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Deborah L. Russell

December, 2012

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IMPLICATION OF DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ON SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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December, 2012

Dedication

For my husband Jerry Russell,

You have always encouraged me to pursue aspirations I never thought I could achieve.
Your faith, support and stubborn determination have helped me realize my dreams.
Thank you for your love and patience during this long process.

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Russell, Deborah L. "Implication of Differences in Academic Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students on School Improvement Planning for Educational Leaders" Doctor of Education Dissertation, University of Houston, December, 2012.

ABSTRACT

Third grade reading level has been found to be a predictor of both eighth and ninth grade reading level as well as graduation and college attendance (Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall, & Gwynne 2010). This qualitative study explored how the perspectives on improving reading achievement from parents, teachers, and principals affected school improvement decision-making by the principal.

Principals, teachers, and parents completed questionnaires providing their perceptions of the causes of reading difficulties and the support given to struggling readers. The principals were also asked about their use of information provided by teachers and parents in their school improvement planning. Themes were examined both individually and across groups.

Many common themes were noted for the principals and teachers. Information from the parents showed some common themes as well. Four of the seven parents denied that their child had a reading difficulty. However, their participation was based on their child's below level reading ability.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The achievement gap in the United States is not a new concept. In accordance with section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a survey was conducted to examine the lack of educational opportunities available to students of color (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966). The report on this survey, entitled Equality of Educational Opportunity, was presented to the President and the Congress in 1966. The data gathered for this survey served as a starting point for further investigation (Coleman et al., 1966). Since its publication, Coleman's research – better known as The Coleman Report – has been cited by a plethora of other researchers studying the achievement gap (e.g., Achievement Gap, 2004; Haycock, 2003; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009).

The achievement gap generally refers to a “disparity in academic performance between groups of students” (Achievement Gap, 2004, p. 1). Various researchers (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006) expand this definition to include other elements. For instance, Carpenter et al. (2006) stated that there were multiple achievement gaps. Their study focused on gaps within groups based on the following variables: (a) socioeconomic status (SES), (b) inclusion in an English as a Second Language program, (c) primary language spoken in the home, (d) number of parents in the home, and (e) parental variables. Using this definition, the researchers stated that factors in the home (e.g., SES and parental involvement) were greater predictors of student academic achievement than ethnicity (Carpenter et al., 2006). The

authors of the Coleman Report (1966) also asserted that differences in student learning could be attributed to specific background characteristics of the students (e.g., the parent's presence in the home and the parent's educational background).

By focusing on the single, ethnicity-based definition of the achievement gap, educators might be looking for short term solutions that ignore the underlying problem (Ladson-Billings, 2006). That would be, in part, an agreement with the findings of the Coleman Report, that student achievement levels were dependent on the income and education levels of the parents of those students (Haycock, 2003). The achievement gap was suspected to be a composite of the educational level of parents and the effect that level had on (a) the child's level of education, (b) the health of family members, (c) the money choices and income of the family, (d) the fertility choices by both mother and their children, and (e) the decisions that young people made in regard to schooling, childbearing and participation in criminal activity (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In light of the combined causes Ladson-Billings (2006) declared that America had an education debt rather than an achievement gap. Moreover, research suggested that maintaining such a strong focus on that gap, ultimately, kept educators and policy makers from addressing the long term, underlying problem (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Over the past 30 years, the earnings among the lowest 20 percent of families have declined by 7%, while earnings among the top five percent of families in the United States have grown by 78% (Haycock, 2012). This places the United States in fourth place among the countries in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the category of disparity between the highest and lowest incomes. The United States is currently ranked 19th in reading achievement among the

40 countries of the OECD on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) with a graduation rate of only 70% (Darling-Hammond, 2007). According to Barr and Parrett (2007), the best way to predict lifetime income levels is by using an individual's level of education. Thus, without an adequate education there is very little hope for a stable economic life and the cycle of poverty continues or grows worse. It is clear that the way to break the cycle of poverty in the United States is to restore the country's educational and economic competitiveness – both globally and within its own borders.

Statement of the Problem

The job market today requires a more educated work force than at any time in U.S. history. According to the Education Equity Project, students who dropped out of high school in 1964 earned 64 cents for every dollar earned by high school graduates. By 2004, students who dropped out of high school earned only 37 cents compared to their more educated peers (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001).

The road to dropping out does not begin in high school. Many dropouts lack the foundational skills to succeed in high school classes. These skills begin with their entry into elementary school. The lack of underlying skills also contributes to the achievement gap.

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2005 documented a 26-point disparity in reading achievement between African American and Hispanic fourth graders and White students in the same grade (Achievement Gap, 2004). Bali and Alvarez (2004) noted that gaps for African American students appeared earlier and were wider than gaps for Hispanic students. By holding the variable of socioeconomic status constant for both African American and White students, Bali and

Alvarez noted that there was no difference in achievement between the two groups when the students entered public school. However, an achievement gap between African American students and White students was apparent by the time the students entered Grade 3 (Lleras & Rangel, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how the perspectives on improving reading achievement from each of the stakeholders in public schools (parent, teacher, and principal) affect the school improvement decision-making on the part of the principal. In this study parents, teachers, and principals completed questionnaires. Their responses were analyzed to look for themes in their perspectives on students with reading difficulties.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What role do parents have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
2. What role do teachers have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
3. What role do principals have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?

Definition of Terms

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS): A report compiled by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) providing a wide range of information regarding the performance of students within each school and district in Texas. The AEIS reports are

available each year in the fall with data from the previous school year. The performance indicators are as follows:

- Results of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS*) – by grade, by subject, and by all grades tested;
- Participation in the TAKS tests;
- Exit-level TAKS Cumulative Passing Rates;
- Progress of Prior Year TAKS Failers;
- Results of the Student Success Initiative;
- English Language Learners Progress Measure;
- Attendance Rates;
- Annual Dropout Rates (grades 7-8, grades 7-12, and grades 9-12);
- Completion Rates (4-year longitudinal); and
- College Readiness Indicators:
 - Completion of Advanced / Dual Enrollment Courses;
 - Completion of the Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program;
 - Participation and Performance on Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Examinations;
 - Texas Success Initiative (TSI) – Higher Education Readiness Component;
 - Participation and Performance on the College Admissions Tests (SAT and ACT), and
 - College-Ready Graduates.

Performance on each of these indicators is disaggregated by ethnicity, sex, special education, income status, limited English proficient status (since 2002-03), at-risk status (since 2003-04, district, region, and state), and, beginning in 2008-09, by bilingual/ESL (district, region, and state, in section three of reports).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Adequate Yearly Progress is the measure by which schools, districts, and states are held accountable under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This measure is used to determine whether schools are successful at educating children. States must use a single accountability system to determine whether or not all students and subgroups of students in public schools are making progress toward academic content standards held by the states. The ultimate goal of AYP is that all students in the United States achieve proficiency in reading and mathematics by the year 2014.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a United States Act of Congress that was signed into law by President George W. Bush concerning the education of children in America's public schools. This mandate functions as the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB supports standards-based education reform and is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. This mandate requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are to receive federal funding for schools. The Act does not include a national achievement standard; rather, standards are set by each individual state.

Race to the Top: This initiative is a funding program from the United States federal government created under President Barack Obama, which offers grants to states reforming their educational systems. The Race to the Top initiative asks States to advance reforms around four specific areas:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

Awards from Race to the Top have gone to nine States and the District of Columbia for creating plans that are ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing comprehensive education reform. Race to the Top winners have worked on student achievement by increasing the allowable number of charter schools, creating a system of merit pay for teachers, using value-added modeling in teacher evaluations, and adopting the common core standards.

Socioeconomic Status (SES): This term represents or describes an individual or groups social status within a hierarchical structure.

Stanford Achievement Test Series, Tenth Edition (Stanford 10): This is a multiple-choice, norm-referenced achievement test used to measure academic achievement in the areas of reading, mathematics, environment/science, social studies, spelling, study skills, thinking skills, and listening.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): This test is the state assessment instrument in Texas that measures reading, mathematics, writing, science and social studies achievement at various grade-levels.

Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI): An assessment tools used to test students in kindergarten through third-grade on the five domains of reading required to qualify for the Reading First Program under No Child Left Behind.

Title I: A provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that was created by the United States Department of Education to distribute money to states and schools with a high percentage of low-income students.

Limitations

Due to the complexity and variety of educational situations and the small number of principals, teachers, and parents who participated in completing the questionnaire, this research study may not be used as a generalization of the perceptions of all stakeholders and thus not for all principals wanting to improve their schools.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the time of Horace Mann in the 1830s, educational reform has been viewed as a high priority in America (Hunt, 2005). Mann called for a non-sectarian public education that was funded and controlled by the government (Baines, 2006). Later, in the twentieth century, John Dewey introduced the imperative that the principles of democracy should be applied to formal schooling. Thus, the application of this philosophy meant that schools would be free for children from kindergarten to college, and students would create their own knowledge with facilitation from the teacher. Dewey's final assertion was that children in an educational setting should be trained to work together and care for each other. This, in Dewey's view, would create a cooperative society for America as these children attained adulthood (Warde, 1960).

Then, the launch of Sputnik by Russia in 1957 brought another call for reform. The Russian's achievement was viewed as a threat to American superiority and innovation, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science. This perceived threat prompted a call for education reform that would broaden and deepen the teaching of mathematics and science. Additionally, these reforms brought with them an increase in federal funding allocated to public schools (Bybee, 1997).

In 1985 *A Nation at Risk* was issued. This report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education made the statement that "[i]f an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." (National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983, p. 1). The authors of *A Nation at Risk* adamantly insisted that the goal of education must be to develop the talents of all students to their fullest potential. Yet, reaching such a goal would require support from parents, as well as high expectations from schools. That is why the support of education by the public was viewed as one of the most important tools in educating the workforce of tomorrow (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Under President George W. Bush the federal government enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. As a requirement of this new mandate, schools were rated on the overall performance of all students in grades 3-8 for reading and mathematics. Performance was also rated for subgroups by racial membership and low socioeconomic status (Lee & Wong, 2004). Furthermore, in addition to meeting performance levels, NCLB required a participation rate of 95% for all students, as well as 95% of each identified subgroup. Sanctions were also imposed on those schools who failed to meet the performance goals for two or more years (Kim & Sunderman, 2005).

School performance under NCLB was based on the average (mean) proficiency level of all students as well as subgroups (Lee & Wong, 2004). Researchers questioned the use of mean proficiency levels of student achievement rather than measures of academic improvement as the standard for meeting federal progress requirements. Some researchers hypothesize that the proficiency levels of student achievement do not represent a true picture of school effectiveness (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Rather, researchers stated that the use of mean proficiency as a method of determining achievement levels under NCLB rewarded schools for having children who were more academically prepared prior to their entrance into school. Students who were not

academically prepared were often members of more than one subgroup – one based on their ethnicity and one based on their low socioeconomic level. Due to this overlap, the use of subgroups would over-identify some schools as low performing (Kim & Sunderman).

Although NCLB was still in force, the Obama Administration created the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Part of this particular initiative entailed the establishment of the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grant program (Race to the Top [Executive Summary], 2009). This program was designed to reward states for educational innovation and reforms in the areas of (a) adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments; (b) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; (c) building data systems to measure student growth and success; and (d) turn around the lowest performing schools (Race to the Top, 2009). Local Education Agencies (LEA) who chose to participate had to show substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improved graduation rates, and insure that their students were prepared for college, careers and to be participants in the world economy. States were chosen for funding according to selection criteria worth a total of 500 points. The selection criteria were as follows:

- State Success Factors:
 - Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it;
 - Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans; and
 - Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps.
- Standards and Assessments:

- Developing and adopting common standards;
- Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments; and
- Supporting the transition to enhance standards and high-quality assessments.
- Data Systems to Support Instruction:
 - Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system;
 - Accessing and using State data; and
 - Using data to improve instruction.
- Great Teachers and Leaders
 - Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals;
 - Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance;
 - Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teacher and principals;
 - Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs;
 - and
 - Providing effective support to teachers and principals.
- Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools:
 - Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs; and
 - Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.
- General Selection Criteria
 - Making education funding a priority;
 - Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters and other innovative schools; and
 - Demonstrating other significant reform conditions (Race to the Top [Executive Summary], 2009, p. 3).

In addition to the given criteria, additional points were awarded for emphasizing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs. In addition to an emphasis on STEM programs, RTTT was interested in states that (a) took a comprehensive approach to school reform; (b) enhanced early learning outcomes through quality pre-school programs; (c) adapted data collection programs to include longitudinal information on special education programs, English language learner programs, early childhood programs, at-risk and dropout prevention programs; and (d) school climate and culture programs.

Although both NCLB and RTTT dealt with many of the same issues and had many of the same goals, their approaches were quite different. For instance, one provided incentives for schools to change, while the other mandated reform procedures in order for states to continue to receive funds they were already getting. The RTTT was a competitive grant process. Therefore, it was not mandatory that states undertake the necessary changes to apply for the funding. Under NCLB, states were required to (a) have academic standards, (b) make annual progress toward every student meeting the standard and close gaps between students in certain subgroups, (c) test students with a state mandated test to measure their learning, and (d) collect data to see if they were making progress toward the state goals. States were not measured against each other under NCLB, but required to develop their own standards and assessments. The RTTT initiative also required states to adopt the common core standards. Both of these programs were created to aid various states in closing the achievement gap that existed between ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Lohman, 2010).

Economically Disadvantaged Students

According to the US Census, which was taken in 2010, 15.1 percent of Americans were living in poverty. Therefore, according to these statistics, the poverty line for a family of four was set at a yearly income of \$22,314 or below. Sadly, this figure represented the highest percentage of Americans in poverty since 1993. And, due to the increase in the US population, the number of Americans living in poverty in 2010 (46.2 million) was the highest it had been in the 52 years since the first poverty rates have been published in 1959 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011).

After nearly a decade of decline, the number of children living in low-income families has increased significantly since 2000. For children under 18 years of age, the poverty rate rose from 20.7% in 2009 to 22.0% in 2010. The statistics were even higher for children living in a home with a related single female as the head of the household. Children living with their single mother or other female relation were living at the poverty rate of 46.9 percent. This compared to the percentage of 11.6 for children living with married couples. The numbers were even higher for children under the age of six, with 58.2 percent of them living with their single mother in poverty (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2011).

A student born into poverty was at a distinct disadvantage when compared to his or her peers whom were born into more affluent families. Upon the emergence from the womb, a child born into a less affluent family experiences certain factors that serve as barriers to his or her success in school. More specifically, the quality of prenatal care their mother received, their mother's exposure to toxins while pregnant, and the level of

stress that the mother was under all strongly influenced the developing fetus (Jensen, 2009).

Once a baby is born, the quality of its social interactions has a profound effect on its developing growth. These interactions begin with the child's relationship with their primary caregiver. During infancy the child's personality begins to form in one of two primary directions: Secure and attached, or insecure and unattached (Jensen, 2009). Therefore, infants who form weak attachments to their primary caregivers showed signs of total insecurity in early childhood. Children who formed more secure and attached personalities experience less difficulty in school (Jensen, 2009).

The mother-child attachment that was formed in preschool children became the basis for the student's relationship with teachers and peers upon entering school. Students who grew up in households with limited social interactions, which is often the case with many low SES families, may have had a difficult time demonstrating appropriate social responses in school situations. Furthermore, peers and teachers might construe the student's behavior as uncooperative, disrespectful or even hostile. This behavior, however, might have been a product of the child's limited knowledge of social skills and appropriate interactions (Jensen, 2009).

The majority of teachers in public schools come from middle-class backgrounds. Education itself was viewed by many middle-class families as a way to climb the ladder of success and make money. Yet, for those students living in poverty, the view toward education could often be drastically different. In general, members of low income families found education to be valued and revered in the abstract, but not in the reality (Payne, 1996).

Work by Joos in 1967 found that every language uses five “registers” (Payne, 1996). The registers of language are the variety of the language used for specific purposes. Research also shows that children living in poverty are typically only taught to use the casual register in their homes (Knestrict & Schoensteadt, 2005). Moreover, the majority of these students do not have access to the formal register. The language of instruction in schools and on standardized tests utilizes the formal register. Therefore, the disconnect between the language of school and the language that students from low income families understand causes confusion and results in students not understanding what is being said, read, or asked of them (Knestrict & Schoensteadt, 2005). The inability to use the formal register could keep low SES students from doing well in school, scoring well on standardized tests, and being successful in a college environment (Payne, 1996).

In 2009, 49 percent of fourth-grade students in the US qualified for the free or reduced priced federally funded lunch program. And, although this number dropped to 39 percent in suburban areas, it swelled to 62 percent in cities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). In addition, 68 percent of fourth-grade students who attended public schools in 2010 scored below proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test. It is also important to note that these results varied by economic status. For example, while 55 percent of students from families with middle or upper incomes scored below proficient level, the scores of 83 percent of students from low income families fell in the below proficient range (Annie E. Casey, 2010).

A six year study by Hart and Risley (1995) demonstrated that, by 3 years of age, children of professional parents added words to their vocabulary at approximately two times the rate of children growing up in families on welfare. Both the quality and quantity of verbal interactions directed toward children was correlated with the income levels of the parents. Subsequently, the slower vocabulary growth noted for the children of poverty led to slower cognitive patterns and lower IQ scores based on tests taken later in childhood (Hart & Risley, 1995).

In exploring the relationship between intelligence and socioeconomic status, Croizet and Claire (1998) found that the context in which the test was administered made a great deal of difference on the outcome. When participants were given a test and told that it would assess their intellectual ability the low income students performed far below their high income peers. However, when no such instruction was given and the participants were not under the impression that their intelligence was being assessed, and the two groups scored at close to the same levels (Croizet & Claire, 1998).

Payne (1996) contended that intelligence tests did not assess ability, but acquired information. She contended that when students were given such a test it actually tested the child's knowledge of the hidden language of the middle class. Therefore, if the test taker's parents were well educated, the child's score would be higher than those children whose parents had received less education (Payne, 1996).

Some of the parents of low income students did not have a diploma, as one-fourth of all American students dropped out of high school. The majority of these students were poor or disadvantaged minorities. Hence, by dropping out of school, these students faced a lifetime of unemployment or, at best, underemployment. There was a direct correlation

between students who were illiterate and those who dropped out of school. Additionally, more than half of the men and women in prison were illiterate high school dropouts (Barr, 2007).

Economically Disadvantaged Students and Reading Achievement

Third grade reading level has been shown to be a predictor of future academic success in various ways (Hernandez, 2011; Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall, & Gwynne, 2010). Lesnick et al. found that the reading level of eighth-grade students, as well as the course performance of ninth-grade students, could be predicted by the reading level of the children in the third-grade (2010). They found it to be a predictor of graduation and of college attendance as well, even when demographics were included as controls.

According to a study by Teale, Paciga, and Hoffman (2007), children from low income backgrounds scored significantly lower in reading and writing than children from middle and high income backgrounds. The researchers used data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and determined that these gaps were significantly larger in relation to students in urban settings, as opposed to comparisons within the in the general population of students. This disparity was due to a disproportionate number of low income students living in cities (Teale, et al., 2007). Historically, the areas of greatest academic difficulty for these students have been fluency and phonics.

Kieffer (2010) found that students were at much higher risk of developing reading difficulties during each of the developmental stages studied if they were from a low socioeconomic background than their peers from higher socioeconomic circumstances. The effects of income level was most apparent in the early developmental stages of

reading. The study illustrated a substantially greater risk before third-grade for children of poverty (Keiffer, 2010).

So and Chen (1984) found that income level had more effect on the reading achievement of White students than on Hispanic students. This finding suggested that the major obstacle in reading achievement for White students was the economic status of their families and raising them out of poverty might have an effect on their reading success. For Hispanic students, however, there are other factors that contribute to reduced achievement in reading (e.g. learning English as their second language) so that increasing their economic status might not have a strong effect (So & Chen, 1984).

White (1982) stated that the studies done on the correlation between academic ability and SES found various strengths in the relationship. In his meta-analysis of almost two hundred studies, White found that the strength of the correlation depended on the unit of analysis that was used. Although the studies found a positive relationship, questions that were tested using an aggregated unit of analysis showed a strong relationship between academic achievement and SES. Those studies that used the individual student as the unit of analysis showed a positive, but weak correlation (White, 1982).

Although the correlation may be a weak one, it was still positive. Given the number of people living in poverty (at the highest point since 1959), and that 22 percent of children under the age of 18 were living in poverty, the American educational system had to address this issue (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2011). Fullan (2006) purports that the first step to successful change is to begin closing the achievement gap as the mission of the organization.

The achievement gap.

In her Presidential Address at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting in 2006, Gloria Ladson-Billings stated that the achievement gap was “one of the most common phrases in today’s education literature” (2006, p. 3). This gap was viewed as the biggest challenge in American education (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). “Achievement gap” was the term given to the inequality in academic performance between African American and Hispanic students and White students, as well as students termed low-SES, compared to those students from high-SES backgrounds (Achievement Gap, 2004).

The achievement gap in the United States is not a new concept. In accordance with Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a survey was conducted to examine the lack of educational opportunities available to students of color (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966). The report on this survey, entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, was presented to the President and the Congress in 1966. The data from that survey served as a starting point for further investigation (e.g., Bali & Alvarez, 2004; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Teal et al., 2008). The Coleman Report, as it was also known, was cited in a plethora of other studies that examined the achievement gap. (e.g., Achievement Gap, 2004; Haycock, 2003; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009)

The disparity in test scores between children of color and their White peers keeps researchers and educators searching for solutions to close the achievement gap. Students in grade 2 in California took the Stanford 9 achievement test in 2003. On the reading portion of the test 23% of African American students scored at the proficient level, as

compared to 50% of the White students. For Hispanic students, the gap in scores was even greater with 17% of Hispanic Students scoring at proficient levels, as compared to the 50% proficiency level scored by the White students (Achievement Gap, 2004).

Ladson-Billings (200) also noted that the achievement gap was still evident between African American and Hispanic students and White students when researchers compared groups with similar family incomes.

Between the years 1970 and 1988, the achievement gap between Hispanic students and White students decreased by one-third, and the achievement gap between African American students and White students decreased by one-half. Since that time, however, the gap has become wider (Haycock, 2001). This pervasive widening may be due, in part, to the fact that schools across the country are more segregated in the 21st century than they were in 1991 (Orfield & Lee, 2004).

Impact of Students who are Economically Disadvantaged

Children who did not read on grade level by the end of the third-grade dropped out of high school at a rate four times higher than children who read proficiently by the end of their third-grade (Hernandez, 2011). This finding translates to 16 percent of these low-proficiency readers not graduating. Children who lived in poverty for at least one year and were not proficient third-grade readers dropped out at a rate of 26 percent. This figure rose to 36 percent for poor readers in low income families who lived in areas of concentrated poverty (Hernandez, 2011).

Students who lived in poverty dropped out of high school at a rate of 22 percent overall. Even those students from impoverished backgrounds who were reading proficiently in third-grade dropped out at a rate of 11 percent, as compared to 9 percent

for students who had never lived in poverty (Hernandez, 2011). Moreover, along ethnic lines, 31 percent of African American students and 33 percent of Hispanic students living in poverty, and not meeting third-grade reading proficiency levels, did not graduate from high school. These ethnic differences in dropout statistics were not apparent when the students were reading on grade level by the end of third-grade (Hernandez, 2011).

Title I.

Title I was a program of the Federal Government that provided grant assistance to local education agencies (LEA) and schools throughout the country with high percentages of students from low-income families. As a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I was established in order to ensure that all students – regardless of their individual circumstances – would be able to meet high academic standards. Awards given to each state were based primary on poverty estimates from the U.S. census and the cost of education for the state.

Title I grant funds were also given to the state for distribution to the LEA where at least five percent of the student population were determined to be economically disadvantaged. The LEA distributes the funding to the schools as either school-wide or targeted funds. If a school qualifies for school-wide Title I funding (i.e., at least 40 percent of their students were established as coming from low income families) the funds may then be used for school-wide programs that serve all children in the school. These programs were to upgrade the entire educational program for increased academic achievement of all students, but particularly of the lowest achieving students. If the percentage of students in attendance was between 35 and 39 percent, the school received targeted Title I funds and the money could only be used to assist the low-income students

who were failing or most at risk of failure. These funds were used to support additional instruction in reading or mathematics, after school tutorials, pre-school programs, summer school programs and additional materials that extended and reinforced the regular school program. Title I grant funds were required to be used for strategies and materials that were scientifically research-based and for programs to involve parents in the school. In the 2009-2010 school year, 21 million students were supported with Title I funds in the United States. Of those 21 million, 59 percent were in kindergarten through the fifth-grade.

Adequate yearly progress.

All kindergarten through twelfth-grade schools were required to show adequate yearly progress in the areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and graduation rates for high school campuses or attendance rates for elementary and middle school campuses. As a part of NCLB mandates, states were required to establish their own criteria for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The state plan was peer reviewed and approved by the US Department of Education and had to be based on expectations for growth in student achievement, which included all students being proficient in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. In addition to these guidelines, state plans for measuring achievement had to be based primarily on the state achievement test.

The state of Texas required districts and schools to report on three indicators – namely, reading/language arts, mathematics, and either graduation or attendance. The reading and mathematics indicators included participation as well as achievement on the state standardized test. Performance and participation were taken for the entire student population as well as the following student groups:

- African American
- Hispanic
- White
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Special Education
- Limited English Proficient

Achievement data were calculated for students who attended for the entire school year, and those who were enrolled on the enrollment snapshot date in the fall of the school year. Participation information was also gathered for students enrolled on the day testing occurred.

Schools that failed to meet the requirements for AYP and were receiving support under Title I were subject to sanctions under specific guidelines. If a school receiving these funds did not achieve AYP for two consecutive years on the same indicator (i.e. reading performance, mathematics performance, graduation, or attendance) supplemental funds were provided by the School Improvement Program (SIP) that were used to implement the required revised school improvement plan. This plan was to include strategies that were scientifically research-based to raise the level of achievement of the students as a method to meet the state standards. Additionally, students attending a campus identified as in need of school improvement were to be given the option to transfer to another school within the LEA if possible. If the campus did not meet AYP in subsequent years, additional sanctions were imposed including restructuring and alternative governance if the school entered Stage 5 (2011 Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP] Guide for Texas School districts and Campuses, 2011).

Students from low income families were over-represented in accountability data used for AYP as they were present in more than one student group. Students listed as economically disadvantaged were also counted again in their ethnic group (i.e. African American, Hispanic, or White) and might also be a part of the group of students who were limited in English proficiency (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). This over-representation coupled with achievement issues made it more likely for schools with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students to receive sanctions under NCLB for failing to make AYP.

Segregation.

In 1966, most of the schools in the country were segregated along racial lines. It was asserted that achievement would likely increase if students from backgrounds with a low level of “educational strength” (p. 22) attended schools where the enrollment was primarily made up of students who came from homes where education was valued (Coleman et al., 1966). Researchers inferred that African American students who attended schools where at least half of the student body was made up of White students felt a greater sense of control (Coleman et al., 1966). Those findings regarding peer effects led to the belief that the integration of schools was critical in closing the achievement gap (Wong & Nicotera, 2004).

Of the minority groups studied, the authors of the Coleman Report purported that the highest levels of segregation were among African American students; however, White students were shown to be the most segregated, with 80% of all White students attending schools that were 90% to 100% White (Coleman et al., 1966). Many attempts were made to integrate the schools of America, but those attempts were met with varying amounts of

success. Research on the issue of “White Flight”, or the movement of White students away from racially integrated schools was primarily accomplished in two ways. White parents either relocated their families to communities that were more ethnically homogeneous and the schools were predominantly White or they enrolled their children in predominantly White private schools (Saporito & Deenesh, 2006). Even within school districts, researchers noted disparities between schools. Schools located in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods had a lower percentage of students meeting the standard than schools located in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods. The researchers hypothesized that the difference was due to the residential attendance boundaries for the various schools (Zhang & Cowen, 2009).

Segregation exists in urban, suburban, and rural schools (Zhang & Cowen, 2009). Although segregation was documented in all three types of communities, the achievement gap was more pronounced in urban areas based on results from the NAEP. In 2005, the gap between African American students and White students was 29 points nationally, yet it rose to 32 points in urban districts. For Hispanic students, as compared to their White peers, the gap was 27 points nationally and 29 points in urban districts. When students living in poverty were compared to students above the poverty line, the gap was 27 points nationally, but 32 points for urban districts (Teale et al., 2008). Based on these findings, it is clear that integration alone will not close the achievement gap.

Many authors since the publication of the Coleman Report have stated that school factors, as well as segregation itself, have impacted student achievement in general and the achievement gap in particular (e.g., Haycock, 2003; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Lleras & Rangel, 2009). School factors, such as class size (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009),

ability grouping (Lleras & Rangel, 2009), school choice (Renzulli & Evans, 2005), and teacher quality (Haycock, 2003) have been linked to achievement differences between African American and Hispanic children and White children. The curriculum taught in low performing schools was also noted as a contributing factor to the achievement gap (Haycock, 2003).

School funding.

One way that schools are supported is through funding. An inequality of funding was correlated with the disparity in academic achievement, with levels of funding flowing along racial and socioeconomic lines (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Therefore, lower levels of funding were believed to account for an increase in class size (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009) and a decrease in teacher quality (Haycock, 2003) – both of which were linked to student learning (Haycock, 2003; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009).

Researchers documented the positive cumulative effects on student performance in higher grades when students in Kindergarten through grade 3 were educated in small classes. The finding held true for students at all achievement levels; yet, class size was shown to have a more substantial effect on students with low achievement in both reading and science in certain grades (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009). Lower funding caused students in poorer districts to suffer as those districts lacked the financial support necessary to build more classrooms, staff them with effective teachers, and/or provide access to smaller classes in general (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009). Small classes in primary grades were suspected to be of even greater benefit to Hispanic students. Researchers attributed lower achievement levels in early grades for students of Hispanic

origin to language and cultural differences. Inclusion in smaller classes was of particular benefit in these two areas (Bali & Alvarez, 2004).

Researchers noticed that students who were caught in the achievement gap needed more time to achieve at the levels of their higher achieving peers. School districts with adequate funding were able to provide support before school, after school and during the school day for students whose achievement levels fell below the standard (Haycock, 2001). Although small group phonetic tutorials were found to be effective, the most effective method advancing students who struggled in reading was the use of one-on-one targeted phonetic tutorials (Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2009). This type of support would prove to be an even greater burden for schools with limited funds. Students who attended schools in poorly funded districts would not have access to such services.

Between 2003 and 2006, the Miami-Dade Public Schools instituted a program that targeted 39 low performing schools for additional financial aid and support over the three year period. The increased funding was used to fund (a) extended mathematics and reading periods, (b) small group interventions, (c) curriculum, (d) regular assessments, (e) professional development for teachers and leaders, (f) increased staffing, and (g) additional compensation for teachers. At the end of the 3 year period, significant gains were realized in the elementary schools; however, students in the secondary schools did not realize the hoped for said gains (McFadden, 2009).

Although most educators and parents felt that an increase in funding would help to close the achievement gap, Hill (2008) claimed that an increase in school funding was not necessary. Rather, he concluded that it was difficult to show that an increase in school funds would produce positive student outcomes. He proposed that schools were

not using their money efficiently enough to ensure that no further improvement could be made without more funds (Hill, 2008).

In a study examining per-pupil expenditures on instruction and central office administration, teacher-student ratios, teachers' education, school social environment and student achievement, Wenglinsky (1997) determined that not all spending had an impact on student achievement. Instructional spending that was connected with lowering the teacher-student ratio did have a positive impact on academic success. He found that money spent to increase teachers' salaries, but maintain teacher-student ratios, did not increase achievement (Wenglinsky, 1997). An increase in student academic success was also attributed to district spending on central office administration that decreased the teacher-student ratio.

Class size, however, was not as highly linked to student success as teacher quality when viewed on a statewide level by Darling-Hammond (2000). Using data from the NAEP and School and Staffing Surveys (SASS) for all 50 states, she found teacher quality to be an even greater predictor of student achievement than the demographics of the students themselves. As in the study by Wenglinsky (1997), Darling-Hammond (2007) did not see as great a correlation to academic success from teachers holding advanced degrees as from quality teachers holding the correct certification for the level and subject taught.

Leadership Effects

Under NCLB, as with the educational reforms of the past, major changes in teaching and learning as well as the operation of schools became necessary. Although school districts monitored the change, the real work of creating the change fell to school

leaders. School principals may have been given a vague blueprint for change through this act; nonetheless, it was up to them to create the mechanisms to see it through to reality.

Douglas Reeves (2006) states, “Leaders are the architects of individual and organizational improvements” (p. 27). This particular quote highlights the role of the principal in implementing educational reform. To accomplish change, it is imperative that school leaders reshape their organizations from within. More specifically, they must work collaboratively with others and take advantage of their strengths in order to improve the learning environment for their students.

Principals in high achieving schools maintain an intense focus on high levels of academic achievement for all of the students in the school (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990). Leaders must instill that focus in the teachers and ensure that the entire staff is on target in order for the students to succeed. Educating students is the business of schools; therefore, administrators must participate in activities that enable teachers to keep that business moving forward.

Few schools have been elevated from low performing to excellence without a strong and persistent leader (Wilson, 2011). Principals must understand the change and work strategically and collaboratively with their faculties to create a vision of the desired outcome. They must also understand the barriers to the attaining the vision and effecting the change for their students (Trail, 2000).

Although leadership within districts and schools comes from many different sources, superintendents and principals still have the most significant impact (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In a meta-analysis of 27 studies, Waters and

Marzano (2006) determined that there was a statistically significant relationship between district leadership and student achievement. According to Waters & Marzano (2006), effective superintendents engaged in five different types of leadership activities: (a) collaborative goal setting; (b) non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction; (c) board alignment and support of district goals; (d) monitoring goals for achievement and instruction; and (e) use of resources to support achievement and instructional goals (p. 3-4).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identified 21 areas of leadership that positively correlated with student achievement. The areas were as follows: (a) culture; (b) order; (c) discipline; (d) resources; (e) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (f) involvement in curriculum; (g) focus; (h) visibility; (i) contingent rewards; (j) communication; (k) outreach; (l) input; (m) affirmation; (n) relationship; (o) change agent role; (p) optimizer role; (q) ideals and beliefs; (r) monitoring and evaluation; (s) flexibility; (t) situational awareness; and (u) intellectual stimulation (Waters et al., 2003). In addition to these leadership areas, Waters et al. (2003) stated that effective principals have a working knowledge of leadership strategies and understand how to balance the culture and population of the school with the community to increase student achievement. Two variables identified in this meta-analysis to be the determining factors of a positive or negative correlation with student achievement were correctly identifying the focus on improvement and understanding the proximity that the change had to the existing norms and values within a school (Waters et al. 2003).

Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2009) studied the time spent by principals in different behaviors. Their findings indicated that principals spent almost 30 percent of their time

with administrative responsibilities (e.g. supervising students and on compliance requirements). An additional 20 percent of the principals' time was spent on organization management (e.g. hiring and managing staff and budgeting). Instruction-related tasks (e.g. classroom observations, professional development for teachers) only consumed ten percent of the day. Horng et al. (2009) found a positive correlation between an increased amount of time spent on organization management tasks over administrative management tasks and student test scores. The organizational management task most highly correlated with an increase in achievement was hiring personnel.

High levels of teacher collaboration as a goal and practice has been shown to foster increased student achievement (Reeves, 2003). With this in mind, research supports the notion that principals must create schedules that allow teachers to meet together during the school day (Cannon, Figlio, & Sass, 2011). When instructional leadership is shared, school leaders play an indirect yet positive role in increasing student achievement (Goddard, Y., Miller, Larson, & Goddard, R., 2010). Teachers are more likely to collaborate when principals monitor instruction, share decision making and work as instructional leaders. Goddard et al. (2010) found that one standard deviation of shared leadership was associated with .73 standard deviation increase in teacher collaboration. One standard deviation in teacher collaboration was associated with a .24 standard deviation increase in mathematics scores and a .19 standard deviation increase in reading scores (Goddard et al., 2010). Therefore, when principals practice shared instructional leadership, student achievement rises, as mediated by teacher collaboration (Goddard et al., 2010).

Research also shows that programs created by top-down leadership fade with the introduction of a new leader. Yet, shared leadership also led to sustained growth, even after the principal left the school (Lambert, 2002). In order for teachers to participate in shared leadership, principals must share their vision and engage in the learning with their teachers (Goddard et al. 2010). Principals that facilitated conversations around learning, insisted on a focus on student learning, supported leadership in others, and modeled collaborative practice exhibited behaviors that supported shared leadership and (through them) promoted an increase in student achievement (Lambert, 2002).

Principals of effective schools created policies that systematically shifted the focus from teacher incentives to policies shown to improve performance of low performing teachers and students (Cannon et al., 2011). As a means of supporting teachers, effective principals created policies for closer supervision, mentors teachers, professional development and improvement plans. Additionally, according to Cannon et al. (2011), student supports that were shown to be most effective were: required grade retention, required supplemental instruction during the school day, and required tutoring after school. Policies to lengthen instructional time, with the exception of after-school tutoring did not have as great an impact on the overall effectiveness of the school. Principals who organized their teachers into teams and created common planning periods for them to collaborate met with high levels of success (Cannon et al., 2011).

Although teacher attrition and the subsequent hiring of new, less experienced teachers had been cited as one factor in the achievement gap, Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2012) found that the best principals were turning over ineffective teachers to replace them with more effective ones. They determined that, for these principals,

teacher turnover was primarily concentrated in grades where value-added scores were lower. Teacher attrition of this type was designed to improve the quality of teaching throughout the school (Branch, et al., 2012).

Teacher Effects

The advent of NCLB brought the issue of teacher quality to the attention of the public when it was enacted in 2004. This act mandated that the standard of “highly-qualified” be achieved by every teacher by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004). NCLB defined a highly-qualified teacher as one who could pass specific exams that tested the teacher’s knowledge of content and pedagogy. It had been argued that the required certification tests were not adequate predictors of teacher quality (Berry et al., 2004). Leaders in business and government came to understand what parents and educators already believed; teacher quality had the greatest influence on student achievement (Berry et al., 2004). The difference in teacher qualifications between high-poverty and low-poverty schools in New York City lessened significantly since 2000 (when certification was required to teach in all schools in the district) (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008).

Rockoff (2004) documented that in addition to the teacher certification testing mandated by NCLB, teacher evaluations were highly correlated with student achievement. Although subjective in nature, these evaluations reflected important aspects of teacher quality that were not reflected in the scores of the certification exams (Rockoff, 2004). In terms of the achievement gap, the subject and pedagogy tests did not

assess the teachers' ability to work with the diverse population of students present in America's classrooms (Berry et al., 2004).

Research conducted in Boston related to teacher quality documented that teachers deemed to be in the top-third on a measure of teacher quality produced up to six times the amount of academic growth as the teachers who fell into the bottom third (Haycock, 2001). In many districts, moreover, students in the greatest need of teacher support were often assigned to educators with the weakest academic foundations, regardless of the teacher quality measure used (Haycock, 2001). Disadvantaged students often had the most ill-prepared and ineffective teachers in the areas of (a) certification, (b) experience, (c) subject-matter experience, (d) exam performance, and (e) classroom effectiveness (Haycock, 2003). Students in classrooms of ineffective teachers need two years to regain their achievement losses. Hence, if a student is taught by two ineffective teachers in a row, it is doubtful that they will ever catch up (Barr et al., 2007).

Teacher quality was reported to have a cumulative effect on student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Haycock, 2003). In a study on the achievement gap in Tennessee, students who spent three years in classrooms with highly effective teachers achieved raw scores 50 percentile points higher than those students who had three years with ineffective teachers. The cumulative effects of exposure to either effective or ineffective teaching meant the difference between being placed on a gifted track or the possibility of a lifetime of service in the fast food industry (Haycock, 2003).

Students taught for several consecutive years by teachers new to the profession were documented to perform at lower levels on standardized tests than students who were taught by more experienced teachers (Hanushek et al., 2004). A small number of

teachers in their first or second year were as effective as their more experienced peers, but those teachers were exceptions to the norm. One of the greatest predictors of low rates of student success was teacher turnover, which often led to students being taught by inexperienced teachers (Zhang & Cowen, 2009).

Ironically, the ability to keep teachers on staff often corresponded to the achievement of their students. Teaching students who were lower achieving was a strong factor for teachers of all experience levels who decided to leave the field of education. For students in the most need, this finding represented a vicious cycle. In schools with low achievement there were high teacher exit rates which, subsequently, brought about repeated exposure to new teachers. Those new teachers were generally less effective. This process did not work to narrow the achievement gap and even caused it to expand in some cases (Hanushek et al., 2004). This cycle was noted in urban, suburban, as well as rural schools. Teacher turnover was especially high in rural school districts where it was difficult to recruit and keep quality teachers. Teacher attrition added to the gap in achievement between rural students and their non-rural peers (Zhang & Cowen, 2009).

Some teachers leaving low achieving schools moved to schools where students achieved at higher levels, but some left the profession. When experienced teachers left teaching, new teachers took their place. And, in 1999, it was estimated that 2.4 million new teachers would be a need across the country between 2000 and 2008 (Rockoff, 2004). An influx of teachers new to the profession might be one contribution to a widening of the achievement gap (Hanushek et al, 2004; Haycock, 2001).

Although teachers new to the profession have been found to have a detrimental effect on student achievement, the reverse was not always true. Rand Education (2000)

asserted that the traditional methods of measuring teacher qualifications had little to no effect on student achievement. When researchers examined student achievement compared with teacher qualifications, a five-year increase in teaching experience represented less than a one percentage-point increase in student achievement. The level of education obtained by the teachers was also shown to have no effect. Similarly, the researchers found no relationship between scores achieved by teachers on certification examinations and score achieved by students on achievement tests (Rand Education, 2010). Therefore, policies that rewarded teachers based on certifications and qualifications may have little effect on increasing student achievement (Rockoff, 2004).

Parent Effects

It was a widely accepted belief that increased parent involvement led to increased student achievement. Everything from helping with homework to attending PTO meetings was thought to improve children's academic abilities. Many studies have shown this premise to be true. Children whose parents were involved in their education showed greater academic gains than children of uninvolved parents. This involvement included many different activities, such as knowing the name of their child's teacher, attending school functions, and volunteering in the school. The study also included taking their child to the library, helping with homework, and portraying a positive attitude about the school and education to their children (Luchuck, 1998). In a study performed by Desimone (1999), student-parent discussions about school were better predictors of student achievement than all of the other parent involvement activities.

Positive parental perceptions of school programs and climate were also significantly related to the level of a parent's involvement. An increase in parental

involvement in the school overall was positively correlated with perceptions that the school empowered the parents. Schools where the principal and teachers were more open in their interactions with parents and where open lines of communication created more of a collaborative association between the parents and the teachers and led to more positive perceptions by the parents (Griffith, 2000).

Parents who were college educated and had higher income levels were associated with higher levels of parental involvement. Conversely, parents with limited educations and low income levels were less involved in their child's education (Hill, 2008). This particular finding was also upheld by Jensen (2009) who stated that in poverty-level homes, caregivers tended to be overworked and overstressed and far less likely to be involved in school activities with their children. In fact, only 36 percent of parents living below the poverty line were involved in their child's education, as compared to 59 percent of parents living above the poverty line (Jensen, 2009).

Data from the US Department of Health and Human Services showed neglect to be the most highly correlated form of abuse for children in poverty (DePanfilis, 2006). Although most parents and other caregivers living in poverty did not neglect their children, poverty in conjunction with other risk factors (e.g. substance abuse, social isolation, financial uncertainty, continual family chaos, or a lack of available transportation, or affordable child care) could put a child at greater risk for neglect (DePanfilis, 2006). Single parent families were more than twice as likely to be low income when compared with those from two parent families. Of families with two parents in the home, 23 percent were below the poverty level, as compared to 59 percent of families with a single parent (Rate of Children in Low-Income Families Varies Widely

by State, 2004). In addition, according to a different analysis of the child poverty rate by family type conducted by Thomas and Sawhill (2005), the poverty rate for children in 2003 was:

- 7.6 percent for children living with married parents;
- 34.0 percent for children living with a single parent; and
- 21.5 percent of children living with co-habiting parents.

When considered in isolation, a child living in a single-parent household may not have hurt their academic achievement, especially if the alternative is living with two parents in conflict. However, when the drop in income associated with the establishment of a single-parent family was taken into account there was a greater likelihood that achievement was negatively effected (The Family and Student Achievement, 1995).

Conclusion

Although education reform has been a topic for educators and politicians alike for over 175 years, it was not until NCLB and RTT that the education of every child became a national priority. No longer was the public education system seen as a sorting mechanism to educate White middle class students for higher education; training other students for either skilled or unskilled labor; or forgetting about them entirely. By and large the jobs for this sector of the labor force have been disappearing and schools had to take on the job of educating all children regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or economic status.

Current researchers advised policy makers to broaden their concern over the large and ever-widening achievement gap to include the fact that many minority and low income students were not only falling short of minimum academic standards, but had

made little progress toward meeting them (Lee, 2004). The response of the federal government to the lack of academic progress of those students was to enact NCLB to set the standards for all students and impose sanctions on schools whose students did not measure up (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Integration (Teale et al., 2007), increased school funding (Hanushek et al., 2004), and ensuring a quality teachers in every classroom (Haycock, 2003) were all posed by investigators as paths to help struggling students. The one factor that many researchers noted as the key to improving student academic achievement was, in fact, raising teacher quality (Rockoff, 2004).

The Census of 2010 listed the number of children under the age of 18 who were living at or below the poverty level as 16,401,000 (or 22 percent) (DeNavas et al., 2011). Although schools cannot elevate the income level of their students, they do need to address the issues of academic achievement that these students bring. When fourth-grade students took the NAEP in 2010, two out of three scored below proficient in reading. This statistic rose to 83 percent for fourth-grade students living in poverty (Annie E. Casey, 2010).

Principals and teachers were charged with the task of turning this trend of failure around. It was thought for many years that students were locked into their situations by issues of race and economics and schools could not do little to change things (Coleman et al., 1966). However, many schools have shown this to be a fallacy (Reeves, 2003). Including parent support and involvement increased the ability of school personnel to ready all students for college and careers (Desimone, 1999).

A great deal of research has been conducted in the way of documenting the meaning, measurement, causes, and solutions for the achievement gap. This quote, from

Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, sums up the reason why the solution must be found: “My biggest fear for this country’s future, competitively speaking, is that we’re doing a poor job in education. If we can resolve our educational problems, I think we will maintain the extraordinary position the United States holds in the world at large” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 9).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the procedures for examining the perceptions of principals, teachers, and parents with regard to the reading ability of low-socioeconomic students. In addition, this chapter examines the impact that these perceptions have on school improvement planning by school leaders. This chapter also includes a description of the research design, setting, procedures, instruments, analysis, and limitations of this study.

Description of Research Design

This qualitative research incorporated questionnaires designed by the researcher that were administered to principals, teachers, and parents. The questionnaires consisted of a combination of open- and closed-ended questions with six questions on the teacher questionnaire, seven questions on the principal questionnaire, and eight questions on the questionnaire for parents. The two additional questions on the parent form were demographic in nature. The additional principal question was designed to gain information on how and what types of information the principals gained from teachers and parents and used for school improvement planning. The questionnaires were completed by five principals, five teachers, and 10 parents. An analysis of the data from each source searched for common themes and trends. The questions were designed to illicit information about the subjects' perceptions on children with reading difficulties. Principals were required to answer on the overall school level; the teachers on the classroom level; and the parents were asked questions specifically about their own child. The questions were posed in natural and familiar language so that they would be easily understood by the subjects completing the questionnaires (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The principals who answered the questionnaire were asked to give their perceptions on the students in their schools who had difficulties with reading and what the school was doing to support these students. They also answered a question related to the use of information gained from teachers and parents in school improvement planning.

1. What percentage of the students in your school have reading difficulties?
2. Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
3. What programs are in place to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?
4. How and to what extent do you use input from teachers and parents in your school improvement planning?
5. Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

The teachers who answered the questionnaire were asked to give their perceptions with regard to the students in their classroom that had difficulties with reading and what the teachers were doing to support these students.

1. What percentage of the students in your class have reading difficulties?
2. What type(s) of difficulties have they had?
3. Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
4. What do you do to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?

The parents who answered the questionnaire were asked to give their perceptions about their own children who had or were having difficulties with reading and what the parents were doing to support their child.

1. Does your child have a history of difficulties with reading?

2. What types of difficulties have they had?
3. Why do you think your child has had these difficulties with reading?
4. What do you do to help your child improve their reading ability?

Subject participants in all three groups were asked the following: Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What role do parents have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
2. What role do teachers have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
3. What role do principals have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?

Setting

For the purposes of this study, five campus principals volunteered to complete the questionnaire and their identities were documented with pre-determined codes to maintain confidentiality of the results (e.g. P1, P2, and P3). The principal participants were all from schools with fourth and fifth-grade students. In particular, three of the principals led elementary schools and two of the principals led K-8 schools.

All of the principals were associated with a large school district located in the Gulf Coast region of Texas, which encompasses 301 square miles within a major metropolitan area and is the seventh-largest public-school system in the nation and the largest in Texas. The school district has a very diverse population of students comprised

of 298 campuses (170 elementary, 42 middle, 55 high schools, and 31 combination campuses) and includes over 200,000 students. The representative demographics of the district are 61% Hispanic, 7.8% Caucasian, 26.5% African American, 2.9% Asian, and 0.3% Native American. Of the total student population, 79.2% qualify as Economically Disadvantaged and 30.7% meet the qualifications as Limited English Proficient. This district earned a Texas Education Agency (TEA) ranking as an “Acceptable” District during the 2010-11 academic school year as documented on the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report.

The teachers who responded to the questionnaire were a convenience sample of fourth and fifth-grade language arts teachers from one elementary school located in the same district as the schools of the five principals. The school where the teachers were employed is located in a residential area of the city with homes that listed up to \$1.5 million and apartments that rent for as little as \$400. The grades served by the school are kindergarten through fifth-grade. Student demographics of the school are 27.7% Hispanic, 48.6% Caucasian, 7 % African American, 12.7% Asian, and 0.8% Native American. Of the student population, 26% qualifies as Economically Disadvantaged and 18.3 % meet the qualifications as Limited English Proficient. In total, the school employs 2 administrators and 45 teachers. During the 2010-11 school year, this school earned a TEA ranking of “Recognized” as documented on AEIS report.

The parents who responded to the questionnaire were a convenience sample of parents whose children attended the same school as the teachers used in the study. In addition, all of the parents had students enrolled in the fourth or fifth-grade.

Subjects

All five of the school principals who volunteered to participate in the questionnaires worked in the district for at least 10 years and had been at their current assignment at least one year. Four of the principals who participated led campuses that earned a TEA ranking as “Exemplary” or “Recognized” during the 2010-11 school year. The fifth principal led a school with a TEA rating of “Academically Acceptable” during the 2010-11 school year.

The five teachers who completed the questionnaires were employed at the same school. They taught reading and language arts to either fourth or fifth grade students. All of the teachers had at least five years of experience and had been in their current position at the school at least one year.

The ten parents who completed the survey had a child in either the fourth or fifth-grade at the same school. They were identified for the study by their child’s participation in the free and reduced lunch program, as well as their child’s history of reading difficulties. The latter was based on the child’s achievement level on the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), Stanford 10 test, and/or the TAKS test. The teacher group and the parent group were made up of a convenience sample from a single elementary.

Procedures

The University of Houston, Committee of the Protection of Human Subjects, granted approval of this study (See Appendix F). Informed consent was required of the principals to match the subjects with the demographics of their schools. To remove all identifiers that might indicate individual principals the names were replaced by predetermined codes to maintain an anonymous procedure for reviewing the data. Five

campus principals volunteered to participate in this research study. Each participant signed a “Consent to Participate in Research” form before the questionnaire was completed.

The five teachers and seven parents who participated in the study were all from the same school and therefore did not need to be separately identified. A cover letter outlining the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of the study was attached to the questionnaires and the subjects returned the completed forms anonymously in sealed envelopes. No personal information was gathered and consent was implied by their reading of the cover letter and completion and return of the questionnaire. Predetermined codes were given to each questionnaire to maintain continuity of information.

Questionnaires.

The subjects received the form “University of Houston Consent to Participate in Research” that fully explains the purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality, risk and discomforts, benefits, alternative, and publication statement. This form also included the “Subject Rights” and all the subjects initialed each page and signed the consent form before completing the questionnaire. All of the subjects responded to the questionnaires in writing.

The questionnaires were completed by the principals at a day and time that was convenient to their schedule. The questionnaire consisted of the following two questions relating to the principal’s professional experience and education:

1. How many years have you been a principal?
2. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Additionally, the following four remaining questions dealt with the principal's perceptions about students with reading difficulties and academic success:

1. What percentage of the students in your school have reading difficulties?
2. Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
3. What programs are in place to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?
4. Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

The questionnaires were completed by the teachers at a day and time that was convenient to their schedule. This questionnaire consisted of the following two questions relating to the teacher's professional experience and education:

1. How many years have you taught?
2. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Additionally, the following five remaining questions dealt with the teacher's perceptions about students with reading difficulties and academic success:

1. What percentage of the students in your class have reading difficulties?
2. What type(s) of difficulties have they had?
3. Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
4. What do you do to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?
5. Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

The questionnaires were completed by the parents at a day and time that was convenient to their schedule. The questionnaire consisted of the following four questions relating to demographic information about the parent and their family:

1. What is your ethnicity? (African American / Hispanic / White / Other)
2. How many children do you have? (1-2 / 3-4 / 5 or more)
3. What is your age? (20-29 years of age / 30-39 years of age / 40-49 years of age)
4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

The following five remaining questions dealt with the parents' perceptions about their child in regard to reading difficulties and academic success:

1. Does your child have a history of difficulties with reading? (Yes / No)
2. If so, what types of difficulties have they had?
3. Why do you think your child has had these difficulties with reading?
4. What do you do to help your child improve their reading ability?
5. Who do you feel has the greatest influence on your child's academic success?

Instruments

The instruments used in this research study were the questionnaires created by the Principal Investigator for the five principals, the questionnaires for the five teachers, and the questionnaires for the 10 parents. It should be noted that each of the instruments were created by the researcher. All questionnaires included questions related to the subject's educational history and experience along with questions related to reading difficulties and academic success. The parent questionnaires had two additional demographic questions associated with their ethnicity and their number of children. The principal questionnaire contained an additional question pertaining to the gathering and use of information from teachers and parents for use in the school improvement planning process.

Analyses

The information from the questionnaires was analyzed in three stages. The first phase of the data analysis involved compiling all of the statements related to each question for each group of subjects. Specific terms that were common among all of the subjects in each group were identified and categorized to isolate discrete themes. Next, during the second phase, important words and phrases were organized as possible key factors in the perceptions of each group. Finally, during the third phase of analysis, the results were translated into generalizations about perceptions of principals, teachers and parents of students with reading difficulties.

Limitations

Due to the complexity and variety of educational situations and the small number of principals, teachers, and parents who participated in the completion of the questionnaire, this research study may not be used as a generalization of the perceptions of all stakeholders. Therefore, the results revealed by this particular study may not be relevant for all principals wanting to improve their schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The intent of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of principals, teachers, and parents related to students with a history of reading difficulties, as well as the implications of this information from the stakeholders for principals as they plan for school improvement. The responses from three separate questionnaires given to these three groups were analyzed for themes related to answering the following questions:

1. What role do parents have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
2. What role do teachers have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
3. What role do principals have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?

Each of the subjects was given a questionnaire to determine their perspectives on the types of reading difficulties students present, the reasons for those difficulties, and the methods they were using to support these students and improve their reading abilities.

The principals' answers were based on all of the students in their perspective schools; the teachers' answers were based on the students in their current classrooms; and, the parents answers were based on their knowledge of their own child.

Subjects

Parents' demographics.

The questionnaires were completed and returned by seven of the 10 parents who agreed to participate in the study about their children – who had been identified as having a history of reading difficulty. Each of the parents who completed questionnaires had children in either the fourth or fifth grade at the same school. This school examined in this study maintained a TEA accountability rating of Recognized for the 2010-2011 school year and served 876 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographics for this particular campus were as follows: African American (7%), Hispanic (27.7%), and White (48.6%). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 26.8%. The passing rate for all students tested was 93% on the TAKS reading test. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (93%), Hispanic students (87%), White students (97%), and for students who are economically disadvantaged (85%). Additionally, the school was located in a large urban school district.

All of the parents who participated in the study had children who participated in the free and reduced lunch program and were, therefore, designated as “economically disadvantaged”. Over half (four out of seven) of the subjects reported their ethnicity as Hispanic; two subjects reported their ethnicity as African American; and, one reported themselves as being White. Parents listed their age by range with three of the parents in the 20-29 year age range, three of the parents in the 30-39 year age range, and one parent in the 40-49 year age range. Ranges were also used to identify the number of children for each parent. Four of the parents listed “three to four children” and three of the parents

listed “one to two children”. The educational experience listed by the parents ranged from “completion of the tenth grade” to “associate degree”.

The following table provides a summary of age and number of children:

Table 4.1

Age & Number of Children

Subjects	Ethnicity	Age	Number of Children	Education
M1	AA	20-29	1-2	1 year College
M2	Hispanic	30-39	3-4	High School
M3	Hispanic	20-29	1-2	Tenth Grade
M4	Hispanic	20-29	3-4	High School
M5	White	30-39	1-2	Some College
M6	Hispanic	30-39	3-4	High School
M7	AA	40-49	3-4	Associate Degree

Note: AA = African American.

Teachers’ demographics.

Five teachers completed questionnaires about the students in their classrooms with reading difficulties. Three of the teachers taught fourth grade reading and two taught fifth grade reading. All taught at the same school attended by the children of the parents in the study and had been teaching for at least four years. The school where the teachers taught had a TEA accountability rating of Recognized for the 2010-2011 school year, and this particular school served 876 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographics for this campus were African American (7%), Hispanic (27.7%), and

White (48.6%). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 26.8%. The passing rate for all students tested was 93% on the TAKS reading test. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (93%), Hispanic students (87%), White students (97%), and students classified as economically disadvantaged (85%). In addition, the school was located in a large urban school district.

Three of the teacher participants in this study taught fourth grade. The first teacher (T1) had been teaching for eight years and held a Master of Education degree. The second teacher (T2) had been 12 years of teaching experience and also held a Bachelor of Education degree. The third teacher (T3) taught for four years and held a Bachelor of Education degree.

Two other teachers taught fifth grade. The fourth teacher (T4) taught for 30 years and held a Bachelor of Education degree. The fifth teacher (T5) taught for eight years and held a Master of Education degree.

Table 4.2 below provides a summary of education and experience.

Table 4.2

Education & Experience

Subjects	Education	Years as Teacher	Grade Level
T1	M.Ed.	8	Fourth
T2	BS	12	Fourth
T3	BA	4	Fourth
T4	BA	30	Fifth
T5	M.Ed.	8	Fifth

Note: The average years as a teacher = 12.4 years.

Principals' demographics.

Five principals completed questionnaires related to the students in their schools with reading difficulties. All of the principals led schools located in a large urban school district. The first principal (P1) led an elementary school that earned a TEA rating of Exemplary for the 2010-2011 school year. This particular school had an enrollment of 759 in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographics for this campus were as follows: African American (10.1%), Hispanic (44.1%), and White (41.6%). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 40.1%. The passing rate for all students tested on the TAKS reading test was 97%. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (98%), Hispanic students (95%), White students (99%), and students who are classified as economically disadvantaged (96%). The principal had a Master of Education degree and had held the position of principal for one year.

The second principal (P2) led an elementary/middle school that earned a TEA rating of Recognized for the elementary and Exemplary for the middle during the 2010-2011 school year. The total enrollment for the school was 549 in grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The demographics for this campus were African American (16%), Hispanic (53.4%), and White (21.3%). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 71%. The passing rate for all students tested on the TAKS reading test was 86%. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (80%), Hispanic students (80%), White students (97%), and students who are classified as economically disadvantaged (80%). The principal held a Master of

Education degree and had been in the position of principal for nine years – five of which were at the current school.

The third principal (P3) led an elementary/middle school that earned a TEA rating of Exemplary for the 2010-2011 school year. The rating was not divided by school level as in the previous school. The total enrollment for all grades (pre-kindergarten through eighth grade) was 533. The demographics for this campus were: African American (12.8%), Hispanic (85.4%), and White (1.3%). The percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged was 87.8%. The passing rate for all students tested was 92% on the TAKS reading test. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (92%), Hispanic students (92%), and students who are classified as economically disadvantaged (92%). Due to the small number of test takers, and the effort to promote confidentiality, the percentage of White students who met the passing standard was not listed on the AEIS report. The principal at this campus held a Doctor of Education degree and had been in the position for four years, all at the same school.

The fourth principal (P4) led an elementary school that earned a TEA rating of Exemplary for the 2010-2011 school year. The school had an enrollment of 592 in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographics for this campus were: African American (16.7%), Hispanic (25.2%), and White (39.7%). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 23.3%. The passing rate for all students tested on the TAKS reading test was 99%. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (99%), Hispanic students (96%), White students (99%), and students who are classified as economically disadvantaged (96%). The principal held

a Master of Education degree and had held the position of principal for four years. All four years were at the same campus.

The fifth principal (P5) led an elementary school that earned a TEA rating of Academically Acceptable for the 2010-2011 school year. The school had an enrollment of 600 in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The demographics for this campus were: African American: (28%), Hispanic (57%), and White (9.2%). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was 71.3%. The passing rate for all students tested on the TAKS reading test was 87%. The student groups passed the test at the following rates: African American students (83%), Hispanic students (87%), White students (99%), and students who are classified as economically disadvantaged (83%). The principal had a Doctor of Education degree and held the position of principal for four years at the same school.

Table 4.3 below provides a summary of the range of education and experience.

Table 4.3

Experience, Education, Years of Principal Experience and School Level

Subjects	Education	Years as Principal	School Level
P1	M.Ed.	1	Elementary
P2	M.Ed.	9	Elementary
P3	Ed. D.	4	Elementary/Middle
P4	M.Ed.	4	Elementary/Middle
P5	Ed. D.	4	Elementary

Note: The average years as principal = 5 years.

Parent Questionnaire Procedures

All of the parents were contacted by telephone to explain the study and request their participation. If the subject agreed to participate, the questionnaire was sent to them through their child in a sealed envelope. A cover letter was also attached to the questionnaire, which explained the purpose, procedures, confidentiality, risks and benefits of the study. The reading of the cover letter and completion of the survey provided implied consent by the subjects. An envelope addressed to the principal investigator was included in the packet. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the subject sealed the questionnaire in the attached envelope and was returned to the front office of the school. These envelopes were then given to the principal investigator.

The questionnaire began with the following four demographic questions about the parent:

1. What is your ethnicity?
2. How many children do you have?
3. What is your age?
4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Next, the following four questions pertained to the parent's perceptions of their child's reading difficulties and what was being done to help improve their abilities:

1. Does your child have a history of difficulties with reading?
2. If so, what types of difficulties have they had?
3. Why do you think your child has had these difficulties with reading?
4. What do you do to help your child improve their reading ability?

The first question here was asked to determine whether the parent believed that their child had difficulty with reading. The second question was written to obtain information on the types of reading issues that the parent had observed with their child. The third question was designed to gain information on the parents' perceptions of the reason(s) their child had difficulties with reading. The fourth question gave information about the ways that the parent was helping their child to improve their ability to read.

Only three of the seven parents answered the first question in the affirmative – that is, indicating that they believed that their child had any difficulty with reading. Therefore, only these three subjects provided detailed answers to the three questions that followed. The parents' responses to the questions were compiled and commonalities and themes were determined from their responses. The following themes were common for each question:

Parent Questionnaire Results

In response to the second question – that is, “If so (i.e., if their child had difficulty with reading), what types of difficulties have they had?” – the parents gave a variety of responses. The most common themes from these responses were:

Theme one: types of difficulties.

- No difficulties with reading (4/7)
- Comprehension (3/7)
 - Doesn't always know what she read
 - (Difficulty) knowing what he read
 - Don't remember what he reads
- Slow reader (1/7)

- Difficulty learning to read (1/7)
- Reading new words (1/7)
- Failure of standardized test (TAKS) (1/7)

Figure 1 provides a view of the frequency of responses from parents in the various types of difficulties that their child had in the area of reading. N=7 parents

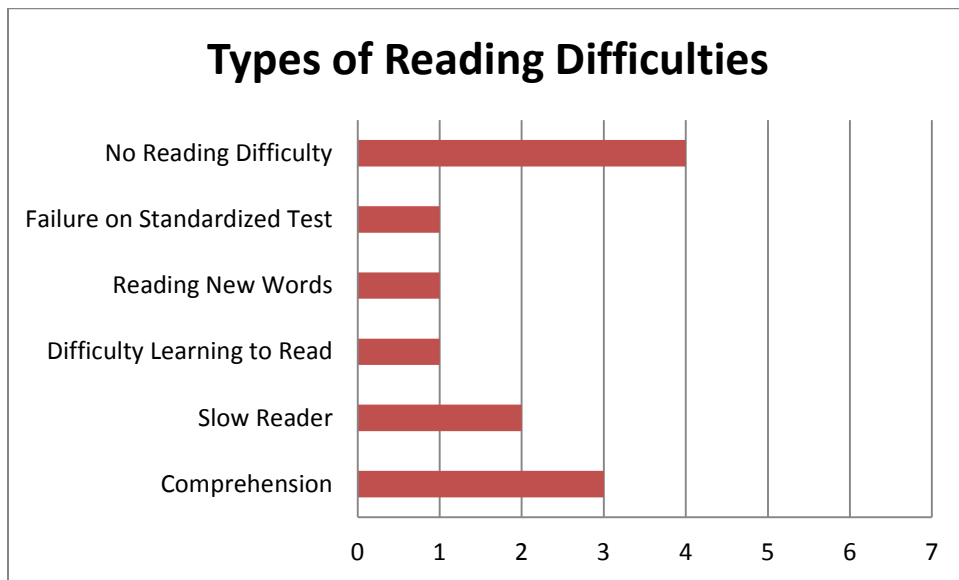


Figure 1. Types of reading difficulties – parents. This figure illustrates the types of difficulties with reading that the parents identified in their children.

Theme two: Reasons for reading difficulties.

- No difficulties with reading (4/7)
- Suspected Dyslexia (1/7)
- English language acquisition (1/7)
- Dislike of reading (1/7)

Figure 2 provides a view of the frequency of responses from parents on their perceptions of the reasons for the difficulties that their child had in the area of reading.

N=7 parents

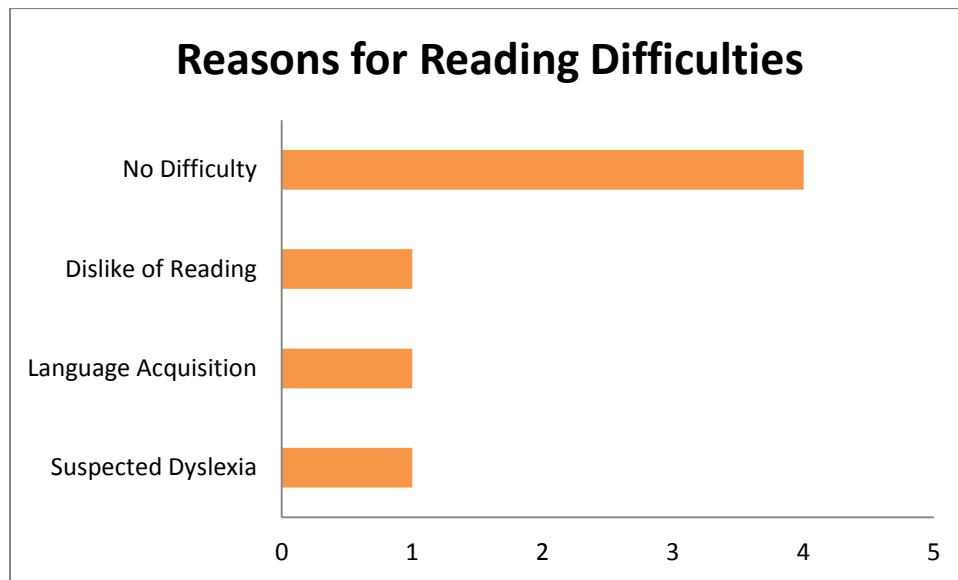


Figure 2. Reasons for reading difficulties – parents. This figure illustrates the parent's perceptions of the reasons their child had difficulty with reading.

Theme three: Parental support with reading.

- Homework (7/7)
 - Get them to do their homework, help them with their homework
 - I do not speak much English so I can't help them with their homework.
 - Tell them to do their homework
 - Tell him to... do his homework
 - I help her with her homework
 - I make sure that he does his homework
- Reading at home (3/7)
 - Listen to them read

- I tell them to read
- Tell him to read
- Interface with the school (2/7)
 - Tell them to... listen to the teacher
 - Talk to the teacher
- Access to books (2/7)
 - I buy books and take her to the library
 - I buy books, but he doesn't like to read them.
- Additional help (3/7)
 - I have talked to the school about testing
 - I talk to the teacher about more help
 - A lady from the church works with him sometimes

Figure 3 provides a view of the frequency of responses from parents on the support they give their child with reading. N=7 parents

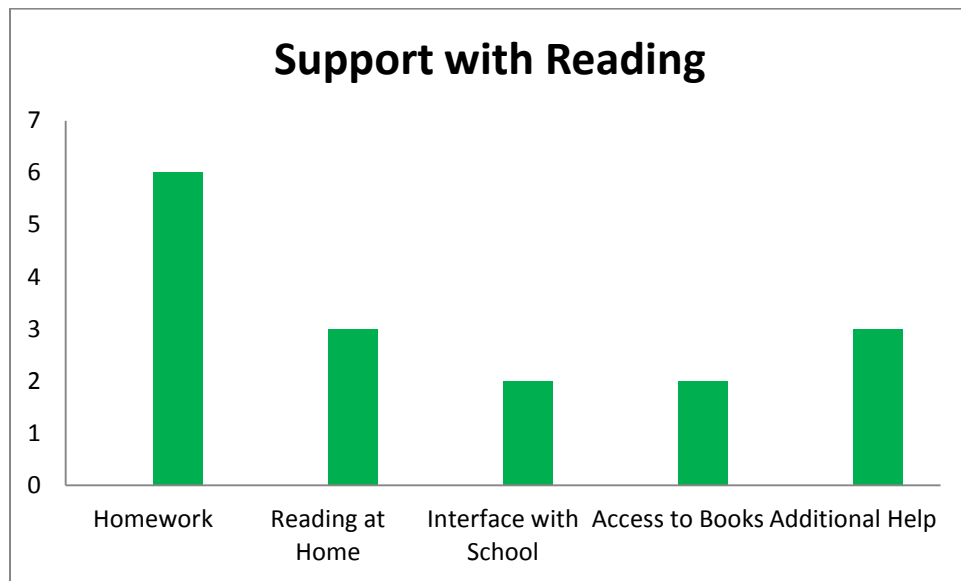


Figure 3. Support with reading – parents. This figure illustrates the ways in which the parents supported their students in reading.

Teacher Questionnaire Procedures

All of the teachers completed the questionnaire in hand-written form. The study was explained in a group and questions were answered. A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire explaining the purpose, procedures, confidentiality, risks and benefits of the study. The reading of the cover letter and completion of the survey provided implied consent by the subjects. An envelope addressed to the principal investigator was attached to the cover letter and questionnaire. Upon completion, the subjects sealed the questionnaire in the attached envelope and returned it to the front office of the school. The envelopes were then given to the principal investigator.

The questionnaire began with two demographic questions about the education and experience of the teacher:

1. How many years have you taught?
2. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

The teachers provided their best estimate of the percentage of their students that struggled in reading in answer to the next question:

1. What percentage of the students in your class have reading difficulties?

Table 4.4 below provides the percentage of struggling readers as reported by the teachers.

Table 4.4

Percentage of Struggling Readers - Teachers

Subjects	Percentage of Struggling Readers
T1	35%
T2	5 - 7%
T3	15%
T4	10%
T5	30%

Note: The average percentage of struggling readers = 19%.

The teachers then answered questions about their perceptions and practice regarding students with reading difficulties in their classes:

1. What type(s) of difficulties have they had?
2. Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
3. What programs are in place to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?

The first question was written to obtain information on the types of reading issues that the teachers worked with in their classrooms. The second question was designed to gain information on the teachers' perceptions of the reasons the students that they taught had difficulties with reading. The third question gave information about the variety of interventions and other means that the teachers used to assist students who struggled with reading.

The teachers' responses to the questions were compiled and commonalities and themes were determined from their responses. The following themes were common for each question:

Teacher Questionnaire Results

Theme One: Types of reading difficulties.

- Reading disabilities (2/5)
 - Dyslexia
 - Learning disabilities
- Lack of the foundational skills (5/5)
 - Phonemic awareness
 - Phonics
 - Comprehension
 - Fluency
 - Limited vocabulary
- Language barriers (1/5)
 - Students learning English as their second language

Figure 4 provides a view of the frequency of responses from teachers on the various types of difficulties that their class had in the area of reading. N=5 teachers

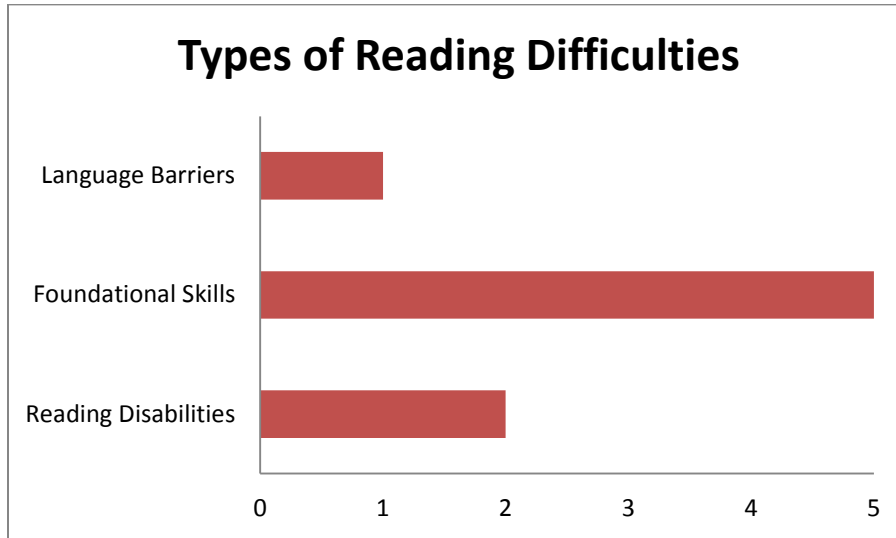


Figure 4. Types of reading difficulties – teachers. This figure illustrates the variety of reading difficulties found by the teachers in their classrooms.

Theme Two: Reasons for reading difficulties. In response to the second question – “Why do you think students have difficulties with reading?” – the teachers gave a variety of responses. The most common themes of these responses were:

- Reading disabilities (3/5)
 - Genetics
 - Students reading disabilities were not diagnosed
 - Delays in reading fluency
- Reading below grade level (2/5)
- Prior educational experiences (3/5)
 - No training in context clues, visualization, or phonics
 - Lack of prior interventions
 - Lack of background knowledge
- Personal factors (3/5)

- Little exposure to regular reading habits at home
- Does not like to read
- Lack of motivation
- Language/cultural barriers
- Learning English as a second language
- New to the country

Figure 5 below provides a view of the frequency of responses from teachers on their perceptions of the reasons for the difficulties in reading for the children in their class. N=5 teachers

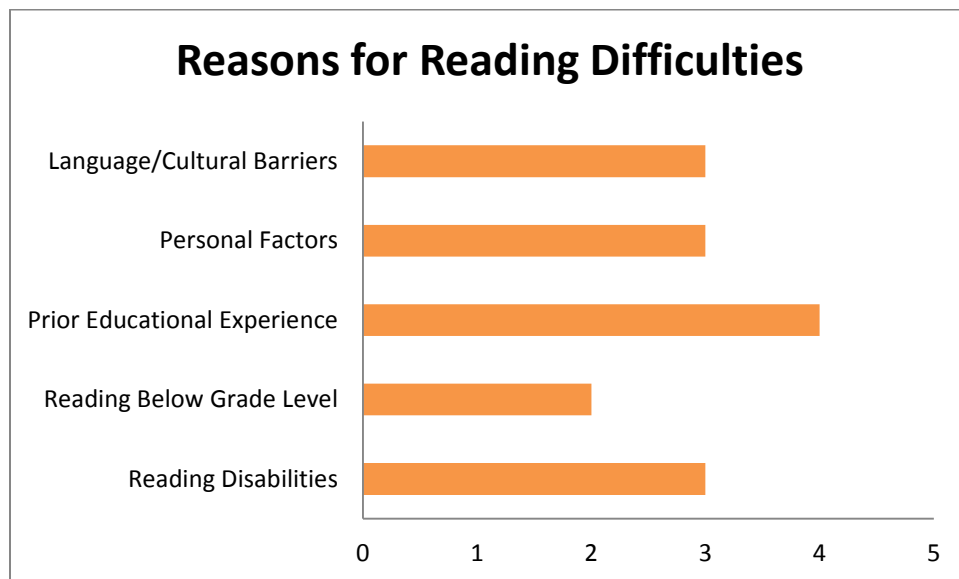


Figure 5. Reasons for reading difficulties – teachers. This figure illustrates the reasons for reading difficulties perceived by the teachers.

Theme Three: Support for students with reading difficulties. In response to the third question, “What do you do to help the children in your class improve their

reading ability?” the teachers gave a variety of responses. The most common themes on programs and activities to support students with reading difficulties were:

- Individualized help 4/5
 - Reading level assessment three times per year
 - Student/teacher one on one
 - Weekly checks for fluency and comprehension
 - Pull out program
- Extended day instruction 1/5
 - After school tutorials
- Grouping strategies 5/5
 - Group students by reading level to work with teacher
 - Partner reading
 - Small group instruction within the classroom
 - Peer tutoring
- Activities 5/5
 - Vocabulary strategies
 - Context strategies
 - Online activities
- Daily reading 5/5
 - Choral reading in small groups
 - Student read aloud to teacher
 - Teacher read aloud to student
 - Daily silent reading from student selected materials

Figure 6 provides a view of the frequency of responses from teachers on the support they give the children in their classrooms with reading difficulties. N=5 teachers

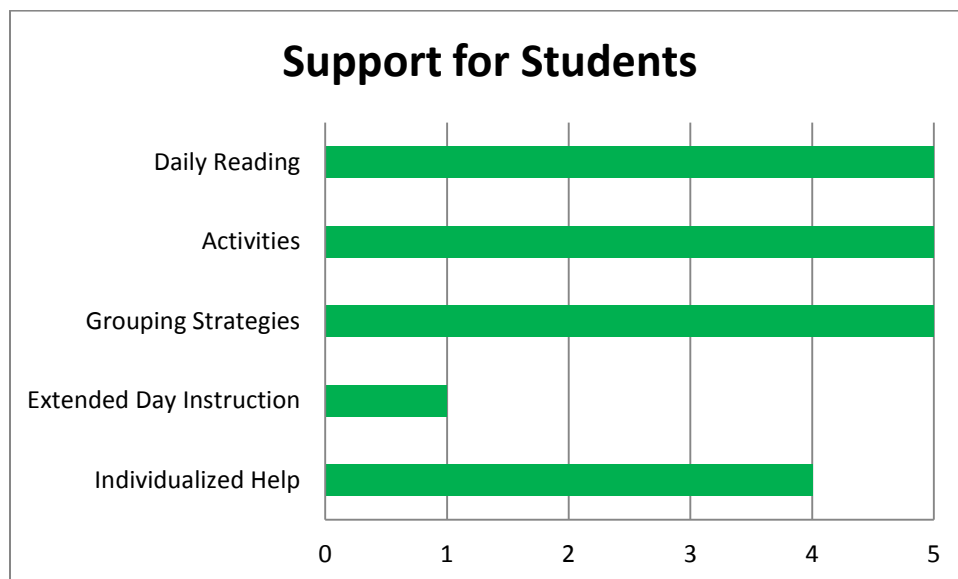


Figure 6. Support with reading – teachers. This figure illustrates the variety of support given by teachers and other individuals in the school and classroom setting.

Principal Questionnaire Procedures

All of the principals preferred to complete the questionnaire via email. The study was first explained over the telephone, and the consent was emailed, signed, scanned and returned through the email. Then, the questionnaire was emailed to each principal and was returned through the same source.

The questionnaire began with the following two demographic questions related to the education and experience of the principal:

1. How many years have you been a principal?
2. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

The principals gave their best estimate of the percentage of students on their campus that struggled in reading in answer to the next/following question:

1. What percentage of the students in your school have reading difficulties?

The following table provides a summary of the percentage of students with reading difficulties in each school:

Table 4.5

Percentage of Struggling Readers - Principals

Subjects	Percentage of Struggling Readers
P1	15 - 20%
P2	5 - 10%
P3	40%
P4	20%
P5	10%

Note: The average percentage of struggling readers = 19%.

Then the principals answered questions about their perceptions and practice regarding students with reading difficulties in their schools:

1. Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
2. What programs are in place to help the children in your school improve their reading ability?

The first question was designed to gain information on the principals' perceptions of the reasons the students in their schools had difficulties with reading. The second question gave information about the variety of interventions and other means that each school used to assist students who struggled with reading.

The principals' responses to the questions were compiled and commonalities and themes were determined from their responses. The following themes were common for each question:

Principal Questionnaire Results

Theme One: Reasons for reading difficulties. In response to the first question – “Why do you think students have difficulties with reading?” – the principals gave a variety of responses. The most common themes of these responses were:

- Reading disabilities: 3/5
 - Students with impairment such as dyslexia
 - Students who have developmental delays or are slow learners
- Lack of preparation for school: 5/5
 - Lack of background knowledge
 - Lack of resources and support at home
 - Lack of literacy exposure in the home
 - Lack of reading experiences prior to coming to school
- Instructional factors: 4/5
 - Inadequate educational materials or programs
 - Ineffective teachers, especially in the primary grades
 - Lack of appropriate teacher training
- Language barriers: 2/5
 - Students learning English as their second language

Figure 7 below provides a view of the frequency of responses from principals on their perceptions of the reasons for the difficulties in reading for the children in their school. N=5 principals

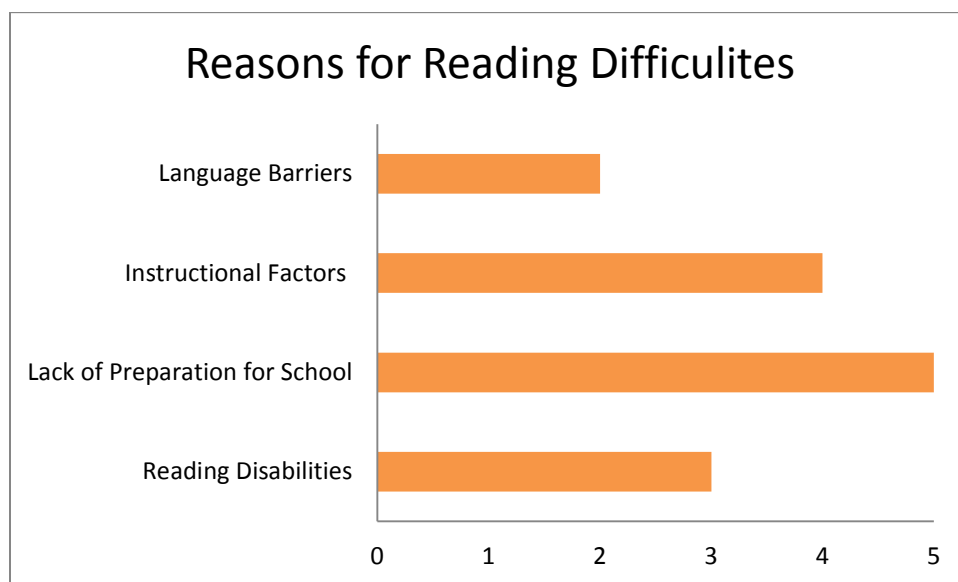


Figure 7. Reasons for reading difficulties – principals. This figure illustrates the reasons noted by the principals for reading difficulties of students in their schools.

Theme Two: Programs to support students with reading difficulties. In response to the second question – “What programs are in place to help the children in your school improve their reading ability?” – the principals gave a variety of responses. The most common themes on programs to support students with reading difficulties were:

- Specialized instruction 4/5
 - Small group pull out for dyslexia
 - Small group pull out programs for tier 3 students
- In-class interventions and programs 5/5
 - Computer programs
 - Small group work within the class

- Guided reading programs
- School-wide literacy programs
- Extended day instruction 2/5
 - After school tutorials
- Teacher training and resources 4/5
 - Teacher training through Neuhaus
 - Increased resources in primary classrooms

Figure 8 provides a view of the frequency of responses from principals on the support provided to the children in their schools who have reading difficulties.

N=5 principals

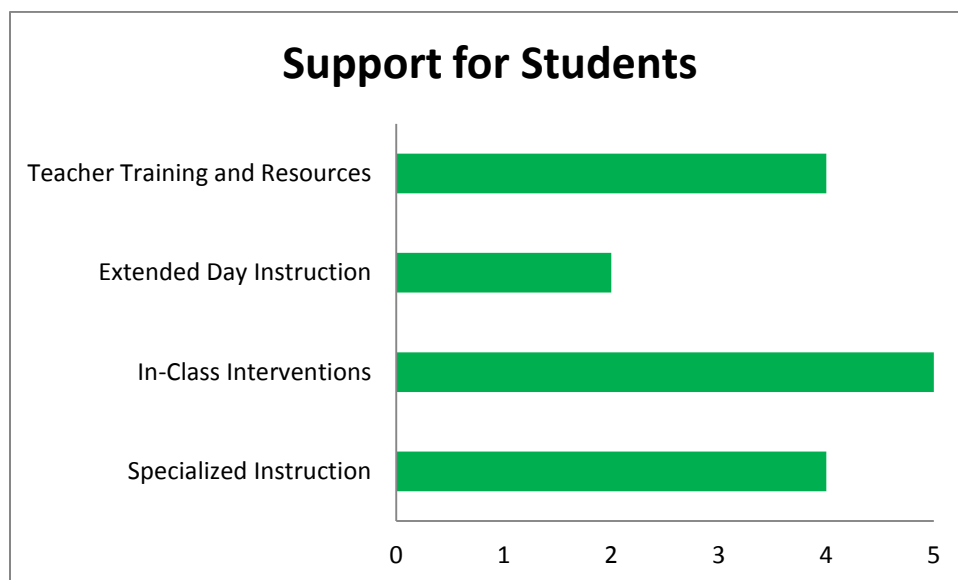


Figure 8. Support with reading – principals. This figure illustrates the support cited by the principals that was given to the students with reading difficulties in their schools.

Additional Principal Question Responses

The principals were given an additional question on how they obtained and used input from teachers and parents to create their plans for school improvement. Answers were obtained from four of the five principals for this question. All of the principals said that they considered information from these two groups; however, they did differ in how the information was obtained and the extent to which it was used.

1. How do you use information from teachers and parents in the school improvement planning process?

All of the principals responded that they did make use of information from teachers and parents in school improvement planning; yet, they did so to various degrees. Three of the four principals who responded to this question set up specific separate meetings with these two groups to obtain data to use in making plans for the upcoming school year. One of the principals (P5) stated that, “Feedback from teachers and parents is vital.” The fourth principal responded that he/she gave more weight to the input from the teachers. Another principal (P3) stated, “Since the actions and strategies are directly related to the teachers, they have the most feedback on that aspect.” Information was gathered from only the two parents on the SDMC by this principal and then the leadership team created the plan and it was given to the SDMC for approval. The plan was then shared with the teachers and parents in a PTO meeting. The other three principals (P1, P2, and P5) also followed the same process with more information gathering from the stakeholders prior to formulation of the school improvement plan.

The principals’ responses to the questions were compiled and commonalities and themes were determined from their responses. It should be noted that the question asked

of the principals was open ended. Although the response level for many of the themes (1/5) appears low, a checklist of themes may have produced a larger response for each item. The open ended format was used for exploratory purposes. The following themes were common for the question:

Theme one: Methods of gathering information from teachers and parents.

- Teacher committee meetings 1/5
- Primary Learning Community (PLC) meetings 1/5
- Shared Decision Making Committee (SDMC) meetings 5/5
- Grade Chair meetings 1/5
- Vertical Team Meetings 1/5
- Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) Board meetings 1/5
- Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings 2/5
- PTO general meetings 1/5
- Informal meetings with teachers or groups of teachers 2/5

Figure 9 below provides a view of the frequency of responses given by principals regarding the methods they use to gain information from teachers and parents for use in school improvement planning. N=5 principals

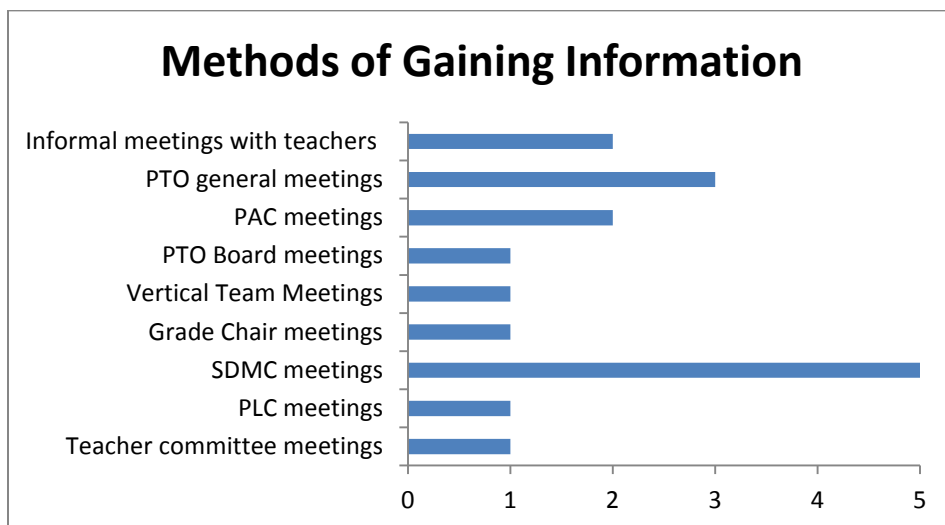


Figure 9. Methods of gaining support. This figure illustrates the methods used by principals to gain information from teachers and parents for use in school improvement planning.

Theme two: Types of information obtained from the teachers and parents.

- Input and analysis of school improvement needs 1/5
- Review of School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals from previous year 1/5
- Analysis of student achievement data for special populations to plan goals for SIP 1/5
- SIP Goals 2/5
- Action steps for SIP 4/5
- Handbook details 1/5
- Guidelines 1/5
- Professional development needs 2/5
- Materials and resources 1/5

- Parent education needs 1/5

Figure 10 provides a view of the frequency of responses of principals on the types of information they gain from teachers and parents for use in school improvement planning. N=5 principals

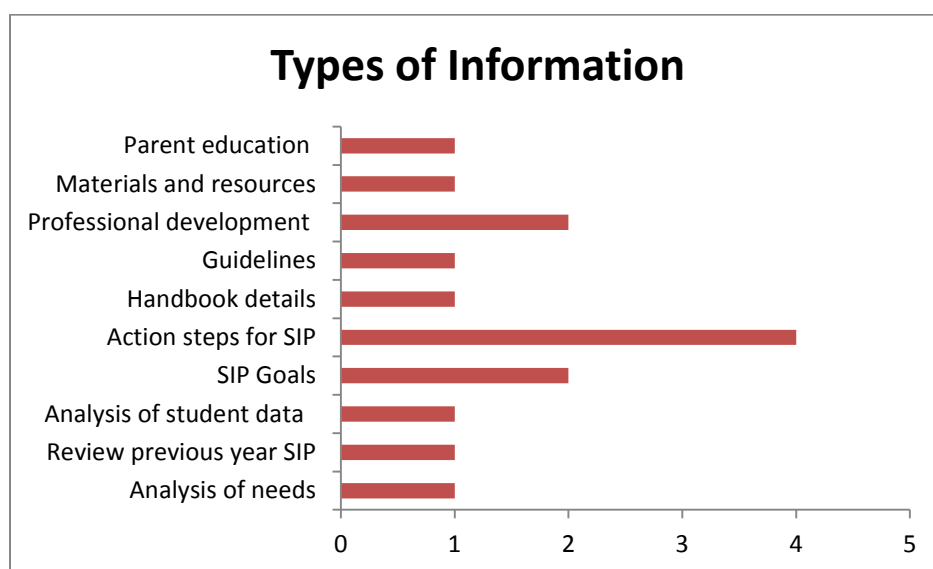


Figure 10. Types of information. This figure illustrates the types of information gathered by principals from teachers and parents for use in school improvement planning.

Results of Final Question

The subjects in all three groups were given the same final question on their respective questionnaires. The last question was written to gain their perception of who had the greatest influence on the academic success of children (or their own child in the case of the parents). Although the answers given by the participants in the three groups differed somewhat, three themes were apparent in the responses given. The first theme was present only in the responses from the parents; however the remaining two themes were present in the responses of all three subject groups.

Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

Theme one: The school 2/17

- The school

Theme two: The teacher 8/14

- Their teacher
- Quality teaching. Teachers have the biggest impact of student learning. Teachers and school leaders have the ability to remove the learning barriers for students when they are at their school—which is most of the waking day.
- Intelligent; driven; selfless; effective teacher in the classroom
- Primary teachers

Theme three: Shared influence 8/14

- An effective teacher that works with the parents to help the child – Team work.
- At-risk characteristics can be overcome by good teaching and effective school leadership.
- 1) Parents 2) Teachers
- The greatest influence on a child's academic success starts with a child's parents. They are their lifelong teacher. The second greatest influence is the school teacher. If he/she genuinely shows her students that she cares and is willing to do whatever it takes to help the student succeed, the student will respond in a positive way and therefore can be successful in learning.

- It takes both teachers and parents
- Teacher (however, I think reading success is based equally on parent and teacher. Reading must be implemented at home.) –parenthesis added by the subject
- I (the parent) share the responsibility with her teachers
- I need to make sure that he does his school work, but his teacher needs to make sure that he knows what he needs to know.

The following table provides the percentage of responses in each theme:

Table 4.6

Percentage of Responses by Theme Perception of Influence on Academic Achievement

Theme	% of Responses
Theme One: The School	11.0%
Theme Two: The Teacher	44.5%
Theme Three: Shared Influence	44.5%
TOTAL	100%

Figure 11 below provides a view of the percentages of the responses given by the parents, teachers, and principals on who has the greatest influence on the academic achievement of children.

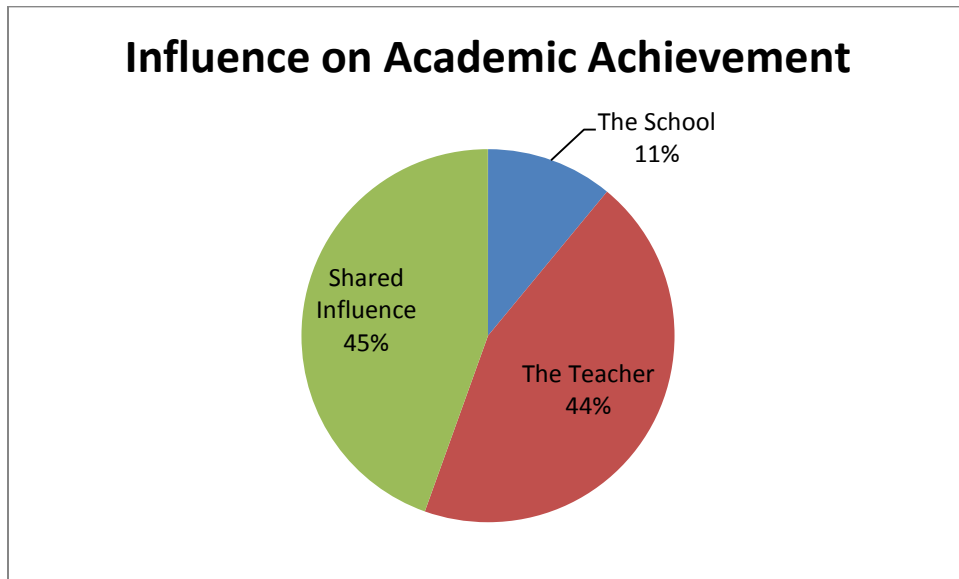


Figure 11. Influence on academic achievement. This figure illustrates the combined perception of parents, teachers, and principals on who had the most influence on the academic achievement of children.

Synthesis of Data

The responses of the parents, teachers, and principals on the questions related to students with reading difficulties were analyzed in their respective subject groups. The data was also analyzed across groups for those questions (i.e. types of reading difficulties, reasons for reading difficulties, and support for children with reading difficulties) to look for common themes among the groups. Only the parents and teachers were asked to give their perceptions of the types of reading difficulties.

- Parents - If so (if their child had difficulty with reading), what types of difficulties have they had?
- Teachers - What type(s) of difficulties have they had?

The only common theme that emerged between the two groups was that of foundational skills.

- Comprehension
- Limited vocabulary
- Phonics skills

The other areas noted by the teachers (i.e. reading disabilities and language barriers) were not listed by the parents as types of reading difficulties, but as reasons for their child's below grade level performance in reading.

All three groups of subjects were asked a question pertaining to their perceptions of the reasons for reading disabilities.

- Parents – Why do you think your child has had these difficulties with reading?
- Teachers – Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?
- Principals - Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading?

The responses of the parents, teachers, and principals all contained reasons along the following themes:

- Reading disabilities
- Personal factors
- Language/cultural barriers

The teachers and the principals agreed that factors in the students prior educational experiences were contributors to the difficulties students experienced in the area of reading.

The final question pertaining to reading difficulties was asked of all three subject groups.

- Parents - What do you do to help your child improve their reading ability?
- Teachers - What programs are in place to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?
- Principals - What programs are in place to help the children in your school improve their reading ability?

The responses from the parents did not correspond to the responses of the other two groups as they related to the home setting. The principals and teachers did have an overlap in their answers to the question, as the support given to the children in both cases was in the school setting in the following areas:

- In-class interventions and programs
- Specialized instruction
- Extended day instruction

The next chapter, Chapter 5, includes the overview of the study, discussion of the results, implications for school principals, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The achievement gap between students of high and low economic standing is a huge problem facing America today. Students who meet the criteria for economically disadvantaged and have a history of reading difficulty are at a distinct disadvantage, particularly when compared to their more advantaged peers. Of the fourth grade students who participated in the NAEP in reading, 55 percent of students from families who were middle or upper income scored below proficient level, while the scores of 83 percent of students from low income families fell in the below proficient range (Annie E. Casey, 2010). This 23 percentage point difference may work against these students, especially when considering the finding that third grade reading level is a predictor of both graduation and college attendance (Lesnick et al., 2010).

School leaders must use all of the resources at their disposal to plan for school improvement that will work for their campus and their students to lessen the impact of these economic factors. Two of the resources for information are the people who know the students the best – namely, the parents and the teachers. The perceptions of these stakeholders, coupled with those of the principal, can be powerful tools and avenues for school improvement planning. Goddard et al. (2010) found that one standard deviation of shared leadership was associated with .73 standard deviation increase in teacher collaboration. Furthermore, high levels of teacher collaboration as a goal and practice has been shown to foster increased student achievement (Reeves, 2003).

Parental involvement in appropriate aspects of school planning is also an effective tool for student achievement. According to Epstein (1995), “The main reason to create

such (school/family) partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life” (p. 701). One of Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement was that of including parents in decision making. Through this type of involvement, students gained awareness that their rights were being safeguarded by their families, parents gained a sense of ownership within the school, and teachers developed an awareness of the perspectives of the parents (Epstein, 1995). Schools where the principal and teachers were more open in their interactions with parents, and where open lines of communication created more of a collaborative association between the parents and the teachers, led to more positive perceptions by the parents (Griffith, 2000).

This chapter will include an overview of the study, a discussion of the data and current literature on this topic, implications for school leaders and implications for further study.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the perspectives of principals, teachers and parents on improving reading achievement for students in public schools. The intent of the study was to analyze the effect of these perspectives on the school improvement decision-making on the part of the principal. In this study, principals, teachers, and parents were given questionnaires to complete independently and anonymously. Their responses were analyzed in order to identify themes in their perspectives on students with reading difficulties. The principals were also asked to describe how they gain and use input from teachers and parents in their school improvement planning.

The three research questions explored in this study were:

1. What role do parents have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
2. What role do teachers have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?
3. What role do principals have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged?

Discussion of Results

What role do parents have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged? The subjects in the parent group of this study all had children who qualified as economically disadvantaged based on their application for the free and reduced lunch program. The educational level reported by the parents ranged from some college (42.8%) to the completion of tenth grade (14%). Payne (2003) found that children of parents with less education scored lower on standardized tests than children of parents with higher educational attainment. This lack of education and possible previous personal experience with school may have led to a decrease in understanding by the parents in their child's actual academic abilities. These factors could also contribute to a limited ability by the parents to help their child improve academically.

One interesting finding in the data was the percentage of parents (57%) who did not perceive that their child had any difficulty with reading. This was interesting in light of the fact that one of the criteria for choosing the parents for the study was the low rate of performance their child exhibited on the TPRI, Stanford 10, and/or TAKS. Although all of the parents reported that they helped with their child's education in some way, the

help was not based on perceived additional need by over half of the parents. If the parents did not perceive that their child had a deficit with reading or that they were reading below grade level (based on their total reading percentile on the Stanford 10) the parents did not understand their child's needed for specific additional support to make up the deficit.

Hernandez (2011) found that children who did not read on grade level by the end of third grade dropped out of high school at a rate four times that of their on-grade-level peers. When parents of fourth and fifth grade students, such as those who took part in the study, do not understand or acknowledge that their child has a reading deficit, they may not give them the support that they would if the deficit was known and understood. Although the teachers and other school personnel can and do work with these children, discussions about school between a parent and their child is the best predictor of student achievement of all parent involvement activities (Desimone, 1999).

The three parents who did report that their child had below level reading performance cited different reasons. Although the sample was very small, the reasons that they reported corresponded to the difficulties that were seen in the school by both the teachers and the principals. One of the parents in the study believed that their child might have dyslexia. Another felt that their child demonstrated a reading deficit due to their difficulty with English language acquisition. The third parent perceived that their child's below grade level reading ability was due to the child's general dislike of reading.

Parents who participated in the study each reported involvement in their child's education in various ways. Research has shown that children whose parents were involved in their education showed greater academic gains than children of uninvolved

parents. This involvement included taking their child to the library, helping with homework, and portraying a positive attitude about the school and education to their children (Luchuck, 1998). By their own report, the parents in this study participated in many of the listed activities with 29% of the parents reporting that they took their child to the library or bought their children books. Help with homework or attention to homework was reported by an even larger percentage of the parents (71%). By talking to their children about reading and completing their homework and reminding them to listen to the teacher, the parents showed their interest in their child's education and the importance of school. Through these activities and others (i.e., meeting with the teacher, asking for additional testing, and obtaining outside help) the parents in this study did things within the scope of their knowledge and resources to improve the academic achievement of their children.

What role do teachers have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged? Haycock (2001) cited teacher quality as having a profound effect on student academic achievement. Teacher quality in terms of certification and experience, as well as other factors, has been found to have a profound effect on student performance. As required by the district, each of the teachers who completed questionnaires for this study were certified for the area in which they taught. Although disadvantaged students are often taught by the least experienced teachers, this was not the case in the sample used for this study (Haycock, 2003). The teachers reported that they had been in the classroom from four to 30 years (with an average number of 12.4 years taught). Teaching experience is only one component discussed in the research of teacher effectiveness; however, experienced teachers do have an increased

knowledge base on which to draw to work with all students and especially those with academic deficits.

As previously noted, over half (four out of seven) of the parents did not believe that their child had any difficulty with reading, even though they had been asked to participate due to below grade level performance on the Stanford 10 and TPRI, or TAKS reading. They were also asked about their own specific child. The teachers were able to generalize to their classroom, based on observation, data, and training to ascertain reading difficulties among their students.

The teachers who participated in the study reported the use of many strategies and grouping techniques to support their students who were below grade level in reading. A majority of the teachers cited individualized help, grouping strategies, daily reading, and various activities as the means they used to support their struggling readers. Slaven et al. (2009) found small group instruction to improve reading abilities – with one on one, focused instruction having the most impact. It should also be noted that these strategies were widely used by the teachers in the study. Although the teachers did not always deliver the individualized instruction themselves (i.e., pull out programs and small group tutorials), they did assess their students and use data to recommend them for these programs. The data used for these decisions was a combination of the scores on standardized assessments (TAKS and Stanford 10) and less formal, in-class assessments (i.e., periodic reading level assessments and weekly fluency and comprehension checks). The teachers used these strategies and grouping techniques to improve the academic achievement of all of their students, including those who were economically disadvantaged and struggling in reading.

What role do principals have in improving reading achievement of students who are economically disadvantaged? In their study of organizational management tasks and student achievement, Horng et al. (2009) found that the organizational management task most highly correlated with an increase in achievement was hiring personnel. The principals who participated in this study listed many programs in use on their campuses to support their struggling readers. Many of the principals cited literacy programs used throughout their schools such as guided reading and pull out programs with dyslexia or reading specialists to give additional support. The majority of these programs were dependent upon a classroom teacher or other professional to deliver services to students. Therefore, the programs put in place by the principals to increase the achievement of their struggling readers could only have an impact on these students with the hiring of highly effective teachers. Teacher quality was reported to have a cumulative effect on student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Haycock, 2003).

In order for the principals to plan school wide initiatives to help struggling students (e.g., guided reading, school-wide literacy programs, and pull out programs for dyslexia), school leaders need to have an understanding of the issues that are causing students to read below grade level. The similarity of the responses between the principals and the teachers who worked with the students on a daily basis demonstrates this understanding of the needs of the students on their campus. Both the principals and teachers stated the lack of foundational skills and reading disabilities as reasons for the students in their care to read below grade level. These programs, coupled with teacher training and increased resources, are parts of an overall campus plan designed to move every child toward success.

The district in which this study was conducted maintained a decentralized formula for funding. Each principal in the study noted programs that required funding outside of the general classroom. The funding of specialists for pull-out programs and additional teacher pay for after school tutorials required the principals to prioritize the achievement of struggling students. Principals in high-achieving schools maintain an intense focus on high levels of academic achievement for all of the students in the school (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990). Using funding in this way has been found to increase levels of student achievement (Haycock, 2001).

Planning for school improvement requires that principals obtain information from various sources. Furthermore, principals must understand the needs of their schools and work strategically and collaboratively with their faculties to create a vision of the desired outcome. They must also understand the barriers to the attaining the vision and effecting the change for their students (Trail, 2000). Information gained from teachers is an integral part of this process. The principals participating in this study used various means to collaborate with their instructional staff. By grouping the teachers in different ways (i.e., SDMC, grade chairs, vertical teams, PLCs, and committees), the principals were able to gain insight and consensus on goals that would move the campus forward. In working with the teachers, the principals analyze student data, review past goals, create action steps, and plan for necessary materials and professional development for the coming school year. Information gained in these groups provided the principals with a platform to plan for school improvement.

The principals in the study responded that they requested and received much less input from the parents of their students. The group of parents giving information was

primarily restricted to the small number who served on the SDMC or PAC or those that made comments during PTO meetings. Even with this limited number of participants in the process, the principals did use information gained in these forums to add to the data for school improvement planning and future parent education programs. Parents participating in these programs would, in turn, be more active partners in their children's education and further the goals of the school to increase achievement for all students.

Principals, as leaders on their campus, must work collaboratively with others and take advantage of their strengths in order to improve the learning environment for their students. Through this collaboration, the use of data, gaining understanding the needs of their population, and comprehending the barriers involved in achieving their goals, the principals in the study were able to lead campuses that supported all of their students, including those who were economically disadvantaged, to achieve higher levels of academic achievement.

Conclusion

Under NCLB schools are rated based on the academic performance of their students. Funding under Title I can be affected by these ratings if schools do not meet minimum levels on state tests. Performance is also rated for subgroups by racial membership and low socioeconomic status (Lee & Wong, 2004). For this reason, more emphasis has been placed on achievement of all students than at any other time in the history of public education in America.

Douglas Reeves stated the following: "Leaders are the architects of individual and organizational improvements" (2006, p. 27). The responsibility for school improvement is that of school principals. Two variables identified in a meta-analysis by Waters et al.

(2003) that were determining factors of a positive or negative correlation with student achievement were correctly identifying the focus on improvement and understanding the proximity that the change had to the existing norms and values within a school. By working with the teachers and, to a lesser extent, the parents, principals can identify the direction for school improvement goals and gauge the need for change to support the move toward these goals.

The principals, teachers, and parents who participated in this study responded that the school, teachers and a combination of both teachers and parents had the greatest influence on student achievement. Principals, therefore, must collaborate with both teachers and parents to ensure that every student within their school is given the support necessary to demonstrate this academic achievement.

Implications for School Leadership

School leaders must understand that student achievement is dependent upon a gaining information and support from all stakeholders. Principals must develop methods to gain this information and support. Goddard et al. found that one standard deviation in teacher collaboration was associated with a .24 standard deviation increase in mathematics scores and a .19 standard deviation increase in reading scores (2010). Through creating schedules and other opportunities for teachers to collaborate, principals foster opportunities to expand each teacher's knowledge and expertise and ensure that high yield practices are not contained within pockets within the school, but permeate school culture.

The involvement of teachers in school leadership is imperative to building this school culture for excellence. Principals that facilitated conversations around learning,

insisted on a focus on student learning, supported leadership in others, and modeled collaborative practice exhibited behaviors that supported shared leadership and (through them) promoted an increase in student achievement (Lambert, 2002). Principals must foster opportunities for teacher leaders to take part in the shaping of programs within the school. Information gained from student data is one piece of the achievement puzzle, but insight from teachers allows principals to look beyond the numbers to see the individual children so that their needs can be met.

Visibility of the principal is a critical part of educational leadership. This cannot be restricted to walking the hallways and being in the cafeteria to ensure discipline. Rather, it behooves principals to be present in classrooms in order to understand the teaching and learning occurring in their buildings. To know the needs of their students and the abilities of their teachers, principals must involve themselves in the classrooms on a regular basis. Only through this involvement, can school leaders understand, lead and inspire the work that needs to be done.

The involvement of parents, especially those from economically disadvantaged household, in the life of the school is often difficult but important. Principals need to find ways to include the parents in their child's education. Depending on the school, this could take the traditional form of committees and volunteer opportunities. As is often the case with lower income areas, the parents may need educational opportunities themselves to be able to partner with the school in their child's achievement. Principals must understand that these opportunities need to take a form that fits the community. Rather than wait for the parents to come to the school directly, programs may have to be geared toward the parents themselves in order to be effective and gain the greatest involvement.

When parents feel that their ideas are listened to and validated, they are more apt to listen to and work with the school to advance their child's education.

In order for to include input from teachers and parents in the plan for improvement of the school, principals must create venues where information can be shared. Sustainable school improvement can only exist through a clear vision and shared leadership. Creating partnerships between parents, teachers and administrators is the path to student achievement that can continue beyond the tenure of a specific administrator.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study have provided many areas for further study. One such area is the relationship between the understanding parents have regarding their child's true academic abilities, as well as their ability to support them academically and advocate for them in the school system. In this study, over half of the parents did not view their child as having any difficulties with reading; yet, their child's (below-level) reading performance had been one of the criteria for their invitation to participate. In order to achieve these novel pathways, a wider sample of parents would need to be obtained. Data collection in the form of interviews with trained interviewers would remove the question of the brief or unresponsive answers given by parents being a factor of their inability to complete the questionnaire or their actual belief in the answer given. Another aspect of this research would be the examination of the success of various methods used to educate parents on the specific academic abilities of their child and ways to support them in the home environment.

Another potential topic for further research is examining more closely the role that teachers play in the development of school improvement plans in terms of not only

increased student achievement, but sustainability of programs. The principals in this study reported a range of teacher involvement in the planning process from teachers as an integral and active part to the majority of the future goals setting and planning as a function of the leadership team with the teachers being given much more of a peripheral role. A survey of principals and teachers on several campuses would need to be conducted to gain data on the level of involvement (or perceived level of involvement) of the teachers in the planning process. Data related to students' academic achievement and the sustainability of programs would need to be studied over time to measure the success of the various levels of teacher integration into the improvement planning process.

Finally, an additional area of further study is that of examining the methods used by principals to understand the actual needs of their students – that is, other than through assessment data and the effectiveness of each method in predicting needed academic support, creating support systems and maximizing their use. The principals in the study had answers that correlated very closely with the teachers when asked what the reasons were for the reading difficulties on their campus. Principals new to the position enter their schools with data on standardized testing; however, they may not have the tools necessary to progress beyond the numbers. Gaining insight into the methods employed by effective principals in this area would give new principals a vantage point from which to dig deeply so that they can create programs to meet the specific needs of their campus, not just a generic blueprint for change.

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APPENDIX A: PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Identification Number _____

IMPLICATION OF DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ON SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
Teacher Questionnaire

- 1) How many years have you taught? _____
- 2) What is the highest level of education that you have completed? _____
- 3) What percentage of the students in your class have reading difficulties? _____
- 4) What type(s) of difficulties have they had? _____

- 5) Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading? _____

- 6) What do you do to help the children in your class improve their reading ability?

- 7) Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

APPENDIX C: PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Identification Number _____

IMPLICATION OF DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
Principal Questionnaire

- 1) How many years have you been a principal? _____
- 2) What is the highest level of education that you have completed? _____
- 3) What percentage of the students in your school have reading difficulties? _____
- 4) Why do you think your students have these difficulties with reading? _____

- 5) What programs are in place to help the children in your class improve their reading ability? _____

- 6) How do you use information from teachers and parents in the school improvement planning process? _____

- 7) Who do you feel has the greatest influence on a child's academic success?

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: IMPLICATION OF DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Deborah L. Russell from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D Program at the University of Houston. This research is a part of a dissertation is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Angus MacNeil.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to discover how the perspectives of principals, teachers, and parents impact decision-making for school improvement planning. This study will include interviews of five principals, five teachers, and ten parents. The questionnaires will be distributed during a one month period of time. The approximate time needed to complete the questionnaire by the participant will be 30 minutes.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 20 subjects asked to participate in this project. The questionnaire will be given to you to complete on a day and time that is convenient to your schedule. Completion of the questionnaire should not take more than 30 minutes of your time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There should not be any foreseeable risks, discomforts or inconveniences during this study.

BENEFITS

By answering these questions about your perspectives and practices in improving reading achievement, you may have an opportunity to reflect on your current practice.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

CIRCUMSTANCES FOR DISMISSAL FROM PROJECT

Your participation in this project may be terminated by the principal investigator

- if you do not complete the questionnaire;
- if you do not follow the instructions you are given;
- if the principal investigator determines that staying in the project is harmful to your health or is not in your best interest;
- if the study sponsor decides to stop or cancel the project

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Deborah L. Russell at (832) 746-4109. I may also contact Dr. Angus MacNeil, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-3902.
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study

that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and Dr. MacNeil. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E: ANONYMOUS CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: IMPLICATION OF DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ON SCHOOL IMPORVEMENT PLANNING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Deborah Russell from the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Houston. This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Angus MacNeal.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the perspectives on improving reading achievement from principals, teachers and parents in public schools affect the school improvement decision-making on the part of the principal. In this study parents, teachers, and principals are being asked to complete questionnaires. The responses will be analyzed to look for themes in the perspectives of the three groups on students with reading difficulties. The study will be conducted over a 30 day time period.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 20 subjects to be asked to participate in this project. Each subject will be asked to complete a questionnaire with demographic information and information about the reading difficulties and help provided to the children in their care. Questionnaires will be completed by subjects at their chosen location and will be returned to the school in a sealed envelope to the front desk. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this project is anonymous. Please do not write your name on any of the research materials to be returned to the principal investigator.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks involved with participation in this study.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand the use of information gained from principals, teachers and parents in the school improvement planning process for students with reading difficulties.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

If you have any questions, you may contact Deborah Russell at 713-917-3600. You may also contact Dr. Angus MacNeal, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-3902.

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204).

Principal Investigator's Name: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

August 22, 2012

Deborah Russell
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Educational Leadership & Cultural Studies

Dear Deborah Russell,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Implication of Differences in Academic Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students on School Improvement Planning for Educational Leaders" was conducted on July 5, 2012.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 2** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Nettie Martinez at 713-743-9204.

Sincerely yours,



Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **May 1, 2017**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 12491-EX

APPENDIX G: DISTRICT APPROVAL LETTER



HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

HATTIE MAE WHITE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT CENTER
4400 WEST 18th STREET • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77092-8501

TERRY B. GRIER, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

www.houstonisd.org
[www.twitter.com/HoustonISD](https://twitter.com/HoustonISD)

Carla J. Stevens
*Assistant Superintendent
Research and Accountability Department*
Tel: 713-556-6700 • Fax: 713-556-6730

August 14, 2012

Ms. Deborah Russell
14102 Locke Lane
Humble, Texas 77077

Dear Ms. Russell:

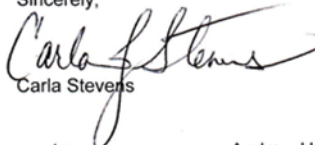
The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is pleased to approve the study "Impact of Differences in Academic Achievement of Economically Disadvantaged Students on School Improvement Planning for Educational Leaders." The research will explore how the perceptions of principals, teachers, and parents inform planning for school improvement. The study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of doctoral degree requirements at the University of Houston. The projected date of study completion is August 31, 2012.

Approval to conduct the study in HISD is contingent on your meeting the following conditions:

- The study will use surveys to capture perceptions of targeted participants at Briargrove Elementary School. The principal approves the research study.
- This study does not interfere with the District's instructional/testing program.
- The researcher must follow the guidelines of HISD and the University of Houston regarding the protection of human subjects and confidentiality of data.
- The HISD Department of Research and Accountability will monitor this study to ensure compliance to ethical conduct guidelines established by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) as well as the disclosure of student records outlined in Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- In order to eliminate potential risks to study participants, the reporting of proposed changes in research activities must be promptly submitted to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability for approval prior to implementing changes. Non compliance to this guideline could impact the approval of future research studies in HISD.
- The final report must be submitted to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability within 30 days of completion.

Any other changes or modifications to the current proposal must be submitted to the Department of Research and Accountability for approval. Should you need additional information or have any questions concerning the process, please call (713) 556-6700.

Sincerely,


Carla Stevens

CS: vh
cc: Michele Pola
Mark Smith

Arnold Viramontes
Rodney Watson

Andrew Houlihan
Eden Jones-Hines