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Best Practices in Literacy Achievement to Address Reading Failure for Elementary Schools in One School District

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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2016

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MA, Marygrove College, 2000

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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The local district in this study has not made adequate yearly progress in the past several years in language arts literacy on state assessments. Particularly problematic were poor reading skills among district students. Poor literacy skills negatively affect student learning across the curriculum. The purpose of this case study was to identify teachers' and administrators' perceptions of best literacy practices, professional development, and administrative decisions regarding literacy learning for primary students in reading at a strong performing elementary school in the district. The target school was selected to help address reading failure for the low-performing schools in this district. Bloom's taxonomy of learning, which indicates that higher-level learning is based on foundational knowledge that is often provided at the primary level, was the framework for this study. A bounded case study was conducted that included a purposeful sample of 7 elementary teachers of language arts from Pre-K to 2nd grades and 2 administrators at the target elementary school. Classroom observations and interviews were used to collect data. NVivo was used to assist in coding, analysis of data, and identification of recurring themes. The findings indicated that an outcome-based curriculum incorporating Bloom's levels of learning coupled with supportive district decisions regarding literacy were key components driving literacy success at the target school. The findings were incorporated into a policy paper as a project to propose and support elementary level reading curriculum changes and administrative decisions regarding literacy success for elementary students in the local district. Implications for positive social change might be far reaching as elementary school students in this district benefit from literacy skills that improve their academic success and ultimately their overall quality of life.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study on literacy achievement to Adrianne, Jerome, Jr., Victoria, my family, friends, and all those who were supportive and encouraging throughout my entire doctoral journey.

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I thank God for being able to complete this doctorate degree. I would also like to thank the following people without whom this doctoral journey would not have been possible: My committee members Dr. Ellett, Dr. Graham, Dr. Hunt, and formerly Dr. Campbell-Jones; Mrs. Griffin my peer reviewer; Dr. Lloyd for her guidance on coding; Mr. Brown and Mrs. Kazmierowicz for their supportive scheduling; my community partner administration and participants; my children for their patience, support, and prayers; my sister Geri Jackson, my prayer partner; Mr. Gorrell for pushing me to finish; and my friends for their support, prayers, and consideration.

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Introduction

Academic success is important in school and in life (Shanahan et al., 2010). Strong literacy skills support student achievement across the curriculum (Comber & Nixon, 2011). When reading problems develop early, they become more difficult to combat in later years (Maughan et al., 2009). Students with literacy problems in early elementary education often fall further behind as they progress through higher grades where reading materials becomes more complex (Torgesen et al., 2007). Dion, Brodeur, Gosselin, Campeau, and Fuchs (2010) conducted a study to determine the effects of reading intervention in primary grades and concluded that early intervention was productive. It is important to address literacy problems at an early age. Addressing literacy learning early provides a better opportunity to increase student achievement each year.

To address poor literacy achievement in my district, a case study was conducted to explore perceived best practices associated with foundational literary strategies from grades Pre-K to Grade 2 at a strong performing elementary school. First, an overview of district reading failure statistics was compared to state and national averages. Second, issues that impact reading achievement were discussed. Research questions focused on (a) teacher and administrative staff perceptions of literacy strategies related to achievement; (b) teacher and administrative staff perceptions of professional development as it related to student achievement in literacy; and (c) administrative decisions that impacted literacy learning, such as policy, procedures and/or processes.

Whole school reform and collaborative efforts of stakeholders can positively impact student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan, 2009). The conceptual framework of the study was a constructivist approach to identify perceived best practices through a pragmatic lens. The goal was to find what works. Observations and interviews allowed me to construct knowledge of how reading is taught and learned.

The Local Problem

There is a lack of reading achievement in my district. Students are not proficient in language arts literacy based on results from the state standardized assessments. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2010), at least three of the district schools have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the last eight years. Some of the issues that have contributed to the failing scores in language arts literacy are the constant movement of teaching staff and high administrative turnover. The annual movement of staff contributes to an inconsistent use of curriculum which negatively impacts the continuity of learning for students. Teacher in-service training is also lacking in the district. The district has had many administrative and staff personnel changes over the last several years. There have been three superintendents and two interim superintendents in the last 10-year period. Administrative leadership, principals, and teacher assignments have been changed annually**.** Staff is transferred every year between buildings and in content areas, which can reduce teacher effectiveness as subject matter experts. Constant reorganization can decrease the stability of the educational environment and can lead to gaps in practices or incongruous instructional practices.

The district's efforts to find the right balance of instructional practices have caused reading strategies to become unbalanced over time. Each new administrative team brought new language arts literacy ideas and reading programs for implementation. Previous administrative offerings were abandoned midstream before results could be obtained. The district was not able to benefit from administrative offerings and new programs became fruitless due to a lack of follow-through. The short tenure of each district superintendent created a lack of continuity in programs and strategies implemented. Teacher leadership has been negatively impacted as new jobs were created and job descriptions were redefined. For example, one superintendent wanted content area supervisors involved and interacting with teaching staff at their respective sites, while the next superintendent preferred supervisors to remain at central headquarters to review curriculum. Each new administration also changed the focus of professional development offerings, as well as the process for teacher training. As teacher training changed from administration to administration, instructional strategies changed. Inconsistency of strategies can negatively impact student achievement. Additionally, curriculum updates and revisions were placed on hold due to lack of guidance and budget restraints. Some curriculum became incomplete, outdated, or nonexistent.

The lack of district leadership, regarding both initiatives and directives, has created varying teacher practices and strategies. Lack of continuity in both horizontal and vertical articulation among and between grade levels has compounded the problem. Teaching staff also concurs that a problem exists in leadership related to student progress and academic achievement. Many teachers in the district understand the dynamics

incorporated with lack of continuity and inconsistency in curriculum, where the inability to appropriately implement successful strategies negatively impacts student achievement. To address the problem, the study of a strong performing district helped inform practice. Perceived best practices that positively impact student achievement, identified through case study research, were considered in changing district initiatives to increase student learning.

The student population in the local district is over 90% minority, with over 50% eligible for Title I funding which subsidizes free and reduced lunches for families identified as living at poverty level income status (NJDOE, 2010). The district special education population is 19.7%, which is almost double the state average of between 9%-11% (NJDOE, 2010). The middle school student mobility rate of 15.6% and the upper elementary school mobility rate of 15.9% both exceeded the stated average of 10.5% during the 2009-2010 school years (NJDOE, 2010). The township is located near three major inner cities and a military base, each contributing to the transient nature of the student base. The newly appointed district superintendent indicated in the 2011 opening convocation meeting that of the 9,000 students that reside in the township, only 4,200 attend the local public schools. Eligible students enroll in the nearby regional school or attend private schools.

Middle school students in the local district have experienced and expressed difficulty in comprehending and responding to state standardized test questions. During test preparatory tutoring classes between the years 2002-2009, students continuously struggled with understanding New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK)

test directions and mathematical word problems. Students were not able to distinguish between data necessary to solve the problems and insignificant or irrelevant data. Students also had problems comprehending lengthier test questions because fluency was often an issue. According to O'Shea, McQuiston, and McCollin (2009), fluency is an important component of literacy and increases comprehension. When dealing with multipart open-ended questions, students often did not address each portion of the question and many times went off topic in their answers. The lack of coherent teaching strategies to address literacy skills in my district continues to be a pervasive and persistent problem related to academic achievement resulting in students' inabilities to comprehend or perform various tasks requiring literacy skills.

The current superintendent announced at the opening convocation of the school year that the students were performing below average in both language arts and math. Administrative expectations to address low reading achievement included instituting word walls; classroom learning centers; small libraries in language arts classes along with reading corners; and student reading packets on winter, spring, and summer breaks. Highs school and middle school principals revised classroom schedules from 45-minute teaching periods to 90-minute blocks to provide more instructional time and more student engagement time. Administration was aware of poor student performance and low academic achievement and was addressing student achievement and academic success across the curriculum.

Statistics on Reading Failure

Reading failure is a problem across the country. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) reported that 37% of fourth graders in the United States were below proficient in reading achievement (as cited in Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2008). The NEAP report stated that the percentages are even higher in other socioeconomic groups, including low-income families, various minority groups, and English as a second language groups. The district students fall into several of these socioeconomic groups such as low-income and minority classifications and state test results indicate that Grades 5-12 students are below proficient in language arts literacy. Demographics associated with at-risk students often result in lack of literacy proficiency (Ackerman, Izard, Kobak, Brown, & Smith, 2007). The 2000-2010 local high school housed Grades 9-12; the middle school seventh and eighth, and the upper elementary school fifth and sixth. According to the 2009 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) State Report, the district high school, middle school, and upper elementary schools have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) and have been classified "in need of improvement" for the last 7-8 years (NJDOE, 2010).

In the language arts literacy section of the New Jersey 2009-2010 High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), only 1% of the district high school students scored advanced proficient compared to the state average of 18.7% (NJDOE, 2010). Although 57.1% of the students scored proficient on the same test, the district was 12.2 percentage points below the state average of 69.3% (NJDOE, 2010). The district had a higher than average rate of partially proficient high school students: 41.9% compared to the state

average of 12% (NJDOE, 2010). Almost half of the district high school students knew less than 50% of the test questions. At the national level, the district high school students had below average Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores. They scored 410 on the verbal portion of the test and 397 on essay questions compared to the state average of 496 and 499, respectively, in the same areas (NJDOE, 2010).

Over half, 58.2%, of the district seventh graders scored below proficient on the language arts literacy portion of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK7), which was 27.7% higher than the state average of 30.5% (NJDOE, 2010). The district eighth graders, at 36.6%, were also above the state average of 17.1% in the partially proficient category of the language arts literacy portion of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK8; NJDOE, 2010).

The majority of both fifth and sixth grade students in the district's upper elementary school did not pass the 2009-2010 language arts literacy portion of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK5, NJASK6; NJDOE, 2010). Fifty-three point five percent of district sixth graders and 57.1% of district fifth graders were below proficient compared to the state average of 34.5% for sixth graders and 36.7% for fifth graders, respectively. The 2009 NJASK6 language arts literacy cluster report indicated that sixth graders in the district earned 10.1 points lower than the state total in writing, 22.9 points lower in reading, and 16.6 points lower in analyzing text (NJDOE, 2010). In September 2011 at teacher orientation, the upper elementary principal reported that 98 of the 300 sixth grade students, approximately one third, were eligible for retention in June 2011.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify perceived best practices for foundational literacy achievement. A qualitative case study informed practice. A look at a strong performing school in a neighboring district subject to the same state literacy standards and assessment criteria provided direction and insight into school improvement for the local district. Classroom observations and interviews of K-2 elementary teachers provided in-depth understanding of instructional strategies that enhanced student learning and impacted literacy achievement. The neighboring district has historically had continuity of leadership, which leads to consistent practices that allow for productive results. Because of the reoccurring changes in administration and staff in the local district, a variety of programs have been instituted with no follow-through, thereby minimizing the ability to identify outcomes useful for data-driven initiatives. This study of a successful school district, achieving at or above local, state, and national academic standards informed practice and policy, addressing a need for improved literacy and academic achievement in the local school district.

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to identify perceived best practices and understand teacher perspectives on strategies that positively impact literacy achievement at the foundational or elementary level. The objective was to observe literacy strategies implemented in the classrooms of a strong performing school that enhanced teacher practice and improved student academic achievement with the ultimate goal of applying those best practices to a persistent literacy problem in the local district. A constructivist

interpretive approach was selected to investigate evidence-based strategies developed from data-driven criteria with the purpose of better understanding teacher perceptions of best literacy strategies, teacher preparedness, and classroom implementation of those evidence-based strategies.

Reading is necessary for academic achievement (Shanahan et al., 2010). A lack of literacy skills can impact learning across the curriculum (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Eckert, 2008). Literacy issues addressed at an early age impact later achievement (Dixon-Krauss, Januszka, & Chae, 2010). In Bloom's (1956) tier of hierarchical learning, foundational knowledge is a building block for higher-level synthesis of concepts. There are a variety of components that affect literacy achievement including comprehension, fluency, phonological awareness, decoding words, and writing. Teacher strategies and interventions implemented at the foundational levels can positively impact student achievement in literacy (Dixon-Krauss et al., 2010).

The conceptual framework that guided this study was a constructivist approach. The goal was to construct or build knowledge based on observations, interviews, and other collected data. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), a constructivist approach includes the study of a phenomenon that leads to an understanding or meaningful conclusion. I constructed and built knowledge based on the study findings and data. I used this approach to identify best literary practices and to understand the phenomena of literacy achievement at the primary or foundational level through observed evidenced-based strategies implemented in classroom settings (Lodico et al., 2010). Constructivist researchers employ inductive reasoning techniques to form

conclusions or theories based on patterns or themes. The data are viewed within the confines or bounds of the study. Unlike experimental methods that test a hypothesis, constructivists develop a theory after they collect the data. This study was viewed through a pragmatic lens because the goal was to identify perceived best practices that can address the problem of reading failure in the local district.

Special Terms

The following definitions were used in this study:

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): Assessment results in three grade spans for the purpose of calculating progress and identifying schools in need of improvement (NJDOE, 2010).

Assessments: High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) and New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. State tests designed to measure student progress in the attainment of the core curriculum content standards, (NJDOE, 2010).

National assessment of educational progress (NAEP): The largest national assessment of what the nation's students know and can do. NAEP assesses fourth-, eighth, and 12th grade students in subjects such as reading, mathematics, science, and writing (NJDOE, 2010).

No child left behind act of 2001 (NCLB): An act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice to give all students equal access to learning tools so that no child is left behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Student mobility rate: The percentage of students who both entered and left during the school year. The calculation is derived from the sum of students entering and leaving after the October enrollment count divided by the total enrollment (NJDOE, 2010).

Significance of the Problem

Illiteracy leads to failure, both in school and often in life (Shanahan et al., 2010). When students do not learn to read and write it negatively impacts their academic success across the board with a myriad of outcomes. Failure in literacy can cause a range of problems from academic failure and grade-level retention to increased student dropout rates and delinquency problems. This study addressed academic achievement; instructional strategies; local, state, and national initiatives; and social change impact.

The district data indicates that reading failure exists at the elementary level and upward from subject to subject, grade level to grade level, year after year. Students who experience reading failure in elementary school have compounded problems as they enter middle school and high school because secondary-level teachers often do not focus on reading skills and strategies, but more on content (Fisher & Frey, 2008). As content literature becomes more complex, these students fall further behind. Student failure to become proficient in literacy often affects all subjects. Poor comprehension limits learning across the curriculum. Students who do not read well often do not write well or experience difficulty articulating written responses (Miller, 2010). This study was conducted to identify perceived best practices in literacy achievement. To gain in-depth insight into productive literacy strategies, a case study design best suited this study. Through classroom observations, implementations of literacy strategies were evaluated

for process, effectiveness, and student interaction/response to teacher instructional methods. Interviews with teacher participants yielded teacher perspectives regarding the training, implementation of instructional strategies, and the impact on student achievement.

Literacy success at a strong performing school can lead to more student productivity when strategies are shared with colleagues. Early intervention is important in order to avoid a cycle of repetitive failure, which eventually leads to more intense interventions (Powers & Mandal, 2011). Hagaman, Luschen, and Reid (2010) indicated that a lack of literacy skills is one of the most common reasons students are referred to special education. With a higher than average percentage of special education students in the local district, applying best literacy practices identified in this study could help lower special education classification referrals in the local district. The goal is to implement perceived best practices to improve student achievement.

As the researcher, I constructed meaning from teacher perspectives regarding practices and strategies that impact academic achievement to address a gap in practice. Knight-McKenna (2009) suggested that one way to address literacy problems is to train educators in prevention techniques. Comprehension is an important skill, but teachers often do not implement strategies that teach comprehension (Stricklin, 2011). Fluency is related to comprehension and is important in literacy achievement (Goering & Baker, 2010; Hausheer, Hansen, & Doumas, 2011; Patton, Crosby, Houchins, & Jolivette, 2010), but its absence often indicated reading problems (Meisinger, Bloom, & Hynd, 2010). Speece et al. (2010) suggested that some reading problems develop as late at fourth grade

and early response to intervention (RTI) models do not always intercept students with latent problems. Ehren (2009) argued that teaching reading does not end at the elementary level, but must continue and be expanded through secondary levels to address comprehension as it relates to different disciplines and content specific texts. However, secondary teachers often focus only on content because they do not consider themselves reading teachers and do not include comprehension strategies to support content text (Ehren, 2009). This study will provide insight into strategies that have produced reading success.

Identifying best literacy practices can increase the local district's portfolio of instructional interventions to improve academic achievement. Literary success at the local level can impact state and national initiatives in reading achievement. The students can pass state and national standardized tests (NJASK, HSPA, and SATs) at a higher rate, which can impact national reading percentages reported by NEAP, the nation's report card. Implementing best literacy and instructional strategies identified in this study can improve the literary development of the student population in the local district. Education should develop students for real world situations (Reimers, 2009). Literacy problems have been related to behavior problems (Morgan, Farkas, Tufis, & Sperling, 2008). According to Platt (2009) reading is necessary across the curriculum and students with poor literacy skills may develop poor behavior (Platt, 2009). A lack of literacy of skills has also been linked to delinquency (O'Brien, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Shelley-Tremblay, 2007; Platt, 2009). This study can positively impact student achievement and ultimately improve the overall quality of life for local district students. This study

addressed a gap in practice by identifying best practices that impact academic literacy achievement.

Guiding Questions

A case study was conducted to gain in-depth insight into teacher perspectives regarding their perceptions of best practices related to academic achievement in the area of literacy. The case study was based on the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research designs are used to collect data through interviews, observations, and documentation, and the findings are summarized in a narrative format. The concepts or ideas found may lead to a theory, articulate a process, or establish a concrete relationship over time (Lodico et at., 2010). To obtain the data needed to construct meaning of teacher perceptions, observations and interviews were conducted to provide thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2010; Lodico et al., 2010). Qualitative questions were phrased to determine in-depth understanding and how or why a phenomenon was occurring (Creswell, 2010; Lodico et al., 2010).

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Overarching Question:

1. What literacy strategies do educators believe enhance student achievement in literacy (reading) in your district?
    a. What literacy strategies are being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement? (sub-question)
    b. How do students learn to read well in your district? (sub-question)

Overarching Question:

2. What are educator's perceptions of professional development related to student achievement of literacy learning?
    a. Describe the professional development programs you have attended at your elementary school. (sub-question)
    b. What do educators believe are the components of an effective professional development program for literacy achievement? (sub-question)
3. How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning/achievement?

Review of Literature Addressing the Problem

My literature review strategy consisted of searches in educational research databases from the Walden Library that included EBSCO Host, ERIC, SAGE publications, and some ProQuest publications. Search sources included primary, full text, peer-reviewed articles from the last 5 years. Articles on reading interventions over the past 3 decades or longer have documented the evolution of reading strategies commonly used to date, but I have referenced and cited mainly current literature. My initial goal was to identify reading failure in general, then narrow it down to find common, core causes, and solutions. I was able to identify a common thread throughout many of the articles that indicated that primary or foundational practices impact reading achievement at later ages and levels. Many of the studies reported commonly used strategies that successfully impacted student achievement. Numerous articles from various perspectives repeatedly identified concepts that impacted literacy learning such as grade level, age, socioeconomic background, and at-risk concerns, which eventually indicated the point of saturation and no new learning was emerging. All literature,

sources and sites relevant to this study were documented and referenced throughout this section. Sources also included internet sites for public local and national data. Public data sites confirmed that reading failure is not just a local issue, but is also a concern at the county, state and national levels.

Various approaches have been employed to address reading failure including school reform, data-driven decisions, and the engagement of diverse literacy strategies. Research studies have been conducted to determine how literacy learning is achieved. School reform is continuously on the horizon with a myriad of ideas, but effectiveness is a constant question (Rose, 2010). Data-driven changes have been stressed, but Schildkamp and Kuiper (2010) suggested that data-driven decisions are more effective when the data are used competently. Likewise, Fisher and Frey (2008) indicated that strategies in and of themselves do not make the difference, but rather strategies used in meaningful ways can enhance comprehension. In a quasi-experimental study two methods of reading interventions were used to map student achievement and the results indicated that a structured program was effective in increasing reading achievement (Helf, Cooke, & Konrad, 2014). In this study, I identified a structured curriculum that positively impacts literacy learning in a strong performing district that effectively implements policy, curriculum, and strategies to obtain successful results. This district is competently making data-driven decisions based on sound research.

A review of literature identified various literacy strategies and techniques. Zucker, Justice, and Piasta (2009) reported that reading aloud to children does help develop comprehension and decoding ability. Zucker et al. suggested techniques to

improve literacy related to printed text. Cadieux and Boudreault (2005) discussed the positive effects of adult-child reading pairs, where parents got involved in their child's reading activities. Cadieux and Boudreault's study indicated that parental behaviors such as the level of parent cooperation, communication, and enthusiasm led to improved reading comprehension in their children. Kletzien (2009) discussed paraphrasing as a means to improve comprehension. Kletzien distinguished paraphrasing from summarizing and suggested that rereading, discussing, and questioning are a part of the process. As students move through upper level grades, teachers often require less reading out loud than do elementary school teachers. To have students continually improve in the area of literacy, O'Shea, McQuiston, and McCollin (2009) suggested that secondary level teachers continue to have students read aloud, regardless of ability, in order to increase fluency and gain confidence. Walker (2003) discussed commonly used strategies that contributed to student self-efficacy in the area of literacy, such as student choices, which empowers students and gives them ownership of their work. Other strategies include teacher involvement, encouragement, feedback, and appropriate assessments. Flynn (2007) identified teacher behaviors, rather than curriculum, as the catalyst for student achievement. Steckel (2009) conducted a case study to determine effective strategies used by literacy coaches as they relate to learning achievement through active involvement, thinking, and discussion. A one-shot survey conducted by Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009) revealed that over 50% of the teachers who participated agreed that a combination of in-class support and individualized reading instruction by a reading coach were means of intervention that were beneficial to students. Teachers realize that

it takes a variety of instructional strategies to increase learning. In this study, teachers used similar methods to support literacy learning. Students were provided basic skills assistance with a literacy coach and individualized reading support through the guided reading program.

Change is often necessary to improve practice but issues such as cost and teacher training can impede the process. In a quasi-experimental (pretest/posttest) study, Read It Again (RIA) was tested to determine its effectiveness (Justice et al., 2010). The study was conducted with at-risk students in eight rural Appalachian counties that spanned over two states. Twenty preschool teachers and 137 students attending 14 schools in four districts participated in the study. Eleven teachers served as the experimental group, while nine served as the control group. Justice et al. (2010) found high posttest scores, yet recommended that a more rigorous study be conducted to confirm results. This study addressed concerns associated with at-risk students, students similar to those in my district. The study was meaningful because it addressed factors that prohibit change, such as the cost of new curriculum and the teacher training needed to implement new strategies. The RIA program helped alleviate both issues, which could positively affect struggling districts. In this study a model curriculum was identified that also addressed reading failure. Teacher training was embedded in the curriculum and literacy components purchased over time can minimize initial costs. Adopting a program that works enables the district to expedite needed change.

Content reading strategies can improve literacy learning when effectively executed. Assorted techniques have been applied with varying results. Adams and Pegg

(2012) observed secondary teachers incorporate literacy strategies into math and science lessons over a 2-year period in a qualitative study. The literacy strategies used, such as vocabulary, reading for comprehension, or descriptive writing were often consumed by the math and science content goals. The implementation techniques varied by math and science teachers and altered literary outcomes. Adams and Pegg concluded that was difficult to balance the execution of literacy strategies in content areas. The lesson objectives can get amalgamated between the literacy strategy and the subject matter and one often overwhelms the other. McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) conducted an experimental study to compare effectiveness between content versus strategy-based approaches to teaching reading comprehension. McKeown et al. showed steady results between the first and second years. Only certain areas of the test measures indicated improved achievement. McKeown et al. suggested relating content to relevant ideas so students could make connections that would increase comprehension. Thibodeau (2008) conducted a study of high school teachers using job-embedded professional development and collaborative measures to address student achievement in content literacy. Thibodeau's results showed that student-centered learning, rather than teacher-led directives was beneficial for both students and teachers. Fisher and Frey (2008) conducted a study on student and teacher perspectives of useful content literacy strategies. Fisher and Frey used surveys, interviews, and observations to collect data over several years at a high school where various literacy strategies were employed. Fisher and Frey showed that meaningful literature increased participation and spurred deep questioning by students. Fisher and Frey indicated that students wanted and needed to

participate in developing their education. Alger (2009) agreed that making connections to content area literacy enhanced comprehension and asserted that all teachers are teachers of reading. Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2009) specified that using well-defined strategies frequently and across the curriculum increased literacy success. Thompson et al., shared that creating change to increase literacy learning involves whole school learning. All teachers must reinforce literacy strategies to improve student achievement.

Five Components of Literacy Achievement

Researchers have identified five basic components associated with literacy achievement: phonics, phonics awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010; Goering & Baker, 2010; Hausheer, Hansen, & Doumas, 2011; O'Shea, McQuiston, & McCollin, 2009). These components develop foundational aptitudes that augment reading proficiency. Foundational literacy learning is necessary for success across the curriculum and throughout life. (Hausheer et al., 2011; Hirsch, 2010; Patton et al., 2010). The lack of language literacy skills creates a literary void that contributes to academic failure across the curriculum (Miller, 2010). Low-level literacy skills can create problems in other academic areas and can become increasingly problematic, particularly in the area of comprehension (Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010). Pitcher et al. (2010) conducted a collection of case studies using the constant comparative method to determine if students' needs were being met and findings indicated that schools were implementing blanket programs instead of interventions to meet specific student deficiencies.

Phonics. Phonics, a "sound-symbol" code approach to literacy instruction (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010), has been found to be successful in the kindergarten and first grade levels, as well as for at-risk and learning disabled students when systematically taught. A lack of phonological skills decreases a student's ability to decode words (Hayiou-Thomas, Harlaar, Dale, & Plomin, 2010). The inability to decode words negatively impacts reading ability, but early intervention at the kindergarten level and systematic phonetic instruction positively impacts achievement and improves outcomes in word decoding, reading, and comprehension (Patton et al., 2010). Phonics is an important part of elementary literacy education. The ability to sound out words is crucial in reading achievement. Phonetic instruction is most effective when taught in primary grades.

Phonetic awareness. Phonetic awareness is the ability to understand sounds related to spoken words. Phonetic awareness includes letter recognition and sight words and is a predictor of reading readiness in primary grades (Patton et al., 2010). A lack of phonological awareness contributes to the inability to achieve word recognition skills which results in deficiencies in comprehension. Cassidy et al. (2010) stated, "Phonemes are the smallest units of sound which make up spoken language, while phonemic awareness refers to the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes" (p. 647). In a study on the relationship between preschool speech and language skills, Hayiou-Thomas et al. (2010) found that oral language, verbal abilities, and language deficits contributed to nonphonological literary abilities, which also impeded comprehension. A lack of verbal and language skills are predictors of later literacy failure. Effective instruction of

regarding phonetic awareness must also include differentiated instructional techniques to reach all students. In a quasi-experimental study on phonological awareness, the results that showed paired reading strategies had a positive effect on the at-risk kindergarten participants (Cadieux & Boudreault, 2005). Reading aloud enhances literacy skills. Listening to reading increases comprehension and helps students improve articulation and pronunciation of words. Paired reading techniques increase literacy achievement. Reading aloud was a significant component of the curriculum identified in this case study.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary has been related to reading achievement and comprehension. Vocabulary has been referred to as high-frequency words, higher level words, and content specific or unique words (Cassidy et al., 2010). Vocabulary and other literacy disparities between various socioeconomic groups and also English language learners (ELLs) affect reading success and how various types of texts are comprehended (Hirsch, 2010; Justice et al., 2010). Crabtree, Alber-Morgan, and Konrad (2010) agreed that comprehension difficulties are related to vocabulary. A lack of prior knowledge, subject area familiarity, and inability to execute strategies that enhance reading reduces vocabulary exposure and contributes to failure in the area of comprehension.

Comprehension. Comprehension, the ability to understand and make meaning of text (Patton et al., 2010), has become so important that NCLB (2001) federal funding was provided to ensure that all students could read by the end of third grade (Cassidy et al., 2010). Both cognitive and metacognitive skills are associated with proficient comprehension (Walker, Monro, & Richards, 1998). Three metacognitive strategies

(prior knowledge, context clues, and sequencing) enhanced comprehension achievement in a study of first grade students (Patton et al., 2010). According to Hirsch (2010) and Alger (2009), prior knowledge is an essential cognitive component to comprehension. Other variables that contribute to comprehension include letter identification, decoding, rapid naming, phonological skills, vocabulary, semantics related to grammar, and oral language skills (Hayiou-Thomas et al., 2010). An additional component that impacts student achievement is teacher preparedness in reading instruction (Cassidy et al., 2010). In a 2-year, quasi-experimental study of fifth grade students, two comprehension approaches were compared (McKeown, et al., 2009). The results indicated that a context approach furthered comprehension better than a strategic approach. Students improved understanding using context questions and discussion rather than comprehension techniques (McKeown et al., 2009). Stricklin (2011) agreed that it is not solely strategies, but a combination of appropriate teacher instruction that includes, questioning, clarifying, and discussion in reciprocal teacher-student interaction, that positively impacts comprehension. The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (as cited in Shanahan et al., 2010) recommended a combination of the above mentioned strategies at the primary level, which includes teaching students strategies, meaningful questioning, quality discussion, a variety of purposeful text selections, and a motivational environment that encourages reading. Students comprehend in an array of learning styles. Using an assortment of strategies provides more opportunity for students to increase learning. Multiplicity of practices allows teachers to reach more students. A

mix of procedures can reinforce comprehension development. Participants in this study affirmed integrating methods support student learning.

Fluency. Fluency is an important skill related to literacy and reading achievement because fluency and comprehension have a relationship with each other (Cassidy et al., 2010; Patton et al., 2010; O'Shea et al., 2009). According to Meisinger et al. (2010), fluency is usually addressed in primary grades and is a key component to academic achievement. Meisinger et al. (2010) assessed 50 students and found a significant correlation between the lack of fluency and the lack of reading comprehension, with 24% of the participants having a particular fluency deficit related to word recognition. Fluency is the flow of reading where comprehension or understanding is achieved. Fluency can further be defined as the "efficient, effective word recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of text. Fluency is manifested as the "accurate, rapid, expression of oral reading" (Cassidy et al., 2010, p. 651). Patton et al. (2010) stated that fluency is a cognitive process that includes word decoding and letter recognition techniques. An unfortunate cycle usually occurs in nonfluent readers. When reading becomes a challenge, nonfluent readers tend to read less and often fall further behind in literacy development.

Researchers agree that if fluency is not addressed in primary grades, reading ability is usually stunted, and reading becomes more challenging in higher grades because text content becomes more complex (Patton et al., 2010). Because fluency is a pertinent literary function, it is often included in response to intervention (RTI) assessments and are included as a part of the definition of dyslexia (Meisinger et al.,

2010). Early intervention is most productive in increasing literacy achievement. RTI is a commonly used approach to reading intervention and is considered a framework not a model (Mokhtari, Porter, & Edwards, 2010; Speece et al., 2010). The goal of RTI is to address reading failure by applying measures to improve reading achievement for at-risk students and to minimize special education referrals at the primary level. Disparities related to RTI effectiveness include implementation, assessment, and availability of resources. Mokhtari et al. (2010) found that RTI was most productive when experienced teachers provided instruction. Improving fluency can improve reading, build vocabulary, and increase critical thinking skills (O'Shea et al., 2009). There are a variety of ways to address fluency such as choral reading, paired reading, and repetitive reading. In an alternate view, Hagaman et al. (2010) found that fluency should not be presumed to produce reading comprehension as there are readers who have the ability to rapidly read through text, yet cannot articulate the meaning of the content. Fluency is an important literary component but should be taught in conjunction with other literary strategies. A well-developed often reads fluently but fluency alone does not create a well-developed reader. Literacy achievement includes the ability to read well, write well, comprehend, and synthesize various literary techniques associated with language arts learning.

Trends of literacy components. Trends regarding these five indicators of literacy and reading achievement has fluctuated over the past 20 years (Jacobs, 2008) and different skills have been emphasized in literacy instruction. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, trends indicated a move away from phonics and phonetic awareness (coding and decoding skills) toward a whole language approach, which may have negatively

impacted reading achievement. Whole language created a different approach to presenting literary skills. Over time, standardized national assessments provided data that refuted the success of the whole language approach (Cassidy et al., 2010) and literacy instruction has since reverted back to an emphasis on phonics or a combination of both phonics and whole language practices that include vocabulary and comprehension. A combination of direct instruction and whole language help students grasp various literacy strategies (Jacobs, 2008). Phonics includes concepts associated with vocabulary, pronunciation, syllables, rhyming, consonant blends, decoding, and language mechanics such as capitals, punctuation, and grammar. Whole language encourages concepts such as inventive spelling and emphasizes writing flow rather than focus on standard language arts regulations. Students are encouraged to capture thoughts and edit later for conventions. Problems arose when the editing process did not occur. Alleviating the revision process created gaps in student learning and weakened literacy development, in particular writing. Each methodology encompassed useful literary strategies but whole language without a phonics base created a deficit in student literacy skills. Combining a phonics program with whole language provides more thorough literacy instruction.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational learning classifications was the basis or conceptual framework for this study. Bloom's model consists of three domains, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, but I focused on cognitive development. Each level within a domain indicates a progression in the learning process. Knowledge-based capabilities relating to learning, identifying, and comprehension of data was the area of

focus in this study. Although Bloom originally focused on the relationship between curriculum and testing, the learning classifications later became a framework for student learning in classrooms. The cognitive domain comprises stages of learning from basic recall to a higher integration of concepts learned. The process includes practices such as remembering, understanding, and applying facts or learned concepts and moves to higher-level thinking that involves synthesizing material by analyzing, evaluating, and creating new learning from the influence of those learned facts and concepts. Each stage of learning is similar to a building block upon which the next level rests. Learning at the higher levels depends on knowledge attained at the lower levels. This concept of building knowledge based on foundational learning was relative to my study.

Many researchers (Comber, 2011; Dion et al., 2010; Jacobs, 2008; Knight-McKenna, 2009; Maughan et al., 2009; Morgan, Farkas, Tufis, & Sperling, 2008;) agreed that literacy achievement at the primary level supports academic achievement across the curriculum and in later learning. Students that learn to read, comprehend, and write well in primary years are often successful in other areas of learning (Comber, 2011; Knight-McKenna, 2009). It is necessary to read and comprehend in all content areas and secondary teachers often focus on content rather than reading strategies (Ehren, 2009). When students obtain literacy achievement at the foundational level they often do well academically in later grade levels (Maughan et al., 2009). Literacy is a building block upon which other learning is constructed. The literacy components discussed earlier (phonics, phonetic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency) are taught at the primary level and strategies that help students develop mastery of these skills enable

students to achieve proficiency in literacy learning and provide skills transferable across the curriculum (Georing & Baker, 2010). In a qualitative study on elementary school literacy learning and teaching strategies it was determined that phonics and whole language strategies impacted student achievement in literacy (Costello, 2012). Costello (2012) focused on primary grade students. The findings indicated that literacy success by third grade was imperative because literacy learning provided the foundation to learn in higher grades, a concept relevant to Bloom (1956). As students gain basic knowledge, they learn to integrate and manipulate the concepts at higher levels and also create new knowledge.

The impact of professional development to implement cognitive reading strategies was tested to determine the outcomes in an experimental study by Sailors and Price (2010). The goal of the study was to determine if precepts about cognitive learning impacted reading when strategies were executed by trained teachers. The results confirmed that the students instructed by teachers who received professional development outperformed the control group students. Sailors and Price (2010) used professional development to focus on acknowledged precepts about cognitive learning as it related to reading. Memory and the use of patterns remain factors that largely contribute to cognitive learning relative to reading and new studies regarding brain-based research are being conducted to determine how the brain makes these connections (Willis, 2009). Literacy learning is a cognitive learning activity that it is most effective when implemented at the foundational level where it can positively impact student achievement across the curriculum resulting in increased learning in later year. My research indicated

that the lack of literacy skills had a far reaching, negative impact on student success in school, across the curriculum, and in life. Researchers concurred that early interventions increased opportunity for student literacy achievement. The success of various strategies at the primary level supports my research for best foundational literary practices that positively impact reading instruction and achievement.

Implications

Findings focused on identification of perceived best practices that enhance student achievement in literacy at the foundational level. The project, a policy recommendation (Appendix A) was developed based on the findings of this case study. The benefit of this project was to disseminate research-based data findings to create change that would positively impact literacy learning in a failing district. The potential for positive social change could extend from the local level to the county, state, and national levels.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study was conducted to identify perceived best practices and teacher strategies that positively impact student academic achievement in the area of literacy. The goal was to observe successful classroom instruction, and understand teacher perspectives at a strong performing school to address literacy failure in a neighboring district. I was able to ascertain from observations and interviews how literacy strategies impact student achievement. Section 2 delineates the methodology of the study including an explanation of the research design and approach, participant description and justification, data collection plan, data analysis techniques for qualitative studies, along with outcomes and results. Section 3 includes a description of the goals

and rationale of the project, a review of literature addressing the project, an explanation of how the project relates to the problem, a project evaluation plan, the importance of the project to local stakeholders, and how the project impacts positive social change in the larger context. Section 4 includes conclusions regarding the project's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for alternate ways to address the problem. Also included is a discussion on scholarship, project development, evaluation, leadership and personal learning as a researcher. Finally, a reflection on the importance of the work and implications for future research is provided. Appendix A includes the project and presentation slides on study data. Additional appendices include study protocols and evaluation instruments.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

Section 2 provides a description of the research design and approach and concludes with the findings. This section includes a description of the participants, selection process, the number of participants, procedures for gaining access to the participants, methods of establishing a working relationship with participants, and measures for the ethical protection of participants. It also includes the description of data collection choices, the data collected, and the role of the researcher. The qualitative results section provides the findings and outcomes of the case study. The findings include a description of the process by which data were generated, gathered, and recorded. Data analysis results are provided along with the system used for keeping track of data. Further components include a discussion of the coding process, emerging themes, and how the findings relate to the problem. The outcomes are aligned to the conceptual framework of this study as it correlates to Bloom's (1956) theories on learning. The procedures that contributed to accuracy, validity, and reliability are presented along with the project. This section concludes with a summary of the study outcomes.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This study was conducted to identify perceived best practices in literacy achievement in a strong performing elementary school. A qualitative case study approach was used to identify teachers' perceptions of best practices that impact student achievement in literacy and to obtain an understanding of teacher perspectives regarding

literacy strategies that positively impact student literacy achievement. Questions guiding this study are

Overarching Question:

1. What literacy strategies do educators believe enhance student achievement in literacy (reading) in your district?
    a. What literacy strategies are being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement? (sub-question)
    b. How do students learn to read well in your district? (sub-question)

Overarching Question:

2. What are educator's perceptions of professional development related to student achievement of literacy learning?
    c. Describe the professional development programs you have attended at your elementary school. (sub-question)
    d. What do educators believe are the components of an effective professional development program for literacy achievement? (sub-question)
3. How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning/achievement?

Historically, qualitative research has been used to gain in-depth knowledge, learn how something is done well, and to study a phenomenological concept (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative research is usually associated with conceptual frameworks to explain a phenomenon, provide meaning, articulate a process, or identify teacher perceptions of best practices. Inductive reasoning techniques are used during an applied research process to examine the effectiveness of practices (Lodico et al., 2010). Case studies

document a group or individual's experience in a particular setting. Other types of qualitative approaches include ethnography which focuses on the study of cultures, grounded theory which is used to build a theory based on data collected, and phenomenological studies which are more appropriate for profiling the participants (Lodico et al., 2010).

Ethnography focuses on analyzing and understanding a culture. The use of ethnological studies in education has been influenced by anthropological and sociological practices used in the study of cultures (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). The goal of an ethnographic study is to understand a group's behavior and how that behavior may relate to a larger setting, such as a group, an institution, or society. Ethnographic studies are usually conducted over a long period of time to provide a detailed account of how a particular group operates on a daily basis in terms of beliefs, thoughts, activities, rituals, and patterns (Creswell, 2008). One unique aspect of this type of study is that the researcher often becomes involved in the culture as an observer-participant to obtain in-depth knowledge about the culture and to gain perspectives from the participants' viewpoint. The purpose of my study was to identify perceptions of best practices in literacy achievement and although culture will have some bearing on student success, culture was not the emphasis of reported findings. Consequently, an ethnographic study was not the most appropriate methodology for my study.

Grounded theory research is a systematic approach to build or confirm a theory based on the data collected. The researcher builds a theory from the ground up or verifies an existing theory based on findings. The researcher often seeks to build or develop a

theory rather than applying a pre-existing theory that does not fit the process being researched. The goal of the researcher is to explain or theorize how a process occurs over time by providing a conceptual framework for a particular topic or process (Creswell, 2008). Data are organized into thematic categories that will eventually create a model or base that anchors the theory, grounding it. The theory may be generalized to a larger population. The researcher may collect rounds of data to confirm or disprove the developing theory (Lodico et al., 2010). My study on best practices in literacy achievement was based on an existing conceptual framework that reading is fundamental for academic achievement across the curriculum. The goal of my study was to identify research-based literacy practices that positively impacted student achievement and not develop a new theory. For that reason, grounded theory research was not applicable to my study.

Phenomenological studies examine the experiences of individuals. These experiences may or may not be based on cultural aspects which separate them from ethnological studies. A study emphasizes the perspective of each individual participant and his or her personal interpretation of a particular phenomenon (Lodico et al., 2010). The researcher is interactive with the participants to gain a more in-depth understanding of their norms and allow participant feedback to shape the direction of the study. The goal of a phenomenological study is give voice to individual perceptions of the same experience by providing a variety of viewpoints. Although my study used interviews to obtain teacher perspectives on strategies impacting literacy achievement, the focus was not on individual perspectives but rather emerging themes that identify best practices,

overall. Therefore, a phenomenological study was not the best approach for my research project study goal.

Case study research provides in-depth explanations. The goal is to provide a detailed understanding of a bounded unit or case through rich descriptions (Lodico et al., 2010). Case study researchers investigate a question or problem to ascertain meaning or identify a process and determine what works, or improve practice through a variety of data collection tools such as interviews, observations, and reviewing records. Triangulating, or cross-referencing multiple types of data provides validity to the study (Glense, 2011). Case study research differs from other qualitative research approaches such as ethnographic, grounded theory, or phenomenological because of the limitations on time and participants involved in the study which creates a bounded system.

Using a constructivist interpretive lens, my goal was to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices and to describe strategies believed to impact literacy achievement through the use of observations, interviews, and data that supports student success in a strong performing school. A case study approach provided the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge by observing classroom interactions between teachers and students associated with literacy strategies that may positively impact student learning. Participant interviews provided understanding and clarification of instructional practices and concepts, as well as teacher perspectives regarding strategies that impacted student literacy achievement.

Participants

Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative studies. The participants are chosen because they best suit the study purpose. They can provide knowledge or understanding relative to the study topic (Creswell, 2008). My study included two types of participants: teaching staff and administrative staff. Teaching staff were certified, trained classroom teachers of primary grade levels Pre-K through second grade, who presented classroom lessons. Teachers provided lesson objectives on strategies implemented in the classroom and shared perspectives regarding effective strategies, professional development related to student instruction, and district policy related to literacy instruction. Administrative staff invited to participate in the study included one elementary school reading coach, one elementary assistant principal, the elementary school principal, one district language arts supervisor, and the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for the district. Administrative staff was invited to provide insight into how literacy is taught at the primary level. Administrative staff was also invited to provide their perspectives on how professional development and district policy and practices related to literacy learning that impacted student achievement. Administrative staff provided information on overall district goals and objectives related to literacy learning. The purpose of selecting these participants was to obtain insight into perspectives on literacy strategies, professional development related to literacy learning and district policy, and procedures that impact literacy learning resulting in student academic achievement. These personnel provided a holistic view of their district methodologies and practices that contribute to student literacy success.

Criteria for Participant Selection

The goal of this study was to identify best literacy practices at the primary level that positively impacted student achievement. Participants were selected from certified, trained Pre-K to second grade level teachers of literacy. According to Bloom (1956) foundational knowledge establishes the constructs for higher level learning. Most researchers concur that fundamental reading achievement occurs at the primary level (Dion et al., 2010; Dixon-Krauss et al., 2010; Powers & Mandal, 2011). Literacy procedures used between and across grade levels at this high performing elementary school informed practice. Primary grade level teachers of language arts literacy were appropriate participants for this study. Administrative participants also informed practice as the decision makers of district language arts literacy policy that drove instruction.

Justification for Number of Participants

Approximately 10 to 15 participants allow for saturation or identification of reoccurring themes in qualitative research data (Creswell, 2008). The number of participants in this study was sufficient given that seven of the twelve participants provided two sets of data. Twelve participants were invited to participate in the study. The participants consisted of both teachers and administrators. The teacher participants included one Pre-K, two kindergarten, two first grade, and two second grade teachers. The administrative participants invited to participate in this study included one elementary school reading coach, one elementary assistant principal, the elementary school principal, one district language arts supervisor, and the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for the district. The teacher participants implemented the

classroom strategies. Both teaching staff and administrative staff were interviewed to gain an understanding of primary level literacy strategies, professional development related to literacy strategies, and district policy related to literacy learning. One administrative staff e-mailed her response to the administrative interview protocol. Together, the data provided a whole-school view of how literacy learning occurs in the elementary school of this strong performing district. Classroom observations were performed first followed by an interview with the same teacher. Observations were used to identify teacher practices and strategies that impacted student achievement in literacy. Interviews provided first-hand knowledge and perspectives on how students achieved literacy success in the primary grades. Interviews also helped to clarify observed classroom techniques. The administrative interviews provided perspectives on teacher professional development and district policy related to literacy initiatives. Administrative participants informed practice on the selection and implementation of literacy curriculum, benchmark data, and district growth. A participant chart is show in Table 1.

Table 1

Study Participants and Data Collection Activities

Participant List	**Classroom Observations (40 Minutes)**	**Interviews (30 Minutes)**
Pre-K (only one available)	1 Teacher	1 Teacher
Kindergarten	2 Teachers	2 Teachers (Observed)
First Grade	2 Teachers	2 Teachers (Observed)
Second Grade	2 Teachers	2 Teachers (Observed)
Elementary Literacy Coach Elementary Vice-Principal		1 Interview Chose not to participate
Elementary Principal		Not available to participate
District Supervisor-Language Arts		1-E-mailed in answers to interview protocol
District Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction		Chose not to participate
Totals	7 Observations	9 Interviews
Total Participants		9 Participants

I obtained a letter of cooperation from the superintendent and the building principal (Appendix B) that confirmed consent to perform this study and to access the site and participants. To gain access to the participants, the district required a response to a District Policy Code #N2241 questionnaire (Appendix C), which addressed the purpose of my study, the amount of time needed to collect the data at the site, the time

requirements of the participants, the use of data and results, the activities in which I was engaged during data collection, the benefits to the district, and provisions to protect the participants. I provided the district all appropriate protocols prior to data collection.

I obtained superintendent and school principal permissions to gain access to the participants. The school principal was e-mailed teacher and administrative invitations (Appendices D and E) as well as hard copies which I delivered to the school. Teacher and administrative staff signed appropriate informed consent documents (Appendices F and G) agreeing to freely participate in the study, as well as the right to withdraw at any time. One administrative participant provided implied consent by e-mailing back her responses to the administrative protocol. Study participants selected e-mail as the preferred method of contact. I corresponded with each participant via e-mail throughout the data collection process. Classroom observations took 40 minutes and the interviews took 30 minutes. Member checking was employed to allow participants an opportunity to review findings and to provide feedback. The purpose and goal of the study was explained to participants via e-mail and through the letter of consent, which also included a request for permission to audiotape interviews. All procedures were explained thoroughly and participants were informed of their right to ask questions, view study results, and remain anonymous. Participants coordinated scheduling by setting up a mutually agreeable time table for observations and interviews. Observations were conducted in the teacher participant's classroom. Each teacher was provided a Data Collection Coordination Request via e-mail to allow for data collection in their classroom (Appendix H). A mutually agreed upon signal or cue was provided to the teacher to use

during the classroom observation in the event the participant chose to withdraw from the study during the observation session. Interviews for all participants were held in a mutually agreeable, neutral location, where the participant was free to withdraw at any time without negative repercussions.

Methods of establishing a researcher-participant working relationship was supported by common professional bonds. I have similar certifications and professional experiences in the primary grade level environment and a rapport was easily established. In addition to a common professional background, I was familiar with the district, the educational structure, and some of the programs they established to support student academic achievement. The participants and I had common goals as educators to help all students learn and achieve educational success. Personal introductions to each participant regarding my background helped to initiate a cordial, collaborative environment. To engage the participants and to gain trust, I provided clear explanations of the purpose and goal of my study. Positive body language during both observations and interviews supported my efforts to put the participant at ease (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Rapport was built by reaffirming that I did not have any supervisory responsibility over the participants and by emphasizing that the observations and interviews were not a critique of teacher performance, but rather an attempt to collect data to identify best literary practices that impacted student achievement. Teacher participants were encouraged to perform as they naturally would in a familiar educational environment to help capture the true essence of daily processes and procedures. As a high performing district, the strategies identified added to the positive nature of my study.

Ethical protection of the participants was ensured by requesting only voluntary participation. Participants signed an informed consent letter that included the study purpose, goals, and procedures. All participants had the right to withdraw at any time. To ensure anonymity and keep identification confidential, I created pseudonyms for each participant. It was made clear that there were no known risks associated with the study. I had no supervisory authority over any participants. Participants selected the location they felt most comfortable for their interviews which allowed them the ability to withdraw at any time and alleviate any duress. Schedules were mutually agreed upon and member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of my findings for the participants. No student participants were included in the study. The Date Use Agreement (Appendix I) was not used because school records and school data were not available for review. No identifying characteristics of were used in order to protect the study participants. Participant pseudonyms were used when referring to study participants to preserve their anonymity. Pseudonyms included a letter and a number such as T1 for a teacher participant and A1 for an administrative participant.

Data Collection

For this qualitative case study, classroom observations and interviews were used to collect data. Observations provided data on strategies implemented in the classroom that impacted literacy learning. Interviews provided thick, rich data on teacher and administrative perspectives regarding valuable literacy strategies related to student learning, how teacher preparedness impacted student literacy learning, and district policy and procedures that impacted literacy achievement at this high performing elementary

school. Observations and interviews are common to case study research as they provide rich descriptions (Creswell, 2008; Lodico et at., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Observations and interviews were performed over the course of a 9-week time period. Purposeful sampling was enlisted to select knowledgeable participants, well versed in the strategic implementation of literacy strategies that positively affected student achievement.

Seven elementary teachers participated in this study (two second grade, two first grade, two kindergarten and one Pre-K teacher). Teachers e-mailed a pre-observation form (Appendix J) to present lesson objectives prior to the classroom observation. Each teacher and I engaged in a brief discussion of the lesson objectives prior to the classroom observation to clarify the strategy being implemented and to address any questions or concerns of the participant. Each teacher participant engaged in one 40-minute classroom observation of a literacy language arts lesson, followed by one 30-minute interview. The participants selected the dates and times for their classroom observations and interviews. The focus of the classroom observations was to observe the implementation of literacy strategies that impacted student literacy learning. The focus of teacher interviews were to clarify data collected during the classroom observation and to gain insight into teacher perspectives on literacy strategies, teacher training, and district decisions that affected student achievement in literacy. Interviews were audiotaped. Findings were provided to study participant for member checking.

Administrative participants included the school reading coach, and language arts supervisor. One administrative participant participated in one 30-minute and one administrative participant e-mailed a response. The focus of administrative interviews

were to gain insight into perspectives on successful literacy strategies, teacher training that impacted student learning, and district policy, procedures, and processes that impacted student achievement in literacy. Interviews were audiotaped and findings were provided to participants for member checking.

Observation notes were manually written in the form of field notes. A field note recording form (Appendix K) allowed for annotated comments of the observation and questions regarding the observation. Questions generated during the observation were included in the teacher's interview. Both teacher and administrative interviews were audiotaped with the participants consent. Audiotapes were transcribed within 24-48 hours after the interview. Member checking was employed and findings were provided to participants to review for accuracy and feedback. All data collected was secured in a locked structure at the researcher's residence and will be held for a period of five years. No one has access to any data collected except the researcher. All data will be thoroughly shredded and destroyed at the appropriate time. The Teacher Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix L and the Administrative Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix M.

General Interview Protocol

Overarching Question:

1. What literacy strategies do educators believe enhance student achievement in literacy learning in your district?
    a. What literacy strategies are being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement? (sub-question)

b. How do students learn to read well in your district? (sub-question)

Overarching Question:

2. What are educator's perceptions of professional development related literacy learning in your district?
    a. Describe the professional development programs you have attended at your elementary school. (sub-question)
    b. What do educators believe are the components of an effective professional development program for literacy achievement? (sub-question)
    c. How does professional development impact literacy learning and student academic achievement?
3. How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning/achievement?

The study questions guided the interviewing process. Additional questions were generated from classroom observations to clarify lesson strategies. Interviews provided an opportunity to gather data related to the study questions, the interview protocols and notations resulting from the classroom observation. Tables of typed field notes and interview transcripts provided a system for keeping track of data for analysis.

The Data Collection Process

An invitation was provided to elementary teaching staff and district administration to participate in this study. Purposeful sampling was elicited to draw staff knowledgeable in literary instructional strategies. The participant pool consisted of elementary literacy/reading teaching staff grades Pre-K through second grade and administrative staff associated with literacy learning. Those who were willing to

volunteer were considered within the parameters of the study. Participants had to be engaged in or involved with literacy instruction as criteria of this study. After participants were identified, they elected to use e-mail as the preferred form of communication and they were fully informed about the goal of study by e-mail. I e-mailed each participant to establish rapport. In my correspondence, I reviewed my role as researcher and explained my data collection activities. The e-mailed correspondence afforded both the participant and me an opportunity to clarify any questions about the data collection process for this study and become more familiar with each other. To put the participant at ease, I emphasized my focus was not to critique the participant but to gain understanding of strategies that increased literacy learning. Participants were provided an informed consent (Appendices F and G), which provided a written explanation about the study and their role in the study. Once participants were fully informed about the study and volunteered to participate in the study, a mutually agreeable schedule was established for classroom observations and interviews. The process for data collection for each type of participant was as follows:

Teaching staff data collection procedures. At the district's request, I provided The Teacher Invitations (Appendix D) to the school principal, to share with the elementary teaching staff engaged in literacy instruction. This provided another layer of protection to participants. The invitation provided both the nature and goal of the study and response information. Once the participants were thoroughly informed about the study, those who agreed to participate e-mailed a response to the invitation. In return, I e-mailed all those interested the Teacher Consent Form (Appendix F), the Pre-

Observation Protocol (Appendix J) and the Teacher Interview Protocol (Appendix L). I also provided hard copies of each to the school's principal to share with those interested. Those who volunteered to participate in the study signed the informed consent form and completed the pre-observation form. The pre-observation form provided both demographic data on teaching experience and a summary of the lesson I would observe. We created a mutually agreeable schedule for both the classroom observations and the interviews. Classroom observations were conducted in the participant's classroom. The purpose was to maintain the natural flow of the lesson and provided a comfortable and familiar environment for both the teacher and his or her students. Interviews followed each classroom observation within 24-48 hours and were conducted at a location selected by the participant for their comfort. The participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative repercussions.

The Pre-Observation Protocol (Appendix J) was provided to each teaching staff participant in advance of his or her classroom observation. The protocol was used to obtain demographic information and to identify the instructional strategy to be observed during the classroom observation. This protocol also included a section for the participant to present their literacy lesson plan, lesson objectives, strategy being implemented, state core curriculum standards, and any other information pertinent to the lesson. A brief pre-observation discussion was held prior to the classroom observation discuss the lesson and answer any participant questions. This discussion afforded me the opportunity to reassure the participant that the classroom observation was to collect data and not review performance.

The classroom observation was conducted during a 40-minute literacy/reading lesson to observe the literacy strategy being implemented by the teacher participant. A Checklist Protocol (Appendix N) was used to eliminate bias and provide consistency of observations. The Field Notes Observation Protocol (Appendix K) was used to record teacher and classroom interactions during the observation. The field notes observation form included a narrative section to allow me to record classroom activities chronologically. A column was included for reflective notes and provided an area to identify additional questions to be addressed during the interview process. Field notes were reviewed and typed within 24-48 hours after the observation which allowed me to review classroom activities and make notations on what was observed. Additional questions identified during classroom observations were used to clarify classroom procedures but they did not add significant data to the study so they were not added to the interview protocol.

Teacher participants participated in a 30-minute interview within 24-48 hours after their classroom observation, using the Teacher Interview Protocol (Appendix L). The three overarching questions focused on teacher perceptions of best practices in literacy instruction, teacher professional development, and district decisions that positively impacted student achievement in the area of literacy learning. Additional questions from the observation field notes were used to clarify teacher actions in the classroom. All seven teacher interviews were audiotaped. Audiotapes were transcribed and findings were provided to the participants to offer comments, feedback, and review for accuracy. The goals of the interviews were to identify literacy strategies implemented

in the lesson, clarify teacher actions in the classroom, and discuss how students learn from these strategies. Additional interview goals included ascertaining how teacher training and district decisions impacted literacy learning in the district. The participants were given seven days to review findings and provide feedback. None of the participants chose to make changes to the findings. The findings were unambiguous and included distinctly documented data from observed classroom behaviors and recorded interview statements. Interview statements were quoted to support the findings.

Administrative staff data collection procedures. The superintendent provided permission to directly invite administrative participants. Administrative staff engaged in literacy instruction were e-mailed an Administrative Invitation (Appendix C). I also provided hard copies to the school principal. The invitation provided both the nature and goal of the study and response information. Participants who volunteered to participate in the study were provided the Administrative Consent Form (Appendix G) and the Administrative Interview Protocol (Appendix M). Administrative participants scheduled a mutually agreeable time for the 30-minute interview and a location of their choice where they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without negative repercussions. The informed consent forms were signed prior to any interviews or data collection. Administrators were interviewed after teaching staff observations and interviews were completed. Administrative participants invited to participate in the study included the elementary reading coach, assistant principal, school principal, the district language arts supervisor, and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. The purpose of interviewing administrators was to gain whole-school perspective.

Administrators set or oversaw district goals, policy, processes, and procedures. Administrators provided the guidelines and direction for academic learning that addressed curriculum, assessments, and professional development. Administrative interviews provided insight into perspectives on how decisions related to curriculum selection, student assessments and teacher training impacted student achievement, at this strong performing school. The interviews were audiotaped and findings were provided to the participants to review for comments, feedback and review of accuracy. One administrative participant chose to e-mail her response to the administrative protocol, thereby giving implied consent. The participants had seven days to provide feedback. No administrative participants chose to respond. The data collected was apprehensible and administrative quotes were used to support findings.

Access to Participants

Participants were selected on a voluntary basis. The district superintendent and school principal provided access to the participants. An administrative letter of cooperation (Appendix B) was obtained and invitations (Appendices D and C) were sent to potential participants. Letters of informed consent (Appendices F and G) were signed by participants who volunteered to participate in the study, after full disclosure was made regarding the study and its purpose. The participants coordinated a mutually agreeable schedule to conduct observations and interviews along with alternate dates to alleviate complications due to emergencies or cancellations. The goal was to observe and interview classroom teachers who implemented literacy strategies and interview administrative staff associated with literacy learning. Observations provided the

opportunity to view teacher classroom interactions. Classroom activity helped provide insight into how learning occurs at this strong performing school that would otherwise be unavailable if only interviews were employed. A meeting with the building principal was held prior to conducting the study to review the overall goal of the study and needs related to participants. Discussions regarding collecting data were conducted via e-mail with the superintendent.

Role of Researcher

My role as the researcher was to identify perceptions of best practices in the area of literacy achievement. Research for this case study was performed in a neighboring district, at a strong performing Pre-K through second grade elementary school. I conducted observations as a nonparticipant observer (Creswell, 2008). During the observations I did not interact with the teacher, students, or the implementation of instructional strategies in the classroom. This study was designed to capture the natural flow of a literacy lesson. I discussed implementation strategies during the interview process. I had no supervisory or professional relationship with the district or at the data collection site and have never been employed in this district or at this elementary school. No past or current professional role existed on my part as the researcher. I had no past or current supervisory or professional relationship with the teacher participants or superintendent. I did have a past professional relationship with the school principal, who was an assistant principal and previous colleague in my current district. My previous professional relationship with the principal enhanced my ability to collect data and helped provide access to participants. Researcher bias related to prior educational knowledge

regarding common perceptions of best practices associated with literacy may exist because I am an educator. Bias was addressed by using a classroom checklist (Creswell, 2008). I used a Lesson Checklist Protocol (Appendix N) during observations of implemented strategies to maintain consistency.

Data Analysis

Two types of data collection tools, classroom observation field notes and interview protocols, were used to obtain three sets of thick, rich data. Data was collected from two types of participants: certified teaching staff and administrative staff. Teaching staff conducted the classroom lessons and implemented literacy strategies being observed. Administrative staff was included in data collection to identify district policy and procedures that drive literacy instruction. Data sources included field notes from classroom observations, transcripts from teacher interviews, and transcripts from administrative interviews.

Data was analyzed through a systematic series of steps including reading, reviewing, sorting, and grouping techniques. Each type of data source was analyzed separately and later triangulated. Observation field notes were reviewed for repetitive actions. Interview transcripts were reviewed for common or repetitive descriptions of strategies, responses, or outcomes in classroom interactions. Audiotaped interviews were be transcribed. Data was reviewed and sorted using a table matrix. Repetitive or common ideas were identified, coded, and then grouped into categories that gave rise to emerging themes (Creswell, 2008). Codes were later re-organized as they related to concepts associated with Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of learning.

Member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation were used to establish accuracy, credibility, and validity. Member checking is a method used to support accuracy and minimize researcher bias by allowing each participant to review the findings of the researcher. The member or participant is provided an opportunity to discuss and confirm the findings with the researcher. The participant may clarify any discrepancies, make corrections, and provide feedback. Member checking helps to ensure that the researcher has captured the ideas of the participant (Creswell, 2008). Peer debriefing is another process used to provide credibility to a research study. The researcher enlists the support of one or more colleagues to review field notes and check for logical conclusions drawn by the researcher. The peer reviewer may also help provide perspective and other types of critical review (Lodico et al., 2010). The peer reviewer asked to participate in my study has over 30 years of educational experience and specializes in the area of literacy. The peer reviewer served as media specialist at my middle school for approximately five years, with 25 years of experience in another district. The Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix O) was not needed because all participant data was concealed using pseudonyms. The peer reviewer had no access to any participant identities. I am not aware of any connection between the peer reviewer and the district in which the study was conducted. Triangulation is another way to validate findings. This strategy involves comparing data from different sources to determine if there is any connection, continuity or relationship. Data can be compared in a variety of ways. According to Creswell (2008) data can be compared between individuals (comparing interviews), between data sources (comparing interviews with

field notes), or between methods (comparing documents to interviews). Triangulation substantiates credibility and validity when similar data is categorized producing a theme. In this study triangulation was used to compare classroom observation field note data and interview data. It became evident that teacher practice and participant perspectives were aligned regarding literacy strategies that positively impacted student achievement. Triangulation was also used to compare teacher interview data to administrative interview data. Participant perspectives were compared regarding the impact professional development had on classroom instruction and student learning and district policies that impacted student achievement. I analyzed data to determine if connections existed between what were perceived best practices and the strategies implemented in the classroom. The comparison helped to clarify and confirm what I observed. School records such as report card grades, classroom assessments, bench marks and state testing scores, were not available for review. Although I was unable to review school data directly, one administrative participant discussed school progress. The participant discussed school benchmark testing, other assessments, and school growth, which increased the validity of findings. The discussion of progress through the years supported findings of classroom practices that enhanced literacy achievement. The Confidentiality Agreement with the school (Appendix P) was not needed because no school records were viewed. Data from audiotaped interviews were transcribed. Member checking was employed to verify accuracy of findings. Transcripts were coded and reviewed for categories and emerging themes using a table matrix. Themes were constructed from teaching staff and administrative staff interviews.

Qualitative Results

Data were generated through the teaching and administrative staff of a strong performing Pre-K through second grade elementary school and were focused on language arts literacy learning. Data were gathered through the use of classroom observations and interviews. Data were recorded using the study protocols. The process included the use of the study tools. Tools included the Teacher Invitations (Appendix D), Teacher Consent Forms (Appendix F), Pre-Observations Protocol (Appendix J) to identify lesson objective and collect demographic data, Classroom Checklist (Appendix N) to alleviate bias, Field Notes Observation Form (Appendix K), Teaching Staff Interview Protocol (Appendix L), Administrative Consent Form (Appendix G), Administrative Invitation (Appendix E) and Administrative Interview Protocol (Appendix M). In addition to study tools, data were recorded in an interview journal, and on audiotaped interview recordings. Data recorded on the field notes observation protocols and recorded on audiotapes were typed into transcripts for analyses. The overall process included sending and delivering hard copies of invitations and consent forms to teaching and administrative staff, selection of voluntary participants, scheduling, collecting data from classroom observations, interviews, member checking feedback and peer reviewer feedback.

Teacher invitations and teacher consent forms were e-mailed and hard copies delivered in person to the gatekeeper, the elementary school principal, to distribute to the teaching staff. Potential participants interested in participating in the study were identified and names and contact information were provided to me via e-mail. In a return e-mail, I informed each potential participant about the goal of the study and provided my

contact information. The potential participants used e-mail as their preferred method of communication to ask questions, state concerns and generally dialogue back and forth with me as the researcher. Seven teachers, two in each grade level from kindergarten, first, second and one Pre-k teacher, were selected to participate in the study. At this point, one teacher chose to withdraw as a study participant. This teacher felt that because she had an inclusion teacher in the classroom, it would not be fair to subject that teacher to the classroom observation. I thanked this teacher for her consideration and another participant was selected to represent the same grade level. Once the teachers agreed to voluntarily participate in the study, they were e-mailed the Pre-Observation Protocol and the Teaching Staff Interview Protocol. I agreed to pick-up the signed Teacher Consent Forms in person prior to conducting the classroom observation.

Once the participants consented to be a part of this study, classroom observations and interviews were scheduled. The participants chose to use e-mail to discuss questions and concerns throughout the data collection process, which allowed me to establish a good rapport as there was a constant source of communication at the participant's convenience. They could e-mail whenever it was convenient for them and I was able to provide timely responses. Participants were provided a 4-week window to select a date of their convenience for their classroom observation and interview. This allowed the participants the courtesy and consideration to select a time when it would be convenient for them. As teacher participants responded with dates and times for classroom observations and interviews, they were assigned a pseudonym. This process provided further protection of participants, anonymity for teaching staff, as pseudonyms were

assigned based on scheduling order, and not associated with grade level, therefore assignment of teacher pseudonyms became more random. The first participant scheduled was assigned T1, the second T2 and so on. Over the course of four weeks, the classroom observations and interviews were conducted. Some participants chose to be interviewed the same day and others scheduled two different appointments based on their scheduling needs. By accommodating each participant, I was able to gather data to be analyzed.

Demographic and background information for teacher participants was gathered using the Pre-Observation Protocol which was e-mailed to each participant prior to their scheduled classroom observation. Six of the seven teacher participants returned the pre-observation forms prior to the classroom observation of the lesson being taught. The classroom observations consisted of one 45-minute language arts literacy lesson implemented by the participating teacher. Each participant also participated in a 30-minute interview.

Data Gathering

Classroom Observations

Teacher participants scheduled their 45-minute classroom observation within the 4-week window of time I provided to each. Once the classroom observation was scheduled, six of the seven teachers provided me their pre-observation protocol, which included some demographic information such as years teaching, years at grade level, etc. and the lesson overview. Prior to each lesson presentation, I was able to converse with the teacher participant 5-10 minutes to discuss the pre-observation protocol and the lesson strategy being implemented. This afforded the teacher participant the opportunity

to ask questions and get clarification on any concerns. At this time, I was able to recap the goal of my study and assure the teacher participant I was not critiquing the lesson but only gathering data regarding the language arts literacy strategy being presented. As the teacher initiated the lesson, I was able to use the lesson checklist protocol to identify common lesson components and help alleviate bias. I used the 3-column Field Notes Observation form (Appendix K) to record the lesson presentation data. I recorded time intervals in column one, observed actions in column two, and comments or notations in column three. As the lesson commenced I recorded the start time. I wrote what I observed the teacher doing and saying, as well as student responses and interactions. As activities transitioned, I recorded various time intervals spent on each component of the lesson, and made notes in the comment section of the Field Notes form. Some notes referred specifically to strategies presented and some notes indicated questions to ask during the interview process. I recorded the end time of the lesson as the teacher concluded the lesson. Some classes were dismissed to lunch, electives or another class; while other classes were given extended time to complete the independent practice or a new subject commenced. In the case where the students remained in the class for their next subject and the teacher opted to conduct the interview, coverage staff was provided to relieve the teacher participant at the end of the observation. Each teacher participant's lesson held to approximately 45 minutes. Because the students were dismissed or the teacher participant was provided coverage, I was afforded the opportunity to speak with the teacher following each observation and thank them for their participation. This also

allowed the teacher participant yet another opportunity to ask questions, state concerns and/or confirm scheduled interview dates and times.

Teacher Interviews

Teacher participants used the same 4-week window to schedule their 30-minute audiotaped interview. Five participants chose to be interviewed on the same day of their classroom observation and two chose separate interview dates. Class coverage was provided to each teacher according to need. All teacher participants were e-mailed the Teacher Interview Protocol prior to classroom observations to provide them time to review the interview questions. The teacher participants selected the location of the interview to allow them a comfort level and privacy during the interview process and alleviate duress. Four teachers chose their classroom, two teachers chose to use an administrative counseling office and one teacher chose to use a conference room. I reminded each teacher participant that the interview would be audiotaped and they all agreed to be audiotaped both verbally and through their signed Teacher Consent Form. I used an interview journal to take notes during the interview process. I started each interview with the study questions, because they were provided in advance and I felt each participant would be familiar with them. The focus of each interview session was the three over-arching questions of the study. 1) What are teacher perspectives regarding best practices in literacy that positively impact student achievement; 2) What are teacher perceptions of professional development impact on student achievement in the area of literacy and 3) What district decisions impact student literacy achievement in your

district. Additional questions were asked regarding various classroom interactions, lesson strategies and different acronyms used to clarify data collected.

Administrative Interviews

Administrative staff was invited to participate in the study upon completion of all teacher classroom observations and teacher interviews. Administrative invitations and administrative consent forms were e-mailed to the superintendent and the elementary school principal. The e-mailed correspondence included a request to interview administrative staff in particular positions related to language arts literacy. I was provided the names and contact information of those personnel holding the position of literacy coach, elementary language arts supervisor, assistant principal and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction and the elementary school principal. Administrative invitations and administrative consent forms were then e-mailed to each potential participant. Only two administrators chose to participate in this study. Only the reading coach participated in the 30-minute audiotaped interview process. I received one e-mailed response from the elementary language arts supervisor. The assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction chose not to participate in the study and the assistant principal never scheduled an interview. The reading coach provided the holistic data of how the school operates and how the language arts literacy program is conducted. The e-mailed administrative response provided perspective regarding strategies that impacted student achievement in literacy language arts learning and supported the data collected from the reading coach.

School Transition Notation

During my interview with the reading coach, she revealed that it was her last week in the district. She was accepting a position in another district where she would continue to work as a language arts literacy supervisor, therefore no follow-up with this participant was available. In addition to this change, it was also announced that the superintendent would be accepting a promotion to a county position before the end of the school year. Due to these changes, I was unable to obtain access to the school records and benchmark data. The reading coach provided information about testing, benchmark data, and how incremental growth has occurred over her years in the district. The information obtained from the reading coach interview is indicative of the type of data I would have observed from school records and benchmark measures. Her interview provided invaluable data that supports how growth has occurred over time to produce student achievement in the district elementary school language arts literacy program.

Data Analysis Results

Analyzed data was sorted into categories and patterns developed that emerged into themes. Tables and typed files were used to keep track of data. Coding was performed manually over several rounds. In Vivo Code was used for analyzing interview transcripts to identify data, verbatim, from the study participants (Saldana, 2008). Process Coding was used for analyzing observation field notes, to identify repetitive patterns of actions among classroom teachers, during instruction (Saldana, 2008). Data was analyzed to identify literary strategies, processes, and procedures used for literacy instruction. My goal was to obtain data to address my study and identify best practices in

literacy achievement to address reading failure. Findings and outcomes are related to the three study questions: 1) What literacy strategies do you believe enhance literacy learning (reading) in your district?; 2) What are your perceptions of professional development related to student achievement of literacy learning?; and 3) How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning and achievement?

The Coding Process

Interview transcripts and observation field notes were typed into a two-column format. The first column was used to record data collected and the second column was used for coding. Typed data was organized by study questions and labeled by participant pseudonym. Coding was done manually over several rounds. In Vivo Coding was used for interview transcripts to capture strategies verbatim from study participants, while Process Coding was used for observation field notes, throughout the coding process, to classify patterns of actions in the classroom.

Coding Teacher Interview Transcripts

In the first cycle of coding, thick rich data was analyzed from each interview transcript individually. The focus was to extract literacy strategies, processes, or procedures stated verbatim by the participant. Data was manually extracted and coded. The codes were listed in the second column of the interview transcript. After my initial coding, I sorted codes by study question and typed codes into separate tables by participant pseudonym. Codes were then listed on large post-it easel paper by participant pseudonym to cross-reference participant responses to each study question. I began to identify patterns as I noted repetitious terms and comments from teacher-participant

transcripts. As I identified code patterns, I assigned that code a number. I then grouped all like number codes together to determine the frequency of use. I typed grouped patterns into a new table and listed the associated participant pseudonyms with the grouped codes. Codes were listed in order of frequency. Those stated most often during the interviewing process, were the literacy practices most prevalent among study participants. Frequency provided a general consensus of perceptions and behaviors. I reviewed data again during the second cycle of coding to obtain supporting participant quotes from interview transcripts associated with each code identified during my initial coding process. I created a code transcript by typing codes and supporting documentation from data into a separate file organized by participant pseudonym and based on study questions.

During a third round of coding, I reviewed coded data for links based on relationships. Codes were reorganized and new groupings were formed which provided another perspective of data collected. Different groupings allowed new meanings to evolve from the thick, rich data, which led to a fourth round of organizing codes.

Codes were typed and color coded by participant pseudonym. The codes were cut out and manually arranged on post-it easel paper. By creating puzzle pieces of code, the pieces could easily be arranged and rearranged. This process allowed codes to be subsumed as like codes were grouped with codes that indicated similar functions. This final round of manipulating codes provided the view that produced categories. It was from these categories that themes emerged.

Coding Administrative Interview Transcripts

Two of five administrative-participants, a literacy coach and a curriculum supervisor of elementary literacy, chose to participate in my study. I was able to interview one administrative-participant and a second administrative-participant chose to e-mail a written response using the Administrative Interview Protocol (Appendix M). I typed the administrative transcript into the two-column format and analyzed the data for strategies, processes, and procedures used for literacy learning. I analyzed the administrative e-mailed response for similar data. I coded the findings from both administrative-participants responses and correlated them with the codes used for the teacher-participants. I will include the administrative findings under the appropriate themes.

Coding Observation Field Notes

I typed observation field notes into a two-column format. The actions of the teachers during lesson implementation were typed into the first column. The second column was reserved for codes. I manually read and coded each set of field notes using process coding to identify repetitive patterns of actions among classroom teachers during instruction. I associated codes with teacher behaviors, classroom processes and classroom procedures used during literacy lessons. The behaviors, processes, and procedures I observed most often during classroom observations were grouped together. Code frequency provided a foundational view of consistency among classroom practices. Patterns were identified as teacher-participants used similar actions during classroom lesson implementation. I used typed tables and typed code transcripts to keep track of

observation field note data. All coded data was labeled by participant pseudonym. The findings from the data analyses are presented below using the themes, categories, and sub-categories that evolved and developed.

The Findings

I will present interview findings by theme. I based themes on categories of data. I organized categories of data by grouping codes where I perceived relationships. Several themes emerged from the categories and are presented below. I placed a main category under each theme and included sub-categories as supporting examples of data related to the theme. I used participant quotes to support findings and they will also provide further clarity, validity, and reliability of data. Quotes that support more than one theme, category or sub-category will be used accordingly. A sample interview transcript can be found in Appendix Q and a sample of observation classroom field notes can be found in Appendix R.

Interview Findings

Theme 1: Teachers Need to Know Where Their Students Are to Meet Their Needs

Category: Assessments. The main tool in planning and organizing classroom literacy instruction in this district is assessments. Five of the seven teacher-participants and the one administrative-participant interviewed, stated, verbatim, that it is important to know where the students are, in terms of literacy learning levels, in order to match literacy learning to the correct level of instruction. Initial diagnostics vary, depending on grade level. Teachers use results to place students in appropriate learning groups. Teachers also use assessment results to identify a starting point for literacy instruction

and then track progress through benchmarks. Participants identified three assessment tools: Concepts About Print (CAP), Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) (2012), running records, and Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) spelling inventory. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) is currently the main curriculum and will be discussed in more detail under outcomes section.

> Participant T1: I give that (writing) progress to the parents at the end of the year…the parents can see how they came in, in September and where they are at the end of the year. It's really something you have to keep track of because you have to know where they are.
>
> Participant T2: Concepts About Print…It's a test we use in the beginning of the year to see where they are regarding print.
>
> Participant T3: …there is a literacy folder with things like upper case, lower case recognition, name printing, concepts about print and if they score in the spring---and they know all of their upper case, lower case letters and they score 15 on the concepts about print, then I F&P them and level them.
>
> Participant T5: First, identify where each student is. This is a good school district. Not just diagnosing a reading problem, it's finding out where the students are…Before Guided Reading, they have already been assessed, so the teacher knows their level and where they are.
>
> Participant T7: First, is knowing your students' levels and where they are at. Knowing through either spelling inventory or a running record, but

> knowing where they are having the most difficulty, knowing where they need the most support and then planning their activity, lesson or group around THEM (emphasized), to help them. So definitely looking at the different levels, I find that is really important, at least it works for me, knowing their levels; what starting point; I am able to benchmark them and keep them moving…making sure the teacher is assessing, but not over assessing to the point where all we do is testing, but to show growth.
>
> Participant A1: We do as many assessments as we can to get as big a picture as we can…a lot of assessments we've done over the years since I've been here and begin to break them down a little bit more to identify not just instructional levels to see where our students are…

Sub-Category 1: Teachers use Concepts About Print (CAP) entry level diagnostic. This school uses CAP as their elementary school, entry level test to determine students' exposure to print concepts. Some of the concepts the students need to be able to identify are the book title, book cover, author, illustrator, back cover, etc. Other concepts include upper case, lower case alphabet letters, name recognition, capitals, end marks, spacing, etc. In this school, one teacher-participant mentioned that students who obtained a passing score on the CAP test were ready for running records diagnostics. Three teacher-participants specifically discussed CAP, but all seven included some aspect or review of CAP concepts in lesson presentations. Participants T1 through T7 included some form or book review, letter recognition, phonics, sentence writing, sentence structure, punctuation and/or other language arts mechanics.

Participant T2: Concepts About Print…It's a test we use in the beginning of the year to see where they are regarding print. It's things such as show me the front of the book, show me the back of the book, can you point to the title page, what does the author do, what does an illustrator do, point to a capital letter, point to a lower case letter…and we use a point system that goes 1-15. If they fall into the 11-15 range they are emerging----which means they are ready to move onto reading. And those are the children we start with Guided Reading and Running Records.

Interviewer: What do they do if they fall under the emerging range?

Participant T2: Then we just continue working on with them on more concepts about print. We do the review every day, this is the title page, this is the cover, what the author, illustrator do, and then we test them a month later….I made a list of print concepts; awareness about print, phonological awareness, blending, segmenting, those kind of things; things that rhyme, phonics, doing things like letter matching, letter recognition, fluency, shared reading, paired reading, reader's theatre we do sometimes; vocabulary, grouping and categorizing the words, comprehension---using story maps and graphs, organization, that kind of stuff; and writing---using dictation or beginning to sound out a word…

Participant T3: …there is a literacy folder with things like upper case, lower case recognition, name printing, concepts about print and if they score in the spring---and they know all of their upper case, lower case

> letters and they score 15 on the concepts about print, then I F&P them and level them…basically we do a lot of things with oral language, a lot of language, name recognition, letter recognition, basically the whole day revolves around language and literacy.

Sub-Category 2: Teachers use curriculum based running records benchmark diagnostic. All seven teacher-participants and both administrative-participants emphasized the use of benchmarking, running records or specifically identified the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum as a means to assess students' reading literacy levels and then adapt instruction to meet students' needs. Running records are a reading diagnostic tool that counts words within a selected text or book. The passages or books have levels of difficulty. The general scoring technique is based on missed words versus the entire amount of words in the text (Reading A-Z, 2015). The goal is to determine the reading level of the student. Teachers test students at various intervals throughout the school year to track progress. The school requires two benchmark scores per school year, but teachers may administer benchmark tests at will to check progress more often, as they deem necessary.

> Participant T1: We have to do running records all the time to keep abreast of them. There are two that are required, but I do informal ones every two months in between, so I can make sure they are making progress.
>
> Participant T2: Concepts About Print…It's a test we use in the beginning of the year to see where they are regarding print…and we use a point system that goes 1-15. If they fall into the 11-15 range they are emerging-

---which means they are ready to move onto reading. And those are the children we start with Guided Reading and Running Records.

Participant T3: I'm sure the other teachers have told you that we use F&P…there is a literacy folder with things like upper case, lower case recognition, name printing, concepts about print and if they score in the spring---and they know all of their upper case, lower case letters and they score 15 on the concepts about print, then I F&P them and level them.

Participant T4: …when they do their running records in F&P, its great if they can read, but they also have to comprehend at the same time…

Participant T5: The other powerful tool we use are the running records and we use the F&P this school district has given us extensive training in F&P…

Participant T6: We do running records as a form of assessment.

Participant T7: First is knowing your students levels and where they are at. Knowing through either spelling inventory or a running record, but knowing where they are having the most difficulty, knowing where they need the most support and then planning their activity, lesson or group around THEM (emphasized), to help them.

Participant A1: First, it's matching books to students (reading level) instructionally, at the cutting edge of their development. That information we get from the initial benchmark assessments and records and so we find

> their instructional level and we match books to them and group students according to their level and/or to their need.
>
> Participant A2: Over the past few years, we have implemented a new data collection tool. Teachers administer the F & P benchmark assessment two times a year. This data is collected into a flash report and analyzed by administration and the BOE.

Sub-Category 3: Teacher use Words Their Way spelling inventory. Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) is a spelling diagnostic tool that identifies the student's ability to read new words. Students are asked to spell words not seen prior to the test. This diagnostic is used to identify prior knowledge and help level the student. The test is scored based on error count and results are used to focus instruction on problem areas. Five of the seven teacher-participants and an administrative-participant made mention of the Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) program the district uses.

> Participant T3: The district uses Words Their Way.
>
> Participant T4: Words Their Way Spelling Inventory will let us know if they are having trouble with any part of a word like blends, or vowels, long vowels, short vowels, that will break it down and tell us whether they may be having a problem and we focus on that area, blends or vowels or those students who need help with that.

> Participant T5: Some of the tools that we use are the Words Their Way Inventory, which shows us exactly where the students are in their spelling development and their awareness.
>
> Participant T6: We do Words Their Way---which is spelling through words sorts and word patterns…
>
> Participant T7: First, is knowing your students' levels and where they are at. Knowing through either spelling inventory or a running record, but knowing where they are having the most difficulty, knowing where they need the most support and then planning their activity, lesson or group around THEM (emphasized), to help them….We started the last few years of starting IN ("in" was stressed) September and doing a spelling inventory and then re-doing it in May to see how much growth is there.
>
> Participant A2: (literacy strategies being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement)…Words Their Way differentiated word study.

Theme 2: Teachers Used Differentiated Instruction as a Strategy to Address Student's Needs

Category: Individualize Instruction. Teachers are trained to assess each, individual student using research-based curriculum tools to determine their literacy or reading level. Once student levels are determined, the teachers know where to begin literacy instruction. The teacher then plans and coordinates lessons to meet each student's individual needs. Several study participants affirmed addressing individual

student needs. Various tools are provided staff to differentiate instruction. The most prevalent strategies mentions were guided, small group instruction, independent reading and the schools' intervention services. Teachers modify and adapt lessons to meet the needs of their students.

> Participant T1: I have 3 ESLs (English as a Second Language), I have hearing impaired. I have vision impaired that I kept sitting down with. This student is with the Child Study Team now --- she doesn't have any fine motor or good recall on letters, so I highlight for her. Differentiated is definitely important.
>
> Participant T2: I think they looked for an additional add-on. Foundations, from what I understand, was started for special needs students
>
> Participant T5: The Guided Reading program answers that problem of reaching each of those students where they need to be, where they are learning.
>
> Participant T7: First, is knowing your students' levels and where they are at… knowing where they need the most support and then planning their activity, lesson or group around THEM (emphasized), to help them…I just think that you have to really individualize and differentiate instruction as much as you can…
>
> Participant A1: …so we find their instructional level and we match books to them and group students according to their level and/or to their need…

> Participant A2: (effective literacy strategies that impact student achievement)…Differentiating instruction, meeting the students' individual needs and providing meaningful feedback in a timely fashion to allow for maximum improvement.

Sub-Category1: Teachers used guided reading to address students' needs.

Guided Reading is small group instruction based on reading level. No more than five to six students, who read at the same level, are placed in a group. The students are provided a book based on their level and the teacher works with the small group. One student at a time reads aloud, while the others read silently. The teacher guides the group through reading the story while simultaneously reinforcing other literacy skills such as recognition of print concepts, comprehension, character identification, etc.

> Participant T2: Concepts About Print…It's a test we use in the beginning of the year to see where they are regarding print…and we use a point system that goes 1-15. If they fall into the 11-15 range they are emerging----which means they are ready to move onto reading. And those are the children we start with Guided Reading and Running Records.
>
> Participant T4: Another thing we have is Guided Reading, small group reading, that we do in the class, we have sets of books, readers for the class…it goes across subject matter….has readers on level, below level…
>
> Participant T5: There are some other literacy strategies we use. I think the most powerful one is Guided Reading. That is a big priority in this district. With Guided Reading, the students are reading books at their

instructional level, so that avoids boredom in the classroom because we have such a wide range of abilities in the one room. A big push in our school district with that…that's our biggest tool, our biggest strategy is Guided Reading…Example of Guided Reading: Sitting at a table…one teacher…4-5 students, small group…I present a book to the students…the students in the group are about the same level…the book is appropriate for their level…so I am listening to each student…I'm picking up their strengths and I'm looking for areas that I can teach them…I'm looking for teaching points…it's individualized…

Participant T6: You cannot have the success in the classroom without Guided Reading. It's the only time where you can zero in on whether they are applying everything you've taught them and it's a chance to do a little mini lesson…it's based on student need.

Participant T7: …and then I like to break in, as you saw, into smaller groups, so I can work with a smaller group of children.

Participant A1: Guided Reading (GR) has a lesson sequence. First, it's matching books to students (reading level) instructionally, at the cutting edge of their development.

Participant A2: (literacy strategies being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement)…Guided Reading groups.

Sub-Category 2: Teachers use independent reading to meet students' needs.

Six of the seven teacher-participants stated that independent reading, whether reading

daily, reading at home or reading practice, was important in student literacy learning. Students read books at the level at which they are assessed, both in school and at home. Independent reading, at level, builds student self-efficacy because the student is accomplishing reading tasks successfully. As students master each level, the teachers re-assess progress using benchmarking tools and students move up the literacy gradient. Students have access to independent reading material through the curriculum, the school media center and through online school subscriptions. Independent practice meets the needs of exceptional learners at both ends of the literacy spectrum. Lower-level readers can progress at their own rate, while higher-level readers can move forward without hindrance.

> Participant T4: Another thing is reading at home. One thing I do with my class, a weekly reading log, and they have to read at least 60 minutes at home. So I tell them if they do Monday through Friday for 10 minutes a day, that's 50 minutes right there…and they have the weekend to catch up if they have to.
>
> Participant T6: …and they do independent reading. They have Bookbag. They read anywhere from 10-15 minutes independently in the beginning and then that gradually increases.
>
> Participant T5: After Guided Reading…I send them on to do independent reading…

> Participant T7: We do have a set very structured guideline…independent reading, instructional reading levels…instructional reading levels need to be reported by a certain date.
>
> Participant A1: …we find their instructional level and we match books to them … according to their level and/or to their needs… Put the little swimmies on and throw them in the water and let them read, because you can teach all you want, but if they don't get a chance to read, it really doesn't matter (laughs).

Sub-Category 3: Teachers use their school's intervention programs. The school has set criteria for their teachers to use to track student progress. If students do not meet determined benchmark requirements by certain dates specified by the district, teachers will use an Interventional and Referral System (I&RS). I&RS is a process prescribed to provide early intervention techniques to enhance student learning (State NJ US, 2015). One of the goals is to provide intense reinforcement in weak areas through continuous practice and review. The district also uses a type of basic skills program, called Academic Achievement to help bolster literacy learning. The district's goal is to identify struggling students early, to close gaps in learning and try to prevent students from falling further behind.

> Participant T1: …I do informal ones (running records) every two months in between, so I can make sure they are making progress. If they are not, then I know to step I and get I&RS or support. If I only did it at the beginning and the end, then I would never know that they needed help. So

> it's better to do it throughout the year…Academic Achievement, we have that every other day due to budget constraints, last year we had it every day. That makes a big difference because that is small group instruction based on their level. It used to be called basic skills.
>
> Participant T5: For example, in this classroom I have students who are still at a kindergarten level, they are struggling. There is an intervention program in place to help those students.
>
> Participant A1: I work with the I&RS teams in all of the buildings as much as I can to help those students.

Theme 3: Teachers Used Constant Practice and Consistency to Help Students Learn

Category: Routines. Routines drive the daily schedule at this strong performing school. All seven teacher-participants mentioned either, routines, review, repetition, reinforcement, daily practice, consistency or continuous actions. Each day mirrors the next. The students know what to expect and become familiar with the flow of the day. Teacher perceptions were that when students know what to expect, they perform better. Teachers use daily routines to help students learn. Constant repetition, reinforcement and practice are a large part of their daily routines. Routines are developed through the use of structured lessons, constant review and learning stations.

> Interviewer: What are teacher perspectives on best literacy strategies?
>
> Participant T1: Definitely repetition, reinforcement… Keeping them on the same routine, they know what to expect…they're creative because we

keep them on the same kind of consistent activities. Continuous review, consistent expectations.

Interviewer: What strategies do you find impact student achievement in literacy?

Participant T3: …they love the people vocabulary cards, they love clapping syllables, a lot of repetition even though we go letter to letter. They also have a printing book that we are working with that they do every week.

Participant T7: Some students need repetition once or twice…but other others need 8 to 10 times…

Sub-Category 1: Structured lessons. The teachers use lessons that are very structured and follow the same pattern on a daily basis. They follow a schedule that is repetitious on a weekly basis. Students start with a morning message the teacher has written on the board. The message is an opportunity for teachers to reinforce language arts literacy concepts and mechanics. The students read the sentence, identify and review of sight words, discuss sentence structure, beginning capitals, ending marks such as periods, and other Concepts About Print. The teachers state lesson objectives and clarify the learning goal at the beginning of each lesson. The students gathered on story rugs for the group lessons. The lessons provide repetition to help students learn and grow. The students can build on what they know. They are then dispersed back to their desk for independent practice. Hands-on activities are used every day. Learning stations are used in the afternoon.

> Participant T1: The lesson is so structured. Every Monday is exactly the same. Every Tuesday, every Wednesday, so they get so used to the routine, if I forget something the students will say "you forgot…". The kids can practically run it by December.
>
> Participant T3: I always introduce a letter in the same way and then the kids know what to expect. I introduce on Mondays and then all week long we work on it and then on Fridays we do a wrap up.
>
> Participant T7: …knowing where they need the most support and then planning their activity, lesson or group around THEM [emphasized], to help them… We do have a set very structured guideline…independent reading, instructional reading levels…instructional reading levels need to be reported by a certain date.
>
> Participant A1: And then the lessons are diagnostic in nature, obviously, and they are instructional, because there is one instructional point, the one the student needs the most and it's evaluative, because you are always making sure that you are collecting those notes to guide your next group session, the next time you meet with them, to see where they are.

Sub-Category 2: Teachers provide constant review. What is learned on Monday is reviewed on Tuesday. What is learned on Monday and Tuesday is reviewed on Wednesday and so on. The same lesson is taught all week with add-ons each day. For example when an alphabet character is introduced, that letter is the focus of each lesson that week. That same letter is taught all week. The only variation to the lesson will be

the story. The story will change to enable the teacher to introduce additional words using the same alphabet character. For example teacher-participant T1 presented a lesson about the letter "T". The class engaged in a shared reading book about a tiger named Tommy, and then practiced choral reading of the same book. Later in the lesson T1 did a Read Aloud using a different book, about a tortoise to continue to reinforce the letter "T", the focus of the lesson. Students will add to the word wall throughout the week with words that begin with the letter "T". Students are assigned a reading story for homework. In this case, the students will read the same story each night for continuous practice. Sight words are another area of constant review. Each week new sight words are added to the previous set, and practiced daily. At the end of each week students are tested on not just the new sight words, but all sight words taught up to that week. In this manner, students continually review all sight words provided throughout the year.

In a similar manner, T5 practiced identifying the concept of schema. T5 presents the word schema. T5 then uses syllables to pronounce and define the word comprehension to help the class focus on understanding the concept of schema. T5 provides an example of schema by recalling a book previously read by the class. T5 helps the students make personal connections to the book about a loose tooth and reminds students they took the Raz-Kids (Learning A-Z, 2015) quiz online. T5 discusses that some of the students could not remember quiz answers because they did not have a connection to the story, or no "schema" was being used. The class transitions to the story rug. T5 reiterates the concept of schema and explains the process of identifying one's schema. T5 models identifying one's schema by reading aloud a story, stopping at

various intervals, thinking aloud and making a list of thoughts that relate to that part of the story. For example, T5 reads a page, stops and states that the passage brings thoughts about the beach. T5 repeats the process four to five times, each time identifying thoughts relative to the story passage. Review continues using the white board where T5 further defines schema. Students practice writing their own schema and then draw pictures that connect to the story. Students share their work. Throughout the lesson, T5 includes CAP review of ending punctuation marks.

> Participant T1: … it's really just repetition…I test them on all the words from the beginning. So on Friday they have a list of 9 words and it was the same words we did the first week of school, the second week of school, the third week of school, now this is the 4th week, they get the same words….
>
> Interviewer: What's the test?
>
> Participant T1: It's just a list of words. The student comes up to me and I point to the word and if they know it they say it. And the test looks exactly the same. The required list for the district is 30 words.
>
> Interviewer: What do they do if they fall under that (CAP) range?
>
> Participant T2: Then we just continue working on with them on more concepts about print. We do the review every day, this is the title page, this is the cover, what the author, illustrator do, and then we test them a month later.

> Participant T3: …basically we do a lot of things with oral language, a lot of language, name recognition, letter recognition, basically the whole day revolves around language and literacy.
>
> Participant T6: In our district we used a balanced literacy approach. Which is using…making sure that every day you are reading TO, WITH and BY, making we are using Shared Reading--that's where we teach the strategies and practice the strategies.

Sub-Category 3: Learning stations. The Daily 5 are a set of learning stations. The students move from one station to another in fifteen or twenty minute intervals. The stations include independent reading, writing about reading, vocabulary practice, small-group instruction with the teacher and shared-paired reading. The stations are visited in a different order daily, but the work is routine and the practice reinforces the literary concepts the student has been taught. T7's class demonstrated the use of several learning stations. T7 reviewed each of the centers. As each group was called, the students' work was explained. For example, the computer group was instructed to work on Raz-Kids (Learning A-Z, 2015) reading review. T7 reminded them of the login and password. The other groups worked on decodable books, Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015), create words, partner reading with reading books and folder work, while T7 conducted Guided Reading with a group of only two students. T7 described the small group reading process as she conducted the lesson. Learning stations are another literacy mechanism teachers in this strong performing school use to provide continuous review to enhance literacy learning.

> Participant T4: We have a lot of different ones (literacy strategies) that we use at this school…so it's, is like the Daily 5, when they have to listen to reading…
>
> Participant T6: Other than Guided Reading, we use stations and The Daily 5 model for stations. The Daily 5 is listening to reading, read to self, read with a partner, word work and writing. So at some point they will be at each of those stations.

Theme 4: Teachers Used Modeling as a Strategy to Teach Students

Category: Modeling. Five of seven teacher-participants specifically stated modeling as a strategy used in the classroom, but all seven teacher-participants used modeling during the classroom observations. Teacher's perspectives were that modeling is an important way to guide student instruction, help students focus on the learning goal and reinforce learning. Modeled behavior is showing what is expected. The teachers modeled behaviors for hands-on activities, writing assignments and in illustrating good reading behaviors. After each group lesson taught, the teacher modeled or demonstrated the behavior they wanted the students to practice to indicate understanding of the concept. The students were then provided a task to accomplish individually. How well the students accomplished the task indicated mastery of the concept, understanding of the concept or the need for remediation of the concept. Three customary areas teachers modeled included hands-on activities, writing related to reading and reading aloud to give students an opportunity to listen to good reading.

Participant T1: I have a vision impaired that I kept sitting down with…so I highlight for her…I'm teaching writing now, showing them how a sentence is formed.

Participant T4: As far as literacy, I do Read Alouds also with the kids, which is modeling which is real important. If they can hear a fluent reader and understand like you change your tone of voice and stuff

Participant T5: Modeling is probably another very important teaching strategy….many times in traditional classrooms or even for a new teacher…I can remember just with myself---assuming that students knew what to do and I would give instructions and so my expectation would be that they would listen to my instruction and do what I asked them to do…but so many times they just don't know what it looks like…they want to please the teacher and they want to do well, but they don't know what it looks like…they need a picture. So one of the things that I like to do in my classroom and I see so many teachers in our school do this is that they model first. In fact that's one of my favorite teaching models is gradual release of responsibilities…and that's where first I do and they watch, then I do and they help, nest they do and I help and the last step is really my objective, they do and I watch. That is my favorite model…and I see that in my school district and I think that's one of the reasons we've had a successful literacy program. It's that the children actually see what a good behavior is regarding reading; writing. And also in all of our lesson plans,

> we have written Read Alouds…it's in our lesson plans…based on research, children that are read to are strong readers and we have that in our classrooms each day….listening to good reading…they know what it sounds like…that's another strategy that we use.
>
> Participant T6: You have to make sure you are doing some part of modeled writing, some shared reading….modeled writing is where I teach all of my phonics and grammar and if I am teaching a certain genre of writing…
>
> Participant T7: When we introduce things, we do a lot of whole group and an activity where I have to model. I want them to see, get them use to the procedure or the type of story we are doing, I like to connect…A lot of that, definitely communication…I find that helps…I definitely like whole group like I said to introduce, to model, we get on the rug, we move around a lot.

Sub-Category 1: Hands-on activities support lesson concepts. Five of the seven teacher-participants referred to hands-on materials in their interview, although one study participant was referring to the lack of hands-on materials and another study participant was referring to teacher training. It was interesting that three of the teacher-participants who referred to hands-on materials also commented on modeling as a classroom technique, because all teacher-participants provided follow-up activities after their lessons and modeled the activity. The activities supported the lesson and reinforced the concepts taught.

Participant T1: You really want to get them involved, a lot of hands-on stuff.

Participant T3: I don't get any consumables; I just get the teacher's manual. And it's basically all resources that I pull.

Participant T4: You learn it (a strategy), but the in-depth part came from the hands-on or the district training.

Participant T6: …you want something that you can actually bring into the classroom...

Interviewer: Components of an effective professional development?

Participant T2: The hands-on, the take-aways, the things you can come back and implement to help the not-as creative teacher.

Sub-Category 2: Writing related to reading. All study participants, both teachers and administrators, mentioned writing either directly or stated the use of the grade-level literacy folder. Two teacher-participants specifically mentioned making connections, while two other teacher-participants stated comprehension as important. The curriculum incorporates writing related to reading concepts for the very purpose of making connections to improve comprehension. For example, two teacher-participants modeled using the concept of "schema" to improve comprehension. Schema was defined as a way to make a connection to something you know that relates to the topic you are discussing. One teacher-participant used schema in practicing prior knowledge during the reading of a story, while another teacher-participant used schema to connect a poem to ideas to which the students were familiar. Writing included letter formation, making

sentences, labeling, journaling, poetry journals, writing genres for literacy folders, and other language arts mechanics such as initial capitals, punctuation, etc.

> Participant T1: I do a writing sample each month. …I do a free write to see how they are doing and they can write anything they want at all, to see their progress if the they are catching on.
>
> Participant T2: I made a list of print concepts; awareness about print, phonological awareness, blending, segmenting, those kind of things; things that rhyme, phonics, doing things like letter matching, letter recognition, fluency, shared reading, paired reading, reader's theatre we do sometimes; vocabulary, grouping and categorizing the words, comprehension---using story maps and graphs, organization, that kind of stuff; and writing---using dictation or beginning to sound out a word…and writer's workshop as well. (Regarding Reader's Theatre)…and they see that what they say is important, they see it in writing, they see that what is in writing can be read back to someone…
>
> Participant T3: …they have their little poetry journals which I created for them…
>
> Participant T4: …everyone has to do a literacy folder. All students have that during the course of the year. You have to do assignments, like in the fall they have to write a personal narrative, and then the folder will follow them…they have to write a letter, a story, and an opinion piece. They are not all done at the same time, it's scattered over the course of the school

year and it's something that follows them…so they can check their progress.

Participant T5: And we also write about our reading.

Participant T6: You have to make sure you are doing some part of modeled writing.

Participant T7: …we have so many pieces of writing a year that we turn in, some are required and some of it is free choice, so we make sure that everybody is writing in a journal daily.

Participant A1: …to get Writing Workshop in…we included a two-hour LA block in both elementary buildings so that there is enough time to do all of the things we need to in language arts.

Participant A2: (literacy strategies being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement)…Reader's and Writer's Workshop.

Sub-Category 3: Listening to reading. Although I observed four out of six teacher-participants reading to students, two teacher-participants specifically stated that listening to good reading was important to model to students. They emphasized that knowing what good reading sounds like helps students with fluency. Listening to reading was an important way to have students hear good reading and was also a part of daily and weekly activities whether from the teacher, online reading programs or from recordings at the learning stations.

Participant T4: As far as literacy, I do Read Alouds also with the kids, which is modeling, which is real important. If they can hear a fluent

reader and understand like you change your tone of voice and stuff…They can listen to books through Raz-Kids … the Daily 5, when they have to listen to reading…

Participant T5: And also in all of our lesson plans, we have written Read Alouds…it's in our lesson plans…based on research, children that are read to are strong readers and we have that in our classrooms each day….listening to good reading…they know what it sounds like…that's another strategy that we use.

Participant T6: Other than Guided Reading, we use stations and The Daily 5 model for stations. The Daily 5 is listening to reading…

Theme 5: Teachers Acknowledged It Took a Variety of Combined Strategies and Tools to Impact Literacy Success

Category: Combine Strategies. Teachers stated that tools are common, but they vary in use. Teachers expressed the need to combine a variety of strategies as needed. There was no one single strategy that got the job done, but a combination of strategies put together in a way that was meaningful for each, individual class. Strategies, although from the same basic repertoire, could be re-arranged for each class or year as needed. Some of the more repetitious responses included, curriculum, creating your own resources, books, online tools, word work-vocabulary/sight words and a home/school connection.

Participant T2: We kind of combine all of the strategies, but a lot of us do our own thing, because we don't have a lot of time to meet, which is unfortunate, as a grade level.

Participant T3: It's all the things that we have come up with over the years and that I find online and all the different things.

Interviewer: What are effective literacy strategies that impact student achievement?

Participant T4: We have a lot of different ones that we use at this school

Participant T6: In our district we used a balanced literacy approach…Shared Reading for example is a really important piece. This is where you are teaching all of your reading strategies in your shared reading piece, which is like the poem we did today….You put some of your own and some is district…How you put them together is your choice.

Interviewer: So once you know where they are, are there any other strategies you use in the class…?

Participant T7: We do a mix of whole group and individual instruction.

Sub-Category 1: Curriculum. All seven teacher-participants mentioned curriculum in some capacity or another. Each teacher-participant made specific reference to one or more of the school's various curriculums or made reference to tools associated with a particular curriculum. The staff used Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum school-wide. This particular curriculum will be explained more fully in the Outcomes section under the heading Curriculum and Assessments. The teachers were trained on the

running records benchmark assessment tools and the data is used to level students in reading. Teachers knew where to begin instruction based on levels. The curriculum enabled staff to differentiate instruction. Five teacher-participants specifically mentioned Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) spelling inventory. Four teacher-participants made reference to Harcourt (2015) and Fundations (Wilson, 2015). Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) is a literary diagnostic, previously mentioned. Harcourt (2015) is the former language arts literacy program, now used to supplement Fountas and Pinnell (2012). Fundations (Wilson, 2015) was a phonics program, new to the district. At least three teacher-participants indicated that it was important to use current, relevant, research-based curriculum to positively impact student literacy achievement.

> Participant T2: Fundations – start with letters according to how they are written. The lined paper is identified as the sky line, the plain line, the grass line and the worm line, so it's where the letters are placed on the line. So they start with all the letters that start at the skyline.
>
> Participant T7: We have an older series so they made sure it meets the framework of the core curriculum standards are…it's the same Hardcore…so we make sure it covers the standards…
>
> Participant A1: We brought in Fundations…because we did see the need.

Sub-Category 2: Use your own. Teachers used a wide variety of tools that the school provided or that they came up with on their own. Three teachers specifically

stated that it was important to be creative and if the strategies provided were not enough, teachers had to find or create their own resources.

> Participant T1: I make those (referring to paper story books), because there are no books that Harcourt provides the students (to take home) to read every day.
>
> Participant T2: …but a lot of us do our own thing, because we don't have a lot of time to meet, which is unfortunate, as a grade level.
>
> Participant T3: It's all the things that we have come up with over the years and that I find online and all the different things…they have their little poetry journals which I created for them because there are no consumable the district is giving me. And then they have a little dictionary, again that we pulled.
>
> Participant T4: There's one other thing that I use, and this is strictly up to the teacher, I know a couple of teacher do it and I do it---use Spelling City.com, it's a website. Every week there's 15 spelling words for the story that we read and the website has 30 spelling lists for the 34 classroom stories in the reading books, and they can go online and do practice spelling tests, they can get various different games with the words, there's a word search, unscramble, you can print out some homework, so it's another resource for additional homework the can use to study them.

> Participant T6: You put some of your own and some is district…we do a little bit of writer's workshop, but I have modified that to fit best practices of everyone that I have read and developed my own.

Sub-Category 3: Books. To fully and successfully execute a reading program, the teachers needed books and classroom libraries. Students needed books in order to practice and build reading skills. Six of the seven teacher-participants mentioned books and/or library time as an integral part of literacy learning. Teachers discussed books and access to books as a part of the literacy program at their school. The teacher-participants used a combination of library time, the media center, print books, character books, mentor texts and online books as tools to reach students. T4 stated that reading produces good readers. In addition to reading books, dictionary was mentioned. Small group guided reading was a specific strategy relating to the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum, but teachers also stated read-alouds, large group reading, and shared reading as additional reading strategies to engage students.

> Participant T1: We do have library time where they can go and pick out book.

> Participant T3: … then they have a little dictionary…They also have a printed book that we are working with that they do every week and then they have a character story book with all the characters from the story that we read on Monday…it has the story and the character in there, story recall and stuff like that.

> Participant T3: We have book time where they have to sit with a partner and just kind of look at the book, that kind of thing.
>
> Participant T7: We also go to the library, the media center. They hired another part time person, so that we can go twice as often and help the kids that way.
>
> Participant A1: The other big thing we also did the first two years was to make sure we had books to read where they were (at level), and that has been a big, big one for us… So we've developed classroom libraries over the last five years that are much more I guess effective, you could say, and I think a lot of the increase in levels that we've seen in our students, and the growth we've seen is because we are now giving them lots and lots of opportunities to really read where they are (level-wise).

Sub-Category 4: On-line resources or interactive. A strategy widely used was online and interactive activities to engage students. Teachers used a variety of internet resources to enhance literacy learning. For example, Raz-Kids (Learning A-Z, 2015), an online reading intervention, was mentioned by most participants. Teachers stated that online resources were great for supporting instruction. The district subscribes to online resources that all classrooms have access to, and teachers also find their own that fit the needs of their students from year to year.

> Participant T1: They encourage 21st Century Learning...when it works...on the computers…we have Raz on the com putters where they

> can track their own level and move up on their owl level, so if they don't have books at home, they can go on there if they have a computer.
>
> Participant T3: It's all the things that we have come up with over the years and that I find online and all the different things.
>
> Participant T4: …what I like is that there are a lot of things online that kids get to use like Raz-Kids, where they can go in and read different books that are on their level. So you get to put the level in there, and the nice thing about it is that they have comprehension quizzes at the end of them …they can go on Spelling city.com and practice the words, you can click a button and it will pronounce the word back to them…
>
> Participant T7: Other than that Raz-Kids, a lot of teachers use that. We have Study Island, we have Brain Pop…we have licenses that we can use, so that's been helpful too. Reporting our grades online, that's been helpful too.

Sub-Category 4: Supplies, vocabulary, sight words and phonics. Teacher-participants expressed vocabulary and/or sight words as an important part of literacy learning, and four teacher-participants specifically stated phonics is an important part of literacy learning. Sight words and phonics are considered different from spelling inventories, but a part of the balanced literacy approach.

> Participant T2: I made a list of print concepts; awareness about print, phonological awareness, blending, segmenting, those kind of things; things that rhyme, phonics, doing things like letter matching, letter

> recognition, fluency, shared reading, paired reading, reader's theatre we do sometimes; vocabulary, grouping and categorizing the words, comprehension---using story maps and graphs, organization, that kind of stuff; and writing---using dictation or beginning to sound out a word…
>
> Participant T6: …we use Frye sight vocabulary. The first 100 words for first grade, and that is research based. He says these are the first 100 words that you find in print that occur most often in print.

Sub-Category 5: The home and school connection. Two teacher-participants identified parent support and homework as an important component related to student learning, independent practice and academic success. One teacher-participant explained that parental involvement was evident in classroom performance and during assessments. When parents practiced sight words with children, reading improved and students scored well on weekly tests. Homework was another forum for independent practice and was an essential part of their daily and weekly routine.

> Participant T1: So it's really just repetition and parent support. If they have no parent support for those words, then they have a very hard time. They take home three new words and then they are tested on Friday…parents say I practiced with them, then when they get the test on Friday and their child doesn't know it, they don't realize that you have to do it more than once.
>
> Participant T7: …and then definitely that the home to school connection is through our practices, that parents come in and share if they can.

Theme 6: Teachers Discussed Whole School Interaction as Important in Student Achievement.

Category: Communication. Communication is an important part of the success formula for the school. The superintendent postulates the central directives for the district. The principal then sets school level goals, appropriate for the grade levels in the school. It is apparent that the school leaders clearly communicate the district and school expectations regarding teaching and learning. Many of the teacher-participants use common language in discussing and describing processes and procedures used in the classroom and in the school. The school-wide use of the curriculum is also evident. Staff is well versed in the goals and objectives of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) program. Developing a common language is part of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) training, but beyond curriculum, it was palpable that this is a learning community. Teacher-participants discussed common planning time, unity/common goals, and core standards as part of the school-wide communication.

> Participant T5: The entire school district communicates the curriculum and the goals… So we've been prepared very well. It's the consistency and the communication in this school district that's been key to our success.

Sub-Category 1: Common planning time. Study participants discussed vertical articulation as a means to meet students' needs. They felt that is was important to know what is needed at the next level in order to prepare students for that grade level. Discussing student learning across grade-levels is an important part of meeting student

needs. Three teacher-participants specifically expressed the desire for more common planning time. Although staff is aware of district and administrative goals and expectations, it appears that participants feel that conversing with colleagues could improve practice.

> Participant T3: You are aware of the literacy strategies that the next grade needs…I've asked for the Fundamentals posters and things like that, so that way I can teach them how they are going to be taught…
>
> Participant T5: …we also do well with communicating with prior grade levels and with future grade levels. We assess the students in the prior grades and we share some of that information with the student in next grade. This is very helpful, especially if the student is struggling. But we know ahead of time about where that student is.
>
> Participant T7: Basically we are going to Writer's Workshop with just (our) grade teachers, which is helpful when you can work with peer colleagues. hey put back common planning time for the SGOs…we can bounce ideas off of each other, find what is working, what is not, and like…I have this kid---how can I help him? It's a good resource.

Sub-Category 2: Unity/common goals. Each teacher-participant distinctly knew their role and could clearly communicate the learning objectives for literacy learning and achievement. Together, the teacher-participants responses unmistakably manifested a marked picture of cohesiveness regarding literacy instruction. It is important for teachers to be on the same page. Staff has to be able to use the same tools

from grade level to grade level, so that data is comparable. It was important for staff to be trained well, so that tools in use, such as benchmarks are measured in the same way from grade level to grade level and from classroom to classroom.

> Participant T5: But we do communicate with one another. We formally assess each student and we are consistent. Each teacher in this school uses the same instruments to assess the students. And we have all been trained on those instruments extensively. And we are able to formally assess our students and know where they are and come to the classroom and teach them at that level. So we've been prepared very well. It's the consistency and the communication in this school district that's been key to our success.
>
> Participant T6: Using all the pieces is district directed.
>
> Participant T7: Reporting our grades online, that's been helpful too. More unified--helps people be on the same page EXACTLY (emphasized)…the district does the trainings now…at one point we had a meeting to review running records because people were making mistakes and if you can't read the data on there from year to year, obviously it's useless data.
>
> Participant A1: …so I facilitated every meeting. I got to know all the teachers that way, got my foot in the door about trust and all that stuff that needed to happen and that's where the discussion really started… so our benchmarks right now anyway, the one component that is the same in all

> the buildings through seventh and eighth grade is the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) benchmark assessment.

Sub-Category 3: Common Core Standards. Common core and state standards were also a way to provide unity and common goals that are articulated from central office to all school staff. Teachers are expected to align teaching to the grade-appropriate state standards and common core standards.

> Participant T6: We do follow the common core…making sure we are hitting those curriculum points for (our) grade are very important…
>
> Participant T7: We have an older series so they made sure it meets the framework of the core curriculum standards. They want us to use the tools we have obviously…we do follow the common core… making sure we are hitting those curriculum points…

Observation Field Note Findings

I analyzed and coded observation field notes using process coding to identify repetitive patterns of actions among classroom teachers. The most repetitious patterns were coded and organized by frequency. The teachers' classroom behaviors, processes, and procedures observed most frequently are presented below from greatest to least. Table 2 provides a summary of the most common repetitive strategies observed and the teacher-participants who engaged the strategy.

Table 2

Summary of Classroom Actions and Activities Frequently Used by Teacher Participants.

	Summary of Repetitive Classroom Teacher Actions	Number of Teacher-Participants Who Used the Concepts Listed by Pseudonym Name	
1	Lesson Introduction – Lesson objective and goal clearly stated	7	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7
2	Whole Group Instruction	7	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 T7 (explained Daily 5 directions)
3	Continuous Review – repeated concepts, review of strategies, reinforced concept over and over	7	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 T7 (reviewed packed concepts)
4	Concepts About Print (CAP)	7	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 T7 (included at learning stations)
5	Hands-on/Writing – follow-up activities	7	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 T7 (included at writing station)
6	Transitions – changes in classroom activities	7	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7
7	Modeling – show students skill, then students use the skill	5	T1, T2, T3, T5, T6
8	Read Alouds– Reading to the class	5	T1, T2, T3, T5, T6
9	Questioning – review, practice	5	T1, T2, T3, T5, T6
10	Choral Reading – Students read as a group	4	T1, T2, T5, T6

All seven teacher-participants started their lesson with an introduction to the students about the lesson goals and objectives. Some provided more detailed

explanations than others, but all included some form of lesson opener that explained the concept to be taught. Each of the seven teacher-participants started with whole group instruction, often on a story rug, creating close proximity to the students. As teacher-participants moved through the lessons, they each performed continuous review throughout the lesson. Teachers stopped numerous times to check with students on either the concept being introduced or concepts previously taught. Every teacher-participant included CAP strategies in his or her lesson. Teachers repeatedly reminded students about book parts (cover pages, authors, illustrators, etc.), literacy concepts such as upper case letters, lower case letters, rhyming words, and mechanics such as capitals at the beginning of sentences, end marks, sentence structure, word spacing, etc. All lessons included follow-up, hands-on activities and all teacher-participants incorporated writing into the activities. Most teacher-participants modeled behavior for student activities to enhance comprehension. Five of the seven teacher-participants started with Read Alouds, while four of those five study participants included Choral Reading shortly after their Read Alouds. To enhance the continuous review, five teacher-participants used a questioning/answer strategy to engage students. Transitions were not a focus of my study, but the seamless execution of student movement to various activities in each classroom became an unexpected noticeable, so I included them as a part of my classroom observations.

The literary strategies and techniques demonstrated by teacher-participants were mirrored from classroom to classroom and from grade level to grade level. Literacy instruction was age appropriate and higher-level learning strategies were evident in upper

grades. The strategies were not necessarily novel, but the phenomena I observed was the extraordinary level of consistent behaviors at which teacher-participants executed instruction.

Lesson Introductions

Each teacher-participant provided a lesson opener. The teacher-participants took time to explain to the students the overall learning objective. The teacher-participant further explained the goal of the lesson and shared exactly what the students would be doing. Some teacher-participants explained it more than once, but in a different ways. It was evident that the teacher-participants wanted to clearly state their expectations and maintain the focus of the instruction. For example, T1 announces and introduces the letter "T". T1 explains that the activity will be writing the letter "T". T1 continues to explain that the student will participate in a shared reading exercise about the letter "T". It is clear at this point that the students should be focused on the letter "T". T2 introduces a book and announces the lesson objective of writing sentences and parts of sentences. Two sentences are displayed on the whiteboard. The sentences will be used later in the lesson. T5 defines the term lesson objective as what is to be accomplished. T5 then shares the current lesson objective to identify one's scheme. T5 writes the new word "schema" on the board to focus students on the term and provide comprehension. T5 takes several minutes to clarify and define the goal of the lesson. Three teacher-participants included a review of previous concepts or activities that relate to the current lesson. For example, T3 then announces the class will review letter "F" asks students to remember the recent visit from local firefighters who brought their fire trucks to the

school. There is a short discussion to focus students on the letter "F" before the current lesson is presented. T4 announces the lesson focus is on commas. The students will watch a video and T5, similar to T3, reviews a previous lesson on the use of commas to separate lists. It is apparent that introducing or announcing objectives is an important technique used to focus students of the goal of the lesson.

Whole Group Instruction

Every classroom used whole group instruction. Most often, it included gathering the students into a common area, like a story rug. Students learned in close proximity to the teacher and each other. This format enabled the teacher and students to interact, encouraged student focus and response, and allowed the teacher the ability correct student behavior. While whole group instruction is not a novel instructional technique, I observed a high level of student focus and engagement from classroom to classroom. Students were actively involved during the whole group presentation. Teacher participants executed whole group instruction age-appropriately, by stopping often and drawing students into the lesson with questioning or physical participation. For example, T1 in reviewing the story, allowed students to come to the board to put spots on the turtle after they correctly identify a "T" word. T2 reads and stops the story to ask questions and brings attention to various pictures in the story. T2 makes a list of fall items with the students and then explains that they will make sentences with those items. T2 asks students to name fall items. T6 reads only one or two lines of poem then stops to review and bringing focus to the concept. The lesson presentations were indicative of a well-trained staff.

Continuous Review

Each teacher participant practiced continuous review throughout the lesson. Teacher-participants used a variety of methods such as questioning, practicing, identifying, recall, repeating, etc. to review current or previous concepts. For example, T1 read a story passage and then asked student to identify sight words. T1 later questioned students to identify the question mark. T1 speaks, has the student repeat, then points and has the student repeat again. T1 uses hand signals to have student repeat the letter and practice saying words starting with that letter. T2 repeats fall items, previously identified in the story read. T2 reminds students to write words to label pictures. T2 repeats directions. T3 reviews the frog story to identify upper and lower case letter "F". Students review items on the board that begin with letter "F". T3 brings attention to words in the story starting with letter "F". Students practiced making the letter "F" using sign-language. T3 reviews visuals of upper and lower case letter "F". T4 reiterates information, directions and reviews the questions associated with the lesson activity. T4 redirects students during the activity. Teacher-participants who conducted Read Aloud activities engaged student practice by stopping periodically throughout the passage and checking for comprehension, schema, rhyming words or the skill being taught. Teacher-participants clearly use continuous review as a strategy to present language arts literacy concepts in the classroom and throughout lesson presentations to help students practice skills and concepts being taught. Although T7 did not conduct a formal lesson, a thorough review of concepts was explained in introducing a work packet. Each page and concept to be used was discussed.

Concepts About Print (CAP)

Each lesson I observed contained some form of print concepts either as the lesson focus or as a review. Although lessons varied from classroom to classroom, teacher-participants incorporated CAP points wherever and whenever possible to reinforce print concepts. T2 and T4 conducted lessons where print concepts were the focus, such a sentence writing and structure and use of commas. Others reviewed print concepts where it was applicable within a lesson, such as when reading a story, reviewing book parts, author and illustrator roles, etc. Again, although T7 did not specifically present a formal lesson, CAP concepts are included in the Daily 5 learning station activities.

Hands-on Activities/Writing Related to Reading

All lessons included a writing portion related to the strategy taught. Some lessons included additional hands-on activities such as coloring, tracing, etc. Each teacher-participant stated that writing related to reading was an important component of the curriculum and each lesson contained an element of writing. Hands-on activities reinforce learning through independent practice. Individual practice can be used as another form of student assessment that enables teachers to identify mastery of a concept through application.

Transitions

Classroom management procedures were well established as students moved from activity to activity without incident. Transitions were seamless from class to class. Students were well aware of teacher expectations and classroom rules. This was an area I had not included in my study focus, but it is obvious that a well-managed classroom is

conducive to a productive learning environment. Students have a much higher potential for learning, when disruptive behavior is not an issue. Students knew the expectations and classroom management was not an issue. I did observe an organized reward and consequence system in place in each classroom. Students were able to obtain stickers, receive choices of activities, move their own names up (or down) a behavior chart, etc. I noted that all teacher-participants used verbal praise and positive reinforcement with students throughout the lesson, while providing guidance and correction when needed, but without ostracizing the student.

Modeling

Teacher-participants modeled behaviors throughout most classrooms. Modeling behavior helps student focus on the learning goal. During the lesson presentations, the teacher-participants T5 and T6 modeled literacy behaviors such as, reading fluently, and rhyming; while T1 and T3 modeled pronouncing phonetic sounds, and T2 modeled sentence structure and punctuation. Prior to each activity, teachers explained the task and then showed students how to perform the task. Teachers executed one task at a time then had students copy the task. Students moved through the activity following teacher led examples. Some teacher-participants involved a student to model behavior to their peers. Modeling behaviors included repetition, verbal reinforcement, reiteration, etc. The activities support the lesson and reinforce the concepts taught. Activities included creating sentences about seasons, poetry, creating a collaborative story with group partners, etc.

Read Alouds and Questioning Techniques

Five teacher-participants read aloud to their class. Teacher-participants used active listening skills by stopping often throughout the passage and asking questions, or pointing out a particular concept on which they wanted the students to focus. Questioning and answering continued through most teacher-participant Read Alouds. The active listening technique keeps students engaged because they do not have to listen to long passages sitting passively.

Choral Reading

Another active reading technique is choral reading. This strategy provides students with an opportunity to review text as a group and practice words and concepts. Choral reading engages all students. A benefit of choral reading is that it allows students to practice the text without fear of failure, being singled out or being ostracized.

Triangulation of Interviews and Classroom Observations

According to Merriam (2009) triangulation cross references data sources to substantiate findings. Although I was unable to obtain school documents such as benchmark data or report card grades, the thick rich data retrieved from the participant interviews and classroom observations will allow multiple measures for validity. Glense (2011) indicated that a combination of measures enhances findings rather than just a single source of data. In triangulating data from interviews and classroom observations field notes it was apparent that behaviors validated perceptions. Many of the literacy strategies discussed were also being implemented in classroom practice. For example, five of the teacher-participants indicated modeling positively impacted student

achievement. Six of the seven teacher-participants actually modeled desired literary behavior in the classroom, either through showing the students how to perform tasks for follow-up language arts literacy activities or through Read Alouds, which is practicing good reading skills. Five of seven teacher-participants also specifically stated that the hands-on approach was important to literacy achievement and all teacher-participants used hands-on activities in the classroom during the observations. All seven teacher-participants identified writing as a means to enhance literacy learning, and writing practice was observed during each classroom activities. Most writing activities were a follow-up to the lesson presented, while the seventh was part of the Daily 5 learning centers, but writing was indeed occurring in every classroom. All seven teacher-participants specified continuous actions in the form of review, repetition, reinforcement, or daily practice in their interview and these continuous actions embedded in the classroom routines and observed in all seven classrooms. Staff consistently reviewed lesson concepts and students were well aware of expectations, including seamless transitions from one activity to another. Six of seven teacher-participants practiced large group instruction, three teacher-participants performed Read Alouds, and two teacher-participants demonstrated Guided Reading. Although only three teacher-participants detailed CAP during their interview, six of the seven teacher-participants included CAP review in their lesson presentations. Four teacher-participants quantified differentiated instruction is used strategically to implement lessons. Two teacher-participants were observed providing support with hands-on activities, while four others provided activities that included adaptations to address different learning styles. For example, an activity

would include any combination of writing, drawing, sharing, peer collaboration, etc. Three teacher-participants using technology during instruction and two classrooms were using online learning activities. A third teacher-participant did state that their classroom was awaiting technology repair or she would have been able to use online learning with those students. Five teacher-participants affirmed that books were an important of literacy learning tools and six classrooms used books during the literacy lesson and/or with student activities. In essence, teacher perceptions of literacy practices that positively impacted student achievement were supported by classroom behaviors in this strong performing school.

Saturation

Saturation was realized as teacher and administrative interview transcripts indicated identified routine literacy strategies, processes, and procedures used throughout the school. Teacher-participants continued to name the same variety of strategies through the interviewing process. The strategies were reiterated over and among study participants, but were used in assorted combinations in various classrooms. Administrative-participants also named the same school-wide programs and approaches. Repetitive actions in classroom observation field notes among teacher-participants and between grade levels also indicated unison of practices. Saturation was evident as analyzed data became repetitious and no new knowledge emerged.

Outcomes

The findings provide a thick, rich variety of strategies that study participants used to address literacy achievement at this strong performing school. The outcomes of these

findings are addressed first as they relate to the following study questions, followed by a correlation to Bloom (1956):

Over-arching Question:

1. What literacy strategies do educators believe enhance student achievement in literacy (reading) in your district?
    a. What literacy strategies are being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement? (sub-question)
    b. How do students learn to read well in your district? (sub-question)

Over-arching Question:

2. What are educator's perceptions of professional development related to student achievement of literacy learning?
    a. Describe the professional development programs you have attended at your elementary school. (sub-question)
    b. What do educators believe are the components of an effective professional development program for literacy achievement? (sub-question)
3. How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning/achievement?

Teacher Perceptions of Literacy Strategies

Study participants were asked what literacy strategies do they believed enhanced student achievement in literacy (reading) in their district; what literacy strategies are being implemented in their district that positively impacted achievement; and how did students learn to read well in their district. The findings section reports detailed strategies provided by study participants. These stratagems are summarized into three

main groups that link classroom observations with interview discussions, based on overall cohesion of study participant behaviors and responses.

Curriculum and assessments. All study-participants identified curriculum and assessments as part of the literacy achievement for their district. Structured lessons are curriculum based. To implement the research-based curriculum productively, appropriate and on-going training is provided for all participants, annually, so that data is properly retrieved in a consistent, systematic manner, and analyzed in a meaningful way. Both a teacher-participant and an administrative-participant emphasized the importance of having comparable data. Administration chose Fountas and Pinnell (2012) as a school-wide curriculum on which all staff was trained. The methods and tools provided in the curriculum are used consistently among all classrooms and across grade levels.

Fountas and Pinnell (2012). Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell worked as educators in the area of early intervention reading recovery in the 1990s. Together, they developed the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum for language arts reading literacy based on their own teaching experiences, the teacher experiences of others, along with research projects in which they participated and the research of others. The program they developed is a comprehensive, whole school approach to literacy learning and achievement. Their work filled a gap in literacy instruction which included matching books to readers, differentiated instruction in small group settings and providing other researched-based practices in response to teachers' questions to meet student needs. Their curriculum initially focused on primary grades and later expanded to middle school grades, creating a K-8 literacy continuum. The focus of their research and goal of the

continuum was to identify what developed readers from one level to the next. They used an A to Z text level gradient tool that was later revised and re-designed to address specific reading behaviors that would propel readers forward, and published their work in a guided reading publication. The authors explored the detailed characteristics of fiction and non-fiction literature at each level to determine what behaviors readers needed to exhibit in order to advance from one level to the next. Their work resulted in a publication of twelve systems of strategic actions to identify, teach and provide support for each reading level along the gradient. Additional publications included literacy components such as read alouds, shared reading, writing about reading, phonics and spelling, and others. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) created an intervention program based on their leveled gradient to address the struggling reader. They designed a research-based framework, created highly structured lessons and solicited children's authors and illustrators to create engaging books to support leveled intervention. They developed a benchmark assessment system to provide data that identifies where students align on the gradient; which students need immediate intervention; and tracks student progress. The program also provides a prompting guide that offers staff specific language to identify strategic reading behaviors. The prompting guide encourages consistent language in horizontal articulation among and across content areas and vertical articulation between grade levels. The overall goal of the curriculum is to create a whole-school program where everyone uses the same systematic approach from diagnostic, to structured classroom instruction, to intervention, creating a common conversation across the school that leads to increased literacy learning.

Other curriculum. Additional curriculum identified by study participants included Harcourt (2015), Fundations (Wilson, 2015), and Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) spelling inventory. Four of the seven teacher-participants specifically mentioned Harcourt (2015) as their traditional language arts literacy curriculum. The curriculum offered the typical reading basal, comprehension tests, and unit assessments. The Harcourt (2015) series became a support resource after the implementation of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum. Fundations (Wilson, 2015), a phonics-based program, was named also among four teacher-participants. This program was piloted at their school in the spring of 2013 and September 2014 started the first full year of use. When asked why they brought in Fundations (Wilson, 2015), teacher-participant T2 explained the differences in the curriculums, their purpose, and use.

> Participant T2: For instance, Harcourt teaches a letter a week, out of order, instead of A, B, C, but they do it according to which letter is seen most in books. They start with the letter "m" because you will see it over and over again in a child's book.
>
> Participant T2: But now we have Fundations in the mix and they don't start with letter "m", so it makes it hard because you are teaching one thing with the reading aspect and you've got another letter for the phonics aspect… Fundations – is the phonics part – it's more like drill; T-top, F-fun, and they associate that letter with that sound and picture. So when they are writing and they are trying to sound out funny, they sound out "f"

> and then they look at the card F-fun and then know. Fundations starts with letters according to how they are written. The lined paper is identified as the sky line, the plain line, the grass line and the worm line, so it's where the letters are placed on the line. So they start with all the letters that start at the skyline.
>
> Interviewer: What is LLI?
>
> Participant A1: LLI – Leveled Literacy Intervention Program. It was developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell and we use their assessment tools in the regular classrooms as well and it's kind of like a "read and recovery" in a box…

Differentiated instruction. Six of the seven teacher-participants and both administrative-participants indicated the strength of the program revolved around meeting student's individual needs. Assessments determined student levels and instruction aligned to students' need. Reinforcing levels enable students to gain mastery at their current literacy level and then move up the gradient to increase literacy achievement. Guided Reading was considered the most effective strategy by five of the seven participants. Guided Reading is small group literacy instruction with students on the same reading level. Students practice daily until students move up the reading gradient provided in the curriculum.

> Participant A1: When I first got here, there was a lot of whole group instruction and a lot of books on shelves for kids just to pick, but not a lot of instruction on just right books, and how to guide students on how to

> determine whether or not this a book they can read and teachers even understanding what those books and those levels are about so they can match and nudge them in the right direction.
>
> Participant A2: (students learn to read well in this district)…through being instructed in reading strategies on their individual reading level in small groups.

Routines and repetition. Study participants stated that routines, repetition, reinforcement and practice allow students the continuous review needed for literacy learning and achievement. I observed common procedures and practices throughout all classrooms. Teacher-participants used continuous review throughout lesson presentations. Concepts were reiterated, practiced and reinforced wherever and whenever possible. Staff constantly used repetition when introducing new concepts and used review to remind students about concepts previously taught. To practice concepts teacher-participants modeled behavior for follow-up activities. Some students modeled behaviors for classmates. Routines were evident in the conduct of the students and seamless transitions.

> Interview: There was a lot in the lesson. You had the story, the morning message, you had some new words, flash care review…how does the student learn all of that?
>
> Participant T1: …and that will be the exact same thing every day. I will do the exact same thing every day. …I'll do the exact thing tomorrow; the only difference is that it will be a different worksheet. So they know

exactly what's coming up…it never goes away until Friday and then we meet a new character on Monday.

Participant T6: In our district we use a balanced literacy approach. Which is using, making sure that every day you are reading TO, WITH and By, making sure we are using Shared reading—that's where we teach the strategies and practice the strategies

Interviewer: What strategies?

Participant T6: Guided Reading…Independent Reading….The Daily 5…..modeling writing, shared writing…phonics, grammar, Word Work…

Participant T7: … stating the objective, we always do that, now we put it up on the board with the standard next to it, that kind of thing which is a little more formal.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Study participants were asked if professional development training enhanced student literacy learning. Participants were also asked if formal teacher preparedness impacted student achievement. Finally, participants were asked to discuss professional development trainings at their school that positively impacted literacy learning and to describe the components of an effective professional development offering.

I collected demographic data to determine teacher-participants education levels, years of teaching experience, time at their current grade level and teacher time at this strong performing school. Six teacher-participants provided demographic information related to their educational experience. Table 3 summarizes the information requested,

excluding the grade level to provide an additional level of anonymity and protection for the study participants.

Table 3

Teacher Participant Educational Experience.

Teacher Educational Demographics								
Participant	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7*	Average
Level of Education	BA	MA	BA	MA	MA	BA+ credits		3/6 MA 50%
Numbers of years teaching	17	17	21	2.5	10	23		15.1 yrs.
Number of years at this grade level	4	10	18	2.5	4	10+		8.2 yrs.
Numbers of years in this district	13	16	21	2.5	7	10		11.6 yrs.
Grade Level	Not provided to protect the participant							
*T7 did not provide demographic data								

Demographically, the teacher-participants have an average of over 15 years of teaching experience, with an average of over 8 years at their current grade level and approximately 11.5 years in this strong performing district. The level of experience is evident in the teacher's ability to execute training and model desired behaviors. Classroom management was handled well and transitions were seamless. Classrooms were aesthetically decorated with age appropriate learning stimuli. Teacher-participants were well versed in the art of teaching.

Five teacher-participants did not believe that college was a major factor in teacher preparedness that impacted student achievement, although one study participant did believe that student teaching helped provide experience. The most often stated reason was the time lapse since college. A few participants suggested that things had changed in the field of education; for example, different models had come and gone since their college years. Four of the seven teacher-participants and two administrative-participants stated professional development was an important factor in teacher preparedness that impacted learning. When I asked what professional development experiences had been significant, three teacher-participants and both administrative-participants specifically identified training on the school curriculum and strategies actually used in the classroom as a key component that positively impacted student achievement in literacy learning. Four teacher-participants affirmed that hands-on materials impacted student learning. Four teacher-participants and one administrative-participant specified that common planning time was useful to meet with colleagues; and share, compare and/or brainstorm ideas.

> Participant T1: To be honest, I don't think college did anything for me. Most of everything I've learned is just from teaching through the years, trial and error, occasional workshops I've gone to, getting ideas, talking to other teachers, getting ideas from other teachers, going online, researching things… We as teachers would actually like to have more time to talk to each other to bounce things off…

Participant T3: …it seems like now, people graduating from college are getting a much different experience as a teacher than I did, cause I graduated in 93. It seems like it's more hands-on, (pause)…they get a lot more time in the classroom. I mean I did, that's when I did student teaching, like the regular student teaching, that's probably where I learned the most…just from being there, hands-on and from other teachers with experience, just talking…

Participant T4: We have Writer's Workshop. The district has different professional developments.

Participant T6: I've been teaching for 22 years, so things have changed since then. I graduated in 1991 and taught in parochial school and then I taught in Philadelphia and in just that 3 years there was a change. It went from (pause)… can't remember, but that's when the balanced literacy started to be pushed in Philadelphia and that's where I learned most of my literacy background ….actually all of it. All of what we implement today, and this district came on board quite a few years later, but it still worked and it's still definitely a best practice.

Participant T7: I came from the days of Madeline Hunter and the anticipatory set and whole language was big when I got out of college, naming the room, putting a nametag…the whole Madeline Hunter---seeing what they know, assess their knowledge beforehand, then teach to that, (pause)…I think yes, I still use that, I still do a little what do you

know, what are we going to do today---we're going to talk about this today, stating the objective…I was actually a history major and elementary education was a secondary thing, so as far that is concerned, I don't use too much of that.

Participant A1: Well I do, honestly, probably 98% of all the language arts training… I am mostly a teacher trainer. I do some assessments and I do a lot of modeling, so that the teachers can see me. So I'm in the classroom and I've done modeled lesson and demonstrations in the past for Guided Reading and shared reading and writing.

Participant A2: Our teachers have received the following training at various levels: Benchmarking (Running Records), Guided Reading, Writer's Workshop, Reader's Workshop, and Words Their Way.

An interesting factor surfaced from two teacher-participants who both had completed graduate programs within the last 2-5 years. Both study participants stated that their programs had provided training relevant to their current classroom practices. Participant T4 indicated that his graduate program did mention various curriculums, although not in detail, and some of the curriculum mentioned is being used currently in the district. Similarly, T5 confirmed that her graduate program provided current, research-based curriculum tools that the district is also using currently. Both study-participants maintained that it was advantageous that their district was up-to-date on contemporary trends in education.

> Participant T4: In my case, I went back…within 5 years. Subbed last year, got a job this year. Just received my masters in Elementary Education,…they mentioned a lot of things, and they touched on a lot of things that we are doing here…they didn't go in-depth, but at least I had a seed planted, so I was a little familiar with it, so once I saw it here, I was like okay I remember hearing that and then I was able to get up and running…
>
> Participant T5: (Excitedly) A big example! I took a course where the textbook was Words Their Way Spelling Inventories and it seemed like the very next in-service we were trained on Words Their Way…and I was thrilled because I wasn't learning one philosophy in education or one curriculum and then having to learn something completely different in my district. It was very consistent with my graduate studies (pause)…it was based on current research and what worked (pause)…and I was so pleased to learn that my school district used those same strategies (pause)…they based their decisions on what is working.

I unearthed an assortment of additional ideas from teacher-participant perceptions about preparedness that positively impacted student achievement. Participants specified on-the-job training helped. Some stated that trial and error in the classroom improved instruction. Others stated that being flexible and being able to adapt lessons improved outcomes. Several stated it was important to differentiate lessons to meet students' needs. A few teacher-participants stated that quality over quantity of student work was

important. Several study participants indicated that having supplies to support classroom instruction was important and that supplies should also support the school curriculum. For example, T3 wanted more consumables for her students. Further ideas communicated by study participants regarding teacher preparedness that impacted student learning included school communication, school goals, relevant professional development and training that reflected true examples that could be turn-keyed into practice. Although study participants expressed a variety of notions, the general consensus focused on the understanding that teacher training be relevant, correlate with current classroom practice, and be research-based.

> Participant T2: The hands-on, the take-aways, the things you can come back and implement to help the not-as creative teacher. And I think it helps too that the person who is giving the presentation is someone that is in the classroom currently…to know that these teachers are using it and you are able to do it.
>
> Participant T4: You learned it (a teaching strategy), but the in-depth part came from the hands-on or the district training.
>
> Participant T5: Each teacher in this school uses the same instruments to assess the students. And we have all been trained on those instruments extensively. And we are able to formally assess our students and know where they are and come to the classroom and teach them at that level.

> Participant T6: I think that anything that has a direct impact on student achievement is going to be beneficial, but you want something that you can actually bring into the classroom…So workshops with hands-on…
>
> Participant T7: [Long Pause]. Honestly, reading, over the last few years, we really concentrate on the training of teachers in how to do a running record, on how to use that information to help you.
>
> Participant A2: Our teachers have received the following training at various levels. Benchmarking (running records), Guided Reading, Writer's Workshop, Reader's Workshop, Words Their Way.

District Decisions

Study participants were asked how administrative decisions impacted literacy learning and achievement. Study participants asserted the district provided appropriate tools to positively impacted literacy learning and student achievement. They quantified the district decisions to provide curriculum, classroom supplies, school intervention programs, online tools, training and other decisions that improved literacy learning.

All study participants confirmed the use of Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum and the running record benchmarks required. The participants explained that the curriculum running record assessments ascertain student-reading levels and they also specified teaching tools, such as leveled books used to differentiate instruction and meet individual student needs. Other curriculum detailed by participants included Fundations (Wilson, 2015), Harcourt (2015), and Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015). The Daily 5 learning stations included learning supplies and the district invested in

classroom tools like the Elmo projection machine to enhance learning through modeling visuals. The Elmo can project a paper copy without making the page into a transparency. A few teacher-participants mentioned this tool and one teacher-participant displayed use of the machine. Language arts literacy support practices include the use I&RS and their Academic Achievement (basic skills) program.

In addition to research-based, whole-school programs, the district has also made decisions to provide online subscriptions to supplement curriculum-teaching tools. Study participants itemized online tools such as Raz-Kids (Learning A-Z, 2015) online independent leveled reading practice, Reading A-to-Z printable books, 21st Century Learning, Bookbag, Brain Pop, Study Island, Frye sight words, My Map Series, Spelling City, etc.

> Participant T1: We have to do running records all the time…They encourage 21st Century Learning…we have Raz on the computers where they can track their own level and move up on their own,…We can send books home, we can make them through Reading A-to-Z and print them out if they don't have books…
>
> Participant T2: …many of the strategies are in our Harcourt series, which is our language arts program, as well as the Fundations program, our new phonics program…a lot of times the superintendent and the assistant superintendent look at the new programs…But we are basically, (pause, sigh) told which ones we are using. And sometimes teacher input is asked and sometimes it's not. The literacy coach was involved with Harcourt.

We've had that for a few years now and it's a great program, however, things are of course changing again.

Participant T4: Everybody has Raz-Kids , all the teachers have the books for Guided Reading…everybody is doing running records…Words Their Way is something everyone has to do and a literacy folder all students have that during the course of the year, you have to do assignments,…Each grade might have different types of items but the writing samples will be in the folder and the folder will follow each student,…getting different subscriptions, things like Brain Pop help,…supplemental things, cause so many things are online and interactive, so the more of that that we can bring into the classroom is great, rather than just have them look at a book and paper the whole time. The equipment in the classroom, projectors, Elmo, the more interactive the better, looking at pictures, clips, etc.

Participant T7: Other than that Raz-Kids, a lot of teachers us that, we have Study Island, we have Brain Pop…we have licenses that we can use, so that's been helpful too.

Participant A1: (the principal) gave me 15 subscriptions for Reading A-Z because we had no money to buy the F&P at the time, we used Reading A-Z which was cheap and in the process there was a special going on for Raz-Kids. You got that free if you purchased your A-Z subscription, so we got 15 and got both and the teachers went crazy over Raz-Kids

> because that's an online Guided Reading Program the parents loved. Everybody wanted it, so (the principal) tried to find more money to get everybody a subscription for Reading A-Z and Raz-Kids.

Training is provided across the board on school-based programs and practices to augment consistent application. All study participants discussed teacher training and provided various perspectives on professional development.

> Participant T5: I mentioned this earlier too, we have some wonderful literacy coaches and they have been giving workshops to us, different professional development sessions and those are based on current research. We are all learning, and we are even asked to read different research articles, different professional articles so that we are on the same page, and that we are aware of what practices are work, and using them in the classroom.
>
> Participant T6: Balanced literacy practices are making an impact. Upper level decisions, that's helping student achievement. The decision to bring a program like Writer's Workshop will have a great impact. I think that their decision to bring in Guided Reading has made the greatest impact. It's slow, we are introducing pieces at a time. Forcing everyone to pay close attention to the standards has also made an impact because you have a true scope and sequence of what you need to get finished, of what needs to be taught. We've had pieces…we've carried on pieces of

> Fundations…this was an administrative initiative, so…they are doing some things…
>
> Participant T7: They want us to use the tools we have obviously. We do follow the common core…we have so many pieces of writing a year that we turn in, some are required and some of it is free choice, so we make sure that everybody is writing in a journal daily, making sure the teacher is assessing…to show growth. We started the last few years of …doing a spelling inventory…we really concentrate on the training of teachers in how to do a running record, on how to use that information to help you. We do have a very set guideline—independent reading, instructional reading levels---instructional reading levels need to be reported by a certain date. We also go to the library, the media center, they hired another part-time person so that we can go twice as often and help the kids that way. We have an older series so they made sure it meets the framework of the core curriculum standards…it's the same Harcourt….so we make sure it covers the standards.

Administrative decisions appear to be made at the superintendent and assistant superintendent level with some input from school level administrators, supervisors, coaches and sometimes teachers. Although teaching staff may not have as much input as they would like, it is evident that the administration and board of education in this district is reachable in terms of identifying where staff concerns are and how changes in these

area can positively impact student learning. Changes occur as needed to improve academic achievement.

> Participant T7: We also go to the library, the media center. They hired another part time person, so that we can go twice as often and help the kids that way.
>
> Participant A1: The other big thing we also did the first two years was to make sure we had books to read where they were (at level), and that has been a big, big one for us… So we've developed classroom libraries over the last five years…so about the second or third year in, they did go to the Board and they changed fourth grade and made it self-contained. This is our second year of self-contained fourth grade and that has really been effective as well, obviously there has been more time for language arts and we included a two-hour language arts block in both elementary buildings so that there is enough time to do all of the things we need to in language arts. And there was a full day kindergarten that was brought in three years ago and that has made a difference… The last Flash Report I saw was last spring and I don't know it off the top of my head. That information gets done and correlated and given to the BOE as a reporting mechanism for them.
>
> Participant A2: Over the past few years, we have implemented a new data collection tool. This data is collected into a flash report and analyzed by administration and the BOE. Students reading levels have increased

greatly over the past few years. This has been documented through the administration and collection of benchmark data. Every year positive results are seen.

Validity and Reliability

Findings were sent to study participants for member checking. The strategies, practices and procedures reported were identified from classroom observations field notes and from interview transcripts. To enrich cogency, I used a peer reviewer. All data was deidentified and a summary of the peer reviewer's findings are included below.

Peer Review Findings

My peer reviewer has over 30 years of experience as a media specialist. She has worked in several school districts and is well versed in language arts literacy. She obtained her first Master's Degree in the area of early childhood education and development. She extrapolates similar strategies, processes, procedures and behaviors form interview transcripts and observation field notes, which authenticate findings. The following is a summary of discoveries aligned with each study question.

Interview Transcript Findings Aligned to Study Questions

Effective literacy strategies that impacted student achievement. The school uses a balanced literacy approach. Within the balanced literacy system repetition, reinforcement, rituals, and routines have instructive value and effectively impacted student expectations. Running records provide a good navigational tool and create a strong connection between grade levels related to previous learning and current expectations. The overall school curriculum provides a daily immersion of qualitative

and quantitative language arts literacy engagement. Read Alouds are an effective modeling tool. Use of assessments such as running records, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) and CAP are evident from participant responses. Scope and sequence establishes expectations of skills to be taught. Supplemental literacy programs and technology are listed as Raz-Kids (Learning A-Z, 2015), other online learning programs, Reading A-Z, Fundations (Wilson, 2015), Guided Reading, Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015), at home reading, Galley 5 and shared reading.

Teacher preparedness related to literacy learning. Common planning time allows for qualitative and quantitative collaboration between content teachers. Professional development should be aligned with the scope and sequence of the district's curriculum whether presented by internal or external personnel.

Administrative decisions which effectively impacted literacy achievement. District-wide communication of curriculum and goals promote a unified purpose. Expectations should be consistent with regard to formal evaluation of students and staff. There appears to be intensive training for teaching staff on assessment tools. Teacher exposure to current research and district use of current related curriculum improves literacy achievement. The district uses an effective self-reflection strategy from the superintendent, to administrators and instructional staff. Scheduling changes allow more time for literacy immersion.

Some Weaknesses

Teachers use the tools at their own discretion, which may create inconsistencies in use, methodology, implementation practices and frequency. Some may use certain

strategies more than others may. The district should survey and consider teacher needs. The district should highlight best practices in content areas and share with all teachers. Routines are good, but teachers should vary approach and practices to keep the lessons from being mundane. Lack of common planning and collaboration hinder teachers from being on the same page. Staff should be cognizant that preschool experiences (prior to entering a learning environment) impacted student thinking, questioning, information, and ideas, which all impacted literacy learning.

Field Note Findings by Peer Reviewer

Common behaviors extracted from observation field notes included various actions and activities. Teacher-participant behaviors identified in each classroom included questioning techniques, constant review, modeling of tasks, using visuals, immediate feedback and a clearly stated lesson objective. Another classroom observation was the consistent use of classroom management techniques, throughout rooms, that helped students stay on task. Also acquired from classroom observation techniques was the use of CAP intertwined throughout lessons, writing to support literacy learning, defining concepts to enhance student comprehension, synthesis of prior instruction (making connections), and activity directionality, etc. The teacher participants used solid strategies, such as thinking aloud to heighten recall, which exhibit application of current research practices. Among the myriad of other approaches used were chunking, literacy centers, student collaborative efforts and relevant conclusions of lessons such as publishing or sharing. It was evident these classrooms were student-centered and the teacher was the facilitator.

Additional Weaknesses

The peer reviewer identified some lesson flaws. For example, students were confused during one lesson where they needed to write on a clipboard and then pass to the next student. She noted that it was evident from the confusion that the students did not have enough background experience, initially, to execute the activity. Another flaw included a teacher-participant calling on one student repeatedly to respond. The peer reviewer mentioned that this type of behavior could limit the teacher's ability to adequately assess and evaluate other students in a timely fashion. Finally, the peer reviewer thought that although teacher-participants provided lesson explanations, more modeling was needed to help students understand the scope of the lessons.

Outcomes Related to Bloom

Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) is a framework of learning objectives divided into three domains, cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Each domain has a set of goals that rank from lowest to highest. The ideology is that learning occurs in steps, where the initial steps create building blocks upon which higher learning occurs. The cognitive domain is associated with intellectual skills. The affective domain refers to the feelings or emotions related to learning. The psychomotor domain is related to the physical ability of doing or performing tasks related to learning. Initially my focus was mainly on the cognitive domain, but after more in-depth review, it is clear that all three categories of learning goals are interrelated in impacting learning.

The cognitive domain has a set of six learning goals. This domain refers to knowledge and thinking skills. The six goals are to recall, understand, apply, analyze

evaluate and create. The idea is that learners must first be able to recall information before they can understand or begin to comprehend it. Once comprehension takes place, then learners can apply or use the information. If learners have enough understanding to apply data, they can begin to analyze or break information into parts, make inferences or identify causes and motives. At this level, the learner can evaluate or make judgments about information, its quality or validity. When a learner determines the value of information, they can synthesize the information and begin to use it in new ways, see new patterns, find alternative solutions or create new knowledge, which is the highest manipulation of information in the cognitive domain.

The affective domain refers to the attitude of the learner. Five levels of goals are presented in this domain. All learners must receive or be aware of the information being presented. This is the beginning stage of this domain. The next goal is the learner's ability to respond or react to the information provided. The third goal is to value or understand the information and act on it. The final two goals include organizing information based on the learner's personal value system, personal experiences or schema and finally internalizing or adopting behaviors that become characteristic of the learners value system.

The psychomotor domain is associated with skills. Although Bloom's team of educators did not thoroughly identify the learning goals in the psychomotor domain, others have contributed to specificity of these goals (nwlink, 2010). Simpson (1972), provides a viable set of goals that are relevant to elementary education. Simpson (1972) termed seven learning levels as, perception, set, guided response, mechanism, complex

overt response, adaption, and origination. The goals are to create awareness, readiness, imitating, basic proficiency and the scale then moves on to the higher levels of expertise, altering responses and creating. As in the other domains, learning goals are progressive and each one builds upon the previous. The first four levels were exhibited during the classroom observations. Students first had to recognize information by hearing, noticing touching and distinguishing information. They then are made ready by mentally preparing and arranging information prior to practicing. The teacher-participants model behavior so that students may copy, imitate and follow instructions. Finally, the students demonstrate basic proficiency by responding to stimulus, performing and completing tasks. The learning process demonstrated in each classroom clearly revealed this hierarchal structure of learning objectives.

The hierarchy of learning goals and behaviors in each domain were clearly exhibited throughout the classrooms in this strong performing school. The constant use of recall, repetition, review, reinforcement and routines provided the groundwork in the cognitive domain to promote understanding. The structured lessons provided the consistency for students to understand expectations and the data that went along with that structure. Constantly presenting a set of sight words, phonetic sounds related to letter recognition, introduction of various alphabetic characters, or the continuous review of print concepts, throughout grade levels positively impacted literacy learning. To further enhance understanding, this school uses assessments to identify student's levels and then individualized instruction to meet student's needs. Early intervention techniques such as I&RS and Academic Achievement (basic skills) are also used to alleviate failure. The

students then practiced application or use of knowledge, the third tier of the cognitive domain. Each lesson included an application segment to help students process the information and further promote understanding. Concerning to the affective domain, student awareness of received information was evident during the large group presentation. Students were very much alert and engaged as information was provided by the teacher-participant. The group responded or reacted to the information in the form of choral readings, question and answers, reciting, etc. The students acted upon the information in the form of application as stated above. The psychomotor domain was evident, again, in the student responses to information presented by the teacher-participant. Modeling provided the precise forum to encourage skills such as imitation or copying, the first learning goal described by Dave (1975). That goal directed behavior to level two, manipulating or following directions. Teacher-participants guided students to level two by having them participate in a hands-on activity that required them to follow directions. The third tier of the psychomotor domain, developing precision, was reached through constant practice, review, independent work, the Daily 5 stations, writing related to reading, Fundations (Wilson, 2015), Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015), Raz-Kids (Learning A-Z, 2015) , and the various tools the district provides to enhance literacy learning throughout Pre-K to second grade.

This strong performing elementary school clearly demonstrated learning techniques identified in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). The three domains, cognitive, affective and psychomotor are very much interrelated in the learning process. All three domains were evident in teacher-participant behaviors during lesson presentations and in

student responses and reactions to knowledge and information provided. I also noted that only the first three or four levels of each domain were applicable in the learning process. I attribute this to the fact that the first set of goals in each domain refers to foundational learning and these are the levels associated with elementary education. Primary grades, where structured learning often begins, is where knowledge is formally presented, received, imitated, understood, responded to, manipulated, applied, practiced, etc. The higher-level domain goals, analysis, synthesis, internalizing, articulation, naturalization, etc. often occur in higher grade levels.

Three effective goals of Bloom (1956) also related to the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum. The first correlation is that one of Bloom's (1956) goals was to create a common set of terms that all educators could use when communicating about learning behaviors as they relate to curriculum and assessments. In the same manner, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) provided a whole-school curriculum that includes common language terms in the training component to be used among staff to encourage uniformity in communication. It is evident that both sets of educators understand that it is important when setting goals and analyzing outcomes that language be concise and consistent, so that comparisons of data are accurate. The second correlation is that learning is developed on a continuum. Bloom (1956) provided a hierarchy of learning goals within categories or domains. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) provided learning levels based on common behaviors exhibited with various literacy skills. Both sets of educators indicate that learning occurs in a way that success at higher levels depends on mastery of lower levels. A third observation between Bloom (1956) and the Fountas and Pinnell (2012)

curriculum is that both communicated a relationship between curriculum, assessment and learning. Bloom's (1956) goal was to provide a set of learning goals or objectives that would provide a basis or starting point for the development of curricula and assessments, while Fountas and Pinnell's (2012) goal was to provide assessments to identify student levels, so that instruction would begin at the correct starting point in the curriculum developed. The student would then progress along the literacy curriculum as they mastered their current level. Bloom (1956) and Fountas and Pinnell (2012) had clear ideas about the structure of learning as a process. Finally, Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) still serves as a basis for learning structures today, as can be correlated with new curriculums such as Fountas and Pinnell (2012) and validated by the instructional processes used at this strong performing school. Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) is a timeless framework of learning objectives that are still relevant today.

Implications

Findings indicate that an outcome-based curriculum drives literacy achievement at this strong performing elementary school, coupled with district policy. To implement policy change, the project, a policy recommendation will be disseminated to local district stakeholders to elicit literacy change. The goal is to address the chronic problem of literacy failure, improve literacy learning, and pass state assessments to reach adequate yearly progress. In addition, literacy achievement can improve learning across content areas. The social impact of this study is to improve individual student literacy achievement, create life-long learners, and develop critical thinkers with 21st century learning skills. The outcomes of this case study substantiate the positive impact of

research-based literacy strategies used effectively to increase literacy achievement. Participant T5 summed up her district mantra when she stated:

> Participant T5: This school district seems to be united and we are given common goals at the beginning of the school year, and one of the commons things is a series of questions, and the superintendent lives this: 1) What are we doing?, 2) Is it working?, 3) How do we know?, and then 4) Where do we go from there…and we are constantly asking ourselves, and our administrators, I believe, are doing this too…constantly asking what are we doing, and it does seem that we have been able to answer the question ---yes--- it is working….I am just pleased with how the students are responding to what we are doing…

Although the teacher-participants represent only a portion of each grade level, they clearly communicated that their colleagues are practicing the same strategies, albeit in different succession. The tools are provided by administration which prevent excessive variation from the district goals. Staff has the authority to select strategies and routines that meet students' needs, as long as their decisions remain within the confines of the district's repertoire of literacy offerings. The tools and procedures are approved by administration and the staff is responsible to use what is provided in whatever combination works for their classes. The tools and procedures are uniform, although the process may vary from class to class. Administration provided common training and resources that encouraged alignment with directives. Umbrella directives were clear, yet allowed teacher creativity within those parameters. Overall, the school, staff and

stakeholders were aligned with the goals for literacy learning at this strong performing school.

Summary

This strong performing school used a myriad of literacy strategies, but all are included in the school repertoire of options. The school is unified in their approach to reading strategies. The strategies were reiterated over and among study participants, but were used in whatever combination needed. Interestingly, grade level teacher-participants were also unified in the strategies used at that level. For example, second grade teacher-participants specifically stated fluency, whereas teacher-participants from other levels did not. Kindergarten teacher-participants used more sight word vocabulary instructional strategies and sentence structure practice than did higher-level grades. The strategies may not be new or innovative, but the interesting observation was the unification at which these strategies were implemented form classroom to classroom and grade-level to grade-level. Each classroom mirrored another, regardless of grade level. The striking resemblances between classroom procedures aligned with teacher responses. Teachers were actually doing what they discussed, so theory matches practice. In addition, teacher-participants are using the same terminology to describe behaviors, instruction and interventions. The school-wide training was evident, as each participant is well trained in the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum, and common language among staff is encouraged. Teacher-participants are on the same page. The school acted in unison. The students were receiving coherent, consistent instruction. Consistency is practiced from grade-level to grade-level which according to Bloom (1956) is the

foundation of the taxonomy. The most common strategies were running records, benchmarking tools, differentiated and individualized instruction, small group guided reading, independent reading practice, vocabulary (sight words), spelling inventory, phonics, modeling, writing related to reading, routines, review, repetition, practice/reinforcement. Strategies and methods were used interchangeably. Whatever strategy was implemented, it was used repeatedly to provide constant review for the students. It is apparent that reading achievement is occurring at this strong performing school based on the changes they have made in curriculum, tools and training.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to identify best practices in literacy achievement to address reading failure. It is evident from the strategies identified at this strong performing school that reading failure can be addressed using a systematic, whole-school approach. Current, research-based curriculum, used school wide, along with on-going staff training, and district decisions that support initiatives and provide the necessary supportive tools are the foundation to student achievement in literacy learning. Darrell (2015) agreed that leveled books, phonics and teacher training can positively impact literacy learning in primary grades. Literacy achievement impacts student learning across the curriculum and in life.

Section 3 delivers a project that stems from the study findings. The project is the product of the culmination of the research study and the outcomes discussed in this section. This case study identified literacy strategies that positively impacted student learning. Those strategies, along with teacher practice and district decisions will be

shared with stakeholders through a comprehensive policy change recommendation. The goal of the project is to elicit a change in instructional literacy practices that will increase student reading achievement and promote positive social change to enhance students' lives in years to come.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 provides a discussion of the study project. Based on research findings, a policy recommendation with detail (Appendix A) is provided as the study project. This section includes the rationale for selecting this particular project genre. A review of literature is provided related to policy as a means of change. A project description and evaluation plan is also described. Finally, the project implications are discussed summarizing the potential for positive social change.

The goal of the policy recommendation is to disseminate research findings to create policy change that can increase literacy achievement. The policy recommendation informs practice and provides research-based, best literacy practices that address reading failure. It also includes an outcome-based curriculum that can increase literacy learning. The goal is to change current district policy to alleviate the chronic problem of reading failure and to improve student achievement in literacy. A policy change of this magnitude could ultimately improve student success across content areas.

Rationale

Four genres options were provided for project selections: an evaluation report, a curriculum plan, professional development training, and a policy recommendation. The case study conducted identified curriculum as a key factor that impacts student achievement in literacy. Most often change occurs from the top down. District-wide changes in the local district incurring literacy failure, such as curriculum alterations, would need approval from central administration and the board of education. Based on

findings from the case study, a policy recommendation would be the best genre to elicit change to address literacy learning.

An evaluation report is a genre appropriate for an evaluation study. The report includes the purpose of the evaluation, the criteria, and the major outcomes. It also addresses the local needs and is aligned with program evaluation standards. Because the goal of this study was not to evaluate a program but to adopt and implement research based strategies, an evaluation report is not an appropriate project. The goal of a project evaluation is to determine a program's functionality and value (Spaulding, 2008).

A curriculum plan project is the actual development of a curriculum. A plan includes the purpose, level, learners, the scope, and sequence along with the materials, units, and lesson details. The lessons include objectives, activities, assessments, and evaluations. Because I was recommending the use of an established, outcome-based curriculum, a curriculum plan is not necessary not an appropriate project.

Professional development/training material provides in-service to users in a particular area. Training includes purpose, goals, learning outcomes desired, the specific group to be trained, training components, timelines, activities, and materials needed for implementation. The goal of the project for this case study was to elicit change. A policy change is needed prior to training. Professional development is not appropriate for the project.

A policy recommendation is the appropriate genre for this project because the goal this case study was to inform practice that elicits effective change to increase student literacy achievement in a failing district. Similarly, the typical characteristics of policy

recommendation includes an organized presentation of the existing issue or problem; evidence of the issue; credible research relating to the topic; and a recommended, viable resolution to the issue (Study Guides and Strategies Website, 2015). Research informs practice and can stimulate the need for change based on findings, results, or outcomes (Kasprzak et al., 2010). Most change is initiated from the top down through policy decisions. Policy can provide the framework in which an organization or district operates (King & Thorpe, 2012; Klebansky & Fraser, 2013). Policy creates an overarching vantage point that includes all stakeholders and incorporates execution of a plan (Moss, 2012). The goals and objectives include numerous aspects that affect program implementation and practice within the organization or district. The goal is to guide behavior and practice to obtain desired outcomes. Policy can establish direction, expected outcomes, processes, and procedures and provide the tools with which to accomplish and monitor the expected tasks (Kasprzak et al., 2010). Policy is a means to move theory to practice.

The findings, results, and outcomes of this case study highlighted an effective approach to improve literacy learning. The results revealed a systematic employment of an evidence-based, comprehensive curriculum that includes research-based literacy strategies, techniques, practices, behaviors, and district decisions that support staff training and include materials and resources that support literacy learning. The findings from this case study will address literacy failure in the local district. To elicit the needed changes to transform literacy learning, a policy recommendation is the best genre for this project.

Review of the Literature

Policy recommendation is a means to incorporate theory into practice. It is important that research informs practice and that research-based strategies underpin instruction. Evidence-based practices can positively impact academic achievement (Begeny et al., 2012; Begeny, 2011; Begeny et al., 2010; Deltor, Booker, Serenko, & Julien, 2012; Hagans & Good, 2013; Klebansky & Fraser, 2013; McKie, Manswell Butty, & Green, 2012; Warren-Kring & Rutledge, 2011). Policy is the framework within which an organization operates. Data-driven policy decisions can have far reaching effects from the local level to national and international educational platforms by producing effective results in student achievement (McKie et al., 2012). New initiatives or poor performance often affects policy decisions that require system changes which include all stakeholders (King & Thorpe, 2012). The process is an all-encompassing one that is usually implemented in phases once the foundational work is accomplished (Kasprzak et al., 2010; Moss, 2012). Policy is the vehicle for districts to establish mandates, initiate directives, and incorporate change to accomplish goals, objectives, and desired outcomes that can improve performance. Curan, Grimshaw, Hayden, and Campbell (2011) discussed the process of knowledge transformation and acknowledged that research findings must be incorporated into practice in order to affect change. If research outcomes support initiatives, results should be implemented. This case study revealed a means to address literacy failure. The findings supported student achievement and could impact literacy learning if adopted.

Policy is often used to address educational changes such as curriculum. O'Connor (2014), in a discussion of institutional policy change dynamics related to electronic learning, concurred that policy change is often related to curriculum employment or redesign. To address local, state, and federal educational initiatives, rural districts in the Midwest changed policy to incorporate distant and online learning programs that enabled students to access quality courses when educators were not available in remote locations (Fisherman, 2015). These districts were often spread wide geographically with few resources and minimal staff; yet, they were being held to the same state and federal criteria that required extensive reporting. They lacked the ability to meet compliance deadlines efficiently, which minimized the ability to qualify for allocation of various funding. Policy created an innovative response to expand educational opportunities through technology. Conner and Zaino (2013) indicated that case study research has often informed educational reform and policy. Conner and Zaino investigated how Philadelphia youth organizations have impacted policy by demanding high quality education leading to college and career readiness, as well as accountability for using city resources wisely. Conner and Zaino stated that prototypes can be advantageous in influencing educational policy and reform. This case study identified a model curriculum that would improve literacy learning. The Fountas and Pinnell (2012) prototype could positively influence policy reform in a failing district. In a Scotland study on how policy change for curriculum is best implemented for success, Priestley and Miller (2012) researched the intricacies of methodical change. Priestley and Miller's premise was that educational reform, even when supported by policy, was difficult to

manage. Priestley and Miller's curriculum was student-centered with components to meet student and local district needs. To facilitate incorporation of the highly touted program, Scotland's educational council developed initiatives to support curriculum change that included components such as teacher training, use of a model, and teacher-led case studies to review core subject strategies and assessments that later led to action research assignments (Priestley & Miller, 2012). Although Priestley and Miller's study was immersed in a socialistic lens of change in school systems, they found that policy facilitated engagement of reforms, influenced practice, and supported instructional practices of educators. In a study on preschool curricula in Finland, Turunen, Maatta, and Uusiautti (2012) confirmed that curriculum drives educational practices and that early education impacts learning. Likewise, the government of Singapore used policy to improve preschool education through developing new curriculum (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011). One of the main reasons for the change came from shifting philosophies that active learning and student-centered programs are more productive than former, passive instructional practices where teachers lecture and students just received information. A case study was conducted by Elgstrom and Hellstenius (2011) to examine a debate regarding educational policy that affected curriculum selections of core subjects. Grounds for the debate were the limited time allotted to teach core content (Elgstrom & Hellstenius, 2011). Previous policy focused on crucial learning and knowledge and the critical question became what subjects constituted core content (Elgstrom & Hellstenius, 2011). The essence of Elgstrom and Hellstenius' study signified that policy drives educational practices, such as what subjects will be taught (Elgstrom & Hellstenius,

2011). In the United Kingdom, policy was used to incorporate new curriculum into primary schools to enhance intercultural learning (Woodgate-Jones & Grenfell, 2012).

Policy change at the primary level has the potential to make a greater impact on educational outcomes. Irvine and Price (2014) reviewed how a collaborative approach supports policy initiatives. Irvine and Price stated that successful policy change requires a shared understanding of goals, phasing in various components over time, and the ability of educators to execute new concepts well. Similarly, Thomas and Huffman (2011) discussed how schools are using more collaborative efforts to effect change leading to student improvement. Curriculum like Fountas and Pinnells' (2012) incorporated the use of data-driven decisions at the teacher level, not just at the administrative and district levels. Thomas and Huffman agreed that instructional staff is interpreting assessment data to adapt lessons to meet individual student needs, and policy changes support these curricula in an effort to improve results on local and state assessments. This study's findings indicated that teachers used benchmark data to develop differentiated lessons to address students' needs and increase literacy learning.

There are a variety of methods and rationale to engage policy change to improve practice. Saarinen and Ursin (2012) reviewed different approaches to policy change and suggested three distinct approaches to policy change: structural, actor, and agency, with structural being the most common. Structural policy change, where the governing body makes the decisions, is the approach relative to curriculum change (Saarinen & Ursin, 2012). According to Saarinen and Ursin, the structural methodology creates macro changes that affect educational outcomes across the board and can impact state and

national level outcomes. Schuler (2014) stated that past practice has informed policy, but in an effort to be proactive, current trends point to the use of outcome-based curriculum to maximize success as opposed to looking backward to what did not work. Shuler stated that leaders must be willing to exact needed change by trying something new and by encouraging educators to take charge of educational decisions and not leave them to politicians and businesses who are not familiar with educational requirements. Bullough, Hall-Keynon, and MacKay (2012) discussed how public law impacts educational policy.

Organizational reform is a phenomenon that most entities experience because change is inevitably needed over time. Effective, productive change is a systematic, methodical process, which when executed well can yield desired results and outcomes. Defise (2013) stated that change is implemented through stakeholder engagement, training, and resources. Implementing new curriculum can be a daunting task in any school; yet, educational institutions must introduce new programs intermittently to address learning goals and to increase achievement. Policy drives educational decisions related to curriculum.

The project literature review was conducted using search phrases related to policy change in education, linking practice to theory, curriculum reform, and organizational changes. Search strategies consisted of extensive searches in educational research databases from the Walden Library that included EBSCO Host, ERIC, SAGE publications, and some ProQuest publications. Search sources included primary, full text, peer-reviewed articles from within the last 5 years.

Project Description

The project is a policy recommendation that identifies best literacy practices to address reading failure. The project includes the background of the existing problem of chronic reading failure. A summary of the case study data analysis and findings are included. The policy recommendation is supported by evidence from both literature and research on how to affect literacy achievement. The project recommendations are connected to the evidence.

Minimal resources are needed for this project. They include a request form to be placed on the board of education meeting agenda and multiple copies of the policy recommendation for distribution to board members and central administration. Existing supports of the project include the following: state assessment scores that indicate a lack of literacy achievement in the local district; literature defining research-based strategies that yield results; case study findings that denotes literacy achievement in a strong performing district supported by passing scores on state assessments; the identification of an outcome-based, comprehensive curriculum that positively impacts literacy learning; and a functioning district model already in place that could serve as a means to expedite changes by mirroring the process. Potential barriers may include conflict with current local district literacy initiatives, resistance to change, rejection of policy recommendation, budgetary concerns regarding implementing a new curriculum, and time concerns regarding obtaining results. There are several potential solutions to the barriers. Because the local district has not been able to overcome the chronic problem of literacy failure in the past 10 years, it is evident that currently initiatives are not effective.

Admitting the current state of the district would be a first step. To address concerns or resistance to change, leadership from the neighboring district could be invited to address the local school board regarding current practice yielding literacy achievement. Overcoming resistance to change can be encouraged by allowing stakeholders to lead initiatives (Watson, 2014). Budgetary concerns may be addressed by cultivation from administrators, innovative ideas that include financing needed materials, and clear directives (Owen, 2014). Finally, in regard to time concerns, adopting the policy recommendation provided would expedite needed changes to and promote literacy learning immediately.

The policy recommendation provides a solution that includes key components needed for change, such as curriculum, training, assessments, and resources, and it should be considered as a viable resolution. Adopting an all-inclusive program can help expedite implementation and eliminate lag time in both implementation and obtaining results. A solution to barriers would be to partner with the neighboring district as a mentoring district to support implementation in the local district. Collaborating with a district well-versed in using the program can save time and money and increase outcomes. Because both districts are subject to the same core standards, state assessments, and federal mandates, the neighboring district's experience would be an asset to the local district in getting this program up and running.

The policy recommendation is a deliverable that can be disseminated immediately. The proposal for implementation includes completing appropriate district forms required for approval to be placed on a board of education meeting agenda. The

timetable for implementation would be approximately 30 to 60 days because the board only meets on a monthly basis. Copies of the policy recommendation would be made prior to the board meeting for dissemination to board members and central administration. My would be to initiate the request to meet with the local board of education and central administration, complete any required forms to be placed on the board meeting agenda, and provide the copies of the policy recommendation. Some responsibilities may include responding to follow-up questions, sharing further details or clarification from the case study, and meeting with district administration if requested. Others involved might include secretarial support staff to coordinate meeting requirements, as well as the board of education and/or central administration members.

Project Evaluation Plan

Project evaluation is goal-based. The goal of the project is to disseminate findings that inform practice based on research and adopt the policy recommendation (Appendix A). The objective is to identify literacy strategies that address reading failure and examine the possibility of implementing a research-based literacy program that positively influences literacy achievement. Evaluation of the project can determine if the policy recommendation is considered and/or accepted by district stakeholders. To obtain stakeholder perspectives, a feedback form is included with the policy recommendation (Appendix A). Stakeholder responses can determine next steps for the district. Spaulding (2008) stated that obtaining stakeholder feedback helps build trust and increases the potential for support.

The overall evaluation goal is to have the failing district adopt the policy recommendation to address the problem of chronic literacy failure. This study's results exhibited district policy that impacted literacy achievement at a strong performing elementary school. Implementing an outcome-based literacy curriculum that incorporates research-based strategies, teacher practice, and professional development training can positively impact literacy learning. Adopting the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum, or one similar, can have far reaching effects. Teaching students how to effectively use literacy skills and strategies can enhance students' ability to gain knowledge, solve problems, and become critical thinkers (Ming, 2012). Another evaluation goal is to identify the district's willingness to identify and implement a researched-based solution that can be systematically and methodically implemented in a timely fashion to yield increased performance rates in district literacy achievement.

Key stakeholders include the district board of education as the decision making body regarding policy, curriculum, and professional development. Central administration includes the superintendent, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the district language arts literacy supervisors, and the district business administrator who manages district accounts. Central administration would oversee and facilitate implementation of new curriculum at the local district elementary schools. Elementary school administration and staff would execute the curriculum program procedures and strategies. My responsibility as the researcher may include providing further detail regarding this case study. Improved district literacy achievement would provide more

opportunities for students to access post-secondary learning institutions, broader career choices, and increase the potential for improved social standing in the community.

Project Implications

The policy recommendation is important to local stakeholders because it provides a viable, timely solution to the chronic problem of reading failure. It provides an opportunity to turn the district in a new direction and produce literacy achievement. Policy is the means to make the necessary transformations. The implications for social change are far reaching. Literacy is important in school and in life. Literacy proficiency promotes academic achievement across the curriculum, impacts student success, and contributes to the attainment of life goals. At the local level students will able to pass state standardized tests that positively impact the district's adequate yearly progress. Literacy success can stimulate life-long learning, foster critical thinking skills, and supports problem-solving skills. Literacy achievement underpins and enhances 21st century learning skills. In the larger context, local literacy achievement can transfer to proficiency at the state and federal levels. Improvement on standardized assessments can also elevate the U.S. standing when rated internationally on educational performance. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance learners' lives while making them productive, contributing members of society.

Conclusion

Section 4 will include reflections on the overall process of conducting case study research along with commentaries on personal learning.as a scholar-practitioner. Also

discussed will be the overall importance of the work in this study and its potential for positive social change.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This section contains the reflections and conclusions of this study. It will also include the following: a discussion on the project's strength and limitations; a description of different ways to address and define the problem, along with alternative solutions; a description of what was learned about the research process and project development; reflections about personal learning as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer; reflections on the overall importance of the work; implications, applications, and directions for future research, as well as a description of the potential impact for positive social change; and the conclusion.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the project, a policy recommendation, lies in the ability to address reading failure using evidence-based solutions. New curriculum often provides a rationale for policy change because it often guides educational practices (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; O'Connor, 2014; Thomas & Huffman, 2011; Turunen et al., 2012; Woodgate-Jones & Grenfell, 2012). The project is founded on the case study's outcomes, in which the goal was to identify best practices in literacy achievement to address reading failure. The results of the study were summarized in the project and provided evidence that the use of an outcome-based curriculum, coupled with research-based strategies, produced literacy achievement. Tracking success is an important part of policy change related to curriculum (Priestley & Miller, 2012); therefore, using an all-inclusive program that embeds the necessary tools to track improvement and provide

remediation is a strength in recommending this curriculum. In addition, the project literature review provides support that most educational initiatives are enacted through the use of policy change (Shuler, 2014). A strength of the project is that it provides both research-based and evidence-based data upon which policy change can be administered (Schuler, 2014). This project, a policy recommendation, is appropriate for advocating the implementation of new curriculum that can positively impact literacy achievement and address the problem of chronic literacy failure at the local level. Institutional changes can promote achievement beyond the local level and impact national level outcomes (Saarinen & Ursin, 2012). The project provides an opportunity to apply best practices to address reading failure. Realizing increased literacy learning is a strength of this project, ultimately transforming research into practice.

Project limitations span from the policy recommendation not being reviewed by the board of education or central administration to the decision to not approve the recommendation of adopting a new curriculum. Although the policy recommendation is grounded in literature and supported by the case study research that provides evidence of literacy achievement, the local district may not accept or agree with the suggested changes. Other limitations of the project may be not enough detail to elicit curriculum change at the district level. The policy recommendation is limited in offering other methods to address reading failure at the local level. Finally, the policy recommendation provides research and evidence that supports literacy achievement, but actual outcomes cannot predicted.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Another way to address the problem of reading failure may be to use a quantitative approach to determine the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2009). The use of an experimental and control group to test effectiveness and to compare outcomes of various literacy programs could prove useful. Applying various schemes is an optional manner to determine what works. The district could collect indigenous data to determine what works in the local jurisdiction. However, piloting various programs would be time consuming and costly, while student achievement would continue to go unaddressed or be negatively influenced during the pilot programs. A district in crisis does not have the luxury of extended time to address issues and concerns. Other options, similar to the policy recommendation, include taking a pragmatic view to determine what works (Lodico et al., 2010) by observing other districts experiencing literacy achievement and to collect data that could be turn-keyed in an efficient manner to address literacy failure at the local level. A final option would be to engage stakeholders in a professional discourse to brainstorm interventions regarding the problem of chronic literacy failure. The goal of learning becomes a shared responsibility by all stakeholders by addressing gaps in achievement, a lack of student learning, or poor instructional techniques (Stewart, 2014). Allowing stakeholders to lead change initiatives reduces resistance (Watson, 2014). One of the main features of change is to obtain buy-in of stakeholders and to induce a commitment of intent to go the distance and do whatever it takes to achieve success (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, & Lindsey, 2009).

An alternative way to address the problem of literacy failure at the local level may be to shift the focus from student learning to instructional practices. According to Stewart (2014), the general movement toward school improvement has a main focus on increased student achievement through improved teacher practice; therefore, another approach to address literacy failure is to develop consistent teacher practices throughout local district classrooms. When teachers use assorted approaches, a lack of continuity can create gaps in student learning from class to class and from grade level to grade level. Students then move on with varying degrees of mastery and innumerable instructional practices, which when unevenly applied, may continue to widen learning gaps. A school operating without monitored program consistencies can do a disservice to student achievement. Instructional staff not be held accountable to adhering to curriculum guidelines, and pacing schedules could impact student learning. Some teachers may provide more in-depth instruction and practice, while others may skim the surface. Owen (2014) and Sleegers et al. (2014) concurred that, even with consistency of teacher practice, outcomes can be different depending on implementation and focus. A lack of horizontal and vertical articulation of district goals, curriculum implementation, and uniform student assessments allow instructional staff to lean toward their own devices. A lack of structure can contribute to incoherent teacher practice that can impede student learning across the curriculum and over time. This study shows that teacher behaviors and practices were uniform between classes and across grade levels, creating consistency and continuity in teaching that positively impacted student learning.

Scholarship, Project Development, Leadership and Change

Scholarship is an important aspect of any research study. Scholarship provides voice, tone and language, and it supports a basic structure in which a research study should be presented. Scholarship gives a study the professional context that allows it to speak to an audience in a particular academic genre. Other aspects of scholarship include clear, concise, and appropriate writing and a focus on the study goals, professional sources, and insight gained from synthesizing a thorough review of literature. Qualitative and quantitative research studies, like the scientific method, are constructed using a consistent format. This format facilitates the presentation of data and enables the audience to identify various components of the research based on its organizational structure. For example, components uniform to research studies include an abstract, identification of a problem, a literature review, data collection techniques, presentation of findings, and a conclusion based on the findings. Scholarship is an important aspect of presenting research data in a professional, academic manner. Adhering to this long-standing process enables a researcher is to achieve reliability and validity, which gives credence to his or her study.

It important to let research study findings drive project development or dictate the means by which to disseminate outcomes. A researcher may have a desire to produce a certain project at the onslaught of their research, but outcomes and findings can be unpredictable. It is important to allow the findings to speak for themselves and not to read into them or force the data toward a certain end. It was only after the case study concluded that an appropriate project genre could be identified. It took several rounds of

data analyses to finally organize the data into meaningful sets of categories that naturally evolved into themes. Recurring rounds of data analyses provide different perspectives and insights that is not possible in a solitary sitting. Likewise, project development takes time. Saldana (2008) provided numerous insightful and systematic approaches to view, organize, and analyze data. Making meaning of data and beneficial results are essential to project development. The project development was established based on the case study findings. An analytical review of data collected in this case study identified practices that positively impact literacy achievement. The findings corroborate the strategies most often cited among researchers as effective for literacy instruction. To effect similar outcomes in the local district, a policy recommendation project was developed to disseminate literature and research that support literacy achievement. The goal of this case study was to identify best practices in literacy achievement to address reading failure. The goal of the policy recommendation was to adopt those strategies and to mirror a strong performing district's behaviors to produce proficient students in language arts literacy. The project summarizes both the literature and the findings that relate to how the local district can promote literacy learning.

Educational leaders should monitor school success. Changes in society and the world are occurring at an accelerated rate. New technologies are evolving that provide a surplus of information. To prepare students for 21st century skills and beyond, educators must keep pace with real-world issues and concerns. A constant review of practices and reflection on achievement are necessary in order to stay current. Expediting new and improved tactics can be accomplished by adopting research-based practices and strategies

that produce results, rather than remaining with antiquated systems that produce the status quo. Educators must be innovative and engaging to prepare today's students for future success. Simple case studies can be efficiently conducted to observe and identify evidence-based practices that positively impact student learning and achievement. Abbasi and Zamani-Miandashti (2013) also maintained that leadership is an integral means of affecting teacher performance that can improve student outcomes. In a study on the impact of leadership development on organizational culture, Ray and Goppelt (2011) confirmed that good leadership does not always transfer to expected organizational change, but reflective behaviors can help staff make the adjustments that can lead to improved practice. Although administration may provide directives for change, authentic improvement is better identified by the actual teacher. For example, in my case study teachers were expected to track student achievement directly related to instructional strategies implemented.

It would be rare for a person to set out on a several year journey and not experience personal change. As a scholar, my personal learning and growth has increased. One of the main areas of my personal growth has been in the evolution of goals. At the outset, obtaining a higher level degree was my main goal. A passion for literacy achievement remained my focus, but the research process created a shift in my objectives from receiving to giving. Through emphasis on a designated problem, my purpose became how to improve educational outcomes for others. My ambition now is to use acquired knowledge and synthesize findings to make a difference. Personal learning includes understanding that scholarly research is a logical, systematic discipline. My

course work laid the groundwork for defining qualitative versus quantitative research studies. A thorough study of the various frameworks, types of reasoning, and theories helped me to shape decisions about how to select the appropriate methodology for structuring research. Further instruction provided me guidance in employing the steps involved in conducting case study research. Collaboration with colleagues produced my understanding of coding and offered insight into analyses of collected data. The study took shape and became tangible as sections were completed and connected. Retrospect provided me clarity and a full realization of what each step entailed along with the importance of each procedure. The evolution of the entire process eventually produced a complete entity. The culmination of the experience was thrilling and empowering. The ability to conduct research and come to conclusions that could enhance teaching and learning created a sense satisfaction in me as a scholar practitioner. Personal learning and growth as a scholar increased my desire to conduct further research. Future research endeavors may include a quantitative, casual-comparative approach to identify which literacy programs are most effective.

As a practitioner, conducting case study research provided a great experience for me. Performing a literature review to the point of saturation afforded me insight into how consensus occurs amongst scholarly ideologies or between experts in a field of study. The literature review established the foundation to support the study framework, theory, and research methodology. Gaining insight into research-based literacy strategies linked theory to practice. Knowledge of strategic literacy tactics provided me the basis to pinpoint and extract stratagems when analyzing case study data from participant

interviews and classroom observations. As a practitioner, it was exhilarating to see research align with theory. The theoretical framework established that foundational learning provides a basis upon which higher level concepts can be built (Bloom, 1946). It was apparent in the case study findings that Bloom's (1946) concepts are still operational, as each grade level expounded on learning imparted at the previous level. It was also apparent that using the research-based strategies noted in the literature review produced effective results. The positive outcomes from this case study led to a project where the evidence could be promoted and used in the form of policy recommendations. My ultimate goal as a practitioner is to use this research study to improve student achievement and create positive social change. The study and project results could have far reaching outcomes beyond the local district.

As a project developer, it became important to make a valuable impact. Connecting the evidence to practice was the footing for policy recommendation project. My ability to use current trends grounded in literature, supported by case study findings to influence practice, allowed me to accomplish the objective and purpose for conducting this case study. Disseminating the findings in an effective manner that produces results is my aim for project development. The ultimate desire as a project developer is to see outcomes that improve individual student literacy learning as a result of the policy recommendation. A residual effect would include making AYP at the local level and becoming a passing district on state assessments. The policy recommendation could have a multitiered effect at the individual, class, school, local, state, and federal levels and

yield far reaching results that could constructively impact positive social change in the local district for years to come.

Reflections on the Importance of the Work

Literacy is needed for learning success across content areas and in life. Literacy is foundational to learning most disciplines. Literacy achievement can have far reaching effects and can ultimately determine an individual's quality of life. The decline and lack of literacy skills in U.S. educational arenas is a serious matter. It is important that students become well versed not just in content area subjects but in life-long learning skills that include critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Literacy, once mastered, can provide the competencies that allow students to move into the synthesis and creative realms discussed by Bloom (1956). Literacy can lay the foundation for higher-level learning across the curriculum and translate into a better quality of life. The outcomes and findings of this case study confirm that a methodical, systematic approach to literacy instruction can produce effective outcomes. Strategies, curriculum, and policy changes that can lead to literacy skills can positively impact student learning and achievement.

My personal learning has grown exponentially in a variety of areas. I have learned the meaning of qualitative versus quantitative research and the various components of each. I have discovered how to conduct scholarly research in practice, along with the importance of following research protocols and constructs to produce meaningful and useful work. In addition, I have realized how integrity, reliability, and validity are important aspects of authenticating professional research studies. I have ascertained that research can contribute to a body of knowledge or can lead to further

exploration, as some findings produce new inquiries. As a person gains insight into particular issues, additional questions and concerns surface that can produce a need for further research. Although research can be a daunting and cumbersome process at various intervals, it has also been one of the most rewarding activities that I have engaged in my professional career.

Public education has gone through cyclical changes since its inception in 1857 with the focus on improvement (Hawley, 2007). To promote continuous improvement educators look to new insights that enhance practice leading to increased student achievement. My study was conducted to identify best practices to address the problem of reading failure. Adapting to changing can address contemporary student learning. Applying current trends enable students to increase knowledge and become insightful critical thinkers. As scholar-practitioners, research-based practices and data driven decisions can ameliorate next generation teaching and learning.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications for this case study indicate that reading failure can be addressed through systematic change. The case study research showed that use of a research-based curriculum, well-trained instructional staff, and supportive district decisions enhanced practice and addressed student learning. Literacy strategies implemented at the primary level positively impacted literacy achievement. The case identified district initiatives, curriculum, literacy strategies, classroom practices, and an operational method to implement literacy learning.

Application of best practices identified through the case study research can be turn-keyed and applied in the local district experiencing literacy failure. The case study provided insight into the supports and methods used to increase literacy learning for students at the primary level. The concepts for successful application were based in the implementation of an all-inclusive, outcome-based curriculum. Program set-up is a key component to success (Ferguson, 2013; Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014; Leclerc et al., 2012; Pella, 2011). A policy recommendation to incorporate this curriculum is included to obtain stakeholder buy-in and long term commitment to data-driven decisions, while making the necessary adaptions to yield expected results.

Future research can address literacy learning as societal changes impact cultures. Tracking literacy outcomes in future years can provide the basis for alterations, adaptions, restructuring, and even celebration. Current programs and results can be continually analyzed along with issues that impact learning such as demographics, socio-economic status, parenting, and resources. As knowledge and technology continues to impact society, educators can find innovative ways to reach 21st century learners.

The implications for positive social change include a far-reaching ripple effect of literacy achievement in two respects: individual and aggregate. Increasing individual literacy learning in students' lives can positively impact achievement and goals. Literacy learning in a student's life can support learning across the curriculum, can affect student opportunities and the next generation of learners. Increased academic achievement has the potential to provide a student more options in terms of post-secondary educational opportunities, increased ability to earn a living, and an increased ability to become a

productive, contributing member of society. Aggregate increased literacy achievement in the local district can positively impact state performance and improve national progress. District goals drive policy decisions where student achievement is the objective. State and national standards establish benchmarks that indicate student achievement or failure. Incorporating an evidence-based curriculum can enhance a district's longevity to reach all learners. Increased literacy learning can improve learning across content areas that support academic success related to state standardized assessments. Local district success improves state and national achievement ratings. Literacy achievement can positively impact student learning benefiting society at large.

Conclusion

Literacy achievement is fundamental to learning and in life. Literacy learning affects academic achievement across content areas. Literacy learning addressed at the primary level has the most impact. Literacy achievement can have far reaching effects. It can contribute to achieving one's life goals or hinder and cripple one's quality of life. Through the study on best practices in literacy achievement to address reading failure, outcomes indicate that increased literacy learning is obtainable. Three key components that positively impacted literacy learning were a systematic, evidence-based methodology; effective and relative teacher training; and district decisions that support literacy instruction. Through purposeful engagement of data-driven initiatives and collaborative actions, districts can create an environment for positive social change in the area of language arts literacy achievement.

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Appendix A: The Project

Best Practices in Literacy Achievement to Address Reading Failure

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Version: January 2016

Executive Summary

Over the past 10 years the local district has not made adequate yearly progress in passing New Jersey state standardized testing requirements. These tests indicate that this district has a problem developing student proficiency in language arts literacy. Although scores have fluctuated from year to year, the lack of achievement in language arts literacy is chronic.

A case study was conducted to identify best practices in literacy achievement to address reading failure. A review of literature provided a consensus on what most researchers identify as the major literacy components and strategies that support literacy learning. The literature review also confirmed that literacy strategies were most effective when implemented at the primary level. Interviews and classroom observations were used to collect data in a strong-performing, neighboring district elementary school to identify what they were doing to make adequate yearly progress and pass state assessments. The findings revealed that an outcome-based curriculum, Fountas & Pinnell (2012), coupled with the research-based strategies used uniformly among and between grade levels increased literacy learning.

Recent state literacy assessment scores continue to indicate epidemic literacy failure in the local district, dictating a need for immediate intervention. The case study findings clearly indicate literacy achievement in the strong-performing, neighboring district. A policy change is strongly recommended to adopt the same outcome-based, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum to mirror their success because both districts must adhere to the same local, state and federal mandates. The Fountas and Pinnell (2012) program aligns to New Jersey state standards and is an all-inclusive program that incorporates a comprehensive curriculum along with training, lessons, benchmark

assessments, remediation and supporting resources. The neighboring district could serve as a great model in implementing the curriculum. Collaborating with them as a mentor district could expedite results in the local district to begin to improve literacy achievement immediately.

Policy Recommendation

To address the local problem of chronic reading failure a case study was performed in a strong performing, neighboring district where language arts literacy achievement is evident. According to state assessments the local district is not making adequate yearly progress, while the neighboring district is achieving literacy success. A case study was performed to identify literacy strategies that positively impact student literacy achievement and to understand what works in this strong performing district. Key factors in their success revolve around district policy that incorporates the Fountas & Pinnell (2012) curriculum. This is evidenced-based language arts literacy curriculum supports literacy learning. Therefore, the following is a policy recommendation to adopt this outcome-based curriculum to increase literacy achievement. This policy recommendation provides a summary of the existing problem along with a summary of the analyses of the case study findings. Major evidence from both literature and the research are included. The recommendations will be connected to the evidence provided. The goal of this policy recommendation is to change current district policy to address the problem of chronic reading failure and increase student literacy achievement at the local level, which can positively impact student learning across content areas.

The Existing Problem

Reading failure over the past decade has been evident in the local district as documented by state standardized testing. A large number of students in the district have been rated partially-proficient or below proficient in past years. The NJ State Department of Education has reported that the district schools and students significantly lag behind

their peers and in comparison to schools across the state in the area of language arts literacy performance (NJDOE, 2015). The state performance ratings for standardized testing outcomes are found in Table 4 below.

Table 4

New Jersey School Performance Ratings (NJDOE, 2015).

Rating	**Percentile**
Very High	>/= to 80th percentile
High	60th - 79.9th percentile
Average	40th – 59.9th percentile
Lagging	20th – 39.9th percentile
Significantly Lagging	</= to 19.9th percentile

According to the state performance ratings (Table 4), language arts literacy data collected during the 2013-2014 school year for the district middle school (Grades 6 through 8) indicate students significantly lag behind in the areas of academic performance, college and career readiness and growth performance. The reports states that in the area of academic performance the middle school students in the district obtained a 19th percentile rating when compared to both their peers and schools statewide, meaning 89% of the students' peers and schools across the state scored higher than the district. In the area of college and career readiness, the students achieved a rating in the 28th percentile when compared with their peers and the 19th percentile compared to schools statewide. In regard to growth performance, middle school students in the district obtained a rating in the 33rd percentile compared to their peers and scored in the 25th percentile compared to schools statewide (NJDOE, 2015). The middle school

overall, school wide performance for academic achievement in language arts literacy in the 2013-2014 school year was a 46% success rate, meaning less than half the school's student population scored proficient in the area of literacy. Both the peer and state percentile indicated a 20th percentile rating, identifying the school as overall lagging behind in the area of language arts literacy learning. Enrollment in the district has decreased over the past three years, yet the middle school demographics continue to exude a 96% minority population (NJDOE, 2015). The educationally disadvantaged or students with disabilities rate has increased to 22% over the past several years (NJDOE, 2015) and the economically disadvantaged student population rate is approximately 64% (NJDOE, 2015).

Although the district high school varied in its performance in the areas of academic performance, and college and career readiness, the overall report concluded that the high school lagged behind peers and schools across the state. The state report indicated that the district high school achieved a 79% school wide performance rating on the 2013-2014 High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), yet that rating only translated into the 10th percentile among peers and 7th percentile statewide in the area of academic achievement on language arts literacy (NJDOE, 2015). The high school rating in the 45th percentile among peers and 28th percentile compared to other schools showed school improvement in the area of college and career readiness. The district high school overall performance on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) during the 2013-2014 school year was 62%, ranking it in the 45th percentile among peers and in the 19th percentile among schools statewide. The district high school fell 18% below the state

target of 80%. Only 95 of the district high school student scored above 1550 on the SAT, ranking it in the 29% percentile among peers and in the 17th percentile compared to school statewide. The state target is 40% creating a gap of 31% (NJDOE, 2015). Only 12% of the high school students took advance placement (AP) tests compared to the state target of 35% (NJDOE, 2015). In each of these three areas; SAT performance, scoring above 1550 on the SAT, and taking AP tests, the district high school did not meet its target goals. Demographically the district high school population has remained steady over the past several years. The student population remains above 90% minority, at approximately 98% (NJDOE, 2015). The number of students will disabilities mirrors the middle school at 22% as does the number of economically disadvantaged students at approximately 63% (NJDOE, 2015).

Since the start of this study, the district upper elementary school, which housed Grades 5 and 6, was closed so no state statistics are available on an upper elementary school in the local district for the 2013-2014 school year. Central administration has moved fifth grade back to the elementary schools, therefore, the elementary school state performance scores and ratings also include the fifth grade in each elementary school state performance report. A summary of the five district elementary schools' language arts literacy state performance is shown in Table 5 below. The scores include academic achievement (AA) peer and state percentiles, college and career readiness (CCR) peer and state percentiles, student growth (SG) peer and state percentiles, language arts proficiency (LAP) peer and state percentiles, and their overall school performance (OSP).

Table 5

New Jersey School Performance Ratings on Elementary Language Arts Literacy (NJDOE, 2015)

School	AA		CCR		SG		LAP		OSP
	Peer	State	Peer	State	Peer	State	Peer	State	-
1	28th	14th	6th	6th	15th	10th	39th	19th	51%
2	49th	21th	10th	6th	46th	28th	55th	23rd	54%
3	60th	23th	16th	8th	75th	60th	52nd	22nd	53%
4	9th	7th	13th	8th	15th	8th	7th	8th	36%
5	20th	12th	3th	6th	40th	27th	20th	14th	46%

The table above shows the breakdown for the five district elementary schools' state performance. These percentages represent the outcomes based on the state rating categories provided in Table 1. The percentiles indicate that most of the district elementary schools were rated in the lagging or significantly lagging category, as their scores were under the 40th percentile. A summary of the 2013-2014 outcomes by school is explained below:

- Elementary school 1 had an overall significantly lagging performance in 5 of 6 areas. School 1 significantly lagged when compared to both peers and schools across the state in the area of college and career readiness and in student growth. It also significantly lagged in comparison to schools across the state in the area of academic achievement. School 1 lagged in comparison to peers in the area of academic achievement and had an overall rating of 51% on the state language arts proficiency assessment.

Elementary school 2 significantly lagged in performance when compared to peers and schools across the state in the area of college and career readiness. It lagged when compared to schools across the state in the areas of academic achievement and student growth. Elementary school 2 achieved an average performance in the area of academic achievement when compared to peers, contributing to an overall rating of 54% on the state language arts proficiency assessment, the highest amongst the district elementary schools.

- Elementary school 3 significantly lagged behind both peers and schools across the state in the area of college and career readiness and lagged when compared to other schools in the area of academic achievement. The district elementary school 3 achieved high performance ratings when compared to peers and schools across the state in the area of student growth and when compared to peers in the area of academic achievement. The overall language arts literacy proficiency assessment rating for elementary school 3 was 53%.
- Elementary school 4 significantly lagged behind performance in all areas when compared with both peers and schools across the state, with a 36% overall performance rating, the lowest rating amongst all district elementary schools.
- Elementary school 5 significantly lagged behind in all areas when compared with schools across the state, and when compared with peers in the area of college and career readiness. However, it only lagged behind peers in the area of academic achievement and even scored an average rating when compared to peers in the

area of student growth. The overall rating for elementary school 5 was 46% on the state language arts literacy proficiency assessment.

Generally, all five district elementary schools lagged in performance when compared with peer students and schools across the state in the area of language arts literacy proficiency with an average district rating of 48%, meaning 52% of schools across the state performed better than the district elementary schools in language arts literacy. Elementary school 5 has the largest population of students with disabilities at 16%, and the largest number of economically disadvantaged students at approximately 67%, yet school 5 did not have the lowest ratings amongst district elementary schools. Elementary school 3 did not have the lowest number of economically disadvantaged students but had the highest overall achievement rating of 54% among the five district elementary schools, indicating that more than socio-economic status impacts student achievement.

In conclusion, it is apparent that literacy failure is a chronic problem in the district at all grade levels. To address the problem of reading failure a case study was conducted to identify best practices in literacy achievement. The findings of the study indicate that the implementation of an evidence-based, comprehensive language arts literacy curriculum can positively impact literacy achievement as evidenced by the strong performing elementary school's outcomes discussed under the District Results section. The recommendation will be to adopt the same program model.

Summary of Analysis and Findings

A case study was conducted at a strong performing elementary school to identify best practices in literacy achievement. The outcomes of the study identified what this district was doing to create literacy success. The findings indicated the use of an outcome-based curriculum, Fountas & Pinnell (2012). All teachers used this curriculum throughout the elementary school. The district literacy coach trained all staff on how to use the various components of the curriculum. In addition the literacy coach provided on-going support such as modeling lessons and testing students. Strategies, such as repetition, reinforcement and continuous review were used constantly in each classroom observed. Consistent use of these techniques provided the students with a strong foundation that emphasized the concepts being promoted in the curriculum. The school-wide use of the curriculum components provided continuity from grade level to grade level. According to Bloom (1956), the repetition of concepts established the foundation upon which other learning can be grounded and built. This strong-performing district put this theory into practice and yielded positive results. Teachers were able to build upon foundational learning and move students forward in literacy learning.

To ensure that that teachers collected meaningful data, the literacy coach trained teachers on how to use the curriculum benchmark assessments and how to interpret the data. Training was conducted repeatedly and as needed to support instructional efforts. Data was used to drive instruction and create tailored lessons to meet individual students' needs. The biggest goal was to meet students' needs at the appropriate levels. This was a key factor in student learning and growth.

The case study findings identified the myriad of literacy strategies used throughout this strong performing elementary school. Strategies were research-based and grounded in the Fountas & Pinnell curriculum which was used throughout the district. Interview data was organized into categories that evolved into six major literary themes that encompassed the strategies used to positively affect literacy learning. (1) Assessments to identify student-reading levels were at the core of the program. (2) Differentiated instruction was used to meet individual students' needs while routines allowed for constant practice and consistency. (3) Modeling clarified expected behaviors on work assignments and regarding classroom procedures. (4) Participants expressed the idea that combining strategies or using multiple means also enhanced instruction. (5) Whole school interaction created a sense of unity that contributed to uniform practice and promoted communication, which included productive training. Classroom observations revealed consistent practices among classrooms and grade levels. Common techniques across all classrooms visited included: Clearly stated lesson objectives, whole group instruction, repetition of lesson concepts, continuous review to reinforce print concepts, hands-on activities for both reading and writing, smooth transitions indicative of strong classroom management techniques, modeling expected behaviors, read-alouds, questioning and answering techniques and choral reading. Interview data corroborated teacher practice and classroom instructional behaviors. This school exemplified turning theory into practice.

Interview data revealed a variety of perspectives regarding teacher preparedness. Most participants agreed that formal training such as college had minimal impact on

current classroom instruction due to an average gap of ten years or more since most had attended undergraduate studies and new research and paradigm shifts in educational ideologies had developed. For example, whole language instruction in no longer a focus, but rather a redirection back to phonics based programs. The study did indicate that teacher perspectives were aligned in the use of research-based curriculum and programs. The staff conceded that effective professional development included relevant training, training on their currently used curriculum, and included hands-on techniques that could be turn-keyed into classroom practice.

Finally, the study participants expressed the various systems district policy implemented to support language arts literacy achievement. Every single participant identified the Fountas & Pinnell (2012) curriculum in his or her interview. The majority of the participants also spoke of the guided reading component of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) program. The participants discussed the uniform use of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum, which embeds research-based literacy strategies. The use of common assessments, district benchmark tools, curriculum training and district support through intervention programs, materials, tools and online subscriptions created a comprehensive approach to improving literacy learning at this strong performing elementary school.

Major Evidence

Reading failure at the primary level can cause students to lag behind in later academic years and create gaps in literacy skills (Hagans & Good, 2013). Reading failure is prevalent locally according to state standardized test results (NJDOE, 2015), and across the country as indicated by the Programme for International Student

Assessments (PISA, 2012). Every three years the Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) assesses not just student knowledge, but also synthesis and application of information in the areas of mathematics, reading and science across countries. According to the latest PISA report, the United States is performing at an average level compared to other countries in the area of reading, indicating little change over the past every three years (PISA, 2012).

Literature indicates that literacy achievement is important in learning across the curriculum. Developing good readers can contribute to producing life-long learners, critical thinkers and problem solvers. Early childhood programs can positively influence literacy achievement through standardized, uniform programs (McKie, Manswell Butty & Green, 2012). Hagans and Good (2013) concur that implementing reading strategies at the primary level has the most influence and impact on literacy achievement. Calhoon and Pestscher (2013) confirm that closing the achievement gap in reading deficiency is possible using the right modality, but the larger the gap the more difficult it is to make gains, whereas better readers improve faster. Begeny (2011) and Begeny et al. (2012) support the use of systematic approach to literacy learning using a research-based curriculum. In both studies, evidenced-based programs were successfully implemented where outcomes indicated increased performance in reading fluency in the treatment groups, when strategies were methodically implemented. Warren-Kring and Rutledge (2011) and McKie, Manswell Butty, and Green (2012) also note the use of research based-data to address reading failure that include best practices. Klebansky and Fraser (2013) suggest applying a structurally sound framework to design curriculum that

systematically addresses literacy strategies and instruction. According to Deltor, Booker, Serenko, and Julien (2012), active learning strategies are more effective than traditional lecture strategies. When students are actively engaged in their own learning, rather than just receiving information they are more likely to retain information and perform higher overall. Researchers agree that the fundamental components of literacy learning programs include phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (Brand, Marchand, Lilly & Child, 2014; Calhoon & Petscher, 2013; Hagans & Good, 2013; Begeny et at., 2012; Begeny, 2011; Begeny, et al., 2010). Along with these literary pillars, researchers include a myriad of other behaviors, strategies and techniques that enhance literacy learning. The various methods include: read alouds, concepts about print, collaboration, question and answer, visuals, content texts, think alouds, writing, rhyme, blending, segmenting, classroom management, routines, student choice, technology, and others. (Brand, Marchand, Lilly & Child, 2014; Fenty, McDuffie-Landrum & Fisher, 2012; Hagans & Good, 2013; McKie, Manswell Butty & Green, 2012; Ming, 2012). Other strategies included successful tutoring strategies (Warren-Kring & Rutledge, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and developing a home-school connection to positively impact literacy achievement (Brand, Marchand, Lilly & Child, 2014).

Teacher preparedness can also affect literacy achievement. Both Ming (2012) and Warren-Kring and Rudledge (2011) found that literacy strategies can yield positive results, but must be effectively executed by instructional staff. Therefore, teacher training is an important aspect of program success. In both reports, the researchers

remarked on the importance of accurate application of strategies. Warren-Kring and Rutledge (2011) indicated key factors included training, experience, and expertise of the instructor. There was a direct correlation between training and student achievement. In addition, it was noted that instructor perceptions and attitudes could influence instruction. Brock, Case and Taylor (2013) found this to be true also in a study focused on literacy instruction in a complex, urban environment. The study discussion and conclusion comments noted the need for teacher training that enabled instructors to meet the instructional needs of all students in an appropriate manner. According to Klebansky and Fraser (2013), training helps teachers develop effective approaches to literacy instruction. Defise (2013) concurs that training is an essential component in implementing change. It can be concluded that researchers agree that teacher training plays an important role in the effective execution of language arts literacy strategies that positively affect student achievement.

Policy drives organizational goals, objectives, expected outcomes, processes, and procedures. Policy plays a key role in turning theory into practice (Moss, 2012). One of the ways policy is influenced is when new mandates or initiatives arise. King and Thorpe (2012) document a policy change plan and process in an effort to meet new state graduation requirements. Part of the process was to consider existing models and frameworks that incorporate the needed changes to ease implementation. There has been an unfortunate paradigm shift in education from the impartation of knowledge for its own sake to the focus on tested concepts. The competitive comparison of student progress between states and from country to country as monitored by entities such as the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card, and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), continues to produce statistical data which drives policy decisions. Policy change can positively impact literacy achievement when influenced by research-based data. To that end, it would be appropriate to recommend adopting the evidence-based Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum to address reading failure in this district.

Research evidence of progress is provided below. The information provided is a summary of case study data collected in 2013 from administrative participant A1, who was involved in the implementation and use of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum since its inception the neighboring district. This major evidence indicates progress over the five year period from 2008 to 2013.

In-District Support

The community partner in this case study employs a language arts literacy (LAL) coach. Over the last 5 years (2008-2013), the position expanded from a K-5 coach to cover K-12. The grades include the middle school and a particular focus on special education students in Grades 9 through 12. The main role of the LAL coach was to conduct 98% of the district LAL training. The responsibilities also included working with district data, developing assessments, training on how to use the assessments to collect meaningful and comparable data, analyzing data and correcting data. Other responsibilities were to develop interventions, introduce new programs, model LAL strategies and identify student instructional levels. The LAL coach worked with various district support teams such as Academic Achievement, which provide basic skills

instruction. The coach also collaborated with intervention and referral services (I&RS) (State NJ US, 2015), which is an early intervention system, and the child study team (CST), which evaluates students for special education. The coach conducted teacher training and modeling on district endorsed programs such as Leveled Literacy Intervention by Fountas and Pinnell (2012), Guided Reading, Just Words (grades K-5), and Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) a word accuracy program.

Assessment Data and Interventions

Assessment data is collected from district benchmarks, curriculum assessment benchmarks (Fountas &Pinnell, 2012), and WIST Assessments. The district uniformly used the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) benchmarks in all their buildings, grades K-8, to identify student reading levels. The data is analyzed to find the top most instructional levels, students on grade level, and the percentage of student below grade level. In addition, the district reviews how many students the basic skills program services compared to those not being serviced. The results are organized into grouped levels. For example, the outcomes will show how many students are on levels 1-3, 3-5, and so on. The summary of data is called a district flash report and student levels are calculated twice a year, both in the fall and spring. The figures enable the district to identify growth percentages.

The district breaks down spring assessment data and uses it to populate their summer Literacy Academy. This summer program runs the month of July and includes reading and writing workshops, along with literacy labs that incorporate Guided Reading and Words Their Way (My Pearson Training, 2015) stratagems. Data is collected at the

end of July and is very specific. The goal of the Literacy Academy is to have students maintain their reading levels and if possible, improve. The program especially helps at-risk students alleviate or minimize the summer slide, a regression of literacy concepts previously learned, which can occur during the extended summer break in instruction.

Guided Reading

Guided reading, a Fountas & Pinnell (2012) component, enables instruction to be tailored to meet a student's need. The program sequence is initiated with a benchmark assessment. The data is used to find the student's instructional level. Next, students are assigned to groups based on levels, and then books and lessons are matched to their level. The lessons are diagnostic and evaluative in nature. The teacher is always collecting data that will drive the next lesson. Instructional strategies are uniform across reading lessons, so all teachers are using the same format. The lesson sequence includes five steps: introduce the text, picture walk or preview the text, students read the text individually, the teacher provides instruction, and there is a response to the text. An additional step may include supplemental work, which is optional. All teachers K-8 were trained in this sequence as their means to teach reading.

Some Obstacles

The literacy coach explained that it was a challenging transition. One of the initial difficulties was the large number of teachers (approximately 11-14) in each grade level made it problematic to attain consistency. It was an arduous task to keep a building staff of 50 teachers moving forward, as well as try to meet individual teacher needs. The LAL coach noticed that teachers were liberally assessing students' open-ended questions

with rubric scores of 4s and 5s. Yet, when the state test results were published, the students' writings were scored with 2s and 3s. Administration and staff were able to reflect, revisit and revise practice. Although the staff did not have exemplars, the remedy was a more meticulous use of the writing rubric, which eventually produced more authentic results, because the rubric prescribed the exact criteria expected for open-ended answers.

Finally, when asked if the basis to reading achievement is significant at the primary level, the LAL coach whole-heartedly agreed. She stated that one of the previous problems stemmed from district money being focused on Grades 3 through 5 because of testing concerns, and those same grades (3-5) were not seeing growth in writing. Yet Grades 3 through 5 were seeing growth in reading, because concentrated support was being directed to the K-2 reading program.

District Results

In 2009, the elementary school was sending 30-40% of students to third grade reading 1.5 to 2 grade levels below where they should have been. In other words, almost half of third graders were reading on a first grade or end-of-kindergarten level. To address the problem, the district brought in a balanced literacy approach and began to analyze assessment data to identify student literacy levels. The leveled literacy interventions (LLI) improved performance. In one year, the results showed that most students were almost reading at grade level, indicating an increase of almost 2 grade levels. In two years, their district high school special education students went from 35% proficient in LAL to between 74-79% proficient. The LAL coach attributed the 40%

jump to the use of Guided Reading, the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) leveling, and the curriculum materials that supported instruction, because the makeup of the student composition remained consistent.

The district saw increases in levels every year since the program's inception. Over the 4-5 years of use, classes would show on average a 3-4 level increase from the previous year. A major component of the curriculum that contributed to student growth was the use of the leveled reading books. The leveled books are specifically matched to the appropriate instructional levels along the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) reading gradient. The second element was the ability of the teachers to understand the gradient levels and then guide students in matching books to ability, to effect progress. Classroom libraries were developed and that provided many more opportunities for students to read and practice reading.

District Decisions in Support of Literacy Instruction

The district made several decisions to support literacy achievement. Originally, Grades 4 and 5 in the upper elementary school changed classes for content area instruction, allotting 80 minutes for language arts. Transition time reduced the actual teaching block to about 60 minutes creating a disproportionate amount of time for reading as well as writing. The board of education voted to make 4th grade self-contained. The amended schedule provided a 2-hour window to fully engage students in both reading and writing. The resolution provided staff the needed time to effectively execute literacy lessons. A second district decision converted the half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten, which according to the LAL coach has made a difference.

Additional central administrative decisions supporting literacy instruction included the purchase of the Fountas and Pinnell (2012) curriculum and its components including the benchmark assessments and the leveled book libraries. The district provided on-going professional development training and technology subscriptions that supported on-line, interactive literacy learning websites.

Recommendation

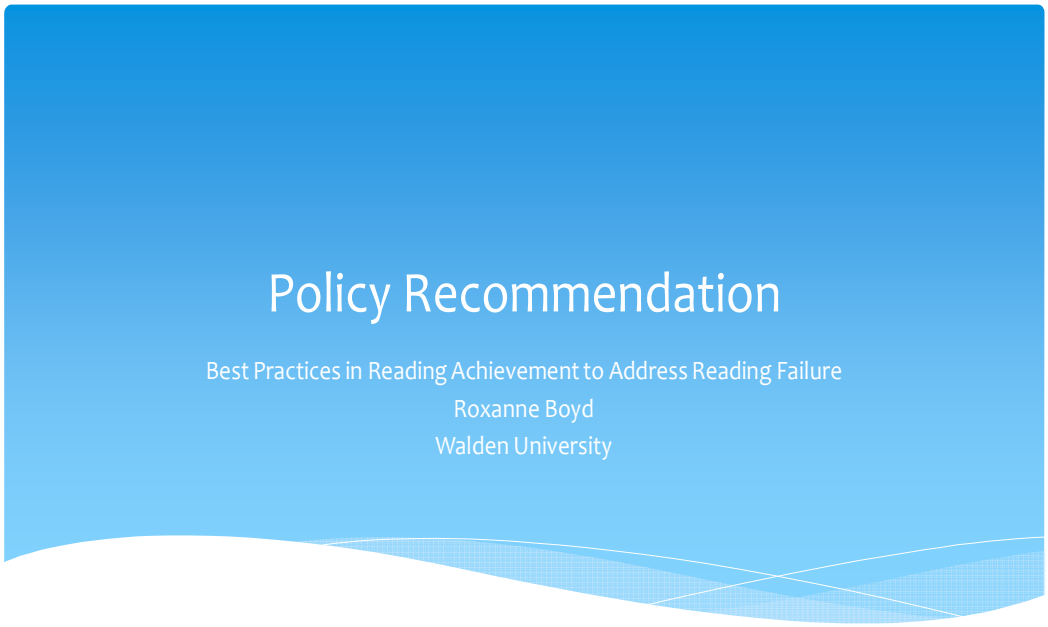
To address the chronic problem of lack of literacy achievement at the local level a policy change is being recommended regarding curriculum. It is strongly being recommended that the local district adopt the Fountas & Pinnell (2012) all-inclusive, outcome-based curriculum. The current failure rate calls for a need for immediate intervention. Curran, Grimshaw, Hayden, & Campbell (2011) state that research findings must be adopted in order to influence change. The case study findings indicate that an evidence-based, comprehensive language arts literacy program, such as Fountas and Pinnell (2012) can positively influence literacy achievement, when executed effectively and used uniformly across and between grade levels. Analyzed study data from both classroom observations and participant interviews confirm that the program works. Interview data established that the curriculum embedded literacy strategies positively impacted literacy achievement. Classroom observational data identified instructional behaviors, routines, processes, and procedures that effectively influenced literacy learning. Practices were used across and between grade levels generating continuity and consistency both vertically and horizontally in language arts literacy instruction. The Fountas and Pinnell (2012) is an all-inclusive system that provides the necessary

components to successfully execute a language arts literacy program. Due to the extensive length of district reading failure, it would benefit the district to expedite literacy interventions. To maintain relevance, improve practice and increase achievement, organizations need to acquire the ability to make rapid transformations (Wolf, 2011). One means of eliciting expeditious change is to defer to, and use what is already working. For example, in an effort to integrate a global literacy component into state high school graduation requirements, the Oregon State Board of Education looked to existing models to implement policy change (King & Thorpe, 2012). Conner and Zaino (2014) also indicate that models benefit change. Moss (2012) states one of the benefactors of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report is that best practices can be shared amongst countries to enhance student performance where weaknesses are evident. Change is an immediate need because the local district has been experiencing over 10 years of literacy failure. Adopting an all-inclusive, outcome-based curriculum would expedite needed interventions. Incremental growth in literacy learning would move the district in the direction of beginning to make adequate yearly progress (AYP).

Finally, in the book *Disrupting Class, Christensen* (Christensen, 2008) discussed modular learning to reach individual learning styles. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) is a type of module based literacy curriculum which uses leveled-learning to meet student needs. Christensen's main point is that sometimes it is necessary to stop what is currently being done and do something different, something that works and something that yields results. It is evident from state results that the local district is in crisis, while case study findings clearly indicate the neighboring community partner's literary achievements both in

district and on state assessments. Mirroring an established program would be an excellent way to expedite much needed success and turn from failure to achievement. To that end, it would behoove the local district to make a policy change to incorporate the Fountas & Pinnell (2012) curriculum into the local district's language arts literacy program to address the chronic problem of reading failure and increase student literacy learning.

Policy Recommendation Presentation Slides



Best Practices in Literacy Achievement to Address Reading Failure
Policy Recommendation/Presentation Feedback Form

Did the presentation inform you of the district's performance on state tests in literacy?
Circle one: Yes or No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Did the presentation provide clear information on the Fountas & Pinnell (2012) curriculum? **Circle one:** Yes or No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Do you think this curriculum, or one similar, would positively impact literacy learning in the district? **Circle one:** Yes or No **Why or Why not**?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Would you be interested in the district implementing the Fountas & Pinnell (2012) curriculum in this district to improve literacy learning?
Circle one: Yes or No

What other information would be helpful to you?

_____

_____

_____

Additional suggestions/comments: _____

_____

Please return responses to R. Williams at MMS, within 7 days.

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Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

September 2013

Superintendent of Schools
Y School District

Dear Superintendent of Schools,

I would like to request permission to study the Y School District in the Fall Semester of 2013 for my qualitative, doctoral research, project study.

As a current doctoral candidate at Walden University, the purpose of my doctoral dissertation is to identify best practices in literacy achievement. I work in a district where unfortunately, literacy achievement is failing and the district is not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). State reports indicate your district is exemplary of literary success.

To that end, I would like to complete a case study on foundational strategies that contribute to literacy and reading achievement. The primary school would be an appropriate site for my study. I will be collecting data in the form of classroom observations and staff interviews over the course of a 9-week period. To minimize disruptions, I plan to observe and interview only two teachers per grade level (K-2), along with the Pre-K teacher. Additional interviews will include administrative staff. Participant interviews will be limited to approximately 30 minutes or less. Specific activities will include classroom observations related specifically to literary or reading strategies. Interviews will be conducted for clarification of implementation procedures (within 24-48 hours after observation). Follow-up will include verification of transcripts (member checking) for accuracy, which will contribute validity to my study. Results will be shared with your district and included in my dissertation. Benefits to your district will be to obtain a snapshot in time of your current district success, as well as a review of how well your practices and procedures are contributing to student achievement in the area of literacy. As with all research studies, the protection of the participants is of the utmost importance. Informed consent forms will be provided for participants. Pseudonyms will provide anonymity to further protect participants in reporting study results. I will make every effort to be minimally intrusive to the workplace and the lives of the participants. I will work diligently with the school principal, a former colleague, and the staff to create a mutually agreeable schedule for participants.

I received my Bachelor's Degree from Douglass College, Rutgers University in Economics. I received my Master's Degree in Teaching from Marygrove College. My work profile includes over 10 years of corporate experience at AT&T and over 20 years of experience as an educator. I am able to combine my corporate and educational experience into structuring a successful classroom environment. I have dual educational certifications: one in Elementary Education K3 through 8, and one in General Business

Studies. I have taught grades Pre-K, K, 1st, 3rd, 5th, 8th Grade Science and am currently the Technology Teacher for Grades 6 through 8 at the middle school in my district. I also have experience as a Technology Instructor at the local County College.

As a resident for over 20 years, I fully support your endeavors to create an outstanding educational community. Your background, knowledge and achievements have availed your students the competitive edge needed as 21st century students. My corporate experience enables me to understand the need for a hierarchical structure, even in the educational arena. I support your efforts to manage your district in an efficient business manner. The reason I have chosen your district as the focus of my doctoral dissertation is that it is a strong performing district, with excellent student achievement and success, resulting from research-based strategies. A study of your district will certainly inform practice and policy.

Please find attached the completed, district Policy questionnaire that further details my doctoral research study. Feel free to contact me for any additional information. I look forward to approval from the your Board of Education, as a form of Letter of Cooperation, signed by both yourself as superintendent and the elementary school principal to conduct my research study, or a returned e-mail response stating your agreement/approval to study your district regarding best literacy practices.

Sincerely,
Roxanne Boyd -Williams, MAT
Ed.D. Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning - Candidate

Copy to:
Y School Board of Education
Elementary School Principal
Dr. Phyllis Ellett, Walden University Doctoral Chair/Instructor

Attachment:
Completed BTS Policy #N2241

Letter of Consent - Agreement to perform study in Y School District:

Printed Name	Printed Name
Signed District Superintendent/Date	Signed School Principal/Date

Appendix C: Policy #N2241, Educational Research Projects Questionnaire

Policy

The Board of Education will cooperate, whenever appropriate and feasible, with organizations and individuals conducting bona fide educational research involving pupils enrolled in the schools of this district.

All educational research by persons other than district employees must be approved in advance by the Board. A written application for approval must state the purpose of the research, the specific ways in which pupils will be involved, the estimated duration of the project, the persons who will conduct the research project and their relevant affiliations, any possible benefits and risks to pupils or to the school district, and methods for maintaining student confidentiality and security.

Approval will be granted only to those projects that will serve the interests of pupils and the educational program; approval will not be granted to projects that will impede or significantly disrupt the instructional program approved by the Board.

Parents or legal guardians will be informed of any educational research project that involves their children and may request the removal of their children from the project.

Research Projects by Staff Members

The Board of Education encourages the participation of teaching staff members in research projects that are soundly designed and professionally conducted.

Teaching staff members may seek funding from local, state, and federal sources, public and private, for locally conducted research projects. Any research project involving pupils must be approved by the Board; all other research projects involving district personnel, facilities, and/or resources shall be approved by the Superintendent.

An application for approval of a proposed research project must include a detailed description of the project, including:

- the purpose of the research,
- the specific ways in which pupils will be involved and the number of pupils involved,
- the estimated duration of the project,
- any possible benefits and risks to pupils or to the school district,
- methods for maintaining student confidentiality and security,

- the degree to which, if any, the project will interrupt or displace the regular instructional program,
- the period of time that will be devoted to the project,
- the project costs and the source of funding,
- any background information or literature necessary to understand of the project,
- the means by which the project will be evaluated,
- an assessment of the contribution the project will make to the educational program of this district.

The conduct of research activities must rigorously protect pupils' privacy. The Board must be satisfied that strict standards of anonymity and confidentiality will be observed.

(Policy) Reading and Adoption

- First Reading April 25, 2006
- Second Reading and Final Adoption May 24, 2006
- Reviewed January 2007

MY RESPONSE TO DISTRICT QUESTIONS

- The purpose of the research*:

To identify best practices in literacy (reading) achievement, in a strong performing district.

- Pupil involvement*:

Students will not be involved in the study.

- Estimated duration:

Data will be collected over an estimated 9-week period. Three to 4 weeks to conduct observations and interviews per grade level. Additional weeks may be used for staff and administrative interviews, verification of transcripts (member checking), and any additional follow-up details.

- Benefits/risks to pupils/school district:

Benefits to district will be a snapshot of successful implementation of literary strategies impacting student achievement and an external perspective on achievement. No risks to students/district.

- Confidentiality/security:

No students will be involved in the study. Principal will act as gatekeeper for access to adult participants regarding observations, interviews and scheduling. Anonymity will ensure confidentiality.

- Instructional displacement:

Project will not displace regular instructional program. Researcher will be as minimally disruptive or invasive as possible while performing observations. Interviews will be conducted on a mutually agreeable time schedule between principal, participant and researcher. Researcher role will be that of a non-participating observer. Researcher role is to be inconspicuous, so that the natural flow of the classroom is kept intact for best observable results. Researcher will observe only language arts literacy/reading instruction. Principal and teacher participant may determine suitable time and coordinate with researcher. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled separate from observation to minimize interruptions, at a mutually agreeable, non-instructional time between teacher and researcher. Member checking (verifying accuracy of findings) may be done via e-mail between participant and researcher. An example of a minimally invasive schedule may consist of just one short visit per day. See sample schedule below.

Sample:

Week 1 Observation/Interview Grade 1	Mon – 9-9:45 AM – Teacher X – Observation Tues – 1-1:30 PM – Teacher X - Interview Wed – 9-9:45AM – Teacher Y - Observation Thurs – 1-1:30PM – Teacher Y - Interview

Research may leave the premises after each brief encounter to keep daily routine intact as much as possible.

- Time devoted to project:

Time devoted to the project will be Fall Semester (Sept-Dec*), to allow for follow-up questions and member checking of transcripts for accuracy. *Expected completion November or earlier.

- Project costs:

There are no costs to the district associated with the project.

- Background information, literature review summary.

Academic success is important in school and in life (Shanahan et al., 2010). To perform well academically, strong literacy skills are needed across the curriculum (Comber & Nixon, 2011). When reading problems develop early, they become more difficult to combat in later years (Maughan et al., 2009). Students with literacy problems in early elementary education often fall further behind as they progress through higher grades where reading material becomes more complex (Torgesen et al., 2007). Dion, Brodeur, Gosselin, Campeau, & Fuchs (2010) conducted a study to determine the effects of reading intervention in primary grades and concluded that early intervention was productive. To address poor literacy achievement in my district, a case study will be

conducted to explore best practices associated with foundational literary strategies from grades K-2 at a strong performing school. Whole school reform and collaborative efforts of stakeholders can positively impact student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan, 2009). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) reported that 37% of fourth graders in the United States were below proficient in reading achievement (Lee, Grigg & Donahue, 2008). The report states that the percentages are even higher in other socio-economic groups, including low income families, various minority groups and English as a second language groups. The district falls within this area of concern with Grades 5-12 lacking in literacy proficiency, coupled with demographics associated with at-risk students (Ackerman, Izard, Kobak, Brown, & Smith, 2007). Reading is fundamentally necessary for academic achievement (Shanahan, et al., 2010). Lack of literacy skills can impact learning across the curriculum (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Eckert, 2008). Literacy issues addressed at an early age impact later achievement (Dixon-Krauss, Januszka, & Chae, 2010). In Bloom's (1956) tier of hierarchical learning, foundational knowledge is a building block for higher level synthesis of concepts. There are a variety of components that affect literacy achievement including comprehension, fluency, phonological awareness, decoding words, writing, etc. Teacher strategies and interventions implemented at the foundational levels can positively impact student achievement in literacy (Dixon-Krauss et al., 2010).

- Project evaluation:

The project will become a part of doctoral candidate dissertation. Evaluation will include my first chair: Dr. Phyllis Ellett, and my second chair: Dr. Donna Graham. See contact information below.

Phyllis Ellett Ed.D., NBCT Instructor, MSEd Mathematics Department The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership Walden University 100 Washington Avenue South Suite 900 Minneapolis, MN 55401 home: 863.508.7986 cell: 407.201.0496 phyllis.ellett@waldenu.edu 1st Chair	Dr. Donna Graham Methodologist – 2nd Chair donna graham@waldenu.edu

- Project contribution:

The results will be shared with the district. The findings will provide a snapshot in time of best practices and strategies positively impacting literacy achievement. External reflection on district practices may also provide balance and perspective. Walden

University advocates for positive social change and therefore expects its students to be teacher-leaders, as well as change agents. The expectation is that positive social change will result in the educational profession.

Additional Information:
*At this time permission to do research in your district is being requested. The Elementary School would be the only school involved in the study. The principal and I are previous colleagues. The principal knows my character and work ethics.
** NO data will be collected (in terms of observations, interviews, etc.) until IRB approval has been obtained. I will provide IRB approvals to you to present to your Board of Ed, as well as a copy for the school principal, prior to collecting data. Because only adults will be included in my study, the IRB approval process should be expedited.

References:

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Maughan, B., Messer, J., Collishaw, S., Pickles, A., Snowling, M., Yule, W., & Rutter, M. (2009). *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 50*(8), 893-901.

Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: IES Practice Guide. NCEE 2010-4038. *What Works Clearinghouse,* Retrieved from EBSCO*host.*

Appendix D: Teacher Invitation

September 2013

Dear Educator,

You are invited to participate in a study on Best Practices in Literacy Instruction to Address Reading Failure.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are teacher of literacy education in a strong performing school. My goal is to identify best literacy practices that impact student achievement in the area of literacy learning. Research shows that students who have strong literacy skills, also perform better across the curriculum. Researchers also concur that literacy learning is best established at the primary level. Therefore, as an elementary teacher of literacy instructional strategies, you are a good candidate for my study. If you choose to volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one classroom observation and one interview. You will have access to findings and be given an opportunity to provide feedback and comments. If you are interested in learning more about this study and are interested in voluntarily participating in this study, please e-mail or phone a response within the next 7 days. Please indicate your preferred method of contact (phone, e-mail, or in person) and the best time to reach you. Your participation will be completely voluntary.

Please provide your:

E-mail Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Best time to reach you: _____

Preferred method of contact (e-mail, phone or in person): _____

Appendix E: Administration Invitation

September 2013

Dear Administrator,

You are invited to participate in a study on Best Practices in Literacy Instruction to Address Reading Failure.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are an administrator involved with literacy education in a strong performing school district. My goal is to identify best literacy practices that impact student achievement in the area of literacy learning. Research shows that students who have strong literacy skills, also perform better across the curriculum. Researchers also concur that literacy learning is best established at the primary level. Therefore, as an administrator over literacy practices in your district, you are a good candidate for my study. If you choose to volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will have access to findings and be given an opportunity to provide feedback and comments. If you are interested in learning more about this study and are interested in voluntarily participating in this study, please e-mail or phone a response within the next 7 days. Please indicate your preferred method of contact (phone, e-mail, or in person) and the best time to reach you. Your participation will be completely voluntary.

Please provide your:

E-mail Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Best time to reach you: _____

Preferred method of contact (e-mail, phone or in person): _____

Appendix F: Teacher Consent Form

This document is an "Informed Consent" to provide information about a research study and invite you to participate.

Nature of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to identify teacher perceptions of best practices in literacy achievement. The goal is to identify literacy and reading strategies that contribute to student success. Literacy achievement supports academic success across the curriculum. Strong literacy skills are usually developed in early childhood learning, at a foundational level.

Participation and Participant's Rights:
You are being asked to participate in the study because you are an elementary teacher of literacy and reading skills at a strong performing school. As mentioned, foundational learning contributes to academic success. Your participation is voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, with no adverse effects to you. You have the right to ask questions about the study being conducted and have access to the report findings.

Participants Role:
To obtain data regarding best literacy practices and strategies, participants will be involved in classroom observations, audiotaped interviews and follow-up activities. Please understand that the researcher is not critiquing the teacher. This is not a performance review but a study of what works in the classroom regarding literacy and reading achievement, which promotes student success. The activities for data collection are as follows:

Data Collection Process:
1) Complete a pre-observation form, summarizing literacy lesson/strategy and providing demographic information. A 15-minute discussion of pre-observation form, via phone, e-mail or in person will be conducted 1-2 days prior to the lesson for clarity.
2) One 40-minute classroom reading/literacy lesson observation.
3) One 30-minute, audiotaped interview within 24-48 hours of the classroom observation.
4) Member Checking – Participants will be provided findings to review for accuracy, feedback and/or comments. Participants will be provided seven days for responses. Activities will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and place between the staff and the researcher.

Researcher and Researcher's Role:
Roxanne Boyd (Williams), a doctoral candidate at Walden University, is conducting the research study. The researcher will be a non-participant observer. This means that the

researcher will not interact with the participant during the observations, but allow the natural classroom process to occur.

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The benefits of the study will provide your district with a snapshot in time of instructional strategies that support literacy achievement and student success, as well as provide insight into what contributes to that success. The findings may also benefit the researcher's district in support of improved literacy achievement.

Privacy
Participants will remain anonymous in the report of findings. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants, as needed.

Contact Information:
Please feel free to contact the researcher, Roxanne Boyd, who can discuss this with you. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-14-13-0156964 and it originally expired on August 13, 2014, and was later extended to September 8, 2015.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign this consent form below. Signing indicates that you understand the nature and purpose of the study, and the process and procedures involved.

You will be provided a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information and understand the nature and purpose of the study and am volunteering to be a part of the study as a participant. I give my permission to have my interview audiotaped. My signature indicates that I am agreeing to the terms described above.
Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of Consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic Signature

_____

Appendix G: Administrative Consent Form

This document is an "Informed Consent" to provide information about a research study and invite you to participate.

Nature of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to identify staff perceptions of best practices in literacy achievement. The goal is to identify literacy and reading strategies that contribute to student success. Literacy achievement supports academic success across the curriculum. Strong literacy skills are usually developed in early childhood learning, at a foundational level.

Participation and Participant's Rights:
You are being asked to participate in the study because you are educational staff informed and involved with the instruction of literacy and reading skills at a strong performing school. As mentioned, foundational learning contributes to academic success. Your participation is voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, with no adverse effects to you. You have the right to ask questions about the study being conducted and have access to the report findings.

Participants Role:
To obtain data regarding best literacy practices and strategies, participants will be involved an audiotaped interview and follow-up activities. This is a study of what works in the classroom regarding literacy and reading achievement, which promotes student success. The activities for data collection are as follows:

Data Collection Process:
1) One 30-minute, audiotaped interview.
2) Member Checking – Participants will be provided findings within 24-48 hours after the interview to review for accuracy, feedback and/or comments. Participants will have seven days to respond.
Activities will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location between the participant and the researcher, with permission to audiotape.

Researcher and Researcher's Role:
Roxanne Boyd (Williams), a doctoral candidate at Walden University, is conducting the research study. The researcher will be a non-participant observer. This means that the researcher will not interact with the participant during the observations, but allow the natural classroom process to occur.

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The benefits of the study will provide your district with a snapshot in time of instructional strategies that support literacy achievement and student success, as well as provide insight into what contributes to that success. The findings may also benefit the researcher's district in support of improved literacy achievement.

Privacy
Participants will remain anonymous in the report of findings. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants, as needed.

Contact Information:
Please feel free to contact the researcher, Roxanne Boyd, who can discuss this with you. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-14-13-0156964 and it originally expired on August 13, 2014, and was later extended to September 8, 2015.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign this consent form below. Signing indicates that you understand the nature and purpose of the study, and the process and procedures involved.

You will be provided a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information and understand the nature and purpose of the study and am volunteering to be a part of the study as a participant. I give my permission to have my interview audiotaped. My signature indicates that I am agreeing to the terms described above.
Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of Consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic Signature

_____

Appendix H: Data Collection Coordination Request

September 2013

Dear Teacher,

I have obtained the principal's support to collect data for my research project entitled Best Practices in Literacy Achievement to Address Reading Failure.

I am requesting your cooperation in the data collection process. I propose to collect data between September and October, 2013. I will coordinate the exact times of data collection with you in order to minimize disruption to your instructional activities.

If you agree to be part of this research project, I would ask that you allow me to observe a 40-minute reading/literacy lesson in your classroom and conduct a 30-minute, audiotaped interview with you within 24-48 hours after the classroom observation. I would also ask that you complete a pre-observation form to provide demographics and a brief summary of the lesson objectives and literacy strategies to be addressed. I will provide my findings and allow you seven days to review for accuracy as well as provide feedback and/or comments will be included as part of my data collection process.

If you prefer not to be involved in this study, that is not a problem at all. If circumstances change, please contact me.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to share the results of this study with you if you are interested.

I am requesting your signature or that you reply with "I agree" in your e-mailed response to document that I have cleared this data collection with you.

Sincerely,
Roxanne Boyd (Williams)

Printed Name of Teacher _____

Date _____

Teacher's Written or Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their e-mail address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix I: Data Use Agreement

This Data Use Agreement ("Agreement"), effective as of September 2013 ("Effective Date"), is entered into by and between Roxanne Boyd (Williams) ("Data Recipient") and Y School District ("Data Provider"). The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited Data Set ("LDS") for use in research in accord with the HIPAA and FERPA Regulations.

1. Definitions. Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the "HIPAA Regulations" codified at Title 45 parts 160 through 164 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.

2. Preparation of the LDS. Data Provider shall prepare and furnish to Data Recipient a LDS in accord with any applicable HIPAA or FERPA Regulations.

3. Data Fields in the LDS. No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited Data Set (LDS). In preparing the LDS, Data Provider shall include the data fields specified as follows, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research (language arts/literacy/reading report grades, language arts/literacy/reading test grades, school literacy benchmark summaries, school/district literacy assessments, state standard reading testing results, etc.).

4. Responsibilities of Data Recipient. Data Recipient agrees to:

    a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;

    b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;

    c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;

    d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement; and

    e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.

5. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its Research activities only.

6. Term and Termination.

   a. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.

   b. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.

   c. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.

   d. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.

   e. Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.

7. Miscellaneous.

   a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.

   b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.

   c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.

d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER	**DATA RECIPIENT**
Signed: _____	Signed: _____
Print Name: _____	Print Name: _____
Print Title: _____	Print Title: _____

Appendix J: Pre-Observation Protocol

Please provide information on the adjacent box.

Name of Teacher	
School	
Grade Level	
Date of Pre-Observation Meeting	
Date of Scheduled Classroom Visit	
Type of Lesson: Literacy	Reading/Language Arts
Name of Observer	Roxanne Boyd (Williams)
Level of Education (BA, BS, MA, Ph.D.)	
Number of years teaching	
Number of years in this district	
Number of years in this grade level	

What will be the topic of your lesson?

What will be the literacy strategy taught?

What are the students expected to learn from this lesson?

Tools/Materials:

Any additional information you would like the researcher to know about you or your class.

Appendix K: Field Observation Form

Observation/Field Notes – Literacy Strategies
Setting:
Observer: RB
Role of Observer: Nonparticipant Observer
Date and Time:
Length of Observation:

Time	Description	Reflective Notes/Questions

This form will be duplicated as needed.

Appendix L: Teaching Staff Interview Protocol

Over-arching question:

1. What do you perceive to be effective literacy strategies that impact student achievement?
    a. What literacy strategies are being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement?
    b. How do students learn to read well in this district?

Over-arching question:

2. What are your perceptions regarding teacher preparedness related to literacy learning?
    a. Describe the professional development programs you have attended for your elementary school?
    b. What do you believe are the components of an effective professional development program for literacy achievement?

Over-arching question:

3. How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning/achievement at your elementary school?

Appendix M: Administrative Interview Protocol

1. Describe your role in the district.

Over-arching question:

2. What do you perceive to be effective literacy strategies that impact student achievement?
    a. What literacy strategies are being implemented in your district that positively impact achievement?
    b. How do students learn to read well in this district?

Over-arching question:

3. What are your perceptions of professional development related to student literacy learning?
    a. Describe the literacy training provided for the elementary school teachers in your district?

Over-arching question:

4. How do administrative decisions impact literacy learning/achievement at the elementary school?
    a. Describe curriculum, programs, and/or materials that positively impact literacy achievement at the elementary school.
    b. How have you implemented policy/procedural/process change within the district to obtain literacy achievement?

c. What outcomes have been achieved? How have they been documented (report card grades, district bench marks, state testing)? What kind of timeframe was involved (For training? For implementation? For actual results?)

Additional Probes (if needed):

Student Learning

1. How do students learn how to read well (in general) in your opinion?
2. What literacy strategies do you find work well for you? Why?
3. How do you know when students are learning? (What signals/outcomes do you observe?)
4. What helps increase comprehension in your opinion? Give examples.
5. What evidence indicates comprehension has occurred? Explain.

Teacher Preparedness

6. Describe how you positively impact instruction and increase achievement? Give examples.
7. Describe how you prepare for literacy instruction?
8. What are some specific steps or strategies in which teachers can engage?

Appendix N: Lesson Checklist Protocol

Lesson Objective

_____ Posted where students can see it.

_____ Presented verbally

Literacy Strategy

_____ Clearly defined

_____ Clearly communicated

Lesson Implementation/Process

_____ Lesson opener/introduction

_____ Guided Practice/Whole Group Instruction Presented

_____ Independent/Individual Practice Provided

_____ Lesson follow-up/closing

Teacher Actions:

Student Activities/Engagement:

Materials/Tools/Technology:

Additional Information:

Appendix O: Peer Reviewer Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "Best Practices in Literacy Achievement to Address Reading Failure" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix P: Researcher Confidentiality Agreement with District

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "Best Practices in Literacy Achievement to Address Reading Failure" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

8. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
9. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
10. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
11. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
12. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
13. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
14. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix Q: Sample Interview Transcript

Participant T5	FINDINGS
Q1. Your perceptions of best practices in literacy?	What do you perceive to be best practices that positively impact literacy achievement?
First – identify where each student is. (this is a good school district). Not just diagnosing a reading problem, its finding out where the students are. Some of the tools that we use are the Words Their W ay inventory, which shows us exactly where the students are in their spelling development and their awareness. The other powerful tool we use are the running records and we use the F&P, this school district has given us extensive training in F&P, how to do guided reading. And we have wonderful literacy coaches who models to us what it is we are supposed to do. And how to read the assessment and what to do from there, where to go from there. There are some other literacy strategies we use. I think the most powerful one is guided reading. That is a big priority in this district. With guided reading…the students are reading books at their instructional level, so that avoids boredom in the classroom because we have such a wide range of abilities in the one room. For example in this classroom I have students who are still at a Kindergarten level, they are struggling. There is an intervention program in place to help those students. There's also students in my classroom (even though this is a 1st grade classroom) they can read at a 3rd	1. Leveling (T5) "*First – identify where each student is. This is a good school district. Not just diagnosing a reading problem, its finding out where the students are.*" 2. Words Their Way Spelling Inventory (T5) "*Some of the tools that we use are the Words Their W ay inventory, which shows us exactly where the students are in their spelling development and their awareness.*" 3. Running Records (T5) "The other powerful tool we use are the running records" 4. F&P (T5) "…and we use the F&P, this school district has given us extensive training in F&P," 5. Guided Reading (T5) "this school district has given us extensive training in F&P, how to do guided reading. "

grade level. That guided reading program answers that problem of reaching each of those students where they need to be, where they are learning. A big push in our school district with that…that's our biggest tool, our biggest strategy is guided reading. And also in all of our lesson plans, we have written Read Alouds…it's in our lesson plans…based on research, children that are read to are stronger readers and we have that in our classrooms each day…listening to good reading…they know what it sounds like…that's another great strategy that we use…and we also write about our reading. There are many more, but those are some of the primary strategies that we use. **Example of guided reading**: Sitting at a table…1 teacher…4-5 students, small group….I present a book to the students…the students in the group are about the same level…the book is appropriate for their level…I do a book walk with the students…I present the book to the students and introduce any vocabulary that might be unknown to them….we make a few connections and then I allow each student practice reading that book on an individual basis…I give them a signal and I ask them to read just to me…so I am listening to each student…I'm picking up their strengths and I'm looking for areas that I can teach them…I'm looking for teaching points…it's individualized…it lasts 10-15 minutes and then I send them on to do independent reading….each student is reading the same book….it's not to embarrass the students….the other students are reading along….each student has their own copy (do not have to share), the other students are working independently…the students have a telephone tool so that the students are	"*There are some other literacy strategies we use. I think the most powerful one is guided reading. That is a big priority in this district. With guided reading…the students are reading books at their instructional level, so that avoids boredom in the classroom because we have such a wide range of abilities in the one room. For example in this classroom I have students who are still at a Kindergarten level, they are struggling. There is an intervention program in place to help those students. There's also students in my classroom (even though this is a 1st grade classroom) they can read at a 3rd grade level. That guided reading program answers that problem of reaching each of those students where they need to be, where they are learning. A big push in our school district with that…that's our biggest tool, our biggest strategy is guided reading.*" 6. Modeling (for teachers)-Literacy Coach (T5) "*And we have wonderful literacy coaches who model to us what it we are supposed to do. And how to read the assessment and what to do from there, where to go from there.*" 7. Read Alouds (T5) "*And also in all of our lesson plans, we have written Read Alouds…it's in our lesson plans…based on research, children that are read to are stronger readers and we have that in our classrooms each day…listening to good reading…they know what it sounds like…that's another great strategy that we use…*" 8. Writing About Reading

reading individually to themselves –the teacher can hear and they can hear themselves….(I asked…students hears the story over and over…not necessarily).. Before Guided Reading, they have already been assessed, so the teacher knows their level and where they are (as well as the student). *(You mentioned many…were there others (besides Guided Reading and Read Alouds)*…MODELING is probably another very important teaching strategy….many times in traditional classrooms or even for a new teacher…I can remember just with my self---assuming that students knew what to do and I would give instructions and so my expectation would be that they would listen to my instruction and do what I asked them to do…but so many times they just don't know what it looks like…they want to please the teacher and they want to do well, but they don't know what it looks like…they need a picture. So one of the things that I like to do in my classroom and I see so many teachers in our school do this is that they model first. In fact that's one of my favorite teaching models is gradual release of responsibilities…and that's where first I do and they watch, then I do and they help, next they do and I help and the last step is really my objective, they do and I watch. That is my favorite model…and I see that in my school district and I think that's one of the reasons we've had a successful literacy program. It's that the children actually see what a good behavior is regarding reading, writing.	(T5) "*and we also write about our reading. There are many more, but those are some of the primary strategies that we use.*" 9. Modeling (T5) "*MODELING is probably another very important teaching strategy….many times in traditional classrooms or even for a new teacher…I can remember just with my self---assuming that students knew what to do and I would give instructions and so my expectation would be that they would listen to my instruction and do what I asked them to do…but so many times they just don't know what it looks like…they want to please the teacher and they want to do well, but they don't know what it looks like…they need a picture. So one of the things that I like to do in my classroom and I see so many teachers in our school do this is that they model first. In fact that's one of my favorite teaching models is gradual release of responsibilities…and that's where first I do and they watch, then I do and they help, next they do and I help and the last step is really my objective, they do and I watch. That is my favorite model…and I see that in my school district and I think that's one of the reasons we've had a successful literacy program. It's that the children actually see what a good behavior is regarding reading, writing.*" 10. F&P (T5) 11. Running Records (FORMAL ASSESSMENTS) (T5)

	12. Vertical Articulation - Communication (T5) "*we also well with communicating with prior grade levels and with future grade levels. The entire school district communicates the curriculum and the goals. We assess the students in the prior grades and we share some of that information with the student in next grade. This is very helpful, especially if the student is struggling. But we know ahead of time about where that student is.*" "*We also recognize that students develop differently and at different paces. So we know that sometimes there will be a jump in abilities, and sometimes there won't be quite a jump. But we do communicate with one another. We formally assess each student and we are consistent. Each teacher in this school uses the same instruments to assess the students. And we have all been trained on those instruments extensively. And we are able to formally assess our students and know where they are and come to the classroom and teach them at that level. So we've been prepared very well. It's the consistency and the communication in this school district that's been key to our success.*"
Q2. tell me more about teacher preparedness (district, formal training)	FINDINGS
We did talk about the Guided Reading table and before we ever start the Guided Reading Program, we do prepare by formally assessing each student and we also use an F&P to do that. We do running records and we also well with communicating with prior grade levels and with future grade levels. The entire	

school district communicates the curriculum and the goals. We assess the students in the prior grades and we share some of that information with the student in next grade. This is very helpful, especially if the student is struggling. But we know ahead of time about where that student is. We also recognize that students develop differently and at different paces. So we know that sometimes there will be a jump in abilities, and sometimes there won't be quite a jump. But we do communicate with one another. We formally assess each student and we are consistent. Each teacher in this school uses the same instruments to assess the students. And we have all been trained on those instruments extensively. And we are able to formally assess our students and know where they are and come to the classroom and teach them at that level. So we've been prepared very well. It's the consistency and the communication in this school district that's been key to our success. Formally – MA degree helped???? - A big example. I took a course where the textbook was Words Their Way, Spelling inventories and it seemed like the very next in-service we were trained on Words Their Way...and I was thrilled because I wasn't learning one philosophy in education or one curriculum and then having to learn something completely different in my district. It was very consistent with my graduate studies…it was based on current research and what worked…and I was so pleased to learn that my school district used those same strategies…they based their decisions on what is working. Your MA was less than 2 years ago- still fresh and current….nice that the district is	

up on the current research…..It was so consistent	
Q. District decisions policy that affect student learning	FINDINGS
This school district seems to be united and we are given common goals at the beginning of the school year and one of the common things is a series of questions and the superintendent lives this 1) what are we doing 2) is it working 3) how do we know and then 4) where do we go from there…and so we are constantly asking ourselves and our administrators I believe are doing this too… constantly asking what are we doing, and it does seem that we have been able to answer the question ----yes---it is working. I think I mentioned this earlier two…we have some wonderful literacy coaches and they have been giving workshops to us, different professional developments sessions and so those are based on current research. We are all learning, and we are even asked to read different research articles, different professional articles so that we are on the same page, and that we are aware of what practices are working, practices are working, and using them in the classroom. I am just please with how the students are responding to what we are doing …..	

Anything else….if I think of anything else, I will add this to the interview and e-mail you….I have worked in several school districts and I have a tremendous amount of confidence in what we are doing.

Thank you.

Appendix R: Sample Classroom Observation Field Notes

T1- Classroom Observation Coded Field Notes: Lesson Objective: Letter "T"		
Time	Observation/Description	Reflective Notes
9:59AM	Lesson objective was announced. Letter T. HW was announced (story book). New story to be read was announced. Activity – writing T and shared reading was announced.	Story announced/Intro Activity – writing letter T Shared Reading
10AM	T1 modeled the lesson "message" that students would fill in. She wrote the message on the board. Wishing sticks were used to select a student to complete the sentence. Students were asked to recognize site words. Teacher read the rest of the sentence. Sentence formatting was modeled with spacing. T1 questioned students to determine if the sentence: Made sense; had spaces between words, had a capital at the beginning of the sentence, had an ending mark also called – punctuation.	**Modeled** – filling in lesson message T1 • T1 modeled the lesson "message" that students would fill in. She wrote the message on the board. • Modeled sentence structure (spacing) • T1 reads the poem first – points to each word. Students choral read with her one time. • T1 draws a setting on the board as an example for students. **Whole Group Instruction** • Questioning • Choral Reading • Read Alouds Back to story rug. Lesson close – <u>Shared reading</u> Tommy Tiger. T1 reads. <u>Choral reading</u> as teacher points. <u>Rhyming words and "ing" words discussed</u>. Random student selection **Questioning** T1 Students were asked to recognize site words.

		Site Words Recognition/Review T1 Students were asked to recognize site words. **Questioning** T1 T1 questioned students to determine if the sentence: Made sense; **CAP-Mechanics reviewed** – (spaces, caps, ending marks/punctuation.) T1 The question mark (?) was discussed (how, why and when it is used). T1 questioned students is one needed for the morning message sentence. Students determined the ending mark needed was named the "period" (.). T1 did a quick review of ending marks; question mark, exclamation mark and period.
10:05	The question mark (?) was discussed (how, why and when it is used). T1 questioned students is one needed for the morning message sentence. Students determined the ending mark needed was named the "period" (.). T1 did a quick review of ending marks; question mark, exclamation mark and period. Choral reading was used to read the morning message as the teacher points to the words. New story introduced – Teacher read to group on story rug. T1 points to each word as story is read. T1 directs students to look at pictures as story is read.	**Choral Reading** – (whole group instruction) T1 • Choral reading was used to read the morning message as the teacher points to the words. • The students start to read along. **Read Alouds** – T1 • Teacher read to group on story rug. • Book "Foolish Tortoise". (This was the 2nd book T1 read and had paragraphs on pages w/pictures.) T1 held the book up and read. **Repetition** T1

	The story is repetitious…each page has same words "Out of _____ ". (The story has the main character coming out of something on each page.) The students start to read along. T1 instructs them to us the pictures if they cannot determine the written word. Example…Out of the ____ cave (if they cannot read cave---use the picture of the cave.) Students practice with the teacher. T1 stops and questions students about the story content at various intervals. Ex. T1 asks students why "Out of the tub", because precious page the turtle came "Out of the mud". (Ex., story connections, story recall, sequencing, content, etc.) T1 reviewed book title "Out" Student HW was to read "Out" each day. Students directed to look at Letter "T". Say "T". Sound of "T". "T" book about a "turtle" to be read today. T1 reviews parts of a book; cover, back, title, title page, author's job – to write the words; illustrator – draws the pictures. This book had co-illustrators so both drew the pics. Book "Foolish Tortoise". (This was the 2nd book T1 read and had paragraphs on pages w/pictures.) T1 held the book up and read. T1 stopped and asked what was going on. T1 continued to read and ask questions. After each set of passages read, students commented on the pictures. T1 stops and waits for quiet. The story rhymes.	• The story is repetitious…each page has same words "Out of _____ ". (The story has the main character coming out of something on each page.) • T1 encourages students with: repeating answers, using affirmations, **Context Clues/Practice** T1 T1 instructs them to us the pictures if they cannot determine the written word. Example…Out of the ____ cave (if they cannot read cave---use the picture of the cave.) Students practice with the teacher. **Questioning (for Comprehension)** T1 • T1 stops and questions students about the story content at various intervals. Ex. T1 asks students why "Out of the tub", because precious page the turtle came "Out of the mud". (Ex., story connections, story recall, sequencing, content, etc.) • T1 stopped and asked what was going on (w/second book). T1 continued to read and ask questions. After each set of passages read, students commented on the pictures. • T1 continues to ask questions of the students about what is happening and why. **HW** – Review, practice, (re-read) T1 Student HW was to read "Out" each day. **CAP**

		T1 • T1 reviewed book title "Out" • T1 reviews parts of a book; cover, back, title, title page, author's job – to write the words; illustrator – draws the pictures. This book had co-illustrators so both drew the pics. **Review-continuous** T1 • T1 review story content covered earlier… waits for correct answer, discusses, and rewards class w/stickers as lesson progresses. T1 review story.
10:10- 10:15	T1 continues to read. T1 makes points about the story as it progresses. T1 continues to ask questions of the students about what is happening and why. T1 encourages students with: repeating answers, using affirmations, manages class behavior in stride as the lesson moves on. T1 reviews story content covered earlier… waits for correct answer, discusses, and rewards class w/stickers as lesson progresses. T1 review story.	• T1 switches to the board. Reviews story points • T1 switches to the board. Reviews story points • T1 reviews group of "T" words, tortoise, tired, took, trees, time. • T1 reviews site word flash cards. • Review of "T" words with pictures. • Review of picture flash cards. **Repetition** • T1 encourages students with: repeating answers, using affirmations, • T1 speaks, has students repeat. T1 points, students repeat. • T1 uses hand signals (raised hand) to have students repeat the letter (in this case "T") and to practice saying words. **Hands-on (activities)** • T1 reviews writing page. • Visuals – coloring page and writing page.

		• Students who name a "T" word (she will write it on a spot) and student will stick it on the turtle shell/back. Each day students will add new "T" words to spots and stick to turtle shell. • Handout 1: Color and Trace. Handout included a poem, with a turtle pictured on it. Students will draw a background (park, zoo, pond, lake, etc.) around the turtle. • Handout 1– Trace capital and lower case letter "Tt". Color turtle, draw background. Trace the letter "T". **Writing**- (Handout #2) Writing – Name on paper Writing directives (from curriculum) sky to grass, straight line down, cross at the top – spaces in between. Trace first row, write second row, trace the "T" words. Write slowly, sit correctly.
10:15-10:20	T1 switches to the board. Reviews story points (as follows): Turtle = tortoise (another name for same animal) Tortoise is walking, walking and "tired" Hides under "trees" In "time" passes bed took shell off (realizes this was not a good idea) and eventually puts shell back on. T1 reviews group of "T" words, tortoise, tired, took, trees, time. T1 moves to coloring page. Read coloring page "Tick T. Teddy Bear" T1 reviews writing page. New "T" site words introduced – To, Today, And.	

	T1 distinguishes To from Too and Two. Visuals – coloring page and writing page. T1 reviews site word flash cards.	
10:20	Review of "T" words with pictures. Review of picture flash cards. (Students are reminded they get an alphabet book when they study a letter. Eventually they will have an entire set at home to review and work with.) T1 speaks, has students repeat. T1 points, students repeat. T1 shows students the turtle. Students who name a "T" word (she will write it on a spot) and student will stick it on the turtle shell/back. Each day students will add new "T" words to spots and stick to turtle shell. (Students are redirected to remain on story rug.) T1 uses hand signals (raised hand) to have students repeat the letter (in this case "T") and to practice saying words. When other words were used, only the "T" part of the word was focused on. Ex. Teddy Bear – only Teddy was focused on. T1 reviewed the new words again and also the words on the turtle spots pasted to shell (today). Handout 1: Color and Trace. Handout included a poem, with a turtle pictured on it. Students will	

	draw a background (park, zoo, pond, lake, etc.) around the turtle. T1 reads the poem first – points to each word. Students choral read with her one time.	
10:20 – 10:25	Students return to desks to complete handout – draw background for turtle and color (lake, park). Handout 1– Trace capital and lower case letter "Tt". Color turtle, draw background. Trace the letter "T". NOTE: T1 states the technology normally used would be to project pictures of different kinds of turtles for students to view as they color their turtle pictures. Also (Elmo) would be used to display the HW book "Out" so that students can see better and read along. T1 reviews student colorings and provides positive reinforcement, correcting as needed (ex. Color slower to stay in the lines, etc.) Motto, "not first, but best." T1 draws a setting on the board as an example for students. T1 walks around to comment on student work. Reminds to tract "T", color and draw a background/setting for the turtle.	
10:30	Students coloring activity is placed in the bin when finished. Students get books when finished or play dough. (activity choices, student routines built in) Positive reinforcement verbalized of those who follow directions. Students put away reading, play dough as next assignment begins.	
10:30	Writing – Name on paper	

	Writing directives (from curriculum) sky to grass, straight line down, cross at the top – spaces in between. Trace first row, write second row, trace words. Write slowly, sit correctly.	
10:35-10:40	"Not the first one, but the best one" – class motto. T1 worked with one struggling student one-on-one. Students gave thumbs up if done.	
10:40	Back to story rug. Lesson close – Shared reading Tommy Tiger. T1 reads. Choral reading as teacher points. Rhyming words and "ing" words discussed.	

Additional Notations:
Routines:
On rug
Stars for answers
Work in basked when done
Not first, but best
Students know teacher signals

The teacher times the work assignments and continuously reminds the class of the remaining time (Ex., "5 more minutes, 2 minutes left," etc.)

10:30 Last homework goes home – students place homework in their personal bins (this helps with name in print recognition).

10:40 HW book put in their mailboxes.

Teacher states lesson will be repeated the remainder of the week, with different stories read to reinforce letter of the week.