

Early Grade Retention and Student Success: Evidence from Los Angeles

Jill Cannon



Why Study Early Grade Retention?

- Grade retention a last resort
- Research provides mixed evidence
- Little is known about California retention rates
 - District-specific standards-based promotion policies
 - Lack of statewide data
- Implications for student performance



We Focus on LAUSD Students

- LAUSD is largest district in state
- Diverse student population
- Student-level, longitudinal data
 - 7 years of student data
 - Followed to third grade
 - About 150,000 students and almost 500 schools
- CDE school-level data
- Interviews with principals



LAUSD Retention Declining—But Not Uncommon

Retention rates by school year and grade



This Study Addresses Two Major Questions

- Which students are high risk?
- Do retained students improve?



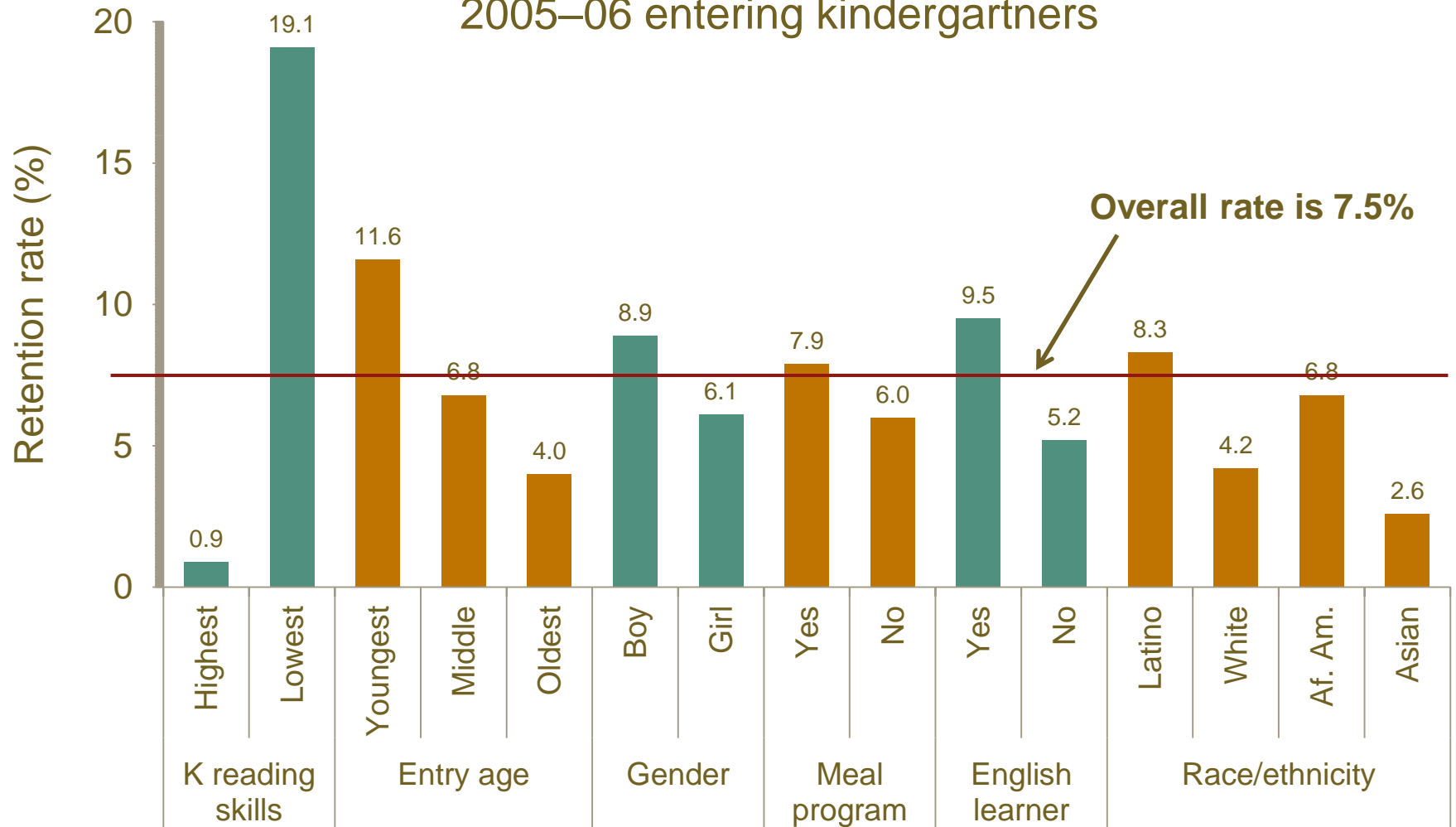
Outline

- Who is at risk of retention?
- Academic improvement for retained students
- Policy implications



Retention Rates Vary Widely

Retention rates before third grade
2005–06 entering kindergartners



Risk Factors Stay Significant After Adjusting for Other Factors

- Differences are smaller
- Age and gender greatest predictors
- African American students 1 percentage point *more* likely than Latinos
- Meal program participation and EL status have much smaller effects



Multiple Factors Greatly Increase Risk

- 2 or more risk factors: higher probability
 - Younger age a key factor
 - About 1 in 10 likelihood for younger boys
- 1 risk factor: relatively low probability
 - Older girls at lowest risk
 - Asians especially low risk



Retention Rates Vary Across Schools

- Higher rates at low API rank schools
- Student demographics and performance not the only factors
 - 17% of schools had no retention in 2008
 - Half were low API
- Differences among schools with similar ranks



Outline

- Who is at risk of retention?
- **Academic improvement for retained students**
- Policy implications



First-Grade Repeaters Improve Across All Groups

- Significant gains in reading skills in repeated year
 - From 40% to 64% correct
 - 71% for non-retained students
- Similar gains for students with different risk factors



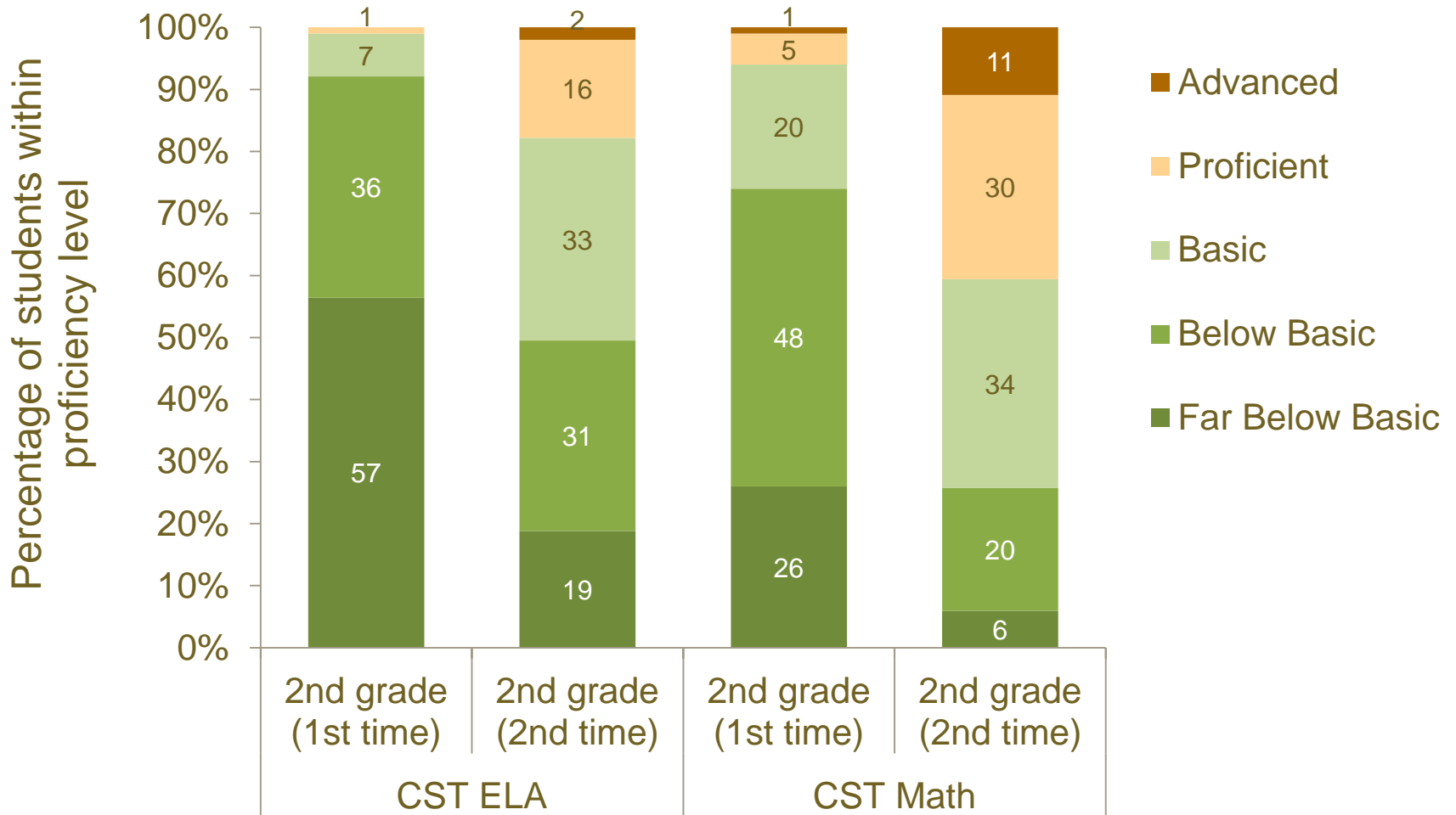
Second Grade Repeaters Also Assessed

- California Standards Test (CST)
- Improve at least one proficiency level?
 - Reasonable goal for retained students
- Achieve proficient status?
 - Key accountability measure

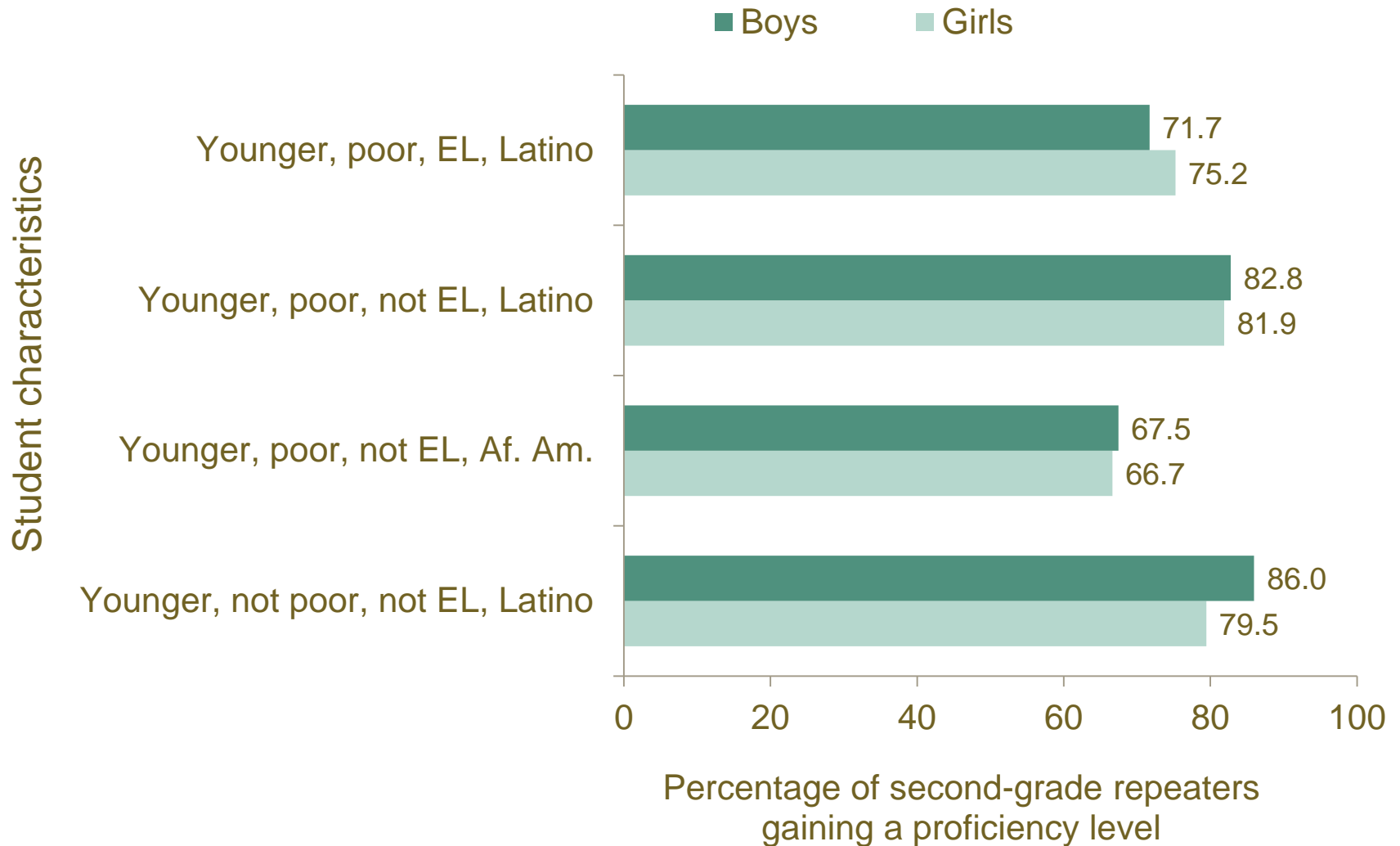


Many Second-Grade Repeaters Make Meaningful Gains

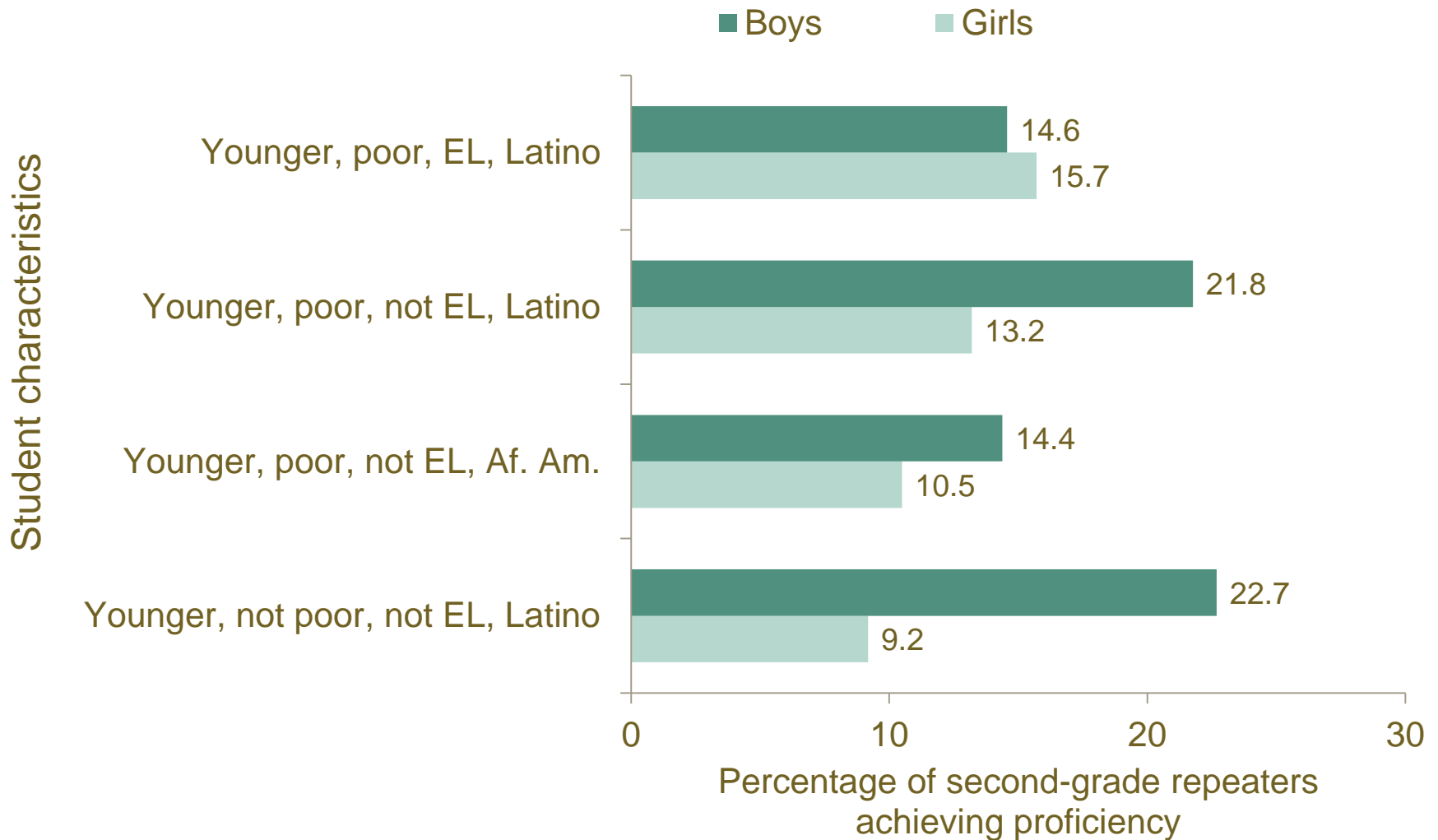
Many make proficiency level gains



Majorities Likely to Gain ELA Proficiency Level



Some Repeaters Likely to Achieve ELA Proficient Status



Retention Can Have Short-Term Benefits

- Retained students do not catch up to students who never repeated a grade
 - Starker difference for ELA than math
- But some repeaters can make significant gains
- Second-grade repeaters may have better performance than if never retained



Principal Perspectives Vary

- Differing philosophies help explain differences across schools
 - Half don't feel it's effective in long run
- Parent consent key
- Early intervention options preferable



Outline

- Who is at risk of retention?
- Academic improvement for retained students
- **Policy implications**



Retention A Serious Step, But Can Help Some Students

- Retention is a local and state concern
- Transitional kindergarten policy may reduce rates
- Prevention and long-term outcomes need more study
 - Statewide longitudinal data needs
- If other options fail, retention may be appropriate



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Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.

