



## **Unintended Consequences: A Case Study of the Tennessee Third-Grade Retention Law's Effects on Children and Families**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative case study examined the impacts of Tennessee's third-grade retention law on children, families, and educators through an action research framework. Using semi-structured interviews, social media content analysis, and document reviews, the study explored the lived experiences of parents, who are also educators, and whose children were impacted by the third-grade retention law, to uncover the law's broader implications. Findings revealed significant emotional stress on children, disruptions to family dynamics, and heightened teacher burnout, compounded by inconsistencies in communication across rural and suburban districts. The participatory nature of action research allowed stakeholders to collaboratively reflect on the challenges posed by the policy and propose actionable solutions. The study also highlighted

opposition to the law, with participants advocating for earlier literacy interventions and systemic support over punitive retention measures.

By integrating action research principles, the study prioritized the voices of those directly affected and emphasized the importance of comprehensive support systems that address socio-emotional and academic needs, particularly for students who faced foundational learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Implications include the need for transparent communication, equitable resources, and early interventions to mitigate the unintended consequences of retention policies. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on high-stakes educational policies and demonstrate the potential of action research to inform evidence-based reforms that prioritize student well-being and equity.

*Keywords:* third-grade retention; educational policy; qualitative research; family impact; teachers

## Introduction

Beneath the formal language of policy and assessment scores lie a raw human experience—the stories of children lying awake, dreading the results of a test, parents anxious over their children’s futures, and teachers burdened by the weight of expectations. Consider Hannah (*all names are pseudonyms*), who could not bear to tell her daughter that she might be retained if she failed the third-grade state test. “I didn’t want her to feel like she wasn’t good enough,” Hannah recalled, shielding her daughter from worry and anxiety for as long as possible.

Janet, a special education teacher, saw her son overwhelmed by a pressure that seemed disproportionate for his age. “He’s smart, but he was terrified of failing,” she shared. This illustrates the gap between a child’s potential and their ability to navigate high-stakes testing. Mary, a mother of five, witnessed her once-confident child transform, plagued by self-doubt. “She used to love school, but after this law, all I see is anxiety,” Mary reflected, questioning an educational system that measures a child’s worth by a single test.

These stories are not unique. Sarah, a school paraprofessional, described the relief when her daughter narrowly passed by one point—an outcome that almost resulted in retention. “It’s overwhelming to think that one test could determine so much of her future,” Sarah admitted. These narratives illuminate the real-world consequences of Tennessee’s third-grade retention law, providing essential context for the findings discussed in this study.

The Tennessee 3rd-grade retention law mandates that students demonstrate proficiency in English language arts (ELA) based on their performance on the Tennessee comprehensive assessment program (TCAP) (Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3115.a.1, 2022). Officially known as the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, the law intends to ensure that “students who are determined to need additional supports in reading, receive them before being promoted to 4th grade” (Tennessee Department of Education, 2024, p. 1). Although the law provides alternate pathways to promotion, such as free summer school and/or tutoring support, it has raised concerns regarding its real impact on children, families, and educators.

Adding to the complexity of Tennessee's third-grade retention law is the unique educational journey of the children directly impacted by it. The students written about in this study were in kindergarten when the COVID-19 pandemic began, truncating their school year and transitioning their learning to virtual platforms. For children in rural areas, limited access to reliable internet and technology created significant barriers to effective learning (Jalongo, 2021). When schools reopened in the fall of 2020, these students entered first grade—a critical, phonics-focused academic grade—under strict COVID-19 protocols that included full-time mask wearing. This posed challenges for phonics instruction, which relies on auditory clarity and visual cues to teach mouth shapes for sound production. Additionally, young children who were not yet reading or writing, many of whom had limited computer or keyboarding skills, were at a particular disadvantage when trying to learn online (Jalongo, 2021). Quarantine policies further disrupted learning, with one participant reporting her child missed six consecutive weeks of school due to quarantine protocols. Teachers, who lacked comprehensive training for online instruction during 2020–2021, faced difficulties in delivering optimal online learning experiences (Trust & Whalen, 2020). These compounded factors impaired literacy development at a foundational level, framing the challenges these children faced when navigating third-grade retention policies (Almasi & Yuan, 2023).

Tennessee is not alone in its pursuit of grade-level accountability; similar policies exist in 37 states, with 17 mandating retention based on state assessments (Cummings & Turner, 2020). Yet, little is known about the long-term social and emotional impacts of laws, particularly in Tennessee. Research on similar policies has shown adverse outcomes, including heightened stress for children and families and increased teacher workload (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

This study explores the lived experiences of parents whose children completed third grade during the first year of the law's implementation. Uniquely for this study, four of the five parents were also educators (instructional coach, school paraprofessional, special education teacher, and principal). By examining perceptions from both rural and suburban districts, this research highlights potential regional disparities and uncovers the broader implications of the law. Rooted in an action research framework, this study actively engages with stakeholders to reflect on and address the challenges posed by the retention policy from a parent, family, and educator point of view. Action research, as a participatory methodology, seeks to bridge the gap between research and practice by involving those directly affected by the issue under investigation. By doing so, this approach not only generates actionable insights but also empowers participants to advocate for policies that prioritize both academic achievement and the well-being of children.

## **Review of Literature**

The policy of grade retention has long been a topic of debate among educators, policymakers, and researchers, with studies revealing mixed outcomes. While some research suggests short-term academic gains, others point to negative social-emotional impacts and long-term academic consequences. This literature review synthesizes key studies on retention laws, focusing on their effects on students' academic performance, mental health, and family dynamics.

### ***Social-Emotional Impacts on Retention***

The psychological toll of retention policies has been well-documented in existing research. Over 50 years of studies have reported primarily negative academic outcomes for students who were retained (Martin, 2011), but the lasting effects go far beyond only academic concerns. Studies have indicated that retained students were lower in areas like self-efficacy and motivation, but they were higher in other categories like disengagement or anxiety (Martin 2011). Furthermore, a general overview of retention studies indicated these negative impacts hold true across demographic categories or age ranges of students retained.

Some specific examples of recent studies provided even more clarity. Tavassolie and Winsler (2019) explored the impacts of Florida's mandatory retention law, revealing that English Language Learners, Black and Latino students, special education students, and those from low-income backgrounds were more vulnerable to negative retention-related outcomes. The study highlighted how these groups exhibited increased susceptibility to stress and adverse emotional impacts, extending beyond academic performance.

Diris (2017) investigated grade retention's influence on student achievement, finding that repeating a grade during elementary school had detrimental effects on future academic outcomes. The study concluded that retention failed to strengthen foundational literacy skills essential for educational progress, instead contributing to long-term academic disadvantages. While significant research has focused on quantitative outcomes of retention policies, fewer studies have centered on the perspectives of parents regarding these legislative measures.

### ***Parent Roles in Shared Decision Making***

The importance of parent involvement in educational decisions is well-supported by existing literature. Stepko (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study to explore the differing perceptions between teachers and parents/guardians regarding student retention in primary grades. The research uncovered significant barriers to collaborative decision-making, with parents expressing a strong desire for inclusion in discussions that influence their children's academic journeys. Stepko's findings revealed that parents often felt excluded from critical conversations, even though their insights could enhance student outcomes and well-being. This study underscored the apprehension many parents feel about the potential adverse effects of retention on their children, particularly related to self-esteem and social emotional development.

### ***Long-Term Implications of Retention***

The long-term consequences of grade retention have been shown to extend beyond the elementary school years. Hughes et al. (2018) conducted a 14-year longitudinal study that found a significant association between retention in the early grades and an increased likelihood of high school dropout. Specifically, their study revealed that students retained in elementary grades had a 2.3% higher risk of not completing high school compared to their promoted peers. Similarly, Giano et al. (2022) examined the odds of high school dropout based on the grade level in which a student was retained. Their findings indicated that the probability of dropping out was more than twice as high for students retained in third grade compared to those who were never retained.

While the quantitative impacts of retention policies have been explored extensively, there is a notable gap in research focusing on the social-emotional experiences and perceptions of families and educators affected by these laws. This gap calls for qualitative studies that provide a more comprehensive view of the multifaceted impacts of retention. This study aims to fill this void by investigating the lived experiences of parents and educators during the initial implementation of Tennessee's 3rd-grade retention law.

The review of literature underscores the complexity of grade retention policies and their implications for students, families, and educators. Existing research highlights both short-term academic benefits and long-term drawbacks, with an emphasis on the need for more holistic, inclusive approaches to educational policy. By situating the study within this body of research, the aim is to contribute valuable insights that inform policy revisions and support systems that prioritize not only academic success but also the mental health and well-being of students.

## **Methodology**

This study employed an Action Research framework with a qualitative approach to investigate the impacts of Tennessee's third-grade retention law on children, families, and educators. Action Research, as outlined by Patton (2015), emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement and aims to bridge the gap between research and practice. This stakeholder involvement allows researchers to "critically address a real-life issue with those experiencing it" (Green et al., 2024, p. 12), an especially important aspect of studies examining the emotional toll of educational policies on students and their families. Action Research also centers participant voices, which is central in conveying the human impact of legislation that is often forgotten amid discussions of achievement scores and retention numbers. Therefore, the Action Research approach used in this study enabled the researchers to capture the perspectives of those directly affected by the policy (five parents; four also engaged as school professionals), promoting critical reflection and potential transformation in educational practices.

## ***Research Design***

A qualitative case study design was used to provide an in-depth exploration of participant experiences. Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants who met the criteria: parents or guardians of children who completed third grade in 2023 and whose children attended either a rural or suburban school. In addition, four of the five participants also reflected the perspectives of educators within the school system. This comparative element was designed to uncover any regional differences in experiences, perceptions, and information dissemination.

## ***Data Collection Methods***

This study incorporated multiple data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the retention law. These included semi-structured interviews, social media content analysis, and document review.

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

Interviews were conducted with five mothers who met the participant criteria. These interviews lasted less than 60 minutes each. Two of the five interviews were conducted in-person and the remaining three interviews were conducted via Zoom for accessibility. Member checking was employed to ensure accuracy of the collected interview data. The semi-structured formal interviews allowed participants to share their personal stories while ensuring key topics were addressed, such as initial reactions to the law, ongoing concerns, the perceived impact on their families and children, and how the law impacted teachers.

Sample questions included:

1. Can you describe your understanding of the TN 3rd grade retention law and how it works?
2. Can you talk about how the law impacts children and families, both now and in the future?
3. Are there any aspects of the law that you believe could be improved or changed?
4. How has the law impacted teachers?

### *Social Media Content Analysis*

To capture a broader public sentiment, social media posts related to the retention law were analyzed. This included posts from platforms such as Facebook, where parents discussed their experiences and interacted with school districts. One participant noted that her district requested the removal of comments that could be perceived negatively, highlighting the challenges in transparent communication.

### *Document Review*

Documents such as school websites, public communications, flyers, and informational materials were analyzed to assess the accuracy, clarity, and consistency of the information provided to families. This review aimed to identify discrepancies in communication between rural and suburban school districts, as well as the overall adequacy of the resources available to parents.

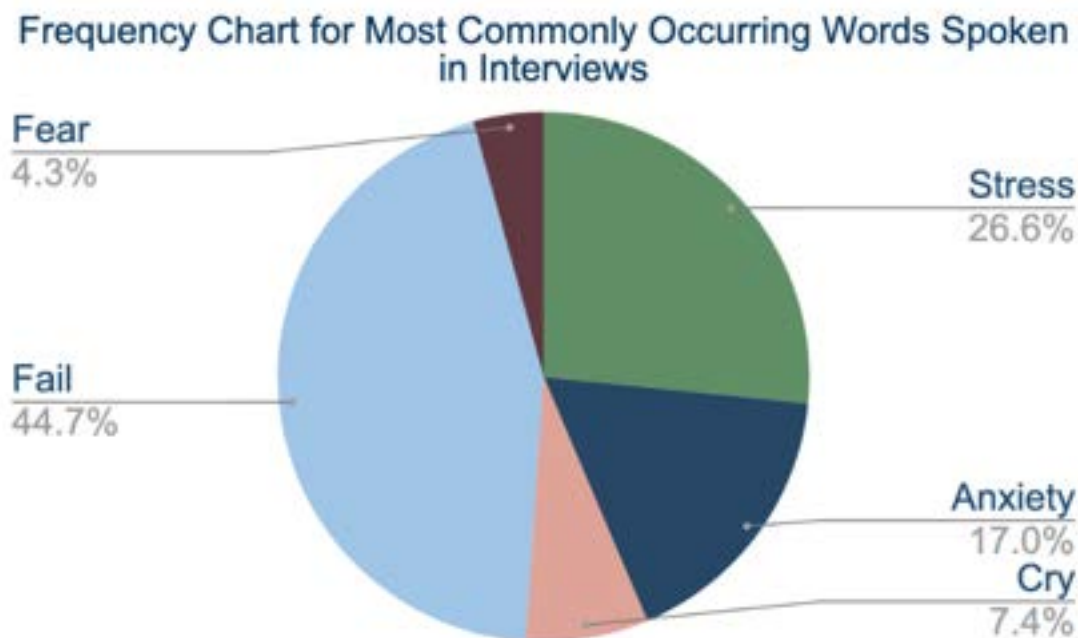
### *Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes across the data. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy. The researchers independently coded the data and met to compare and consolidate their findings, ensuring inter-coder reliability. Key themes were identified, including heightened child and family stress, teacher workload and burnout, and disparities in information dissemination.

To enhance the rigor of the study, triangulation was used by integrating insights from three data sources—interviews, social media, and document analysis. This method bolstered the reliability of the findings, offering a more nuanced understanding of the policy's impacts. To visualize these themes, a frequency table was created to show the occurrence rate of each theme across the interviews with the participating mothers (and mothers as educators). The table illustrates which

topics were most frequently mentioned, highlighting areas of greatest concern and providing a quantitative perspective on the qualitative data.

*Figure 1. Frequency of Most Commonly Occurring Words Spoken in Interviews*



### ***Participants***

Five mothers participated in the study with four of the five mothers who also engaged in the schools as educators, each chosen to represent experiences from both rural and suburban areas in Tennessee. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities. The participants included:

1. **Hannah:** An instructional coach and mother of a now fourth grader in a rural district whose child passed the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).
2. **Sarah:** A school paraprofessional and guardian of three children, including a fourth grader in a rural district; her child also passed the TCAP.
3. **Janet:** A special education teacher in a rural county and mother of a 4th grader; her child passed the TCAP.
4. **Mary:** A stay-at-home mother in a suburban district with four children, including a 4th grader; her child passed the TCAP.
5. **Amy:** A school principal in a rural district and the mother of a 4th grader; her child did not pass the TCAP.

## Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participant rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at a central United States university.

## Findings

The analysis of interviews, social media content, and document reviews revealed several significant themes related to the impacts of Tennessee's third-grade retention law. The findings shed light on the stress experienced by children, the emotional toll on families, challenges faced by educators, and disparities in communication and information access. Each theme is discussed below with supporting quotes and examples to illustrate the lived experiences of participants. Table 1 provides an overview before delving into each finding in detail.

**Table 1**

### *Parent Perspectives: Retention Realities and Reflections*

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Supporting Quote(s)</u>
Stress and Anxiety Among Children	Emotional strain and anxiety experienced by children due to fear of retention and high-stakes testing.	<p>"He was literally in tears that he was going to fail." (Janet)</p> <p>"I did not tell my daughter there was a chance that she could possibly be retained. Because I knew if I told her from the start there would be anxiety all year long. I'm not good enough. Did I pass?" (Hannah)</p>
Family Dynamics and Emotional Toll	Increased stress and disrupted family dynamics stemming from the policy's pressure.	"The stress that this law has put on me as a parent and my son is senseless." (Amy)
Teacher Workload and Burnout	Heightened teacher stress and workload, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction.	<p>"Most of my teachers are medicated. Most of them have anxiety. Most of them have stomach issues because they can't manage the stress of this." (Hannah)</p> <p>"That's why I wanted to be out of education. I think we're losing a lot of good teachers"</p>



		because of the senseless rules that we're implementing on teachers in this state and the amount of tests that we have.” (Amy)
Disparities in Communication and Understanding	Differences in how information about the retention law was conveyed between rural and suburban areas.	“The teachers were as lost as the parents. They didn’t really know what they could do.” (Sarah)
Opposition to the Policy	Concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of the policy, which calls for systemic change.	“Retention is never, and will never be the answer. The answer is smaller classrooms, more support, and trained teachers.” (Hannah)

### ***Stress and Anxiety Among Children***

The emotional strain experienced by children was a dominant theme across all participants’ accounts. Parents frequently described the palpable anxiety their children experienced, particularly in the months leading up to the TCAP. Janet, a special education teacher and mother, illustrated the intense pressure her son faced: “[He] was very stressed... the night before taking it, he was literally in tears that he was going to fail.” Sarah, a paraprofessional and mother of a child who narrowly passed, added how the pressure “affected her performance on the test” and believes that her daughter “may have done better if she wasn’t so worried.” This suggests that the anxiety induced by the policy can undermine student performance, creating a counterproductive cycle and aligns with Tvassolie and Winsler’s (2019) research which highlighted the negative emotional impacts of retention policies on at-risk student groups, including increased stress and anxiety.

Mary, a stay-at-home mother of five, observed a shift in her daughter’s attitude toward school: “Watching my daughter have quiz anxiety when she used to be carefree... it's frustrating to see how much change came from one law.” This shift highlighted concerns about the long-term psychological effects, as Hannah, an instructional coach, noted, “They’re always going to feel like they’re not good at reading.” The stress and anxiety experienced by children inevitably extended into their homes, affecting family dynamics and placing an emotional burden on parents who struggled to navigate the implications of the policy.

### ***Family Dynamics and Emotional Toll***

The retention law’s implications extended beyond children to affect entire families, creating stress that rippled through daily life. Sarah described the emotional toll. “As a parent, it’s overwhelming. My child used to love school, but when the pressure hit, she started hating it.” This supports Stepko’s (2018) findings that parents experience significant apprehension about

the social-emotional consequences of retention on their children. This shift in school perception strained parent-child relationships and added to the emotional weight experienced in the home.

Mary shared how the uncertainty surrounding test results disrupted summer plans. She shared that they “didn’t receive the results until the last day of school. . . even as a parent, it was stressful not knowing.” Mary’s account of canceled family plans due to delayed test results emphasizes how retention laws can disrupt not just academic experiences, but family life, paralleling the assertion of Hughes et al. (2018) that policies can have ripple effects beyond the classroom.

The looming test scores compounded the anxiety felt by parents and children alike, demonstrating the significant emotional burden placed on families. Hannah, who worked as an instructional coach, chose not to inform her daughter about the potential for retention: “I did not tell my daughter that there was a chance that she could be retained. . . I knew it would cause anxiety all year.” While families were bearing the weight of this policy at home, educators were simultaneously experiencing an increased workload and emotional strain, creating a cycle of stress that permeated both school and home environments.

### ***Teacher Workload and Burnout***

Educators, as confirmed by the parent/educator interviews, also faced considerable stress related to implementing the retention policy, affecting their professional effectiveness and personal well-being. Janet, as both a special education teacher and a parent, voiced concern over the unpredictability of test outcomes: “There’s so much pressure on teachers. We can’t tell how a kid’s going to test on a given day,” echoing Diris (2017), who found that retention policies place significant pressure on educators tasked with preparing students for high-stakes assessments. Hannah, an instructional coach, supported this, noting the toll on her colleagues: “Most of my teachers are medicated . . . they have anxiety and stomach issues because they can’t manage the stress.”

Parent/educator participants shared that the added pressure led to burnout and a decline in job satisfaction. For example, Amy, a school principal, highlighted this issue: “We’re losing a lot of good teachers because of the senseless rules that we’re implementing on teachers in this state and the amount of tests that we have.” In her school, the heightened stress posed a risk to teacher retention and overall school morale, which she worked hard to build. The stress faced by teachers was compounded by inconsistencies in communication and understanding the policy, which left both educators and parents feeling ill-equipped to support children effectively.

### ***Disparities in Communication and Understanding***

The study revealed significant disparities in how the retention policy was communicated, especially between rural and suburban districts. Sarah, a parent and school paraprofessional, noted, “The teachers were as lost as the parents. They didn’t really know what they could do,” illustrating gaps in information dissemination. This aligns with research suggesting that inconsistent communication can exacerbate stress and confusion among stakeholders (Stepko 2018). Such disparities particularly affected rural families, who had less access to resources,

reflecting Tavassolie and Winsler's (2019) findings on how certain groups are disproportionately impacted by educational policies. This finding was supported by the document review of district communications, which showed that families in rural areas had less open access to clear and comprehensive information compared to the suburban district in our study. These disparities in communication contributed to growing frustration and skepticism, fueling widespread opposition among stakeholders who questioned the policy's efficacy and fairness.

### ***Opposition to the Policy***

Parent participants expressed significant opposition to the policy, questioning its effectiveness and timing. Janet, a parent and special education teacher, emphasized, "I think if they're going to do it, they need to do it when they're younger . . . by third grade, they've already missed key reading skills." This critique is consistent with findings from Giano et al. (2022), who noted that retention at later stages in elementary school is linked to higher dropout rates. Hannah, a parent and instructional coach, added a broader critique: "Retention is never, and will never be the answer. The answer is smaller classrooms, more support, and trained teachers."

Mary, a stay-at-home mom, echoed this sentiment, suggesting that while accountability is essential, the current approach is flawed: "It needs to alleviate that pressure rather than add to it." This shared opposition highlighted concerns about the law's fairness and whether it truly supports student growth. This widespread opposition, expressed by the participants in the study, underscored a collective call for policy revision, emphasizing the need to balance academic accountability with the mental and emotional well-being of children, families, and educators.

### **Summary of Findings**

These findings reinforce the complex and multifaceted impacts of Tennessee's third-grade retention law on children, families, and educators. The anxiety experienced by children, the emotional toll on families, and the increased workload for educators highlight the need for policy revision. Disparities in communication and public understanding point to the importance of equitable information dissemination. Collectively, these insights suggest that while the law aims to improve academic outcomes, its implementation may lead to unintended, counterproductive consequences.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the multifaceted impacts of Tennessee's 3rd grade retention law on children, families, and educators. This discussion contextualizes these findings within existing literature, highlights the study's contributions, and explores implications for educational practice and policy. The Action Research framework of the study presents these results in a way that centers the voices of those most impacted by the law, but it also suggests implications for practice in the following section that seek to mitigate the negative consequences of such legislation. In Action Research, the goal is not merely reporting on a studied phenomenon, it is inspiring needed change based on the findings. With that in mind, a comparison of this study's findings with existing research on retention is helpful before providing suggested responses.

The heightened stress and anxiety experienced by children align with Tavassolie and Winsler's (2019) study, which found that high-stakes retention policies contribute to significant emotional distress, particularly among vulnerable student groups. This study's findings expand on this by showing that the anxiety induced by the retention policy not only affects students' test performance, as illustrated by Sarah's observation that her daughter "may have done better if she wasn't so worried," but also impacts their long-term relationship with school. Mary's (stay-at-home mom) account of her daughter developing "anxiety" resonates with Stepko's (2018) research, which noted parental concerns about the social-emotional well-being of children subjected to retention.

The stress on families and the disruption of family dynamics reinforce the broader implications of educational policies on home life. Hughes et al. (2018) highlighted that retention can have ripple effects, influencing not just students but their families. This was evident in Mary's statement about the uncertainty surrounding test results that disrupted summer plans and contributed to family stress. These findings emphasize that policies designed with academic intentions must consider broader familial impacts to avoid unintended consequences.

The reported teacher stress and burnout (from the parent/teacher interviews) align with Diris' (2017) conclusions that retention policies place heavy burdens on educators. Janet's (special education teacher) experience—"There's so much pressure on teachers. We can't tell how a kid's going to test on a given day"—highlights how such policies exacerbate teacher anxiety and workload. Hannah's (instructional coach) remark that "most of my teachers are medicated" points to a critical issue in the sustainability of the teaching profession, echoing broader concerns about job satisfaction and retention within the teaching profession.

The disparities in how the retention policy was communicated reflect findings from Stepko (2018), who identified that inadequate communication can lead to confusion and stress for both parents and educators. In this study, these disparities emerged from inconsistent messaging across school districts, variations in how rural and suburban communities were informed about the law, and a lack of clear guidance from state and local education agencies, leaving both families and educators uncertain about its implementation and consequences. School paraprofessional and parent Sarah's comment, "The teachers were as lost as the parents," illustrates how a lack of clear, consistent messaging can amplify the emotional and logistical challenges posed by policy changes. This finding underscores the importance of equitable and comprehensive information dissemination to support families and educators across different geographic regions.

The widespread opposition to the retention law, highlighted by parent participants' critiques, points to a need for policy reevaluation. Special education teacher and parent Janet stated, "By third grade, they've already missed key reading skills," suggests that earlier interventions may be more effective than retention at the third-grade level. This aligns with the findings of Giano et al. (2022) that retention in later elementary grades is linked to higher dropout rates. As an instructional coach and parent, Hannah's advocacy for "smaller classrooms, more support, and trained teachers" resonates with current educational theories that emphasize systemic support over punitive measures.

## Implications for Practice

The study's findings indicate that Tennessee's third-grade retention law may have unintended consequences that counteract its intended benefits. Policies aimed at improving academic performance should prioritize the mental health and well-being of students and consider the holistic development of children. The following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Early Intervention:** To counteract the effects of learning disruptions, early interventions and equitable learning recovery programs have been identified as essential strategies for supporting student literacy development (Johnson et. al., 2021). Educational policies should focus on earlier interventions in kindergarten through second grade, where foundational literacy skills can be developed and mastered.
2. **Support Systems for Teachers:** Teachers faced unprecedented challenges in literacy instruction during the pandemic, necessitating adaptations and systemic support to meet students' needs effectively (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2020). Providing teachers with resources and support to manage policy expectations can reduce burnout and improve educational outcomes.
3. **Enhanced Communication:** Ensuring consistent, transparent communication from school districts to families is essential to alleviate confusion and build trust.
4. **Comprehensive Student Support:** Research by Jimerson, et al. (2002) has shown that early socio-emotional and behavior characteristics can play a significant role in determining long-term academic outcomes, emphasizing the importance of integrating social-emotional learning frameworks to support students' holistic development and academic success. Beyond academic metrics, policies should consider social-emotional learning frameworks to support students' overall development.

## Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the perceptions and impacts of Tennessee's third-grade retention law on children, families, and educators from the perspective of five mothers whose children were faced with the third-grade retention law and four of the five mothers were educators, acknowledging certain limitations is important. The study had a small sample size and relied on limited access to disseminated documents to families. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples to generalize findings and explore additional perspectives from various stakeholders. Longitudinal studies could further illuminate the long-term effects of retention policies on student achievement and well-being.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the impacts of high-stakes educational policies by providing qualitative insights into the lived experiences of families and educators from the unique experiences of mother/educators with children impacted by the Tennessee retention law. The findings underscore the need for policies that prioritize students' emotional

and academic well-being, advocate for earlier interventions, and support educators in their roles. By addressing these considerations, educational policies can better foster equitable and supportive learning environments that promote positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

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