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Investigating a Summer Reading Program for Title I students

by

Stephanie M. Mountain

February, 2010

Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

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.

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Date:

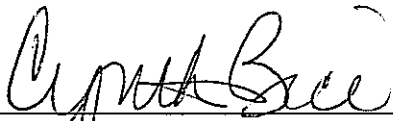
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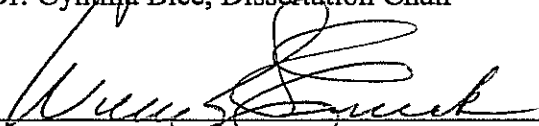
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degree of
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at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



Dr. Cynthia Bice, Dissertation Chair

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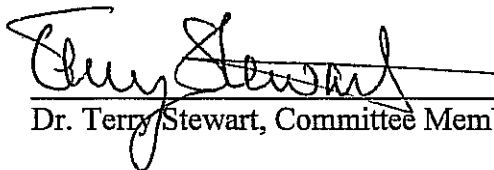
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Abstract

Constant changes in legislation regarding monitoring student achievement levels have led schools to redevelop usage of instructional time in several core subjects. Legislation such as Missouri Senate Bill 319 specifically mandates that the school must intervene if a student is not reading at the appropriate level by grade four. Alternative measures to improve reading achievement levels, such as extending the school year into the summer, are being implemented within schools.

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program in raising Title I students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills for Title I students who attended the program. The findings resulted in recommendations for changes to the current program based on study results and research of best practices. The research questions were

1. What are the best educational practices for teaching reading in an elementary Summer Reading Program?
2. How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?
3. What instructional techniques did the Summer Reading Program teachers of the ABC School District use to facilitate student learning?

4. Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective in raising students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary levels?

The effectiveness of the program was based on teacher observations and perceptions. In addition, the effectiveness was determined by the increase of student test scores in the area of Reading based upon the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test and the Missouri Assessment Program administered in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The surveys concluded that although the teachers believed the current Summer Reading Program was beneficial so students had the opportunity to continue reading, academically there were many areas of the program's structure that needed improvements to best accommodate individual Reading improvement needs. The analysis of test scores concluded there was not a significant difference in reading achievement levels of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program compared to the students who chose not to attend.

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Chapter One

Overview of the Study

Summer vacation was not always the norm for American children. The traditional 180 day school calendar did not become prevalent until the 1840s when reformers like Horace Mann merged the urban and rural school calendars into one. “Summer emerged as the obvious time for a break: it offered a respite for teachers, meshed with the agrarian calendar and alleviated physicians' concerns that packing students into sweltering classrooms would promote the spread of disease” (Altman, 2008, ¶ 2). Since then many school districts have changed their thinking about how to best utilize the summer months. “The political climate surrounding education is more demanding than ever before” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 13). Increased pressures from the Federal government, especially the aim to meet Annual Yearly Progress standards, have forced educators to extend learning opportunities beyond the normal school calendar (Buchanan, 2007).

This action research study was initiated to determine effectiveness of the ABC School District’s current Summer Reading Program. The effectiveness of the program was based on teacher observations and teacher perceptions of the program. In addition, effectiveness of the program was determined by the increase of student test scores in the area of Reading based upon the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) administered in 2006-2007 and the GMRT and MAP tests administered in 2007-2008 using the same participants.

The Summer Reading Program was a three week intervention reading program that extended through the month of June following each school year. The students who were recommended to attend the program were Title I students who had significant difficulty in reading. A Title I student is a student who is not reading at his or her current grade level and attends a Title I school. Title I schools receive federal funds based on the percentage of low income students enrolled in the school (Center For Law and Education, 2002). The optional Summer Reading Program provided 42 hours of additional reading support for the students who were not reading at the level the state determined to be appropriate.

The action research study investigated the length of the reading program, combination of students participating, student attendance and transportation, and skills taught in the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program to identify areas that could be improved in order to better meet the educational reading needs of the Title I students.

A survey was conducted to gather teacher observations and teacher perspectives of how the district's Summer Reading Program was implemented. All certified teachers who taught in the four Title I schools involved in the study were asked to complete the survey. The survey encompassed lesson planning techniques and use of differentiation of teaching styles and assessments in the Summer Reading Program. Although most action research studies are more qualitative in nature, this study was a mixed method study that integrated an analysis of test scores with the results of teacher perceptions and observations from the surveys. The GMRT and MAP scores of the Title I students who attended the program and those who opted not

to attend were obtained. They provided a comparison of achievement differences between the two groups. The survey results, test score data, and research on best practices for teaching reading and creating an effective summer learning program were combined to create a set of proposed changes to the current Summer Reading Program in the ABC School District.

Background of the Problem

“The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), including Reading First and Early Reading First programs in 2001, intensified the attention focused on accountability and achievement in literacy education” (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007, p. 784). A pertinent goal of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was to provide increased focus on research-based education practices that aligned with specific curricular objectives, especially in the subject area of reading (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The passing of NCLB led to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in which the primary focus was to “provide all children with a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education”(U.S. Department of Education, 2004, Statement of Purpose, ¶ 1).

To encourage educators to pay more attention to the reading curriculum, state legislatures created laws to define exactly which content standards a student should be able to achieve (McDonnell, 2005). One of the laws Missouri created was contained in Senate Bill 319 signed by Governor Bob Holden on June 29, 2001. Senate Bill 319, “emphasizes the early assessment of students’ reading skills and requires school districts to intervene with students who are reading below grade

level” (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2008, State Policies on Reading Assessment, ¶ 1). The bill replaced and clarified previous requirements enacted by the legislature in 1999. Senate Bill 319 was intended to prevent the so-called *social promotion* in public schools. “Social Promotion is the practice of advancing students to the next grade even when they have not mastered the material in their current grade” (Johnson, 2001, ¶ 9). According to Senate Bill 319, any student who was not meeting grade level standards in reading needed to have a reading improvement plan created which included additional reading instruction. The supplementary instruction must have included a minimum of 30 hours of additional reading support (MODESE, 2008). Students who were not meeting grade level reading requirements were assessed by a Certified Reading Specialist and might have qualified for Title I Reading services. Title I is a federally funded program that provides financial assistance to schools with a poverty rate of at least 35% (Edweek.org, 2004b). Title I was one of the resources 58% of school districts in this country used for the additional reading support resources required by Senate Bill 319 (Phillips, 2008). If a student qualified for Title I Reading Services, he or she received extra reading support outside of the regular classroom for one half hour per school day. The extra help was provided to the students by a Certified Reading Specialist who focused primarily on the students’ individual reading weaknesses. Other additional reading instruction could have come from a summer school program.

School districts have created different methods, like summer school or after school programs, to address the issues that arise when students have the inability to

read at the required grade level (Brown, 2001). Many of the methods are similar to the Summer Reading program described.

The students in this study may or may not have attended the Summer Reading Program at their elementary school. The ABC School District's Summer Reading Program provided 42 hours of additional reading support for students on a reading improvement plan. The classroom teacher, with the help of the Reading Specialist, created a list of goals for the student to work on throughout the summer program. The Summer Reading Program was taught by a group of certified teachers. The teacher created lessons based upon each student's individual goals combined with the district's reading curriculum. However, parents were given the option of whether or not they wanted their child to receive the extra help throughout the summer.

Statement of the Problem

"A quality summer-school program can help struggling students improve their performance significantly and, in many cases, avoid failure" (Denton, 2002, p. 8). The ABC school district offered a summer school program designed to improve the reading and comprehension of their Title I students who struggled in literacy.

The overall purpose of Title I is to give schools with high concentrations of children living in poverty the funds to provide special assistance for children who are not achieving well academically or who are at-risk of educational failure. (Romano, 1999, ¶ 1)

The study included an examination of the Summer Reading curriculum structure and other extenuating circumstances, such as the option of attendance to the program, which may have been a determining factor to the success of the program.

Cooper (2003, ¶ 3) stated, “Children learn best when instruction is continuous. The long summer vacation breaks the rhythm of instruction and can have a greater effect on the learning of children with special needs.” With an emphasis on creating the additional reading programs, educators questioned whether or not the programs they created were helping the students achieve their individual reading goals. The Summer Reading Program offered by the ABC School District was once a four-week program that was cut to a three-week program. The goal of the program has intended to focus on providing reading intervention that increased the students’ reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary; therefore, bringing them closer to their expected achievement levels.

With a limited budget for Summer Reading, the ABC School District experienced several irregularities in the implementation of the program possibly hindering the effectiveness of the program. A summer reading teacher may have had a class of 20-25 students, from varying different grade levels, all with very different instructional needs. Attendance to the program was not mandatory, nor was there any incentive to attend each day. Transportation was not available to those who chose to participate; therefore, attendance of students varied and was usually dependent upon the parents’ work schedules. To provide additional, individual support to the elementary students, each teacher was given the opportunity (but not required) to utilize ABC School District’s A+ Tutors. A+ Tutors were high school students who participated in a volunteer program, which required them to earn hours towards reduced or free college tuition. There exists little evidence of evaluation of the success of the Summer Reading Program at meeting the educational needs of Title I

reading students. Consequently, the program remained in place without changes for many years and its impact on student achievement remains unknown. This study dealt with problems associated with external limitations such as lack of transportation, different grade levels of the participants, and lack of teaching resources. Because of this, the stakeholders of the Summer Reading Program were not able to determine if it was a successful intervention tool at raising Title I students' reading achievement.

Importance of the Study

This study provided research-based information to aid in improving extended learning opportunities and reading instruction for a Title I Reading student. Boss and Railsback (2002) maintained that providing a student with a high quality enrichment program that extended beyond the school year could have only increased students' achievement, especially in the area of Reading. "Students overall achievement test scores drop by one month, on average, over summer vacation. Students from all income levels show diminished scores in reading comprehension by the end of summer, but the losses are greatest for low-income students" (Black, 2005, Summer Slide, ¶ 3). Through research of the best practices in effective summer school programs, teachers and administrators of the ABC School District created a defined curriculum for their Summer Reading Program. The study provided insight into the effectiveness the Summer Reading Program in raising achievement scores for Title I reading students. Any school district with a summer school program could benefit from the findings of this study. The results helped to define specific curriculum components and program structure needed in a summer school program to effectively raise student achievement scores. The results from this study provided a model for

other districts to evaluate their own program and learn from the findings of the study how to improve their Title I summer reading program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program in raising Title I students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills for Title I students who attended the program. The findings resulted in recommendations for changes to the current program based on study results and research of best practices. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the best educational practices for teaching reading in an elementary Summer Reading Program?
2. How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?
3. What instructional techniques did the Summer Reading Program teachers of the ABC School District use to facilitate student learning?
4. Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective in raising students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary levels?

In order to investigate all of the research questions and determine the effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program at intervening with students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary, this action research study was comprised of three parts:

1. Research of effective summer school instructional practices and research of best practices for teaching reading to elementary students.
2. A survey to gather teachers' perspectives of how effective the Summer Reading Program was at intervening with the students who struggled in reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills.
3. A statistical comparison of MAP and GMRT scores of the students who attended the program to those students who opted not to attend the Summer Reading Program.

The students who attended the Summer Reading Program were judged to be the most at risk of not being promoted, according to the policy within Senate Bill 319 which forces the school to *intervene* if the student is reading below grade level by fourth grade. In the circumstances of Senate Bill 319, *intervene* means to retain the student in the third grade (MODESE, 2008). “Approximately 20% to 35% of students who were retained learned more when they repeated a grade; more than 40% learned less” (Bowman, 2005, p. 43). Retention was not always the most effective intervention to increase student achievement. This study investigated the length, combination of students, use of transportation, and skills taught in the ABC School District’s Summer Reading Program to identify areas that could be improved. From the investigation, research-based recommendations were made to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum of the ABC School District that could be applied to the Summer Reading Program to better meet the educational reading needs of the Title I students.

Hypotheses

1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.
2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.
3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.
4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.
5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

7. Teachers in the ABC School District will evidence positive perceptions of the effects of the ABC Summer School Reading Program as measured by an administered survey.

Null Hypotheses

1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.
2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.
3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.
4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.
5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
7. Teachers in the ABC School District will not evidence positive perceptions of the effects of the ABC Summer School Reading Program as measured by an administered survey.

Limitations of the Study

According to Fraenkel and Wallen,

In any study that either describes or tests relationships, there is always the possibility that the relationship shown in the data is in fact due to or explained by something else. If so, then the relationship is not at all what it seems and it may lose whatever meaning it appears to have. (2003, p. 178)

When this occurred, the study was said to have threats to internal validity or limitations to the study. Below are the limitations that may have occurred while this study was conducted.

Implementation. The first threat to the validity of the research was the implementation of the Summer Reading Program. The same teacher did not teach all of the students involved in the scope of the study. The Title I students' grade level dictated teacher assignment in the Summer Reading Program.

Mortality threat. Although every effort was made to ensure convenience and anonymity to increase the percentage of returned surveys, there was not a guarantee that all teachers who were sent a survey completed the survey.

Students' characteristic threat. The students who attended the summer program may be those with more involved parents, may have parents who read to them at home. This variability could account for increased test scores. The program is also voluntary, inadvertently the students may have self selected the groups tested by choosing or not choosing to attend the Summer Reading Program.

Attendance. Another threat that may have affected the results of the study was the inability to determine whether or not the students who were enrolled in the Summer Reading Program attended every session. If a student only attended two out of the four days, the results of the GMRT administered at the beginning of the next school year may have been skewed from that of a student who attended every session.

Testing. The testing threat may have impacted the results of this research. Neither the GMRT, nor the Communication Arts portion of the MAP test, may have been administered at the same time or even on the same day. Many factors could have skewed the results of the test. For example, a student who was able to focus more in the morning may have had to take the test in the afternoon or vice-versa, or there may have been a thunderstorm going on that would have made some of the kids nervous, or even the prospect of an upcoming assembly could have made a child lose focus. Results could have been skewed if the test was not administered on the same day, at the same time, and under the same conditions. Furthermore, the students did not have any real motivation to perform well on the test, thus their true reading abilities may not be indicated.

Data collector bias. Because the primary investigator works in the ABC School District and has taught the Summer Reading Program, there may have been

preconceived notions regarding the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program. In an attempt to prevent potential collector bias, survey results were disaggregated electronically. However, there was an opportunity for open-ended questions that may have been impacted by the aforementioned biases.

Data collection time. Survey participants were given limited time to respond. Results were obtained and tabulated in a given period of time to ensure results of the study would be available to be proposed to the ABC School Board of Education when requested.

Survey development. The researcher did not have any formal training in creating a survey for the purposes of research.

Definition of Terms and Acronyms

The following terms were defined to clarify essential information related to this research:

Effectiveness. For the purposes of this study effectiveness was determined by teacher perceptions of the program. Effectiveness was also determined by the increase of student test scores in the area of Reading based upon the GMRT and MAP tests administered in 2006-2007 and the GMRT and MAP administered in 2007-2008 using the same participants.

Title I school. A school with at least 35% or more students living at or below poverty level. Title I was a federal program designed to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. For a student to qualify for Title I programs they need to have met a preset score (determined by the school district) in two of the following criteria: (a) score based on student proficiency level of Missouri

Assessment Program (MAP) scores, (b) locally developed assessments, (c) teacher checklist with a rating scale, and (d) quarterly reading grades (Department of Education, 2006).

Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Signed in 2004 by President George W. Bush, the law was developed to advance the educational success of children with disabilities as well as improve special education conditions. Some of the areas of IDEA include the following: (a) ensuring students with disabilities are included in accountability systems, (b) establishing methods to reduce the number of students with culturally diverse backgrounds that are inappropriately placed in special education, (c) continue to protect the right of a free and appropriate education for all disabled students, and (d) providing funding for special education instructors (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004).

Missouri Senate Bill 319. Enacted to emphasize the importance of early assessment of students' reading skills and requires school districts to intervene when students are reading below grade level. The law was intended to prevent "social promotion" in public school (MODESE, 2008, State Policies on Reading Assessment, Reading Improvement Plans, Student Retention and MAP Testing section).

Summer Reading Program. The ABC School District offered a three week program, 42 additional hours of instruction, intended to focus on providing extra support to students with reading difficulties, especially in the areas of reading comprehension and vocabulary.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A bill signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. The law was based on the idea that all children will be proficient in reading and math by 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Gates-MacGinitie Test (GMRT). An assessment tool, created by Riverside Publishing, used to assess student achievement in reading. The test was designed to measure each learning stage from listening skills to mature reading comprehension for all readers, Kindergarten through adults. The GMRT can serve as a screening, diagnosis, outcomes or progress monitoring tool (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria, & Dreyer, 2000).

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). A performance based assessment system, used by all Missouri public schools, as required by the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. The test design measured student proficiency in meeting Missouri's Show Me Standards in education. Students in third through eighth grade were tested annually in the areas of Communication Arts and Math. Students in grades five and eight were also tested in Science. The performance of the students was indicated using four achievement levels: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic (MODESE, 2004, The Missouri Assessment Program section).

Achievement gap. Refers to the differences in academic performance between groups of students.

It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between many African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income and well-off families.

The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates.

(Edweek.org, 2004, ¶ 1)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Also known as *the Nation's Report Card*, the NAEP serves as the only representative of what American students know and can do in various subject areas. NAEP assessments are given nationwide to selected students. The selection of students is aimed at getting a representative sample of all students. The assessments are the same and serve as a “common metric” to school districts across the Nation. The NAEP is run by government appointed officials and is the group of people reporting the status of the achievement gap among American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009, About Us section).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). All districts must make satisfactory improvement each year to achieve the goal of all children being proficient by 2014 (as defined by each state). (Center For Law and Education, 2002)

Reading Improvement Plan. A plan designed for a specific student reading below grade level. The plan included at least thirty hours of additional reading instruction outside the regular school day. (MODESE, 2008, State Policies on Reading Assessment section, ¶ 3).

At-Risk student. Any student who is experiencing difficulty on one or more of the following areas: (a) academics, (b) discipline, and (c) social or economic conditions.

Summary

Chapter I provided a background to the reasons behind the need to extend learning opportunities into the summer months. Laws such as NCLB and Senate Bill 319 have caused school districts to examine their current summer school programs and determine strategies to better meet students' needs. In the ABC School District, a Summer Reading Program is implemented three weeks in June. The intention of the research was to determine whether the Summer Reading Program offered by the ABC School District was successful at improving students' reading abilities. Within Chapter I, five research questions were described in the purpose of the study. The primary task of the researcher was to answer the research questions through surveys, reviewing literature on the subject matter, and a comparison of MAP and GMRT scores between the students who attended the Summer Reading Program to those who opted not to attend.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Past educational practices included using summer school programs to help supplement the areas of curriculum where a student was weak. A student was sent to summer school if he or she failed a subject(s) or did not meet grade level requirements. Summer school was viewed as a punishment more than a positive educational experience (Buchanan, 2007, p. 32). Fifteen years ago education leaders began to reform many practices that would lead to improving the quality of education. Educators were given more options to extend learning for students who needed special services. One of the resources provided to school districts was Title I. “Title I is a federally funded program that provides special assistance for children who are not achieving well academically or who are at-risk of educational failure” (Romano, 1999, ¶1). Title I was ideal for students who did not qualify for special education services but needed some extra support that helped them succeed in subjects such as reading or math. Another widely used, federally funded program was Reading First. Reading First was a nationwide effort enabling all students to become successful early readers. Funds were dedicated to help states and local school districts eliminate the reading deficit by establishing high-quality comprehensive reading instruction in kindergarten through the third grade (Edweek.org, 2004b, ¶ 8).

According to Hardman and Dawson (2008),

The uncompromising promise of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is that every student in U.S. schools will achieve much higher levels of academic

performance. As mandated in NCLB, every student will succeed by the year 2012 if schools develop the highest academic standards. (p. 5)

With laws such as NCLB and IDEA enacted by legislators to hold schools more accountable, educators needed to determine if what they were previously doing was truly effective.

Theory

“Reading is about understanding written texts. It is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought” (Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt, & Kamil, 2003, p. 6). Teachers realized that the subject of reading was an area of weakness among many students. “Many teachers are concerned about the numbers of elementary children who struggle with reading. Such concerns are warranted. Studies indicate that when students get off to a poor start in reading, they rarely catch up” (Kelly & Campbell, n.d., ¶ 1). Students struggling in reading were not benefited by the fact that reading in general was a complex process.

Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one’s spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences, and connected text (Pang et al., 2003, p. 6).

Comprehension and word recognition were where many new readers struggled and needed extended learning opportunities. The most commonly agreed upon remedy to the problem was providing extended learning services outside the school day.

According to Brown (2001), “A major factor that underpins the expansion of

extended learning is the development of educational standards for all students. These standards create the need to provide extra time and additional learning opportunities for those students who have difficulty learning” (p. 13).

Sometimes extended learning services were provided after school; however, many school districts opted to provide summer enrichment programs that helped supplement the education programs.

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 39% of White students scored at the proficient level or higher on the fourth grade reading portion of NAEP, while only 12% of Black students and 14% of Hispanic students scored at the proficient level or higher (Edweek.org, 2004a, ¶ 2). Brown (2001) commented,

The current debate is not whether extended learning programs are necessary, especially in low-performing schools, but how best to deliver these programs in ways that bolster overall achievement and development without being more of the same instruction presented during school hours. (p. 14)

Theoretically, educators knew that summer programs helped in some way, but consideration of whether the components of the summer programs improved achievement enough to satisfy the required standards needed to be addressed.

History of Title I Legislation

Title I aid began in the 1964-1965 school year under Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration. During the Johnson era, the thought of providing federal money to education was controversial. At that time, many believed that education should be run by individual states, and the federal government should not intervene (Nagin, 2009). However, President Johnson had declared a *War on Poverty*. He recognized the need

for government to intervene to help eliminate the poverty, social, and racial injustices present in the country. “The phrase *War on Poverty* was coined by Johnson in 1964 and was considered in response to the economic conditions of that era; in terms of education the goal of Title I was to narrow the achievement gaps between middle class and poor children” (Phillips, 2008, p. 2).

When Title I funds first became available to schools, there was little government control over the allocations of these funds. The formula that determined which schools could receive funding was very loose. This resulted in most schools qualifying for Title I funding. In addition to the vast number of schools receiving money, there were few federal guidelines as to how the monies could be used. The lack of guidance led to the mishandling of funds, and Title I grants ended up being used as general aid to schools. “Between 1965 and 1980, Congress amended the original legislation four times and each reauthorization specified more precisely the congressional intent that Title I assist educationally disadvantaged students from low income families” (McDonnell, 2005, pp. 23-24).

Another distinct moment in the progression of Title I occurred in 1988. Prior to 1988, the federal government still let individual states handle most of the Title I affairs. However, in 1988 the federal government took a more active role. There was a reauthorization to the Title I legislation “states were required for the first time to define the levels of academic achievement that Title I eligible students should attain” (McDonnell, 2005, p. 29). The new legislation required schools that received Title I aid to provide assessment data and documentation of the students’ progress. Accountability increased again in the 1994 Improving America’s Schools Act.

To receive Title I grants, schools were required to submit plans that provided for challenging content and performance standards, state assessments and yearly reports on meeting standards, and provisions for teacher support and learning aligned with the new curriculum standards and assessments.

(McDonnell, p. 30)

The state governments required schools to submit plans referencing how the school as a whole could reform in order to meet the needs of the students. “As part of the accountability measures required by NCLB, states using Title I funding must develop a timeline for using increasing student performance and ways to increase parental involvement in education” (Phillips, 2008, p. 3). The goal of Title I modifications was not to provide remedial education but to create a new mindset for the entire school focused on increasing all student achievement. Increasing student achievement became the dominant theme in NCLB.

Types of Title I Programs

There are two types of Title I programs: school-wide programs and targeted-assistance programs. In school-wide programs, Title I money was used to enhance the entire school’s educational program. Targeted-assistance programs helped students who were the lowest achieving in reading or math to meet state standards. In the targeted-assistance programs, schools “must use strategies that are proven to be effective and are provided by highly qualified personnel. In addition, schools must provide effective instructional strategies and extended learning time to ensure that children receive an accelerated curriculum” (Romano, 1999, ¶ 9). Most school districts used targeted-assistance programs in which they focused the extra education

services on specific children. In targeted assistance programs, children were selected to participate in a Title I program based on an educational need. Educational need was determined by scores from a series of tests that were implemented by a reading specialist. The type of Title I program that the students for this study were engaged in was a targeted-assistance program.

The Title I program had specific guidelines that states must adhere to in order to accomplish its purpose. Title I required each state to

1. Ensure high standards for all children and align efforts of states, local educational agencies and schools to help children served under this title reach such standards.
2. Provide children an enriched and accelerated educational program, including, when appropriate, the use of the arts, through school-wide programs or through additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time so that children served under this title receive at least the classroom instruction that other children receive.
3. Promote school-wide reform and ensure access of children (from the earliest grades) to effective instructional strategies and challenging academic content that includes intensive complex thinking and problem-solving experiences.
4. Significantly upgrade the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development.

5. Coordinate services under all parts of this title with each other, with other educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with health and social service programs funded from other sources.
6. Afford parents meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at home and at school.
7. Distribute resources, in amounts sufficient to make a difference, to areas and schools where needs are greatest. (Romano, 1999, ¶ 2)

Before specific guidelines and accountability requirements for Title I programs were implemented, a great deal of variability existed among Title I program effects. The effectiveness of the program was not judged by a clear plan for implementation and evaluation. Instead, individual schools determined program implementation and evaluation. However, once guidelines were revised, there was a noticeable increase in the effectiveness in the program. According to Borman (2002),

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Title I was not regarded as an effective program primarily because localities did not implement it as intended by Congress. However, the positive trend of the program's impact suggests that as the U.S. Department of Education and Congress have taken the initiative to develop more stringent implementation and accountability standards, Title I has evolved into a more viable and effective intervention. (p. 50)

Sometimes programs (such as Title I) accountability standards were not enough to improve student achievement enough to satisfy legislative expectations. In Missouri, Governor Bob Holden signed Senate Bill 319 in legislation. This bill required the following:

(a) Elimination of the “retest” requirement for students scoring at “Step 1” on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) exam; (b) limiting the use, for accreditation purposes, of MAP scores from students with limited English proficiency; (c) assessment of students in grades 3-6 to determine their reading level; (d) individualized *Reading Improvement Plans* for students in grades 4-6 who are substantially below grade level in reading; (e) additional reading instruction for students with Reading Improvement plans; and retention of students in grade 4 if they are reading below the third-grade level. (MODESE, 2008, State Policies on Reading Assessment section, ¶ 1)

Students who qualified for Title I reading were the students who were most at risk for being retained due to the legislation requirements in Senate Bill 319. All students in a Title I reading program did have a reading improvement plan established by a reading specialist. However, to provide more reading instruction beyond the regular school day, most schools had to rely on summer school programs to fulfill that requirement.

Retention

“Educators and policymakers have debated for decades whether struggling students benefit more from repeating a grade or from moving ahead with their same-age peers” (David, 2008, p. 83). Because of the uncertainty of academic gains, educators and parents were concerned with the section of Senate Bill 319 that required schools to retain a fourth grade student if his or her reading ability level was below third grade level. Research suggested that retaining a student at that age would not always significantly improve their reading skills.

Research examining the academic achievement of students who have been retained over time reveals that within two to three years, students' achievement was no better than before retention, and their academic outcomes were less than their peers in the general population who were not retained.

(Bowman, 2005, p. 43)

Ideally, the goal of the school was to catch the students who had reading difficulties early, give them the extra reading support, and constantly monitor their progress with hope that the educators would not be forced to retain a fourth grade student.

According to Burns, Appleton, Jimerson, and Silbergliitt (2006), grade retention is defined as “requiring a student to remain at his or her current grade level the following school year despite spending a full school year at that given grade” (p. 134). Many individuals viewed retention as a means of punishment for a student who was having difficulty in the classroom. Years ago, retention was considered a method of educational intervention. The purpose of retaining a student was to help him or her achieve the skills necessary to succeed at the next grade level (Bowman, 2005).

While many educators knew that not all students were as prepared as they should have been to continue on to the next grade, they also knew that repeating the grade level while using the same material and the same teaching techniques did not always work, either. In fact some studies showed that retention did more harm to a student than good.

Research examining the overall effect of 19 empirical studies conducted during the 1990s compared the outcomes for students who were retained and matched in comparison to students who were promoted. Results indicate that

grade retention had a negative impact on all areas of achievement (reading, math and language) and socioemotional adjustment. (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003, ¶ 6)

It was generally accepted that it was emotionally and socially better for students to be promoted to the next grade level, despite the fact they had not mastered the skills of the previous grade (Hennick, 2008). Social promotion is “the practice of allowing students who have failed to meet academic standards to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of satisfying the requirements” (Hennick, 2008, p. 55). With continued use of social promotion it became apparent that many American students were graduating from high school with minimal reading and math skills. In 1998, in President Bill Clinton’s State of the Union address, he vowed to end social promotion in America’s schools.

The research refuted the idea of retention being an effective educational intervention even in greater depth. In actuality, some concluded that retention after certain ages added to the educational problems of the students. According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2003),

Retention does not appear to have a positive impact on self-esteem or overall school adjustment; however, retention is associated with significant increases in behavior problems as measured by behavior rating scales completed by teachers and parents, with problems becoming more pronounced as the child reaches adolescence. (¶ 6)

Byrd, Weitzman, and Auinger (1997) claimed “there is a correlation between students being over-age for their grade because of retention and behavior problems in children

and adolescents” (p. 654). Students, who already viewed themselves as “different” from the other children because they were not able to learn at the same pace, were even more devastated when they were separated from their peers and directly pointed out as “not being good enough.” The feeling of inferiority lead to other problems such as poor behavior choices and disruptions within the classroom the educators had to face in addition to meeting their educational needs (Bowman, 2005).

Research on students who were retained found they were at risk for “higher absenteeism and lower social-emotional rankings as compared to a group of promoted students” (Burns, Appleton, Jimerson, & Silberglitt, 2006, p. 135). “Retention can increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of school. Students who drop out are five times more likely to have been retained than those who graduate” (David, 2008, p. 84). Thus, it is essential for educators to be sure that students are retained for the right reasons and remain in school.

Past educational practices allowed the teacher to be the primary leader in the decision on whether or not to retain a student. The teacher was able to use classroom assessments and observations to examine the reasons why the student was not reaching the required academic standards (Bowman, 2005). With high stakes testing, state legislatures took this ability away from the teacher and set specific requirements a student must meet, often using the score of only a single test (David, 2008). The result of such practices by school districts allowed students to be retained based on a score earned from a test in which they had one opportunity per school year to take. “The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) estimates that the number of kids being held back has skyrocketed. As many as 15 percent of students in the

U.S. repeat a grade each year” (Hennick, 2008, p. 55). Retention was a practice mainly used only in the United States. “Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and the United Kingdom retain none of their elementary students while Germany retains fewer than 2 percent of its students over their elementary careers” (Holmes, 2006, p. 57).

Many legislatures argued that the costs of having adults in the working force without a proper education would cost taxpayers millions of dollars, therefore, retention was a necessary practice. However, “retention of students is estimated to cost the country on average about \$10 billion per year” (Holmes, 2006, p. 58). Instead of retaining students Holmes (2006) argued, “It would be more cost effective to use those funds to increase the educational resources to improve student performance and eliminate the need for retention” (p. 58).

Summer Learning Extension Programs

Summer school was once perceived as a way to punish the students who could not learn the material the first time it was taught. “Students who haven’t performed well during the regular year are grouped with other struggling students in an environment characterized as more like a jail term than a positive learning experience” (Buchanan, 2007, p. 33). Summer school was also a means to negotiate passing of a student from one grade to another. “By 2000, more than a quarter of the nation’s school districts were requiring summer school attendance of students who were not meeting standards for promotion” (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 4).

“To succeed in school and life, children and young adults need ongoing opportunities to learn and practice essential skills, especially in the summer months”

(National Center for Summer Learning, 2009a, Know the Facts section). Studies concluded that summer school or summer extension programs should not be viewed as a punishment but more of an opportunity. “Summer school has evolved from a general remediation program to a focused effort to improve specific skills, particularly in reading and math” (Buchanan, 2007, p. 32). The emphasis on schools to improve student achievement caused the demand for summer school programs to rise dramatically.

From 1991 to 1999, the percentage of public elementary schools eligible for aid under Title I funding rose from 15 percent to 41 percent. From 1998 to 2000, the 10 largest districts saw summer school enrollment swell from 600,000 to 850,000. Currently 10 percent of all students are enrolled in some form of summer school. (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 8)

The primary goal of a summer school program was to “improve academic outcomes for youth” (National Center for Summer Learning, 2009, Results section). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) sent out a report in 2002 saying “approximately 64% of students in grade 12 were reading below the proficient level and 77% were writing below the proficient level” (McGaha & Graves, 2007, ¶ 2). This meant that the achievement gap in education was continuing to widen. Many attributed this to the fact that formal reading instruction generally was completed well before a student entered high school, meaning those students who were struggling before, struggled even more once all reading instruction had ceased (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009). This meant the amount of reading instructional time when the students were in the elementary grades. “In 1993, The National

Education Commission on Time and Learning began urging school districts to develop school calendars that acknowledge the differences in student learning” and to realize that today’s students need increased instructional time (Cooper, 2003, ¶ 2). Increasing instructional time could have meant extending school calendars into June or by utilizing summer school programs. “Summer sessions can be a key weapon in closing the so-called achievement gap between white and minority students, according to proponents of the programs” (Buchanan, 2007, p. 34).

“Funding is a major roadblock to creating and sustaining summer school programs in many communities” (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 13). Proponents of summer school programs called for an increase in funding to provide the extra support to students who needed it. Unfortunately, lawmakers made decisions in the opposite direction. In 2007, the “Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education cut summer school funding in half” (Buchanan, 2007, ¶ 10). In 2008, “Congress created the Summer Term Education Program for Upward Performance (STEP UP) program last year, but didn’t fund it” (Fairchild, 2008, ¶ 9). They underestimated the impact summer learning had on student achievement and began to cut funding in order to save money. Legislators did see the statistical improvement summer school made on a struggling learner. The National Center for Summer Learning (2009b) found the following:

Statistically, lower income children begin school with lower achievement scores, but during the school year, they progress at about the same rate as their peers. Over the summer, it’s a dramatically different story: Disadvantaged children tread water at best or even fall behind. It’s what we call *summer slide*

or *summer setback*. (Summer Can Set Kids on the Right or Wrong Course section, ¶ 6)

Not all cities underfunded their summer school programs. In Chicago, Illinois the increased demand of high stakes testing and ending social promotion led to a construction of a formal summer school program called Summer Bridge. “Summer Bridge offers third, sixth, and eighth graders not meeting minimum test score cutoffs on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) a second chance” (Engel, Nagaoka, & Stone, 2005, p. 936). The curriculum of the Summer Bridge program was intensive and completely aligned with the curriculum standards set forth by the ITBS, a state mandated used to measure student achievement. “Teachers are provided with a centrally developed mandatory curriculum that is aligned with the reading and mathematics topics covered on the ITBS” (Engel et al., 2005, p. 936). The results of the Summer Bridge program were positive and students showed substantial improvement in their reading and math skills. “In short, there is accumulating evidence that summer programming can be an effective tool in raising student achievement” (Engel et al., 2005, p. 936). Unfortunately, not all communities had the same funding opportunities as Chicago, Illinois. However, districts with limited internal resources could have alleviated the financial burden by using several outside funding sources. “Districts may be able to tap funding streams for programs such as Title I, 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, Safe and Drug-Free Schools grants, migrant education funds and private foundation support” (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 27).

The National Center for Summer Learning (2009c) described nine characteristics that contributed to a summer program's effectiveness:

1. Intentional focus on accelerating learning
2. Firm commitment to youth development
3. Proactive approach to summer learning
4. Strong, empowering leadership
5. Advanced, collaborative planning
6. Extensive opportunities for staff development
7. Strategic partnerships
8. Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement
9. Clear focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness. (§ 4)

The best summer learning programs needed to “develop the whole child-intellectually, socially, physically, and emotionally” in order to create a supportive atmosphere (National Center for Summer Learning, 2009c, What Makes a Summer Learning Program Effective? section). The first three characteristics gave an approach to learning or an attitude the educators must have exhibited in order to ensure an effective learning environment. The remaining six characteristics described an ideal program's infrastructure that helped to create a successful learning environment.

Even if a summer program possessed some of the nine characteristics just listed, many still had recurring problems year after year that affected the success of the program. The setbacks that many summer programs encountered are as follows:

There is limited time for instruction. Many summer programs are shortened because there is a lack of adequate funding to extend the program. Using some external funding sources, school districts may be able to extend their summer program further into the summer months without causing an extra burden on the districts' internal budget" (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 25). Furthermore, the district needs to determine what is needed for their students to reap the educational benefits of a summer school program. According to Denton (2002), "Summer programs produce more lasting benefits when they operate over a greater number of weeks for fewer hours per day" (p. 7). Instruction time may also be increased if teachers hired to teach the summer school program are from the same district as the students. "Instructional time is wasted as new teachers got to know summer students. Less time getting to know the students will be used because the teachers and students will already be familiar with one another" (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 25).

Most summer programs evidence a lack of structure within the summer program. The summer school program should have a vision for learning. The vision of the summer school program should be student centered and based upon the idea of how to improve student achievement.

The school district needs to determine if the focus of the summer program will be on meeting the learning needs of students who have fallen behind or boosting achievement scores. Once the goals of the program are determined, create a step by step plan outlining how the goals of the program will be met. (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p. 25)

The step by step plan needs to include time for advanced planning of the upcoming program. Often, summer school planning does not begin until spring, thus the plans and vision of the summer program are rushed and inadequate to improve student achievement. “An effective summer program plan needs to begin at the start of the school year” (Boss & Railsback, 2002, p.25). The planning process should include all stakeholders involved in the success of the program. “One of the most effective ways to ensure an adequate supply of qualified teachers for summer school is to involve them in the planning process from the beginning” (Denton, 2002, p. 12). Teachers who feel they have had a part in the planning process are more likely to take an active role in the execution of the program. Involving teachers in the planning process will allow for more continuity and a smoother transition for students between the regular school year curriculum and the summer school curriculum.

A lack of high expectations for students is a setback for many summer programs. The curriculum developed for the summer school program should include assessment and accountability measures for students who are attending the program. The curriculum needs to be focused on the individual student’s needs. According to Denton (2002), “Research shows that successful summer programs are characterized by not only lots of individual attention and clearly stated learning objectives but also by innovation and flexibility in finding ways to help students succeed” (p. 14). “All summer school programs should include rigorous evaluation of teaching strategies and student achievement in order to ensure that the program meets student needs and to identify which practices work for different children” (Denton, 2002, p. 17). Evaluation of a summer program needs to begin from the onset of the program to ensure all data was accurate through the duration of the summer program. The focus of the evaluation

should include the specific goals of the summer program and further research into whether goals had been met. Once the program is over, part of the evaluation plan should include time and personnel to research the evaluations completed by teachers in the school district. The evaluations are a tool to help determine how to make the following summer school program even more effective. “Successful programs are not static. They constantly incorporate new knowledge from outside research into their policies and practices” (Denton, 2002, p. 16).

Teaching Reading: Best Practices

In schools, there is a never-ending debate on which techniques, resources, and curriculum components could be regarded as the best practices to help children learn. Every few years school districts rewrote curriculum and adopted a new series of text books for a subject. The subjects were on a rotating calendar, so that one content area was reviewed every school year. With each textbook series, the publishing companies had “experts” who were sent to the school districts to sell their line of textbooks. These experts claimed to know what the best practices for teaching and learning were and therefore designed their materials around their theories on best practices (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). “Authors of educational policy and prepackaged curriculum presumably create documents with intended purposes and outcomes” (p. 146). However the authors of these items did not realize that “classrooms are complex environments where teachers are dilemma managers, negotiating their practices to meet the teaching challenges that arise everyday” (p. 146). What looked good on paper often was disastrous in the classroom setting. For example, the success of completing most prepackaged curriculum materials is determined by adhering to a

lesson plan schedule as determined by the authors. However, students may or may not understand the material the first time around, thus leaving the teacher to find external resources that will help the student understand the skill. After the child or children understand the concept, the teacher may be two days behind the “schedule” of the prepackaged curriculum. Despite what publishing companies claimed to know, Hennick (2008) claimed that educators needed to remember five key statements that would help any student succeed in any subject:

1. Provide interventions before a student falls hopelessly behind such as summer school or small class sizes.
2. Work to identify learning and behavior problems early in the school year.
3. Remember parental involvement is a crucial aspect in a student’s ultimate success.
4. Teachers need to turn their eye toward their own instruction, look at student’s learning and then revise instruction.
5. Teachers should never be shy about seeking assistance from other educators. (p. 58)

With emphasis on increasing the average reading scores of students, educators had to come to the reality that previously used methods to teach reading might not be sufficient. “Studies indicate that when students get off to a poor start in reading, they rarely catch up. Struggling readers encounter negative consequences: grade retention, assignment to special education classrooms, or participation in long-term remedial services” (Kelly & Campbell, n.d., ¶ 1). Teachers constantly tried to figure out the most effective way to help struggling readers and new readers begin to acquire the

skills to make them more proficient readers while also gaining a love and respect for reading. “We are not merely teaching letters and words, we are also teaching children” (Lilly, 2008, p. 671).

Many theories have emerged through time regarding the best way to teach reading. “During the 1980s and 1990s, instead of viewing reading as a collection of discrete skills to be mastered one at a time, theorists and practitioners recognized the interrelatedness of reading, writing, speaking, and listening” (Jensen & Tuten, 2007, p. 297). Over time many of the models of the best ways to teach reading were combined into one model, the Merged Model (Pruisner, 2009). “The focus of instruction (in the Merged Model) is to facilitate growth of the reader’s knowledge base that represents language development, beginning reading, and develops into reading that extends from elementary to secondary instruction” (Pruisner, 2009, p. 44). Educators came to realize that students needed to have background knowledge they could relate their reading to before they could truly comprehend material they were reading.

Instead of focusing on the finite skills that readers develop, educators began talking about how to build students’ backgrounds, promote concept formation, instill joy and delight in reading, and forge connections among the language processes of reading writing listening, and speaking. (Jenson & Tuten, 2007, p. 297)

Most classrooms were decorated to set a tone for learning. Posters that gave examples to curricular topics, character education, and educational resources hung on walls. However, beyond the posters and decorations, there needed to be a community

atmosphere that fostered active literacy. “Active literacy is the means to a deeper understanding and diverse, flexible thinking” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 16). In order for there to be a climate for active literacy, Harvey & Goudvis explained that a literate community needed to be built. The principles behind a literate community were as follows:

1. Foster passion and curiosity. Teachers should encourage student curiosity.
2. The environment should value collaborative learning and thinking.
3. Large blocks of time should be set aside for extended reading and writing.
4. Explicit Instruction. Give example to the way readers should think and model these behaviors.
5. Language matters. Use respectful language to ensure others do not feel as though their thoughts do not matter.
6. Authentic response. Students should be given the opportunity to respond to reading in a variety of ways.
7. Responsive teaching and differentiated instruction. Teachers need to design instruction to fit the needs of the students.
8. Text matters. Have a multitude of texts of every genre, style, form and topic.
9. Room arrangement matters. Arrange the room so that it fosters communication and participation.
10. Accessible resources. Provide resources that will support students thinking. Be creative with the resources. (pp. 35-37)

According to Miller (2002), before a teacher can successfully teach a student to read with proficiency, he or she must understand how active, thoughtful, proficient readers construct meaning:

1. Activating relevant, prior knowledge (schema) before, during and after reading text.
2. Creating visual and other sensory images from text during and after reading.
3. Drawing inferences from text to form conclusions, make critical judgments, and create unique interpretations.
4. Asking questions of themselves, the authors, and the texts they read.
5. Determining the most important ideas and themes in a text.
6. Synthesizing what they read. (p. 8)

Competent readers took for granted that as they read, they were picturing what was happening in the story or text in their head. Without thinking about it, competent readers asked questions, drew conclusions and made predictions about the material they read. Once comprehension was achieved, reading came naturally and without a struggle.

Strategic readers address their thinking in an inner conversation that helps them make sense of what they have read. They search for the answers to their questions. They attempt to better understand the text through their connections to the characters, the events, and the issues. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 12)

Teachers needed to encourage students to have that inner voice that allowed them to create images, ask questions, draw conclusions, and make predictions. “This inner

conversation helps readers monitor their comprehension and keeps them engaged in the story, concept, information, and ideas, allowing them to build their understanding as they go” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 78). Miller (2002), explained this inner voice as an ability that needed to be taught in order to learn how to comprehend read material. The concept was best taught by the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model. According to Miller, the model had four distinct phases:

Teacher modeling and explanation of a strategy. This stage was implemented by reading to students out loud. As the teacher read out loud, he or she modeled to the students what they should be saying in their heads as they read. “When we teach our kids to listen to the inner conversation and notice when they stray, they are more likely to catch their wandering minds sooner, stop and refocus” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 80). The modeling allowed them to think out loud what was happening in the brain and demonstrated how to use mental processes to construct meaning in words. In this phase, the teacher was teaching students how to monitor their comprehension by giving scenarios when they might become distracted from the material they were reading. The use of role playing specific situations showed the students how to cope when an obstacle presented itself.

Table 1 outlines strategies to monitor student comprehension. The left column describes common obstacles young readers had to overcome in order to learn how to comprehend material. The right column provided strategies to overcome the distracting obstacles.

Table 1

Monitoring Comprehension

<u>Why Meaning Breaks Down</u>	<u>What to do about it</u>
Fatigue	Reread to construct meaning. Put the book down when too tired
Not enough background Knowledge (by the reader)	Focus and read words more carefully than usual
Thirst	Get up and get a drink of water
Stress	Talk to a teacher or friend about what's on your mind
Don't like the book	Choose another book
Too Hard	Think about what you know and try to connect it to new information
Boring	Choose another book if possible or talk to someone who finds the topic interesting

Note. From *Strategies That Work* by Harvey and Goudvis, 2007, p. 80, Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Guided practice. Guided practice gave students more independence for task completion. A specific reading strategy was practiced as a whole group then the

students were encouraged to go back to their smaller groups, collaborate and apply the practice with their peers. Guided practice was best taught in a Reader's Workshop atmosphere. Reader's Workshop "blends whole group instruction, small needs-based groups, and individual conferring" to guide students through the reading process (Lewis, 2009, ¶ 4). "Reader's Workshop is defined as a student-centered, student-paced reading program. Students practice and learn reading through self-pacing, self-selection, sharing and listening, and a lot of reading" (Atwell as cited in Buhrke & Pittman, n.d., p. 15).

Lessons that incorporated reader's workshop began with learning a strategy as a whole group. The strategy was usually an element of reading such as tone, mood, or point of view. After the strategy was taught to the class, the class was given a large amount of time to practice the strategy individually, in small groups, or in pairs. While the students were working on the skill, the teacher walked around the room observing student conversations. The teacher constantly questioned the students about their reading material and how they applied the newly learned skill (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). According to Miller (2002), it was imperative that the students knew the precise expectations of the teacher before breaking off into their small groups. The students had to know what they were doing, why they were doing it, and what the final expectations were of the activity. As the teacher walked around the room, he or she would informally assess the students, while making notes about the student's progress. Questions the teacher needed to use as informal assessment of the students progression were; did the students understand how the connections/strategies were helping them? Were the children making a real connection to the story? What kind of

language were the students using as they were talking with one another about the reading material (Miller, 2002, p. 62)?

Independent practice. Independent practice was also known as the *letting go* phase.

During independent reading time, the students are given the time needed to get interested in a book. Independent reading time provides an opportunity to read that the students might not have had if they were not in Reader's

Workshop. (Buhrke & Pittman, n.d., p. 17)

“In one review of literature on independent reading, Cullen summarized more than a dozen large-and small-scale studies presenting evidence of a strong connection between independent reading and school success” (Cullen as cited in Knoester, 2009, p. 676). The independent reading phase of Reader's Workshop was proven invaluable to the success of readers. The students were able to apply the learned reading strategy into their own reading. The teacher needed to be specific about the expectations for this area of the reading process. The students were encouraged to choose their own reading material, based on their level of reading comprehension and interest. Their level of reading was determined through assessment prior to the Reader's Workshop. “Conferences with individual students take place simultaneously during independent reading” (Buhrke & Pittman, n.d., p. 17). The crucial part to the independent practice phase working was teacher feedback. “We found that conferencing with students has an effect on their ability to construct meaning and to share connections they make with various texts” (Buhrke & Pittman, n.d., p. 18). The teacher constantly met with individual students and allowed them to share their thinking, ensuring they were able to demonstrate an understanding of the reading material. Not only did conferences

give the teacher an opportunity to assess the students reading progress, they also guided the teacher's lesson planning to further reading strategies that needed focus in the future.

Authenticity and application. Application occurred when the student was able to work independently reading a story or text and apply reading strategies without specific guidance. This phase was used in "authentic reading situations and the strategy should be used in a variety of different genres, settings, contexts, and disciplines" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 33). Berardo (2006) defined authentic reading as "real life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes. . . . materials produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community" (p. 61). "Students learn language not in abstract, decontextualized terms but in application, in a context that language is really for" (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006, p. 345). Authentic reading material was made up of language students could relate to, and therefore, found interesting. "One of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to expose the learner to as much real language as possible" (Berardo, 2006, p. 64). When students found their reading material interesting they were more likely to continue reading. There were four factors to remember when choosing authentic reading material:

1. Suitability of Content - Does the text interest the students? Is it relevant to the students needs?
2. Exploitability - Can the text be exploited for teaching purposes? What strategies/skills can come from the text?

3. Readability - Is the text too easy/difficult for the students to read? How much new vocabulary does it contain? Is that vocabulary relevant?
4. Presentation - Does it look authentic? Does it grab the student's attention? Does it make him want to read more? (Berardo, 2006, p. 63)

The authentic texts and purposes are contrasted, within our frame, with those texts written primarily to teach reading and writing skills for the purposes of learning to read and write or to develop literacy skills, strategies, values, and attitudes-literacy activity we call 'school only'. (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006, p. 346)

Texts used only in school were followed by a worksheet or comprehension questions. "The goal was to engage in the kinds of discussions that make students want to come back for more-the kind of discussion in which students learn about life, themselves, and the power of reading great books" (McIntyre, 2007, p. 610).

Authentic reading material brought out discussions that a student could relate their own experiences to therefore, gaining a love of reading. One advantage to using authentic materials in the classroom was they were infinite and virtually cost-free.

The most commonly used authentic materials used by classroom teachers were newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs, and literature (Berardo, 2006).

Of course, there were other advantages and disadvantages to using authentic materials. Table 2 outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic reading materials in the classroom (see Table 2).

Table 2

Authentic Reading Materials

<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Disadvantages</u>
<p>“Real” language exposure with language change/variation reflected</p> <p>Students are informed about what is happening in the world</p> <p>Textbooks tend not to include incidental/improper and become outdated very quickly</p> <p>The same piece of material can be used for different tasks.</p> <p>Ideal for teaching/practicing mini-skills-skimming/scanning</p>	<p>Often too culturally biased, difficult to understand outside the language community</p> <p>Vocabulary might not be relevant to the student’s immediate needs</p> <p>Too many structures are mixed so lower levels have problems decoding the texts</p> <p>Special preparation is necessary, can be time consuming</p> <p>Can become outdated easily, e.g. news stories, articles</p>

Table 2 (Continued)

<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Disadvantages</u>
<p>Contain a wide variety of text types, languages styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials</p> <p>Encourage reading for pleasure, likely to contain topics of interest</p>	

Note. From “The Use of Authentic Materials in the Teaching of Reading,” by S. Berardo, 2006, *The Reading Matrix*, 6(2), p. 65.

In classrooms that used the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model to teach reading comprehension, the four phases did not occur in the first reading lesson. The process was something that needed to be developed as the school year progressed. The teacher gradually added another phase to lessons so eventually all four phases were occurring in each reading lesson block. The most successful way the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model was taught was through Reader’s Workshop. An effective Reader’s Workshop needed approximately 90 minutes of instructional time. There was a gradual release to the reading process that the teacher used to ensure skills were mastered and comprehension achieved (see Table 3).

Table 3

Components of the Workshop

	<u>Time to Teach</u>	<u>Time to Practice</u>	<u>Time to Share</u>
Phases of Gradual Release	15 – 20 Minutes Read-aloud, Mini-lesson Whole Group	45 – 50 Minutes Reading, Conferring Small Group, Pairs, Independent	15 -20 Minutes Reflection, Sharing Whole Group, Small group, Pairs
Modeling reading Behavior	X	X	X
Thinking Aloud (showing how)	X	X	X
Guided Practice (having at it)	X	X	X

Table 3 (Continued)

	<u>Time to Teach</u>	<u>Time to Practice</u>	<u>Time to Share</u>
Independent Practice (letting go)		X	X
Application on their own (now I get it!)		X	X

Note. From *Reading With Meaning* by D. Miller, 2002, p. 11. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Table 3 describes how the teacher can utilize time to create a Reader’s Workshop within the classroom. The times did not have to be followed to the minute; however, the teacher needed to realize that in order for this method to be successful, the students had to be given the opportunity to grow as readers and gradually gain independence.

Reading Assessment

Before assessment of reading progress could occur, it is important to first understand the definition of reading. Reading is

The ability to develop a more complete understanding of what is read, to connect information in the text with knowledge and experience, and to

examine content by critically evaluating, comparing and contrasting, and understanding the effect of such features such as irony, humor and organization. (National Assessment Governing Board as cited in Applegate, Applegate, McGeehan, Pinto and Kong, 2009, p. 372)

Applegate, et al. (2009) went on to describe, “Mature reading involves thoughtful literacy – the ability to link the text with one’s existing knowledge to arrive at a considered and logical response” (p. 372).

The purpose behind reading assessment was to monitor students’ progress. Assessment allowed the teacher to identify each student’s strengths and weaknesses in order to create the best instruction that would meet each student’s educational needs. Continued assessment gave the teacher the opportunity to determine the level each student was reading on and monitor their reading growth (Rasinski, 2003). Effective assessment of students was not a skill easily learned by teachers. Many educators confused assessment and grading, therefore, the teacher was not able to accurately monitor the student’s reading progress. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) described the difference between assessment and grading as, “When we assess our kids’ progress, we look for a demonstration of understanding. Work samples, student talk, and artifacts are the evidence we use to assess their learning. Grades are all about evaluating what kids have learned through practice” (p. 41).

There were many methods of assessment that were effective in determining how well a student could read. Many assessment methods were dependent upon which reading skill the teacher wanted to monitor. Rasinski (2003) stated,

Oral reading, however, offers us a window into the reading process. Strengths and weaknesses in word recognition, fluency, and—to a lesser extent—comprehension are measured by analyzing the quality of the student’s oral reading and any deviations from the text. (p. 157)

In oral reading assessment, an instructional level was achieved when the student could read the selection with 90-95% accuracy. A student still needed teacher assistance at this level; however, the most progress in reading also occurred at the instructional level since the selection was not too easy, and not too difficult for the student (Rasinski, 2003).

When students and teachers were held accountable by state tests and laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act, true comprehension assessment began to lack. According to Applegate, et al. (2009), “Many teachers emphasize literal recall because they assume that that they are preparing their students to perform well on accountability measures” (p. 372). Harvey and Goudvis (2007) concurred stating, “Unfortunately, in this era of No Child Left Behind, test preparation is becoming the default curriculum. Assessment is not only about what our kids do, but also how effective our instruction has been” (p. 39). To assess what the students know (not so much what they can do) from their reading, teachers have used authentic assessment methods to monitor students’ growth in understanding the concept behind reading comprehension. Authentic assessment provided three pieces of information:

1. Our students learning and progress. By looking at student’s work and listening to their words and thoughts, we derive authentic understanding of how they are doing.

2. Past instruction. We need to design our lessons keeping in mind what we have learned from our students and letting that information guide our instruction.
3. Future instruction. Responsive teaching and assessment go hand in hand. Based on what we see in students' work, the evidence of their understanding, we design subsequent instruction that is tailored to what they need. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 39)

According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), teachers were able to find out if readers understood what they read in the following ways:

1. Listening to kids. Check to see if the students truly understand the language.
2. Read kids' work. Look for evidence of constructed meaning.
3. Confer with kids. Conferencing with students provides an ideal opportunity to talk one on one and help them sort out their thinking in order to come to a deeper understanding.
4. Listen in on conversations kids are having with one another. This gives the opportunity to hear what they are really thinking.
5. Observe behavior and expressions.
6. Chart responses. Record exactly what the students are saying. Allow the students to use the charted responses as guides in further discussions.
7. Keep anecdotal records of conferences and conversations.
8. Script what kids say, recording comments and questions. (p. 40)

Teachers realized the best way to assess how well a student comprehended

material was not by regurgitating answers straight from the context of the story but by leading discussions and creating opportunities for students to share what they were thinking with the teacher and/or the class (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Summary

Chapter Two was a review of the literature on (a) Title I, (b) retention, (c) summer learning extension programs, and (d) the best practices of teaching reading. Each section addressed multiple topics and what they meant to the education field. The research of best practices to teach reading presented evidence that the Summer Reading Program is lacking in research-based practices to better improve student reading achievement. The Summer Reading Program does not provide teachers opportunities to learn how to best utilize the three and half hours of instruction each day in order to meet maximum teaching and learning potential.

The review of literature identified efforts educators could make in order to help all students succeed. In classrooms, there are always students that found reading difficult and intimidating. These are the students for which programs such as Title I and Reading First are intended. The groups of students who find reading to be difficult are the ones who need the extra learning time in order to comprehend what other students learn easily. “Summer school has been suggested as a necessary component of a school district’s plan to end social promotion and increase student achievement” (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004, ¶ 1). This extra learning time can also come in the summer, when the regular school session is over.

Research defined very specific strategies that can be used to best teach reading. School districts need to take these strategies and create a very specific

curriculum for their summer programs. A more defined curriculum ensures time is used effectively and that students are learning. Teaching reading strategies such as Reader's Workshop take time to prepare, but with the proper professional development opportunities, teachers find their teaching to be much more meaningful.

Chapter Three describes the methodology this action research project used to obtain teacher perceptions of the Summer Reading Program in the ABC School District. The topics in Chapter Three include the following: (a) type of research, (b) research questions, (c) a description of the sample selection, (d) external validity, (e) instrumentation, and (f) data analysis procedure.

Chapter Three

Methodology

When Senate Bill 319 passed on June 29, 2001, the contents forced educators to look closely at their methods of tracking the reading progress of students. By law, if a fourth grader was reading below one grade level, the school was mandated to retain that student. (MODESE, 2008, State Policies on Reading Assessment section) School officials did not like to retain a student due to the social and emotional implications that occurred, especially for a student as far along as fourth grade.

“Summer school has been suggested as a necessary component of a school district’s plan to increase student learning. . . . research shows that high quality programs can make a difference in student learning” (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004, ¶ 3). As an intervention measure, many schools developed summer programs that helped struggling readers. The summer programs were designed to provide extra support for students who were not reading at the grade level required. The extra support was aimed to provide additional reading help so that the possibility of the student being retained was prevented. For the extra support to be beneficial for the student, it needed to be an effective learning experience.

If Tammy attends summer school in which time is spent on material she’s already learned, if she is taught the same way as she was taught when she failed to learn the first time, or if she is presented with material unconnected to or below the level of knowledge expected in next year’s classroom, she won’t gain much from her experience. (Christie, 2003, p. 485)

Research Methodology and Design

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program in raising Title I students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills for Title I students who attended the Summer Reading Program. The effectiveness of the program was based on teacher observations and teacher perceptions of the program. In addition, effectiveness of the program was determined by the increase of student test scores in the area of Reading based upon the GMRT and the MAP administered in 2006-2007 and the GMRT and MAP tests administered in 2007-2008 using the same participants. The research questions answered from this study were: The research questions were

1. What are the best educational practices for teaching reading in an elementary Summer Reading Program?
2. How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?
3. What instructional techniques did the Summer Reading Program teachers of the ABC School District use to facilitate student learning?
4. Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective in raising students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary levels?

Hypotheses

1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.
2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.
3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.
4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.
5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

7. Teachers in the ABC School District will evidence positive perceptions of the effects of the ABC Summer School Reading Program as measured by an administered survey.

Null Hypotheses

1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.
2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.
3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.
4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.
5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
7. Teachers in the ABC School District will not evidence positive perceptions of the effects of the ABC Summer School Reading Program as measured by an administered survey.

The design of this study and the proposed recommendations that followed the findings from surveys and analysis of test scores allowed this project to be categorized as an action research study.

Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully using the techniques of research...action research specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future. (Ferrance, 2000, p. 8)

Action research is an educationally based form of research. Educators consistently need to look at methodologies and programs used in schools and assess the effectiveness that each had on student learning achievement; therefore action research is constantly an ongoing process. As a teacher of the Summer Reading Program, the researcher felt it necessary to determine whether the Summer Reading Program was achieving the goal of improving student reading achievement as intended.

There are several types of action research. Individual research is accomplished by one teacher with the objective to seek a solution to a problem within his or her classroom. This type of research only benefits the one teacher. Collaborative action research includes a group of teachers dealing with a problem faced in several classrooms. This is usually accomplished by a team of teachers who shared the same students or taught the same curriculum. School-wide research focuses on an issue that is uniform throughout an entire school. This research is conducted by a team of teachers and administrators with the same goal in mind. Finally, the form of action research that was conducive to this study, district-wide research. This research addressed a problem common to several schools in one district. The results of a district-wide action research project helped ensure “real school reform and change can take hold based on a common understanding through inquiry” (Ferrance, 2000, p. 4). This study was considered district-wide action research. According to Donato (2003, ¶ 5), there were certain characteristics of an action research study that made it appropriate for this particular type of study:

1. Present an issue or concern relevant to student learning
2. Identify specific areas of concern
3. Observe how those areas play out in the setting of the study
4. Research how the issues may be addressed
5. Collect data to determine a plan of action
6. Plan strategic actions or recommendations based on the data

Due to problems within the study, such as external limitations imposed by a lack of transportation, combining of grade levels, and a lack of teaching resources, the

stakeholders in the Summer Reading Program were not able to determine if it was a successful intervention tool at raising Title I students' reading achievement. The program was held for three weeks in the summer. The students were asked to attend three and half hours per day, four days a week. Students recommended for the summer program were not held accountable for their attendance, and transportation to the program through the district was not available. Along with minimal time and lack of transportation, other concerns addressed in this research were the methods of delivering instruction and teacher perceptions of the description and objectives of the Summer Reading Program. This study used a survey questionnaire to collect teacher perceptions and observations of the Summer Reading Program. Each of the 90 teachers who taught in the four Title I schools of this study was asked to complete the survey. Upon combining the results of the questionnaire with the research of best practices for creating an effective summer reading program, recommendations were formulated to improve the current program.

Questionnaire Instruments

“A questionnaire provides a tool which you can tabulate and discuss information” (Powell, 1998, p. 2). To gain insight to the teachers' perspectives of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program, this research relied on a survey questionnaire as a tool to gather information. The objectives of the questionnaire were to (a) determine if teachers knew the description and objectives of the Summer Reading Program, (b) examine which instructional techniques were used in the program, (c) gather teacher input on the effectiveness of instructional techniques used

in the program, and (d) gather insight to recommendations the teachers would make to improve the program.

The survey was created by the researcher and written in second person to create the scenario of an interview. Some of the questions included terminology pertaining to the Summer Reading Program with a specific objective in mind. It was impossible to conclude that every respondent took away the same meaning to every question. To increase the likelihood of honesty, all responses were kept anonymous and the results were electronically tabulated via SurveyMonkey.com. The survey was comprised of twelve questions (see Appendix C). The first three questions were demographic questions to help the researcher determine if teacher perception was altered by number of years teaching experience or level of teaching assignment. The other nine questions were a combination of both open-ended and closed questions, each with the objective to gain the respondents' perceptions of the Summer Reading Program. Questions four and nine presented a single response format aimed at utilization of district required forms completed by each classroom teacher prior to the start of the Summer Reading Program that was specific to the needs of students attending the program. Questions five, six, seven, eight, ten, and eleven were set up with single response items. However, a box was provided for further explanation. Question twelve was an open ended question designed to gain insight into any recommendations teachers made to improve the quality of the Summer Reading Program.

Sample Selection

This action research study was conducted to determine how effective, through surveys and test score data, a school district's Summer Reading Program was at meeting the educational needs of Title I elementary students. The study highlighted the district's program objectives. Participants shared their observations and perceptions of objectives and purposes of the Summer Reading Program in relation to meeting the needs of students.

The ABC School District is a district that runs deep into the community's history. The district dates back to 1807, as a one room schoolhouse founded by an original settler of the area. In the early years of the district, there were not enough students to justify a high school so the district accommodated students from kindergarten through eighth grade. After students completed the eighth grade, the district had to bus them to high schools in two neighboring districts. In 1960, the ABC School District opened its first high school, and for the first time in over 100 years, the district was able to accommodate students, kindergarten through twelfth grade. Through the next 48 years, the district continued building schools in an effort to keep up with the demands of the growing community. The district that began with a one room school house developed into an educational system made up of four high schools, four middle schools, and fifteen elementary schools. The community around the schools was a close knit community. Many parents volunteered in the schools and many of the teachers lived within the school community, with their children attending the district (History of the District, n.d.).

The participants were 90 fully certified elementary school teachers who may or may not have taught in the Summer Reading Program. The kindergarten through fifth grade teachers were collected from the four elementary schools involved in the study. For the purposes of this study, the elementary schools were regarded as Elementary 1, Elementary 2, Elementary 3 and Elementary 4.

The secondary data was collected from a population of 150 third through fifth grade students who take the MAP test each spring, from the four Title I elementary schools. Each of the 150 students attended the schools in both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years and all qualified for Title I reading services. The 150 students were divided into two groups. One group was comprised of students who attended the Summer Reading Program and the other group was comprised of students who opted not to attend the Summer Reading Program.

Figures 1-16 depict several different characteristics of the elementary schools involved in this study. Many ethnic backgrounds were represented throughout the study's population; however, the majority of the students used in this study were White. The numbers of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program were compared to the numbers of students enrolled in the school. This helped to determine the quantity of low income students enrolled and therefore, determining eligibility of Title I funding. Finally, a comparison was depicted of the Title I students' achievement scores on the MAP test in the content area of Communication Arts. Each comparison of test score levels was divided by grade levels.

Elementary 1 is an intermediate elementary school, built in 1966. The school, made up of 440 third through fifth graders, is located in an established community.

The teachers that worked in the school at the time of the study were 100% fully certified and averaged 11 years of teaching experience. Sixty percent of the teachers that worked at Elementary 1 earned advanced degrees which included Masters and beyond in the field of education. The teacher to student ratio was approximately 20 students for every 1 classroom teacher.

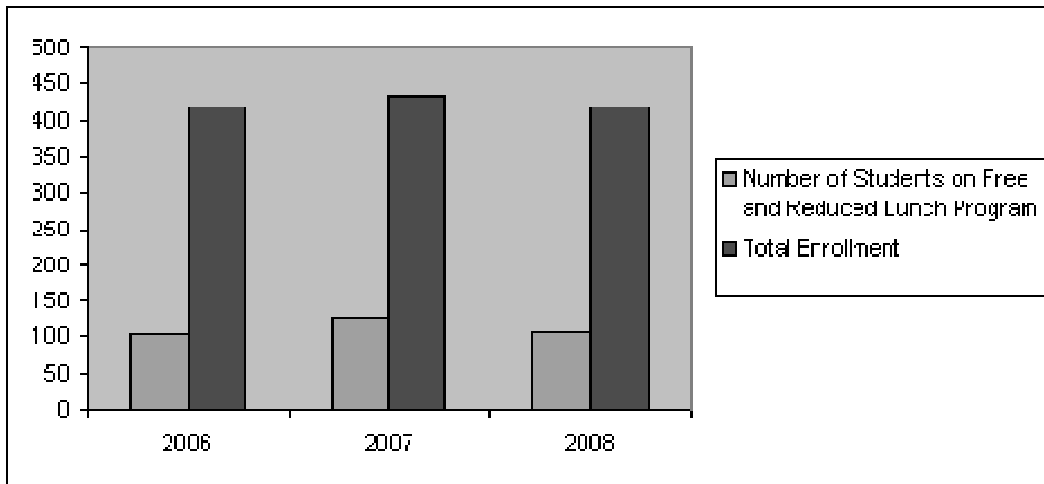


Figure 1. The number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program between the years of 2006-2008 for Elementary 1.

From MODESE, 2008, School Statistics section.

Figure 1 indicates the number of students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program for the school years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 compared to the total number of students enrolled in the same school years.

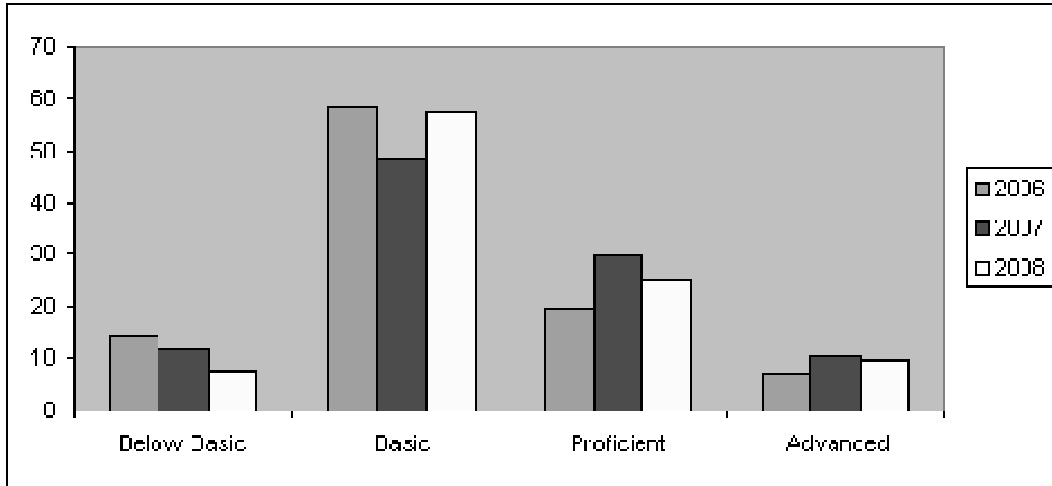


Figure 2. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I third grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 1.

In Figure 2 the achievement levels of third grade, Title I students in Elementary 1 are compared. The comparison only depicts the Communication Arts section of the Missouri Assessment Test (MAP) for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The majority of Title I students scored at the Basic level of the MAP test in all three school years. The second highest level scored by the students was Proficient followed by Below Basic and Advanced.

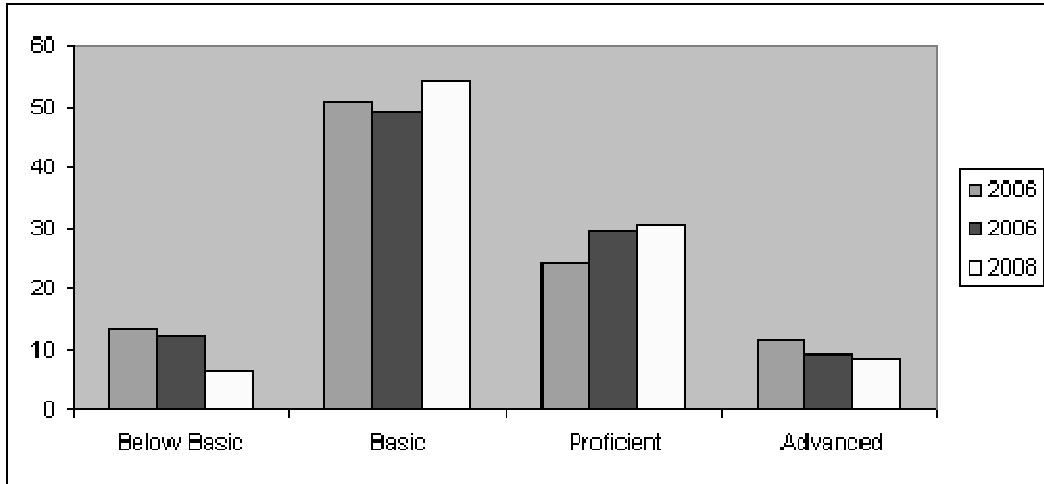


Figure 3. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fourth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 1.

In Figure 3 the achievement levels of fourth grade, Title I students, enrolled in Elementary 1 are compared. This comparison only depicts the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The majority of fourth graders scored at the Basic level of the MAP test. There was a gradual increase of student scores at the Proficient level, while both the Below Basic and Advanced levels gradually decreased in the number of students scoring in those levels.

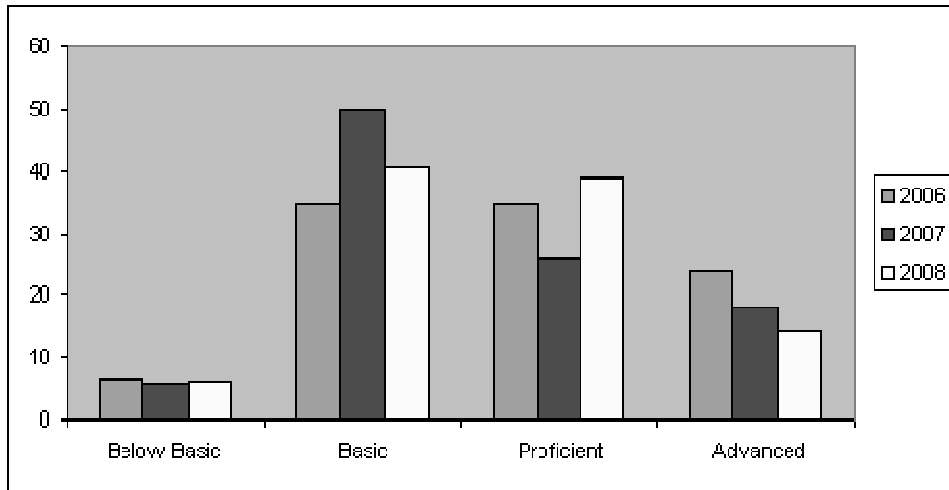


Figure 4. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fifth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 1.

Figure 4 compares the achievement levels of fifth grade, Title I students, enrolled in Elementary 1. This comparison depicts the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The fifth graders in Elementary 1 primarily scored at the Basic level. However, different from the third and fourth graders, the scores were not as consistent in this level. The same held true for the students scoring in the Proficient level. There was a gradual decline in the number of students scoring at the Advanced level. The number of students at the Below Basic level stayed the lowest compared to the other three; however, the number of students in this level remained the most consistent.

Elementary 2 is one of the older elementary schools in the district. It is an intermediate elementary school comprised of approximately 455 students in grades 3 through 5. The teachers at Elementary 2 averaged 8 years of teaching experience, with 100% fully certified in elementary education. Sixty percent of the teachers

earned advanced degrees which included Masters and beyond in the field of education. The average student to teacher ratio was 19 students per 1 teacher in each classroom. Elementary 2 is located in the middle of a lower socio-economic neighborhood.

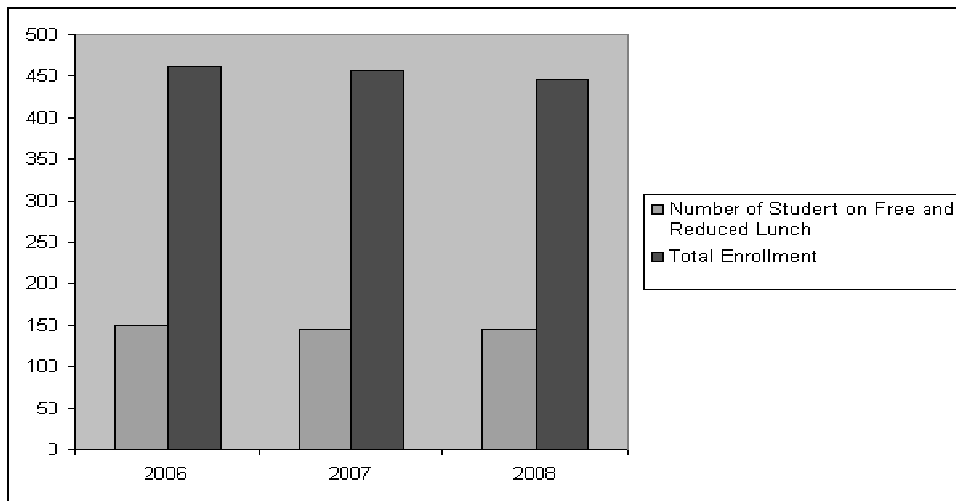


Figure 5. The number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program between the years of 2006-2008 for Elementary 2.

From MODESE, 2008, School Statistics section.

Figure 5 indicates the number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program for the school years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 for Elementary 2 compared to the total number of students enrolled in the same school years.

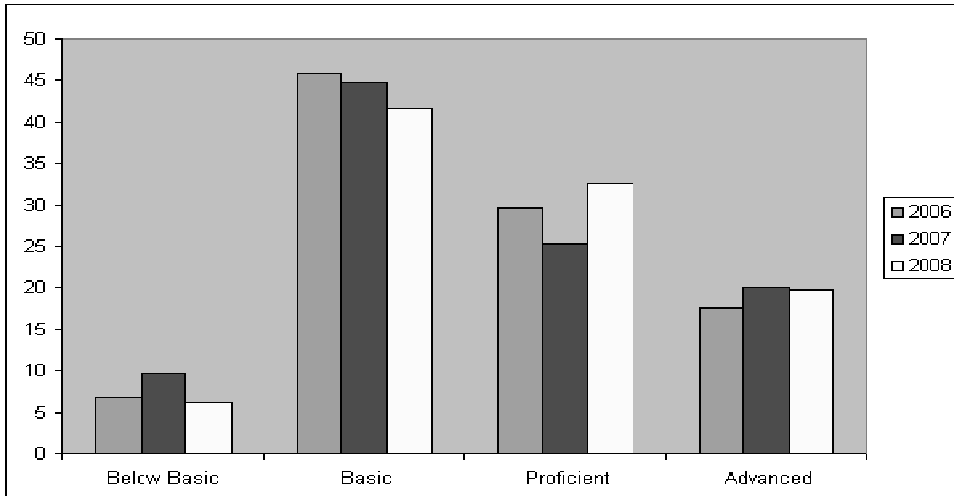


Figure 6. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I third grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 2.

In Figure 6 achievement levels of third grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 2 are compared. This comparison only depicts the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. In all three school years, most of the Title I students achieved at the Basic level. However, the number of students scoring at the Basic level slowly declined throughout the three years. Proficient was the second highest level achieved by the third graders in Elementary 2. The least amount of students achieved at the Below Basic level.

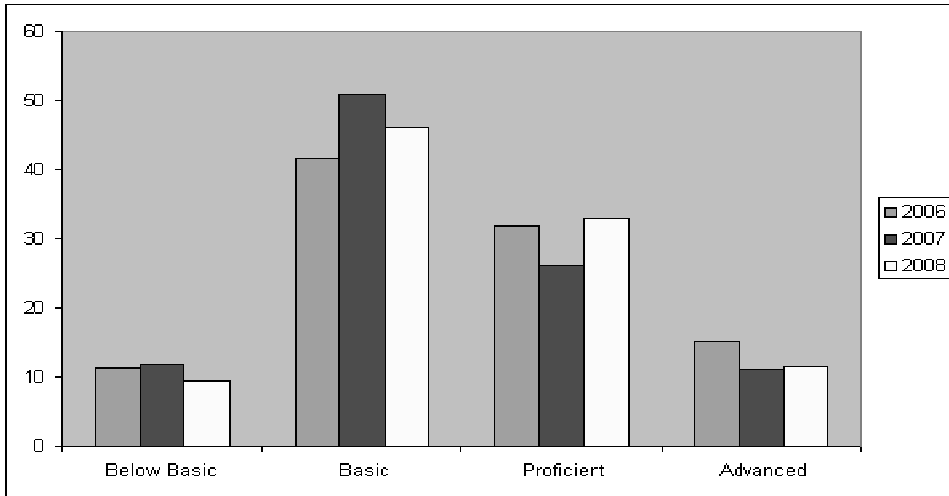


Figure 7. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fourth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 2.

Figure 7 compares the achievement levels of fourth grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 2. Figure 7 is a comparison of only the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The majority of the fourth grade students scored at the Basic level of the MAP test while the fewest students scored at the Below Basic or Advanced Levels. The number of students scoring at the Proficient did not stay consistent in numbers, but was continually the second highest achievement level earned by the Title I fourth graders.

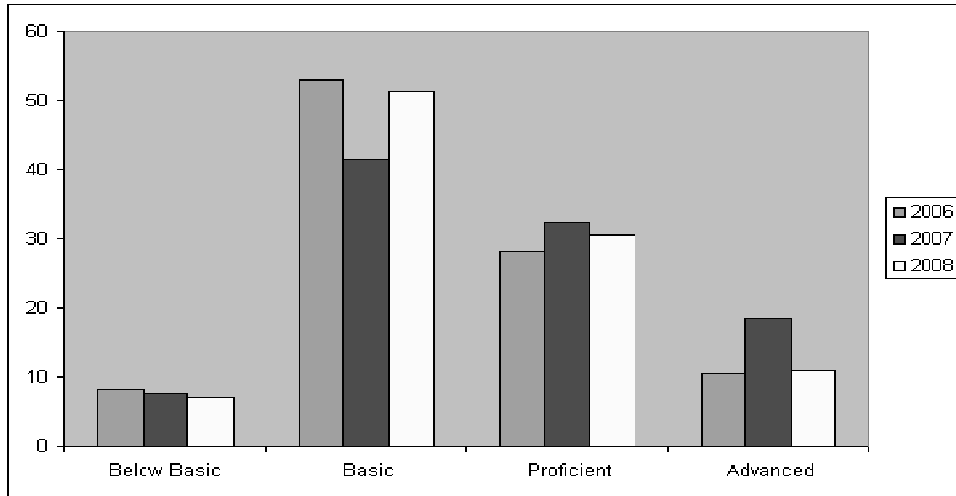


Figure 8. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fifth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 2.

In Figure 8 the achievement levels of fifth grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 2 are compared. The comparison is only of the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. Similar to the third and fourth graders of this school, the majority of the Title I students scored at the Basic level of the MAP test. Again, the Proficient level was the second highest scored area while Below Basic and Advanced were scored by the fewest students.

Elementary 3 is a kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school. The school population at the time of this study included approximately 520 students and was located in an established community. The 41 teachers that worked in the school were 100% fully certified in their field and averaged 10 years of teaching experience. Sixty-eight percent of the teachers that worked at Elementary 3 earned advanced

degrees. The teacher to student ratio was approximately 20 students for every 1 classroom teacher.

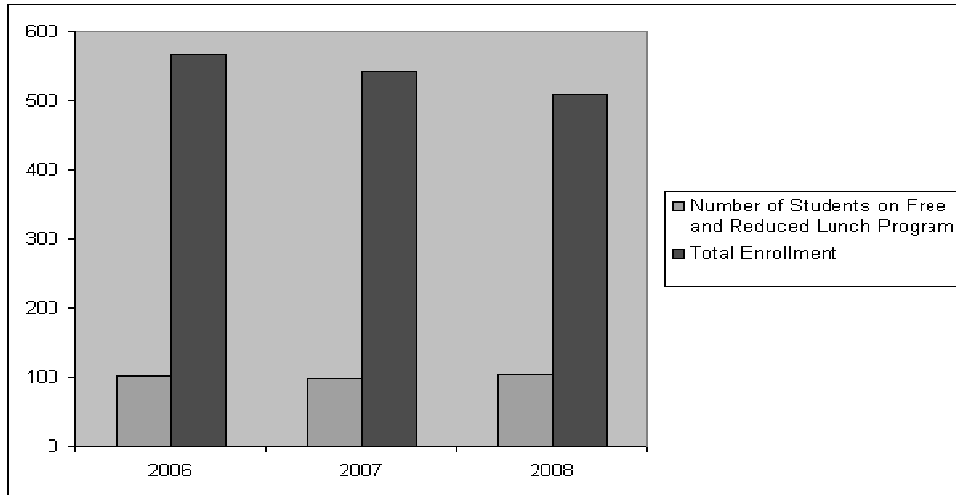


Figure 9. The number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program between the years of 2006-2008 for Elementary 3.

From MODESE, 2008, School Statistics section.

Figure 9 indicates the number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program for the school years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 for Elementary 3 compared to the total number of students enrolled in the same school years.

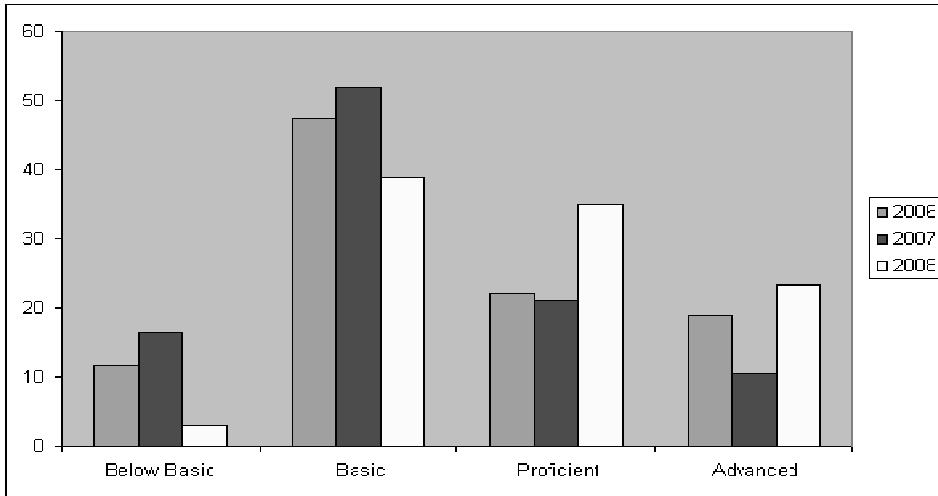


Figure 10. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I third grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 3.

In Figure 10 achievement levels of third grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 3 are compared. This comparison only depicts the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. In all three school years, most of the Title I students achieved at the Basic level. Proficient was the second highest level achieved by the third graders in Elementary 3. In 2008, there was a significant decrease in the number of students at the Basic and Below Basic levels, while there was a significant increase in students at the Proficient and Advanced levels.

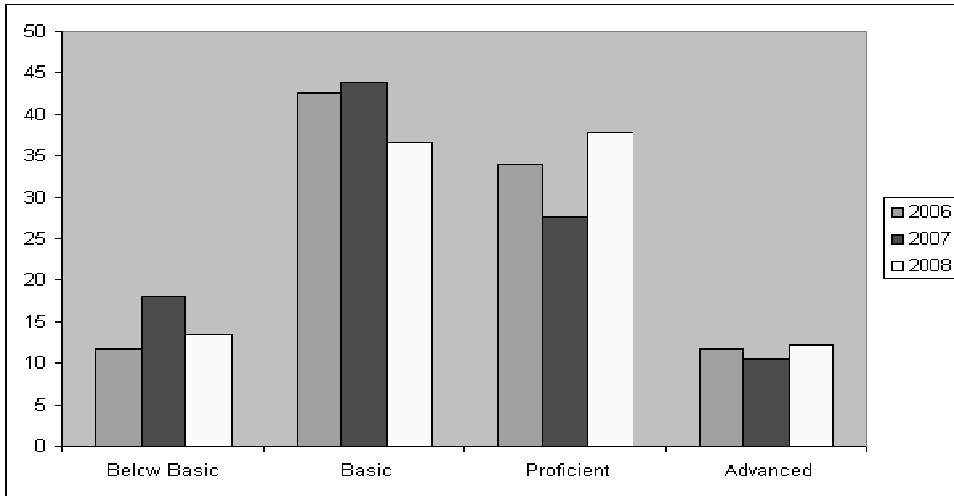


Figure 11. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fourth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 3.

Figure 11 compares the achievement levels of fourth grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 3. Figure 11 is a comparison of only the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The majority of the fourth grade students scored at the Basic level of the MAP test while the fewest students scored at the Below Basic or Advanced Levels. The number of students scoring at the Proficient did not stay consistent in numbers, but was continually the second highest achievement level earned by the Title I fourth graders.

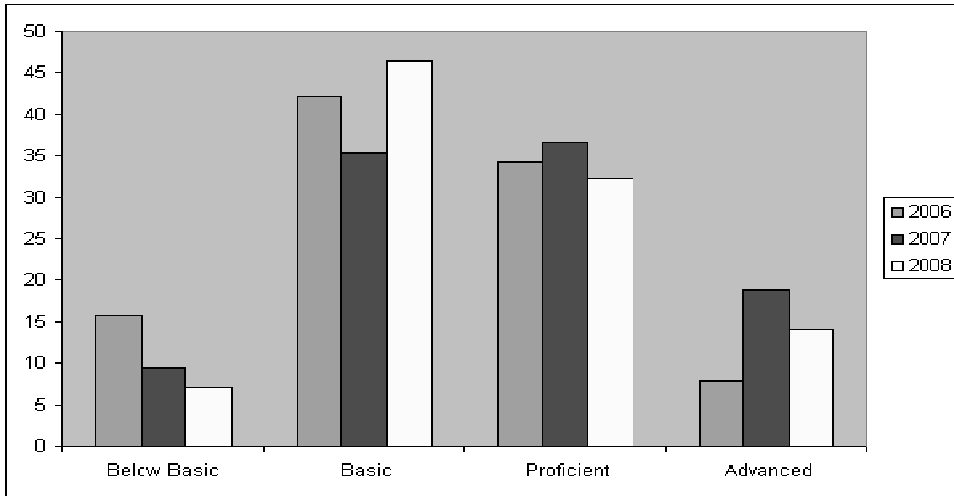


Figure 12. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fifth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 3.

In Figure 12 the achievement levels of fifth grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 3 are compared. The comparison is only of the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The majority of fifth graders scored at the Basic level, followed by the Proficient level. The number of students scoring at the Below Basic level gradually decreased, however the number of students scoring at the Advanced level remained significantly inconsistent.

Elementary 4 is a kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school. The school at the time of this study was made up of approximately 530 students. Elementary 4 is located in the center of the city on a major throughway. At the time of this study, the teachers that worked in the school were 100% fully certified and averaged 9 years of teaching experience. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers that

worked at Elementary 4 earned advanced degrees. The teacher to student ratio was approximately 19 students for every 1 classroom teacher.

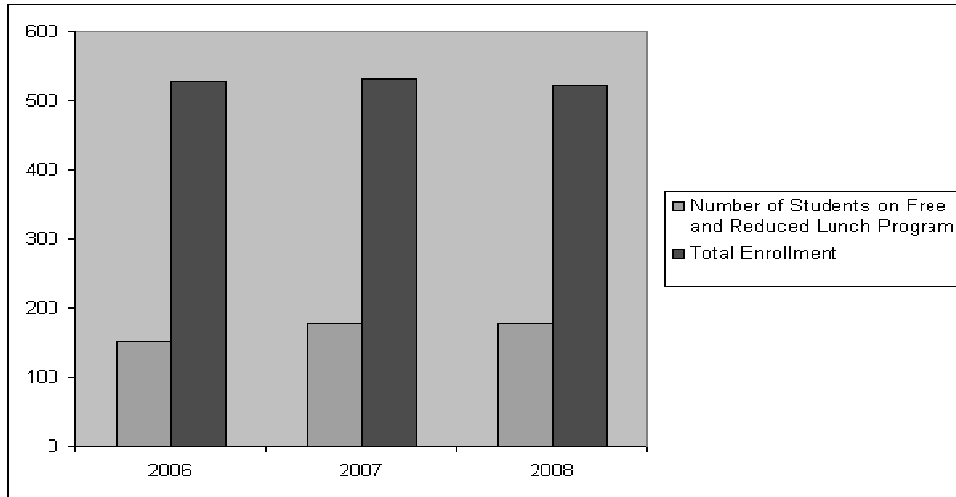


Figure 13. The number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program between the years of 2006-2008 for Elementary 4.

From MODESE, 2008, School Statistics section.

Figure 13 indicates the number of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program for the school years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 for Elementary 4 compared to the total number of students enrolled in the same school years.

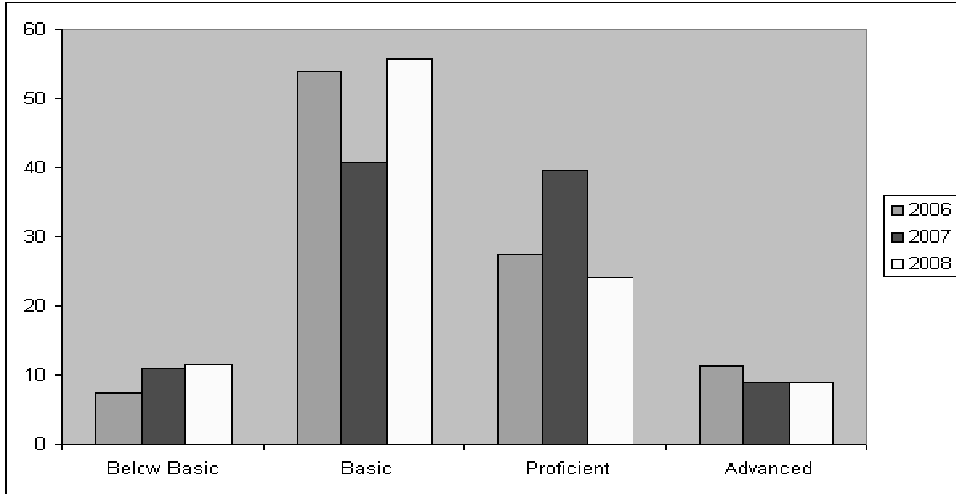


Figure 14. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I third grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 4.

In Figure 14 achievement levels of third grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 4 are compared. This comparison only depicts the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. In all three school years, most of the Title I students achieved at the Basic level, although in 2007 the number of students at the Basic and Proficient levels were very close. Proficient was the second highest level achieved by the third graders in Elementary 4, with a spike in 2007 in number of students scoring at that level. The number of students at the Below Basic level gradually increased, while students at the advanced level decreased.

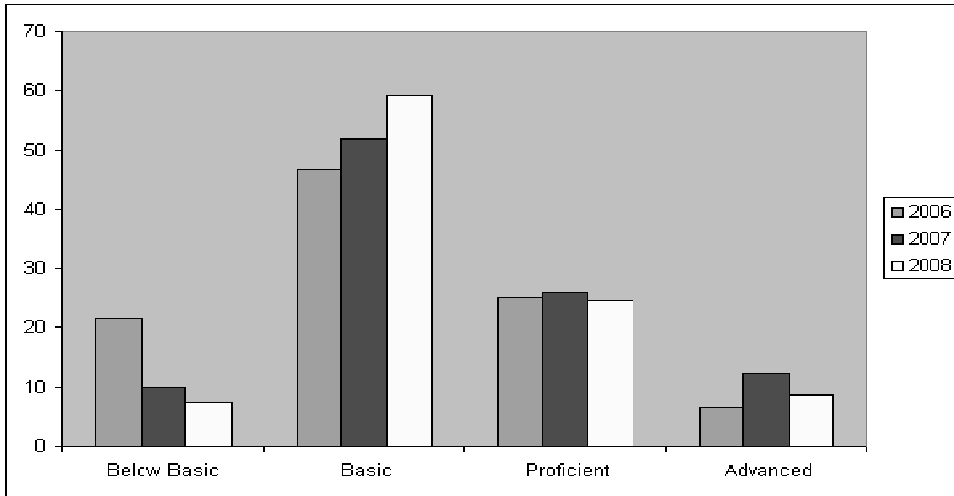


Figure 15. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fourth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 4.

Figure 15 compares the achievement levels of fourth grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 4. Figure 15 is a comparison of only the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The highest number students scored at the Basic level. In addition, the number of students scoring at the Basic level gradually increased through the three school years. Proficient was the second highest level achieved and the number of students at this level remained consistent through all three years. Students scoring at the Below Basic level decreased throughout the three years, while the number of students at the Advanced level fluctuated through the three years.

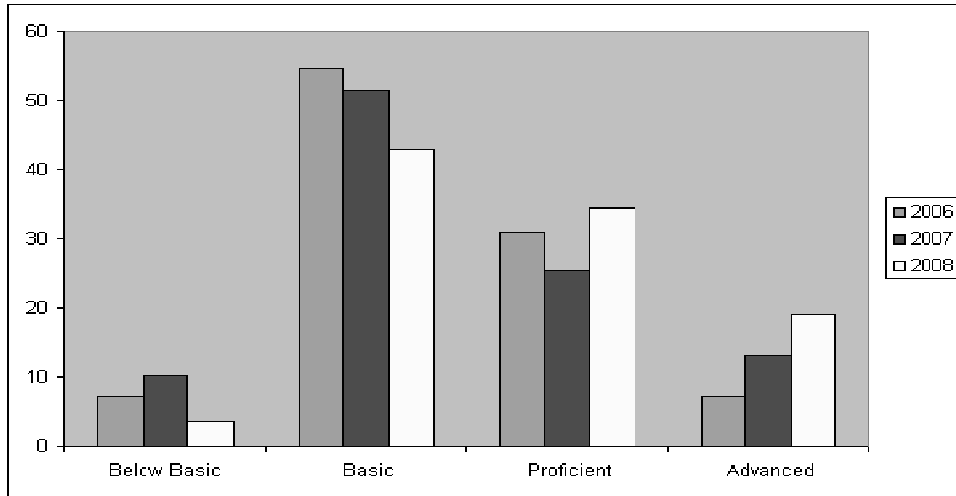


Figure 16. A bar graph representing the level achieved by the Title I fifth grade students in the Communication Arts portion of the MAP throughout the 2006-2008 school years for Elementary 4.

In Figure 16 the achievement levels of fifth grade, Title I students enrolled in Elementary 4 are compared. The comparison is only of the Communication Arts section of the MAP for the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years. The majority of fifth graders scored at the Basic level, followed by the Proficient level. The number of students scoring at the Below Basic level fluctuated through the three years; however the number of students scoring at the Advanced level gradually increased.

External Validity

“External validity is the degree to which the conclusions in your study will hold for other persons in other places at other times” (Trochim, 2006, ¶1). External validity refers to how much the research can be generalized to a specific population. The Summer Reading Program studied for the purposes of this research was unique to the ABC School District. Where other school districts may have had an extended

summer learning program, it might not have been designed like the one in this study. The Summer Reading Program for the ABC School District was based solely around improving reading achievement. Reading was the only subject taught in the summer program. With this in mind, the results of this study may only be applicable to the ABC School District.

The external validity might have been compromised due to the fact Elementary School's 1, 2, 3 and 4 were Title I schools. Population validity is the "extent to which the results of a study can be generalized from the specific sample that was studied to a larger group of students" (Siegle, 2009, Threats to External Validity section). Title I schools were schools with at least 35% or more students living at or below poverty level. Title I is a federal program designed to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. This created a specific sample population that may not be representative of all school populations.

Instrumentation

According to Scheuren (2004), "Today the word 'survey' is used most often to describe a method of gathering information on preferences, needs and behavior from a sample of individuals" (p. 9). The central source of information in this research was a survey. The survey used in this action research study was designed to determine teacher perceptions and teacher observations of ABC School District's Summer Reading Program. The survey was sent to all teachers who taught in Elementary 1, 2, 3 and 4, regardless of whether or not they taught in the Summer Reading Program. The teachers' were assured anonymity. The objective of the survey was to determine teachers opinions of the effectiveness of the summer reading

program based on observations of Title I students who had participated in the program. “To overcome the problem of scattershot content and unequal expectations, teachers need a common, coherent, and specific curriculum” (Jerald, 2003, p. 14). The survey also asked specific questions regarding how the curricular objectives of the program were determined in relation to the educational needs of the students.

There were two additional tools used for the purposes of this study, student reading scores taken from the GMRT and the Communication Arts portion of the MAP. The purpose behind using the scores taken from the two tests was to analyze whether there was a significant change in the student’s reading achievement level among the students who opted to participate in the district’s Summer Reading Program versus those students who did not participate in the program.

The GMRT was a test given to kindergarten through twelve graders that determined reading ability levels. In the ABC School District, the GMRT was given to Title I students to monitor their literacy growth while in the schools’ Title I Reading Program. Elementary 1, 2, 3 and 4 each gave the GMRT to their Title I reading students in the fall of each school year. The GMRT results used for this study were given in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007. The students’ scores were indicated by a percentile rank (PR). The students were given the GMRT over two days. The reading specialist determined the raw score from the number of questions the student answered correctly based on the number of possible questions. The raw score was categorized with a range of scores. The PR indicated the percentage of students in the same grade, in the norm group, with lower raw scores.

The MAP test was first implemented in the 1997 as a result of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. The test is “designed to measure student progress in meeting the Show-Me Standards” (MODESE, 2004). The Communication Arts area of the MAP test was composed of two areas, reading and writing. The students were scored based on how well they interpreted and identified information, showed relationships, and identified word meaning. The writing portion of the test served to determine how well the student could use Standard English to formulate sentences, hold a continuous thought while writing, and use details that would hold an audience. The students were given a Communication Arts score derived from these two areas. The score then categorized the student into four different achievement levels: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. The student data used in this study was taken from the MAP test given in Spring 2007 and Spring 2008. By conducting a z-test for difference between means, the results of the tests were used to determine whether the students who opted to participate in ABC School District’s Summer Reading program showed a significant difference in reading achievement level than those who did not participate.

Data Analysis Procedure

A written letter of consent (see Appendix A) was obtained from the ABC School District’s Superintendent granting permission for the study to be conducted. The research involved collecting teacher perceptions of the current summer reading program via a survey. In addition, data derived from student scores on the GMRT and the communications arts section of the MAP test were collected to determine if there

was a definitive change in achievement levels among the students who had participated in the program.

Survey participants received a mailed letter explaining the purpose, the voluntary nature of participation in the survey, and assurance that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. The questionnaire items included some subject characteristic questions (grade level, years of experience) as well as questions aimed toward gathering their perception of the purpose and effectiveness of the Summer Reading program. Once teacher perceptions were retrieved, the responses were electronically tabulated by SurveyMonkey.com to give an overall view of teacher observation and perception of the program. The results of the students' test scores, the questionnaire, along with research on best practices was used to create a list of recommendations that was shared with the district's Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum.

Summary

Chapter Three described the methodology for the action research conducted in the ABC School District. An overview of this type of research was described along with the research design. The format of the survey questionnaire was included. A complete description of the subjects was contained within the chapter and procedures for conducting the study were outlined.

Chapter Four describes the results from the survey and answers the research questions the study was based upon. The data derived from student GMRT and MAP scores are also presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program in raising reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills for Title I students who attended the program. The effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program was based on teacher observations and perceptions of the program. In addition, effectiveness of the program was determined by the increase of student test scores in the areas of Reading. Reading scores were derived from the GMRT and the MAP administered in 2006-2007 and the GMRT and MAP tests administered in 2007-2008 using the same participants. A survey, created through SurveyMonkey.com, was conducted to gather teachers' observations and perceptions of how the district's Summer Reading Program was implemented. The study encompassed four Title I schools in the ABC School District. All certified teachers who taught in the four Title I schools were asked to complete the survey. The survey determined lesson planning techniques and use of differentiation of teaching styles and assessments used in the Summer Reading Program. This action research study aimed at addressing four research questions:

1. What are the best educational practices for teaching reading in an elementary Summer Reading Program?
2. How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?

3. What instructional techniques did the Summer Reading Program teachers of the ABC School District use to facilitate student learning?
4. Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective in raising students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary levels?

Hypotheses

1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.
2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.
3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.
4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.
5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
7. Teachers in the ABC School District will evidence positive perceptions of the effects of the ABC Summer School Reading Program as measured by an administered survey.

Null Hypotheses

1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.
2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.
3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.
4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.

5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.
7. Teachers in the ABC School District will not evidence positive perceptions of the effects of the ABC Summer School Reading Program as measured by an administered survey.

In addition to survey analysis, five z- tests for difference between means were conducted to determine if there was a significant statistical difference in test scores of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program and those who opted not to attend. The data compared the test scores generated from the GMRT and the MAP taken in the 2006-2007 school year and the 2007-2008 school year, using the same participants. The final z-tests for the difference between means compiled the scores from both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years to determine as a whole a statistical difference from those who attended Summer Reading versus those who did not.

Description of the Sample: Summer Reading Program Questionnaire

The primary instrument designed for this study was the Summer Reading Questionnaire created through SurveyMonkey.com. The questionnaire was sent to

210 certified staff members employed in the four Title I schools in the ABC School District. A total of 59 certified staff members or 28.1% submitted responses to the survey questions (see Appendix B).

The questionnaire was comprised of 13 questions regarding teacher demographics, lesson planning processes, assessments and perceptions regarding expectations and effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program (see Appendix C). The first three questions consisted of demographic questions that could only be answered with a single response. The demographic data obtained from the respondents are represented in Figures 17-19.

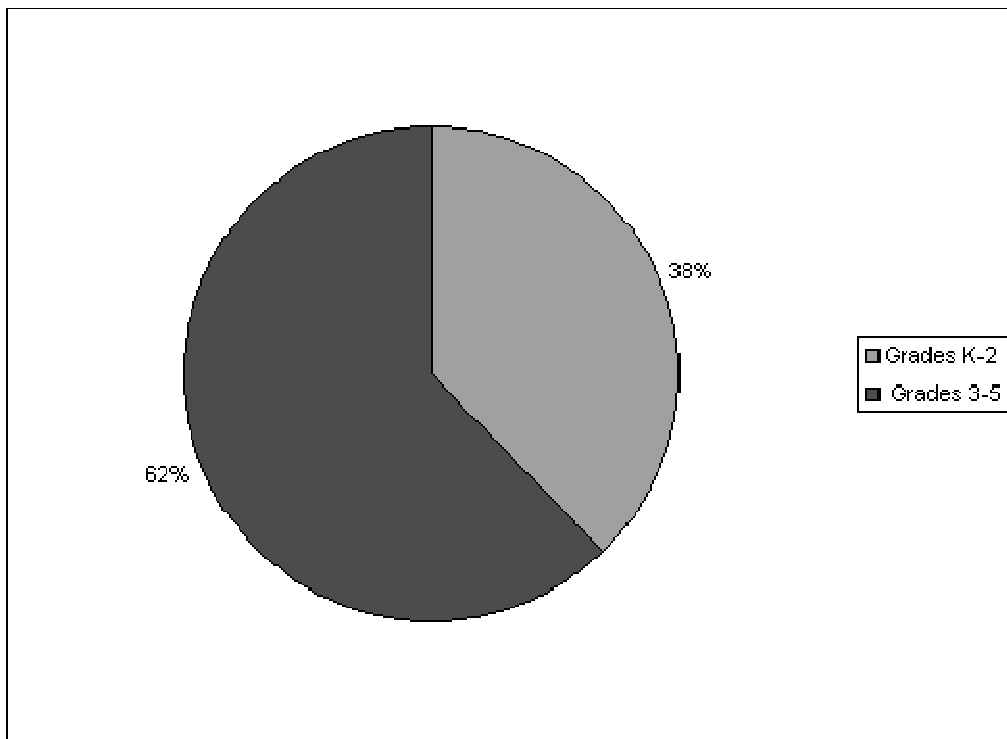


Figure 17. Grades levels taught. N = 59

Question one identified the respondents by the grade levels taught during the regular school year. For the purposes of anonymity the teachers were asked to

indicate where in the range of grade levels they taught. Most of the teachers who responded to the survey taught in grades three through five (62%). The remaining respondents (38%) taught grades kindergarten through second grade. The grade level taught in the regular school year is not indicative of the grade level(s) taught in the Summer Reading Program.

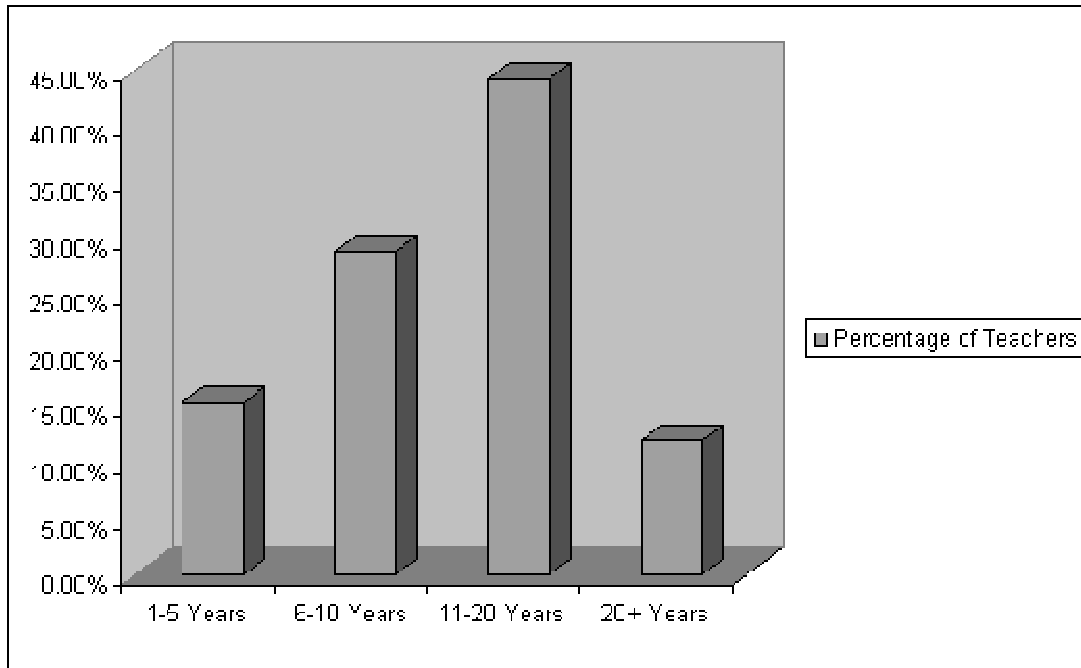


Figure 18. Years of Teaching Experience

Figure 18 displays the number of years the teachers who responded to the survey taught. Four categories were provided. The lowest response (11.9%) came from teachers who have 20 or more years while the highest number (44.1%) of respondents have taught 11-20 years. The remaining two categories, 1-5 years and 6-10 years, consisted of 15.3% of teachers and 28.8% of teachers respectively.

The survey was sent to all certified teachers who taught in the four elementary schools that comprised this study. Question 3 on the survey was designed to

determine how many teachers have taught the Summer Reading Program (see Figure 19).

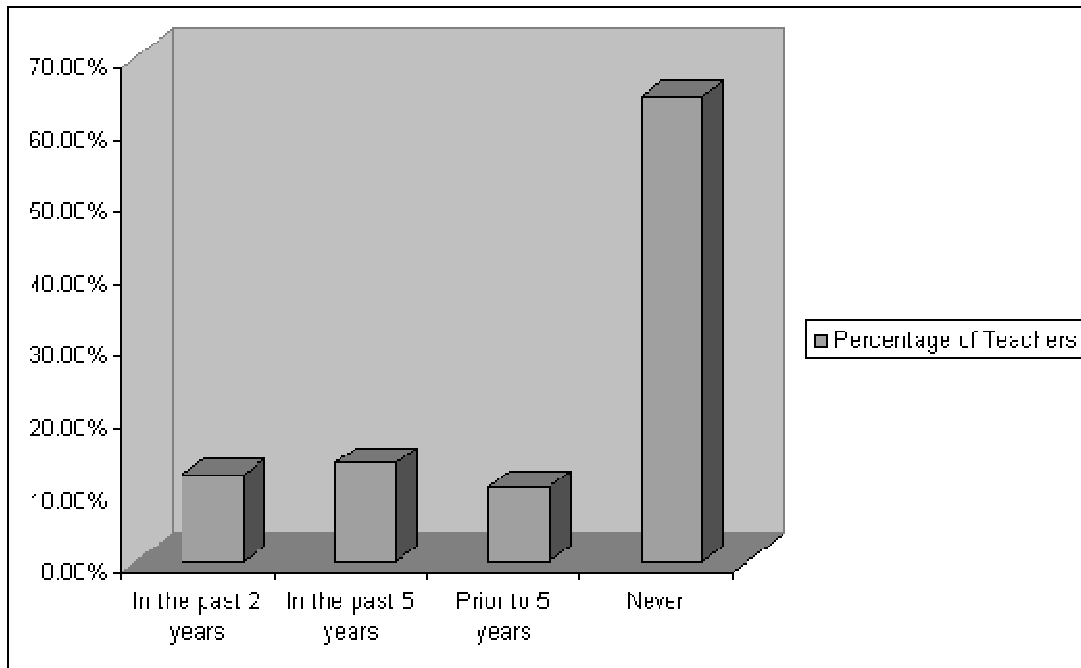


Figure 19. Do you or have you taught Summer Reading?

Throughout the four elementary schools, the majority of the teachers have never taught the Summer Reading Program (64.4%). Thirteen percent of the teachers have taught the program within the last five years, 11.9% within the last two years. The remaining 10.2% of the respondents taught Summer Reading prior to five years ago. The last 10 items on the Summer Reading Questionnaire were designed to elicit answers to the questions that provided a basis for this research project.

Research Question: What are the best educational practices for teaching reading in an elementary Summer Reading Program?

The current Summer Reading Program consists of 12 days with 42 hours of instructional time. Lessons are developed by the teachers who are hired in the spring

of each school year, by the ABC School District, to teach the Summer Reading Program in the upcoming summer. The daily lessons are derived from individual student objective sheets (see Appendix D) that are completed by the student's classroom teacher. On the objective sheet, the classroom teachers write five areas of the reading curriculum the student has not mastered. Prior to the start of the program, the student objective sheet is the only resource the Summer Reading teacher has for assessing the student's academic needs. Item 4 (When preparing for Summer Reading how do you develop lesson plans?) was designed to determine how the Summer Reading Teacher uses the student objective sheet to develop lesson plans and whether or not they find the objective sheet beneficial to the lesson planning process (see Figure 20).

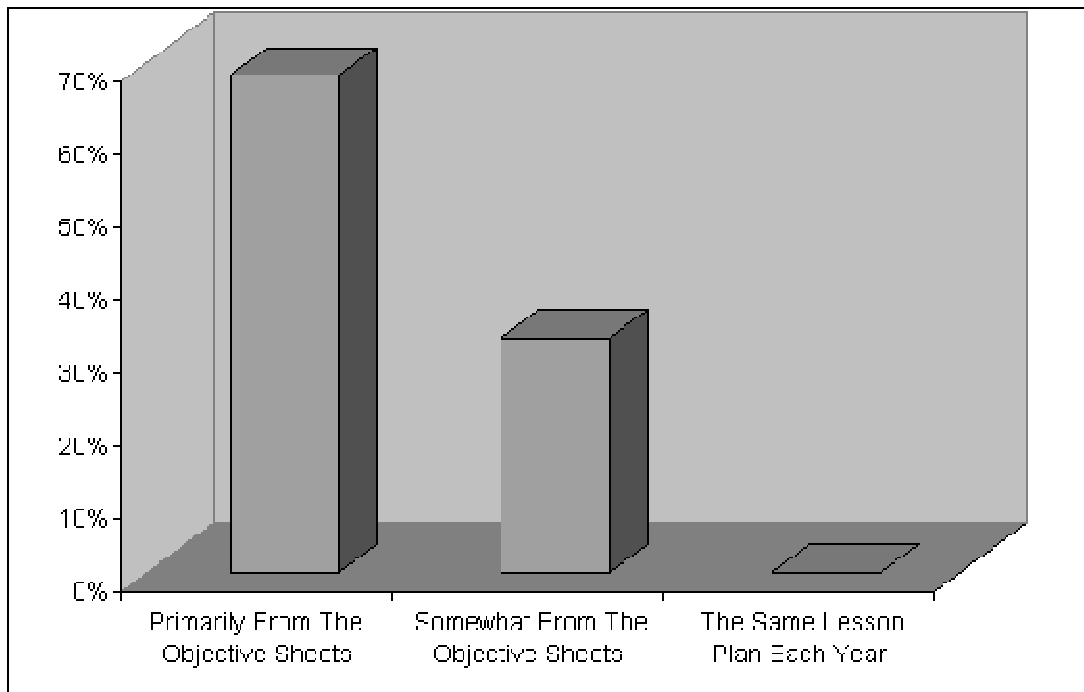


Figure 20. How Teachers Develop Lesson Plans

Item 4 identifies the percentage of teachers who use the student objective sheet to differentiate their lessons to meet the needs of the students for that year. Sixty eight percent of the teachers utilize the individual student objective sheets to formulate their teaching objectives. Another 32% reported that they somewhat use the goal sheets that are filled out about each student. None of the respondents use the same lesson plan each year.

The subject of reading is composed of many different skills that must be mastered in order for a student to be considered a competent reader. Since the Summer Reading classes are made up of students with a variety of weak areas in Reading, Item 6 (Which area of reading do you focus most of your Summer Reading lessons on?) was designed to determine which reading skills the teacher focuses their Summer Reading lessons on (see Figure 21).

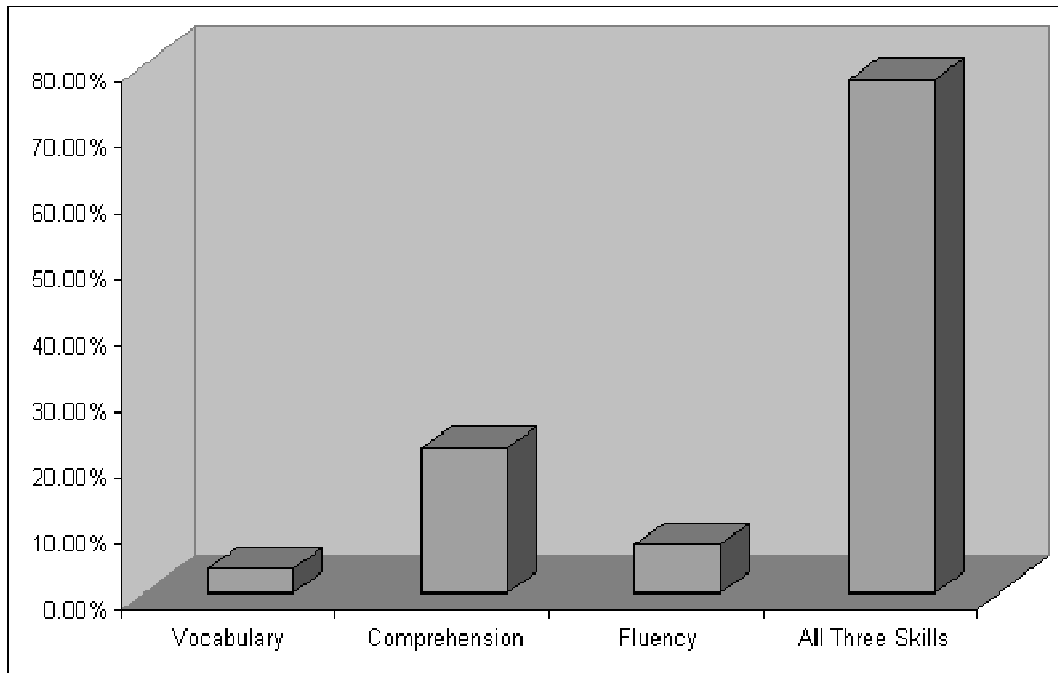


Figure 21. The skill areas of reading focused on throughout the Summer Reading Program.

In order to benefit the student's overall reading ability, focusing on all three skills (vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency) would be ideal. Seventy-eight percent of the surveyed teachers did state they focus on all three skill areas when they are teaching the Summer Reading Program. Less than four percent said they focus their lessons only on vocabulary, while 22.2% focus their lessons solely on comprehension. Finally, 7.4% of the respondents said they focus their Summer Reading lessons only on fluency. In Item 6 the teachers were asked to describe the instructional strategies to best meet the students' needs in each of the areas. One teacher commented,

When I taught summer reading the students were mainly having difficulty with decoding strategies. This affected all of the areas above. We would usually start with whole group poetry where we would work on fluency. We would then have a read-aloud where we would work on comprehension. The remainder of the time was spent in literacy stations and small group instruction to target the necessary skills.

Research Question: How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?

Item 5 of the questionnaire inquires about the usefulness of the student objective sheet. There are five lines for the classroom teacher to write goals specific to that student. This question was designed to determine if goals that are provided give adequate enough information for the Summer Reading teacher to develop meaningful, student centered lessons. Seventy-four percent of the respondents stated

that “yes” the information was adequate enough information. Twenty-six percent of the respondents claimed the objective sheets were not beneficial to the Summer Reading teacher. Of the 74% that stated the information was helpful, many further explained that the student objective sheet was primarily used to have an idea where to start the three week program. Teachers commented, “You get a sense what the kids needs to work on” and “It gives me an ideas of where to focus my efforts.” Some of the other comments that supported the objective sheets focused more on the reading level of the student, “I can customize a lesson plan to meet the needs of each child” and “the objective sheets give me a sense of the specific reading level the student is at.” The respondents that made up the 26% of the surveyed population stating the student objective sheets were not useful said, “The information is too broad,” and “It just repeats the district objectives word for word.” Another critic of the student objective sheet said, “The mix of kids and abilities is too difficult to get a good solid program in place since we must meet those objectives.” Finally, one teacher had this to say about the use of the objective sheets to prepare for the upcoming Summer Reading Program,

The planning sheet asks for objectives. The objectives are sometimes too broad to really cover specifically what a student needs to help him/her. For example, an objective might be to decode words. There are a lot of ways to decode words. Is the student having trouble with cvc (consonant-vowel-consonant) or more difficult patterns? Is the student strong in letter sound relationship, but has difficulty checking for meaning? I think the more specific the teachers can be, the better it is to pinpoint. It would also allow for teachers

to set up groups to work on skills lacking while others work on stations that strengthen the areas in which they are struggling.

In the past few years, the ABC School District has combined grade levels within one Summer Reading classroom. There can be two or three different grade levels in one classroom. Question 8 was designed to determine teacher perception on the impact this practice has on the Summer Reading classroom.

The response to item 8 was split almost evenly among the respondents. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents said having multiple grade levels in the classroom supported a more positive learning experience. These respondents claimed, “Younger students can be motivated to work at a higher level to impress the older children, and older children often work harder to lead the younger kids.” Another respondent said, “Some kiddos that have a lower self esteem based on their skills are given a chance to shine (as long as there are consecutive grades grouped together)” and “students can learn from and with each other- the grades levels are close in age. It is not like you have 1st (graders) grouped with 5th (graders).” Finally, “It doesn't really matter; you can just group according to reading level.” The other 42% of the respondents claimed that the idea of putting multiple grade levels in one classroom negatively affected the classroom learning environment. The respondents against the idea stated, “It's hard with the different levels of students to meet everyone's needs” and “When students range in both age and ability, it is very difficult to meet their needs. The use of centers helped.” Another respondent who felt that having multiple grade levels hindered the learning process said, “It's usually too much of a span... 3rd, 4th and 5th graders who all have reading disability makes it really tough!!!”

The definition or purpose of the Summer Reading Program as defined by the ABC School District's policy manual is, "The district shall establish a summer school program for reading instruction with a minimum of 40 hours of reading instruction and practice for all students with a reading improvement plan." Question 11 of the survey (Do you believe that the district provides clear expectations for the purpose and outcome of the Summer Reading Program?) was designed to gather teacher beliefs about why the Summer Reading Program is in place. The explanation area of this question was designed to determine if the teachers know the educational objective of the Summer Reading Program.

Fifty-two percent of the respondents believed the district provided clear expectations for the purpose and outcome of the Summer Reading Program. The comments regarding this percentage of the surveyed population were, "It is open-ended, I like that because I am not held to a program and can teach to student needs." Further comments by respondents included, "We are expected to touch on the goals as written by the classroom teacher," and "The skills highlighted allow us to work on an individual basis." Forty-seven percent of the respondents did not agree with this group. They felt that the expectations and purpose of the Summer Reading Program are not clear. The teachers that responded this way said, "The program is extremely vague and little resources are provided. I purchase what I can and pull from resources I already have, but my resources are limited." Further comments suggested, "I feel like we are kind of left in the dark, there are no set materials, lesson plans or instructional objectives – just do what you want" and "The teachers still do not have anyone to be accountable to."

Research Question: What instructional techniques did the Summer Reading Program teachers of the ABC School District use to facilitate student learning?

Question 7 (Since you may have students from different grade levels in your Summer Reading class, what strategies do you use to differentiate learning?) was designed to gather information on how the teachers handle meeting reading needs of students from various grades levels (see Figure 22).

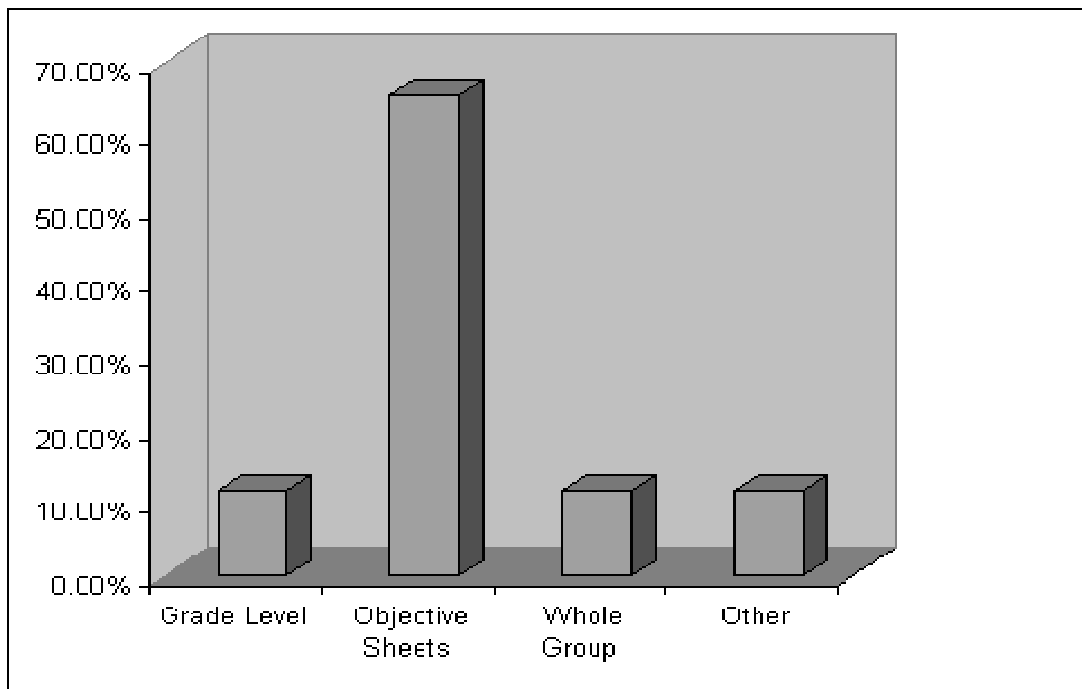


Figure 22. The method of delivering instruction primarily used in the Summer Reading Program.

Note. Type of grouping applied

Twelve percent of the teachers that answered this question stated that they group the Summer Reading students by grade level in order to deliver instruction.

Sixty-five percent said they group students according to the skills needed to be reviewed per the objective sheets provided by the classroom teachers. Whole group instruction was primarily used by 12% of teachers in the Summer Reading classroom. Twelve percent of the respondents marked “other” as the method for implementing Summer Reading instruction. The teachers who marked this box were asked to elaborate on their methods of delivering instruction. One teacher stated, “The objective sheet is not always specific enough, but I group children based on their common weaknesses regardless of grade level.” In the group that described “other” as their method of delivering instruction, 70% of them said that small groups or center activities worked best in the Summer Reading setting. The remaining 30% grouped their students based on individual need and created differentiated lessons based on the areas of weakness within each group.

Item 10 (If you use A+ Tutors, what role do they play in your Summer School Classroom?) was designed to determine if teachers view the use of A+ Tutors in their Summer Reading classroom as an asset to the learning environment (see Figure 23).

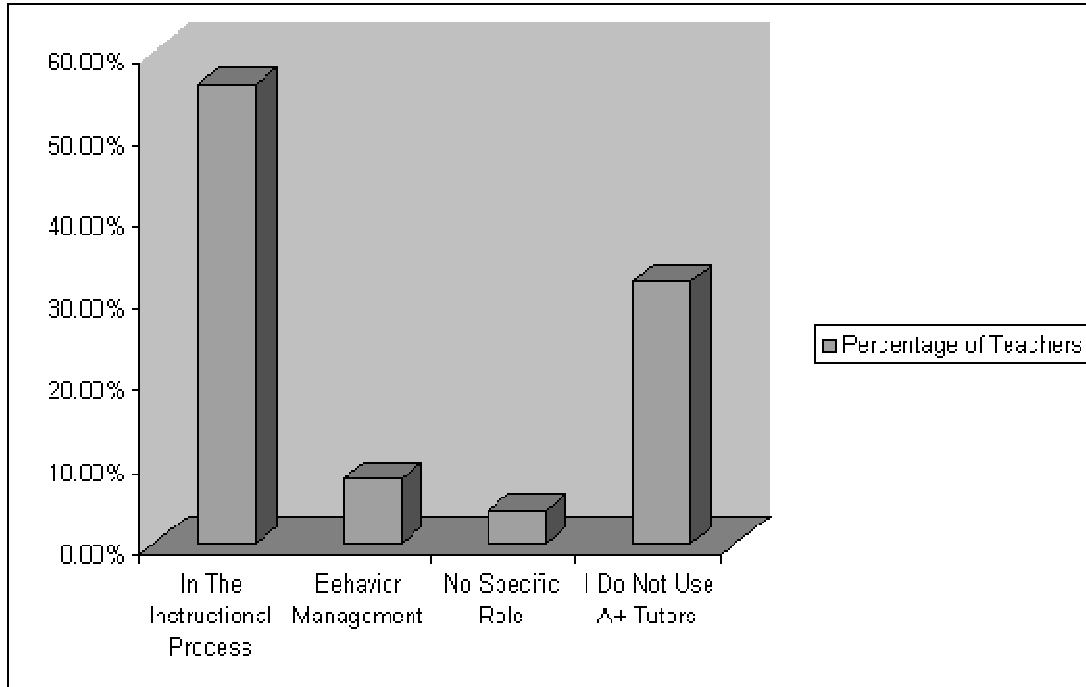


Figure 23. What role do A+ Tutors have in your Summer Reading Classroom?

The results from the survey indicated 56% of Summer Reading teachers use the A+ Tutors as a part of the instructional process. Their role is to help the students learn. The results also concluded that 32% of the teachers do not use the A+ Tutors in the Summer Reading classrooms. Eight percent of the teachers stated that the A+ Tutors are used to help manage student behavior while 4% indicated the A+ Tutors do not have a specific role in their classroom.

Research Question: Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective in raising students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary levels?

Item 12 (Do you believe student academic needs are addressed through the Summer Reading Program?) of the survey was designed to determine teacher

perception of the effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program in meeting student academic needs. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers surveyed felt that the academic needs of the students were met through the Summer Reading Program. Further explanation of this result was, “Most of our Title I students are at – risk reading students and would not choose reading as an activity of choice. Summer reading gives them a social way to read and practice skills over the break.” Two other responded by saying. “At least they are getting a little bit of reading help instead of going an entire summer without reading anything” and “If a teacher uses skill-based instruction [it is effective].” Only 22.2% of the respondents felt the academic needs of the students were not being met and the program was not academically beneficial to those in attendance. The comments by the respondents mainly addressed the lack of time and number of students in each class. They said, “Three hours a day, four days a week, for three weeks is not adequate to help these students,” and “It isn't long enough for there to be enough improvement.” In regard to the number of students per classroom the respondents stated, “There are too many students in a classroom to meet the needs of the students,” and “There are too many students to address specific needs!” Finally, another teacher summed up her thoughts on the benefits of the Summer Reading program in meeting student needs by saying,

I believe the purpose was to review skills so that the students would not lose as much over the summer months. Our Summer Reading is so close to the end of the school year, that the students still have plenty of time to lose some of their skills. Working those three weeks is better than nothing, but if they don't read through July and August, I don't know if much was accomplished.

Question 9 (Are there any assessments that you use throughout Summer Reading to determine student progress?) was written to determine if the teachers use any methods of assessment to determine the progress of the students while attending the Summer Reading program (see Figure 24).

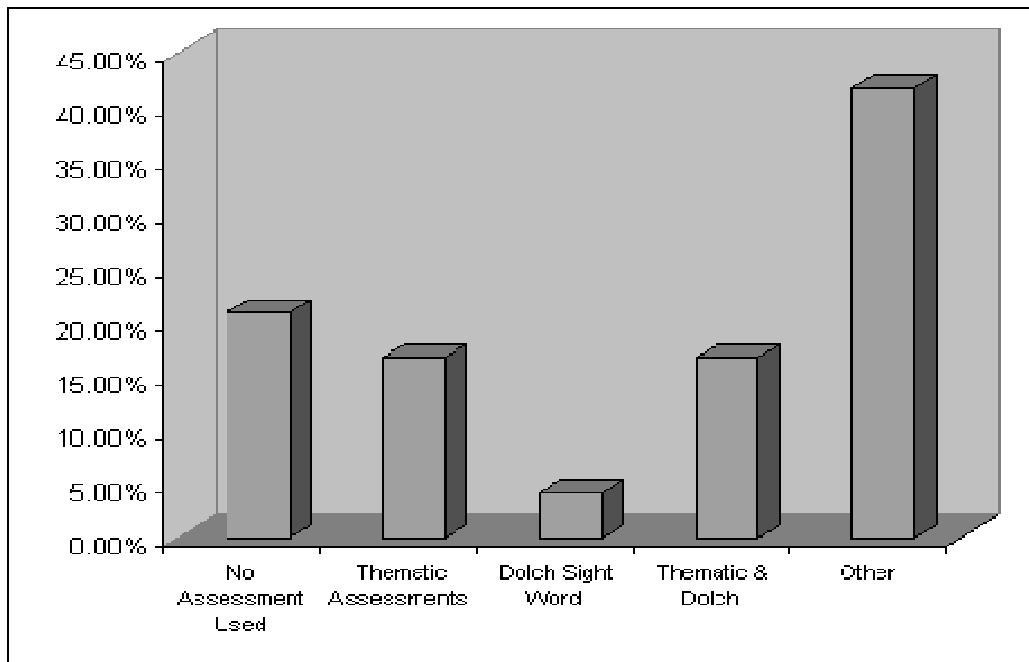


Figure 24. Assessments used throughout the Summer Reading Program.

Twenty-one percent said they do not use any assessment methods while teaching the Summer Reading Program. Thematic assessments provided by the reading series publishing company are used by 17% of respondents. Another 4% claimed to only use Dolch Sight Word assessment. A combination of thematic assessments and Dolch Sight Word tests to evaluate the students is used by 17% of the surveyed teachers. Finally, 41.7% claimed to use a form of assessment that was not listed. With further explanation by the teachers who marked “other” as a form of

assessment, it was determined the “other” category included, Scholastic Reading Inventory, Reading Counts, self-made assessments, and observations.

Question 13 (In your own words, list two changes that you believe would enhance the ABC School District’s Summer Reading Program) of the survey was an opportunity for the teachers to provide insight on how they feel the program could be enhanced to better educate the students. The results from Question 13 proved to be many of the same suggestions by the teachers surveyed. Figure 25 depicts a summary of the suggestions given by the teachers surveyed.

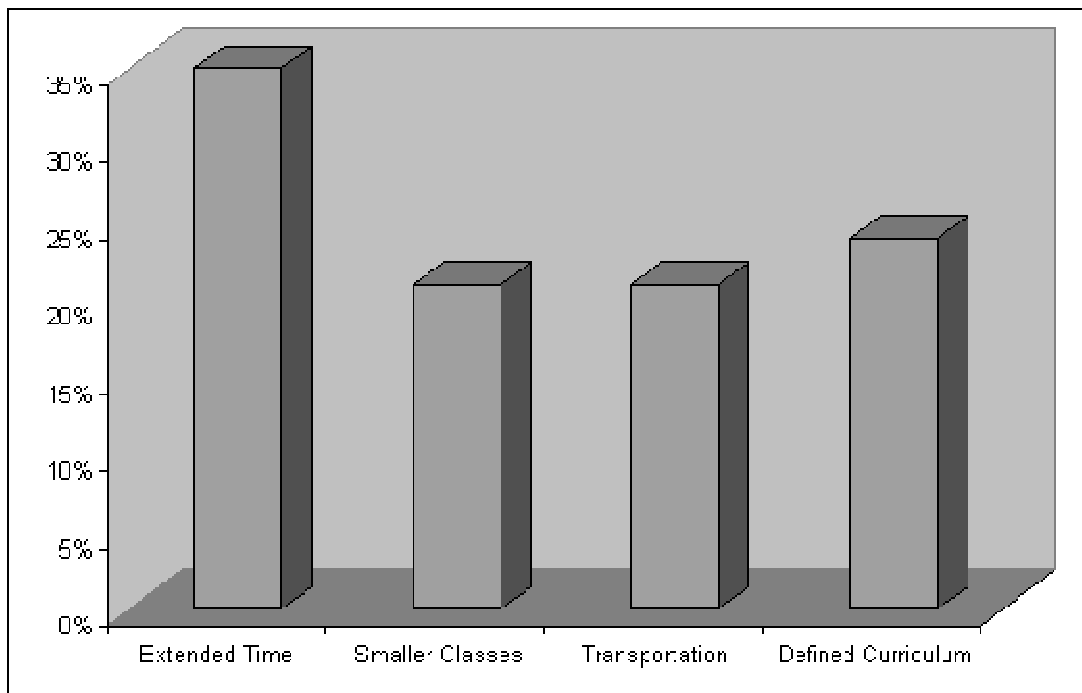


Figure 25. Teacher suggested improvements to the Summer Reading Program.

Thirty-five percent of the teachers surveyed commented that the Summer Reading Program would be much more effective if it extended beyond the current three week time frame. Twenty-one percent of the respondents said that smaller class

sizes would be more beneficial for the students and the teachers who participate in the program. Transportation was also suggested. Currently, there is no form of transportation to and from the school where they attend Summer Reading. Twenty one percent of the teachers said this would make a difference in the success of the program. Finally, 24% of the surveyed teachers said there needs to be a defined summer curriculum with clear objectives. The rest of the respondents also suggested the following improvements to the current program:

1. Develop a program around other curricular areas,
2. Provide incentives for attendance,
3. Provide teachers with a budget for supplies,
4. More formative assessment, and
5. More accountability for the teachers teaching the program.

Statistical Analysis of Test Scores

Table 4

Group Descriptive Statistics for GMRT test given 2006-2007

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Students who attended	64	.2580	.11382
Students who did not attend	66	.3152	.17031

Note. GMRT = Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test

Table 4 summarizes the population descriptive statistics for the 2006-2007 Title I students analyzed in this study. The students who attended Summer Reading

represented an average of .2580 on the GMRT test while those students who opted out of the Summer Reading Program averaged a score of .3152.

Table 5

Group Descriptive Statistics for MAP test given 2006-2007

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Students who attended	29	608.83	32.862
Students who did not attend	41	600.24	22.767

Note. MAP = Missouri Assessment Program

Table 5 summarizes the population descriptive statistics for the 2006-2007 Title I students analyzed in this study. The students who attended the Summer Reading Program averaged 608.83 on the MAP test while the students who opted not to attend the program averaged 600.24.

Null Hypothesis #1. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007.

Table 6

Z-test About the Mean for GMRT test given 2006-2007

<i>z</i>	<i>z(critical)</i>	<i>p. (1-tailed)</i>
-2.244	1.65	.9881

Note. $p < .05$

Table 6 summarizes the results from the z-test about the mean for the GMRT that was given in 2006-2007 to the Title I students. In the data, there is significance at the 0.05 level which means there is less than a 5% chance of the data being incorrect. The test was used to compare the scores of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program with those of the students who opted not to attend the program. With a significance of .9881 ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected and there was a decrease in scores indicated by those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program. The test showed that the students who did not attend the Summer Reading program actually scored higher on the GMRT than those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program.

Null Hypothesis #2. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007.

Table 7

Z-test About the Mean for MAP test given 2006-2007

<i>z</i>	<i>z(critical)</i>	<i>p(1-tailed)</i>
1.292	1.65	.1112

Note. $p < .05$. Test is only representative of the Communication Arts section of the MAP test.

Table 7 summarizes the results from the *z* test about the mean for the Communication Arts section of the MAP test given in 2006-2007. The test compared the MAP scores of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program the previous summer with those who chose not to attend. With a significance of .1112 ($p < .05$) the test concluded that the null hypothesis was not rejected and though the students attending the Summer Reading Program did have higher scores than those who did not attend, the difference in scores was not statistically significant.

Table 8

Group Descriptive Statistics for GMRT given 2007-2008

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Students who attended	58	.3541	.17429
Students who did not attend	73	.3658	.18021

Note. GMRT = Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test

Table 8 summarizes the population descriptive statistics for the 2007-2008 Title I students analyzed in this study. The students who attended Summer Reading represented an average of .3541 on the GMRT while those students who opted out of the Summer Reading Program averaged a score of .3658.

Table 9

Group Descriptive Statistics for MAP test given 2007-2008

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Students who attended	38	621.34	32.421
Students who did not attend	49	627.18	26.355

Note. MAP = Missouri Assessment Program

Table 9 summarizes the population descriptive statistics for the 2007-2008 Title I students analyzed in this study. The students who attended the Summer Reading Program averaged 621.34 on the MAP test while the students who opted not to attend the program averaged 627.18.

Null Hypothesis #3. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the GMRT in 2007-2008.

Table 10

Z-test About the Mean for GMRT given 2007-2008

<i>z</i>	<i>z(critical)</i>	<i>P(1-tailed)</i>
-.372	1.65	.6443

Note: p < .05

Table 10 summarizes the results from the z-test determining the mean for the GMRT that was given in 2007-2008 to the Title I students. The test was used to compare the scores of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program the previous summer with the students who opted out of the program. With a significance of .6443 ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected and there was a decrease in scores by those students who did not attend the Summer Reading Program. The test showed that the students who did not attend the Summer Reading Program actually scored higher on the GMRT than those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program.

Null Hypothesis #4. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' performance on the MAP test in 2007-2008.

Table 11

Z test for Difference Between Means for MAP Test given 2007-2008

<i>z</i>	<i>z(critical)</i>	<i>p (1-tailed)</i>
-.927	1.65	.8159

Note. $p < .05$. Test is only representative of the Communication Arts section of the MAP test.

Table 11 summarizes the results from the z-test for difference between means for the Communication Arts section of the MAP test given in 2007-2008. The test compared the MAP scores of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program the previous summer with those who chose not to attend. With a significance of .8159 ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected and there was a decrease in scores indicated by those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program. The test showed that the students who did not attend the Summer Reading Program actually scored higher on the MAP than those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program.

Table 12

Group Descriptive Statistics for GMRT given 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Students who attended	122	.3037	.15291
Students who did not attend	136	.3417	.17677

Note. GMRT = Gates MacGinitie Reading Test

Table 12 summarizes the population descriptive statistics for both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. N represents the number of students who attended or did not attend from both school years. The students who attended represented an average of .3037 on the GMRT while the students who opted not to attend Summer Reading represented an average of .3417.

Null Hypothesis # 5. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants combined performance on the GMRT in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

Table 13

Z-test for Difference Between Means for GMRT given 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

<i>z</i>	<i>z(critical)</i>	<i>p(1-tailed)</i>
-1.846	1.65	.9678

Note. $p < .05$

Table 13 summarized the results from the z-test for difference between means for the GMRT given to Title I students from both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. The test compared the scores of the students who attended the Summer Reading Program for both school years to the students who opted not to attend the program. With a significance of .9678 ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected and there was a decrease in scores indicated by those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program. The test showed that the students who did not attend the Summer Reading Program actually scored higher on the GMRT than those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program.

Table 14

Group Descriptive Statistics for MAP test given 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Students who attended	67	615.93	32.961
Students who did not attend	90	614.91	28.100

Note. MAP = Missouri Assessment Program

Table 14 summarizes the population descriptive statistics for both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. N represents the number of students who attended or did not attend from both school years. The students who attended represented an average of 615.93 on the MAP while the students who opted not to attend Summer Reading represented an average of 614.91.

Null Hypothesis #6. Students who attended the ABC Summer Reading Program will not evidence an increase in reading scores as measured by comparing the difference between participants' combined performance on the MAP test in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

Table 15

Z-test for Difference Between Means for MAP Test given 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

<i>z</i>	<i>z(critical)</i>	<i>p(1-tailed)</i>
.208	1.65	.5793

Note. $p < .05$. Test is only representative of the Communication Arts section of the MAP test.

Table 15 summarizes the results from the z-test for difference between means for the Communication Arts section of the MAP test given in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The test compared the MAP scores of the Title I students who attended the Summer Reading Program in both school years to the students who opted not to attend the program. With a significance of .5793 ($p > .05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected and though there was an increase in scores indicated by those students who did attend the Summer Reading Program, the increase was not statistically significant.

Summary

Chapter Four was a disaggregation of teacher perspective data from the survey instrument used in this action research study. The chapter was divided by the research questions. Each research question was answered from the data collected by means of the survey. Charts and graphs were used to highlight trends and correlations among the perspectives of the teachers. The chapter concluded with a statistical analysis of two tests commonly used to assess student achievement progression.

In Chapter Five, the results of the study will be reviewed and conclusions will be presented as well as recommendations that can be made to the ABC Board of Education to further enhance the productivity of the Summer Reading Program.

Chapter Five

Summary and Conclusions

The description for the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program is a summer school program for reading instruction with a minimum of 40 hours of instruction and practice for all students with a Reading Improvement Plan. To achieve this all students in the ABC School District, who qualify for participation in the Title I Reading Program, are recommended to attend the Summer Reading Program for three weeks in June. Providing an opportunity for additional reading instruction fulfills the requirements of providing additional reading instruction to students reading below grade level as stated in Missouri Senate Bill 319 (MODESE, 2008).

To meet the increasing demands to improve student achievement by extending learning opportunities, investigating the effectiveness of the current Summer Reading Program was essential to meeting the educational reading needs of those students in the ABC School District who are not reading at their current grade level. This action research study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program in raising student reading achievement. The effectiveness of the program was based on teacher perceptions of the program. In addition, a literature review was conducted on effective summer school program structures and best practices for teaching reading. Specifically, the research questions were as follows:

1. What are the best educational practices for teaching reading in an elementary Summer Reading Program?

2. How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?
3. What instructional techniques did the Summer Reading Program teachers of the ABC School District use to facilitate student learning?
4. Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective in raising students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary levels?

In order to determine the effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program, two research instruments were used: (a) SurveyMonkey.com questionnaire, and (b) an analysis of the test results from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) and Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests given to each Title I student during the school years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a resource to anonymously gather teachers' true attitudes toward the program. When reviewing the results from the questionnaire the researcher noted that if survey respondents answered question three with 'I have never taught Summer Reading' 23 of them chose not to continue with the survey (Question 3 dealt with their perceptions of the program's effectiveness). The question should have clearly indicated that responses were needed from all teachers whether or not they had taught in the Summer Reading Program,

since their perceptions of the program were equally important. The results should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

The analysis of the GMRT and MAP tests provided a comparison of achievement differences among Title I students who attended the program and those who opted not to attend. It was noted, however that the data for the 2006-2007 GMRT may have been skewed. The results of the analysis showed a significant difference in the two groups. The students who did not attend the Summer Reading Program scored significantly higher than the students who did attend. This irregularity may have been attributed to the unequal number of scores used within the two groups. This along with the fact that the groups were not matched demographically must be considered when interpreting the results of the test comparison.

Summary of Findings from Analysis of GMRT and MAP Results

Five z-tests for the difference between means were conducted to determine if there was a significant statistical difference in test scores between the students who attended the Summer Reading Program and those who opted not to attend. The data compared the test scores generated from the GMRT and the MAP taken in the 2006-2007 school year and the 2007-2008 school year, using the same participants. The final z-tests compiled the scores from both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years to determine as a whole a statistical difference from those who attended Summer Reading versus those who did not attend.

The analysis of 2006-2007 GMRT revealed that there was a statistical difference in the tests scores of the students who attended Summer Reading compared

to those that did not attend. The statistical difference however was in favor of the students who did not attend the Summer Reading Program as they scored higher than the students who did attend. This could be due to methods of gathering data since the groups did not consist of equal number of students or it could lend itself to extenuating factors of which the researcher was not made aware. For example, if parents read and work with their child on an individual basis for a summer, then that child is more apt to have improved reading skill by the start of the new school year. Another factor to consider is whether the student had outside tutoring in reading. If the parents enrolled the student in a tutoring program for the summer, instead of attending Summer Reading, then ideally the student would be a more fluent reader because he or she received individualized reading help. The analysis of the MAP test for the same year did not show a statistical difference between the students who attended Summer Reading compared to the students who did not attend.

The analysis' of the 2007-2008 GMRT and MAP revealed that there was not a statistical difference in either test. The same holds true for the analysis of the entire population. The analyses of the entire sample for both 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 GMRT and MAP did not show a statistical difference between the students who attended Summer Reading compared to the students who did not attend. Ideally, the students who attended the Summer Reading Program should have shown a statistical improvement over the students who did not attend the program. With the results indicating no statistical difference between the two groups, the effectiveness of the program at meeting the needs of the Title I reading students is not adequate enough to be considered as a benefit to meeting the educational needs of the students. If the

Summer Reading Program's curriculum focused on specific skills needed to be achieved at a specific grade level, the results of analysis may improve. As it stands, the students are not improving their reading skills enough to show a statistical improvement.

Answering the Research Questions

The results from the questionnaire by SurveyMonkey.com will be very beneficial to developing recommendations for revising the current Summer Reading Program into a more reading curriculum-centered and defined extended learning program. These recommendations will be submitted to the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction. The following is a summary of the findings to answer the research questions.

How do the teachers who taught in the ABC School District perceive the Summer Reading Program's effectiveness as an intervention to help students struggling in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary?

Item 11 of the questionnaire (Do you believe that the district provides clear expectations for the purposes and outcomes of the Summer Reading Program?) was designed to gather teacher insight about why the ABC School District provides the Summer Reading Program to the students. Based upon the responses from the questionnaire, 53% of the teachers seemed to feel that the district provided clear expectations while 47% felt that the district expectations for the program were "vague" and "unclear."

Item 4 (When preparing for Summer Reading, how do you develop lesson plans?) evaluated how the teachers determined which objectives should be taught

throughout the three week program. The results indicated that all the teachers who taught the Summer Reading program used the Summer Reading Performance Report in some way and found them useful (74% found the objective sheets useful while only 26% said they were not useful). The majority of teachers (68%) primarily used the objectives stated by the classroom teacher on the Summer Reading Performance Report to create their lessons while only some of the teachers (32%) somewhat used the objectives from the Summer Reading Performance Report.

To summarize, while the resource the teachers are given (The Student Performance Report) is found to be useful; many of the teachers are still unclear about the purpose behind the Summer Reading Program.

Which instructional strategies are used in the Summer Reading Program by the teachers to facilitate learning?

The classrooms in the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program consist of students with various reading capabilities and several grade levels. Based on these factors, it was important to determine how teachers deliver instruction to best meet all learner needs. Item 7 of the questionnaire (Since you may have students from different grade levels in your Summer Reading class, what strategies do you use to differentiate learning?) was asked of the teachers to investigate how they created a diverse learning environment. The majority of the teachers (65.4%) grouped students according to the objectives stated in the Summer Reading Performance Report. The remaining responses; grouping according to grade level, whole group instruction, and other; were each used by 11.5% of teachers within their Summer Reading classroom. To summarize, the majority of the surveyed teachers group the Summer Reading

students according to the objectives stated on the Summer Reading Performance Report.

To further investigate this research question, the teachers were given the opportunity to describe which reading skill they believed was most essential to integrate into Summer Reading lessons. Item 6 (Which area of Reading do you focus most of your Summer Reading lessons on?) gave four options for the teachers to choose from. The primary response (77.8%) was that all three skills of vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency were implemented in Summer Reading lessons. Comprehension (22.2%) was the next skill primarily focused on; fluency (7.4%) and vocabulary (3.7%) were the skills least used as a focal point for lessons. In summary, the vast majority of surveyed teachers implement vocabulary, comprehension and fluency skills in their Summer Reading lessons.

From the results of these two items, it was concluded that although the student performance report is very important to the Summer Reading teachers and how they diversify their classrooms, grouping of students should be according to skill and grade level. Sixty-five percent of the teachers stated they group their students according to the skills listed in the objective section of the Student Performance Report. It should be noted however, that a skill such as identifying story elements within the text has different implications for a third grader than it does for a second grader. A third grader would learn such a skill more in depth whereas a second grader may be just introduced to the skill. The teacher would need to be cautious that the lessons are meeting the needs of the students at their level. It was also concluded that

the teachers believed all three reading skills mentioned are essential to better understanding the reading process.

Were the Summer Reading instructional techniques used by the teachers in the ABC School District effective at raising students' vocabulary and comprehension levels?

There were three questions designed to determine the effectiveness of the Summer Reading program. Since the combining of various grade levels seemed to be a major concern of the teachers, item 8 asked if this practice had a positive or negative impact on the learning process in Summer Reading classrooms. Fifty-eight percent of the teachers believed that it positively impacted the classroom. The combining of the grade levels provided an opportunity for the older students to mentor the younger students. However, 42% of the teachers surveyed disagreed. They believed that combining grade levels negatively impacted the learning process and did not allow the teacher to provide extra individual support to the students at their particular grade level. In summary, slightly over half of the surveyed teachers agreed that combining grade levels is an effective Summer Reading instructional technique.

Item 9 was posed to the teachers to determine if they implemented any formal assessments to determine progress within their Summer Reading classroom (Are there any assessments that you use throughout Summer Reading to determine student progress?). The question allowed them to choose one of four responses: No Assessment Used (20.8%), Thematic Assessments provided by the adopted reading series (16.7%), Dolch Sight Word (4.2%), Both Thematic Assessment and Dolch Sight Word (16.7%), or Other (41.7%). Those that marked "Other" went further to

explain they use Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI, Reading Counts, teacher made assessments, and observations to assess their students. In summary, the majority of surveyed teachers use other forms of assessment such as SRI or Reading Counts to evaluate students reading levels.

Item 12 (Do you believe student academic needs are addressed through the Summer Reading Program?) determined teacher perception of the Summer Reading Program. An astounding 77.8% of the teachers answered “yes” to this question while 22.2% answered “no.” While 77.8% of the teachers said they believed the program is effective in meeting student’s academic needs, many went on to explain their feelings stemmed from the idea that “it was better for the kids (academically) to be reading a little than not reading at all.” Another teacher explained, “The kids attending Summer Reading are students at-risk of falling way behind, at least for three weeks they are still receiving some academic support in a structured environment.” To summarize, the vast majority of teachers surveyed feel that the Summer Reading Program is effective in meeting student’s academic needs.

From these results, the researcher can conclude that even though the majority of the teachers surveyed said the program was an effective tool in meeting student academic needs, their perceptions may have been formulated with the thought that a little extra support is better than no extra support. The close proximity of the results for item 8 (58% felt combining grade levels positively impacts students performance, 42% said it has a negative impact) supported the conclusion that the combining of grade levels, although an effective cost cutting measure, is not benefitting the students and the learning process. The last conclusion drawn from the responses is from Item 9

and the use of assessments. The results were widely distributed among all the forms of assessment. To show how students are doing as a district, the teachers should be encouraged to use the same assessment(s). This would provide accurate data on how well the Summer Reading Program is meeting the needs of the students. The results from the assessment(s) could be used to improve the program and its curricular components.

Summary of Recommendations from District Teachers

For the purpose of this study, it was important to gather teacher insight to what they thought needs to be changed within the program to better meet student needs. Even though item 13 (In your own words, list two changes that you believe would enhance the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program) was a free response, it resulted in many similar responses from teachers. The top four suggestions were as follows: extending the time beyond three weeks (34.5%), providing smaller class sizes (20.7%), providing transportation (20.7%), and using a defined curriculum (24%). The teachers, who teach the program, know the program best. Each of the recommendations is relevant to meeting the academic needs of the students and should be addressed by the school district.

Recommendations for the ABC School District

According to Chapter Two literature review, with the right summer school program structure in place, extending learning into the summer months can be very valuable to the struggling learner. Based upon the results from the survey sent to the teachers teaching in the four Title I schools and the analyses of the GMRT and MAP

the following recommendations should be made to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction to improve the current Summer Reading Program:

1. Provide professional development for all classroom teachers prior to the start of the Summer Reading Program, to foster the use of collaborative strategies between those teachers involved and those not involved in the Summer Reading Program.
2. Create a curriculum for the Summer Reading Program containing each goal to be achieved based on the grade level expectations from the State Department of Education.
3. Identify grant money that can be applied to provide transportation to the Summer Reading Program. This will enable the establishment of a mandatory attendance policy.
4. Develop a specific job profile to be met by those who wish to become Summer Reading Program teachers.
5. Extend the amount of time devoted to a Summer Reading Program based on the specific goals to be achieved.

Recommendations for Future Research

The data for this research was limited to the four Title I schools in the ABC School District. To further determine the effectiveness of the program, future research for this district could take into account the remaining elementary schools. Although they are not Title I schools, the Summer Reading Program is still an option for their students struggling in reading. Further research could include other districts and their

summer programs to determine the most effective means to extending learning to help low achieving students.

Summary

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the effectiveness of the ABC School District's Summer Reading Program in raising Title I students' reading comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills for students who attended the program. The results of this study were derived from two sources, a survey completed by the teachers who taught in the four Title I schools and from analyses of GMRT and MAP tests of the students who attended Summer Reading compared to the students that did not attend. The survey results concluded that there are several areas where the ABC School District could improve its Summer Reading Program. According to the analyses of the GMRT and MAP tests, there was not a statistical difference between the students who attended the Summer Reading Program compared to the students who did attend. It was concluded that if the current Summer Reading Program was indeed effective at improving students reading achievement, there would have been a statistical difference favoring the students who attended.

Extending learning into the summer months is a practice that school districts have used for many years. Some summer learning programs serve as enrichment and others are used to help students who did not meet grade level expectations during the regular school year. The findings from this action research study indicated that summer school must be a well thought out, organized program with a specific goal and objectives along the path to reaching that goal in order for it to be an effective strategy for improving student reading. While summer school is not going to benefit

every struggling reader, it is a strategy every school district should utilize in order to help students achieve higher reading levels.

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Appendix A

Written Letter of Consent

FORT ZUMWALT SCHOOL DISTRICT
DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
110 Virgil Street
O'Fallon, Missouri 63366

Honored for "Distinction in Performance" by the State Board of Education

Telephone: (636) 272-6620
Metro: (636) 240-2072
Fax: (636) 272-1059
Web Site: www.fzschoools.org

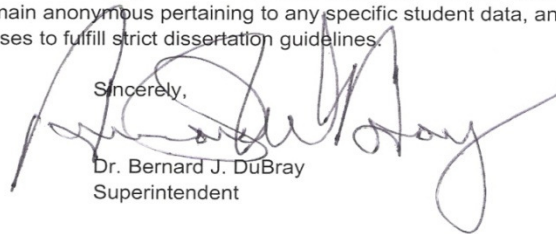
Dr. Bernard J. DuBray
Superintendent of Schools

November 26, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

Mrs. Stephanie Mountain has permission to use data from our district in an effort to complete accurate research for her dissertation project at Lindenwood University. It is my understanding that this information will remain anonymous pertaining to any specific student data, and will only be used for research purposes to fulfill strict dissertation guidelines.

Sincerely,



Dr. Bernard J. DuBray
Superintendent

BJD:wp

Board of Education

Mary Givens*
President

Carol Russell*
Vice President

Michael Cummins*
Member

Jane Landstra*
Member

Barbara Story*
Member

Scott Grasser*
Member

Mike Swaringim
Member

*C.B.M. - Certified Board Member

Appendix B

Summary of Results

Summer Reading Teacher Survey

1. I teach:

		Response Percent	Response Count
Primary (K-2)		33.9%	20
Intermediated (3-5)		66.1%	39
		<i>answered question</i>	59
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

2. Years of teaching experience?

		Response Percent	Response Count
1-5 years		15.3%	9
6-10 years		28.8%	17
11-20 years		44.1%	26
21 or more years		11.9%	7
		<i>answered question</i>	59
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

3. Do you or have you taught summer reading?

		Response Percent	Response Count
In the past two years		11.9%	7
In the past five years		13.6%	8
Prior to five years ago		10.2%	6
I have never taught summer reading		64.4%	38
		<i>answered question</i>	59
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

4. When preparing for Summer Reading how do you develop lesson plans?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Primarily from the objective sheets provided by the students' classroom teachers	68.0%	17
Somewhat from the objective sheets provided by the students' classroom teachers	32.0%	8
I use the same lesson plan each year	0.0%	0
	<i>answered question</i>	25
	<i>skipped question</i>	34

5. Is the information provided, by the classroom teacher, on the students' Summer Reading objective sheet useful in lesson planning?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	74.1%	20
No	25.9%	7
	Explain why or why not	17
	<i>answered question</i>	27
	<i>skipped question</i>	32

Summer Reading Program Effectiveness 142

6. Which areas of Reading do you focus most of your Summer Reading lesson on?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/>	3.7%	1
Comprehension <input type="checkbox"/>	22.2%	6
Fluency <input type="checkbox"/>	7.4%	2
All of the above <input type="checkbox"/>	77.8%	21
Describe your instructional strategies to best meet the students needs in these areas		12
	answered question	27
	skipped question	32

7. Since you may have students from different grade levels in your Summer Reading class, what strategies do you use to differentiate learning?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Students are grouped according to grade level <input type="checkbox"/>	11.5%	3
Students are grouped based on objective sheets provided by teachers <input type="checkbox"/>	65.4%	17
Whole group instruction is primarily used <input type="checkbox"/>	11.5%	3
Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	11.5%	3
	answered question	26
	skipped question	33

8. Does having multiple grade levels in one Summer Reading classroom positively or negatively impact the instruction and student achievement?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Positively	57.7%	15
Negatively	42.3%	11
Explain why or why not		18
answered question		26
skipped question		33

9. Are there any assessments that you use throughout Summer Reading to determine student progress?

	Response Percent	Response Count
A) I do not use any assessment methods	20.8%	5
B) I use the thematic assessments correlated to the reading series	16.7%	4
C) Dolch sight word assessment	4.2%	1
D) Both B and C	16.7%	4
Other (please specify)	41.7%	10
answered question		24
skipped question		35

10. If you use A+ Tutors, what role do they play in your Summer School classroom?

	Response Percent	Response Count
They are used in the instructional process	56.0%	14
Primarily for behavior management	8.0%	2
They do not have a specific role	4.0%	1
I do not use A+ Tutors	32.0%	8
	answered question	25
	skipped question	34

11. Do you believe that the district provides clear expectations for the purpose and outcomes of the Summer Reading program?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	52.9%	18
No	47.1%	16
	Explain why or why not	12
	answered question	34
	skipped question	25

12. Do you believe student academic needs are addressed through the Summer Reading program

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	77.8%	28
No	22.2%	8
	Explain why or why not	19
	answered question	36
	skipped question	23

13. In your own words, list two changes that you believe would enhance the Fort Zumwalt School District Summer Reading Program:

		Response Percent	Response Count
1.	[Redacted]	100.0%	29
2.	[Redacted]	79.3%	23
<i>answered question</i>			29
<i>skipped question</i>			30

Appendix C

Teacher Survey

Summer Reading Teacher Survey

1. Default Section

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of Ft. Zumwalt's Summer Reading program.

1. I teach:

Primary (K-2)

Intermediated (3-5)

2. Years of teaching experience?

1-5 years

6-10 years

11-20 years

21 or more years

3. Do you or have you taught summer reading?

In the past two years

In the past five years

Prior to five years ago

I have never taught summer reading

4. When preparing for Summer Reading how do you develop lesson plans?

Primarily from the objective sheets provided by the students' classroom teachers

Somewhat from the objective sheets provided by the students' classroom teachers

I use the same lesson plan each year

5. Is the information provided, by the classroom teacher, on the students' Summer Reading objective sheet useful in lesson planning?

Yes

No

Explain why or why not

Summer Reading Teacher Survey

6. Which areas of Reading do you focus most of your Summer Reading lesson on?

- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Fluency
- All of the above

Describe your instructional strategies to best meet the students needs in these areas

7. Since you may have students from different grade levels in your Summer Reading class, what strategies do you use to differentiate learning?

- Students are grouped according to grade level
- Students are grouped based on objective sheets provided by teachers
- Whole group instruction is primarily used
- Other (please specify)

8. Does having multiple grade levels in one Summer Reading classroom positively or negatively impact the instruction and student achievement?

- Positively
- Negatively

Explain why or why not

9. Are there any assessments that you use throughout Summer Reading to determine student progress?

- A) I do not use any assessment methods
- B) I use the thematic assessments correlated to the reading series
- C) Dolch sight word assessment
- D) Both B and C
- Other (please specify)

Summer Reading Teacher Survey

10. If you use A+ Tutors, what role do they play in your Summer School classroom?

- They are used in the instructional process
- Primarily for behavior management
- They do not have a specific role
- I do not use A+ Tutors

11. Do you believe that the district provides clear expectations for the purpose and outcomes of the Summer Reading program?

- Yes
- No

Explain why or why not

12. Do you believe student academic needs are addressed through the Summer Reading program

- Yes
- No

Explain why or why not

13. In your own words, list two changes that you believe would enhance the Fort Zumwalt School District Summer Reading Program:

1.
2.

Professional Vitae

Stephanie Mountain earned her Bachelor of Science in Education degree in May, 2001 from the University of Missouri - St. Louis. She continued her education at Lindenwood University where in 2004; she earned a Master's degree in Administration, and in 2005 she earned her Education Specialist degree.

Stephanie Mountain has been in elementary education since 2001. She has spent the past nine years teaching Fifth Grade at Pheasant Point Elementary in the Fort Zumwalt School District.