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A Study of the Effect of Additional Reading Assistance on Student Achievement

Nicole A. Gillan-Sanderson
Lindenwood University

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Nicole A. Gillan-Sanderson

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Sherrie Wisdom	5-4-2012
Dr. Sherrie Wisdom, Dissertation Chair	Date
Jed Deets	5-8-2012
Dr. Jed Deets, Committee Member	Date
Stephen Sherblom	May 4 2012
Dr. Stephen Sherblom, Committee Member	Date
Barb Zarzeck	04-05-12
Barb Zarzeck, Committee Member	Date

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 here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Nicole A. Gillan-Sanderson

Signature: Nicole A. Gillan-Sanderson Date: 5-4-12

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Abstract

This study describes a procedure one school district used to increase students' reading abilities through reviewing data and adjusting the instruction to give students intensive services, as needed. This school worked in a problem-solving team approach to develop a comprehensive team that followed the progression of student achievement. Professional development was utilized extensively to make adjustments for reading instruction to a data-driven approach.

The targeted population consisted of third through fifth grade students in the Southern Illinois Area. The study school averaged student scores that dropped three years in a row between the years 2004-2008. With the demands of No Child Left Behind, this school must increase scores at a rate of 2.4% yearly to remain on target and avoid perception as a failing school.

The literature review suggested that educators differentiate instruction and utilize best practices to improve reading comprehension and fluency. These suggestions created a balanced literacy approach, grouped students into smaller groups, tiered students into groups, utilized job-embedded professional development, and utilized a problem-solving team approach. The researcher focused on data through district assessments to target individual student needs. Once students were targeted for additional reading assistance, students were placed into Power Hour. This reading hour focused on the elements of balanced literacy, and students who were not successful in Power Hour were referred to the problem-solving team, known as PASS, to develop a comprehensive plan to meet their needs through additional reading instruction during afternoon sessions.

The analysis of student achievement data was determined by comparing pretests to posttests at different stages of the program. Pretest and posttest scores were gathered for students enrolled in Power Hour and PASS, and the results of student achievement on the Illinois State Achievement Test in grades three, four, and five were included in the analysis. Results indicated there was a significant improvement at each grade level, as well as with the group of students who received intensive assistance. Overall, this study supported a positive effect of additional reading assistance on a student's independent reading ability.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

The assessment of academic progress is a vital part of our educational system. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the latest revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and is aimed at bringing each child up to the learning standards of the state in which he or she lives. NCLB requires that by the year 2014 every child will be performing at his/her expected grade level (United States Department of Education, 2008). Schools are currently required to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) towards this goal. In Illinois, this progress is measured by state assessments of achievement in reading and mathematics, school attendance rates, and graduation rates each successive year in comparison to the previous academic years (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004). Overall, NCLB requires proof of student improvement each year toward the final goal of every child performing at grade level. This new legislation requires documentation of student progress toward these goals (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004).

The study school is located in Southern Illinois and consists of one elementary school and one middle school. There are 600 students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade (P-5). Students attending this school district reside in a four square mile radius of the school. The students attend a local high school for grades nine through12.

The study school has 24 homerooms with two self-contained special education classes and one resource special education class. Class sizes for grades kindergarten through second grades average 19 students and class sizes for grades three through five average 24 students. According to the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2008), teachers

on average have 12 years of experience—47% with a bachelor's degree and 53% with a master's degree. The demographics of the teachers that serve this district are the following: Caucasian 85% and minority 15%. The study school serves a community that has 77% Caucasian students and 23% minority students with 4% of the students living in low-income households. Parental involvement stands at 99%, with a 96% attendance rate, a 9% mobility rate, and a 13% student Individual Educational Plan (IEP) rate. Class sizes are limited to 22:1. Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) resulted in 91% of the students meeting or exceeding state standards in grades three through five. In grades six through eight, 90% of the students met or exceeded state standards. Of the 13% of the students with IEPs, 75% of those students are third grade or higher (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2008).

Students in the study school are assessed periodically each year to ensure they are learning at a successful rate. Testing students more often allowed the district to analyze student progress and determine the needs of students on an ongoing basis. In September, elementary students are pre-tested with the following:

1. Gates-McGinitie Reading Tests
2. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

In January, mid-year, elementary students are tested with the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).In March, students in grades three through eight are tested with the ISAT. In May, students are post-tested with the following:

1. Gates-McGinitie Reading Tests
2. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

Analyzing the data from the assessments described above helps determine which students are progressing.

Statement of the Problem

The study school is one of the highest performing schools in the Southern Illinois Area. Even though this school is high performing, there are still valid concerns regarding student achievement. The ISAT results for the study school indicated that from the years 2004-2008 average student scores dropped three years in a row, totaling a 4% decrease. During the years 2007 and 2008 the study school maintained the status quo. By 2014, 100% of students in grades three through five must be making adequate progress, which is defined by the Illinois State Board. This school must continue to make progress at a steady rate of 2.4% each year in order to remain on target, or be seen as falling behind. In order for this to happen, this research proposes to evaluate present practices and to consider alternatives to current instruction in the areas of reading that will more effectively impact student achievement.

Prior to this study, the study school used a traditional style to teach reading. The teachers followed the basal series, assigned students to read the selection, answer questions, and tested on the story. There was not much differentiation and students that were not successful were referred to testing for Special Education. Interventions were done on a minimal basis and data collection was limited to performance defined by grades taken within the classroom setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this project is to determine if additional reading assistance given to students not meeting quarterly targets at the study school had a positive impact on the

academic performance in the area of reading on the assessments given throughout the year.

Research Question

Specifically, the question to be answered was, will students make academic improvement after receiving additional reading assistance in a small group setting?

Variables

Independent Variable. The independent variable in this study was the implementation of reading assistance to students not making adequate yearly progress in reading as measured by the Gates-McGinitie, the study school's local assessment. This extra reading assistance was implemented in two ways, (a) the Power Hour program, which was an hour of contact time for targeted students and (b) the Promoting Academic Success for all Students (PASS) process, designed for students who were not successful with Power Hour to receive additional assistance one on one during afternoon sessions. The goal of this program and process was to increase the percentage of students making adequate yearly progress in reading at their grade level.

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable is the average percentile rank achieved on the Gates-McGinitie test in grades three through five during the fall of 2008 school year and the spring of 2009 school year, the percentage of progress on the DIBELS assessment, and the percentage of students achieving adequate yearly progress on the reading portion of the ISAT.

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis # 1 is that there will be no improvement of the average percentile rank of students in grades three, four, and five who are assigned to extra reading assistance on the reading portion of the Gates-McGinitie.

Null Hypothesis # 2 is that there will be no change in scores on the reading portion of the ISAT when comparing results prior to participation in Power Hour and PASS to results following participation, for students in grades three, four, and five.

Rationale for the Study

The goal for the reading assistance program was to create the opportunity for every student at this elementary school to perform at the highest level of achievement possible to meet the federally mandated educational requirements by year 2014. With the mandates from the NCLB legislation, more emphasis is being placed upon results of standardized testing (United States Department of Education, 2008). It is imperative that educators find ways to identify students who are having difficulty. One method of identifying these students is through the analysis of local assessment test scores and then utilizing the Power Hour block and PASS process to individualize the instruction. It is hypothesized that improvement for these under-performing students will have a direct impact on the year-end test scores for the entire school.

Limitations of the Study

Data collector bias. In accordance with some students' Individual Educational Plan (IEP) goals, some procedures were changed from the standardized procedures. Typical accommodations were to read the test aloud or allow extended time and these

may have resulted in inflated test scores from these students. Due to the students' IEPs, this is a required bias, but this limitation does exist.

Experience of teacher. The level of instructor experience, commitment, and understanding of the reading program may have affected the implementation of the program and achievement performance.

Factors beyond the scope of this study. Students who had incomplete data sets, for purposes of the study, were removed.

Instrumentation threat. The questions that appear on the standardized assessment tool may differ from one year to the next. There are different forms of the test available and therefore, the actual test questions can be different. These alternative forms are designed to be equivalent in the types of questions and the difficulty level, but differences do occur.

Location threat. The teachers in each classroom have a wide variance in resources and teaching styles to enrich their students' academics. These additional resources in some classrooms may account for higher performance by the students within these classrooms on the standardized assessments.

Maturation threat. Due to the passage of time, there is a maturation threat of the internal validity. Some improvement in the area of reading should be expected from students as they mature and participate in other aspects of life related to the skills studied in this research. It is difficult to assess which growth may be due to the interventions and which growth may be due to natural maturation.

Mortality threat. Every effort was made to ensure that all students completed the entire Gates-McGinitie standardized assessment. However, it is possible that a

student was absent for an extended time and unable to complete every section of the test. The results of this study are limited because they only reflect the population of the study school's third, fourth, and fifth grade students.

Definitions of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). According to Illinois State Board of Education (2004b), "Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a measurement defined by the United States federal NCLB Act that allows the U. S. Department of Education to set standards for assessing how every school district in the country is performing academically"(para. 3). In Illinois, this progress is measured by state assessments of achievement in reading and mathematics, school attendance rates, and graduation rates each successive year in comparison to the previous academic years. By 2014, 100% of students should be performing at his or her grade level.

Anna Plan Model for reading instruction (-modified version). According to Miles, Stegle, Hubbs, Henk, and Mallette (2004/2005),

> The Anna Plan model is a whole-class support model for early literacy. It is a unique delivery model for enhancing school-wide literacy instruction. The Anna Plan focuses on both whole-class and small-group instruction with the use of developmentally appropriate texts and repeated readings of them, word solving, phonemic awareness, writing, and ongoing assessments of students' progress. (p. 318)

This model redefines roles of the reading teachers, classroom paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and regular classroom teachers by coordinating schedules and streamlining reading assistance.

Benchmark. Each testing session is called a benchmark. DIBELS recommends testing to be completed three times per year, once in the beginning of the year, again in the middle of the year and finally at the end of the year. At each benchmark, each student is aiming to progress along their individual aim line. An aim line is generated by each student's baseline score achieved, subtracted from the benchmark score needed and divided by the number of weeks an intervention has for implementation (Magnolia Consulting, 2006).

Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).

> DIBELS is a validated, diagnostic measure that educators use for screening, grouping, and monitoring children's progress over time regarding reading comprehension. DIBELS is administered one on one between the student and the teacher. DIBELS scores predict success or failure on end-of-year summative tests such that low scores indicate the likelihood of failure and high scores indicate the likelihood of success. This assessment system 'informs' teaching and learning processes by providing continuous student performance data and reporting improvement to parents, teachers, and administrators to enable evidence-based evaluation and data-driven instruction. The scores are sensitive to small gains, even after short intervals, because of effective instruction. This model combines assessments with web-based data management and reporting applications. (Magnolia Consulting, 2006, p. 5)

Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). The ISAT measures individual student achievement relative to the Illinois Learning Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004).

Intervention. For the purposes of this study, intervention is defined as extra support and instruction that are targeted specifically to skills a student has not acquired (Magnolia Consulting, 2006). In this study, one intervention is the Power Hour, during which we provided students with 100% contact time, which means they were working with one of the three highly qualified adults in the classroom for 60 minutes in the area of reading. Another intervention in this study was the additional assistance given outside of the Power Hour during afternoon sessions which is referred to as the PASS process. During this time, interventions target intensive students who are not successful within the Power Hour model in a one on one instructional setting. Documentation is kept to review progress on a regular basis and the PASS Team meets monthly to review improvements.

Gates-McGinitie.

> Gates-McGinitie is a norm-referenced test, which compares the performance of students with a national norming sample. The test measures reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, with several sub-tests in each area. Scoring on the test is based on a normal distribution of scores generated by the original norming sample. Thus, each year, students who take the test are compared against students who were involved in the initial administrations used to set the scoring tables. (Magnolia Consulting, 2006, p. 4)

Mobility. According to Illinois State Board of Education (2004), mobility refers to the movement of students from one school to another school or one district to another district during the school year. When students are mobile, gaps are created in a child's education because of the inconsistent instruction.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB is a federally mandated educational reform that holds states and individual districts accountable to a set of standards against which every child's educational achievement is measured (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004b).

Power Hour. For the purposes of this study, the term Power Hour refers to a one-hour instructional reading block built into the master schedule. This reading block was implemented at the study school to allow all highly trained personnel to focus on each grade level's reading needs at one time. Each grade level has an hour blocked for reading instruction. During this hour, the students are moved into reading classes on their instructional level. Students that are the *most intense* (a term used to describe the neediest students) are in a reading room with the regular education teacher, special education teacher, and the reading teacher. All other students are in classrooms with a regular education teacher. These students were instructed using a leveled reading series that emphasized the grade level standards, while keeping the interest level high and reading level of the text instructional.

Promoting Academic Success for all Students (PASS). PASS is a school-wide process adopted at the study school. Students referred through this process are referred to as our intensive or PASS students. Referred students were not successful in the instructional reading block, Power Hour. So, they are referred to a team, known as the PASS Team, of highly qualified personnel that will collect necessary data and create an individual instructional plan for these intense students. The PASS Team meets monthly to review progress monitoring from various sources of data. This team is made up of a regular education teacher, special education teacher, psychologist, social worker, reading

teacher, parents, and principal (Wolf Branch School District, 2007). If students are not successful during this process, they were referred to the Special Education Team to determine if there was a need for further data collections.

Progress monitoring. Harn (2007) stated, "Progress monitoring is a scientifically based practice used to assess student's academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction" (para. 19).

Reading interventionist. A reading interventionist is a highly-qualified teacher with a reading degree specializing in research-based interventions and techniques (United States Department of Education, 2008).

Research-based interventions. The United States Department of Education (2008), defined research-based interventions as, "Methods, content, materials, developed with guidance from the collective research and scientific community" (p. 5).

Response to Intervention (RtI).

> RtI is a process that provides immediate intervention to struggling students at the first indication of failure to learn. Through systematic screenings of all students, teachers are able to identify those students, provide differentiated interventions to small groups of students, monitor their progress on those interventions, and adjust instruction accordingly. (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2006, para. 4)

Summary

In summary, this study investigated the relationship between scores on the Gates-McGinitie before and after third, fourth, and fifth grade students received additional reading assistance at the study school. With ongoing pressures from the federal

government to meet AYP, it is imperative that districts find a process that streamlines help to students with significant needs. Even though this district performs at one of the highest academic levels, demographics continue to change and student achievement has not increased at a growth rate to stay competitive. Furthermore, students come into this district without the proper skills foundation to sustain a competitive level. Therefore, testing two times a year is not enough to monitor whether students are progressing towards success. In order to stay competitive academically, schools must know students' progress at all times and change the instructional approaches to meet the needs of all students. This study investigated whether or not the new instructional block and additional assistance makes a statistically significant difference.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) defines the standard of education that applies to all children who attend public schools. According to NCLB (Harbor House Law Press, n.d., para. 1), "The standard expressly includes children with disabilities, limited English proficient children, migratory children, Native American children, neglected or delinquent children, homeless children, and young children in need of reading assistance.

The 'Statement of Purpose' describes the intent of the law:"

> The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments . . . closing the achievement gap between high- and low- performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers . . . holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students. (Wright's Law, n.d., para. 2)

NCLB is the latest revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is aimed at bringing each child up to the learning standards of the state in which the child lives. NCLB requires that by the year 2014 every child will be performing at his/her expected grade level. Schools are currently required to produce AYP towards this goal. Overall, NCLB requires proof of student improvement each year toward the final goal of every child performing at grade level. This 2002 legislation

requires documentation of student progress toward these goals (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004b).

> The Illinois State Board of Education states the following:
>
> On December 3, 2004, Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). The language Congress uses in IDEA 2004 and NCLB (ISBE, 2004) stresses the use of professionally sound interventions and instruction based on defensible research, as well as the delivery of effective academic and behavior programs to improve student performance. Congress believes that as a result, fewer children will require special education services. (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004b, para. 6)

High Stakes Testing

In 2001, the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy assessed teachers' perceptions on the following issues: (a) narrowing of instruction, (b) alignment of state standards and tests with teachers own instruction and tests, (c) pressures teachers feel to raise test scores, and (d) overall opinions about state-mandated testing. This survey was given to a sample of 12,000 public school teachers in grades two through12 in 47 states. The results primarily were comparable in primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. Most teachers felt that the district curriculums were aligned with the state standards. The teachers also felt that the daily instruction and materials were aligned as well. The differences in the teachers' perceptions on the pressures of the state-testing were present. Many of the elementary teachers felt more pressure because they are more accountable for various contents tested. Most middle and high school teachers do not have the pressures of various contents because of specializations. Overall, it is stated that

policy makers must rethink the testing desired outcomes. In many schools, non-tested areas are being pushed aside because of the need to prep the students for testing (Pedulla, 2003).

The pressures and demands of the assessments have built because of the accountability associated with such assessments. Due to accreditation for failing schools being at stake, schools are forced to teach test format and material towards the test to help student with background and exposure, while others are surviving solely on the demographics of the districts and parental involvement making education a priority. Having AYP configured in this manner causes some curricular material to take precedence over other material depending on the needs of the students within schools.

Reading Research

In 2007, According to West Virginia Response to Intervention [WVRtI] (2007), NCLB is defined to be scientifically based reading research as research that:

1. applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction and reading difficulties; and
2. includes research that:

a. employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment,

b. involves rigorous data analysis that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn,

c. relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations, and

d. has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review. (WVRtI, 2007, para. 8)

Effective reading instruction includes a three-tiered reading model designed to meet the needs of all young readers. It is a prevention model intended to catch students before they fail and to provide the supports students need to learn to read during the early years of schooling.

Response to Intervention. According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004, (IDEA 2004) focused national attention on a growing successful practice in the general education classroom—Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is a tool for assessing and working with struggling learners. The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD, 2007) defined RtI as:

> an assessment and intervention process for systematically monitoring student progress and making decisions about the need for instructional modifications or increasingly intensified services using progress monitoring data. (pg. 1)

This practice has brought new interest and major changes made in the NCLB law. The following are three of the major changes:

- …when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in section 602, a local educational agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a sheer discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability…In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures… and a local education agency may use up to 15% of its federal funding…to develop and implement coordinated, early intervening services…for students in kindergarten through grade 12 who have not been identified as needing special education or related services but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment…" (NASDSE, 2006, para. 13 - 14)

Provisions of IDEA 2004 allow school districts to use scientific, research-based interventions as an alternative method for identifying students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). This process is generally referred to as RtI. RtI utilizes a problem-solving framework to identify and address academic and behavioral difficulties for all students using scientific, research-based instruction. RtI is the practice of (a) providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, (b) monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and (c) applying child response data to important educational decisions. RtI practices are proactive, incorporating both

prevention and intervention and are effective at all levels from elementary through secondary grades (NASDSE, 2006).

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (2007) claims, RtI is intended to reduce the numbers of students struggling and "falling through the cracks" by ensuring students are provided high quality instruction taught with fidelity. By using RtI, the district can provide interventions to students as soon as a need arises. This is very different, for example, from the methods associated with the aptitude-achievement discrepancy models traditionally utilized for Specific Learning Disability identification, which have been criticized as a "wait to fail" approach (para. 6). According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, 2006), RtI should include the following:

1. High quality instructional and behavioral supports.
2. Qualified personnel to deliver scientific, research-based interventions with expertise in the intervention used and in the areas of student difficulty.
3. Continuous monitoring of student progress,
4. Students have documentation maintained in their files to document data-based decisions.
5. Fidelity, integrity, and the intended intensity is verifies through documentation.
6. A comprehensive evaluation of the data and response to interventions is completed by a review team.

7. The review team sets interventions that address the individual student's weaknesses and the needed level of intensity, support and resources.
8. Parents are notified verbally and in writing of the entire process used in address student concerns. Documentation of these notifications and involvement are kept.

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (2007) stated:

> In a RtI system, all students receive instruction and positive behavioral supports in the core curriculum supported by strategic and intensive interventions when needed. Therefore, all students, including those with disabilities, are found in Tiers I, II, and III (described below). Important features, such as universal screening, progress monitoring, fidelity of implementation and problem solving occur within each tier. The basic tiered model reflects what we know about students in school: their instructional needs will vary. Thus, the nature of the academic or behavioral intervention changes at each tier, becoming more rigorous as the student moves through the tiers. (para. 7)

Tier I is the general curriculum for all students. The instruction is scientifically based reading instruction that emphasizes the five critical elements of reading. There is 90 minutes of core reading instruction per day. A benchmark assessment is given at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic year (Harn, 2007).

Core curriculum should be effective for approximately 80-85% of the students. If there are a significant number of students not successful in the core curriculum, it is suggested that instructional variables, curricular variables and structural variables should be examined to determine where instruction needs to be

> strengthened, while at the same time addressing the learning needs of the students not being successful. It is important to be proactive and preventative at this stage. (NASDSE, 2006, para. 10).

Tier II is the beginning of treatment. This level is also known as the supplemental instruction level. There are small, academically homogeneous groups (three to five4 students) of students identified with reading difficulties who have not responded to Tier I efforts.

> The program is specialized, scientifically based and emphasizes the five critical elements of reading. These students are getting an additional 30 minutes per day in small groups outside of the core 90 minutes of reading instruction. These students' progress is monitored twice a month on target skills to ensure adequate learning is taking place. (Harn, 2007, para. 25).

This level should only serve approximately 15% of the students. "Based on performance data, when students improve 3-5 weeks consistently on their biweekly progress monitoring plan they are move back into Tier I" (NASDSE, 2006, para. 11).

Tier III is the intensive level. This level focuses on, "Students with marked difficulties in reading or reading disabilities who have not responded adequately to Tier I and II efforts" (NASDSE, 2006, para. 12).

> The program is sustained, intensive, scientifically based and emphasizes the critical elements of reading for students with reading difficulties/disabilities. The groups are homogeneous small groups with no more than three students at a time. There is a minimum of two 30-minute sessions per day in small groups or 1:1 in

> addition to the 90-minute core-reading block of regular reading instruction. (Harn, 2007, para. 26).

These students' progress is monitored weekly to ensure adequate learning. "This level serves approximately 5% of the students. Based on performance data, when students improve 6-9 weeks consistently on their weekly progress monitoring plan they are moved back into Tier II" (NASDSE, 2006, para. 13).

One of the greatest challenges with developing an RtI system is funding. The Federal Government recommends school districts to use up to 15% of a school district's budget on RtI efforts. That can be quite a large amount of federal funds. Especially for the schools that do not qualify for federal funding, since it is based on free and reduced lunch status. These schools then have to use their operating funds, which take away from other building and district improvements.

> The government highly encourages districts to get creative in identifying, consolidating, supplementing and integrating resources from diverse funding sources to produce the infrastructure necessary to support the RtI implementation in the future. It may take realigning or restructuring of existing resources and personnel, including staff and time in order to find a way to implement RtI efforts. Therefore, successful implementation of RtI may require changes in roles and role clarification. (NASDSE, 2006, para. 14)

Problem-solving. Before problem-solving teams can be productive, norms need to be set for teams to operate within. According to Garmston (2007), schools must start paying attention to creating a collaborative culture to influence curriculum and student

achievement. When collaborating, Garmston recommends developing seven key norms. It is important primarily because people will begin to monitor themselves individually and as a group, and the norms will begin to shape the behaviors of new members. The seven norms for group problem-solving are:

1. Promote a spirit of inquiry-questioning one's own thinking and others;
2. Pause-allow wait time to reflect on question prompted;
3. Paraphrase-restating what is says keeps everyone hearing and understanding the same information;
4. Probe-use open ended questions to probe what colleagues mean;
5. Put ideas on the table;
6. Pay attention to oneself and others-learning styles;
7. Presume positive intentions of one's collaborators;

When discussions follow these seven norms, people will feel more at ease to participate (Garmston, 2007). When meeting about student achievement, conversations must be productive. Using the seven norms will create the environment to allow everyone to share ideas about a particular student and or area of curriculum.

Teams using problem-solving techniques should make decisions within a system. The purpose of these teams is to find the best instructional approach for a student with an academic or behavioral problem. This process provides a structure for using data to monitor student learning so good decisions can be made at each tier with a high probability of success. When using this method, teams answer four interrelated questions:

1. Is there a problem and what is it?

2. Why is it happening?
3. What are we going to do about it?
4. Did our interventions work?

Problem solving and standard techniques ensure decisions about a student's needs are driven by the student's response to high quality interventions. (NASDSE, 2006, para. 20).

Right now, only 5% or less of the available research on school reform strategies has clearly demonstrated effects. Comprehensive School Reform and school-wide models state to:

> have promised they are research-based and provide the training and other supports needed to encourage a coordinated approach to improvement that addresses curriculum and instruction, professional development, leadership, parental and community involvement, and other components needed for student success. Since 1998 when the federal Comprehensive School Reform funds became available, schools nationwide have adopted more than 700 different CSR models. Depending on the quality of implementation, research evidence to date indicates some of these models are more effective than others. The results vary greatly—even with the most effective models. (Comprehensive School Reform, 2007, para. 4).

Professional Learning Communities. Professional Learning Communities is an idea or premise that the most promising strategy for substantive school improvement is developing the capacity of school personnel to function as a collaborative team rather than separate, isolated classrooms where teaching, not learning is taking place.

According to Eaker and Dufour (2002), the PLC framework can be grouped into three major themes: a) a solid foundation consisting of collaboratively developed and widely shared mission, vision, values, and goals, b) collaborative teams that work interdependently to achieve common goals, and c) a focus on results as evidenced by a commitment to continuous improvement.

By adopting this philosophy, teachers will begin to work together to facilitate student learning instead of just teaching. Through this process, teachers are given time to collaborate and brainstorm ways to improve student learning. Teachers are asked to share their success by teaching colleagues different approaches to concepts.

Best Practices and Strategies

According to Burggraf (2004), best practices of teaching and learning innovations have been found to lead to improved school performance. Best practices in education find ways to reach all students by teaching material for understanding. This effort encompasses activities oriented toward higher-order thinking skills. These skills are evidenced by problem solving and creating instead of simply reproducing knowledge, greater use of cooperative learning, and assessment on samples of work that illustrate understanding and application rather than memorization and reproduction. Educating all students includes individualizing instruction and mainstreaming students with special needs by working in teacher teams to create a successful environment for all students.

Strategies are the discrete programs and general actions necessary to accomplish improvement. While all districts have to define what the district wants to do, strategies tell how the desired effect will be accomplished. In order to be effective, strategies must be designed in a measurable form and broken down into a set of major steps or

components that will be taken in order to accomplish the designs of programming (Burggraf, 2004).

Balanced literacy research. In the mid-1960s, the United States Office of Education published comparative research on reading instruction models for first grade (Venezky, 1984). This research effort created interest in the foundations of reading. From this debate, researchers developed two distinctive views: the skills-based approach and the meaning-based approach (Johnson, 1999). The research focused on which approach was the best way to teach reading. Research supports the finding that effective reading instruction needs skill instruction, including phonics and phonemic awareness, while incorporating high-interest reading and writing experiences. This combined method was referred to as the balanced literacy approach.

According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), a Balanced Literacy Program consists of a variety of reading and writing activities. These activities range from teacher directed to students working independently. Fountas and Pinnell believed balanced literacy is a philosophical orientation that assumes achievement will come through effective reading and writing instruction. This instruction should support multiple levels and varying instructional approaches (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Guided reading is one aspect of a Balanced Literacy Program. This approach to teaching reading is considerably different from the traditional way of teaching reading, known as teacher-directed. In the past, teachers would deliver directions to read a story, answer the questions and follow with a brief discussion about the story and/or elements. Guided reading is delivered in a much different manner (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Guided reading is a process where four to six students are grouped together according to their instructional need. These groups are dynamic, flexible, and are meant to change on a regular basis. The teacher selects the text to be used in the group based upon an observed need. These texts are at the appropriate reading level for each group. The lessons have a specific focus, relevant to the grade level standard being taught that week and is engaging enough to keep the students actively involved. There is not a prescribed sequence of stories or script. The focus is on the student, not on the lesson or curriculum flow chart. The teacher sits with the students for 25-30 minutes working on *pre, during* and *after- reading* strategies. During this time, the teacher listens to students read individually one on one, as opposed to *round robin* where teachers assign students paragraphs and ask them to read aloud. Listening to students read individually allows teachers to conference with each student and note good and bad reading behaviors. Skill practice is embedded in the shared reading. The teacher and student interact with the text to construct meaning. Assessments are ongoing and used during instruction rather than at the end of a course or unit. Progress monitoring is completed periodically throughout the quarter to make sure students are kept in their correct instructional grouping (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

There are great benefits to guided reading. Guided reading is consistent with current research and understandings about learning and teaching. It can be used in all levels of education. Guided reading helps the reader develop reading strategies, higher order thinking skills, motivation, confidence and a positive attitude toward reading. Because of small groupings, a teacher can provide the necessary support students need to read and comprehend texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Guided reading allows many opportunities for interdisciplinary instruction. For example, teaching a variety of genres and being able to teach everyone the same genre on their instructional level. Another example is to have the opportunity to complete a content study on a subject like hurricanes or tornadoes. This opportunity would also allow students to be guided through science or social studies books at their own pace, but still are exposed to grade level material. The chances to instruct throughout all the disciplines are unlimited with guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Standards play an essential role in learning to read and write. Guided reading supports the standards in a big picture kind of way. Guided reading is focused on the individual students' needs, not necessarily the curriculum or standards. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) argued that a successful guided reading lesson should always follow the sequence: selecting the text with a purpose, introducing the text, reading the text, discussing and revisiting the text, extending the meaning, and engaging in some type of the word work. Since standards are written on a gradient level, the pre, during, and after activities for each lesson should focus on the group's instructional standard. It is expected that predictions about the book, the understanding of the concepts about print, story elements/discussions, word work, and a closure activity that will allow students to culminate their learning will be included in all lessons (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Certainly, activities in a guided reading lesson for kindergarten are not the same as first grade, and first grade is very different from second through fifth grades. In a kindergarten guided reading lesson, one would expect to see letters, sounds, the understanding with concepts of print, browsing bags (bags that have picture books for every student to experience text on a daily basis), and a teacher using a big book to teach

story elements until the students are ready for their own books. In first grade, one should see more browsing bags, increasingly harder skills with concepts of print, one-to-one matching with fingers to words, vocabulary lessons, graphic organizers, conversations between the students and the teachers on predicting and thinking along the way while trying to interpret the text. Teachers should be checking for understanding and observing behaviors. At this level, it is extremely important to begin teaching the students to use the nonfiction books correctly. In grades second through fifth, the foundation of literacy skills should be building. There should be a continuum from the earlier grades. New concepts should include fluency instruction, text connections i.e. text-to-text, text-to-world and text-to-self that will lead to Bloom's Higher Order Thinking Skills (Anderson et al., 2000). Various techniques need to be considered when checking for understanding, as well as authentic assessments. It is important that ongoing assessments be completed both formally and informally. In the primary grades, at least once a week, and once every two weeks in the intermediate grades would be sufficient.

In a balanced literacy classroom, Bloom's Taxonomy is a vital component for creating a learner-centered classroom. Lee (1999) explains Bloom's Taxonomy offers a promising approach for designing classroom experiences for students, experiences that promote critical thinking and constructivist approaches to learning. When designing Bloom's, the American Psychological Association collected educational objectives from the curricula of their own institutions. For each objective, they separated the intended behavior into categories ranging from the simple to the complex. That is how the six levels of intellectual behaviors came about.

The levels progress from the simplest to the most complex. Creating a learner-centered classroom requires different perspectives from both the instructors and students. The goal of the instruction becomes the intentional intellectual development of students. This changes the way students think and encourages them to confront what they believe in light of facts and evidence. It becomes permitted to judge the merits of ideas, information, and values based on criteria. The focus of the classroom instruction becomes the acquisition of student skills and competencies rather than the instructor's academic knowledge or content coverage. Teaching becomes an intentional activity in which instructors guide students and isolate learning difficulties before they begin to hinder the mastery of classroom outcomes (Lee, 1999).

Using the taxonomy, instructors can create a detailed blueprint of a student-centered environment that fosters critical thinking and the process of knowledge construction. Future planning at the course, unit and individual lesson levels becomes the foundation of the blueprint (Lee, 1999).

Research-based interventions.

NCLB requires the use of research-based instruction and interventions. Research-based interventions are strategies, teaching methodologies and supports that have been shown through one or more valid research studies to help a student achieve to their maximum potential.

> Intervention means extra help or extra instruction targeted specifically to skills a student has not acquired. The term intervention is typically used in connection with instruction in Tiers II and III. During intervention time, the teacher selects approaches that reach students while providing numerous opportunities for practice, feedback and error correction. Options teachers can use to adjust the

> intervention include increasing time allowed for intervention, decreasing group size, changing materials or strategies, or moving students into a different group. (WVRtI, 2007, para 12)

The use of research-based or scientifically based interventions is vital for effective instruction. Harn (2007) at the Center on Teaching and Learning at the University of Oregon categorized reading programs into two groups:

1. "Scientifically proven – meaning scientific results have already been published in peer-reviewed journals using the previously described scientific rigor.
2. Research-based – meaning the methods, content, materials, etc. were developed with guidance from the collective research and scientific community.

> Nevertheless, interventions must increase the intensity of instruction emphasizing more time, smaller groups, and consistent verbal instruction. (Harn, 2007, para. 10).

Instruction must target essential skills and focus more on accelerating learning of key skills, which may mean teaching less so what is being taught can be taught more thoroughly. Further, teachers must differentiate the instructional needs of the students. Interventions must be regularly monitored to be responsive to student learning. In addition, evaluation and response must happen as quickly as possible. Harn (2007) also stated, "Interventions must be skillfully delivered. *At risk* students require clear explanations, systematic practices, effective error correction, and good pacing" (para. 10). This is a prime opportunity for professional development. "Interventions must be

coordinated at the school level with the principal and all instructional staff involved to orchestrate resources and staff to students or grades most in need" (Harn, 2007, para. 11).

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction has proven to be an effective instructional theory that takes into account a variety of learning styles, interests and abilities found within a classroom.

> Differentiated Instruction is a process of teaching and learning that begins with the premise that not all students are alike. Based on the readiness, learning preferences and interests of the student the curriculum and the presentation of the material is adjusted to give students access to multiple paths to the same goals or outcomes. Differentiation allows instruction to *meet each student where she/he is* and maximizes student opportunities for success. (Burggraf, 2004, para. 3)

Burggraf (2004) goes on to explain:

> Differentiated Instruction is a practice that makes it possible to maximize learning for all students. It is a collection of instructionally intelligent strategies based on student-centered best practices, which make it possible for teachers to create different pathways to respond to needs of diverse learners. (para. 2)

According to Hanson (2009), the author of Response to Intervention and Differentiated Instruction, the principle of Differentiated Instruction is that all children can learn if the instruction is responsive to their needs. It acknowledges the uniqueness of each student in terms of the experiences, personal characteristics, and innate qualities and attributes he or she brings into the classroom. Furthermore, it recognized teachers must tailor, modify, and customize instruction based upon their knowledge of the student, through empowering the child to learn and be successful in school.

According to Tomlinson, (2001),

> A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so each student can learn effectively. With differentiated instruction, it is imperative that the paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered. Teachers should become the facilitator of the learning instead of concentrating on the standardized curriculum. (para. 6)

The focus should be driven by problem-based learning with real world applications in the community and not necessarily driven by the textbook in an isolated manner. Differentiated instruction also allows technology to become an integral part of the education (Tomlinson, 2001).

Assessments

Assessments are essential in education. The following three assessments are directly linked to RtI model assessments and are used for several purposes:

1. Screenings – These are universal and are given to all children to identify those who are not making progress at expected rates.
2. Diagnostics – These are used to determine what children can and cannot do within the cognitive and behavioral domains.
3. Progress Monitoring – These assessments are given to determine if academic or behavioral interventions are producing desired effects (NASDSE, 2006).

Within any of these assessments, a problem-solving approach must be taken to assist in the identification of the student's learning needs. To follow the problem-solving approach one must (a) first attempt to identify the problem, then (b) analyze the problem

to hypothesize why it is occurring, (c) develop a plan to address the problem, and (d) evaluate the student's response to the planned intervention (NASDSE, 2006).

Two other types of assessments are formative assessments and summative assessments. According to Chappuis and Chappuis (2007), the true difference between these two assessment types comes down to how the results are used. Formative assessments have the purpose of informing learning and teaching, while summative assessments have the purpose of reporting learning at a certain time.

Formative assessments are most valuable when teachers do not mark on the final paper or input a final summative grade, but rather they allow the assessment to serve as a practice for students and give descriptive feedback that reflect the practices. This allows teachers to adjust instruction quickly and allows students to use the results to adjust their learning quickly. The key difference is in the use of the results. If the teachers and students are able to make use of the results and mark the learning, considerable progress is made (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2007). Unfortunately, state assessments are summative assessments and do not offer meaningful data to track a student's learning, but these assessments are needed to make decisions on students as a group.

A balanced assessment system must consist of both formative and summative assessments, according to Garrison and Ehringhaus (2007). Summative assessments are an integral part of systems. They are generally part of the grading process for example, benchmark assessments, state assessments and end of unit/chapter assessments. These help evaluate the effectiveness of programs, school improvement goals, curriculum and student placement in programs, whereas formative assessments serve as giving students the opportunity to "practice". Garrison and Ehringhaus (2007) agreed that descriptive

feedback has been noted to be the most significant instructional strategy to move students forward in their learning. They also agree that the true distinction between these two types of assessments come down to what the assessors do with the results.

Marzano (2009) identified instructional strategies, which are instructional tools only, which have a high probability of enhancing student achievement for all students in all subject areas at all grade levels. He continues to explain that not one instructional strategy works equally well in all situations.

These instructional strategies are

1) Identifying similarities and differences
2) Summarizing and note taking
3) Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
4) Homework and practice
5) Nonlinguistic representations
6) Cooperative learning
7) Setting objectives and providing feedback
8) Generating and testing hypotheses
9) Questions, cues and advance organizers. (Marzano, 2009, p. 7),

Furthermore, Marzano (2009) also supported the practice of using assessments during instruction. He advocates designing formative assessments. These assessments should track student progress, peer progress, and assign meaningful grades that will encourage students to take new learning and apply it to their real world. This will allow students to construct more meaning from their learning.

Accountability

Hamilton (2010/2011) stated that the government is holding K-12 education to unrealistic expectations by emphasizing improvement efforts solely on test-based accountability. Furthermore, she argues that educators must begin to look beyond test scores to improve school practices. Assessments are created with different purposes in mind and should never be used for anything other than that purpose (Hamilton, 2010).

When too much emphasis is put on assessment, districts begin to reallocate funding and time toward what that which they are accountable, state assessments. When this happens, resources are pulled away from areas where content is not tested and the content tested consumes the majority of the funding and time. This brings a great deal of concern, because resources are then devoted to the less complex skills and processes of learning and teachers will often teach towards the test (Hamilton, 2010/2011).

Hamilton (2010/2011) brings up a valid concern, because she finds this type of teaching and assessing leads to score inflations. The pressures from these assessments are truly giving an artificial sense of achievement in some districts. The score increases are not a true reflection of the students' learning of the skills and knowledge that the test is intended to measure. So, for the most part, these efforts have failed.

The federal government has recently begun to focus more on standards for a solution. Even though most states claim their state assessments align with standards, there is still a well-known achievement gap among states (Hamilton, 2010/2011). For over 20 years, educators have tried to align standards, assessments, and curriculum into meaningful road maps for learning. Because this is such a monumental task, and every

state does it differently, teachers have begun to rely more on state assessments to drive their instruction.

According to Hamilton (2010/2011), there are four items to consider when designing assessments and accountability policies that are likely to support school improvements:

1. Accountability systems that are designed to reward or penalize districts, schools, or individuals on the basis of their performance should not rely exclusively on tests.
2. For assessments and accountability systems to be useful, policymakers must consider ways to improve the quality of information from tests themselves, and to mitigate the expected negative effects of using tests for high-stakes purposes.
3. Any accountability system that seeks to support instructional improvement ought to include a high-quality formative assessment system.
4. Deciding whether to focus the system on student or educator performance, on individual or group performance, on current achievement or growth, and on fixed targets or participant rankings. (p. 52)

Once policymakers begin to look outside the box of assessments, a wide range of better options become available.

Cole (n.d.), President of the Texas Federation of Teachers and Vice President of American Federation of Teachers (AFT), argued that accountability must be present. Texas' educational world transformed when the school reform law in 1984 was passed to begin accountability measures. This marked the end, of what many felt, was the

conspiracy of silence regarding education's failures. Cole (n.d.) stated that even though the achievement gap between white and other children is still present, it has decreased considerably. Accountability and standards must be stated for funding purposes to hold districts to attainable goals.

In 1984, Texas revolutionized their entire school system. They put measures into place to create standards for their staff from the hiring process all the way through to their instructional practices. Texas began reallocating funds of new money and redirecting old money into new areas of improvement based on needs (Cole, n.d.).

In 1999, the state of Texas implemented more changes to their educational system. Not only did they change overall structure practices, they also revisited promotion and retention policies. Working together with the Federation of Teachers, legislation was made to require all students to pass the third grade reading test for promotion to fourth grade. This policy was eased in and was expected to begin in 2003 when the kindergarteners in 1999 were third graders. This gave the district ample time to get professional development aligned and put diagnostic testing and immediate interventions in place. Prior to the restructuring, the failure rate on the reading test was 20%. After the changes were executed, the failure rate was decreased to 4% in 2003. Teachers were better prepared and were able to advocate for their students in a more effective way. Overall, Cole (n.d.) stated accountability makes people keep score, so it helps break the silence within buildings and causes the resources to begin flowing toward the student achievement.

Professional Development

The National Staff Development Council (Headden & Silva, 2011), advocated for teachers to spend at least one fourth of work time on professional study and collaborative work. Professional development should be embedded into the teacher's daily work and closely linked to student learning, which can be done by study groups, action research, training, coaching, and the joint planning and analyzing of student work. Sparks (1999) suggested two ideas to make time for teacher learning, (a) free the teachers from their classrooms by experimenting with extra-curricular, occasional large classes, course-related projects and community services. This would allow students to spend an equivalence of one day per week away from the regular teachers, or (b) begin with spending three to four hours per week which is 10% of a teacher's work week and move towards 25% of the teacher's work week within two to three years. During the second and third year, schools should experiment with how much time and what should be done during this time to impact education.

In order for schools to continue to look at student achievement, districts must begin looking at reorganizing the time required and spent on teachers learning. In order to get better results, teachers are going to have to be given more structured time to be more productive (Sparks, 1999).

Effective instruction is composed of two components:

- Instructional delivery (how to teach)
- Instructional design (what to teach)

With either of these, it takes strong professional development to change a system. Professional development needs should be examined so all personnel possess the

requisite skills and attitudes to implement a reading program. The quality of both the pre-service and in-service professional development models used will be critical when translating research into practice. According to NASDSE (2006), "Successful professional development must include all three components of skill development: beliefs and attitudes; knowledge; and skill" (para. 26).

The NASDSE (2006) further explained:

> Both general and special educators will feel an increased accountability for student learning as well as strengthened confidence in their own skills and knowledge related to teaching reading. Roles of personnel must change. Collaboration among teachers must increase in order to determine student needs, designate resources, and maximize student learning. (para. 25)

Lashway (1995) suggested "That schools that dedicate themselves to systematic, collaborative problem-solving can 'continually' develop and implement new ideas, thereby not just improving but transforming themselves" (para. 3). Leithwood, Doris, and Steinbach (1995) defined a learning organization as

> A group of people pursuing common purposes (individual purposes as well) with a collective commitment to regularly weighing the value of those purposes, modifying them when that makes sense, and continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those purposes. (p. 32)

Lashway (1995) stated, "Although this is an inspiring vision, schools may be far from achieving it. Teacher isolation, lack of time, and the complexity of teaching present significant barriers to sustained organizational learning" (p. 27). Elmore, Peterson, and

McCarthey (1996) discovered that, “Even when teachers were willing to learn new methods; they often applied them in a superficial or inconsistent way, offering the appearance but not the substance of real change” (para. 4).

In Holt Public Schools, job-embedded professional development has noted to be very successful. In 1990, Holt Public Schools began shortening student hours every Wednesday by two hours to allow time to collaborate and expand their professional development beyond their own buildings. Since this change, all of Holt Public Schools have scored A’s and B’s on the state report card. They have found that the educators are more focused on the purpose, use and value of the time spent in professional development. This structure allows the teachers time to research and develop practices that will meet ongoing challenges (Harn, 2007).

One challenge of traditional professional development is that after hours of teaching, trying to focus on new learning is challenging. When professional development is held at the end of the workday or before a holiday break, there seems to be a lack of focus. Teachers are focusing on their task lists to maintain their classroom routines or planning for holiday breaks, they are not focused on the new learning that needs to take place. While going to outside conferences are great, this particular district has found that educators are more apt to try techniques learned within their buildings, because of the local support system. Embedded time, which is the time within the school day, gives educators quicker response time to try the new technique and a platform for clarification, when things do not go as planned (Von Frank, 2009). Job-embedded staff develop is a technique many districts are finding more cost effective. This type of staff development allows teachers in the same building or district to stay within their school or district to

learn new techniques to reach students. As explained previously, this can come in various styles. When teachers observe other teachers within their same demographics, and they have a support system they can turn to with questions or suggestions, they are more apt to try the newly learned technique (Von Frank, 2009).

Leadership

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) and Fullan (1993) have described the change process in education and the difficulty of initiating change in large complex organizations such as school districts. According to Fullan (1993), "Change is difficult because of its complexity and because large organizations tend to resist change"(para. 4). Fullan (1993) also noted, "failed attempts at educational reform result, in part, because one cannot mandate the most important components of reform – a vision and a will to implement it" (para. 5).

Creating a learning organization depends on the leader. This type of leadership style must be consistent with the philosophy of the leader. It is believed that when faculty, staff, students, and community are empowered, great changes occur. It cannot happen unless the leader embraces the change of style. The paradigm shift will make positive effects on student achievement. However, it may also question past practices.

Mitchell, Douglas, and Tucker (1992) found

> Creating a learning organization requires a deep rethinking of the leader's role. Principals and superintendents must see themselves as 'learning leaders' responsible for helping schools develop the capacity to carry out their mission. A crucial part of this role is cultivating and maintaining a shared vision. Leaders must tend to the organizational structures that support continuous learning,

> squeezing time out of a busy schedule, collecting and disseminating information, accurately tracking the school's performance, and creating forms of governance that support collective inquiry. Leaders must view their organizations as learning communities, for faculty as well as students. One problem is we have tended to think of leadership as the capacity to take charge and get things done. This view keeps us from focusing on the importance of teamwork and comprehensive school improvement. (p. 32)

"Perhaps it is time", Liontos (1992) stated, "to stop thinking of leadership as aggressive action and more as a way of thinking—about ourselves, our jobs, and the nature of the educational process. Thus, 'instructional leadership' is 'out' and 'transformational leadership' is 'in'" (para. 4).

According to Leithwood (1992), McGregor Burns first developed the idea of transformational leadership in 1978. Leithwood (1992) also stated that later, Bass extended the idea of transformational leadership. He goes on to conclude,

> There has been a shift in businesses away from Type A to Type Z organizations. Type Z organizations reduce differences in status between workers and managers, emphasize participative decision-making, and are based on a form of "consensual" or "facilitative" power that is manifested through other people instead of over other people. (Leithwood, 1992, para. 7)

Transformational leadership is known to enhance the motivation, morale and performance of organizations. These leaders are known to help everyone within an organization to succeed. "Evidence shows there are similarities in transformational

leadership whether it is in a school setting or a business environment" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990 p. 16).

> The issue is finding a way to be successful in collaboratively defining the essential purpose of teaching and learning and then empowering the entire school community to become energized and focused. In schools where such a focus has been achieved, we found teaching and learning became transformative for everyone. (Liontos, 1992, para 7)

Leithwood (1992) finds transformational leaders pursue three fundamental goals:

1. Helping staff develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture. Transformational leaders involve staff in collaborative goal setting, reduce teacher isolation, use bureaucratic mechanisms to support cultural changes, share leadership with others by delegating power, and actively communicate the school's norms and beliefs.
2. Fostering teacher development. When leaders give staff a role in solving non-routine school improvement problems, they should make sure goals are explicit and ambitious but realistic.
3. Helping teachers solve problems more effectively. Transformational leadership is valued by some, says Leithwood, because it stimulates teachers to engage in new activities and put forth "extra effort" (see also Hoover et al., Sergiovanni, Sagor). Leithwood found transformational leaders use practices primarily to help staff members work smarter, not harder. (p. 9)

There are many positive effects of transformational leadership. The evidence of these effects is knows as being “uniformly positive” (Leithwood, 1992, p. 10). He also stated two findings from his own studies:

> (1) transformational leadership practices have a sizable influence on teacher collaboration, and (2) significant relationships exist between aspects of transformational leadership and teachers' own reports of changes in both attitudes toward school improvement and altered instructional behavior. Sergiovanni (1990) suggests that, student achievement can be "remarkably improved" by such leadership. Sagor (1992) found, that schools where teachers and students reported a culture conducive to school success had a transformational leader as its principal. (Leithwood, 1992, p. 11)

Related Studies

The Austin School District initiated a balanced literacy plan for students that needed extra intervention. Their model consisted of building a balanced literacy framework throughout the district to explore three components. (a) The amount of time devoted to each component of balanced literacy, (b) the consistent components of balanced literacy throughout all grade levels, and (c) the effective measures that principals take to support balanced literacy within their schools (Austin Independent School District, 2001).

Over the course of the first year, the district mandated that all elementary buildings were to implement a 90-minute literacy block in which reading and writing activities were integrated. The district provided technical assistance to teachers in the form of professional development opportunities. Information was collected from

classroom observations, teacher surveys, and group interviews. This program served over 3,000 students and 96% of these students made gains. The average gain in grades one - four was 8.7 reading text levels within a school year (Austin Independent School District, 2001).

The Anna Plan (Miles et al., 2004/2005) is a unique delivery model for enhancing school wide literacy instruction in the primary grades. Lincoln Elementary School is part of the Anna School District in Anna, Illinois. The staff of this elementary school is recognized for their creative approach to the whole-class support model they have developed by applying the principles of Reading Recovery and Four Blocks literacy instruction with all of the primary-age students in their school. This model follows several essential principles of program success that include small-group instruction, the use of developmentally appropriate texts and repeated readings of them, a focus on word solving and phonemic awareness, consistency between supplementary and classroom reading instruction, a writing component, and on-going assessment of students' progress (Miles et al., 2004/2005).

Lincoln Elementary School's reform effort began in 1996 and has made a remarkable difference in increasing their students' reading abilities. In 1996, 50% of the students met or exceeded the state standard for reading. Not long after, 90% of their students consistently met the state standards. Within a short amount of time, the demographics of the district changed, but they have maintained test scores at 75% or better meeting and exceeding state standards. Because of their efforts, Lincoln Elementary School has been recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education as an "elite high poverty/high achieving school" (Miles et al., 2004/2005, p. 320).

Bethel School District in Eugene, Oregon has coordinated the power of instruction and interventions to see dramatic effects. There are seven elementary schools with approximately 5,310 students. The socioeconomic status shows 32 – 74% of this district's students on free and reduced lunch and 15 % of their students are receiving special education services. The district had at least six different reading programs used district-wide. In year one before implementation of RtI, 21% of the district's third grade students did not meet the minimum proficiency standard in reading. At that time, the district began the necessary steps to implement RtI (Harn, 2007).

As Bethel School District started gathering data, they found that it was not that the students were not learning, but rather that the assessments of students were not tied to their daily instruction. They were being referred through special services in order to get the focus instruction the students were in need of, not because teachers felt they had a learning concern. This district found that students were not learning disabled, but instructionally disabled (Harn, 2007).

After recognizing this problem, the Bethel School District set out to join forces with University of Oregon's Institute for Development of Educational Achievement. A four-year grant of $700,000 was committed to this district to develop, implement, and evaluate a new reading initiative. Grant monies were primarily spent on bringing in experts in the reading field to present material, hiring a reading coordinator, and paying for teachers to attend professional development (Harn, 2007).

The new initiative took the approach, "as-early-as-possible," instead of the "wait-and-see" model. As early as the second week of school, the assessment team administers the DIBELS to all kindergarteners. Once these scores are reviewed, students are grouped

into one of three categories: "benchmark," students who met district goals, "strategic," students who are progressing but behind, and "intensive," students who are at risk of failing to meet district goals. By the end of October, kindergarteners were getting 30 minutes per day of reading instruction and progress monitored twice a month.

In year six of implementation, the number of children who have been in the Bethel reading program since kindergarten has decreased tremendously. Special education referrals are now between 4% and 6%. Overall, the special education placement rates have reduced by 34% across this time period as well (Harn, 2007). The portion of third graders meeting state standards in reading increased from 79% in 1999 to 92% in 2004. Largely, the student they are catching is the student who has trouble paying attention. Due to the structured setting, those students are captured and focused on during these periods. Because of the opportunity to focus the instruction on skills in which these students are deficit, the teachers do not have near the number of behavior problems with these students (Harn, 2007).

Summary

According to the NASDSE (2006), "The foundation of a successful model is scientifically based instruction organized around the five components essential to early reading: phonemic awareness, phonics and word study, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension" (NASDSE, 2006, para. 3). The state of West Virginia found,

> General education classroom teachers must be prepared with knowledge about how students learn to read, materials designed to help address all five areas of reading and techniques and strategies that help students develop grade level reading skills. Those providing the additional literacy must have the same

> knowledge and in addition, they must know how to use materials, strategies and techniques targeting specific reading difficulties. All educators must know how to assess student progress and use assessment data to adjust instruction and develop effective interventions. (WVRtI, 2007, para. 10)

A large percentage of the research showed differentiating instruction and reviewing instructional delivery approaches is very important to increasing students' reading abilities. In addition, the research suggested professional development be more focused on the actual needs of the students and teachers involved. However, leadership plays a key role while attempting to shift the paradigm from teacher centered to student centered. An effective leader creates the opportunity for the processes to occur and the conversations to develop and continue regularly.

At the study school, the approach was quite different. The researcher reviewed the literature and utilized the research to implement an instructional reading block that allows for differentiated instruction, problem-solving, and tiered interventions. This block gave teachers the time to instruct the students who are struggling on a daily basis regarding the five essential components by providing 100% contact time between students and qualified teachers. The focus during the first year of implementation was to maximize the additional assistance and monitor the progress over a period. The study school also instituted a problem-solving team to begin analyzing student achievement within a structured process. The following chapter will review the methods and procedures of the instructional reading block.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine if additional reading assistance for students not meeting quarterly targets had a positive impact on performance in the area of reading. Specifically, the question to be answered was, will students make academic improvement after receiving additional reading assistance in a small group setting?

Power Hour refers to a one-hour instructional reading block built into the master schedule. This reading block was implemented at the study school to allow all highly trained personnel to focus on each grade level's reading needs at one time. Each grade level has an hour blocked for reading instruction. During this hour, the students are moved into reading classes on their instructional level. Students that are the *most intense* (a term used to describe the neediest students) are in a reading room with the regular education teacher, special education teacher, and the reading teacher. All other students are in classrooms with a regular education teacher. These students were instructed using a leveled reading series that emphasized the grade level standards, while keeping the interest level high and reading level of the text instructional.

Promoting Academic Success for all Students (PASS) is a school-wide process adopted at the study school (see Figure 1). Students referred through this process are referred to as our intensive or PASS students. Referred students were not successful in the instructional reading block, Power Hour. Therefore, they are referred to a team, known as the PASS Team, of highly qualified personnel that will collect necessary data and create an individual instructional plan for these intense students. The PASS Team meets monthly to review progress monitoring from various sources of data. This team is made-up of a regular education teacher, special education teacher, psychologist, social

worker, reading teacher, parents, and principal (Wolf Branch School District, 2007, p. 11). If students are not successful during this process, they are referred to the Special Education Team to determine if there is a need for further data collections.

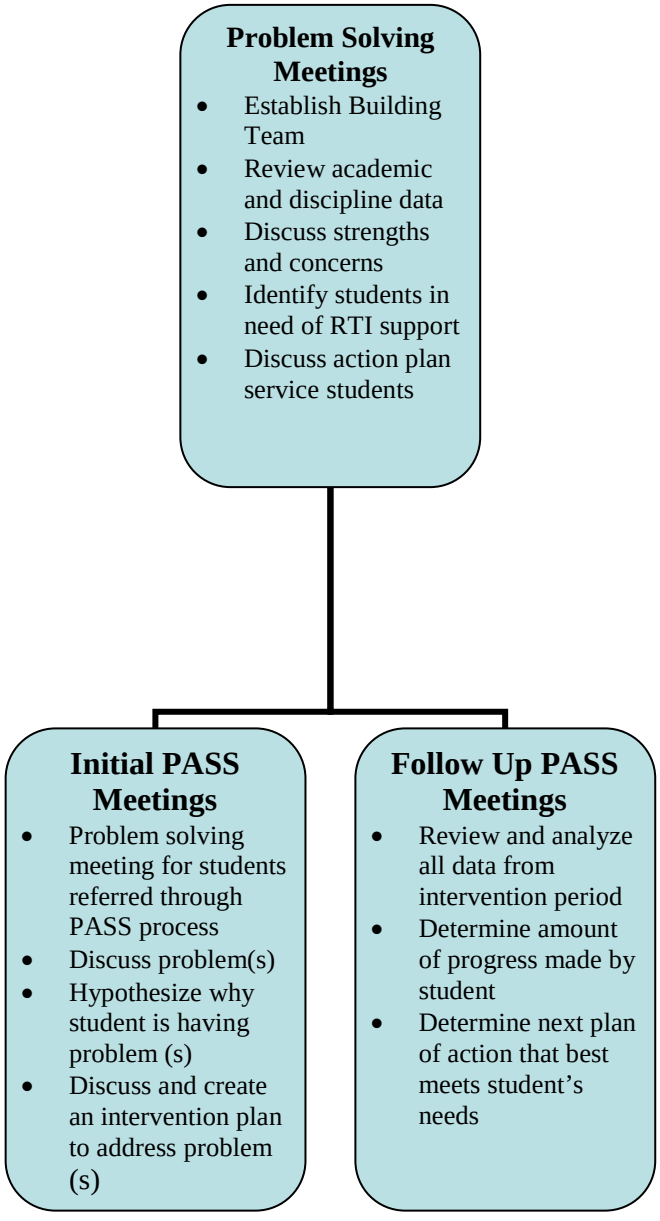

Figure 1. PASS Process.

Due to an increase in pressure from high-stakes testing and the emphasis placed on student performance and accountability, finding ways to improve test scores and

individual student achievement continues to be a top priority. Analyzing the pre-tests, Gates-McGinitie, local quarterly assessments, Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Illinois Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT), and post-tests provided the data needed to determine if the efforts of additional reading assistance for students not meeting targets provided the desired results. The two programs mentioned above were the two programs being studied to tell whether there was a significant difference to continue the additional reading assistance.

Variables

Independent Variable. The independent variable in this study was the implementation of reading assistance to students not making AYP in reading as measured by the Gates-McGinitie, the study school's local assessment.

This extra reading assistance was implemented in two ways, (a) our Power Hour, which was an hour of 100% contact time for target students and (b) students that were not successful in Power Hour were considered the intense students and referred through the Promoting Academic Success for All Students (PASS) process.

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable was the average percentile rank achieved on the Gates-McGinitie in grades three through five during the fall of 2008 school year and the spring of 2009 school year, the percentage of progress on the DIBELS assessment, and the percentage of students achieving adequate progress on the reading portion of the ISAT.

Question

Specifically, the question to be answered was, will students make academic improvement after receiving additional reading assistance in a small group setting?

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis # 1: There will be no improvement of the average percentile rank of students in grades three, four, and five who are assigned to extra reading assistance on the reading portion of the Gates-McGinitie.

Null Hypothesis # 2: There will be no change in scores on the reading portion of the ISAT when comparing results prior to participation in Power Hour and PASS to results following participation, for students in grades three, four, and five.

Demographics

The study district is located in Southern Illinois and consists of one elementary school and one middle school. The school being studied has 600 students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade (P-5). Students attending this school district reside in a four square mile radius of the school. The students attend a local high school for grades 9-12.

The study school has 24 homerooms with two self-contained special education classes and one resource special education class. Class sizes for grades kindergarten through second grades average 19 students and class sizes for grades three through five average 24 students. According to the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2008), teachers on average have 12 years of experience—47% with a bachelor's degree and 53% with a master's degree. The demographics of the teachers that serve this district are the following: Caucasian 85% and minority 15%. Table 1 summarizes the district demographics for the four years.

Table 1

District Demographic Information

Year	IEP	Low Income	Parental Involvement	Attendance Rate	Mobility	White	Black	Other
2007-2008	13%	5%	99%	96%	4%	78%	14%	8%
2008-2009	13%	5%	98%	96%	5%	77%	13%	10%
2009-2010	12%	4%	98%	96%	5%	75%	15%	10%
2010-2011	13%	9%	99%	96%	5%	73%	15%	11%

Note. District demographic information beginning the year before implementation year and beyond. Percentages reflect percentage of students in each category.

During the first year of implementation, the study school served a community that had 77% Caucasian students and 23% minority students with 5% of the students living in low-income households. Parental involvement was at 98%, with a 96% attendance rate, a 5% mobility rate, and a 13% student Individual Educational Plan (IEP) rate. Class sizes are limited to 22:1.

Table 2

District Academic Information on the Illinois State Achievement Test

Year	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Subgroup 1 Black	Subgroup 2 IEP	Subgroup3 Low Income
2007-2008	88%	90%	89%	94%	88%	96%	80%	57%	*
2008-2009	85%	85%	90%	97%	93%	95%	84%	48%	*
2009-2010	89%	91%	90%	89%	93%	95%	82%	65%	*
2010-2011	92%	89%	92%	93%	92%	89%	79%	62%	76%

Note. District reading scores for grades three through eight beginning the year before implementation year and beyond. Percentages reflect percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations in reading on the ISAT. Also, the subgroups reflect the percentages of black students, IEP students and low income students meeting and exceeding expectations in reading on the ISAT. *During these particular years, there were not enough student to create a subgroup.

Table 2 indicates the ISAT scores for the district were maintained at 91% throughout the years of implementation. However, for grades three, four, and five the scores steadily increased to 91% over the three-year period. According to the Illinois State Board, districts must have 45 students in a particular category to create a subgroup. From 2008 until 2010, this district did not have 45 students to create the Low Income Subgroup (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2008).

Table 3

Demographic Information for Treated Students

Year	Minority	Low Income	Students in PASS	Students with IEPs
3rd Grade	22%	19%	10%	19%
4th Grade	26%	13%	5%	21%
5th Grade	17%	17%	9%	35%

Note. Percentages reflect percentage of treated students in each of the labeled categories.

Table 3 indicates the demographics for treated students for the study school. For third grade, 22% of the students treated were minorities, 19% were low income, 10% qualified for PASS, and 19% already had IEPs. For fourth grade, 26% of the students treated were minorities, 13% were low income, 5% qualified for PASS, and 21% already had IEPs. For grade five, 17% of the students were minorities, 17% also were low income, 9% qualified for PASS, and 35% were students with IEPs.

Subjects

The subjects were students identified after the completion of the pre-tests given in September 2008 in grades three through five at the school studied. These students were identified and placed into an instructional reading classroom for one hour a day based on their areas of weakness. Three certified teachers instructed these students within the

classroom, one regular education teacher, one special education teacher and one reading interventionist.

Research Design

The independent variable in this study was the implementation of reading assistance to students not making adequate progress on the Gates-McGinitie. The goal of Power Hour and PASS was to increase the percentage of students making adequate progress in reading at their grade level. The dependent variable was the average percentile rank achieved on the Gates-McGinitie in grades three through five during the fall of 2008 school year and the spring of 2009 school year. The participants were students in grades three, four, and five who were identified as having low pre-test scores and subsequently instructed through use of Power Hour and possibly PASS in a small group setting.

Instrumentation

The Gates-McGinitie is a nationally validated and normed achievement test that allows comparison of the study sample and the same grade students nationally (Magnolia Consulting, 2006). Not only does the school district use this assessment to compare students nationally, the results also compare elementary schools with one another and allow comparison from the beginning of the year versus the end of the year. The test measures reading in the areas of comprehension and vocabulary.

> Scoring on the test is based on a normal distribution of scores generated by the original norming sample. Thus, each year, students who take the test are compared against students who were involved in the initial administrations that were used to set the scoring tables. The national average percentile rank (PR) is

50, with half of the students scoring below 50 and the other half scoring above 50. (Magnolia Consulting, 2006, pp. 6-10)

The students' scores were broken down into several categories on the master list of test results. These included the raw score, scaled score, national percentile, grade equivalent, and national stanine on the bell curve. For the purpose of this study, the national percentile rank measure will be utilized to compare reading scores to determine whether achievement levels were affected by extra reading assistance.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) "is a nationally validated and normed achievement test that measures how well the students meet the Illinois Learning Standards in reading, mathematics, and writing" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004a, para. 2). "These scores are used to calculate the AYP of both the school and district" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004a, para. 4). This allows the schools and students within schools to be compared to other states, schools, and students across the United States.

The Illinois Learning Standards are a set of standards adopted in July 1997 and created to set high expectations for student learning in the state of Illinois (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004a). Administrators, teachers, and parents can use these reports from the ISAT to target students' strengths and weaknesses and re-teach the standards that were not met. "These scores are reported in four performance categories: Academic Warning, Below Standards, Meets Standards, and Exceeds Standards" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004a, para 2). At each level, there are cutoff scores that are developed for each content area (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004a). For the purpose of this study, ISAT data was used as secondary data and reviewed in a

descriptive manner to consider improvements in overall school achievement data. The area of focus was the meets and exceeds category within the reading scores to determine whether achievement levels were affected by extra reading assistance.

The DIBELS test is an approach used to measure the academic growth of individual students throughout progress monitoring. The essential purpose of progress monitoring is to aide the teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions they are providing to the individual students. These scores are reported in three categories that specify a level of instructional recommendation: intensive instruction, strategic instruction, and benchmark (Harn, 2007). These scores are only reviewed to determine if the student was on track to meeting the benchmark goal for the designated time period. For the purpose of this study, we focused on the level of instructional recommendation throughout the year to determine if the student was responding to the intervention. Progress monitoring was completed on these students on a weekly basis. Reviewing the progress monitoring weekly, along with other data, allowed the prediction of whether or not achievement levels were affected by extra reading assistance.

Reliability

"Reliability refers to the consistency of the scores obtained—how consistent they are for each individual from one administration of an instrument to another and from one set of items to another" (Magnolia Consutling, 2006, p. 49). An assessment that is reliable should always indicate results that are close every time the assessment is taken, maybe not identical, but scores should always remain close.

A reliability coefficient expresses a relationship between scores of the same individuals on the same instrument at two different times or between two parts of

> the same instrument. The three best-known ways to obtain a reliability coefficient are the test-retest method, the equivalent-forms method, and the internal consistency methods. Reliability coefficients must range from .00 to 1.00—that is, negative values are not considered reliable. (Magnolia Consluting, 2006, p. 50)

The Gates-McGinitie assessment follows the test-retest method. "This involved administering the same test twice to the same group after a certain time interval has elapsed. A reliability coefficient was then calculated to indicate the relationship between the two sets of scores" (Magnolia Consulting, 2006, p. 4). The Gates-McGinitie was also reviewed for placement of individual students at the beginning of the year.

The DIBELS assessment was used as secondary information to gauge whether or not the students were staying on track with their projected aim line throughout their weeks of study. The aim line was plotted on a graph. The slope of the aim line depended on the amount of growth each student needed to make individually. This aim line was made up of each student's benchmark score and end of the year target score. Once these were calculated the aim line was create to use as a visual. Weekly scores were then plotted on the graph by dots. The goal was to ensure the students' weekly scores were improving with the slope of the aim line. The reading assistance reviewed the information on a weekly basis.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education (2004a), the reliability of the ISAT ranges from 0.93 to 0.95 in reading. Since the ISAT assessments are not taken until the spring and the results are not calculated until the summer, the ISAT assessment was analyzed as a third assessment to measure students' long-term performance.

Procedure

Over the summer, a reading instructional block, Power Hour, was planned for the study school. This block was designed with the master schedule blocking one hour for each grade level to carry out the instructional reading period. The researcher coordinated the reading teacher, special education teacher, and the reading assistant's schedules to align with each grade level. For example, kindergarten, first grade, and second grade worked with one reading teacher, one special education teacher, and one literature assistant. Grades three, four, and five worked with another reading teacher, another special education teacher, and another literature assistant. Dividing the grades kindergarten through second and three through five allowed the school to have two reading classrooms going simultaneously.

Next the researcher, along with the reading teachers, reviewed materials within the school building that were accessible for whole group, small group, and individual reading instruction. These materials were divided into levels of intensity as well as, one of the five components of reading. All materials were prioritized in the manner below.

Table 4

Reading Resources

Tier I, II, III
Reading Series: K-5 (PA, P, F, V, C)
Think Alongs; K-5 (V, C)
Dr. Heggerty: K-5 (PA)
Intervention Tool Kit: K-5 (PA, P, F, V, C)
Lexia: K-2 (PA, P, V, C)
Reading Plus: 3-5 (F, V, C)
Florida Reading Research Binder: K-5 (PA, P, F, V, C)

Note. Reading resources for students in each tier. The level of frequency and amount of duration changes according to tier placement. PA=Phonemic Awareness; P=Phonics; F=Fluency; V=Vocabulary; C=Comprehension

Prior to the school year starting, professional development was conducted on Differentiated Instruction and Best Practices in Reading. The staff was also trained on RtI, problem-solving teams, and understanding how to use data to make decisions on student achievement. The staff was educated on the PASS process and how the team approach could be used as a resource for their students. Throughout the grade levels, the staff had conversations on expectations and defining progress within the study school.

After the initial benchmark, the study school had a day to review data, which was known as Data Day. Since all grade levels had one day a week with common planning time, the grade level teachers were able to join the team along with the reading teacher, special education teacher, and the administrator to discuss the grade level strengths, and weaknesses as a whole. This day was vital to ensure everyone had a voice. From this meeting, groups were organized, future professional development topics were considered, and students were selected for the Power Hour and or PASS. This instructional block was implemented at the study school to improve the average test scores of students in

grades three, four, and five on the reading portion of the ISAT. This school formatted the reading block in grades one through five in the following manner.

During the Data Day, there was an agenda that was followed (Appendix B and C) to stay on schedule and ensure all items were covered. The goal of this day was to identify the struggling readers by analyzing the data on an assessment overview spreadsheet (Appendix D). This assessment overview spreadsheet consisted of scores from local assessments, quarterly subject grades, reading group status, and any other pertinent information the team needed to use to review. Data was prioritized because often student scores were inconsistent (Appendix E). Depending on the students' scores, the students were placed in an advanced reading classroom, on-level reading classroom, or a strategic reading classroom. If scores were above grade level, students went into the advanced classroom, if scores were within grade level range, they were placed in the on-level classroom, and if scores were below grade level range, students were placed in the strategic classroom. The strategic classroom had extra assistance within the room, which added more intensity to the instruction in comparison to the core curriculum. Within this strategic classroom, there was a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and a reading interventionist working with the students for a 60-minute instructional reading period. Every student in this classroom received 60 minutes of direct reading instruction daily. Students in other classrooms received 60 minutes as well, but only 20 minutes of their 60 minutes was direct instruction. The other 40 minutes were utilized by rotating through centers where they practiced on skills the teacher needed to reinforce with independent work.

Students in the strategic room were divided into three groups. The three groups rotated around the room getting quick, research-based lessons on every component of reading, every day. The concentration of the instruction was on the five essential components of literacy: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NASDSE, 2006). Each teacher in this class took an area of expertise and provided the instruction for 20 minutes. One teacher took the phonics, phonemic awareness and the vocabulary, another teacher took the fluency, and another teacher took the comprehension component. Once the instruction was completed, the group switched within the classroom. These interventions were completed at a fast pace to minimize the downtime.

All students within the strategic classroom were progress monitored. Progress monitoring is a quick assessment, like a running record, used to predict whether a student is on target with their individual reading goal. Progress monitoring was completed through DIBELS to evaluate whether or not students were responding to small group instruction. Students within the strategic classroom that had not progressed according to DIBELS moved into Tier III for more intense services. All other students within the other classrooms were monitored twice a month to ensure ongoing success.

Tier III, at the study school, consisted of students referred to the problem-solving team for intense services through the PASS process (Appendix A). This team consisted of the homeroom teacher, special education teacher, reading teacher, psychologist, administrator, parents, and possibly the speech teacher, and social worker.

Any certified staff member can refer a student through the PASS process. During the Data Day, the team should review all data and identify students who need tiered

services. Parents also have the right to request their child through the process. In order to be referred initially through the PASS process and to begin Tier II support, a student must meet at least two of the following criteria:

1. Bottom 25th percentile or lower according to DIBELS
2. Failing grades (Ds or Fs)-Subject referred for must have Ds or Fs
3. Score of 1 1/2 years below on grade equivalence of GATES
4. Did not meet on ISAT (previous year) if applicable
5. Previously retained

Likewise, to be referred to begin Tier III support, a student must not be meeting personal goal and is significantly lower than grade level peers in additional to meeting at least two of the following criteria:

1. Bottom 10th percentile or lower according to DIBELS
2. Failing grades (Ds or Fs)-Subject referred for must have Ds or Fs
3. Score of 2 years below on grade equivalence of GATES
4. Did not meet on ISAT (previous year) if applicable
5. Previously retained

Students who were receiving RtI services during the previously years may go directly to Tier II or III support.

Once a teacher had academic concerns, she/he met with the administrator to determine if a PASS referral was appropriate. The administrator gave the teacher a manila file with a packet of information to complete. This packet documented all current assessment scores, strengths, weaknesses, and communication with parents and strategies tried thus far to improve the student's performance (Appendix F-G, I-P, Q). The teacher

also set the initial meeting with the parents. The student's hearing and vision was checked by the school nurse. The school psychologist conducted a Survey Level Assessment on the particular child and the principal observed the core curriculum for fidelity.

All other team members were notified of the confirmed meeting date and time. The meeting was scheduled seven to 10 days from the initial meeting with the administrator and the teacher. Once a student was identified and referred to the team, the same process is followed for every student.

Before the initial meeting, parents were called by the classroom teacher to discuss areas of concerns and the process. The teacher requested the student's hearing and vision be checked. Parents were called to confirm the actual date and time of the initial meeting. A substitute teacher was secured to provide coverage for the regular classroom teacher to attend the meeting. All forms were completed and a data collection file was started to begin collecting work samples throughout the process. Classroom teachers brought current grades, forms of communication that have been documented with parents, work samples that reflect prior to intervention, during intervention and after interventions to the initial meeting.

At the initial meeting (Appendix V), all members were present and signed a confidentiality form (Appendix H). It was explained that the purpose for PASS was to provide additional support for student not meeting benchmark standards or goals and/or failing classes. Additional support is provided by creating intervention plans that are intended to help the student make academic progress. The intervention plan may include strategies in addition to general classroom instruction.

During the meeting, student concerns, data, and work samples were reviewed on the student's academic history. The student's strengths and weaknesses were shared, along with the teacher and parent's expectations. Not only was the individual student's achievement data shared, but also a comparison was reviewed to determine where the student was achieving in respect to their peers. Many times, other prevalent information was shared to help educators establish a relationship with the student. All team members had the opportunity to engage in the dialogue. Once all the background information was shared, the team decided on interventions for the student and developed a strategic individual plan (Appendix W-X). The plan consisted of an identification of the deficit area, the score the student was achieving presently, the length of time the intervention was applied, the rate of growth the student was expected to achieve, and the overall goal. Deficit areas were highlighted and assigned interventions. A progress monitoring schedule was also put into place at the initial meeting and all members agreed to the terms. A progress monitoring schedule could be conducted, weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the severity of the student's needs. A follow-up meeting was set six to nine weeks from the initial meeting date to review progress.

After the initial meeting, the reading teacher, classroom teacher, and any other team member involved followed the intervention schedule. Teachers made any necessary revisions to the intervention plan and schedules. The progress was monitored and reviewed. The teachers prepared for the follow-up conference.

At the follow-up conference, data was reviewed and the implementation of interventions were evaluated. The team reviewed if the student met his or her goals, how much progress was made or not made, and the rate of improvement was reviewed. There

was a quick discussion on the most appropriate placement or services for the student. If changes were warranted to the plan, they were made quickly at the meeting and another plan with new goals may be created.

The PASS team members were problem solving team members. Each team member worked to address academic needs of the students and were expected to be at all meetings. Members of the teams established good communication skills and solid knowledge based on various supports and interventions. Core team members consisted of the administrator as the instructional leader, the referring teacher, the reading teacher/RtI interventionist, and the school psychologist. Some meetings needed expertise from the school nurse, social worker and other educational stakeholders who had expertise and/or knowledge about the student. If for some reason that staff member could not attend, the member would give feedback to the team on the Alternate Teacher form (Appendix S). Each team member brought valuable information and resources to assist in the progression of the student's academic success. Throughout this process, every member had certain responsibilities in helping to determine the student's needs.

The administrator or coordinator's responsibilities were to observe and evaluate Tier I curriculum (Appendix R). This member held teachers accountable for effective curriculum and instruction. The administrator or coordinator met regularly with school staff to problem-solve and refine implementation, identify ongoing professional development needs for Tier I instruction, serve as a resource to school-based personnel, seek outside technical assistance as needed, and submit required data reports and documentation to communicate RtI information to parents and staff. It was also the

responsibility of the administrator or coordinator to get a Release of Information form signed by parent(s) of the referred student to review previous educational experiences.

The parents' role on the team was to contribute information throughout the referral process. Many times parents provided pertinent medical information that was needed. They also informed school personnel of their concerns and expectations from the home perspective (Appendix I-J). Parents helped assess their child's needs and determine intervention strategies.

The reading teacher assisted all teachers with implementation of researched-based interventions at Tier I level. They also helped to select, design, implement, and analyze Tier II and Tier III interventions and assessments. Furthermore, they assisted in the selection of students for Tier II and III interventions. Once students were identified, the reading teacher monitored student academic progress with progress monitoring tools and created data reports to present at PASS meetings. These members also administered and interpreted the Gates-McGinitie and DIBELS assessments for both benchmarking and progress monitoring periods for the students.

The general classroom teacher used research-based materials in the classroom to implement the Tier I core curriculum. They utilized differentiated instruction techniques with students who were below expectations with research-based interventions. The general classroom teacher was responsible for collecting data that indicated the progress of individual students, subgroups within their classroom, and of the class's progress as a whole (Appendix K-P). Once information was collected, the teacher reported the targeted students' progress in comparison to the rest of the class to the PASS team. This

information was collected from running records, informal classroom assessments, and/or observations.

The school psychologist assisted in the referral process by setting goals and interventions for referred students. This member consulted with teachers to assist with designing interventions in the general education setting. The psychologist observed referred students to provide input on an individualized level during the PASS meetings and conducted a Survey Level Assessment on the student.

Other team members consisted of social workers, nurses, speech and language pathologists, or special education supervisors. These members brought a significant amount of expertise into the meeting. They aided the team with the understanding of development barriers, outside barriers, and connection within the curriculum, home, and health fields. Many of the members ensured that other student needs were met by being a liaison within the school community.

The follow-up meeting (Appendix Y-Z) was normally set six to nine weeks from the initial meeting. This allowed the team to collect further data and observe whether interventions were being conducted with integrity. At the follow-up meeting, copies of all recent assessments were shared, the plan that was set at the initial meeting was evaluated for the effectiveness and depending on progress, either the student (a) returned to Tier I, (b) a new plan was written, or (c) the student was recommended for a specific learning disability.

In general, PASS students received additional assistance outside of the 60-minute Power Hour instructional block to work on more intense interventions. The PASS students were pulled out of their homeroom classes for an additional 30 minutes, two to

three times per week to work on more intense reading strategies. They were assessed weekly and the strategic individual plan that was devised in their initial meeting was followed into these sessions.

Statistical Test

For the purpose of this study, a t-test for matched pairs was utilized to test the null hypotheses, which were:

Null Hypothesis # 1: There will be no improvement of the average percentile rank of students in grades three, four, and five who are assigned to extra reading assistance on the reading portion of the Gates-McGinitie.

Null Hypothesis # 2: There will be no change in scores on the reading portion of the ISAT when comparing results prior to participation in Power Hour and PASS to results following participation for students in grades three, four, and, five.

The level of significance was set at the .05 level. Since the researcher was only interested in the positive effect, a one-tail t-test was selected for the statistical analysis of percentile rank for hypothesis # 1. To analyze hypothesis # 2, a z-test for difference in proportions was applied to the percentage of students achieving at or above proficiency prior to the program compared to the percentage following participation in Power Hour and PASS.

Summary

By following the above procedures, the researcher began to isolate successful interventions that allowed students to be more successful during independent reading. Creating a team of specialists to collect pre- and ongoing data on a student's achievement was vital. This team reviewed a student's history along with recent assessments, in order

to create a plan for interventions. By developing a well-thought out plan; with key members of staff; with specific guidelines for teachers, specialists, students, and parents to follow; there was a greater possibility for success. This plan provided documentation the team referred to over time when deciding whether to refer a student for further accommodations to and modifications for the curriculum. The success of this study was monitored by the reading achievement on assessments of individual students getting the additional reading intervention compared to the students that were not. Chapter 4 will present the report of the results.

Chapter Four: Results

The goal for this project was to create the opportunity for every student at this elementary school to perform at the highest level of possible achievement to meet the federally mandated 2014 educational requirements. With the mandates from the NCLB legislation, more emphasis is being placed upon results of standardized testing. It is imperative that educators find ways to identify students that are having difficulty. One method of identifying these students is through the analysis of local assessment test scores and then using these results to individualize the instruction. Improvement for these students will have a direct impact on the year-end test scores for the entire school.

The purpose of this project is to determine if additional reading assistance for students' not meeting quarterly targets at the study school had a positive impact on the academic performance in the area of reading on the assessments given throughout the year.

Specifically, the question to be answered was, will students make academic improvement after receiving additional reading assistance in a small group setting?

The independent variable in this study was the implementation of reading assistance to students not making adequate progress on the Gates-McGinitie. With the implementation of this program, this elementary school may increase the number/percentage of students making adequate progress at their grade level. The dependent variable is the average percentile rank achieved on the Gates-McGinitie in grades three through five during the fall of 2008 school year and the spring of 2009 school year.

Treatment of Data

The Gates-McGinitie is a nationally validated and normed achievement test that allows comparison of this study school's students with students at the same grade level nationally. Not only does the school district use this assessment to compare students nationally, the results also compare elementary schools with one another and allow comparison between scores at the beginning of the year and the end of the year. The test measures reading in the areas of reading comprehension and vocabulary.

> Scoring on the test is based on a normal distribution of scores generated by the original norming sample. Thus, each year, students who take the test are compared against students who were involved in the initial administrations that were used to set the scoring tables. The national average percentile rank (PR) is 50, with half of the students scoring below 50 and the other half scoring above 50. (Magnolia Consulting, 2006, p. 4)

The students' scores were broken down into several categories on the master list of test results. These included the raw score, scaled score, national percentile, grade equivalent, and national stanine. For the purpose of this study, the dependent variable was national percentile rank within the reading scores. This data was analyzed to determine whether achievement levels were affected by extra reading assistance.

Results and Analysis of Data

Null Hypothesis # 1 was that there would be no improvement of the average percentile rank of students in grades three, four, and five who were assigned to additional reading assistance on the reading portion of the Gates-McGinitie.

A paired two sample t-test, for the difference in the means, was utilized to test the null hypothesis at each grade level three, four, and five and for all the Tier II and Tier III students within grades three, four, and five. The t-tests were conducted to analyze the effect of the independent variable (reading assistance) on the dependent variable (Gates-McGinitie). The pre-test was the fall 2008 Gates-McGinitie test and the post-test was spring 2009 Gates-McGinitie test. The student national percentile rank on each test was the measure utilized for statistical analysis.

The spring 2009 post-test average percentile rank and the fall 2008 pre-test average percentile rank for grade three are listed below in Table 5. Table 5 illustrates the statistical analysis for this data. The mean national percentile rank on the fall 2008 pre-test was 39.5% and the mean national percentile rank on the spring 2009 post-test was 53%. This reflects an increase of 13.5% for grade three students during the time of this study.

Table 5

Third Grade Power Hour Students

	Variable 1	Variable 2	
Mean	53.05263	39.47368421	Mean
Variance	329.0782	196.688478	Variance
Observations	38	38	Observations
Hypothesized Mean	0		Hypothesized Mean
Df	37		Df
t Stat	4.621664		t Stat
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.26E-05		P(T<=t) one-tail
t Critical one-tail	1.687094		t Critical one-tail

Note. Gates-McGinitie comparison. Third grade students receiving Power Hour instruction.

The t-test value was 4.62, which exceeded the critical t-test value of 1.69 at the.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Data supports that the

additional reading assistance did contribute to a significant difference in reading achievement at the third grade level, as measured by percentile rank on the Gates-McGinitie.

The spring 2009 post-test average percentile rank and the fall 2008 pre-test average percentile rank for grade four are listed below in Table 6. Table 6 illustrates the statistical analysis for this data. The mean national percentile rank on the fall 2008 pre-test was 48.6% and the mean national percentile rank on the spring 2009 post-test was 52.2%. This reflects an increase of 3.6% for grade four students during the time of this study.

The t-test value was 1.79, which exceeded the critical t-test value of 1.68 at the.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Data supports that the additional reading assistance did contribute to a significant difference in reading achievement at the fourth grade level, as measured by percentile rank on the Gates-McGinitie

Table 6

Fourth Grade Power Hour Students

	Variable 1	Variable 2	
Mean	52.24444444	48.66666667	Mean
Variance	165.7343434	151.0454545	Variance
Observations	45	45	Observations
Hypothesized Mean	0		Hypothesized Mean
Df	44		Df
t Stat	1.790134983		t Stat
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.04015747		P(T<=t) one-tail
t Critical one-tail	1.680230071		t Critical one-tail

Note. Gates-McGinitie comparison. Fourth grade students receiving Power Hour.

The spring 2009 post-test average percentile rank and the fall 2008 pre-test average percentile rank for grade five are listed below in Table 7. Table 7 illustrates the

statistical analysis for this data. The mean national percentile rank on the fall 2008 pre-test was 39.1% and the mean national percentile rank on the spring 2009 post-test was 47.6%. This reflects an increase of 8.5% for grade five students during the time of this study.

The t-test value was 3.06, which exceeded the critical t-test value of 1.69 at the.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Data supports that the additional reading assistance did contribute to a significant difference in reading achievement at the fifth grade level, as measured by percentile rank on the Gates-McGinitie.

Table 7

Fifth Grade Power Hour Students

	Variable 1	Variable 2	
Mean	47.54761905	39.11904762	Mean
Variance	419.1806039	256.985482	Variance
Observations	42	42	Observations
Hypothesized Mean	0		Hypothesized Mean
Df	41		Df
t Stat	3.059810073		t Stat
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.001947451		P(T<=t) one-tail
t Critical one-tail	1.682878974		t Critical one-tail

Note. Gates-McGinitie comparison. Fifth grade students receiving Power Hour.

The last group analyzed was the average percentile rank from the students within grades three, four, and five that had not progressed according to DIBELS and had been referred for Tier III services through our PASS Team. These students were considered our intensive students, because they received additional assistance outside of the 60-minute period to work on more intense interventions. These students were pulled out of their homeroom classes for an additional 30 minutes, two to three times per week to work

on more intense reading strategies. They were assessed weekly and a strategic plan was devised to begin looking at the strengths and weaknesses of that particular student.

The spring 2009 post-test average percentile rank and the fall 2008 pre-test average percentile rank for the intensive students in grades three through five are listed below in Table 8. Table 8 illustrates the statistical analysis for this data. The mean national percentile rank on the fall 2008 pre-test was 30.5% and the mean national percentile rank on the spring 2009 post-test was 36.7%. This reflects an increase of 6.2% for grades three through five students during the time of this study.

Table 8

Grades Three through Five Students in Power Hour and PASS

	Variable 1	*Variable 2*	
Mean	36.74285714	30.45714286	Mean
Variance	221.4319328	100.902521	Variance
Observations	35	35	Observations
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		Hypothesized Mean Difference
Df	34		Df
t Stat	2.181345851		t Stat
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018084126		P(T<=t) one-tail
t Critical one-tail	1.690923455		t Critical one-tail

Note. Gates-McGinitie comparison. Third through fifth grade students that were classified intensive and received both Power Hour and PASS Services.

The t-test value was 2.18, which exceeded the critical t-test value of 1.69 at the.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Data supports that the additional reading assistance did contribute to a significant difference in reading achievement of the intensive students in grades three through five, as measured by percentile rank on the Gates-McGinitie.

Illinois State Achievement Test

The researcher reviewed the secondary data to complete observations based on the achievement for the state test, ISAT. The scores were reviewed based on whether or not students met or exceeded the state standards. See Table 9 for an analysis of the scores.

Table 9

Scores of Treated Students on the ISAT

Grade Level	Overall Percentage of Tiered Students Meeting/Exceeding ISAT	Tier II	Tier III	IEP
3rd Grade	77%	83%	67%	33%
4th Grade	74%	82%	100%	38%
5th Grade	61%	85%	50%	25%

Note. ISAT scores. Overall percentage of treated students meeting/exceeding state standards. Tiers are separated.

ISAT scores on students treated show improvements throughout all tiers. Seventy-seven percent of the third grade students that had at least one of the two interventions met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT. Among students in Tier II, Power Hour, 83% of those students met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT. Students in Tier III, Power Hour and PASS, met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT at the rate of 67%. Thirty-three percent of the students with IEPs met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT.

Seventy-four percent of the fourth grade students that had at least one of the two interventions met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT. Among students in Tier II, Power Hour, 82% of those students met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT. Students

in Tier III, Power Hour and PASS, met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT at 100%. Thirty-eight percent of the students with IEPs met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT.

Sixty-one percent of the fifth grade students that had at least one of the two interventions met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT. Students in Tier II, Power Hour, met or exceeded ISAT expectations at an 85% rate. Students in Tier III, Power Hour and PASS, 50% met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT. Twenty-five percent of the students with IEPs met or exceeded expectations on the ISAT.

Overall, ISAT assessments have shown improvements in scores throughout the years. They have also maintained the upward trend (Table 10).

Table 10

Overall ISAT Scores for Grades Three through Five

Test Year	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	Total
2007-2008	88%	90%	89%	89%
2008-2009	85%	85%	90%	89%
2009-2010	89%	91%	90%	90%
2010-2011	92%	90%	94%	92%

Note. ISAT Reading scores beginning one year before implementation year and beyond. Percentages reflect percentage of students meeting/exceeding state standards.

Null Hypothesis # 2 is that there will be no change in scores on the reading portion of the ISAT when comparing results prior to participation in Power Hour and PASS to results following participation, for students in grades three, four, and five.

To analyze both individual and grade level achievement on the ISAT through a comparison of pre and post-program performance, a z-test for difference in proportions was applied. Proportions represented the percentage of students performance at proficiency or above on the state assessment. Table 11 represents the individual level

achievements. In addition, Table 12 represents the grade level movement, comparing before and after implementation of Power Hour and PASS.

Table 11

Pre and Post Percent Achievement on the ISAT: Individual Level Achievement.

	3rd Grade % Proficient	5th Grade % Proficient	test value
2007-2008 Sample	88	90	0.1788
2008-2009 Sample	85	94	0.8049

Note: Critical value: ±1.96. Participants followed for two years.

For each of the two samples of third graders followed through two years of the study, the test-values of 0.1788 and 0.8049 did not exceed the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Data did not support a significant improvement in percentage of achievement. An observable increase was present (see Table 12).

Table 12

Pre and Post Percent Achievement on the ISAT: Grade Level Achievement.

	2007-2008 Sample	2010-2011 Sample	test value
3rd Grade	88	90	0.3577
4th Grade	85	94	0.0000
5th Grade	88	90	0.4472

Note: Critical value: ±1.96.

For each of the three grade levels followed through two years of the study, the test-values of 0.3577, 0.0000, and 0.4472 did not exceed the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Data did not support a significant

improvement in percentage of achievement for grades three, four, and five. An observable increase was present for third grade and fifth grade. There was no observable improvement for fourth grade, though the percentage did not decrease.

DIBELS Assessment

Table 13

Student Scores on DIBELS Assessment

Grade Level	Overall Tiered Students Progress on DIBELS	Tier II	Tier III	IEP
3rd Grade	37%	34%	27%	42%
4th Grade	33%	32%	32%	38%
5th Grade	27%	24%	33%	30%

Note. Student scores. Percentages reflect percent increased from beginning year benchmark to end of the year benchmark. Tiers are separated.

Reviewing the entire year's growth on DIBELS (see Table 13), third grade students that had at least one of the two interventions increased 37% overall. Students in Tier II, Power Hour, had an average of 34% growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year's assessment. Tier III students, those that participated in Power Hour and PASS, had a 27% growth. Students with IEPs increased 42%.

The fourth grade students overall had a 33% increase. Students in Tier II, Power Hour, averaged a 33% growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year's assessment. Tier III students, those that participated in both Power Hour and PASS, had a 32% growth. Students with IEPs increased 42%.

The fifth grade students overall had a 27% increase. Students in Tier II, Power Hour, averaged a 24% growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year's

assessment. Tier III students, those that participated in both Power Hour and PASS, had a 33% growth. Students with IEPs increased 30%.

Summary

An analysis of the data for grades three, four, five, and the intensive group reflects there was a significant improvement at each grade level and with the intensive group of students. With each group, the data supported to reject the null hypothesis. After the implementation of additional reading assistance, an analysis indicated that students increased their scores not only on the Gates-McGinitie and DIBELS but also on the ISAT. Overall, this study supported the hypothesis that additional reading assistance directly affects a student's independent reading ability. The following chapter will discuss the conclusions reached from this study.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this project was to determine if additional reading assistance for students not meeting quarterly targets at the study school had a positive impact on the academic performance in the area of reading on the assessments given throughout the year. Specifically, the question to be answered was, will students make academic improvement after receiving additional reading assistance in a small group setting? After the implementation of additional reading assistance, an analysis indicated that students increased their scores not only on the Gates-McGinitie and DIBELS but also on the ISAT. Overall, this study supported the hypothesis that additional reading assistance directly affects a student's independent reading ability.

This study analyzed the students' progress when receiving research-based interventions in a small group setting versus when the students were not receiving interventions. When looking at the statistical analysis from the Gates-McGinitie pre-test in September of 2008 and the post-test in May of 2009, there was a significant increase in student percentile rank for the third, fourth, and fifth grade students, along with the intensive students receiving interventions. This study also analyzed if there would be a change in scores on the reading portion of the ISAT when comparing results prior to participation in Power Hour and PASS to results following participation, for students in grades three, four, and five. Scores indicated that students made an observable improvement in these programs, which added to the increase in the overall scores for the study school.

The goal for this project was to create the opportunity for every student at this elementary school to perform at the highest level of achievement possible to meet the

federal mandate 2014 educational requirements. With the mandates from the NCLB legislation, more emphasis is being placed upon results of standardized testing. By 2014, 100% of students in grades three through five must be making adequate progress. The study school must continue to make progress at a steady rate of 2.4% each year in order to remain on target without falling behind. In order for this to happen, it was imperative that educators found ways to identify students who were having difficulty and to begin to look at instructional practices. One effective method of identifying those students was through the analysis of local assessment test scores and using those results to individualize the instruction. Improvement for those students will have a direct impact on the year-end test scores for the entire school.

Due to significant effects of the data analyzed from the Gates-McGinitie percentile rankings, this study supports the use of the research-based intervention reading block at the study school. This study will also be useful for evaluating and programming for yearly school improvement goals. By sharing the results with staff members, the focus will remain to continue intervening early by analyzing the pre-test data, monitoring the progress monitoring data and improving our knowledge on research-based interventions that affect instruction. In order to predict student success, educators need a way to identify and meet student's academic needs while evaluating present practices. There must be consideration to alternatives with instruction in the areas of reading that will directly affect student achievement and progress toward required AYP.

Implications for Effective Reading

This study findings supported there was a significant increase in student percentile rank for the third, fourth, and fifth grade students, along with the intensive

students receiving additional reading assistance on the Gates-McGinitie reading test. This study also analyzed if there would be a change in scores on the reading portion of the ISAT when comparing results prior to participation in Power Hour and PASS to results following participation, for students in grades three, four, and five. Scores indicated that students made an observable improvement in these programs, which added to the increase in the overall scores for the study school.

Due to the significant effects of the data analyzed from the Gates-McGinite, the researcher of this study recommends continuing the reading block hour that provided additional reading assistance to the students targeted. The Power Hour program and the PASS process were supported in order to have a strong impact on increasing the percentage of students meeting standards.

The researcher learned from the review of literature that it is imperative to design a comprehensive school procedure when initiating change in practices. Burggraf (2004) indicated that differentiating instruction and reviewing instructional delivery approaches are very important to increasing students' reading abilities. This was a new approach for the study school. Before this research proposal, the district's practices were to teach reading in a very traditional way. For example, read the story and answer the questions. Teachers taught in isolation, teacher aides copied papers, and the reading teachers worked with a limited amount of students in a Reading Recovery Model. The demographics of this school had not changed much from year to year and often generations of family members were educated in this district. During these years, the students were from highly educated, two family homes where education was the main priority. These students understood the material easily and had backgrounds filled with rich knowledge.

Teachers did not need to find alternative ways to address material, nor did they need to spend additional time teaching reading or finding ways to reach various students. The needs were not nearly as great as they are now.

After the RtI mandate was initiated, all districts had to react and create guidelines to address the students not achieving minimum standards. At that time, the district moved to coupling the RtI framework with this small-group reading model to mirror the Anna Plan study that was discussed in the previous related study. This district does not receive much federal funding. Most expenses are paid out of the operating funds. Unfortunately, most of those funds go to maintaining the fiscal budget. The researcher had to creatively find ways to maximize the additional reading support within the school. Given that the researcher learned to maximize additional school personnel and utilize the professionals on a team from the problem-solving and job embedded staff development literature in Chapter 2, the researcher devised this plan to accomplish that task.

After studying Fountas and Pinnell (1996), the researcher learned that small group reading was the most effective approach. Between Bethel School District (Harn, 2007) and the Anna Plan (Miles, 2004), both studies showed similarities of intervening with the neediest students in small group settings. The first goal was to provide the students who had the highest level of need 100% contact for 90 minutes per day. It was expected, if the theory held true, that students with whom the reading interventionist worked most intensively would have the greatest percentage of increased success. However, these students only improved at 6.2%, which was the second smallest improvement. The difference could be that group of students had the most to improve upon to attain benchmark.

In terms of assessment, the study school conducted the screenings, diagnostic assessments, and the progress monitoring. The only assessment that showed conflict was progress monitoring. The RtI Manual (NRCLD, 2007), recommends teachers progress monitor Tier II and Tier III twice a month. The researcher found that this period was too long because students were slipping further and further behind before the data was reviewed. The researcher moved to having the reading teachers progress monitor on a weekly basis for the students that were being targeted to ensure the students had enough testing sessions to make decisions prior to the student falling further behind.

In addition, the research suggested that professional development needs to be reviewed and more focused on the actual needs of the students and teachers involved. Though this study suggests that developing an instructional reading block and instructing students at their instructional level while focusing the expertise at the lower level emphasizing the five early literacy components is essential, it is not the only necessity.

By sharing the results of the study with staff members, the focus should be on each grade level's curriculum alignment, grade level assessments, and the needs for professional development. The practices of following the three-tier philosophy and utilizing the scientifically based instruction approaches and interventions need to continue to be a priority for the study school.

It is essential to continue to find ways to identify students and train teachers to differentiate the instruction within the general curriculum in order to meet the needs of the variety of learners within the classroom. The goal is to begin seeing teachers tailor, modify, and customize their instruction as the teacher and grade level team see fit from the ongoing data they are collecting. The reading block and intensive services have made

significant improvements in student achievement scores. This study school has continued the efforts to keep the blocked hour and intensive services a high priority for staff and students as needed.

Professional development needs to be job embedded, as Von Frank's (2009) research stated, and reviewed periodically to ensure that best practices are occurring. Conversations between team members to discuss the instructional delivery and design continue to be difficult, but are beginning to happen on a regular basis. Setting the norms to develop problem-solving guidelines has allowed staff to feel comfortable to share. These norms allowed the researcher to facilitate the conversations in a non-threatening manner, while using the four questions to frame conversations.

Establishing time for the PASS Team to continue ongoing dialogue and engaging grade level teams in the discussion of the process empowered teachers to adopt practices naturally. There seemed to never be enough time. Scheduling was one of the most difficult tasks to try to ensure all grade level teams met to discuss practices and the PASS Team met to discuss targeted students. The researcher found that successes need to be celebrated and the hurdles need to be learning points. Again, the norms and problem-solving framework became the way business was done for this study school. The researcher found that everyone came with different experiences and everyone was given the time to share their professional opinions to help formulate the plans for individual students. Keeping files and data on students from meeting to meeting was essential. The discussions had to be mainstreamed to have enough time to talk about all students. The PASS Team restructured the four questions into identifying, (a) What is the problem, (b) Why is it happening, (c) What resources are available to help, (d) How will effectiveness

be monitored? Once this change entered the language through ongoing dialogue, teachers could document progress quickly and change interventions as needed.

The researcher found studying Garmston's (2007) work on developing norms to be a great process to have meetings that were more productive. Unfortunately, the lack of leadership training in effective collaboration has resulted in many unproductive meetings. In the past, both while teaching and leading, the researcher has observed some teachers watching the clock, sitting back not wanting to participate and others wanting to quickly fly through the agenda and go about their individual tasks; that was not the case with the norms set. Using Garmston's (2007) seven norms, the researcher was able to step back as the administrator and facilitate the meeting. This encouraged everyone to share ideas and took the pressure off to manage meetings. Opening every meeting, grade level team or PASS, with interesting questions and allowing everyone time to reflect on was effective. Often times, the researcher would paraphrase what had been said and then begin probing others for more dialogue. At times, it felt like only a few teachers would collaborate, until these norms became natural in the dialogue.

Creating a learning organization by transforming leadership, in the views of reading teachers and the principal, was difficult. The researcher was in agreement with Elmore et al. (1996) when he stated that teachers are always willing to learn new methods, but naturally end up back to the original style of teaching. In the researcher's experience, change depends heavily on leadership.

This study school had to rethink the role of the leader. The school has 600 students and multiple students who are educated off campus due to severe disabilities. This takes a lot of time away from the leader due to responsibilities to participate in IEP

meetings and collaborate with other educators. Since demographics were changing, the study school began needing more from the researcher as the principal. The school needed the researcher to be a learning leader, even though the researcher had experience with much of the research, and no longer just the task manager. The school faculty and administration needed to learn best practices together.

Restructuring the way business is conducted was an incredible task. The researcher had to be prepared to be involved from the beginning. There were cheerleading moments and there were moments that were really trying. Nevertheless, because of the dedication to this process, two years later, this study school has been honored with the 2010 Academic Excellence Award from the Illinois State Board. This award was earned by only 13% of the schools in the state of Illinois. In order to earn this award, the school must have 90% of its students meeting state standards by sustaining excellence and making AYP for three consecutive years. There is a certain triumphant feeling, when one conducts research to learn a new process, let alone brings an entire staff through a learning process and does it well enough to earn an award.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Results from this study supported the use of the Power Hour and the PASS process. The third grade students in Power Hour increased at 13.5%, the fourth grade increased 3.6%, and the fifth grade increased 8.5%. Those students in Power Hour and PASS increased at the rate of 6.2% during this time of study. The study school set a goal of students increasing their rate at 2.4% yearly; therefore, these scores were favorable toward continuing these practices at the study school.

Even though there was success to be celebrated for this study school, there has been a lot of learning throughout the journey. Changing the reading approach to factor in the best practices learned from this study and targeting students through data collections has been a process that needed to evolve over time at the study school. Other districts that are considering adopting a similar comprehensive approach may want to thoroughly plan and prepare staff the year prior to beginning the change.

Results from this study could possibly be strengthened by considering the experience of the teacher and the location of services. For this particular study, the researcher did not take into account the level of experience of the reading teacher. Nor was there a group that received interventions that another group did not. However, other districts that are considering a similar study may want to consider comparing a district with similar demographics that do not utilize the strategies to the district that is utilizing the strategies.

Since this study only looked at adding an instructional reading block and adding additional assistance for those students who were targeted during the data collection phase, there are other factors that could be studied to strengthen the research. One factor that could possibly strengthen the study is to research what is actually happening at the small-group reading table. Reviewing the materials used and not just the process, which was carried out in this study, could provide additional information on effectiveness.

The most challenging part of the scheduling process was setting up the master schedule so that all instructional reading was happening in an organized fashion with the intention not to double schedule our reading assistants. Once the instructional reading block schedules were set, students in the Tier III intense services needed time slots put

into their schedules to receive the additional assistance. After reviewing the data collected in this study, one could widen this study by researching the effect on the duration and frequency of the interventions. Specifically looking at fourth grade, another researcher may want to study why third and fifth grades improved considerably more than fourth grade.

Results from this study could be strengthened by widening the time span for this study. Setting up a treatment group and a non-treatment group, taking control of instructional delivery, or having a prescribed treatment and studying the instructional delivery approach from a new angle, would all be worthy of a study. This study could be strengthened by developing staff knowledge on reviewing ongoing data and the process of changing interventions quickly. This would help staff to become more natural at modifying interventions within their classroom and documenting the necessary information to make decisions. Teachers need additional assistance at some point. Teaching teachers these measures would help frame the best practices occurring within their daily classrooms.

The study school's School Improvement Team may want to consider following this track of students to determine the effects on their reading ability long term. The team will be eager to see if students have corrected reading behaviors or if students surface as needing reading services again later in their educational years. It is expected these students will continue to progress and not fall behind.

Illinois will be introducing the Common Core Standards and the requirements for AYP school districts. The new AYP requirement will be based off of the individual growth model (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012). The assessment will be given

three times a year and will require districts to follow progress of teachers and students. The new assessment will allow districts quicker access to scores and will consist of a better measurement for students meeting the state standards.

Discussion

Implementing some of the best practices researched within this study has been challenging at times. Guided Reading, Differentiated Instruction, RtI, Collaboration, Problem-Solving, and Professional Development have provided the study school an opportunity to begin to utilize these best practices to address the school's needs. This study school has moved to giving assessments, reviewing the data, and remediating as soon as possible.

The study school expanded to other content areas and gradually changed educational conversations. The study school is no longer using classroom aides to run copies. Teachers are not worried about the quantity of the curriculum. So often, teachers worried about covering the textbook and allowed chapters and weeks to dictate movement throughout the text, instead of allowing the data to drive their instruction. The emphasis is on the quality of the curriculum versus the quantity of the curriculum.

Fewer and fewer students are surfacing in need of help and that is because students are identified early to re-teach a variety of skills. This process has allowed teachers valuable time with students who would have been considered to have the potential special education concerns. Teachers are able to do more with more these students and intensify their instruction based on data results. It has also helped students who are not performing close to their grade levels the opportunity to get two to three doses of reading a day because the instruction is more focused on deficit skills.

The school has been faced with many challenges throughout this process. There are always the uncertainties over what the other students doing, how teachers are assessing the grade level material in reading, and concerns over special education students. All three of these areas, and many more, are work in progress. The researcher continues to research other ideas like, Smart Centers (DeCesare, 2005), which is an approach to put centers *in a box* with reading, writing, and extension activities to keep the students actively engaged for longer periods. Many teachers are assessing through a combination of random readings, listening activities, basal readings, accelerated reading, and fluency activities to get an actual grade level grade. However, the conversations are happening and views are changing.

Special education students are still one of the biggest concerns. The study school piloted this approach and is finding that students are exposed to more grade level materials through this instructional block. This has been a success for everyone. Teachers have been held accountable and are developing in many ways professionally.

New conversations are surfacing daily. We are beginning to review assessments to ensure that mixed messages are not being communicated and assessments and instruction are comparable. For example, a student should not be getting A's and B's in reading when they are below state standards on the Gates, DIBELS, or ISAT assessments. Progress monitoring helps these concerns immensely. If this becomes the case, it is a red flag for a conversation on that particular child and teacher. Since this type of accountability has been put in place, teachers are serious about making sure the students are doing and getting what is appropriate. Teachers do not need the researcher

to facilitate the dialogue in conversations any longer because the conversations are happening without guidance.

Leadership is key to facilitating and sustaining significant change. Teachers need to see the leader is hands-on, approachable, and can *walk the talk.* However, principals cannot be the only leaders. In order for schools to continue to look at student achievement, it must begin with reorganizing the time required and spent on teachers learning. In order to get more results, teachers must be engaged in more structured learning time to be more productive in the classroom. Conversations must start developing. When organized correctly, anything can happen; creating a more personalized climate is a valuable end in itself.

In order to support district goals, districts must continue to use a variety of data to analyze. It is imperative that a process is put into place to review the data, collaborate about the data and share the data to plan for the future steps regarding the data. Being focused on the process early will allow districts to staff and program effectively. In doing so, this will continue to support district school improvement goals. Assessment scores, when utilized with combined efforts of observations, interventions, data collection, and a collaborative effort will allow districts to program for students prior to a student falling behind.

In this particular school, there are 600 students. There are four to five sections of kindergarten through fifth grades, two self-contained special education classrooms, one resource teacher, two reading teachers, and two reading assistants. There is a half-time social worker, half-time psychologist and one full-time administrator. The reading block can be conducted with the personnel that is in this particular building. This district does

not qualify for federal funds, nor has extra funding to support various positions. Currently, classroom aides are being hired with teaching certificates so they can help facilitate the reading instruction. The actual reading assistants are paid half of what a new teacher would make in this district and have responsibilities to work with children. Teachers are encouraged to find parent volunteers to help run copies or cut items out, instead of using classroom aides. There is a true commitment on the administrator's side to protect the reading blocks and personnel that make this program successful.

The researcher has learned that part of teaching reading to at-risk readers has to first begin with the student's self-confidence. So often, these students defeat themselves. They are not aware of good reading practices and do not realize they exhibit great strategies. When working with these students, reading teachers right away started working with kids to identify great reading strategies that they were already using and moved into learning new strategies.

The team also learned that the RtI Manual (NRCLD, 2007) recommended not keeping a student too long in Tier II or Tier III stages. Due to different foundational exposures, the study school had several students making progress at a slower rate than others do but, it was progress. The reading interventionist would often keep those students for several rotations to help gain confidence, continue with building a relationship, and ensure the student was ready to begin to transfer the new learning into a different environment. This felt very subjective at times. While students develop at different speeds developmentally, they also develop at different speeds academically. Reading teachers had to differentiate instructional approaches for these students, which included a timeframe for developing the reading skills desired.

Communication with parents early on and throughout the process was vital. After the initial meetings with parents, reading teachers would also make phone calls to parents periodically to discuss ongoing strengths and weaknesses their child was exhibiting. It was learned that these relationships developing early on allowed for trust during later times. Parents witnessed the team's intention to truly do what it takes to help their child. The trust built relationships that (a) educated parents to the overall process and (b) improved the quality of those difficult conversations when things were not progressing at a reasonable rate in which other avenues, like Special Education Services, had to be explored.

Recommendations

Since the researcher completed this study a few years ago, some changes have taken place that other interested districts may want to consider. In 2011, the district under study chose to adopt AIMSweb and discontinue the use of DIBELS. AIMSweb is a benchmarking and progress monitoring system that allows schools to report progress to parents quickly. Since AIMSweb supports kindergarten through eighth grades and our district needed to expand our RtI efforts through the middle school, our district chose to adopt this management system. AIMSweb is much more costly then DIBELS; however, there are many great factors.

AIMSweb allows the benchmarking, progress monitoring, and state assessments to be kept on the same database. This program also has many more options with graphs and charting of student outcomes on assessments. State predictors are also set in AIMSweb to allow schools to quickly access students' scores and get interventions going in a timely manner. In addition, high-performing schools have the capabilities to set their

own norms and raise expectations after reviewing comparable districts. All school personnel have access and can create disaggregated reports by norm-referenced or criterion-referenced.

Data days have become vital in this entire process at the school of study. These days have blocked times set aside for grade levels to meet with the principal and review progress or lack of progress. Data is reviewed from the entire grade level, to the individual classrooms down to the individual students. Plans are created for students that have surfaced on the benchmarking or progress monitoring. This allows students to be remediated right away.

Curriculum studies have also been a very important piece added to staff and grade level monthly meetings. The teachers are reading articles found and discussing new techniques to tweak our practices. The discussions have changed tremendously from how can this student get special education help to how can we help this student more? Most teachers are reflecting on practices and revisiting educational philosophies. At times, the administrator may need to probe with questions, but the dialogue is changing.

Teachers at the study school are also doing their own progress monitoring for reading and math. The teachers are able to quickly review the data and change interventions at a quicker pace. Parents are informed and are now knowledgeable about the assessment scores. This process has been around now for four years and parents are more comfortable with student placement and being able to read and understand their child's scores.

With Common Core Standards changing the way students are instructed and assessed in most schools, this study school will remain with these practices. The school

will be defining quarterly curriculum targets and quarterly assessments, which will add more data to review as students begin to surface. For this school, adding this next layer will be a great way to continue the additional reading and math practices. The structure will continue as it has and the new additional information will help with student placement.

The School Improvement Team is also considering a cost effective study on the additional reading and math assistants. Class sizes are always an item up for discussion, but with them being relatively low for this particular district, the team will consider reviewing the impact of additional teachers versus the additional assistants.

Since the reading has proven to be quite effective, the school under study has recently mirrored the same concept into the math instruction. Again, scheduling has been critical and time had to be spent on ensuring the master schedule did not overlap with the reading schedule because often the same personnel happened to be utilized. Students in math are being pre-tested by units to allow teachers to group by concepts and differentiate the daily instruction. Progress monitoring is being done on a weekly basis. Students that surface from the differentiated instruction as needing additional assistance follows the same PASS process. Once the PASS meeting is conducted and the team deems it necessary for the student to receive additional assistance, the student is assigned to a math assistance. For starters, the students are instructed 2-3 times per week for 20 minutes on the plan that was developed in the initial meeting. If the student does not show progress, that time is increased to 4-5 times per week just as it was in the reading program.

Conclusion

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Districts must start engaging in the idea of NCLB, since the 2014 mandate is around the corner. The study results are important because the study school is beginning to be impacted by a change in demographics. Reading in a subject in which students are weak when they arrive at the school, they do not have the reading foundation to continue the instructional approach from the past.

NCLB is a great initiative. It has created accountability, if nothing else. It does leave some yearning; however, the government's intention was effective. It begins with leadership.

The review of literature has convinced the researcher many things. Developing a team with norms set for a communication framework is a requirement. This allows everyone to communicate with the same common language and create a tactic to get students appropriate help. RtI is an effective way to identify students by utilizing the screening to target students. The Anna Plan (Miles et al., 2004/2005) is an efficient model to achieve these results. This particular model, coupled with RtI and problem-solving teams, allows students to receive the appropriate instruction needed to be successful.

Setting a focused professional development plan spotlighting best practices and committing to these initiatives convinced the study school professional staff that they were on the right track. The literature stressed professional development must be job embedded, focused, and closely linked to student learning. Again, teamwork is a skillful way to reach this goal. Teachers learn from one another especially when they are in a trusted learning environment with their peers.

No matter what process a school adopts to target students that are not achieving, collaboration, professional development, and leadership are the three key components. The actual examination of the process was very valuable, not just the study's results.

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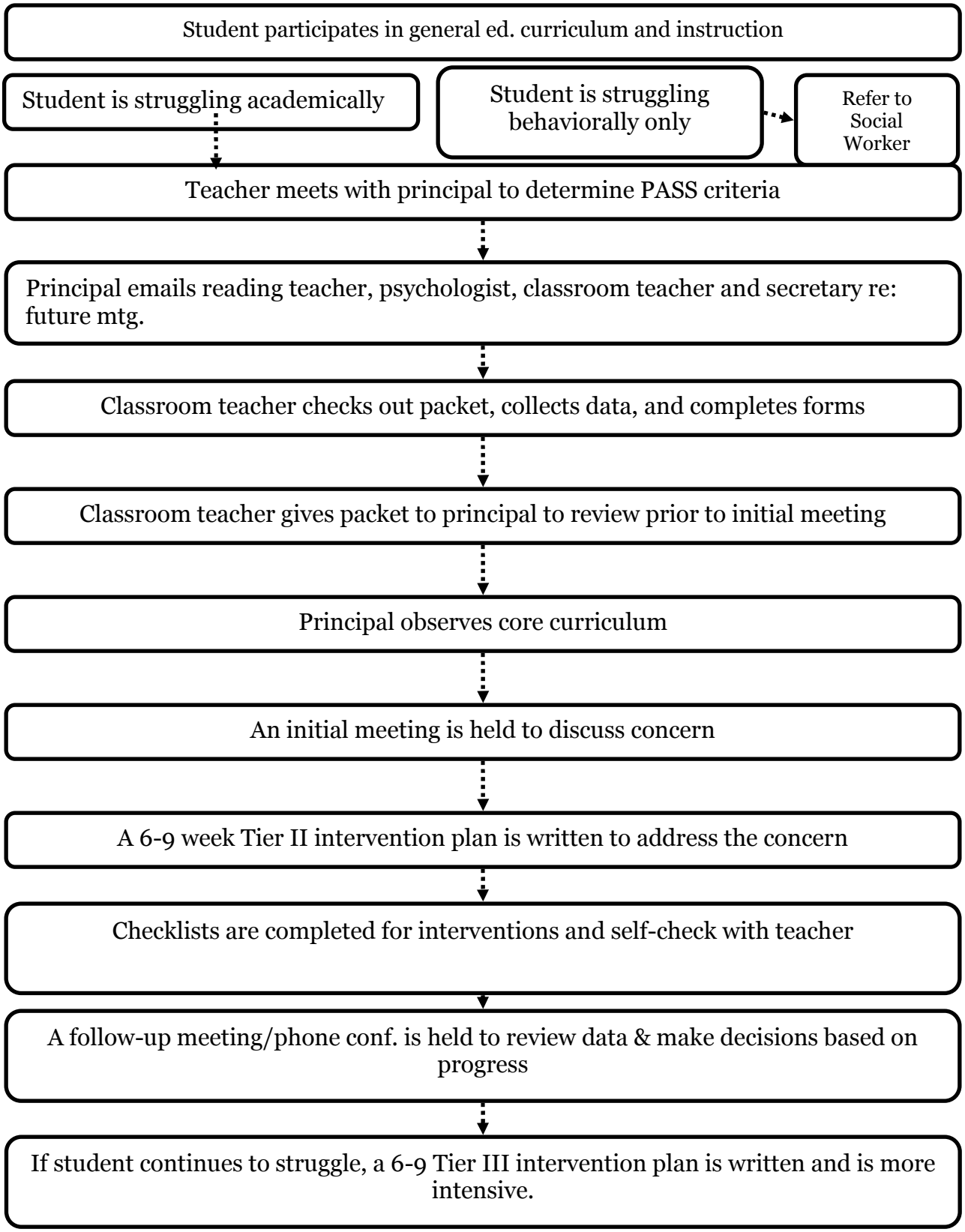
Appendix A

PASS Overview



Appendix B

Data Day Agenda

Grade Level Rep.-Please prioritize students of concern in your grade level and bring names and assessment scores with you to our next Data Meeting. Also, please bring scores from fresh reads, reading tests, math tests and discipline logs to support grade level concerns.
Reading Teacher-Please bring PM reports for students and intervention logs.

Date: _____

1) Grade Level Concerns:

    a. Students Needing Additional Reading Support:
    b. Students Needing Additional Math Support:
    c. Students Needing Additional Behavioral Support:

2) Progress of Active PASS Students:

3) Small Group Reading Students:

    a. Intensive:
    b. Middle:
    c. Advanced:

4) Small Group Math Students:

    a. Intensive:
    b. Middle:
    c. Advanced:

5) Overall Trends Observed:
    Triangles-
    PM Data-
    Fresh Reads-
    Overview Forms-
    SWIS-

6) Other Concerns:

7) Next Steps and Priorities (personnel responsible):

8) Suggestions for Professional Development:

Appendix C

Mid-Year Agenda

Grade Level -Please come prepared with a list of students from your reading group/math group that you would like to discuss. Also, please bring scores from fresh reads, reading tests, math tests and discipline logs to support these concerns.
Reading Teacher-Please bring PM reports for students and intervention logs.
The O Drive Data, SWIS Data and AIMSweb for all grade levels will be available at the meeting.

Needed: Agenda, Assessment Overviews, PM Data, Updated Grades, SWIS Data, DIBELS

1) **Celebrations:**

2) **Review:**

   a. **Tier 1 Changes (General Classes):**

   b. **Tier 2 Changes (Intensive Class):**

   c. **Tier 3 Changes (PASS):**

3) **Scoring overall as a class:**

4) **Whole Class Concerns:**

5) **What students are you concerned most about:**

6) **Intervention Changes:**

7) **Students needing additional behavioral support:**

8) **Students needing additional math support:**

9) **Lit./Math Assistants--groupings for afternoon classes:**

Appendix D

Assessment Overview

Wolf Branch Elementary Assessment Overview																					
		General Information						Dibels - August			Gates - Fall			1st Quarter				2nd Quarter				
Third Grade		Birth Date	# of Retentions	PASS	504 CRT IEP	Academic Concerns in Second	Reading in 2nd - Above, On, Strategic	Oral Reading Fluency	Retell Fluency	Benchmark	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total	Reading Grade	Language Grade	Spelling Grade	Math Grade	Reading Grade	Language Grade	Spelling Grade	Math Grade	Promotion Concerns
Last Name	First Name			√		√	A O S	7 7	25 %	B, S, I	G E	G E	G E	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	√
Average																						

Wolf Branch Elementary Assessment Overview																							
		Dibels - January			3rd Quarter					Dibels - May			Gates - Spring			4th Quarter							
Third Grade		Oral Reading Fluency	Retell Fluency	Benchmark	Reading Grade	Language Grade	Spelling Grade	Math Grade	Concerns	Oral Reading Fluency	Retell Fluency	Benchmark	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total	Reading Grade	Language Grade	Spelling Grade	Math Grade	Reading in 3rd - Above, On, Strategic	Concerns	Retained (R)	Comments
Last Name	First Name	92	25 %	B, S, I	%	%	%	%	√	110	25 %	B, S, I	GE	GE	GE	%	%	%	%	A, O, S	√		
Average																							

Appendix E

Priority for Data

INITIAL DATA

For Placement

Primary:

1. **DIBELS**
2. **ISAT**
3. **GATES**
4. **BASELINE**

Secondary:

1. **PROGRESS MONITORING**
2. **LEXIA**
3. **READING PLUS**
4. **GRADES**

ON-GOING DATA

For Changes

Primary:

1. **DIBELS**
2. **PROGRESS MONITORING**
3. **LEXIA**
4. **READING PLUS**

Secondary:

1. **GRADES**
2. **WORK SAMPLES**
3. **FRESH READS**

Primary= Priority

Secondary= Supplemental Information

Appendix F

P.A.S.S. STUDENT COVER SHEET

STUDENT NAME	D.O.B	DATE

A request for a Response to Intervention referral was made by:_____ for the following reasons:

- ☐ A review of the request has determined that a referral **is deemed necessary** at this time.
- ☐ A review of the request has determined that a referral **is not deemed necessary** at this time.

The reasons and relevant factors for the above indicated decision include:

Prior to Initial Meeting:

- ❑ Teacher packets received
- ❑ Copy of letter sent to child's home informing parent of initial meeting
- ❑ Hearing and vision test completed
- ❑ Score reports from classroom, building, district and state assessments
  - ___Gates ___ Lexia
  - ___ISAT ___ Reading Plus
  - ___Dibels ___ Progress Monitoring Results
  - ___Classroom Grades/Assessments
- ❑ Student work samples
- ❑ Cumulative File Record Review completed
- ❑ Copy of attendance, behavior referrals, medical records
- ❑ Copy of class observation
- ❑ Notes from other teachers involved (including Extracurricular Activities)
- ❑ Reading Teacher conducts a Survey Level Assessment
- ❑ Teacher, Parent and student forms completed
- ❑ Fidelity determined

Date:	**Initial meeting scheduled**

- ❑ Review concerns
- ❑ Student PASS Plan developed and written
- ❑ Progress Monitoring Plan Created/reviewed
- ❑ Schedule Follow-up meeting

Date:	**Follow-up meeting scheduled**

- ❑ Copy of letter sent to child's home informing parent of follow-up meeting/phone conference
- ❑ Copies of the progress monitoring added to file
- ❑ Copies of recent grades and assessments added to file
- ❑ Copies of observations and fidelity check added to file
- ❑ Copies of Lexia/Reading Plus reports added to file
- ❑ Evaluate Intervention
- ❑ Write Intervention Plan
- ❑ Schedule Second Follow-up meeting or consider other placement

Appendix G
P.A.S.S. STUDENT INTERVENTION LOG

Student: _____

Date	Time In	Time Out	Intervention	Notes/Observation

Appendix H
P.A.S.S. SIGNATURE PAGE

STUDENT NAME	DATE

PASS TEAM PRESENT AT MEETING (SIGN-IN)

Name	**Position/Relationship to Student**
	Building principal
	Student
	Parent
	General education teacher
	School psychologist
	Reading teacher/RTI interventionist
	Reading teacher/RTI interventionist
	Social worker
	Speech pathologist
	School nurse
	BASSC Representative
	Other:

P.A.S.S. CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I AGREE THAT ALL INFORMATION (i.e. teacher, parent, and student information, school performance data, specific demographic data etc…) DISCUSSED PERTAINING TO THE INTERVENTION PROCESS WILL BE HELD IN STRICT CONFIDENCE. I WILL NEITHER CONTACT NOR DISCUSS ANY PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION WITH ANYONE OUTSIDE THE OFFICIAL FUNCTION OF THIS PROCESS FOR ANY REASON.

Appendix I
P.A.S.S. PARENT FORM

STUDENT NAME	D.O.B	DATE

Parent/Guardian Name			Teacher's Name
Grade	Room #	Language Spoken at Home	Other Teachers
Parent/Guardian Telephone (s) (H) (W) (Mobile)			Email:

CONTACT INFORMATION

LEARNING AND/OR BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS (DESCRIBE THE CONCERN IN YOUR OWN WORDS)

Have you talked with your child's teacher about this concern?
- ❒ Yes
- ❒ No

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR CHILD TO BE ABLE TO DO? (DESCRIBE)

WHERE THE PROBLEM OCCURS (CHECK ✓ ALL THAT APPLY)

❒ Classroom (Circle all that apply): language arts, math, science, social studies, computers ❒ School grounds ❒ Cafeteria ❒ Gym ❒ Hallway	❒ Bus ❒ Home ❒ Transitions between class ❒ Other: _____

WHAT HAS BEEN TRIED TO HELP YOUR CHILD (DESCRIBE)

PLEASE ATTACH ANY INFORMATION YOU THINK MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD (e.g., quizzes, tests, homework, assignments, etc). **COPY TO BUILDING PRINCIPAL**

ABOUT MY CHILD

Medications	Other Relevant Health Information

Appendix J

STUDENT STRENGTHS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Fluent reader
- ❒ Strong mathematical skills
- ❒ Strong spelling skills
- ❒ Strong language skills
- ❒ Strong writing skills
- ❒ Skillful in science
- ❒ Skillful in social studies
- ❒ Positive attitude
- ❒ Hard worker
- ❒ Trustworthy
- ❒ Works well in groups
- ❒ Respectful toward authority
- ❒ Motivated
- ❒ Focused/goal oriented
- ❒ Organized
- ❒ High expectations for self
- ❒ Works well independently
- ❒ Works cooperatively in teams
- ❒ Cooperates with teacher
- ❒ Responsible
- ❒ Transitions easily
- ❒ Creative
- ❒ Possesses leadership qualities
- ❒ Handles conflict well
- ❒ Athletic
- ❒ Artistically inclined
- ❒ Takes pride in appearance
- ❒ Musically talented
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____

CONCERNS ABOUT HOW MY CHILD IS LEARNING (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Poor grades
- ❒ Disorganized
- ❒ Does not finish work
- ❒ Does not follow directions
- ❒ Does not remember things
- ❒ Poor writing skills
- ❒ Poor reading skills
- ❒ Poor math skills
- ❒ Poor study skills
- ❒ Gives up easily
- ❒ Does not work well by him or herself
- ❒ Does not work well with others
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____

CONCERNS ABOUT HOW MY CHILD BEHAVES (CHECK ✓ ALL THAT APPLY)

❒ Physically hurts people (e.g. hits, throws things)	❒ Argues	❒ Avoided by peers
❒ Is bullied	❒ Says mean things (e.g., makes threats, swears)	❒ Is sexually inappropriate
❒ Bullies others	❒ Shy/withdrawn	❒ Gives up easily
❒ Destroys property	❒ Gets angry easily	❒ Is late or skips school
❒ Easily distracted	❒ Steals/lies/cheats	❒ Other: _____

PERSONAL CONCERNS (CHECK ✓ ALL THAT APPLY)

❒ Overweight/underweight	❒ Has difficulty moving	❒ Possession of drugs or alcohol
❒ Nervous	❒ Complains of nausea/vomiting	❒ Other: _____
❒ Appears sickly	❒ Hurts himself/herself	❒ Other: _____
❒ Sleeps a lot	❒ Smells of smoke or alcohol	

Appendix K

P.A.S.S. REFERRAL FORMS
TEACHER PACKET

REFERRAL DATE: _____

STUDENT INFORMATION:

NAME: _____ BIRTHDATE: _____
AGE: _____

GENDER: M F RACE: _____ SCHOOL _____

GRADE: _____ **TEACHER**: _____

WITH WHOM DOES THE STUDENT LIVE? ☐ MOTHER _____ (first and last name)

☐ FATHER _____ (first and last name)

☐ OTHER: PLEASE EXPLAIN_____

STUDENT ADDRESS: _____ **CITY/STATE/ZIP CODE** _____

HOME PHONE NUMBER: _____ **CELL PHONE NUMBER**:_____

WORK PHONE NUMBER OF _____: _____

TEACHER NAME:_____ PERSON MAKING REFERRAL (IF DIFFERENT) _____

PARENT CONTACTED PRIOR TO PASS REFERRAL REGARDING THESE SPECIFIC CONCERNS YES/NO
LIST AND DESCRIBE COMMUNICATION WITH PARENT (S) (INCLUDE DATES AND TIMES)

Cumulative File Review

Is this student age-appropriate for grade level? ____ yes ____ no
If no, indicate why:

Has the student been retained? _____ yes _____ no
If yes, indicate grade level:

Appendix L

In the chart below, indicate school attended, number of days absent, and any special services received. (Speech/Language, Reading Support, Social Work, Resource, etc…)

Grade	School Attended	# Absences	Special Services Received
K			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

In the chart below, indicate the average report card grades.

Grade	Reading	Math	Spelling	Writing	Science	Soc. Stu.	Other:
K							
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

In the chart below, record group testing results for the student, & salient comparison scores.

Grade	ISAT		Gates		DIBELS			Other:	Other:
	R	M	Fall V/C/T	Spring V/C/T	Fall B/S/I	Winter B/S/I	Spring B/S/I		
K									
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									

In the chart below, indicate any behavioral concerns noted in file.

Grade	Behavioral Concerns Noted
K	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Appendix M

Specify any notable health history which you feel may be related to current referral concerns.

Specify any known medications the student is currently taking.

Please review any previous evaluations completed, and note relevant findings.

SPECIAL SERVICES

	DATE (s)		DATE (s)
Speech Therapy		Social Worker Services	
Occupational Therapy		Other: _____	
Physical Therapy		Other: _____	
Literacy Support			

TO BE COMPLETED AT MEETING

***VISION SCREENING** **HEARING SCREENING**

Date	Right	Left	With Glasses	Date	Right	Left

*If failed vision, please indicate near or far

Appendix N

ACADEMIC CONCERNS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

❒ Word reading	❒ Gross motor	❒ Does not work well independently
❒ Reading comprehen	❒ Articulation	❒ Does not work well with others
❒ Numerical operatior	❒ Grades declining	❒ Attention/on-task behavior
❒ Math reasoning	❒ Disorganized	❒ Other: _____
❒ Spelling	❒ Slow rate of work	❒ Other: _____
❒ Written expression	❒ Incomplete assignments	❒ Other: _____
❒ Listening comprehension	❒ Does not follow directions	❒ Other: _____
❒ Oral expression	❒ Low rate of retention	❒ Other: _____
❒ Language	❒ Poor study skills	
❒ Fine motor	❒ Gives up easily	

Peer Comparison: What is the difference between the student's level of performance compared to the performance of peers, subgroup or standards of expected performance?

STUDENT STRENGTHS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

❒ Fluent reader	❒ Works well in groups	❒ Transitions easily
❒ Strong mathematical skills	❒ Respectful toward authority	❒ Creative
❒ Strong spelling skills	❒ Motivated	❒ Possesses leadership qualities
❒ Strong language skills	❒ Focused/goal oriented	❒ Handles conflict well
❒ Strong writing skills	❒ Organized	❒ Athletic
❒ Skillful in science	❒ High expectations for self	❒ Artistically inclined
❒ Skillful in social studies	❒ Works well independently	❒ Takes pride in appearance
❒ Positive attitude	❒ Works cooperatively in teams	❒ Musically talented
❒ Hard worker	❒ Cooperates with teacher	❒ Other: _____
❒ Trustworthy	❒ Responsible	❒ Other: _____
		❒ Other: _____
		❒ Other: _____

PERCENT OF HOMEWORK TURNED IN _____% RATE QUALITY OF EFFORTS
A B C D F

PERCENT OF CLASS WORK TURNED IN _____% RATE QUALITY OF EFFORTS
A B C D F

SPEECH CONCERNS YES _____ NO _____ (If concerns, please email and invite Speech Teacher to meeting)

PHYSICAL THERAPY CONCERNS YES _____ NO _____

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CONCERNS YES _____ NO _____

Appendix O

BEHAVIORAL/EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL CONCERNS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Verbally disruptive
- ❒ Physically disruptive
- ❒ Physically aggressive
- ❒ Sexually aggressive
- ❒ Victim of bullying
- ❒ Bullies others
- ❒ Avoided by peers
- ❒ Destroys property
- ❒ Easily distracted
- ❒ Argumentative/defiant
- ❒ Shy/withdrawn
- ❒ Hostile when criticized
- ❒ Attention seeking behavi
- ❒ Truant/tardy
- ❒ Cheats on tests
- ❒ Easily frustrated
- ❒ Steals
- ❒ Lies
- ❒ Has an uneven, usually unhappy disposition
- ❒ Responds inappropriatel praise
- ❒ Does not ask for help wl needed
- ❒ Lacks motivation
- ❒ Lacks self-control
- ❒ Sudden change of mood during day
- ❒ Difficulty interpreting sc cues
- ❒ Does not accept responsibility
- ❒ Easily influenced by oth
- ❒ Cries frequently
- ❒ Bizarre or odd behaviors (please explain)

  _____

  _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____

PERSONAL CONCERNS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Poor hygiene
- ❒ Body odor
- ❒ Overweight/underweight
- ❒ Appears sickly
- ❒ Sleeps in class
- ❒ Agitated/nervous
- ❒ Difficulty moving/uncoordinated
- ❒ Complains of nausea/vomiti
- ❒ Bloodshot eyes
- ❒ Evidence of self-mutilation
- ❒ Burn marks
- ❒ Smells of smoke / alcohol
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____

WHERE THE PROBLEM OCCURS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Classroom (Circle all that apply): language arts, math, science, social studies, computers
- ❒ School grounds
- ❒ Cafeteria
- ❒ Gym
- ❒ Hallway
- ❒ Bus
- ❒ Home
- ❒ Transitions between class
- ❒ Other:

  _____

Appendix P

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE STUDENT CONCERN PRIOR TO REFERRAL (CHECK ✓ ALL THAT APPLY)

STRATEGIES TRIED	HOW LONG TRIED?	RESULTS?
❒ Instructional accommodations Specify:		
❒ Modified curriculum/demands		
❒ Materials modification [Specify]		
❒ Small group instruction		
❒ Tutoring		
❒ Assistive technology		
❒ Supplemental intervention program		
❒ Daily behavior chart		
❒ Contract		
❒ Acknowledge positive behavior		
❒ Preferential seating		
❒ Problem-solving conference (attach parent communication logs)		
❒ Extended learning or tutoring		
❒ Rearrange physical setting		
❒ Using tape recorder or overhead proje		
❒ Graphic organizers		
❒ Cooperative learning		
❒ Memory drills (math facts/sight word		
❒ Manipulatives for math, other subject		
❒ Observation by another staff member		
❒ Counseling		
❒ Incorporating cultural differences		
❒ Giving opportunities for leadership		
❒ Offers strategies for self-managemen		
❒ Other [Specify]		

Appendix Q

P.A.S.S. ACHIEVEMENT DATA 1 OF 1
INTERVENTIONIST FORM

ASSESSMENT DATA (INCLUDE COPIES OF SCORE REPORTS)

GRADE LEVEL	TEST NAME	BENCHMARK TARGET			STUDENT SCORE		
		B	M	E	B	M	E
Kindergarten	Initial Sound Fluency	8	25				
	Letter Naming Fluency	8	27	40			
	Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	NA	18	35			
	Nonsense Word Fluency	NA	13	25			
	Lexia						
1st Grade	Letter Naming Fluency	37	NA	NA			
	Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	35	35	35			
	Nonsense Word Fluency	24	50	50			
	Oral Read Fluency	NA	20	40			
	Lexia						
2nd Grade	Nonsense Word Fluency	50	NA	NA			
	Oral Read Fluency	44	68	90			
	Lexia						
3rd Grade	Oral Read Fluency	77	92	110			
	Reading Plus						
4th Grade	Oral Read Fluency	93	105	118			
	Reading Plus						
5th Grade	Oral Read Fluency	104	115	124			
	Reading Plus						

Appendix R

P.A.S.S. INTEGRITY CHECK 1 OF 1
CORE CURRICULUM
Effective Instruction
Implementation Integrity Direct Observation Checklist

Teacher: _____ School: _____ Observer: _____

Student: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Lesson #: _____ Group Size: ____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Note: If the step is not applicable, write N/A in the "+" column and do not include in the calculation of fidelity.

+	-	Step	Checklist
		1	Classroom is organized (e.g., materials are accessible, students can see materials clearly, students are seated appropriately, smooth transitions between lessons)
		2	Teacher teaches all lesson parts
		3	Teacher corrects all errors using appropriate correction procedures (e.g., corrects all errors immediately; teacher says correct word, student repeats correct word, student begins again)
		4	Even, quick pacing is maintained throughout lesson (e.g., approximately 12+ student responses per minute; students are engaged; quick transitions between lessons; teacher able to follow all parts of script without reading directly from script)
		5	Teacher is enthusiastic, provides specific praise throughout lesson
		6	Students are engaged and responsive during teacher-led instruction (e.g., at least 80% of responses are group responses; group responses are on signal; individual turns are offered)
		7	Students respond with 90% accuracy before moving to next part of lesson
		8	Classroom management is evident (e.g., group rules/expectations are clear; misbehavior is ignored or redirected; specific praise is offered; clear and effective motivation system in place)
		9	Evidence that built-in assessment/checkouts are followed

Total Number of +/9 = _____% Total Effective Instruction Fidelity

Appendix S

ALTERNATE TEACHER FEEDBACK FORM 1 OF 1

STUDENT NAME	D.O.B	DATE
TEACHER NAME	SUBJECT	

IN GENERAL, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE STUDENT AS A LEARNER?

ACADEMIC CONCERNS (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Word reading
- ❒ Reading comprehen
- ❒ Numerical operatior
- ❒ Math reasoning
- ❒ Spelling
- ❒ Written expression
- ❒ Listening comprehension
- ❒ Oral expression
- ❒ Language
- ❒ Fine motor
- ❒ Gross motor
- ❒ Articulation
- ❒ Grades declining
- ❒ Disorganized
- ❒ Slow rate of work
- ❒ Incomplete assignments
- ❒ Does not follow directions
- ❒ Low rate of retention
- ❒ Poor study skills
- ❒ Gives up easily
- ❒ Does not work well independently
- ❒ Does not work well with others
- ❒ Attention/on-task behavior
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____
- ❒ Other: _____

WHAT SPECIFIC TASK(S) IS THE STUDENT HAVING DIFFICULTY PERFORMING?
WHAT FACTORS DO YOU FEEL INTERFERE WITH THE STUDENT'S LEARNING?

HOW DOES THE STUDENT LEARN BEST?

COMMENTS: (please list any other relevant information pertaining to the student's learning, including strengths)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix T

P.A.S.S. STUDENT INTERVIEW FORM 1 OF 2

STUDENT NAME	D.O.B	DATE

MY CONCERNS (IN YOUR OWN WORDS, DESCRIBE WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE HELP WITH)

Have you talked to your parent about your concern? YES/N	Have you talked to anyone about your concern? YES/NO Who?

WHERE DO YOU NEED THE HELP? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

❒ Classroom	❒ Bus
❒ School grounds	❒ Home
❒ Cafeteria	❒ Transitions between class
❒ Gym	❒ Other:
❒ Hallway	_____

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR TO HELP YOU?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

PLEASE ATTACH ANY INFORMATION YOU THINK MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONCERN (e.g., quizzes, tests, homework, assignments, etc).

Appendix U

P.A.S.S. STUDENT INTERVIEW

ABOUT ME (CHECK ✔ ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ I have a positive attitude
- ❒ I am a hard worker
- ❒ People can trust me
- ❒ I work well in groups
- ❒ I work well by myself
- ❒ I am respectful
- ❒ I finish my work
- ❒ I am motivated to do a good job
- ❒ I am organized
- ❒ I have a good sense of humor
- ❒ I am responsible
- ❒ I am creative
- ❒ I am a good leader
- ❒ I am good at music
- ❒ I am good at art
- ❒ I am athletic

I HAVE DIFFICULTY: (CHECK ✔ ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Getting good grades
- ❒ Finishing my work
- ❒ Following directions
- ❒ Remembering things
- ❒ Writing assignments
- ❒ Reading
- ❒ Doing math
- ❒ Studying for tests
- ❒ Working by myself
- ❒ Working with others
- ❒ Other: _____

BEHAVIORS I NEED TO STOP DOING: (CHECK ✔ ALL THAT APPLY)

- ❒ Physically hurting people (e. hitting, throwing things)
- ❒ Bulling others
- ❒ Destroying property
- ❒ Being easily distracted
- ❒ Stealing/lying/cheating
- ❒ Arguing
- ❒ Saying mean things (e.g., mal threats, swearing)
- ❒ Being shy
- ❒ Getting angry easily
- ❒ Giving up easily
- ❒ Being late for school
- ❒ Other: _____

OTHER COMMENTS:

Appendix V

PROMOTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS (P.A.S.S.)
Initial Meeting Notice

Date: _____ Student: _____

Dear _____,

Our school district's goal is to make sure that every child is successful. As we aim toward this goal, it is highly important that we provide every child with academic and behavior support. You have been contacted by _____, a PASS team member about _____'s lack of progress in the classroom. We are concerned about the academic growth of _____; therefore, we need to meet to discuss possible interventions that will provide your child with additional support.

We would like to meet with you, the reading teacher/RTI interventionist, the teacher, the principal, and the school psychologist at **_____ School on _____ at _____.**

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your child's strengths and weaknesses and create an intervention plan based on their strengths that will help him/her be more successful in our school. We highly encourage you to participate in this meeting so we can work together as a team to help your child meet his/her highest learning potential.

It is difficult to have a meeting without your input and expertise, so if this time or day is not convenient for you, please notify _____ at _____ so that we can reschedule.

We look forward to meeting and working together as a team.

Respectfully yours,

The PASS Team

Appendix W

P.A.S.S. PLAN

DIRECTIONS: This form is to be completed for each student who receives intervention instruction in addition to the core curriculum (Tier 1).

Student Name:	Grade:	Teacher:

Deficit Area: Date:
Peer Mean: Subgroup Mean:

Goal Development:

Step 1: Indicate Baseline Score

Step 2: Length of time, in weeks, the progress will be monitored

Step 3: Select Growth Rate (Grade 1 = 2wpm Grade 2-6 = 1.4wpm)

Formula

Number of weeks ____ X Growth Rate ____ = ____

\+ Baseline =

Goal

Step 4: Plot Baseline & Mark Goal on Graph

Appendix X

P.A.S.S. PLAN

DIRECTIONS: This form is to be completed for each student who receives intervention instruction in addition to the core curriculum (Tier 1).

Student Name:	Grade:	Teacher:

Deficit Area:

START DATE	SKILL	MATERIALS/ INTERVENTION	ARRANGEMENTS: WHOLE CLASS, SMALL GROUP, 1:1	MINUTES & FREQUENCY	IMPLEMENTER

Appendix Y

PROMOTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS (P.A.S.S.)
Follow-up Notice

Date: _____ Student: _____

Dear _____,

Thank you for participating in our previous PASS meeting. As we work towards helping your child to succeed, your participation and input will become more vital.

As you know, we discussed your child's strengths and weaknesses. As we continue to move toward supporting you and your child, we plan to continue to keep an open line of communication to evaluate whether or not the planned intervention(s) are helping your child to progress.

Our next scheduled conference will be a phone conference on _____ at _____. During this time, we will work together to analyze if your child needs to continue with additional interventions.

It is difficult to continue to the next step without your input and expertise, so if this time or day is not convenient for you, please notify _____ at _____ so that we can look at an alternative date.

We look forward to working together as a team.

Respectfully yours,

The PASS Team

Appendix Z

P.A.S.S. TIER EVALUATION

STUDENT NAME	DATE

1. Provide documentation of student progress from initial referral to present time. According to the progress monitoring results, was the intervention effective?

2. State the current performance discrepancy after intervention, i.e., the difference between a student's level of performance compared to the performance of peers or scientifically-based standards of expected performance.

3. Summarize the student's needs in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and environment. How does this compare to peer needs?

The PASS team has met to evaluate the academic progress of the referred student above. Based on data and the team's findings, we recommend the following:

❒ The planned intervention was successful in meeting the child's needs and correcting the deficiency, therefore the student shall return to Tier I instruction only.

❒ The planned intervention has shown some progress; therefore, the student shall continue with the previous Tier _____ intervention for _____ weeks in addition to Tier I instruction.

❒ The planned intervention did not meet the students' needs; therefore, the team should create another Tier _____ intervention plan with a changed goal objective.

❒ The planned intervention has resulted in no improvement; therefore,

_____

Comments:

Vitae

Nicole Gillan-Sanderson currently is an administrator at Wolf Branch Elementary School, in Swansea, Illinois. Nicole's education experiences include teaching grades four through six self-contained, kindergarten through fifth grade reading teacher, and four years of administrative experience at Elizabeth Morris Elementary School in Cahokia School District which is an at-risk urban setting. In 2008, Nicole became the principal at Wolf Branch Elementary School. This school is suburban and has a higher-socioeconomic status. Nicole is particularly interested in curriculum and instruction, data-driven instruction, and assessments.

Throughout Nicole's leadership career, she has been recognized with the following awards:

- Wolf Branch Elementary, Awarded, Illinois Academic Excellence Award (90% of the students meet state standards for three years), 2011
- Wolf Branch Elementary, Awarded, Illinois Academic Excellence Award (90% of the students meet state standards for three years), 2010
- Elizabeth Morris Elementary, Awarded, Illinois Spotlight Award (92% low-income/76% achieving), 2006
- Elizabeth Morris Elementary, Awarded, High Performing School Status in Math and Reading by Just for the Kids, 2006
- Elizabeth Morris Elementary, Awarded, Illinois Spotlight Award (79% low-income/77% achieving), 2005
- Elizabeth Morris Elementary, Awarded, Illinois Academic Improvement Award (24 point gain), 2005

- Elizabeth Morris Elementary, Awarded, Illinois Academic Improvement Award (16.3 point gain), 2004

Nicole has obtained an Associate's Degree from St. Louis Community College at Meramec, a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education from St. Louis University, a Master of Science Degree in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Urban Education from St. Louis University, and an Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership-Superintendent Credentials from Lindenwood University.