A Dissertation
titled
Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments
by
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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision

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An Abstract of

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Educators constantly explore ways to enhance the learning environment and promote learning; non-traditional grading and assessment practices are often discussed as a way to positively affect the educational atmosphere for learning. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of students who had experienced non-traditional grading and assessment practices for the three years of their middle school career. Specifically, they experienced the chance to have the opportunity to retest or retake summative assessments.

Comprehensive interviews took place with 20 students. Responses were categorized into three primary themes where 12 sub-themes emerged. The sub-themes that emerged from the first primary theme, Purpose of retests/retakes were: (a) grade improvement, (b) gain additional learning, (c) receive feedback on areas of weakness, and (d) reduce test anxiety. The sub-themes that arose from the second primary theme, Influences to take retest/retake were: (a) disappointment in performance, (b) family mandate/request, (c) time management ability, (d) apathy, and (e) self-efficacy. The third and final primary theme, Outcomes of retests/retakes revealed: (a) grade improvement, (b) strong sense of self-efficacy, and (c) reduced test anxiety.
This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my family. My parents, George and Roxann Baker, for instilling in me high expectations and the drive to be the best I can be! Secondly, to my sisters who are always there for me—anytime, day or night. Next to my husband, who has supported anything and everything that I have ever aspired to do. I truly could not imagine my life without him. Also, to my mother-in-law who has been by my side providing encouragement throughout my entire career. Finally, to my nieces and nephew, who I can only hope that I have inspired to challenge themselves and never stop learning and growing!
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List of Abbreviations

AYP ......................... Adequate Yearly Progress
CCSS ...................... Common Core State Standards
EEOC ...................... Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
ESEA ...................... Elementary and Secondary Education Act
GLCE ...................... Grade Level Content Expectations
MEAP ...................... Michigan Educational Assessment Program
NCES ...................... National Center for Education Statistics
NCLB ...................... No Child Left Behind Act
NDEA ...................... National Defense Education Act
SCT ......................... Social Cognitive Theory
SLT ......................... Social Learning Theory
TIMSS ..................... Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
WAIS ...................... Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale
Chapter One

Introduction and Background of Study

Introduction

Public School Districts are facing a crisis as never before. At the federal level there is little if any funding for educational initiatives or programs, accountability for teachers and educational leaders is increased, and expectations for increasing student achievement is required so as not to face sanctions from the state and federal government. Student performance in the United States has stagnated and students in foreign countries are performing at higher levels in all content areas compared to American students. Individual states have had to cut funding for education due to the economic situation that is faced nationwide. Particularly in the state of Michigan, there is a structural deficit in school finance, or in the buildings? That has had a detrimental effect on school districts throughout the state for the last several years.

The current governor of the state of Michigan has proposed an Educational Plan that mimics much of the federal blueprint for education while including a $470 per year reduction per pupil. The proposed per pupil reduction has caused several districts to layoff large numbers of teachers, increase class size, privatize services, reduce budgets for textbooks and technology at the building level, and force concessions of salary and benefits by teachers and administrators. Because it is almost impossible to make the necessary cuts while still running an effective school that will produce college and career ready students, even with these reductions many districts will still face a deficit budget. A deficit budget is illegal in the state of Michigan.
If public education had no accountability standards, fewer funds would be necessary to dedicate to education. Educators of one hundred years ago did not have the pressure of ensuring that ALL students are college and career ready and achieving at high levels. Not all students would need secondary education or post-secondary education in the farming communities of the past or within the factories of industrialized cities. It was completely acceptable and widely agreed upon that not all students would be successful.

Bloom (1968) stated that teachers in the past started their classes each year with the expectation that one third of their students would be able to learn what they had to teach at a proficient level, one third would be able to do some of the work, and the final third of the students would only be able to do the minimum to just to pass the class or fail. These expectations are no longer acceptable and are not capable of contributing to a learning environment that ensures the learning of ALL students at high levels.

Bloom (1968) describes the impact of these expectations to the educational environment on a student.

This set of expectations, supported by school policies and practices in grading, becomes transmitted to the students through the grading procedures and through the methods and materials of instruction. The system creates a self-fulfilling prophecy such that the final sorting of students through the grading process becomes approximately equivalent to the original expectations. This set of expectations, which fixes the academic goals of teachers and students, is the most wasteful and destructive aspect of the present educational system. It reduces the aspirations of both teachers and students; it reduces motivation for learning in students; and it systematically destroys the ego and self-concept of a sizable group of students who are legally required to attend school for ten to twelve years under conditions which are frustrating and humiliating year after year. The cost of this system in reducing opportunities for further learning and in alienating youth from both school and is so great that no society can tolerate it for long (p. 1).

This quote solidly summarizes the situation that has been created in public education today. Educational leaders are now trying to combat the history that has
detrimentally affected the teaching and learning process and in particular the grading and assessment process. Many of the educators currently teaching in the classroom experienced a learning environment that embraced these expectations. When these expectations are the norm, they inevitably impact the beliefs educators hold true in the learning environment that they have created in their classroom. The shift that has to be made so that learning environments ensure success for all students rather than one third of our student population can be difficult for educators coming from an educational setting that promotes success for some rather than all. The challenges of increasing the repertoire of tools that teachers use to instruct students, implementing intervention programs to help struggling students, initiating grading and assessment programs that promote learning and self-efficacy in our students are just the tip of the iceberg that educational leaders face when ensuring success of all students.

Instructional leaders are constantly looking for the “silver bullet,” or strategies and techniques to implement within a school that will have the greatest effect on ensuring that all students achieve at high levels. There can be difficulty when implementing new programs at the building and classroom level. Often new initiatives are instituted with little educational research or too frequently without evaluation. Educational institutions never really determine if the new initiative had an impact on student achievement before moving on to the next new idea. Achievement data are being mandated by state and federal government as the driver of decisions that are made regarding educational offerings for students. The other factor that often enters into determining whether a new initiative is sustainable, is whether or not the adults involved perceive it as effective and if can be administered easily so as not to impact their workload. Educators cannot ignore
a student’s perspective about what strategies increase student achievement and are successful within the learning environment. As learners, students have a voice in evaluating what initiatives have a positive impact on the learning environment—understanding, comprehension, self-efficacy, and motivation—to challenge themselves to reach higher levels of learning for the rest of their lives. This study is one way to gather students’ perceptions of educational strategies.

There are many influences that impact student learning within the classroom. The researcher examined research-based grading and assessment practices, particularly students’ perceptions of having the opportunity for retesting, and how they felt about the practice in academic settings. This explored the theory and research connected to retesting and academic self-efficacy as the researcher explored how students felt about being academic successful in a school that employed the retesting practice and the perceptions they had regarding the opportunity to retest.

Background of the study

The history of school improvement efforts implemented to increase student achievement. The Soviet’s successful launch of the Sputnik spacecraft in 1957 gave the first indication to the American federal government that the United States’ education system was likely inferior to the educational system in the Soviet Union. Concern that the United States was not preparing students for scientific fields of study was growing. Since Sputnik, there have been numerous studies that have strengthened the belief that the American education system is failing.

Several proposals in were enacted 1958 in reaction to this “defeat” by the Soviets. Until this time, it was unheard of that a President would recommend that federal
dollars be devoted to public education, as public educational institutions were deemed a state and local issue. The President, Dwight D. Eisenhower quickly responded by creating the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) that combined the ideas that the United States need to shore up national defense and increase competiveness of the international economy. The NDEA specifically addressed facilities dedicated to education and research; developing programs that focused on science, math and engineering; and increasing student achievement. The creation of the NDEA was a way around using federal dollars to support public education as schools were required to voluntarily accept the guidelines for funding. Public institutions jumped at the opportunity to purchase educational materials with federal funds (Federal Education Policy, 2009). Another federal program that supported science education was the Physical Science Study Committee that’s purpose was to meet with science educators and curriculum developers to create more rigorous high school science courses. The National Science Foundation (NSF) distributed funds for schools to develop the curriculum and resources. Once again this was a way for federal dollars to get to public educational institutions. The NSF was not permitted to make local level curricular decisions and could only offer recommendations.

In 1960, Eisenhower lost the Presidential race and John F. Kennedy was appointed President. Kennedy supported federal aid going to schools and was a strong proponent of ensuring that all students had an equal opportunity for a quality education. Because the educational system of the 1960s was racially segregated, the belief was that the education made available to students of color was inferior to the education provided to white students. Kennedy was a supporter of the Civil
Rights Movement. Kennedy’s goal was to see that all American children received a globally competitive education regardless of their demographics (The Civil Rights Act of 1964, n.d.). Compensatory education for the under-privileged student grew and was supported by Kennedy. This focused the federal education policy from the Sputnik initiated emphasis of high performing students back to the needs of economically disadvantaged youth (Federal Education Policy, 2009).

After Kennedy’s assassination, President Johnson continued the focus on education that Kennedy had begun by declaring a “War on Poverty.” This idea came from the growing concern that students of poverty were not receiving an equal opportunity for a quality education (The Civil Rights Act of 1964, n.d.). President Johnson’s state of the union address described America’s concern with poverty which led to the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This act addressed the inequality in education that students were facing. The ESEA divided the funding provided to public schools from the federal government into five categories. The first area was Title I, which provided funding to educationally disadvantaged students. Title II funds identified the need to provide our learning organizations with library and audio/visual equipment. Title III allocated funds to help at-risk students achieve academically by utilizing after school activities, tutoring, and counseling programs. Title IV funds are dedicated for colleges and universities to perform educational research. The last section of the ESEA is Title V which provides funding for the education departments in each state (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 2001).
The United States’ Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was created with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The EEOC enlisted a team of researchers to conduct a survey of America’s students, teachers, and principals. The results of this survey proved to be some of the most controversial statements that had ever been released regarding public schools and became a very significant event in educational history (Viadero, 2006). The survey was entitled The Equal Opportunity Educational Survey and was eventually coined the Coleman Report attributed to the primary researcher, James Coleman. The Coleman Report is the first time that educational researchers used student outcomes as a definition of academic success. The research found that the overwhelming determiner for students’ academic success was their family background and the peers with whom students went to school. The Coleman Report used the data to show that only 10% of the success that each child achieved was determined by the school the student attended and the remaining 90% was determined by family background and economic status. The information that was revealed from this study had the educational community up in arms. Public school officials and teachers found it very difficult to accept the data that had been presented (Viadero, 2006).

Other findings from the Coleman Report illustrated that black students who attended schools with white, middle class students did better than black students who went to school with other black students who were living in poverty. These data were used as evidence showing why it was necessary to provide bussing for students to integrate students of low socio economic status with those students of upper and middle class in public schools (Viadero, 2006).
The next significant event that negatively impacted the perception of public education took place in the Reagan Era. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan’s National Commission for Excellence in Education published a report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This report continued to draw on the belief that American schools were failing and not developing students to be competitive in a global society. This created a situation where politicians, policy makers, and community members across the United States began questioning the achievement levels of American students. School district, state, and federal policies were developed to ensure that public education prepare our students to compete for future careers with countries worldwide. Reagan’s commission made recommendations that included the following topics: rigorous curriculum content, consistent standards and expectations, increased time in the classroom, highly qualified teachers who receive performance-based salaries, and financial support of the school to target the various student populations (*A Nation at Risk*, n.d.).

The concerns regarding The United States public education system and its ability to produce globally aware citizens that are college ready were on the rise.

Another blow to the efforts of the educational community occurred in the 1990s. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted a “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).” The TIMSS gathered data from American fourth and eighth graders and compared them to students with the same years of schooling in other countries. The report showed the United States was performing within the mid-range average scale score of the 36-48 countries that participated in the test for both fourth and eighth graders. The United States was not satisfied with the mediocre student performance outcomes. The NCES has been
collecting TIMSS data since 1995 and continues to collect data and recent reports are available from 2007 (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, n.d.).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 that was signed by the President George W. Bush in 2002 is an initiative that many educators feel has been developed to the detriment of public education. The NCLB Act is the most current reauthorization of President Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This act requires individual states to use annual standardized assessments to identify achievement gaps between subgroups. The NCLB Act does not identify a national performance level as each state sets the standard. The year 2014 is the date that the NCLB Act sets for 100% of the students in the United States being deemed proficient on the basic skills assessed by the annual test. Funding is granted based on the state’s compliance with the standardized testing. School districts are then required to use research based practices to improve instructional practices to close the achievement gaps that have been identified by the assessment data.

Although there was an attempt to reauthorize the NCLB Act while President Bush was still in office, it did not happen due to several areas of the law that both parties could not agree upon. The biggest road block was how to measure student achievement. Using mastery or student progress was heavily debated (Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind: The Obama Blueprint, 2010). When President Obama took office he began taking a look at the law and proposed changes to Congress with the help of Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan.

The document that President Obama has given to Congress differs from The NCLB Act in several key areas. There are four topics that each plan addresses listed in
Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind: The Obama Blueprint (2010). The topics are the assessment of standards, highly qualified teachers, adequate yearly progress, and consequences for schools that do not show growth in student achievement. NCLB under the Bush administration stated that all students will receive a score of proficient or advanced in core areas by 2014 as determined by the testing that occurs each year in grades three through eight and one time between grades 10 and 12. Obama’s goal for testing is that it would occur in all areas of a students’ education and by the year 2020 “all students should be college or career ready” (Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind: The Obama Blueprint, 2010, p. 2). Bush’s NCLB Act states that all core teachers must be “highly qualified” by obtaining a bachelor’s degree and by demonstrating evidence of competent teaching ability. Obama wishes to institute an evaluation system that will rate teachers and principals based on student performance. A portion of Bush’s plan that determines whether a school makes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is based on the number of students who score proficient on the annual tests. Obama’s plan will continue to promote measurable student progress that prepares them to be college and career ready. The consequences from NCLB include progressively negative sanctions against a school that does not show an increase in student achievement. The difference in Obama’s plan is that his plan involves rewards to educators and schools based on good performance (Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind: The Obama Blueprint, 2010).

Obama’s plan also includes ways that schools can compete for Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation grants to help fund reforms that focus on student achievement. Districts must develop a proposal involving all stakeholders that include college and career ready standards and assessments, ways to share information with
parents and teachers to help them improve their students’ learning, strategies to support teachers and educational leaders, and programs that turn around failing schools (ESEA Blueprint for Reform, 2010).

Elements of the Effective Schools Movement

With the focus on accountability for increasing student achievement, comes the push for improving schools and their effectiveness. Many educational reform movements have taken place since the beginning of the 20th century to improve school effectiveness. Since the information from the Coleman Report was made public, the research has spurred great controversy in the field of education. Since the 1960s, numerous research studies have been conducted to dispute the results of the Coleman Report. From the controversy came The Effective Schools Movement of the 1970s. Many educational researchers developed hypotheses based on some of the data from the Coleman Report. Their hypotheses were based on the data that showed some students with low socio economic status did better than their peers with low socio economic status. The researchers then made the assumption that there must be factors within the school that contributed to students of poverty performing at high levels (Marzano, 2003).

The Connection between Student Achievement and Assessment and Grading Practices

Continuous school improvement methods are measured by demonstrating an annual increase in student achievement. It has become increasingly important for teachers to utilize grading and assessment practices that reflect student achievement. Academic marks must be reflective of the level of knowledge a student has attained
(Stiggins, Arter, Chappius, & Chappius, 2004). As standardized testing results tend to be a heavily weighted factor in determining school effectiveness, it is imperative that teachers are accurately assessing what benchmarks, standards, and skills a child has mastered. When a teacher can determine areas of weakness for a particular student, it is possible to utilize the supports a school has in place to address those areas and strengthen the proficiency level for that student.

Building leaders analyze students’ level of proficiency based on standardized, district, and building-wide assessment results. Administrators compare standardized assessment data to common assessment data from core content classroom teachers. If a large discrepancy is detected, it may be necessary to institute grading policies that are an accurate measurement of what level of proficiency a child has reached. The goal is to give the parent, teacher and student an accurate view of where a child stands in regards to the standards and benchmarks of the curriculum (Marzano, 2006).

History reveals that grading and assessment practices were used to label students. By ranking students, schools were able to define winners and losers. As students who were consistently unable to master the standards were identified, educators inadvertently reinforced feelings of failure. For many students, using grading and assessment methods inappropriately has contributed to the United States’ increasing high school dropout rate (Stiggins et al., 2004).

Grading and assessment practices have become progressively more significant facets of the academic program that need to be addressed by instructional leaders. School rewards and sanctions that are determined by student achievement scores will impact how grades are reported. The possibility that teacher pay could be linked to
student achievement scores may impact how grades are reported. It is necessary to ensure that school districts can accurately reflect student achievement scores when there are so many factors at stake.

There are many research-based assessment and grading practices that can be used for informing stakeholders of the progress of individual students. These reporting methods may vary across buildings, districts, and states. The variances of methods used to report proficiency or progress of a student can work for or against the learner. High levels of self-efficacy have been linked to high levels of academic achievement where as low levels of self-efficacy have been linked to low levels of academic achievement. The research about the beliefs students hold about their academic abilities has determined that self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of academic achievement (Bandura, 1986). This research supports why educators should employ those assessment and grading practices that contribute to high levels of academic self-efficacy.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to explore students’ perception of having the opportunity to retest at the middle school level. It will benefit instructional leaders to offer students retesting opportunities if that practice should improve how a student feels about their ability to be academically successful. It is the goal of this study to explore the experience of retesting through the research question: What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments?

Those students with strong academic self-efficacy have confidence that they have the ability to accomplish what is necessary to be a successful student. Students who have a high sense of self-efficacy tend to exert a great deal of effort to accomplish tasks, they
will choose tasks that are challenging and continue to persevere when they encounter an adverse situation (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) states “Research shows that people who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think, and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as inefficacious. They produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it” (p. 395).

A 2007 meta-analysis tested a model that connected metacognition, achievement goal orientation, learning style and self-efficacy to attempt to explain and predict any variations amongst all of the variables relating to performance. The research determined that self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of performance and metacognition.

Educators must encourage students to be confident in their abilities to reach their goals because a high level of self-efficacy suggests they can process deeply, are metacognitive, and meet performance standards (Coutinho & Neuman, 2008).

Grading and assessment practices can differ among teachers of any grade level, content area, or type of classroom. A student in one classroom may be assessed very differently from a student in another classroom, even when the same content is being taught. When a student progresses through grade levels K-12, each teacher’s methodology for grading and assessment can be subjective and based on a variety of factors. Some public school districts have recognized that the variation in ways student achievement data are reported at the classroom level will impact data-driven decisions. Some school districts implement research-based assessment and grading practices and others do not. Specifically, this study will examine one particular aspect of research based assessment and grading practices, retesting. Certain methods of assessment and
grading can create a high level of student academic self-efficacy, while other methods may contribute to low levels of student academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993).

Retesting in this study is defined as a student having the opportunity to take a summative assessment again. The researcher is interested in whether or not using the research-based grading and assessment practice of retesting impact a student’s feelings of academic success. If the goal for the educational system in America is to increase student achievement, and if the teacher’s assessment and grading practices impact student self-efficacy, and if student self-efficacy impacts student achievement, then assessment and grading practices that positively influence student efficacy may be a tool for school districts to consider implementing. Self-efficacy is a predictor of student achievement and unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes, they have little incentive to act (Bandura, 1986).

As students progress through the K-12 education system, the sense of self-efficacy deteriorates (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). With the implementation of research-based assessment and grading practices, could retesting turn around the demotivating effects of traditional grading practices? The researcher intends to examine the perceptions of students having the opportunity to retest on summative assessments and if students believe that they can be successful academically by having multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning.

In the middle school setting that the researcher has observed, there are a variety of responses from students when given the opportunity to retest. Some students use the opportunity to demonstrate additional learning and improve their summative assessment grade where other students do not take the opportunity to retest when it is presented.
Some students retest even when they have a passing score on the original assessment. Some students will plan on taking the retest rather than plan and study for the test on the actual test date. Some students will not complete the requirements necessary to take the retest therefore forfeiting their opportunity. From these observations, student responses regarding the practice of opportunity for retesting on summative assessments is of particular interest to the researcher.

This practice of retesting is often controversial, as many educators feel that it is not a reflective practice in the “real world.” However, there are current educational opportunities to retest on various standardized tests and when gaining admission to certain schools and programs. In the year 2014-2015 the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) standardized test will no longer be in place, but the standardized assessment to determine proficiency of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will be used in the state of Michigan (Common Core State Standards, n.d.). This test will have a window when the test is given to students, and students will have an opportunity to retest within that testing window.

In organizational settings, people may retest for career promotions, law enforcement positions, and various types of licensure. There has been a significant amount of research as to why people choose to retest and how practice effects impact scores of retesting. Retesting has been analyzed across various subgroups and demographic groups. Little research has been dedicated to determine if there is an impact from retesting on self-efficacy. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address how students’ perceptions of having the opportunity to retest and if there is any connection to feelings of academic self-efficacy.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Historical Description of the Effective Schools Movement

The Effective Schools Movement encouraged researchers to find schools that were effective in overcoming the barriers of low family support. As effective schools were identified, there were common factors that could be detected. Some early findings of this movement determined that the following factors contribute to effective schools: strong leadership, orderly climate, high expectations, a focus on reading, and careful student evaluation procedures (Mace-Matluck, 1987). More research, including case studies, further identified common factors of effective schools: strong leadership through the school leader or teacher leaders, high academic expectations for students, a clear set of goals and focus for the entire school, a consistent school-wide staff preparation program, and a system for frequent monitoring of student progress (Marzano, 2003). Mace-Matluck (1987) provides a summary of all of the effective school research that was identified by Ron Edmonds (1979) as “Five Correlates”: the principal is the instructional leader of the school, the instructional content has been defined, the educational atmosphere is safe and orderly and encourages learning, teachers support and model that all students can reach high levels of achievement, and evaluation of educational programs are determined by student achievement data.

The Effective School Movement encouraged Mace-Matluck (1987) to summarize the organizational/structural and process variables that were identified by Purkey & Smith (1983). The organizational/structural variables included are site-based management, instructional leadership, staff retention, a defined and well-aligned
curriculum, school-wide professional development, active parental participation and support, maximized instructional time, district level support, and recognition of academic achievement. The process variables were—creating a positive professional learning community and respectful, collegial relationships; belief everyone is a valuable member of the learning community; shared mission, vision, and goals; and an orderly learning environment with effective discipline procedures.

Levine and Lezotte (1990) described the school effectiveness factors in their analysis of effective school research. The common elements included a climate and culture that produces successful students, essential learning skills, monitoring of student progress, participatory staff development, effective leadership, strong parent involvement, and having high expectations for all students.

The quantitative research done by Sammons (1999) revealed several factors contributing to effective schools. Effective leadership, focusing on the teaching and learning process, having a shared mission, vision, and goals, holding high expectations for all students, using positive reinforcement and recognition, frequent progress monitoring of students, recognizing pupil rights and expectations, creating a strong connection between home and school, and ensuring that the entire school is a learning organization.

One of the most in-depth studies of the factors that play a role in the development of effective schools was a quantitative study completed by Scheerens and Bosker (1997). They identified eight elements of effective schools and ranked them according to the effect on students’ academic performance. These factors, in order of importance, are as follows: teaching time available, monitoring student progress,
creating an environment that encourages high academic achievement, parental involvement in the school setting, a positive school climate, focused content coverage, effective school leadership, cooperation between administration, teaching staff, parents and students.

Finally, the research regarding the essential components of effective schools was completed by Marzano in 2000. He reviewed the study by Scheerens and Bosker (1997) and updated the study and made minimal adjustments to the rankings. Marzano made some changes in verbiage and moved one topic higher in the ranks, as it was found to play a larger role in student achievement. Marzano’s (2003) list includes the following elements in order of importance, “Opportunity to Learn, Time, Monitoring, Pressure to Achieve, Parental Involvement, School Climate, Leadership, Cooperation” (p. 18).

Marzano (2003) further collapsed the list of “school-level factors” contributing to effective schools. The five school-level factors are the focus of many of Marzano’s books. These five factors are listed in order of importance: “guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parental and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism” (Marzano, 2003, p. 19).

Each reform movement requires analysis of student achievement data. Student achievement data can come in the form of standardized state test scores, local assessments, and end of course marks. These data are then used in making decisions at the state and federal level as well as at the classroom level.
The Nature of Self-Efficacy within the Social Cognitive Theory

Within social cognitive theory (SCT) it is necessary to describe the interactions among three key factors: personal, behavioral, and environmental. SCT defines self-efficacy as a personal factor because it is people’s perceptions of their abilities to complete the tasks required to reach specific types of outcome (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy affects what tasks people will choose, how much effort they will put into completing those tasks, and how long they will put in the effort when the tasks becomes challenging. Those people, who have low self-efficacy toward accomplishing a certain task, may choose to avoid it and those who believe that they can complete the task will likely do so. When students encounter a challenging task, those with self-efficacy will put forth more effort for a longer period of time than those lacking self-efficacy (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 1996/2008).

Self-efficacy can be explained by the interactions among three factors of the SCT. The interaction of the behavioral and personal factors can be demonstrated by self-efficacy influencing academic behaviors such as task selection, persistence, and degree of effort (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). Based on this research, students’ behaviors affect self-efficacy. When students complete assignments, they measure their progress towards meeting their goals (gaining new knowledge, and finishing the task). The information the students gain when making progress indicates to them if they are able to learn the material and be successful, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy for future learning (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 1996/2008).

Self-efficacy can be illustrated by the interaction between personal and environmental factors of the SCT as well. One example involves students with
disabilities, who typically have low self-efficacy for accomplishing tasks successfully (Licht & Kistner, 1986). Personal factors can impact the environment when teachers may draw conclusions about a child with disabilities before they actually see how the child performs. Some teachers make these judgments because they may hold lower expectations for those students academically than they do for non-disabled students, even when the disabled child is demonstrating proficiency (Bryan & Bryan, 1983). Also, feedback from a teacher (an environmental factor) affects self-efficacy, a personal factor. There will be a positive effect on self-efficacy when a teacher states, “You are doing an awesome job!” compared to, “This assignment is going to be too difficult for you.”

Personal factors can also influence one another. For example, students effectively implementing a test-taking strategy will produce higher achievement on tests and result in students having more confidence about taking tests in the future because they understand and could use the strategy again. Therefore, higher self-efficacy may impact students’ choice of test-taking strategies. These types of personal interactions that take place within the person are crucial for self-regulation.

Aspects of effective schools utilize opportunities to enhance students’ feelings of academic self-efficacy. It is crucial to create positive interactions between behavioral, environmental, and personal factors within the SCT such that students make decisions that will increase self-confidence in their ability to be successful academically.

The Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Student Achievement

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (2001) conducted a study on perceived cognitive efficacy in social contexts. Children’s cognitive development is deeply connected to social aspects of life. In this study the sense of self-efficacy was
measured in various situations. The domains included the perception of self-efficacy related to self-regulated learning and mastery of different content areas; in forming and keeping social relationships; resisting peer pressures to take part in risky behavior such as unprotected sex, drugs and alcohol; and in meeting the expectations of themselves and those held by others. Analysis of the data from this study showed three primary elements of self-efficacy: perceived self-regulation, and social and academic efficacy, each of which can be related to emotional and interpersonal behavior.

The results from this study state that children with a strong sense of self-regulative and academic self-efficacy behave more appropriately, and are more popular, and widely accepted by their peers. Those students lacking a strong sense of self-efficacy are more inclined to emotional difficulties, aggressive tendencies, and are more likely to engage in unhealthy practices. The impact of the lack of academic self-efficacy on their behavior increases with age (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001). With younger children, academic self-efficacy had a greater impact than the social self-efficacy on emotional and interpersonal behavior patterns. Older children indicated that social efficacy as well as academic efficacy impacted their social and emotional behavior. This trend is understandable as adolescents tend to rely more on peer connections when deciding whether they can be successful academically or socially. The connection between cognitive self-efficacy and how one performs in an academic setting is clear.

Bandura (1993) describes one of the most important aspects in developing a strong sense of self-efficacy as experiencing self-initiated mastery experiences. Mastery experiences create situations that develop competencies in ability (Bandura, 1986).
Opportunity to create a sense of control on students’ self-development will strengthen the level of personal self-efficacy.

It is inappropriate not to consider the effect of the teacher’s self-efficacy and the impact on student academic self-efficacy. Research states that the culture of the classroom is dependent on the teacher’s belief in his instructional self-efficacy. Gibson and Dembo (1984) determined teachers with a strong sense of instructional self-efficacy dedicate more classroom time to academic achievement, implement strategies to help struggling students, and institute programs for recognition. Teachers who have a low sense of instructional self-efficacy tend to dedicate time to lessons with no academic content connection, and do not hold high expectations for students who struggle while highlighting their failures.

Bandura’s (1986, 1993) theory describes how motivation is a goal-oriented behavior that is encouraged and determined by the outcome expectation regarding what people expect the consequences of their actions to be and the self-efficacy for the performance of those actions. When discussing motivation, it is necessary to analyze the outcome expectation as the way students feel about possible outcomes will act in ways that will help them attain the outcomes they believe in. The ideal learning environment would focus on the concept of ability being an acquirable skill, reduce the ways that students are compared to one another and promote progress by comparing themselves to previous performances and accomplishments. This type of learning environment will increase self-efficacy and promote academic achievement. Students who are motivated academically believe that if they are diligent about studying they will receive high
grades. If students value high grades, one could expect that students will study regularly and validate their expectations (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 1996/2008).

**Influences on Self-Efficacy**

Pajares and Valiante (2006) described three factors that influence adolescents’ self-efficacy. Family, school and peer environments are responsible for the development of an adolescent’s self-efficacy. How each of the factors interact in social contexts plays a role in determining how one feels about his or her ability to be successful in and out of school. Very early on, families with varying amounts of capital—financial, educational, and social resources—tend to provide different experiences that impact a child’s self-efficacy. These experiences will make a difference in a child’s perceptions of his or her ability to be successful in school. A child who has been surrounded by a family that is supportive, models ways to handle challenges effectively, and motivates their children to achieve encourages children to have a greater sense of self-efficacy.

Schooling impacts self-efficacy through instructional strategies, grading and assessment practices, teacher feedback, the level of difficulty in lessons, competition, and the transition from one level of schooling to the next (Pajares & Valiante, 2006) Classes that are difficult may influence a child’s self-efficacy, by affecting his or her belief in accomplishing certain tasks. Positive feedback from teachers can enhance a student’s self-efficacy while negative feedback will create feelings of inadequacy, resulting in a lower sense of self-efficacy.

In adolescence, the influence of a child’s peers typically replaces the influence of the family, as adolescents tend to view themselves through the eyes of their peers. Adolescents tend to migrate to students with similar views and beliefs. This can impact
self-efficacy if peers do not value and hold the same beliefs as the family regarding performance and academic success. Adolescents give a lot of power to their peers in determining their own self-efficacy as they do not have any other behaviors to compare themselves to.

The Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Research-Based Assessment and Grading Practices

Aspects of effective assessment can be implemented so that learning is promoted throughout the teaching and learning process and increases student academic self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) developed the social cognitive theory (SCT) that includes one’s beliefs of self-efficacy. The SCT is based upon the interaction of three factors—personal, behavioral, and the environmental. The SCT is very closely linked to social learning theory (SLT) which is defined as the interaction between only two factors, the personal self and the environment (Bandura, 1977). The aspect of self-efficacy is developed in the SCT in the area of self-regulatory capability or how individuals have control over how they think, feel, act as well as the level of motivation they have to complete a specific task (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy is a factor when determining the amount of self-motivation that a person has in accomplishing a goal. When people feel that they have the ability to achieve their goal, they will tend to exert an increased effort to reach their goal compared to others with low self-efficacy.

Bandura (1991) states that self-efficacy beliefs have an effect on one’s cognitive processes. People will behave in certain ways based on the goals they have identified. These goals will be set based on how an individual assesses his or her skill level. The higher level of self-efficacy a person has the more challenging goals will be set, and
there will be a stronger commitment to reach them. Marzano (2006) indicates that one assessment method that promotes learning is to have students use a graph to track their achievement. Students set goals for each content area and are able to see how they are progressing. Students’ awareness of proficiency levels is beneficial for inspiring them to raise the bar for themselves or define in what areas they need to seek additional help. Awareness of academic progress can be a motivational tool.

A person with a strong sense of self-efficacy will be able to visualize success and will create situations where he or she can be successful. Those with a weak sense of self-efficacy will tend to visualize failure scenarios and focus on what can go wrong. Negative self-talk can sabotage one’s course of action (Bandura, 1993).

Ability is not a permanent human characteristic. There are several features within a person’s ability level that must work together in a way to serve a particular purpose. The features include cognitive, behavioral, social and motivational skills. Just because an individual has knowledge of a concept does not guarantee that he or she will be perform at high levels. If one has a negative emotional reaction to a situation, he or she may not perform well even with given knowledge. Personal achievement is dependent on perceptions of self-efficacy. Variances in self-efficacy can determine low, medium and high achievement levels (Bandura, 1993).

Ability is also impacted by how one believes a skill can be acquired (Bandura, 1993). If a person’s ability level can be increased by gaining new knowledge and practices, he or she can learn from his/her mistakes and is not easily upset in stressful situations. Those that view that ability as acquired tend to view their capabilities based on how they have improved compared to those around them.
Other people may view ability as genetic; that is, they are born with it. People who believe that their skills are inherent tend to select tasks that they will be successful at and reduce the chances of showing their deficiencies. The more one struggles on a test of ability they may draw the conclusion they are not smart. People who do not feel smart often feel threatened by those that do (Bandura, 1993).

Wood and Bandura (1989) performed a study that tested the idea of how one perceives his or her ability, either as acquired or inherent, and its impact on self-efficacy. The researchers instilled two different conceptions of ability in their sample group by telling some of them that a high success rate on the test indicated an inherent intellectual ability. The other candidates were told that successful performance on the task indicated they had an acquired skill. The study measured the difference between the two conceptions on self-regulation in performance based settings. The situation that was created with those who believed that ability is a skill that can be acquired tended to promote a sense of self-efficacy. Even when the questions became increasingly difficult they challenged themselves to keep going and did not get defeated. The students who believed their ability is an inherent skill began to doubt themselves when the questions became difficult and their sense of self-efficacy began to decrease, and the overall success rate among these individuals plummeted.

Individuals assess their ability levels based on others around them. It is human nature to make social comparisons to other people deemed similar to themselves (Bandura, 1993). Students receive a large amount of this type of data in school settings because of assessment and grading practices and teacher’s subjective evaluations of their academic achievement (Marshall & Weinstein, 1984; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1984).
When grades are used to compare students, it is difficult for students to be motivated to continue learning (O’Conner, 2007). This type of comparative data can have a strong impact on one’s self-efficacy. Students continually see others performing at a higher level can damage their sense of self-efficacy and hinder their performance. The opposite is true if a student can increase achievement levels through improving performance, thus strengthening self-efficacy.

With frequent formative assessment practices in place, useful feedback can be provided regularly (Popham, 2008). Quality feedback gives students a description of where they stand in relation to the learning target and how to improve. Bandura (1993) describes one’s need for feedback regarding performance. The way that social feedback is provided to individuals can affect their perceptions of self-efficacy, which will then impact their performance.

Zepeda (2004) describes the responsibility of the principal in reforming the culture and climate of a school so that a common vision can be shared. The mission and vision of the school must lead to student achievement. It is necessary to focus all school improvement efforts on student learning. School improvement efforts must include implementing assessment and grading policies that promote learning and strong academic self-efficacy.

**Elements of Research-Based Assessment and Grading Practices**

There are numerous pieces to the assessment and grading puzzle. In order to gain a complete appreciation for the value of assessment and grading practices to the learning process, it is imperative to have a thorough understanding of each area of education linked to effective assessment and grading practices. The first area to be
addressed is the state mandated curriculum. All core content areas grades 3-8 in the state of Michigan have defined Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs). Once GLCEs have been defined, it is up to the curriculum specialist and/or the building principal to develop committees to build the district curriculum. Developing district curriculum is critical to ensure that students are progressing in the expected fashion to show proficiency at the high school level and ultimately be prepared to be globally competitive in the post high school arena. The curriculum specialists, building principals, and teacher leaders are required to understand all aspects of each GLCE, benchmark or skill. The in-depth understanding of these topics provides opportunities for those responsible for curriculum to break apart the GLCEs into essential outcomes. A responsibility of the school district is to allocate funds for professional development so that all staff becomes proficient at understanding the goals and outcomes pertaining to their content area.

Often, districts that have not developed a K-12 curriculum may have staff members that assume the state standards are the curriculum. This creates an atmosphere of teaching for coverage rather than teaching for mastery. It is necessary to review the curriculum and “deconstruct the standards” (Stiggins et al., 2004, p. 80). State standards can be very cumbersome when defining exactly what the student should master. When deconstructing the state standards, essential outcomes are “pulled” from the bigger ideas within the standards.

Curriculum development provides an opportunity to set clear targets for teachers, students, and parents. Effective assessment requires matching the assessment method to the learning target that is being assessed (Stiggins et al., 2004). Mastery learning, a
process where students are provided the help to master specific content before moving on to more difficult tasks, has a clearly defined K-12 curriculum, GLCEs that have been broken apart, and foundational or essential skills and outcomes that have been identified. Essential outcomes for each grade level content area have been identified and all general and special education teachers are utilizing them (McTighe & Wiggins, 1999).

Employing staff who are confident in the use of the state and district curriculum promotes a literate assessment environment.

When essential outcomes have been disseminated, teachers make the students aware of the learning targets for the lesson or unit (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2002). These targets, in student-friendly terms, are clearly communicated before the teaching begins. When students are unaware of the learning target, it can be a matter of luck to hit the target. The learning target should be posted in the room so that anyone walking into the room is able to identify the learning target. Effective assessment practices make the learning targets available to parents and community members.

After essential outcomes and student learning targets are formulated, unit planning takes place “beginning with the end in mind” (Wormeli, 2006, p.21). Essential information is used to create the various types of assessments. Wiggins & McTighe (1999) identify what must be included when building a viable curriculum. The process described by the authors was designed to help educators in the classroom when they are developing units within their curriculum. The process that is used is the backward design process. This process is divided into three stages. The first stage requires the teacher to determine what it is they want their students to learn. Teachers will breakdown those learning targets into “enduring understandings, essential questions, and knowledge and
skill” (Wiggins and McTighe, 1999, p. 50). The second step in the process is to define what will be accepted as evidence of learning. Finally, teachers must design individual lessons in the instructional process. The sequence of each experience in the teaching and learning process must be carefully planned for students, utilizing research-based instructional strategies.

The more frequently assessments are administered; the greater the gains to be made by students (Marzano, 2006). The number of assessments per unit is determined when a teacher can affirm that enough evidence has been accumulated to assess students’ level of mastery of the learning target. It is essential for frequent formative assessments to be given so that feedback is provided to students on their progress of learning. Assessments are most valuable when students take them in “bite-size” chunks. Lengthy tests that have repeated content serve to distract and demotivate test-takers. Smaller, frequent assessments throughout the unit provide a more encouraging and motivational assessment environment than large, end of unit assessments (Marzano, 2006).

The majority of the planning process should be spent developing formative assessments. Formative assessment is used to gauge what progress students have made toward a level of proficiency during the learning process. Following each formative assessment, effective feedback is provided to enable students to advance. Homework, daily class work, discussions, observations, and quizzes fall under the realm of formative assessment. Formative assessment should not be included in the final grade, as it is the practice of the knowledge or skill to be assessed. Just as batting practice is not included
in the player’s batting average, formative assessments are not included in the final grade.
Educators adjust the instruction based on the results of the formative assessments.

Popham (2008) illustrates four different levels of formative assessment as a school strives to reach full implementation. Level one describes how educators use formative assessment to adjust their instructional methods based on the evidence provided by the students. Level two has students using the results of their own formative assessment evidence to make changes in their learning strategies. Level three discusses the need to change the culture in a classroom from ranking and comparing students to one another and their performance to comparing student learning to the learning targets and make adjustments in teaching and learning strategies. Level four is reached when the entire school adopts the use of formative assessment through the use of professional learning communities and professional development hours.

Summative assessments are tasks that students complete to demonstrate what knowledge has been gained at the conclusion of the learning process. Teachers administer summative assessments when enough evidence has been collected to determine that their students will reach a level of mastery (Wormeli, 2006). Optional retesting of summative assessments is a practice that can be implemented at this point in the assessment process. Final grades are comprised of the information gathered from summative assessments. Providing professional development to all staff is a way to ensure there is a clear understanding of formative and summative assessment.

In order to get the most knowledge from assessment information, rubrics must be constructed and used consistently within grade level content areas. Rubrics are tools that provide students with an outline for what is expected to reach mastery of the task and
allow teachers to consistently evaluate assessments to determine the level of student proficiency. Rubrics must be constructed for each task to be completed by the learner. Student self-reflection and evaluation are other necessary components for effective assessment (Stiggins, Arter, Chappius & Chappius, 2004). It is important that students are given an opportunity to reflect on their growth. Involving students in peer assessment is another way for pupils to become experienced in using rubrics and gain awareness of expectations. “Don’t leave students out of the grading process. Involve students; they can—and should—play key roles in assessment and grading that promote achievement” (O’Connor, 2007, p. 111).

Assessment design is a critical skill for curriculum developers and classroom instructors to master. All summative assessments are not required to be pencil and paper tests. Stiggins, Arter, Chappius and Chappius (2004) state that options for methods of assessment are selected response, extended written response, performance assessment, and personal communication. The types of learning targets that educators assess are knowledge mastery, reasoning proficiency, performance skills, and the aptitude for creating products. The assessment method should match the learning target.

Once formative and summative assessments items are generated, daily lesson plans are developed. Remedial and extension activities are necessary to be included in the daily lesson plans for students who reach different levels of mastery at different times in the teaching and learning process. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Karhanek (2004) describe numerous examples of effective school systems. The effective systems that have been identified utilize a systematic set of interventions to provide safety nets for students who are failing. Identifying essential curriculum outcomes must
be in place as well as common assessments so students who are not reaching mastery level of learning targets can receive remedial services.

In addition, Stiggins, Arter, Chappius and Chappius (2004) point out the importance of making student samples of exemplary work available throughout the unit. Student samples are necessary so students are able to see what is required to close the gap between their level of proficiency and an exemplary display of knowledge (Stiggins, Arter, Chappius & Chappius, 2004).

Effective Assessment and Grading Practices: Retesting

Because the goal is to create an atmosphere where students are not afraid to fail, it is important for students to understand that they must learn from their mistakes (Wormeli, 2006). In traditional educational settings, students have been given one opportunity when taking summative assessments. External challenges such as socio-economic status, lack of parental involvement, and obligations that take away from time to complete homework can take priority in the educational environment. Educators can account for these challenges by providing multiple opportunities for student success. Allowing students to re-take a summative assessment is a way to promote learning. Learning can be supported by encouraging students to reflect on an unsuccessful attempt on an assessment and to come up with a plan of action to do better the next time (Stiggins, Arter, Chappius & Chappius, 2004).

Retesting in an educational setting is defined as having the opportunity to retake any summative assessment. The summative assessment is the assessment after the learning has taken place, such as at the end of a unit of study or after the learning target
has been reached. Summative assessments can include performance, written, forced-response, oral, and project-based assessments.

Additional criteria that are in place for this study include that the student must complete all missing assignments, correct errors on the original assessment and write a reflection of the student’s original performance on the first assessment, all before they take the retest. These criteria are in place so students understand that it is necessary to gain additional knowledge if the expectation is to improve on a retest. Finally, teachers must change the questions on the retest so that the exact same test is not given a second time and practice or retest effects, the effects from taking a test again, are less likely to skew the assessment score (Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, & Gerrard, 2007).

Research on retesting separates the opportunity to retest into educational settings that currently includes only post-secondary schools, and organizational settings, such as places of employment and governmental offices for licensing and certification. The retesting research has examined how practice (or retest) effects affect performance on the retest, types of retesting situations, demographic differences, variances in retest time intervals, types of tests and retest performance, and licensing and certification concerns with retesting with possible solutions.

Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, and Gerrard (2007) examined why people choose to retest in a 2007 meta-analysis. If candidates believe that they will have an increased opportunity for promotion or to gain admission into a college or program that they desire, they are more likely to retest. Candidates may also retest if they believe that a higher score may increase their chances of an anticipated outcome. Finally, this study
also concluded that if candidates believe that they have the ability to earn a higher score the second time around to achieve the specific outcome, they may elect to retest.

Practice effects are those effects that change a person’s test score from the first assessment to the next (Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, & Gerrard, 2007). The authors hypothesized the impact of each practice effect. The results supported the hypothesis of the practice effect of Mere Repetition. Test Coaching is an effect that was found to have a positive relationship with improved scores. The study did not find that Formal Instruction provided a statistically significant result. In regards to the Study Context practice effect, the authors described that the student may be more motivated in an operational context rather than a research context, as there is little to lose or gain in a research context. The results from the study showed that the results did not differ based on the context. The Test Form practice effect of using the same form of test is comparable to using an alternate form when there are longer time intervals between the retest of the exact same form. The study found that there were not significant differences in the degree of Cognitive Ability Dimension effects when compared proportionally. The last practice effect is described as Regression to the Mean. This study was only able to attribute less than ten percent of the total effect size to regression to the mean.

Schleicher, Van Iddekinge, Campion, & Morgeson (2010) examined retesting effects with various assessments to determine if different demographic groups show discrepancies in score improvement. The motivation for this study was to determine if there is an adverse impact on employee selection due to retesting gains. Even though candidates want to do their very best to be selected for a particular position, sometimes they are not able to do so. Therefore, organizations have put retesting policies in place.
The tests used in the Schleicher, Van Iddekinge, Campion, & Morgeson (2010) study were written and performance tests. The written test included verbal ability, job knowledge, and biodata tests. The performance test sample included behavior description interview, situational interview, experience and interest interview, leaderless group exercise, and a case analysis exercise.

The authors of this study hypothesized that there would be greater score gains with retesting for White candidates than for minority candidates, Black and Hispanic. The authors also believed that White candidates would score higher on written tests than on the performance tests. The results showed that Whites had significantly higher gains in scores with retesting than Blacks and Hispanics on the job knowledge, biodata, and verbal ability tests and the case analysis exercise. The opposite was true on the interview session scores of the retest, where Blacks showed significantly larger score improvements. The testing attitudes differed between Black and White candidates, as White candidates typically had more positive beliefs in the area of test taking than Black candidates, especially regarding tests of cognitive ability (Chan, 1997; Chan & Schmitt, 1997; Ryan, 2001). The results from the cognitive tests can be attributed to the position that “test attitudes can influence administration, it is conceivable that those with more favorable attitudes may also gain more from practice that those with negative attitudes” (Reeve & Lam, p. 229). Test taking self-efficacy, described as test-taking motivation and the test takers’ belief that the assessment is a valid measure of their ability, develop people’s attitude toward testing.

Schleicher, Van Iddekinge, Campion, and Morgeson (2010) state that there will be greater gains in retesting scores for younger candidates than for older candidates. The
The data from this study also indicated that there were differences in retesting effects by gender. Women had larger retest gains than men in all five of the performance assessments. Johnson and Helgeson (2002) attribute these gains to the notion that when the candidates were informed that they failed the first test women tended to respond to the negative feedback better than men. The women tended to use the feedback to make improvements more effectively than men. Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele, (1998) stated that efficacy related to gender is typically correlated to stereotypes and norms of society. The amount of efficacy one feels is dependent on the stereotype connected with a particular activity as well as how much the individual believes that the stereotype is true.

Lastly, the Johnson and Helgeson (2002) study examined the retesting gains from each type of assessment. The largest gains were found in the biodata and leaderless group discussion tests and the lowest gains were found on the verbal ability test. There are a variety of factors that the authors deemed as viable reasons for the differences. They recommend further research to determine when there is true improvement on the retest or just from learning certain test taking strategies.

Catron & Thompson (1979) designed a study to determine how the length of time between the original test and retest would impact the retest scores. This study
included 76 male college students. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) was
given to each student at two different times with the intervals being one week, one
month, two months or four months. The authors expected that the longer the test interval
the more likely the retest scores would be closest to the original score, where the least
amount of practice effect would impact the retest score. Retests after four months in the
verbal IQ scores returned to the first test level. However, the performance IQ scores
remained higher even after four months.

Millman (1989) describes a concern when candidates have an opportunity to
retest when they are attempting to become licensed or certified. If licensing and
certification tests pass a candidate that is incompetent (false positive) and do not pass a
competent one (false negative), the system for this process is flawed. The question arises
if a person had to select a doctor to perform surgery; would that person select the doctor
who was found proficient on the first round of examinations or the doctor who passed on
the second or third retest? The author describes how the opportunities to retest are in
favor of incompetent candidates:

- A candidate can do extremely well on easier questions and worse on
difficult questions.
- Some questions on the retest may be exactly the same as the previous
test; therefore, memory recall works in their favor.
- Sometimes passing scores are lowered to adjust for a lack of certified
workers.
- More difficult examinations may have their passing scores lowered after
the test has been taken by candidates.
• Retest cut scores are the same as the first test’s cut scores.

• The standard error of measurement that is used to lower the cut score for passing is sometimes inaccurate and overestimated, creating large downward adjustment of a passing score.

• It is possible to guess the correct answer on a forced-response test rather than actually knowing the answer.

• Having the opportunity to retest, the candidate may benefit from positive errors in measurement.

Millman (1989) offers several solutions to decrease false positives as well as false negatives. Lengthy tests could be created to take place over multiple days to ensure that the ability to guess the correct answers enough to pass the test would be reduced. Those candidates that received a score close to the passing score would be required to attend a second session of testing. Another option is to raise the cut score for the retest so the impact of the retest effects can be lessened. An increased test bank of questions would be required so that questions on the retest are not duplicated. Cut scores should not be lowered even if there are a low number of certified candidates or when the test is found to be very difficult.

Juhler, Rech, From and Brogan (1998) did a research study that analyzed the effect of optional retesting on college students’ achievement in an individualized algebra course. As mathematics requires learners to master specific concepts that are sequential in nature, it makes sense that a student would master the concepts before moving on to the next concepts. These authors hypothesized that retesting would be an effective strategy to motivate students to relearn information to a mastery level if they had not
learned the concepts the first time they were taught. The authors created a learning environment that any student scoring a B or less on every test in the course would be required to take a retest. It was found that there was a significant improvement between the initial test and the retest for 90% of the students that were eligible.

Catanzano and Wilson (1977) designed a study to analyze three different retesting scenarios. The first was that students do not have an option to retest; the second scenario is that students have the option to retest, and the third situation is that students must retake a test if they scored less than 80% on the initial test. The study was conducted by one teacher teaching three different seventh grade science classes, each class serving as one of the testing situations. These three testing situations would examine student achievement, test anxiety, and student attitude. The achievement testing was divided into two types of assessment: free-response and structured-response. The anxiety and attitudes factors were both measured by separate scales.

The authors determined that there was a significant difference in achievement scores in the mandatory and optional retesting situations in the free-response questions and re-exam posttests only. There was no significant difference in test anxiety among the three different testing contingencies. Students who were in the optional retesting scenario had significantly better attitudes than the mandatory testing scenario. The mandatory retesting students who were determined to have high test anxiety, did significantly better academically than those students in the optional and no retesting scenarios.

Practice effects have been deemed as playing a significant role in the retesting environment by the authors. Because the students in the mandatory and optional
retesting scenarios had been exposed to more free-response questions, they did better on the posttests. The data from the investigation describe a positive correlation between the mandatory and optional retesting situations and student achievement and attitude. Evidence leads one to believe that the 80% mastery and optional retesting scenarios are both effective practices. Optional retesting has a higher impact on a positive attitude than the mandatory situation. The optional retesting put the responsibility of learning on the student; because of this fact the authors recommend that the level of difficulty of the retest should be equivalent to the original test. Optional retesting is also preferred operationally because there is less test creation and tracking on the part of the educators. Finally, based on student attitude, achievement on low-level test items (free-response), and the practicality of providing retests, the optional retesting contingency is preferred by Catanzano and Wilson (1977) over the mandatory or no retesting contingencies.

The Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Retesting

Self-efficacy beliefs are formed by interpreting information from four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, psychological or affective states, and social persuasions (Bandura, 1986). Retesting falls under the mastery experience of self-efficacy formation. When describing mastery experience within the realm of self-efficacy, Bandura (1993) discusses the fact that the more ability to perform a task successfully, the stronger level of self-efficacy that will be developed. The opposite is true when a person has difficulty completing a specific task or is unable to complete the task; self-efficacy is diminished (Bandura 1986, 1989, 1991, 1993).

Mastery learning described within the realm of instructional, assessment, and grading practices is a theory based on the premise that all children can learn when given
the appropriate circumstances in a learning focused environment and culture. There are
two essential elements to mastery learning as described by Bloom (1968): a student’s
aptitude for learning a particular subject and effective instruction. Quality instruction
includes amount, quality of instruction, and the time that is made available for learning.
Carroll (1963) states that aptitude is linked to the amount of time necessary for the
learner to reach mastery of a specific learning target. Bloom (1968) indicates that
educational institutions can make the greatest difference in a child’s aptitude by
providing more effective learning environments so that less time will be necessary for a
child to reach mastery in a specific subject.

A student is able to demonstrate the most recent level of learning through
retesting. A student may not have had enough time to learn the information; therefore
providing opportunities for a student to retest on a concept is one way to provide a
student with additional time and practice to reach mastery.

Summary

Some grading and assessment practices have created situations that force teachers
to assign a few students a grade of A, the majority of students receiving a C, a small
number who receive a D and finally, some that fail. There are educational settings that
then put the administrator in a position to monitor teachers’ class grades. When a teacher
assigns a large amount of As, the tendency is to label the teacher “too easy.” The same is
addressed if the teacher assigns too many failing grades; then the teacher is labeled “too
hard.” If this is the premise that educational institutions work under, it is unlikely that
mastery will be attained by all students. In a perfect world, all students would be learning
at high levels, thereby justifying that all students receive As.
If the educational system is now held to the standard that it will produce students that have the opportunity to choose to go to college or begin a career after high school, the learning environments we create for students must promote strong academic self-efficacy. Educators must know what mastery looks like by identifying essential outcomes. The school and community have to be willing to accept new ways of reporting the proficiency levels of learning targets as an accurate reflection of student achievement, rather than comparing students to one another. A student’s self-efficacy is impacted when she/he believes that his or her achievement level is dependent on other students’ level of mastery. A student’s perception of academic success is reduced when achievement indicators are not based on her/his personal performance and progress and when other factors are included an achievement score.

Specific policies, especially grading and assessment policies which are utilized at schools, affect the learning experience a student has. The learning environment that is created for students to help them build a strong sense of academic self-efficacy includes providing multiple opportunities for success. Retesting when utilized alongside other researched-based assessment and grading techniques is one way to provide multiple opportunities for success.
Chapter Three

Research Design

This study warrants an empirical, phenomenological research method. This method is most appropriate, as the purpose of the researcher is to describe experiences as perceived by the participants. Phenomenological studies offer the opportunity to explore the perceptions of a particular phenomenon, in this case, having the opportunity for retesting on summative assessments.

Research Question

What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments?

Student perceptions from having the opportunity to retake summative assessments in a middle school setting explored through the use of interviews. The researcher intended to gain insight into middle school students’ feelings on this topic rather than draw conclusions based on assumptions from educational theorists.

Epistemologically, phenomenological methods are subjective and focus on personal knowledge, concentrating on the significance of one’s perceptions and interpretations. Phenomenological research is connected to other aspects of qualitative methods, such as action research, case study, ethnography, and hermeneutics. There are common themes within the realms of qualitative human science research. These common themes distinguish this type of research from traditional quantitative research methods. Moustakas (1994) identified these common themes:

- The information received from these types of qualitative methods could not be gathered by quantitative methods
• Qualitative research provides the researcher with the big picture of the entire experience rather than specific data from one piece of the experience

• Qualitative information is looking for meanings and themes of an experience, not results or measurements

• Gaining first-person descriptions through formal and informal interviews and conversations

• To understand human behavior it is necessary to gather both perceptions about an experience and evidence from scientific investigations

• The questions and problems that are designed are chosen because the researcher is interested and passionate about the topic

• The overall experience and behavior can be viewed as an interconnected relationship of subject and object as well as parts of the whole

Phenomenological research describes rather than explains a phenomenon through the eyes of the participants (Husserl, 1970). Glesne (2010) describes the role of the researcher as larger than just gathering and recording data. The other role that the researcher holds is researcher as learner. As a learner, the researcher will reflect on the process and the information received from the participants. The primary duty is that of a listener, not speaker. When the researcher does all of the talking, the respondents may feel discouraged to open up and share the wealth of information that they have.

There are various approaches that can be used to gather data. Phenomenology can include the use of observation, interviews, or open-ended surveys. The data can then be organized and analyzed to find themes related to the topic, which may lead to developing theories regarding the participant’s experience.
To summarize, transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness. Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for a phenomenological reflection. The very appearance of something makes it a phenomenon. The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences and experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49)

**Sample and Population**

The participants selected were 20 ninth graders that attended middle school, in a Midwestern state during the 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. Only ninth graders were eligible for the study because these students have experienced having the opportunity to retest for the three years they have been in attendance at the school. The twenty students will be selected according to the subgroup status. Every tenth name on the list of students meeting the criteria will be selected until the total of 20 participants has submitted consent forms.

**Sampling**

The sample was selected by using a maximum variation method. Participants were selected to include some variation among the students in ninth grade based on demographic subgroups, due to importance of determining achievement gaps as defined by NCLB. When disaggregating data from standardized tests, subgroup data is examined. The subgroups that are examined are ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic and special needs status. Based on the information gathered from those students, general themes will be discovered.

**Inquiry and Design**

For this study, the researcher has determined that a structured phenomenological interview would be the best way to explore the perceptions of having the opportunity to
retest. Because the phenomenon of retesting is not a traditional grading and assessment practice, the researcher is interested in discovering student’s perceptions surrounding the phenomenon. The interview guide will be followed to ensure that each participant is asked the same questions in each interview.

Glesne (2010) states that the benefits of a structured interview are that there need not be a rapport developed between the participant and the researcher, and these interviews will provide consistent information that can be compared with various participants. Another benefit is that a structured interview can easily be performed by a researcher trained in using the interview guide.

**Interviewing**

The structured interview for this study will have a total of seven questions with an opportunity for three more additional questions depending on the responses given to two particular questions. The first two questions are open-ended questions that address the topic of the research study and allow students to share what they know about the retesting opportunities at their school. The next questions begin to identify the participant’s experience with retesting and how they perceive the opportunity affects them academically. It was the researcher’s intention to gather insight on the outcomes of the retests and the feelings that were experienced when a retest occurred. The researcher intended to gather information about when a student elected not to retest. The questions also attempted at finding out how a student felt if retakes were no longer available during the learning process. Finally, the researcher anticipated collecting data that determined how students would recommend a retest opportunity for a new school setting and how it
may impact their perception of themselves being successful academically (sees Appendix A for complete interview protocol).

**Transcribing**

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed to further facilitate the data analysis. The transcripts from each participant’s responses to the interview guide will provide the researcher with information to use as a thematic analysis of the information (Glesne, 2011). The researcher will search through the data to find any patterns or themes that are present.

A voice recorder will be used and the researcher will attempt to use a speech recognition program to aid in the transcribing of the researcher’s interview questions. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim, even though the um’s and pauses and overlaps within the conversation are not critical for the study as the objective is to discover themes and patterns from the perceptions regarding having the opportunity to retest.

**Analysis**

The researcher employed a thematic analysis approach when analyzing the data to determine if there are themes and patterns within in the transcripts. Data coding was utilized with this type of work (Glesne, 2011). The data were coded after reading through all of the pieces of data and then any connections were made from information that is coded in a similar way. Data codes were used to find relationships to other aspects of the research, such as how it varies from subject to subject based on the demographic differences.

Thematic analysis of data is a technique that is typically used in grounded theory research (Glesne, 2011). Patterns and themes are identified in an attempt to build theory
(Glesne, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Although this research study is not based on grounded theory inquiry, the researcher borrowed some of the practices and concepts to look for patterns and themes.

When making comparisons of the data, the researcher created charts to view the various aspects noted from each participant. These comparisons aided in the identifications of the relationships between subject and ideas. These relationships led to patterns that may indicate similarity or differences among the demographic groups as well as trends of the entire group of subjects.

Glesne (2011) suggests that qualitative research goes beyond simple generalizations and basic norms. It is the task of the researcher to use the research to “help reveal underlying complexities” (Glesne, 2011, p. 188). The researcher looked for ways that each case differed from the norm and any distinctions that are present. Not only were patterns being identified, but any contradictions were included in the research as well.

Validity

Qualitative research can be difficult in ensuring the validity of the research method. Proving that something is factual and accurate is problematic as there are no specific criteria to make that determination, when concepts are constructed in a social setting. There are however, some ways to show that the researcher’s work is reliable and trustworthy. The following strategies will be used to increase the validity of this the study:

- Bias: The researcher is invested in the relationship of retesting and academic self-efficacy, based on the recent implementation of a district-wide grading and
assessment policy that includes retesting on summative assessments for all students. The building that the researcher is assigned to implemented the policy four years prior to the entire district instituting it. The attachment the researcher has for the topic may lead to finding data to support personal beliefs regarding retesting and the impact on self-efficacy. The researcher may hear what she wants to hear. Researcher bias was addressed by focusing on being subjective. Journaling before and after interviews helped the researcher to realize the opinions that were brought to the table before the interview and then helped to reflect on recognized biases.

- Member-Checking: The researcher shared the interview transcripts, thoughts, and drafts of the final report with the participants to ensure the information was documented accurately.

- Peer review and Debriefing: The researcher requested input from the Dissertation Committee, but also members of the cohort, as well as fellow educators outside of University of Toledo. Gaining insight from others provided a way for external reflection to ensure research bias is not altering the results of the study.

The ninth grade students that were identified from attendance for their entire middle school career at the selected middle school and were identified for selection. The Parent Consent forms were sent out to all students eligible. Once the forms were returned, subgroup data was gathered to attempt to address the subgroups identified by NCLB. Interviews began January 9, 2012 and were completed February 14, 2012. Interviews lasted from six minutes to 17 minutes. After the interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed using the application d2u from the iTunes store. Once the
transcriptions were completed, the interviewees met with the researcher again to verify if
the information that was collected was an accurate reflection of their perceptions of the
retake process. The member-checking meetings took place from February 21, 2012 to
March 2, 2012 and lasted from five to seven minutes. The participants in the study
indicated that the information was accurate and no new information was provided to the
researcher.
Chapter Four

Analysis of Data

In the following chapter, the researcher presents an analysis of the qualitative phenomenological study, which attempts to explore the research question, “What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retake Summative Assessments?” The review of literature indicates there is very little research on the impact of K-12 students having the opportunity to retest on summative assessments. This researcher engaged in this study in an effort to analyze information from students who had the opportunity to retest during their middle school years and gain direction for further investigations. A total of 100 parental consent forms were sent to students who attended the selected school for their entire middle school career on December 12, 2011. The week of January 9, 2012 twelve parent consent forms were received. January 12, 2012, 88 parental consent forms were resent to the identified students. The week of January 23, 2012 two more parental consent forms were received. On January 27, 2012 86 parental consent forms were resent to the identified students. On January 30, 2012 seven more parental consent forms were received. It was challenging to obtain research participants, as there was not always a commitment on the students’ part to get the Parental Consent Form signed and returned in a timely fashion. The student group continued to be reconfigured when the researcher was trying to obtain the pre-determined number of 20 participants. The female participant group is larger due to the number of signed and returned Parent Consent Forms that were able to be obtained. The final group that was approved for interviews offered data that presented a wide range of perceptions to provide for a useful qualitative analysis.
This chapter analyzes data collected from 20 comprehensive interviews. Participants were chosen based on the middle school attendance criteria defined in Chapter Three. As the research progressed, the researcher consulted with two members of the doctoral cohort and three educators who reviewed the data. There were three primary themes that emerged including 12 sub-themes that were discovered through further analysis of the interview data (See Table 1.1): (1) Purpose of retests/retakes, (2) Factors that influenced students to take/not take the opportunity for a retest/retake, (3) Outcomes of retests/retakes.

Table 1.1: Primary themes, sub-themes, and responses. Below is the breakdown of the primary themes, sub-themes and the number of responses from each student participant related with a particular sub-theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Purpose of Retests/Retakes</td>
<td>Grade Improvement</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gain additional learning</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receive feedback in areas of weakness</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce test anxiety</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Influences to take/not take retest</td>
<td>Disappointed in performance</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family request/mandate</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time management ability</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to gain an understanding of the perceptions of students having retesting opportunities in middle school, the researcher will give an overview of the demographics of the students that participated in the study. Next, the researcher will describe the primary themes and define the sub-themes that emerged. Finally, the researcher will discuss the detailed analysis of the sub-themes that are present in the student interviews as well as state any demographic connections among the themes.

**Student Demographic Overview**

Of the twenty students that participated in the study, there were seven males, one of whom was black, and the remaining six males were white. Three of the white males were also special needs students. One special education and one general education white male was economically disadvantaged. There were a total of thirteen females, six of whom were black, five were white, and two were bi-racial. One white, one black and one bi-racial female were economically disadvantaged.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade improvement</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong self-efficacy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced test anxiety</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2: Student Demographics. Below is the demographic breakdown of the students who participated in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Special Needs</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bi-racial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bi-racial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary Themes and Sub-Themes
Each interview consisted of nine open-ended questions, and interviews lasted from seven to 16 minutes. Once interviews were complete, the interviews were transcribed. The researcher used a web application entitled d2u: dictate2us, version 1.6, to transcribe the interviews. The application was developed by bottle rocket and can be purchased from the iTunes App Store. The researcher studied the data and arranged the spreadsheets such that one sheet contained all student responses to a particular question. From the interviewee responses the researcher grouped replies into primary themes based on commonalities. From there, similar responses could be broken down even further to identify more specific data within each theme, recognizing 12 sub-themes. Primary themes that emerged were labeled according to a number associated with that theme and the sub-themes that were identified received another number related to the primary theme, and the coding system was created (Appendix B). For instance, the primary theme: Purpose of retests/retakes was labeled with a “1” and the sub-theme associated with the primary theme “1”: Grade Improvement was labeled “1.1”. Students were reported as S1-S20 to protect individual identities.

**First primary theme: Purpose of retest/retakes.** The first theme that arose from the data collection was perceptions from students stating the purpose of retests/retakes in an academic setting. There were four sub-themes that emerged from the primary theme:

1. Grade improvement. Seventeen different students indicated that grade improvement was a purpose of retakes. Nine students indicated this response multiple times throughout the interview process. To gain additional learning. Nine students indicated that the purpose of taking a retake offered them an opportunity to gain additional learning, from small group remediation from a teacher, one on
one instruction from a teacher, peer tutoring, or study group prior to the retake. Three students indicated this response twice.

1. To receive feedback on areas of weakness. Nine student responses deemed the purpose of retakes was so that they could learn about their areas of deficiency and identify content they had not mastered and seek out additional instruction to be ready for a retake. Two students indicated this response twice.

2. To reduce test anxiety. Thirteen students’ believed that having the opportunity to retake a summative assessment afforded them a “second chance,” a “back-up plan”, a “life-line” and “something to fall back on” if they were stressed during a testing situation (S5, personal communication, January 23, 2012). Three students indicated this response more than once.

Each of the sub-themes are explained further below.

*Grade improvement.* Within the primary theme: Purpose of retests/retakes, the sub-theme that was predominantly reported among all of the students was that they viewed the purpose of retakes as improving students’ original assessment grade as well as their overall marking period grade. Students indicated that summative assessment grades were more heavily weighted than formative assessments. Every single student stated the purpose was to improve a grade at some point during every interview. One student commented, “If students did poorly the first time, they had a chance to go through and fix what they did wrong so they have a fair chance of getting a good grade” (S20, personal communication, January 10, 2012). Another student stated, “Retakes help students get better test scores, since test grades are a large portion of their final grade. If they increase their test grade then they could increase their final grade” (S2, personal communication,
February 3, 2012). Student (S4) stated that the purpose for retakes was to “address poor performance on tests” (personal communication, January 23, 2012). Additionally, the purpose of retakes were described as the “opportunity for when you failed a test, you can improve your grade” (S19, personal communication, January 18, 2012). Student (S15) indicated that the purpose of retakes is, “to improve my grades” (personal communication, February 1, 2012). Finally, Student (S3) shared that the purpose of schools to have retakes in their grading policy is because, “kids want to pass” (personal communication, January 24, 2012).

**Gain additional learning.** The second sub-theme that emerged from the primary theme: Purpose of retests/retakes, was that students saw the purpose as a way to gain additional knowledge of the subject. The students recognized that if they were to demonstrate mastery of the content by earning a proficient score on a summative assessment that they may need additional instruction to do so.

When I failed a test, I would want to take it again to get a better grade, but I do not take tests good. I would have to get help from Ms. J. She would help me more than the other teachers did because she would help me until I ‘got it’ a lot. She would teach me again but a little bit better (S8, personal communication, February 10, 2012).

Student (S1) states the purpose for retakes is, “to get additional help for the test” (personal communication, February 10, 2012). “You have a chance to learn more,” affirms (S13, personal communication, February, 13, 2012). Student (S19) also verified that “you can learn the information again” (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Additionally, student (S20) corroborated that the purpose of retakes was for, “kids to find out what they don’t know and learn it again (personal communication, January 10, 2012).
Receive feedback on areas of weakness. The third sub-theme linked to Purpose of retests/retakes, is that students felt that it was beneficial for them to receive feedback on specific areas of unsuccessful performance. Students would then correct mistakes and study the amended information, seek additional instruction, or sign up for peer tutoring. A student describes how he/she use the feedback:

Because like the first time you take it, I mean you’re expecting to do good, sometimes, but just when you get your test back you learn what you need to get extra help with and like what subject, and which one should be helped with. Retakes give you a chance to go back and study really hard the questions I got wrong (S4, personal communication, January 23, 2012).

Another student specifies, “Retakes are so we can have another chance because maybe we thought in different ways, and now we can learn it again” (S19, personal communication, January 18, 2012). Student (S14) establishes that the purpose of retakes is, “to know what you did wrong and do it better (personal communication, February 3, 2012). Another student states that purpose of retakes is to, “find out what I don’t know and can do it better” (S13, personal communication, February 10, 2012.) Lastly, a student indicated the purpose of having a retake so that, “students can learn from their mistakes (S6, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

Reduce test anxiety. Test anxiety occurs when students experience overwhelming amounts of stress, feelings of nervousness, and the inability to perform well during testing situations. A student describes one way a retake helps reduce stress:

Students need retakes like so they are not like ‘Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God’ like stressing over it too much. Because like if you get like a C or B and you are an A+ student, you can always retake it if you want to (S10, February 14, 2012).

Student (S5) shares:
Like for me, I’m not a good test take at all and sometimes I don’t get it the first time and get nervous. I know I can go back and try to make it a second and that helps me do better (personal communication, January 23, 2012).

Another of example of test anxiety is expressed by, “I wouldn’t feel too good if I could not retest because I would be like all stressed out about my test grade making sure it was perfect and what not” (S14, personal communication, February, 3, 2012).

Test anxiety is felt by student (S17):

If I did not have a retake option, it makes me feel pressured. It makes me feel like I have to focus more, not that I don’t, but I will actually have to bring my A game to every test, and even if I had a bad day that will upset me. Like say I have family issues or there’s a day of a test that I am not there or I am just not myself then I would need a retake (personal communication, February 2, 2012).

Student (S4) indicated that, “I would be nervous if I only had one chance to take a test” (personal communication, January 23, 2012).

Second Primary Theme: Influences to Take/Not Take a Retest. The second primary theme that developed from data was the multitude of factors that influenced a student’s decision to take the opportunity for a retest. The following five sub-themes were revealed through analysis:

1. Disappointed in performance. Nineteen students expressed a disappointment in themselves as well as knowledge that they knew their parent/guardian would be disappointed in their performance would engage in a retake opportunity. Two students responded with this statement twice.

2. Family. There were eight examples that students described of how the family may request or mandate that a student take a retake. One student indicated this response twice.
3. Time management ability. Seven students described that whether or not they felt they had enough time to seek additional assistance or prepare for tests could impact whether or not they employed the retake opportunity. Two students indicated this response twice and one responded three times.

4. Apathy. Eight Students shared that sometimes it was their lack of willingness to do what was required for the retake opportunity.

5. Self-efficacy. Five students shared that the level of self-efficacy a student had affected the decision to take a retake or not. Two indicated this response twice.

Each of these sub-themes are further defined below.

**Disappointed in performance.** The students identified situations in which they were not satisfied in their performance on the original assessment. The fact that a low test grade might also warrant a reprimand from their parents would impact the choice to take a retake. One student described of their own poor performance as well as the fear of disappointing their parents:

Because if a kid is having a bad time like it’s just like a bad time for them or they just didn’t study, they were being a little careless. They would have time and say, ‘Oh my gosh, I can’t believe I did this. Now I have this terrible grade and I have to show my parents. Let me retake it and I’ll do better this time and I’ll be more focused’ (S7, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Another student shared that, “If you are unhappy with your grade, you would want to take a retest” (S2, personal communication, February 3, 2012). Student (S3) indicated that if, “I performed poorly on the test, I would want to take a retake” (personal communication, January 24, 2012). Additionally, Student (S11) identified that, “If I felt bad about getting a bad grade, I would take a retest” (personal communication, February
“If I got a low grade,” was an influence to retake a test was specified by (S10, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

*Family request/mandate.* When parents are aware of the school policy that may contain a retake/retest component, students realize that some parents’ have expectations that a failing grade is not an option or that a retake is highly suggested by their family.

One student’s explanation for choosing to take a retake is:

> So mainly it is about grades and how like your family feels about it. Like, let’s say, if you have one of those moms that are distinctly like, ‘Oh, what did you get on your test? What did you get on your test?’ And if they don’t like your response, they’re also an influence like, ‘Hey, you need to retake this’ (S7, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Another student also shares similar influences, “Really, I think [retakes] is just for grades mostly, like you don’t really want to get in trouble with your parents” (S10, personal communication, February 14, 2012). “Parents and my teachers would make me take a retest” (S1, personal communication January 24, 2012. Student (S3) stated that, “my parents always made me take a retake” (personal communication, January 24, 2012). Student (S16) also declared that, “I had to take a retake if my parents checked on the computer and saw a bad grade” (personal communication, January 9, 2012).

*Time management ability.* Students described situations where some evenings there was not enough time to study due to extracurricular events. Other scenarios students described were they had multiple classes to study for. Students had to decide how to maximize the time they had each evening to determine how much time they had to dedicate to studying for tests or completing homework. Students also seemed to understand ways they could manipulate the grading system; if they knew there was another summative assessment in the same marking period that they did poorly on a
previous summative assessment, they had a chance to have a positively heavily weighted assessment grade averaged with the low assessment grade. They counted on the better score to “level out” (S15, personal communication, February 1, 2012) the low score. A student indicates, “Maybe they had something to do like the day before and they did not have time to study or just had problems, so they need to take the retake” (S16, personal communication, January 9, 2012). Student (S15) tells what influences her decision to take a retake:

Okay, it will make me retake it if it was one of the last tests and I did bad like for report cards and I did bad then I will retake it. If I knew that we had another test coming up, I wouldn’t retake it because it will level out anyway, so like in the end it we get good grades on the other test it will still level out (personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Additionally, a student reiterates similar influences in deciding whether or not to take a retake, “I would be upset if I could not take a retake, if I had like a game the night before the test or had tons of homework and didn’t have time to study” (S9, personal communication, January 10, 2012). Student (S11) acknowledged that if, “I didn’t have enough time, I would not take a retake” (personal communication, February 14, 2012). “Sometimes there was not enough time in the marking period to take a retake, if I waited too long,” (S6, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

Apathy. Students voiced that there are times that they do not feel like taking a retake or do not want to put forth the effort to do what is required for seizing the opportunity to retake. “Sometimes I did not take a retake because I was just lazy or I did not want to give up my lunch to retake” (S14, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

A student describes why they may not choose to retest:
In math last year, I was in Ms. M’s class, I got a C on the test and I knew the material pretty well, and she asked me, ‘Hey do you want to retake this?’ and at that time, I was like, ‘I don’t feel like it.’ I actually knew the material very well so if I would have taken the retake I probably would have gotten a better grade (S14, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Student (S10) declares reasons about how apathy could impact the decision to retake:

I chose not to retake when I had a lot of work to do – I guess me kind of being lazy, but if I just didn’t want to do the extra work to do the retake or work out the corrections or maybe the test was so hard in the first place, so there was little reason for me to try again (personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Student (S17) stated that, “If I didn’t feel like it, I would not take a retest” (personal communication, February 2, 2012). “If I had too much other work to do, I would be lazy sometimes” (S12, personal communication, February 3, 2012). Student (S8) also indicated that, “I did not take a retake if I just didn’t want to” (personal communication, February 10, 2012).

**Self-efficacy.** Students who had a strong sense of self-efficacy indicated they would always choose a retake because they wanted the highest grade possible. Those students with a low sense of self-efficacy elected not to engage in a retake if they knew their score would not improve or if the content was too difficult. A student with a high sense of self-efficacy recalls, “I always took retakes unless I got an A+” (S13, personal communication, February 10, 2012). Another student with a lower sense of self-efficacy indicates why they didn’t choose to take a retake:

In math class, I failed a big-kind of test- and that was a really big part of my grade so I didn’t tell my parents about it, and I didn’t retake it, the test was so difficult that I did not want to go through it again so I just kept quiet about it (S3, personal communication, January 24, 2012).

A supplementary example of a student who is not efficacious in social studies, “I am terrible on Social Studies tests. Social Studies is memorizing things. I’m not good at
memorizing things. So I always relied on the retake just in case I do bad (S15, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Student (S18) states:

Like they could think they- they-could feel like they are not smart and they don’t know how to do it or they could really- just really not understand and then they could study more and get a test and realize that they understand and then they can pass and they’re like, ‘I get it’ (personal communication, February 10, 2012).

Student (S18) is aware that students who have low self-efficacy, or don’t feel smart and are not confident in their ability are more likely to pass up the retake option than those students who have a higher sense of self-efficacy. Students who feel like they understand the material and are confident in their ability are more likely to utilize the retake option. Student (S2) assured that because “I am confident in all I do; I would always take a retest unless I got a high grade” (personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Third Primary Theme: Outcomes of Retests/Retakes. The third primary theme that was identified in the research was “Outcomes of Retests/Retakes.” The students articulated that when they engaged in a retake there were three outcomes that typically were experienced. The three outcomes could then be categorized as three sub-themes within this primary theme. The three sub-themes were:

1. Grade improvement. All twenty students reported that when the opportunity for a retake is utilized, the test scores on the retake are always better as long as they engaged in all of the required tasks making them eligible for the retake.

2. Strong sense of self-efficacy. Eighteen students indicated grade improvement was always an outcome of a retake scenario. Five students indicated this response three times and six indicated it twice. This outcome led them to feel that they
could be more successful when faced with future challenges and it gave them an increased level of confidence.

3. Reduced test anxiety. Six students verbalized the simple fact of knowing they had an opportunity for a retake reduced the amount of anxiety they felt prior to the test. One student indicated this three times.

The three sub-themes are explained in greater detail below.

**Grade improvement.** The students reported an improvement in the assessment score nearly every time they took a retake. One student mentioned the necessity for them to seek additional instruction to ensure an improvement in the grade, “If I sat down with the teacher and got help, I did better, but if I didn’t, it stayed the same or went down” (S11, personal communication, February, 14, 2012). “I always do better on retakes,” (S20, personal communication, January 10, 2012). Student (S8) stated that, “I get a chance to improve my grade on a retake” (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Student (S14) detailed that, “I mostly did better on retakes, sometimes the same” (personal communication, February 3, 2012). Student (S6) stated that, “I always did better on retakes than my first test” (personal communication, January 20, 2012).

**Strong sense of self-efficacy.** Students described that when they improved their grade on a retake that they felt they had an increased confidence in their ability to do better academically in their classes. One student describes how they felt when they do better on a retake:

> It made me feel that if I know I haven’t studied the first time I wouldn’t really do good, but when I studied the second time, I got a better grade and shows that if I put my mind to it, then I can do it (S5, personal communication, January 23, 2012).

Another student reported how they feel after improving their grade on a retake:
I felt positive. Good. I mean I just felt like I knew that I was learning. I feel like I can do well like if I push myself, I can do better if I get another chance to retake. I feel more confident, like even lately I have felt really confident about all my science and math tests. I’ve been getting really good grades (S6, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

A student stated that having the opportunity for retakes, “makes them feel comfortable knowing they can excel better” (S14, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Student (S13) stated that after they did well on a retake, “I felt like I can do anything and that I can be the best in the class” (personal communication, February 10, 2012). “I felt like I am doing what I supposed to be doing when I get a better grade and I felt proud” (S20, personal communication, January 10, 2012).

**Reduced test anxiety.** Students shared that having the opportunity for a retake provided feelings of relief if they wanted to improve their grade through the retake process. For example, one student states:

Yeah, the retake would take your stress out because if you will have stress while you’re doing an assignment or something and you’d freak out saying, ‘Okay, I’ve got to get this right. I got to get this right or my grades would be failing still’ Because I mean, if I get stressed out on my grades, then I would just – if I didn’t know how to do that, I would just guess on it and have something bad (S3, personal communication, January 2, 2012).

Another student shares the same sentiment:

When I take a retake and do better, I feel like I can do anything in that class. Like I was excited. Like I was the best in the class. I can get all my work done. If I could not take retakes anymore I would probably fail all my classes. I’d be really mad. I would feel like I can do nothing. I would just sleep in class and put my head down and not even listen to the teacher (S13, personal communication, February 10, 2012).

**Connection between Demographic Information and Sub-Themes**

Analyzing all 20 student interviews against the various sub-themes, the researcher determined there were a significant number of students who responded similarly to three sub-themes in particular: (a) the purpose of retakes is grade improvement, (b) students are influenced to take a retest because they are disappointed in their performance, and (c) outcomes of taking a retake is grade improvement. The purpose of retesting to improve the original assessment grade was mentioned at least once by 17 of the 20 students, where all six of the economically disadvantaged students reported this. Students believe this will, in turn, improve the overall marking period grade, as students understand that summative assessments are more heavily weighted. An influence that 18 of the 20 students agreed upon was that they engaged in the opportunity of retakes because they were disappointed in their performance, including all six of the economically disadvantaged. All 20 students stated the outcome for taking a retake was grade improvement.

There were 11 responses stating that the purpose of retakes was to gain additional learning. A total of six out of the seven males described this purpose. Two males mentioned this purpose more than once.

Primarily female students indicated that their purpose of taking a retake was to receive feedback on their areas of weakness. Of the nine responses, eight were female. There were a total of 13 responses stating the purpose of retakes was to reduce test anxiety. The majority of responses for this purpose were from ten female students.

The family requested/mandated influence was corroborated by a total of nine responses. Of these nine responses, only three were male. The influence of time
management issues show six of the 11 responses identified by males. Student apathy was described in eight responses, four of which were male. Because the number of male participants is only 35% of the study, time management and apathy show an increase in male tendencies to respond to these areas of influence.

Eighteen of the 20 students involved in the study indicated a sense of strong self-efficacy as an outcome of engaging in the retake process. Further breakdown of the data reveal that six of the seven males who participated in the study discuss this outcome. Of the economically disadvantage students, five of the six also stated that strong self-efficacy was an outcome of having the opportunity to for a retest.

Summary

This chapter described and discussed the outcomes of the study as obtained by the interviews of 20 students who were enrolled in the selected middle school for their entire middle school career. Data were obtained during in-depth interviews where nine open-ended questions were asked. Data were transcribed using the application d2u: dictation2us. Three primary themes developed and 12 sub-themes emerged when the data was analyzed and evaluated.

The description of primary themes and sub-themes were presented in Table 1.1. The student responses were able to be chunked into the three primary themes: (1) Purpose of Retests/Retakes, (2) Influences to Take/Not Take Retests, and (3) Outcomes of Retests/Retakes. From further analysis of the primary themes, 12 sub-themes were identified: (1.1) Grade improvement, (1.2) To gain additional learning, (1.3) To receive feedback on areas of weakness, (1.4) To reduce test anxiety, (2.1) Disappointed in performance, (2.2) Family request/mandate, (2.3) Time management ability, (2.4)
Apathy, (2.5) Self-efficacy, (3.1) Grade improvement, (3.2) Sense of strong self-efficacy, and (3.3) Reduced test anxiety.

There appeared to be relationships between male responses and the sub-themes of gaining additional learning, time management ability, and apathy. Female responses demonstrated a connection to the sub-themes of receiving feedback on areas of weakness, family request/mandate, and reducing test anxiety.

Figure 1.1: Gender percentages by sub-themes.

The economically disadvantaged students indicated that a sense of strong self-efficacy resulted from having the opportunity to retest.

The following chapter will continue the discussion of the findings. The inferences that can be drawn and possibilities for future research will be examined.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the study including the conclusions that have been drawn from the findings discovered in Chapter Four. Included in this chapter are the inferences made from these findings and recommendations for future research.

Introduction

This study was designed to explore the perceptions of students in their middle school years about having the opportunity to retest/retake summative assessments. The interview protocol was designed to involve students in a reflective process to examine how they felt about retaking summative assessments and perceptions they had surrounding their experience. The literature review describes studies in settings outside the K-12 educational system. At this time, very few studies have been done in relation to K-12 retesting situations.

This chapter articulates students’ perceptions and how a student feels having the retesting opportunity may impact their belief in themselves to be academically successful. The demographic information is addressed to examine how it connects with responses of the participants. The responses offer further indication as to how an instructional leader could use this information to guide school improvement efforts, specifically in relation to assessment and grading policies that include opportunities for retesting.

The setting for this study was a suburban high school where two middle schools merged at the ninth grade level. Of the 500 students in the freshman class, participants of the study were identified based on those who had attended one of the middle schools, for all three years. Of the students identified, 20 students were selected by a purposeful
subgroup selection method. Various demographic groups were intended to be represented; however, it ultimately depended upon the signed and returned Parent Consent Form. Therefore, not all sub-groups were equally represented. The sub-groups that were represented were disaggregated over the primary themes and sub-themes that evolved from the data. This chapter concludes with how instructional leaders can use the results and ways to further expand on this study.

Summary of the Literature Review and Purpose

Educators are continually bombarded with requirements to make the curriculum relevant and rigorous and the need to engage our students in learning. Instructional leaders are required to identify practices that encourage students to strive for mastery in learning. This study offers the exploration of assessment and grading practices, specifically the opportunity for retesting/retakes, and what students perceive the impact of having the opportunity to retest has on their academic success.

The literature suggests that the educational system employs contradictory assessment and grading practices, practices that actually work against a student and cause students to accept failure and shut down in the learning process. Grading and assessment practices have defined the system in which students are ranked and identified as success or failures. This study explores initiatives that have the potential to increase student achievement from a student’s perspective. Educational practices that encourage students to employ strategies to enhance their learning environment will have an effect or what a student perceives about their ability to be successful academically.
Findings and Interpretations

First primary theme: Purpose of retest/retakes. In the interviews students discussed why they believed schools would implement a retest/retake policy. Every student’s perception of the purpose of retakes was so that students could have a “second chance.” The students express that, “Kids make mistakes, and they need to learn from them. They need to have a back-up plan” (S5, personal communication, January 23, 2012). The students’ perceptions show they understand that the retake opportunity is a strategy implemented in a grading and assessment policy for a variety of purposes. The sub-themes identified by the students further describe the variations in perceptions of purpose of retesting. The literature offers that the purpose of offering a student a retest on a summative assessment links directly to grading and assessment practices. When isolating the retest/retake from grading policies, one can discern the purpose of retesting is:

One of the most consistent practices of successful teachers is the provision of multiple opportunities to learn…The consequence for a student who fails to meet a standard is not a low grade but rather the opportunity, indeed the requirement—to resubmit his or her work (Reeves, 2000, p. 11).

O’Connor (2007) states that educators really want to communicate the message to students that their learning will be acknowledged at any point during the learning cycle. This message encourages students’ motivation when it is realized that whenever a student demonstrates an increase in his level of achievement, the pay-off is full recognition of the improvement.

Guskey describes how retesting and grading policies are intertwined:

The key question is, ‘What information provides the most accurate depiction of students’ learning at this time?’ In nearly all cases, the answer is ‘the most current information.’ If students demonstrate that the past assessment information no
longer accurately reflects their learning, that information must be dropped and replaced by the new information. Continuing to rely on past assessment data miscommunicates students’ learning (1996, p. 21).

**Grade improvement.** While this was the most common interpretation of the purpose of retakes by 85% of the participants in the study, this was the most inconsistent with what the research states should have been instilled in students through the grading and assessment policy that they experienced during the three years of middle school with the stated policies in place. The researcher did not anticipate this response. The researcher hypothesized that after students experienced research-based grading and assessment philosophies for the last three years of schooling that more responses would describe the purpose of retakes as the opportunity to demonstrate the most recent level of knowledge. Students who state grade improvement is the purpose for educational institutions to implement a retake policy endorse the notion of grading being so ingrained in life that grades still define whether a student is perceived as successful or not.

Grades are typically described as extrinsic motivators. It is not unheard of to hear students share stories among one another about how they will earn 20 dollars if they get an A on their report card or if they get an E they are grounded. O’Connor (2007) indicates that grades tend to motivate students who already doing well academically. For students who not performing well in school, grades can actually be demotivators for students. O’Connor recommends that educators examine their grading practices and apply what they know and believe about what motivate and demotivates students (2007). Stiggins (2001) identifies similar findings:

Those who experience …success gain the confidence needed to risk trying…students who experience … failure, lose confidence in themselves, stop trying, and [fail] even more frequently….As it turns out, confidence is the key to student success in all learning situations (p. 43)
Educational institutions ultimately seek students who want to learn and continue to grow even after leaving the institution. Kohn (2012) suggests that the extrinsic motivational component of grading, the student working toward a better grade or the A, works against the intrinsic motivation of learning for the sole purpose of learning. Grading is just another example of how rewards and punishments in society encourage students to simply strive for grade improvement rather than for the love of learning.

**To gain additional learning.** There were a total of twelve responses from students who stated one of the purposes of retesting was to gain additional learning. The data were clear that students understood that the reason they did poorly on an assessment was due to the fact that they had not mastered enough of the content or demonstrated a level of proficiency on the concepts presented on that assessment. The insight from the students in the study demonstrated that they took responsibility for not performing on the original test. “Retakes help you learn stuff you didn’t learn the first time or stuff you didn’t quite understand the first time (S4, personal communication, January 23, 2012).

Another student explains how additional learning was gained prior to taking a retest.

If I failed a test I would go see Ms. Jordan. She would help me more than other teachers did. She would help me like –help me- help me until I get it a lot. Until I really got it and that is what I like about [retakes] (S8, personal communication, February 10, 2012).

The meta-analysis completed by Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, and Moriarty (2001) discussed the practice effects in regards to retesting. The meta-analysis substantiates S8’s statement above. The student requested additional support before the retest. The teacher utilized a practice effect, test-coaching, as stated in the meta-analysis. Hausknecht,
Halpert, Di Paolo, and Moriarty (2001) report that the practice effects were largest when test-coaching was used between tests.

Research states that there could be a multitude of factors that contribute to a student not demonstrating mastery and needing additional instruction besides the following examples the students shared in this study: (a) the student not learning it the first time or, (b) not understanding the content presented the first time around. Wormeli (2006) proposes that an educator should have a thorough understanding of the level of proficiency of every student at any given time, such that the educator knows when that child is able to demonstrate mastery on a summative assessment. Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) articulate that assessment practices should meet several conditions to ensure that students are as prepared as possible when an assessment is given. The first condition is described by guaranteeing the assessment design is focused on a clear and specific purpose. Students should have the operative words here. a complete understanding as to where they are now academically, where they are going, and what steps they should take to get there. Educators must be aware of the needs of students and plan assessments so the informational needs of both the adult and the student are being met. Condition two is described as the process of creating assessments that are based on clear and specific standards at the appropriate ability level for the student. Educators must take the standards and deconstruct them into realistic chunks of learning for the student. Teachers must teach those chunks of learning to mastery and students should be made aware of what those learning targets are. The third condition is that types of assessments should match the learning target and those types of assessments should be familiar to students and used throughout learning. If the type of assessment does not match the learning target
inaccurate results are produced. Assessment development is a skill that educators hone to safeguard students from the misalignment between what they know, what they need to know and how to show they know it. Ensuring this alignment may reduce the need for students to seek additional instruction to meet the learning targets.

To receive feedback on areas of weakness. There was a response from 35% of the participants in the study that indicate that another purpose of retesting is to receive feedback on the areas of weakness that have been identified from the assessment. Unfortunately, after a summative assessment is given is not the optimum time for students to benefit from feedback. Research suggests the exact opposite. Sadler (1989) notes that for a teacher to understand feedback a ‘gap’ must be considered. It is the intention of feedback to close the gap between what a student currently knows and where they are supposed to be, or the intended level of proficiency and mastery. Hattie and Timperley (2006) define truly effective feedback as when teachers have a complete awareness of where students are at and where they should be academically. Feedback reduces this gap when it provides hints to get a person to focus on the task at hand, it can describe what steps to take to successfully complete a specific task, it can provide the learner with information about misconceptions, and it can be a motivator for students to dedicate more time and effort on the task. Hattie (2012) describes the multiple ways feedback can be provided:

Through affective processes, increased effort, motivation, or engagement; by providing students with different cognitive processes, restructuring understandings, confirming to the student that he or she is correct or incorrect, indicating that more information is available or needed, pointing to directions that the student might pursue, and indicating alternative strategies with which to understand particular information. A key consideration is that feedback typically comes second-after instruction-and thus its effectiveness is limited if it is provided in a vacuum (p.115).
Feedback provided to student during the formative assessment process also provides teachers with feedback. Feedback from formative assessments of student learning can be used to modify instruction (Hattie, 2012; Wormeli, 2006; Stiggins, Arter, Chappius, & Chappius, 2004; McTighe & Wiggins, 1999). The modification of instruction does not typically take place after summative assessments.

The final condition that Stiggins and Chappius (2005) attest to that is necessary for students to demonstrate maximum learning during the teaching and learning process is to provide a communication system that affords results from assessments to all users in a way that is beneficial, delivered in a timely manner, and understood. Feedback should provide “regular diagnostic information to the teacher and frequent descriptive feedback to the learner” (p. 17). Feedback should be delivered in an on-going fashion, to encourage the learning process to continue. Specific feedback should give a student direction as to what they are doing well and what they need to work on measured against the stated standards. Feedback is not a summative determination (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bloom, 1984).

Eight of nine total responses were from female students indicating the need for additional feedback on areas of weakness. This data relate to the research study completed by Schleicher, Van Iddekinge, Morgeson, and Campion (2010). This study found that women showed higher gains in scores on the retest than men in all five of the tests. Each of the eight participants indicate that they received an improved score on retests and the notion of seeking additional feedback is in line with Johnson & Helgeson’s (2002) study that described differences in gender regarding receptivity to feedback. Reactions from women regarding negative feedback tended to show that
women reacted more positively and turned it around to aid in their improvement of performance.

*Reduce test anxiety.* The last example of the purpose of retesting was to reduce test anxiety. These feelings negatively impact a student’s performance on a test and adversely affects his/her self-efficacy, the belief about their ability to be successful in school (Cisek & Burg, 2006; Huberty, 2009). There were 50% of the participants in the study indicate that they felt less nervousness knowing that a retest option was available to them. “Sometimes there would be like a couple of tests a day, like it’s stressful. Retakes are like so [students] are not totally like ‘Oh, my God, oh my God, oh my God’ like stressing over it too much” (S10, personal communication, February 14, 2012). Salend (2011) lists several causes for student test anxiety:

- Extreme anxiousness, obsessive compulsive or inattention disorders;
- The belief that a student must be perfect and hold themselves to expectations that are unrealistic
- Low self-esteem and negative self-talk
- Low motivation, procrastination, and reduced confidence
- Punishment
- Lack of the ability to study for test
- Previous low testing performance
- Family, teachers, peer pressure
- Inadequate testing atmosphere
- Unreliable, invalid tests
- Ineffective classroom practices
Huberty (2009) recommends several school level interventions that correlate to Salend’s (2011) mention of ineffective classroom practices. Two school level interventions that pertain to this study are the recommendation to relax the assessment and grading protocol without lowering criteria for mastery and modifying time constraints of the period necessary to demonstrate learning (Huberty, 2009). Retesting on summative assessments provides a way to relax the grading procedures such that a student is not penalized for taking an additional opportunity to demonstrate learning. The format for retesting is another method that offers a student more time to give the instructor evidence of learning.

**The second primary theme: Influences to take/not take a retest.** Interviewees in this study listed three examples of influences that would encourage taking the opportunity to retest as well as two examples that discouraged taking the opportunity to retest. It behooves educational leaders to embolden those influences that encourage students to utilize the retesting opportunity and reduce the influences that discourage students to take a retake.

**Disappointed in performance.** There were 90% of the respondents in this study that indicated the primary influence to engage in the retake opportunity was because they were disappointed in their performance on the original test. Whether that student was dissatisfied with the letter grade or believed they did not represent all they knew on the subject, there was a feeling of disappointment. Expectancy-based descriptions of motivation imply that the reason one may elect to retake a test is driven by the student’s dissatisfaction with the original score and the belief that retaking the assessment will improve their grade (Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, & Moriarty, 2001). The middle school perception data suggest that there is some inherent intrinsic motivation on the part
of some students to influence them to take an opportunity to improve or increase their
achievement. To foster the students’ belief in the need to learn and grow, research
suggest that teachers should help students focus on how well they are doing and less on
what they are doing (Kohn, 2012).

**Family request/mandate.** Information from this study demonstrates that the role
of the family influences whether or not a student engages in the retake process. There
were 45% of the students that described incidents where their parent or guardian would
strongly suggest or even mandate their child to take a retest, another example of an
extrinsic motivator. Parents who believe in their ability to have a positive impact on their
child’s academic achievement act in ways that encourage their child to do improve their
performance (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Bandura, 1993). Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara,
and Pastorelli (2001) suggest that parents who are aware of their efficacy to promote their
child’s development build their children’s academic self-efficacy and encourage
ambitions, that will ultimately affect the relationships they have others, emotional
stability, academic achievement and choices of careers.

Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece (2008) states that extrinsic motivation is a means to
an end. If the goal of education is for students to internalize the learning and make it their
own, the parental or family influence may have a positive impact on achievement in the
short-term, but for long-term success, it is necessary to increase the intrinsic motivation
so a student engages in the continuous improvement on their own.

**Time management ability.** There were 35% of the students who took part in this
study that expressed concern that time management was a factor if they had multiple tests
to study for on the same day, if they had extracurricular obligations at the same time they
should be dedicating to studying for an assessment, and if the end of the marking period was near all played a role in determining whether or not the opportunity for a retest was taken. Research suggests that teacher collaboration on scheduling tests will positively impact the learning environment of the student (Wormeli, 2006).

**Apathy.** Students describe apathy as a negative influence such as being lazy or not caring about their grades. Apathy has an effect on a student’s decision as to whether a retest is requested.

There is a great deal of research stating how grading and assessment policies can demotivate the student to such a level that failure and apathy prevail. Rather than educational institutions using traditional grading and assessment practices to ineffectively change student behavior, educators can look for practices that ensure succeeding at learning is the single most important factor in the classroom. Intrinsic motivation encourages one to realize that success is relative—what success looks like to each individual is different. Success is felt when one see himself getting better (Stiggins, 2001).

Grading and assessment practices are not the tools to change behavior, or force a student to want to learn. The tools that positively change behavior are described by Marshall (2001): (a) noncoercion, (b) encouraging the student to track one’s own progress, (c) gathering student input if a consequence is required, so they own it. “When a consequence is imposed, the student feels the victim. When the consequence is elicited, the student owns it and grows from the decision” (Marshall, 2001, p. 9). Classroom practices that increase intrinsic motivation and decrease extrinsic motivation produce the
best results. Teachers who develop a learning environment around these philosophies can reduce apathy felt by students.

**Self-efficacy.** There were 25% of the students that described examples of how feelings of strong self-efficacy influenced them to engage in the retest option as well as how feelings of weak self-efficacy influence them not to engage in the retake. These feelings of self-efficacy are once again linked to research on how grading and assessment practices develop ones self-esteem and how much satisfaction a student experiences from his/her accomplishments. Marshall and Wienes (1984) state, “In their academic work, students receive a great deal of comparative information about their capabilities from grading practices and teachers’ evaluations of their scholastic performances” (p. 313). These unrelenting judgments from evaluations hold strong implications regarding efficacy. Schunk (1983) reports:

A heightened sense of efficacy sustains task involvement and results in great achievement and lower percepts of efficacy lead to less persistence and lower achievement (p. 92).

Jinks & Morgan (1999) describe how self-efficacy beliefs relate to one’s performance. If a student feels low self-efficacy it would lead to low performance and create a downward spiral toward even lower self-efficacy. Students that have high level of self-efficacy might not be willing to continue to learn about a given topic if they believe that there is not much left to learn or if the topic is insignificant in their life.

**The third primary theme: Outcomes of retest/retakes.** The outcomes students revealed in this study were all viewed in a positive nature. No students indicated that there were any negative implications of having the opportunity to take a retest.
**Grade improvement.** Participants in this study indicated that grade improvement was an outcome in 100% of the interviews when students engaged in the retake process. Similar results are true of the meta-analysis from Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, and Moriarty (2001) show that test scores from the first test administration to the second test administration increase nearly one quarter of a standard deviation and one fifth of a standard deviation from the second to the third test administration. In other words, if a student scored at the 50\textsuperscript{th} percentile on the original test, it was likely that the student would score at the 60\textsuperscript{th} percentile on the second test. Furthermore, one could expect to score at the 71\textsuperscript{st} percentile on the third and final test.

**Strong self-efficacy.** There were 90% of the students in this study that pronounced that after improving their score on a retest that they feel better about themselves. “It made me feel more accomplished, like I can do better if I absolutely try it” (S9, personal communication, January 10, 2012). “When I did better on a retake it made me feel good. It makes me feel more accomplished or like smarter” (S10, personal communication, February 14, 2012). “I feel smarter when I do good on a retake. I felt accomplished because I got the A” (S8, personal communication, February 10, 2012).

Bandura (1977, 1986, 1989, 1991, 1993) theorizes that people develop a willingness to complete a task based on the cause and effect of their life experiences. He also states that people develop beliefs about their ability to deal with certain situations. If these theories are connected to research involving children’s beliefs of learning, it is highly likely that children with a strong sense of academic self-efficacy would perform at higher levels and experience greater success academically (Jinks & Morgan, 1999).
Further research suggested by Usher (2009) involved students’ perceptions of the affective and physiological stimulation in mathematics. Students that expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy explained their sessions of increased arousal in ways that were inspiring; those that described experiences of low self-efficacy associated a level of stress that often made them feel disappointed and unable to move forward.

Coutinho and Neuman (2008) define the “strongest predictor of performance was self-efficacy, indicating that students with confidence in their abilities to perform well experience successes in performance” (p. 146).

Coutinho and Neuman (2008) conducted a study that exposes:

…strong implications for students, teachers, researchers and the learning environment. Students can learn to have faith in their abilities and to adopt mastery and performance goals. Teachers could benefit from encouraging students in their work and fostering a strong sense of self-efficacy among students. Metacognition might not be critical in the holistic learning environment. The richest learning environment could be one that fosters support and encouragement and helps to build faith in abilities and skills. A rich learning environment also could be one that teachers students mastery and performance goals and how to achieve these goals. These findings could be of interest to researchers who want to replicate these results in similar or different environments or delve deep into self-efficacy and learning variables (p. 147).

**Reduced test anxiety.** There were 30% of the participants in the study that indicated that an outcome of having the opportunity for retakes reduced the level of test anxiety that was experience on a summative assessment. One student states:

Yeah, the retake would take your stress out because if you will have stress while you’re doing an assignment or something and you’d freak out saying, ‘Okay, I’ve got to get this right. I got to get this right or my grades would be failing still’ Because I mean, if I get stressed out on my grades, then I would just – if I didn’t know how to do that, I would just guess on it and have something bad (S3, personal communication, January 2, 2012).
Limitations

There were several limitations that surfaced throughout the completion of this study. The first limitation was in the number of students in the study. The number of students did hinder the ability to draw significant conclusions about individual subgroups. A larger number of participants in the interview process might have allowed for additional data to support the conclusions that have been drawn from this study as well as offer more opportunities for further investigation.

Another limitation was the imbalance of the demographic sub-groups within the participants involved in the study. The acceptance of minor students in research studies is dependent upon the completion of the Parental Consent Form. While the original group that was selected was balanced across all sub-groups, as students did not submit the signed consent form, new students were invited to participate. The final group of twenty did not represent all sub-groups equally.

An additional limitation that was experienced by the researcher was that the interviewees believed that the researcher was a supporter of having a retake opportunity available to students. The students knew the researcher as their middle school principal for the past three years. It is possible that the respondents answered in such a way as to feel they were not disagreeing with the researcher or answering by describing the topic positive light. This limitation could have been eliminated if another interviewer completed the interviews.

Test anxiety was not explored in the literature review, as previous experience from the researcher had not indicated this element would arise in the data. Exploring
literature in this area would offer additional insight into both areas and possibly indicate areas for future research.

The last limitation that was encountered during the study was the nervousness that the audio recording device created with the students in the interviews. There were three students who were physically shaken by the presence of the device. One student stated “I am sorry, I am freaked out” (S2, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

**Recommendations**

Immediate actions recommended for instructional leaders are to eliminate demotivational grading and assessment practices in the educational system. Any practice that has a detrimental effect on a students’ performance needs to be analyzed and eradicated. Gaining insight from the students themselves, those whom grading and assessment policies are imposed upon, should be sought out by educators. Even if the practice is simply perceived by a student to have a positive impact on their academic performance, educators could potentially harness that belief and use it to foster further beliefs of a strong academic self-efficacy.

Students reporting that the primary purpose for taking the opportunity for a retake was to improve grades suggest that the grading and assessment policy that was experienced by students did not adequately reinforce the love of learning for the simple sake of learning. All the students in the research study went to the same school for their entire middle school career and experienced the same grading and assessment philosophy. All of the educators engaged in the same professional development regarding research-based grading and assessments philosophies. Just because the instructional leader and a large number of the staff believed that initiating a retake policy would
provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate their most recent level of knowledge, does not necessarily mean that teachers advocated for the policy behind closed doors.

Because teachers can make the process for being eligible for a retake more difficult than others, students expressed that if there was a lot of work to complete prior to taking a retest that they were more likely to not take the opportunity. For example:

[Each teacher] had different requirements. Some teachers may have you do more or a different type of work than others, but it was all work but just different types. It made me want to take some retakes and not to take others (S12, February 3, 2012).

There were 45% of students that identified the purpose of engaging in the retake process stated it was to gain additional learning. Instructional leaders need to invest time at the district level in promoting the paradigm shift from the purpose of education to assign grades that are part of a reward and punishment system ranking students from high achieving to low achieving, to that of a system that fosters learning and mastering content standards that prepare students for life experiences. It is evident that educational institutions are slow to change and the saying goes, ‘What two institutions will look the same in 50 years? Churches and schools.’

There has been a great amount of research on feedback in the educational setting. If students are still yearning for more feedback regarding what they know and don’t know after the entire unit has been taught and the summative test has been given, there is lack of effective feedback given throughout the learning process. Hattie (2012) found in a 900+ meta-analysis that out of 150 factors, feedback ranked number ten, based on the effect size and the influence on achievement. A teacher in Kohn’s (2012) article described how the shift in the paradigm of using demotivating grading and assessment practices to “de-grading” (offering feedback in place of points or a grade) happened.
Kohn is a former educator and currently researches and speaks on education, human behavior, and parenting. Kohn addresses the concerns with competition and rewards and how those two dichotomies impact learning in the classroom (Kohn, n.d.). In Kohn’s article, this teacher describes his classroom and how grading was attributed to creating situations where kids were arguing with teachers, cheating on assignments and tests, memorizing what they need for a test and then dumping it afterward, and fighting with parents all over grades. Students no longer get a grade or a number on anything, feedback is provided so students know what is necessary for improvement. Instructional leaders may reap the benefits in having classroom teachers explore the use of timely and effective feedback with less emphasis on grades and how this process would impact the learner.

A student’s perception that the opportunity of having a retake option on a summative assessment reduces test anxiety is powerful insight. It would be beneficial for instructional leaders to explore ways to reduce test anxiety throughout a student’s educational career whether it is via a retake opportunity or any other possibility. Another teacher interviewed in Kohn’s (2012) article stated that he began to shift the paradigm from grading practices that stressed kids out and encouraged them not to take intellectual risks. The teacher shared that students are permitted to resubmit anything to improve the level of mastery. While this practice takes a great deal longer to assess because comments are provided to the students about what they need to improve on and how to do better rather than simply tallying the points, the teacher finds it promotes learning in his classroom.
The disappointment in performance that is felt by individual students or by their parent/guardian is a motivator. The parental influence is nonetheless an external motivator, but still determines whether the student is willing to take a retake. To further develop the paradigm shift so the influence to retake is to reflect the most current level of mastery as well as to learn more of the required concepts and skills, public education will be more likely to produce students who are intrinsically motivated by the joy of learning.

It is possible to offer ways to develop the ability in students to manage their time well. This could be accomplished through an Advisory or a Life-Skills component of the curriculum. Organizational skills, planning, and the talent for managing one’s time is a skill which even many adults have not mastered. An addition to the middle school curriculum that includes life-skills could encourage these abilities in students.

There are a multitude of factors that can contribute to why a student experiences apathy and has low self-efficacy. For the recommendation in this study, the focus will address how assessment and grading practices have impacted student apathy and low self-efficacy. Kohn (2012) states that assessment should be done cautiously and not so frequently that student becomes fixated on his achievement (how well he are performing and how he compares to others) and no longer focused on learning itself. Kohn also describes a scenario about a dutiful teacher who has students focus on tracking their progress on reading skills to the extent that they are no longer looking forward to what is taking place in the book they are reading (2012). Kohn (2012) suggests that grades don’t prepare anyone for the “real world” unless the real world is one that is disinterested in learning and doesn’t require critical thinking skills. Grades are not an essential part of
education anymore, just as corporal punishment and taking dictation are no longer necessary. The recommendation for instructional leaders is to explore ways to provide experiences to students that nurture learning, encourage self-reflection and the desire to grow and challenge one’s self academically by taking thoughtful risks.

While the outcome of retakes were grade improvement and a strong sense of self-efficacy was the predominant response from the participants, educators could clarify to students, parents, and other stakeholders about the retake opportunity. The experience should be explained in such a way that it is not simply a strategy to get a better score on the test. Educators can deemphasize the grading aspect of the process and focus on the learning aspect of the process. The last outcome of having the retesting opportunity that respondents reported is reducing test-anxiety. Kohn (2012) described one experience about how different grading and assessment practices impacted a particular group of students.

Many high performing students were angry at first. They saw [de-grading] as unfair. They viewed school as work and their peers as competitors…Yet, over time they switch and end up learning more once they aren’t feeling the pressure from grades.

It is imperative that instructional leaders discover research-based strategies that reduce test anxiety. With the increase in student and teacher accountability, testing is taking place multiple times throughout each year of a child’s school career. Education currently dictates that it is more important to gather quantitative data about a student’s performance than qualitative data about a student’s performance (Kohn, 2012).

Shifting the paradigm from students who are defined by a grade or grade point average to students who are engaged in learning because they want to be is a courageous undertaking.
Suggestions for Further Research

There are numerous educational studies that can be applied to further this research. The first level of interest that is revealed to the researcher is the difference in how male and female students respond the various aspects of retesting. This study proposes that female students tend to advocate for additional feedback on areas of weakness and reducing test anxiety when engaging in the retake process more than their male counterparts. Additional research in this area could explore what types of feedback males respond to or to discover strategies that would help male students use feedback to improve performance.

The study suggests that male students attest that reasons for retesting are primarily influenced by time management factors and apathy. Further research in this area may be investigating how to thwart student apathy to determine what practices, in regards to grading and assessment practices, cause the apathy when it begins and student input as how to combat apathy associated with these grading and assessment practices could prove useful for classroom teachers.

It would be fascinating to locate students who have attended schools that are grade-free and compare research on self-efficacy, motivation and academic achievement to students that have attended schools that employ traditional methods of grading and assessment.

Conclusion

With the heightened accountability standards for students, teachers, and principals, school districts are exploring research-based strategies to increase student achievement. Effects of non-traditional grading and assessment practices on middle
school students were experienced by the researcher as a middle school principal, whereby providing the motivation to conduct this study. Grading and assessment practices have been explored in the review of the literature, in particular having the opportunity to retest/retake on a summative assessment. Retesting opportunities in a variety of settings were explored in the literature review, but the research was limited. The researcher was of the belief that having the opportunity to retake a test would have a bearing on the level of self-efficacy a student experienced. Therefore, self-efficacy was explored in the literature. The overarching purpose of this study was to explore middle school students’ perceptions of having the opportunity to retake summative assessments.

Interviews were conducted with twenty students who had attended the same a middle school for the three years of their middle school career. Of the twenty students that participated in the study, there were seven males, one of whom was black and the remaining males were white. Three of the white males were also special needs students. One special education and one general education white male was economically disadvantaged. There were a total of thirteen females, six of which were black, five were white, and two were bi-racial. One white, one black, and one bi-racial female were economically disadvantaged.

The interview data regarding student perceptions of having the opportunity to retake summative assessments were collected through nine open-ended questions. The researcher identified three primary themes from the student responses: (1) Purpose of retests/retakes, (2) Influence to take/not take retests, and (3) Outcomes of retests/retakes. From these three themes came 12 sub-themes: (1.1) Grade improvement, (1.2) To gain additional learning, (1.3) To receive feedback on areas of weakness, (1.4) Reduce test
anxiety, (2.1) Disappointed in performance, (2.2) Family request/mandate, (2.3) Time management ability, (2.4) Apathy, (2.5) Self-efficacy, (3.1) Grade improvement, (3.2) Strong self-efficacy, and (3.3) Reduced test anxiety.

Analysis of the 20 student interviews against the various sub-themes, the researcher determined there was a substantial number of students who responded similarly to three sub-themes in particular: (1) The purpose of retakes is grade improvement; (2) Students are influenced to take a retest because they are disappointed in their performance, and (3) Outcomes of taking a retake is grade improvement. The purpose of retesting to improve the original assessment grade was mentioned at least once by 17 of the 20 students, where all six of the economically disadvantaged students reported this. Students believe this will, in turn, improve the overall marking period grade, as students understand that summative assessments are more heavily weighted. An influence that 18 of the 20 students agreed upon was that they engaged in the opportunity of retakes because they were disappointed in their performance, including all six of the economically disadvantaged. All 20 students stated the outcome for taking a retake was that grade improvement.

There were 11 responses stating that the purpose of retakes was to gain additional learning. A total of six out of the seven males described this purpose. Two males mentioned this purpose more than once.

Primarily female students indicated that their purpose of taking a retake was to receive feedback on their areas of weakness. Of the nine responses, eight were female. There were a total of 13 responses qualifying the purpose of retakes was to reduce test anxiety. The majority of responses for this purpose were from ten female students.
The family requested/mandated influence was corroborated by a total of nine responses. Of these nine responses, only three were male. The influence of time management issues show six of the 11 responses identified by males. Student apathy was described in eight responses, four of which were male. Only one New Tech student discussed apathy as an influence on taking a retake. Because the number of male participants is only 35% of the study, time management and apathy show an increase in male tendencies to respond to these areas of influence.

Students who indicated a sense of strong self-efficacy as an outcome of engaging in the retake process was 18 of the 20 students involved in the study. Further breakdown of the data reveal that six of the seven males who participated in the study discuss this outcome, as well as six of the seven students enrolled in the New Tech program. Of the economically disadvantage students, five of the six also stated that strong self-efficacy was an outcome of having the opportunity to for a retest.

This qualitative, phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of middle school students as they related to having the opportunity to retest on summative assessments, a non-traditional, research-based grading and assessment practice. The theoretical framework proposed learning happens when one observes what another person will or will not do. Specifically, learning is more likely to occur if the observer sees a similarity between themselves and who they observing and if the observer has a high sense of self-efficacy. The literature implied that certain methods of assessment and grading can create a high level of student academic self-efficacy, while other methods may contribute to low levels of student academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). If a teacher employs practices that increase self-efficacy then the research suggests that
learning is more likely to occur. The researcher anticipated gaining information to support the implementation of a particular grading and assessment practice, retesting on summative assessments and discovering a possible connection to retakes and an increased sense of self-efficacy by evaluating student perceptions of the retake opportunity. According to the 20 participants, perceptions related to the opportunity for retesting on summative assessments are connected to a wide-range of topics from grade improvement to reducing test anxiety, also including increased self-efficacy.

Chapter five concludes this study, revealing three primary themes from the student responses: (1) Purpose of retests/retakes, (2) Influence to take/not take retests, and (3) Outcomes of retests/retakes. From these three themes 12 sub-themes arose: (1.1) Grade improvement, (1.2) To gain additional learning, (1.3) To receive feedback on areas of weakness, (1.4) Reduce test anxiety, (2.1) Disappointed in performance, (2.2) Family request/mandate, (2.3) Time management ability, (2.4) Apathy, (2.5) Self-efficacy, (3.1) Grade improvement, (3.2) Strong self-efficacy and (3.3) Reduced test anxiety.

Recommendations suggest that instructional leaders conduct research to further explore the differences in perceptions involving retesting from males and females, as well as other sub-groups. Additional studies on the impact of non-traditional educational settings such as a New Tech model or a grade-free environment has on academic achievement, self-efficacy and motivation for learning are suggested for investigation.

Developing the love of learning in every student should drive decisions about how to improve schools. All results of school improvement efforts cannot merely be whittled down to numbers. Test scores, points in a grade book, and grade point averages do not solidify that a student is prepared for college, a career, or life; can problem solve; has a
desire to continue to grow and learn outside of an educational institution; and be a contributing member to society. School improvement efforts must include strategies that promote the ability in students to reach those goals listed above.
References


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Appendix A

Retesting and Student Perception Study

Interview protocol

Instructions

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Michelle Baker-Herring. Thank you for participating in this interview. The first part of this interview is a survey, in which I will ask you about your experiences as a student at South Middle School. The purpose is to get your perceptions of your experiences regarding retesting and the feeling of being academically successful. There are no right or wrong or good or bad answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

Recorder Instructions

If it is okay with you, I will be recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the facts but at the same time be able talk with you. I assure you that everything you say will remain confidential. I will be writing a report which will contain all of the students’ comments without revealing anyone’s name.

Consent Form Instructions

(Each participant’s parents will be contacted prior to the interview.) Hello. My name is Michelle Baker-Herring and I was the previous principal of South Middle School and now I work at Belleville High School. I am doing research on a practice that we used at South Middle School. I am interested in gathering information about how your child felt about the experience of having to the opportunity to retest on end of unit tests. I would like to interview your child after school so as not to interrupt the school day. I will be sending home a Parent and Student Consent Form with your child. The students are only
permitted to participate in the interview with the signed Consent Form. Feel free to contact me with any further questions at Belleville High School. (I will meet with individual students to give them the Parent and Student Consent Form.) (After students return consent form, interviews will be scheduled.)

Q1. Describe what you know about the retesting (retake) process at South Middle School.

Q2. Why do you think retesting is included in a school’s grading and assessment policy?

Q3. What would influence your decision to retest? How do those influences make you feel?

Q4. Do all teachers have the same requirements to be eligible to retest? How does that make you feel?

Q5. What was the outcome for the majority of retests you did take? How did those make you feel?

Q6. Discuss a time when you chose not to retest.

Q7. If you no longer have the opportunity to retest, how do you feel about no longer having that option?
Q8. Would you recommend that other schools institute a grading and assessment policy that provides an opportunity for retesting?

Q9. Does having the opportunity to retest have an impact on how you feel about your ability to be successful academically?

Debriefing

(Read all of the following aloud to student.)
Thank you very much for coming this morning (afternoon). I appreciate your time and your comments have been very helpful. The purpose of this interview is to better understand students’ perceptions of their experiences regarding retesting and how that experience has contributed to how you feel about being successful academically. I am interested in your thoughts and your reactions. The results of this research will provide useful information to educators and administrators, in helping them to develop grading and assessment policies that encourage students to feel successful and promote learning. You will be kept anonymous during this study including anything that is written, published or not.

DQ1. Is there any other information regarding this interview that you think would be useful for me to know?
If yes, go to DQ1a. If no, no question.

DQ1a. Please share that with me now.
Thank you for participating. (Turn off recording device.)

**Interviewer Reflection**

After the student leaves the room, the researcher will indicate their reactions and observations about the interview.

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<th>Student ID number:</th>
<th></th>
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<td>Date of Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describe the student’s attitude toward the researcher and the interview:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe any unusual circumstances and/or events that had any bearing on the interview such as interruptions, language difficulty, etc.:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe anything else that happened during the interview that has any bearings on the study’s objectives:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Comments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Additional Information**

Potential Questions a student may ask with appropriate answers:

1. What is retesting?

   *When a student has the opportunity to take a summative test again.*
2. What is a summative test?

_The test at the end of a unit of study, or after you have learned a specific concept or topic. Like a unit test, or essay, or a performance test like a lab in science._

3. What is a grading and assessment policy?

_This the guidelines that all teachers in a school or district follow when they are looking at a student’s performance in their class during a specific amount of time and determining how much they have demonstrated they know about that subject._

4. What do you mean by academically?

_Academically refers to your performance and how you show what you have learned about any subject._

5. What are perceptions?

_This is what you think and/or feel about a particular experience._
Appendix B

Code Used During Data Analysis

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<th>Number</th>
<th>Primary Theme and Sub-themes</th>
<th>Description/Criteria for Inclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Purpose of Retest/Retakes</strong></td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>Grade improvement</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>To gain additional learning</td>
<td>S1 (twice), S4 (twice), S6, S7, S8 (twice), S9, S11, S13, S19</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>To receive feedback on areas of weakness</td>
<td>S4, S6, S13, S14 (twice), S18, S19 (twice), S20</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>Reduce test anxiety</td>
<td>S2 (twice), S4 (twice), S5, S7, S8 (twice), S10, S14, S17, S18, S20</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Influences to take/not take retest</strong></td>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>Disappointed in performance</td>
<td>S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S7 (twice), S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S17, S18, S19, S20 (twice)</td>
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<td>Family request/mandate</td>
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<td>Time management ability</td>
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<td>Apathy</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Outcomes of retests/retakes</strong></td>
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<td>3.1</td>
<td>Grade Improvement</td>
<td>S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>Strong self-efficacy</td>
<td>S1 (three times), S2 (twice), S4 (twice), S5, S6 (three times), S8 (twice), S9, S10 (three times), S11, S12, S13 (twice), S14 (twice), S15, S16, S17, S18 (twice), S19 (three times), S20 (three times)</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
<td>Reduced test anxiety</td>
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To: Dale Snauwaert, Ph.D. and Michelle Baker-Herring
Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership

From: Barbara K. Chesney, Ph.D., Chair
Kamala London, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Walter Edinger, Ph.D., Chair Designee

Signed: B. K. Chesney Date: 12/05/11

Subject: IRB #107596
Protocol Title: What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments?

On 11/22/11, the Protocol listed below was reviewed by the Chair and Chair Designee of the University of Toledo (UT) Social Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board (IRB) via the expedited process. Modifications were requested and approved by the Chair on 12/05/11. A signed and dated consent form is required prior to any new individuals taking part in this research. This action will be reported to the committee at its next scheduled meeting.

Items Reviewed:
• IRB Application Requesting Expedited Review
• Current Approved Interview Questions (version date 12/05/11)
• Current IRB Approved Consent/Assent Form(s) (version date 12/05/11)

This protocol approval is in effect until the expiration date listed below, unless the IRB notifies you otherwise.

Only the most recent IRB approved Consent/Assent form(s) listed above may be used when enrolling participants into this research.

Approval Date: 12/05/11 Expiration Date: 12/04/12

Number of Subjects Approved: 20

Please read the following attachment detailing Principal Investigator responsibilities.
PARENT OF A MINOR RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM
What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dale Snauwaert, Professor, 419-530-8438; Michelle Baker-Herring, Student Researcher, 734-697-9133

Purpose: Your child is invited to participate in the research project entitled, What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments? which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Dr. Dale Snauwaert. The purpose of this study is to explore students’ perceptions of having the opportunity to retest on summative assessments.

Description of Procedures: This research study will take place in the Media Center at Belleville High School, Belleville, MI, 48111. Your child will be asked to participate in a 15-30 minute individual interview. Each interview will be audio recorded. Your child’s name will be omitted from all data collection. There are a total of 20 students participating in the study.

Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to audio record your child’s interview during this research procedure?

YES ______ | NO ______
Initial Here | Initial Here

After your child has completed their participation, the researcher will debrief them about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions they may have about the research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study such as feeling anxious or uncomfortable. If your child should feel uncomfortable or anxious about participating in the study they have the right to stop participation at any point. Your child does not have to answer any question that they choose not to.

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to your child if they participate in this research may be that they will learn about how educational research can be done and may learn more about retesting on summative assessments and how that opportunity makes them feel academically. Others may benefit by learning about the results of this research.

Confidentiality: The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that your child provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from responses which will not include names and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to protect your child’s confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

University of Toledo IRB Approved
Approval Date: 12/05/11
Expiration Date: 12/04/12

Adult Informed Consent Revised 11.05.10 Page 1 of 2
Voluntary Participation: Your child's refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled at Belleville High School or the University of Toledo. In addition, they may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation for your child to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after their participation you should contact a member of the research team Dr. Dale Snaquaert, 419.530.8438 or Michelle Baker-Henning, 734.697.9133.

If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your child's rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the Office of Research on the main campus at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully

You are making a decision whether or not to have your child participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to grant permission for your child to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today's date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

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<th>Name of Parent of Subject (please print)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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<tr>
<th>Name of Person Obtaining Consent</th>
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This Adult Research Informed Consent document has been reviewed and approved by the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral and Educational IRB for the period of time specified in the box below.

Approved Number of Subjects: 20

University of Toledo IRB Approved
Approval Date: 12/05/11
Expiration Date: 12/04/12
STUDENT ASSENT FORM
What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dale Snauwaert, Professor, 419-530-8436; Michelle Baker-Herring, Student Researcher, 734-697-9133

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, What are Middle School Students’ Perceptions of Having the Opportunity to Retest on Summative Assessments? which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Dr. Dale Snauwaert. The purpose of this study is to explore students’ perceptions of having the opportunity to retest on summative assessments.

Description of Procedures: This research study will take place in the Media Center at Belleville High School, Belleville, MI, 48111. You will be asked to participate in a 15-30 minute individual interview. Each interview will be audio recorded. Your name will be omitted from all data collection. There are a total of 20 students participating in the study.

Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to audio record your interview during this research procedure?

YES [ ] NO [ ]
Initial Here Initial Here

After you have completed the participation, the researcher will debrief you about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study such as feeling uncomfortable or anxious. If you should feel uncomfortable or anxious about participating in the study you have the right to stop participation at any point. You do not have to any question that you do not choose to.

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you will learn about how educational research can be done and may learn more about retesting on summative assessments and how that opportunity makes you feel academically. Others may benefit by learning about the results of this research.

Confidentiality: The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

University of Toledo IRB Approved
Approval Date: 12/05/11
Expiration Date: 12/04/12

Adult Informed Consent Revised 11.05.10

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Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled at Belleville High School or University of Toledo. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation you should contact a member of the research team, Dr. Dale Snavwaert, 419.530.8438 or Michelle Baker-Herring, 734.697.9133.

If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the Office of Research on the main campus at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today's date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

Name of Subject (please print)    Signature    Date

Name of Person Obtaining Consent    Signature    Date

This Adult Research Informed Consent document has been reviewed and approved by the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral and Educational IRB for the period of time specified in the box below.

Approved Number of Subjects: 20
Appendix A:

Interview Protocol

RETESTING AND STUDENT EFFICACY STUDY
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PART I.
INSTRUCTIONS

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Michelle Baker-Herring. Thank you for participating in this interview. The first part of this interview is a survey, in which I will ask you about your experiences as a student at South Middle School. The purpose is to get your perceptions of your experiences regarding retesting and the feeling of being academically successful. There are no right or wrong or good or bad answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

RECORER INSTRUCTIONS

If it is okay with you, I will be recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the facts but at the same time be able talk with you. I assure you that everything you say will remain confidential. I will be writing a report which will contain all of the students’ comments without revealing anyone’s name.

CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS

(Each participants’ parents will be contacted prior to the interview.) Hello. My name is Michelle Baker-Herring and I was the previous principal of South Middle School and now I work at Belleville High School. I am doing research on a practice that we used at South Middle School. I am interested in gathering information about how your child felt about the experience of having to the opportunity to retest on end of unit tests. I would like to interview your child after school
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF RETESTING

so as not to interrupt the school day, I will be sending home a Parent and Student Consent Form with your child. The students are only permitted to participate in the interview with the signed Consent Form. Feel free to contact me with any further questions at Belleville High School. (I will meet with individual students to give them the Parent and Student Consent Form.) (After students return consent form, interviews will be scheduled.)

Q1. Describe what you know about the retesting (retake) process at South Middle School.

Q2. Why do you think retesting is included in a school’s grading and assessment policy?

Q3. What would influence your decision to retest? How do those influences make you feel?

Q4. Do all teachers have the same requirements to be eligible to retest? How does that make you feel?

Q5. What was the outcome for the majority of retests you did take? How did those make you feel?

Q6. Discuss a time when you chose not to retest.

Q7. If you no longer have the opportunity to retest, how do you feel about no longer having that option?
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF RETESTING

Q8. Would you recommend that other schools institute a grading and assessment policy that provides an opportunity for retesting?

Q9. Does having the opportunity to retest have an impact on how you feel about your ability to be successful academically?

DEBRIEFING

(Read all of the following aloud to student.)

Thank you very much for coming this morning (afternoon). I appreciate your time and your comments have been very helpful. The purpose of this interview is to better understand students’ perceptions of their experiences regarding retesting and how that experience has contributed to how you feel about being successful academically. I am interested in your thoughts and your reactions. The results of this research will provide useful information to educators and administrators, in helping them to develop grading and assessment policies that encourage students to feel successful and promote learning. You will be kept anonymous during this study including anything that is written, published or not.

DQ1. Is there any other information regarding this interview that you think would be useful for me to know?

If yes, go to DQ1a. If no, no question.

DQ1a. Please share that with me now.

Thank you for participating. (Turn off recording device.)
INTERVIEWER REFLECTION

After the student leaves the room, the researcher will indicate their reactions and observations about the interview.

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<th>Student ID number:</th>
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Date of Interview

Describe the student’s attitude toward the researcher and the interview:

Describe any unusual circumstances and/or events that had any bearing on the interview such as interruptions, language difficulty, etc.:

Describe anything else that happened during the interview that has any bearings on the study’s objectives:

Additional Comments:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Potential Questions a student may ask with appropriate answers:

1. What is retesting?

   *When a student has the opportunity to take a summative test again.*

2. What is a summative test?
The test at the end of a unit of study, or after you have learned a specific concept or topic. Like a unit test, or essay, or a performance test like a lab in science.

3. What is a grading and assessment policy?

This the guidelines that all teachers in a school or district follow when they are looking at a student's performance in their class during a specific amount of time and determining how much they have demonstrated they know about that subject.

4. What do you mean by academically?

Academically refers to your performance and how you show what you have learned about any subject.

5. What are perceptions?

This is what you think and/or feel about a particular experience.