THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

STUDENT PROMOTION AND RETENTION: WHAT'S BEST FOR KIDS?

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Welcome and Moderator:

RON HASKINS
Co-Director, Budgeting for National Priorities,
Center on Children and Families
The Brookings Institution

Keynote:

BARBARA O'BRIEN
Former Lieutenant Governor, State of Colorado
Senior Fellow, The Piton Foundation

Overview of Policy Brief:

MARTIN WEST
Assistant Professor, Harvard University

Panelists:

MARY LAURA BRAGG
Director of State Policy Implementation
Foundation for Excellence in Education

SHANE JIMERSON
Professor
University of California, Santa Barbara

KAREN SCHIMKE
Early Learning Project Manager
Education Commission of the States

MARTIN WEST
Assistant Professor, Harvard University

GROVER J. "RUSS" WHITEHURST
Director, Brown Center on Education Policy
The Brookings Institution

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HASKINS: Welcome to Brookings. My name is Ron Haskins. I'm a Senior Fellow here, and I run this Center on Children and Families, along with my colleague, Belle Sawhill, and we also run something called Budgeting for National Priorities, which, thankfully, is not part of the agenda today.

I want to begin by thanking our sponsors, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which campaigned for the Grade-Level Reading and Birth to Five Policy Alliance, and also I want to thank the Planning Committee. We've done a lot of events here at Brookings. I see many people who have been here. We do probably 10 or 15 events a year, but I've never been at an event that so many fingers in the pie, and despite that it was, really, we got along and made good decisions I think, and I was really pleased with the planning. And the Planning Group included Ralph Smith of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading; Lisa Kline of Birth to Five Policy Alliance; and Barbara O'Brien of the Piton Foundation. And then we had great comments from Lila Fiester, who's not part of the Planning Group, but she read the policy brief and made really excellent suggestions on the policy brief. So, I'm grateful to all of them.

I'm now going to summarize our Planning Committee organized this event in seven propositions, most of which are facts.

First, individuals need a sound education to prosper in our 21st century.

Second, yet we are an undereducated nation. Our students do poorly in international comparisons, and despite huge increases in per-pupil spending, certain students learn about as much as they did two or three decades ago.

Third, we have had some closure of the gap between Black and Hispanic students on the one hand and white and Asian students on the other. But, meanwhile, the difference in achievement between kids from wealthy families and poor families has increased substantially with direct effects on children's prospects in America. So, our claim to be the land of equal opportunity has a gaping wound.

Fourth, literacy is the key to education.

Fifth, it follows that schools systems must ensure that all children can read and can read to learn.

Sixth, the question for this event is whether grade retention can be a constructive part of a plan to ensure that all children are reading by third grade.

Here's our agenda. After my brief comments, we're going to have a keynote by Barbara O'Brien. Then we're going to have an overview of the policy brief by Martin West. Then we will have a panel of people who will react to the policy brief and the general issue of retention. And then I'm going to play the famous Brookings game of Stump the Panel and ask them some questions, and then we'll give the audience a chance to ask questions. So, that's our plan.

All right, the keynote -- we're very fortunate to have Barbara O'Brien here. You have a lot of biographical material about every person participating in the event in your material, and we don't usually read things that you can read yourselves, so let me just make a few comments first.

She's had an illustrious career in child advocacy and politics. She's a rare child advocate that actually rose to elective office. And she's the former lieutenant governor of Colorado who left electoral politics at the height of her power, and she now continues to think and write about education as a Senior Policy Fellow at the Piton Foundation and is the National Policy Director for the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

On a personal note, I've had a lot of experience in the last, say, two or three decades advising policymakers, and I have the highest admiration for any politician who gets out before they allow their desire to be reelected to warp their views and values. (Laughter)

Barbara.

MS. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Ron, and I should say my husband is also

grateful because I left while we were still married, and we considered that quite an accomplishment.

And I also want to thank everyone at the Center who helped organize this. There were a lot of moving parts, because we had so much interest and partners coming together to support it, and you did a wonderful job of coordinating. So, thank you.

I'm here today wearing two hats, as you heard from Ron, but both of them -- the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the Piton Foundation -- are focused on helping give vulnerable young children good opportunities in life. And for the Piton Foundation, it's trying to not only improve school readiness for low-income children but to try and connect best practice to public policy, and we see this event as one opportunity to really begin to think deeply about one of the policy issues that is arising for our whole country and match it with what we know about the growth development and learning of young children.

The campaign for grade-level reading is based on the belief that schools must provide effective teaching for all children in every classroom every day, and as director of the National Policy Group, as part of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, we have tried to put that into concrete action at every level of our communities and states. We believe that, yes, schools must be accountable. But it's not just up to schools. It's going to require engaged communities that are mobilized to remove barriers, expand opportunities and assist parents in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in order to be full partners in the success of their children. So, this topic today about how to address reading proficiency and what to do for kids who are behind fits perfectly with trying to mobilize parents, communities, and policymakers around the challenges facing vulnerable children.

We have focused in particular on three things. One is the readiness gap. Children from low-income families are less likely to read or to be spoken to regularly or to have access to books, literacy-rich environments, high-quality early care, and pre-

kindergarten programs. These children may hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their middle-income peers before ever even reaching kindergarten.

The second focus is on the attendance gap. One in ten kindergarten and first-grade students nationwide misses nearly a month of school each year in excused and unexcused absences. These students cannot afford to lose time on task, especially in the early grades when reading instruction is a central part of the curriculum.

And, third, the summer slide. Children from low-income families lose as much as three months of reading comprehension skills over the summer, and by the end of fifth grade, they're nearly three grade levels behind their peers.

So, these three pillars of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading clearly involve what happens in the lives of children to be ready for school, but then what can communities do to help schools do a good job of teaching reading by addressing absence this summer and their readiness?

We're also here today because sponsoring an event like this is an opportunity for people who care deeply about kids to not only engage and discuss difficult topics but to come together at least around a consensus that we have to make grade-level reading -- reading proficiency at the end of third grade, a national priority.

Martin West, who will be speaking in a minute, has raised what I think you'll find are two very important questions in his policy brief, "Is retaining students in the early grades self-defeating?"

The first question is if we take academic success seriously and are convinced that reading by the end of third grade is critically important to academic success, how do we prevent students from ever falling behind?

And, second, how do we respond when they are still behind and about to go into fourth grade?

These are difficult questions, because if we're serious about the importance of third-grade reading proficiency, we must hold ourselves accountable for

increasing the number of students who achieve it. If we are serious, what are the metrics for meaningful state, city, and district investments in preventing young children from falling behind in the first place? How do we evaluate and continuously improve efforts at helping students catch up? How do we respond when data systems identify students in pre-school, kindergarten, and first and second grades who are not on track? What if attempts at intervention haven't worked?

I'm worried that it's going to be easy to make promises and set new goals around reading, because, after all, who doesn't want children to learn to read? But will we have the intestinal fortitude to make tough decisions about budgets, programs, and policies?

Every one in this room knows that high-quality child care would make a huge difference in the school readiness of vulnerable young children, yet most child care for vulnerable children is mediocre or worse. How many cities and states have subsidized child care at a level that allows low-income parents to purchase high quality? How many states tolerate waiting lists for pre-school for low-income children despite overwhelming data on the return on investment by none other than the Federal Reserve?

Ben Bernanke recently said at a meeting of the Children's Defense Fund, "Economically speaking, early childhood programs are a good investment, with inflation-adjusted annual rates of return" -- see, only an economist would write like this, but I'm quoting -- "annual rates of return on the funds dedicated to these programs estimated to reach 10 percent or higher. Very few alternative investments can promise that kind of return. Notably, a portion of these economic returns accrues to the children themselves and their families, but studies show that the rest of society enjoys the majority of the benefits reflecting the many contributions that skilled and productive workers make to the economy." When you have Ben Bernanke talking like that, you know that we have a place where our country could put much more attention and we're failing to do it.

We're here today to talk about when and if to create retention policies as

one tool for improving student reading proficiency. But long before having to make the difficult decision of whether to retain a student in the early grades, we should have done everything in our power to give that child a good start in life; to have prevented preventable delays and eliminated the effects of poverty on a child's growth and development as many other nations already do; to have prepared children for school through high-quality, early-childhood programs and pre-school; to have provided good instruction in every classroom and to ensure that every child has high-quality teaching in every setting every day; to provide intensive, customized intervention to students who are behind.

We're used to saying that children are our future. But state and national budgets tell a different story. We have failed time and again to deliver on promises about child health, early care and education, and level playing fields. Instead, we have systems that can't change the fact that children who are behind will almost certainly stay behind. The current fiscal distress in both the federal government and the states will require cuts in many programs over the next decade and beyond. How long can we continue to do more with less? This is unacceptable.

We can start by putting a stake in the ground around the importance of strong reading skills at the end of third grade. That's the foundation of school success as students take on more challenging material in the higher grades. We have the first eight years in the life of every child to help him or her get ready for school, thrive in school, and love reading by the end of third grade. The question is: How serious are we?

Thank you.

MR. HASKINS: Usually when we have an event like this, we like to have some intellectual product that sets the tone for the event and summarizes the issues, and so we do something called a policy brief, and we look around for someone who has a lot of knowledge and is brave to write a policy brief and not pussyfoot around and say "oh, but on the other hand" and this and that but will actually come out and make a

recommendation. So, usually people who have been around a long time don't want to do that, because they might, you know, ruin their reputation, but Marty is young (laughter) and willing to take a chance. So, Martin West of Harvard wrote the policy brief for us. We're very pleased about that. I think it did exactly what we wanted. It takes a clear position, and I think it will induce some serious discussion during the panel.

In addition to being a professor at Harvard, in the Education Department he's also a deputy director of the Kennedy School's program on education, policy, and governance; and he's executive editor of *Education Next,* a journal that has been known to express an opinion or two.

And I know something about Marty that is not on any of your papers that describe his background, and I don't think you'd even find it on the Internet. (Laughter) Marty was a champion high school wrestler. (Laughter) And I have been informed that when he gets in a tight debate, he could put his opponent in a headlock, from which position they can't breathe let alone talk. He wins a lot of debates that way.

So, Marty, we're glad to have you.

MR. WEST: Thanks, Ron, for that introduction. Not what I expected. (Laughter) But it brings back good memories.

It's a pleasure and an honor to be here today. I think we're all here because of the growing recognition of the importance of early reading proficiency to students' future academic success, not just in reading but across all subjects and in their probability of graduating from high school and going on to college and a successful career.

This growing recognition has already begun to inform policy in many ways. We see that at the federal level through the federal government's increased support for scientifically based early reading instruction under No Child Left Behind. There was the Reading First program. The Obama administration has followed up with its own proposal to put reading first in its blueprint for the reauthorization of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Of course, now, when it comes to the real action and innovation, in particular in American education, that happens at the state level.

So, it's interesting to see that 32 states and the District of Columbia all have policies that are explicitly aimed at promoting third-grade reading proficiency, often by requiring that students be assessed early on in their educational careers and interventions offered to those students at risk of reading deficiency. And there's been a flurry of activity in this area. Just in the past year, 13 states have enacted or modified their policies already in 2012.

So, all this activity is very encouraging, but it also raises an uncomfortable question, and that question is what should be done when those measures fail to occur or prove unsuccessful? Should students be retained and provided with intensive remediation before they move on to grade 4, or should they be promoted along with their peers? And, increasingly, states have been answering in the direction of retention.

Fourteen states now require, to some degree, retention for students with low reading test scores in grade 3, and similar policies are under debate in many other states currently. These policies vary quite a bit in their particulars in their definition of what a low test score is, in the exemptions they offer, the opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency through other means in what services are required to be offered when students are retained. But despite these differences, the debate over the policies follows a fairly stable contour from place to place.

Proponents argue, first of all, that these policies are largely intended not to increase retention per se but rather to use the threat of retention to create incentives for educators, parents, perhaps even for students themselves to meet performance expectations. But they also can be expected to increase retention rates. And proponents argue therefore that retained students will benefit from the opportunity for additional instruction before moving on to more challenging material, as well as from the improved

match of their abilities to the contents of the curriculum they're exposed to, as well as to the abilities of their peers. The enactment of these policies has not been without controversy, however, and so critics have a response to these points.

First of all, they point out that retaining students is a costly educational intervention. If students as intended spend an additional year in full-time public education as a result of being retained, then we need to have an additional year of funding for that education. It also requires that students, if they remain in school, forego a year of earnings before entering the labor market, something that needs to be incorporated into the analysis of these policies. So, these are clear costs.

Critics also say that there aren't even benefits for the students who are retained that would offset those costs. Rather, they argue that retained students would be harmed by the trauma or stigmatization of being retained perhaps by reduced expectations on the part of parents and educators and simply by the cost of adjusting to a new peer group.

So, what does the research say? If we're looking simply at the volume of published research, then we come to a fairly clear conclusion. There's a massive literature of observational study showing that retained students achieve at lower levels, complete less schooling, and have worse social emotional outcomes than observably similar students who are promoted. Indeed, Ernest House of the University of Colorado in 1989 surveying this literature said it would be difficult to find another educational practice on which the evidence is so unequivocally negative.

To the extent that all of the studies on a given topic, however, suffer from a common flaw, a consistency of findings should not increase confidence in their validity. And when it comes to studying the effects of grade retention, the key challenge is to separate the effects of retention from the effects of other differences between students, other characteristics of students that led them to be retained in the first place.

What triggered the retention decision? The most common approach in

the literature to studying this question is to try and find students who are retained and to compare their outcomes to observably similar students -- similar in terms of their demographics, in terms of their prior achievement -- who happen to be promoted. But I think that the likelihood of selection bias when making these types of comparisons makes these studies quite unreliable as a guide for policy.

To give just two examples of what could go wrong when you take that approach, it could be that educators are more likely to retain a student when they see a test score and they know that that score reflects a student's true achievement rather than simply the fact that the student had a bad day on the day of the test. If that's the case, retained students would be more likely to have bad outcomes regardless of the retention decision. Similarly, more involved parents may be more likely to appeal a retention decision.

The nice thing about test-based promotion policies, whatever their merits as a matter of public policy, is that they provide researchers with an opportunity to provide much more rigorous evidence on the causal effect of retention on students' outcomes. They do this, because they create a situation in which you have students who are very similar in terms of their reading performance. Some are just slightly above the promotion cutoff, some are just slightly below the promotion cutoff, yet they're exposed to a very different treatment. Some or all of the students below the cutoff will be retained, some or all of the students above the cutoff will be promoted, and we can then follow the outcomes of these groups performing what's known as a regression discontinuity evaluation that provides unusually strong ability to draw causal inferences about policy effects.

This approach to studying grade retention was pioneered in some studies of retention effects in Chicago public schools, a policy in place in the 1990s, and it's been used in a series of studies, some of which I participated in -- conducted in the state of Florida over the past several years. The Florida policy has been the most far

reaching, the first real active statewide promotion policy, and it's since emerged as a model for many of the states that have enacted these policies in recent years. So, evidence on its design, implementation, and impact on students is of considerable interest.

So, what's going on in Florida? Well, since 2003, the state has required that third-graders scoring at the lowest level on the FCAT reading test be retained. I put "required" -- well, "required" may not be exactly the right word, because there is a variety of exemptions explicitly mentioned in the policy. For example, limited English proficient students who have received less than two years of instruction in English are exempted from the retention requirement as are most categories of special education students. Students also have the ability to demonstrate their proficiency on an approved alternative standardized test. They can also demonstrate their proficiency through a portfolio that is aligned to the state's content standards.

As a result of these exemptions, I actually think calling the policy test-based promotion is something of a misnomer. It would be more accurate to say that a low test score changes the default decision that would be made for the student such that an affirmative case needs to be made that they're ready to be promoted to the fourth grade.

The policy doesn't simply require that they be retained. It also requires that they receive additional services during the retention year. They need to be given the opportunity to attend a summer reading camp, to be assigned to a high-performing teacher, and to receive intensive reading interventions during that retention year. That means that when we study evidence on the effects of the program on retained students, those studies will reflect the full package -- not just retention itself but retention and these additional requirements.

Despite the exemptions I mentioned earlier and the fact that roughly half of low-performing third-graders are actually given exemptions from the policy, this did

amount to a major change in the approach to early grade retention in Florida. The number of grade three students retained increased to nearly 22,000 as the policy was implemented in 2003, up more than fourfold from the number in 2002. That's just shy of 14 percent of third-graders in Florida. The initial third-graders were retained in 2003.

As you can also see, that number has fallen significantly in subsequent years. Most of that reduction actually reflects a reduction in the number of students failing to meet the promotion cutoff. While it's difficult to attribute that to the incentives created by the policy definitively, it's consistent with the idea that educators and students in Florida have responded to the presence of the policy by improving their performance.

So, what happens to students in Florida when they're retained? Well, the most recent research on that question examines the policy's effects on students retained as third-graders in 2003 for six subsequent years. And here's what it shows. First of all, there's substantial short-term achievement gains in reading and math among retained students compared to their promoted peers when those students are tested at the same age. So, for example, after two years -- two years after the initial retention decision, a retained student will be in the fourth grade; most of the promoted students will be in the fifth grade. If we compare their performance when tested at that same age, the retained students actually outperform their promoted peers by almost half of a standard deviation in reading and by about half that much in math. This amounts to more than a grade-level equivalent in reading and about half of that amount in math. So, these are quite substantial positive effects despite the fact that the retained students are a grade level behind their promoted peers.

These achievement effects, however, fade out gradually over time and become statistically insignificant within five years. This is a common pattern in educational interventions, especially those in the early grades, to see achievement effects that are large initially but fade out over time. This is a common pattern even in many interventions that, despite the fadeout of test score impacts, have been shown to

have substantial positive, enduring effects on students' long-term outcomes. In the case of retention, I think it's especially likely that you could expect to see positive long-term effects, because retained students, despite the fadeout of the impact, are still outperforming their promoted peers in both reading and math when tested at the same grade level. So, if we, rather than compare students who are the same age, compare students who are at the same grade level, we find retained students doing much better than their promoted peers.

Another interesting consequence of the Florida policy that's just emerged recently is that there's very clear evidence that retained students are substantially less likely to be retained in later years. So, as a result of this, after five years the retained students are only .7 grade levels behind their promoted peers despite the fact that the initial treatment of retention was to put them a full grade level behind.

What you see here is that most of that effect comes in the first year when students are much less likely to be retained again in the third grade than their promoted peers are to be retained in the fourth grade. But those effects continue for several years after the initial retention decision. This means that one of the key consequences of the Florida policy was to expedite the retention of many students who would otherwise have been retained in later years when those decisions were being made purely at the discretion of local educators.

So, what does this mean for policy? I think that these results from Florida paint a relatively encouraging picture, certainly a much more encouraging picture than that which is available in the dominant observational literature on this topic, and I think it means a few things for policy.

First of all -- and this is just to acknowledge that test-based promotional policies are not being presented by anyone on the panel today as a silver bullet solution as the only thing that we need to do to address concerns about early-grade reading skills. We need comprehensive strategies. In my view, improving early-grade reading skills is

an urgent national priority that will require that states do a number of things, including ensuring at-risk students have access to high-quality pre-school programs; that they develop early identification systems and target struggling readers for intervention; and that they improve the general quality of instruction in the early grades.

Some of my research actually suggests that districts are especially likely to take their effective teachers and their least experienced teachers and to place them in grades K-2, perhaps because of the presence of state testing systems in higher grades and their absence in early grades. That's the type of pattern that I think will really undermine efforts to address this situation.

Test-based promotion policies are no substitute for that kind of comprehensive strategy to reduce the number of struggling readers. However, test-based promotion policies, I would suggest, can be a useful component of such a comprehensive strategy. To the extent that states want to go in this direction, I think they should keep in mind that these policies are most likely to succeed when they're accompanied by specific requirements for additional research-based reading instruction and adequate funding to support the implementation of those requirements.

The Florida effects that we've observed reflect the complete package of the intervention, both retention and additional requirements, not just the effects of retention on its own, and common sense suggests that retention shouldn't imply an exact replication of what came before. If it didn't work the first time, try something different.

Test-based promotion policies also need to balance the desire to allow local educators to draw on their local knowledge of students' abilities to give them discretion to make decisions that they think are in the best interest of the students to balance that desire with the goal of increased accountability and access to focused support. I think the research in Florida suggests that retention can be useful more often than local educators often tend to think is the case. But, obviously, some measure of exemptions needs to be included in thinking about these policies. I don't think we know

exactly the right way to handle that situation yet.

Finally, because what kind of researcher would I be of I didn't conclude with an enthusiastic call for more research? (Laughter) I think we need to continue to study the effects of test-based promotion policies on the long-run outcomes of retained students, as well as on the quality of instruction available to all early-grade students. Oftentimes, the discussion of these policies focuses very narrowly on their consequences for retained students. Obviously, that's something of great interest. But we also need to understand what's happening to the broader systems in which they're being implemented.

So, thanks for your attention, and I look forward to the discussion.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, the panel will come up, and without a break we'll proceed.

Okay, so I want you to know that we're researchers here at Brookings. We're working on a little machine that will attach to the chair, and when all the panelists come up the machine will grab the mic and stick it on their lapel. (Laughter). And it'll all happen at one time, so we'll save three minutes for more discussion, so be ready for that.

All right, so we have a great panel that doesn't necessarily agree with everything in the policy brief. People have their own views that worked on this issue. I'm really pleased we're able to get the quality of people that we have on this panel.

First is Karen Schimke, who's Early Learning Project Manager for Education Commission of the States and played a huge role in elementary school policy, and she's author of a terrific brief, which, if you picked up the materials out there, you have on literacy policies.

Next we have Russ Whitehurst, who's the director of the Brookings Brown Center for Education Policy and a former director of the Institute of Education Sciences. And in a previous life, he did research on reading. So, another appropriate reason for having him on the panel.

And then we have Shane Jimerson, who is a professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara and a highly acclaimed and frequently honored researcher on education issues and has an amazing background that you can read about, if you have 15 minutes, on the material in your folder.

And, then, finally, Mary Laura Bragg, who's the director of the State Policy Implementation Foundation for Excellence in Education. We were really intent on having someone from Florida, because Florida has done so much in this area, so we're really glad that she could come and be part of this panel.

Our format will be each speaker will have eight minutes for an opening statement, which they'll give from their chair, and then I'm going to ask them some questions, and then the audience will have a chance to ask questions. We'll begin with Karen Schimke.

MS. SCHIMKE: Good morning. As I was anticipating getting ready for this discussion, I was reminded of my own experience with reading proficiency. My twin sister and I were in the first grade in a small rural town in western Nebraska, and I don't think our teacher really understood that there were two of us. (Laughter) So, one night my mom pulls out a book and she says okay, so we're going to read tonight. It was probably October of first grade. And so she handed me the book, and I read -- well, I suspect it was Dick, Jane, Spot, and Puff, because I was of that era, and so I read, and then she hands the book to Carolyn, and Carolyn looks at the book, and she says well, I don't read, and I said I read for her. (Laughter). And that was the end of Carolyn's journey to nonproficiency in reading -- the absolute end -- once my mother came down off the ceiling.

So, my mother was as concerned as any parent would be and as all of the states are about having students read proficiently by the end of third grade and, frankly, in the journey up to the end of third grade, moving along in the proficiency pathway.

I think we're well aware of what happens to kids who aren't reading proficiently -- four times more likely than their proficient peers to drop out at the end of high school. It's pretty clear that in a world where we need well-prepared workers and adults that proficiency is key.

I think that the states' concerns about proficiency are especially relevant since we're in an era of common core state standards and No Child Left Behind and the renewal of the ESEA, and so they're trying to create a sense of urgency and clarity that in reading proficiency states mean business.

While much of the conversation press coverage is around retention, wisely, states have in general not had a single strategy but have a package of comprehensive, interlocking, well-connected strategies, all of which are critical if we're going to serious about third-grad reading proficiency. In some ways, talking about retention, at least to me, is sort of a shorthand way of talking about a whole package, a much broader package. And we've heard about what some of the research says about retention. Much of the research doesn't back it up. Just as the opinions of parents and educators are mixed, so is the research mixed.

In looking at several research and literature reviews, my take is that there are some differences in which groups of kids are matched to other groups of kids in the research. There are differences at what point the research is done, and for, certainly, a non-researcher like myself and possibly some of you in this room --

MR. HASKINS: Oh, no, Brookings audience -- all researchers.

(Laughter)

MS. SCHIMKE: -- it's pretty difficult to kind of sort through all of this stuff and all of the white noise and say so what is this telling us.

Some research certainly suggests that children that repeat do improve their proficiency, while others suggest it doesn't make much difference. In a 2007 article in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, it was reported there is no short-

term benefit, substantial long-term risks, substantial cost to taxpayers. Because students of poverty and color are disproportionately represented, there's a question of equity.

And I think the questions that have been raised are questions that certainly bear everybody's consideration. One is the question of equity. Children who are of color, who are boys, and who are low economic status are very disproportionately represented among retained students. Likewise, the question of cost and how much it costs to have a year of retention -- cost both to the school district during that year and cost later when there's a delayed entry into the workforce.

One of the thoughts I had as states are moving forward and thinking about how they should proceed in this area was I began to wonder whether children who are retained in fact might have a higher possibility of either being bullies or being bullied, and I found one study, and the one study talks about not only retained children but over-age children, that is, children where entry into kindergarten is delayed as well as children who are retained, and they found a fair difference between the potential for bullying and being victims of bullying. It's an interesting article. It appears in the *Journal of Applied School Psychology*. It's called "A Preliminary Study of Bully and Victim Behavior in (inaudible) Grade Students: Another Potential Hidden Cost of Grade Retention or Delayed School Entry."

I think that -- I called the authors on the study to find out if there were other studies, that maybe (inaudible) found them, and there weren't, and were they going to do anymore studies. They'd love to. Guess what. It was about money, which is, again, a common experience.

So, grade retention is a costly strategy, I think far most costly than providing the kind of early intervention, early identification, and prevention that is so critical and, in general, is a part of state strategies. Our emphasis at ECS has certainly been on early identification and intervention.

When we talk about early identification, I think so often in this business

we talk about in kindergarten, maybe in first grade, maybe even second grade. We would talk about it in pre-K, and so that we would really be saying, and certainly those of us who have worked in pre-K for a long time know, that in the pre-K classroom teachers know then when things are going to be problems for children. And they know not so much because a child is or isn't reading. We wouldn't expect a child to be reading in pre-kindergarten. Rather, they know because they can see how the child manages the rest of their executive functions; how they manage waiting their turn, sitting still, being a part of the classroom discussion, working with other kids, interacting with their environment.

So, we are putting out -- ECS is going to put out kind of the fourth in a series of literacy documents in the next bit, and it's going to focus on what state policy should think about as a roadmap. It's going to have two components: a section on systems and a section on sort of classroom and school activities.

"Systems" is going to look at program design and implementation, system oversight, ongoing assessment of both children and classrooms, and effective and immediate intervention.

The piece having to do with classrooms in schools is going to look at redefined adult capacity -- teachers, principals, superintendents -- what they have to be like, what they have to be prepared to do in order to really provide the instructional atmosphere that kids need.

The second is a language and content-rich rigorous and engaging curriculum and, finally, a partnership with the families. And I think -- and we could spend this entire day talking about the role of families and the partnership of families as decisions are made about third-grade reading proficiency.

We take this concern that states have and that schools and families have very, very seriously. States are taking steps, taking action on this, and we think that's appropriate. I think the most important thing, however, is that this is about comp early -- comprehensive, interlocking strategies. No single strategy could possibly lead to the kind

of outcomes all by itself.

Thank you.

MR. HASKINS: Thank you. Very nice. And your watch works and everything. Thank you.

Russ Whitehurst.

MR. WHITEHURST: I'm pleased to be here. This is a topic that's important to me. I've been in the reading wars for a large portion of my career.

I want to first congratulate Marty West on bringing a rigorous piece of research to this debate. I think it does raise the level of evidence that's relevant to what we're talking about. And I could spend my seven and a half remaining minutes talking about research methodology, but I'll avoid that temptation --

MR. HASKINS: Good decision. (Laughter)

MR. WHITEHURST: -- and try to kick it up a notch.

What is this debate about? Let's start with the fact that 25 percent of youth in this country do not graduate from high school. And let me describe to you a conversation I overheard a few years ago. It was a young woman who had graduated with honors from a high school here in the District of Columbia. She'd gone to Salisbury State College, and she was dropping out, and I heard someone talking to her, "Why are you dropping out?" "I can't pass the courses there." So, we have 25 percent of students who don't have the skills to graduate from high school.

We've got a lot of kids who are graduating from high school with a meaningless credential in that it does not signify that they've acquired the skills that make them ready for the world of work or further education, and so we have a system that is massively failing.

What are we to do about that? Are we to promote students socially all the way through the system? Are we to give college degrees based on social promotion because people with a college diploma do better than those who do not have a diploma?

I think not. And so the question is: When is the system to be made accountable for giving students the skills that they need to succeed in life?

Nearly all the research on the issue of grade retention and social promotion has focused on the particular cohort of students who are affected by the policy. You saw that in Marty's presentation of research today; you'll see it in the larger literature. The question is: For the students who were retained, what is the consequence the next year and the year after? That's an important question. But I think the larger question is: What is the effect on the system as a result of retaining those students?

Imagine for a moment the IRS function in auditing your taxes, and imagine and that there's a new emphasis on offshore bank accounts and we hear about that in the news, and a few people are caught and they have to pay a lot of back taxes and there are front-page stories about it and questions about it. Almost surely the effect of that is that people who have those offshore accounts are talking to their accountants and backing off of that tax strategy. Imagine enforcement of driving-while-intoxicated laws, and you hear that on July 4th the police are going to be out in force and if you're drunk you're in serious trouble. We can do studies that look at the effect of these policies on the people directly impacted by the policies; that is, if you're caught drunk driving, what happens to you later on? We might find a certain consequence. The real question is: What is the effect on the people who are exposed, through observation, to this policy?

There are hints in this slide that Marty put up and in the policy brief that the school systems in Texas and parents and kids are responding to this policy, as you and I would if we knew we were doing something that's likely to have a negative impact; that is, they're doing better, children are less likely to fail the third-grade exam than they were in the past. We don't know if the Florida policy is causally connected to that, but there certainly is suggestion that it might be. I think we desperately need research that looks not only at the impact on the treated but the impact on those who are coming along next, the impact on the whole system on its ability to provide quality preparation in

learning to read.

I will say one of the things I learned from doing work in this area, both as a researcher, as a federal official for many years, is that we really don't know yet how to accomplish this task well. If you look at reading scores on NAPE, they have been essentially flat for 20 years. If you look at studies that examine the impact of accountability systems, you'll see sizeable impacts on math suggesting that once people in schools and teachers are accountable for results in math, they do things and know how it gets better, and you find little to no effects on reading.

You take the federal Reading First intervention, which was a massive federal attempt to inject scientifically based instruction in reading in the beginning grades, and the large federal evaluation of that, for which I was responsible, found no impact on reading skills.

And so we can expect some impact, I think, from well-implemented school retention policies, coupled with early identification and better intervention. But I would say we still have a ways to go in understanding how to take children who start school, and by starting school I mean kindergarten or even pre-K, substantially behind in the skills and abilities that predict later reading, vocabulary, and predicular (?) letter and sound recognition. We still don't understand well how to engineer curriculum and provide instruction that is regularly and predictably going to get those children on grade level by the end of third grade.

And so my view of retention is it is an important pressure point on the system. I am convinced that it can produce at least short-term, positive benefits for kids if it's part of a broader intervention policy. But I also think we have a ways to go in terms of understanding how to get this task accomplished. I think what we've learned from the presentations today is a piece of a very important puzzle that we've got to solve in the nation's interest as soon as possible.

Thank you.

MR. HASKINS: Thank you.

Shane Jimerson, and thanks so much for coming all the way from California. It's great to have you on the panel.

MR. JIMERSON: Certainly.

All right, and thank you.

As I begin, I want to express and share a thank-you to the Brookings Institute here for inviting me to participate in these important discussions regarding reading and retention policy and practice with a particular emphasis on what's best for kids.

And I say that, because I've spent my career investigating and advocating for what's best for kids, okay, so I want to begin with that as the preface. But just by a show of hands -- a little bit more engaging in participatory activity here -- by show of hands, how many of us are engaged in scholarship to help children learn at school? Just by a show of hands, how many of you are engaged in scholarship? Good. How many of us here are directly involved at the school level developing policies to help children learn? At the school level? We have some folks here. Fantastic. And how many of us are directly involved with educating children at school at least once a week? Fantastic.

All right, and I know there are many others that come from various backgrounds and have various motivations to be here. But just for the sake of -- in the spirit of voting, how many are going to refuse to vote no matter what questions ask? (Laughter) Yeah, it's a trick question. I appreciate your honesty.

All right, I'm here today as I am compelled to continue to advocate for children to emphasize the importance of using science to inform policy and practice to advance all the social and cognitive competence of children. During the past 20 years, I have carefully reviewed over a hundred studies examining grade retention that have been completed during the past 100 years. This includes all available published studies,

as well as many reports and thesis projects, which are not ultimately published in journals or books and such.

In addition to hundreds of studies regarding specific intervention strategies I've also conducted numerous investigations and studies and analyses directly related, as well as published a meta-analysis of studies examining outcomes associated with grade retention. Thus, I share these comments that I've prepared based on the collective of these experiences.

Because each of us on the panel, as Ron has pointed out, has only about 480 seconds, I will simply make three brief points for your further consideration. Again, a question: How many of you have already read at least five of the previous meta-analyses examining the effectiveness of grade retention, just by a show of hands? How many of you have already been immersed in this? Fantastic. That's a good place to start.

All right, the first point -- when the empirical evidence fails to support the effectiveness of grade retention: Among over a thousand analyses of achievement and adjustment outcomes during the past 100 years, there are few that reveal significant, positive effects associated with grade retention. In the handout that's provided, you see the summary of effect sizes yielded in meta-analyses, and we don't have time to explain the meta-analytic process and such, but note that none of those results in any of those meta-analyses reveal a significant, positive effect, okay? You can look at it. It's right there for you. Not making this stuff up. Whereas short-term gains, for instance, during the repeated year and possibly the following year, are occasionally documented, as has been noted, long-term effects through middle school and high school are either neutral and/or deleterious. Furthermore, grade retention has emerged as one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropout.

In addition, part of the discussion today is to focus on reading and retention. Thus, it is notable, if you look carefully on that handout the negative effect

sizes for reading are among the highest in two of the three meta-analyses detailed in the handout. Again, over a thousand analyses from over 75 years of research specifically captured in those meta-analyses. The negative effects on reading actually border significance in the sense that you're upwards of .4, .5 in terms of the effect size.

Related to this first point regarding the lack of evidence supporting the effectiveness of grade retention, the recent analyses of the Florida context, as have been noted, conflate grade retention and several other empirically supported interventions, in particular, for instance, summer school, intensive reading intervention, and high-quality teachers, as well as other processes that are part of that Florida test promotion legislation. These other processes are also linked to effective intervention strategies. For instance, and some of these have been mentioned, assessment, progress monitoring, parent involvement. And whereas other scholars have completed analyses to examine the relative effects of summer school and retention when used with the same students -- for instance, in Chicago, Roderick & Colleagues have done this -- each of the analyses that I have personally reviewed addressing the Florida context have not.

Why is this important? Because the previous analyses that did include both revealed that the summer school yielded a favorable effect where the retention did not. So, this idea of coupling them and making the case for retention-plus is not well founded within the empirical literature, hence, the statement that the analyses of the Florida context conflate grade retention and several other empirically supported interventions.

Moreover, as related to this first point, the Florida legislation refers to a comprehensive program for student progression. This is their section 1008.25 -- it's got a bunch of subsections -- comprehensive program for student progression. Whereas many of the other components included in this comprehensive program are empirically based and laudable, the retention component is contraindicated.

Is anyone familiar with the 2009 book that reviews 800 meta-analyses

and includes a rank order of 138 specific factors associated with student achievement? Anyone? Okay. It includes factors at multiple levels -- student, home, teaching, curricula, school. This is the book here actually. The comprehensive review reveals five factors associated with negative effects of the 138. Retention is one of those five. Retention is placed at No. 136 of the 138, followed by -- would you like to guess what Nos. 137 and 138 are? I think we can all agree that No. 137, television, and No. 138, mobility, are associated with deleterious effects for student achievement. Okay, retention was No. 136, followed by television and mobility.

Considering the research during the past 100 years, the evidence clearly indicates that we must move beyond grade retention and social promotion. By a show of hands, how many of you are aware of specific empirically supported interventions to help children learn at school to promote reading, math, science, social skills? All right. Fantastic.

The second point: There are numerous and extensive studies that document effective intervention specifically facilitating development in areas such as reading, mathematics, and behavior adjustments, some of the core elements that are often based for retention decisions. Education professionals must focus on interventions that build upon the strength of students and target their needs, attending to the empirical evidence informing targeted interventions with specific challenges within specific contexts. These include individual, classroom, and school district-level strategies. And you can see the handout. For instance, I've listed several of them, and reading interventions and summer school and ongoing formative evaluation are just some of these. Those are just for example.

Okay, and to the third point, one more participation question: How many of you are confident that the currently established policies will promote student learning and success at school? Who's confident that the policies are there to make this happen? All right. One person. Very good.

The third point is: Policies that emphasize specific evidence-based interventions to promote the academic success of students are essential to meet achievement standards. About 15 years ago Secretary of Education Richard Riley highlighted that "Taking responsibility for ending social promotion means ensuring that students have the opportunity and assistance they need to meet challenging standards" in the eight years prior to that decision being made in some instances with certain policies. Indeed, it is imperative that policymakers, educators, and other leaders focus on the important questions.

The question is not to retain or not to retain. The question is not to retain or promote. The question is how to promote the social and cognitive competence of the student. More specifically, given the individual and contextual considerations, upon identifying individual needs, what specific evidence-based strategies will be implemented and monitored in an effort to address the needs and to facilitate the development and academic success of this student.

As I briefly highlighted today in my brief comments, considering the collective evidence it is imperative that we move beyond grade retention and the social promotion. Instead we must implement policies and practices predicated on empirical evidence linked to promoting learning outcomes.

Thank you for participating and considering these three points.

MR. HASKINS: Shane, thank you. And other than that, how did you like the policy brief? (Laughter)

Mary Laura Bragg.

MS. BRAGG: I don't get an introduction? (Laughter)

MR. HASKINS: I already introduced you. What do you want me to say? (Laughter) Mary Laura Bragg, a famous person from Florida.

MS. BRAGG: But I'm the cleanup hitter.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this discussion. I was on

the team that wrote Florida's policy 1008.25, as you pointed out, and I was the person responsible for implementing it in Florida.

I am a high school history teacher, and I have witnessed first hand the vacant stare of a tenth-grader when that student is asked to read out loud or discuss something that they have read. I have been a recipient of victims of social promotion.

Our foundation, the Foundation for Excellence in Education, has worked with many of the states that have, in the past year, worked to tackle this problem of K-3, pre-K-3 reading. Annie E. Casey Foundation's data linking dropouts to third-grade reading skills was not around when Governor Bush and the Florida legislature began crafting this policy, but we did craft it around three points of research that existed in the early 2000s: that 75 percent of students reading poorly at nine years old would continue to struggle throughout their adulthood; that 80 percent of kids identified with a specific learning disability are struggling readers simply because they have not learned how to read; and the work that was published in the 2000 National Reading Panel Report.

So, the policy we created is pretty simple. Our law requires prevention and intervention K-3; retention for third-graders who aren't ready to handle the text required of them in fourth grade and beyond; and then additional intervention for retained third-graders. So, three basic parts. Schools must begin notifying parents in kindergarten if their child has a reading deficiency and is therefore at risk of retention in the third grade. Schools must build individual reading plans for those students, aimed at removing that deficiency, and we know this in the first 30 days of kindergarten. I can talk about what we do literacy-wise in pre-K but can save that for the discussion piece. Third-graders in Florida who scored the lowest level on our state test are retained unless they meet a good cause exemption.

Then one of the things that I would point out from the brief is that any student -- any special education student in Florida who takes the state test is subject to the policy. So, there are a significant number of students with disabilities who are subject

to the policy. The only ones who are exempted are if they don't take the state test or if they've been previously retained. And then if you're retained, you get intensive intervention.

Our approach works. I saw in the four years that I was in charge of the policy -- and I went back to teaching after I left the department -- a sea change in reading instruction in grades K-3.

Just some -- I'll give you some examples of the impact on human behavior that we saw. For several years before we enacted this policy, our assessment office had a pot of about $2 million -- and we have a lot of students in Florida -- $2 million for reading diagnostics, K-3 reading diagnostic assessments, and districts could purchase -- basically receive those tests for free. It was a state appropriation. And every year maybe a quarter of that money was drawn down. In the first two years of the policy, that money was gone by September. That is human behavior changing.

We also, before the policy, would get periodic requests from districts for professional development, random professional development in reading. In the first two years of this policy, the requests were tenfold. They were specific. We want professional development on whole group, a small group instruction. We want it on data-driven instruction. We want it on specific interventions aimed at specific deficiencies. And the number of calls and e-mails we got from parents asking for help and the number of calls and e-mails from community groups asking how they could help skyrocketed.

The data that is included in your packet shows the impact of the policy. Retentions increased at first, but they declined, because the number of students reading at the lowest level on our state test declined.

The other thing I would like to show -- well, there's a chart in your handouts -- is that the retentions in kindergarten, first, and second grade increased, because it was a K-3 policy. Our goal was not retention. Our goal was good, strong initial instruction in grades K-2 and 3, and then intervention as a way to stop retention.

But the last resort of retention was -- retention as a last resort was the goal.

To me, when a principal realizes that he has four years to ensure a child is ready to move on to fourth grade and that the parent of his children will know in the first 30 days of kindergarten that the child may have a reading deficiency, the school is going to organize around reading. We saw the best teachers in an elementary school move to K-1 and 2. The sea change in making sure that schools organize around what they need to organize around -- it's kind of a shame to me that the threat of retention is what got elementary schools doing what their primary focus is, which is to teach kids how to read.

Our NAPE data shows -- the last chart in your packet shows that even in 2011 our policy is still working. We have more kids reading on grade level, fewer kids reading on the lowest level and are forced grade (inaudible). That chart is broken down into subgroups, and every subgroup outperforms the national average.

Also, to speak to African-American and Hispanic students, the number of Florida third-graders scoring at the lowest level has declined by 41 percent. But the percentage of African-American and Hispanic students scoring at that level has declined by 37 and 46 percent, respectively.

And regarding -- one last thing about special ed, we looked at 300 of our lowest performing Title I schools from 2003/04 to 2009/10, and we found that the percentage of third-graders identified with a specific learning disability was cut in half during that time period. And the percentage of first-graders who were identified with a specific learning disability was cut by 75 percent. That is huge.

I think that if you fund your priorities first to get to cost -- and I would sway that we've spent a lot of time talking about the cost of retention and nothing about the cost of dropouts and the cost to the country and health care and the lost earnings and students who drop out, I think that that is an important point, and if you fund your priorities first, then you can prevent the additional cost of retention in later grades.

So, thank you.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, very good, thank you.

It was a great panel. I'm going to try to deal with three things. I heard that there are people in the audience who would like to be gone by lunch, so we're going to deal with these in an expeditious fashion.

Racial discrimination assessment plans, and then we're going to deal with this research issue about when the witch doctors disagree, which is what you've just seen on this panel here. So, let's talk first about racial discrimination. My understanding is that the recent study from the Department of Education says that there is a disproportionate impact on Blacks and Hispanics. However, if you'll adjust for achievement scores, the disparate impact disappears. So, you have more Black and Hispanic kids retained, but if you match on their test performance, then it's the kids who have the lowest test performance, and since Blacks and Hispanics have lower test performance, they're more likely to be redeemed.

Does anybody agree with that? Or is there other evidence that there is racial -- that this policy has a disproportionate racial impact?

MR. JIMERSON: I'm not sure that we can agree with everything that you've said or establish it definitively at the national level, so we know that Black and Hispanic kids are disproportionately likely to be retained at the national level. That comes out of some data collected by the Office of Civil Rights and the Department of Education just recently. We can't take that same data and do the type of adjustment for achievement that you have mentioned.

What we can do is look in Florida at what's happened to Black and Hispanic students where you see similar patterns, them being more likely to be retained. But if you control for their actual reading scores, then they're slightly less likely to be retained. So, in those places where we've looked for evidence of discriminatory implementation, you don't see it. But I'm not sure that we can establish that as a fact on a national basis.

MR. HASKINS: So, does anybody think this is racially disproportionate and unfairly so?

MS. SCHIMKE: In terms of why it happens or that it happens?

MR. HASKINS: Let's leave the why aside. We don't like a policy if it unfairly discriminates against any group but especially the group -- the very groups that have the most trouble in our society, Blacks and Hispanics. So, if this policy of grade retention were to unfairly retain kids on a basis other than something reasonable like a test score or a teacher assessment or something like that, then we should be opposed to the policy. So, I think the first thing we ought to establish is, is there evidence that this policy is unfair to any groups?

MR. JIMERSON: When you say "unfair," that's sort of a loaded question, but is it disproportionately used, yes.

MR. HASKINS: Yes, I -- well, agree.

MR. JIMERSON: Is it (inaudible) to be effective?

MR. HASKINS: Right.

MR. JIMERSON: No, so therefore are we exposing a certain underrepresented, disproportionately disadvantaged population of our youth to this particular, as demonstrated, ineffective strategy? Yes, that's the answer to that question.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, but the answer is yes because you think the policy hurts everybody who's subjected to the policy.

MR. JIMERSON: I didn't say that. I didn't say that.

MR. HASKINS: Oh, I thought that's why you --

MR. JIMERSON: You said it hurts everybody who's subjected to it. But, again, when we're looking at population statistics, the type of analyses that we've all completed, there have been some that have followed individuals longitudinally over time. But, in general, I'm speaking about interventions, which is the same as if you're doing a reading intervention. Rarely are you looking at the single individuals. You're typically

looking at the hundred or two-hundred or a thousand, and you're discerning effects based on your population statistics. So, again, I don't want to be put in a position where I've been suggested to say that every single child is --

MR. HASKINS: No, I can -- okay, I withdraw. That's not what I meant. What I meant was that this policy, according to your review of the literature, and a lot of other people, too -- it's not just you that feels this way -- that retention in general had some harmful effects, not that it harms every single individual kid, but on average it doesn't have good benefits and it has harmful effects. So, even if you have more Blacks and Hispanics, a higher proportion of them subjected to the policy, which is definitely the case -- that is true, I don't think anybody denies that -- and because the policy does not help them and hurts some kids, it's likely to have a disproportionate negative impact on them. That's your position, right?

MR. JIMERSON: Yes. Yes.

MR. HASKINS: Okay. But that's not because anybody intends for more Black kids and more Hispanic kids to be hurt in some way. It's because they made a mistake in their judgment about the effectiveness of the policy. So, we come back to the same main question, which we're going to return to in just a minute, about what the evidence shows, because the witch doctor's got to be called to account here.

Okay, the assessment plan. I'm aware of a lot of situations where assessments are lousy. How serious is the assessment problem here? Can we really identify kids who don't read well? And can we identify kids who do read well? I mean, are the tests useful? And even if we have good tests, not everybody necessarily uses them. Do we have to caution states or school systems about, you know, the approach they take? And I assume it would not be just tests; there would be other elements, as Florida has, like teacher evaluations and, what did you call it, a portfolio of evidence about whether the kids should be promoted? So, how big a problem is assessment here?

MR. WHITEHURST: It's not a problem. A variety of tests and reading skills -- I can show you the correlations between reading skills at the end of first grade and tenth-grade performance, the single strongest predictors of tenth-grade performance. Florida has a good assessment system, among the best in this area. So, when you're talking about the classification of individual students and whether a student just on one side of the promotion versus retention line has been reliably identified, that is a different issue. There's (inaudible) around the cut point. But in general, the assessments are good, and they can certainly discriminate between good readers and poor readers.

And let me say in response to your previous question that the discrimination here is the provision of education to minority and disadvantage kids that is low quality and leaves them damaged for life. And I think we need to focus on that as the discrimination that we all should be ashamed of and do something about.

MS. SCHIMKE: I just want to say a word on assessment. Assessments, say, in first grade, are different than assessments in kindergarten or in pre-kindergarten; and one of the things in talking to a colleague who is pretty much an expert in assessments recently, he highlighted the fact that it's not only which assessments are used -- evidence based, nationally normed, and so forth -- but when they're given and where they're given, and that assessments to very young children that are given before they've had a chance to acclimate to the environment, that is too early in either kindergarten or first grade and are going to be less reliable. And what they tend to do is over-identify kids with needs. Maybe that's not bad, because then they get some service. But the truth is they may -- it may waste service dollars.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, so there's agreement on the panel. No one's disagreeing so far that we do have good assessment instruments and that the states could design a very reasonable way to identify poor readers. So, leaving aside the issue of whether they should be retained or what should happen, we can identify them, and we ought to have a program for them. We all agree on that.

Yes.

MS. BRAGG: One comment about assessment. I think that assessment -- and, thank you, I think Florida has a very strong assessment system as well. The key is the next step, what the teachers do with the information that they get and the need for really good professional development for teachers to understand what the data around that student shows and then how to attack that deficiency that is there.

MR. HASKINS: Right.

MS. BRAGG: That's the key, because assessment by itself is not going to get us to where we need to go.

MR. HASKINS: Well, one of you correct me if I'm wrong. I think a lot of tests -- a lot of people (inaudible) tests and agree that a test that identifies a poor reader is not necessarily a diagnostic test. It's not necessarily useful to plan a program intervention for a kid, right? But what I'm -- all I'm interested in now is we can identify poor readers if we have a special treatment for them. That is not a big issue. I suspect it might be an issue in some cases, because states and localities might not do it exactly right, but, anyway, we can do that.

Okay, final question now. So, this is one about the witch doctor (inaudible). This happens all the time in social science. And I think we ought to try to reach some resolution on this. We have a stark difference here. Some -- Shane is saying you should not retain; it's bad for kids to retain -- not every kid but on average -- and the evidence said it produces positive impacts, is nil, and that's based on over a hundred years worth of research and meta-analysis and so forth. And then the policy brief -- and Marty claims that the Florida evidence shows that it can be part of a plan.

So first, before I ask you the question, I want to see if we can reach some kind of agreement here, that I think there may be more agreement than meets the eye. We are all in agreement, I think, that if a school system really wants to attack this problem of reading, of insufficient reading by the early grades, that they need a multiple-

part strategy and definitely should include preschool education, diagnosis, lots of extra reading, and so forth. So, there a lot of agreement about how to do this, okay.

Now, the position of the policy brief is that as part of that multiple-part plan that retention makes sense, and Shane is saying that goes in the face of a lot of evidence. So, what's the resolution here? How can we resolve this difference for an audience of people who's not going to read, you know, 3 or 4 or 500 studies on (inaudible) meta-analyses? So, what's -- you know, this happens when you go to policymakers. Researchers don't agree, so what the -- what's a policymaker supposed to do? What's the answer?

Yeah.

MR. WEST: Can I try an analogy? I'm thinking on my feet, so this may not work out, but I'm not an epidemiologist, but my guess is that coronary bypass surgery is strongly negatively predictive of health outcomes if I compare people who have a coronary bypass operation to everyone else in the population. My guess is that that still holds true even if you match the people you're comparing based on their cholesterol level, based on some measure of their heart strength. My guess is that if you did a meta-analysis of that relationship, it might even be 136 out of 138 of the many relationships we can study in this type of meta-analytic way. That doesn't mean -- that means that you should do everything possible to avoid a situation in which you might use coronary bypass surgery, and you might be exposed to it as an individual. But that does not tell you that for those people who are exposed to it that it causes their worst health outcomes. And in order to answer that question, we'd have to set up some sort of a situation where a researcher could take people who are equally likely to be exposed to the intervention that we're interested in, some of which get it and some of which don't as a result, essentially, of chance.

We can't randomly assign students to be retained or not to be retained, but we can take advantage of the situation that I discussed created by the assessed

based promotion policies to compare students who are exactly similar, save for the fact that they scored one point differently on the state reading test. And that provides unusually strong opportunities to make causal inferences, and none of the other research that's reviewed in these studies comes anywhere close to that level of rigor. And so in my view, we should pay attention to the highest quality evidence, which includes studies of Chicago and of Florida and not turn to the larger, older, in many cases, outdated literature.

And can I -- the only other point I would make is that --

MR. HASKINS: Wait, don't leave this one. Let's -- because Shane, I'm sure, will want to respond.

So, Shane, respond. I'll come back.

MR. JIMERSON: Yes, there's a lot of elements, and with all due respect, the idea that we're going to embrace in isolation the regression, discontinuity, analysis -- which, frankly, the articles that have been published relative to the reports that have been generated have gone much further in acknowledging the fact that it's not looking at retention. Throughout this article, we refer to the treatment under Florida's policy as retention if only for the sake of brevity, understanding that it's conflated with so many other elements that it is just shameful to pretend that it's systematically examining retention.

Now, to be fair, I acknowledge and embrace -- and, frankly, most of the analyses I have completed have been regression analyses utilizing longitudinal studies, prospective longitudinal studies, granted they're not experimental randomized design, which we both know is not going to happen and is not plausible. But -- so I applaud the initiative, and it's not to say that Marty is the first here, so it's not to put him on the spot. But I applaud the initiative of those who have utilized the regression discontinuity analysis in an effort to obtain samples that are able to be examined subsequently. So, I applaud that.

However, I take issue with the ongoing rhetoric about isolating causal effects and then suggesting that it links to retention, because it simply doesn't, and that -- it's too strident, it's too myopic, and it's fallacious. It simply does not reflect what is happening in those analyses. Moreover, I want to be clear. This is not -- I'm not suggesting that it's my research, my particular studies that are revealing this. What I'm suggesting is that we look at the collective of all the assorted strategies, many, many, and I'm not as willing to discuss the previous 80 years or 90 years or a hundred years of research for the recent five studies that, frankly, again, Chicago doesn't reveal what you've found in the Florida context, because they can plug in the effects for summer school. And Roderick & Colleagues discerned and have demonstrated, using the same precise analyses that you folks have with the exception that the Florida context evidently -- and this is an issue for further research, although I'm much more ambivalent about the need for further research I suppose having been at this for 20 years, I'm to the point where how about we attend to the last 100 years of research before continuing to advocate for further research, albeit my point that we haven't historically been attending to it. I'm not willing to dismiss that literature that is very multi-disciplinary in nature, very multi-method, an array of statistical procedures, when in fact we always need to look forward and advance the science, always need to look at those analyses that are being done. But those are some of the key elements that I believe distinguish our perspectives on this.

MR. HASKINS: Someone is dying to say something here. I'm going to give Russ the last word and let him --

MR. WHITEHURST: One of the things I learned as the director of the Institute of Educational Sciences where we had the responsibility for vetting research on what works in education is pay no attention meta-analysis, because garbage is garbage out. What you need to do is look at the methodological quality of particular studies and determine what can be reasonably concluded from them.

MR. HASKINS: Exactly.

MR. WHITEHURST: Frankly, 98 percent of the research in education that has been conducted over the past hundred years does not meet a methodological standard that allows any reasonable conclusions about what works, and so I would certainly privilege, in terms of conclusions about policy, the strongest methodological research rather than the mass of research has been conducted. I think what we can conclude here is that the Florida policy, which had many elements, had at least for a few years a positive impact on kids in Florida and probably a systemic impact on the behavior of a system and the people responsible for getting kids to learn. Whether a policy with the same label would have a similar effect in North Carolina I don't know. It would depend on the details, and that's why we very much need additional research and research time to particular policies.

It's very hard to make conclusions about meta-analytic conclusion based on a hundred years of research about what's likely to be the impact of a particular policy that has seven different elements that differ from the elements that have been used in any other particular research. So, again, there are always differences among researchers. It's hard to resolve those differences unless you just believe me. (Laughter).

MR. JIMERSON: And, by the way --

MR. HASKINS: Let me see if I can sum up -- wait, let me see if I can summarize one thing here that I thing here that I think picks up on a very important point you made that Russ clearly agrees with, and that is you cannot single out any element of the Florida policy and say this caused the effect. It's the whole thing.

MR. JIMERSON: Or you could --

MR. WEST: Even if it's not an analysis to examine that, it is possible it hasn't been done

MR. JIMERSON: Indeed, it doesn't exist, that's right.

MR. WEST: Yes, so that -- yeah, so I'm not agreeing --

MR. HASKINS: Here's the point. I mean, I'm sure the audience here is wanting to know what kind of resolution here, and from the Florida study we could not conclude, okay -- anybody disagrees, say so right now -- we cannot conclude that grade retention per se is an effective policy. What we can conclude is that grade retention as part of a broader policy can have positive effects, the whole thing taken together. You couldn't single out any one element, correct? Isn't that what you're --

MR. JIMERSON: Within that context, that's what the analyses have yielded, although I would take the position that if you implemented the reading interventions and such without the retention policy, that I would -- based on the historical evidence looking at the effectiveness of direct reading instruction, continuous progress monitoring, formative assessment, that you would yield those effects.

MR. HASKINS: This I know for sure.

MR. JIMERSON: Okay, but --

MR. HASKINS: We will never be able to answer that question, because we're not going to do that experiment.

MR. JIMERSON: We can do the --

MR. HASKINS: Unless you're dying, we've got to get to the audience here.

MR. JIMERSON: I am dying here to say that I agree with a lot of what Russ said. In terms of meta-analyses, the best meta-analysis is actually going to systematically document which studies have high quality based on what parameters in a very similar way to what's been done within a what works clearinghouse in the sense of you review a lot of studies and you end up identifying what are their control parameters, what is the degree. And every -- each of the high-quality meta-analyses I have seen actually reports that information in addition to the effect size, because within a meta-analysis you would need to be able to look at that level of detail. We agree that we can't

look at a single study in isolation, but we also ought to be able to look at the relative strengths of the studies.

MR. HASKINS: I was wrong. You get the last word. Make it quick.

MS. BRAGG: I don't think we should we try to separate the pieces and parts of the policy. The pieces and parts of the policy are prevention, intervention, and retention; and based on student performance in Florida, it has made a huge difference.

MR. HASKINS: Go ahead.

That was very short. Thank you.

MS. SCHIMKE: And if I had put the title together for today's session, it would not have been "retention," it would have been "third-grade reading proficiency" for the same reason that Mary said, that they're inseparable.

The second thing I want to say is that if you look at the document in your folder about all of the states and you look at state policy, you see a wide array of things where a state will have a, b, c, d; some other state will have d, e, f, g; and so on. So, states, which, you know, some people say are kind of the basic place where stuff happens, have done lots of different things and most have not been studied.

MR. HASKINS: Okay, questions from the audience. Someone's going to come around and give you a microphone. Let's have a succinct question and succinct answers.

Right here in front. Tell us your name and ask a question.

MS. WERTHEIM: I'm Mitzi Wertheim. I'm with the Naval Postgraduate School. You might wonder why I'm here. My mother was a pioneer child psychologist interested in the brain.

I want to ask you about the Lindamood-Bell system. If that was available in schools early on, and I (inaudible) because my granddaughter did it and it made an enormous difference, what would that cost, and is there a way to do it? Are you familiar with it?

MS. BRAGG: I am, but it's been 10 years since I was at the state level, but in a broader context we put out requirements as to what had to be in a good reading program, and we left the purchase and the decision to use that up to the district. That gets kind of to what Marty said about some district ability to make decisions based on the needs of their kids. But from a state policy perspective, we were very specific about research-based programs and not market research, because every program that came out in the beginning of the 2000s had a stamp that said "Reading first approved," and there was no such thing. So, I am familiar with many of the programs, but cost-wise I can't speak to it. So.

MR. HASKINS: Right in the back there on your right.

SPEAKER: Contessa Burbon. For children who are victims of violence and bullying and they attended intensive summer programs in class, should the schools and the state be more compassionate on them, and what do you recommend?

MR. HASKINS: Let's have a quick answer. What are we going to do about bullying?

MS. SCHIMKE: A quick answer.

MR. HASKINS: Catch the bullies and throw them off a cliff. (Laughter)

MS. BRAGG: Teach them how to read.

MR. HASKINS: Teach them how to read. That's it. That'll solve the bullying.

Next question, over here, all the way on the left.

MS. ROLLIN: Yes, thank you, Miriam Rollin with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.

One question about the Florida study. Is there anything in the study or any other research that gives us the answer to accent retention, or is there any evidence that retention in fact made a significant contribution to those outcomes?

MR. HASKINS: Relative to the full package.

MS. ROLLIN: Relative to summer (inaudible) teaching and intervention and all the other things that Florida was doing that sounded really great.

MR. JIMERSON: Yeah, so it's not something that we can address definitely for the reasons we just discussed. We don't have data, for example, on (inaudible) summer school of the extent to which students were being assigned to highly effective teachers. Many of the additional requirements were later expanded to all kids in the grade. So, for example, one of the requirements was that they have one consecutive, what is it, 90-minute-a-day uninterrupted reading period. So, some of those were later expanded to all students, and so they shouldn't be something that's different from a retained and promoted students. But it's really hard to separate it all out.

One of the things we do look at is the difference between effects in reading and in math. All of the additional interventions were targeted towards reading specifically, yet we still see some benefits in math, and so that makes me think that there may be some independent effect of retention itself. But there's no way to say for sure.

MR. HASKINS: So, the answer to your question, no. (Laughter)

Right there in the back on the left. Right there, yes.

MR. SCHULTZ: High, Tom Schultz with the Chief State School State Officers. I have a quick comment and then a question.

The comment is that among the things that can be done in terms of enhancing reading proficiency, it seems that retention is one of the most expensive things that you can do. To illustrate the data from Florida, it costs more than $10,000 per child, whereas in terms of their pre-K program, they're currently spending less than $2500 per child, and it seems to me a problem is that the cost of that is hidden. It doesn't get debated in terms of "is this a good way for us to spend public dollars when we increase the percentage of kids who are retained?"

The question is: Looking at the data that Mary provided, the concern I have is that in spite of this ambitious effort in Florida, over the past seven years,

according to this data, there's been relatively little progress in reducing the percentage of third-grade readers at the lowest level. You're kind of between 18 and 20 percent for the last seven years where the schools have been going at it as hard as they could go. So, what would people on the panel recommend -- what next has to be done? What else has to be done beyond what's been done in Florida?

MR. HASKINS: Great question.

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you.

MS. SCHIMKE: One thing that I would say, just to go back, we have a fair amount of literature and research now on the impact of high-quality pre-kindergarten, and Florida has had a pre-kindergarten program for quite a number of years. Like the rest of the states around the country, the quality varies a good bit. And of course lots of kids aren't in pre-K, they're in other kinds of childcare settings. Barbara talked before about mediocre settings and so forth, and so, you know, if you look at the work of the National Institute of Early Education Research and so forth, there's a mountain of evidence on pre-K and what implications it has for future school success.

MR. HASKINS: And you're saying that evidence shows that pre-K -- high-quality pre-K can make a big difference.

MS. SCHIMKE: High-quality pre-K can make a huge difference, and lifelong differences, differences around crime --

MR. HASKINS: Well the answer to his questions is more and higher-quality pre-K.

MS. SCHIMKE: That's one answer.

MR. WHITEHURST: Can I --

MR. HASKINS: Go ahead, yeah.

MR. WHITEHURST: If I jump in. I think what we've learned now from 15 or 20 years of a full board effort in terms of learning about what it takes to get kids to be able to read is that we know for the first time how to systematically get children to break

the reading code, and so the problem of children not being able to sound out words on the page because they don't know the alphabet letters, they don't know what sounds they make, we now know how to do that. Now we don't yet know to get all teachers to know how to do it, but we know how to do it. Where things fall apart, and I think was the lesson of Reading First, where things fall apart is where we get to reading comprehension.

MR. HASKINS: Yeah.

MR. WHITEHURST: And reading comprehension depends on more than being able to sound out words on the page. It depends on knowledge of the world, a lot of content knowledge, a lot of vocabulary knowledge, and we're not going to get kids to acquire that knowledge based entirely on, you know, three hours a day in a good-quality pre-K program. It's going to take a broad-level early intervention to give kids a continuing series of interventions to give kids in disadvantages circumstances that knowledge. And absent that knowledge, they're going to have a lot of trouble reading. And so it is pre-K, and it is pre-pre-K, and it is family-related programs, and it is continuous, and, you know, I think rather than focusing on high-quality pre-K as a rubric, we should focus on what's happening in pre-K programs, the specific interventions that are most likely to help children cross this crucial barrier.

MR. HASKINS: A little disclosure here. I gave Russ $10 to make that little speech, because on October 2nd in this very room we are going to release the next volume of *Future of Children*, which is entirely about literacy and exactly addresses the issue that you just mentioned.

Yes, Mary Laura.

MS. BRAGG: I'd like to make a comment to your comment. I -- well, first of all, pre-K -- our pre-K program has only been in place since 2005, so we are just seeing a 506, we're just seeing those students in third and fourth grade, and there's not enough data to draw any conclusions there. We, too, are very hopeful that it will make a difference. I would disagree that we haven't seen a decrease in -- a steady decrease in

the percent of students reading at the lowest level. We've seen many kids move from the next to the lowest level to grade level and above. So, I think that I will continue to say that it has definitely made a difference.

And to wrap in the point about are retention policies unfair in terms of race, I would say that our -- the numbers show that our African-American and Hispanic students have benefited the most from this policy. For whatever reason they were not -- they were struggling readers, they have benefited from intervention and retention. And, yes, they were more likely to be subject to the policy. But they were also more in need of the interventions that they received.

MR. HASKINS: One more question. On the right here, a couple rows up. Thank you.

MS. GUERNSEY: Hi, I'm Lisa Guernsey, director of the Early Education Initiative of the New America Foundation. I want to say thanks for airing a lot of this. I think it's a really important conversation to have.

I'm frustrated. I think probably others in here, too are, with the inability to deal with the conflation issue, the fact that this is a package of intervention and prevention and retention and yet the fact that we keep kind of just calling it retention as the answer. And one of the things I'm wondering is whether there's any -- maybe now it's just theoretical, but anything to just a simple barrette of retention that is adding to the ability for the interventions to work, and if that is what people think might be happening here, is there a less costly barrette to be using, less costly to children perhaps if in fact we're seeing in some other research a negative impact of that?

So, thank you.

MR. JIMERSON: This is an interesting question, and Russ articulating the threat or motivation component of it. I think this warrants further consideration. Notably, I don't know the precise answer to your question, but I have a reflection -- is that there have been multiple studies historically that have looked at children's perception of

grade retention as a stressful life experience, and there's been multiple studies that have been done that ultimately when they look at a list of stressful life experiences, children historically, prior to the Florida-Chicago context, had already been indicating that when they report their perception of grade retention and 20 other life experiences, that grade retention has been as stressful, from a child's perspective by sixth grade, as going blind and the death of a parent, okay? And for those of you who would like to know how stressful it is from a child's perspective to go to the dentist, that's usually about 19th or 20th on this list. So, relatively speaking, grade retention being as stressful for children. And so in terms of motivation from a child's perspective, I sort of see it that children have perceived this historically when -- that's everything -- we focused a lot of energy today on the achievement component, and we're not talking so much about the social, emotional consequences, the long-term implications associated with that either, which I believe and I would advocate are equally important as we look at the development of a child over time so that we're promoting the social and cognitive competence of the child, not simply the academic achievement.

MR. HASKINS: Karen?

MS. SCHIMKE: Clearly, one of the issues that's come up is the question that retention, sort of heightened awareness, made everybody serious about this achieved urgency. There's got to be more than one way to achieve urgency, and so I think that one of the challenges for all of us in whatever roles we have in life is to say does setting targets achieve urgency; does a public commentary on how we've done on the targets help with urgency? -- so on and so on -- and that we need to come up with an array of ways of achieving urgency rather than thinking a threat is the only one.

MR. HASKINS: Yes.

MS. BRAGG: Two things. My husband, who I know is not watching, refers to himself as an academic red shirt. He was retained later in elementary school and living with me while this was going on. He said if this had only happened to me

earlier.

But the other point I would make is, again back to human behavior, the increase of parents, the number of parents who -- you know, teachers always say we wish we had parent engagement until parents get engaged. (Laughter) The fact that parents in -- parents of kindergarteners were saying I want to know what it is I can do. I want to know what you're doing for my child. And that was not happening in the beginning of third grade. That was happening in kindergarten, and the thought that a parent would not find out until the end of third grade that their child had a reading difficulty, I mean, that's educational malpractice. They should know as soon as we know, and in some instances pre-K, and so to your issue of the threat of retention, I certainly understand having had to deal with it at a high school level the threat and the impact it has socially. I again will bring up what is the impact of self-esteem on a high school dropout, and I think that that warrants as much consideration in this conversation.

MR. HASKINS: Well, please join me in thanking the panel.

And if you haven't done enough about literacy, come back on October 2nd.

Thank you. You've been a great audience.

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