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# Challenges that Educators Face When Providing English Language Arts Instruction to K-5 Elementary Students in Title 1 Schools

Shari A. Clarke  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Shari Clarke

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Challenges that Educators Face When Providing English Language Arts Instruction to  
K-5 Elementary Students in Title 1 Schools

by

Shari Clarke

MA, Walden University, 2009

BS, Montclair State University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2024

## Abstract

Students in Title 1 school districts continue to fall far behind their peers academically in comparison to neighboring suburban districts. School reform has unsuccessfully attempted to improve test scores by consistently changing reading curriculums and mandating the use of various resources that fail when implemented. Struggling school districts must use research-based strategies that include educators' perspectives to best identify how to successfully increase student achievement. Test scores reveal that schools in a Title 1 school district in northern New Jersey are lacking proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA). The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that educators face when providing ELA instruction to students. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the work of Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kliener. The secondary framework was based on the work of Bronfenbrenner. A qualitative research design was used to collect ethnographic data to investigate the problem with a purposeful sample of 15 district educators. The participant interviews offered a better understanding of some of the challenges that educators face when providing ELA instruction to students in Title 1 school districts. Data were coded and analyzed. Findings indicated challenges stemming from unrealistic expectations of teachers, post pandemic issues, students with learning barriers, and a need for partnership between schools and parents. A 3-day professional development project was developed for teachers and administrators. This research may contribute to positive social change by offering stakeholders suggestions that can increase academic achievement for all students.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

Literacy is a national concern and testing has been a way to focus on English Language Arts (ELA). In elementary schools, ELA instruction teaches students reading and writing. Learning to read is a complex phenomenon that requires a student to understand spoken language, identify graphic symbols, and decode context and meaning (Landerl et al., 2021). Although fundamentally different, reading and writing both require students to tap into similar cognitive skills (Golden Hughes et al., 2021). Reading requires the use of preexisting knowledge and writing requires the use of this same knowledge during the writing process (2021). Studies have reported that the earlier a child is exposed to effective literacy education the greater academic success they will have in the future (Majorano et al., 2022).

School reform has made progress in improving literacy instruction; however, Title 1 school districts continue to struggle with reading comprehension and achievement (Medina et al., 2021). This study is necessary because more research is needed about the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA in urban Title 1 school districts. Research that explores these educational challenges may influence positive social change by offering school districts solutions for improving K-5 academic instruction for underachieving students.

The problem I investigated in this study is the low achievement for K-5 elementary students in ELA in an urban Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) stated that Title 1 School Districts

contain children that are characterized as financially challenged. These districts are to be provided appropriate funding through various grants to establish a means for students to achieve academic success (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The district in this study has a large population of African American students and a rapidly increasing population of English language learner students. Underprivileged school districts like this have consistently struggled to acquire the resources necessary for academic success (Kainz, 2019).

The district in this study has a target goal of 38.3% proficiency in ELA (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2021). This ELA proficiency target goal of 38.3 % is significantly lower than that of their counterparts in neighboring suburban districts which have target goal scores as high as 88.3 % (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2021). Despite the amount of research and reform placed in improving academic achievement, economics and demographics are still the dominant determining factors for student success or failure academically (Cherfas et al., 2021). This study will add to the body of research by investigating the challenges that K-5 urban Title 1 elementary educators of low achieving students are facing in providing equitable ELA instruction.

### **Rationale**

The problem to be investigated in this study is the low achievement for K-5 elementary students in ELA in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. Title 1 school districts are comprised of a high number of students who are characterized as financially challenged or in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

The neighborhood that a student goes to school in can correlate with how they will academically achieve due to a disproportionate number of educational resources, high quality educators, discipline matters, and special education concerns (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021). The students in the district in this study have low achievement in ELA.

In 2019, New Jersey reported that on average Black and Hispanic fourth grade students achieved 27 % lower than their peers on state reading tests (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-b). On this same report, students that were national school lunch program eligible received a 30 % lower average score than students that were not eligible. According to the school district in this study, in 2018, it had a target goal score of 38.3% for student proficiency on their annual English language standardized test, while their counterparts in neighboring suburban districts had target goal scores as high as 80 % student proficiency. Additionally, according to the school district, in 2021, it had a target goal score of 38.3% for student proficiency on their annual English language standardized test, while their counterparts in neighboring suburban districts had target goal scores as high as 83.3% student proficiency. This data suggests that this district has an almost 40% lower target goal for their students to be proficient on the ELA standardized test than students in neighboring districts. This is a significant difference in achievement.

With classrooms becoming more diverse, educators must find solutions to increase the low achievement in literacy for all children (Langeloo et al., 2022). According to the State of New Jersey (n.d.) English language arts assessment data, the test results for new Jersey students in 2021 displayed White or Asian students scoring an

average of 60 % - 80 % proficiency while Black or Hispanic scored an average of 30 % - 35 % proficiency. A districts effectiveness relates to their ability to provide effective and equitably based instruction to every student (Anderson & Young, 2018). Educators and stakeholders must find solutions to improving literacy achievement outcomes for all students. The intention of investigating the challenges that K-5 elementary educators are facing in providing ELA instruction for low achieving students is so teachers can be better equipped to improve instruction to help increase literacy achievement for urban, Title 1 students in the future.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used in this project study.

*Culturally competent instruction*: Culturally competent instruction is curriculum that was founded in culturally responsive pedagogy that enables students to meet high content standards while simultaneously learning about culture that relates to their experience (Cherfas et al., 2021).

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)*: Research defined the concept of "culturally relevant" and "culturally responsive" pedagogy as instruction that is informed by the lived experiences of marginalized student populations (Kelly et al., 2021). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires educators to question how their perception of their students influences their ability to achieve (Moule, 2012). This knowledge is used to guide instruction that best meets the needs of diverse students.



*Disadvantaged students:* Disadvantaged students can be characterized as those that struggle succeeding academically due to several limiting factors that include racism, economics, and discrimination (Dixson, 2023).

*Diverse student population:* Diverse students represent a population that integrates individuals from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds, sexes, ethnicities, cultures, and cognitive capabilities (Brown & Juvonen, 2018). The term *diversity* in New Jersey school districts pertains to the practice of including all students albeit their ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religious practice, or cognitive and physical capacity (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2023a).

*English Language Arts (ELA):* The Department of Education defined ELA as literacy instruction that develops student skills in the foundations of reading, writing, listening, and communication (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2024).

*Literacy:* Literacy pertains to a student's ability to read and write. Although fundamentally different, reading and writing both require students to tap into similar cognitive skills (Golden et al., 2021). Reading can be defined as one's ability to decode letters, fluently identify words in sequence, and to effectively understand the meaning of words (Ecalte et al., 2021). Learning to read is a complex phenomenon that requires a student to understand spoken language, identify graphic symbols, and be able to decode context and meaning (Landerl et al., 2021). Reading requires the use of preexisting knowledge and writing requires the use of this same knowledge during the writing process (Golden et al., 2021).

*Reading instruction:* Learning to read is a complex phenomenon that requires a student to understand spoken language, identify graphic symbols, and their ability to decode context and meaning (Landerl et al., 2021). ELA instruction aims to teach students how to identify and comprehend vocabulary within texts efficiently (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2023).

*State standards:* State standards are research-based guidelines or expectations that outline what students should achieve at each grade level in every content area to prepare them for success after the completion of their elementary education State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2023a).

*Title 1 school district:* The National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.-c) stated that Title 1 School Districts enroll children who are characterized as financially challenged or in poverty. The term Title 1 in New Jersey school districts is a school classification that identifies populations that have high volumes of students coming from families in poverty (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2023c).

### **Significance of the Study**

With classrooms becoming more diverse, educators must find solutions to increasing the low achievement in literacy for diverse children (Langeloo et al., 2022). Diverse student populations represent individuals from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds, sexes, ethnicities, cultures, and cognitive capabilities (Brown & Juvonen, 2018). This study is significant because there is more research needed about the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA in urban, Title 1 school districts. Students of color are one of the populations

represented in Title 1 school districts. Children of color are trying to learn to read while being raised in communities accustomed to failure and defeat (Carter, 2022). This study has the potential to make an original contribution to the local and global education setting by highlighting the challenges to the instruction of low achieving students in an urban K-5 elementary Title 1 school district, in northern New Jersey. The elementary level focus of this basic qualitative study is significant in that younger students have a higher possibility of increasing achievement than older students since achievement discrepancies do not decrease as elementary students progress into higher grade levels (Scammacca et al., 2020).

This study might be useful to the local and global educational setting by exploring the challenges that educators are facing in ELA instruction for low achieving students. It may create more culturally competent pedagogy that could lead to increased student achievement among diverse student populations. School leaders can create successful learning environments for low achieving students when they use a culturally competent mindset (Kamm, 2018). Culturally competent instruction is the educational practice that requires educators to question their behaviors and thoughts about diverse students during the planning and instructional process (Moule & Jean, 2011). With the current influx of diverse students in public school systems, there is a need for educators of disadvantaged children to feel that they can educate proficiently (Clark, 2020).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA in an urban, Title 1

school district in northern, New Jersey. Social research uses various techniques to deeply evaluate human behavior through surveys, demography, experiments, and interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Through interviews, the following questions will guide this project study to examine the challenges of educators.

RQ1: What challenges do K-5 elementary educators face when providing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction to low achieving students in a local, Title 1 school district in northern, NJ?

RQ2: What resources and supports do elementary educators need to overcome the challenges they face when providing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction to low achieving students in a local, Title 1 school district in northern, NJ?

To address these research questions, I explored the perceptions of elementary educators regarding the challenges they are facing when trying to assist their students in increasing academic achievement in ELA.

### **Review of the Literature**

In this project study, I explored the challenges that K-5 elementary educators are facing with ELA instruction for low achieving students in an urban, Title 1 school district. The district in this study has a diverse student population (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-a). Diverse students represent a population that integrates individuals from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds, sexes, ethnicities, cultures, and cognitive capabilities (Brown & Juvonen, 2018). Low achievement for diverse students has been of top concern for policy makers and school district leaders (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021). ELA proficiency in diverse students has been a primary issue due to its

literacy implications. Students that do not achieve academically do not meet positive outcomes later in life (Garcia-Borrego et al., 2020; Scammacca et al., 2020). With a greater influx of diverse students in classrooms, education leaders must better address the challenges to instruction that face these students (Clark, 2020). For school systems to make lasting change, everyone in the school community must be a part of that change (Senge et al., 2000). This suggested a need for the research in this study.

Disparities in low achieving students in schools can be attributed to the focus on testing instead of research based instructional strategies that incorporate the culture and experience of diverse learners (Cherfas et al., 2018; Kamm, 2018). A vast amount of research suggests some of the known challenges for instructing low achieving students to be a lack of equitable resources, culturally incompetent curriculum, high-stakes testing, discriminatory discipline tactics, ineffective pre-teacher training, and inadequate family support (Cherfas et al., 2018; Cramer et al., 2021; Hogue et al., 2020; Kamm, 2018; Massing et al., 2023; Myers, 2023; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021; Watkinson et al., 2022). Understanding the challenges that educators are facing may help other educators improve their instruction of diverse students. It may also help district leaders explore how to address achievement discrepancies more effectively. These concepts define the phenomenon that grounds this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study was primarily based on the work of Senge et al. (2000). For schools to make lasting change, educational reforms must consider the way that people think and relate to one another (Senge et al., 2000). A

successful school district encourages every person in the learning community to learn from each other. System thinking must become a way of considering every aspect of education (Senge et al., 2000). School systems must become places that connect teachers, students, and parents. Every person must feel responsible for the learning that takes place within the school system.

This study was secondarily based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1989). According to Bronfenbrenner's seminal work, a sense of belonging and school climate directly influence a student's ability to learn and achieve academically. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory states that students are influenced by five systems known as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Each system influences a student in different capacities with the greatest influence being the microsystem (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The microsystem includes what has the greatest influence because of its immediate contact with a student which includes environment, friendships, educators, siblings, and parents (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022).

School systems must collectively evaluate how they think about the thinking and learning that takes place (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Senge et al., 2000). Creating successful environments for students to learn is one of the most significant aspects of school climate (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The community, school and classroom are a systematic unit that must work together to ensure that effective student learning occurs. If one part of the unit is not working properly, it can damage all the other parts of the learning unit. Low ELA achievement for K-5 elementary students in Title 1 school districts reflects a problem in the educational system. Lasting change cannot occur within schools without

the commitment and involvement of every person in the learning system including administrators, teachers, students, and community members (Senge et al., 2000).

Following this framework, the study could assist educators in improving achievement in the K-5 ELA instruction in urban Title 1 schools by influencing the knowledge of the entire urban school system. Exploring the challenges presented by various K-5 elementary educators will highlight multiple themes that influence the low ELA achievement in urban Title 1 schools.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

To assist with the investigation of this study, I explored Walden University databases through the online library. I primarily searched Education Source, ERIC, and SAGE journals. I searched these databases using various keywords such as *urban education, challenges to urban education, literacy, elementary education, challenges to literacy, academic achievement, achievement gaps, understanding the perspectives of educators, culturally competent instruction, culturally responsive instruction, disability, state standards, diverse student population, Title 1 school districts, reading instruction* and *ELA*. These combinations and key words provided preliminary research that was pertinent to the problem explored in this study. The current literature discussed in this review was published between 2018 and 2023. However, older references were used for the conceptual framework and seminal works.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA in an urban Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. In the following section keywords and concepts

are discussed and related to the problem and purpose of this project study through the literature review. The topics include characteristics of Title 1 school districts, diverse student populations, defining academic achievement, understanding the perspectives of educators, challenges to urban education, strategies to improve ELA achievement, integrating culturally responsive instruction, exploring literacy instruction, incorporating systematic school wide thinking, and identifying relevant data. This literary review concludes with a summary of the key words and educational concepts discussed.

### **Characteristics of Title 1 School Districts**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.-c), Title 1 School Districts enroll children who are characterized as financially challenged. The initial purpose of identifying Title 1 school districts was to ensure that students in low achieving and increased poverty school districts received adequate funding to incorporate school wide interventions that best improved insufficient academic achievement (United States Department of Education, 2018b). The National Center for Education Statistics stated that Title 1 School Districts are to receive funds that consist of four categories that include basic grants, concentration grants, targeted grants, and education finance incentive grants. These grants allocate funds based on mathematical formulas and demographical data that calculate a districts poverty levels, school age population, and income (United States Department of Education, 2018b). However, there are consistent achievement gaps for disadvantaged students which suggests that Title 1 school district interventions are not meeting the academic needs of this student population (Kainz, 2019).



One of the greatest struggles for students in Title 1 school districts is poverty. Poverty and a lack of basic resources is connected to student achievement. Poverty correlates with the level of education that the parents of students have, inadequate social exposure, and automatically being enrolled in a low achieving school system (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Living at varying levels of poverty can also affect different aspects of a child's daily life. Some of the negative outcomes caused by poverty are the number of other people living in their home, domestic violence/abuse, lack of familial support, and inadequate access to nutrition (Silva-Laya et al., 2020).

### **Diverse Student Populations**

Title 1 school districts contain a diverse population of students. Diverse students derive from various socioeconomic backgrounds, sexes, ethnicities, cultures, and cognitive capabilities (Brown & Juvonen, 2018). While African American and White school enrollment has decreased in the past few years, Hispanic student enrollment has significantly increased (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The early childhood classroom is becoming more diverse with students that can speak multiple languages (Langeloo et al., 2022).

With the current global climate, there is also a rising number of displaced and refugee children entering classrooms. These diverse students must adjust to learning a new language while also typically suffering from racism and exclusion amongst their peers and educators (Massing et al., 2023). Many of these students experience more trauma upon arriving to the United States than in their own country which is in part due

to increased police presence, lowered educational standards, and discriminatory instructional practices (Myers, 2023).

A refugee can be identified by multiple criteria, but they are each similar in that they have been forced to transition from one country to another for various reasons that include but are not limited to war and violence (Massing et al., 2023). Although there have been admission policy changes, the United States has historically taken in more individuals identified as refugees than any other country (Morales, 2022). Students that have a refugee status may struggle academically due to trauma, language identification, discrimination, disruptions in formal education, and culture integration (Kazu & Deniz, 2022; Massing et al., 2023). When students are forced to migrate, they experience trauma induced by the moving process, racism, and exploitation (Kazu & Deniz, 2022). Some of the challenges to educating refugee students include language barriers, access to appropriate instructional materials, and classroom size (Kazu & Deniz, 2022). With an increase of diverse students, district leaders must integrate research-based strategies to best instruct these students.

English language learners are identified as students who live in an English-speaking country that predominantly speak another language (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2022). English Language Learners (ELLs) represent one of the most prevalent student groups in the United States and they face some of the most difficult threats to their education which include language acquisition, achievement discrepancies, personal insecurities, and acclimating to the school environment (Watkinson et al., 2022). One student in every five students in an American classroom primarily speaks another

language other than English (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2022). With a growing number of ELLs in urban classrooms, school leaders must find more culturally responsive strategies to assist them in academic success.

### ***Special Need Students and Students with Disabilities***

Special education was initially created to offer differentiated quality educational services for students that were typically marginalized due to special needs or disabilities (Proffitt, 2020). Like racial inequalities, students with disabilities are also a marginalized group (Watkinson et al., 2022). Higher level content standards present pedagogical challenges for diverse students including those that differ in culture, language, and cognitive abilities (Cramer et al., 2021). Research also shows that some school children that are having difficulty focusing on their classrooms are often misdiagnosed with learning disabilities instead of their real needs being addressed equitably (Senge et al., 2000). Proffitt (2020) stated that African American students are often further discriminated against when they are incorrectly labeled as cognitively or behaviorally disabled. Schools must change these limiting practices and create inclusive spaces for all their students to learn equitably.

Anderson and Young (2018) suggests that a districts effectiveness relates to their ability to provide effective and equitably based instruction to every student. For Title 1 school districts to create successful learning systems, the needs of all their diverse students must be considered and valued. When all student needs are not at the center of educational practice there will be gaps in academic achievement. These gaps in achievement reflect a larger problem of inequality (Schlueter, 2021).

## **Defining Academic Achievement**

Achievement is used to measure the success of an education system (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Ramlackhan and Wang (2021) stated that there is a direct correlation between income and achievement. The research suggested that the neighborhood that a student goes to school in influences how much they will academically achieve due to a disproportionate number of educational resources, high quality educators, discipline concerns, and special education concerns. Historically, school systems in the United States are challenged by their need to close academic achievement gaps (Flores, 2018). An achievement gap is characterized as a gap between two groups of students where one student population significantly achieves higher academic outcomes than the other student population (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021; Hung et al., 2019;). The term achievement gap has recently been labeled as discriminatory since it implies a deficit in racially marginalized populations instead of centering its focus on systematic educational inequality (Quinn et al., 2019). These inequalities correlate with the research that suggests that students that are given adequate resources to achieve academically have a higher potential to succeed later in life (Kamm, 2018).

Achievement disparities for disadvantaged students suggest that public school interventions are still not meeting the academic needs of this student population (Kainz, 2019). This disparity in academic achievement is significantly higher in inner city school districts (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021), like the Title 1 district in this study. Students that do not achieve academically continue this trend with many negative outcomes that include poverty, drug use, prison, and inadequate health (Kamm, 2018). Educational

policy continues to view gaps in achievement as a singular problem that increasing test scores can solve. However, gaps in achievement reflect a larger concern of inequality that reside within and outside of school districts (Schlueter, 2021).

### **The Many Challenges that Teachers in K-5 Title 1 Schools Face when Teaching Literacy**

Social research uses various techniques to comprehensively evaluate human behavior (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used qualitative interviews to explore the challenges that educators face in K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 schools. Understanding the perspective of educators can lead to positive social change. One dominant change agent for schools that have low achieving students is a successful school leader (Kamm, 2018). These school leaders include administrators, teachers, and support staff. According to Senge et al. (2000), for school systems to become successful learning environments, they must become places that connect teachers, students, and parents. This study may provide an opportunity for a diverse group of educators to discuss the challenges that they face to their instruction which may assist district leaders in connecting all members of the school system.

#### ***Teachers***

One challenge that teachers in Title 1 school districts face instructing low achieving students is the teacher and student dynamic. The student and teacher relationship are a complex phenomenon. Although school reform and school policy outline what students must learn academically one of the major influences on student success is the relationship between the student and their teacher (Cer & Solak, 2018;

Cherfas et al., 2018; Whaley et al., 2019). Teachers influence a large part of the learning experience for students. One indicator of a high-quality classroom is successful student to teacher experiences and interactions (Sutton et al., 2021).

A second challenge teachers of low achieving students face is not being efficiently trained to teach standardized objectives to students with diverse needs (Cramer et al., 2021). Cramer et al. (2021) stated that content standards present pedagogical challenges for diverse students including those that differ in culture, language, and cognitive abilities. Medina et al. (2021) investigated the increased student achievement for reading comprehension in students that were instructed by teachers that were given opportunities to engage in consistent and thoughtful professional development. Without adequate opportunities to engage in effective professional development, instruction and achievement is hindered.

Another challenge teachers face is teacher retention. According to Nápoles et al. (2022), half of first-time educators quit within in the first5 years of their teaching career. Research also indicated that many teachers of diverse students leave the profession before their tenure (Hogue et al., 2020). Underprivileged school districts that lack the number of teachers necessary to teach academically challenging standards (Cramer et al., 2021) can lead to teacher burn out. Teacher-burn-out describes a gradual process that ranges from an emotional loss of motivation to a loss of employee commitment (Nápoles et al., 2022).

### ***Administration***

One of the major challenges that teachers face in literacy instruction is the effectiveness of their administrator. The success of school reform is often reliant upon an

administrator's ability to successfully execute it (Kim & Weiner, 2022). Francois (2021) discussed an inner-city school that was successful in improving the literacy of their students due to the leadership of its principal. This principal created a nurturing environment where all members of the school community were active participants in the success of every student. This included the integration of consistent grade level meetings, giving educators time to reflect and observe student learning, the intentional selection of meaningful professional development, and the revision of outdated pedagogical practices.

### **Challenges to Title 1 Education**

The characterization of Title 1 in New Jersey school districts is a school classification that identifies populations that have high volumes of students coming from families in poverty (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2023c). The underprivileged community presents many challenges to the academic instruction of students. Often, under achieving students are held responsible for their lack of success instead of the blame falling on systematic failures (Council et al., 2019). For the school environment to succeed, students and teachers must be empowered with the knowledge that the entire learning system can change (Senge et al., 2000).

### ***Discrimination***

Under privileged communities are discriminated against. According to Carter (2022), the American school system was built on a foundation of racism and discrimination towards students of color. Under privileged schools have consistently faced many challenges that hinder their academic achievement largely due to the fact

their experiences are not considered in the educational process (Council et al., 2019). Educators of children of color are trying to educate students in a world that was never designed for them to succeed (Carter, 2022).

### ***Higher number of English Language Learners (ELLs)***

An additional challenge to the Title 1 education school system is the high number of English Language Learners (ELLs). Data suggests that one student out of every five students in American classrooms speak another language in addition to English (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2022). The amount of Hispanic bilingual students is rapidly increasing in underprivileged school districts (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021). ELLs are students who live in an English-speaking country that predominantly speak another language (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2022).

### ***Low-Income Families***

According to the United States Department of Education (2022), the involvement of a child's family is directly linked to the success of their educational experience through the resources that they provide. Reading at home is a challenge for students that struggle with poverty due to their inability to acquire books that they can read. Literacy outcomes improve significantly when students are given adequate resources such as books, of their choice, to read outside of school (Zucker et al., 2022). Research has shown that the earlier a child is exposed to literacy education the more future academic success they will have (Landerl et al., 2021; Majorano et al., 2022; Simmons et al., 2022).



***Mobility Rate***

One issue that influences students of color is their school mobility rate. Students that are forced to move more than their peers have more challenges to achieve academically (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021).

***Lack of Trained Teachers***

Teacher training is another challenge that influences academic achievement in disadvantaged students. One of the challenges that contribute to a gap in achievement in urban school districts is the lack of qualified educators (Young et al; Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021).

***Disciplinary Concerns***

Basile (2020) outlined how although it is consistently resisted, elementary male students of color are disciplined more harshly than their White counterparts even though they misbehave with the same frequency. Research has shown that this discipline is intentionally performed to direct males of color from school to prison (2021). Educational leaders must develop a renewed perspective of African American boys that view them as valuable instead of problematic (Proffitt, 2022).

***Lack of Resources***

Educators of diverse learners do not believe that their students are given the adequate resources to be proficient in literacy (Ciampa, 2021).

***Content Standards***

The core curriculum content standards were created to standardize the academic expectations required for students at every grade level and standards guide teacher

instruction and assessment (Cramer et al., 2021). These standards do not consider the needs of diverse learners. Standardized curriculum content standards have led to standardized testing to assess student knowledge with these standards. However, standardized testing does not adequately assess the skills or needs of minority students (Moule, 2012).

### **Strategies to Improve Literacy Achievement**

School reform and classroom pedagogy must find a way to work together to improve literary achievement for African American children (Duggins & Acosta, 2018). The following section highlights literature that discusses strategies that urban, Title 1 district school leaders could utilize to improve academic achievement in ELA. The strategies discussed in this literature review present a critical view of the broader problem. These strategies include *integrating culturally responsive instruction, exploring improved literacy instruction, and incorporating systematic school wide thinking.*

### **Integrating Culturally Responsive Instruction**

Educators cannot create safe learning environments if they are unable to consistently treat each individual child with care regardless of demographics, ethnicity and cognitive abilities (Moule, 2012). According to Senge et al. (2000) schools have historically been a place where students are forced to create learning habits that do not encourage lifelong learning. For students to achieve academically and become lifelong learners, classrooms must become student centered. Student centered teaching enables the educator and the student to equally contribute and own the educational process (Moule, 2012). Teachers can center their instruction on their students by integrating culturally

responsive instruction (Moule, 2012; Cherfas et al., 2018; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021; Kelly et al., 2021).

The concept of "culturally relevant" and "culturally responsive" pedagogy as instruction that is informed by the lived experiences of marginalized student populations (Kelly et al., 2021). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires educators to question how their perception of their students influences their ability to achieve (Moule, 2012). Inner city educators are not tasked with the job of saving the lives of their students, they are however asked to encourage and offer students ways to grow and learn (Carter, 2022). Furthermore, culturally relevant pedagogy is most successful when educators are aware of racial discrepancies in society (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021).

According to Cherfas et al. (2018) curriculum that is founded in culturally responsive pedagogy enables students to meet high content standards while simultaneously learning about culture that relates to them. Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) does not celebrate Black History month once a year. Instead, it is a deep understanding and intentional connecting of everyday curriculum to the lives of students. CRP actively utilizes student culture to enhance the learning that takes place within the classroom.

While there are numerous strategies to increase cultural competency, what follows are a few best practices. The first is to create safe spaces for diverse students to share their lived experiences. For some diverse students, transition to the United States has created a lot of traumatic experiences. Trauma can be caused by an increased police presence, lowered educational standards, and discriminatory instructional educational

practices (Myers, 2023). For diverse learners to achieve challenging academic standards, classrooms must become safe spaces for them to learn.

A second, suggested by Myers (2023) is the use of Testimonio methodology to assist diverse students in comprehending self-expression. This research discussed various instructional lessons where an educator used student personal testimonials to create safe spaces where diverse students felt empowered and engaged in the learning process. It is possible for educators to focus on academic objectives while also giving time for students to discuss social concepts within a safe classroom space (2023).

A third strategy that school districts can use to become more culturally responsive is utilizing the concept of restorative justice. According to Zakszeski & Rutherford (2021) restorative justice in school systems can be defined in part as the understanding that unmet student needs can influence student behavior. Creating positive school communities includes a relationship between students, staff, and the community. Restorative justice is the combination of ideals and practice that influences school climate through student discipline, student emotional skills, student behavioral skills, and staff personal thought processes (2021).

Literacy instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy combined can change the lives of marginalized students. Ciampa & Reisboard (2021) stated that culturally responsive pedagogy centers around the idea that educators of diverse students should teach a culturally rich curriculum that connects learning to the student's personal experience. Children of color will improve their academic performance with literacy

concepts when they are encouraged to learn new knowledge with texts that reflect their culture (2021).

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is a proven strategy to increase academic achievement. It uses a students lived experiences to enhance the learning that takes place in the classroom. For CRP to make lasting change, research suggest that it requires adequate teacher training, acceptance, and dialogue (Cherfas et al., 2018).

### ***Exploring how to Improve Literacy Achievement***

For Title 1 school districts to improve literacy achievement, they must be willing to first become knowledgeable in current literacy research. Zimmerman et al. (2019) identified that reading fluency is defined as a reader's propensity to successfully read words orally and infer meanings from the text. Additionally, when readers learn to identify and comprehend words at a quicker rate, they are then able to utilize the internal skills necessary to engage in high level thinking (2019).

To assist students with reading fluency, school districts can integrate innovative instructional strategies. These strategies must be researched, and the appropriate training provided to ELA teachers to implement the methods in their classrooms. One instructional strategy is to use technology as a resource. Council et al. (2019) explored reading interventions that utilize technology to deliver positive outcomes in an underachieving population by offering student-centered assistance to individual students, increase motivation, and assist in improved classroom management. This study added to the body of research that suggests that the use of technology is an effective resource to improve literacy in under achieving school districts.

Another strategy is to diversify the language and proctors of state tests to consider those that speak alternate languages. Escamilla et al. (2018) detailed how English-only testing in the United States not only limits the accuracy of standardized assessments, but they also discourage the achievement of bilingual students. These standardized tests are not structured to take into consideration the literacy strengths or weaknesses of bilingual students (2018). For gaps in learning to decrease, mandated state testing must be administered equitably.

Some teachers have found that integrating inquiry-based lessons into their literacy instruction assists academic achievement. Ballenger (2019) explored a teacher in a Title 1 school district that successfully improved literacy achievement through inquiry-based learning. The research concluded that inquiry-based learning can assist students in underachieving districts with understanding, connecting, and applying complex literary concepts.

Another proven strategy is educator autonomy. Educators must be given the autonomy to differentiate instruction to help diverse learners meet state standards. Duggins & Acosta (2018) discussed that the Common Core State Standards require educators to limit students from making personal connections to literary texts. Additionally, the use of scripted lessons has removed teacher autonomy to alter their pedagogy to best meet the needs of diverse students. Educators find it challenging to incorporate proven strategies, such as student “read aloud” sessions, with a demanding set of curriculum standards.

Educators have also used a strategy known as *teacher support* to assist struggling students. Langeloo et al. (2022) used their research to explore the success of teacher supports. It was explained that teacher supports are the supports given by a teacher when a student struggles to produce a desired answer. One example of a teacher support is when the teacher invites another student to respond to an instructional question that the initial child could not give an answer for. This strategy does not diminish the learning experience but offers an opportunity for students to learn from one another instead of solely the teacher (2021). Another teacher support that educators can utilize is limiting the answers a student can select in response to a question. Instead of giving students an open-ended question, teachers offer a limited number of possible answers to choose from (2021). The final teach support is when a teacher models the thought process students need to engage in to achieve the correct answer. Teachers can model part of the answer and let students complete the rest. Langeloo et al. (2022) concluded that teacher supports can assist monolingual students improve academic competencies, but they do not suggest using them to diminish the effort of the young learner.

Another strategy used by literacy educators is shared reading experiences. Kennedy & McLoughlin (2022) concluded that shared booked reading among student learners is a research-based strategy that improves reading outcomes for ELL learners. ELLs predominantly speak another language over the English language. Thus, shared reading is a strategy that teachers can use in small group or whole group settings that have positive outcomes for ELL learners to learn literacy skills from their teachers and peers (2022).

When students are engaged in the learning process, the entire education experience is enriched. According to Golden Hughes et al. (2021), students achieve in writing instruction when educators allow them to be a part of the instructional experience through strategies such as writer's workshop, student choice, and rubrics. Additionally, when educators utilize concise learning objectives student reading comprehension is encouraged.

### ***Incorporating Systematic School Wide Thinking to Improve Literacy Achievement***

Morgan (2022) discussed that many educators begin teaching under achieving students with a deficit mindset. This mindset leads to educators thinking that their students have a deficit in knowledge which influences their achievement. When educators approach underprivileged students with a deficit mindset, they neglect the opportunities that can be found in this student population (2022). Data states that positive learning outcomes occur when children in early childhood settings are taught in environments that foster belonging (Erwin et al., 2022). Effectively creating successful environments for students to learn is one of the most significant aspects of school climate (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The idea of belonging correlates with systematic school wide thinking.

In the seminal work, Senge et al. (2000) defined systematic school wide thinking as a concept centered on the idea that all human beings have the inherent desire to learn. A school that learns encourages every person in the learning community to learn from each other. The community, school and classroom are a unit that must work together to ensure student learning. If one part of the unit is not working properly, it can damage all the other parts of the learning unit (2000). School systems need to be conducted as active



learning systems rather than industrial machines. Living matter changes and transforms with time, therefore school systems must change as well.

Senge et al. (2000) highlighted multiple keys to cause positive change in a school system. Education researchers and policy makers are starting to understand that learning does not merely happen in the mind but also in the entire body as well. Learning is a process that simultaneously utilizes the entire body. Traditionally, teachers are trained that the majority of student learning should be centered on classroom instruction. However, learning does not just happen in the classroom it does and can take place anywhere.

School systems pride themselves in being a "school community" however, in most schools there is a distinct separation of hierarchy and power (Senge et al., 2000). For school children to succeed in their lifelong journey, there must be a balance of control and communication. Administrators, teachers and students must collaborate and share the responsibility of the learning that takes place in school. Schools must become a place where learning is active. This means that students are taught to explore, imagine and create while learning new concepts. Traditionally students have been taught to memorize and recite specific facts. A learner centered approach gives students the chance to problem-solve, ask questions, and discover new concepts. When educational spaces are created with student safety in mind, diverse students feel empowered and engaged in the learning process (Myers, 2023).

### **Identifying Low Achievement Data**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in an urban Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. In the following section I will identify data that relates to the content of this study. Understanding the data that influences the challenges that K-5 elementary educators are facing in increasing English Language Arts is essential to improving it. According to Bernhardt (2017) stakeholders must begin to understand why they are getting the data they are receiving about academic achievement to know how to effectively improve the results. Data results from school systems can be divided into four groups which include student learning, demographics, perceptions and school processes (2017). The data below displays Title 1 Funding Descriptions, 2019 State Reading Snapshot, Demographic Data of the Community, Demographic Data of the Children in Public School in the Community, and the Demographic Data of the Community Compared to State and National.

## Figure 1

### *Title 1 Funding Descriptions*

#### Program Description

Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state

1. Basic Grants provide funds to LEAs in which the number of children counted in the formula (formula children) is at least 10 and exceeds 2 percent of an LEA's school-age population.
2. Concentration Grants provide funds to LEAs that are eligible for Basic Grants and in which the number of formula children exceeds 6,500 or 15 percent of an LEA's the total school-age population.
3. Targeted Grants are based on the same data used for Basic and Concentration Grants except that the data are weighted so that LEAs with higher numbers or higher percentages of children receive more funds. Targeted Grants are based on the same data used for Basic and Concentration Grants except that the data are weighted so that LEAs with higher numbers or higher percentages of formula children receive more funds. Targeted Grants provide funds to LEAs in which the number of formula children (without application of the formula weights) is at least 10 and at least 5 percent of the LEA's school-age population.
4. Education Finance Incentive Grants (EFIG) distribute funds to States based on factors that measure:
  - a State's effort to provide financial support for education compared to its relative wealth as measured by its per capita income; and
  - the degree to which education expenditures among LEAs within the State are equalized.

*Note.* Data retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

Identifying Title 1 school districts was intended to provide struggling districts with funding necessary to assist school leaders in dispersing resources to improve academic achievement. According to The National Center for Education Statistics (“Title 1,” 2021) Title 1 School Districts are to receive funds that consist of four categories that include Basic Grants, Concentration Grants, Targeted Grants and Education Finance Incentive Grants These grants allocate funds based on mathematical formulas and demographical data that calculate a districts poverty levels, school age population, and income (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

**Figure 2**

2019 State Reading Snapshot Report for New Jersey

## Results for Student Groups in 2019

| Reporting Groups                     | Percentage of students | Avg. score | Percentage at or above NAEP |            | Percentage at NAEP Advanced |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
|                                      |                        |            | Basic                       | Proficient |                             |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                |                        |            |                             |            |                             |
| White                                | 42                     | 238        | 84                          | 53         | 16                          |
| Black                                | 17                     | 211        | 54                          | 23         | 4                           |
| Hispanic                             | 28                     | 213        | 58                          | 26         | 5                           |
| Asian                                | 11                     | 248        | 90                          | 65         | 26                          |
| American Indian/Alaska Native        | #                      | ‡          | ‡                           | ‡          | ‡                           |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander     | #                      | ‡          | ‡                           | ‡          | ‡                           |
| Two or more races                    | 2                      | ‡          | ‡                           | ‡          | ‡                           |
| <b>Gender</b>                        |                        |            |                             |            |                             |
| Male                                 | 51                     | 224        | 69                          | 39         | 10                          |
| Female                               | 49                     | 231        | 75                          | 45         | 15                          |
| <b>National School Lunch Program</b> |                        |            |                             |            |                             |
| Eligible                             | 40                     | 210        | 55                          | 22         | 4                           |
| Not eligible                         | 57                     | 240        | 85                          | 56         | 19                          |

# Rounds to zero.

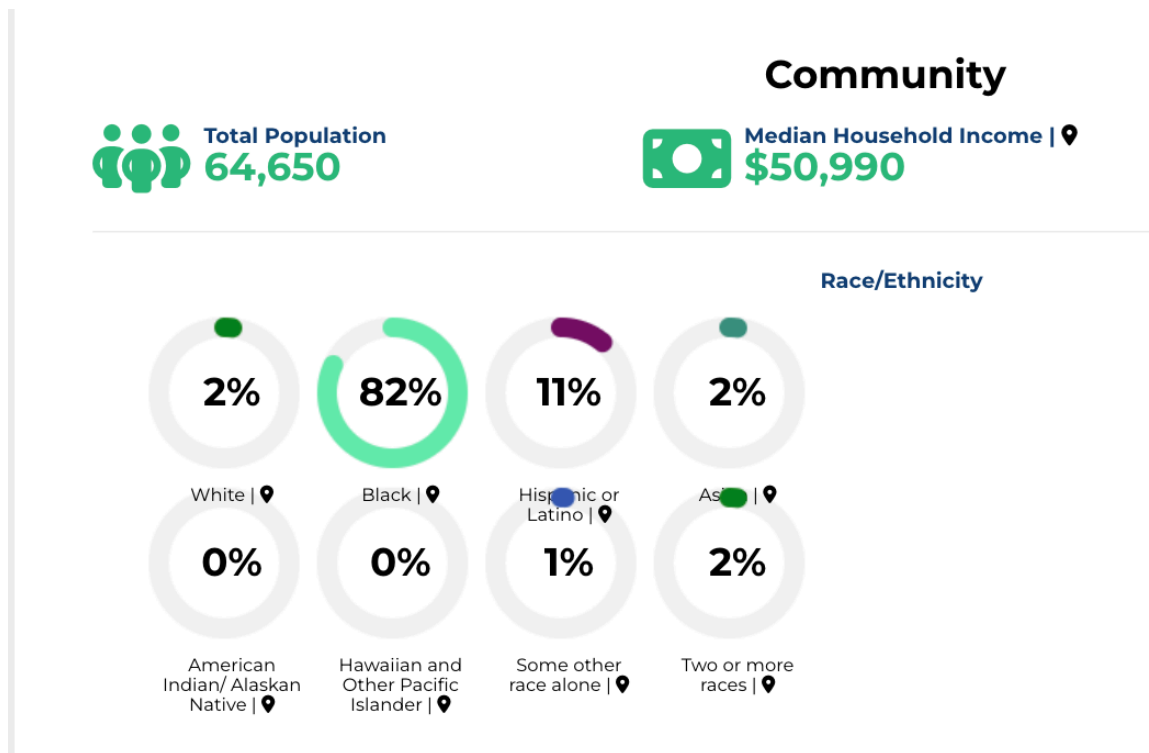
‡ Reporting standards not met.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding, and because the "Information not available" category for the National School Lunch Program, which provides free/reduced-price lunches, is not displayed. Black includes African American and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin.

Note. Data retrieved from

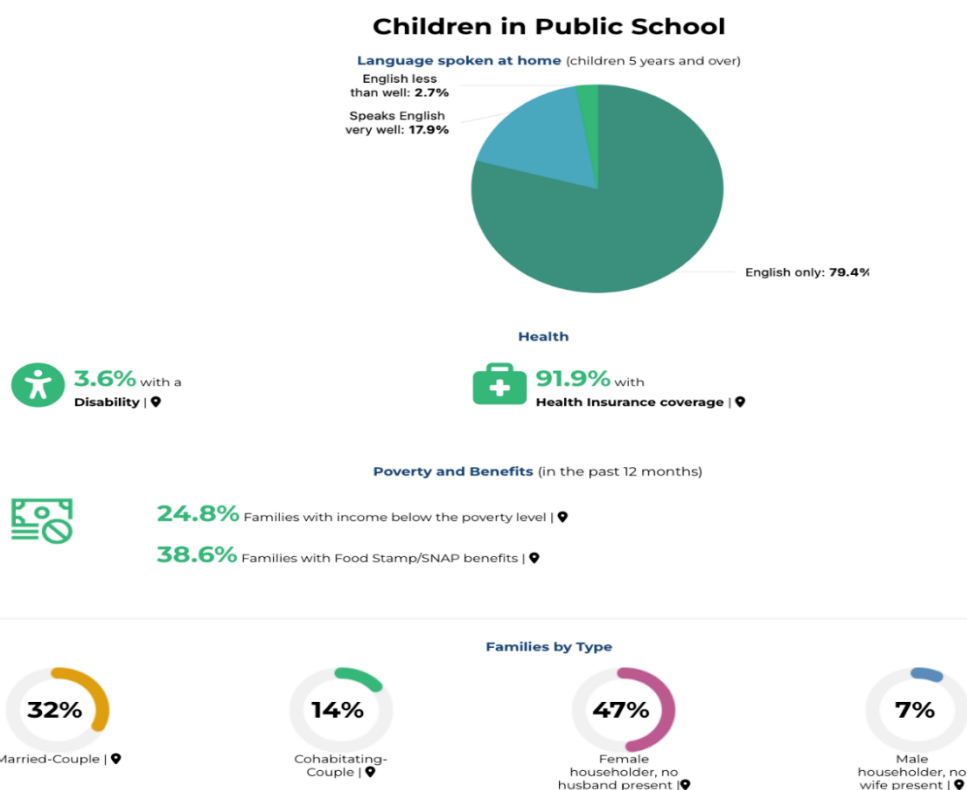
<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2019/pdf/2020014NJ4.pdf>

This data illustrates some of the academic disparities between diverse students and their peers in reading test scores in 2019. That data identifies Black students having a 27 points lower average score than their White peers. Hispanic students had a 25 points lower average score than their White peers. The data identifies students who were National School Lunch Program eligible having a 30 point lower average score than students that were not eligible.

**Figure 3***Demographic Data of the Community*

*Note.* Data retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/Edge/ACSDashboard/3404230>

This illustration displays the demographical data from the district that this basic qualitative study will take place in. The name of the district has been omitted for privacy purposes. The data illustrates that 82% of the population in the community identify as Black, 11 % of the population identify as Hispanic or Latino, and 2% of the population identify as White. This data states that the median household income in this community is \$50,999. The estimated total population of the people living in this community is 64,650.

**Figure 4***Demographic Data of the Children in Public School in the Community*

*Note.* Data retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/Edge/ACSDashboard/3404230>

That data illustrates that 79.4 % of this community speak only English at home. While 17.9 % of this community speak English very well and 2.7% speak English less than well. In this community 24.8% of families live below the poverty level and 38.6 % of families are provided Food Stamps or SNAP benefits. Married couples represent 32 % of the families in this community. While 47% of families are female led with no husband or male present.

**Figure 5***Demographic Data of the Community Compared to State and National*

*Note.* Data retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/Edge/ACSDashboard/3404230>

The data in Figure 5 illustrates how this community compares to other communities in New Jersey and the United States. This community has similar demographic data in the categories of Households with Broadband Internet, individuals that Speak English Less Than Very Well, and individuals that have Less Than a High School Graduate degree. There are large disparities in the categories of Median Household Income, Families with Food Stamps or SNAP Benefits, Married Couple Households, individuals that are a High School Graduate and Families with Income Below the Poverty Line. Identifying the data that influences the challenges that K-5

elementary educators are facing in increasing English Language Arts is essential to understanding it to begin improving it.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. Exploring the challenges that K-5 elementary educators are facing in providing ELA instruction offered insight into how to increase literacy achievement for Title 1 students in the future. Identifying educator challenges has the potential for positive social change by assisting all stakeholders in the successful reforming of Title 1 school systems in the United States. Despite the amount of research and reform placed in improving academic achievement, economics and demographics are still the dominant determining factors for student success or failure academically (Cherfas et al., 2018). Historically, the neighborhood that a student goes to school can influence how a student will academically achieve due to a disproportionate number of educational resources, high quality educators, discipline matters, and special education concerns (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021).

A school that learns encourages every person in the learning community to learn from each other (Senge et al., 2000). School reform and classroom pedagogy must find a way to work together to improve literary achievement for African American children (Duggins & Acosta, 2018). Exploring the challenges that K-5 elementary educators are facing in providing ELA instruction to low achieving students may assist district leaders and school educators in collaborating to identify solutions and strategies to the problems



facing their students. Some of the strategies that educators discussed include integrating culturally responsive instruction, exploring improved literacy instruction, and incorporating systematic school wide thinking.

The first strategy of culturally responsive instruction can invite teachers to center their instruction on their students by integrating culturally responsive pedagogy (Moule, 2012; Cherfas et al., 2018; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021; Kelly et al., 2021). School districts could offer teachers with regular opportunities for professional development that educates teachers on how to utilize culturally responsive strategies in their classrooms with diverse elementary students. Second, research-based strategies that improve literacy instruction can be followed by the appropriate teacher training for ELA teachers to implement the methods in their classrooms. Third, school wide systematic thinking could assist school leaders in creating more successful school environments. When educational spaces are created with student safety in mind, diverse students feel empowered and engaged in the learning process (Myers, 2023). Teachers could be given training prior to the start of the school year to create effective classroom environments that assist low achieving students.

### **Summary**

The district that this study took place in, is comprehensive in that the students in this demographic are like other Title 1 school districts across the country. Underprivileged communities typically contain neighborhoods that are challenged by overpopulation poverty, inadequate housing, transportation, and unequal education opportunities (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021). The direct correlation between income and

achievement suggests that the neighborhood that a student goes to school in influences how much they will academically achieve (2021). Many students in Title 1 school districts live near the poverty line. Living below or near the poverty line directly effects a child's educational opportunity and academic achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2017).

Although Title 1 school districts have many needs, some needs can be addressed with qualitative research. The need for collaboration and the creation of spaces for educators to have a voice has long been researched (Whaley et al., 2019). Understanding the challenges of urban Title 1 elementary educators may offer insight into how we can improve academic achievement for students in all Title 1 school districts.

This section defined the problem that prompted this project study. It also highlighted the rational for the problem choice. Terms associated with the problem were defined and explained. The significance of the study problem and its connection to the local educational section was presented. The two qualitative research questions were discussed and an explanation for how they would be used to investigate the nature of the problem were framed. The conceptual framework that grounds this study and its relation to the study approach was stated. Literature that provided a critical view of the broader problem associated with the local problem addressed in this study was presented. Lastly, implications for possible project directions based on the anticipated findings of data were outlined.

The following sections will provide a description of the research design, explanation of the participant criteria, detailed account of the data collection for this

study, and outline foreseen limitations. A description of the research design will suggest how the research design derives logically from the problem statement and research questions. The explanation of the criteria for selecting participants will define how participants were selected for this study. The detailed account of data will justify how the data collection and analysis for this study is appropriate for the type of evaluation and to the qualitative tradition chosen. An outline of limitations will explain the foreseen limitations for the evaluation in this study.

## Section 2: The Methodology

The elementary level focus of this basic qualitative study was significant in that younger students have a higher possibility of increasing achievement than older students since achievement discrepancies do not decrease as elementary students progress into higher grade levels (see Scammacca et al., 2020). Further research is required on this topic if achievement is going to improve for this population. Current school reform has attempted to repair under achievement for low-income students without addressing the core issue of a lack of equitable resources and supports that will equip them with the same access as their higher income peers (Alexander & Jang, 2018).

Upon investigating the challenges of urban, Title 1 elementary educators', low achievement may improve due to the insights and strategies discussed. The project study may provide district leaders with data that could lead to higher level collaboration between various educational stakeholders. Additionally, I used the following research questions that align with the problem and research purpose to understand educator challenges and their suggested strategies for elementary educators in urban, Title 1 school districts:

RQ1: What challenges do K-5 elementary educators face when providing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in a local, urban, Title 1 school district in NJ?

RQ2: What resources and supports do educators need to overcome the challenges they face when providing instruction to K-5 elementary education?

In the following section, I discuss the methodology used to guide the basic qualitative research in this study. To explore the research questions in this study, 15

district educators participated in semi-structured interviews until I reached data saturation. I analyzed the data to determine how the challenges educators are facing in providing ELA instruction are related to discrimination, high number of ELLs, lack of culturally responsive pedagogy, low-income families, student mobility, lack of trained educators, disciplinary concerns, lack of resources, and limited content standards which may have caused a gap in practice. Participant interviews highlighted barriers and suggestions as they relate to challenges that educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts.

### **Research Design and Approach**

The intention of doctoral research in education is to add to the field of instruction (Single, 2010). A qualitative methodology was selected for this study to best highlight the perspectives of participants being individually interviewed. The participant pool for this study included 15 elementary educators in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern New Jersey. This participant pool was comprehensive in that it represents various educator positions in the district that include administrators, support staff, child study team members, mainstream classroom teachers, and specialty teachers. Each of these educators provide ELA instruction or assistance as a facet of the curriculum.

### **Qualitative Research**

The research design for this project study derived logically from the problem and guiding research questions. Qualitative research is directed by a knowledge of literature and theory in the topic being explored (Hung & Francis, 2020). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), researchers use various techniques to methodically evaluate human

behavior that include but are not limited to surveys, demography, experiments, focus groups, observations, and interviews. In qualitative research, interviews present the researcher with data that can give individuals a better understanding of one another. Qualitative interviews that facilitate a higher-level thought process are the most successful and informative when the researcher uses the technique of asking specific questions to facilitate the individual to think with an in-depth lens (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used interviews for this project study to best highlight the challenges facing urban, Title 1 elementary educators.

### **Justification for Implementing a Basic Qualitative Design**

Educational research uses qualitative, quantitative, and a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative research design to guide its research. According to Hong and Francis (2020), quantitative inquiry cannot grasp what qualitative research can through its exploration of human experience and personal perspective. Qualitative research avoids assumptions and explores the human experience to understand phenomenon (Caduff et al., 2023). Thus, a qualitative research design was selected for this study. Qualitative research often uses interviews to collect data. Qualitative interviews enable the researcher to explore various questions and answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through interviews, I sought to answer the research questions in this study to understand the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low-achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey.

### **Research Designs Not Selected**

A qualitative research design best aligned with the problem and research questions in this project study while other designs did not meet the criteria. Although quantitative and qualitative research can both assist school districts in improving low academic achievement, a qualitative research design derived logically from the problem and research question. Quantitative research evaluates the complex relationship between alternate variables, whereas qualitative research explores how something occurs socially in individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Additionally, quantitative research uses data to create statistical graphs that organize numbers into a visual form that can be understood easily (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2020). Quantitative research uses numbers to characterize variables (Dietz & Kalof, 2009). A quantitative research tradition would not align with the qualitative data to be collected in this study as numerical data would not answer the research questions. A qualitative research design was selected to best evaluate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA.

For this qualitative project study, verbal interviews were selected to best evaluate the research questions. Other qualitative methods would be less effective to evaluate the challenges of the educators in this participant group. One qualitative approach uses art materials in the interviewing process. Researchers have found that the use of art materials can be very helpful in qualitative interviews where complex personally painful issues are discussed (Butcher, 2022). Participants have found that drawing can assist them in describing something painful (Butcher, 2022). This study allowed participants to discuss

their challenges to instruction and not personal issues that cause trauma or pain, therefore the use of art creation was not best for this study.

Another qualitative approach is the use of focus groups. Focus groups can be used to collect data from participants while they are interacting with each other in a group format (Shekhar, 2019). Focus groups can successfully be used in qualitative research but limit the data by not providing participants with an opportunity to provide natural responses to interview questions (Shekhar, 2019). This study allowed participants to discuss their challenges to instruction in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, therefore focus groups were not deemed effective for this study.

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

Butin (2010) stated that research is a thorough and intentional examination of a topic. Beighton (2021) suggested that researchers can adjust their participant group after they have reviewed and summarized all the interviews. Purposeful sampling enables the researcher to identify who they want to collect data from to best answers the research question in a study (Hong & Francis, 2020) based on their experience and knowledge. Additionally, researchers can make inferences regarding a large population by evaluating a small subset of the population (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2020). For this project study, the sample included 15 district educators that hold various positions.

The quantity of 15 district educators enabled a deeper inquiry per individual. It is understood that change cannot occur within schools without the commitment and involvement of every person in the learning community including administrators, teachers, students, and community members (Senge, 2000). Thus, the criteria for



participating in this study was educators that have held their position with at least one year of employment in the district. These positions included administrators, support staff, child study team members, mainstream classroom teachers, and specialty teachers. After all of the interviews took place, I purposefully sampled which interviews best highlighted barriers and suggestions as they related to challenges that educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

The first step to gaining access to participants for this project study was to receive permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the assistant superintendent of the school district, prior to any data collection in the district. I was granted permission to conduct the project study by the IRB, through the completion of an IRB curriculum, instruction, and assessment (CIA) partnership case study capstone application. The Walden University IRB approval number is 09-29-23-0145855. After receiving permission from the Walden IRB, I shared my approval documentation with the assistant superintendent of the school district. Then I was approved to conduct interviews with district staff (Appendix C). After approval was attained, I then recruited the participants for the study in a low-pressure, noncoercive manner. I used my professional network and public contact information to gain access to potential participant e-mails. The criteria for participating in this study was educators that have held their position with at least one year of employment in the district. A copy of the participant invitation letter (Appendix D) was sent to potential participants personal e-mail from my Walden University e-mail in the body of the e-mail (not as an attachment).

The informed consent letter outlined the interview procedures for interviews. It explained how the interviews would be audio recorded and not video recorded as per Walden University IRB guidelines. The letter also explained the voluntary nature of the study and their ability to decline to answer any of the research questions asked. I informed participants that their involvement in the study would not pose any risks beyond those of typical daily life.

### **Methods of Establishing a Researcher Participant Working Relationship**

Qualitative interviews require a relationship between the participant and interviewer. These interviews are founded on the principles of basic conversation and enable participants to elicit higher level thinking (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To begin establishing a successful researcher participant working relationship, I briefly contacted all participants after they agreed to participate in the study. Then I encouraged participants to schedule interviews during a convenient time for their comfortability and ease. Hong and Francis (2020) stated that interview participants must be invited to complete interviews in times and spaces that are most comfortable which enables them to better answer challenging questions. All participants were given detailed Zoom instructions that included their individual Zoom time, ID number, and how to conceal their personal information for the Zoom interview. Zoom interviews were audio recorded, as per Walden University guidelines.

Hong and Francis (2020) stated that it is important for the researcher to reflect and consider throughout the interview process, to ensure that they remain objective and unbiased allowing the participants voice to be heard. Butcher (2022) suggested that a

researcher builds trust in the interview process by allowing the participant to have their own voice and take pauses after questions are asked. To build trust, I allowed participants enough time to consider each question regardless of the time during their interviews. Additionally, I used basic communication techniques to ensure that participants felt comfortable and unthreatened. Participants were informed that interviews could take up to 60 minutes to complete. However, most interviews did not use the complete allotted time.

### **Measures for Participant Protection**

To ensure the privacy and protection of all participants in this study, research-based protocols, guided by Walden University's IRB manual, were followed. I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB) before contacting the school district and participants in this study. The district was given a preliminary explanation of the study and a request to interview its employees. Once approval was obtained, I began to recruit in a low-pressure, noncoercive manner. As per Walden University's IRB guidelines, participants were sent an informed consent letter that explained the basic description of the study and an explanation of the risks and benefits of volunteering to participate (Appendix D).

As per the Walden University IRB guidelines, I will maintain sole control of the research data collected in this project study via password protection on all devices and drives. My interview recordings and transcripts will only be shared with my Walden University project study chairs. I will not share interviewee names, identifying details, contact info, or recordings with anyone outside of my Walden University project study

chairs. As required by Walden University, I will keep the raw data and recordings from this study for 5 years and then permanently destroy it. Data will be kept secure for this entire time by secure password protection. I will also ensure that all interviewees' supervisors and coworkers remain unaware of who took part in this project study. Participant demographics will be reported in a group format to ensure that individual identities are not revealed. The collected research and demographic data will not be used for any purpose outside of this study.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Justification of Data Collection Methods**

The data collected in this basic qualitative study was used to explore the challenges that K-5 elementary educators are facing in providing ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 schools. Qualitative research enables the researcher to collect comprehensive data that includes the experience and perspective of participants (Caduff et al., 2023). Researchers use various techniques to explore human behavior that include surveys, demography, experiments, focus groups, observations, and interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews give participants a chance to use their voice through qualitative research (Butcher, 2022). To collect the data in this study I used semi-structured interviews.

In qualitative research, a researcher uses the technique of asking specific questions to facilitate the individual to think with an in-depth lens (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews in this study followed the format of basic conversation led by thought provoking questions that were able to elicit higher level thinking. Interview

questions are outlined in Appendix E. Participant interviews took place over an audio-recorded Zoom meeting. Interview content was labeled with numerical pseudonyms and transcribed using Apple Software to ensure clarity. Qualitative researchers ensure validity by asking higher level questions and reviewing transcripts with participants (Hong & Francis, 2020). Participants were told that they could request an e-mailed transcript of the audio recording of their interview to review and make changes if necessary.

### **Interview Design and Protocol**

To best explore the research questions in this study, I selected to conduct semi-structured interviews with the study participants. To successfully explore the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts, the research design included a self-designed interview protocol of the study participants. Interview protocols are outlined in Appendix F.

Historically, qualitative interviews can take place virtually, on the telephone, or in person. However, due to recent Cov-19 restrictions, the district in this study limited the number of individuals that can enter their schools. Therefore, to maintain the safety and comfortably of participants, all interviews were held through Zoom. As per Walden University's IRB guidelines, interviews were audio recorded and video recording was disabled. Interview length varied dependent on the participant being interviewed with interviews running from 40 minutes to 1 hour in length.

To ensure authenticity or validity, social scientists aim to conduct their research with a limited number of errors (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2019); therefore; interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcribing audio from interviews enables a

researcher to effectively decipher the data collected (Hong & Francis, 2020). Educators that agreed to participate in this study were required to provide informed consent prior to beginning their interviews. Consent forms will be securely saved for the 5 year timeline set by Walden University.

Butcher (2022) suggested that a researcher must build effective trust during the entire interview process. To assist in building trust, I began and ended each interview briefly discussing topics that did not pertain to the interview. This method ensured that the educators felt comfortable and at ease with the interview process.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

The procedure for gaining access to participants for this project study was to receive permission from the Walden University IRB and the superintendent of the school district. After approval was attained, then I recruited the 15 participants for the study in a low-pressure, noncoercive manner. I used my professional network and public contact information to gain access to potential participant e-mails. The criterium for participating in the study was educators that have held their position with at least one year of employment in the district. A copy of the participant invitation letter (Appendix D) was sent to potential participants personal e-mail from my Walden University e-mail in the body of the e-mail (not as an attachment).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In research, a researcher's work can be viewed as their narrative about a specific topic (Thomas, 2017). My role as the researcher in this qualitative study was to define a problem in need of further research, recruit and select potential interview participants

from the district, conduct interviews, transcribe interviews, select the most relevant interviews for analysis, analyze data collected from interviews, organize analyzed data into potential themes, and to finally discuss conclusions from the data. The research from this project study addressed a gap in practice by highlighting the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts.

To maintain neutrality, it is important for qualitative researchers to reflect and consider throughout the entire interview process (Hong & Francis, 2020). Social science research focuses on determining specific causes and reasons as to why people do what they do without making predictions (Babbie, 2017). Qualitative research avoids assumptions and seeks to understand what motivates thoughts and behaviors (Caduff et al., 2023). I have been an educator with multiple roles within the district for 17 years. In the district, I began as a student teacher, then transitioned to teacher's assistant, and now hold the title of art educator. The participants in this study are district colleagues of mine, however, as an extracurricular educator, I do not supervise or work closely with anyone in the district.

As an educator in the district, I acknowledge the potential researcher biases and assumptions of this study. However, to ensure that I maintained neutrality during the research of this sensitive topic, and avoid limiting biases into the work, I wrote a journal. These journal entries allowed me to reflect on my challenges and experiences during the data collection stage of this project study (Appendix G). I periodically met with my first chair to discuss experiences and thoughts during the research process. Additionally,

throughout the interview process, I maintained neutrality by minimizing agreeing or disagreeing with participant responses. No incentives were given to participants; however, each was thanked for their voluntary involvement.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Qualitative researchers avoid assumptions and explore the human experience deeply, to understand phenomenon (Caduff et al., 2023). The data collected in this basic qualitative study was used to explore the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts. Data analysis helps a researcher create meaning and understanding of a phenomenon (Hong & Francis, 2020). After collecting the data, researchers should first review and make concise conclusions and then categories can be made with recurring themes (Hong & Francis, 2020). After gaining permission to conduct the project study, I recruited and selected potential interview participants from the approved school district. Then, I began interviewing the 15 selected district employees.

After the interviews were completed, I used Apple software to transcribe the audio files to text. Participants were informed that I would e-mail them a transcribed copy of their interview for review upon request. Participants were also encouraged to make changes to the text for clarity. After all necessary edits were made, I began to analyze the interviews. The analysis consisted of carefully organizing data from transcripts into themes and codes on a list in a Microsoft document. Then these codes were categorized into groups according to the ideas that they represent. The resulting themes and classifications provided a structure for making sense of the data and



understanding significant findings about the phenomenon of this project study. These trends and themes were then categorized into wider themes that illustrate the entirety of the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021) to best understand the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts.

During this data collection process, all information was kept secure. As per Walden University IRB guidelines, I maintained sole control of the research data collected in this project study via password protection on all devices and drives. My interview recordings and transcripts were only shared with my Walden University project study chairs. I will not share interviewee names, identifying details, contact info, or recordings with anyone outside of my Walden University project study chairs. Finally, I have shared the final analysis results of the participant interviews with each participant.

### **Limitations**

This study may be limited due to the small number of educators interviewed. The participant pool for this study included 15 elementary educators that represent various educator positions in the district that will include administrators, support staff, child study team members, classroom teachers, and specialty teachers. Although there were limitations, I was still able to collect in-depth data that effectively explored the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts.

## **Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in an urban Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. I conducted a basic qualitative study to complete the investigation. For this qualitative project study, verbal interviews were selected to best evaluate the research questions. The following two research questions aligned with the problem and research purpose of the study. Additional follow up questions were asked as necessary throughout the interview process (Appendix E).

RQ1–Qualitative: What challenges do K-5 elementary educators face when providing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in a local, urban, Title 1 school district in NJ?

RQ2–Qualitative: What resources and supports do educators need to overcome the challenges they face when providing instruction to K-5 elementary education?

After collecting the data from the interviews, I used Apple software to transcribe the audio files to text. Participants were informed that I could e-mail them a transcribed copy of their interview for review upon request. Participants were also encouraged to make changes to the text for clarity. After all necessary edits were made, I began to analyze the interviews. The analysis consisted of carefully organizing data from transcripts into themes and codes on a list in a Microsoft document. Then these codes were categorized into groups according to the ideas that they represented. The resulting themes and classifications provided a structure for making sense of the data and

understanding significant findings about the phenomenon of this project study. These trends and themes were then categorized into wider themes that illustrate the entirety of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) to best understand the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts.

### **Setting**

The interviews for this study took place via Zoom, resulting in each setting being different for every participant. Participants did not report any concerns about their interview settings. Prior to beginning their interview, I asked every participant if they were in an appropriate interview setting where they would not be interrupted or disturbed by noise. Therefore, interviews took place in comfortable, quiet, and private spaces. Participants did not discuss being influenced by any personal or organizational conditions at the time of their interview that would affect their responses to the interview questions.

### **Demographics**

A basic description of the demographics and characteristics relevant to this project study of the 15 participants is presented in Table 1. The demographic data in Table 1 includes the age, gender, ethnicity, education level, years of experience, position in district, subject area taught, teaching grade level, and time in the district. Most of the teacher participants were in the age range of 35-44 ( $n = 10$ ), and there were more females ( $n = 12$ ) than males ( $n = 3$ ). There were multiple ethnicities represented in this study with the majority being African American ( $n = 7$ ). All the teachers received at least a bachelor's degree in education and a majority completed at least one or more master's degrees ( $n = 10$ ). One of the participants received a doctorate in education ( $n = 1$ ). None

of the participants had less than 5 years of experience in the education field and most were teaching for over 15 years ( $n = 11$ ). The participants in the study worked in the district with various positions that include administrator ( $n = 1$ ), support staff ( $n = 3$ ), child study team ( $n = 2$ ), classroom teacher ( $n = 6$ ), or specialty teacher ( $n = 3$ ). Most of the participants were classroom teachers ( $n = 6$ ) that taught different subjects including English Language Arts (ELA), the core subjects (ELA, math, science, and social studies), science, or specialty subjects. Most of the participants taught between the PreK-5 ( $n = 11$ ) grade level and some PreK-12 ( $n = 4$ ). None of the participants worked in the district for less than 5 years and most were in the district for 15+ years ( $n = 8$ ).

**Table 1***Demographics for Participants (N = 15)*

| Characteristics             | N=15 | %     |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|
| <b>Age</b>                  |      |       |
| 18-24                       | 0    | 0     |
| 25-34                       | 1    | 6.66  |
| 35-44                       | 10   | 66.66 |
| 45-54                       | 2    | 13.33 |
| Over 55                     | 2    | 13.33 |
| <b>Gender</b>               |      |       |
| Male                        | 3    | 20    |
| Female                      | 12   | 80    |
| Other                       | 0    | 0     |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>            |      |       |
| Hispanic or Latino          | 3    | 20    |
| Native American or Indian   | 0    | 0     |
| African American            | 7    | 46.66 |
| Caucasian                   | 2    | 13.33 |
| Other                       | 3    | 20    |
| <b>Education</b>            |      |       |
| Bachelor's Degree           | 4    | 26.66 |
| Master's Degree             | 10   | 66.66 |
| Doctoral Degree             | 1    | 6.66  |
| <b>Years of Experience</b>  |      |       |
| 1-5 years                   | 0    | 0     |
| 6-10 years                  | 2    | 13.33 |
| 11-15 years                 | 2    | 13.33 |
| 15+ years                   | 11   | 73.33 |
| <b>Position in District</b> |      |       |
| Administrator               | 1    | 6.66  |
| Support staff               | 3    | 20    |
| Child study team            | 2    | 13.33 |
| Classroom teacher           | 6    | 40    |
| Specialty teacher           | 3    | 20    |
| <b>Subject Taught</b>       |      |       |
| English Language Arts (ELA) | 1    | 6.66  |
| All subjects*               | 5    | 33.33 |
| Science                     | 1    | 6.66  |
| Specialty subject *         | 3    | 20    |
| Other*                      | 5    | 33.33 |
| <b>Teaching Grade Level</b> |      |       |
| PreK-5                      | 11   | 73.33 |
| PreK-12                     | 4    | 26.66 |
| <b>Time in District</b>     |      |       |
| 1-5 years                   | 0    | 0     |
| 6-10 years                  | 4    | 26.66 |
| 11-15 years                 | 3    | 20    |
| 15+ years                   | 8    | 53.33 |
| Other                       | 5    | 33.33 |

*Note.* Specialty subjects include technology, music, dance, arts, and world language. Some teachers in the study were non-classroom teachers therefore they did not teach a specific subject. In this district, some classroom teachers teach all subjects which include ELA, math, science, and social studies.

### **Data Collection**

In this basic qualitative study, I interviewed 15 district participants using Zoom. I recruited participants for the study in a low-pressure, non-coercive manner. I utilized my professional network and public contact information to gain access to potential participant contact information. I sent messages to participants briefly, sharing what my study was going to be about and asked if they were interested in participating in the study. Once participants accepted the invitation, we discussed a convenient time to conduct their interview. After a time was agreed upon, I sent participants the preapproved Walden University IRB Participant Consent Form (Appendix D) via e-mail. I also sent participants detailed instructions on how to access their Zoom interview link, the time slot of their interview, and informed them of their need to block all identifying information during their interview.

Data collection via Zoom took place over a 1 month time period. The interview time frame varied among each participant with most averaging 40 minutes. This time frame included demographic questions, two research questions, and follow up questions as needed. Participants were interviewed in various settings from different locations that had wi-fi connection. There were some minor issues of the Zoom website freezing or internet connection cutting out but none lasted more than 5 seconds. In these rare instances the participant and I recapped what was said prior to the interruption. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed using Apple and Microsoft software. There were no other variations in the data collection method from the plan presented in Section 2.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis began after all 15 participant interviews were completed. I first reviewed the notes that I took after each interview. I reflected upon what I initially thought was necessary to highlight and underline for further consideration. I then began to listen to the audio recordings and transcribe each interview to ensure clarity. To maintain confidentiality, names were not used to identify individuals in this study. Each participant was given a numerical pseudonym that I used to label their audio file and accompanying transcript (P1-P15). Audio recordings of the interviews were saved with the participants numerical pseudonym (RecPar1-RecPar15) along with the correlating written transcript (TranPar1-TranPar15).

I listened to the audio recordings along with reading the written transcripts to accurately capture participant responses. I sometimes had to make edits and corrections in places where the transcribing technology made errors in transmuting audio to text. After corrections were made, I reviewed each transcript again to ensure accuracy. Member checking was achieved by e-mailing each participant a copy of the written transcript from their interview. Transcripts were labeled with their participant pseudonym (TranPar1-TranPar15). After all the interviews were transcribed, participants were allotted three days to notify me of any edits or changes that they wanted to make to their initial interview. Some participants responded, most did not. I did not receive any messages requesting interview revisions.

I then read through the transcripts to reexamine and categorize participant interview responses. The analysis consisted of carefully organizing data from transcripts

into codes and themes on lists in a Microsoft Word document. There were primary codes and there were secondary codes. Primary codes were characterized as 1-2 words mentioned in interviews. Secondary codes were complete phrases mentioned by participants. Then these codes were categorized into themes. These themes were placed into minor and major theme groups according to the ideas that they represented. Patterns and ideas that were mentioned more frequently were characterized as major themes. Patterns and ideas that were mentioned less frequently were considered minor themes.

The resulting groups from the themes and classifications provided a structure for making sense of the data and understanding significant findings about the phenomenon of this project study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Codes and themes were used to answer the research questions of this study. I coded 192 minor codes and 530 major codes. I analyzed 30 major themes and 35 minor themes. Once major and minor themes were identified, I placed all the themes into descriptive categories. Next, I used the research questions, codes, themes, and categories to identify which of these answered each research question. I used colors to help organize the data. I indicated Research Question 1 with yellow and Research Question 2 with blue.

Finally, I again reviewed the initial codes, themes, and categories to create defining themes to represent the data. The data are organized by the five themes that were created through my data analysis: unrealistic expectations of teachers, post pandemic issues, students with learning barriers, need for partnership between school and parents, and love of the job. Detailed examples of the data are described in this section with quotes from participants and correlating summaries. Research findings are outlined



according to their corresponding themes as well as how the two research questions were answered.

## **Results**

In this section, I will outline the research findings related to the themes derived from the research questions. I will also discuss any discrepant cases. The findings from the data are organized by the five themes that were created through the data analysis. These themes include unrealistic expectations of teachers, post pandemic issues, students with learning barriers, need for partnership between school and parents, and love of the job. Detailed examples of the data are described in this section with quotes from participants and correlating summaries.

### **Theme 1: Unrealistic Expectations of Teachers**

One of the first most prevalent themes that appeared in the data was described as unrealistic expectations of teachers in the school district. There were 9 teacher participants that spoke to the challenge of high expectations placed on teachers (P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P12, P13, P14, P15). Teachers described being overwhelmed by trying to meet the needs of their students while also staying up to date with all the demands placed on them from the district. Some of these expectations include: teacher participation at weekly team meetings, paperwork, frequent testing, demand for technology integration, differentiating instruction with no assistance, influx of ELL with no assistance, understanding new curriculums without training, teaching different learners with no training or resources, demand for higher level teaching in overcrowded classrooms, special needs students in mainstream classrooms with no additional support, and

understanding new ELA programs with little guidance. One participant who is a first-grade teacher expressed a continued lack of support in her classroom. As discussed by P12,

I'm a general education teacher but I sometimes have ELL students in my class. I may or may not have the support. I should have support in the class if I have these English Language Learners (ELLs) in my class but as we know there's a shortage of teachers and teacher assistants (TA's)... So, I probably don't have that support. Last year, specifically, I had 24 kids in my class. Only two of them were English Language Learners. I didn't have the support that I was supposed to.

Teachers expressed the expectation to utilize differentiated instructional practices with students, without receiving the support necessary to effectively teach them. P5 mentioned how difficult it was to differentiate instruction with students that struggle with basic knowledge,

...there is no phonemic awareness. Students are not being taught letter sounds. I still have 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders who don't know the sounds of every letter in the alphabet. So, the expectation that a teacher is supposed to somehow know how to address all these needs in the classroom, I think is an unfair expectation.

I asked P4 how educators were responding to the unrealistic expectations in the school district, and they responded,

A lot of people are burning out very quickly. A lot of people are leaving our district, and a lot of people are not doing what they're supposed to because they feel so overwhelmed... I can say that in my school we've had about 5 teachers or

maybe more, quit the profession or leave the district within being here for about 3-4 years.

The first theme of unrealistic expectations placed on teachers was a prevalent theme in most of the interviews. According to the data collected in this project study, one of the most common challenges to ELA instruction in this school district is the requirement for teachers to meet a wide range of expectations without the appropriate resources. Under privileged school districts like the one in this study have consistently struggled to acquire the resources necessary for academic success (Kainz, 2019). However, these districts are to be provided appropriate funding through various grants to establish a means for students to achieve academic success (“Title 1,” 2021).

### **Theme 2: Postpandemic Issues**

Another theme that continued to emerge from the data in several interviews were post pandemic issues. Several teachers reflected on what their schools were like “before” and “after”. There were 10 participants that discussed various issues stemming from the pandemic crisis (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P12, P14). These issues included a high number of students migrating from non-English speaking countries, overcrowded classrooms, increase in technology usage, shortage of teachers, lower comprehension, social emotional learning difficulty, weakened writing skills, lack of reading skills, and learning loss, post pandemic. P1 stated,

But again because of the pandemic, most kids found other ways to entertain themselves instead of being at school. So, it's going to take a very concerted effort

from everyone to get them back on track and understanding that literacy is first and foremost.

Some participants expressed a passionate concern for the students that are experiencing educational setbacks due to the pandemic. When asked about the challenges educators are facing in ELA instruction, P10 quickly stated that there was a pandemic issue. P10 commented,

I think with the influx of just so many people coming in from different life paths we do need to understand and recognize this is all because of post pandemic migration. There's so much that has happened, and I feel like one of the things that nobody's really addressing is that post pandemic issues are in education. I think when you go to the L (Language) in the ELA piece you know we could talk about how kids are lacking in decoding skills and they're lacking in so many things which also spills over into their writing.

Most of the participants mentioned student behavior as a challenge to ELA instruction.

When asked about the behavior component, one participant reflected on the strain that the pandemic had on student social emotional learning skills due to a lack of interaction. P14 stated,

I guess with the pandemic, not being able to have that PreK social and emotional interaction. I've had some of them in PreK on Zoom, so I knew that they didn't even have the ability to work together with other students. I know the fact that they couldn't really share or show that they knew how to work in a team, as a team was something that I had to do last year with them.

A common code represented in the data was the word “issues”. Teacher participants mentioned multiple issues that teachers in the school district were facing as challenges to ELA instruction. The pandemic issue has changed the education system in this district, however as stated by P1, “... it can be overcome. It is going to take everyone being on board to get the students back to reading.”

### **Theme 3: Students with Learning Barriers**

The findings indicate that most of the participants viewed students with learning barriers as one of the most difficult challenges to ELA instruction. There were 13 participants that discussed this concern (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14). These participants each hold different positions in the district, yet each of them recognized learning barriers as a top challenge to ELA instruction. Participants mentioned that learning barriers could include poverty, cognitive challenges, language difficulty, lack of parental involvement, and pandemic learning loss. One participant mentioned reading several books catered to teaching students like those in this district, that struggle with poverty to assist instruction. As stated by P10,

I think that this is one of the things that face a lot of us as teachers. We must come in with the lens of, “what is it like to be on the other side” out of the classroom and understanding that the children are coming in with a lot of deficits. Let's figure out how we can help but, we have to look at the students as humans. If their basic needs aren't being met, they will have vocabulary issues, background knowledge issues, and decoding issues.

The data suggests that students in the district that have learning barriers also struggle with grasping ELA concepts. One participant discussed that students that have learning challenges often get unmotivated to learn. P2 stated,

...kids are lacking motivation. This is because they're having difficulty with their academic skills. I test students to see how they're performing. And I find that they have a learning disability, or some type of a learning difficulty and they are performing very badly. So, when students do not understand the concepts that the teachers are presenting, they lose their ability to learn.

Disadvantaged students struggle succeeding academically due to several limiting factors that include racism, economics, and discrimination (Dixson, 2023). The teacher participants in this district acknowledged and expressed great concern for their students that have learning barriers to their academic success.

#### **Theme 4: Need for Partnership between Parents and Schools**

The data revealed that another challenge to ELA instruction in this district was a need for partnership between the parents of students and the school system. There were 9 participants that discussed this theme in their interview (P1, P2, P3, P4, P9, P10, P12, P14, P15). The data suggests that none of the participants blamed academic challenges on the parents of students, however, they recognized a need for partnership on both sides. In response to Research Question 2, most participants suggested a partnership between the parents of students and the school district. One participant discussed a need for the parents and community to be involved in improving the school system. P8 mentioned,

I think that by having our community be more involved it will force them to be more involved with their child's education. I think that would also help a lot because then teachers would actually go back to feeling that they had support.

Senge et al. (2000) asserted that for school systems to become successful learning environments, they must become places that connect teachers, students, and parents. Several participants mentioned a lack of concern from the school district, for the needs of the parents of the students. Some of the needs included career development services, language translating, access to teachers, technology training, comprehension training, and access to Board of Education. One participant mentioned that it would be helpful to her students if the district was able to offer resources to the parents. P5 commented,

They can also make some resources available to parents so that they can assist their children and help them to get involved and to also help them to help their children at home.

Another participant mentioned how some of the parents in the district struggle with acquiring the resources necessary to comprehend the curriculum being taught in school. P3 stated,

Unfortunately, in the district that we work in, parents don't always have the resources to expose kids to things outside of where we live. So, the kids oftentimes are lacking due to a lack of experiences. So, if we're reading a story about a farmer for example, that's using a hoe to work the land the students have no idea what that is because they're not exposed to certain vocabulary.

Creating a school system that partners with teachers, students, and parents may assist the students in this district with ELA achievement.

### **Theme 5: Love of the Job**

The only theme that was discussed by every participant in this project study was a love for the job. Data was collected from 15 participants, and all expressed an affection for their position within the district (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15. Nápoles et al. (2002) states that many first-time educators quit within the first five years of their teaching profession. However, when each teacher participant was asked if they enjoyed their position in the district, they all listed multiple reasons why they enjoyed the profession. Some of the participant responses included the creativity of the teaching profession, the ability to mold young learners, helping others as a lifelong purpose, bringing joy to their school building, and the opportunity to take part in the success of their students. The following table describes each participants response to why they enjoyed their position in the district. The first column illustrates the participant pseudonym number, the second column the years that the participant has been teaching, and the third and last column explains what the participant states as the reason that they enjoy their job. These responses support the theme that participants in this study enjoyed their positions within the district.



**Table 2***Do You Enjoy Your Position in the District?*

| P#  | Years | Response   |
|-----|-------|--|
| P1  | 27    | Enjoys watching students grow.   |
| P2  | 17    | Enjoys the opportunity to advocate, get accommodations and meet students' needs. |
| P3  | 33    | Values being able to teach students directly.                                    |
| P4  | 18    | Enjoys bringing creativity and fun to the people in the building.                |
| P5  | 18    | Likes being able to assist teachers.   |
| P6  | 12    | Enjoys teaching interesting lessons to students.                                 |
| P7  | 17    | Loves spending time with students while they create work.                        |
| P8  | 10    | Loves being able to watch students move up to graduation.                        |
| P9  | 21    | Loves sharing and learning along with the students.                              |
| P10 | 21    | Loves the God given role of giving teachers hope.                                |
| P11 | 18    | Absolutely loves the new experiences that happen daily while teaching.           |
| P12 | 12    | Enjoys nurturing and supporting the new horizons of students.                    |
| P13 | 23    | Enjoys teaching children how to communicate?                                     |
| P14 | 19    | Likes being able to watch elementary student's progress.                         |
| P15 | 10    | Likes being able to engage with the students.                                    |

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

After the data was coded themes began to emerge. There were 5 different themes generated from the data. The data revealed that Research Question 1 produced Theme 1: Unrealistic Expectations of Teachers, Theme 2: Post Pandemic Issues, and Theme 3: Students with Learning Barriers. Research Question 2 produced Theme 4: Need for Partnership Between Parents and Schools. Theme 5: Love of the Job was generated from both Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. These themes are discussed and connected to the larger body of literature in the following sections.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As mentioned in Section 1, the conceptual framework of this study is primarily based on the work of Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kliener (2000). This framework suggests that for schools to make lasting change, educational reforms must consider the way that people think and relate to one another (Senge et al., 2000). For schools to make lasting change, educational reforms must consider the way that people think and relate to one another (Senge et al., 2000). System thinking must become a way of considering every aspect of education (Senge et al., 2000).

It was also mentioned in Section 1 that the study was secondarily based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1989). According to Bronfenbrenner, a sense of belonging and school climate directly influence a student's ability to learn and achieve academically. Bronfenbrenner's Systems theory states that students are influenced by five systems known as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. Each system influences a student in different capacities with the greatest influence being

the microsystem (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The microsystem includes what has the greatest influence because of its immediate contact with a student which includes environment, friendships, educators, siblings, and parents (2022).

The data generated from Research Question 1 highlighted Theme 1: Unrealistic Expectations of Teachers, Theme 2: Post Pandemic Issues, and Theme 3: Students with Learning Barriers. Teachers discussed these themes as some of the most difficult challenges to English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. Teachers expressed being overwhelmed by new curriculum, technology integration, frequent testing, and unmanageable time restraints. Interviews also revealed a common theme of issues derived from the COVID-19 pandemic. Students with different learning challenges were another problem that teachers described as a hindrance to ELA instruction.

For ELA instruction to improve, this school district could foster a more systematic approach that considers how the relationship between students and teachers influence achievement. For students to be successful, school systems must collectively evaluate how they think about the thinking and learning that takes place (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Senge et al., 2000).

The data produced from Research Question 2 highlighted Theme 4: Need Partnership Between Parents and Schools. Participants mentioned that parents needed to be a part of the learning process of the students. None of the participants blamed parents for a lack of involvement in the school district. Instead, many of the participants mentioned a need for parents to be brought in as partners to student with career development services, language translating, access to teachers, technology training,

comprehension training, literacy interventions, and access to the district's Board of Education.

Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 created Theme 5: Love of the job. Despite various challenges that were discussed, teachers expressed a genuine love for their job. This enjoyment derived from working with their students and watching them grow and learn. Some of this enjoyment derived from time spent with students, the shared learning experience, and witnessing students develop.

### **Project Proposal: For the Love of Learning**

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that educators face when providing ELA instruction to students. Literacy achievement is a top educational concern nationally and locally therefore, districts must use research-based strategies to improve achievement. Participants in this study described multiple challenges that they face when providing ELA instruction to the students within the district. Yet all of them described an affection for the teaching profession. This led me to create a professional development (PD) plan that could offer teachers an opportunity to learn innovative strategies in a dynamic setting. This 3 day PD would allow teachers to be encouraged to remember their Love of Learning through research based, high level, teacher training.

For school systems to make lasting change, everyone in the school community must be a part of that change (Senge et al., 2000). As mentioned in Section 1, Bronfenbrenner's states that a sense of belonging and school climate directly influence a student's ability to learn and achieve academically. Bronfenbrenner's Systems theory states that students are influenced by five systems known as the microsystem,

mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. Each system influences a student in different capacities with the greatest influence being the microsystem (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The microsystem includes what has the greatest influence because of its immediate contact with a student which includes environment, friendships, educators, siblings, and parents (2022). School systems must collectively evaluate how they think about the thinking and learning that takes place (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Senge et al., 2000).

Therefore, a series of collaborative PD could assist the district in working as a system to improve student achievement. Courses would be offered for every stakeholder in the school district including Board of Education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. With every part of the school system working together as a united system academic success may begin to occur.

### **Summary**

In this qualitative research study, I interviewed 15 educators recruited in a local urban, Title 1, school district using my professional network and public contact information. The purpose was to explore the challenges that district educators face in providing K-5 elementary ELA instruction in urban, Title 1 school districts. Research Question 1 focused on the challenges that district educators face in English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. Research Question 2 focused on what resources and supports educators need to overcome the challenges that they face when providing instruction to students.

I presented a clear review of the process which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded. I presented patterns, relationships, and themes as findings supported by the data that aligned with the research questions. Discrepant data was included into the data analysis. However, no participant response was considered discrepant. The study followed procedures to address accuracy of the data through clear documentation, member checks, checking and rechecking, researcher reflexivity, peer debriefing, and saturation. A sample transcript, sample research log and journal summary can be found in Appendix G, Appendix H, and Appendix I.

### Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in ELA in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. Based on the five themes that emerged from participant responses, I proposed that a professional development (PD) plan for all stake holders in the school district. This includes board of education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. This PD workshop, entitled “For the Love of Learning” was designed to offer teachers and district stake holders the opportunity to work collaboratively to improve ELA student achievement. The PD workshop will offer a pre-PD intake session, research based instructional practice courses, breakout discussion sessions, provide meals (breakfast, lunch, and snack), mindfulness breaks, reflection, and a pos- PD evaluation.

#### **Rationale**

The findings presented within this study revealed that educators need several supports to assist with student instruction. Not all the themes can be addressed in the scope of a 3-day PD. However, the proposed PD will offer district staff with a rich learning experience that fosters higher level learning, collaboration, mindfulness, and reflection.

The PD workshop will consist of 3 days of professional development. Each PD day will require schools to be closed for students for one entire work day. Based on the data that emerged from *RQ2: What resources and supports do you need to overcome the*

*challenges that you are facing when providing instruction to your students?* there will be a plethora of courses offered in this workshop addressing the supports the teachers discussed in their interview. Table 3 displays the themes generated from responses to RQ2.

**Table 3**

*What Resources and Supports Do You Need to Overcome the Challenges that You are Facing When Providing Instruction to Your Students?*

| RQ2: Themes                         | # of occurrences | % of occurrences |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Appropriate resources               | 5                | 33%              |
| Pull out services for kids          | 5                | 33%              |
| Better technology                   | 3                | 20%              |
| Appropriate texts                   | 4                | 26.66%           |
| More time                           | 4                | 26.66%           |
| Autonomy to teach                   | 5                | 33%              |
| Art integration                     | 2                | 13.33%           |
| Smaller class sizes                 | 3                | 20%              |
| Parental involvement                | 3                | 20%              |
| Appropriate PD                      | 2                | 13.33%           |
| Appropriate involvement from Board  | 4                | 26.66%           |
| More assistance                     | 1                | 6.66%            |
| Differentiated teacher expectations | 1                | 6.66%            |
| Support for the community           | 1                | 6.66%            |

My research highlighted the limited high-quality PD options provided for the teachers in this school district. Teachers expressed a great deal of high expectations without the time to implement best teacher practices. This PD will enable the district staff



to engage in a meaningful learning experience that encourages systematic thinking. The focus of the PD will be high level learning, collaboration, mindfulness, and reflection.

### **Review of the Literature**

To validate the selection of the PD plan, a robust quantity of literature was researched to complete the investigation of this study. I explored Walden University databases through the online library. I primarily searched Education Source, ERIC, and SAGE journals. I searched these databases using various keywords such as *professional development, teacher training, instructional practices, urban education, literacy, elementary education, challenges to literacy, academic achievement, understanding the perspectives of educators, reading instruction* and *ELA*. These combinations and key words provided preliminary research that was pertinent to the PD presented in this study. The current literature discussed in this review was published between 2018 and 2023. However, older references were used to expand on best practices to implement the PD plan.

### **High Quality Professional Development**

As mentioned in Section 1, school reform has made progress in improving literacy instruction; however, Title 1 school districts struggle with reading comprehension and achievement (Medina et al., 2021). One integral part of increasing student achievement in Title 1 districts is assisting the teaching work force. Casanova et al., (2023) contend that for teachers to keep up with high expectations they must be provided opportunities for continued professional development (CPD). The data revealed three themes pertaining to PD that included the importance of intention and expectation,

participation in the collaboration process, and the offering of direct strategies. Their research concluded that teachers need PR that is centered on collaboration and best classroom practices.

Haug and Mork (2021) suggested the need for effective teacher PD considering the high expectations of educational reforms. They discussed the prominent aspects of successful PD. These aspects include content focus, active learning, collective participation, coherence, and duration. Haug and Mork investigated what elementary teachers considered important for successful student achievement. Teacher participants discussed challenges to PD that included the way the PD course was organized and the ability for the skills to be implemented. Teachers expressed that one of the most basic and necessary aspects of successful PD was access to appropriate teaching resources. The authors concluded that teachers must invest time into learning new pedagogical concepts for growth to be experienced. However, this time must be offered from administrating authorities. Haug and Mork highlighted the struggle that teachers experience in reflecting on their own personal learning. The teachers in the study were able to focus on the needs of their students. However, they struggled to focus on their own learning. For school reform to be effective, teachers must develop their craft.

The district in my study already offers district PD days; however, teacher participants still expressed the need for appropriate PD that meets their personal instructional needs. McChesney and Aldridge (2021) explained how a lot of district resources are spent on providing teachers with professional development. Teachers needs and expertise must be considered when planning professional development. Their

research discussed teacher perceptions of barriers to professional development that include access, language difficulties, cognitive understanding, comprehension of acceptance of content, and lack of autonomy. The research highlighted the need for educators to be considered as lifelong learners and education professionals to help make PD more successful.

### **PD Plan Design**

When I began to create the PD plan, I considered what characteristics would make the plan most successful for the district. Considering the wide range of district personal, I decided that a mixed method approach would work best. In their work, Su et al., (2018) discussed that teacher PD has historically been characterized with a focus on knowledge or on practice. Some teachers in their study expressed a desire to learn new teaching concepts yet lacked the time to reflect on the new knowledge being taught. Su et al. described how a knowledge-based approach to PD focuses on increasing teacher knowledge of content and disregards the need for teachers to develop implementation skills. The practice-based approach to PD focuses on giving teachers the opportunity to engage in practical learning experiences.

Su et al. (2018) further explained that a mixed method approach to PD is the combining of a knowledge-based and practice-based PD. In addition to a mixed method approach, their study also combined the mindset that teachers are life-long learners. This mixed methods with the addition of teachers as lifelong learners' approach, engages teacher professionals as an educational community. This approach considers teacher needs when planning effecting teacher PD. It was also discussed that teachers learn best

from PD that is centered on issues that they deem important. Teacher instructors must consider not only the content that must be taught but also the perspectives and opinions of the teachers being taught. The study concluded with the idea that PD should encourage discovery not instruction. Furthermore, evaluations after teacher PD should assist teachers reflect on new knowledge and aide district leaders in creating more practical PD in the future.

An aspect of my PD plan is to incorporate one online professional day in the 3-day workshop. The data revealed that more than half of the participants in the study viewed technology as a challenge to their ELA instruction. According to Alenezi (2017), policy makers have invested a lot of recourses into technology training but there has been little improvement. If students are going to be prepared for the current technological world, more research must go into why educators are not able to efficiently implement and integrate it into their classrooms. Therefore, for technology to be used successfully to improve student academics, educators must be trained how to efficiently implement it. An educator that does not implement technology correctly can hinder the learning process. Alenezi also suggested that effective classroom technology usage can be impacted by an educator's confidence and support in it. Therefore, a lack of adequate professional development and teacher training in technology can hinder its effectiveness. Educators that are not given support to utilize technology from their school community can negatively impact the effectiveness of an educator to implement it. Teachers who are not given adequate technical support and technology resources will have a difficulty integrating it into their instruction.

Alenezi (2017) also discussed how educators mention that they do not have enough time in the academic day to integrate another element, even if it is technology. Therefore, students and teachers need adequate time to explore and modify their technology skills. Teachers who believe that they are ill equipped to integrate technology into their classrooms will lack the confidence to effectively incorporate it into their instruction. Alenezi concluded that the practice of student-centered instruction and technology can be creatively linked to designing curriculum that is individualized yet also encourages student collaboration.

Bragg et al. (2021) investigated what aspects of PD are the most effective. This study investigated teacher PD programs that were exclusively online. The research highlighted that teacher satisfaction with PD significantly increases when they are offered strategies and resources. The research considered online resources, readings, discussions, engaging activities as viable supports. Their extensive research on the literature surrounding online PD determined that the most effective PD included the following: a consideration of different learning styles, encourage participant engagement, offer resources for learners, and encourage future PD.

Another aspect of my PD plan is to integrate multiple creative activities in the 3-day workshop. The data revealed almost half of the participants in the study mentioned creativity as a part of their instructional process. Therefore, I intend to incorporate research-based strategies that could assist PD participants with using art integration within their pedagogy and for personal healing. One of the courses offered will be led by an experienced art therapist that can teach educators how to first use art therapy practices

in their own healing and to then use it with their students. Educational programs that are considered high in quality include familial like relationships between students and teachers, offer students innovative resources that foster opportunities for learning experiences, and allow students to engage in artistic creativity on a day-to-day basis (Young et al., 2018).

Kruger and Swanepoel (2017) found that many disadvantaged children experience trauma in their daily lives and a deeper understanding of possible remedies in schools is needed. According to Kalmanowitz and Rainbow (2016), art creation and meditation can enable a person that has experienced trauma to do something positive about what they have encountered. Breathing exercises and meditation have been proven to assist those that experience anxious episodes stemming from trauma. Different from traditional therapy alone, talking combined with art creation can offer individuals a more thorough understanding of what they have experienced. People that have experienced trauma can experience greater healing when talking and art creation is combined. Kalmanowitz and Rainbow also suggested that art therapy allows people that have experienced trauma to better understand and reflect on their experiences. sometimes traditional therapy does not offer individuals an adequate means to express themselves. However, art creation can offer individuals clarity on painful experiences. Art therapy leads to a self-awareness of feelings towards what has happened in the past to the present.

The first day of my PD plan is focused on a preprofessional development workshop for the entire district. This session in the series offered in the workshop will allow staff to prepare for the learning that will take place. The final day of the PD will

give staff an opportunity to reflect, plan collaboratively, and evaluate the courses offered in the workshop. There is extant literature on the lack of success in implementing teacher PD programs. Appova and Arbaugh (2018) discussed their research that investigated thousands of teachers and their views about professional development. They discussed how teacher engagement in professional development directly correlates with expectations placed on teachers by school districts. More than half of the participants desired PD but expressed a lack of effective PD being offered to them. Almost all the teachers stated being required to engage in quick, fast paced PD that did not offer the opportunity to ask questions or collaborate. The research explored what motivates teachers to learn. The teachers in the study expressed various motivation factors for the learning that takes place in PD programs. These motivations include a desire to teach students, encouragement from their peers, a professional requirement, and assistance of adequate financing.

According to Osman and Warner (2020), despite its common place in school districts worldwide, it is unknown how much influence PD has on teacher instruction. The researchers discussed what motivates educators to implement PD practices after PD instruction. It was explored how teachers expected a PD to be successful. Data revealed four categories for how teachers responded with expectations of PD success. These responses included teachers who perceived that they could effectively implement the PD but did not see the value of it. Other teachers did not think they could effectively implement the PD and did not see the value of it. Some did not think that they could effectively implement the PD but did see the value of it while others did believe that they

could implement the PD and did also see the value of it. The researchers concluded that it is vital for teacher expectancies of PD success to be considered in the research and design of PD.

## **Project Description**

### **Professional Development**

This professional development (PD) project will be a 3-day workshop entitled *For the Love of Learning*. The purpose of this PD is to more effectively assist educators with the challenges that they are facing in English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. This PD will provide district staff with resources for staff to learn about utilizing the services offered in their buildings, integrating technology more effectively, integrating appropriate ELA texts, effective time management practices, teaching autonomy in public schools, district turn and talks, art integration, and self-reflection. According to Senge et al. (2000) system thinking considers every aspect of education. This PD plan will require every stakeholder in the district to work as a system to drastically alter the entire school district.

### **Proposal for Implementations and Timetable**

This PD opportunity will be shared with all members of Board of Education to ensure that aligns with existing PD and Board Policies. Once it is approved, the dates for the PD will be scheduled with the Human Resources department. The Human Resources department will work with the Curriculum department to determine the site and selection of highly experienced instructors of the PD.

The following materials will be needed:

- Entrance ticket



- Post It Notes
- Journals
- Markers
- Poster Paper
- Lined paper
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Bring your district laptop
- Bring related articles
- Breakfast for each day
- Lunch for each day
- Beverages for each day
- Snacks for each day
- Decorations and paper supplies for each day
- Culturally responsive texts that align with curriculum

The goals of this professional development are

- Encourage staff to become more mindful of what it means to Love Learning.
- Instruct staff on research-based strategies to improve the English Language Arts instruction in the school district.

The learning outcomes of the professional development are

- Educate staff on how to best utilize the services offered in their buildings.
- Prepare staff on how to successfully integrate technology more effectively.

- Instruct staff on how to integrate new ELA texts into their curriculum.
- Train staff on how to utilize effective time management practices.
- Collaborate with teaching staff and administrative staff on how teachers can have more autonomy in their instruction practices.
- Facilitate turn and talks between all district employees.
- Educate staff on how to integrate art and art therapy into their ELA instruction.
- Provide the tools necessary for constructive self-reflection.

### **Target Audience**

The target audience of this professional development (PD) is Board of Education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. Another target audience is the policymakers and legislators that dictate school policies, testing mandates, funding, and perpetuate the continued disparity between Title 1 school districts and suburban school districts.

### **Outline of Components**

The professional development (PD) will include a rich three-day training schedule. The first day of the workshop will consist of all district staff meeting together to commence the program. There will be a one-hour program at the beginning of the first day to encourage and motivate teacher participation. The commencement program will be led by a brief student performance from elementary, middle, and high school students. These students will perform and then leave the workshop. Prior to the performance, staff

will be given a program that includes the layout for the workshop, descriptions of courses, locations of courses, times of courses, and all other informative details pertaining to the workshop. After the performance there will be a brief keynote inspirational educational speaker to end the commencement program. Then staff will participate in an ice breaker activity. After the activity staff will complete the pre-PD intake form. Finally, staff will be invited to eat breakfast.

### **Timeline**

#### ***Day 1***

8:00-9:30 am - Commencement program

Student performers

Keynote speaker

Icebreaker activity

PD intake form

9:30 -10:30 am - Breakfast

11:00 am – 1:00 pm – Session 1

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Lunch and dismissal

#### ***Day 2***

8:00-9:00 am – Breakfast

10:00 – 1:00 pm – Session 2 and Session 3

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Lunch and dismissal

***Day 3***

8:00-9:00 am – Breakfast

10:00 – 12:00 pm – Session 4

12:00-1:00 – Reflection and Evaluation

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Lunch and dismissal

**Activities**

Each session will be hosted by an experienced instructor. Staff will have the option to select which courses they would like to attend. Courses will use a mixed approach of lecture, discussion, and practice. At the end of every session staff will collaborate on ways they can incorporate concepts into their discipline.

**Trainer Notes**

The instructors will prepare for workshop by vigorously reviewing the demographics of this district. The instructors will also meet with the district's Curriculum Department to ensure that the PD meets the needs of the diverse staff in the district.

**Implementation Plan**

The district staff will hold each other accountable by having follow up team meetings.

**Project Evaluation Plan**

The focus of this professional development (PD) is to more effectively assist educators with the challenges that they are facing in English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. This PD will provide district staff with resources for staff to learn about utilizing the services offered in their buildings, integrating technology more effectively,

integrating appropriate ELA texts, effective time management practices, teaching autonomy in public schools, district turn and talks, art integration, and self-reflection. To evaluate the efficiency of this PD plan the following steps are recommended.

First, the project will be evaluated based on the initial responses from district participants. There will be a comparison of prior knowledge and expectancies compared to the post evaluation after the PD. Second, the project will be evaluated based on the learning that takes place based on the staff reflections and projects created during the program. Finally, I staff meet periodically after the 3 day PD to discuss challenges and benefits of the strategies taught.

### **Project Implications**

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that educators face when providing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction to students. As mentioned in Section 1, the district in this study has a target goal of 38.3% proficiency in English Language Arts (“ESSA District Accountability,” 2021). This ELA proficiency target goal of 38.3 % is significantly lower than that of their counterparts in neighboring suburban districts which have target goal scores as high as 88.3 % (2021). Literacy achievement is a top educational concern nationally and locally therefore, districts must use research-based strategies to improve achievement. Therefore, the research questions addressed the challenges educators face when providing ELA instruction and what resources and supports educators need to overcome these challenges.

Participants in this study described multiple challenges that they face when providing ELA instruction to the students within the district. Similar to other Title 1

school districts like it, these challenges include but are not limited to unrealistic expectations, post pandemic issues, lack of funding for supplies, absenteeism/staff shortages, students with learning barriers, and a lack of partnership with school and parents. However, regardless of these challenges, all the teacher participants described an affection for the teaching profession. This led to the creation of a professional development (PD) plan that could offer teachers an opportunity to learn innovative strategies that addresses these topics in a dynamic setting. Struggling school districts must utilize research-based strategies that include educators' perspectives to best identify how to successfully increase student achievement for at risk students. This research may contribute to positive social change by offering stakeholders suggestions that can increase academic achievement for all students.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that educators face when providing ELA instruction to students. Based on the findings of the research, I developed a 3-day PD workshop, which is designed to enhance the current PD provided by the curriculum department in the district. This additional PD workshop was created to provide professional development for board of education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population.

In this section, I discuss my reflections on the strengths and limitations on implementing an innovative PD workshop for board of education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. This PD would be used to better equip district stakeholders and staff to address the challenges they are facing in providing ELA instruction to students in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey.

#### **Project Strengths**

This project study is vital for the professional and educational success of students, board of education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. This project may also apply to other Title 1 school districts that face challenges with ELA instruction. This project study has the potential to

influence the way the entire school system addresses student learning by presenting evidence-based and research-based practices.

According to Haug and Mork (2021), teachers must invest time into learning new pedagogical concepts for growth to be experienced. For school systems to make lasting change, everyone in the school community must be a part of that change (Senge et al., 2000). Therefore, the focus on PD is a strength of this project study. Appova and Arbaugh (2018) suggested that teacher engagement in PD directly correlates with expectations placed on teachers by school districts. When district stakeholders and educators are provided with opportunities to engage, collaborate, and incorporate research-based strategies ELA instruction may improve.

### **Project Limitations**

While the data in this project study provided an overview of the perspectives of district educators, it was also limited. Adding additional qualitative research strategies to further research studies may strengthen the understanding of participant experiences within urban, Title 1 school districts. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), researchers use various techniques to methodically evaluate human behavior that include but are not limited to surveys, demography, experiments, focus groups, observations, and interviews. Qualitative interviews that facilitate a higher-level thought process are the most successful and informative when the researcher uses the technique of asking specific questions to facilitate the individual to think with an in-depth lens (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For this project study, further qualitative research methods could include open-ended questions, additional interviews, observations, and focus groups.



Another limitation of this study was the need to better understand what types of PD would be best for the educators and stakeholders in this demographic. According to McChesney and Aldridge (2021), a lot of district resources are spent on providing teachers with (PD. However, teacher needs, and expertise must be considered when planning PD. Some barriers to successful PD include access, language difficulties, cognitive understanding, comprehension of acceptance of content, and lack of autonomy (McChesney & Aldridge, 2021). Adding additional research questions that further examine teacher perspectives on professional development may help create more successful PD programs than can be offered to district staff throughout the 10-month school year.

An additional limitation of this project study was my primary focus on elementary instruction in an urban, Title 1 school district. The elementary level focus of this basic qualitative study was significant in that younger students have a higher possibility of increasing achievement than older students since achievement discrepancies do not decrease as elementary students progress into higher grade levels (see Scammacca et al., 2020). Therefore, the research findings are applicable to the study site and other elementary Title 1 schools like it although not to all schools in the district. This type of study could be strengthened by adding middle and high school educator perspectives to add to the body of research.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that educators face when providing ELA instruction to students in an urban, Title 1 school district. Literacy

achievement is one of the top educational concerns nationally and locally, therefore, districts must use research-based strategies to improve achievement. The neighborhood in which a student attends school can correlate with how they will academically achieve due to a disproportionate number of educational resources, high quality educators, discipline matters, and special education concerns (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2021). Langeloo et al. (2022) suggested that as classrooms become more diverse, educators must find adequate solutions to increase the low achievement in literacy for all children.

In this project study, I explored data from 15 elementary educators in the selected school district to create a 3-day research-based PD program. Additional PD that fosters collaboration and offers district staff further resources to best assist with ELA instruction could also prove helpful. Another recommendation would be to expand this research to other school districts. It could be beneficial to explore other urban, Title 1 school districts that have successfully improved student achievement through effective ELA instruction.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

Over the past 17 years, I have spent my entire career within the inner city, urban, elementary classroom. My experiences have brought me much joy and life purpose. I began as a teacher assistant and then graduated to being a full team specialty teacher. During this time, I have taught thousands of students between the ages of three and 12. I have watched some of my students succeed and move on to fruitful lives in the community, including teaching, military service, and art. However, I have also seen many of my students not succeed, from frequent teen pregnancies to students being shot and killed directly outside of our school building.

I have desperately desired to be a part of bringing change to this demographic. I wholeheartedly believe that the community, school, and classroom are a systematic unit that must work together to ensure that effective student learning and lifelong success occurs. If one part of the unit is not working properly, it can damage all the other parts of the learning unit. For schools to make lasting change, educational reforms must consider the way that people think and relate to one another (Senge et al., 2000). Senge et al., (2000) stated that lasting change cannot occur within schools without the commitment and involvement of every person in the learning system including administrators, teachers, students, and community members.

During my process of completing this project study, scholarship was achieved by exploring and understanding the challenges that elementary educators face when providing ELA instruction to students in an urban, Title 1 school district. This primary step was essential in my development of the PD created during this study. This PD can be used to better equip district stakeholders and staff to address the challenges they are facing in providing effective ELA instruction to students.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

The rationale for this qualitative project study came from years of watching urban, Title 1 students lack the skills necessary to engage in basic literacy instruction. I have witnessed students struggle from kindergarten through fifth grade with identifying letter sounds, formulating words, conceptualizing sentence structures, and acquiring the ability to comprehend primary texts. It became apparent that this study was significant because there is more research needed about the challenges that educators are facing in

instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in low achieving school districts. Carter (2022) suggests that children of color are trying to learn to read while being raised in communities accustomed to failure and defeat. The elementary level focus of this project study was selected since younger students have a higher possibility of increasing achievement than older students (Scammacca et al., 2020).

One of the most difficult aspects of this project study was collecting the data. It took several weeks to find willing participants that would agree to meet with me in an acceptable time frame. It was also challenging researching appropriate literature for both literature reviews. I developed a system of sorting applicable literature, reading the texts, then identifying which aspects I wanted to incorporate into my project study. The project in this project study was developed to assist district educators and stakeholders with better understanding the challenges that they are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA). The workshops offered in the professional development (PD) will be monitored and evaluated with simple unbiased questionnaires before, during, and after to measure its equity and quality.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This project study has the potential impact for positive social change in that teachers and stakeholders could gain a better understanding of the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in low achieving school districts. Frequently, under achieving students are held accountable for their lack of academic success instead of the blame

falling on systematic failures (Council et al., 2019). Furthermore, school reform and school policy has outlined what students must learn academically and lack emphasis on the fact that one of the major influences on student success is the relationship between the student and their teacher (Cer & Solak, 2018; Cherfas et al., 2018; Whaley et al., 2019). One fundamental indicator of a high-quality classroom is successful student to teacher experiences and interactions (Sutton et al., 2021). Teachers influence a large part of the learning experience for students. Therefore, their perceptions and experiences are indispensable for student achievement and lifelong academic success.

The research in this project study was grounded in the experiences and perspectives of K-5 ELA elementary educators that instruct students in a low achieving urban, Title 1 school district. Anderson & Young (2018) suggest that a districts effectiveness relates to their ability to provide effective and equitably based instruction to every student. Future research could continue to explore the challenges that educators are facing through the lens of diversity and culturally responsive pedagogy by adding educators from different school districts to this study. As mentioned in Section 1, "culturally relevant" and "culturally responsive" pedagogy can be defined as instruction that is informed by the lived experiences of marginalized student populations (Kelly et al., 2021). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires educators to question how their perception of their students influences their ability to achieve (Moule, 2012). This knowledge is used to guide instruction that best meets the needs of diverse students. Additional PD could be used to increase educator and district stakeholder knowledge on

how to create curriculum and school policy that is culturally responsive and culturally relevant.

### **Conclusion**

This project study was developed to explore and better understand the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in low achieving school districts. From the data, emerged five dominant themes which included Unrealistic Expectations of Teachers, Post Pandemic Issues, Students with Learning Barriers, Need for Partnership Between Parents and Schools, and finally a Love of the Job. From these themes, I created a 3-day PD workshop to address the needs expressed by the participants of the study. This PD will provide district staff with resources to learn about utilizing the services offered in their buildings, integrating technology more effectively, integrating appropriate ELA texts, effective time management practices, teaching autonomy in public schools, district turn and talks, art integration, and self-reflection. The research in this study has explored teacher perspectives, presented extant research, and provided a collaborative PD workshop to ignite the flame of social change in all low achieving, urban, Title 1 school districts.

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## Appendix A: The Project

### For the Love of Learning

With classrooms becoming more diverse, educators must find solutions to increasing the low achievement in literacy for diverse children (Langeloo et al., 2022). Children of color are trying to learn to read while being raised in communities accustomed to failure and defeat (Carter, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that educators are facing in instructing low achieving K-5 elementary students in English Language Arts (ELA) in an urban, Title 1 school district in northern, New Jersey. Based on the five themes that emerged from participant responses, I propose that a Professional Development (PD) plan for all stake holders in the school district. This includes Board of Education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. This PD workshop, entitled “For the Love of Learning” is designed to offer teachers and district stake holders the opportunity to work collaboratively to improve ELA student achievement. The PD workshop will offer a Pre-PD intake session, research based instructional practice courses, breakout discussion sessions, provide meals (breakfast, lunch, and snack, mindfulness breaks, reflection, and a post PD evaluation.

#### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project was to offer teachers and district stake holders the opportunity to work collaboratively to improve ELA student achievement. My research highlighted the limited high-quality professional development (PD) options provided for

the teachers in this school district. Teachers expressed a great deal of high expectations without the time to implement best teacher practices. This PD will enable the district staff to engage in a meaningful learning experience that encourages systematic thinking. The focus of the PD will be high level learning, collaboration, mindfulness, and reflection. This PD will provide district staff with resources for staff to learn about utilizing the services offered in their buildings, integrating technology more effectively, integrating appropriate ELA texts, effective time management practices, teaching autonomy in public schools, district turn and talks, art integration, and self-reflection. According to Senge et al. (2000) system thinking considers every aspect of education. This PD plan will require every stakeholder in the district to work as a system to drastically alter the entire school district.

### **Target Audience**

The target audience for this professional development (PD) is Board of Education members, supervisors, administrators, child study team members, classroom teachers, specialty teachers, teacher assistants, and all other personnel that interacts with the student population. This PD will focus on staff that interacts with elementary students, however over time, middle school and high school staff should be incorporated. Additional workshops can be added and adjusted to best meet the needs of the integrated grade levels.

### **Timelines**

This PD opportunity will be shared with all members of Board of Education to ensure that aligns with existing PD and Board Policies. Once it is approved, the dates for

the PD will be scheduled with the Human Resources department. The Human Resources department will work with the Curriculum department to determine the site and selection of highly experienced instructors of the PD.

### **Materials**

- Entrance ticket
- Post It Notes
- Journals
- Markers
- Poster Paper
- Lined paper
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Bring your district laptop
- Bring related articles
- Breakfast for each day
- Lunch for each day
- Beverages for each day
- Snacks for each day
- Decorations and paper supplies for each day
- Culturally responsive texts that align with curriculum

### **Goals**

The goals of this professional development are to:

- Encourage staff to become more mindful of what it means to Love Learning.
- Instruct staff on research-based strategies to improve the English Language Arts instruction in the school district.

### **Learning outcomes**

The learning outcomes of the professional development are:

1. Educate staff on how to best utilize the services offered in their buildings.
2. Prepare staff on how to successfully integrate technology more effectively.
3. Instruct staff on how to integrate new ELA texts into their curriculum.
4. Train staff on how to utilize effective time management practices.
5. Collaborate with teaching staff and administrative staff on how teachers can have more autonomy in their instruction practices.
6. Facilitate turn and talks between all district employees.
7. Educate staff on how to integrate art and art therapy into their ELA instruction.
8. Provide the tools necessary for constructive self-reflection.

### **Outline of Components**

The professional development (PD) will include a rich three-day training schedule. The first day of the workshop will consist of all district staff meeting together to commence the program. There will be a one-hour program at the beginning of the first day to encourage and motivate teacher participation. The commencement program will be led by a brief student performance from elementary, middle, and high school students. These students will perform and then leave the workshop. Prior to the performance, staff

will be given a program that includes the layout for the workshop, descriptions of courses, locations of courses, times of courses, and all other informative details pertaining to the workshop. After the performance there will be a brief keynote inspirational educational speaker to end the commencement program. Then staff will participate in an ice breaker activity. After the activity staff will complete the pre-PD intake form. Finally, staff will be invited to eat breakfast.

### **Timeline**

#### **Day 1.**

8:00-9:30 am - Commencement program

Student performers

Keynote speaker

Icebreaker activity

PD intake form

9:30 -10:30 am - Breakfast

11:00 am – 1:00 pm – Session 1

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Lunch and dismissal

#### **Day 2.**

8:00-9:00 am – Breakfast

10:00 – 1:00 pm – Session 2 and Session 3

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Lunch and dismissal



**Day 3.**

8:00-9:00 am – Breakfast

10:00 – 12:00 pm – Session 4

12:00-1:00 – Reflection and Evaluation

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Lunch and dismissal

## Appendix B: Letter to District

Attention:

**Request for Permission to Conduct Research in Elementary Schools**

I am Dr. Ashraf Esmail. This is an official request for Shari Clarke (Quinones) to conduct research in your district. I am her Chair and advisor. She is the art teacher at \_\_\_. She is currently a Curriculum, Instruction, and Education student at Walden University. The research Ms. Clarke wishes to conduct for her Doctorate dissertation involves the exploration of the Challenges that Educators Face When Providing English Language Arts (ELA) Instruction to K-5 Elementary Students in Title 1 Schools. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Walden University.

I am hereby seeking your consent for Ms. Clarke to conduct anonymous interviews with 20-25 district educators. Provided is a copy of her approved dissertation proposal, which includes an outline for the research process that she plans to utilize for the study.

Upon completion of the study, she will provide the \_\_\_ School District with a bound copy of the full research report. This study has the potential to make an original contribution toward addressing a gap in practice by highlighting the challenges of a local problem in inner city, K-5 elementary Title 1 school districts. Your district is comprehensive in that the students in this demographic are similar to other inner city school districts like it across the country.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at or at.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Ashraf Esmail, Ph.D

Walden University

Contributing Faculty Member Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership

## Appendix C: Approval from District

October 16, 2023

Ms. Shari Clarke

Dear Ms. Clarke,

This letter is written to grant you permission to conduct a research study on "Challenges that Educators Face When Providing English Language Arts (ELA) Instruction to K-5 Elementary Students in Title 1 Schools". The purpose of the study is to make an original contribution toward addressing a gap in practice by highlighting the challenges of a local problem in inner city, K-5 elementary Title 1 school districts. It is my understanding that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and the name of the organization, students and/or teachers will not be included in the study.

Lastly, I confirm that I am authorized to approve research for this organization and that this plan complies with the \_\_\_ School District's policies. Please note, employees of the school district cannot be assigned to assist you and you cannot have access to any data or information that is not public data.

Please feel free to share the results of the study with the Superintendent upon completion.

Sincerely,

—

\_ Assistant Superintendent of Schools  
C: \_, Superintendent of Schools

"Overcome Odds & Achieve Success"

## Appendix D: E-mail to Participants

You are invited to take part in an interview for a study conducted as part of my Ed.D. in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

### **Interview Procedures:**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be invited to take part in an audio-recorded interview about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Transcriptions of interviews will be analyzed as part of the study, along with any archival data, reports, and documents that the organization's leadership deems fit to share. A copy of your interview recording is available upon request. Opportunities for clarifying your statements will be available through processes of transcript review and member checking. Interviews may take an hour and each review process will take approximately 30 minutes.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study would not pose any risks beyond those of typical daily life. My aim is to provide data and insights that could be valuable to this organization and others like it.

### **Privacy:**

Interview recordings and full transcripts will be shared with each interviewee, upon request. Transcripts with names and other identifiers redacted may be shared with my university faculty and my peers in class. Any reports, presentations, or publications related to this study will share general patterns from the data, without sharing the identities of individual participants or partner organizations. The interview transcripts will be kept for at least 5 years, as required by my university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is. Walden University's ethics approval number for this study is (. Please share any questions or concerns you might have.

If you agree to be interviewed as described above, please reply to this email with the words, "I consent."

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant identification number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Was consent form received?** \_\_\_\_\_

**A. Teacher Demographic Questions:**

1. What is your race/ethnicity?
2. Do you identify as female/male?
3. How old are you?
4. What is the highest degree of education that you have completed?
5. What type of educational position do you hold in the district?
6. How many years of experience do you have as an educator?
7. What grades do you teach or manage?
8. What subject(s) do you teach?
9. How long have you worked for the district?
10. Do you enjoy your position in the district?

**B. RQ1–Qualitative:** What challenges do K-5 elementary educators face when providing English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in this district?

**Interview Question:**

1. What challenges are you facing in providing ELA instruction to your students?

**Follow-Up Questions:**

1. What challenges do you think your colleagues are facing?



2. Can you explain your \_\_\_\_\_ answer?
3. Can you add anything further to \_\_\_\_\_?

**C. RQ2–Qualitative:** What resources and supports do educators in this district need to overcome the challenges that they face when providing instruction to K-5 elementary education?

**Interview Question:**

1. What resources and supports do you need to overcome the challenges that you are facing when providing instruction to your students?

**Follow-Up Questions:**

1. What resources do you think your colleagues need?
2. Can you explain you \_\_\_\_\_ answer?
3. Can you add anything further to \_\_\_\_\_?

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol

**Ask participant if they are in a quiet setting with little to no distraction.**

**Confirm that consent form was received.**

**Explain the purpose of the interview.**

In this interview, I would like to ask you questions about the challenges that you feel teachers are facing in English Language Arts instruction in this school district.

**Address terms of confidentiality.**

This is an anonymous research study. Your answers will be audio recorded but NO identifying information will be shared. If you would like a copy of the transcript of your interview, please notify me.

**Explain the format of the interview.**

This interview can last up to an hour but at least 30 minutes.

I will first ask you basic demographic information, then I will ask the research questions.

Please relax and take your time in answering.

**Tell participant how to get in touch with you later if they want to.**

Please feel free to e-mail me with any questions should they arise after your interview.

**Do you have any questions before we start? Begin interview.**

**Close interview with a warm thank you and appreciation for their service.**

### Appendix G: Journal Summary

At the start of my journal, I wrote down notes describing my perceptions and experiences throughout my doctoral process. I began several years ago with a vibrant passion and desire to bring systematic change to inner city, Title 1 school districts. However, as the years progressed, the more challenging the process became. I spent many nights and early mornings reading and examining literature related to my topic. I wrote down ideas to later have to cross them out and start again. I missed birthday celebrations. I canceled plans. This journey took a toll on my mental and physical health. Thankfully, my family stepped up to the plate and patiently assisted whenever possible.

As I began to conduct interviews, I wrote detailed notes about each interview. This was an extensive and exhausting extra step. However, it proved to be very helpful for my process. Each participant was asked the same series of interview questions, yet each participant responded differently. The responses were all unique and colorful like an abstract painting. As an artist, this concept was rewarding and illuminating. Watching the data come together to present a concise illustration of educator perspectives and experiences was beautiful.

My first interviews were the most challenging. It was difficult getting participants to agree and adhere to the time slots that they selected for their interviews. It was also challenging navigating the Zoom platform and ensuring that participant information remained anonymous. My first participant was very late for their interview. Therefore, I had to push back my schedule to accommodate the interview. My second interview had minor interruptions with connectivity delays. While these two interviews were the most

difficult, they both taught me how to tweak and revise my interviews to best meet participant needs.

After I collected 10 participant interviews, I was eager to continue conducting more interviews. Sending requests and not receiving a response was discouraging at times. However, I continued to reflect on all that I had already accomplished getting to this point. I considered the progression of getting my Prospectus then Proposal approved and all the challenges that I was required to overcome. I also considered the process of getting my school district to approve me to conduct interviews in the school district. All the trials I faced prior to beginning my participant interviews prepared me to continue until completion.

Capturing these journal notes and exploring the data for many hours has helped me to better understand the challenges that inner city, Title 1 elementary K-5 are facing in instructing their students. I have a deep compassion for the educators that work tirelessly to educate their students regardless of their personal challenges and shortcomings. I am humbled to have been able to engage in this opportunity and I pray that my work will assist with causing more systematic change for school districts across the country.