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Signature Hugo Alberti Andersen, Jr.
Date July 29, 1970

THE EFFECTS OF NON-PROMOTION ON SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

by

HUGO ALBERTI ANDERSEN, JR.

A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

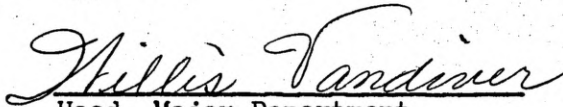
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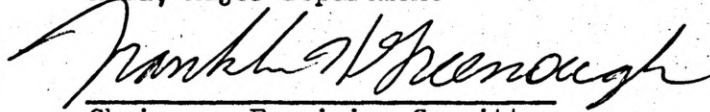
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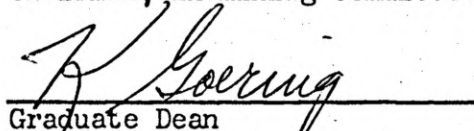
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Elementary Administration

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H. A. A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem.	4
Procedures	4
Limitations.	4
II. RELATED STUDIES.	6
III. METHODS OF PROCEDURES.	14
Population	14
Data	15
Treatment.	15
IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA	17
Teacher Interviews	19
Observations	20
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS.	22
Summary.	22
Conclusions.	22
Recommendations.	24
APPENDIX	26
Appendix <u>A</u>	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Negative Responses Given to Statements Pertaining to Self-Image from the Non-Promoted and Promoted Groups. .	17
2. Negative Responses Given to Statements Pertaining to Feelings Toward Others from the Non-Promoted and Promoted Groups.	18
3. Negative Responses Given to Statements Pertaining to Feelings Toward School from the Non-Promoted and Promoted Groups.	18
4. Negative Responses Given to Statements Pertaining to Social Adjustment from the Non-Promoted and Promoted Groups	19

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if non-promoted students develop negative attitudes toward themselves, toward others, toward school, and social responsibility. A group of 71 students in grades five, six, and seven participated in this study. Of this group, fifty-nine had been regularly promoted and twelve had experienced non-promotion.

The students in both groups were given a feeling determiner sheet to which they responded to forty-five items concerning self-image, feelings toward others, feelings toward school, and social adjustment. The statements given from each group were classified as positive or negative in nature. A percentage of negative responses from each group was computed. The F ratio was used to determine the variance homogeneity for each group, concerning each of the four categories. The separate variance t -model was used to determine if any significant differences occurred between the negative responses given by the two groups of students in this study. The students in this study were also observed during the school year as they participated in the many school activities. Interviews with teachers helped to gain added information about the students in this study.

Conclusions arrived at as a result of this study were:

- (1) No statistical difference was found between negative responses made by the two groups concerning self-image.
- (2) Non-promoted students seem to develop a greater negative attitude towards others.
- (3) Non-promoted students develop a greater negative attitude toward school.
- (4) Negative attitudes concerning social roles were greater among non-promoted students in this study.
- (5) According to the observations made, non-promoted students usually are overly aggressive or withdrawn from the group in which they had been placed.

Recommendations made were: (1) A follow-up study should be made of this problem. (2) Non-promotion of students should be very carefully studied before the decision is made. (3) All students should find success in school through the development of educational programs that fits the individual student. (4) Schools should strive to enhance positive attitudes of all children. (5) Non-promotion should not be used as a "cure-all".

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The problem of promotion or retention of elementary pupils has confronted teachers and school administrators since the graded system of education was adopted by the public schools.

In our graded system of instructional organization many pupils fail to attain the standards that have been established for the group. Educators thus face the dilemma of promoting or retaining these children at the same grade level for another year.

Historically, retention was the primary method of treating individuals who did not meet the specific skill requirements of the given grade level. However, educators are beginning to modify their philosophy towards a belief that many factors other than pupil achievement of certain pre-determined standards should be considered as the criteria for retaining pupils at the same grade level for more than one school term. These can be classified as: emotional instability, social rejection, delinquency and general school dissatisfaction.

Educators have realized that often retained children continue to experience difficulty in achieving academic success, and possibly more important, social success as they continue through school. Often, these children feel rejected and do not become an integral part of the school in general. As their classmates and friends progress through the grades

they find themselves left behind in a strange and lonely setting. Many times they have little in common with their new classmates who are younger and less mature in several ways.

In this century, schools have employed three types of promotion policies. In historical evolution these policies are:

1. A fixed standard policy by which pupils must achieve a predetermined level of competence in order to be promoted.

2. A continuous promotion policy by which promotion is based on chronological age. This system assumes that although individuals learn at a varying rate, the maximum learning takes place when pupils progress steadily through the grades.

3. A guidance promotion policy that carefully studies each individual case and promotes or retains the student on the analysis of what is best for the individual child. This policy assumes that teachers and administrators have a great enough knowledge of the learning process and the nature of the individual to make the proper choice.

Many of today's educators hold the firm belief that our schools must become more humane in all aspects. Pupils must become involved and gain a feeling of worth and relevance to their education. If this is to be carried forward, all children, both fast and slow, must not be left standing apart from the group. Each child must have the recognition of his teachers and peers in order to develop a self-worth or self-

image that is conducive to motivation in a positive direction.

With this underlying philosophy of making certain that every child achieves success in school and develops positive attitudes, it is hoped that a study dealing with the manner in which students who have experienced retention in school feel about themselves and others, and how they relate and become involved with the entire school setting will be of value in the future. It is hoped that this might contribute some facts that will enable school administrators and teachers to select a policy of pupil progress that will not cause a child to become alienated, but rather permit each child to follow a pathway that will lead to involvement with others, motivate each child in the proper direction, and allow each child to feel good about himself and others, as he continues his education.

PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to determine if differences in attitudes exist between non-promoted students and regularly-promoted elementary school students in the following areas: self-image, feelings toward others, feelings toward school, and social development.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures were used in this investigation:

1. A review of related literature was made pertaining to academic achievement, social adjustment, peer-group relations and teacher-student relationships.
2. A feeling determiner inventory was given to both the promoted and the non-promoted elementary pupils in grades five, six, and seven.
3. Interviews with teachers were used to acquire information about promoted and non-promoted students in their classrooms.
4. Observations were made of promoted and non-promoted elementary students in the classroom, on the playground, and during outside school activities to gain further insight of the problem.

LIMITATIONS

This study pertaining to the attitudes and feelings of promoted and non-promoted elementary school pupils had the following limitations:

1. There were no previous resource materials available pertaining to this problem for Montana schools.

2. The pupils surveyed were all public school pupils.
3. The pupils surveyed were all from a small community in an agricultural area of northeastern Montana.
4. The pupils surveyed were only from the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade.
5. Not all of the pupils responded to all of the statements on the inventory sheet.
6. The population sampled was limited to seventy-one students.
7. Some of the material gathered for this study had to be interpreted by the writer.

CHAPTER II

RELATED STUDIES

The policy on promotion of students has undergone marked changes in the past fifty years. The trend appears to be moving away from the rigid promotion policies geared to achievement of skills at a given level within a given time, towards promotion primarily based on chronological age.

In appraising the literature, many studies are available to substantiate that this trend toward chronological age promotion is definitely occurring.

Coffield and Blommers (3:235) reported that at the turn of this century, about fifty percent of the pupils had experienced failure by the time they completed their elementary schooling, but this proportion was nearly halved by the thirties, and by the year 1954 it was approximately ten percent. The average annual promotion rate for pupils in the eight regular grades of elementary schools in New York City from 1912 to 1952 clearly indicated this trend.

The principal reason for the discontinuance of rigid promotion policies based only on achievement seems to be that very little is gained, either academically or socially, from spending more than one year at the same grade level.

In a study of 192 second grade and 160 fifth grade pupils reported by Otto and Melby (9:594-596) showed that there was no difference between the achievement of pupils who were threatened with non-promotion over those pupils that were told at the beginning of the year that they would all be promoted.

As a result of two studies on achievement standards Cook concluded: "the surest way to lower the standards of the common school is to hoard the dull pupils". (2:251-252)

The first of these studies was conducted in 1921 in the Austin, Minnesota, Public Schools when 54 percent of the pupils entering the seventh grade had been retained at least once in their school careers, showed a median IQ of the school to be ninety-four. The same test, given in 1951 when only four percent of the children entering the seventh grade had ever been retained, showed the median IQ to be 111.

Hall and Demarest (7:204-207) reported in the Elementary School Journal on the effects of reading achievement of a change from a strict to a liberal promotion policy. The study concluded there was evidence to support the conclusion that regular promotion of children does not result in a lowering of academic achievement. Their conclusions were based on a ten-year period of students passing through the fourth and sixth grades of the Phoenix Elementary District #1.

James Jones (8:6) reports the following:

"A review of the recent research in promotional theory indicates a wealth of evidence that a pupil should progress with his own age group, and that, scholastically, a pupil will usually achieve more by being promoted than by being retained. The great preponderance of evidence definitely favors promotion over non-promotion. There is a wealth of evidence that few, if any of the affirmed benefits attributed to non-promotion are justified or achieved in practice."

In a study conducted by Coffield and Blommers (3:248-249) of 190 pupils who had experienced failure after the second grade in school the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Failed pupils gain approximately only six months in educational progress during the repeated school year.
2. Failed pupils gain approximately one year and three months in educational progress during the two years following failure.
3. The educational progress of failed pupils is about four to six months less than that of matched promoted pupils.
4. The progress of failed pupils during the two years following failure is not significantly greater than that made by promoted matches during a single year spent in the next higher grade level.
5. The educational progress of seventh grade pupils who have experienced failure once is typically on a par with that of matched promoted seventh grade pupils who have spent one year less in school.
6. The educational progress of seventh grade pupils who have experienced failure once is about eight months less than the matched promoted eighth grade pupils who have spent the same number of years in school.
7. The educational progress of seventh grade pupils who have failed once is not affected by the grade in which the failure occurred.
8. The variability of pupil achievement in a school's seventh grade class is not affected by the rigidity or leniency of its promotion policy.

9. The general level of achievement of a school's seventh grade class is not significantly affected by the rigidity or leniency of its promotion policy.
10. The percent of overage seventh grade pupils is significantly greater in the case of schools having rigid promotion policies than in the case of schools having lenient promotion policies.

Goodlad (6:301-328) conducted a study of social and personal adjustment of children which had been promoted and an equal number of non-promoted children. Fifty-five children who were promoted were equated with fifty-five children who were retained. These children were given tests relating to self-rating, peer-rating and teacher ratings. From this study it was concluded that there were differences in social adjustment and personal adjustment between the promoted and non-promoted groups. The non-promoted children were found to be more outward-going which might have been considered an advantage had it not been for the fact that rejection contributed to this, rather than acceptance.

The area of peer group relations clearly favored the promoted group. Non-promoted children thrived less well than promoted children when each group was compared to its own class group. Promoted children were named less frequently than non-promoted children as persons not desired for very best friends (2.4% as to 7.4%).

The motivating effectiveness of failure has been demonstrated by psychologists and mental hygienists to be very slight in comparison with

the motivating power of success. If a student is continually experiencing failure, very little motivation can come from further failure. Case studies have indicated that what actually happens is that the pupil resigns himself to his fate, concludes that he is not worth much as this world's values go, and becomes apathetic, and perhaps hostile (4:246).

Failure implies frustration: it is in effect, the thwarting of the pupil in the achievement of what he holds to be a desirable goal. Such thwarting can have two effects: either the pupil will abandon the goal as desirable, or he will continue to hold the goal as desirable and suffer the frustration. Carroll states: "Failure is always at least temporarily disintegrating; persistent failure usually leads to serious behavior disorders. Success is a constructive experience; continued success usually leads to self-confidence." (4:247)

Numerous investigations have documented the belief that children suffer severe and adverse mental hygiene effects from school failure. In a study by Sandin and Goodlad which investigated many aspects of the problem, their general conclusion was that non-promotion clearly had strong adverse effects upon the adjustment and mental hygiene of the children studied. (4:248)

Children who are not promoted become overage for their grade, and become separated from the playmates and friends with whom they usually

associate. They are generally more physically mature than the children in their new grade, are looked upon as "dummies" by pupils and teachers alike, and frequently experience continuing disapproval and pressure at home. (4:248)

The avowed purpose of schools is to help children grow in desirable directions. Any experience which is strongly detrimental to the child's personality is in opposition to that purpose. This would then imply that non-promotion, on this factor alone, is an indefensible practice in modern schools. (4:248)

Proponents of the grade-standard theory of promotion maintain that it is harmful to a child's personality to place him in the next grade if he is unable to cope with the material presented. (4:249) This belief can only be held if one assumes there is an achievement level which is typical of each grade. It has been noted that even in grades two and three the odds are heavy that the range in reading levels will be four or more grades. Above grade three the children will range over five or more grade levels in achievement in the various school subjects. The facts of child development attest that children are born with differences, and no matter what is done in school or out of it, these differences will continue to exist with the passing years.

If the range of achievement cannot be reduced by non-promotion, better adjustment cannot be gained by the pupil. Furthermore, the

adverse effects on mental hygiene outweigh any advantages which might occur from failing a pupil to place him with others supposedly nearer his "achievement level". (4:250)

Dr. Glasser in his work with delinquent girls has stated that the girls frequently said, "we always failed in school". Because of this they very early in life felt they were not wanted or liked by the people at their school and in turn they did not care much for them. (5:11)

From the beginning man desperately tries to form an identity. Identity is a basic human need. Every child in school has this basic need to identify himself as somebody, as a separate, unique, distinct human being. The self-image or self concept is very important to every child. (5:11)

The way a child is going to identify himself is critical. If the child views himself as unsuccessful or a failure, his identity will certainly be in a negative direction. If he cannot find a success identity, he will follow a path that leads to a failing identity. Children who feel they are failures will behave as failures. Their behavior will often be anti-social in nature and it can be serious or mild. The child who views himself as a failure will follow one of two pathways. He can follow the pathway of delinquency or the pathway of withdrawal. (5:12)

Children who are successful in school are involved to a great degree with others. Man is a social being and the things he does must be

felt as being important to others as well as to himself. If children are failed they become less involved, often to the point of withdrawal. Each child needs the confirmation and the verification of others, as well as the development of a worthwhile self-image in order to achieve success in school and later in life.

CHAPTER III

METHODS OF PROCEDURE

This chapter deals with a description of the methods and procedures employed in obtaining the data for this study. It also contains a description of the population and of the statistical measures used to analyze the data.

POPULATION

The population for this study was selected from a small elementary school located in an agricultural area of extreme northeastern Montana. The population consisted of elementary pupils in grades five, six, and seven, for a combined total of seventy-one. Of this group, fifty-nine had been steadily promoted and twelve had experienced non-promotion during some point in their school experience.

The population used in this study was divided into two groups, the steadily promoted group and the non-promoted group. Two students in the non-promoted group had experienced non-promotion twice in their school years.

In a study dealing with the attitudes and feelings of promoted and non-promoted students it was the feeling of this writer that a smaller group of students observed over an extended period of time would be beneficial to completing a more accurate study of the problem.

DATA

The data for this study were obtained from a feeling determiner inventory sheet which included forty-five items. (10:97) Appendix A: This inventory sheet was administered to all the students in grades five, six, and seven. The students were instructed not to identify their sheet in any way, and to respond to each item as they honestly and sincerely felt about each one. The papers had been previously marked without the students' knowledge in order that they could be identified and selected for the promoted group or the non-promoted group.

Additional data for this study was obtained from interviews with teachers and observation of the students involved in this study. Observations were made in the classroom, during physical education classes, recess, and during outside school functions, such as school music concerts, school parties, athletic events and dramatic presentations.

TREATMENT

The data obtained from the feeling determiner inventory sheets were categorized into four areas: self-image, feelings toward others, feelings toward school, and social adjustment. Each response was further classified as being positive or negative in nature. Two items on

the inventory sheet were omitted since it was not possible to judge the responses as being either positive or negative.

Within this framework the responses received from the promoted group and the non-promoted group were classified and a percentage of negative responses given for each of the four categories previously mentioned.

The variance homogeneity was calculated for each of the four categories using the F ratio. The t test was used to determine if a significant difference in the means existed in the four categories involving negative responses given by the promoted group and the non-promoted group. All t-test values used to reject the null hypothesis of no significant difference were at the .05 level of confidence.

The t-test model for computation of the differences in mean scores between the two groups with an unequal number of subjects and lacking variance homogeneity was the separate variance formula. (10:145)

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S_1^2}{N_1} + \frac{S_2^2}{N_2}}}$$

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data analyzed were obtained from the responses given to the forty-five items on the feeling determiner inventory sheet that was administered to seventy-one elementary students. In this group there were fifty-nine promoted students and twelve non-promoted students.

The t values computed for each category in the following tables were derived from the formula described in the treatment of the data section of this study.

TABLE 1

NEGATIVE RESPONSES GIVEN TO STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO SELF-IMAGE FROM
THE NON-PROMOTED AND PROMOTED GROUPS

Non-promoted Group	Promoted Group
Mean 45%	Mean 27%
$t = 1.77$	

A t value of 2.001 must be computed in order to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between the means of the non-promoted and promoted groups. Although the null hypothesis cannot be rejected at the .05 level of significance, the lower mean score of negative responses of the promoted group might indicate that a difference does exist, although it was not statistically significant.

TABLE 2

NEGATIVE RESPONSES GIVEN TO STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO FEELINGS
TOWARD OTHERS FROM THE NON-PROMOTED AND PROMOTED GROUPS

Non-promoted Group	Promoted Group
Mean 45%	Mean 28%
$t = 3.4$	

The computed t value of 3.4 exceeds the t table value of 2.001 which is necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of confidence. This tends to indicate quite strongly that feelings toward others of the elementary student had been negatively effected by non-promotion, as measured by the instrument used for this study and the specific population under study.

TABLE 3

NEGATIVE RESPONSES GIVEN TO STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO FEELINGS
TOWARD SCHOOL FROM THE NON-PROMOTED AND PROMOTED GROUPS

Non-promoted Group	Promoted Group
Mean 65%	Mean 46%
$t = 3.006$	

The computed t value of 3.006 exceeds the t table value of 2.001 which is necessary in order to reject the null hypothesis that no significant difference exists between the two groups. From this analysis it might be concluded that attitudes toward school tend to become negative with elementary students that had experienced non-promotion at some grade level of their school experience.

TABLE 4

NEGATIVE RESPONSES GIVEN TO STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO SOCIAL
ADJUSTMENT FROM THE NON-PROMOTED AND PROMOTED GROUPS

Non-promoted Group	Promoted Group
Mean 33%	Mean 13%
$t = 3.71$	

The computed t value of 3.71 exceeds the t table value of 2.001 necessary to reject the null hypothesis that no difference exists between the mean scores of the two groups. This t value was the largest computed value obtained from the four categories in this study.

TEACHER INTERVIEWS

The students in this study had received classroom instruction from ten different teachers in the school system. Interviews with

these teachers indicated that the non-promoted students were mentioned as being discipline problems or withdrawn from the class approximately twice as often as the promoted students.

OBSERVATION

From records kept of visitations to the principal for infractions of school rules, it was found that 72% of the students were from the non-promoted group.

During observation periods in the classroom, the non-promoted students were often found unable to pay attention to the teacher or to outwardly show they were comprehending the material that was being presented. The non-promoted students were seldom asked questions by the teachers, and most questions directed to them would not be responded to in any way. Two students in the non-promoted group would often respond with seemingly the first thought that came to their mind. This appeared to be a way in which the two non-promoted students received some attention from their classmates.

During recess and physical education periods it was observed that very often the non-promoted students were found either outside the group, or they were overly aggressive in their behavioral patterns.

While observing the non-promoted group during extra-curricular school functions, they were most often found in a group with other non-promoted children. It appeared from their behavior and actions that they were in attendance for other reasons than a genuine interest in the activities that were being presented.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

This study was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in the feelings and attitudes of two groups of elementary pupils. One group was composed of steadily-promoted students, and the other group consisted of pupils that had experienced non-promotion. Upon completion of the study it seems apparent that on the basis of the techniques used to gather the data, and the statistical measures employed in this study, that elementary pupils who experience non-promotion do develop a greater amount of negative feelings and attitudes in three of the four categories surveyed, than elementary pupils who had been continuously promoted through the elementary grades.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this study some conclusions may be drawn. The reader must remember that the data were obtained primarily from the responses of fifth, sixth, and seventh grade elementary pupils in a small public school. The following conclusions can be made from the data collected:

1. No statistically significant difference was found between the non-promoted group and the promoted group for negative responses made concerning self-image. The non-promoted group, however, had an average of negative responses considerably greater than the promoted group, which may indicate some difference did exist, although it was not shown by the statistical measures used in this study.
2. Non-promoted elementary pupils seem to develop a negative attitude toward others. This might be brought about by a feeling they had been unjustly treated by teachers, administrators, and parents when they were retained at the same grade level for another school term.
3. Non-promoted elementary pupils appear to develop a negative attitude and feeling toward school. These negative attitudes toward school may be attained because the non-promoted pupils blame the inadequacy of the school for their failure. The development of negative attitudes may be compounded by the fact that the child did not understand the real reasons for being retained.
4. Negative attitudes of non-promoted children concerning social adjustment seem to develop the most strongly of the four categories in this study. The development of unhealthy social attitudes may be prompted by the fact that most non-promoted children become overage for the group. Also, many overage pupils are usually more physically and socially mature. Because of this, much of their behavior and actions may be viewed by their teachers as being bad and improper.
5. According to the observations made by this investigator, non-promoted students usually become overly aggressive, withdraw from the group in which they have been placed, or become the class clowns.
6. Non-promoted students account for the most infractions of school rules.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The investigator is fully aware of the limitations of this study, but believes some worthwhile insights into the effects of feelings and attitudes of non-promotion on elementary school children have been gained. While there is a certain amount of controversial opinion among educators involving the subject of promotion or non-promotion of elementary school children, the following recommendations are made:

1. Educators should strive to enhance the self-image of all children. This seems necessary due to the large percentage of negative responses made by both the promoted and the non-promoted elementary school children in this study.
2. Elementary schools should make every effort possible to cause children to enjoy their school experiences.
3. Elementary school children should be instructed to know and fully understand the relevance of their school activities.
4. The content of homework assigned to elementary school children should be carefully studied by all teachers and administrators. The amount of negative responses given by all the pupils in this study concerning homework was shockingly high.
5. Non-promotion, or the threat of non-promotion, seems to accomplish very few beneficial results. All schools should plan a program which would keep student failure at a minimum, and success at a maximum.
6. Every educator should make certain that the children who experience difficulty in school are made to feel they are important and unique, and that they are making a worthwhile contribution.
7. Non-promotion should not be used as a "cure-all" for every child who experiences difficulty in school.

8. The decision to retain a child should be done only after very careful consideration has been given to the effects this would have on the particular child.
9. Educators must realize that not all children can be expected to accomplish the same goals in the same length of time, and this should be considered as part of the criteria in developing an educationally sound pupil-progress plan for their school system.
10. A follow-up study should be made of more schools with a more complete coverage of attitude development of non-promoted children.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Feeling Determiner Survey

Feeling Determiner Survey

1. Today I feel
2. When I read I
3. I get angry when
4. To be grown up
5. My idea of a good time is
6. I wish my parents knew
7. School is
8. I can't understand why
9. I feel bad when
10. Teachers are
11. I wish teachers would
12. Going to high school
13. To me, books
14. People I think
15. I like to read about
16. On weekends I
17. I'd rather read than
18. To me, homework
19. I hope I'll never
20. I wish people wouldn't

21. When I finish high school
22. I'm afraid
23. Comic books
24. When I take my report card home
25. I am at my best when
26. Most brothers and sisters
27. I don't know how
28. When I study arithmetic
29. I feel proud when
30. I wish my father
31. The future looks
32. I like to read when
33. I would like to be
34. For me, studying
35. I often worry about
36. I wish I could
37. Reading science
38. I look forward to
39. I wish
40. I'd read more if
41. When I read out loud
42. My only regret

43. I love to
44. School would be more fun if
45. I like teacher " _____ " because he (she)

(1: 97)

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