

Repeating a Grade

Headline

Among children in grades one through three, non-Hispanic blacks are much more likely than other children to have repeated a grade of primary school. In 2003, 10 percent of non-Hispanic black children had repeated a grade, compared with 1 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander children, 4 percent of non-Hispanic white children, and 6 percent of Hispanic children of the same age. ([See Figure 2](#))

Importance

Young children often repeat grades because teachers or parents feel they have not acquired the appropriate academic or social skills to advance to the next grade. Some argue that by spending an extra year, children will have the time to gain the necessary skills needed for success in the next grade. However, much research shows that repeating a grade actually does not benefit children academically or socially.¹ Those students who repeated a grade continued to score significantly below other low-scoring peers who had not been held back on standardized tests. One study of children who had repeated second grade found that their performance scores were very similar to those of students in special education. Children who were retained in the first grade were more likely than other students to drop out of school.²

While cause and effect are difficult to untangle, grade retention can also produce more negative socioemotional development. In contrast to matched comparison groups, one study found children who had repeated a grade showed poorer social adjustment, more negative attitudes towards school, more problem behaviors and less frequent attendance, although other studies found fewer significant differences.³ At the same time, others argue against the practice of ‘social promotion,’ or promoting children just so they can continue on with their peers.⁴ Other options, such as making sure children with disabilities are receiving special education, early intervention programs, or preschool attendance, should also be explored.^{5,6}

Trends

Between 1993 and 1999, the percentage of first through third graders who had repeated a grade of primary school increased from 5 percent to almost 7 percent, before returning to 5 percent in 2003. ([See Figure 1](#))

While patterns for non-Hispanic white children follow the overall trends, patterns for non-Hispanic black children have been less consistent, with the highest reported percentage since 1993 occurring in 2003. ([See Table 1](#))

Note: Those children who only repeated kindergarten or who delayed the start of kindergarten are excluded from all of these estimates.

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Non-Hispanic black children in grades one through three are much more likely than other children to have repeated a grade of primary school. In 2003, 10 percent of non-Hispanic black children had repeated a grade, compared with 1 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander children, 4 percent of non-Hispanic white children, and 6 percent of Hispanic children of the same age. ([See Figure 2](#))

Differences by Parental Education

Children whose parents have more than a high school degree are much less likely than children whose parents have less education to repeat a grade. In 2003, 2 percent of children with a parent who had a bachelor's degree or more and 4 percent of children whose parents completed some college or a technical vocational degree had repeated a grade, compared with 8 percent of children whose parents received a high school degree or equivalent and 10 percent of children whose parents had a high school degree or less. ([See Figure 3](#))

Differences by Neighborhood Poverty Level

First through third graders living in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of child poverty are more likely than other children to have ever repeated a grade in primary school. Thirteen percent of children living in a neighborhood where 20 percent or more of the children lived in poor households had ever repeated a grade in 2003, compared with 7 percent of children living in a neighborhood with 10 percent to 19 percent of children living in poverty, 5 percent of children living in a neighborhood with 5 to 9 percent in poverty, and 3 percent of children living in a neighborhood with less than 5 percent poverty. ([See Figure 4](#))

Differences by Poverty Level and TANF/AFDC benefits

Children living in a household with an income at or below the poverty level are more likely than those living in a household above the poverty level to have ever repeated a grade (10 percent versus 4 percent, respectively, in 2003). Children receiving TANF in the past year were more than three times as likely as those not receiving TANF to have ever repeated a grade in 2003 (14 percent versus 4 percent, respectively). ([See Table 1](#))

Similar patterns exist for Medicaid and food stamp receipt. In 2003, children receiving Medicaid or food stamps were more likely than other children to have ever repeated a grade. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Region

First through third graders living in the South are more likely than first through third graders living in the Midwest and the West to have repeated a grade (8 percent versus 3 percent, respectively, in 2003). ([See Table 1](#)) Five percent of children living in the Northeast had repeated a grade.

State and Local Estimates

None available

International Estimates

None available

National Goals

None known

Definition

This indicator includes children in first through third grade or the equivalent if they are home-schooled etc.

Parents who answered yes, when asked if their children had repeated any grade since first grade, are included in these estimates.

Data Source

Child Trends' original analyses of data from the National Household Education Survey.

Raw Data Source

National Household Education Survey
<http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/>

Next Update

Unknown

¹Jimerson, Shane R., Kaufman, Amber M. (2003). "Reading, writing, and retention: A primer on grade retention research." 00340561. *Reading Teacher*, 56(7).

² Randolph, Karen, Fraser, Mark, and Orthner, Dennis. "Educational Resilience among Youth at Risk". *Substance Use & Misuse*, 39(5):747-767.

³Jimerson, Shane R. and Kaufman, Amber M. (2003).

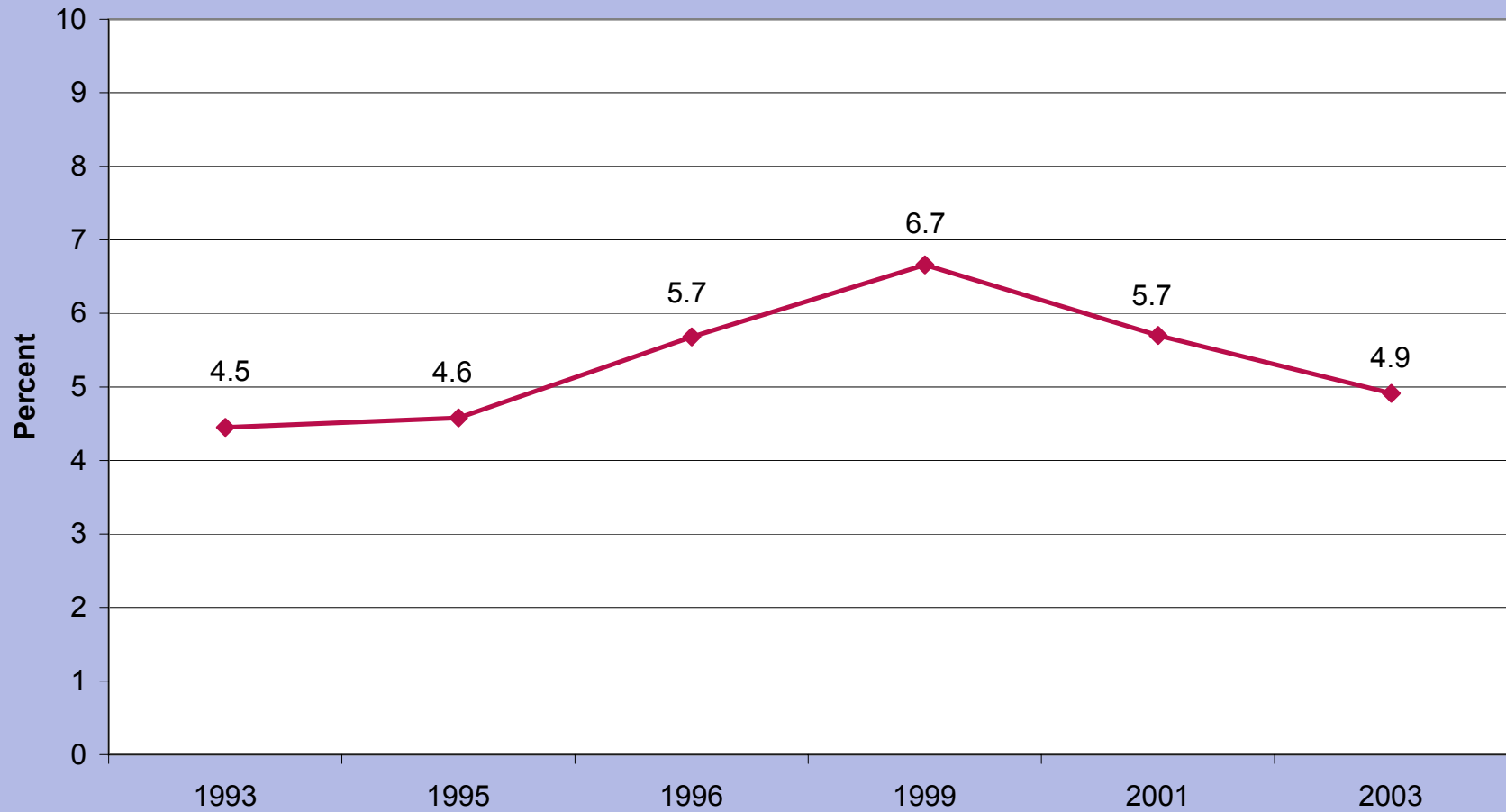
⁴Jimerson, Shane R. and Kaufman, Amber M. (2003).

⁵ U.S. Department of Education. (1999). "Taking Responsibility for Ending Social Promotion: A Guide for Educators and State and Local Leaders." Available at:
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/socialpromotion/index.html>.

⁶Reynolds, Arthur J., Temple, Judy A., and Ou, Suh-Ruu. (Sep/Oct 2003). "School-Based Early Intervention and Child Well-Being in the Chicago Longitudinal study." *Child Welfare*, 82(5):633-657.

Figure 1

The Percentage of Children in Grades 1 through 3 who Repeated a Grade,* 1993-2003

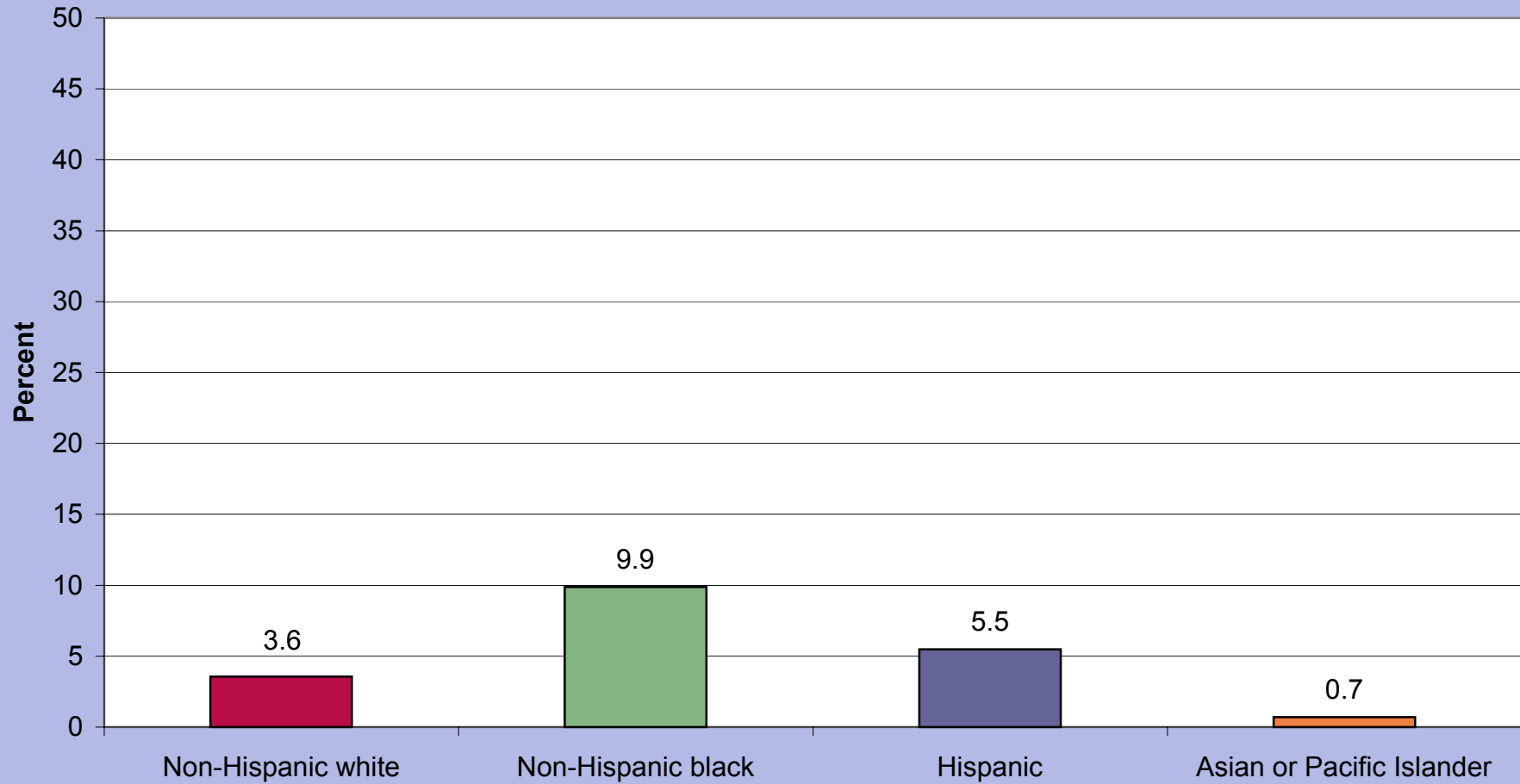


* Those who repeated Kindergarten are not included in these estimates.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.

Figure 2

Percentage of Children in Grades 1 through 3 Who Repeated a Grade,* by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2003

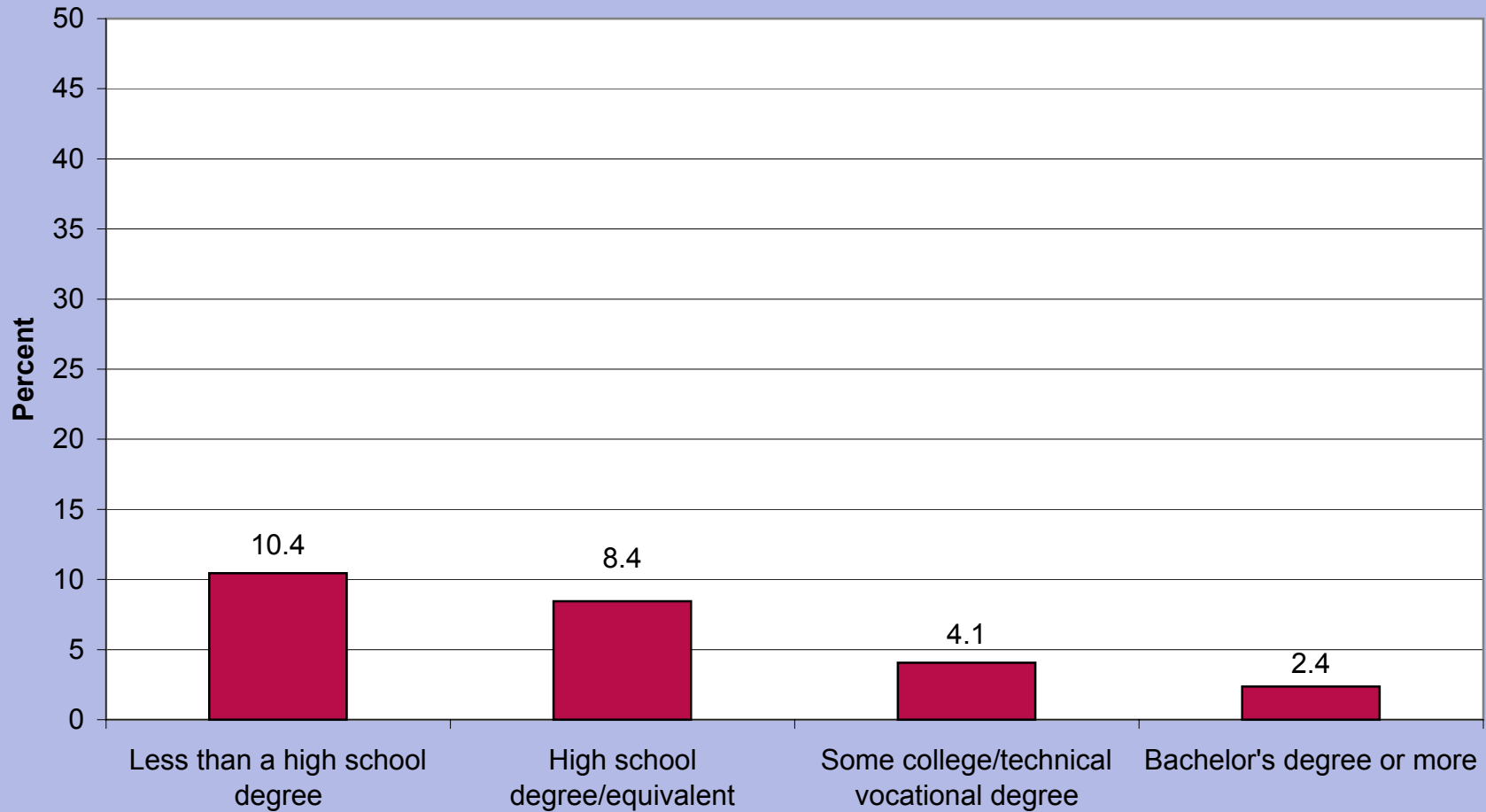


* Those who repeated Kindergarten are not included in these estimates.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.

Figure 3

Percentage of Children in Grades 1 through 3 Who Repeated a Grade,* by Parental Education, 2003

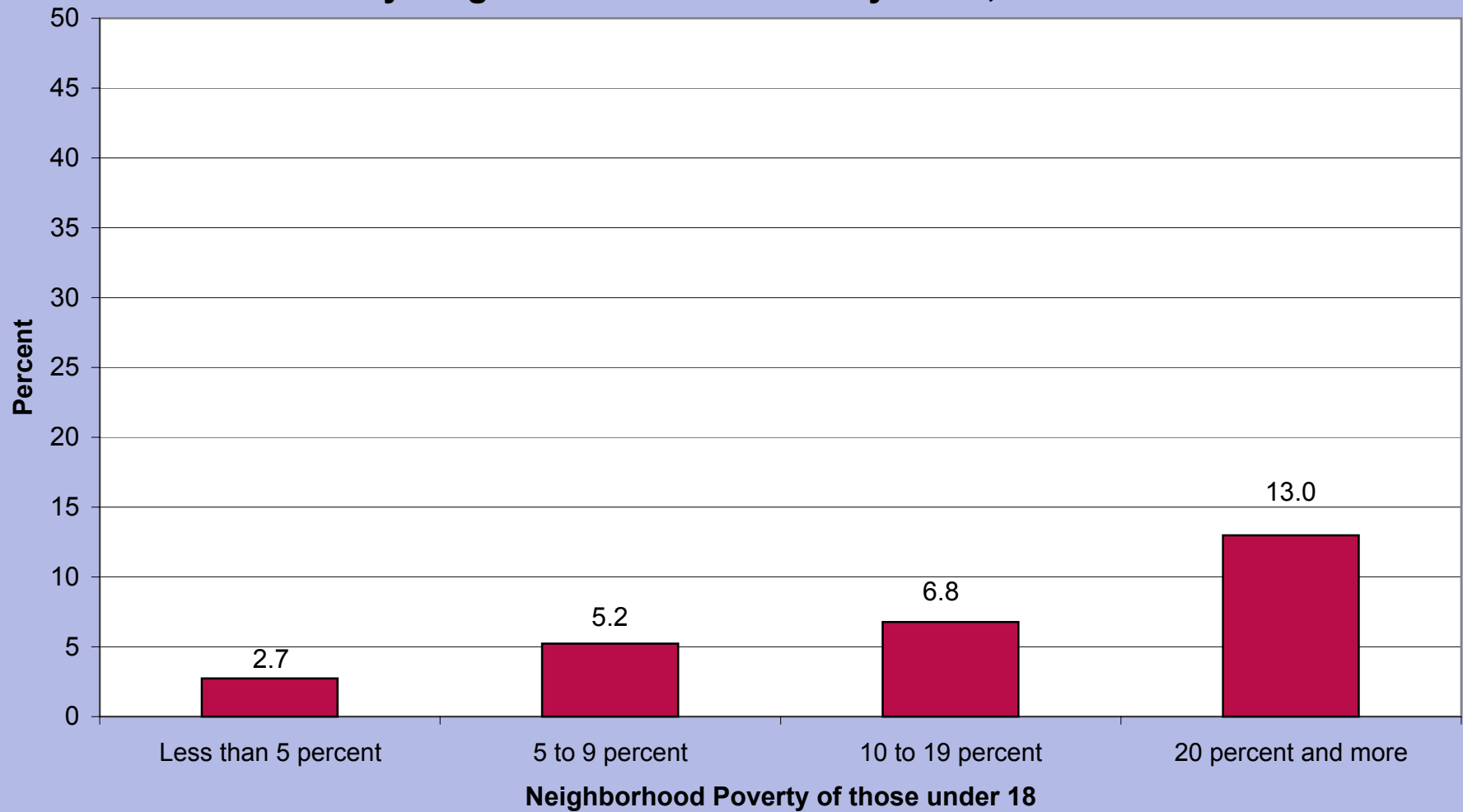


* Those who repeated Kindergarten are not included in these estimates.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.

Figure 4

Percentage of Children in Grades 1 through 3 Who Repeated a Grade,* by Neighborhood Child Poverty Level, 2003



* Those who repeated Kindergarten are not included in these estimates. Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.

Table 1

Percentage of Children in Grades 1 through 3 who Repeated a Grade,* 1993-2003

	1993	1995	1996	1999	2001	2003
Total	4.5	4.6	5.7	6.7	5.7	4.9
Gender						
Male	5.0	5.4	7.4	8.5	6.8	5.8
Female	3.9	3.7	3.9	4.8	4.5	4.0
Race/Ethnicity						
Non-Hispanic white	3.5	3.6	4.4	5.7	4.3	3.6
Non-Hispanic black	9.0	7.1	8.3	8.9	8.6	9.9
Hispanic	5.6	8.2	8.5	8.6	7.9	5.5
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.5	0.0	2.6	1.2	0.0	0.7
Parental Education						
Less than a high school degree	11.8	9.5	12.9	13.8	15.4	10.4
High school degree/equivalent	6.3	5.8	7.3	8.6	8.3	8.4
Some college/technical vocational degree	2.8	4.6	4.4	5.3	4.7	4.1
Bachelor's degree or more	1.5	1.9	2.6	4.3	1.7	2.4
Immigrant Status						
Native born with native born parents	-	-	-	6.8	5.7	4.8
Native born with a foreign born parent	-	-	-	5.5	4.3	4.2
Foreign born	-	-	-	8.7	6.8	8.1
Primary Language Spoken in the Home						
Both parents' main language is English	4.5	4.4	5.5	6.6	5.6	5.0
One parent's main language is not English	1.4	8.5	17.4	3.3	8.3	5.9
Neither parent's main language is English	4.8	6.1	5.8	8.4	5.8	3.9
Poverty level						
Household income at or below poverty line	-	-	-	-	-	10.0
Household income above poverty line	-	-	-	-	-	3.6
WIC benefits						
Received WIC benefits in the past 12 months	-	6.6	4.6	7.8	6.5	6.6
Did not receive WIC benefits in the past 12 months	-	4.4	5.8	6.5	5.6	4.7
TANF/AFDC benefits						
Received TANF/AFDC benefits in the past 12 months	-	7.8	9.9	12.4	-	14.0
Did not receive TANF/AFDC benefits in the past 12 months	-	4.2	5.0	6.0	-	4.2
Medicaid Receipt						
Received Medicaid in the past 12 months	-	-	-	-	11.6	10.9
Did not receive Medicaid in the past 12 months	-	-	-	-	4.3	3.5
Food Stamp Receipt						
Received food stamps in the past 12 months	-	8.3	9.6	13.0	14.5	11.2
Did not receive food stamps in the past 12 months	-	3.7	4.6	5.4	4.3	3.9
Urbanicity						
Urban, inside urbanized area	4.1	4.9	-	5.9	5.9	5.1
Urban, outside urbanized area	4.4	4.7	-	7.8	6.2	3.9
Rural	5.5	3.9	-	8.1	5.0	5.0
Region						
Northeast	5.1	5.9	5.0	6.0	4.6	5.1
Midwest	3.7	2.6	5.1	5.2	4.3	3.3
South	5.9	5.9	7.8	8.7	7.3	7.5
West	2.4	3.2	3.4	5.6	5.7	2.7
Neighborhood Poverty (of those under 18)						
Less than 5 percent	3.4	3.2	-	4.1	4.3	2.7
5 to 9 percent	3.4	3.5	-	7.1	5.6	5.2
10 to 19 percent	6.2	7.1	-	9.5	7.4	6.8
20 percent and more	8.2	9.1	-	9.6	8.9	13.0
Type of School						
Public	4.6	4.6	6.1	6.8	6.1	5.4
Private	3.0	2.7	3.9	5.1	5.4	5.4
Church-related	3.3	4.8	2.3	5.5	1.7	1.1
Current grade level						
First grade	4.5	3.1	4.0	3.6	2.6	2.4
Second grade	4.4	4.3	6.3	9.5	8.4	6.1
Third grade	3.4	6.3	7.0	7.3	6.3	6.5

* Those who repeated Kindergarten are not included in these estimates.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.