenges

that their peers who have higher SES status and/or standing. In their research, Suh and Suh (2007) found that the three primary risks factors for dropping out of high school are previous retention, low socioeconomic (SES) status and behavioral issues. They also found that if a student has two or more of these risk factors they are at a significantly higher risk of dropping out of high school.

Researchers have found that if a student is not educationally engaged that the student is more likely to consider dropping out of high school. Hardre and Reeve (2003) found that when a teacher is supportive of their students, those students are more likely to value their education and are less likely to drop out of high school. When a student finds that the educational material they are learning in school is relevant to them in some way, they are much more likely to achieve academic success. When someone is successful, they are less likely to want to quit what they are doing and want to continue to be successful. Many schools are beginning to implement programs to address the issues of ensuring that students are academically engaged and are receiving any extra academic support which that student might need.

In summary, high school drop out rates vary by area and can often be misleading depending on how the data is reported (Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). The research that has been conducted on the high school drop out rates has primarily focused on the characteristics that are shared by those students' who drop out of high school (Suh & Suh, 2007; Leventhal, 2004) rather than ways of successfully preventing a student from dropping out of high school. If a student has been previously retained, the likelihood that the student will later drop out of high school prior to graduation increases significantly (Suh & Suh, 2007).

Over the past several decades, testing has become an integral part of the academic curriculum in schools in many states. And even more recently in education, testing has become a high-stakes situation for many students. A test, when used appropriately, can be a good measure of the students' academic progress. Many states have decided to have students pass a test in order to be promoted from one grade to the next or in order to be able to graduate from high school. For the graduating class of 2006, there were 23 states that required a student to pass a high school exit exam in order to receive their high school diploma. The push to have a high school exit exam by policy makers has been driven by the belief that some students that have obtained a high school diploma lack the basic academic skills that are necessary in order to be successful in college, employment opportunities, and society at large (Warren, et al. 2006). The push to have a high school exit exam is also due to the popular belief that school standards have been lowered so that more students will receive their high school diploma.

According to the American Psychological Association (2001) the results of a test can give a teacher feedback on how their students are doing, what the students are doing well, and in which areas the students need to improve. By having high stakes testing, teachers are able to verify if their students are achieving the standards of their state. This allows the teacher to modify their lesson plan in order to better prepare their students. Anagnostopouls (2006) also found that the general public believes that using standardized testing allows a teacher to target their instruction to the specific information that the students are having difficulty with, so that more of their students will be academically successful.

According to Reardon and Galindo (2002), the supporters of high-stakes tests argue that this type of testing has added incentives for teachers and students to improve their performance, and their opponents argue that these tests have inflated the drop out rates due to students who do not perform well on tests not continuing their education. According to the Center for Public Education (n.d.) testing can actually increase the amount that a student is learning in the classroom as indicated by the students' performance on the high-stakes tests. Robbins, Allen, Casillas & Peterson (2006) found that the grades that are given in high school can widely vary due to the differences in schools. Also, Robbins et al. found and that the schools expectations and performance also vary depending upon their definition of a student being academically successful. Therefore, standardized tests allow for students to be promoted or to graduate from high school based on their actual abilities and not on a teacher's subjective opinion. It has also been found that high school academic performance and achievement on standardized tests are heavily weighted when determining academic decisions (Robbins et al, 2006).

In contrast to the above-mentioned findings, the research conducted by Warren, Jenkins, and Kulick (2006) found that if a state has a high school exit exam that there are lower graduation rates and more students taking the General Education Development test (GED). And in those states where there is a high school exit exam, the pass rates are reported at the state, school district, and school level. These reports are often highly publicized by the local media and there are often consequences for those school districts, principals, and teachers in those areas where the students did not do well on the exit exam.

According to Warren et al (2006), critics of the exit exams believe that these policies actually lower the overall graduation rate among those populations that are considered to be in the racial and ethnic minority and for low SES students. Opponents to high school exit exams state that many students who believe that they are incapable of passing the exam automatically dismiss the exam (Warren et al. 2006). Anagnostopoulos (2006) found that once students do not do well on these exams that in some areas where there are test-based accountability policies, resources and funding for programs for students are withdrawn, instead of being increased.

In summary, standardized or high-stakes testing has become a norm in the United States and is often used to determine the academic success of the students and the teachers who teach them (Warren, Jenkins & Kulick, 2006). The test scores are used in making decisions about grade promotion and graduation. When using test scores to make these types of decisions, it should be remembered that the test score is just a snapshot of the students' abilities and should not ever be used as the only determining factor (APA, 2001). Many believe that these tests are helpful and can help teachers to modify their curriculum in order to better serve their students (Reardon & Galindo, 2002; Robbins et al. 2006). Whereas, proponents to high-stakes testing state that drop out rates are increasing due to the fact that students who do not test well do not attempt to do well on these tests due to their belief that they are incapable of doing well on these tests (Warren et al, 2006).

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Test is given to students in the third through eighth grades in the state of Tennessee. The TCAP

is a criterion – referenced test and is how the state of Tennessee determines its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In every grade, third through eighth, the student is required to take the TCAP to determine their abilities in Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Although taking the TCAP is required, making a certain score, or meeting a certain performance level, is not needed in order to be promoted to the next grade.

Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)

The Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) is given to students in the first through eighth grades in the state of Georgia. As the name suggests, the CRCT is a criterion-referenced test and is how the state of Georgia determines its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In every grade, first through eighth, the student is required to take the CRCT to determine their abilities in Reading, English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. In order to be promoted from the eighth grade to the ninth grade, a student must meet the predetermined score for promotion.

Summary

The research that has been conducted on the effects of standardized testing has focused on the effectiveness of testing in determining benchmarks met (Reardon & Galindo, 2002). Research on standardized testing has also focused on the belief that some students do not test well and that those students are more likely to drop out of school due to their belief that they cannot do the work (Warren et al, 2006). In summary, the research that has been conducted on graduation rates and on drop out rates has focused on student characteristics and environmental characteristics that relate to the risk of the student dropping out of high school (Suh & Suh, 2007; Leventhal, 2004). A literature search failed to uncover any studies that investigate the relationship between an 8th graders performance on a standardized test and how it relates to their completion of high school. A literature search also failed to uncover any studies that investigate if being socially promoted or passing a standardized test to be promoted from the 8th to 9th grade has any effect on high school graduation and/or drop out rates.

The Present Study

This study looked at the graduation data and high school drop out rate from the state of Tennessee and the state of Georgia. This information will be analyzed in order to determine if students who are required to take a standardized test prior to being promoted to the 9th grade are more likely to graduate from high school than those students who are not required to take a standardized test in order to be promoted. The states of Tennessee and Georgia were chosen for this study due to the similarities between these two states. The states are in the same region of the United States, have similar demographics, similar socioeconomic status distributions among their populations, both have a major

agriculturally based economy except for the larger cities, such as; Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, and Augusta. Both Tennessee and Georgia offer the HOPE scholarship which is a state funded scholarship for college bound high school students. The state of Tennessee does have a standardized test, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), however it is not a requirement for the student to pass the standardized test in order to be promoted from the 8th to the 9th grade. The state of Georgia has the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and does require that an 8th grade student pass the CRCT in order to be promoted from the 8th to the 9th grade.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Participants

This study did not use individual participants. Instead, this study is looked at archival data that had been previously collected on the public high school students in the states of Tennessee and Georgia for the 2005-2006 school year.

Materials

The individual states report card was located, via the internet, and examined. The report cards were then examined and analyzed for the graduation rates and drop out rates of the states of Tennessee and Georgia.

Procedures

The report card for the state of Tennessee was compared to the report card for the state of Georgia. The report cards were analyzed for differences between graduation rates and drop out rates for the students in the public school systems of those states. A chi-square analysis was then used to determine if there was a significant difference between the drop out rates of the two states and if passing a standardized test to be promoted from the eighth grade to the ninth grade had a significant impact on graduation rates.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

According to the Tennessee Report Card for the 2005-2006 school year, there were a total of 991,489 students enrolled in the Tennessee public school system. This number includes the total number of students in the elementary, middle, and high schools in Tennessee. For the 2005-2006 school year, Tennessee had a total of 45,424 students that graduated from high school and a total of 4,935 students that dropped out of high school. The cohort drop out rate for this time frame, as reported by the state of Tennessee, was 9.8%.

According to the Georgia Report Card for the 2005-2006 school year, there were a total of 499,000 students enrolled in Georgia public High Schools. For the 2005-2006 school year, Georgia had a total of 53,081 students that graduated from high school and a total of 2,495 students that dropped out of high school. The cohort drop out rate for this time frame was 4.7%.

When comparing the drop out rate percentages for Tennessee and Georgia, the state of Tennessee has approximately twice the number of students who drop out of high school than the state of Georgia.

Table 1. Number of students who graduated & dropped out of high school

	Georgia	Tennessee	Total
Graduates	53,081	45,424	98505
Drop Outs	2,495	4,935	7430
Total	55,576	50,359	105,935

Using the chi square test of independence statistic, a significant difference was expected in the number of high school graduates and high school drop outs between the states of Georgia and Tennessee $\chi^2(1, N = 105,935) = 1142, p < .05$. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the drop-out rates between those states who require students to take, and pass, a proficiency exam prior to being promoted to the ninth grade and those states that do not require students to do so.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in the high school graduation rates and drop out rates between the states of Tennessee and Georgia. The specific hypotheses of this study was that those states in which students who are required to take a standardized test and make a passing score prior to being promoted from the eighth to the ninth grade would have higher high school graduation rates and lower drop out rates than those states that do not require students to take a standardized test and to make a passing grade in order to be promoted to the next grade.

Based on prior research, it was expected that there would be a significant difference in the graduation rates and drop out rates between the states of Tennessee and Georgia. This difference was based on the belief that when a student is being socially promoted from one grade to the next, that student often becomes further and further behind, and will eventually drop out of high school (SREB, 2001). Hypothetically, a student in the state of Tennessee could be socially promoted from first through the eighth grade, and then once in 9th grade the student, along with their teacher(s) are held accountable for their academic success, and social promotion is no longer permissible due to promotion being granted based on the number of credits that the student has earned. Once a student that has been socially promoted throughout their academic careers, reaches high school, they are frequently unable to obtain the necessary credits in order to obtain their high school diploma due to not having the basic academic foundations that are needed in order for them to be successful in high school. This would

suggest that these students, unable to complete the necessary graduation requirements, in a timely manner would eventually drop out of high school prior to graduation.

Previous research also suggests that those students that have the necessary academic foundations that are needed to ensure that a student will be academically successful in high school are successful. Due to the No Child Left Behind Act and teacher accountability, proponents of high stakes testing believe that these test give teachers feedback on how the student is doing in their classroom and helps the teacher to modify their curriculum in order to help ensure that the student is obtaining the necessary information in order to be academically successful. Based on this information, it is held that a student that is able to exhibit that they have obtained the necessary standards and benchmarks up to the eighth grade level, by passing a standardized test, will be able to continue to be academically successful once they have reached high school.

The current study found that there is a significant difference between those students, in Georgia, who are required to take, and pass, a proficiency exam prior to being promoted to the ninth grade and those students, in Tennessee, who are not required to do so. According to these findings, those students that must take, and pass, a proficiency exam in order to be promoted to the ninth grade are also much more likely to graduate from high school.

Limitations

The current study only used statistical data that had been obtained from the individual states' school report cards. The students, in both states, were not individually tracked and recorded. Due to the mobility of today's society, it is known that not all students in either Tennessee or Georgia, were at the same school, or in the same school

system, from the time that they began the eighth grade until they left school, via transferring, graduating, or dropping out of high school. Future studies would need to look at individual students and track their rates of graduation and dropping out of high school based on their passing or failing the proficiency exams that are administered in their state.

As previously noted, the ways in which the data is reported often has an impact on the actual number of high school drop out rates (Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). The individual methods of how the states of Georgia and Tennessee report this data was not examined. Whether or not the states of Tennessee and Georgia use the same methods of calculating their information for their state report cards was not examined. The number of students who had received various forms of waivers and / or credit modifications was not examined. When examining the data to be included in the study, the individual states were taken at “their word” for the reporting of their individual state report cards and how they came about their data was not examined. It would be recommended that future studies not only look at the reported information but be able to obtain the data for how that information was obtained other than using self-report. Future studies would also want to look into the various different methods that states use in order to determine which students might receive waivers and how this actually impacts the reported high school graduation rates and drop out rates.

The current study only looked at the difference between graduation rates and drop out rates after passing the proficiency tests. The study did not look at the resources that the state of Georgia has been able to implement for those students that did not pass the proficiency test (CRCT) upon the initial examination. Nor has it been examined how

these programs affects the high school graduation rates and drop out rates in the state of Georgia. From the results of this study, it could be hypothesized that the programs that Georgia has implemented for their eighth grade students who did not pass the proficiency exam initially are successful in helping the students in their school districts to reach their ultimate academic goal of graduating from high school. However, future research would need to look at the programs that have been implemented for those students who have not initially passed the CRCT and determine their specific affects on Georgia's graduation and drop out rates.

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