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THE INTERSECTION OF POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS
PERTAINING TO LITERACY IN HIGH SCHOOL
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We hereby approve the dissertation
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, George. You are the inspirational rising sun in each morning, the brilliance of day, shining hope and resilience; the stillness of night that quiets my unrest. When I speak of you, all realize I have no greater love.

- ❖ To my two children, Elizabeth and John who demanded I write a book about my other kids. Your love, support and levity staid me on this difficult path. You are always in my heart.
- ❖ To my family at Larchwood, “There are no greater teachers than these, they are the first to love you, to teach you and guide you.” From you I have learned that social justice is more than words on a page, more than eloquent speech. Rooted in love, social justice finds those left behind, marginalized, and neglected, elevating them to the obvious, asking our companionship along an arduous journey.
- ❖ To those children I call “my kids”, my students who are shining lights in my day. You dreams and desires though distant are not unlike my own. For you, I offer this as the first step in a difficult fight. I will stand beside you; fight for you and with you. I will never give up. You are my charges; I will be at your side.
- ❖ To my mother who planted the seeds of education early, enkindled them with love, and foster their development through many encouraging phone calls.

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I am very grateful to my dissertation committee which included Dr. Kristine Still, Dr. Anthony Menendez and Dr. Lee Wilberschied. I offer my sincere and deepest thanks for your tremendous investment of time, patience and direction. This dedication to my development as a student I find awe-inspiring especially since these duties were added to your already very full schedules.

THE INTERSECTION OF POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS
PERTAINING TO LITERACY IN HIGH SCHOOL

MARY F. HANDLEY

ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an intense focus on literacy acquisition at the elementary school level. There is indisputable evidence correlating early reading achievement and future academic success. This evidence has resulted in Federal and local dollars being poured into school districts annually to insure the development of these essential skills. Frequently these dollars address instructional strategies, innovative programs; professional development for teachers to improve pedagogy and their impact is measured by teachers using a variety of assessment. Due to this practice, we fail to measure, track, and provide intervention for those who are reading below grade level once they have moved into the upper grades.

Little datum is available regarding the literacy rates or of programs that support and improve the skills of at-risk readers at the secondary level. In 2000, the National Reading Panel identified a negative trend in national reading scores over a five year period. Once behind, these at-risk students seldom catch up remaining significantly behind throughout their educational careers as they are unable to read instructional text.

This study investigated the mean and median reading comprehension scores of graduating seniors from a large urban Midwestern high school as well as teacher perceptions about literacy policy and practices. It was found that 42% of the high school seniors read at or below the sixth grade level and would require remedial reading classes if entering college. Given the research findings and teacher perceptions, educational

policies may require reforms including specialized remedial reading classes in high schools to address the growing number of functionally illiterate students rather than simply embedding reading strategies as a component of content area classes.

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CHAPTER I

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

Figure 1. Deonte

A photograph of a piece of lined paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text is written in a cursive, somewhat informal style. The words are: "I like it because at 1st I can Not read but Now i can and it mad me feel good about my self That i want be worn of lot Now". There are some faint, illegible markings on the paper, possibly from a scanner or a watermark.

This was Deonte’s response to an essay question on his final exam that asked about how his reaction had changed towards reading. The translation was, “I like it (reading) because at first I cannot read but now I can and it made me feel good about myself that I won’t be worried of a lot now.”

I am worried.

Deonte was a senior at Harper High School (HHS) and graduated in June of 2012. He was unable to read beyond a second grade level which was a marked improvement

from where he had started the year. He would come to my room during lunch to practice sight words and reading activities. His initial reading assessments placed him at the pre-primer level in reading comprehension. By the end of his senior year, with the additional reading practice time every day during lunch, he improved to a first grade ninth month level. He received no other instruction on how to read during his instructional day. Deonte graduated as an illiterate adult with little prospects of obtaining employment in a world that demands 21st century skills.

In their report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Biancarosa and Snow (2004) stated:

American youth need strong literacy skills to succeed in school and in life. Students who do not acquire these skills find themselves at a serious disadvantage in social settings, as civil participants, and in the working world. Yet approximately eight million young people between fourth and twelfth grade struggle to read at grade level. Some 70 percent of older readers require some form of remediation. (p. 3)

Literacy, the ability to decipher words and their meanings, should be viewed as a civil right (Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Plaut, 2008). This ability to interpret, make judgments and create meaning from written text is the basis of education. Plaut (2008) argues that without this skill, individuals lack the power to freely participate in democracy and are denied access to critical knowledge. For Deonte, this will most certainly be the case.

Statement of the Problem

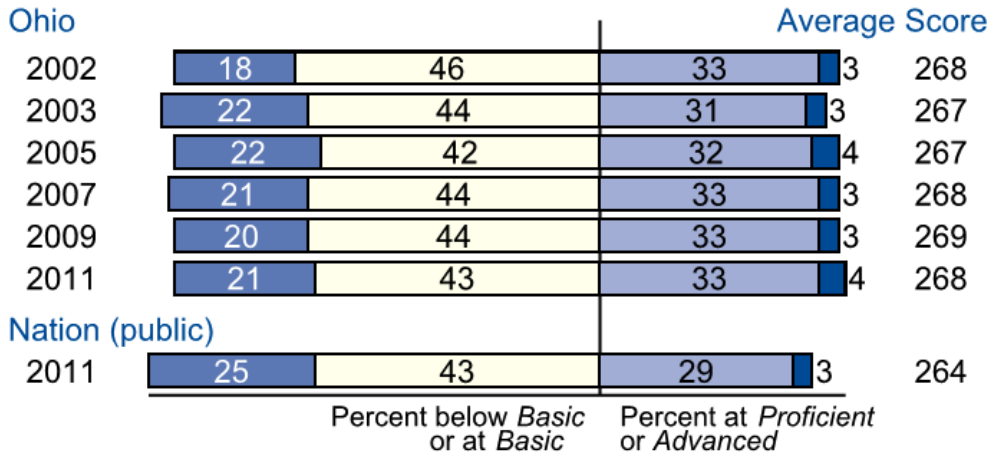
National reading scores have changed little over the past decade (Brasseur-Hock, Hock, Kieffer, Biancarosa, & Deshler, 2011). Experts in the field of adolescent literature

estimate that over 70 thousand students struggle with reading grade-level text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Struggling readers face tremendous hurdles in secondary and post-secondary academic arenas as they lack the ability to comprehend and make use of new vocabulary in academically challenging coursework. Slavin, Gheung, Groff, Lake, (2008) reported “Only 51% of students who took the ACT test¹ in 2004 were ready for college-level reading demands” (p. 291). The national average on the 2012 ACT Reading is 21.3 and for the state of Ohio, 22.1 (ACT, 2013). The average ACT score at Harper High School was 15.9.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2011) in Figure 1 below indicate the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in reading for the years of 2002 – 2011 for 8th grade students in Ohio. No data were available for twelfth grade students. The figure illustrates what many teachers in public schools have understood for many years, that even with the intense focus from the federal government and increased testing, scores for reading have not improved, and students, particularly those in urban areas, have remained the same or declined.

¹ ACT test is a national college entrance exam that covers the subject areas of English, Math, Reading, and Science. This testing occurs during eleventh grade and may be taken again in twelfth grade year.

Figure 2. Achievement-Level Percentages and Average Score Results



Below *Basic*
 Basic
 Proficient
 Advanced

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

This lack of ability to read instructional materials and grade level texts has had a dramatic impact. Graduation rates in the state of Ohio were listed at 74% for 2009 and at 47% for African Americans (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Within the context of graduating seniors, little is known about the basic reading comprehension levels of these students. The Ohio Graduation Test requires that students know approximately half of the information on the test to receive a passing grade and thus a high school diploma. What implications are there regarding this practice?

Purpose of the Study

With more than 7,000 students dropping out of high school each day (Russell, 2011), there appears to be a significant problem. The aim of this dissertation was to explore the mean and median reading comprehension scores of senior high school students, as well as teacher perceptions of educational practices that govern this population. Current educational policies that limit reading instruction to the elementary

grades may need to be reviewed and reformed if the research bears out a growing epidemic of high school graduates that are functionally illiterate.

My interest in the topic was rooted in my experiences at the high school level with students who graduate barely able to read beyond an early elementary level. Several rationales have been offered for this decline such as teacher beliefs regarding achievement of urban students, student motivation, a shift in instructional practices due to high stakes testing and lack of appropriate instructional strategies. Whatever the reason may be, the purpose of this dissertation was to bring light to this ever burgeoning problem.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

School has long been viewed as the institutional vehicle with which to advance equality (Patterson, 2010; McNamee & Miller 2009; Ravitch, 2010) and further one's access to the social and cultural capital associated with success. The key to such access is rooted in literacy. Those who don't possess this critical skill are effectively locked out of future successes. High School core subject area teachers have limited ability to teach the basic reading skills required to remediate the deficits being defined by state and district assessments. Most disconcerting is the knowledge that even with remediation, more than half the students remain reading below grade level. This deficit bleeds into their futures limiting opportunities for employment as the demand for skilled labor and credentials continues to increase (McNamee, & Miller, 2009). The high school diploma serves as the first of these credential gatekeepers to opportunity and the American Dream.

“According to the American Dream, education identifies and selects intelligent, talented, and motivated individuals and provides educational training in direct proportion

to individual merit” (McNamee, & Miller 2009, p. 107). This is the myth championed by most high school teachers of urban students. If you work hard and get a good education, you will be able to move out of poverty, afford a family and be successful. With an education, you will be able to achieve any of your dreams!

This meritocratic view of the American Dream presupposes that access to a good education is equal to all who wish to attain one, providing the same skills and proficiency in a variety of core subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics and basic science. “Equality of educational opportunity is a crucial component of the American Dream, but it has never come close to existing in America” (McNamee, & Miller, 2009, p. 131).

There are many instances where this opportunity is unequal to the urban poor through no fault of their own. Yet many Americans continue to blame this marginalized group for the ills that befall them calling them lazy, or feeling that they don’t try hard enough (Patterson, 2009) and this perceived lack of effort seems to justify the public’s attitudes. The feeling that people deserve benefits and rewards for the effort they put forth (Sandel, 2009) does not control for the extreme situational stresses that many urban poor face. Students may apply tremendous effort to master their studies but lack qualified instructors, materials, and supplies taken for granted in suburban districts. Students in my district must walk to school if they live within three miles of school. Many times they arrive wet, cold and hungry. They spend six hours in classrooms with no heat, too much heat, broken windows with too few textbooks, and no supplies (other than what the teacher can afford). That is effort. How is it rewarded?

Too often access to higher education is governed by gatekeeping methods such as ACT and SAT exams², entrance exams, interviews, and alumni status (McNamee & Miller 2009, p.129). Seldom do the poor possess the social capital or the economic ability to enhance their child's ability to circumvent these selection elements. SAT scores have become a better prediction of family wealth than of educational strength or merit (Patterson, 2009). Wealthy members of my family were astounded that I did not have my children participate in the ACT/SAT training courses (\$350 to \$500 per course) and that I wasn't paying for them to take the exams at least twice (or three times like their children had). In suburban districts, ACT/SAT preparation books and teacher support are readily available for students unlike in the urban schools that seldom have enough subject area books for students to take home let alone study guides for non-required subject matter. How is this equal access to education?

School has long been viewed as the institutional vehicle with which to advance equality (Patterson, 2010; McNamee & Miller 2009; Adams, 1995) and further one's access to the social and cultural capital associated with success. As such, schools have taken on the guise of being a total institution but have failed to fulfill the aims of equitable graduation rates. Although the national average of high school completion was reported at 87.3% in 2006 (U.S. Department of Commerce 2007 as cited in McNamee, & Miller 2009), urban center graduation rates continue to hover around 50%. This paradox creates an employment gap, limiting employment opportunities for urban youth as the demand for skilled labor continues to increase.

² ACT and SAT are college entrance exams given high school students during their Junior year. Students can retake these exams up to three times submitting their best scores to the colleges of their choice.

Today's economy demands a form of human capital that can only be achieved with credentials. College degrees are the new gatekeepers for employment and are used to limit the pool of applicants (McNamee, & Miller, 2009). The implications are far reaching for the poor of our nation. Lacking some form of higher education credential relegates many individuals to labor intensive or less than desirable jobs which require longer hours of service and lower pay rates perpetuating a cycle of subsistence living. But what is the alternative?

Many of my students would like to go to the local community college but lack funds, essential academic skills and social support common in suburbs. The thought of taking on debt, attending two more years of school for the potential of higher earnings is a foreign idea to these students. Few of their parents have attended college and many lack the skills necessary to navigate the process necessary to complete the application process. Simply completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms (now only accessible on-line) is a deterrent for most urban students. Once past that hurdle, many of them lack the basic reading, writing and math skills necessary to participate successfully in college. Due to the significant deficits in reading comprehension, a substantial number are required to take the 099 classes that cost money but are not credited towards a degree.

The American Dream was once something all could aspire to and achieve. Now it appears to be merely part of our semantic discourse of an imagined future. If we truly believe that education is the great equalizer, it must afford without penalty, with equal opportunity and access to all who wish to participate. The foundation of this dream is rooted in literacy.

Research Questions

The research questions offered both statistical and contextual background of literacy at the high school level and addressed some of the significant problems understood by those who teach in a large urban district. For the purpose of this study, literacy was defined as the ability to read and make meaning of content area text and write to convey meaning at or near grade level. The questions that guided this investigation were:

1. To what extent do the kind of classes (special education, regular education), Northwestern Evaluation Association (NWEA) scores, STAR reader scores, statistically significantly predict Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) Reading scores?
2. What are the mean and median grade level instructional reading comprehension scores for seniors from a large urban high school?
3. What are teacher perceptions about reading interventions, class placement and services offered that are helpful and those they believe would be helpful if implemented at the secondary level?

Significance of the Study

During the 2012 – 2013 school year, HHS had a diverse population of students. Of particular interest for this study was the population of special education students which was nearly 27% of the total student enrollment. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown in students enrolled for that year.

Table I. Current Student Enrollment per Student Subcategories

	Number of Students	Percent
Total Enrollment	837	-
Female	428	51.14%
Male	409	48.86%
Ethnicity: African-American	393	46.95%
Ethnicity: American Indian	4	0.48%
Ethnicity: Asian/Pacific Islander	14	1.67%
Ethnicity: Hispanic	100	11.95%
Ethnicity: White	301	35.96%
Ethnicity: Multiracial	24	2.87%
IEP	222	26.52%
LEP	37	4.42%

This study offers the unique opportunity to investigate not only the statistical achievement patterns of students in regular versus special education, their performance on the state mandated tests but also the perspective of the teachers who work with both populations. The development of the focus group will bring together teachers of both populations to begin the discussion regarding elements of effective literacy interventions. Finally, the study will also investigate the instructional reading level of seniors who are preparing to graduate from high school and the discussion of these levels with teachers.

In his recent work, Gallagher (2010), reports current statistics regarding reading in the United States citing: the 2004 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which states secondary students are reading significantly below grade level, 2005 ACT scores that were the lowest in decades and finally, the Alliance for Excellent Education which reported 8.7 million (or one in four) secondary students cannot read and

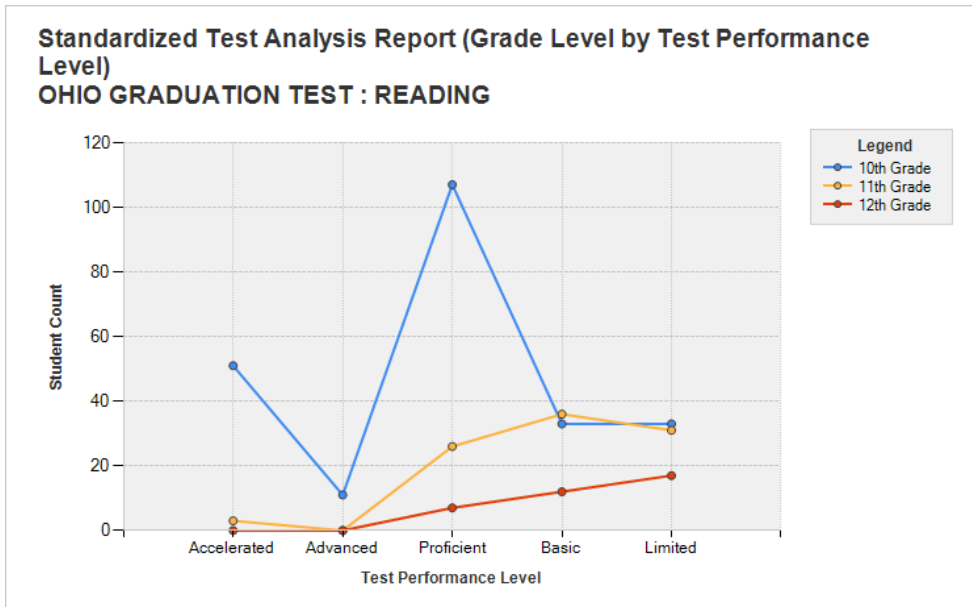
comprehend the material in their grade level textbooks. He isolates four specific areas that have contributed to the decline in reading: (1) Schools value the development of test takers more than critical readers. (2) Schools are limiting authentic reading experiences for their students in lieu of test preparation materials. (3) Teachers are overteaching books by isolating every element of plot, theme (s), and author's intent and (4) underteaching books by racing to cover the text by the specified scope and sequence checking little for understanding and comprehension.

Gallagher goes on to examine each of these issues providing example of each that are everyday practices in our secondary schools. His work introduces a variety of strategies that will reverse what he coined as "Readicide". His views are consistent with the overarching themes discussed in educational research including improving professional development, providing authentic materials as a means to increase student motivation and connecting teaching materials and strategies to students' everyday life experiences.

These views presuppose that students have the basic ability to decipher the text on the page and gain meaning from the text. Unfortunately thousands of students lack the very basic skills of reading, decoding and comprehension of text leaving them behind before they even enter the high school classroom. Current literacy practices call for secondary subject area teachers to integrate literacy strategies which increase understanding of text but many teachers feel this places the unfair burden of teaching reading in their classrooms (Moje, 2008). Given the rise of new accountability measures that tie student performance to teacher evaluations and teacher pay, secondary subject area teachers feel there is not enough time to cover their own curriculum let alone the

additional literacy strategies instruction for struggling readers. As noted previously, once behind, struggling readers remain behind for their academic careers without intensive reading intervention. These trends noted by Moje seem to be true for the students in HHS. Table 3 shows the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) reading scores per grade level for tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students. Noted trends in scores for tenth³, eleventh and twelfth grade students support this assertion. Students scoring below proficient (in basic and limited categories) are nearly identical in both tenth and eleventh grade with more students scoring in basic and limited categories by twelfth grade.

Figure 3. Ohio Graduation Test Reading Scores 2012 -2013



But how did we arrive at this point? Somewhere along the line, defining the goal of education shifted from equity in education, which grew out of the civil rights

³ Students take the OGT for the first time in tenth grade. Only students who did not pass the exam will retake the test again in the fall and spring. Regular education students are not granted a diploma until they pass all five parts of the OGT.

movement in the 1960s to a goal of adequacy which took root in the late 1980s.

Accountability was to become a buzzword for public officials and business leaders when speaking about Education (Braun, Chapman, Bezzu, 2010). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was the legislation that would forever cement this word upon the general public's brow and doom schools and teachers to the unrelenting fate of annual state wide testing. These assessments take on high stakes for districts and students as test results were now tied to school funding (Heise, 2006; Ravitch, 2010). We had arrived at a point of no return.

To best understand how all of the demands of current education policy were inked across the pages, we must first reach back into history and find the elements that came together in the perfect storm now known as No Child Left Behind of 2001. This federal mandate has grown from a long standing pattern of benign neglect in our public school system. In the early 1960's, we as a nation were made aware of a growing economic and educational gap between minorities and their white counterparts. Discussed in the Coleman Report of 1966 and later championed by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Patterson, 2010) were the underpinnings of the education crisis NCLB sought to address. Most notably, NCLB was to focus on the low achievement of minority students, the high drop-out rate and issues of educational funding which did not equate to equal achievement scores. Politically, the civil rights movement challenged the nation to confront the issues of separate but not equal in education and precipitated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This was our federal government's first foray into legislating education. Stemming from a shift in public policy and the civil rights movement, this legislation was intended to provide equal access to education.

Education would become politically charged in the 1980s (Furgol & Helms, 2012) due to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report, commissioned by the Reagan Administration, decried our nation's failing public education systems. The report questioned our school system's ability to graduate an adequate workforce that could compete globally and warned "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity..." (p. 5). Education reform not fell into five categories: Content, Standards and Expectations, Time, Teaching, Leadership and Fiscal Support (Ravitch, 2010, p. 26 – 27). A new narrative had been created and standards based reform was the new battle cry. Educational reform took firm hold in the late 1980s and 1990s and equity was replaced with adequacy as an educational paradigm (Furgol & Helms, 2012; Sanders, 2007).

NCLB Act of 2001 arrived on the doorstep of the new millennium. The achievement gap would be ameliorated through a 600 page mandate that would guarantee accountability. Centered on key elements of reform, NCLB offered an outline of required reforms for states who wished to receive generous federal dollars but with conditions (Barolsky, 2008). They included the hiring of highly qualified teachers, development and implementation of rigorous academic standards, establishment of academic achievement goals for students, testing students regularly to asses adequate yearly progress (AYP) and reporting statistics regarding students and student progress annually (Testani & Mayes, 2008; Umpstead, 2008). These were viewed as critical pieces to the achievement gap crisis that only grew wider for each year of schooling (Sherman, 2008) for poor white and minority students. The caveat was that each of these elements required expenditures that were not covered fiscally by the federal government. This added additional hardship to

states and local governments who were required to maintain vast amounts of data to satisfy NCLB conditions.

Politically this policy was intended to address the ever widening achievement gap in the nation's school system and achieve student proficiency in reading and math for students in all states (Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hylar, 2006; Heise, 2006; Lee & Reeves, 2012; Pendell, 2008) by establishing guidelines that states must follow in order to receive federal education dollars. "No state is required to follow NCLB – unless, that is, it wants to receive federal money for its education system" (Testani & Mayes, 2008, p. 1). The policy had specific requirements but gave autonomy to the states in how they would meet these requirements. This was a significant departure from the federal government's past practices with regards to education policy.

A dimension of NCLB that had had dramatic impact in schools across the nation is the requirement to record AYP statistics. Individual states were required to develop testing that would meet the federal requirements in third through eighth grade and once in high school (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010) if they expected to receive federal funding. Each state was given the right to establish their own level of proficiency (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012). In Ohio, the Ohio Graduation Test (see Appendix A) is the test used at the secondary level to report district progress. Annual graduation rates in the state of Ohio were listed at 74% and at 47% for African Americans for the 2008 school year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012). There continues to be a significant gap between racial groups even with this well-intended legislation. Livermore and Lewchuk (2009) wrote further that the gap now includes both black and Latinos as both of these populations now create the largest portion of the achievement gap. Within

the context of graduating seniors in Ohio, little is known about the basic skills levels of the 47% who graduate. “Deonte” represented this statistic of graduating African Americans and his limited reading ability was of grave concern. This statistic paints a grim picture of the future for many of the students with whom I work as many of them leave high school without the basic skills of reading and writing literately.

Although the NCLB Act allowed states flexibility to meet the guidelines established (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012) it further denied states Title I funds and education grant dollars for failing to meet them. As such, all states have struggled to find ways to meet the federal mandate with several taking legal action against the coercive nature of the Act (Pendell, 2008; Umpstead, 2008; Testani & Mayes, 2008). This new era of adequacy in education carried with it crippling consequences.

School districts were not immune to the pressure to adhere to the new federal mandate. The consequences of failing to make AYP were fiscally tangible and created a new race to develop standards and measures (tests) of these standards to report to the state as demanded by the federal guidelines. Measuring the progress with regards to every student in every state created a shift in exactly how we would evaluate student progress. Sadly, the skills we prize most; critical thinking, collaboration, the ability to judge information are not easily measured and are not components of these tests. AYP is typically measured by the least expensive method, chiefly scores on multiple choice exams that measure fundamental skills and rote memory. This shift became the new fabric of instructional practice in schools across the nation.

A new era of austerity had dawned upon public schools desiring to garner the greatest amount of dollars from ever shrinking state and federal budgets. Schools

decreased the time allotted for reading and math while increasing the test preparation⁴ classes (Musoleno & White, 2010). This narrowed focus has led to declining or flat lined scores in the area of reading for low income students (Darling-Hammond, Williamson & Hyler, 2007; Gallagher, 2009; Livermore & Lewchuk, 2009).

Reading authentic materials has fallen by the wayside as schools adopted a test taking skills approach to reading. No longer are students allowed to read for fun, instead every page is counted, each book assessed (via programs such as Accelerated Reader), and class logs are reviewed by principals who track and compare total books read to class progress on state assessments. Reading used to be fun and now serves to be an arduous means to an end, that of test taking.

Adolescents who struggle with literacy typically aren't motivated to engage in academic reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Guthrie and Davis 2003; Snow and Moje, 2010). Secondary special education students are true examples of this lack of engagement. These students frequently are reading between three and five grade levels below their peers and yet are expected to take the same OGT tests with their scores counting on the school report card. The need to remediate literacy skills became overshadowed by the demands of covering the curriculum in time for state tests (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009).

Seldom are high school students given time to enjoy reading and more often than not they are asked to read from texts that are significantly above their instructional reading levels. If they are constantly confronted with reading tasks that they must struggle to get through or that are overwhelming due to complexity, how can we expect

⁴ 40 minute test preparation classes have been added to all tenth grade core subject area classes in the participating district. The classes are 80 minutes total with the first 40 minutes devoted to the core subject area and the second 40 minutes to be OGT test preparation for that subject area.

them to find it enjoyable? As many students lack reading materials outside of school, the majority of literary exposure is at school in their classrooms. At the secondary level, there are seldom classroom libraries, high interest reading materials, magazines, or graphic novels readily available which students can utilize freely. Limiting their exposure to textbook reading or test preparation guides hardly seems motivational for any child.

Ohio Content Area Reading Standards (see Appendix B) cover a wide array of information at the twelfth grade level including: Acquisition of Vocabulary, Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies, Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text, and Literary Text. Each standard includes several (as many as six) benchmarks that are expected to be covered and assessed. The Ohio Department of Education (2009) states:

Academic content standards provide a set of clear and rigorous expectations for all students. Students need to learn more and do complex work at each grade level as they progress through school. The academic content standards provide clarity to Ohio teachers of what content and skills should be taught at each grade-level. How the material is taught is a local school and district decision.

Under this umbrella, districts are expected to develop and implement curriculum designs per grade level. The scope and sequence manual for twelfth grade English has 41 benchmarks and eleventh grade English manual has 64 benchmarks that must be monitored while the providing instruction. The curriculum scope and sequence manual (see Appendix C) provides additional objectives that must be monitored and assessed as they apply to the subject area. Now add in the behavioral objectives that have been developed in the area of English Language Arts for special education students. Typically there are six to eight goals for reading and written language for each Individualized

Education Plan (IEP) that must be reported on twice quarterly. Table II provided examples of goals that one might find on an IEP for Deonte.

Table II. Individualized Education Plan Goals and Objectives

IEP Goal Secondary Reading: Deonte will analyze and evaluate the five elements of literature including plot, point of view and theme by answering both literal and inferential questions about a selection 4/5 trials with 80% accuracy.

IEP Objective Secondary Reading: Deonte will answer inferential questions about a selection and find details that support the answer in the text 3/4 trials quarterly with 80% accuracy for the duration of this IEP.

IEP Objective Secondary Reading: Deonte will make predictions about a selection consistent with the authors intent and justifying written or oral answers using details from the text with 80% accuracy

Talk about multi-tasking! In order to provide data regarding progress on each benchmark and behavioral objective as well as the State standards, teachers are testing, worksheeting, and rubricing their students to death. Once again, we have broken down the information into such small bits that the big picture has been lost (Gallagher, 2009). Somewhere along the lines, teaching students to read and read well was lost in the mire of Annual Yearly Progress as measured by some test.

Students in HHS are now tested within the first few weeks of each semester in the areas of reading, math and science (a two part test) using the NWEA computer based test (see Appendix C), followed by the STAR Reader Assessment (see Appendix E) another computer based test, and finally additional testing is completed by teachers to establish baseline data for student performance within the classroom. By the first week in October, students have submitted to more than five hours of testing. They frequently complain about the amount of time spent testing requiring prompting to stay focused and complete each test. Teachers also complain about the amount of instructional time sacrificed to

testing (Copeland, Keefe, Calhoun, & Tanner, 2011). Yet, this is the new age of accountability which dawned with the signing of NCLB.

The OGT completes the accountability package of tests and measures. Reliability and validity scores were from the 2006 student sample and included 150,381 students. Though none of the Reading subtest reliability scores were above a .75 (Moore, 2008), the OGT Reading is the state approved test required for students to pass in order to graduate from high school. Last year, HHS had 20 seniors who failed to graduate due to failing scores on the OGT.

Testing Fatigue

Teachers struggle to cover the tremendous amount of materials required to meet each standard racing from one set of benchmarks to another hoping to cover the needed curriculum that will be tested on the state tests (Berryhill et al., 2009; Copeland et. al, 2011). Testing fatigue has set in amongst both teachers and students.

Much of September and October each year is dominated by a chaotic period of testing and students readily express their opposition to the frequent disruption in class schedules. The pressure of maintaining this mountain of data takes an emotional toll on teachers becoming an added strain for overburdened teachers contributing to teacher burn-out and low-self efficacy which has resulted in a concerning attrition rate particularly among special education teachers (Bender, Fore, & Martin, 2002; Emry & Vandenberg, 2010; Larwood & Paje, 2004). Chronic fatigue resulting from these constant disruptions can result in poor planning and low implementation of effective instructional practices in the classroom (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011; Larwood & Paje, 2004; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Though teachers speak of the perils regarding outcome based instructional reform, seldom are they invited to the table to discuss their perceptions of possible solutions. Prior thoughts of only providing reading instruction during the elementary grades have given way to a widely held belief amongst secondary teachers that a basic literacy course should be offered in lieu of electives to students who read significantly below grade level. With all of the data available to teachers at HHS, determining which students are reading below grade level requires only that teachers review the students' profile on-line in Schoolnet⁵.

Definition of Terms

- **Accelerated Reader Program (AR)** – a computer based program that helps teachers and librarians manage and monitor children's independent reading practice (Parent's Guide to Accelerated Reader retrieved from: <http://doc.renlearn.com/KMNet/R003985016GG79F2.pdf>. June 11, 2012). Currently administered in fall, winter, and spring to all high school students in the participating district.
- **American College Testing (ACT)** – a college entrance exam that covers the subject areas of English, Math, Reading and Science. The ACT is given to all eleventh grade students at HHS in the Spring. Students who wish to retake the ACT are provided vouchers to pay for testing during their senior year.

⁵ SchoolNet is a computer based information system available to all teachers in the participating district. It yields all current testing data available on any student including STAR Reader scores, OGT scores and NWEA scores. Teacher can be well armed with student achievement data for all student assigned to them.

- **Adequate Yearly Progress** – a measurement of student academic progress using standardized tests as mandated by NCLB which allows the US Department of Education to determine the performance of all public schools in the United States.
- **Core Subject Area Classes** – the traditional college preparatory classes for high school student that are not electives including: English, Math, Social Studies, Science.
- **Literacy** – for the purpose of this study, literacy will be defined as the ability to read and make meaning of content area text and write to convey meaning at or near grade level.
- **Northwestern Evaluation Association (NWEA)** – a computer based district test for all 9th and tenth grade students for the subjects of Reading, Math, and Science. The scores have a high correlation to the expected OGT scores for each area. The NWEA consists of 48 multiple choice questions. The questions are meant to test the student’s background knowledge of concepts covered in high school. The level of mastery is 208-219. Students who score above this are then classified as accelerated or advanced. Given in the fall, winter and spring, the NWEA data is also being used for value added purposes and will be incorporated into Ohio Teacher Evaluation System.
- **Ohio Graduation Test (OGT):** This test replaced the 9th grade Proficiency test in 2005. Students are required to pass five sections of the OGT: Reading, Writing, Math, Social Studies, and Science in order to receive a high school diploma. For the purpose of this study, only the OGT Reading score was used. The initial test is given in March of the tenth grade year and each fall and spring for students who

did not pass one or more parts. A score of 400 points on any of the subtests is considered passing. Students scoring above this are classified as accelerated or advanced.

- **Regular Education Classroom** – classes for core subject areas of English/Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science and elective classes including music, child development, physical education, career studies, and hospitality and hotel management. These teachers are certified in the content area being taught. They may include special education students with or without support provided to the regular education teacher by a certified special education teacher.
- **Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)** – a standardized college entrance exam that is required by most four year colleges. This test covers Reading, Math and Writing. The PSAT or practice SAT is given to students at HHS in the Spring of tenth grade year. Vouchers, to pay for the cost of taking the test at recognized testing facility, are provided for students.
- **SchoolNet** – a computer based resource for all teachers in the participating district. It yields standardized testing data including: STAR Reader, NWEA, OGT and PSAT scores. Student information also includes: academic progress and grade reports, demographic data, parent information, participation in special education, and enrollment record. Teachers can also develop a wide variety of statistical reports based upon the school in which they work and/or their student caseload.
- **Scope and Sequence** – specific to individual districts, this document connects the state standards to the subject area content. It serves as a guide for teachers as to

what content is taught when during each quarter and provides a framework for consistency of content covered within a district.

- **Special Education Classroom** – within the participating district, students who have been identified as requiring special education services through the development of an IEP may be placed in a classroom that has reduced class size (16 students) to receive their core subject area classes (English/Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science). Teachers of these classrooms are certified in Special Education but unlike their regular education counterparts; do not carry the certification for the subject area.
- **Special Education Student** – for the purpose of this study, special education student indicates a student who has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This student may receive instruction in a variety of settings including the regular education classroom, a cross-categorical classroom, or through supplemental tutoring by the IEP manager.
- **STAR Reader** – is the initial assessment used by the Accelerated Reader Program currently being used by the district as a reading intervention program at the high school level. This assessment yields an instructional reading level which indicates the level at which the student can read independently and gain instructional knowledge.
- **State Standards** – a product of the education reform movement of the 1980's , standards based education offered the public a general means to “measure” students’ academic performance and marked to beginnings of outcome based educational practices. Each state developed standards for the core subject areas

and curriculum was aligned to these standards and measured via state standardized exams.

- **Test Preparation Classes** – within the participating district, all tenth grade students receive 80 minutes of instruction in core subject area classes. The first 40 minutes are designated for instruction of content and the second 40 minutes is for OGT preparation in the class subject. Elective classes are limited during the tenth grade year due to this practice.
- **Title I Funds** – established as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title I funds allocate additional financial resources to school districts that have high percentages of low-income students (Sanders, 2008).

Summary

In recent years there has been an intense focus on literacy acquisition at the elementary school level. There is indisputable evidence correlating early reading achievement and future academic success. This evidence has resulted in Federal and local dollars being poured into school districts annually to insure the development of these essential skills. Frequently these dollars address instructional strategies, innovative programs and professional development for teachers to improve pedagogy, and their impact is measured by teachers using a variety of assessments. Current education policies limit the instruction of reading to kindergarten through third grade level. As students transition to 4th grade, literacy instruction shifts from direct instruction of decoding, sight words and fluency to content specific literacy instruction rooted in comprehension and development of a subject area knowledge base. In middle school, students no longer learn to read, they read to learn. Due to this practice, we fail to measure, track, and provide

intervention for those who are reading below grade level once they have moved into the upper grades.

Little data are available regarding the literacy rates or of programs that support and improve the skills of at-risk readers at the secondary level. In 2000, the National Reading Panel identified a negative trend in national reading scores over a five year period. Once behind, these at-risk students seldom catch up remaining significantly behind throughout their educational careers as they are unable to read instructional text. The practice of limiting reading instruction to the elementary level may need to be reconsidered given the overwhelming negative trend in reading scores across a wide variety of secondary tests and measures.

Focus groups were selected due to their pluralistic integrity as they afford a wide gamut of opinion in a short amount of time and allow the researcher to work closely with the participants (Cheng, 2007). Creating a dialogue with teachers of these students will open a vista seldom if ever viewed. Traversing this landscape can only happen with those who work within the environment of urban high schools balancing the demands of state standards against the daily realities of their students. This discourse may provide an avenue for intervention that will have lasting impact, providing urban youth long lost access to an American Dream.

Chapter II

Background

Literacy and literacy practices have been driven onto the national stage over the past several years with particular focus on secondary school practices. Declining or flat-lining scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in reading (Christy, 2011; Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003; Gallagher, 2009; Maniates & Mahiri, 2011; Moje, 2008) have sounded a warning bell and given cause to reexamine just what may be contributing to this alarming trend. Understanding must begin with our definition of literacy.

For most of the twentieth century literacy was only discussed as a reference point for illiteracy; marking an understood level of expected competence in our postindustrial economies (Goodwyn & Findlay, 2003). Literacy during this era was simply the ability to decipher words and their meanings. This ability to interpret, make judgments and create meaning from written text is the basis for developing literate adults. Plaut (2010) argues that without this skill, individuals lack the power to freely participate in democracy

and are denied access to critical knowledge. Unfortunately, ideological arguments are difficult to quantify.

Over the past several decades, literacy has been ascribed new quantifiable meaning as states monitor academic progress in reading, math and science; attesting to a districts overall achievement. Investigation of this phenomenon requires that we develop a contextual understanding of literacy as a structural component of elementary and secondary schools. Arriving at a unified definition has been a difficult task (Copeland et al., 2011; Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000).

Defining Literacy

As defined in Merriam-Webster's Dictionary on-line, literacy is a noun defined as; the quality or state of being literate. Further, literacy is "the ability to read and write". The term (literacy) may also refer to familiarity with literature and to a basic level of education obtained through the written word" (<http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/literacy>). Though rudimentary in its definition, at the very core, literacy involves the ability to read and write. But the waters become muddied as we apply this definition in the field of education. The definition of literacy varies from state to state, each creating separate components that will be woven together to construct the fabric of the definition. Driving the construction are state standards developed with the intention of establishing a level of proficiency in the core subject areas of English, Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The Ohio Department of Education defines literacy as:

The standards for Language and Literacy reflect knowledge and skills fundamental to children's learning of language, reading and writing. Young children's language competencies pertain to their growing abilities

to communicate effectively with adults and peers, to express themselves through language, and to use growing vocabularies and increasingly sophisticated language structures. Early literacy skills include children's developing concepts of print, comprehension of age-appropriate text, phonological awareness, and letter recognition. Research has identified early skills of language and literacy as important predictors for children's school readiness, and their later capacity to learn academic knowledge (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Note definition denotes early literacy skills. In Pre-K through third grade, the focus is on learning *how* to read and has been the genesis of renewed professional development, reviews, reports and policy shifts including the Reading First initiative (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). As such, much of the grant funding has been directed towards the early stages of literacy in elementary schools (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Assaf, Hoffman & Paris, 2001) with the intent that all children learn to read well and comprehend text by the end of the third grade.

Literacy, the ability to decipher words and their meanings, should be viewed as a civil right (Plaut, 2009). This ability to interpret, make judgments and create meaning from written text is the basis for developing literate adults. Plaut argues that literacy is the key to access and without this skill, individuals lack the power to freely participate in democracy and are denied access to critical knowledge. The key to such access is rooted in literacy. Those who don't possess this critical skill are effectively locked out of future successes and opportunities. Plaut describes literacy as a "gateway skill" which allows students to "understand essential content and develop independence as learners and how that in turn gives students access and power beyond schools" (p.11). Students become free to analyze, judge, and make predictions about ideas. Literate students are free to

become active participants in the environment that surrounds them. What happens to the struggling middle school reader who is not proficient in concepts of print, phonological awareness or comprehension of age appropriate text? Once behind, these struggling readers seldom catch up to their peers without years of intensive reading intervention (Gallagher, 2010, 2009). This population has become a growing concern with far reaching national implications as students graduate lacking the ability to access learning for 21st century skills. Lacking these skills, at-risk students are unable to compete in a global marketplace.

Education Reform

Education reform became a politically charged topic in the early 1990s, as national leaders backed by public opinion demanded greater accountability for the tax dollars spent. How else could we expect our students to be fully prepared for the changing futures that awaited them? Early reforms targeted elementary reading skills but the movement blossomed into an all-encompassing demand for national standards after the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983. The following decades marked a shift from equity to adequacy as we became a performance-based educational system (“Financing Better”, 2005; Jaekyung, 2010). The NCLB was the cinch knot tying state standards, state funding and teacher accountability to student achievement in the areas of Reading, Mathematics, and Science. NCLB allowed governments to regulate rewards or sanctions based school performance (Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2005; Sanders, 2008). It has become a punitive policy that has changed the

landscape of instructional practice in the classroom across the United States (Ravitch, 2010; Rustique-Forrester, 2005).

This federal mandate has grown from a long standing pattern of benign neglect in our public school system. In the early 1960s, we as a nation were made aware of a growing economic and educational gap between minorities and their white counterparts. Discussed in the Coleman Report of 1966 and later championed by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Patterson, 2010) were the underpinnings of the education crisis NCLB sought to address. Most notably, NCLB would focus on the low achievement of minority student, the high drop-out rate and issues of educational funding which did not equate to equal achievement scores. Politically, the civil rights movement challenged the nation to confront the issues of separate but not equal in education and precipitated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This was our federal government's first foray into legislating education. Stemming from a shift in public policy and the civil rights movement, this legislation was intended to provide equal access to education. Broad in nature, ESEA began to address inequities experienced by participants and benefactors of the national education system (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2007) by establishing Title I funds as a provision to assist low income families (Sanders, 2008).

Politically the narrative regarding education shifted dramatically during the 1980s (Furgol & Helms, 2012) due to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report, commissioned by the Reagan Administration, decried our nation's failing public education systems. The report questioned our school system's ability to graduate an adequate workforce that could compete globally and warned "the educational foundations of our society are presently

being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity..." (p. 5). The commission called for education reform in five categories: Content, Standards and Expectations, Time, Teaching, Leadership and Fiscal Support (Ravitch, 2010, p. 26 – 27). Unlike NCLB, *A Nation at Risk* was merely a report that states could follow in hopes of improving current educational practices and outcomes. A new narrative had been created and standards based reform was the new battle cry. Educational reform took firm hold in the late 1980s and 1990s and equity was replaced with adequacy as an educational paradigm (Furgol & Helms, 2012; Sanders, 2007).

The Policy

It is from both a political and moral position that the reauthorization of ESEA, now known as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, was brought to the table. The government was being asked to oversee education on both of these grounds. Morally, education offered citizens a way to better themselves and partake in the “American Dream”. It was touted as legislation that would finally close the achievement gap between minorities, low income students and their white counterparts. NCLB was viewed as an extension of the Civil Rights legislation (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Livermore & Lewchuk, 2009; Sherman, 2008) and a moral imperative with the ultimate goal being 100% of all students would be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Who would argue with having such lofty goals? Shouldn’t all children have the right to an equal education no matter what where they live or what their family income level? This policy was meant to address both the equity issues and the rights of the stakeholders who in a business sense were the consumers. Livermore and Lewchuck (2009) stated:

NCLB was drafted with the specific intention of reducing the skillbased educational inequalities between traditionally disempowered minority students and white students. NCLB integrates both demand-side (consumer choice) and supply-side (organizational restructuring) educational reform as integrated elements of its fabric. An essential element of its supply-side mechanism is based upon accountability and restructuring. (p. 436)

This policy shifted the narrative once again. Education focus would now be outcome based, accountability and measures.

Policy in Practice

Politically this policy was intended to address the ever widening achievement gap in the nation's school system and achieve student proficiency in reading and math for students in all states (Heise, 2006; Lee & Reeves, 2012; Pendell, 2008) by establishing guidelines that states must follow in order to receive federal education dollars. "No state is required to follow NCLB – unless, that is, it wants to receive federal money for its education system" (Testani & Mayes, 2008, p. 1). The policy had specific requirements but gave autonomy to the states in how they would meet these requirements. This was a significant departure from the federal government's past practices with regards to education policy.

Although the Act allowed states flexibility to meet the guidelines established (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012) it further denied states Title I funds and education grant dollars for failing to meet them. As such, all states have struggled to find ways to meet the federal mandate with several taking legal action against the coercive nature of the Act (Barolsky, 2008; Pendell, 2008; Umpstead, 2008; Testani & Mayes, 2008). There has been much criticism of NCLB as a breach of federalism, challenging the federal

government's encroachment on state and local governments' regulatory powers (Consiglio, 2009).

A largely unfunded mandate (Pendell, 2008; Umpstead, 2008), NCLB had lofty goals of rectifying the declining achievement scores and improve graduation rates in public schools across the nation. Politically this act brought both sides of the aisle together (Ravitch, 2010; Sherman, 2008) with Democrats who liked the expanded role of the federal government in education and Republicans heralding a new era of accountability and school choice through vouchers. This policy offered state governments the ability to hold school districts accountable for the education dollars spent, opening the door to sanctions for districts that failed to measure up (Ravitch, 2010). All seemed to be well.

NCLB arrived as a sentinel on the doorstep of the new millennium. The achievement gap would be ameliorated through a 600 page mandate that would guarantee accountability. Centered on key elements of reform, NCLB offered an outline of required reforms for states who wished to receive generous federal dollars but with conditions (Barolsky, 2008). They included the hiring of highly qualified teachers, development and implementation of rigorous academic standards, establishment of academic achievement goals for students, testing students regularly to assess adequate yearly progress (AYP) and reporting statistics regarding students and student progress annually (Testani & Mayes, 2008; Umpstead, 2008). These were viewed as critical pieces to the achievement gap crisis that only grew wider for each year of schooling (Sherman, 2008) for poor white and minority students. The stipulation was that each of these elements required expenditures that were not covered fiscally by the federal government. This added additional hardship

to states and local governments who were required to maintain vast amounts of data to satisfy NCLB conditions.

The budgetary impact of NCLB was another hurdle being faced by states and local governments. States have argued that the additional costs are not covered by this unfunded mandate and states and local school districts unjustly incur the financial burden of compliance with the mandate (Heise, 2006; Jackson & Gaudet, 2010). Several states have challenged NCLB legally stating that this is a violation of the United States Constitutions Spending Clause (Barolsky, 2008; Pendell, 2008; Umpstead, 2008). In question is the right of Congress to create legislation over a field which it has no direct authority. “To be valid, these statutory conditions must be in pursuit of the general welfare, unambiguous, related to the federal interest, not prohibited by other constitutional provisions, and not coercive” (Umpstead, 2008, p. 228). Closing the achievement gap, ensuring all students meet high academic standards and providing education from highly qualified teachers are related to the federal government’s interest and relate to the welfare of the nation. NCLB has been found to be consistent with these principles and from a legal perspective not an unfunded mandate (Livermore & Lewchuk, 2009). Unfortunately, for many, perspective really is a matter of zip code as most urban and impoverished districts are penalized financially for underperforming on state exams (Jaekyung, 2010; Porter MaGee, 2004).

A dimension of NCLB that had had dramatic impact in schools across the nation is the requirement to record AYP statistics. Individual states were required to develop testing that would meet the federal requirements in third through eighth grade and once in

high school (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010) if they expected to receive federal funding. Each state was given the right to establish their own level of proficiency (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012). There continues to be a significant gap between racial groups even with this well-intended legislation (Livermore & Lewchuk, 2009).

In Ohio, the OGT is the set of tests used at the secondary level to report district progress. Annual graduation rates in the state of Ohio were listed at 74% and at 47% for African Americans for the 2008 school year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012). Livermore and Lewchuk (2009) state further that the gap now includes both black and latinos as both of these populations now create the largest portion of the achievement gap. Within the context of graduating seniors in Ohio, little is known about the basic skills levels of the 47%. Literacy professionals tend to measure basic reading skills in grade level equivalents. Do graduating seniors read at a first grade level? Fourth or fifth grade level? Twelfth grade level? This kind of measure is not part of the OGT assessment. This 47% statistic for African American graduating from high school without information concerning how they function in reading ability paints a grim picture of the future for many of the students with whom I work as many of them leave high school without the basic skills of reading and writing literately as illustrated by Deonte's writing at the beginning of chapter one.

Unintended Consequences

The unintended consequences of NCLB have devastated states and school with an obsessive requirement of annual testing, "...and other superficial, shortsighted goals" (Consiglio, 2009, p. 368). These high stakes exams were to be reported to the state as

students' annual measure of progress and proficiency. For the first time in education policy, punishments were associated with failing to be proficient on state tests. In high school, the penalty paid by a new generation of disenfranchised youth who have failed to meet arbitrary testing numbers is the loss of a high school diploma. Speaking of NCLB, Sanders (2008) said, "Its implementation, primarily through its system of rewards and punishments, may actually inhibit educational opportunities for the very population it was designed to serve – low-income students" (p. 589). Though noble in its intent, NCLB has created a new class of marginalized youth who will be doomed to a cycle of poverty lacking the very basic educational credential, a high school diploma.

These assessments take on high stakes for districts and students as test results are now tied to school funding (Ravitch, 2010). The significant costs have caused many states to apply for waivers and to change the standard measures of proficiency for students. Effectively, we have created a "race to the bottom" as the incentive for establishing high standards is lost as financial sanctions are meted out for not attaining them. Heise (2006) discusses the both the political and economic impact of this policy stating:

For risk-averse policymakers (and governors), the policy path of least resistance becomes increasingly attractive over time. Furthermore, in states where suburban districts recoil at the prospect – however remote – of their students not achieving state proficiency standards, a decision to dilute academic standards becomes even easier to make. (p. 144)

Perhaps closing the achievement gap encompasses more than mandating a standard level of achievement through a series of tests and measures. Unfortunately, the penalties under NCLB are often realized by urban school districts or small rural school districts that desperately need funding.

The scale is tipping in public schools desiring to garner the greatest amount of dollars from ever shrinking state and federal budgets. We now scramble to obtain school funding from Race to the Top Funds or School Improvement Grants developing various “reforms” that will secure dollars for strapped budgets (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012). Our schools have decreased the time allotted for reading and math while increasing the test preparation classes. This narrowed focus has led to declining or flat lined scores for low income students (Gallagher, 2010). Is NCLB doing as was intended? The annual test scores are telling us a different story.

The Education Sector is a non-profit think tank challenges the conventional thinking regarding educational policy. Major contributors to this think tank are partly responsible for many of the innovative changes that have occurred in education. As stated in their mission statement, the ultimate beneficiaries of their work are students. Thomas Toch , co-founder of Education Sector, who has a rich history of working with non-profits including the Brookings Institution and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, authored a report about the major companies who control the education testing industry. In his article, *Margins of error: The Education Testing Industry in the No Child Left Behind Era*, Toch (2006) examines testing issues. The report highlights several key players behind the policy, namely the publishing companies who produce the tests used by each state. With nine companies capturing 95% of the testing contracts for tests and testing services (Toch, 2006) there is concern regarding the lucrative nature of providing these services. Since its inception, NCLB has had state testing requirements. In Ohio these tests have changed from the Ohio 9th Grade Proficiency Test in 1994, to the Ohio Graduation Test in 2006, and are due to change again in 2014 as we adopt the Common

Core Standards. The price tag associated with these changes is passed on to each state. It appears that influence is being exerted by the nine companies that control 95% of testing contract shaping the direction of education policy. Interestingly, these nine are some of the largest textbook publishing companies in the United States.

Reauthorizing NCLB

Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as NCLB, requires close examination due to a number of flaws identified by states and school systems rather than blind approval (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010; Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012). A report published by Alliance for Excellence in Education (2010) discusses four elements of critical concern including the lack of consistency with accountability goals and measures, low performing schools and students are not receiving enough attention under the current legislation, limited accountability to how funds are being used and the failure to recognize state-led reform efforts. It is a starting point to reshaping this legislation and demands our attention as a nation of consumers of public education. We have not achieved equity in education and though the narrative has changed, accountability has offered little in the way of an adequate free and public education.

Diane Ravitch, as former Assistant Secretary of Education had significant influence over education policy. Initially a strong supporter of NCLB and education reform, she has since reversed her position regarding NCLB and discusses how this legislation is effectively undermining the education system. In her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010) she discusses how the shift in the narrative from that of reform to accountability changed the dialogue regarding how we

defined a good education. The new dialogue was built upon being able to measure progress and measurement equated to testing. Building a positive school culture, maintaining rich cultural diversity, and social climate were all elements of successful schools that were dropped from the equation. Things that couldn't be measured by annual testing didn't count.

Ravitch further posits that a new era of financed ideological education policy has come to bear in public education. In chapter ten: The Billionaire Boys' Club (p. 195-222), Ravitch reviews how large foundations contributing millions of dollars to elementary and secondary education have driven reform efforts in education. There are few urban district could refuse a million dollar grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Our school district didn't. We should be concerned that foundations have become a driving force behind education reform.

Education policy is changing how we deliver services in our public schools. Yet somehow we have lost the understanding of who the primary stake holders are in this arena, our students who will be the future of our nation. When asked to define what makes a good education, never does one hear adequate yearly progress or 400 points (passing score on the OGT). We speak of creating lifelong learners, critical thinkers, of developing rich problem solvers, of developing creative, imaginative students. These principles cannot be measured and are of no value under the NCLB policy structure. Yet as we face uncertain economic times, these are essential skills that will carry our children into the 21st century and will help them overcome the hurdles that will confront them.

Reauthorization of NCLB is discussed with chagrin as politicians face a conundrum of mandating a standard of education for our nation's children. It is difficult

to change the narrative without appearing to be lowering standards. After more than a decade, there are sufficient data to illustrate the lack of success of this policy (Frugol & Helms, 2012; Lee & Reeves, 2012). The policy has failed in all factors of policy analysis assessment criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, equity and political feasibility. Rather than improving reading and math scores across all states, NCLB has created a caustic atmosphere of competition and peril. It has given rise to districts cheating on high stakes exams, collapse of funding to districts most in need and high stakes testing that hurts the very students it was intended to aid.

Far from efficient or equitable, NCLB has done little to streamline educational practices or benefit those districts who are the most behind. The policy design, although intended to provide autonomy to states in terms of implementation, has instead caused fidelity issues with regards to policy implementation and rigor of standards which vary state to state. Politically, NCLB is a well-intentioned policy that falls far short of its goals. With 34 states now being approved for ESEA “flexibility” as of January 2013, it would appear that we will not meet the initial goal of having students become proficient in reading and math in all states by 2014. There are serious concerns regarding reauthorization of policy that fails on so many fronts.

Lee and Reeves (2012) examined student progress from pre-NCLB and under the NCLB guidelines from 1990 to 2009. Their findings indicated that the level of achievement in reading remained the same or declined after NCLB. In contrast, math scores demonstrated accelerated gains after NCLB. These results, the authors caution, warrant further investigation and possible policy changes to NCLB that would promote long term sustainable academic change. “Although the study does not find a tradeoff

between goals of improving average achievement and narrowing achievement gaps, it is a tall order for a federal education policy to promote both academic excellence and equity” (p. 225).

NCLB has one noted success, testing. We have become a testing nation. With each new test, there are new test study guides, regulations governing the test, evaluators of the test, producers of the test, reporters of the test, tutors for the test. The list goes on and on. NCLB has been good for business! But has it been good for education?

NCLB heralded the lofty goal of having all students in the United States deemed “proficient” in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013/2014 academic school year. This level of proficiency would be determined by individual states utilizing their own testing assessments. Districts wishing to receive federal dollars under this initiative were required to develop academic achievement plans detailing how they will progress towards the goal with Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as determined by high stakes exams. In poor disadvantaged districts, the issue of raising student achievement to the level of state proficiency has called into question the ethics of funding policies (“Financing Better”, 2005; Jaekyung, 2010). Increasingly, as state budgets tighten, funding has decreased to schools requiring them to do more with less. The looming sanctions exacted on districts failing to meet AYP add another bleak stressor into the urban classroom including dropping enrollment, financial cutbacks, and school reconstitution. Unlike wealthier districts, opting out of this federal mandate is not an option for urban districts (Porter-MaGee, 2004) whose hopes of additional funding from city governments evaporated with the lost tax

revenues of a failing economy. We are demanding compliance with the federal mandate but with significant costs to school districts and the children they serve.

State Standards and Benchmarks

The demand for standards that teachers and students could be measured against challenged state governments to develop and define pivotal content areas with standards and sublevel benchmarks outlined at every grade level. Ohio Content Area Reading Standards cover a wide array of information at the secondary level including: Acquisition of Vocabulary, Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies, Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text, and Literary Text and are only the first components of “literacy” as defined by the Ohio Department of Education. Writing being the second component of literacy includes: Writing Application, Writing Process, and Research. Each standard includes several (as many as six) benchmarks that are expected to be covered and assessed. The Ohio Department of Education (2012) states:

Academic content standards provide a set of clear and rigorous expectations for all students. Students need to learn more and do complex work at each grade level as they progress through school. The academic content standards provide clarity to Ohio teachers of what content and skills should be taught at each grade-level. How the material is taught is a local school and district decision.

Under this umbrella, districts are expected to develop and implement curriculum designs per grade level. The scope and sequence manual for Cleveland Metropolitan Schools’ eleventh grade English Language Arts has 64 benchmarks that must be monitored while providing instruction in American Literature. The curriculum manual provides additional objectives that must be monitored and

assessed as they apply to the subject area. Measurement of these benchmarks happens annually on high stakes state exams linking school district performance to funding sources (Berryhill, Linney & Fromewick, 2009; Musoleno & White, 2010).

The participating school district's examination of student progress takes place three times a year, once in September to establish the yearly baseline; January and March to evaluate student growth. The approved tests include computer based exams: STAR Reader (see Appendix E); and NWEA in science (two sections), NWEA math and NWEA reading (see Appendix D). Testing requires students to lose valuable class time to finish the computer based exam lasting approximately 40 minutes each. At HHS lists of students who have not taken any portion of the exam are read aloud daily over the announcements for the two weeks allotted for testing. This does not include the Ohio Graduation testing or the Special Education testing that must occur within the first quarter of the school year. As such, much of September and October each year is dominated by a chaotic period of testing and students readily express their opposition to the frequent disruption in class schedules. The pressure of maintaining this mountain of data takes an emotional toll on teachers becoming an added strain for overburdened teachers contributing to teacher burn-out and low-self efficacy and has resulted in a concerning attrition rate particularly among special education teachers (Bender, Fore, & Martin, 2002; Emry & Vandenberg, 2010; Larwood & Paje, 2004). Chronic fatigue resulting from these constant disruptions can result in poor planning and low implementation of effective instructional practices in the

classroom (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011; Larwood & Paje, 2004; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Should this not be daunting enough, federal mandates that govern special needs students, access to the regular education curriculum require Individualized Education Plans (IEP) be developed and monitored for each student identified. The IEP lists a series of goals that the student is expected to achieve before the end of the IEP year. Literacy skills, being the infrastructure of access to curriculum, are always incorporated into these plans including a series of sub-goals that must be mastered before moving to the annual goal. Goals must be assessed and reported on twice each quarter for all special education students. These progress reports are in addition to the district progress reports and district report card furnished quarterly. Special Education Teachers are required to interview teachers, parents, and students, transcribe notes, demonstrate data collection on goals and benchmarks implemented and enter the reports on a separate computer database. This is an additional four to six hours of work per quarter for these teachers. Failure to provide such documentation results in loss of funding from the state and the matching funds provided by the Federal Government. The weight of maintaining data regarding state standards, benchmarks and IEP goals has fractured the practice of literacy instruction (Berryhill et al., 2009; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Misco, 2011, Musoleno & White 2010) and overwhelmed teachers and administrators alike who attempt to balance the developmental needs of adolescent learners against state policies and practices that garner funding.

Literacy Practices and Teacher Perceptions

Current practices in literacy instruction are determined by the scope and sequence of instruction, developed and approved by each district and parallel the academic state standards and benchmarks at each grade level. It is here that we find the beginnings of the literacy gap, as the transition from third to fourth grade marks a significant change in English Language Arts Instruction. The focus shifts from “learning to read” to that of “reading to learn”. It is within this framework that we must examine literacy practices and teacher perceptions that shape these practices.

Literacy at the secondary level acquires a new definition requiring the learner to take an active role interacting with text, thinking critically, analyzing and interpreting literacy events by reading and writing critically about them (Bean, 2002; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). Literacy becomes a process of multimodal learning as students engage cognitive strategies to interpret and make meaning of literacy events. It is no longer a single skill set taught in the isolation of high school English classes but a complex multidimensional toolbox students utilize to construct meaning of the ever-changing world around them (Moje, 2008; Moore, 2007). Much more than print, text and language arts, literacy in the 21st century has advanced at a mind numbing pace requiring new interpretation that engenders synthesis of expanding and increasingly changing contact zones of print, speech, text, media and written language (Ajayi, 2011; Blair, 1998; Moje et al., 2000; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011).

Moje, Dillon and O'Brien (2000) examine the dynamic role of literacy at the secondary level. The authors posit the meaning constructed from the various text students encounter is "shaped by the social and cultural practices that persons bring to their literate interactions in various contexts" (p. 176). Literacy is not a linear construct but continually changing and evolving within various contexts. As students move from class to class, switching content area subjects, teachers and groups of peers they interact with, Moje et. al. argue that there is shift in meaning making based on the interchange between these variables. Students who see themselves as proficient in one subject area may enter the next class with feelings of significantly lower self-efficacy due to lower achievement or perceived lower relationship support from the teacher. As students are required to deal with more complex text and concepts, the supportive relationship between student and teacher becomes an important dynamic. Many teachers may be unaware of the significant impact of this relationship on student achievement (Ali, 2009).

Contributing to the development of the student- teacher relationship are the teacher's perceptions about their abilities to teach the subject area, beliefs about their students and their beliefs about meeting the needs of stakeholders including parents, administration, and community members. A formidable new stressor to teacher efficacy is the shift in teacher evaluation from direct observation of a teacher to the indirect feature of student performance (Berryhill et al., 2009) as measured by standardized test scores. These scores, student growth measures, will account for 50% of a teacher's evaluation in Ohio beginning in

2015 (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) and test the resiliency of educators across the state as they attempt to reconcile their self-efficacy with public demands for “accountability”.

The ability to maintain high levels of positive self-efficacy are frequently diminished by the weight of accountability practices. Schools with strong ties to “measurable academic goals” have higher rates of teacher burn-out (Berryhill et al., 2009; Cantrell & Callaway, 2008) with the emotional toll paid by teachers mirrored in the attrition rate of novice teachers. Crushed and defeated, many young teachers working in high poverty areas leave with shattered insights of a broken school system focused solely on test scores.

Educators are frontline workers in impoverished urban areas and must work to guard against developing negative perceptions of their employment circumstances. Teacher perceptions and beliefs play a pivotal role in the meaning making process as students negotiate the school environment (Ali, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Moje et al. 2000; Thompson & Webber, 2010). The ability to maintain high expectations and deliver engaging rigorous lessons is critical to the academic success of students and yet the pressure to demonstrate high levels of performance on high-stakes exams can cause teachers to change from developmentally rich instructional practice which promote literacy and comprehension of complex ideas to practices that realize immediate but short-lived results including standardized test preparation (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011; Musoleno & White 2010, Rustique-Forrester, 2005).

Love (2005) found a positive correlation between teachers who believed that teaching was a way of giving back to the community and reading scores. Overall, there were seven elements that were found to correlate significantly with student achievement. These included: teacher ability to connect with students, teachers switching roles with students in the classroom, parent involvement, interdependence of students, teacher seeing teaching as a way to give back to community, believing in success of all students, and the teachers' use of repetition, drill and practice. Teachers believed that parent involvement was essential to improving student achievement and witnessed this parent participation in their classrooms had students who scored higher than their peers on the mathematics and reading achievement tests. These findings were not surprising and are consistent with the positive correlation found between teacher efficacy and student achievement (Ali, 2009; Cantrell & Gallaway, 2008; Copeland et al., 2011; Haney, Wang, & Zoffel, 2007).

Ali (2009), details the integral connection between teacher expectations, student motivation and student self-perceptions. The positive interplay between these elements serves to boost student motivation to continue to work on difficult tasks and improved academic performance. In addition, a positive correlation was also found between low teacher expectation, lower levels of student motivation and lower academic performance. This cycle appears to be based in teachers' knowledge and perceptions of their students' abilities and the differential treatment between high and low achievers in the classroom. These varied

expectations may result in long term lower efficacy for low achieving students as they internalize the limited potentials expressed by their teacher.

Struggling students face compounded issues in high school. Secondary content area teachers have very different views regarding literacy instruction in their classrooms. “Not my responsibility!” Secondary content area teachers are frequently resistant to the thought of losing valuable content instructional time to “teaching reading” (Christy, 2011; Copeland et al., 2011; Moje, 1996) as such, students who struggle with literacy skills fall further and further behind as they are unable to interact with ever increasing complexities presented in their textbook (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Gallagher, 2009). Teachers with low efficacy towards content literacy instruction were more likely to blame these struggling readers, unlike their counterparts who employed a variety of teaching strategies to assist those who were behind (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008; Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Graetz 2003). An inescapable byproduct of this new regime of “accountability”, these negative attitudes are generated by the voracious demand to increase test scores and are counter to improving student self-efficacy and motivation.

The pressure to meet AYP has become a significant factor in how instructional time is spent (Musoleno, 2010). In Harper High School, changes in core subject areas to block scheduling are a relevant example of shifting instructional time to accommodate increased time for test preparation. They developed an adjusted curricular practice to meet the demands of test preparation. All tenth grade content area classes were modified to 80 minute classes with the

first 40 minutes devoted to the content area and the second 40 minutes to be used for OGT preparation. The rationale for instituting block scheduling was to provide for standardized test preparation resulting in higher achievement scores. We have become a testing nation driven by data, numbers and performance that must be quantifiable via a system of measures whose results we await annually on the Nation's Report Card.

Performance indicators are measured in statistical data derived from various tests approved by the state department of education and local district as effective measures of student progress. In Ohio, these tests include the Ohio Graduation Test given for the first time in March of the tenth grade year and subsequently every fall and spring for juniors and seniors who have not passed one or more parts and the NWEA test given in the fall, winter and spring. Unfortunately for many teachers, this has come to mean teaching effective test taking strategies rather than developing critical thinking skills and problem solving strategies.

Perceptions and their Manifestation in the Classroom

The pressure to maintain AYP, proficient scores on teacher evaluations, and funding resources from the state and federal government, has immediate impacts within classrooms across the nation and has given rise to a myriad of instructional programs that will measure and print out data regarding student performance across various benchmarks and standards. Districts focused on gaining valuable points for students on various assessments purchase “scientifically researched based intervention” programs such as Accelerated

Reader, READ 180 or the Wilson Reading Program and require a beleaguered staff to learn a new system of evaluating, instructing (if they are to maintain program fidelity), and reporting progress for students. These programs were developed to address literacy deficits at the elementary level, and later stretched to the middle school level to meet the demands for intervention and data. High school literacy, often perceived as an island unto itself, offered little if any intervention maintaining instead the “high level of rigorous instruction” that covers a wealth of curriculum as mapped out by their district. As many teachers report, they have not been trained as reading teachers, allowing these programs to take the place of individualized instruction for students with significant literacy needs (Copeland et al., 2011; Gallagher, 2010, Moje, 1996).

Successful Interventions

Contradictory to current practices, there is developing evidence that interventions at this level can be successful. Holloway (1999), reviewed intervention practices at the secondary level and found that one grade level of reading achievement was reported after only one semester by those students who participated in a formal reading course. By the end of the second semester, the reading gain was five times the mean gain made by other students in a comparable time period at school. Explicit reading instruction with student centered materials provided significant gains which were generalized to reading in the content areas.

Holloway’s research discussed three key areas related to the lack of reading comprehension among secondary readers. Motivation, lack of experience and egocentricity are cited as central issues. Not only is student motivation discussed but

teachers' resistance to provide cross curricular reading intervention is also noted. The study was conducted at San Diego's Morse High School and reading improvements were measured using the Abbreviated Stanford Achievement Test (ASAT). Students participated in a formal reading course that stressed vocabulary building through natural language and through reading at school and at home. Extensive staff development and training regarding instructional strategies that stress vocabulary development, comprehension and writing were linked to improved standardized test scores at the secondary level. Explicit reading instruction with student centered materials provided significant gains which were generalized to reading in the content areas. Links to other methods that noted similar success in secondary schools was also provided.

Shankweiler et al. (1996) also found supplemental reading instruction would generate improve reading scores at the secondary level. They examined the relationship between word reading and spelling skills and reading proficiency and comprehension. The author states that relatively few studies have examined this relationship. Reading interventions were examined for two groups of ninth and tenth grade students. Students participated in a series of tests that examined spelling, reading, decoding, and metalinguistics including phoneme and morphological awareness. Though these skills are frequently taught in elementary years, there is no such instruction in the secondary schools yet these are the very skills that are found lacking in illiterate or semiliterate adults. This research found the five literacy measures: decoding, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, and print exposure, to be significantly inter-correlated with a large group of ninth grade students. The authors also posit that word recognition and higher processes involved in reading are constrained by this ability to fluently transcode print into

language. The implications are significant as we review current instructional strategies in place at the secondary level. Comprehension skills are seen as a separate skills set from decoding and this research presents data to the contrary.

More recently, these findings were also supported by Kemple, Corrin, Nelson, Salinger, Herrmann, Drummond, et al. (2008) examined findings from the Enhanced Reading Opportunity (ERO) study. The study evaluated two supplemental reading programs aimed at improving reading comprehension skills and school performance for struggling ninth graders. Two cohorts of students from 34 high schools participated in two supplementary programs: Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy which followed flexible fidelity meaning that teachers could adapt their lessons to the needs of their students; Xtreme Reading followed a direct instruction format where lessons were prescribed with limited flexibility. High schools were randomly assigned to one of the two literacy programs. Early results indicated significant gains in the area of reading vocabulary and comprehension but despite the gains, 76 percent of the students enrolled in the Enhanced Reading Opportunity classes were still reading two or more years below grade level.

Lang, Torgesen, Vogel, Chanter, Lefsky, and Petscher (2009) conducted a yearlong study which investigated the effectiveness of intensive reading intervention for high school students. 1,265 ninth grade students in 89 classes in seven different high schools in a large district participated in the study. The study included four intervention groups (READ 180, REACH System 2002, and Reach Intervention through Strategy Enhancement – RISE) and one control group called “business as usual” which taught test taking strategies that applied to the state exam and state standards. These three

interventions demonstrated gains in reading ability and the findings were consistent with a larger study by Kemple et al. (2008) which supported reading intervention for ninth grade students reading below grade level. Here too, many students remained reading below grade level at the end of the yearlong intervention. As noted by the author, students entering high school reading substantially below grade level will require several years of intensive remedial reading instruction if we are to close the achievement gap in reading.

Downing, Williams and Holden (2009), reported on a reading remediation program that involved 151 at-risk students in a public setting. The study cites work detailing the negative economic and emotional consequences that follow poor readers into adulthood. Also noted was the significance of poor readers in the early school years as they continue to be poor readers when they reach high school and seldom catch up to their peers. The participants received a research based intervention that addressed the components of successful reading as outlined by the National Reading Panel Report of 2000. The study found that students who received greater intervention exposure experienced greater reading achievement scores. This is not surprising. Even those students that received less than the recommended intervention experienced higher reading achievement scores.

Several of these studies utilized interventions that are not part of the prescribed curriculum for high school including: direct instruction, metalinguistic instruction, basic spelling and decoding skills. Frequently, these are instructional practices that are tied to elementary “learning to read” practices or to special education classrooms and would never be part of secondary classroom instruction. Secondary teachers need a wide array

of strategies from which they may draw to address the varying reading and writing abilities of their students. Teachers at the secondary level have seldom received training in remediating reading skills or literacy instruction in their content area (Copeland et al., 2011; Ajayi, 2011). As a result, effective intervention strategies may not be utilized by as they are not measured on any of the high stakes tests.

Not surprisingly, several of the studies found that even though positive gains were realized, a significant number of these students remained reading below grade level even after the intervention period. These studies support the findings that once behind, at-risk readers remain behind for the remainder of their educational experience. Thus continuing a vicious cycle of struggling to catch up and perpetuating the self-doubt associated with low self-efficacy and low achievement (Georgiou, Stavrinos and Kalavara, 2007).

Brasseur-Hock, Hock, Kieffer, Biancarosa, and Deshler (2011) sought to answer the following research question: “Do adolescents with below-average comprehension exhibit differentiated profiles of component reading skills including word reading accuracy, word level and passage-level fluency, and oral language?” (p.448). Once thought to be a skill rooted in verbal skills and decoding abilities (Nation & Snowling, 2004; Ouellette, 2006), other factors may be enmeshed in this fundamental skill that impact comprehension. The implications for understanding the multiple skills embedded in reading comprehension are essential in furthering our ability to provide interventions for adolescent struggling readers.

In their study, the sample included 345 students entering their ninth-grade at three separate urban high schools in two Midwestern cities. The students ranged in age from 13.45 years to 17.5 years of age. Using Latent Class Analysis (LCA), a subgroup of

below average readers was identified (n = 195). This subgroup was the basis of a second LCA which yielded five distinct profiles of component skills. This research developed distinct profiles of the subgroup. The researchers assessed poor readers in three areas: Reading Accuracy, Reading Fluency, and Language Comprehension. They divided each category into several component skills including word attack and letter-word identification for Reading Accuracy, accuracy, phonemic decoding efficiency, sight word efficiency and rate for Reading Fluency, and reading vocabulary, picture word identification and listening comprehension for Language Comprehension. This is a dynamic shift from the manner in which we currently identify struggling readers and has far reaching implications regarding remediation of reading skills.

The strength of this research was the multiple reading component skills that were examined and scored using a variety of tests. This format challenges how we currently identify struggling readers by a single cut score and little is known about their subsequent strengths or weak component skills (Brasseur-Hock et al., 2011). Considerable heterogeneity was noted amongst the profiles and was associated with specific strengths and weakness in the component skills.

Therefore, compelling evidence exists regarding the need to develop comprehensive reading programs at the secondary level. The instruction must be balanced and include word level and comprehension skills as well as assessment of component skills. This will be a dramatic shift from current practices in urban centers that have focused more on test preparation and less on literacy skills but is warranted due to declining reading scores (Gallagher, 2010). The analysis in this study supports

interventions responsive to the individual profiles identified as a means of closing the achievement gap.

This research identifies the uniqueness of the needs demonstrated by urban populations. The authors state, “generalizing findings from studies of other struggling readers may not address unique learning needs of the urban student population” (Brasseur-Hock et al., 2011, p. 438) highlighting the unique needs and contexts that govern urban students. Over the past decade we have become skilled at identifying the achievement gap, Brasseur-Hock et al. offer us a means to ameliorate it.

Given the changing landscape of education, school districts are faced with many questions. If we agree that literacy is an essential skill linked to the future success of our students, then we must insure that they have these critical literacy skills in their tool bags before they leave us. Literacy requires motivated engagement which stretches students past perceived limits. This would dictate a more student centered approach to curriculum and instruction with less emphasis on prescriptive direct instruction strategies that yield nebulous data relished only by an unknowing public.

Both Plaut (2009) and Gallagher (2009) express similar views regarding improving literacy in school which are consistent with the overarching themes discussed in educational research including improving professional development, providing authentic materials as a means to increase student motivation and connecting teaching materials and strategies to students’ everyday life experiences. Too frequently, our educational practices are disconnected from the world students are immersed in daily. Students become disengaged, lacking motivation to extrapolate possible futures from perceived archaic instruction (Skerrett & Bommer, 2011). They turn off, shut down and

plug in to escape via mp3 players, cell phones, and computers (Moore, 2007). These are new literacies students understand and receive immediate reinforcement from. These are literacies with which our students are successful. They dialogue daily about the latest app, communicate in a language foreign to most of us over 40 (texting) and learn more from watching “youtube” videos than from their 80 minute lecture classes. Students are motivated to engage in these forms of literacy. How unfortunate that we often vilify, suppress or dismiss the discourse of our youth.

Knowing that much of our students’ motivation is shaped by the experiences that they have in school (Stipek, 1996; 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), Gambrell posits positive literacy motivation promotes improved reading achievement, cognitive processing, and concept comprehension (as cited in Daisey, 2010). It would stand to reason that being able to read efficiently would improve one’s self-efficacy and motivation to participate in an academic environment and the inability to do so would generate an aggressive backlash against the institution of school. Being literate is much more than reading text on the page. Literacy is access, access to self-motivated learning and future success. Literacy provides access to the American Dream.

It would behoove educators to examine the instructional practices that are being utilized that are extinguishing intrinsic motivation and positive self-efficacy. Both are integral constructs of reading motivation (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, Perencevich, 2004) and have far reaching implications regarding instructional practices and student achievement. At its most basic level, literacy’s foundation is reading from which we construct meaning and understanding of the all that surrounds us. Secondary students

unable to read languish in silence, socially promoted and finally expelled into communities that have little sympathy for their diminished skills.

We are obligated as a nation to provide the basic skills necessary to become active participants in our nation's democracy. More so than any other skill, literacy is at the heart of all democracies (Sizer as cited in Plaut, 2009). Being able to read, understand, evaluate and be critical or supportive of the language of ideas is at the root of active participation. This interaction demands a level of curiosity, motivation and prowess that must be cultivated and encouraged. Educators of today can no longer be viewed as the keeper of knowledge but must become facilitators who bridge the barriers of access to equity.

Georgiou, Stavrinides, and Kalavana (2007), found that students, especially those who belonged to groups that were affected by social bias or discrimination were likely to underestimate their abilities and not work to their full potential. This is a common occurrence in urban centers where declining infrastructure, limited funds to provide basic supplies and books for students affirms the belief system that they don't deserve better and contaminates teacher beliefs and expectation of this population. A sense of learned helplessness and lowered expectations flourishes under these harsh circumstances impacting both student and teacher alike. These infectious thoughts often are realized in lower academic achievement and higher drop-out rates amongst urban youth.

Secondary schools must rekindle reading skills by developing curiosities, encouraging engagement while interpreting text and exploring concepts through the language of ideas that are current, enlightening, and relevant to our charges. Reading and writing are much more than the test scores at the end of the year and must not debase the

richness of literacies students participate in throughout their day both in and out of school. It is an element of a broader foundation that permits students to construct meaning from every situational context. Educators must develop a more comprehensive understanding of outside of school literacies offering validation of this wealth of knowledge. This recognition and affirmation will build trust for struggling readers and serve to scaffold underlying premises of outside skills and strengths to in-school content area concepts. Literacy is the critical skill that will arm our students to combat the uncertainty that enshrouds their futures and permit them to engage with communities near and far as 21st Century global citizens.

“Learning to read is at once the most basic, time-honored, and yet most complex and future-focused activity of schooling” (Maniates & Mahiri, 2011, p.20). All of our students have visions of their futures tied to an identity we have participated in developing. Literacies learned both in and out of school are central to expressing these goals and desires, offering access to unlimited futures. Literacy instruction has become lost in a great storm of public demand for measurable accountability. Chaotically expressed through state standards, benchmarks, IEPs, and funding, repeatedly measured and reported on, these demands have restructured the terrain of the classroom from “future-focused” to an annual test score focused. Instructional practices that once opened the doors of curious exploration of concepts and ideas have been quietly closed to allow additional time to build test preparation skills. The winds of change have torn asunder the value of literacy as a gateway skill to lifelong learning and leave in their aftermath a new “measurable” focus for education that is limited, immediate and finite as evidenced in declining national test scores.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

This research was employed to determine if class placement (regular and special education classes) district level reading scores and state assessments statistically significantly predicted passage on the OGT Reading. Teacher perceptions of effective literacy practices at the secondary level in a large urban high school were also explored as a qualitative component of this research. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between class placement, NWEA Reading scores (see Appendix D), STAR Reader scores (see Appendix E) and OGT Reading Scores (see Appendix I). These were measures of student growth used by the participating district. The quantitative data provided a spring board for discussion with focus groups of regular and special education teachers, I explored teacher perceptions about reading interventions, both that these teachers now engage their students in as well as ones which they believe would impact reading achievement. The focus group also considered the impact of their teaching on the diverse reading comprehension levels of students from a large urban high school. Further,

this study sought to examine if there is a relationship between variables that may contribute to these scores including teacher perceptions about services, class placement, and remediation practices.

Research Questions

The following questions will offer a contextual background of literacy at the high school level. Specifically this study will address:

1. To what extent do the kind of classes (special education, regular education), NWEA scores, STAR reader scores, statistically significantly predict passage on the Ohio Graduation Test in reading?
2. What are the mean and median grade level instructional reading comprehension scores for seniors from a large urban high school?
3. What are teacher perceptions about reading interventions, class placement and services offered that are helpful and those they believe would be helpful if implemented at the secondary level?

This study was a mixed method study. The quantitative data include both state mandated assessment and somewhat more diagnostic district mandated assessment to provide a picture of the reading levels at which both special education and regular education students function at the time of graduation from a large urban high school. I added a qualitative component to the quantitative data so regularly generated. The focus group provided a context for what was happening in a large urban high school regarding literacy and contextualized literacy practices teachers found effective at this level as well

as their ideas on class placement and services offered to students. As previously stated in Chapters I and II, there is little research regarding secondary teachers' perceptions regarding literacy practices. Thus, a qualitative component added to the foundation of this critical research.

Discussed in this chapter is the design of the study, the research questions and the instruments utilized including their validity and reliability. Furthermore, this chapter presented the data collection procedure, the process used for quantitative data analysis and a description of the qualitative data analysis of the teacher surveys and the teacher focus groups. Finally, limitations to the study will be presented.

Research Design

This study utilized a mix-method process to provide a richer, deeper description of the elements that surround literacy and literacy scores at the high school level. Mixed methods, in which quantitative and qualitative methods are combined, are increasingly recognized as valuable, because they can capitalize on the respective strengths of each approach” (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2008). Ample quantitative data has been readily available annually regarding reading scores, yet little is understood as to how these scores translate into real world components. These scores took the form of reading scores published annually on the state report card as well as national reading scores which were generated through NAEP tests. As such, it was necessary to develop a greater understanding of the context in which reading takes place in a large urban high school and how the literacy practices and reading scores inform our understanding of students and their knowledge base. Focused group interviewing of teachers who had first-

hand knowledge of the context, students and data was necessary to develop a refined picture of these practices in high school.

Participants

The participants in this study included teachers and students from a large urban high school in a Midwestern city. The high school is one of the few remaining comprehensive⁶ 9 – 12 grade high schools in the city and provides a college preparatory curriculum with both honors and advanced placement courses. The total enrollment for the school at the time of the study was 833 students with 428 females and 405 males. Of the total student population, 214 students were receiving special education services⁷ requiring Individualized Education Plans⁸. One hundred percent of the students in this district receive free and reduced lunch.

The student to teacher ratio for the participating high school was 40 to 1 for regular education teachers during the 2012 – 2013 school year. The total number of regular education teachers was 34. This ratio differed in the special education classrooms due to federal requirements of class size of 16 to 1. The large percentage of students requiring special education services at this building demanded a large teaching staff of 19 special education teachers. These teachers are responsible for instructing core subject

⁶ Comprehensive high schools were designed to serve the needs of all students and do not have selection processes for course participation. These high schools have declined in number due to comprehensive school reforms over the past decade that have given rise to charter schools and alternative school which can require entrance exams or participation requirements (Rumberger, 2011).

⁷ Special education services are supplemental services provided by a school district to ensure a student has equal access to regular education. These services are identified by the IEP team that includes teachers, the student's parent or guardian, administrator, other personnel qualified to discuss the nature of the student disability, and the student himself/herself and written into an IEP that is reviewed and renewed annually.

⁸ Individualize Education Plan (IEP) is developed based upon the academic needs of a student who has been identified as having a disability that impedes access to general education curriculum (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2002).

areas of English, Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics for the special needs students outside of the regular education classroom.

Quantitative Methodology

In order to determine the current reading comprehension levels of students graduating from this urban high school, quantitative measures were applied. The STAR Reader Assessment is utilized by this school district for the purpose of determining the current reading comprehension ability of the students. English teachers were responsible for giving this assessment early in September, again in January and finally in May of each year. All students in the participating district are required to take the STAR Reader Assessment exam (see Appendix E) at least twice during each year they attend high school. This assessment is the initial placement exam for the district wide reading program, Accelerated Reader program.

The district adopted this computerized reading assessment program to track the total number of books read by children and to supply teachers with reports on student progress in reading comprehension skills. The Star Reader Diagnostic Reports (see Appendix F) generated were intended to provide the teacher with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The range of book levels that will challenge a student without causing frustration and will result in optimal learning. This test also yields a reading comprehension grade level score for each student. This score was a marker for teachers and guides them towards a better understanding of their students reading competency level and provided for differentiation of instruction in the classroom. For the purpose of this study, only the fall mean and median STAR Reader test results for senior students were reported. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade reading instructional levels were

included for the purposes of the linear regression. It was hypothesized that students that participated in the regular education classroom would demonstrate a higher reading comprehension score as measured on the STAR Reader exam and that this score will translate into a higher passage rate for these students on the OGT Reading. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that teachers desired a specific course at the secondary level to address the needs of students who were reading significantly below grade level. Reading comprehension is of critical importance to all subject areas but teaching students how to read is not a skill all teachers have nor do they possess the time to teach both reading and subject area material.

Other quantitative measures employed by the district to provided information regarding reading and literacy levels included *Northwestern Evaluation Association (NWEA)* Reading Test scores, and *Ohio Graduation Test (OGT)* Reading test scores. All 9th and tenth grade students in the participating district took the *STAR Reader Assessment* and the NWEA Reading test at least twice a year, once in the Fall and again in the Spring. The OGT is given to tenth grade students in March of each year. For eleventh and twelfth grade students who have not passed the exam, the exam was given in both October and March of the school year. These quantitative measures offered levels of student abilities in reading at the secondary level. A sample of such reports can be viewed in Appendix F.

Qualitative Methodology

A phenomenological methodology was selected for this study because phenomenology is focused less on the interpretation of the researcher and more on the experiences and descriptions provided by the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenology seeks to capture the essence of an experience (or phenomenon) lived by a group of individuals in a shared experience at a time, and place (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Merriam (2009) suggests that Phenomenology can also be used to study people's everyday experiences. This type of research is based on the assumption that there is an essence to shared experience. Often, the richness and depth of an experience cannot be fully understood through quantitative measures. As is consistent with this form of research, I was not interested in reducing these lived experiences of teachers to categorical data that would be expressed abstractly through numbers but wanted to focus on depicting the essence or basic structure of their lived experience.

Unlike the quantitative researcher who begins with a hypothesis they wish to test, qualitative researchers seek to build richer, deeper understandings of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative component to the dissertation was used to offset the tremendous amount of quantitative data currently available regarding reading levels with the personal perspectives of teachers regarding what does impact reading at the secondary level. Using a sample group of six participants, interviewing allowed for the nature of themes to arise. Keeping the small sample size allowed for the researcher to get close to participants, build trust and ask detailed questions and receive responses that offered increased consistency, accuracy and authenticity. The qualitative components included 1) a *Teacher Perception Survey* and 2) a focused group of six urban regular and special education teachers.

The qualitative measure, a *Teacher Perception Survey* (Appendix G) was emailed to teachers in September 2013. This survey had been piloted the previous spring and the descriptive statistics including the mean and median responses were reviewed (see

Appendix H). The pilot survey response scale was changed from a 1 to 10 Likert style scale indicating strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (10) to a 1 to 4 Likert scale indicating strongly disagree (1), disagree (2) agree (3) strongly agree (4). The new scale used in the study allowed the researcher a more refined understanding of teacher's perceptions about literacy practices and did not allow for a neutral response.

The teacher survey was developed to offer a window into the secondary classroom and the literacy practices as they occur within the school setting. Though the survey questions and answers were not standardized, they provided a unique perspective otherwise untapped by achievement data. The anonymity of the survey allowed teachers to answer candidly regarding their perceptions regarding current literacy practices at the high school level. All results were maintained on SURVEYMONKEY.COM.

Results from the survey were then analyzed for emergent themes. These themes were then used as a basis for discussion with a volunteer focus group made up of six teachers: three Special Education teachers and three regular education teachers. Focus groups allowed the group dynamic to generate further discussions and shift the focus from the individual to questions and topics (Patton, 2002). "Focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives-but don't" (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004, p.65). This is frequently the case for educators.

At the beginning of the focus groups, the six teachers were presented with the quantitative data from the March 2013 OGT Reading exam, April 2013 Star Reader scores, the May 2013 NWEA reading scores and the mean and median results for each question on the *Teacher Perception Survey*. This served as the opening forum of discussion for the group where we discussed what current literacy practices teachers

believed were successful in their building and what teachers perceived would be successful literacy interventions if implemented.

Sample and Procedure

The quantitative measures included the STAR Reader Assessment, OGT Reading Test Scores, NWEA reading scores. These scores were selected because they are the quantitative statistics utilized by the participating district to determine student growth and academic progress. The class placement in regular or special education was obtained from the Spring 2013 data available within the participating district to all teachers. All scores were obtained from the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students.

An initial pilot *Teacher Perception Survey* (see Appendix H) was conducted in February 2013. The pilot data were collected and reviewed in March 2013. The survey was edited and revised based upon the initial results. The revised survey (see Appendix G) was used for the study and was e-mailed to the study participants in September of 2013. Of the 55 surveys e-mailed to teachers, 43 surveys were completed. The e-mail included the consent letter (see Appendix J) which informed teachers that they could end the survey at any time during the process without it being recorded. Included in the consent letter were the individuals involved in collecting the data, the value of the research, the amount of time required for the survey, how the data would be stored and for how long, and contact information of the researcher.

The sample was taken from one comprehensive high school (grades 9 – 12) in the participating district and included both regular education teachers⁹ and special education

⁹ Regular education teachers in grades 7 - 12 are defined by the state of Ohio as an individual that has earned a bachelor's degree and holds state certification/licensure in their teaching assignment. Alternative certification status can be achieved by holding a Master's degree in the core subject taught, passing the

teachers¹⁰ from each grade level. The school population is diverse and has over 25% of the students identified as in need of special education services. The complexities of dealing with this wide array of abilities levels frequently caused frustration amongst teachers who felt unable to adequately address the varying levels. The survey was selected as a method that would allow some anonymity to teachers when expressing their perceptions about the district programs, interventions, reflections of their abilities and the abilities of their students. The researcher is a member of the staff and has listened to colleagues discussing the issues of poor literacy skills of the students and the fear of discussing this openly with administrators as it may be perceived as a reflection of teacher inadequacy.

All teachers at the high school were given an invitation to participate in the focus group that would meet for one hour after school (see Appendix K for invitation letter). The first three regular education teachers and the first three special education teachers to return invitations were selected to participate in the focus group. The focus group was scheduled to meet after the survey data was collected and reviewed by the researcher. Mean and median scores were reported for each question and a copy provided for each of the participants. The survey report and the mean and median of the reading assessments (STAR, NWEA, and OGT) offered the starting point for discussion.

The focus group discussion was held on October 9, 2013. This timing allowed teachers to get situated in their new year, new classrooms and with the incoming students.

PRAXIS or NTE exam in the core subject area taught or having 30 semester hours in the core subject area being taught (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

¹⁰ Special education teachers in grades 7 – 12 are defined by the state of Ohio as an individual that has earned a bachelor's degree and holds state certification/licensure in one of these areas: Mild/Medianrate, Medianrate/Intensive, Hearing Impaired, and Visually Impaired, 24 semester hours in the area of intervention specialist including 18 semester hours of the core subject area being taught with six semester hours in teaching of reading. (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

In order to best preserve the integrity of the dialogue, the researcher invited the participants to a classroom located away from the main building and administration. This offered the teachers privacy to discuss freely the concerns reading and literacy practices in their classrooms without fear of being overheard. Selecting a convenient but private location facilitated the honest sharing of ideas (Breen, 2006; Cheng, 2007). The discussion was captured on a digital voice recorder and transcribed after the meeting (see Appendix L for transcript). The transcripts were examined for common themes as they applied to literacy practices in high school.

A follow-up focus group discussion (see Appendix L) was planned for October 16, 2013. The same members were invited back to review the transcripts of the first meeting. Participant review played a critical role in this portion of qualitative research. By asking the teachers to review the rough draft of the researcher's transcription for accuracy and findings, participants were able to provide alternative language (Creswell, 2007), "critical observations or interpretations" (Stake, 1995, p. 115). This form of member checking greatly improves the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Teachers in the participating district began the 2013 – 2014 school year in mid-August. Professional training began August 12, 2013 with students arriving for classes August 19. The *Teacher Perception Survey* was distributed to all teachers within the participating high school (N= 55) on September 24, 2013, via the school e-mail account. The initial e-mail contained a brief introduction, the letter of consent and an embedded link to the survey on SURVEYMONKEY. The sample included 19 Special Education

Teachers and 36 regular education teachers from grades 9 - 12. As literacy skills are expected to be taught across the curriculum, teachers of all subject areas were included in the survey process. A two week window was provided for teachers to complete the survey before the survey was closed and analyzed.

Prior to 1992, Ohio high school students were permitted to graduate with a Certificate of Attendance if they met all curriculum requirements but failed to pass the ninth grade tests or achieve a Diploma with Distinction. In 1994, with the passage of House Bill 55, the Ohio legislature established the exit requirements for all high school students. The bill initially required exams to be given in 9th grade. Students would demonstrate a level of proficiency deemed as acceptable in five areas: Citizenship, Reading, Writing, Mathematics and Science. With the enactment of No Child Left Behind (2001), the Ohio Department of Education adopted the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) in 2001. The five test areas were to meet the high school graduation core content area requirements established under the new Federal law and would align with the soon to be developed academic content standards. The students' OGT Reading scores will serve as a second quantitative dependent variable (see Appendix I).

The data analysis included a linear regression analysis used to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the predictor variables: STAR Reader Score, NWEA Score, Classes taught (regular or special education) and the dependent variable of OGT Reading Score. Data from the 2012-2013 school year was used for this analysis. It is believed that a large percentage of students, not just those in special education classrooms, were reading three or more grade levels below their current grade placement.

Descriptive statistics from the fall 2013 STAR Reader assessment, including the mean and median reading comprehension scores of senior students were examined. The intent was to illustrate the wide reading comprehension ability students possess when entering their final year at a large urban high school. These scores were obtained in October 2013. There may be a large number of students who are reading at or below a sixth grade level and yet are expected to participate, read, and make meaning from textbooks well above their instructional level. Students who graduate with an instructional reading grade-level between fourth and sixth grade would be considered functionally illiterate.

The qualitative component included the *Teacher Perception Survey*. Teachers marked a four point Likert style survey indicating if they agreed, strongly agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements regarding literacy and literacy practices in their high school. The findings of the survey served to inform the topics of discussion for the focus group (see). Descriptive statistics including the mean and median scores for each question were examined and reported.

The focus groups were presented with the core elements that emerged from the *Teacher Perception Survey* as well as the statistical data from both the linear regression analysis and the descriptive statistics. This provided the basis for a semi-structured forum which allowed teachers to reflect upon current literacy practices and develop ideas regarding those possible interventions teachers felt would be successful if implemented. The focus group met once October 9, 2013 and again October 16, 2013 to allow for follow-up and clarification. Transcripts and common themes recorded by the researcher were reviewed during the second meeting. Teachers were encouraged to evaluate the core

themes identified and validate the accuracy of the transcripts, themes and researcher's findings. These findings were intended to offer areas of further research of programs thought to be helpful if implemented and to provide feedback to curriculum advisors regarding teacher perceptions of current successful literacy practices.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The main purpose of this mixed methods study was twofold. Quantitative data was used to determine to what extent reading scores and class placement statistically predicted passage on the OGT. The mean and median reading comprehension scores of senior high school students were also examined. Qualitative data was used to explore teacher perceptions about literacy and literacy practices in high school. This data included a teacher perception survey about literacy practices paired with a focus group to discuss the quantitative data and survey results. A large urban high school in a Midwestern city was the source of the participants for this study.

The quantitative sample included test scores from the 2012-2013 school year. The test scores were generated in the Spring of 2013 by ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students. The standardized test scores included the NWEA Reading, the STAR Reader test, and the OGT Reading. All student score information was taken from the district's teacher resource website, SchoolNet. All teachers within the participating district have access to this information. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 was used to analyze the test scores.

The qualitative component of this study included a Teacher Perception Survey emailed to the participants and a focus group. SPSS was used to analyze resulting responses and provide descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis through constant comparison method of the verbatim transcription was used to analyze the dialogue from the focus group.

The student population of the participating high school during the 2012-2013 school year included:

Table III. Harper High School Enrollment Data 2012 – 2013

	Number of Students	Percent
Total Enrollment	837	-
Female	428	51.14%
Male	409	48.86%
Ethnicity: African-American	393	46.95%
Ethnicity: American Indian	4	0.48%
Ethnicity: Asian/Pacific Islander	14	1.67%
Ethnicity: Hispanic	100	11.95%
Ethnicity: White	301	35.96%
Ethnicity: Multiracial	24	2.87%
IEP	222	26.52%
LEP	37	4.42%

The initial Institutional Review Board application was made on August 27, 2013. Specific changes were requested and revisions were submitted and approved on September 18, 2013. On September 24, 2013 the researcher provided an overview of the study to the participating high school staff members. During this presentation, staff

members were provided with the letter of consent for the Teacher Perception Survey and Teacher Perception Survey internet link.

Research Question 1:

To what extent do the kind of classes (special education, regular education), Northwestern Evaluation Association (NWEA) scores, STAR Reading Assessment scores, statistically significantly predict passage on the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) reading?

Student Test scores were downloaded from the district website, SchoolNet, on September 28, 2013. NWEA, STAR , OGT reading scores from the 2012-2013 school year and class placement either regular or special education were obtained. Data for class placement were recoded from yes, indicating participation in special education programs to the number one and from no, indicating regular education placement to the number zero.

The predictor variables were class placement (special education or regular education), NWEA Reading test scores provided scores that correlated to the OGT reading test, and STAR Reading Assessment scores which stated grade level reading comprehension scores per student. The dependent variable was the March 2013 OGT Reading score where 400 points was passing. A standard multiple regression was used to determine if class placement in special education/regular education, NWEA Reading Scores and STAR Reading Assessment scores statistically significantly predicted the OGT Reading score. Tables 3 reports the correlation coefficients, the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), the intercept, and the standardized regression coefficients (β).

R^2 for regression was statistically significantly different from zero, $R^2 = .504$, $F(3, 196) = 66.425$, $p = .001$. The findings indicate that 50.4% of the variance in OGT Reading scores can be accounted for by class placement, NWEA Reading score and STAR Reading Assessment score.

Table IV. Linear Regression Analysis for Prediction of Passage on OGT Reading

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
(Constant)	321.289	17.351	
Special Ed Y/N	-15.632	2.948	***-.306
NWEA Reading	.393	.089	***.300
STAR Reading	2.222	.557	***.292

$R^2 = .504$ *** $p < .001$

Based on standardized regression coefficients and statistically significant ($p < .001$) t scores, it would appear that class placement (special education or regular education), NWEA Reading scores, and STAR Reading scores accounted for 50.4% of the variance in OGT Reading. The class placement is the most important of the three predictors, based on the squared semi-partial correlations.

These findings were consistent with the researcher's hypothesized theory that the delivery of special education services outside of the regular classroom environment would impact students' achievement ability.

Research Question 2

What are the mean and median grade level instructional reading comprehension scores for seniors from a large urban high school?

Senior students' STAR Reading assessment data was retrieved from the participating school district on September 29, 20013. Initial statistical analysis of frequencies indicated the average reading comprehension score of graduating seniors to be at the seventh grade level with the median grade level score to be lower at the sixth grade fourth month level (see Table 4). Further analysis indicated the most frequently occurring reading comprehension score to be at the fourth grade level (n = 27) and 33 students reading at or below third grade.

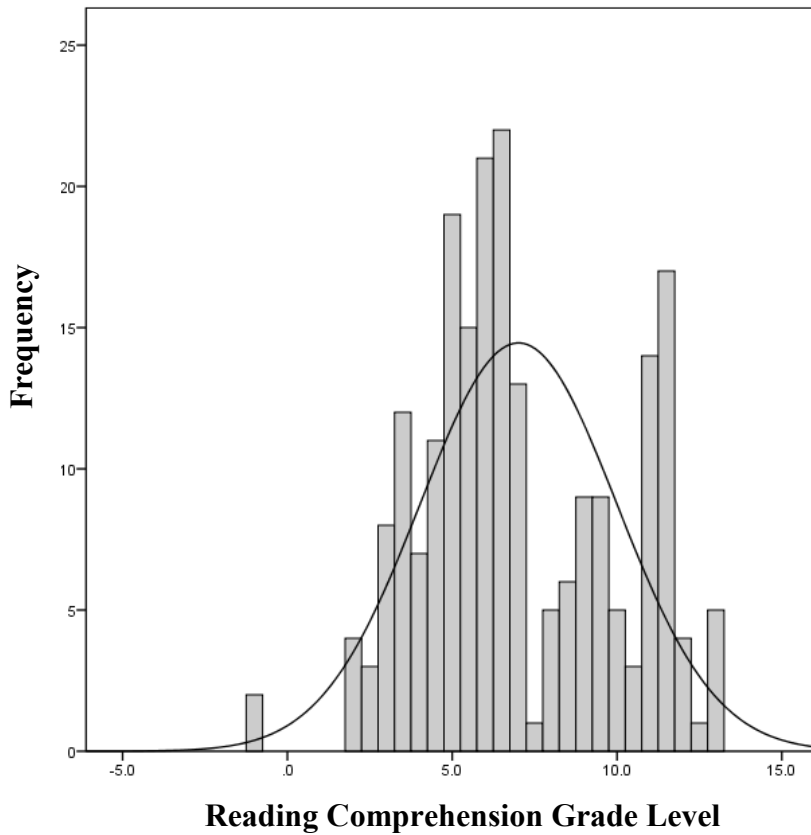
Table V. Reading Comprehension Levels Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
STAR Reader	-1.0	13.0	7.0	6.4	2.98

n = 216

The reading comprehension scores for seniors ranged from below a first grade level to the thirteenth grade level. These descriptive statistics did not provide an adequate picture of the broad array of reading comprehension levels occurring within Harper High School. To obtain improved clarity, Figure 3 below illustrated the frequency and grade level at which the students were reading in March of their senior year and where these scores fall within the normal curve.

Figure 4. STAR Reader Assessment Histogram



Reviewing the quartile data offered a lens that further defined the depth of the problem with nearly 42.1% of seniors who were reading at the sixth grade level or below and into the category which would be classified as functionally illiterate. The next highest quartile (75th) of seniors was reading at the ninth grade level. Only 29% of seniors were reading at or above the ninth grade level. This was above the hypothesized reading level, yet significantly below the expected twelfth grade.

Research Question 3

What are teacher perceptions about reading interventions, class placement and services offered that are helpful and those they believe would be helpful if implemented at the secondary level?

Teacher perceptions about reading interventions, class placement, and services were initially assessed via the Teacher Perception Survey which was sent out to the 55 staff members via district e-mail. 43 staff members responded within the two week period. Of the 55 teachers sent the *Teacher Perception Survey*, 18 were special education teachers.

Teachers were asked to use a rating scale from one to four for each question. One indicated strongly agree, two – agree, three – disagree, and four – strongly disagree. The mean and frequency scores for each question were identified and used as an initial talking point for the focus groups. The first five questions of the survey dealt with the teachers perceptions regarding the district’s reading program (see Table 6).

Teachers agreed that the STAR Reading Assessment offered valuable diagnostic information, the district supervisors supported use of the program and that the district reading program (Accelerated Reader) was helpful to their students. The teachers did not appear to agree on whether the students liked using the program or if they used the program weekly.

Table VI. Teacher Perception Survey Responses

Questions	Mean Score	Response Frequency			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think the district reading program is helpful for my student	2.5	4	22	8	9
The STAR scores yield helpful diagnostic information	2.0	10	25	5	2
I like using the district reading program as part of my weekly routine	2.7	2	17	14	7
I think the students like using the district reading program	2.8	1	16	15	8
I feel the administration supports my use of the reading program in my room	2.3	1	31	7	3

The second portion of the survey dealt with teachers' perceptions of teaching reading in their classrooms (see Table 5). Teachers strongly believed that many students were reading below grade level and students needed more time to read in school. Teachers also agreed (41 of 43 responses) test scores would improve if the school offers specialized reading classes.

Table VII. Perceptions of Reading and Reading Instruction

Questions	Mean	Response Frequency			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think that more than 70% of our students are reading below grade level	1.7	19	19	3	3
I am comfortable providing reading instruction in my classroom	2.9	9	20	11	3
I feel prepared to deal with the varied reading levels of students in my classroom	2.5	5	15	17	4
I would like more training in how to address the varied reading levels in my classroom	2.0	12	21	7	3
I think our test scores would improve if we had specialized reading classes	1.5	25	16	1	1
I wish I had more time to teach reading in my classroom	2.0	12	19	9	3
I think students need more time to practice reading in school	1.6	21	21	0	1

The final portion of the survey asked questions regarding teachers' perceptions of the special education services provided in their building (see Table 6). Teachers agreed that special education students had equal access to the regular curriculum but they also believed these students needed more exposure to this curriculum. Teachers did not perceive special education students as being prepared to take the OGT or that their placement in special education classrooms adequately met their literacy needs.

Table VIII. Special Education Services

Questions	Mean	Response Frequencies			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The current special education services provided for students are adequate	2.7	1	14	22	5
I would change the current service delivery for special education students in my building	1.9	14	19	7	1
I feel too many students are placed in special education classrooms	2.2	9	16	15	2
I think special education classrooms adequately meet the literacy needs of special education students	2.8	0	15	19	6
I think special education students have equal access to regular education curriculum	2.3	3	26	9	2
I think special education students need more exposure to the regular education curriculum	2.4	2	23	14	2
I think that special education students are prepared to take the OGTs	3.0	0	9	23	9
I would like to see more inclusion classes in our building	2.7	3	16	14	8

Focus Groups

The focus groups met twice after school in October of 2013. The meetings took place during assigned time for planning. The six teachers who participated were a diverse group in terms of experience and current teaching assignments; three of whom taught special education classes and three who were teaching in regular education classes.

The regular education teachers included two males and a female. All names included in this dissertation were pseudonyms. “Alan” had been teaching for 29 years in the school district as a math teacher and is working with eleventh and twelfth grade students. “Rob” had been teaching for 28 years in the district in a variety of capacities which included business and information technology and has ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students. As an elective instructor, “Rob” was responsible for both special education students and regular education students in his classroom without additional supports. “Sheila” has been teaching for over 25 years in the district as a science teacher and was currently teaching biology for ninth and tenth grade students.

The special education teachers were newer to the field of teaching and included three females. “Amy” had been teaching for five years with the participating district but had come from a similar position in an affluent suburb where she had taught for ten years. “Leslie” had been teaching for seven years and in a variety of special education settings that included self-contained classrooms for emotionally disturbed, self-contained classrooms for cognitively disabled and learning disabled, inclusion classrooms. Her subject areas changed for each year she had taught. “Judy” had been teaching for 13 years. She too had taught in a variety of special education settings similar to “Leslie” and this year she was in an inclusion setting for American History.

Procedure

The researcher initiated the first meeting by reviewing the median and mean reading comprehension scores (see Appendix L). Each member of the group reviewed the histogram of the reading comprehension scores of seniors (see Figure 3). Teachers were then asked to discuss the results and how this phenomenon of limited reading comprehension manifested in their classrooms. Survey questions and their results were also used as talking points in a semi-structured format. The discussion was recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed within three days after each meeting. The transcripts were analyzed for clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994) regarding class placement, literacy practices that teachers felt were effective and those programs they thought would be effective if implemented. Through a process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) where significant statements were organized and given equal value, the researcher developed a structural description (Creswell, 2007) of teachers' experiences of literacy practices in high school and their perceptions of successful interventions.

Prior to starting the second session, teachers were sent an e-mail asking them to consider the following three questions:

1. What reading intervention programs do we have that are helpful to our students?
2. What reading interventions do you believe would be helpful to high school students if implemented?
3. What impact does class placement (special education/regular education) have on literacy and literacy skills?

The researcher reviewed elements from the first meeting including the mean and median reading comprehension scores of senior students from the 2012-2013 school year and teachers' perceptions of successful interventions for reading comprehension. Four units of meaning or themes emerged regarding teachers perceptions of successful interventions: direct instruction of reading comprehension skills, students motivation to read, creating a new model of instruction, and class placement in special education. These themes developed by the researcher as well as supporting transcript excerpts from the first meeting were distributed and members were asked to check for accuracy of these findings. The process of multiple interviews allowed for clarification of ideas and members check increased the validity of the data (Merriam, 2009).

Theme 1 – Direct Instruction of Reading Comprehension Skills

The overall consensus by the group was that reading ability for the students had plummeted in recent years, "...they stumble over words that should be simple and you know the reading is just bad." They agreed reading comprehension scores that ranged from below first grade to closer to grade level were being realized in their classroom. Students' knowledge of vocabulary, students' ability to decode words, and students' ability to use text structure to answer questions were variables cited as contributing to the low comprehension scores.

The group expressed frustration regarding the districts failure to provide reading intervention programs to address glaring deficits. "Basic literacy is not what they are caring about any more. What they are caring about is what are the scores on these standardized tests going to be," "Sheila" expressed with frustration. This failure to address the critical skill of literacy elicited the strongest language of the day, "They're

setting the kids up for failure. I'll say it to the day I die, they're setting them up for failure" stated "Alan" who teaches Algebra II and Calculus. "And to let a kid get into the high school reading at that level (discussing pre-primer to second grade) in regular ed is a crime" remarked "Sheila" an instructor of Biology. There was a general consensus among participants that they had known for many years that reading comprehension scores were in a downward spiral yet these teachers felt helpless to reverse this path within the current system of instruction. Participants explained how they employed various literacy strategies in their classrooms but these strategies did little to ameliorate the magnitude of the deficits being experienced.

Both the special education teachers and regular education teachers detailed individual accounts of successful reading interventions operationalized in small group settings; often one on one with lessons recurring in the areas of vocabulary development, word attack strategies and using text structures. Both "Rob" (regular education, business teacher) and "Amy" (special education, English teacher) discussed working with "Deonte" who was written about in Chapter I of this dissertation. Both recounted working one-on-one with him and his positive response to intervention. The feasibility of this kind of intensive intervention was not proportionally realistic to the scope of the problem.

Grouping students by their functioning reading ability and offering specialized classes to remediate the specific areas of deficit was frequently revisited as a means to address this issue of poor literacy skills. "Shelia" captured these feelings stating, "I think if we had an actual reading inventory, took inventory like students are given in elementary school grade level, when they enter high school and then there were designated classes that gave direct instruction in it, that would identify word attack as a

comprehension.” The furthered the argument saying that these kinds of classes should be offered in the mornings and students could move into their core subject area classes in the afternoon.

The range of deficit reading comprehension skills was the basis for this solution. “Rob” has both regular education and special education students in his business technology class. He expressed his anxiety of dealing with the wide range of abilities, “I think we’re all so frustrated with amount; we have expectation what were supposed to be doing, to add reading (instruction) to that. I try to interject reading at times with kids, but I have kids that are say 2nd grade reading level. And two seats down, I have students at 12th grade. How, to be an effective teacher how do I address this?” This sense of addressing individual needs was furthered by “Amy”, “You know, the same thing I’d really like to have sort of study hall or intervention class or something where we could work individually with the students and meet them where they are at and bring them forward, because that does work.” Meeting the varied literacy needs of all the students seemed to be impacting both special and regular education teachers.

All participants agreed that there were no reading intervention programs currently being utilized in the high school. “Sheila” reported, “The STAR diagnostic is a beginning. It’s not that we do anything with it.” She felt the diagnostic reading test offered teachers a starting point to understand the reading comprehension abilities of their students but HHS didn’t offer any kind of reading intervention program. As she stated, knowing these current reading levels was the first step in identifying the problem.

Theme 2 – Model Shift

Regarding interventions they felt were successful in schools; teachers mentioned the use of study hall time where students could receive remediation for weak skill areas as a supportive intervention. They felt this was a valuable tool that allowed students time to decompress, investigate interests or seek academic support. The participating district has not offered this option for many years and teachers remarked that there was no time in the current structure of the day that allowed for students to make such arrangement.

The only unstructured time for students during the daily 360 minute schedule was a twenty minute lunch period, “Without having these breaks a lot of our classes are 80 minutes, back to back, and they go from class to class to class.” The group felt this impacted students’ willingness to complete any academics after the school day was finished. Alan discussed what it would be like to be an athlete, leaving home at around 5:30 a.m. putting in seven hours at school with only a 20 minute break for lunch, going to practice until 6:00 p.m. and having to bus or walk home, “So, do you really think he’s going to feel like reading, you really feel like he’s going to do his homework when by the time he gets home?” Teachers perceived study hall was a viable and easy intervention strategy that could be implemented in the current schedule.

Early detection and intensive direct literacy instruction was perceived as an important path to remediate the deficit in literacy skills for high school students. Amy discussed her work with Deonte and the improvements she saw when working individually with him during his lunch. Though a successful intervention, the focus group did not feel this method was a feasible option in their high school due to the magnitude of the problem. Yet the overall perception was that there was a need for a specialized class

in reading instruction, “I think every student that enters the 9th grade, by the ninth grade, certainly if not before but before high school should be Math tested, and English test, reading and writing and should be placed in those two classes” was a dynamic shift in the model Sheila suggested.

Most evident from the discussion was the overwhelming sense that the current system of curriculum delivery was not successful and needed change. “Sheila” further remarked, “This whole model thing of switching classes every so many minutes to accommodate this, that and the other thing, it’s part of the model, and I tend to believe that it’s more of an unwillingness to shake up the whole model.” “Rob”, “Alan”, “Sheila”, and “Amy” all suggested a reading and writing lab similar to those at local colleges where students could drop in for additional support but felt that the current school schedule didn’t provide the flexibility for students to make use of this kind of support.

Theme 3 – Motivation to Read

Teachers also felt the daily schedule was over programmed due to test preparation classes, remedial classes and the district policy requiring all students to have a full schedule of rigorous instruction. The focus group expressed concern that exploration of literacy rich activities has diminished as a result of this overwhelming schedule. Students who were behind in literacy skills were not motivated to read outside of school having become exhausted from moving from one class to the next with required reading far beyond their skill level. Teachers perceived many students to have an aversion to reading, “They hate it. A lot of kids actually hate reading. They are like, ‘Oh my God you want me to read? I don’t want to read” was “Judy’s” reflection. “Judy” had been teaching

special education in a self-contained classroom for many years but this year was working in an inclusion setting. The focus on testing had also had an impact on students' motivation to read, "I think the kids need to buy into reading, just reading for fun not reading to pass a test or reading to do this" stated "Leslie", a special education English teacher.

The group also discussed the lack of classes that allowed students to apply academic knowledge in a hands-on manner and felt hands-on project based learning would motivate students to read more and invest time attacking difficult text as a means of problem solving. "Alan" said, "I use to read Chilton's manuals. If your kids were starting to work on things, they'll read a manual because it has relevance to them and that will help their skills." Several teacher suggested shop projects as a means of improving motivation to read, "That why I'm saying we got to catch them, we've got to have them to build stuff" and "But if you had some kind of a program like shop, like I use to have that's where the relevance comes in." These types of classes had been eliminated at the participating high school in lieu of college preparatory courses, AP classes and honors curriculum. Teachers did not feel this course selection realistically addressed the needs of their students, "Until they change that idea that every kid is going to college, we're going to have that problem" remarked "Alan" who had been teaching in this district for 29 years.

Theme 4 – Special Education Placement

Being identified as a special education student was perceived by all members as having a negative influence on students and student behavior. "Sheila" had three classes of biology that included special education students, "They are learned behavior in special

education, it's not that the student has any more emotional disability or something than half the students in the regular ed classes do." Focus group members felt special education placement offered students the opportunity to perform at a lower standard and behave in a manner which would be unacceptable in the regular education setting stating, "a lot of it is learned screwing-off behavior" or a student who had recently been identified, "acting like a complete idiot." "Amy", who had been teaching in a special education self-contained setting but this year, was in an inclusion English classroom stated, "I see kids and if they're in the inclusion classes, their behavior will start to get better, but if you put them back in the self-contained, the behavior just magnifies (indicating poorer behavior)." "Leslie" who is also a special education teacher indicated that there are some students who need smaller settings because they can become overstimulated in the large classrooms.

Until this year, students who were identified as special needs students were placed in special education classrooms with student ratios of 16 students to one teacher and at times an aide. This year the delivery of special education services shifted to one of inclusion where all students are placed in the regular education setting with additional teachers to support them. Shifting the services in this manner afforded students exposure to all core subject area curriculum. This was reflected in comments made by Sheila, a biology teacher, "Dwane (special education co-teacher) always tells me, 'My students (special education students) would never be doing what we're doing in these classes' (regular education)." Other special education teachers concurred stating the expertise of the regular education teachers was not being matched in the previous model of delivery. This was further supported by the survey data where 25 of 41 teachers responded that

they agreed with the statement of special education students needing more exposure to the regular education curriculum.

When asked to discuss the impact of class placement either in regular education or special education classrooms, very few comments were made. “Leslie” stated, “Sometimes when you put them, the special ed kids in the regular ed setting, most of the kids will achieve more.” The group agreed citing examples of students who were performing well in their classes but there was a distinction made regarding behavior as a conflicting issue. Some special education students needed a separate environment with smaller class sizes that were less distracting and allowed for direct contact with the instructor. “I have another student who goes nuts, I mean literally goes nuts, he comes in ready to fight everybody, swearing and things like that, so he should not be in there. It’s as simple as that. It’s got nothing to do with his ability is, he might have more ability than some of those kids in there” stated “Alan” about a current situation he was dealing with this year. Overt behavioral and emotional difficulties in the classroom were the primary concerns of teachers when discussing the need for a separate educational setting such as a self-contained special education classroom.

Summary

Harper High School reading data from the 2012 – 2013 school year clearly illustrated a crisis in reading comprehension ability with 42% of seniors reading at or below the sixth grade level. Reading comprehension skills between the fourth and sixth grade level are classified functionally illiterate. Those below third grade would be considered illiterate and 33 seniors populated this range.

The qualitative data provided a context for this phenomenon. The initial survey offered a broad perspective of teacher perceptions regarding literacy and intervention services provided in high schools. Finally, the focus groups gave voice to teachers who are the frontline workers in urban high schools allowing them to discuss literacy interventions they believed would be successful if implemented in high school.

Focus group participants agreed that there were no reading intervention programs currently being utilized in the high school but teachers believed there was definitely a need for such a program. Interventions teachers perceived would be helpful for students included reading intervention classes, academic assistance resource labs, increased material resources in content classes to address various reading levels, and project based learning curriculum that would improve students' motivation to read. An overarching meaning governing these categories was flexibility in academic scheduling. Group members felt a systems paradigm shift allowing these forms of interventions would best meet the social, emotional and academic needs of the students allowing them to scaffold current knowledge to future learning. At the very least, these interventions would offer students the fundamental skills necessary to gain access to resources and make choices about their futures.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Literacy is not just a desirable ideal; it is a social imperative. This literacy-and the freedom it offers-is a necessary precondition for students to be able to access and exercise their other civil rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to vote.

This cause is one around which secondary educators must rally. Such literacy enables students to have a voice, take a stand and make a difference. In other words, it gives them power. (Plaut, 2010, p. 2).

Upon entering the PhD program in 2010, our professor asked if we had any idea of possible dissertation topics and I mentioned the critical problem of large percentages of students reading far below grade in urban high schools. A fellow doctoral candidate responded, “So? We all know that.” The information was not surprising to the cohort and none seemed impressed with the problem. I would suggest that the bleakness of this problem has become the predominant and prolific plague attacking urban centers and constitutes a crisis of neglect, an abandonment of those most in need of our protection, guidance, and greatest intervention. This plague is an epidemic that requires all of our intellectual capital ensuring that the perpetual cycle of poverty is not an enduring millstone which grinds away hope of any futures for the children of our cities.

Summary of the Findings

The results of this study furthered the understanding of policies, practices and teacher perceptions pertaining to literacy at the secondary level. There is limited research of secondary reading intervention programs (Slavin, Cheung, Groff, Lake, 2008) or of what teachers perceive as effective interventions. The research questions offered both statistical and contextual background of literacy at the high school level and addressed some of the significant problems understood by those who teach in a large urban district. For the purpose of this study, literacy was defined as the ability to read and make meaning of content area text and write to convey meaning at or near grade level.

The study focused on the reading comprehension level of seniors at a large Midwestern urban high school. Within this community, HHS has a good reputation for having a rigorous curriculum, offering both honors and Advanced Placement courses and is noted for having a college preparatory curriculum. The high school also offers a variety of extra-curricular activities such as sports, clubs, acting and drama groups. All elements are indicative of providing a sound foundation for developing a well-rounded, competent student who would graduate and go on to a local college.

HHS was not immune to the growing epidemic of declining literacy skills. Given the statistical data (see Table 9), nearly all of HHS's seniors will be required to enter into remedial reading courses when they enter into either a community college or four year college. Only 34 of the 216 seniors were reading at an eleventh grade level or higher

Table IX. HHS STAR Reading Comprehension Grade Level Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive	N	Mean	Median
		Comprehension Grade Level	
Regular Education	165	7.9	6.9
Special Education	51	4.2	3.8

More than 32 million Americans cannot read and more than 21% of all Americans are reading below a fifth grade level (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Urban centers throughout the nation fare much worse than the national average. This study was conducted in a large Midwestern city where 69% of the city population is functionally illiterate and in certain pockets of the city illiteracy rates reach as high as 95% (Facts about literacy, 2013). This is not a problem that can be dismissed just because, “everybody knows it” but warrants instead our greatest scrutiny and scholarly investment to resolve the injustices of illiteracy and its’ casualties, specifically our urban youth.

Literacy weaves together the fundamental skills which offer students access to their first glimpse of an American Dream. It is a tapestry that unravels quickly for those students who graduate from high school lacking basic reading and writing skills, graduating with literacy skills that would be classified as functionally illiterate by most authorities but not by their education institutions. For these students, the future is a grim cycle of dependency on social support programs such as welfare, food stamps, and public housing assistance (Ladd, 2012; Shivarajan & Sridevi 2013).

National reading scores have changed little over the past decade (Brasseur-Hock, Hock, Kieffer, Biancarosa, & Deshler, 2011). Experts in the field of adolescent literature estimate that over 70 thousand students struggle with reading grade-level text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Gallagher, 2009; Kamil, 2003). Struggling readers face tremendous hurdles in secondary and post-secondary academic arenas as they lack the ability to comprehend and make use of new vocabulary in academically challenging coursework. Slavin, Gheung, Groff, Lake, (2008) reported “Only 51% of students who took the ACT test in 2004 were ready for college-level reading demands” (p. 291). The national average on the 2012 ACT Reading is 21.3 and for the state of Ohio, 22.1 (ACT, 2013). The participating high school in this study performed significantly lower with an average ACT score of 15.9.

By the Numbers

The results of the regression analysis indicated a strong predictive nature of the variables class placement, NWEA, and STAR Assessment. With over 50.4% of the variance in OGT score being accounted for by these predictor variables. Of these variables class placement (special education, regular education) contributed most to this prediction. With approximately 26% of the student body being identified as special education student, this finding has weighty implications for the district.

NCLB “raised the achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities” (Thompson, Lazarus, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2006, p. 137). Urban districts across the nation serve the most impoverished and the highest numbers of special education students and are severely penalized for poor performance on state exams that measure for AYP (Jaekyung, 2010; Porter-MaGee, 2004; Sanders, 2008). These districts

are desperately seeking to improve special education students' access to curriculum while at the same time fending off financial penalties incurred due to NCLB (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2007; Sanders 2008). Unfortunately for these districts the burden of servicing such high numbers of special education students is daunting as all but one percent of the special education population is required to take the OGT with these results reported on the state report card and calculated in the measure of AYP. NCLB, though a well-intentioned policy, appears to be harming the very population it was intended to protect and serve (Hiese, 2006; Ladd, 2012; Ravitch, 2010).

The pressure to meet AYP has taken a toll on the teachers of these students. The pressure of maintaining this mountain of data takes an emotional toll on teachers, becoming an added strain for overburdened teachers, contributing to teacher burn-out and low-self efficacy which has resulted in a concerning attrition rate particularly among special education teachers (Bender, Fore, & Martin, 2002; Emry & Vandenberg, 2010; Larwood & Paje, 2004). Chronic fatigue resulting from these constant disruptions which take the form of one test or another can result in poor planning and low implementation of effective instructional practices in the classroom (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011; Larwood & Paje, 2004; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Special education teachers are particularly susceptible due to the high number of special needs students in urban centers and the added responsibility of maintaining the deluge of paperwork required by state and Federal governments for special education students.

The large percentage of students requiring special education services at HHS demanded a large teaching staff of 18 special education teachers. These teachers were responsible for instructing core subject areas of English, Language Arts, Reading, Social

Studies, Science, and Mathematics for the special needs students outside of the regular education classroom. Special education teachers were licensed as Mild/Moderate Intervention Specialist or as Moderate/Intensive Intervention Specialists for grades 7 – 12 in the state of Ohio. These teachers were not required to hold licenses in the core subject area that they are teaching but were asked to become highly qualified in at least one core subject area (Thompson,S., Lazarus,S., Clapper, A., & Thurlow,M., 2006). Highly qualified course work offered exposure to the content but is well below the significant training offered under the certification program. This practice may need to be reconsidered given the finding of this study indicating that placement in special education classes explaining 16.81% or $(-.410)^2$ in the variance of OGT reading.

The participating district expected special education teachers teaching multiple subjects to follow the district standards and benchmark objectives in these subject areas and align these standards with the goals and objectives on each students' IEP. This raises the question of special education teachers' ability to cover the content with the depth needed for students to pass the state assessment used to calculate AYP (Bert, A., Fullerton, A., McBride, S., & Ruben, B., 2012; Thompson,S., Lazarus,S., Clapper, A., & Thurlow,M., 2006). These concerns were echoed in the focus group by Sheila who referred to the special education teacher working with her, “ Dwane” (special education co-teacher) always tells me, ‘My students (special education students) would never be doing what we’re doing in these classes’ (regular education)” (see Appendix L, p. 29) and further supported by survey responses (25/41) which stated teachers believed special education students needed more access to the regular curriculum.

Access to curriculum answers only part of the question regarding student performance. Being able to read and make meaning from the content area would weigh heavily into the equation. Access to content building in complexity year to year is denied without requisite literacy skills.

The mean reading comprehension ability of seniors at HHS was seventh grade level but much lower for the special education students who were reading at a fourth grade level. Closer examination of quartile data offered a more grim perspective with nearly 42.5% of seniors reading at or below the sixth grade level. Comprehension scores at this level would be classified as functionally illiterate and are characterized by individuals having difficulty reading or filling out job applications, reading bus schedules or understanding doctors' prescriptions and medical information (Facts about literacy, 2013). At this level, our students have little hopes of traversing the educational gulf that separates them from 21st Century skills need in our ever-changing economy.

The most fundamental job of this nation's education system is to teach children to read (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002). An impressive tenet to espouse, yet how have we managed to fall so far behind in upholding this principal of learning? In the decade since the passage of NCLB, there has been little change in the nations test scores for reading (Lee & Reeves, 2012; Moje, 2008; Ravitch, 2010), but great change has been realized in the growing class of disenfranchised youth living in our urban centers who graduate from institutions lacking essential skills needed to survive. "Judy" put it succinctly stating, "They hate it. A lot of kids actually hate reading. They are like "Oh my God you want me to read? I don't want to read", is an all too frequent refrain from students.

Teacher Discourse

Teachers are the front-line workers that seldom have voice in the development of curriculum but face the harsh realities of academic responsibility for struggling readers in their classrooms (Berryhill, Linney, Fromewick, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). The development of the focus group provided a venue for discussion, validation and realism about the difficulties they were facing in their classrooms. Several core meanings developed from these discussions.

Teachers discussed constraints to literacy instruction in high school, described as Model Shift in the focus group themes. They felt the structure of secondary schools in general lent little if any flexibility to address the issue of literacy deficiencies within content area classes. Moje (2008) stated, “Subject areas have become subcultures of the secondary school, with their own ways of knowing, doing and believing” (p. 99). Teachers feel there is little room to cover required content *and* literacy. Secondary content area teachers are frequently resistant to the thought of losing valuable content instructional time to “teach reading” (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009; Christy, 2011; Copeland et al., 2011; Moje, 1996; Ness, 2008).

We have become a data driven nation and our educational practices reflect every nuance of this evolution (Ravitch, 2010). I can now tell you the reading deficits of my incoming students and their statistical predicted academic growth patterns. What hasn't changed is how we intend to address these deficits. 63% of seniors read three or more years below grade level and yet, we have done little to address the curricular demands of this significant deficit. Current expectations are to provide content area reading instruction but few teachers feel there is enough time or that they are trained well enough

to offer such instruction (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008; Moje, 2001; Showers, Joyce, Schnaubelt, 1998). “Alan” really identified with this theory, “I was going to say I would probably say no (to teaching content area literacy) because I would consider myself doing malpractice trying to teach English or anything like that the way I talk”(Appendix L, p. 186) “Leslie” also supported this theory stating, “I would say no because sometime they don’t know how to teach reading” (Appendix L, p186) when reflecting on core subject area teachers teaching literacy skill in their classrooms.

Reading is key to learning and all students require this rudimentary skill that will serve as a foundation of future success (Plaut, 2009; Rumberger, 2011). Ness (2008) states, “In providing content, rather than literacy strategies for struggling readers, these teachers seem to place importance on domain knowledge as opposed to lifelong literacy skills” (p. 93). Limited literacy skills prevail in urban centers where many adults require assistance to fill out applications, reading directions from their doctors or even reading bus schedules (Facts about Literacy, 2013). Until we are ready to make changes to the curriculum structure, we will continue to provide access to content without the fundamental skills required to bridge future hurdles. Immediate intervention in literacy skills is required if we are to begin addressing the literacy gap of our urban high school students.

Intervention Focus

Teachers’ frustrations with the districts failure to address the need for specialized reading classes became apparent during a professional development session. While obtaining the STAR Reader instructional reading level of their students, there was a great deal of discussion amongst the staff members who expressed frustration with the reading

level of many of their students. The researcher was asked to explain why students who were reading below the third grade level were expected to participate in classes utilizing grade level text books. Teachers also asked the researcher and the principals, why we didn't have a reading class available to students who were reading significantly below grade level and why there weren't materials available to address the significant differences in reading comprehension abilities documented by the district.

This issue continued to resonate with the focus group when discussing the development of a specialized reading class or a reading and writing lab that would address the specific literacy skills students were lacking. Such classes are not currently part of the secondary archetype but there is evidence that such programs are necessary to address the varied tiers of literacy skills. Brasseur-Hock, Hock, Kieffer, Biancarosa, and Deshler (2011) explored reading profiles of struggling adolescent readers. Once believed a skill rooted in verbal skills and decoding abilities (Nation & Snowling, 2004; Ouellette, 2006), other factors may be enmeshed in this fundamental skill that impact comprehension. The implications for understanding the multiple skills embedded in reading comprehension are essential in furthering our ability to provide interventions for adolescent struggling readers. Five distinct profiles of struggling readers were identified. The authors cautioned “generalizing findings from studies of other struggling readers may not address unique learning needs of the urban student population” (Brasseur-Hock et al., 2011, p. 438).

Reading comprehension deficits vary between readers and abilities. Amending the problem requires intensive direct intervention and specific skills based remediation

embedded into the daily routine of school. This is not a supplemental requirement but instead a means to proficiency requiring a scheduled regiment built into the school day.

Lang, Torgesen, Vogel, Chanter, Lefsky, and Petscher (2009) conducted a yearlong study which investigated the effectiveness of intensive reading intervention for high school students and found similar results regarding distinctive differences between student and reading comprehension levels. Providing literacy intervention based upon the various skill deficits was found to be impactful but "... most students who enter high school reading substantially below grade level will require more than 1 year of relatively intensive reading intervention to make significant progress toward the grade-level standard in reading" (p. 170). The authors further noted that over 76% of the study participants remained reading two or more years below grade level post intervention. This is consistent with the findings of this study where 79% of seniors were reading two or more years below grade level.

Given the current reading comprehension levels at HHS, the supporting evidence for literacy intervention classes is ever present if we desire improved positive outcomes for our urban students, outcomes that are more than test scores, more than data points for AYP, outcomes that will be realized in the futures of families, communities and dreams of neglected and marginalized youth.

Evidence that literacy instruction may not be emphasized beyond elementary schools (Parris & Block, 2007) is particularly concerning because researchers have found that adolescents and adults with intellectual disability may actually be more likely to benefit from literacy instruction than younger children (Boudreau, 2002; Farrell & Elkins, 1995; Moni & Jobling, 2000, 2001). English/Literature classes in high school are

predicated on the belief that students already know how to read and make meaning from text. These are not real possibilities for students who enter high school reading three or more years below grade level.

Limitations

There were several limitations to consider when evaluating this study

1. The focus group was limited to six participants. The small number of participants may not provide an adequate representation of the building. The focus group though balanced with three regular and three special education teachers, represents only a small portion of the teachers working at HHS (six of 55).
2. The focus groups met twice for one hour after school for two consecutive weeks. Additional time between meetings may have allowed teachers to better process the dialogue and themes generated from the first session and to formulate in greater depth the programs they believed would be successful literacy interventions for students in high school.
3. Quantitative data for the purposes of this study included only senior students at HHS. Using a broader sample including other grade levels or other high schools with similar demographics would improve the generalizability of this study.

Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

The Common Core State Standards is the latest in a long line of reform measures to sweep across the nation. The Common Core demands a shared responsibility for literacy across grade levels and content areas with the focus on the requirements for

literacy skills needed beyond high school (Fisher, Frey, Alfaro, 2013). These standards will have little impact on instructional practices, serving only to align curriculum (Hollenbeck, A., & Saternus, K., 2013). Embedded in the skills required to achieve these standards is the understanding that students possess the fundamental ability to read and interpret text. However, this study indicates that many urban students are leaving high school without these skills.

The Brown Center Report on American Education (Loveless, 2012) stated, “The empirical evidence suggests that the Common Core will have little effect on American students’ achievement” (p. 14). This report reviewed a decade’s worth of NAEP data and found no correlation between the kind of standards (high or those deemed weaker standards) and student achievement (p. 10). Perhaps we should invest in programs that demonstrate statistical evidence of improving student achievement rather than the latest educational reform championed by politicians and policy makers. Moreover, we need to cultivate rich and diverse dialogue with teachers who work daily with the population of students furthest behind.

A new approach must be taken by our public schools for our urban adolescents. Districts should use the myriad of tests scores generated annually to identify struggling readers and offer these adolescents reading instruction. Explicit targeted reading instruction needs to become part of the secondary landscape (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Hurst et. al, 2010; Lesaux, Harris, & Sloane, 2012). Students who are performing significantly below grade-level when entering high school should be required to take developmental reading courses that address the specific areas of deficit in their literacy skills. This would require a paradigm shift in the institution of school. Developing a new

curricular approach to reading based on the individual needs of students and one reflective of the grade level competencies will best serve the population of students who would be declared functionally illiterate by society. Educators are implored to explore how new literacies including use of the internet, youtube video, iphone technologies can be used to bolster current instructional practices and improve motivation to engage difficult text (Alvermann, 2002; Dillon, D., Moje, E., & O'Brien, D., 2000).

This process would employ the vast talents of those who are deemed literacy specialists and necessitate reading instruction be provided by those who are certified and endorsed by the state to do so. Utilizing qualified personnel to provide literacy based interventions is a shift away from the school practices. Qualified literacy specialist can then engage students in self-select courses; facilitating access to content that is more demanding. A literacy focus curriculum which will guarantee all students will graduate with the ability to continue learning in any venue.

Utilizing STAR Reader Assessment data in all schools to develop strategies of intervention is a must. “Sheila” was quick to identify the dilemma being faced by teachers, “I think giving the STAR diagnostics is a beginning; it’s not that we do anything with it. We have an assessment in place to at least do something with, but we don’t have an actual intervention strategy” (Appendix L, p. 189). Available through this report is an individualized review of a student’s reading strengths and weaknesses. The participating district should utilize the myriad of reading specialists to develop intervention plans for those students identified as reading significantly below grade level.

As a public school teacher for the past 24 years, I have struggled to fight against the inequities that present themselves to my students on a daily basis. Considered

inequities, now called disparities by the general public or as politically coined, the “achievement gap” though well-defined statistically, has offered little change in the status of an equitable education. Merely hearing about the “gap” year after year has done little to offer any alternative in instruction for urban students (Tatum, 2005).

Too frequently there is developed yet another exam that students are required to take which will document their progress or “value-added” status. For many urban youth, addressing literacy skills has meant a deluge of test, reading computer programs, additional reading requirements outside of school and inane reading reward programs that devalue the importance of literacy (Gallagher, 2009) but the numbers fail to tell the whole story.

The only significant change I have noted since the institution of NCLB policy is an increase in testing and the unintended consequence of cuts in school funding to districts who don’t meet AYP. The participating district created 13 “Investment” schools this year as a result of such failures, meaning the schools were “reconstituted” for failing to meet AYP as required under NCLB (Heise, 2006; Woodside-Jiron & Gehsmann, 2009). Under this provision, all staff members were effectively terminated and required to re-interview for positions with the only guarantee of having employment somewhere in the district.

I have watched as students learn they haven’t passed the OGTs just weeks before they were to graduate. This past year at HHS, 20 of the 226 seniors did not graduate because they had failed one or more of these high stakes tests. The emotional wreckage of the high stakes exams and well intentioned education policy is catastrophic for students, teachers, families and in the end, communities. Yet ten years of studying the

standards reform movement, research indicates that high standards, rigorous standards and the current Common Core standards have not demonstrated an increase in student achievement (Loveless, 2012).

Becoming a high school graduate was once synonymous with the command of basic literacies; much has changed. Core subject area teachers have limited ability to teach the basic reading skills required to remediate the deficits being defined by state assessments. Their time is constrained by the scope and sequence of subject area skills mandated by the district. Thus literacy problems are compounded as students are confronted with texts they are unable to read which causes them to fall further behind. Unable to read efficiently, or receive support for these diminished skills, paired with mounting failures lead many students in urban centers to drop out. This deficit bleeds into their futures limiting opportunities for employment as the demand for skilled labor and credentials continue to increase (Ladd, 2012; McNamee, & Miller, 2009).

There is a poignant sense of isolation that binds these students together in a brotherhood of hopeless inequity. They have watched black leaders come and go, their plight unchanged, unacknowledged, and the debasement of their character cemented in unemployment and Welfare programs which doom them to a fate of poverty. I will never forget watching President Obama's inauguration with my students (high school juniors). They wanted to know why I was so excited. "It's our first black President. This is history! We are all watching history being made." To which one of my boys said, "Nothin's gonna change." There was no sadness in his voice just solemn understanding. I optimistically told him, "We'll just have to wait and see."

Five years later, I am still waiting. I had wanted to believe that the issues confronting my students on a daily basis would be addressed or at least acknowledged by our President. I was hoping the commonality of race would be the “pea under his mattress”. Unfortunately, the issues of racial inequality and poverty continue to be an irritant that remains uniquely invisible to those in power. With policies such as NCLB that do little more than, “collude in the production of damage-driven data” (Tuck, 2009), students realize no positive change in their educational experiences. Capturing this data only reaffirms annually the failure of urban students to compete with their suburban counterparts in academic settings.

When do we begin having the difficult and honest dialogue about the literacy needs of our urban youth which are significantly different from their suburban counterparts? The social realities of race, poverty, and environment are all factors that are integral to the academic success of students (Ladd, 2012). Unfortunately, government policies, including *Race to the Top* funding, unwittingly penalize those who are the poorest by withholding funding if academic gains are not documented one year to the next. Urban centers, whose populations are mainly minorities of color, who have much larger populations of special education and English as a second language students, hold the prize in the category of lost funding. Race does matter and it can be measured in dollars and cents.

Conclusion

Education offers the last vestige of hope in this race to obtain existence beyond “survivance” (Vizenor, 2010; Tuck, 2009). As drop-out rates hover near the 50% mark in

most urban centers, there is little promise of attaining the skills necessary to obtain jobs in this new economy. Obtaining minimum wage employment is more difficult than ever before as youth compete with adults who have been laid off from other places of employment. Possessing a high school diploma and the basic skills associated with it has become the first essential step in climbing out of the chasm of poverty.

Literacy is the language of education. Literacy skills will offer firm roots from which learning will grow and flourish beyond the institution of school. Even those who are dissatisfied or disillusioned with school can continue to learn new talents if they are able to read. Students are allowed to attend community colleges without high school diplomas and take college level classes if they are able to pass basic reading, writing, and mathematics placement exams. Reading is the fundamental requirement in all of these.

Somehow we are managing to extinguish this desired skill with current practices and policies that stress better test taking abilities and lower order thinking skills required to bubble in the correct answers on state exams. As educators, we must win back this disaffected class of students and develop a new generation of “avid and enthusiastic readers” (Long & Gove, 2003, p. 359) if we hope to realize improved academic success. There is no greater educational tool a student can possess than being able to read well. It is the key to unlocking future successes and one of the tools necessary to climb over the barriers that constrain people to lives of inequity.

If we do nothing to assist struggling readers, they will leave the shelter of high school to venture forth into a world that has little patience for illiteracy. High school is for many students the last opportunity to build essential literacy skills needed for their futures (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Jofus, 2002). Many will continue the perpetual cycle

of an impoverished existence unable to acquire the 21st Century skill necessary to compete in our global society (Ladd, 2012; Shivarajan & Sridevi 2013) if we continue to neglect the obvious: the rising tide of illiteracy in urban schools. “Deonte” is living proof of our negligence. He is not living the American Dream instead; “Deonte” exists in a nightmare of perpetual poverty. It is time to advocate for more than access and exposure to the content for students. We must provide them the essential skills needed to be literate adults.

All is not lost. We can and must make changes to the secondary schools’ structure to address the catastrophic literacy deficits being realized by students. Recent research by Fuchs, Fuchs and Compton (2010) attest the need for intensive direct instruction required to remediate significant academic deficits. Their research calls for a change to the Response to Intervention strategies typically employed in elementary schools which starts with assessments that enable the teacher to develop clusters of scores that range near the bottom. Teachers then provide instruction to the whole group offering opportunities for differentiation of instruction and accommodations for students falling within these “clusters”.

The authors posit middle schools and high schools require a shift in this model to a more aggressive and direct approach. They call for a two pronged approach requiring either secondary prevention involving direct instruction of small groups between two to five students or tertiary tutoring which is much more intensive requiring one to one or one to two ratios of tutor: student (p. 23). This significant intervention is warranted due to the extensive, long term academic difficulties which often accompany these adolescents. Interestingly, this very approach was what was discussed by focus group members when

recounting the success realized by Deonte. We currently have the data necessary to identify those students in need of intensive intervention, yet we have not used the data to develop specific, tailored interventions.

Embedded in this approach is the need to identify the distinct profiles of the struggling readers requiring multiple sources of assessments (Brassuer-Hock et al., 2010; Fuchs et al., 2010). Once identified, the teacher provides intensive, direct, individualized instruction to remediate the areas of deficit (Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Houge, Geier, & Peyton, 2008). Small groups of no more than two would be developed based upon the severity of the deficits and commonalities in profile. “Effecting meaningfully important reading improvement required much greater intensity than what is offered at secondary prevention: two 50-min sessions each day of one-to-one tutoring” (Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 25). Such intensity of intervention has not been actualized in the high school setting and calls for innovative and creative thinking as to providing personnel and scheduling.

This approach is distinctly different from the long-standing approach to curriculum delivery in high schools and requires the “model shift” teachers discussed in the focus group. We as educators cannot continue down the known path to failure with our urban youth. Systemic change must be the order of the day and change that is driven by researched based success.

This study has offered me the opportunity to engage in active discussions with teachers, administrators and faculty at the local university as to the potential for changing the instructional model of high school. Current literacy rates within the city demand a collaborative effort between all of our resources. The literacy gap is not merely a test score to report in the newspapers but is an epidemic which permeates the fabric of urban

centers draining capital, resources and hope from the constituents who are held firmly in the grasp of illiteracy.

Overcoming the literacy gap calls for collaborative solutions generated by the very populous that experience the fallout. The local university in which the study was conducted has a department devoted to urban education as well as a teacher education program. The mission of these programs includes interdisciplinary research and development of best practices in urban education. The research conducted must bridge the divide between the current practices and systemic constraint that are leaving our students behind offering an avant-garde approach to secondary literacy.

This study has offered me the opportunity to become an architect of a new vision that includes students, teachers and faculty of the local university. In the coming year, I will be working to develop a placement program for practicum students from the university in the public school that participated in the study. Together we hope to design the kind of researched based interventions discussed in this study as well as continue the discussion regarding the inherent difficulties of the current structure of curriculum delivery in secondary schools seeking solutions to an overburdened system.

In his speech to the United Nations in 2003, Kofi Annan stated, “Literacy is the key to unlocking the cage of human misery; the key to delivering the potential of every human being; the key to opening up a future of freedom and hope.” The time has come to place this key firmly within the grasp of our urban youth.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Ohio Graduation Reading Test Sample

Stop, Historians! Don't Copy That Passage! Computers Are Watching by Emily Eakin

1 These are boon times for muckrakers on the scholarship beat. In the last month alone, not one but two of the nation's most high-profile historians, Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin, stand accused of plagiarism in cases that are generating headlines and hand-wringing.

2 Sensing an opportunity to uncover front-page-worthy fraud, journalists armed with Post-It notes—and anonymous tips about the thefts—have turned into literary gumshoes, painstakingly combing through books in the library stacks.

3 But the job needn't be so taxing. Over the last decade, plagiarism detection has gone high-tech. Today's software market is flooded with programs designed to rout out copycats with maximum efficiency and minimum effort.

4 Historians were among the first scholars to try to nail a plagiarism suspect with a computer. In 1991, in a case that became famous in academic circles, several historians filed a complaint with the American Historical Association charging Stephen B. Oates, a historian at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the author of a well-regarded 1977 biography of Abraham Lincoln, with plagiarism.

5 As evidence, Mr. Oates's accusers pointed to passages in his book that closely resembled passages in a 1952 biography of Lincoln by Benjamin P. Thomas. Mr. Oates furiously denied the charges, attributing any similarities between the two books to a reliance on the same historical sources. Twenty-three colleagues signed a public statement calling the plagiarism charges "totally unfounded." After deliberating on the case for a year, the association ruled that Mr. Oates had "failed to give Mr. Thomas sufficient attribution for the material he used," but carefully avoided the word plagiarism.

6 Some of Mr. Oates's opponents were convinced he was being let off the hook too easily. One hit on the idea of having a computer judge the case and approached Walter Stewart and Ned Feder, scientists at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda who had developed what the media dubbed a "plagiarism machine."

7 Mr. Stewart and Mr. Feder spent four months on the project. By the time it was over, they had scanned more than 60 books into a computer and compared them not just to Mr. Oates's Lincoln biography but to his subsequent biographies of William Faulkner and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as well. Their software followed a simple rule: each time a string of at least 30 characters in one of Mr. Oates's books matched a string of 30 characters in one of the other books, the computer made a note. (Strings of fewer than 30 characters were apt to turn up meaningless matches—including common proper names and phrases.)

8 In February 1993, the scientists submitted a 1,400-page report to the association, detailing what they claimed were 175 instances of plagiarism in the Lincoln biography, 200 instances in the Faulkner biography and 240 instances in the King biography, all identified by their computer. But once again the association found no evidence of plagiarism, though it did state that Mr. Oates had depended to a degree greater than recommended “on the structure, distinctive language and rhetorical strategies of other scholars and sources.” The association also took pains to dismiss Mr. Stewart and Mr. Feder’s plagiarism machine, declaring that “computer-assisted identification of similar words and phrases in itself does not constitute a sufficient basis for a plagiarism or misuse complaint.”

9 The scientists’ supervisors at the National Institutes of Health were no more enthusiastic. When they caught wind of Mr. Stewart and Mr. Feder’s extracurricular activities, they confiscated the plagiarism machine and had their research lab shuttered.

10 For the nascent plagiarism detection business, this was an inauspicious beginning, but hardly, it turned out, a major setback. Nearly 10 years later, antiplagiarism software is routinely used by dozens of colleges and universities—even high schools—on student work.

11 At one end of the spectrum are companies like Turnitin.com, based in Oakland, Calif., which uses a software program to check the content of a student work against millions of sites around the Web and a database of papers from online term-paper mills.

12 At the other end are companies like Glatt Plagiarism Services in Chicago, which draw on techniques from cognitive theory to verify authorship. The Glatt Plagiarism Screening program, for example, relies on a method called the “Cloze procedure,” originally used in the reading comprehension portion of standardized intelligence tests.

13 Sample passages from a suspect work—which can range in size from a single essay to an entire book—are scanned into a computer, which, following the Cloze procedure, removes every fifth word. The sample passages are then returned to the author, who is asked to fill in the missing words.

14 Glatt’s founder and president, Dr. Barbara Glatt, says that if the work is authentic, the author will be able to recall most of the missing words. A plagiarist, on the other hand, will invariably flunk the test, or else fess up before taking it. “It’s a tough test to pass,” Dr. Glatt said. “I have never gotten 100 percent of them right.”

15 Nevertheless, she insisted, the Cloze technique is considered highly reliable. Scientists have tried removing the third and fourth words instead, she said, but with much less success. “So far,” she added, “no one has ever been falsely accused by the test.”

16 Of course, neither of these approaches seems well suited for catching scholarly plagiarists. Professional historians of the stature of Mr. Ambrose and

Ms. Goodwin, both of whom deny plagiarism but concede carelessness, are unlikely to be stealing from online term-paper mills. And though Dr. Glatt's approach has the advantage of being able to detect plagiarism when the identity of the plagiarized text is unknown, it's hard to imagine scholars readily agreeing to sit through a Cloze procedure exam at their accusers' request.

17 The approach Mr. Stewart and Mr. Feder adopted—comparing one book to another—may still be a literary sleuth's best bet.

18 Last year, Louis Bloomfield, a physics professor at the University of Virginia, created one such software program that he uses to run quick checks on his students' work. (When he first tried it last spring, he found 122 cases of possible cheating, leading to 15 student expulsions and volunteer departures so far.) "It would be interesting to scan the world's libraries into electronic form and start doing these kinds of comparisons," Mr. Bloomfield said with a mischievous laugh. "I'm afraid you'd pop up all kinds of trouble."

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7. What is the meaning of gumshoes (paragraph 2)?

- A. writers
- B. scholars
- C. criminals
- D. investigators

8. What does the figurative expression "to nail" (paragraph 4) mean?

- A. to miss
 - B. to catch
 - C. to honor
 - D. to question
- (Ross, 2013)

Appendix B. Ohio Content Area Reading Standards

K-12 English Language Arts Benchmarks (Reading)

By the end of the 11–12 program:

<p>This standard is a K-3 standard. Therefore, there are no benchmarks beyond third grade.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Verify meanings of words by the author’s use of definition, restatement, example, comparison, contrast and cause and effect. B. Distinguish the relationship of word meanings between pairs of words encountered in analogical statements. C. Explain the influence of the English language on world literature, communications and popular culture. D. Apply knowledge of roots, affixes and phrases to aid understanding of content area vocabulary. E. Use multiple resources to enhance comprehension of vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Apply reading comprehension strategies to understand grade-appropriate texts. B. Demonstrate comprehension of print and electronic text by responding to questions (e.g., literal, inferential, evaluative and synthesizing). C. Use appropriate self-monitoring strategies for comprehension.
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K-12 English Language Arts Benchmarks (Reading)

By the end of the 11–12 program:

Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text	Reading Applications: Literary Text	Notes
<p>A. Analyze the features and structures of documents and critique them for their effectiveness.</p> <p>B. Identify and analyze examples of rhetorical devices and valid and invalid inferences.</p> <p>C. Critique the effectiveness and validity of arguments in text and whether they achieve the author’s purpose.</p> <p>D. Synthesize the content from several sources on a single issue or written by a single author, clarifying ideas and connecting them to other sources and related topics.</p> <p>E. Analyze an author’s implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.</p>	<p>A. Analyze and evaluate the five elements (e.g., plot, character, setting, point of view and theme) in literary text.</p> <p>B. Explain ways characters confront similar situations and conflict.</p> <p>C. Recognize and analyze characteristics of subgenres and literary periods.</p> <p>D. Analyze how an author uses figurative language and literary techniques to shape plot and set meaning.</p> <p>E. Critique an author’s style.</p>	

Grade Twelve

Phonemic Awareness, Word Recognition and Fluency

Fluency continues to develop past the primary grades. Readers increase their rate of oral reading to near conversational pace. They show their appropriate use of pauses, pitch, stress and intonation that they are reading in clauses and sentence units to support comprehension. They gain control over a wider, complex sight vocabulary and over longer syntactic structures, so that they are able to read progressively more demanding texts with greater ease. Silent reading becomes considerably faster than oral reading and becomes the preferred, more efficient way to process everyday texts.

Acquisition of Vocabulary

1. Recognize and identify how authors clarify meanings of words through context and use definition, restatement, example, comparison, contrast and cause and effect to advance word study.
2. Analyze the relationships of pairs of words in analogical statements (e.g., synonyms and antonyms, connotation and denotation) and evaluate the effectiveness of analogous relationships.
3. Examine and explain the influence of the English language on world literature, communications and popular cultures.
4. Use knowledge of Greek, Latin and Anglo-Saxon roots, prefixes and suffixes to understand complex words and new subject-area vocabulary (e.g., unknown words in science, mathematics and social studies).
5. Determine the meanings and pronunciations of unknown words by using dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, technology and textual features, such as definitional footnotes or sidebars.

Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies

In Grades 8 through 12, students should read purposefully and automatically, using the comprehension and self-monitoring strategies outlined in previous grades. As they encounter increasingly challenging content-area and literary texts, students may more consciously employ these strategies and benefit from teacher modeling of the reading process.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Comprehension Strategies</i> | 1. Apply reading comprehension strategies, including making predictions, comparing and contrasting, recalling and summarizing and making inferences and drawing conclusions. |
| | 2. Answer literal, inferential, evaluative and synthesizing questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media. |
| <i>Self-Monitoring Strategies</i> | 3. Monitor own comprehension by adjusting speed to fit the purpose, or by skimming, scanning, reading on, looking back, note taking or summarizing what has been read so far in text. |
| <i>Independent Reading</i> | 4. Use criteria to choose independent reading materials (e.g., personal interest, knowledge of authors and genres or recommendations from others). |
| | 5. Independently read books for various purposes (e.g., for enjoyment, for literary experience, to gain information or to perform a task). |

Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text

1. Analyze the rhetorical devices used in public documents, including state or school policy statements, newspaper editorials and speeches.
2. Analyze and critique organizational patterns and techniques including repetition of ideas, appeals to authority, reason and emotion, syntax and word choice that authors use to accomplish their purpose and reach their intended audience.
3. Analyze and compile information from several sources on a single issue or written by a single author, clarifying ideas and connecting them to other sources and related topics.
4. Distinguish between valid and invalid inferences and provide evidence to support the findings, noting instances of unsupported inferences, fallacious reasoning, propaganda techniques, bias and stereotyping.
5. Examine an author’s implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness and validity of arguments in public documents and their appeal to various audiences.
7. Analyze the structure and features of functional and workplace documents, including format, sequence and headers, and how

authors use these features to achieve their purposes and to make information accessible and usable.

8. Critique functional and workplace documents (e.g., instructions, technical manuals, travel schedules, business memoranda) for sequencing of information and procedures, anticipation of possible reader misunderstandings and visual appeal.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters confronting similar conflicts (e.g., individual vs. nature, freedom vs. responsibility, individual vs. society), using specific examples of characters' thoughts, words and actions.
2. Analyze the historical, social and cultural context of setting.
3. Explain how voice and narrator affect the characterization, plot and credibility.
4. Evaluate an author's use of point of view in a literary text.
5. Analyze variations of universal themes in literary texts.
6. Recognize and differentiate characteristics of subgenres, including satire, parody and allegory, and explain how choice of genre affects the expression of theme or topic.
7. Compare and contrast varying characteristics of American, British, world and multi-cultural literature.
8. Evaluate ways authors develop point of view and style to achieve specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes (e.g., through use of figurative language irony, tone, diction, imagery, symbolism and sounds of language), citing specific examples from text to support analysis.

Writing Processes

Prewriting

1. Generate writing ideas through discussions with others and from printed material, and keep a list of writing ideas.
2. Determine the usefulness of and apply appropriate pre-writing tasks (e.g., background reading, interviews or surveys).
3. Establish and develop a clear thesis statement for informational writing or a clear plan or outline for narrative writing.
4. Determine a purpose and audience and plan strategies (e.g., adapting formality of style, including explanations or definitions as

*Drafting, Revising
and Editing*

- appropriate to audience needs) to address purpose and audience.
5. Use organizational strategies (e.g., notes and outlines) to plan writing.
 6. Organize writing to create a coherent whole with an effective and engaging introduction, body and conclusion and a closing sentence that summarizes, extends or elaborates on points or ideas in the writing.
 7. Use a variety of sentence structures and lengths (e.g., simple, compound and complex sentences; parallel or repetitive sentence structure).

8. Use paragraph form in writing, including topic sentences that arrange paragraphs in a logical sequence, using effective transitions and closing sentences and maintaining coherence across the whole through the use of parallel structures.
9. Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers and style as appropriate to audience and purpose, and use techniques to convey a personal style and voice.
10. Use available technology to compose text.
11. Reread and analyze clarity of writing, consistency of point of view and effectiveness of organizational structure.
12. Add and delete examples and details to better elaborate on a stated central idea, to develop more precise analysis or persuasive argument or to enhance plot, setting and character in narrative texts.
13. Rearrange words, sentences and paragraphs and add transitional words and phrases to clarify meaning and achieve specific aesthetic and rhetorical purposes.
14. Use resources and reference materials (e.g., dictionaries and thesauruses) to select effective and precise vocabulary that maintains consistent style, tone and voice.
15. Proofread writing, edit to improve conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization), identify and correct fragments and run-ons and eliminate inappropriate slang or informal language.
16. Apply tools (e.g., rubric, checklist and feedback) to judge the quality of writing.
17. Prepare for publication (e.g., for display or for sharing with others) writing that follows a manuscript form appropriate for the purpose, which could include such techniques as electronic resources, principles of design (e.g., margins, tabs, spacing and columns) and graphics (e.g., drawings, charts and graphs) to enhance the final product.

Publishing

Writing Applications

1. Write reflective compositions that:
 - a. use personal experiences as a basis for reflection on some aspect of life;
 - b. draw abstract comparisons between specific incidents and abstract concepts;

- c. maintain a balance between describing incidents and relating them to more general, abstract ideas that illustrate personal beliefs; and
 - d. move from specific examples to generalizations about life.
2. Write responses to literature that:
- a. advance a judgment that is interpretative, analytical, evaluative or reflective;
 - b. support key ideas and viewpoints with accurate and detailed references to the text or to other works and authors;
 - c. analyze the author's use of stylistic devices and express an appreciation of the effects the devices create;
 - d. identify and assess the impact of possible ambiguities, nuances and complexities within text;
 - e. anticipate and answer a reader's questions, counterclaims or divergent interpretations; and
 - f. provide a sense of closure to the writing.
3. Write functional documents (e.g., requests for information, resumes, letters of complaint, memos, proposals) that:
- a. report, organize and convey information accurately;
 - b. use formatting techniques that make a document user-friendly; and
 - c. anticipate readers' problems, mistakes and misunderstandings.
4. Write informational essays or reports, including research, that:
- a. develop a controlling idea that conveys a perspective on the subject;
 - b. create an organizing structure appropriate to purpose, audience and context;
 - c. include information on all relevant perspectives, considering the validity and reliability of primary and secondary sources;
 - d. make distinctions about the relative value and significance of specific data, facts and ideas;
 - e. anticipate and address a reader's potential biases, misunderstandings and expectations; and
 - f. provide a sense of closure to the writing.
5. Write persuasive compositions that:
- a. articulate a clear position;
 - b. support assertions using rhetorical devices, including appeals to emotion or logic and personal anecdotes; and

- c. develop arguments using a variety of methods (e.g., examples, beliefs, expert opinion, cause-effect reasoning).
6. Produce informal writings (e.g., journals, notes and poems) for various purposes.

Appendix C. Harper High School Curriculum Scope and Sequence

Twelfth grade first quarter.

Topic: Key Ideas and Details

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

Topic: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Topic: Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

RL.11-12.10 By the end of grade 11 read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Strand: Reading for Informational Text

Topic: Key Ideas and Details

RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

Topic: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RI.11-12.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account. □

Strand: Writing

Topic: Text Types and Purposes

W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

- a. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- b. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- c. Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
- d. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.
- e. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

Topic: *Production and Distribution of Writing*

W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.11-12.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Strand: Speaking and Listening

Topic: *Comprehension and Collaboration*

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language

Topic: *Conventions of Standard English*

1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

a. Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

b. Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g., Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, Garner's Modern American Usage) as needed.

2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

a. Observe hyphenation conventions.

b. Spell correctly.

Appendix D. NWEA Sample Questions

The Presidential Physical fitness Award can be earned by any boy or girl 10 years or over. The award is presented to students who meet goals for these several activities: 30-yard dash, 50-yard dash, 600-yard endurance run, standing jump, sit-ups, pull-ups or arm-hangs and softball throw. Only 15 out of every 100 children in the U.S. are able to qualify. Others find it impossible to meet the goal for one or more of the events.

What is the main idea of the passage?

1. You must be 10 years old to participate.
2. You must meet goals to earn this award.
3. Fifteen out of 100 students fail.
4. There are 7 activities in the Physical Fitness Test.

The 1965 Voting Rights Law was an outgrowth of the protest demonstrations organizations organized by African Americans to draw attention to discriminatory voter registration practices in national elections. The law abolished tests of literacy, knowledge and character as qualifications for voting. It empowered federal registrars to register potential voters in any county where such tests had been suspended. The Attorney General also had the right to take legal action deemed necessary to eliminate any equivalent of the poll tax.

Which word best describe the author's purpose?

1. to inform readers about the Voting Rights Law
2. to persuade people to register to vote
3. to inspire readers to work for civil rights
4. to entertain the reader

(Schoolwires, 2013)

Appendix E. Star Reader Sample Questions

Sample STAR Reader Evaluate Reasoning and Support Question

The school's study center should be available for student use before school as well as in the afternoon. Some students are dropped off before school starts and must wait outside until the doors are unlocked. Instead, students could be studying in the center during that time. Also, opening the center early would allow students to get out of the cold. Then students could have a little fun before school starts.

Which reason to open the center before school will be the **least** likely to convince the school?

1. Students could study instead of just waiting outside.
2. Students could have a little fun before school starts.
3. Students would have a place to get out of the cold.

Sample STAR Reader Cause and Effect Question

Jun's little brother, Tai, was making a tower out of blocks. Jun watched as Tai slowly slid a block into place. Jun gasped as the tower started to sway, but Tai put his hand out and steadied it.

Just then, their mother called to Jun from the kitchen. He quickly jumped up and stepped past the tower. He brushed against it by accident. The tower crashed, and the blocks scattered everywhere.

What causes the tower to fall?

1. There are too many blocks on it.
2. Jun brushes against the tower.
3. Blocks scatter everywhere.

(Renaissance Learning, 2013)

Appendix F. Star Reader Diagnostic Report

Brown, Brown

ID: 207409656 Class: Handley - 1225

Grade: 12 Teacher: M. Handley

School Benchmark - Grade 12

⚠ Urgent Intervention ⚠ Intervention ⚠ On Watch ⚠ At/Above Benchmark

STAR Reading Scores

SS: 505 (Scaled Score) ⚠ Urgent Intervention Brown's Scaled Score is based on the difficulty of questions and the number of correct responses.

PR: 2 (Percentile Rank) Brown scored greater than 2% of students nationally in the same grade.

GE: 4.7 (Grade Equivalent) Brown's test performance is comparable to that of an average fourth grader after the seventh month of the school year.

IRL: 4.2 (Instructional Reading Level) Brown would be best served by instructional materials prepared at the fourth grade level.

Domain Scores

Domain scores, ranging from 0-100, estimate Brown's percent of mastery on skills in each domain at a twelfth grade level.

Reading: Literature

Key Ideas and Details: 20

Craft and Structure: 22

Reading: Informational Text

Craft and Structure: 21

Language

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: 15

Reading Recommendation

Brown's ZPD identifies books at the right level to provide optimal reading challenge without frustration. Enter Brown's ZPD in www.ARBookFind.com to find appropriate books.

ZPD: 3.3-5.2 (Zone of Proximal Development)

Test Fidelity

Extended Time Limit: This student was given extra time to answer each question

Appendix G. Teacher Perception Survey

Please place an “x” in the box indicating you have read and understood the **consent form** included with the link to this survey.
Teacher Survey

I. Perceptions about Literacy Intervention Practices in High School

For each of the following statements, please rate on a scale from one to four to what extent you agree with each statement.

Strongly Agree (1) Agree (2) Disagree (3) Strongly Disagree (4)

This first section reflects the reading program used in school	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think the district reading program is helpful for my student	1	2	3	4
The STAR scores yield helpful diagnostic information	1	2	3	4
I like using the district reading program as part of my weekly routine	1	2	3	4
I think the students like using the district reading program	1	2	3	4
I feel the administration supports my use of the reading program in my room	1	2	3	4
The following questions are about the Special Education Services in your building.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The current special education services provided for students are adequate	1	2	3	4
I would change the current service delivery for special education students in my building	1	2	3	4
I feel too many students are placed in special education classrooms	1	2	3	4
I think special education classrooms adequately meet the literacy needs of special education students	1	2	3	4
I think special education students have equal access to regular education curriculum	1	2	3	4
I think special education students need more exposure to the regular education curriculum	1	2	3	4
I think that special education students are prepared to take the OGTs	1	2	3	4

I would like to see more inclusion classes in our building	1	2	3	4
These last questions deal with your perceptions and feelings about teaching reading in your classroom	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think that more than 70% of our students are reading below grade level	1	2	3	4
I am comfortable providing reading instruction in my classroom	1	2	3	4
I feel prepared to deal with the varied reading levels of students in my classroom	1	2	3	4
I would like more training in how to address the varied reading levels in my classroom	1	2	3	4
I think our test scores would improve if we had specialized reading classes	1	2	3	4
I wish I had more time to teach reading in my classroom	1	2	3	4
I think students need more time to practice reading in school	1	2	3	4

II. Students You Currently Teach

- special needs (cross-categorical/Single Classroom)
 special needs (inclusion)
 regular education

III. Reading In Your Classroom

A. Do you use a reading program in your school?

If yes, please list the program name:

Yes	No
------------	-----------

B. How long is the class period?

20 minutes 40 minutes 80 minutes

C. How long do the students spend reading independently in class daily?

(check all that apply to this question)

0-10 minutes 11-20 minutes over 20 minutes

it is not a reading class 2-3 times a week once a week

Appendix H. Pilot Survey Descriptive Statistics

Perceptions about Literacy Intervention Practices in High School

For each of the following statements, please rate on a scale from one to ten to what extent you agree with each statement. One indicating you strongly disagree and ten indicating you strongly agreeing.

This first section reflects the reading program used in school	Mean Score	Median Score	Frequency
I think the district reading program is helpful for my student	5.1	5	24 \leq 5
The STAR scores yield helpful diagnostic information	6.5	6	28 \geq 5
I like using the district reading program as part of my weekly routine	5.3	5	13 = 5
I think the students like using the district reading program	4.9	5	20 \geq 5
I feel the administration supports my use of the reading program in my room	6.7	6.5	27 \geq 5
The following questions are about the Special Education Services in your building.			
The current special education services provided for students are adequate	8.6	9	30 \geq 5
I would change the current service delivery for special education students in my building	7.4	7	28 \geq 5
I feel too many students are placed in special education classrooms	5.9	6	23 \geq 5
I think special education classrooms adequately meet the literacy needs of special education students	7.9	8	27 \geq 5
I think special education students have equal access to regular education curriculum	8.9	10	31 \geq 5
I think special education students need more exposure to the regular education curriculum	7.9	9	29 \geq 5 with 13 = 10
I think that special education students are prepared to take the OGTs	9.0	10	31 \geq 5 with 18 = 10
I would like to see more inclusion classes in our building	4.5	5	26 \leq 5 with 9 = 5
These last questions deal with your perceptions and feelings about teaching reading in your classroom			
I think that more than 70% of our students are reading below grade level	6.9	7.5	26 \geq 5
I am comfortable providing reading instruction in my classroom	5.8	5	21 \geq 5

I feel prepared to deal with the varied reading levels of students in my classroom	4.4	4	$25 \leq 5$
I would like more training in how to address the varied reading levels in my classroom	5.7	6	$26 \geq 5$
I think our test scores would improve if we had specialized reading classes	6.0	6	$22 \geq 5$
I wish I had more time to teach reading in my classroom	3.4	3	$27 \leq 5$
I think students need more time to practice reading in school	5.5	5	$24 \geq 5$

Appendix I. Ohio Graduation Test Sample Reading Score Report

Student Name	OHIO GRADUATION TEST: Date : 3/1/2013; Section: READING
Acba, G	434
Acoff, T	
Acost, G	386
Adrian, M	
Allen, K	
Allen, P	
Almontee, H	399
Almonteer, V	
Anderson, T	412
Aqel, L	
Artler, R	
Austin, J	406

Appendix J. Teacher Consent Letter

Dear Teachers:

My name is Mary Handley, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Urban Education at Cleveland State University. I am currently conducting a research study to explore teachers' perceptions about literacy practices at the high school level and would like you to complete a brief survey which will take approximately 5 minutes.

There are no known risks anticipated with participation in this study. All information I collect will be confidential. I will write a report at the end of the study with pseudonyms used in the report. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. By checking the statements: *Please place an "x" in the box indicating you have read and understood the **consent form** included with the link to this survey*, you are giving your consent to participation in this study. By signing the consent form you are acknowledging that you are at least 18 years of age or older. Copies of all survey data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the locked office of Dr. Brian Harper (JH 358) at Cleveland State University. Electronic data files will be stored on a password protected computer. Access to the data files is also password protected, and only the primary researcher and co-principal researcher will have access to the files. The data will be kept for three years and will be destroyed upon completion of the project. Although you will receive no direct benefits for participation in the study, completing the survey might provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your teaching practice and beliefs and whether they have been affected by current practices in your building. The findings of this study will inform the field of teachers' perceptions about literacy practices at the high school level.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-6370.

If you have any questions about the study please contact Mary F. Handley, Doctoral Student at 216-402-5782, or Dr. Brian Harper, Advisor at 216-875- 9770.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mary F, Handley
Doctoral Student

Dr. Brian Harper
Advisor, Methodologist

Teachers' Perceptions about Literacy Practices in High School

By signing this consent form (marking "x" in the box on surveymonkey), I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix K. Focus Group Invitation Letter

September 2013

Dear Teachers,

My name is Mary Handley, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Urban Education at Cleveland State University. I am currently conducting a research study to explore teachers' perceptions about literacy practices at the high school level and would like to invite you to participate in a focus group that will meet two times this fall (October 9th and October 23rd) for one hour each session (2:30 – 3:30).

There are no known risks anticipated with participation in this study. All information I collect will be confidential. I will write a report at the end of the study with pseudonyms used in the report. If you would like to participate in this focus group please sign and return the bottom of this form to my mailbox by October 8, 2013. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Although you will receive no direct benefits for participation in the study, by participating in the focus group you will have the opportunity to reflect on your teaching practice and beliefs and whether they have been affected by current practices in your building. The findings of this study will inform the field of teachers' perceptions about literacy practices at the high school level.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-6370.

Respectfully,

Mary F. Handley
Intervention Specialist
Harper High School

Yes, I would like to participate in the focus group regarding literacy practices at the high school level. I am aware that I may withdraw from the group at any time without penalty.

_____ (sign name)

_____ (print name)

Please return to Mary Handley's mailbox by October 8, 2013

Appendix L. Focus Group Transcripts

October 9, 2013

For the record all of you are here voluntarily, you know that you can leave at any time that this is just voluntary participation to talk about literacy in high school. Which has been a grave concern of mine and for many of you that I've talked with the same.

Rob: This is a reading level, this is pupil participating.

Voice: We're really grateful you're doing this.

Researcher: The graph that you have in front of you, just as a reference point this is a graph that shows the reading comprehension level of seniors from last year, and the normal curve is there and the mean is the highest point in the center and it is 6th grade level.

Sheila: Is this nationally?

Researcher: This is us, Harper High School from 2012-13, you can see that 6th grade level is where they came out in the mean area. This is all of the seniors so it includes our special education population as well as our regular Ed. I apologize could we go around and would you say your first and how many years you've been teaching.

Sheila 25 years

Amy 15

Leslie 7

Robert 29

Rob 28

Judy 13

Researcher: So we have a variety of experiences, we have biology represented here, business technology, math, special education for English and social studies. So when we're looking at this is it reflective of all of our kids. What was most concerning to me is as you look at the graph, and it was done in cortiles. The lowest cortile actually started at the fourth grade level, the median score for our seniors came out at 5.9. But the mode was fourth grade level. That meant that the most occurring score that showed up was fourth grade level.

Judy: Now I have a question about this?

Researcher: It was below first grade. She's asking about the one below zero, and we had four seniors who graduated with a below first grade level reading level. And I'm sure that they were special Ed, but you know what that means. That's kind of our talking point that I want us to look at and I wanted to discuss the issues of what were seeing in literacy.

Sheila: One interesting thing I see about this, I have been tracking this for a few years now just within my own students with their AR scores which is our diagnostic, that we use here Accelerated reader diagnostic, STAR testing. And at 10th grade this is about the average. So are they now making any progress that brings the question to me between 10th grade and seniors? You know is that it?

Researcher: I actually ran the stats for the whole school as well. And the whole school from our 9th, 10th, 11th and 12 graders for last year. Their mean is actually lower, and the mode score is closer to 3rd grade level. So, when you take the whole school into account this even moves back further. We're not seeing progress.

Voice: So what you are saying you are kind of plotting it yourself and you are seeing between 10 and 12, you're not seeing it.

SHEILA: If this is what our 12 graders are at yeah, because most of our student start the year in the middle fifth grade and 10th grade, the 9th and 10th and if this is 12 grade data is that indicative of us not moving.

Voice: That pretty interesting.

Researcher: So, I would ask you do you guys see literacy as a problem in your classrooms? And I want to ask our Business Tech and our Math teacher, who you wouldn't say is reading an issue for you, are you seeing it?

Rob: Yeah, absolutely, I guess kids to just read directions simple, one, two, three, four, five. Follow directions and they can't. "Please explain this to me." A lot of kids come into my lab and they get directions from you guys to do something, and they don't have a clue, they can't decipher what that question is. I have to go through and kind of break it down for them. And one of the things that I actually teach in my higher level courses, I teach a networking course, which is a college level course, is context clues. And how to approach a question and break down what are you looking for? Things like never, always and all those context clues that you can use in a testing situation. They don't have a clue.

Amy: You know, I think all teachers are doing that, so it's not like they're not hearing that it.

Rob: No, I'm not accusing you guys, we've talked a lot about this, the Researcher and I, and why is this happening? I mean, a little bit has to do with the fact that they just go to this and they see pictures and hear sound.

Researcher: So you talk about that they just use your form and have immediate stimulus.

Rob: Right and they don't have to read anything. They have to read very little or they read text speech and how, there's very little thought process in the text speech, it's right there, its declarative and its right there and they are never challenged to ready something that in-depth that would require experience or a word bigger than a four or five letter word.

Researcher: What about you Alan? What are you seeing?

Alan: Well, It's always been know that the problem with the OGT, the Math OGT, is the reading because they can't read for comprehension, they can't understand Mathematics in terms of the reading. They don't know when to multiply, when to divide. How to do it, because they can't read it in the problem and it's always been a major issue, and it's only gotten worse over the years.

Researcher: What you're saying is that you're seeing just basic decoding and reading as the issue?

Alan: Right, they cannot read a word problem in math and understand whether they are supposed to multiply, whether they're supposed to divide, subtract. They just cannot read it for that type of understanding and that's why the proficiency test when they had it was easier for them because it was pretty much multiple guess. And they were able to figure it out, but when they went to the OGT and they made it a word problem format. That always been the issue why our kids perform badly on that because they would not even try the word problems. The free response problems they wouldn't even try half. Now, It's amazing to me but the issue has become more Social Studies and Science now on the OGT, because that even worse.

Rob: The Social Studies, I'm shock at how poorly these kids hammer Social Studies. A lot of kids pass all four and bomb social studies. I would have thought the opposite.

Alan: I would not suspect that I could pass social studies but I can, because when I took it and read it most of the answers are imbedded in the problems. So if you read with comprehension, you can figure out, the same with Science. You can figure out the answers to most of the question if you are reading with comprehension. But it's obvious that they are not. Just ask them to read in class, they stumble over words that should be simple and you know the reading is just bad. It's been bad it's just been getting worse.

Rob: I've got a question, I do not teach English. Do English Teachers teach word attack skills? Because when I was teaching lower grades where I was around a bunch of people that were teaching reading. It was whole word and word lists that were the big thing. It was not breaking a word down into syllables and pronouncing it and pronunciation and phonics and those kinds of word attacks, like when I want to decipher a word I can break it down.

Amy: When they get to high school, were not necessarily teaching that as a skill, with special Ed teachers we know our individual students, we will address that with a certain student. With a lot of my students, I push, push, push. I have them read aloud a lot, since it's English. I tell them I have to hear them read. It's just that's what I do. Actually most of them their word attack skills, they are able to sound out words and they will keep reading and keep reading. However, their vocabulary is so low. They can get through a whole paragraph and not miss a word, but if you ask them what they read.

Rob: They don't have a clue.

Sheila: It doesn't mean its good comprehension.

Amy: What I'm seeing is a lot of the student, they are able to sound out words, They are able to break it down. I will listen for beginning and end sounds. And, a lot of times I'll stop especially if a kid stumbles over a word and I get excited about mistake; because it gives me an opportunity to go over something that other kids don't know.

Rob: My question was out to the crowd, because I'm looking for a reason why kids can't do this? I'm not saying there's some cultural some preparatory reason why?

Amy: They have very low vocabulary skills and knowledge, even the regular Ed, since I've been in inclusion. I'm able to see the regular Ed and the special Ed. All of them across the board have very low vocabulary knowledge.: Which of course you didn't have if you have very low reading levels. I mean that correlates. Why I think it's multifaceted. I think there a lot of different things coming in here. I think so many of our kinds move around so much when their young. They never get that initial basis of you know k-8, what do they say, you really don't learn that much after 6th grade or so. That you just build on it. But there learning is so interrupted from four and five different elementary schools that their literacy was never really established. And then you combine technology with that, you combine not wanting to read, finding it boring, finding it frustrating. There reluctance to read all lead to less and less reading. Which just puts them further and further behind and I really think it's multifaceted. You can blame technology, teaching styles. I mean going through school, my God, how many different classes did we have were education was so trendy, it changed. This was the model were following now, this is the model were following. Whole language versus attach skills versus... what's the best way. Apparently there was never just one best way to fit all, but I think the schools as we have went into all this testing stuff. Basic literacy

is not what they are caring about any more. What they are caring about is what are the scores on these standardized tests going to be. Is our district meeting the state requirements on this? This accountability thing, it has totally shifted our focus away from what interventions do we need at an early age to make sure we can accommodate some of this. And to let a kid get into the high school reading at that level in regular ed is a crime. Not just special Ed.

Researcher: But our district says we have a reading intervention program and that's our accelerated reader.

Sheila: We don't have one. That's not a reading intervention program and all this takes money. You know I mean, you're going to have to pull out time, pay people.

Amy: You know the AR program I do like the STAR test and I like that a student can work independently however, they could care less what their scores are, most of them. You know, and to track them throughout a year.

Researcher: That a new part of our Evaluation.

Amy: There really is not the intervention there, it's an independent program.

Researcher: So if that's not seen as an intervention, what do you? What would you guys see, I mean what do you want as a reading intervention here, we do STAR we have a reading specialist that is supposed to help us with our, our planning of our lessons.

Amy: A Reading specialist?

Researcher: Yes, Kate Sargent is our reading specialist. Our literacy coach.

SHEILA: I think every student that enters the 9th grade, by the ninth grade, certainly if not before but before high school should be Math tested, and English test, reading and writing and should be place in those two classes.

Rob: Tracked, its law

Amy: Alright, well then we have an issues, because yes that would be nice. There were some kids, it was like the second or third year I was here, those three little kids that I pulled, Researcher and I did a little finagling. And I took these three very, very low readers and I worked with them one on one, in fact one kid would skip lunch. What was that kids name? Marquase. He would come to me during his lunch and we would sit in this back little corner of this room and we would close the door and we would go through things piece, by piece, by piece. They would show up. Alright now, for students that are that low when you place them in a regular classroom, I'm sorry, even if it was me I would be a behavior problem.

You can't do it. The school does not have the space or the funds to be able to take kids and really break them apart and attack them. You know I don't' mean attack the student...

SHEILA: You don't think there not will to redo the model?

Amy: No, I don't think they do have the funds, because this should actually start down in kindergarten, first, grade, second grade fifth grade whatever. When I was in the suburbs I had parents bring their kids in in the morning before school started and we had a book club. It was reading intervention. So I had three or four or five kids come in like four days a week and that was their time. That we could go through and break thing down and make it fun and enjoyable. Because they also have to have that component otherwise they're not going to be invested in this. But breaking it down to that small it was helpful. I don't see how that can happen in high school even as special Ed teachers and we try to hit our kids.

Voice: LET ME shift it, suppose this group had a lot of power. Let's say we really could make Harper High School the way we want it. What ever we say were really going be thoughtful, really think about it and then we could set this up whatever we come up with. What would you do, so don't think about what can be; see what I'm trying to say...what would you think. How can we really make a difference in terms of literacy?

Amy: If we had kids with similar weaknesses that we could break them down in small, small groups. This means like three or four kids. If I had three or four kids that were reading at a certain level or had a certain issue, where they needed intervention for part of their reading, whatever level. And really almost like a boot camp with them, work with them on it.

Researcher: So what you're telling us is provide direct instruction as to what grade level reading they're at.

Amy: Right, and be able to document it and chart it and show the kids.

SHEILA: And teach the core subject areas within that, because that has to be paramount. This whole model thing of switching classes every so many minutes to accommodate this, that and the other thing, it's part of the model, and I tend to believe that it's more of an unwillingness to shake up the whole model. Than it is that I agree with what you're saying Ms. Bates, completely that needs to be done, but why isn't that being done. There is tons of money going into this. Where are we putting the resources?

Amy: If our kids had a study hall, now I'm having certain kids miss their lunch to come over and work with me on projects. It's not reading, but its writing projects. And they're missing their lunch. Why isn't there a study hall were we could, I could have the kids, pull them during their study hall would be nice.

Researcher: What do you think Alan, Leslie?

Leslie: I think ya, they need to be in school, like during school like she said learning like when she pulls them out. But I also, think there should be something either before or after school like right now when we have all these meetings. There needs to be everyday like one even though Thursday is intervention day we need more than one day to give time to these kids, either before or after school. Like before school instruction, during and after. Just like when we do a reading activity before reading, during reading and after.

Judy: And the parents need to buy into it.

Leslie: Yeah, I think more parent involvement. I think the kids need to buy into reading, just reading for fun not reading to pass a test or reading to do this, they need to enjoy reading.

Judy: They hate it. A lot of kids actually hate reading. They are like “Oh my God you want me to read?” “I don’t want to read.”

Leslie: I think the more that they read the better reads they’ll become.

Judy: True

Rob: The one thing that I thought a little bit about, that you mentioned was, when could kids come to school. They’re not going to come before school. They’re simply not. You can see how many kids late, are late right now and come right...

You’re going to have to make sure there’s time after, because they’re here and if there here they’ll stay.

Researcher: My question is why can't we build it into the day? Why do we have to have OGT reading, I mean OGT math, OGT Social Studies, OGT Science can we not assess read....and I shouldn't be talking should I?

Rob: My point is that now they want us to stay an extra 40, 50 minutes a day, but then all of a sudden they'll say you got to do this. Rather than just staying, making the day that long, then throwing in a period where there could be a study hall. I would have no problem with having to do an extra period, ever. I will always stay to 4:00 anyways. They're going to be here, they're not going to go, you get more kids to show up and if they have a particular sport they're participating in when that sport comes in they then that where they go at that time. The football season is over eventually, and then they could stay.

Voice: So you're saying extending the school day for kids?

Rob: Yeah, that's what they say, but they're not. They extended our school day and it's all about professional development and they scold us for forty minutes.

Many voices: Right

Oh, I defiantly feel that way.

Leslie: so if it's really about the kids they then they should be the ones here with us every day after school or whatever, extra time, that

Judy: because I honestly thought they were going to extend somehow the school day, but they didn't. I mean 20 minutes even, some times.

Researcher: Well on paper it says we are extended.

Judy: Right, but not the students, we are.

Amy: And then we sit in meetings I mean there have probably been five days this whole year that I have had. That I could just

SHEILA: work with kids.

Amy: Or work on my own or even try to design intervention.

Alan: But you go to understand that was not the reason why they did this. They put the extended time, simply because they didn't like the idea that we leave at 2:30 it had nothing to do with any kind of other sound educational practices or nothing... That the Cleveland School system. That's the way it is. I mean it had nothing to do with anything else except the fact that they want to give the impression that were here late, okay, so were here late. They don't care what're doing, you know something, and I was here every night until 5:00, 5:30 and most of the time I was here with kids. Now, I can't even tell a student to come afterschool now, because I don't where I'm going to be.

Amy: So, it's actually made it worse for the student, I think,

Judy: I have a question, why have we gotten rid of study hall; in the suburbs they got study hall.

Alan: Study halls were gotten rid of due to financial, it was at one time. Now it might not be financial. They didn't have enough time in the day with the amount of teachers.

Voice: Suppose you had study hall, how would those be used? I really don't know anything.

Rob: When I was in school, which is a century ago, by the way. The study halls could be used to be a library aid, be a project aid, to be to do this, to be a gym leader or go to study hall sit down and do some studying or just catch a nap or just sit their quietly and snooze. My son goes to St. Ignatius he has study halls, when he has study hall he goes to

the library and takes nap. You know, all of the above they can be used for which can make your day flow better. Or if you needed special tutoring or you needed something you could say, when's your study hall, come to my room that period you can sit in the back and do something.

Amy: In a lot of other districts the school day is longer, it's like 7:30 – 3:30, I know this cause... A lot of them that's how they are. 7:30-3:30. the kids have a couple study hall. The special end teachers during that time are assigned their caseload, so they see their caseload every day. So I would know, and I may not even have this child in my class, but it's somebody on my caseload I would know that they were having a test or problem in a certain subject. They come to everyday to me every day for study hall. And I would sit there and work through whatever it is they had to work on. Make sure that they were on target, with if they were trying to bring up their reading level, their math whatever it is. And that's how their study halls are assigned.

Alan: Another reason, why they don't have study halls, think about it, I have five kids that are in my pre-calculus class that are also in my algebra two with me. Okay, some of them have two math classes, three English classes where else do they allow kids to make up all these classes.

That they failed.

During school.

Alan: You go anyplace else they got to go to night school or they got to go to summer school or something, but not here. We have kids that their schedules are totally filled and with core classes because they're retaking every thing they should have passed. And now that we have credit recovery that's the next....

big thing.

SHEILA: Lack of processing time though really comes in. Without having these breaks a lot of our classes are 80 minutes, back to back, and they go from class to class to class, as Alan said they might have 7 classes. They never stop to process. A lot of times they just leave at the end of the day and that it. And nothing else is looked at its like get it over with. And very little independent work happens for many of them after that.

Researcher: Our students arrive at 8 o'clock in the morning or 7:30 to get breakfast, classes start at 8:00 and they get one 20 minute break and to go to the lunch room for lunch and that's it.

Voice; and all the rest is content?

Ya

Rob: They may have a gym class in there where they can run around

Maybe, maybe Art.

Researcher: I'm glad you brought up the pressure of testing, and I want to put that out there to all of you. How many of you feel that pressure of testing?

Oh definitely,

Leslie: Even with our kids the special Ed kids, and it can be regular Ed kids too, like when they do the NWEA, or what every they do, they don't even read, you watch them and they're just clicking and clicking because they all just want to get through the test. I think that's some of the reason why some of the scores are low, it might not be a real indicator of what they are, they actually may be smarter than that that but they're just so tested out that they just want to get it over with.

Alan: They don't try with the free response problems on the OGT, they won't even read them hardly, they start reading them and after the first two sentences they say forget this, and they move on.

Researcher: Do you think that's reading, Alan, or do you think, or it is a reading issue or it just exhausted from testing?

Many voice: Probably both

Judy: I would say a combination of the two.

Amy: But it so predominate in this area. Why do kids even think this way? I don't get that?

Sheila: You mean the non-value of education?

Amy: Right, I don't understand that.

Judy: but the thing is this neighbor is a neighborhood that there are many working people, you know what I'm saying, so?

Sheila: certainly not the highest poverty area in Cleveland.

Researcher: And were thought of as a good high school

Rob: I grew up in this neighborhood; my step dad still lives in about ½ mile from here.

Sheila: But look at Cleveland's demographic. What the adult literacy rate here too? I know it might not be as bad in this area, but what is our functionally literacy rate?

Researcher: Our functional literacy rate is 69%. In the city of Cleveland.

Sheila: In the City proper.

Rob: That's means 6 or below.

Researcher: 69% are functionally illiterate. So if you look at our graph we are right in line with that, so we are graduating the majority of our student to be functionally illiterate

within our community. We have about five minutes left. I want you to be thinking about for next Wednesday I'd like us to talk about, What do you see would be successful intervention for kids? And this is whatever you think?

Sheila: Idealistically or?

Voice: The idea that you could create a different system.

Judy: starting from this point or kindergarten?

Voice: No, starting right here in high school. Sorry about that.

Researcher: So all of you know next week we have more testing that you do not know about, we have conditions for learning. That will be that just came up today. He hasn't told us which class he's taking. We are supposed to do AR testing, which won't happen because of this testing which will supersede.

Judy: And the PSAT, Wednesday.

Researcher: If you had your ideal high school, what kind of programs would you develop to address this literacy issue? We're just trying to brain storm to put this on the map. In my research, that I've been doing for my dissertation and with Dr. Gold. People won't talk about it. It's become the talked about thing right now, secondary high school, what are we doing? Nowhere is it said what are kids graduating with and nowhere do we talking about what really are, you guys are the people who see it every day, what would you do to remediate? I'm sure that you have ideas.

Rob: You've got to think about what can you do? That's the biggest limitation, last year you all know remember the two German girls and the Brazilian girl that was here. I go to know one real; I never really had a personal interaction with someone. She was in the 11th grade, she 16 years old, just turned 16, this girl was just miles ahead of our other 16.

I interacted with her all year, because she staying with friends of my and I spent a lot of time with her and she was immature 16 year old girl just like any other girls you'd see, but the skills that she had, the literacy skills. Were just, she read continually and I talked to her about her schools and what they do by the time you hit sixth grade it pretty much establish whether or not you're going to go the academic way or you're going to go thought vocational business related and they track you right away.

Alan: You hit a problem that just can't be solved. Because, in the United States we educate everybody. We're the only one that does.

Rob: That;s my point.

Alan: We say we do, whether we do or not, we try, the other counties don't try.

Rob: We're not doing it, it's a mistake, leaving that alone, we can't really deal with that today or as a group, but if you look at that, how do you grab the kids? What do you do to grab the kids to get them to make any movement whatsoever you've got to hit in what they like,

Alan: You also have to be realistic, like having kids to have to take pre-calculus or stats to graduate is ridiculous. In Cleveland they do, go someplace else they don't any other suburb but, in Cleveland they do. You have to take Algebra, geometry, algebra II and then your last choice is pre-calculus or stats. Now, you set them up for failure by doing that, I don't care what anybody says. That not a State thing, that a District thing. All the State says it that they want four math classes, they don't say that you got to have pre-calculus or stats, it the districts that make the decision to have pre-calculus and stats.

SHEILA: it was probably written into some grant or funding that there getting to raise the standards and things like this.

Alan: Rigor

Rob: If you try and evaluate what they've done or what they've learned you can't; they won't even bump the needle. I asked a couple of kids in stats what is stats? They say I don't know. They don't even know what it is.

Amy: In the new program core curriculum can be great, this is the first year their pushing this, but the books that the District brought, bought into, there are positives with them, I like the thinking part but when it come to the reading part I have called, The resource center to see if I can get or find out where I can get some remedial material, so I can stay along the same path. There is none. They said we don't do anything like that, Why would you be in Cleveland and buy into this program where there is no remedial work. They could not even tell me other primary documents that I could use.

Alan: That's the college board, that's all for AP planning. There not going to have remedial work.

Amy: Were expected to meet our students where they are, to be able to educate them, know where their coming from our Board and the people choosing the books in our curriculum really need to know where are students are coming from. Because, even our regular Ed kids need remediation.

Alan: Do you think they really care about that, all they want is to say that we're a premier school district. There going to make impressions, and say were offering AP calculus, were offering AP Physics. Even though half the kids in there are not prepared or are ready for any of those classes there're still making sure they offering them. What's it for? There're setting the kids up for failure. I'll say it to the day I die, there setting them up for failure. Until they change that idea that every kid is going to college, we're going to have

that problem. They want to make it seem like work is so much harder, we have so much more rigor than other school systems. Yeah were putting rigor on kids that they can't handle. Walk down the street and ask how many people that are living that go to work every day who had pre-calculus their last year who had algebra II there last year? There not going to have them. No, yet they got a good job and they are taking care of themselves.

Rob: I have a Master's degree in technology and I didn't hit pre-calculus until my second year of college.

Alan: I use to read Chilton's manuals. If you kids there staring to work on things they'll read a manual because it has relevance to them and that will help their skills. If you walked in a room and asked any kid how to do a fraction, they're like, "Oh my God, what's a fraction and I hate fractions." Well if you got to work on a lathe or something you'll learn to know what a fraction is.

Researcher: So what I'm hearing is that there is no true application for the majority of our kids in their core content area.

Rob: That's why I say to reach the kids you got to hit them in something they'll be interested in something that will gain their interest.

Researcher: are you saying city kids can't be interested in physic? Is that what you're saying?

Rob: Sure they can, when you show them how it can be fun.

Alan: They'd be interested more in physics if they were seeing how a machine worked or something were they saw the application of it. Okay, they've got to be able to put two and two together because they see no relevance in it. You sit there and talk about physic

what am I going to do with it jump off a building? It's got nothing to do with them. But if you had some kind of a program like shop, like I use to have that's where the relevance comes in. I started liking math only because I had to use math to figure out how to make something. A lot of these kids are extremely artistic, extremely talented and they could probably create a lot of wonderful things all you have to do is look at some of the gang symbols they come up with.

Researcher: And their tattoos

Alan: They are talented; But they got to learn how to channel that image.

Rob: And they're finding other ways to express it. Like the tattoo stuff. They're finding different ways to express it that are not traditionally educational means, they're not. And that's not going to be successful for them in the real world. They're going to be a sub culture out there that important too, but once they try to go out and get somebody to pay them so they can have a living. They got to have skills that they can be used in the real world. That's where were lacking. In all honesty, get out in the suburbs, it not the case, not nearly as bad. You get out in the suburbs. They kids realize and they do have skills, but it's for some reason that in the city we're just not getting across to them. That why I'm saying we got to catch them, we got to have them to build stuff.

SHEILA: I think so much of it the social economic isolation too. As segregation everyone was so much into the racial segregation, but I think a lot of what inner city schools today in general around the nation and probably around the world what kind of keeps the student there down. The values you're talking about is the lack of diversity in that area. There's not a lot difference in diversity in social economic status, so our students don't see a lot of kids or students like the German Girl, okay who have different

thinking and ideas and you get this predominate idea in your culture and that's the driving force and its almost and extreme. And I think some of the attitudes towards literacy are almost extreme in this city.

Leslie: And sometimes in the black culture or African American, it's like the same type of people, so it's a concentrated area of black people and sometimes when they come to school where there are different races if I'm smart and I'm reading sometimes my friends say "Oh you're acting white. or you're smart." And that's personal to me, cause that's happened to me when I went to Catholic school and stuff like that.

Amy: Just on a side note that C-TAG thing that's going on right now they address exactly that issue, that what they address....it's a good program.

SHEILA: It needs to be addressed, it a huge barrier. In Cleveland, I'm glad you brought that up, nobody want to talk about race, it's kind of like an off the table thing, oh, were desegregated, were this is not an issue any more. There's an issue. An there's an issue just between the students African American students and the White staff in a lot of cases or vice a versa. Males and females. There are some issues going on but were not really, that all skirted over because there like elephants in the closet.

Researcher: But are those, would you say those are roots of our literacy issue?

SHEILA: I don't know that it's the root but it's a contributing force to it, I think it's an issue. Like behavioral things that are out of say racial context. Meaning let's say one of my students African American might talk to me in a way that they may never speak to you, because culturally they respect you more or vice a versa.

Judy: The reason I'm laughing is that they would probably talk to me that way.

SHEILA: Just being an observer, as you observe different things going on. I've notice this in the District alot, especially at the high school. I never saw it so much at the lower grades and I taught Junior high for 15 years and then an elementary. But, once I got to the high school I saw that. I also see the clicks here, were have Hispanic clicks, white clicks, we have black clicks and then we have a few kids who mix. There's a group of them.

Researcher: But I would have to ask Alan, I've seen it this year, maybe last year, but I don't think that was predominately Harper High School, the cliquish kind of behavior.

Sheila: We have the diversity to have the clicks; most of the district doesn't even have the diversity our building does in population.

Researcher: I'm asking Alan because Alan has been here forever, he's part of the building. he'll be buried in the build.

Judy: I've been here since 07, 08 and I've seen a shift towards, clicks, more. I think it was more integrated, when I was here initially, but I've seen a shift toward the click thing that you're talking about. And I don't know why the behavior is changing, I don't know.

Alan: It's not really you don't see it. No matter what. There're little clicks.

Rob: There's always clicks, when we worked at Glenville together, but there were clicks, you had the jocks, you had all the athletes, then you had the nerds the kids that were smart and then you had the street, the tough guys. And they were defiantly separated people and they all ran together in that crowd. You could see that. Because it was 100% black school. You could see the clicks evolve always.

Researcher: Before we go into that direction, because I'm not doing the social dynamic.

Rob: I wanted to jump back to literacy, do you ever her kids talk about what their reading to their friends. You'll see some of it once in a while.

Amy: I do hear that, but that's the department I'm in and so we read books.

Judy: That goes back to the click thing she mentions, because it does have to do with what my friends do, that's what I do.

Rob: I remember when I was a kid. Centuries ago it that, Sci-fi was the big thing, so I had all my buddies reading all the latest Sci-fi and that the way it went. I see some of it here, but not a lot, that is a missing element. We got to get them to think about reading. And once again, if you don't read you can't write and you learn how to speak better if you read. It's all contingent upon reading.

Researcher: I don't want anybody to stay here that doesn't want to be here your time is long past. Please feel free to leave.

Amy: The kids are reading the ones that do read in public, there reading those Japanese cartoon books and then there reading the vampire stuff. They like the vampire stuff and the Blue ford series.

They do like that but that is not one that they would go out to the library to pick up.

That's if there in school, the teacher will say you have to read that's what they'll pick up.

I'm talking about ones that they go out on their owns and purchase a book.

Sheila: And those kids who do that you know what there AR scores are? The ones in my classes there in 11th and 12th reading levels. Those kids

Voice: So you're saying they chose to read?

Sheila: There avid readers, voracious readers, there always reading.

Rob: you can almost name them. As they go through my classes.

Sheila: It's no mystery if you know about development and how people learn to read, if you don't get a basic vocabulary down at a certain age and you're working with that and every year you fall further behind, as what occurs you're going to end up in the 9th and 10th grade with a 4th and 5th grade reading level.

Researcher: Well Baby ended up with 2nd grade first month is what he left high school with.

Amy: I don't even think he even measured at first.

Researcher: No he didn't him came to me initially a pre primer.

Rob: When I had him, if I sat down and read to him he could do the work, but I had to sit with him. I didn't mind doing it, I liked baby.

SHEILA: Do you all think that with the right interventions, we could increase their levels at least by a few years?

Leslie: Yeah, Yeah and I think there needs to be some outside reinforcement like at home, it just can't be here, even if it's just for 10 minutes, but we only can do what we can do here, but I also think something needs to be done when they leave here.

Amy: Which is hard to do, since I'm in special end and I get to sit down with parents and have IEP meetings I go through the reading thing and make suggestions, an some of the parents have followed through, but these are parents of special Ed kids. The beginning of the year, I had a girl come to me to say hi, welcome back, whatever. And I said what did you read this summer? And she started blushing, she goes I didn't read any books. I had talked to her Father about reading and I had talked her and I thought she was going to read, and she goes, but I'm getting all of these magazines at my house and all of a sudden I started laughing, I said "you're getting magazines?" and She goes I don't know how or

why I'm getting them, but they have my name on it. And I said your Dad ordered them for those for you. Don't you remember? She says I like reading those, I've been reading all those.

Voice: She didn't consider that reading?

Amy: No, we talked about this with her Father and with her, so she knew where I was coming from, but when she was actually doing it she didn't realize "oh yeah Ms. Bates told my Dad to do this for me." And he went ahead and did this without telling her. She knew they were coming and he probably just assumed that she knew why they were there.

Voice: And she was reading them?

Amy: Oh Yeah, she likes them.

Researcher: I'd be interested to see what her reading level is now, so when she does the STAR and see where she was before and was there any improvement.

Amy: Reading and English are difficult for her; math is much easier for her.

Researcher: One other interesting thing that I didn't mention to think about for next time and I did a regression analyst of our OGT passage rate and the classes that they were in special Ed or regular, the NWEA score, which is highly rated in terms of correlation, and then the STAR readers score. The number one predictor, the strongest predictor was whether or not they were special Ed. In passage. Now, I know that seems like no brainer, but you would have thought that STAR reader and these kids who are not reading would have pulled that out. It was whether or not they were special Ed.

Voice: That's what predicted what?

Researcher: OGT score. NWEA is highly correlated; it why we use that exam, but NWEA came in second and the third thing was STAR reader. So, it tells us that the reading level is part of this component. I think that is an interesting thing to talk about.

SHEILA: That could bring up a whole another discussion Researcher. About, Cleveland Special Ed system in general and how much have we created what we're dealing with, I mean? We went to full inclusion this year; our building did, so people are co-teaching almost everyone in the building outside of just a few people.

Researcher: But that has not been the model?

SHEILA: No, that has not been the model up to this point, but for regular education teachers like me have always saw this watching special Ed population thought the years, that it just reinforces that so many of these behaviors are learned. They are learned behavior in Special education, it not that the student has any more emotional disability or something than half the students in the regular Ed classes do. There are always the few that are really special needs, but a lot of it is learned screwing off behavior and I will be in my small group and will act out...

Alan: I agree with that, I had a student a really long time ago I had him in 9th general math and he was the nicest kid, he really was the nicest kid. His mother was real nice she came in and I talked to her and she was really nice. Three year later when he was a Senior, I was walking down the hall and he's flying down the hall and throwing stuff and acting like a complete idiot with some other kids. I looked at him and I said "what are you doing?" He goes Oh Mr. Fast I'm special Ed now. "I was like oh my God." This is the truth, this is the honest truth.

Amy: I've seen it because for years, I've been going back and forth, I've been doing the inclusion and the self-contained and I see kids and if they're in the inclusion classes their behavior will start to get better, but if you put them back in the self-contained, the behavior just magnifies.

Leslie: Or it can be a little different too, I teach inclusion now too, last year I had all self-contained ED for 80 minutes a day, don't know how I made it. Some of the kids actually act out because they are around too many people because in self-contained it maybe 10 people, so it could be opposite.

Voice: They get over stimulated?

Researcher: Yeah and we do have that population that does need that pull out. But my question would be in terms of their literacy skill when there in these inclusion classes aren't they exposed to so much more. I always think of you saying I teach everybody, I don't care who they are.

Sheila: Roberto always tells me, "My students (special education) would never be doing what we're doing in these class (regular education) (don't understand at 56:46)

Leslie: sometimes they are afraid to participate.

Amy: Give them time they will.

Leslie: Some of them do really well.

SHEILA: It's actually working for probably 70%. You know at least with the ED. It's a nightmare for those three or four, because I have students like that in my class too, then you have six or seven of them like that going on and it can be a bit of a nightmare. The majority of the special education students are going to be lifted up by this, they are.

Researcher: Call it quits.

Rob: What do you think?

Voice: Fascinated, I really was, you gave me lots of food for thought.

Researcher: She's going to retire and write a book. He's writing one two it's called There Is No Mr. Chips. I want you to think about, there one interesting thing on the survey to me. That you guys did, that said "do think thank 70% of our kids are reading below grade level and the majority of us said yes. But, then the question that asked you did you "Do wish you had more time to instruct reading in your classroom?" the majority of the people said no. So, what does this tell us?

Leslie: I would say no because sometime they don't know how to teach reading.

Alan: I was going to say I would probably say no because I would consider myself doing malpractice trying to teach English or anything like that the way I talk.

Rob: I think we're all so frustrated with amount; we have expectation what were supposed to be doing, to add reading to that. I try to interject reading at times with kids, but I have kids that are say 2nd grade reading level. And two seats down, I have students at 12th grade. How, to be an effective teacher how do I address this?

Researcher: So, the range is so huge

Amy: In special Ed the range can be that way too.

Rob: I'm sure it can, you can have a 2 and 8. So what do you do, some kids can perform at that level.

Researcher: And that's what you're going to think about for next Wednesday.

October 16, 2013

Transcription #2:

Researcher: The papers, right next to you, are based on some of the themes that we have, based on the discussion points I broke it out into four themes from what I was hearing from you. It appears that we we're looking at direct instruction for reading, special ed class placement, motivation to read and there was one more, model shift, which meant how were handling high school. Interestingly enough, today with everything we did the kids got that study hall at the end of the day, and they were thrilled. It's the end of the marking period. I said "don't you guys think you need this? And they were like "Yes, we can get stuff done and we'd be done with our homework." Two of the kids were very far behind and at least it was at least starting point and they were interested in what I was doing with you guys after school and what was gonna happen. So the students are full proponents of saying: "yeah, please institute a study hall so we can get stuff done." If you would look at that and say weather or not does that seem accurate to you? Did you think there was another category we should be addressing or did you feel that those four address the things that you wanted to talk about in terms of literacy and how we might make some changes?

Sheila: By the way Moore got drafted to dispense candy and Mitchell has to do tutoring, they asked me to pass it on.

Researcher: We've lost two people from the group? So I'm just going to close the door so we can get started.

I sent in an e-mail with the three questions for us, and I put them on the board, as well. We want to focus today on what intervention programs do we have that you think are successful for literacy. What reading interventions do you believe would be helpful if we implemented them and what impact does class placement special or regular have on academic achieve and literacy skills . So, let's tackle the first one and if you see and other information that you'd like to have included in the themes please tell me, otherwise we are just going to move into answering our questions.

Are you okay with it?

Voices: Yes, okay

Researcher: What interventions do you see us as having here that are successful for our students?

Voices: None – That we currently have?

Researcher: I hear none.

Sheila: I think giving the STAR diagnostics is a beginning; it's not that we do anything with it. We have an assessment in place to at least do something with, but we don't have an actual intervention strategy.

Amy: But, that's not an intervention program.

Researcher: So, right now we have nothing that you feel is a good intervention for literacy. So, we're going to move to two, "Pie in the sky," if you could do anything what would you do to make a successful intervention, and were talking about our high school, what should we do? And there's a meeting today about it.

Rob: What would be the largest obstacle to kids reading, in the high school? In your opinion? Let find out, I think we shoot at all these interventions and all these diagnostics, but we don't identify, what is the obstacle?

Amy: They can't read.

Rob: What does that mean? They can't read. what can't they do? Why don't? What is the obstacle? We understand that they can't read, but that not an obstacle, I can't do push ups, but if I exercise I do push ups.

Amy: They can't read and that is the obstacle. That is an obstacle. They've gotten to this age and their reading level is so low that if, by the time they get her they should be able to read to learn, not learning to read. So, If you have a child showing up in high school their obstacle is they can't read. If they're reading at a fourth or fifth grade level which a lot of our regular ed kids are? It not just special ed. They're going to walk into a class and they are automatically going to be frustrated so, they are going to be more interested in social and everything else going on. I think that is their biggest obstacle.

Researcher: So if we look at that as the obstacle, that they're not capable of reading grade level material. What interventions, what can we do for that portion of the population? And remember it's 42 percent.

Rob: You're absolutely accurate, and that's what I heard, I baited you a little bit. Kids can't read. Okay, so you really mentioned the true obstacles, embarrassment, an ability to learn at the level in which they're at. Those are the obstacles. Can't reading, that's a state of being.

Alan: I'm not so sure I agree with you, saying that they can't read. I think they can't read for comprehension. I'm not so sure that they can't read. They read, but they're not sure

what their reading. There needs to be some way to get them to focus. If you're doing a reading intervention, the intervention they need is to learn how to read for comprehension. I'm sure how to do that because I'm not an English teacher. But that's something to me, that's where the biggest issue is. What I do in my class after I make them, read the first question I ask them is 'okay now what did you read?' Explain it to me. They can't do it; they can't explain to me what they just read. I mean it math okay, so that makes a difference I guess, but I do that all the time. Every paragraph I say: "okay what did that paragraph say to you?" they have no clue.

Researcher: Okay, if it's truly really reading comprehension?

INTERRUPTION -----

Sheila: To get to number two, what reading interventions do you believe would be helpful within class? I think if we had an actual reading inventory, took inventory like students are given in elementary school grade level, when they enter high school and then there were designated classes that gave direct instruction in it, that would identify word attack as a comprehension where you could explicitly identify where their strengths and weaknesses are in reading, cause reading is all of this stuff were talking about:, it's comprehension, it's decoding, it's all of it. If we could then, address those specific things with special classes for that, extra time given during day just for that. Where everyone was in that, for that period of time, say in the morning. Then they move into their regular classes later in the day. Then, those regular classes all need to have content area reading components in them. And then, they be would be getting a lot of extra reading support and literacy support in general.

Researcher: Now, in your classroom you have a different dynamic because its 80 minute, in a 40 minute class session, how do you see implementing those kinds of strategies for building reading comprehension. Is it feasible is what I'm asking and I'm asking. And, I'm asking Alan and Rob because 40 minutes make a different dynamic, 80 minutes I can see. Is that a feasible option, and can you still cover curriculum if you're asked to cover literacy in content area?

Alan: Well, it's not easy. Like in calculus, while I'm teaching, I'm making them read. It's a college level textbook, but part of it is being able to read that type of material. So I make them read and like I said I quiz them on what they've read all the time. Now, on my other classes like my algebra two class. I've got so much to cover, but the main thing is I'm worried about them getting the concept. So there's not a whole lot of reading that goes on there because I present a concept and then I let them try to work on it. I mean it's pretty much task drive, so I'll admit I don't do a whole lot of literacy or whole lot of reading in that type of course. You know how math is?

Sheila: Yeah, Math is understandable, but there would be a minimum of that, you know.

Alan: But, with calculus it lends itself to reading because it all conceptual. It's all abstract and it's all conceptual so you do a lot of reading and that type of thing. But, in the lower level course you're teaching a skill. you know, so it's not as much, especially in 40 minutes. The Spring Board books that they have now, there's a lot of reading in that, okay, eventually if the kids start with the younger age with the Spring Board books then maybe by the time they get up to here we could actually use the Spring Board Books. But the problem I have with the Spring Board Book is they go along way around to come to a concept. It's like Ty Cobb going to Pittsburgh because he killed somebody in Cleveland

so he had to go to Canada through Pittsburgh, you go all the way around. It's the same deal here.

M: Nice analogy.

Sheila: Is this true, I don't know my baseball history.

Alan: That's what he had to do. Yes, He beat a guy half to death, so they had a warrant for his arrest so whenever he played in Pittsburgh he would go through Canada, so he wouldn't get in trouble. But anyways, sorry I digress, so anyways the Spring Board book requires that they know everything beforehand. And so, yes, if they knew everything beforehand then it would be a reading exercise, because they would read through it and they would have to think and answer questions. So, it's very good if you can do it. But the way our students are right now, I can't do that, because they don't have the skills to actually go through it. So I end up, when we do do the Spring Board Book, we do it together. I have to read with them and I have to go step, by step with them and explain and that's not what the purpose of the book is.

Amy: And we do that too.

Researcher: Is there any other intervention, and you can probably address this, that you would apply in terms of addressing literacy in those other areas?

Would having another teacher in there helping with literacy needs help?

Amy: You know, I keep going back to the reading classes that they have for the special ed kids. Those classes can be very difficult, even more difficult, I think, the regular ed classes because you have so many different reading level in there and level of comprehension. Right now, I have this little girl who can word call anything. And were reading a book together, all she gets out of it is that some girl is going to get married.

Which has nothing to do with the story and throughout the whole story were doing summaries, predictions? Her comprehension is so, I've never seen a child with such low comprehension.

Researcher: But that's a special ed self-contained?

Amy: Right, but I could also see this as far as a reading intervention to have them in a class, where you just have lessons. I don't know. You really would have to be an independent situation where it almost would have to be set up like a study hall. You say, okay this is your reading level, have independent programs where each child could go thought independently cause everybody's different. Where one child's strengths are its another child's weakness. And if we're going to attack reading we have to address the individual. And I think once you address the individuals then you'd be....

Alan: Didn't we have programs like that THINK wasn't that what the THINK program was?

Sheila: Series of skills sets wasn't it?

Amy: I'm not sure; I was looking up different programs. After you brought this up I thought "we don't have anything here." I'm a special ed teacher I know my students well enough, I know what they need, but if somebody said "what's a program you use,?" or whatever, nothing. It's stuff I make up as I go, you know that kids needs, it's not, we don't have anything here, there is nothing to work from.

Researcher: So, again I want us to think to where we're going in terms of what do we want?

Rob: You see that's, going back to what I was trying to draw out. We have lots of diagnostic stuff. Lots, but a true, to intervene you have got to identify. In a true,

intervention program the diagnostic stuff should be behind you and you're intervening means that you're trying to attack what the issue is.

Researcher: To remediate

Rob: Okay, to remediate, okay, right, so what is it? You can give test and all kinds of tests and test, find out that they can't do this and their reading at the 2nd grade level. But what is it we can do to really inspire them, like the spark for them to read, cause that's what it takes?

Researcher: But that's what I'm asking. If we say, a specialized reading class where we use the diagnostics that one options, a study hall where we can address people.

Are there any other, Alan's going to a meeting tonight.

Rob: I did a Master's degree initially in reading diagnostics and I worked down at the lab at Cleveland state and I went out to schools and I worked with kids and it seemed. We use to do things called learning activity packets, where you take all kinds, you might read a book like "Sarah, thin and tall and Small?" whatever, it was a book they were reading....

Researcher: Plain and Tall.

Rob: Yeah, that book whatever, and I remember I put together and you know you had drawing, and you had a game, and you had lots of activities that kids could succeed at, okay. Once they started to read the book they could start doing these activities. And they would have easy success. You could draw things, you could have a crossword puzzle, you could have words. All these kinds of things that could draw their attention to the story. Those are based on levels you could do them for very young or very old.

Researcher: So again, were backed to you need a specialized reading class?

Rob: Yeah, because every kid is a little bit different but you could group them. The thing is, once we determined that they're reading whatever low or whatever, but then you have to find some remediation. Some way to bring them, to get the interest going so that they feel like their successful at reading. That's the key, making them successful. That when they read it, it sparked them a little bit, they got an interest, they saw what the story was about and how it would resolve and they were able to predict. And then develop those skills with higher level reading stuff.

Sheila: More of a flexible time model definitely has to be part of it. It's not always going to be accomplished in a 40 minute span, and to have to have students move, from group, to group, to group, to group. They might not get the content area of reading they could potentially get in the other subject areas. Now Math kind of aside, because I think math is a bit of a unique subject versus social studies, English, Science, Health I mean things that are little more based like that. But, we have to way more flexible in our schedules for individual students than this age framework we work with. With grades, and then moving from class to class within these time periods. This one student might actually benefit from two hours of reading and need only 40 minutes of Math, because that where they need to be, but they may need more support in another area. We don't ever seem to have the flexibility to adapt our schedule really to what this student needs. It's like the lunch periods kind of govern everything to fit in through here and here. And it's not a very flexible model, to meet the more individuals needs. We might need another staff member, we might need more resources. Like that's a big thing in my classroom you mention the grade levels regular education has 2nd grade readers and 12th grade readers all the way through and we have one set of resources. Most teachers, order materials

through the years, keep class sets here and there, so we have other sources. But there might be a good percentage of students in our room that, you know this book their not going to get anything from it, their not going to open it. So if they're in that same time period they need a different material to work on then. And that bring up a whole other ball of wax, well then their being separated from the other kids, maybe identified maybe, they need this lower level material. You have to worry about that sort of thing. And that's why I think the word tracking comes up. Oh you can't track. What about, meeting, having a flexible model. Where you meet students' where they are and they can move their not stuck in any one thing but you do have certain levels you need to achieve before you can move to the next set of mastery. And our Nation has gotten so far away from that, we gone to this other extreme. And now, I mean I don't know the history of it, I've forgotten from those classes. What were the historical literacy rates compared to what they are now. Are they really any different? There's more people now, that's for sure.

Amy: Right and there are more people being tested. I wondered that, because you see the comparisons and then I think back and I'm like is this? I'm not sure they're really accurate.

Sheila: I think also, a lot of the populations used go to work. You'd leave school after 14, 15 and go to work and be able earn a decent living and that's been gone for a long time.

Researcher: But the required reading has changed. And now what they say in terms of new hires, what they need are people who can read and read critically about the material they're covering and receive their job training on the job. So if we're graduating students

at this point 42 % of ours are reading at sixth grade or below. What does that imply for their future goals.

Rob: They're not going to be successful in College.

Sheila: They're going to be stuck in low level jobs.

Alan: Well it doesn't mean they not going to be successful in college, they'll end up having to take remedial classes.

Rob: Okay, yeah, their going to have; To be successful in college their going to have to remediate. But if you take them right now, their not going to be successful you can state that clearly.

Researcher: So how do we transition that, Dr. G and I have talked about that number that comes to CSU and remediation that's what they have to do, in those classes.

Sheila: Is it successful at the college level by that point?

Researcher: The attrition rate at CSU is pretty bad.

Rob: Everywhere it's bad. I work in the program that you guys see me going to everyday at after school at Tri-C. It's specifically designed to transition kids from high school into college so they don't have to remediate. And what are we doing? We're doing thing that are fun, we're making it exciting, their competing, their building robots, their learning how to program. We approach it that way. They do math in there, they do programming they do reading.

Voice: Is that more of a project learning kind of l thing?

Rob: Exactly. It's all based on project learning. We transition about 300 kids a year and our OGT percentage is in the 90's, for this program. It's really a good program, but its hands on stuff. They're there they get a robot kit, they build a robot, they learn how to

program it and then they learn how to adapt it to a contest. And then the compete in these contest. Eventually some of the kids go to like California.

Researcher: So that would be another way that you would envision a change we could make to improve literacy, would be with project based learning.

Rob: Absolutely, that's my point, is that you've got to spark them. You got to get their attention. Okay, you got to get them hands on, or whatever they need to get them interested about reading. We diagnose like crazy, but we really don't get them interested about reading. Some girl came to me the other day and asked me "are you reading a book right now?" I go, sure. Well, I'm reading a couple. "Oh, Well not many of the teachers are reading, their too busy with their work." Well I'm always reading a book or two. I'm either listening to an audio book when I drive or I'm reading a book just before I go to bed. Or even on the weekend if I get to the good part I'll read the book, because I'm excited about reading. But that happened when I was a kid.

Alan: I got some papers you can grade.

Rob: See exactly, see what I said, when's the last time you read a book?

Alan: As a matter of fact, I don't have time for that.

Rob: See exactly, I tell people do what you're interesting.

Alan: Actually you're wrong, I read a book.

Rob: Oh you did?

Alan: The biography of Bruce Springsteen.

Rob: I did too.

Sheila: Aren't you involved in like Urban Education and things like that?

Alan: I'm don't even know what I'm involved in any more.

Rob: Yeah, he does. My point is that you do what you like. That's our nature, okay; you do what you're interested. Like my son, I used to tell him you should practice piano. If you like doing it you're going to do it, because you like it. So, our focus should be got to be getting the kids interested in reading, as a fun thing. I don't know, it's not always fun, because I have to read crap that I don't want to read, but you're much more able to read that stuff if you like to read. How do we get that? My point is get our intervention pointed at something to get them interested in reading. Not just, kids don't care about, well you're gonna need that to get a job. They don't care. They care totally zero about that kind of stuff until their in the middle of it and that what he said. When their 25 and want to go to college, then they'll do the remediation. But when their 18 and get out of high school.

Sheila: A big part of the reason that they don't like to read is because they're poor readers, they're frustrated, their embarrassed they would rather do something else to avoid it. So, if you do work with them and improve their reading and they start getting stuff out of it. They automatically start reading more because it's not such a struggle, it's not finding out how poorly their doing at this time.

Rob: Granted, that's an obvious.

Sheila: At any age. Now sure there are people who don't like to read, always will be always have. And like you said, but I really think that if we would just address that and help some of the struggling readers move through, they become less reluctant readers, to say the least, an less reluctant read is going to read more integrated more information, get more out of it. And at our age level its tough, and we get them at this age it their turned

off by it and they've struggles up to this point, it's a big block to get through, I mean big block.

Alan: So, what sort of interventions do they have down at the Elementary schools and the junior high schools? What do they do solve these problems:

Amy: With the elementary schools, there's more like whole class activities like reading "Sarah Plain and Tall". That you can do, you're not going to do something like that in the high school. Kids would like at it, and someone would come in to evaluated you and say really?

Rob: That was just an example. You could grade that higher, you could do it at much higher level.

Alan: But you see, my whole point is we're getting these problems coming to here, what's going on down there and if we're having all the diagnostic stuff like he says we got. Then why aren't they doing something about it there before it gets here, that's my whole question.

Rob: The movement now is to hit at the fourth grade and that's really where it should be. Okay, but we have all these kids that have already gone past that point that we have to deal with. Hopefully, the when the fourth?

Alan: The Third grade guarantee, isn't that supposed to solve everything?

Rob: Well, yeah, absolutely, it supposed to, but you know it's not gonna,. But we have all these kids that are already past that we have to deal with as they come along. We got to think about, That why I think the intervention should be focused in to getting them interested in reading, rather than constantly identifying that they can't.

Researcher; Okay so, if I can summarize, what we're saying is we need specific intervention that address the diagnostics. One being possibly, a reading class where we teach kids how to read and reading comprehension. Also, doing some project based learning for the students and possibly study hall time where kids can come and go and ask questions about the literacy deficits that they are experiencing in different core areas, is that okay, does that seem appropriate?

Various make sounds of approval.

Researcher: In our last ten minutes, I wanted us to shift gears and look at how does class placement: special education, and this means thinking to last year, special education versus regular education placement for our students, impact their achievement? Do you see any difference in those two placements? And we touched a little bit on it last time, but I want you to speak directly to that question.

Leslie: Sometimes when you put them, the special ed kids in the regular ed setting, most of the kids will achieve more. Like, they will put forth more effort and they will read better or volunteer to read or excel better, make better grades and sometimes it can be the opposite. But I think when they go into regular ed, I think it's more beneficial for them, for most of them.

Alan: For most of them, because I have seen some real examples of student who shouldn't be put in the regular setting. It's not all, or a whole lot of them, but there's a couple that I have in my class that I know they should probably be in a self-contained situation.

Amy: But, you know we just started this, this year with a push. In future years if their doing it in elementary and middle school they will assimilate more to what their behavior should be, and their levels. So this year would be the most difficult.

Alan: Right, I see the opposite in my Algebra II class the best student in there is special ed, well two of them, one's regular and one's special ed, but my best two students one of them is special ed. Perfect notebook, does his work all the time stays after asks question he's a wonderful student. Then, I have another student who goes nuts, I mean literally goes nuts, he comes in ready to fight everybody, swearing and thing like that, so he should not be in there. It's as simple as that. It's got nothing to do with his ability is, he might have more ability then some of those kids in there.

Sheila: Behavioral and emotional matter also.

Amy: This gets back to something else. And I don't know if you want to address this. And this is where I see the problem with even having a reading class. When the counselor's are scheduling the classes, they don't take into account anything.

Researcher: What were trying to do though is not think about that, as much as in our pie in the sky image what do we do? What do we do?

Alan: Fire the guiRobce counselors.

Laughing

Researcher: I know what you're saying, but I would say make the resource lab there then. In my pie in the sky we would have the resource lab and the kids can go whenever they want to. Wouldn't that be a beautiful thing? I'm not asking you to invasion what we have now and make it work, I'm saying in your dream, what would your ideal be?

Alan: I've always said I always wanted to have a room, a tutoring room that was staff every single period of the day and the kids would have a study hall or something where they'd be able to go when they had their free time, in there to get tutoring.

Amy: wouldn't that make sense.

Alan: To me it would be the best situation. You could do a lot of things with it, you could even make it a testing center, where kids could go in there and take test and things. You could make it a wonderful situation. If you ran it all day and it was staff by a teacher, it could be perfect, because our kids don't want to stay after school, they just don't and a lot of them they can't because they've got to take a bus half way across town, or their working or they're taking care of their kids or their mother's kids and everything else. That's one thing that if I had my own school, that's what I would have: I'd have a tutoring room, a testing room, whatever you want to call it, maybe even with a lab in there with lectures on tape where they can come in if they missed a day they can come in and make up what they missed.

Researcher: We call them computers now Alan.

Laughing.

Rob: The funny thing is that in a lot of schools, Cleveland State has a writing, tutoring lab and they have a math lab where you can go. They have reading...

Amy: BW does too

Alan: So does Tri-C

Rob: St. Ignatius high school has all that. When you got a free period you can go to a writing lab if you're having difficulty, someone's going to be there, an upper classman

and a teacher are going to be there. As Ms. Bates mentioned, Counselor jobs are to just make sure that the kids take all the course they need to graduate. Why can't they....

Alan: In that case, we'd have to fire all the counselors, because their not doing that.

Rob: How is it that I used to have a couple of study halls a day? When I was in high school I took all the course I needed plus extra and all of a sudden now, they can't find room for a study hall. Why? Has it increased?

SHEILA: It's shortened, time's been shortened.

Rob: Well maybe.

Alan: Times been shortened, teachers have been laid off and course requirement.

There're a lot of different reasons.

Rob: Okay, there should be room, they just need a break. They simply need a break.

My son has study halls; he's at St. Ignatius High School.

Alan: You figure if a kid plays football at Harper High School he has classes all the way through the day, he gets after school he has to go to practice 6:00 o'clock, minimum. So, he's up at 5:30 in the morning to get here by 8:00 o'clock or whenever it is. So, do you really think he's going to feel like reading, you really feel like he's going to do his homework when by the time he gets home? I mean that's a real issue right there, I mean it's different like he said, when we went to school there were study halls, so you could get some of your work during that.

Rob: You could go to study hall and go to sleep, you could go to the library and put your head down and go to sleep. They actually have lounges at St. Ed's, Ignatius even Lakewood, It has a lounge you go in and sit down and they'll wake you up, when the

period over they come around and wake you up. So why is that we can't provide those kinds of things. I personally think that they do it for control. I think they stick them in a class every period because they're worried about crowd control and that's all it is. It's all about crowd control

Alan: No I don't think it's about that. We had study halls, back in the 80's when I first started and things like that. It's financial, I don't care what anybody says, it's all financial. They'd have to hire more teachers, why do you think they took us out of the cafeteria. Why do think they took us out of stuff like that, it's because they didn't want to hire teachers to do the job. They keep throwing it on administrators. Administrators are supposed to do everything because they don't want to hire more teachers. It's all financial. That's what it comes down to.

Rob: Okay

Researcher: So our lack of literacy really comes down to financial?

SHEILA: It's definitely a factor.

Alan: Money's a factor in everything, we all know that, it's a factor, it's a big factor.

Various: sighs

Amy: I don't know, I just had a vision of head start where they would give kids books. I have had kids where I've go to the store and I get books and I give it to them. It's usually something they like because we've had a discussion, or whatever. And, I may hear from them on facebook. What was the name of the book, whatever. I keep thinking back to head start we need more programs like that. I think then the kids from the very beginning would all have a better start, but we've gotten rid of so many of those programs and it just kinda like snowballs into where we are right now. The parents are working, the

parents are busy, the parents may not have the information or knowledge, so it's just kinda like so here it is and fix it.

Researcher: So when Alan goes to his meeting tonight, he's going to tell them that we need study halls and we need direct instruction of reading comprehension skills and we need a lab where kids can just drop in and get assistance for reading and writing. Do you have that, because I'll play it back on the tape. And project based learning

Alan: I think I got most of it.

Rob: Project based learning, when's the last time? Do these kids ever really hear maybe a professional story teller? Come sit in the room and tell a story or listen to an audio books. There's people out there that are professional story teller that can visit your class and tell them a story. This summer there was a traveling troupe of actors that came and told stories and they played characters. One was John Paul Jones and other one was from different eras in history. I saw two of them, an one I was really impress with was the Slave scout that traveled with Lewis and Clark, and I forget his name, but guy was great! And he could tell a story. It was just really.... my son was there and a coupled of his buddies came up and they grabbed them and told them a story. That's the way you hook people in reading by doing that they can create the image in their mind. He had maybe one prop in this hand; I think he might have had a gun, a fake musket. And he just told the story and then he answered question both in character and out of character. It was really interesting, when they were asking the questions about, while he was still in character. And it was interesting. His story was not happy, it was a great story about a black man who traveled in the early 1800's with Lewis and Clark and he was a major

influence in their success, but when they came back he was still a slave. And was it Clark? I forget whoever the owner was; he never freed him until he was very, very old. .

Researcher: He wanted to find his way back.okay, parting comments?

Rob: But I mean to say story telling.

Researcher: Parting comments, about any of those issues? I just want to go around to each of you and know that my heart is in starting reading classes for kids. That's what I invasion in my own high school and the drop in place where kids can walk in and get help. That would be my pie in the sky. How about you Ms. Moore?

Leslie: I agree with all of those.

Researcher: Nothing to add...nothing else you'd do in your high school?

Leslie: I like the idea that we are suppose to have the content book for each subject. I would like that, because reading is intertwined with everything.

Researcher: With all content, okay. Ms. Sands?

SHEILA: Definitely, diagnostic with specialized classes meeting the students where they were and a more flexible schedule to accommodate what that's going to take to get the reading support.

Rob: Activities, to inspire enthusiasm about reading. Whatever activities, I think that's where the intervention is.

Alan: I don't know, I agree with all of it I guess. I'm not a person to really talk to much about reading, because I'm not much of a reader myself actually. But, like I said, I think, when I look at the kids it's not that they can't read, I mean they read at very low comprehension, but then so did I. I'd get stuck on the same sentence for two hours, you know and I'd keep looking at and say like what is this thing? I agree with him, maybe if

you motivate, find something motivating, they'd be more likely to read. I'm just highly concerned about the fact that they're getting to us with such poor skills. Okay, this is supposed to be high school, okay. And they should have, I just concerned about what's going on down there. I'm picking on anybody or pointing any fingers, I'm just concerned, because, I teach calculus and I don't see as much in my classes, like I said because I don't do a whole lot of reading with the exception of that. So I can't be an expert like you guys are who see all this first hand. But if it's that bad then I think something needs to be address down there before it gets here.

Sheila: A lot of times those student that are like that, if you look at their histories, they were in probably four or five different elementary schools. So they've never had like they've never had the flow of continuous learning what they loose in the summer. They could loose in half a year in the summer of what they gained.

Researcher: But that's our point if were going to get them here, how are we doing this and what do we change?

Alan: Wasn't that the purpose of the THINK classes?

SHEILA: I think you're right, they were a set of skill sets just to keep them moving forward.

Rob: They did a lot of listening, they played tapes and had them listening to stories where there was read along stuff.

Researcher: Okay, Alan I'm throwing you out because I know your meetings at 3:30 and I thank you very much for being part of this, I'll show you the finished product.

Alan: you're welcome, okay, see you later.

Researcher: Ms. Bates what do you think?

Amy: You know, the same thing I'd really like to have sort of study hall or intervention class or something where we could work individually with the students and meet them where they are at and bring them forward, because that does work.

Rob: Wouldn't a reading lab facilitate that?

Amy: Yes, but you'd have to watch the numbers. I keep thinking they would just throw so many kids in there and if you have like 30 kids in there it's pointless. Nothing's going to get done. It really would have to be a small number of kids that you could sit down and work with them. Even if they said, okay this week you're going to have these 10 kids and then there going to go the math lab and then you switch, you know. But then, they're saying well its taking up two teachers for two people or whatever. If want them to be successful you really do have to see the students as individuals, figure out what each individual needs to get to the next level.