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A Study of Best Practices and Student Achievement in Elementary and Middle School Reading

Tracey L. Hankins
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in Elementary and Middle School

Reading

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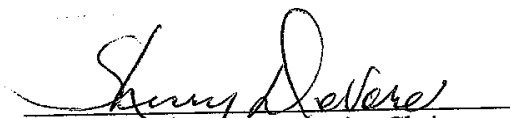
Tracey L. Hankins

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in

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School of Education

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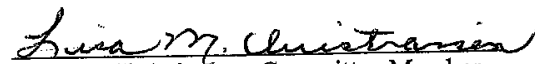
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Tracey L. Hankins

Signature: _Tracey L. Hankins_ Date: _October 30 2013_

Abstract

Reading and writing proficiency are skills necessary to be successful academically and in today's workplace. Literacy skills are directly linked to a better quality of life, the ability to read labels, civic documents, to expand knowledge, and to boost self-esteem (SIL International, 2012). Teaching reading and writing is a complicated arena in education and must be addressed in a systematic manner in order for students to excel. In this study, state test scores in Communication Arts for students in grades 3 through 8 in Missouri were examined to determine the top 10% of schools. Once the top 10% of schools were identified for 2010 and 2011 a list of schools was generated that included only schools in the top 10% both years. The school administrators were then surveyed to determine instructional practices, professional development practices, and practices for additional time and support for students struggling in Communication Arts. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine best practices, professional development, and how additional time and support for struggling students are developed. This study revealed that it is imperative to differentiate instruction to meet individual students' academic levels, and teachers provide instruction for students' individual needs based on assessment data collected throughout the year. Also, instruction is based on a sophisticated knowledge of research-based practices in literacy and literacy development. It is important to tailor instruction for students using multiple sources and multiple levels of curriculum during flexible reading groups, according to the study. Student learning is dependent on high-quality teaching. This study revealed that professional development is conducted within the school district to maximize student achievement outcomes.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

Why is it that some children have difficulty in reading and others do not? In today's high schools across America, 25 % to 30 % of 9th grade students drop out of high school before graduation (Palumbo, 2013). In years past, the verbal portion of the SAT test has been written at the 11th grade level or slightly higher (Palumbo, 2013). Due to the decline in student scores since 1970s the test has been re-normed so a 500 verbal score today is representative of a score of 420 in the early decade of 1990 (Palumbo, 2013). A combination of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have raised accountability for schools and created the need for systematic changes in improving student learning (Muoneke, 2007).

Students have long been identified as learning disabled through the use of a discrepancy model (Dorn & Schubert, 2008). The discrepancy model deduces that when a child is not able to learn to read with his peers that the problem lies with the child, not with the curriculum or instruction provided for the child (Dorn & Schubert, 2008). Good readers use a variety of strategies when reading, while poor readers have no strategies from which to draw (Dorn & Schubert, 2008). Further, while students who struggle reading have some strategies from which to draw, being able to apply these strategies in the most effective manner is not a strength for these learners (Dorn & Schubert, 2008). Public school teachers have over-identified students as learning disabled by using this model and not providing best practices in instruction in the classroom or an intervention plan for the student (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). Through research, classroom instruction best practices, implementation practices, and implications for student achievement are identified.

Background of the Study

Reading has always been a key component when considering a child's success in school (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). In schools in the United States as well as in society, the written word increasingly becomes an avenue for success (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). As adults, reading is a function of society where good readers are rewarded and poor readers are punished (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004).

Schools in the United States are held accountable to higher standards in reading and mathematics due to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, signed by President George W. Bush. The act places an emphasis on high achievement in reading for students in grades three through eight and enhancing the quality of teachers in schools (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). The stakes are great and accountability is at an all-time high in United States public schools (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). Through the NCLB Act, data in each school district are disaggregated for students by poverty levels, ethnicities, disabilities, and limited English proficiencies to ensure that all children are achieving high standards of learning (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, reading scores have not significantly improved since in the last 40 years (Palumbo, 2013). In the past 40 years the instructional approach has changed from a phonics-based instruction to whole-language based to the balanced-literacy approach to instruction, yet reading scores remain equivalent to those during the 1970s (Palumbo, 2013). Literacy can mean a better life for individuals and society with increased self-esteem, responsibility for self-improvement, and the ability to acquire new knowledge (SIL, 2012). In the United States alone,

according to the National Adult Literacy Survey, illiteracy costs the country in excess of $17 billion per year (SIL, 2012).

Theorists have studied the causes of low student achievement over the past half of the century. Coleman reported in July 1966 that the conclusions of *The Equal Educational Opportunity Survey* was that family background was the major factor contributing to low student achievement (Education Commission of the States, 2013). Coleman further concluded that it was not the school's influence, yet that poverty and a parent's lack of education prevented children from learning (Lezotte, 2012). The work of Coleman resulted in programs, such as the United Stated federal funded Title One, which focused on impacting student achievement for students with disadvantaged backgrounds in order to raise student achievement (Lezotte, 2012). The Coleman report sparked controversy in education and led to a movement known later as the Effective Schools Movement (Lezotte, 2012).

The transition from the Coleman report to thinking about schools having influence on student achievement was bridged by a report by Edmonds entitled, "Programs of School Improvement: An Overview" (Lezotte, 2012). The report by Edmonds stated, "while schools may be primarily responsible for whether or not students function adequately in school, the family is probably critical in determining whether or not students flourish in school" (Lezotte, 2012, para. 3).

Coleman and Jencks (as cited in Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001), referenced research that concluded the majority of differences in student achievement are attributed to factors unrelated to schools, such as the student's socio-economic level, home environment, and natural ability or aptitude. Furthermore, Coleman and Jencks also

found that schools account for 10 % of the differences in student achievement (as cited in Marzano et al., 2001). Moreover, the researcher in the study indicated the average student who attends what could be considered a good school will have a score that is 23 points higher than an average student who attends what could be considered a poor school, concluding that schools do make a difference in student achievement (Haystead & Marzano, 2009).

All children take different roads in attaining new literacy skills due to prior experiences and personal perceptions (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Curriculum should be written to ensure that all children, regardless of prior knowledge, are provided with literacy experiences that support learning and assists the student in reaching the highest potential as learners (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Successful schools need teachers who are knowledgeable about reading pedagogy, administrators who promote the value of reading and make it a priority in the school, and parents who are committed to providing support for the child (Carroll, 2010). Making connections through literature to personal experiences facilitates understanding and helps students connect to the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). When students are able to make connections to text, reading then begins to build from the students' immediate environment to more expansive issues beyond home, school and neighborhood (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

Success in reading has always been a key component in the success of students in school (NCLB, 2002). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2012) disclosed serious deficiencies in students' abilities to read, especially in high poverty schools. Data from the NAEP (2000) indicated in prosperous schools nearly one-fifth of

fourth grade students cannot read on grade level, and in schools with high poverty about two-thirds of fourth grade students were unable to reach the basic level of reading achievement (NCLB, 2002). Reading First, a subpart of NCLB (2002), is focused on assisting states to ensure every child can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade. Reading First focused on implementation of instructional practices, materials, assessments, and professional development in best instructional practices (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB provided a focus on scientifically based research practices to enhance student's reading abilities (NCLB, 2002). School districts must focus on the five key areas of reading instruction, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, in order to provide a comprehensive approach to reading instruction (NCLB, 2002). Implementation of the five key areas of reading instruction increases student achievement in Communication Arts (NCLB, 2002).

According to the NCLB (2002) Act, states must provide evidence annually on the extent to which the number of students reading at or above grade level was significantly increased. Accountability for school districts is significantly increased by the NCLB (2002) Act. If a state education agency does not increase reading achievement significantly, over a three-year period, the secretary of education may withhold all or part of the funds available or take other actions against the state (NCLB, 2002).

Professional development for teachers to increase knowledge about scientifically based best practices in instruction was a part of the Reading First initiative (NCLB, 2002). Through quality professional development, teachers acquire skills to effectively screen, identify and surmount reading barriers for students (NCLB, 2002).

The work of Fountas and Pinnell (2001) centered on literacy for students in grades three through six. Reading and writing are interconnected and to separate the two would interfere with the goal of literacy, to construct meaning of text from and through text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The span of literacy development for elementary aged students is amazing; they enter with limited knowledge of letters and sounds and progress to a deep level of understanding of text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Students' experiences and background knowledge are key components as the bridge to understanding literature at almost any level is developed by sixth grade (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

In order for students to continue to progress in reading, teachers must know individual students' levels, understand the full continuum of learning, and provide support at the individual students' level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Students need time, appropriate resources, and teachers with a knowledge of scientifically based reading and writing instruction in order to continue their progress toward being literate (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The more students read a variety of genres, the more proficient readers the students become (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Extended periods of reading and writing must be provided every day in order for students to find success (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Time for additional support during the day, every day, is critical for remediation of students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Obtaining the meaning of text with a thorough understanding when reading and writing is known as literacy (Apthrop et al., 2001). Literacy encompasses the ability to follow directions, to synthesize information, to write complete sentences, and to communicate effectively (Apthrop et al., 2001). Reading and writing are reciprocal processes (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). When students become more advanced in reading

skills, writing skills advance as well (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Students in grade three through six, who have experienced extensive and a variety of writing opportunities, see themselves as writers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). As student's progress through the writing process, editing and publishing work, the students have explored a variety of topics and expanded the knowledge and skills acquired (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was formed and a report was submitted in 1999 to reflect the findings on reading instruction by the panel comprised of 14 scientists who were experts in reading along with parents (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development [NICHD], 2000; Shanahan, 2006). The NRP is the foundation upon which reading practices have been formed in the classroom over the past forty years (NICHD, 2000). The NRP established instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary as the pillars of scientific research best practices for instruction (NICHD, 2000; Sedita, 2001; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Phonemic awareness is the ability to examine and manipulate phonemes in spoken words (NICHD, 2000). Correlational studies have indicated phonemic awareness and knowledge of letters as the two best predictors of students' success in the first two years of education (NICHD, 2000). Teaching students to manipulate phonemes in words resulted in high impacts in all literacy domains, spelling, reading words, as well as comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness has a positive result in word recognition and comprehension for students learning to read (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

The goal of phonics instruction is to assist students in learning and applying the use of the alphabet system to read and spell words (NICHD, 2000). While knowledge of

the alphabet is not helpful when decoding irregularly spelled words, the knowledge does assist readers in recalling the words (NICHD, 2000). In order for students to read fluently and with comprehension of the text, students must be able to identify words involuntarily and decode unknown words (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Phonics instruction teaches students letter-sound relationships and are carried forward in young readers and writers to employ developmental spelling by using these skills (NICHD, 2000).

Fluency in reading is the ability to read accurately, quickly, and with ease (NICHD, 2000). Through extended practice with text students acquire the ability to be fluent readers (NICHD, 2000). The NRP study indicated one major difference between poor readers and good readers is the disparity in the magnitude of time spent reading (NICHD, 2000). Students who do not read with fluency develop a lack of motivation to read and students' comprehension is negatively impacted (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

The ability to recognize letter-sound relationships is only relevant if the word is present in the students' oral vocabulary (NICHD, 2000). Vocabulary plays an important part in a students' ability to read (NICHD, 2000). Important to note is that not all vocabulary can be taught in direct and formal instruction, rather vocabulary is also obtained through incidental and indirect ways (NICHD, 2000; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

Students who comprehend material read have the ability to understand text read, construct memory and meaning of text, and apply understanding of text (NICHD, 2000). Students use background knowledge when reading text in order to apply comprehension of the text (NICHD, 2000). Through constructing meaning from text students are able to

apply knowledge of the meanings and communicate with others the information read (NICHD, 2000). Therefore, "effective literacy programs foster active, responsible learning" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 3). Literacy programs that are effective allow students to search for information, contribute opinions, and take stances (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The most effective system in increasing students' literacy is through direct and explicit teaching of comprehension (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Reading and writing are the primary academic skills necessary to be successful in today's society. According to the National Governors Association, 2005, almost 40% of high school graduates in the United States lack the reading and writing skills necessary to be successful and students lack the skills that employers seek in order to be valuable employees (Sedita, 2011). In addition, nearly one-third of high school students graduating and enrolling in higher education require remediation classes prior to advanced education classes (Sedita, 2011). In 1993 Clay (as cited in Dorn, 1998) indicated that if children do not become successful readers by the end of third grade, achievement would fall behind classmates in later years.

It is vitally important that school personnel be held accountable for the success of students in reading achievement (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). Through NCLB parents, educators, administrators, policymakers, and the public are able to track the performance of every school in the nation (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). With the passage of NCLB in 2001, President Bush left no alternative for public education other than to raise expectations for student achievement in reading and mathematics. The problem to be researched in this study is how do schools provide success in reading for all students?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine current best practices in schools with high student achievement in Communication Arts and instructional practices, professional development, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts. Throughout this study, common characteristics of programs likely to make a difference in the reading achievement of elementary students were examined.

It is the quest of school administrators, teachers, and school board members in the United States for all students to be fluent readers by the end of third grade (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). Accountability in Communication Arts and mathematics for public education is now greater than ever with the implementation of NCLB in 2001. Four research questions were examined to determine the relationship between effective literacy program practices and Missouri public schools with students achieving high scores in reading.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What instructional practices are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?

2. What support systems are in place for students who fall below grade level in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where 90% of students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?

3. What curriculum and resources are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?

4. What literacy professional development practices for teachers are in place in Missouri public schools with students who are achieving at or above grade level in reading at the third through eighth grade levels?

Definitions of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Benchmark assessments. Benchmark assessments are assessments administered periodically throughout the school year, at specified times during a curriculum sequence, to evaluate students' knowledge and skills relative to an explicit set of longer-term learning goals. The purpose, intended users, and uses of the instruments, drive the design and choice of benchmark assessments. Benchmark assessment can inform policy, instructional planning, and decision-making at the classroom, school and/or district levels (Herman, Osmundson, & Dietel, 2010).

Elementary classroom. An elementary classroom for the purpose of this study is at the fourth through sixth grade levels.

Fluency. Fluency is defined as "freedom from word identification problems that might hinder comprehension" (NICHD, 2000, p. 3).

Guided Reading Plus (GRP). Guided reading plus is an intervention model used for struggling students who are reading at the emergent to transitional level and need additional support (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

Middle school classroom. A middle school classroom for the purpose of this study is at the seventh through eighth grade levels. For the purpose of this study, the term, intermediate schools, are exchangeable with middle schools.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The MAP is an annual assessment required by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) (2013) for all public schools to administer to students in grades three through ten. Student progress is monitored and academic goals are set by MODESE for accreditation purposes.

Missouri Learning Standards. The Missouri Learning Standards define the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in college, other postsecondary training and careers. The standards include the Common Core State Standards, a set of academic expectations for English language arts and mathematics (MODESE, 2013).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This act was passed in 2001, by President George W. Bush with the focus to increase academic achievement for students in reading and mathematics (NCLB, 2001).

Onset. An onset is a part of spoken language that is smaller than a syllable but larger than a phoneme. The onset is the initial consonant sound in a syllable (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2008).

Phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words and understand the sounds of spoken language work together to make words (Smith-Burke et al., 2003).

Phonics. Phonics is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as the predictable relationship between phonemes-the sounds of spoken language and graphemes-the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language (Smith-Burke et al., 2003).

Primary classroom. A primary classroom for the purpose of this study is at the kindergarten through third grade level.

Reading recovery. Reading recovery is a highly effective, one teacher to one student short-term plan of intervention for the lowest achieving students in first grade (Smith-Burke et al., 2003).

Response-to-Intervention. Response-to-Intervention (RtI) is a multi-tiered approach to the early identification of students with learning or behavior deficits. RtI begins at the classroom level with high-quality instruction and assessments. Students who are struggling are provided with additional time and support dependent on the individual students' needs (Program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2011).

Rime. A rime is a part of spoken language that is smaller than a syllable but larger than a phoneme. A rime is the vowel and everything that follows it in a word (Armbruster et al., 2008).

Running record. A running record is a reading assessment used by teachers to assess a students' progress toward reaching a reading goal and the students' response to intervention (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Running records are taken at least once a week during one-on-one conferences and assess the student's ability to read the previous day's guided reading book (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). At designated times (usually every 4-6 weeks) a teacher takes a running record on unfamiliar text to determine a student's independent reading level (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

Writer's workshop. Writing Process Workshop is an instructional model that views writing as an ongoing process in which students follow a given set of procedures for planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing the students' writing. It allows

students to be at various stages of the writing process at one time. Collaboration with peers and teacher is inherent in this model. Process writing focuses primarily on what children want to communicate. Student choice is important. (Dorn & Soffos, 2001a)

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Sample demographics. This study is limited to students in the third grade through eighth grade in the state of Missouri. Furthermore, secondary data review of Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) indices was limited to a two-year period, 2010 and 2011. MAP indices in Communication Arts for grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were collected from the MODESE (2013). In addition, surveys were distributed to a limited number of school district personnel and principals in Missouri public school districts where students scored in the top 10% of all Missouri public schools in third grade through eighth grade Communication Arts over a two year period, 2010 and 2011. One hundred six schools received a survey to complete in order to collect data for the study. In addition, a limited number of school districts in the state of Missouri were surveyed to determine best practices of instruction and effects on student achievement. This study was also limited to the return rate of the survey. Of the 106 schools surveyed, 21 surveys were returned. The survey was distributed online on three different occasions, over a one month period, in an attempt to collect responses from the highest possible number of respondents.

This study did not include other factors affecting student achievement which may include, but are not limited to, class size, teacher experience, socio-economic status of the school district population, ethnicity of the students in the school district, or percentage of

students with disabilities. These factors could contribute to the success or failure of the students in a school and therefore may have limited the reliability of the overall study.

Instrument. The survey instrument used was created by the researcher. The question reliability instrument was a limitation.

The following assumption was accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

Summary

Introduced in Chapter One was the background and conceptual framework of the study. The purpose of the study was driven not only by the additional pressures of NCLB, but also the urgency to provide reading instruction and intervention that meets the needs of all students so every student is a proficient reader at the end of third grade.

Some teachers need guidance on choosing research based best practices that impact student learning in reading. The conceptual framework of the study stemmed from the research model formulated in 2000, the NRP study (NICHD, 2000). The statement of the problem, significance of the study, and research questions were also presented in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two of this study, a review of literature included background information and common beliefs about literacy development. Basic reading frameworks were outlined in this section to include work from Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, Dorn and Soffos, 2001, as well as the New Standards Primary Committee. Early and lasting research indicated that there are five practices necessary to strengthen students reading abilities in the primary grades including work with phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Student's comprehension,

vocabulary knowledge, and memory of text are increased with phonemic awareness (NICHD, 2000). Students who have strong phonics instruction increase reading comprehension at the kindergarten and first grade levels (NICHD, 2000). Students at the third grade level are typically fluent readers, reading for meaning with a reduced focus on decoding (Johnson, 1999).

The research on vocabulary indicates that students must first know the meanings of the words read in context before comprehension occurs (Sedita, 2011). Further, students learn new vocabulary through real-life experiences as well as through direct instruction from the teacher (Sedita, 2008). Finally, comprehension occurs when the reader gathers information from the text and draws on prior knowledge to draw conclusions (Sedita, 2008). These five areas must be incorporated in the curriculum and instruction in Communication Arts in order for students to learn to read successfully (Sedita, 2008).

Within Chapter Three, the research design and methodology of the study were described. Chapter Three includes information regarding the population and sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures. In Chapter Five, an overview of the study, findings related to the literature, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies were discussed.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

On the first day of kindergarten, students begin developing as readers; this has a significant impact on the learners as progression occurs through the educational career of the child (Slavin, Lake, Chambers, Cheung, & Davis, 2010). Students who find success in becoming fluent, purposeful, and joyful readers are not guaranteed success in school, but are well on the way to success (Slavin et al., 2010). The National Reading Panel (NRP), (as cited in Slavin et al., 2010) stated that an emphasis in beginning reading programs should include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It is important to note that while phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are important neither stand alone as an instructional method, (Garrett as stated in Slavin et al., 2010).

Other factors, including teaching methods, are also important considerations when analyzing children's reading progress (Slavin et al., 2010). Teachers must gain a complete knowledge of language structure and be able to explain those theories to the students (Carroll, 2010). Teachers must have the knowledge and skills to transform learning for the students (Carroll, 2010). A master teacher is able to apply knowledge of phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and text structure for the students (Carroll, 2010). In 1982 the Correlates of Effective Schools publication was written and outlined five practices that lead to effective schools (Lezotte, 2012). In 1982, Edmonds declared, in the first formally identified Correlates of Effective Schools, that all effective schools exhibited:

- the leadership of the principal notable for substantial attention to the quality of instruction;

- a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus;

- an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning;

- teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery; and

- the use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation. (Lezotte, 2012, para. 5)

Since the first set of Effective Correlates were written, research has continued and much has been learned about the effectiveness of high achieving schools (Lezotte, 2012). A new set of Correlates has been written to outline effective school practices:

- instructional leadership;

- clear and focused mission;

- safe and orderly environment;

- climate of high expectations;

- frequent monitoring of student progress;

- positive home-school relations; and

- opportunity to learn and student time on task. (Lezotte, 2012, para. 9).

Moreover, "the extent to which the Correlates are in place in a school has a dramatic, positive effect on student achievement" (Lezotte, 2012, para. 13). The early definition of effective schools centered around the concept of equal education for all socio-economic classes (Lezotte, 2012). As the effective schools movement progressed educators became concerned not only about socio-economic classes of students, but focused on subsets such as gender, ethnicity, disabilities, and family structure (Lezotte, 2012).

Common Beliefs about Literacy Development

The development of the brain in the first three years of life is the most critical for language development and the most effective time for teaching pre-literacy skills including oral language (Carroll, 2010). A child's language develops as early as infancy through oral reading of books and stories (Carroll, 2010). When a children are exposed to books at an early age, the children learn about print from cover to cover and discover connections from text and pictures to the real world (Carroll, 2010). Allowing children access to a variety of books as the children grow and develop will expand the children's knowledge, vocabulary, and literacy skills, while preparing the children as future learners in school (Carroll, 2010).

When children practice reading and writing, better readers are developed and literacy skills are acquired providing life-long skills for success (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teachers are continually searching for the answer to how reading and writing should be taught in the classroom (Johnson, 2000). Although some teachers will decide how reading and writing should be taught based on prior knowledge and intuition, a systematic approach to monitoring displays results showing the greatest academic gains in literacy development for students (Johnson, 2000). Monitoring the school's literacy program has three basic components: collecting student achievement and reading and writing data on a regular basis, analyzing and evaluating the information gathered, and implementing plans to improve student achievement (Johnson, 2000).

When students read at home and become more fluent readers, reading skills are improved (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Likewise, when students are exposed to meaningful

writing experiences, writers are formed (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Children who are read to at home develop background knowledge about a variety of topics and vocabulary is enriched (Johnson, 1999). Parents reading to their children at home leads to higher comprehension of text and reading strategies as students develop as readers (Johnson, 1999). Children whose parents did not read to them at home will likely catch up on the language and pre-literacy skills missed while in kindergarten (Carroll, 2010). In 1999 the New Standards Primary Committee suggested the following framework for each primary grade level as a guideline for reading:

- kindergarten students should read and reread, independently or with another person, two to four familiar books each day at school and at home;

- first grade students should read independently or with assistance four or more books each day and hear two to four books read aloud each day;

- second grade students should read one or two short books or long chapters each day. In addition, students should listen and discuss one piece of literature that is longer and more difficult than the independent reading level assigned to the student; and

- third grade students should read 30 chapter books per year and listen to and discuss at least one chapter read aloud each day. (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b, p. 23)

Reading and writing require students to apply perceptual and cognitive strategies sharing common relationships in written language (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). As children progress and advance in one of these areas, the other area will progress as well (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). In the primary grades, incorporating writing into the Communication Arts

time allows students to apply knowledge of phonetic understanding (Mahaffey-Sigmon, 2001). Emergent writers use a process known as encoding whereby students make a connection of the letters and sounds and apply those to writing samples (Mahaffey-Sigmon, 2001). In this phase of writing, teachers do not tell students how to spell words, so that it is the student's understanding of phonics, not the teacher's (Mahaffey-Sigmon, 2001). Students in upper grades expand this phase of writing by using resources such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and rhyming dictionaries to assist in learning. Students become more advanced and complex writers by applying rules of grammar, mechanics, usage, the writing process, audience, and purpose (Mahaffey-Sigmon, 2001).

All new learning is based on prior knowledge (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). In 1966, Clay introduced the term emergent literacy to describe the actions of preschool aged children when students use books and writing materials to replicate reading and writing (Johnson, 1999). Since that time, extensive research has been conducted to determine literacy development begins long before children begin formal schooling (Johnson, 1999). Children build language capacity through reading books, playing naming games, and by the caregiver talking to the child about the world in which the child lives (Carroll, 2010). Prior knowledge allows children to make sense of new learning (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Children are then able to build connections, text to text, text to self, and text to real world and to build new knowledge (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teachers must be good observers of children's literacy and provide literature to students that build opportunities to activate prior knowledge and to apply it to new learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Building connections for students between literature and the students' prior knowledge builds bridges of learning for the students (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). When teachers know the students well, teachers are able to share literature that relates to the students' prior knowledge in the real world to build text to self-connections (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). While making strong connections to the text, children gain insights into the characters, problems, and events of the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Students can improve comprehension of text through building text to text connections (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Harvey & Goudvis (2007) suggested some story elements teachers might use to guide students to discovery of text to text elements:

- comparison of characters' personalities and actions;

- comparison of events in a story and story plots;

- comparison of story themes or lessons presented in stories;

- identification of common writing styles, or perspectives in the work of a single author; and

- comparison of different versions of familiar stories.

Teaching children to read for new information when reading nonfiction text is important for acquiring new academic knowledge (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Students must learn to slow down and notice new information as nonfiction material is read (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). While reading new information in nonfiction text, teaching students to use sticky notes to jot information about new or interesting facts is one strategy to improve comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Educators must teach students to merge the students thinking with new information in the text, pause, and to react to the information being read (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Harvey and Goudvis (2007) determined children make text to world connections as text is read. That is to say, as children read new literature, teachers should teach children to make connections to social studies or science concepts (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). When students are given the opportunity to connect with the text and share with other students, learning takes place (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Students begin to move from emergent readers to conventional readers once formal schooling begins (Johnson, 1999). It is important to note that the stages from emergent literacy to conventional literacy are not distinct stages of development, yet a continuum of learning for each individual child (Johnson, 1999). Many researchers and educators use the terms early reader, transitional reader and fluent reader when referring to the stages of reading development growth (Johnson, 1999). When children are beginning readers many opportunities to learn about print should be offered (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Through literacy activities children learn to use pictures as cues and make text predictions (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Children begin to notice print, letter, and word formations, as well as book concepts (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Literacy activities allow children begin to play with words and develop language from the text (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). These literacy experiences scaffold development for young readers (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b).

Students need to hear literature read aloud by teachers, parents, or others (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Through read-aloud literacy, students acquire fluency in reading and hear expressive reading (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Students understand literature at a higher level than at an independent reading level and are able to listen to clues that signal important events, and develop a richer vocabulary (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b).

Students in rich literature classrooms have the opportunity to participate in book discussions and share writing developed independently with others (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). During book discussions children learn to use language to express thoughts and to communicate the intent of the author (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Students learn to listen to different perspectives of other students and present evidence supporting the child's own views (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Students apply the comprehension skills learned in class during book discussions to summarize, compare, contrast, reflect and build connections to the literature (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Likewise, the sharing of one's own writing builds these same skills and demonstrates to students the value of language (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b).

Reading is meaning-making and problem-solving (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Children must learn to apply problem-solving strategies that are guided by desire to gain meaning from the text (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). As children become good readers the information is synthesized quickly while read, based on smooth integration of visual, syntactic, and semantic cues from the text (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). When children are allowed to problem solve through experiencing literature, students learn to organize a range of literature elements including concept knowledge, visual information, language patterns, meaning cues, text structures, and author's purpose (Clay, 1998).

In the primary grades a well-balanced literacy program should have a well-designed phonics program, promoting knowledge of letters, sounds, words and phonological units (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). A well-designed kindergarten program should develop an awareness of sounds and phonological awareness where students should acquire some letter and sound knowledge (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Further, in first

grade, students should refine the knowledge of letters and sounds and acquire strategies for word recognition based on spelling patterns. Children should practice both reading and writing in daily activities (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b).

Writing daily provides students with the opportunity to put ideas into sentences and express thoughts in writing (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Children learn how to edit and revise work samples and use resources for checking to present the completed work for a public audience (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Daily writing by students in conjunction with reading increases reading achievement for students (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b).

Early and Lasting Research

In 1997, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), consulting with the Secretary of Education, to establish a panel which would gather research-based knowledge, including how to teach children to read (NICHD, 2000). From this national panel, practices were identified demonstrating positive gains in reading development for young readers including instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NICHD, 2000). The NRP (2000) became the foundation for literacy instruction over the next ten years. There are five areas to be addressed when successfully teaching children to read: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Teachers must continually focus on research and effective strategies in order to develop competent readers (Taylor, 2008). Students must develop skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension in order to become competent readers (Taylor, 2008).

Phonemic awareness. The National Reading Panel report indicated that correlational studies identified phonemic awareness and knowledge of letters are the two highest predictors of a student's success in reading during the first two years of school (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness and knowledge of letters are the two greatest school predictors indicating how well children will learn to read in the first two years of formal school (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes in the spoken word (NICHD, 2000). Phonemes are the smallest unit of the spoken language (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness, the understanding that the sounds of the spoken language work together to make words, is different than phonics, the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between the sounds and the written symbol that represents that sound (Sedita, 2008).

> With phonemic awareness being a strong predictor of success in reading in a child's first two years of school, the NRP chose phonemic awareness as a focus of study and sought to answer questions such as: Is phonemic awareness effective in helping students learn to read? Which children benefit from phonemic awareness instruction and why do those students benefit? (NICHD, 2000, p. 2-1)

After meta-analysis was conducted in the NRP study, findings revealed the effects of phonemic awareness instruction produced positive effects on both oral reading of the words and pseudo word reading, indicating it helps children decode unfamiliar words as well as remember how to read familiar words (NICHD, 2000). In addition, the NRP study maintained phonemic awareness helped all students learn to read, including students who were disadvantaged in socio-economic status, students with disabilities, and students of all ethnicities (NICHD, 2000).

Kindergarten and first grade students benefit from phonemic awareness and phonics instruction (Taylor, 2008). The benefit of phonemic awareness instruction for students lasts well beyond word recognition to pseudo word reading, indicating help for students in decoding unfamiliar words and recalling familiar words (NICHD, 2000). In addition, results of the meta-analysis study showed advocated phonemic awareness boosts reading comprehension to a smaller degree than that of word recall (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness increases students' comprehension, vocabulary, world knowledge, and memory of text (NICHD, 2000). Students who have phonemic awareness skills are more likely to have an easier time learning to read than those students who do not (Sedita, 2008).

Phonemic awareness instruction may be most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes with letters, one or two phonemes at a time (NICHD, 2000). Students learn best when instructed in small groups with teaching provided by the teacher at the students' instructional level (NICHD, 2000). During small group instruction, teachers are encouraged to assist students in application of skills toward phoneme development applied to reading and writing tasks (NICHD, 2000). A study by Share, Jorm, Maclean, and Matthews (1984), (as cited in NICHD, 2000), provided evidence phonemic awareness and letter knowledge at the beginning of kindergarten are a strong predictor of reading success by the end of kindergarten and first grade.

It is important to note that phonemic awareness does not constitute a complete reading program (NICHD, 2000). It is, however, a foundational piece that contributes to the effectiveness of a complete reading and writing program (NICHD, 2000). In studies conducted over the past ten years, topics including the five pillars of literacy were

analyzed to determine the effects on reading development (Cassidy, Montalvo-Valdez, & Garrett, 2011). Studies on phonemic awareness conducted by the NRP acknowledges only 18 hours of instruction, total, for children specifically in phonemic awareness (Cassidy et al., 2011). The pillar of reading known as phonemic awareness is no longer considered the best practice in teaching reading because it has become a part of the total reading program, not taught in isolation (Cassidy et al., 2011). Phonemic awareness is best utilized in kindergarten but may continue through second grade with activities, such as:

- identifying the individual sounds in a word;

- recognizing the same sounds in different words;

- listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and then combining the sounds in order to form a word;

- breaking a word into its separate sounds saying each sound as the student taps out or counts it;

- recognizing the word that remains when a sound is removed;

- making a new word by adding a sound to an existing word;

- substituting one sound for another to make a new word; and

- recognizing the word in a set of words that has the 'odd' sound. (Sedita, 2008, para 9)

Phonemic awareness improves a student's fluency when reading text as well as comprehension of text (Sedita, 2008). Adolescent readers must be able to decode words and read fluently in order to comprehend the material read (Sedita, 2011). Adolescent students with strong phonemic awareness use the knowledge of letters and sounds to

pronounce unknown words and identify words quickly, increasing fluency and comprehension as text is read (National Institute for Literacy, 2000). The ability to accurately and quickly recall words enables a child to have improved understanding of the text (Sedita, 2008).

Teachers need not devote a significant amount of whole group instruction time to phonemic awareness, a total of 20 hours is sufficient for a complete program (Armbruster et al., 2008). Students will have varying abilities in phonemic awareness. Therefore, a teacher must assess individual students' phonemic awareness through assessment and provide instruction in small group instruction models to meet the students' needs (Armbruster et al., 2008). Small group instruction for phonemic awareness is most effective, as students learn from hearing peers (Armbruster et al., 2008). Remediation of poor phonemic awareness may include a more advanced instruction such as segmenting, blending, deletion/addition, or substitution (Armbruster et al., 2008).

Phonics instruction. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are setting the expectation for reading at a higher level with more challenging texts for students in grades two through 12 (International Reading Association, n.d.). However, more challenging texts for students in grades kindergarten and first do not apply because the focus is on decoding words and word recognition (International Reading Association, n.d.). Beginning readers must learn the alphabetic system, that is, letter-sound correspondence and spelling patterns, and the knowledge of application of such (NRP, 2000). According to Armbruster et al., 2008, "Phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language" (p. 11).

Phonics instruction is designed for beginning readers in the primary grades and for children having difficulty in learning to read (NICHD, 2000). In the classroom systematic phonics instruction might be viewed through letter-by-letter decoding and decoding onset and rime (Taylor, 2008). Modeling decoding through oral reading has a lasting impact on students' reading (Taylor, 2008). A variety of instructional practices are effective when teaching phonics instruction in the classroom, including direct instruction of vocabulary words, pre-reading instruction with word identification, and expansion of vocabulary through rich dialogue and literature (Taylor, 2008). The knowledge of letter and phoneme correspondence is essential for assisting young readers in sounding out word segments and sounding out blends to decode unfamiliar words (NICHD, 2000).

According to findings in the NRP studies in 2000, support was found for the conclusion that systematic phonics instruction made larger impacts on children's reading than does alternative programs providing nonsystematic or no phonics instruction (NICHD, 2000). Phonics knowledge assists students in the ability to read words in isolation or connected text (NICHD, 2000). When children know letter-sound relationships a more accurate prediction of words from context may be made (NICHD, 2000). Knowledge of the alphabet system is a contributor in the success of children's ability to read words in isolation or connected text (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Phonics instruction is a systematic way for students to remember how to read words, and teaches predictable word patterns or irregularities in words so that students have an understanding of both (Sedita, 2008).

The NPR study also revealed phonics instruction, when taught in the beginning stages of reading readiness, is much more effective than phonics instruction introduced

after first grade (NICHD, 2000). Furthermore, systematic and explicit phonics instruction at the kindergarten or first grade level is the most effective means for understanding (Sedita, 2008). This implies that phonics instruction makes the most impact for students when instruction takes place before children learn to read independently (NICHD, 2000). In addition, the researchers in the NRP study discovered that systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than non-systematic or lack of phonics instruction in preventing reading difficulties among at-risk students and in helping to remediate difficulties with disabled students who are struggling with reading (NICHD, 2000). There is inconclusive evidence phonics instruction is effective in producing significant growth in low-achieving readers and further research is necessary to determine what constitutes adequate remedial instruction for low-achieving readers (NICHD, 2000).

Students who receive phonics instruction at the beginning reading level have increased levels of reading comprehension at the kindergarten and first grade levels (NICHD, 2000). At the kindergarten and first grade level, phonics instruction has a positive impact on spelling (NICHD, 2000). Phonics instruction is a strong predictor of students' ability to learn to read (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998). However, as students get older the effect of phonics on spelling is decreased (NICHD, 2000). Additionally, remembering how to spell irregular words is a recall memory, not a phonetic approach and develops over time (NICHD, 2000). Beginning readers should have a phonics program that promotes knowledge of letters, sounds, words, and phonological units (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Overall, phonics instruction contributed more than non-phonetic instruction to the success students found in the correct spelling of words (NICHD, 2000).

Phonics was an important pillar in the NPR (NICHD, 2000) and continued to be a strong emphasis in the research conducted over the next 10 years (Cassidy et al., 2010). When phonics is taught in a systematic approach using vowels and consonants and students use the letter-sound relationships learned during instruction, key findings have been identified:

- phonics improves word recognition and spelling for kindergarten and first grade students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds;

- phonics significantly improves reading comprehension; and

- phonics instruction is particularly useful in developing the reading skills of students who are having difficulty learning to read. (Sedita, 2008)

It is estimated that 10% of adolescent readers struggle with word identification skills (Sedita, 2011). Students who struggle with word identification due to lack of phonics skills are unable to develop fluency and comprehension of text at an appropriate level (Sedita, 2011). Phonics instruction for students is important for development of vocabulary growth and stronger comprehension (Sedita, 2011).

A systematic and explicit phonics instruction program is essential to advance the reading of students (Armbruster et al., 2008). A comprehensive phonics instruction program not only teaches letter-sound relationships, but provides opportunities for students to apply the knowledge (Armbruster et al., 2008). Students must be exposed to a variety of texts with significant text, allowing the students to decode by using the letter-sound relationships (Armbruster et al., 2008).

Fluency instruction. Individuals who read fluently read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (NICHD, 2000). Students who read with fluency are able to read

text silently and make sense of the text (Armbruster et al., 2008). Many consider fluency a necessary skill in becoming a skilled reader; however, it is often neglected in reading instruction in the classroom (NICHD, 2000). The National Institute for Literacy stated that a large- scale study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed 44% of fourth grade students were low in fluency (Armbruster et al., 2008). Students who struggle with fluency often find themselves reading slow, often repeating text several times to comprehend the material (Sedita, 2011). Two practices are identified in the NRP report (2000) that increase fluency in readers. The first practice is emphasizing repeated and monitored oral reading practice (NICHD, 2000). The second approach involves an increased amount of independent sustained silent reading time by readers (NICHD, 2000). Fluent readers group words together to read quickly and effortlessly in order to gain meaning of the text (Sedita, 2008). Fluency is crucial for reading comprehension (Sedita, 2008). Sedita (2011) suggested that modeling fluency by repeated oral reading to students, engaging students in guided oral reading, and partner reading will increase students' fluency.

One practice to improve fluency is guided repeated oral reading (Armbruster et al., 2008). Guided repeated oral reading substantially improves students' word recognition, speed, and accuracy while improving fluency (Armbruster et al., 2008). An analysis of this practice led researchers to the conclusion that the practice has a consistent and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension at a variety of grade levels (NICHD, 2000).

Furthermore, guided repeated oral reading has a positive effect on the reading ability of non-impaired readers, as well as students with reading difficulties through at

least the fourth grade (NICHD, 2000). Students who repeatedly read passages improve reading fluency, as well as overall reading achievement (Sedita, 2008).

The NRP identified instructional approaches to encourage repeated oral reading, which increased reading proficiency (NICHD, 2000). Round robin style teaching, where students read a short passage only one time provide very little evidence as an effective strategy to improve fluency (NICHD, 2000). However, the repeated reading of a short passage for a predetermined number of times or until a level of proficiency has been reached has been proven an effective technique in improving students' reading fluency (NICHD, 2000). Repeated oral reading instruction can be administered through a variety of strategies including student-adult reading (Sedita, 2008).

In student-adult reading the adult reads a passage first, then the student reads the same text with the adult providing support and encouragement (Sedita, 2008). In addition, repeated oral reading can be administered through a tape-assisted program (Sedita, 2008). In tape-assisted reading students follow the printed text, first with a finger following the passage as a voice reads the text aloud to the student (Sedita, 2008). Finally, partner reading is an effective practice for fluency instruction (Sedita, 2008). In partner reading the students take turns reading aloud to each other (Sedita, 2008). When pairing students with one strong reader and one weaker reader, the strong reader should read first to provide support for the other student (Sedita, 2008).

The NRP examined the impact silent reading without additional instruction and simply encouraging children to read (such as Sustained Silent Reading and Accelerated Reader) had on reading achievement (NICHD, 2000). According to the research findings, the studies yielded no positive relationship between encouraging reading and either the

amount of reading or improvement in reading achievement (NICHD, 2000). While encouraging students to read might give hope, it did not demonstrate a clear and convincing benefit for reading development (NICHD, 2000).

Students' reading fluency should be assessed often to assure progress is being made (Armbruster et al., 2008). Fluency may be assessed informally through the teacher listening to the students read. However, formal assessments of fluency should also be conducted to ensure students' are reading ninety words per minute or greater (Armbruster et al., 2008). Timed measures, Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs), miscue analysis, and running records are all methods for assessing fluency rates (Armbruster et al., 2008).

Vocabulary. Vocabulary plays an essential role in the development of strong readers (Sedita, 2008). Readers must know what the words mean in order to comprehend the text read (Sedita, 2008). Vocabulary development is vitally important for students, as students develop as readers, because of the vast number of words students must acquire each year in order to comprehend grade-level text (Sedita, 2011). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, English learners, as well as struggling readers, have a strong need for vocabulary instruction (International Reading Instruction, n.d.). In order for students to be successful in other content areas a strong vocabulary is essential (International Reading Association, n.d.). Students must build academic vocabulary at a steady pace throughout the educational career in order to be successful (Sedita, 2011). There is a wide variety of estimates of the number of vocabulary words a student must acquire each year ranging from 2,000 to 3,500 after grade three (Sedita, 2011).

It is important to note students learn the meaning of new words through indirect instruction, such as everyday experiences as well as through direct instruction (Sedita,

2008). In direct instruction teachers identify and support students' learning of content related vocabulary and phrases (International Reading Association, n.d.). Students comprehend better when vocabulary words are taken directly from the text the students are reading (Sedita, 2011).

Text comprehension. Comprehension is the ability to understand text (Sedita, 2008). Readers gain meaning from the text based on the information available combined with prior knowledge (Sedita, 2008). When considering the expectations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for comprehension, the learning outcomes do not implicitly describe what the student must demonstrate (International Reading Association, n.d.). The CCSS place a significant amount of emphasis on increasingly more complex text that is both narrative and informational in comprehension and text structure (Sedita, 2012). Comprehension, according to the CCSS, is most closely described as being able to independently read with critical analysis to determine the meaning of text, infer the meaning of text, and analyze text structure to determine the text's meaning and tone, and evaluate the text to draw conclusions (International Reading Association, n.d.).

It is evident through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in looking at fourth grade scores from 1992 to 2007, that students are making steady progress in reading comprehension (Murphy, Soter, Wilkinson, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009). According to the data collected by NAEP, students in the fourth grade in 2007 were reading and comprehending at or above the Basic level on the assessment (Murphy et al., 2009). Students characterized as Basic on the NAEP assessment have skills in understanding the overall meaning of grade-level appropriate text, making inferences,

and building connection to self and to other text (Murphy et al., 2009). By the eighth grade nearly 70% of the students reach this level of achievement (Murphy et al., 2009). It is concerning, however, that only 25% of fourth graders and 27% of eighth graders scored at the Proficient level on the NAEP assessment in 2007 (Murphy et al., 2009). The Proficient level of assessment indicates that students have a strong understanding of the text (Murphy et al., 2009).

To assist students in maximizing comprehension of text, teachers should gradually release independence and responsibility to the reader, meaning the teacher first models, then provides guidance, and then support during independent work (International Reading Association, n.d.). Comprehension can be improved through the use of six strategies:

- Monitoring comprehension. Students monitor comprehension and know when to correct errors in reading. Students are taught strategies to correct reading problems.

- Using graphic and semantic organizers. Graphic and semantic organizers help the reader focus on the key points of the text and relate those concepts to other concepts.

- Answering questions. When teachers pose the questions for text it gives students a purpose for reading and helps the reader be more actively involved in reading.

- Generating questions. When students generate the questions from the text students become more active readers and think through the text at a higher level.

- Recognizing story structure. Using story structure as a strategy allows the reader to organize the text into a plot using categories of content such as setting, initiating events, attempts, and outcomes.

- Summarizing. The reader must determine the most important elements of the text when summarizing to condense the information. (Sedita, 2008)

The National Reading Panel, 2000, identified the following reading strategies as being most effective for improving comprehension:

- Comprehension monitoring – Readers approach text with a sense of purpose and adjust how reading accordingly;

- Use of graphic organizers (including story maps) – Readers create or complete graphic or spatial representations of the topics and main ideas in text;

- Question answering and generation – Readers ask and answer questions before, during, and after reading. Students learn to consider what type of question is being asked according to a framework and to anticipate test questions that may be asked;

- Summarization – Readers select and paraphrase the main ideas of expository text and integrate those ideas into a brief paragraph or several paragraphs that capture the most important propositions or ideas in the reading;

- Cooperative learning – Students learn strategies together through peer interaction, dialogue with each other, and with the teacher in the whole-group activities. (Sedita, 2011, p.19)

Literacy skills must be integrated into every core content area using subject-specific reading materials in order to improve comprehension skills (Keys to Literacy,

2012). In order for students at the middle and high school levels to be successful, all teachers must integrate literacy goals since students spend most instructional time in content area classes and must learn to read all different types of genres (Torgesen et al., 2007). Using text structure as a blueprint that guides students to the overall design of the text is one strategy that is effective for students when comprehending material (Key to Literacy, 2012). Utilizing text structure allows students to learn how to determine the broader structure of the texts being read (Keys to Literacy, 2012).

Instructional Programs and Practices

There is no single research program or practice guaranteed to teach students to read (International Reading Association, 2012b). The 2001National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform study stated, "No models had uniformly positive effects, and no models had uniformly negative or neutral effects. In other words, no model worked in every case and every situation" (International Reading Association, 2012b, para. 10). Key elements of successful school-wide reading programs include teachers collaborating to develop the school-wide program (Taylor, 2008). Collaboration in effective schools includes a) meetings with classroom teachers and resource teachers, b) a daily Communication Arts time that is not interrupted during instruction c) a school-wide assessment plan where assessment is used to plan and deliver instruction for students, and d) established interventions are in place for students who are not meeting the academic demands (Taylor, 2008).

In order for student achievement to increase, reading and writing must be taught in core content areas besides language arts, known as disciplinary literacy (International Reading Association, n.d.). The CCSS requires disciplinary literacy, higher order

thinking, problem solving, and communication be taught in grades six through 12 (International Reading Association, n.d.). Outside factors, such as the diversity of student needs, teaching styles, and classroom conditions must be considered when searching for program implementation on a wide-scale (International Reading Association, 2012b).

In order to meet the standards for the CCSS, complex text must be considered for reading instruction in grades two through 12 (International Reading Association, n.d.). In kindergarten and first grade the foundation for reading is established and students must learn to decode words, common sight words, and predictable language, rather than complex text (International Reading Association, n.d.). However, complex text rich in vocabulary should be read aloud to beginning readers in order to support language development and emerging comprehension skills (International Reading Association, n.d.).

More advanced readers in grades two through 12 build reading skills through a well-planned mapping of genres and complexity levels throughout the year (International Reading Association, n.d.). It is important for readers to read texts that are difficult to read fluently and comprehend (International Reading Association, n.d.). Likewise, it is important for teachers to support learners during this time of reading complex, difficult texts by providing significantly greater amounts of support and instructional scaffolding (International Reading Association, 2002).

The research of implementation of best practices in literacy for first, second and third grade students, the Arkansas Literacy Model, first began in 1998 by Dr. Linda Dorn and Dr. Carol Soffos (Dorn et al., 1998). Twenty-one Arkansas schools revealed that students in first, second, and third grades scored 20% or higher over years past using the

Partnership in Comprehensive Literacy Model (PCL), formerly known as the Arkansas Literacy Model (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). A study by Dorn during the 2001 school year, revealed 80% of 988 students were exceeding, meeting, or approaching the standard in reading using the PCL Model (Dorn, Soffos, & Copes, 2002). These same students, at the end of second grade, continued to make gains and 87% were at the proficient level in reading levels (Dorn, Soffos, & Copes, 2002).

Teachers must recognize students entering the classroom are doing so at varying levels (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Some will enter behind the other students, whereas other students will enter at levels beyond grade level expectations, and yet others will fit into the school's definition of being at the expected level (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Traditionally, curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of the average-performing student (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). All too often, educators have ignored the needs of the underachieving student or overachieving student in the classroom (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). It is necessary to design curriculum and instruction to meet these varying needs of students so that every student reaches his highest potential (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b).

Teachers must be knowledgeable about students' abilities to appropriately design appropriate literacy lessons in classrooms based on the strengths and needs of the learners in class (Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Teachers must possess knowledge of the literacy process, specifically the developmental changes that happen in reading and writing as students gain knowledge and skills in literacy. Dorn and Soffos (2001) suggested this implies assessment and instruction share a reciprocal relationship.

A literate environment for students should include one that has differentiated instruction in order to meet the individual needs of each learner (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

The reading curriculum must include whole group, small group, and individual instruction, as well as independent reading time (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). When student learning is associated in whole group, small group, and individual settings, there are opportunities for students to transfer knowledge to a different subjects and scaffold individual learning (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

During small group reading time, teachers select the most appropriate intervention to meet the student needs (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). During small group reading instruction the teacher works with students while other students read and write independently about what the literature being read (International Reading Association, 2012b). The intervention should be aligned with classroom instruction. Student progress is closely monitored by the teacher in small group instruction and includes progress made in whole group instruction. The fourth principle in the Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM) includes intervention teams that collaborate on student progress and make decisions based on data for continued improvement (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

One approach to instruction in the communication arts classroom is the workshop framework (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). The workshop framework can be applied in reading, writing, language, and content. The ultimate goal of the workshop approach is for students to be self-regulated learners, applying the strategies learned during instruction (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). The workshop approach includes four steps, whole-groups mini-lessons, small-groups guided reading lessons, one-to-one or small-group conferences, and whole-group sharing (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) concluded direct instruction in decoding and comprehension along with a balanced direct

instruction, guided instruction, and independent learning time will lead to an effective template for best literacy practices (International Reading Association, 2002).

During whole-group mini-lessons students are introduced to concepts based on the needs of the majority of the class (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). One effective literacy practice outlined by Gambrella and Mazzoni (1999) is to integrate a comprehensive word study/phonics program during the literacy block (International Reading Association, 2002). The teacher must introduce high quality literature and use multiple texts that link and build upon texts in order to have an effective literacy program in the classroom (International Reading Association, 2012b). After assessment, the teacher may need to pull a group of students aside for an additional mini-lesson for those students who did not master the concept (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Step two in the workshop is small-group guided reading lessons focused on small groups of students who need additional support in targeted areas (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). The teacher uses instructional materials at the students' instructional-level and meets with these small groups generally two to three times weekly. The lowest groups meet with the teacher daily (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

One-to-one conferencing with students achieves two goals for differentiating instruction to assist students (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). First, it allows teachers to assess students' learning individually and secondly, it provides the student with individual support for achieving the literacy goal (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). In general, one-to-one conferences last 3 minutes in length and the teacher meets with two to three students daily (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). For students who are struggling in reading, the conferences last five to seven minutes and are conducted two to three days per week (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

Independent practice is an essential component in the framework of developing self-regulated learners. During independent practice, students are given the opportunity to transfer knowledge and strategies acquired into real practice (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Finally, in the workshop approach, students are allowed closure by sharing new knowledge with peers (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

Support for Non-achieving Students

Without a doubt, if teachers remain in education long enough, teachers will encounter students who "fail" or "struggle" or are "at-risk" (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Students who are sometimes characterized with such labels are labeled because of inability to read, except in a rudimentary way, and students get lost in the traditional school settings (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). When 15% to 20% of students in a school are struggling in literacy, the classroom program might be a problem (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). At the eighth grade level, in 2006, only 2% of the students scored at the Advanced level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Murphy et al., 2009).

One theory for poor student achievement is known as the "Matthew effect" (Carroll, 2010). The "Matthew effect" implies students who attend low-income schools and are failing to meet achievement expectations are more likely to have reading and or other academic problems (Carroll, 2010). For the purposes of this study. the "Matthew effect" applies in two ways. First, children who struggle with reading skills typically continue to fall further and further behind academically because practice with reading skills to perfect the skills is not accomplished (Carroll, 2010). Second, students' achievement is impacted by the achievement level of the students' of the other students in the school (Carroll, 2010).

Before interventions are implemented in a school, the common classroom practices and curriculum must be analyzed (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). In this way, "students gain knowledge from a variety of sources outside written text. Enriching the classroom with personal experiences so that students make connections outside the classroom helps them make connections between text and their personal lives" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 111).

Extra support is necessary for students who struggle to maintain grade level achievement (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Formative assessment is necessary to determine a student's current level of achievement in the classroom (International Reading Association, 2013). Formative assessment is the daily interaction between teachers and students to determine current levels and to provide feedback from the teacher to the student to increase the student's learning experience (International Reading Association, 2013). This type of "assessment is characterized by purpose, collaboration, its dynamic nature, descriptive feedback, and continuous improvement," as determined by the International Reading Association (2013, para. 2). Moreover:

- Formative assessment is purposeful. It provides information that can be used in setting learning goals and understanding how well those goals are being met.

- Formative assessment is collaborative. Both teachers and students play active roles in formative assessment.

- Formative assessment has a dynamic nature. It is an active, ongoing process that provides multiple insights into student learning. It occurs during teaching

and learning, is interwoven into lessons, and accommodates the nature of the lesson.

- Formative assessment provides descriptive feedback to teachers and students. Teachers use descriptive feedback to adjust planning and teaching. Students use feedback from teachers to improve learning.

- Formative assessment supports continuous improvement. Teachers and students use the descriptive feedback to make meaningful adjustments in teaching and learning. Formative assessment happens throughout the school day and the school year as teachers teach and students learn. (International Reading Association, 2013, para. 3)

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) offered principles based on research to support struggling readers and writers. It is important to identify what students know and are able to do and build upon those strengths, rather than focusing on students' weaknesses (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). When teachers focus on the strengths of the learners in the classroom, high expectations for all learners are achieved (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Students can be held to higher standards and when teachers believe all students can learn, achievement increases (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teachers should administer formative assessments and then use the assessment data to modify instruction and/or differentiate instruction for students, and formulate individual plans for students (International Reading Association, 2013).

Struggling students require the teacher to re-teach and re-teach material (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Re-teaching material in the classroom requires the teacher to engage the students in active learning in the classroom (Fountas &Pinnell, 2001). The

Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM) is a systematic approach to Response to Intervention (RtI) whereby teachers are the agents of change for literacy development (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). CIM schools, staff-embed professional development and focus on sustained improvement to change the culture of the school (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). To improve student achievement in CIM schools, structures must be created within the school for promoting teacher collaboration and comprehensive approaches to instruction (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). In 2009 and 2010, the state of Illinois conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of the PCL model and the effect on student achievement in reading (Poparad, 2011). All Illinois students in grades three through eight were administered an assessment and the comparison revealed substantial significance, a p-value of .0004, showing a positive impact on student achievement (Poparad, 2011).

Guided Reading Plus (GRP) intervention is designed for struggling students who are at the emergent to transitional level, but falling behind grade level peers in reading levels (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). GRP is very specific for students and follows a three-day lesson plan, scaffolding the learning of small groups of students (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). During day one, students participate in a preplanned word work activity (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Additionally, students on day one are oriented to a new book and read independently while the teacher observes 9Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Finally on the first day of instructional lesson plans, the teacher follows up with discussion questions and teaching points (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). On day two, the teacher takes a running record assessment on two students while the other students read independently easy or familiar texts (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Following the running records, the focus shifts to a critical writing component which includes four parts: the teacher poses a prompt to encourage

students to think analytically about the previous days text; the students discuss the responses given to the prompt and the teacher scaffolds the responses; the students write responses; and the teacher follows up the writing with a one-to-one writing conference with each student (Dorn & Soffos, 2012).

Reading recovery teachers have determined that students who are struggling with reading mastery have a difference rather than a disability, which implies that reading mastery can be improved with good teaching (Lyon, 2003). Leading authorities in reading instruction have stated that the key to remediation of reading problems is one-to-one intervention in the first grade (Lyon, 2003). When a child is hard to reach, he has often times learned to do something, which interferes with learning as a result of teaching practices (Lyon, 2003).

Reading recovery is a 12 to 20 week program focused on the lowest-achieving first grade students (Smith-Burke et al., 2003). The goal of reading recovery is to develop effective strategies for reading and writing so struggling students are on grade level and find success with reading instruction in the regular classroom (Smith-Burke et al., 2003). Reading recovery is a supplement to classroom instruction and should not replace instruction by the classroom teacher (Smith-Burke et al., 2003). In the Reading Recovery model, children are identified based on student achievement data (Clay, 2008). Students in Reading Recovery receive specialized instruction in diagnostic teaching (Clay, 2008). Key components to reading recovery are:

- instruction that is intensive, one-on-one, and daily for first grade children who are most at-risk of reading failure;

- a year-long professional development training program and continued

  professional development through which teachers learn proven, research

  based best-practice instructional strategies for implementation with students;

- research and evaluation to continually monitor student progress as well as

  analyze results, with support for teachers and schools; and

- a long-range plan of implementation to chart the course of continual

  improvement for full implementation and literacy for all students. (Smith-

  Burke et al., 2003)

Smith-Burke et al., (2003) referenced research by Juel and stated if a student is a poor reader at the end of first grade, that student will be highly likely to be a poor reader at the end of fourth grade. Juel also found that first grade students, who are average readers at the end of first grade, are average or above average readers at the end of the fourth grade (Smith-Burke et al., 2003). This evidence encourages educators to identify students in the first grade who are struggling in reading and provide immediate interventions for the students. Without purposeful, intensive, individual teaching, some students will remain behind grade level peers, even with effective classroom instruction or interventions (Smith-Burk et al., 2003).

During reading recovery, students are taught skills to learn to look at print and visually attend to the features of letters (Lyon, 2003). Reading Recovery, a scientifically based program, is designed to pledge that early reading students, struggling to learn to read, shape effective reading and writing skills (Lyon, 2003). Students selected for intervention using Reading Recovery have had one year of formal education and continue to fall behind peers (Clay, 2008). Children must learn to recognize letter formations, and

the visual discrimination skills of identifying these formations lead to children's ability to recognize how words work (Lyon, 2003).

Children begin to make connections between letters, sounds and letter names and use this information to work with the letters embedded in letter names (Lyon, 2003). A practice that assists students in mastering these skills is having students use magnetic letters to build and break words apart so that skills are learned to relate sounds to letter names (Lyon, 2003). Reading Recovery is designed to assist students in building knowledge through connections with prior knowledge and continue to develop independent reading skills (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Once students are able to recognize words, it is a successful practice to begin building knowledge linked to what the child already knows (Lyon, 2003). Through manipulation of letters, the brain can acquire new knowledge and build new words in memory (Lyon, 2003). A child can use eye and hand coordination to move letters from known words to new words, while the neural structures in the brain see, produce, and recall previously learned information (Lyon, 2003). Through positive experiences where children find success, students build strong connections between neurons in the brain to form positive memories that will be sustained in reading and writing in the future (Lyon, 2003).

Physiological evidence is present that suggests learning is strongly influenced by emotion, which plays an important role in the learning of children (Lyon, 2003). Through researching how the brain functions, indications show the stronger the emotion connected to an experience, the stronger that memory of the experience (Lyon, 2003).

Neurotransmitters in the brain signal the importance of the event and thus trigger the brain to retain information and increase retention of information (Lyon, 2003). Thus, it can be deducted that a positive emotion increases learning. Likewise, negative experiences, such as stress in the learning environment, cause blockages of learning and retention of information (Lyon, 2003). Teachers must be conscious of students' emotions especially when working with hard-to-reach students not to put students on the spot for fear of embarrassment or humiliation. The roles students' emotions can play in the learning process have strong implications for teaching and learning (Lyon, 2003).

Professional Development through Literacy Coaches

According to the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English, literacy coaches are performing a wide array of tasks in schools today (Bean & DeFord, 2009). The ultimate goal of the literacy coach is to affect change in teaching to improve the learning of students (Smith, 2009). Bean and DeFord (2009) outlined important information to consider when implementing and sustaining literacy coach positions. Information in the study by Bean and DeFord (2009) was obtained through gathering information from literacy coaches during interviews at various levels: elementary, middle, and high school.

In the beginning, literacy coaches must establish relationships within the building by getting to know the teachers (Smith, 2009). Researchers L'Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean (2010) stated collaborative relationships based on trust, confidentiality, and communication are keys to the success of literacy coaches (Revisiting the Research, 2011). To form relationships with teachers, coaches may hold individual meetings, speak at a faculty meeting, and distribute a flyer outlining the specific job responsibilities of the

literacy coach (Smith, 2009). In addition, coaches must sustain the initial relationship by providing opportunities for interaction and discussion with the teachers (Smith, 2009). It is important for the literacy coach to build trust with the teachers by listening carefully and maintaining confidentiality (Smith, 2009).

Once a level of trust is established, literacy coaches support teachers in planning, setting goals, developing classroom observations, and meeting individually (Smith, 2009). It is suggested the literacy coach begin with teachers who request the help (Smith, 2009). Through word of mouth teachers will become more trusting and also request assistance (Smith, 2009). It is important for literacy coaches to be positive and follow through with commitments when working with teachers (Smith, 2009). When teachers trust the coach enough to invite the coach into the classrooms or to ask for materials, the literacy coach will gain credibility by ensuring a timely arrival or providing the materials requested in a timely manner (Smith, 2009).

It is important for teachers to know the literacy coach is not an evaluator (Smith, 2009). The role of the literacy coach must be a supportive role rather than evaluative (Shanklin, 2006). Research continues to change instructional practices in education (Shanklin, 2006). Additionally, as new programs are introduced teachers need support and help learning the most effective ways to implement these programs (Shanklin, 2006). Finally, the student population is ever changing and teachers find themselves working with a diverse population of students (Shanklin, 2006). In this society, teachers need an intermediate facilitator to assist in providing effective instruction in the classroom, as stated by Shanklin (2006). The principal in the building must understand the literacy

coach may not compromise confidentiality and trust. By upholding confidentiality and trust, a positive impact on learning will be accomplished (Smith, 2009).

Literacy coaches must continue to search for information about reading and the instruction of students through continued professional development (Bean & DeFord, 2009). Also vital to the success of the literacy program in a school, literacy coaches must focus on extending learning of the teachers in the building through professional development (Bean & DeFord, 2009). When coaches continue professional development and conversations with teachers about literacy knowledge, understandings are built about common goals (Bean & DeFord, 2009).

It is also noted that good documentation is important to sustain a literacy program with a literacy coach (Bean & DeFord, 2009). Literacy coaches' time should be used in a way that benefits the students and learning of the staff so higher student achievement is gained (Bean & DeFord, 2009). Accountability of time is imperative when justifying the position to administration or the school board (Bean & DeFord, 2009).

In order for literacy coaches to have a positive impact on student achievement, it must first be determined if the coaching leads to changes in teachers instructional practices (Shanklin, 2006). One characteristic of effective literacy coaching is collaborative dialogue for all teachers, regardless of knowledge and experience (Shanklin, 2006). The literacy coach must find time to be available to all teachers in the school equally (Shanklin, 2006). An effective practice is to form cohorts of teachers, often those that have similar teaching assignments, so teachers in the school learn from one another (Shanklin, 2006). When cohorts are formed and facilitated by coaches, strong learning communities are formed where decisions are made collaboratively about

instruction and how to meet students' needs (Shanklin, 2006). This type of culture in a school honors teachers as decision-makers in the instructional process (Shanklin, 2006).

Another effective characteristic of a school that carefully plans literacy is to facilitate the development of a school vision about literacy that is site-based and linked to the district goals (Shanklin, 2006). The literacy coaches' job is to facilitate the development of a vision of literacy and then develop the structures that support the implementation of the goals to reach the vision (Shanklin, 2006). As a visionary, the literacy coach assists to answer questions and facilitate learning of both the teachers and administrators in the school (Shanklin, 2006).

A literacy coach in an effective school assists teachers in analysis of student learning (Shanklin, 2006). The literacy coach suggests assessments and assists teachers in a deep understanding of the assessment data to improve instruction (Shanklin, 2006). Finally, the coach instructs the teachers how to monitor the student's progress to make informed decisions and differentiate instruction as appropriate (Shanklin, 2006). Teachers in this situation learn to self-reflect on teaching strategies as well as the students' learning (Shanklin, 2006).

Ongoing, embedded professional learning increases teacher capacity and student achievement (Shanklin, 2006). The role of a literacy coach is to provide ongoing and embedded professional development for teachers through a variety of methods including working side-by-side during the school day (Shanklin, 2006). Literacy coaches lead professional discussion groups regarding best practice; study groups are generally done during planning periods (Shanklin, 2006). The literacy coach models instructional practices that are research based in the teachers' own classroom, while the teacher

observes (Shanklin, 2006). The literacy coach may teach in classrooms to allow teachers time to observe other teachers in the building (Shanklin, 2006).

The practice that has the most impact on student achievement in relation to literacy coaches is that of classroom observations (Shanklin, 2006). The literacy coach works with a designated group of teachers for a specified amount of time, generally 8 weeks, through study groups, modeling of lessons, and in-classroom coaching (Shanklin, 2006). In this model the coach would then move on to another group of teachers after that 8 week period, while staying in touch with the first group (Shanklin, 2006). At the middle or high school level it is important that the literacy or instructional coach understand the literary demands of each discipline in order to assist the teachers in becoming more proficient (Shanklin, 2006).

A four-year longitudinal study from 2004 to 2008 was conducted to study the effects on teaching and student learning and achievement (Literacy Collaborative, 2009). The study was conducted across the United States with forty percent of the student in poverty (Literacy Collaborative, 2009). The impact of literacy coaches on student learning increased by 16% in the first implementation year, 28% in the second year, and 32% in the third year (Literacy Collaborative, 2009).

Further, teacher expertise increased substantially and was predictive by the amount of time the literacy coach spent coaching the teacher (Literacy Collaborative, 2009). In addition, communication between teachers increased and the literacy coach became the central communicator in the building over the three-year period of time (Literacy Collaborative, 2009). Student achievement averaged increases of 18% in year one, 29% in year two, and 38% in year three (Literacy Collaborative, 2009).

Summary

Literacy development has a significant impact on culture and society as a whole (Sedita, 2011). The costs to the nation are astronomical, as much as $16 billion annually to businesses, universities, and under-prepared high school graduates, when factors, such as lost productivity and remedial costs are calculated (Greene, 2000). On average, college graduates earn 70% higher salaries than college graduate counterparts, and high school drop-outs are four times as likely as high school graduates to be unemployed (Sedita, 2011). The 2005 National Governors' Association calculated regardless of educational degrees, higher levels of literacy calculate into higher levels on the salary scale (Sedita, 2011).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has tracked students' reading achievement since the early years of 1970 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2012). The long-term trends for reading achievement for students in ages 9, 13, and 17 were published in The Nation's Report Card in 2012 in an effort to identify trends of student achievement (Nation's Report Card, 2012). Students ages 9 and 13 scored higher in 2012 than in 1971; however, 17 year olds did not show significant differences in achievement (Nation's Report Card, 2012). The urgency to improve literacy in the United States is upon us.

Some students are more successful readers because the student possesses the background knowledge to reason and strategies to problem solve (Dorn & Shubert, 2008). Children acquire life-long skills for success when practicing reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Some struggling readers might achieve correct response through luck and lack the knowledge of the skills necessary to duplicate the success a

second or third time (Dorn, 2008). If more than 20% of students in a subgroup are not successful in reading, the school should assess the curriculum (Dorn, 2008). The most important factor is to improve student achievement through highly effective instructional practices and research-based interventions (Dorn, 2008). When students struggle school administration must collect student achievement and reading and writing data regularly, analyze and evaluate the information gathered, and implement specific plans for improvement in order to improve the school's literacy program (Johnson, 2000).

According to the National Reading Panel, (2000), reading instruction must be a balanced approach including direct instruction of reading skills and strategies as well as provide students with opportunities to apply the knowledge learned in reading, writing, and communication (Taylor, 2008). Teachers must carefully plan Communication Arts instruction during a one to two hour daily block in the schedule (Taylor, 2008). Developing a purpose for instruction and providing students with instructional support through research-based practices will enhance reading skills (Taylor, 2008).

Early and lasting research in literacy instruction outlined five areas of focus in reading development for young readers, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NICHD, 2000). The NRP became the leader of reference for literacy over the next ten years (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness instruction showed positive effects on oral reading of text and pseudo word reading, indicating a greater ability of students to decode text (NICHD, 2000). Phonemic awareness should not be taught in isolation, rather instruction should occur as part of the total reading instruction program (Cassidy, Valdez, & Garrett, 2011).

Phonics instruction, letter and sound recognition and mastery, is most effective for students in kindergarten and first grade or students who struggle with reading (NICHD, 2000, NRP, 2000). Systematic phonics instruction makes a greater impact on students' ability to read than do alternative programs providing little or no phonics instruction (NICHD, 2000). Through phonics instruction students become more proficient in spelling and identifying unfamiliar words (NICHD, 2000).

Repeated guided oral reading increases students' fluency (Sedita, 2011). Further, repeated oral reading has a lasting impact on students' reading ability for students reading on or above grade level, as well as those students struggling with reading (NICHD, 2000). Vocabulary instruction plays an indispensable role in the development of reading for students (Sedita, 2008). Vocabulary development is critical for students as they progress as readers because of the immense number of words students must attain each year in order to comprehend grade-level text (Sedita, 2011). Students' ability to independently read with critical analysis to determine text meaning, make inferences, and analyze text structure is known as comprehension (International Reading Association, n.d.). In order for students to make significant progress in comprehending text, teachers must model, provide support, and then allow students to read independently (International Reading Association, n.d.).

Scientifically research based instruction must be in place for students to become proficient readers (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). When students do not meet expectations for reading proficiency, interventions must be put into place (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). School administration must analyze current instructional practices to assure scientific research practices are embedded (Dorn & Soffos, 2012). Teachers must assess students formally

and informally on a regular basis in order to provide individual instruction for students (International Reading Association, 2013).

Ongoing professional development for teachers is crucial to the success of students in reading (Shanklin, 2006). Through on-site literacy coaches, teachers receive research based professional development and coaching in the classroom (L'Allier et al., 2010). Ongoing, embedded professional development increases teacher capacity and student achievement (Shanklin, 2006).

In Chapter Three the descriptive study is explained to examine current best practices in high performing Missouri elementary and middle schools in Communication Arts. Data retrieved from the MODESE were obtained to determine the top 10% of school districts' achievement in Communication Arts in 2010 and 2011. Surveys were distributed to the top 10% of schools identified in both 2010 and 2011, and analyzed for identification of best practices in instruction, professional development, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts. The research design as well as the population and sample were described to reflect the investigation of the study.

An analysis of data, obtained from survey results of school administrators in the top 10% of schools in Communication Arts, was explained in Chapter Four. Data analysis revealed findings for each research question presented in the study. A summary of the contents of the study, as well as implications for practice in literacy instruction were discussed in Chapter Five, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This descriptive study was designed to examine current best practices in high performing schools in Communication Arts in third through eighth grades and instructional practices, professional development, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts.

Problem and Purpose Overview

It is the quest of schools in the United States for all students to be fluent readers by the end of third grade (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). Accountability in Communication Arts and mathematics for public education is greater now than ever before with the implementation of NCLB in 2001. The following research questions were examined to determine the connection between effective literacy program practices and Missouri public schools with students achieving high scores in Communication Arts.

Research Questions.

1. What instructional practices are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?

2. What support systems are in place for students who fall below grade level in primary, elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where 90% of students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?

3. What curriculum and resources are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?

4. What literacy professional development practices for teachers are in place in Missouri public schools with students who are achieving at or above grade level in reading at the third through eighth grade levels?

Research Design

The research design in this study was descriptive in nature to discover the instructional practices, professional development of teachers, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts in high student achievement (Creswell, 2008). Throughout the investigation phase of this study, common characteristics of programs and teacher influences were examined. The state of Missouri is adopting new standards labeled as the Missouri Learning Standards, based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), to focus on higher expectations for students (Blackburn, 2011). According to Blackburn (2011) many school districts lacked rigor in the curriculum standards adopted and practiced in the state.

Population and Sample

Research participants were selected from Missouri public schools districts. In Missouri students are assessed in Communication Arts, math, social studies, and science in grades third through eleventh. For the purpose of this research design, student indices were analyzed only in Communication Arts. The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) indices from all public school students who took the state assessment in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were collected. The indices were analyzed for the assessment years 2010 and 2011. The MAP indices were available through the MODESE (2012) public website.

MAP data from 1,519 elementary or middle schools in Missouri were obtained for the sample. To provide stability for the study, MAP indices from the MODESE for 2010

and 2011 at the same grade levels were analyzed to determine the school districts that are identified as being the top 10 % of high achieving schools and maintaining the schools' relative position in the group over a period of time. A comparison between the administrations of the same assessment were conducted to determine the extent to which the individual schools maintain the same relative position in third through eighth grade Communication Arts student achievement on the MAP (Ary, Cheser-Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

After comparing the MAP indices of each of the 1,519 schools in 2010 and 2011, 145 schools were listed as the top 10% of schools from the list of Missouri schools in each year. When the two lists of top 10% high performing schools were compared, 39 schools in 2010 and 41 schools in 2011 did not score in the top 10% in both consecutive years. In Missouri, 106 schools were in the top 10% of high performing schools in 2010 and 2011.

Instrumentation

Secondary data obtained from the MODESE, specifically, Communication Arts scores for third through eighth grade levels, were used as a source for the study. Data were retrieved using the Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS) portal through the MODESE (2012). Data were obtained only for Communication Arts to be considered for student achievement levels in reading. To provide stability for the study, scores from the MODESE from two consecutive years, 2010 and 2011, at the same grade levels, third through eighth, were examined to determine the school districts identified as high achieving schools, the top 10 % in the state, and maintain the school's relative position in the group over a period of time (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Student Assessment Data

Assessment Year	Number of Districts	Number of students Assessed	Number in Top 10%	Number in Top 10% One Year Only
2010	1,519	388,502	145	39
2011	1,519	392,103	146	41

Note. Data were retrieved from the MODESE (2012). The data represents the total number of districts from which the student achievement scores were collected. In addition, the data represents the total number of students in each year that were assessed on the MAP test for the given years. Finally, the table displays data detailing the total number of schools in the top 10% of student achievement in Communication Arts in each year and the number that only qualified in one year.

A cross-sectional survey (see Appendix A) was constructed to determine the instructional practices and support systems that were in place for students struggling in Communication Arts. Cross-sectional surveys study a cross section sampling of a population at any given time (Ary et al., 2006). Survey questions were designed based on a literature review of best practices in Communication Arts. Curriculum and resources available for Communication Arts instruction, school-wide reading programs that are in place, and professional development for Communication Arts were also addressed in the survey to principals in high performing schools

Survey questions were piloted through distribution to a sample of five literacy coaches and five principals to determine reliability. The researcher revised the survey questions based on feedback from the literacy coaches and principals. The researcher

utilized online resources to make the survey easily accessible, wrote a cover letter to explain the research, and offered the findings to the participating schools to assist the schools in reaching higher achievement for students.

Once permission to conduct the research project was obtained from Lindenwood University in March 2013 (see Appendix B), the survey was distributed to building level administrators in the 106 identified schools to determine the practices that lead to high student achievement in public elementary and middle schools that demonstrate consistent proficiency in reading at the top 10% of the state in the third through eighth grade levels on the state assessment in Missouri. The survey instrument was posted on SurveyMonkey, an online resource.

The survey was distributed on three occasions (see Table 2) in order to obtain data to determine the practices of the highest performing schools in Missouri. One hundred six surveys were distributed during the first survey period, 92 surveys were distributed two weeks later, and finally 85 surveys were distributed three weeks from the original distribution date.

Table 2.

Distribution and Collection of Survey Data

Number of Surveys Distributed	Number of Surveys Collected	Date
106	14	March 11, 2013
92	7	March 27, 2013
85	0	April 2, 2013

Note. Data were collected from the survey distributed by the researcher. The same survey was distributed to all districts on the first date and on subsequent dates.

Data Collection

The researcher gathered student achievement data, MAP indices scores, using the MODESE (2012) database. The student achievement data gathered were from the spring 2010 and spring 2011 MAP testing sessions for grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 in Communication Arts. Student achievement data in 1,519 school buildings were analyzed to determine the top 10 % of school districts in the state of Missouri for each year, 2010 and 2011. The lists of the top 10 % of schools for each year, 145 schools in 2010 and 146 in 2011, were compared and a final list of schools posted on both lists was compiled, 106 schools were located on the 2010 and 2011 lists.

A permission letter (see Appendix C) was sent by electronic mail (email) to the principals of the identified top 10% schools. The topic and purpose of the research were explained. The informed consent form (see Appendix D) accompanied the permission letter. Details of the study, as well as confidentiality and anonymity, were provided. Once

the principal agreed to participate in the study, the survey was available via

SurveyMonkey.

Data Analysis

Twenty-one responses were obtained from the surveys sent to respondents. To

assure confidentiality and anonymity, number codes were assigned to the participating

schools. School one will be shown as S1 (School one=S1). The first phase of analysis

included an in-depth examination of the average expenditures by the school districts for

each student in years 2010 and 2011 (see Table 3). The districts that responded to the

survey have an annual average daily attendance (ADA) expenditure of $13,650 in 2010

and $13,835 in 2011 (see Table 1). This ADA expenditure is significantly higher than

Missouri's state average cost of annual ADA expenditures per student of $9,639 in 2010

and $9,619 in 2011. This would indicate that students in the selected districts have greater

resources allocated per student than does the average district in the state.

Table 3.

Responding District Expenditures per ADA

District	2010	2011
S1	$8,107.00	$6,615.00
S2	$7,565.00	$7,587.00
S3	$7,342.00	$7,437.00
S4	$10,435.00	$10,665.00
S5	$12,156.00	$13,461.00
S6	$10,738.00	$10,335.00
S7	$11,822.00	$8,582.00
S8	$9,772.00	$10,240.00
S9	$9,451.00	$9,352.00
S10	$9,651.00	$8,980.00
S11	$11,639.00	$11,929.00
S12	$13,741.00	$13,000.00
S13	$11,217.00	$11,114.00
S14	$153,022.00	$161,244.00
District Average	$13,650	$13,835
MO State Average	$9,639	$9,619

Note. Data were retrieved from the MODESE (2013). The table is representative of the average annual expenditure per pupil in each of the school districts responding to the survey.

Next, the participating high performing schools were located throughout the state. However, nearly one-third of the districts responding to the survey are located in the St. Louis region of Missouri (see Figure 1 and Table 4) .
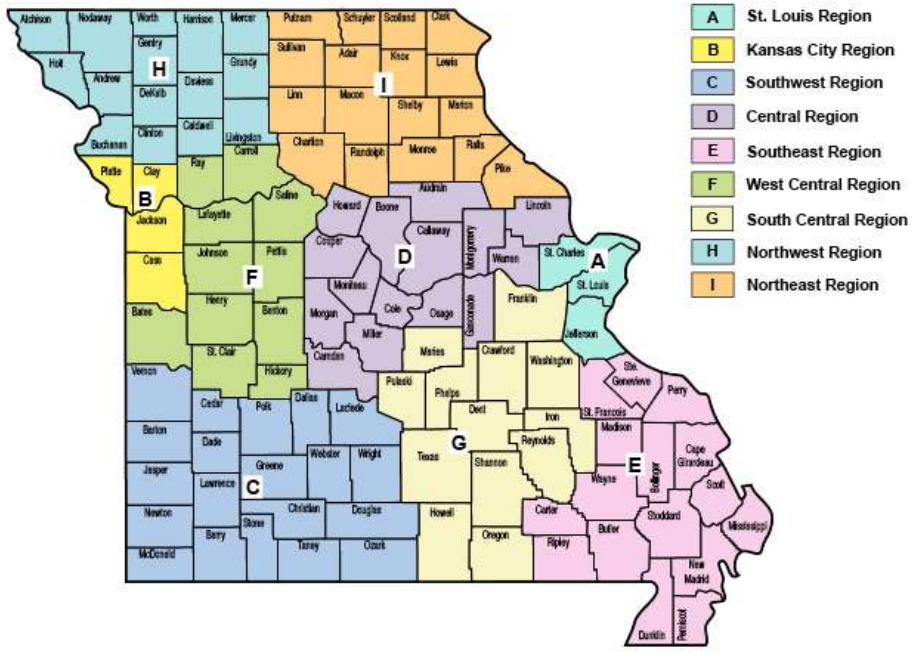
Figure 1. Data were retrieved from the MODESE (2013). The figure is representative of the regions in Missouri. The regions were determined by MODESE.

Table 4.

Responding District State Supervisory Area

Area	Number of Districts in Area
A	7
B	2
C	2
D	0
E	0
F	1
G	1
H	1

Note. Data were retrieved from the MODESE (2013). The table is representative of the number of schools performing in the top 10% of student achievement in Communication Arts in each of the school districts responding to the survey.

Students in high performing schools in Missouri, where district personnel responded to the survey, are enrolled in a variety of sizes of school districts and buildings (see Table 5). The district enrollment of the surveyed schools ranged from 68 to 22,244. The size of the school buildings ranged from 68 to 1,336 students.

Table 5.

Responding District Size and Building Size

District	District Enrollment	Building Enrollment
S1	165	165
S2	5916	426
S3	3589	291
S4	146	51
S5	39	39
S6	10,579	739
S7	6,075	273
S9	22,244	459
		532
S10	5,874	1,336
		392
		440
S11	17,274	398
		449
		416
S12	3,978	468
S13	4,554	307
		125
S14	3,921	68
S15	4,961	351

Note. Data were retrieved from the MODESE (2013). The table represents the total number of students in each school district and in each school building that responded to the SurveyMonkey survey.

The average poverty level in Missouri school districts, as indicated by students who qualify for free and reduced price meals, in the state of Missouri is 45% (MODESE, 2013). The districts identified as being high performing schools, in the top 10% of schools, and responding to the survey, had an average free and reduced price meals rate (see Table 6) of 14.4%. Students in the high performing schools in this survey are considerably above the poverty level of the average district in Missouri.

Table 6.

Responding District Free and Reduced Meals

District	Percentage of Free/Reduced
S1	NA
S2	38
S3	31
S4	35
S5	36
S6	NA
S7	21
S8	NA
S9	16
	8
	27
S10	9
	10
	14
S11	NA
S12	8
	13
S13	38
S14	14.4
Missouri Average	45

Note. Data were retrieved from the MODESE (2013). The table represents the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced meals based on family income levels. These would be an indicator of the poverty level of the students in the representative districts.

Summary

Descriptive statistics were selected in this study to discover the instructional practices, professional development of teachers, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts yielding higher student achievement. The top 10% of schools in Missouri, including grades 3-8, were identified from 2010 and 2011. Of the 106 schools meeting the criteria, 23 agreed to participate in the study. In this chapter, the average expenditures per child, location of responding schools, size of student enrollment, and free and reduced price meals percentages, of the participating schools were provided in tables and figures.

In Chapter Four, the process of analyzing the data was presented. The survey responses were described. The findings, implications for practice, and recommendations were included in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Chapter Four provides a summary of data analyzed in the pre-determining factor of student assessment, MAP scores, and descriptive analysis of the survey data presented. This chapter contains three parts. The beginning of the chapter is an introduction to the study. The purpose of the study and the importance is provided in determining best practices for Communication Arts instruction and practice in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri. In addition, the four key questions are posed for discovery to determine the relationship between effective literacy program practices and Missouri public schools with students achieving high scores in Communication Arts.

The second part was divided into four sections, one section for each research question. Within each section, data analysis from the survey is presented. These sections contain a summary of data that measured effective literacy program practices. Finally, a summary of data analysis was presented to conclude the chapter.

The ability to read may be the most important skill a person acquires (Carroll, 2010). Reading ability leads to the potential to learn new things, to find lucrative employment, and to be a successful member of society (Carroll, 2010). It is suggested that strong reading skills by the end of the third grade lay the foundation for success in high school, college, and postgraduate work (Carroll, 2010). It is the quest of school administrators, teachers, and school board members in the United States for all students to be fluent readers by the end of third grade (United States Department of Education, 2001).

Accountability in Communication Arts and mathematics for public education is now greater than ever before with the implementation of NCLB in 2001. The Common

Core State Standards (CCSS) is a focus for higher student achievement and a push for rigor in American schools (Blackburn, 2011). Learning standards for English Language Arts have been established in each grade level to establish clear expectations for learning in kindergarten through twelfth grade so that students are prepared for college and the workforce (Blackburn, 2011).

This study focused on student achievement in Communication Arts of public school students in the third grade through eighth grade in the state of Missouri. Spring 2011 and spring 2012 data were retrieved and collected from the MAP accessed through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE, 2013). Data from 1,520 schools in Missouri were analyzed (MODESE, 2013). The total number of students from which the 2011 and 2012 MAP test data were retrieved was 388,502, and 392,100, respectively (MODESE, 2011, 2012).

Surveys were distributed to 106 elementary or middle school principals in Missouri public school districts where students scored in the top 10% of all Missouri public schools in third grade through eighth grade Communication Arts in the designated timeframe. The surveys were distributed on three occasions via SurveyMonkey to the 106 participants in the survey, with 21 collected responses obtained. The survey consisted of 24 questions to determine the highly effective practices in schools where students demonstrate high student achievement over a two-year period in Communication Arts.

Findings

What instructional practices are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level

in the third through eighth grades? The following survey responses were presented in an attempt to answer research question one.

As shown in Figure 2, 95% of the high performing schools use benchmark assessment data to direct guided reading groups in the classroom. Furthermore, 95% of respondents use benchmark assessment data to place students for additional time and support, in addition to instruction allotted in the regular schedule.
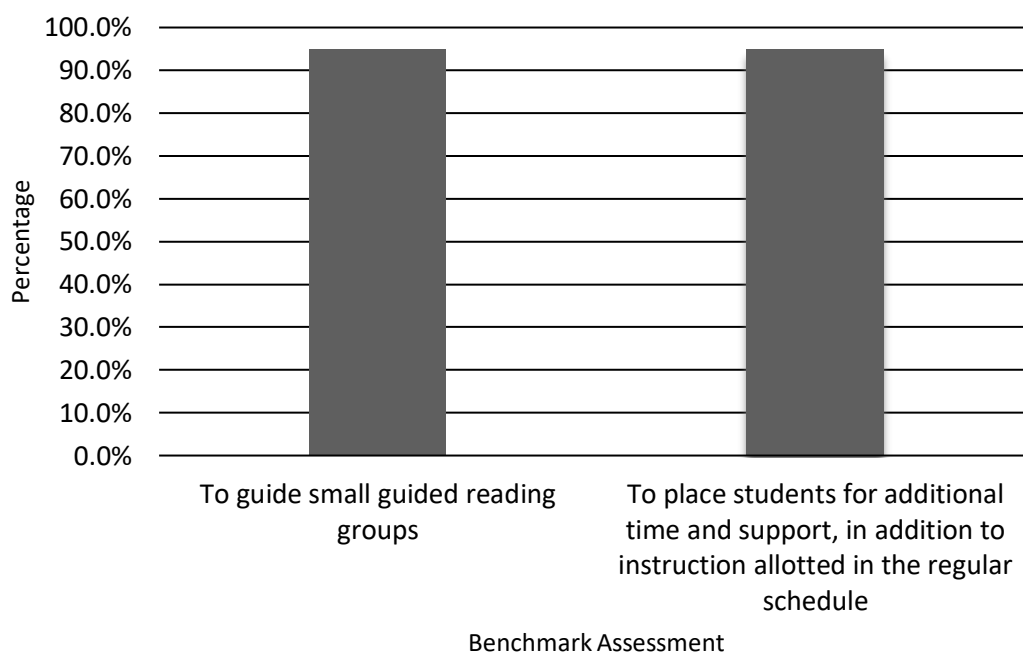

Figure 2. Uses of benchmark assessment data.

Responses from building level administrators, indicating the use of standardized assessments aligned to the state assessment, to prepare for the state MAP exam, illustrated that of the respondents, 66.7% of the schools use standardized assessments

aligned to the state assessment in preparation for the state exam. Respondents indicated 33.3% of schools surveyed do not use standardized assessments in preparation of the state assessment (see Figure 3).
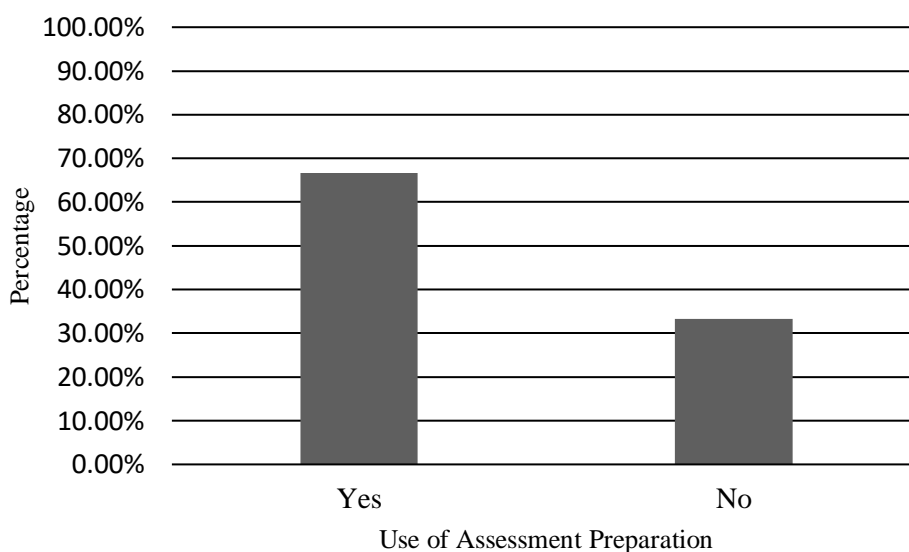
Figure 3. Schools' use of assessment preparation.

Of the 66.7% districts who utilize standardized assessments aligned to the state assessment in preparation for the state exam, 80% of respondents indicated that the assessment tool used in the school, to prepare students for the state assessment, was a district generated practice assessment. State generated practice assessments were utilized by 30% of the schools in preparation for the state assessment. Finally, 60% of the respondents indicated the use of Study Island in preparation for the state assessment.

Respondents further indicated, through an open-ended response, the use of Acuity and

eValuate to assist in preparing students for the state assessment (see Figure 4).
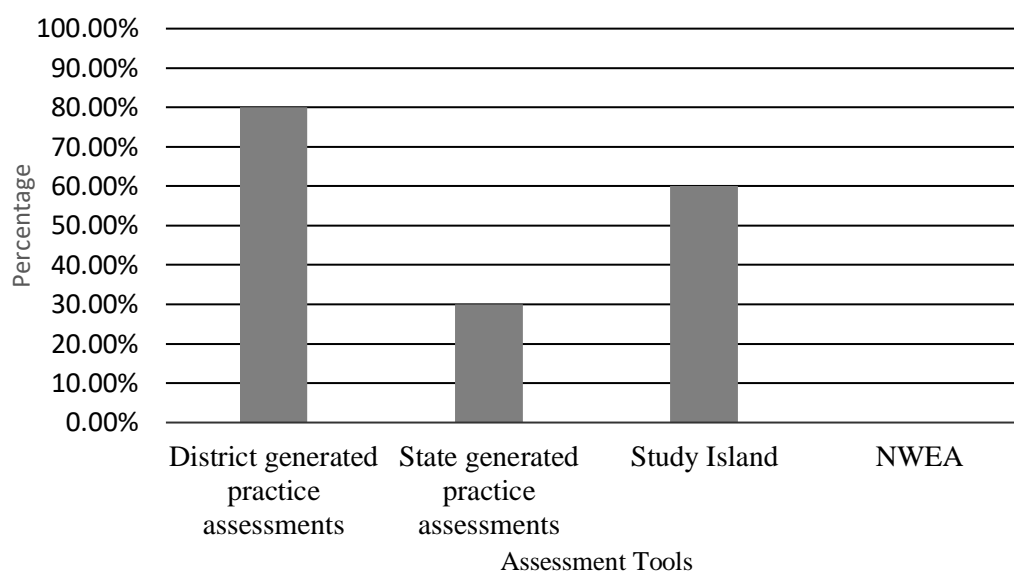
Figure 4. Assessment tools used in high performing elementary and middle schools.

In the schools surveyed, 18.8% of the principals indicated that instruction in

primary classrooms was guided by a basal series. The largest number of principals in the

survey, 62.5%, indicated that in primary classrooms individual reading assessments guide

reading instruction during small groups. Only 12.5% of principals indicated that either

Four Block reading instruction or the Partnership in Comprehensive Literacy Model of

instruction. Finally, 43.8% of the principals indicated that the represented districts, design

a reading instructional model within each district (see Figure 5).
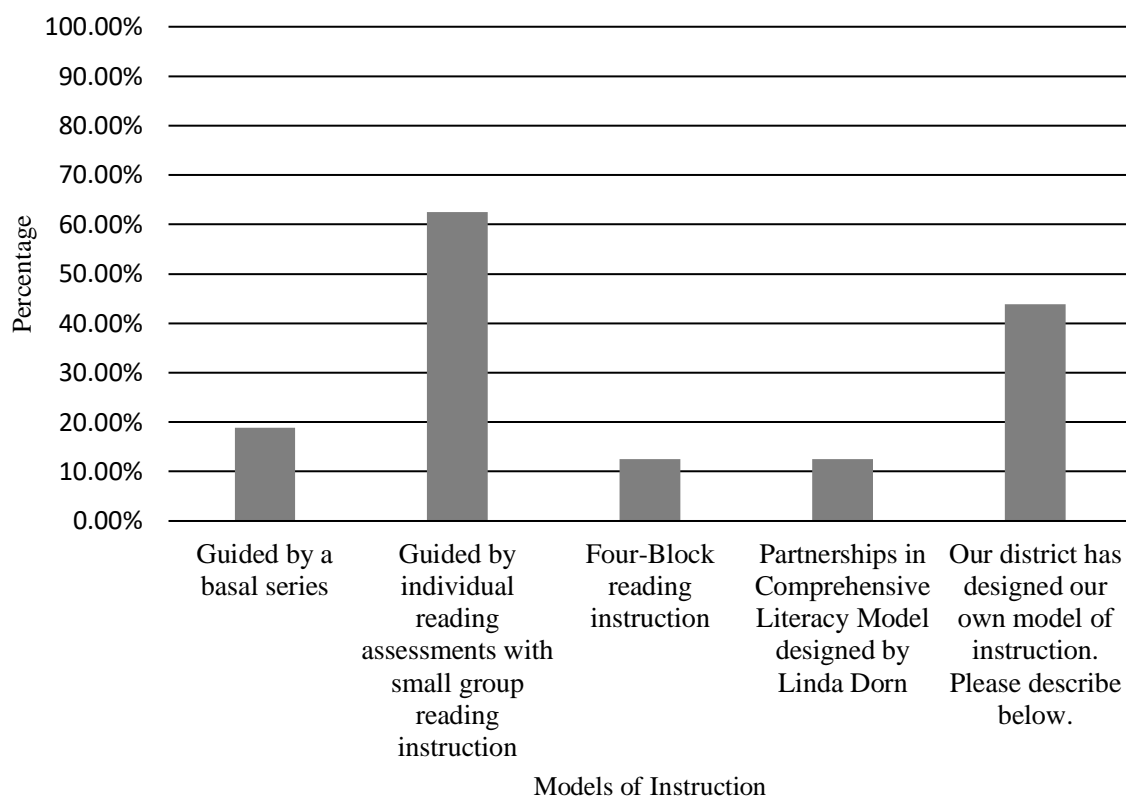
Figure 5. Models of instruction K-3.

The model of instruction utilized for reading instruction in intermediate classrooms shows 17.6% of intermediate classrooms utilize a basal series to guide instruction. Further, 64.7% are guided by individual reading assessments with guided reading groups and 11.8% are guided with four-block reading instruction. Instruction in intermediate classrooms in the schools surveyed indicated that 5.9% of classrooms are guided by Partnership in Comprehensive Literacy instruction. Finally, 35.3% of classroom teachers use a district model of instruction to guide reading instruction. Of the

35.3% of districts utilizing a district-designed model of instruction, Reader's Workshop

was the predominant model utilized, according to open-ended responses (see Figure 6).
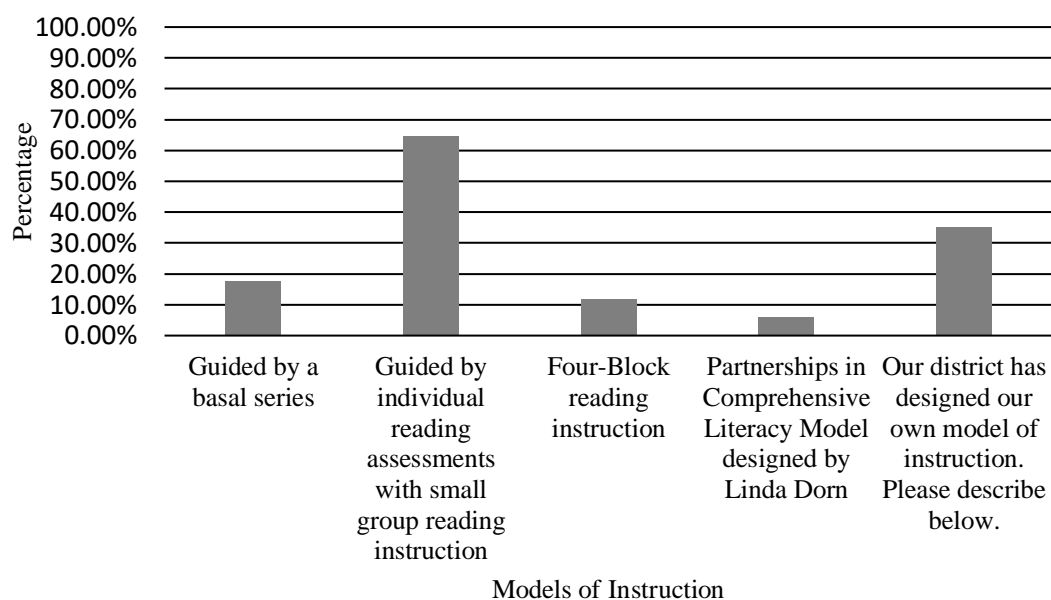
Figure 6. Models of instruction 4-6.

The model of instruction utilized for reading in 7th and 8th grade classrooms, as

indicated by building principals on the survey, shows 14.3% of intermediate classrooms

utilize a basal series to guide instruction. In intermediate classrooms, 57.1% are guided

by individual reading assessments with guided reading groups and 14.3% are guided with

four-block reading instruction, shown in figure 6. According to the data displayed in

figure 7, none of the districts surveyed are guided by Partnership in Comprehensive

Literacy instruction for reading instruction at the intermediate level. A district model of

instruction to guide reading instruction is used by 14.3% of the districts surveyed.
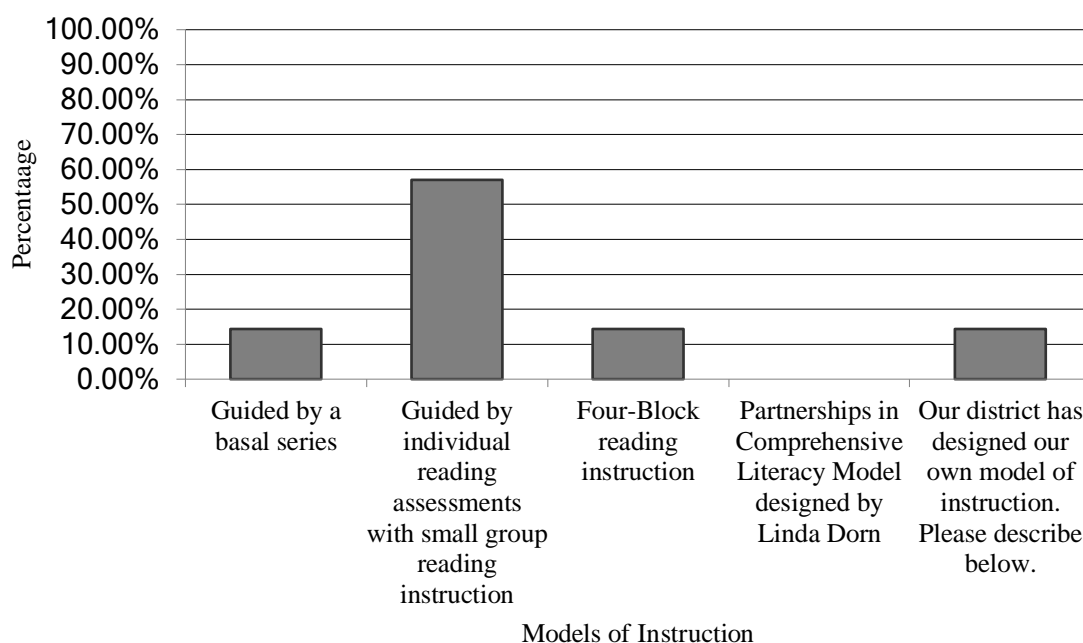
Figure 7. Models of instruction 7-8. Instructional models used in high performing middle

schools at grades seven and eight.

Figure 8 shows the number of times per week teachers in primary classrooms met

with students for small group instruction. According to the principals surveyed, 58.8%

indicated teachers meet five or more times per week in primary classrooms for small

group flexible reading instruction. In addition, 17.6% indicated teachers meet four times

per week. The survey data indicated teachers meet three times per week in 17.6% of the

schools. Finally, 5.9% of principals indicated that teachers in primary classrooms meet two times per week with students for small group flexible reading instruction.
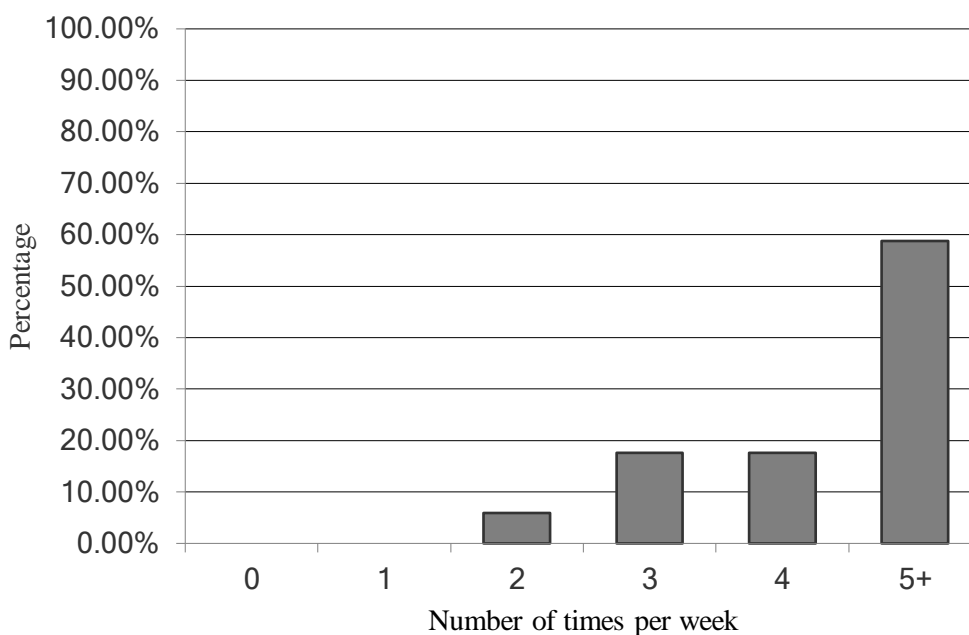
Figure 8. Flexible reading groups K-3. The number of times per week that teachers in high performing schools meet with students in flexible reading groups in kindergarten through third grade classrooms.

The number of times per week teachers in intermediate classrooms meet with students for small group instruction was represented in Figure 9. Principals in 36.8% of the schools surveyed indicated that teachers meet five or more times per week in intermediate classrooms for small group flexible reading instruction. Likewise, 15.8%

indicated teachers meet four times per week and 36.8% indicated teachers meet three

times per week. The survey further revealed in 10.5% of the schools surveyed teachers in

intermediate classrooms meet two times per week. Finally, in 5.3% of the schools,

teachers meet with students one time per week for small group flexible reading

instruction (see Figure 9).
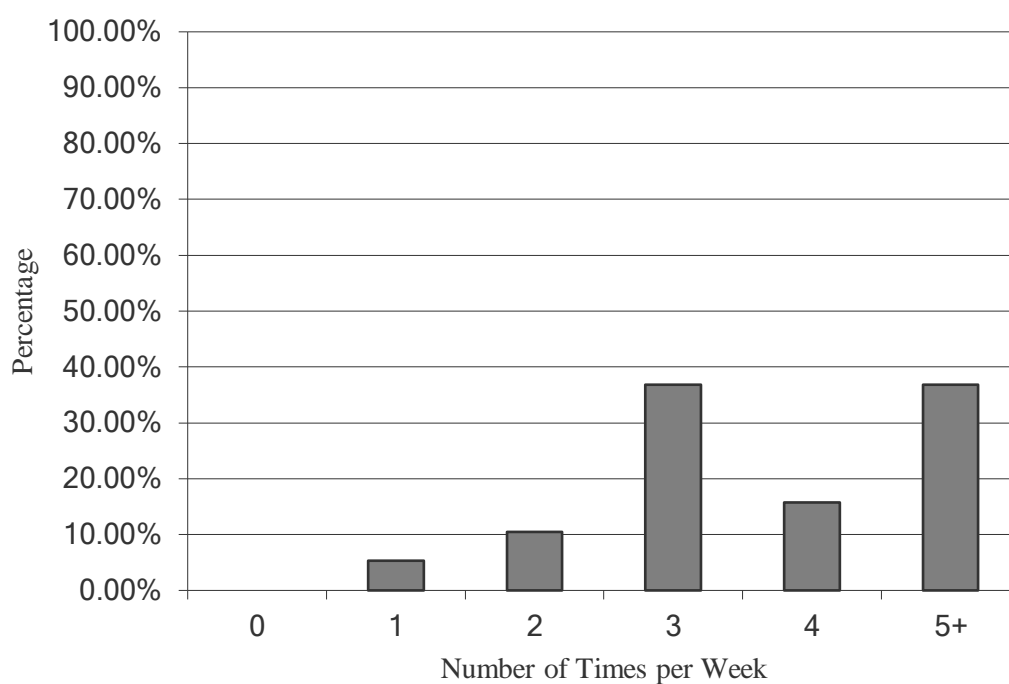
Figure 9. Flexible reading groups 4-6. The number of times per week that teachers in

high performing schools meet with students in flexible reading groups in fourth through

sixth grade classrooms.

Principals were surveyed to determine the number of times per week teachers in

7th and 8th grade classrooms meet with students for small group instruction, as illustrated

in Figure 9. Principals in 25% of the schools surveyed indicated teachers meet five or more times per week in 7th and 8th grade classrooms for small group flexible reading instruction. Similarly, 25% indicated teachers meet four times per week. The survey demonstrated that in the schools surveyed teachers do not meet with small flexible reading groups either two or three times per week. Rather, 37% indicate teachers in 7th or 8th grade meet with students one time per week for small group flexible reading. Twelve and one-half percent of the principals surveyed indicated teachers in 7th and 8th grade classrooms do not meet with students for small group flexible reading instruction.
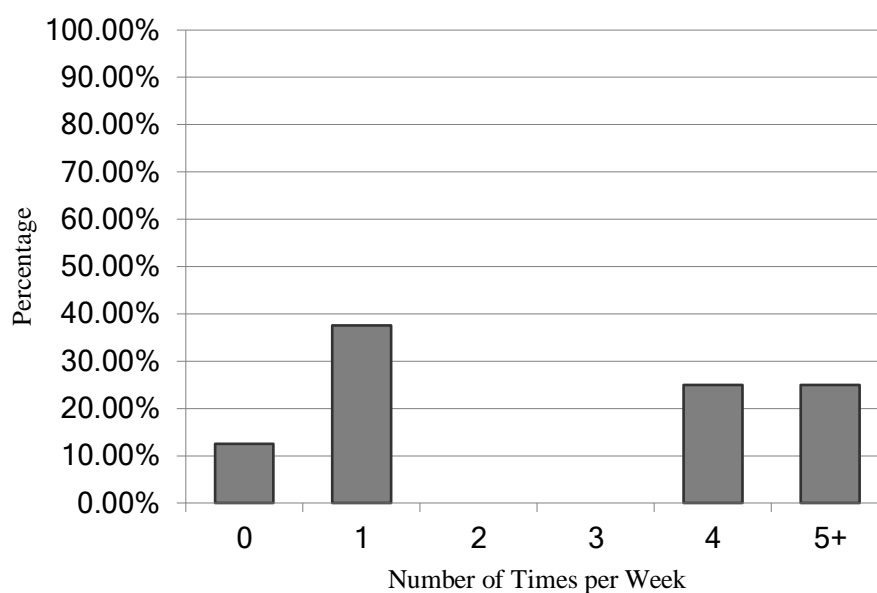
Figure 10. Flexible reading groups 7-8. The number of times per week teachers in high performing schools meet with students in flexible reading groups in seventh and eighth grade classrooms.
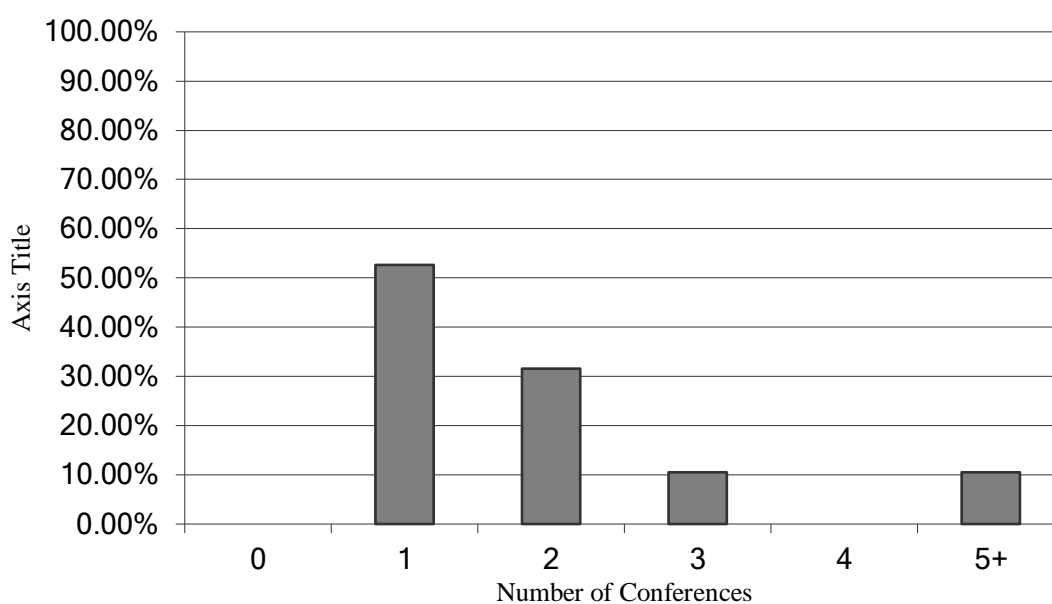
A representation of the number of times teachers in primary classrooms conference with students one-on-one in reading weekly is shown in Figure 11. In the survey, 17.6% of principals indicated that teachers conference with students in reading five or more times weekly. Additionally, 29.4% indicated teachers conference with students in reading one, two and three times weekly respectively.
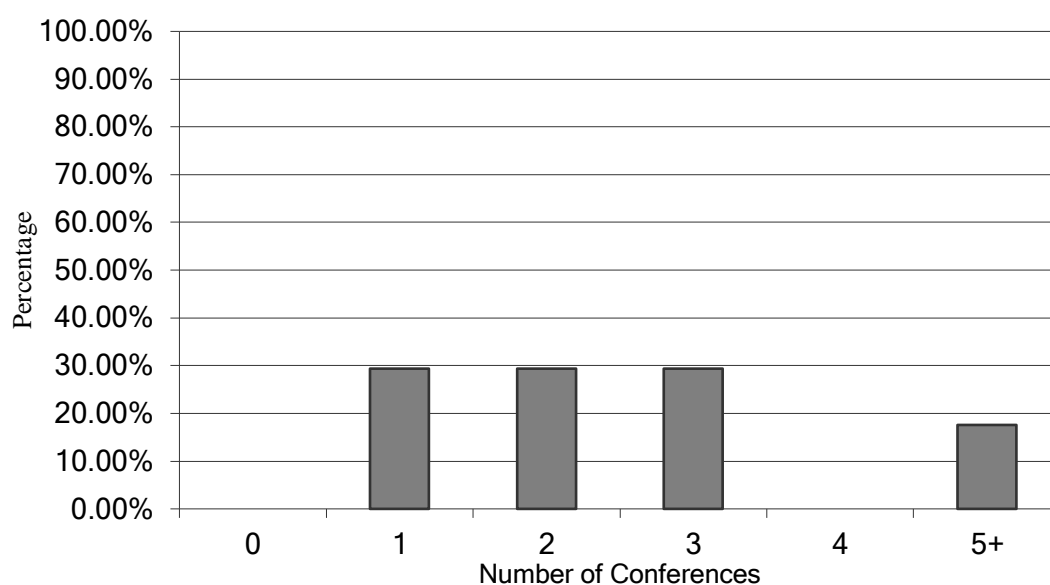
Figure 11. One-on-one conferences in K-3 classrooms. Teachers meet with students weekly.

The number of times teachers in intermediate classrooms conference with students one-on-one in reading weekly is indicated in Figure 12. In the survey 10.5% of principals indicated teachers conference with students in reading five or more times

weekly. Further, 10.5% indicated teachers conference with students in reading three times

weekly. In addition, 31.6% indicated that teachers in intermediate classrooms conference

one-on-one with students two times weekly, and 52.6% indicated that teachers in

intermediate classrooms conference with students one-on-one in reading one time

weekly.

Figure 12. One-on-one conferences in 4-6 classrooms. Teachers meet with students

weekly.

The number of times indicated by principals in the survey that teachers in 7th and

8th grade classrooms conference with students one-on-one in reading weekly are

represented in Figure 13. In the survey 12.5% of principals indicated that teachers

conferenced with students in reading four times weekly and 12.5% indicated teachers

conferenced with students in reading two times weekly. Finally, 75% indicated that

teachers in intermediate classrooms conferenced one-on-one with students one time

weekly.
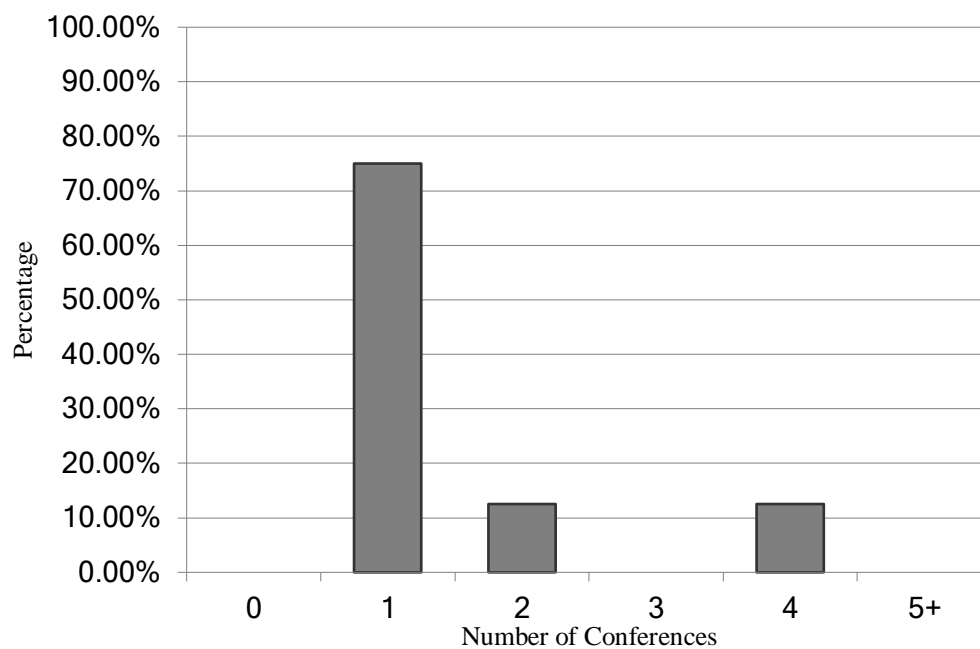
Figure 13. One-on-one conferences in 7-8 classrooms. Teachers meet with students

weekly.

Principals reported literacy corners are an integral part of literacy instruction, as

shown in Figure 14. The survey showed that principals indicated that literacy corners are

an integral part of instruction in 70% of primary classrooms in the designated schools in

the survey. Principals indicated that literacy corners are an integral part of instruction in

45% of intermediate classrooms in the selected schools in the survey. Principals indicated

that in 30% of the schools surveyed, literacy corners are not present in the respective
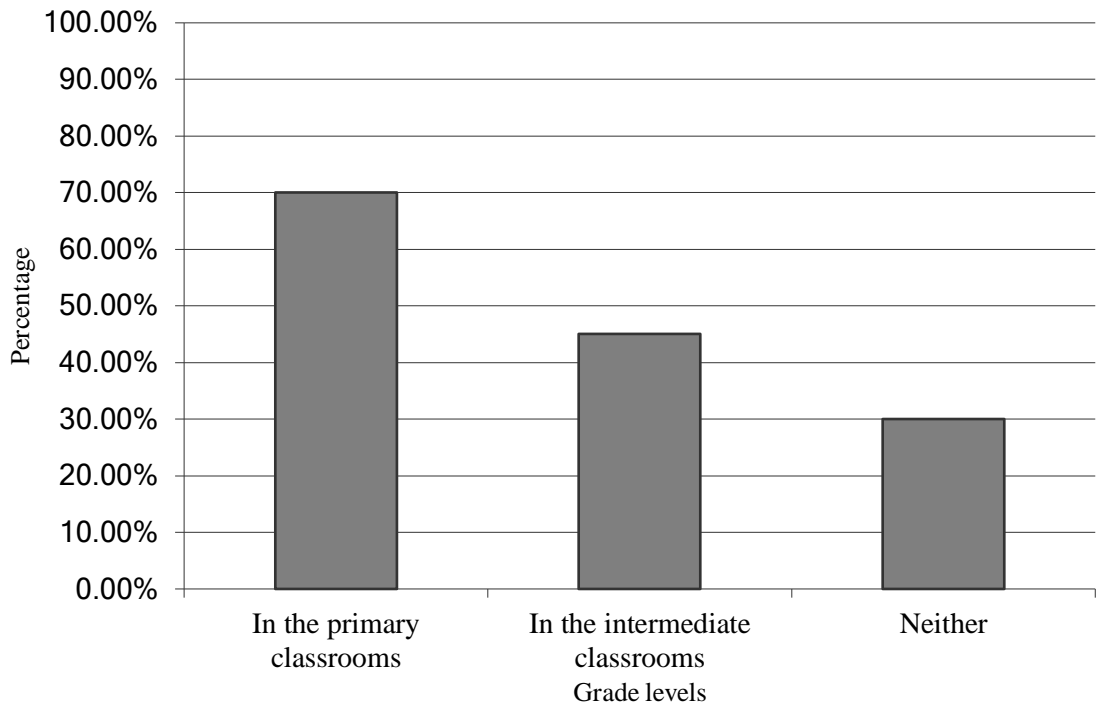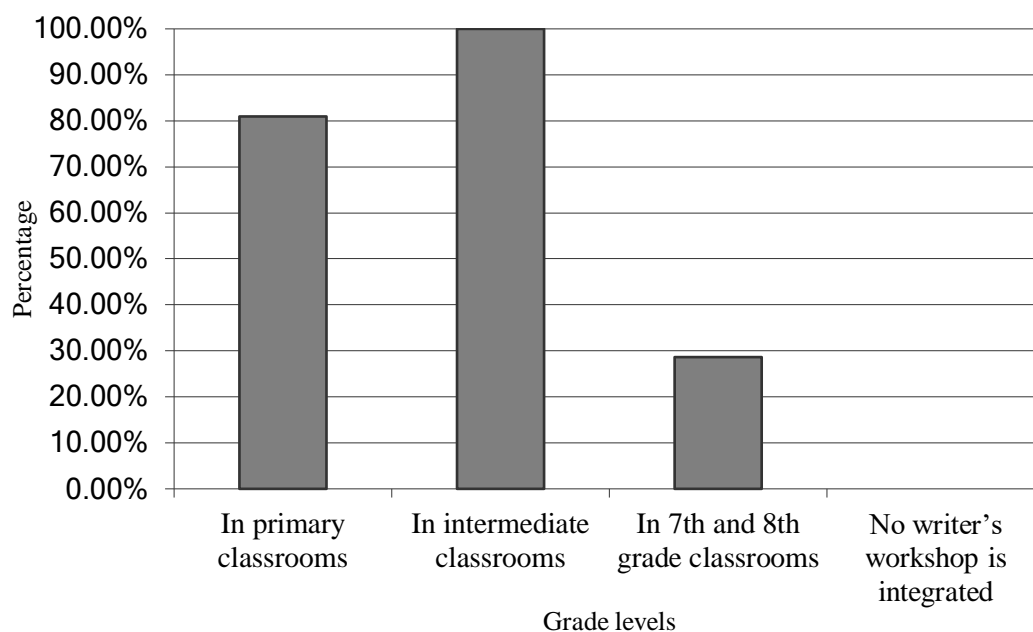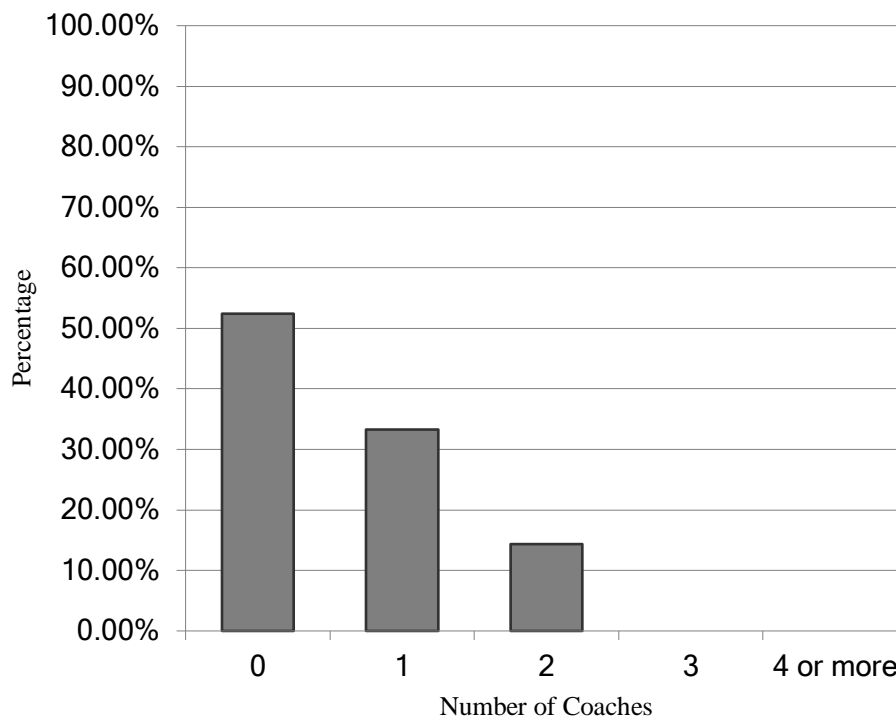
schools.

Figure 14. Use of literacy corners.

The grade level in which writer's workshop is integrated as a part of literacy

instruction in high performing schools is shown in Figure 15. Writer's workshop is an

integral part of literacy instruction in 81% of primary classrooms in high performing

schools. Writer's workshop is an integral part of literacy instruction in100% of

intermediate classrooms in high performing schools. Further, writer's workshop is an

integral part of literacy instruction in 28.6% of 7th and 8th grade classrooms in high
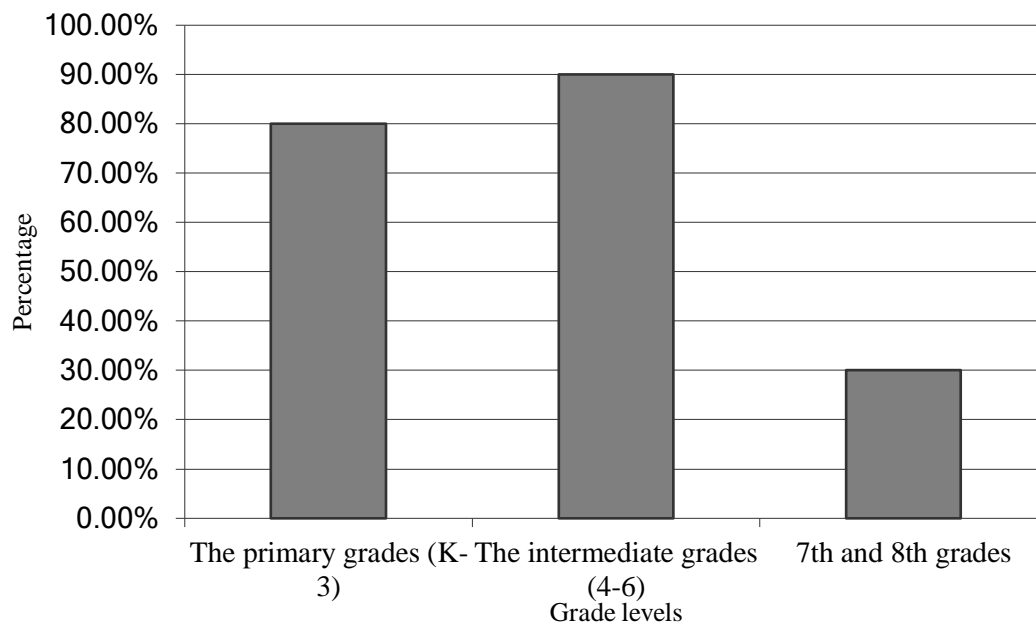
performing schools.

Figure 15. Integration of writer's workshop. Writer's workshop is used as a method of

instruction in the grade levels

.

The number of reading coaches present at each of the elementary and middle

schools in high performing schools was represented in Figure 16. In 52.4% of the schools

reading coaches were not on staff. In 33.3% of the schools one reading coach was noted

on staff. Finally, in 14.3% of the schools two reading coaches were on staff in the

schools surveyed.

Figure 16. Full time reading coaches. The number of reading coaches in high performing

elementary and middle schools.

In high performing schools with reading coaches on staff, 80% have reading

coaches working with students in primary classrooms. Reading coaches work with

students in intermediate classrooms in 90% of high performing schools with reading

coaches. Finally, in high performing schools with reading coaches, reading coaches work

in 7th and 8th grade classrooms 30% of the time (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Assignment of reading coaches. Reading coaches are assigned in the grade

levels in schools with reading coaches on staff.

What support systems are in place in top performing Missouri public schools for

students in the third through eighth grades that fall below grade level in reading? The

survey data in Figure 18 is representative of responses from principals indicating how

students reading below grade level or scoring basic or below basic in Communication

Arts are provided with extra time and support. The respondents reported that in 38.1%

students are served with before and/or after school tutoring for extra time and support. In

90.5% of high performing schools, additional time in the school day is scheduled for

extra time and support for students reading below grade level or scoring basic or below

basic in communication arts. Additionally, in 47.6% of high performing schools, Reading

Recovery is available for students reading below grade level. Level 2 interventions in

Response to Intervention are offered to students who are reading below grade level or scoring basic or below basic in communication arts in 90.5% of the schools, while 57.1% indicated specific individual plans are written for students without identified disabilities.
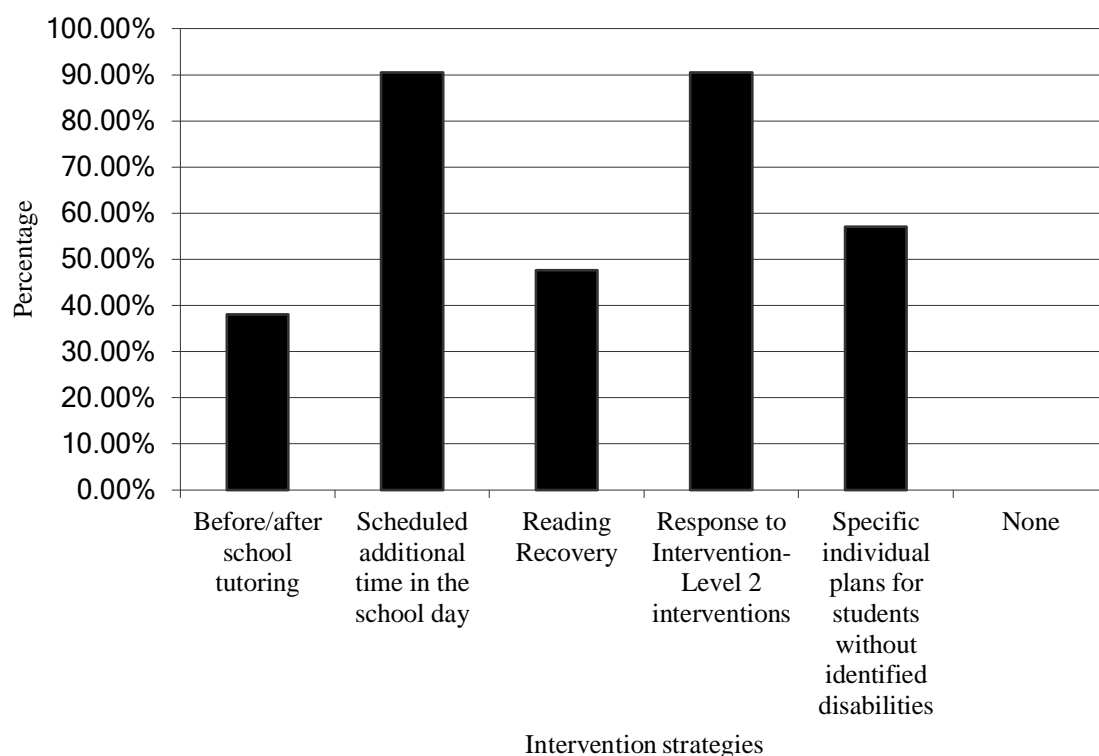
Figure 18. Extra time and support for struggling readers.

What curriculum and resources are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in the top performing Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades? As represented in Figure 19, in 90.5% of the schools surveyed, essential learning outcomes are defined in the

Communication Arts curriculum. In 9.5% of the schools essential learning outcomes are

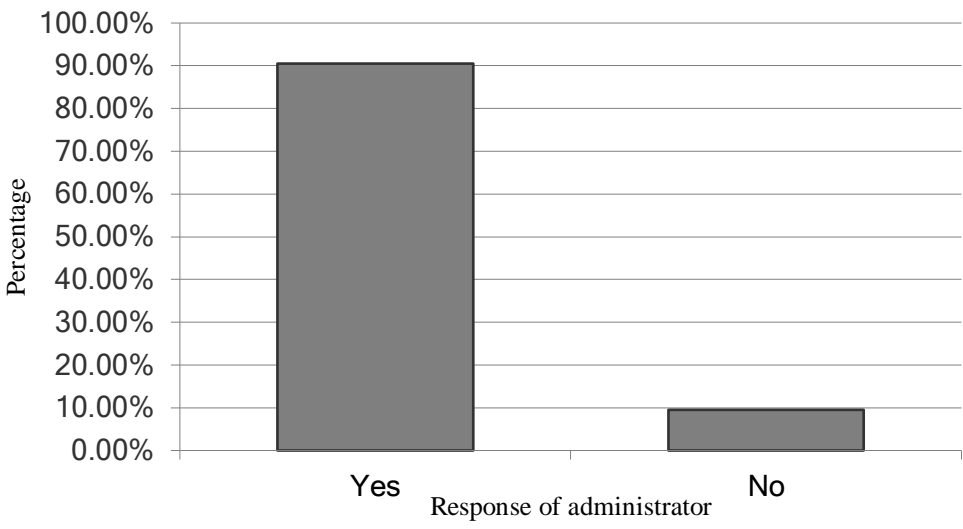not defined in the Communication Arts curriculum.

Figure 19. Essential outcomes in Communication Arts.

As illustrated in Figure 20, 90.5% of the school have a scope and sequence in

place in the Communication Arts curriculum. In 9.5% of the schools, a scope and

sequence is not in place in the Communication Arts curriculum.
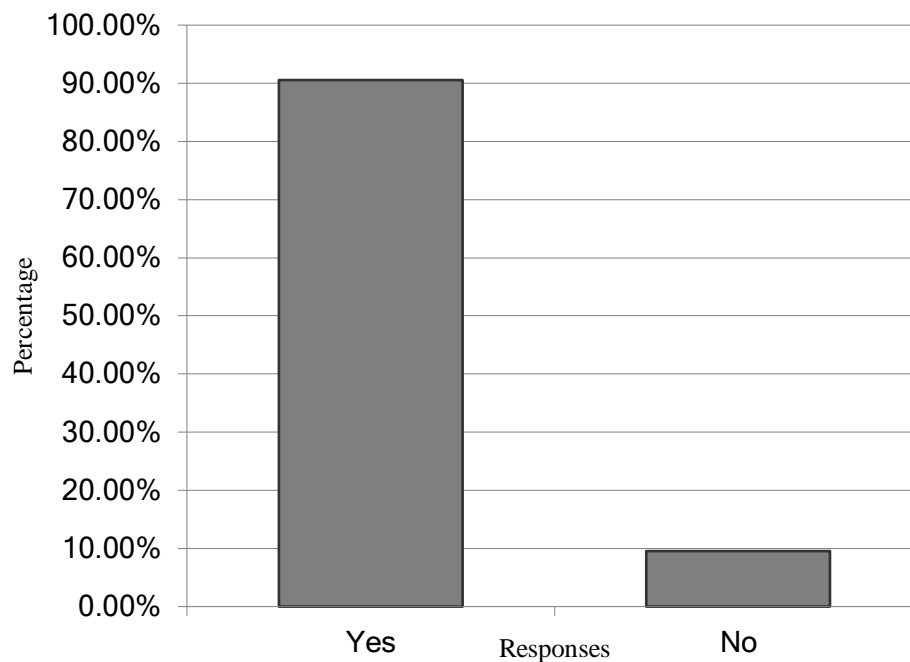
Figure 20. Scope and sequence in Communication Arts. School administrators indicated

the presence of a scope and sequence in the Communication Arts curriculum in the

school.

As shown in Figure 21, 95.2% of high performing schools have developed

benchmark assessments for students in the Communication Arts curriculum. Only 4.8%

of the schools do not use benchmark assessments for students in the Communication Arts

curriculum.
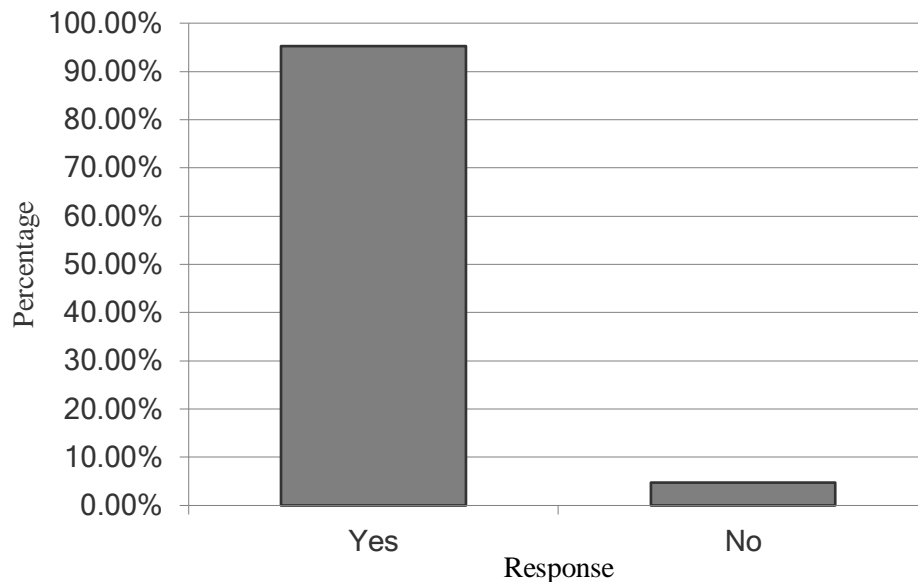
Figure 21. Benchmark assessments in Communication Arts. School administrators

indicated the use of benchmark assessments in Communication Arts in the school.

Shown below in Figure 22, the principals' responses on the survey show the grade

levels at which benchmark assessments are given in Communication Arts. In 60% of

schools surveyed, benchmark assessments are given to kindergarten students in

Communication Arts. In addition the chart represents the percentage of schools using

benchmark assessments in Communication Arts at the specified grade levels as follows,

first grade 75%, second grade 85%, third grade 90%, fourth grade 90%, fifth grade 90%,

sixth grade 45%, seventh grade 35%, and eighth grade 35%.

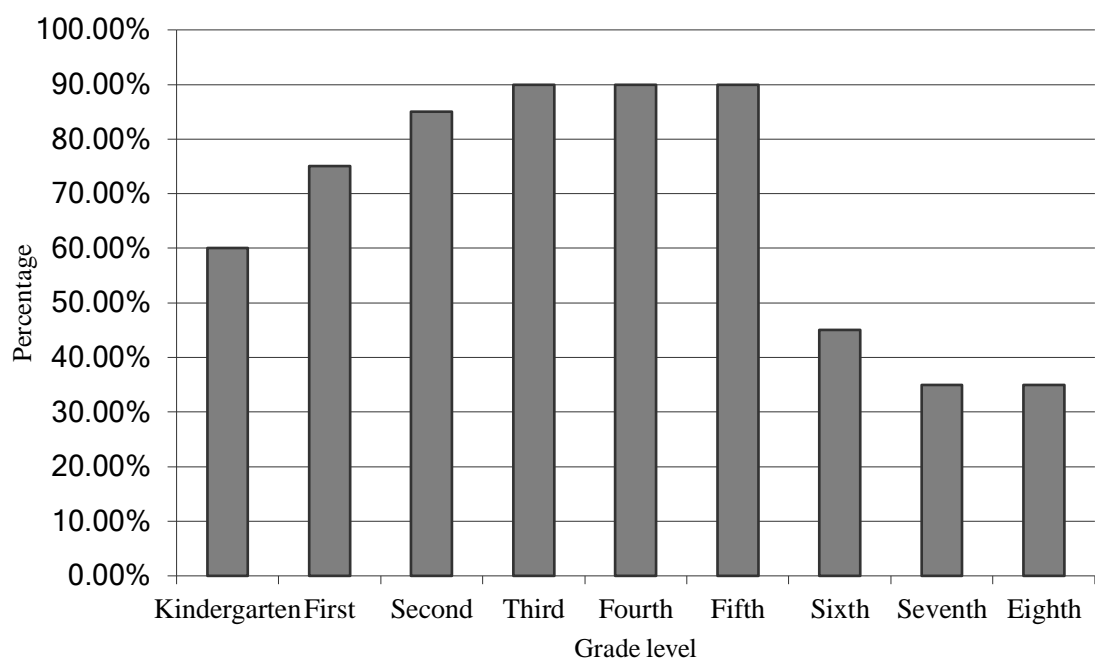*Figure 22.* Grade levels of benchmark assessments in Communication Arts. The grade

levels utilizing benchmark assessments in high performing schools are represented.

In schools where benchmark assessments are given in Communication Arts,

23.5% of the schools use assessment walls to disaggregate student achievement data,

while 94.1% of the schools utilize a student information system to track assessment data

(see Figure 23).
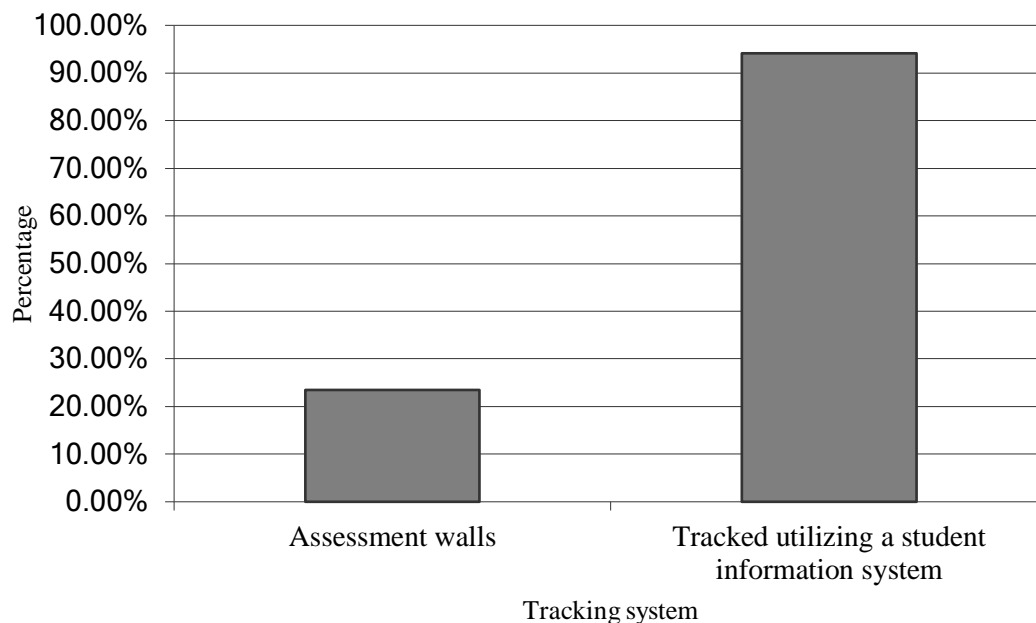
Figure 23. Disaggregation of data. Schools use assessment walls and student information systems to track student data.

Research question four sought to answer, what literacy professional development practices for teachers are in place in top performing Missouri public schools with students who are achieving at or above grade level in reading at the third through eighth grade levels? In 52.4% of the schools a full time reading coach is not on staff, as shown in figure 23. One full time reading coach is on staff in 33.3% of the schools surveyed. Finally, two full time reading coaches are on staff in 14.3% of the schools.
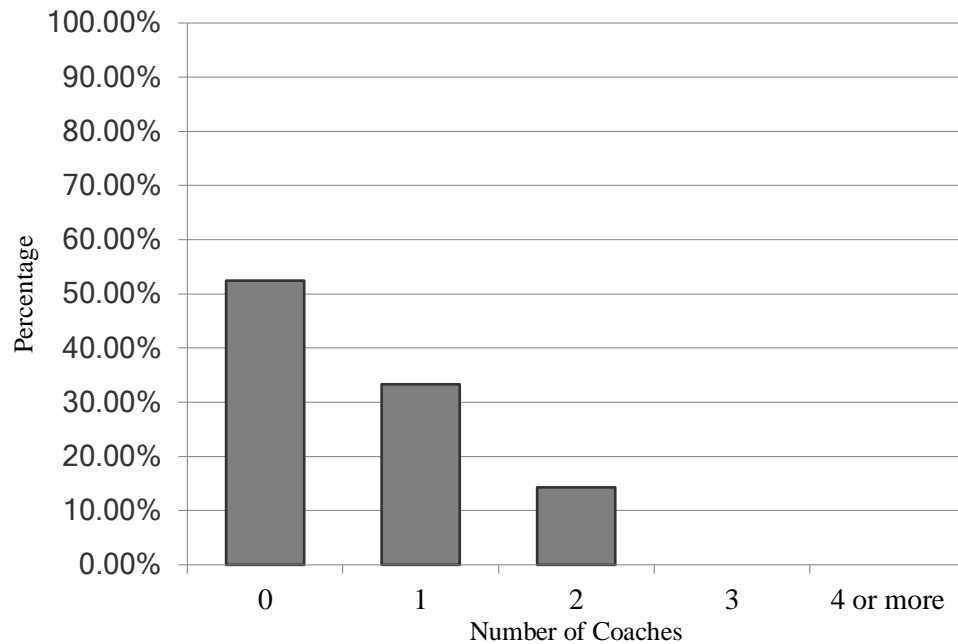
Figure 24. Full time reading coaches.

In schools that have reading coaches on staff, 70% of reading coaches provide professional development for teachers, while 30% of the schools with reading coaches do not have reading coaches facilitate professional development (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. Professional development provided by reading coaches.
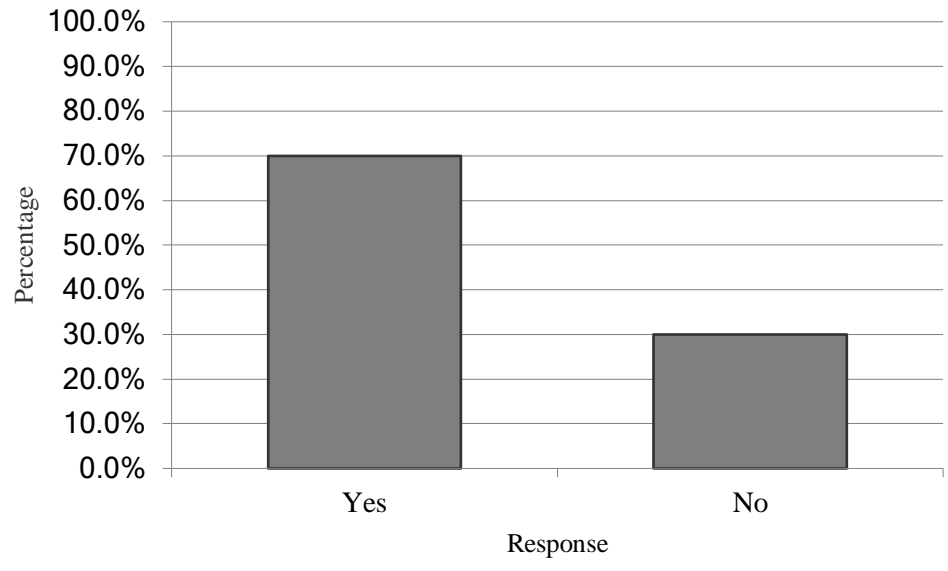
In Figure 26, 14.3% of the teachers in high performing schools receive professional development through off campus workshops or in-services, as shown in Figure 26. The teachers in the schools surveyed receive professional development through on-site professional development 61.9% of the time, while 23.8% receive professional development from instructional coaching.
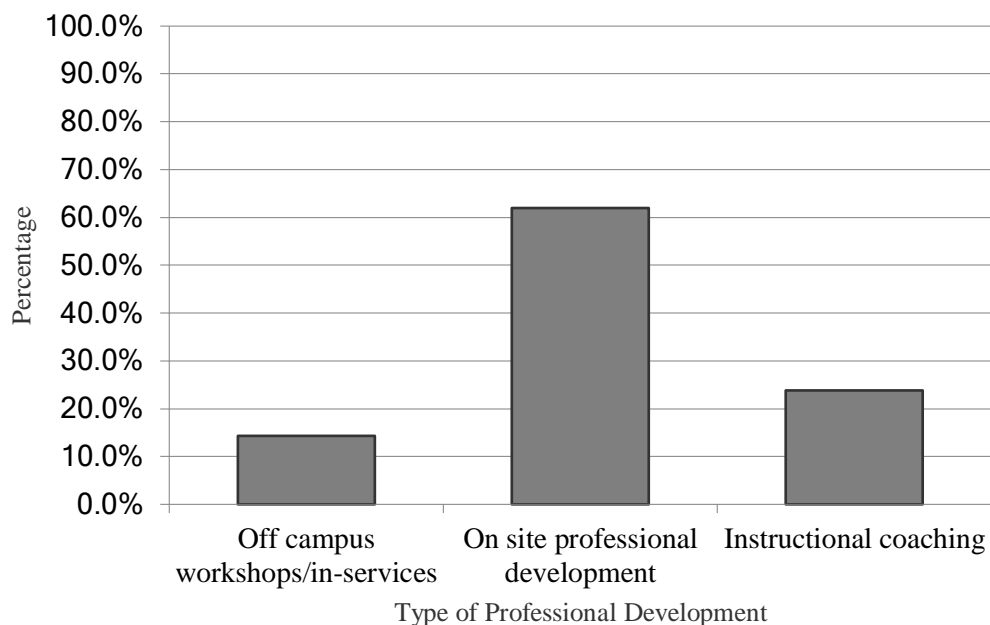
Figure 26. Primary source of professional development. Teachers receive professional development through on-site and instructional coaching

Summary

No one solution exists to solve the gap in literacy achievement in the United States. Schools must focus on systematic reform and adhere to the vision and goals set forth by the district in order to make significant improvements in reading (Carroll, 2010). The adage "It takes a village to raise a child" is applicable when it comes to children learning literacy skills in order to be successful readers. First, all stakeholders must invest in the students and believe that every student can learn and be willing to invest the time and resources necessary to reach that goal (Carroll, 2010). A significant focus lies on district and building leadership in order to build a foundation for students to be successful in Communication Arts. The principal and superintendent must place a significant priority on high quality teaching and learning (Carroll, 2010).

In addition, the administration must have knowledge of practices that lead to student success. Teachers and administrators must know the protocol of instruction and assessment in order to identify students who are falling behind academically in Communication Arts and then allocate resources for support (Carroll, 2010). Finally, professional development must be explicit in all aspects of reading and writing in order for readers to become more proficient. Providing teachers with mentors, coaches, and other support systems in the classroom to model, coach, and mentor teachers impacts the success of students.

Chapter Five contains the conclusions and recommendations of the research conducted. A summary of the data collection and analysis were discussed. Findings of the best practices in instruction, support systems for struggling readers, curriculum and resources allocated to Communication Arts, and professional development practices in Communication Arts were presented. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research were proposed.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to discover the connections that exist between schools with high student achievement in Communication Arts and instructional practices, professional development, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts. Common characteristics of programs likely to make a difference in the reading achievement of elementary and middle school students were examined throughout the study. The MAP student achievement data in grades 3 through 8, in 2010 and 2011, was collected from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) for the study. Based on the MAP indices obtained from the MODESE, the top 10% of schools with Communication Arts student achievement scores in the state of Missouri were identified. The schools in the top 10% achievement in Communication Arts in 2010 and 2011 were identified as high performing schools. A survey was distributed to the principals in the schools on the list of high performing schools via SurveyMonkey. Survey results were then analyzed to determine the common characteristics of high performing schools in Communication Arts.

Findings

Research question one was stated as, "What instructional practices are in place in primary classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?" In the school districts identified as high achieving schools in Missouri through the use of MAP score indices in 2010 and 2011, common instructional practices were identified as being used by these districts. The districts identified herein as high achieving were identified as achieving in the top 10% of the school districts in Missouri on the MAP achievement test in grades 3 through 8 in

2010 and 2011. These schools are schools for others to model instruction after in order for students to find success in reading.

In these high achieving schools, assessments are given at all grade levels. Benchmark assessment data are used in guiding small reading groups, as well as to place students for extra time and support. In 66.7% of the classrooms at all schools, students are given standardized assessments to prepare for state assessments. Students who are given a standardized assessment in preparation for the state assessment are given district generated practice assessments 80% of the time, as well as use Study Island for 60% of the assessments.

Reading instruction in the classrooms in high achieving schools in this study was consistent in primary and intermediate classrooms with 64.7% of primary classrooms and 57.1% of intermediate classrooms guided by individual reading assessments with guided reading group instruction. In the primary classrooms, Reader's Workshop was used in 35.3% of the classrooms, while 17.6% of classrooms were guided by a basal reading series. In intermediate classrooms in the study, 14.3% of classrooms were identified as using Four-Block reading instruction, while 14.3% identified basal series as a primary source for instruction. Similarly, students in grades 7 and 8 in the study are guided by individual reading assessments with small group reading instruction as a primary means of instruction.

Flexible reading groups are guided by teachers in primary classrooms 5 or more times per week in primary classrooms in 58.8% of the classrooms in the study. In intermediate classrooms in the study students meet 3 times per week in 36% of the classrooms in the study and 36% of the classrooms meet 5 or more times per week.

Flexible reading groups in grades 7 and 8 in the classrooms in the study meet one time per week 37% of the time.

Key information indicated that teachers in classrooms in high achieving schools are conferencing one-on-one with the students between 1 and 5 times per week at the primary and intermediate grades. In seventh and eighth grades, teachers in 70% of the schools conference with students one time per week.

Literacy corners are used in high performing schools in primary classrooms in 70% of the schools and in intermediate classrooms in 45% of the schools. Thirty percent of high performing schools in the study indicated literacy corners are not used as a part of instruction. Writer's workshop was a consistent component in instruction at all levels in the high performing schools surveyed, with 100% of the schools using Writer's workshop at the intermediate level and 80% using it at the primary level.

In research question two the researcher sought to answer the question, "What support systems are in place for students who fall below grade level in primary classrooms in Missouri public schools where 90% of students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?" In high performing schools students are receiving additional time and support for Communication Arts during the school day. When students receive additional time and support, reading instruction is provided by the regular education teacher. Additional support is provided in areas identified as weaknesses for the student. In addition, students in high performing schools receive Tier 2 interventions. In a Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model, tiers of the instructional process are incorporated for students. Tier 1 is considered the pillar where all students receive instruction based on evidence-based, scientifically-based best practice during core

reading time in the classroom (Sharpiro, n.d.). Tier 2 instruction is designed for students who are given benchmark assessments and fall below the expected academic levels of achievement and are considered at high risk for failure (Sharpiro, n.d.).

Research question three sought to answer, "What curriculum and resources are in place in elementary and middle school classrooms in Missouri public schools where students are reading at or above grade level in the third through eighth grades?" In schools where students are performing at high levels of student achievement in Missouri the essential learning outcomes in Communication Arts are clearly defined in the curriculum. In addition, in high performing schools, the scope and sequence is written in Communication Arts.

At schools where students are reaching high levels of student achievement in Communication Arts, students are given benchmark assessments throughout the year in Communication Arts. The benchmark assessments are given in schools with high student achievement at the kindergarten through fifth grade levels consistently and then decrease in implementation in sixth through eighth grades. The benchmark assessment data is then tracked using a student information system in the school to disaggregate the data.

Research question four focused on answering the question, "What literacy professional development practices for teachers are in place in Missouri public schools with students who are achieving at or above grade level in reading at the third through eighth grade levels?" In the high performing schools in the survey over half of the schools did not have full-time reading coaches on staff. In 33.3% of the schools one full time reading coach is on staff in the schools and in 14.3% of the schools 2 full-time reading coaches are on staff. In the schools with reading coaches assignments were made

in the primary classrooms 80% of the time, in intermediate classrooms 90% of the time, and in grades 7 and 8 30% of the time. In schools that have reading coaches on staff, the reading coach provides professional development workshops for the teachers in 70% of the schools surveyed. Further, in high performing schools, 85.7% of teachers receive professional development through on-site professional development opportunities or instructional coaching.

Conclusions

Survey results indicated that students reading at or above grade level, as determined on state assessments, as well as on benchmark achievements, have been assessed by the teacher using benchmark assessment tools in the school in order to determine placement and boost student achievement. The National Research Council (NRC) stated that in order for assessments to be of quality assessments must be 1) coherent, 2) comprehensive, and 3) continuous (Herman, Osmundson, & Dietel, 2010). A coherent system has assessments, which are aligned to student goals and objectives (Herman et al., 2010).

A comprehensive system provides the school with a complete set of standards while in addition providing the student data to make decisions (Herman et al., 2010). Finally, a continuous system provides student achievement data throughout the school year (Herman et al., 2010). The benchmark assessments are then used to drive instruction in guided reading groups. Placement in guided reading groups is used to individualize and intensify learning of skills. In addition, the grouping of students allows teachers to tailor instruction for individual learning needs and to provide individual support for students.

The high achieving schools did not use one type of instruction for student instruction in Communication Arts; however, a variety of strategies were utilized to meet the needs of students. Teachers in classrooms where students are successful in Communication Arts instruct students in flexible reading groups 5 or more times per week and are conferencing one-on-one with students more than 1 time per week. Writer's workshop was an integral part of Communication Arts instruction in high performing schools throughout the study. Exemplary teachers have a wide variety of instructional and content knowledge from which to draw. Master teachers then implement the knowledge in the classroom in order to increase student learning.

Schools that have students finding success in Communication Arts have curriculum learning outcomes clearly defined. In addition, a scope and sequence has been established as a guideline for teachers to follow in Communication Arts instruction. The Missouri Learning Standards are aligned to the National Common Core Standards and have been adopted by the MODESE in order to promote literacy for students in Missouri. In schools with high performing students, benchmark assessments are given in Communication Arts in kindergarten through fifth grade consistently. Some schools are using benchmark assessment data at the sixth through eighth grade levels to drive instructional practices in the classroom. A review of literature suggested that teachers use benchmark assessment data to drive instruction for students in small, flexible reading groups (Clay, 2008; Dorn & Soffos, 2001b). Additionally, the instruction must be based on scientifically based practices to meet student needs (Armbruster et al., 2008). In order to make significant gains in student achievement, a systematic strategic plan must be in place to monitor the progress of students (Dorn & Schuber, 2008). Although the research

literature indicated strategic, systematic use of student performance data is important in increasing student achievement and increasing reading achievement, what lacks clarity is the person responsible for interpreting the data and how the data are then used (Apthrop et al., 2001).

Professional development in schools with students who are successful in Communication Arts is primarily done on-site. Instructional coaches provide professional development to the teachers in the schools that have instructional coaches on staff. The review of literature suggested that reading coaches be used as mentors and coaches to the teachers to improve knowledge of instructional practices in Communication Arts.

Implications for Practice

As NCLB continues to hold schools accountable for student achievement, school district leaders must gather and maintain all student achievement data available for students in order to increase student achievement. The demands by NCLB mandate that school leaders evaluate curriculum, instruction, professional development, and resources in schools. The knowledge from this survey will empower school leaders to make informed decisions regarding the Communication Arts program in school.

School leaders must ensure that the curriculum in the school is aligned with Common Core State Standards and the Missouri Learning Standards. Alignment with these standards will assist students in acquiring the necessary skills to be successful in Communication Arts. Having a scope and sequence in place to assist teachers in the implementation of the curriculum is a leading factor in student mastery of the content.

The Communication Arts instruction in classrooms must follow researched practices in order to afford students viable instruction. Phonemic awareness, phonics,

fluency, vocabulary and comprehension must all be addressed in a comprehensive Communication Arts classroom. Reading and writing are reciprocal elements in a Communication Arts classroom. It is important to include reading and writing simultaneously. There is no one method of instruction that increases student achievement in Communication Arts more effectively than does others.

It is important to note that the analysis of data should be an integral component of the Communication Arts instruction in a classroom. By analyzing individual student achievement through a balance of benchmark assessments and norm referenced assessments, the students' individual strengths and weaknesses are identified. Teachers may then design instruction in a balanced method through whole group and small group instruction, based on the data available. Student conferencing one-on-one with the teacher is also organized based on student assessment data. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), teachers must provide a balanced approach to literacy instruction including direct instruction as well as providing students the opportunity to apply prior knowledge and experiences to apply the knowledge (NICHD, 2000).

School district leaders must focus on the professional development of teachers. On-site professional development for teachers through literacy coaching, cohort teams of teachers, and on-site professional development impacts instructional practices and student achievement in the classroom. Literacy coaches build trusting relationships with teachers and model and coach in real-time to impact the learning of the students. In addition, literacy coaches lead professional conversations with teachers to analyze student achievement data and investigate current best practices for implementation in the school.

Students who are struggling in reading and writing may need immediate intervention. Reading Recovery is available for first grade students and is proven to make a difference in Communication Arts achievement. In addition, students who are struggling to keep up with peers must have additional time and support in addition to classroom instruction. Many high achieving schools are providing additional time and support during the school day to expand student's skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research recommendations could include an analysis of instructional practices in elementary and middle school Communication Arts classrooms. The study could focus on student engagement in the classroom during small guided reading groups, both of the students being served by the teacher with direct instruction and the students in indirect instruction. In addition, an analysis of the impact of writing in Communication Arts instruction would be a benefit for future reference in analyzing the impact of Communication Arts instruction in the classroom.

Summary

Improving literacy for students is imperative as improvements schools are made and students move forward in today's society. In order to achieve our goal of a literate nation, a focus must be on imbedded instructional practices, strategic plans for improving the reading and writing of students who are struggling to meet academic standards, and a systematic professional development plan for teachers (National Governor's Council, 2005). A comprehensive Communication Arts program would focus on these components.

Research-based imbedded instructional practices will have a positive effect on student achievement in Communication Arts. Teachers must identify practices that are proven to make a significant impact on the learning of students and then apply those strategies in the classroom. Through ongoing assessments in the classroom teachers must identify students' strengths and weaknesses and design instruction and intervention to support students' needs. The teacher should, in addition to the regular instruction, provide intervention strategies in the classroom. Finally, a systematic plan for professional development must be established in order to make a significant difference in student achievement for students. Instructional coaches including reading coaches may be utilized to improve instructional practices in the classroom.

Hankins, Tracey

From: Beth Kania-Gosche no-reply@irbnet.org
Sent: Tue 2/26/2013 10:05 AM
To: Hankins, Tracey; Lisa Christiansen; Sherry DeVore
Subject: IRBNet Board Action

Please note that Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [419683-1] Best Practices and Student Achievement in Elementary and Middle School Reading Principal Investigator: Tracey Hankins

Submission Type: New Project
Date Submitted: February 20, 2013

Action: APPROVED
Effective Date: February 26, 2013
Review Type: Expedited Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Beth Kania-Gosche at bkania-gosche@lindenwood.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. If benchmark assessments are given in Communication Arts, how are the data

   used to influence instruction in the classroom?

   a. To guide small guided reading groups
   b. To place students for additional time and support, in addition to instruction
      allotted in the regular schedule.

2. Do your students use standardized assessments aligned to the state assessment in

   preparation for the state exam (MAP)?

   a. Yes
   b. No

3. If yes, what assessment tool is used in your district to prepare students for the

   MAP test?

   a. District generated practice assessments
   b. State generated practice assessments
   c. Study Island
   d. NWEA

4. What model/s of instruction is/are utilized for reading instruction in your primary

   (K-3) classrooms?

   a. Guided by a basal series
   b. Guided by individual reading assessments with small group reading
      instruction
   c. Four-Block reading instruction
   d. Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Model by Linda Dorn
   e. Our district has designed our own model of instruction. Please describe
      below

5. What model/s of instruction is/are utilized for reading instruction in your

    intermediate (4-6) classrooms?

    a. Guided by a basal series
    b. Guided by individual reading assessments with small group reading
        instruction
    c. Four-Block reading instruction
    d. Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Model by Linda Dorn
    e. Our district has designed our own model of instruction. Please describe
        below

6. What model/s of instruction is/are utilized for reading instruction in your 7th and

    8th grade classrooms in your school district?

    a. Guided by a basal series
    b. Guided by individual reading assessments with small group reading
        instruction
    c. Four-Block reading instruction
    d. Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Model by Linda Dorn
    e. Our district has designed our own model of instruction. Please describe
        below

7. How many times per week are flexible reading groups meeting with the teacher

    for small group instruction in primary (K-3) classrooms?

    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5+

8. How many times per week are flexible reading groups meeting with the teacher

    for small group instruction in intermediate (4-6) classrooms?

    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5+

9. How many times per week are flexible reading groups meeting with the teacher

    for small group instruction in 7th and 8th grade classrooms?

    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5+

10. How many times per week are teacher's conferencing with students one-on-one in

    reading in primary (K-3) classrooms in your district?

    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5+

11. How many times per week are teacher's conferencing with students one-on-one in reading in intermediate (4-6) classrooms in your district?

    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5+

12. How many times per week are teacher's conferencing with students one-on-one in reading in 7th and 8th grade classrooms in your district?

    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5+

13. Indicate where literacy corners are an integral part of literacy instruction in your school.

    a. In primary classrooms
    b. In intermediate classrooms
    c. Neither

14. Indicate where writer's workshop (with mini-lessons, independent student writing time, and student conferences) is integrated in your school.

    a. In primary classrooms
    b. In intermediate classrooms
    c. In 7th and 8th grade classrooms
    d. No writer's workshop is integrated

15. How many full time reading coaches are on staff in your school?

    a. 0

    b. 1

    c. 2

    d. 3

    e. 4+

    f.

16. If reading coaches are on staff, at what grade levels does the coach work in

    classrooms?

    a. The primary grades (K-3)
    b. The intermediate grades (4-6)
    c. 7th and 8th grades

17. How are students reading below grade level or scoring basic or below basic in

    Communication Arts provided with extra time and support?

    a. Before/after school tutoring
    b. Scheduled additional time in the school day
    c. Reading Recovery
    d. Response to Intervention-Level 2 interventions
    e. Specific individual plans for students without identified disabilities
    f. None

18. Are essential learning outcomes defined in writing in your Communication Arts

    curriculum?

    a. Yes
    b. No

19. Do you have a scope and sequence in your Communication Arts curriculum?

    a. Yes
    b. No

20. Are there benchmark assessments given to students in Communication Arts?

    a. Yes

    b. No

21. If yes, at what grade levels are benchmark assessments given?

    a. Kindergarten

    b. First grade

    c. Second grade

    d. Third grade

    e. Fourth grade

    f. Fifth grade

    g. Sixth grade

    h. Seventh grade

    i. Eighth grade

22. If benchmark assessments are given in Communication Arts, how are the data

disaggregated?

    a. Assessment walls

    b. Tracked utilizing a student information system

23. How many full time reading coaches are on staff in your school?

    a. 0

    b. 1

    c. 2

    d. 3

    e. 4+

24. If you have reading coach/es in your school, does the coach provide professional

development workshops for the teachers?

    a. Yes

    b. No

25. What is the primary source of professional development in reading for teachers?

      a.   Off campus workshops/in-services

      b.   On site professional development

      c.   Instructional coaching

Appendix C

Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301
Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

*"Best Practices and Student Achievement
in Elementary and Middle School Reading"*

Principle Investigator: Tracey L. Hankins

Telephone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮   E-mail: thankins@miller.k12.mo.us

Participant _____ Contact info_____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tracey Hankins under the guidance of Dr. Lisa Christiansen. The purpose of the study is to discover the relationships that exist between schools with high student achievement in Communication Arts and instructional practices, professional development, and time available for intervention and instruction in Communication Arts.

2. This survey will include the following:
    a)   Your participation will involve completion of a brief survey regarding the instructional practices, curriculum, professional development, and time available for intervention in Communication Arts in your school. The survey will be conducted online through SurveyMonkey and the information you provide will remain anonymous.

    b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately ten to twenty minutes. Approximately 390,000 students' data will be analyzed in Communication Arts, grades 3 through 8, in the state of Missouri on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) 2011 and 2012. Schools with the top 10% of student achievement in the state of Missouri in both years will be identified. A survey will be distributed to 110 participants in those school districts to identify the best instructional practices, curriculum, professional development, and intervention available for students.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge regarding best practices in Communication Arts instruction and professional development and may help to improve educational decisions and practices affecting student achievement.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Tracey Hankins at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date   Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date   Investigator Printed Name

Revised 1-21-2010

Appendix D

Permission Letter for Principal

January 23, 2013

Dear Principal _____,
I am conducting a research project entitled, *Best Practices and Student Achievement in Elementary and Middle School Reading,* in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a doctoral degree in instructional leadership at Lindenwood University. The research gathered should assist in providing insights and perspectives into the specific components of merit pay programs that positively affect student achievement. By utilizing quantitative data, common characteristics of programs likely to make a difference in the reading achievement of elementary and middle school students will be examined.

I am seeking your permission, as the principal, to conduct a survey as part of the data collection and analysis process. The surveys will be brief, taking approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Consent is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The identity of the participants, as well as the identity of the school district will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation or any future publications of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation (phone: 417-827-7731 or electronic mail: traceyhankins09@gmail.com). You may also contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Sherry DeVore (phone: 417-881-0009 or electronic mail: sdevore@lindenwood.edu). A copy of this letter and your written consent should be retained by you for future reference. I greatly appreciate your help with this study.

Yours truly,

Tracey L. Hankins
Doctoral Candidate

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Vita

Tracey Linne Hankins currently serves as the Superintendent at Miller R-II School District in Miller, Missouri. Her career as an educator spans 26 years including eleven years as an Elementary Teacher, thirteen years as an Elementary Principal, and the last two years as a Superintendent of Schools. Ms. Hankins has served the students in Missouri with passion and servant leadership throughout her career.

Ms. Hankins received her Bachelor of Science in Education and Masters of Science in Education degrees from Missouri State University. An Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis was received from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Ms. Hankins has served the students at Southwest Baptist University from 2003-2012 as an adjunct professor in the Education department. In addition, she has been an adjunct professor for Lindenwood University from 2002-2012.