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## An Applied Research on Promoting Proficiency in Fourth-Grade Reading

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AN APPLIED RESEARCH ON PROMOTING PROFICIENCY IN FOURTH-GRADE  
READING

A Dissertation  
presented in fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

DEIRDRE E. HUNTLEY

May 2021



## ABSTRACT

This applied research study was conducted to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading. There was a need for improvement in fourth-grade reading after receiving data from the school and state assessments. The study examined the implementation of specific reading and vocabulary strategies, student interventions, strengthening of teacher-student relationships, and encouraging student motivation to help students become proficient in understanding what the students were reading. Student diagnostic results and teacher interviews were utilized in this study. The findings revealed students were demonstrating advancement in reading comprehension. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school building was closed in March of 2020 which impacted this study.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, George. You have been my number one supporter. You have been by my side through my highs and lows of this accomplishment. I will forever love you for encouraging and pushing me beyond what I never imagined. To my children Corey and Tamera, I hope you realize what perseverance is by watching me achieve this milestone in my life. I hope I have set an example for you to follow and go beyond. To my family, friends, school family, and cohort members, you never once allowed me to give up when I was enduring challenging times and feeling weary. Your support will forever be remembered. I am very grateful and thankful to have people like you in my corner. Finally to my loving parents, I hope I have made you proud, and you are smiling down on me. I hold both of you dear and close to my heart. You were my number one teachers. Thank you for instilling in me the importance of continuing my education.

Thank you all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Bunch-Thank you for agreeing to serve as my dissertation chair. Your guidance, patience, honesty, and hard-work has brought out the best in me. Over the course of this journey, I have grown to appreciate your blue ink. To Dr. Cabrera-Davis, Dr. Cormack, and Dr. Taylor-Thank you for helping to guide me to the finish line with your time and dedication. Thank you for your commitment to seeing me succeed.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

This applied research study focused on promoting proficiency in fourth-grade reading. Kim, Samson, Fitzgerald, and Hartry (2010) mentioned there have been numerous national reading initiatives to help students learn to read proficiently before the fourth grade. While this may be true, reading remediation is continually needed for students in the fourth-grade and beyond. Students who are unable to develop the necessary reading skills in grades k-3, usually do not meet the minimum required reading skills in grades 4-6 thus slowing the acceleration of comprehension skills after fourth grade (Kim et al., 2010). Considerable efforts have been devoted to identifying research-based approaches to help students become better readers. In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) published a report concluding what helps students learn to read. The NRP (2000) conducted meta-analyses on the following components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The panel concluded when each of these components is systematically integrated into a reading program, students have a better chance of learning to read. In addition to the utilization of an effective reading program, other factors have contributed to a student's academic achievement in reading.

According to Liew, Chen, and Hughes (2010), once students begin receiving a formal education, teachers become a significant influence on student socialization outside of their home.

Student reading success involves teachers having a positive relationship with their students. Liew et al. (2010) stated, "Positive teacher-student relationships consisting of high warmth and low levels of conflict has been associated with students' positive academic beliefs, motivation, and performance" (p. 52). Without a nurturing learning environment set in place, students are unable to achieve their full potential for success in the classroom.

When I was a teacher, my classroom was a safe learning environment for my students. Consequently, they were able to learn to read without feeling embarrassed or feeling scared of not doing well. I remember sitting in our data meeting, looking at the results of my first-grade classroom beginning of the year reading universal screener. I saw only three out of 20 students had scored at or above grade level. Only 15 percent of my class was considered at or above grade level according to the universal screener. It was going to be a challenge to have my students on grade level in less than 180 days. I wanted their reading skills to improve, so I took the time to get to know them. I believed my students could be successful. They, in turn, believed in themselves.

My students were rewarded for their achievements and their growth in reading. We celebrated small and large victories. The students graphed their assessment results and universal screener scores in data folders throughout the school year. This was done to help keep track of how the students were doing in reading. I held individual teacher-student conferences where we discussed the results of the assessments, the reasons for the results, and a plan to move forward to achieve their goals.

I believed building a positive relationship with my students helped to increase their success in reading. At the end of the school year, my classroom data resulted in 14 out of 20 students scoring at or above grade level on their reading universal screener. These results

showed a 55 percent increase from the beginning of the year. Mason, Hajovsky, McCune, and Turek (2017) found having a supportive teacher-student relationship helped to build and sustain positive academic and behavior outcomes. My students took ownership of their learning. After our data talks, the students worked hard to meet their goals for the next assessment. The students were eager to learn more and enjoyed seeing the progress they were making.

Hughes and Kwok (2007) stated, “Students who enjoy a close and supportive relationship with a teacher are more engaged in that they work harder in the classroom, persevere in the face of difficulties, accept teacher direction and criticism, cope better with stress, and attend more to the teacher” (p. 41). For some students to be successful in reading, they need a positive yet encouraging learning atmosphere in their classroom.

The 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has generated a wealth of data on how well students in the fourth and eighth grade perform across the United States in the subject areas of reading and math. NAEP (2019) has reported a one point decrease since the 2017 reading assessment yet the scores are higher than the 1992 first reading assessment results. However, at the same time, the nation's average fourth-grade reading scores continue to fall below the nation's proficiency cut score.

Student performance on NAEP is categorized into three achievement levels: basic, proficient, and advanced. According to NAEP (2017), “Fourth-grade students performing at the *Proficient* level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations.” (Achievement Levels by Grade, para 5). The 2013 NAEP score results showed the average fourth-grade reading score was 222, and in 2015 there was an increase by one point to 223. This score demonstrated a minimum increase over two years. This score is also 15 points below the 238 minimum proficiency cut score. In

2017, the average fourth-grade reading score was 222. In 2019, the reading score average was 220. These average scores continue to remain below the fourth-grade proficiency cut score of 238.

In 2015, the NAEP score results showed 36 percent of the students in the nation who took the fourth-grade reading assessment scored at or above proficiency. In 2017, the national percentage of students in the country scoring at or above proficiency in fourth-grade reading was 37 percent. There was a slight increase in the percentage of students who scored at or above proficient on the fourth-grade reading assessment from 2015 to 2017. The percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency in reading in 2019 was 35. This percentage was down from the 2017 reading assessment.

In 2017, Mississippi's average score on the NAEP assessment was 215. This was seven points below the nation's average score of 222 in fourth-grade reading. Mississippi's average score was also 23 points below the nation's proficiency cut score of 238. Several states/jurisdictions such as Wyoming, Nebraska, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, DoDEA, and Florida consistently performed higher than the nation's proficiency average on their NAEP assessments in fourth-grade reading for over the past decade (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). In 2019, Mississippi's average score on the NAEP assessment was 219. This was a four point increase over a two year period. According to Reading Is Fundamental (2019), Mississippi continues to score below the nation's average score of 220 in fourth-grade reading.

Students' inability to show improvements in fourth-grade reading proficiency is not only a nationwide issue but also a cause for concern in the state of Mississippi. Student performance on the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) is classified into levels one through

five. Level one is the minimum performance, and Level two is basic. Level three is passing. Level four is proficient, and Level five is advanced. Student reading performance scores are labeled under English Language Arts (ELA) in the state of Mississippi. According to the 2017 MAAP ELA assessment results, 34.9 percent of students from third-grade to English II scored proficient or higher. The percent of students in fourth-grade ELA who scored proficient or higher in Mississippi was 31.3 percent. This percentage resulted in being the second-lowest proficiency percentage in ELA for the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE, 2017).

The 2017 MAAP results showed Bayside Upper Elementary School (BUES) scoring the lowest in reading proficiency in comparison to the school's mathematics and science proficiency scores. The 2017-2018 school-wide common assessment data also depicted this same trend. Although the 2017 MAAP assessment resulted in Bayside Upper Elementary School having increased in performance level from a C to a current performance level of a B, the fourth-grade reading scores were the lowest at BUES. How can the school shift to promoting proficiency in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School?

The 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Framework claimed, "Reading is an active and complex process that involves multiple different behaviors" (The National Assessment Governing Board, 2017, p. 4). There are several essential foundational areas to help students become successful readers: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). These elements work together to enhance student achievement in reading. To read with understanding, developing readers must be able to read with some proficiency and then receive explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies (Tierney, 1982). Good readers can self-monitor themselves when reading. Good readers can recognize when the text they are reading does not make sense to

them. Good readers are also able to utilize a variety of comprehension strategies to help them better understand the text (The National Assessment Governing Board, 2017). Kim et al. (2010) further pointed out in the later elementary years, struggling readers quickly decelerate in vocabulary and have a more difficult time understanding complex text. Many factors assist students in becoming better readers: instructional reading strategies, reading interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation. Since the fourth-grade students at Bayside Upper Elementary School scored the lowest in reading proficiency, it is essential to provide teachers and students with the necessary tools to assist with increasing reading comprehension. Improving how well students understand the text being read is a way of promoting reading proficiency in the fourth-grade.

The central area of concern for this applied research is promoting proficiency in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School. The study aimed at improving student reading comprehension to promote reading proficiency in the fourth-grade. An applied research study was conducted in the fourth-grade ELA classes. I developed and analyzed the program, which was implemented in the ELA classrooms. I conducted a program evaluation to determine how well the elements were implemented at the school as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Results indicated significant elements which had positive or negative effects on the study's results. If the program is successful, the implementation of the elements will be utilized in grades three and five at Bayside Upper Elementary. Other schools within the Riverdale School District may also choose to duplicate this program to help their students become more proficient in reading. The evaluation also identified areas of weakness which the school will use to make future adjustments to see more significant gains in proficiency from the

students. At Bayside Upper Elementary, there is a commitment to educational excellence with the school striving for continuous growth in student achievement in English Language Arts.

### **Description of the problem**

This dissertation in practice centered on my educational experience as a teacher for 13 years and as a building assistant principal for five years. I am currently serving in the role of an elementary assistant principal. I conduct professional learning community (PLC) meetings with teachers, facilitate after school faculty meetings with all staff, observe and provide feedback to teachers through weekly observations and formal evaluations, serve on school and district committees (leadership, literacy, college and career, common assessment review team, professional development, and health council), administer discipline to the students, oversee the student of the month nominations and parent lunch, monitor our school-wide positive office referral system, and meet with parents who have concerns about the wellbeing of their child at school.

Bayside Upper Elementary is one of four schools located in a small railroad town of Riverdale, Mississippi. The town was established to be the central railroad location between Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama. The streets were created in Riverdale to run parallel and perpendicular to the railroad tracks which helped the town to flourish. The population of Riverdale is around 7,067. Riverdale has a poverty level of 23.3 percent (U.S. Census, 2016).

The current graduation rate in the Riverdale School District is 84.1 percent according to the 2017 Mississippi school accountability model results. Bayside serves third, fourth, and fifth grades which are comprised of 362 students. The student population consists of 129 Caucasian males (36%), 67 African-American males (19%), nine Hispanic males (2%), one Asian male



(<1%), 92 Caucasian females (25%), 61 African-American females (17%), two Hispanic females (< 1%), and one Asian female (<1%).

The school staff includes 18 regular education teachers, two gifted teachers, five special education teachers, one music teacher, one physical education teacher, one speech pathologist, and six assistant teachers. The third-grade classrooms are self-contained. Six teachers teach mathematics, English language arts (ELA), science, and social studies. The fourth-grade classes utilize team teaching comprised of three teams of two teachers. One team member teaches mathematics and science, and the other team teacher teaches ELA and social studies. Each fourth-grade teacher has two scheduled classes of students. The fifth-grade classrooms are departmentalized with two ELA teachers, two mathematic teachers, one science teacher, and one science enrichment teacher. There is one special education teacher per grade and two self-contained special education classrooms. The school also has a gifted teacher for third grade and a gifted teacher for fourth and fifth grades. At Bayside Upper Elementary School, a literacy coach works with the third-grade teachers and students to help with continuous improvement in reading. The school also has two academic interventionists who are certified staff members; one serves third grade with the other serving grades four and five. The school shares a media specialist with the middle school and also has a counselor on-site full time. The staff is friendly and committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students.

The culture at Bayside is marked by participation and active community engagement. The students jump-start their engagement for reading with an Accelerated Reader (AR) pep rally, and parents are invited the next afternoon to come read AR books with their child. After students take their STAR reading assessment, they are given individual reading goals to achieve each month. Students read books on their level according to their STAR assessment and take

AR tests to earn points. When the students reach and/or exceed their monthly goals, they earn Panther Bucks. Students can purchase items with their panther bucks at the monthly Panther Buck store which is run by the school's Junior Beta Club. As another way of encouraging students to read, Bayside gives the students a Fall Festival, Glow Party, Reading Raffle, and Spring Festival for meeting their quarterly goals. At the end of the year, if students achieved their AR goals each month, they get to attend the Big Water Fun Day. This day consists of water slides, a dunking booth, and water relay games for them to enjoy. All of this planning, time, money, energy, and volunteering is put into rewarding students for working so hard.

Students in the Riverdale community have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities such as baseball, basketball, football, soccer, karate, dance, girl scouts, boy scouts, and cheernastics. Parent involvement and participation at the school functions is evident and noticeable. The school has an active and supportive Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) which provides volunteer services throughout the school year such as rewarding students for achievements and growth, feeding the faculty and staff, purchasing technology for students to utilize in their classrooms, and purchasing furniture and other building aesthetics which create a positive and welcoming environment for students to want to come and learn.

### **Justification of the Problem**

Catts and Kamhi (2017) believed reading proficiency is one of the most imperative goals of our education system. Students who have difficulty reading by the end of second grade will likely have inadequate reading skills in their future schooling (Connor et al., 2016). Although Bayside Upper Elementary improved in performance level from an overall C to an overall letter grade of a B, areas of growth needed to be addressed. Recently, the school scored the lowest in proficiency in fourth-grade reading. Ritchey, Palombo, Silverman, and Speece (2017) suggested

some students in the fourth and fifth grades later develop reading difficulties which were not identifiable in their earlier grades. Catts and Kamhi (2017) stated, “Reading comprehension is one of the most complex behaviors that we engage in on a regular basis” (p. 73). It is essential to develop a student’s ability to understand what they are reading. Poor readers generally call words but have a difficult time understanding what they are reading (Nation, Cocksey, Taylor, & Bishop, 2010).

Ritchey et al. (2017) noted to obtain academic success, reading comprehension is a necessity. Reading comprehension is utilized in conjunction with other subjects in school. When students comprehend what they are reading, they have a better understanding of the content in different subjects. Barnard-Brak, Stevens, and Ritter (2017) explained a correlation exists between a student’s increase in reading strategies and their understanding of content knowledge. These authors suggested the more reading strategies students are able to use, the more it will help them understand the content. An increase in student achievement in reading proficiency is a goal for Bayside Upper Elementary School.

Hughes, Phillips, and Reed (2013) emphasized, “The National Assessment of Adult Literacy in the USA found that 40 percent of adults function in the lowest categories of ability” (p. 1). Students learning to read affects not just them, but also their family for generations. Research performed by Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad (2002) generated findings maintaining adults who had low proficiency scores on their literacy assessment were more likely to receive food stamps and to live in poverty, yet they were less likely to obtain a full-time well-paid job, to stay abreast of current affairs via newspaper and magazine articles, and to vote. Students who had good comprehension reading skills have the opportunity to further their learning at a trade school, junior college, or a university. Students who establish themselves with

prosperous careers have an opportunity to invest and give back to the community from which they grew up.

According to Hulme and Snowling (2011), "Reading difficulties will inevitably create educational difficulties, which, in turn, are a major source of economic and social disadvantage" (p. 139). Successful readers can lead to students becoming future business owners, doctors, lawyers, and obtaining other professional jobs. Strengthening the reading education of students in the United States gives the opportunity to achieve greater success than others around the world. Kirsch et al. (2002) additionally emphasized having many citizens who have deficits in reading impedes the nation by not possessing the resources to achieve national goals and objectives. These goals may perhaps be political, social, civic, or economic. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessed students in three categories, or domains: reading, mathematics, and science. Every three years, PISA assessments are focused on one specific domain. According to the 2015 PISA results, the United States performance was average in reading. Performance in reading for the United States has not changed since reading was a major domain in 2009. For six years, the United States has remained at an average performance level, whereas other countries have steadily increased in performance (Country Note, 2015).

Teaching students to comprehend the text they are reading involves several factors working together to accomplish the primary goal. Comprehending what one reads starts long before fourth grade. Teaching students to understand a text begins early.

### **Personal Experience**

As an educator, I taught first grade reading for ten years. The focus in my classroom was to make sure my students received instruction on the five components of reading: phonemic

awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). It took many hours of preparation to ensure I was able to reach all of my students using the resources I had in my classroom. I also used effective teaching strategies which I learned from my professional development sessions. My students learned from whole group instruction as well as small group instruction every week. They participated in reading centers for each of the reading components and a teacher-led center. In my teacher-led center and the reading comprehension center, my students read differentiated texts. I used the data collected from universal screeners to determine the level of text the students would be reading.

I also developed a good rapport with my students. Most of the time, my classroom consisted of students who had low academic achievement, struggled with good behavior, or both. As I taught my students academics, I also had to establish a classroom culture of love and learning. It was okay to make mistakes as long as they learned from the errors and kept moving toward their goal. I encouraged them to never give less than their best, and they knew I cared.

Reading comprehension is an issue across the nation, in the state of Mississippi, and the railroad town of Riverdale. Many factors impact students' inability to achieve and maintain grade-level proficiency in reading comprehension. Improving reading comprehension of students of the Riverdale School District will help prepare the students to become literate adults. Adults who are literate are more likely to have better paying jobs, thus increasing the average income of the community. Conducting any additional research on promoting reading proficiency would be influential in exhibiting the best strategies needed to rectify the problem.

### **Audience**

The study findings will benefit students, teachers, other schools in the district, the community, and the state. Teachers, students, and administrators will be working together to

increase student reading proficiency. It will take an investment of time and perseverance to be successful. Being able to comprehend the text which students are reading will help to increase reading proficiency for the fourth-grade students.

**Teachers.** Teachers must balance their time effectively in the classroom. They have a complex class of learners who have deficits in reading as well as advanced readers. According to Shaunessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, and Lindo (2015), “Teachers are charged with the complex demand of educating students who present a range of abilities, interests, attitudes, and language skills” (p. 91). Teachers are accountable for every student’s learning in their classrooms, all while trying to meet the state and federal accountability of high stakes testing. Teachers benefit from students improving their comprehension because the students can positively contribute to their school's accountability model. By contributing to their students’ increase in comprehension learning, teachers are strengthening their content pedagogy and creating a pathway for future educators to use to help their students. Knowing which strategies are effective will influence how the teachers will instruct future students who have similar difficulties.

**Students.** Learning to read for some students is a daunting and challenging task. However, once students are able to understand the text being read, they begin to have a feeling of success. When students fully understand what they are reading, it helps the students advance to other courses in school. Students can apply those learned comprehension skills to gain a better understanding of the content being discussed in the class. Merga and Roni (2018) suggested reading not only provides educational benefits, but it is also a great tool to enhance students' brains and personalities. Being successful in reading encourages students to persevere through future difficult tasks.

**Administrators.** Administrators have the complicated job of ensuring everyone has what they need to be successful at the school. Successful students in reading impacted the way the general education teachers implement reading in their ELA classes. Professional learning communities centered on training teachers on the implementation of effective strategies to help improve reading comprehension in their classrooms.

Depending on the outcome of this study, teachers and administrators in the district will have the opportunity to utilize all or parts of this study to help improve reading proficiency within their schools. Any improvement in reading proficiency will have a positive effect on the intellectual level of the community as these students transition to adults. Not only will the school be able to assist with improving proficiency in the district, but will also be able to contribute information and suggestions to other schools outside of the district on how the school promoted reading proficiency.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this applied research study is to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School. The research process provided a description of the problem at Bayside Upper Elementary. A review of literature pertaining to effective instructional teaching strategies, student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation was used to develop the action plan to improve reading. Teachers, the counselor, and administrators contributed to the development of the action plan ensuring reading achievement is demonstrated among the student learners. The fourth-grade teachers implemented the plan with their fourth-grade students. Data will be collected from fourth-grade teacher interviews, fourth-grade student surveys, i-Ready reading diagnostics, STAR diagnostics, a fourth-grade student focus group, and classroom observations. The action plan will address the concerns, ideas, and

needs of all stakeholders to move student performance levels to proficiency or above on their assessments. Implementation of some elements of this action plan began in August 2019 where as other elements were to be implemented later in the school year. The action plan was to be implemented through May 2020. The program was evaluated after the completion of the plan. The results of the study supported promoting student proficiency in fourth-grade reading.

The central phenomenon of this applied research study is to conduct a program to promote reading proficiency in the fourth-grade reading classes. An evaluation of the program was performed to analyze the data collected about the program seeking any positives, negatives, and future recommendations. Students were to participate in a survey and a focus group during the program implementation. The student surveys were to be used to identify what motivates students to read. The focus group were to be used to identify student perception of the academic atmosphere of the reading classroom, teacher instructional strategies, teacher interventions, teacher-student relationship, and student motivation.

### **Research Questions**

The central focus question for this applied research seeks to determine if teacher instructional strategies, student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation contribute to growing student achievement in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School. The following are research questions used to help further develop this study.

### **Teacher Instructional Strategies**

1. Do vocabulary strategies affect student performance outcomes?
2. Does implementation of the iReady reading program affect student performance outcomes in reading?
  - a. How do students respond to digital lessons?



- b. Is there a relationship between the amount of time spent on individual online lessons and student reading performance?
3. Do guided reading instructional strategies affect student performance outcomes?

### **Student interventions**

4. Do student interventions help promote proficiency in reading?

### **Teacher-student relationships**

5. What type of relationship is established between reading teachers and students?
  - a. How can reading teachers improve relationships with students?
  - b. How can students improve relationships with reading teachers?
  - c. Are there academic benefits to having a positive teacher-student relationship?

### **Student motivation**

6. How can students be motivated to read?
  - a. Are there specific genres fourth-grade students at Bayside like to read?
  - b. Do teachers incorporate a variety of text to motivate students in reading?

After implementing the action plan, an evaluation of the plan will be conducted to determine if the program was successful at promoting proficiency in reading comprehension for fourth-grade students.

### **Overview of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first introductory chapter states the significance of the problem, research questions, and the basis for the study. Chapter two is the Literature Review which supports the study and research related to the research questions. Chapter three, the Methods chapter, provides the procedures for collecting data, research design,

and proposes procedures for data analysis. Chapter four displays and analyzes the study results, and Chapter five reports the study conclusions and further discussions.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

This literature review describes studies reporting on the implementation of various methods and findings which help to promote proficiency in reading among students in the classroom. It will also provide research on student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation. All of these elements influence student achievement with reading comprehension. The process of developing reading comprehension and its effectiveness on student learning dates back as far as 1975 (Duke & Pearson, 2002). According to the National Reading Panel (2000), there are some fundamental components of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension which students must learn in order to become successful readers. These elements work together to enhance student comprehension. To read with understanding, developing readers must be able to read with some proficiency and then receive explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies (Tierney, 1982). In order to be a good reader, a student must become an active reader (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Good readers understand the purpose for reading, are able to make predictions, evaluate the text, and question the understanding of the text throughout reading it (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

According to the United States Department of Education (2019), only 35 percent of fourth-grade students scored at or above the proficiency level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Assisting students in becoming better readers hinges

on many elements working as a cohesive process. This review of literature is divided into four sections: teacher instructional strategies, teacher interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation. The fourth-grade students at Bayside Upper Elementary School scored the lowest in reading proficiency in the Riverdale School District according to the 2017 Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP). This chapter will discuss methods and rationales focused on expanding students' ability to read and comprehend text.

### **Teacher Instructional Strategies**

One of the most influential classroom elements in improving student achievement is the teacher (Stronge & Hindman, 2003). The teacher is the leader in the classroom who creates, monitors, and cultivates the learning environment in which a student learns to read for understanding. The teacher's level of knowledge impacts the delivery of the content to the students. According to Fisher, Frey and Hattie (2016), "Every student deserves a great teacher, not by chance but by design" (p. 2). Influential teachers understand there are numerous strategies to use at various times with different students as a way of increasing student achievement in their classrooms (Fisher et al., 2016).

Until recent years, primarily fiction books were used to teach students how to understand what was being read. Since the development of the Common Core Standards in 2010, it has been recommended 50 percent of the text used in the classroom exposed to students should be from nonfiction text (Kuhn, Rausch, McCarty, Montgomery, & Rule, 2017). Teachers now use a diverse selection of text in the classrooms to help with the development of student reading skills. Teachers use reading literature (fiction) and informational text (nonfiction) to strengthen student comprehension. This study discussed the use of nonfiction text to help increase student comprehension. Kuhn et al. (2017) conducted a study on using nonfiction text to improve

reading comprehension and vocabulary compared to using fiction text in primary grades. The study was conducted in two first grade classrooms and one second grade classroom. A total of 59 participants were observed over a period of eight weeks. Teachers rotated every two weeks from nonfiction text instruction to fiction text instruction. Teachers used four data collecting methods: anecdotal notes on student engagement and learning environment, a vocabulary rubric, use of reading comprehension strategies rubric, and student surveys comparing students' attitudes toward nonfiction versus fiction text. The researchers confirmed students were able to apply their comprehension and vocabulary strategies more efficiently after reading nonfiction text. Students also showed an increase in wanting to read more nonfiction text. The vocabulary and comprehension strategies helped the students understand the informational text. According to Kuhn et al. (2017) nonfiction text helps increase student vocabulary, increase background knowledge, and develop stronger readers.

Young (2014) conducted an action research study on a group of second graders by implementing different research-based comprehension strategies through 15 different classroom centers. The action research study focused on which strategies best-improved reading comprehension for students. Student data results were analyzed from their Imagination Station (Istation) pre and posttest results. The study concluded 89% of the second graders showed comprehension growth and surpassed their growth projection on their Istation posttest. The reading strategies were from the National Reading Panel Report. The strategies included summarizing, retelling, connecting, sequencing, questioning, predicting, synthesizing, reading response stem, theme, determining importance, and expositions. This study encompassed many research-based strategies to help students strengthen their reading comprehension.

A teacher utilizes several strategies in the classroom to foster student understanding of what is being read. Thomas and Vannatta Reinhart (2014) found evidence which supports pre-reading as a reading comprehension strategy to gain a better understanding of a drama in comparison to only attending the viewing of a drama. The study examined 30 sixth- grade Language Arts students who were randomly placed in either the treatment or control group. Students were administered a questionnaire and a 20-question quiz after attending the drama. Each paper had a four-digit number written on it so researchers could identify which student was in the control group or the treatment group. The researchers concluded pre-reading increased student comprehension and provided a strong background knowledge of the drama. The activation of prior knowledge for students before reading a text creates a foundation to build upon as students to continue to read and learn.

Not only do teachers use a complexity of texts, but they also use different delivery methods to help students become better readers. All students do not use the same strategies; they have different learning styles. The delivery method of a text can impact how well a student comprehends what is being read. Ortlieb, Sargent, and Moreland (2014) examined increasing student reading comprehension in a reading clinic by using an online digital reading environment. Fifty-eight fourth-grade students worked one on one with preservice teachers from a university in the Midwest. Ortlieb et al. (2014) conducted the study with participants placed in one of three groups: print-based text instruction, hybrid instruction (equal time with print and online digital reading environment), and digital-based text instruction. Students' pretest and posttest scores were analyzed from their Basic Reading Inventory and the Lexile Framework for Reading using the myON© program assessments. The researchers found participants increased their reading comprehension in the print and digital environments from the pretest compared to

the posttest. The utilization of both digital and print format in this study resulted in student comprehension growth. The students who received only the myON© program intervention showed growth in reading comprehension when assessed in a digital format. The students in the hybrid and print-based groups also demonstrated growth from their pretest, but also scored higher than the digital group on their paper and pencil assessment. Thus, all the students were successful in comprehension growth when assessed in the same format in which the most instruction was given to the students. As advances are made in technology and it becomes more readily available to students, teachers must learn to combine their reading instructional strategies with the digital reading environment (Ortlieb et al., 2014).

Research-based instructional strategies for reading comprehension should strengthen a student's vocabulary while at the same time increasing their fluency. Hawkins, Musti-Rao, Hale, McGuire, and Hailley (2010) conducted a study on the effects of two class-wide listening previewing strategies on reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. The study was on a class of 21 students from an urban charter school in the Midwest of the United States. All students participated in three conditions: a silent reading control condition, a listening previewing condition, and a listening previewing with vocabulary previewing condition. Students were administered nine reading passages on their grade level from book one of the Timed Reading© series. Students had to read the passage and then answer 10 multiple choice questions about the passage. Five of the questions were text dependent, and the other five questions were inferential. Students were also given a vocabulary matching probe where they had to match the vocabulary word to its correct definition. Students participated in the procedures for 30 minutes over nine consecutive days. The researchers found listening previewing strategies assist with students' increases in reading comprehension. Students were

able to listen to a recording or an adult fluently read the text first. Students were then able to fluently read the text and have a better understanding of the story. Reading the text multiple times provided the students with the opportunity to better grasp an understanding of the story.

The development of fluency alone does not help struggling readers comprehend the text they are reading. The research of Hagaman, Casey, and Reid (2012) suggested students who actively participate in the utilization of strategies which restate the text or paraphrase the text are more likely to have reading success. Hagaman et al. (2012) pointed out the effectiveness of using the RAP (Read a paragraph, Ask myself what is the main idea and two details, Put into my own words) paraphrasing strategy to help improve student comprehension. Hagaman et al. (2012) conducted the study on six third graders who struggled with reading comprehension but were fluent readers. These students were taught the RAP paraphrasing strategy one on one. The researchers determined using the RAP strategy did help increase comprehension of the young readers.

Boudreaux-Johnson, Mooney, and Lastrapes (2017) conducted a study on the effectiveness of close reading instructional routines on elementary students who were at risk for failure in reading. The study used two interventions: close reading and collaborative strategic reading (CSR). Six fourth-grade students in a rural public school participated in the study over six weeks. Students were selected according to teacher recommendations, poor scores on previous state tests, and benchmark reading assessments. The study measured two variables: daze and critical content monitoring. Daze was administered every week where students had to read a passage and fill in the missing word within the passage from a choice of three words. This measured students' comprehension ability. Critical content monitoring was assessed using a pre-assessment and post-assessment. These timed online assessments measured students' knowledge



of the content. The researchers found the close reading strategy did not show higher results in comparison to the CSR strategy. Students did, however, convey satisfaction with how the close reading intervention was taught to them. Although students demonstrated more growth in knowledge content using the CSR strategy, students did grow in content using close reading.

Researchers have conducted studies on how well students comprehended text orally versus silent or computer guided. Mostow, Nelson-Taylor, and Beck (2013) compared student performance using computer-guided oral reading (reading tutor) to sustained silent reading (SSR) in two daily 20-minute treatments. The participants attended two Blue Ribbon National Schools of Excellence. There were a total of 193 students in grades first through fourth. Only 178 students completed the study, and of the completers, 55 were special needs students. Students were paired together according to their scoring on a computerized pretest. A student from each pair was assigned the reading tutor, and the other student was assigned the SSR. Pretest and posttest were administered through the following: Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP), Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT), Oral reading fluency, Test of Written Spelling, and Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. The researchers were able to compare the pretest scores to the posttest scores. The researchers found participants who used the reading tutor measured higher than those who used the SSR strategy in areas of reading ability, fluency, and comprehension.

### **Student Interventions**

Teachers perform interventions with students who are not meeting or exceeding grade level expectations according to the data collected from grades and/or universal screeners. Interventions are designed to help students master standards which they are having difficulty understanding. Interventions take place in small group settings, or the teacher may work with

the student one on one. The activities completed in an intervention are different from the whole group classroom instruction. Interventions are provided to students in addition to whole group instruction.

Interventions are done in a small group settings. This allows teachers the opportunity to target struggling students' academic deficits. Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzekanani, Bryant, Dickson, and Blozis (2003) conducted research on the effects of instructional reading group sizes for 90 second-grade students who struggled with reading. Vaughn et al. (2003) administered the study using three types of groupings: 1:1 (one teacher and one student), 1:3 (one teacher and three students), and 1:10 (one teacher and ten students). Participants received 30-minute interventions five times a week over a 13-week period. Students were given pre and posttests using the following assessments: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (WRMT), Test of Oral Reading Fluency (TORF), and Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey. The researchers concluded students who were in the 1:1 and 1:3 groupings had greater gains on student outcomes in the categories of reading fluency, segmentation, and reading comprehension than the 1:10 group. In a small group setting, students have fewer distractions and are able to focus better on the task to complete. The students who were in a group of 10 did not score as high as the students who were in a group of three or by themselves.

The content which is retaught during intervention times is just as important as the number of students in the intervention group. Focusing on misunderstood comprehension and vocabulary standards during intervention has shown to be successful in helping students become better readers. Richey, Palombo, Silverman, and Speece (2017) noted the effects of a reading intervention performed with 46 fifth-grade students to determine if the intervention improved

reading comprehension of the fifth-grade students. The study included over 40 sessions focusing on reading comprehension strategy instruction in the context of informational science text. The researchers found the effects of providing intervention for struggling students increased overall student comprehension.

Wanzek, Petscher, Otaiba, Rivas, Kent, and Schatschneider (2017) conducted a study on the impact of the Passport to Literacy© intervention on fourth-grade students who had difficulty with reading comprehension. The study participants included 451 fourth-grade students from 16 public elementary schools disbursed across six school districts in three states. Data for the study was collected from the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJIII), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (DIBELS), and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) pre and posttests. The researchers found the students who participated in the treatment group demonstrated higher achievement than students in the control group in reading comprehension.

Researchers Baker, Santoro, Chard, Fien, Park, and Otterstedt (2013) recognized the importance of improving comprehension and vocabulary using a read aloud intervention or comparison condition with first-grade students. This study lasted for 19 weeks and took place in twelve schools with one first-grade teacher in each school. A total of 225 students participated. Students were given two pretests: Test of Language Development-Primary (TOLD) and The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Based on the student results of the pretests, the students were placed into four categories.

Table 2.1

*Pretest Categories*

At-risk language, low-risk literacy	At-risk literacy, low-risk language
At-risk language and literacy	Low-risk language and literacy

Teachers who utilized the intervention condition focused on an organized use of narrative and expository text with before, during, and after reading components. Teachers who utilized the comparison condition used strategies the teacher personally believed would help develop the students' comprehension and vocabulary. The researchers found students in the low risk and high risk for language category who participated in the intervention condition outperformed similar students in the comparison condition in the narrative retell and vocabulary outcome measures.

**Teacher-Student Relationships**

Students who are in a classroom where the teacher is happy to see them and makes the students feel loved tend to have a positive outlook on their work. The students are more engaged and eager to learn from the teacher. Liew, Chen, and Hughes (2010) observed the effects of child effortful control and teacher-student relationships. There were 761 children who participated in this study. The researchers concluded students who were paired with a positive teacher and demonstrated a low task accuracy rate did just as well as a student who demonstrated a high task accuracy rate. When students feel connected to the teacher and valued, the students will be more engaged in the activities taken place in the classroom (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Hughes and Kwok (2007) emphasized the importance of creating a relationship between teachers and students and parents and teachers among struggling students in lower grades.

In the study conducted by Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) teachers were observed making in the moment content decisions to help increase student learning and how the teachers' decisions were influenced by different contexts (whole group, small group, individual). The teachers were observed teaching whole group, small group, and providing individual student conferences. This study was conducted on eight excellent elementary teachers' pedagogical knowledge (PK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of reading in their classroom instruction. Griffith et al. (2015) conducted this study with two kindergarten teachers, three first-grade teachers, and three third-grade teachers in the United States. Each teacher was asked to teach two lessons using their usual teaching practices. Each lesson was videotaped, and the researcher took notes as the teacher was teaching. After each lesson, there was a debriefing session between the researcher and the teacher. The researchers found in whole group, small group, and individual conferences teachers were able to not only teach the content but also motivate and engage students in learning. Having in depth knowledge about their students allowed the teachers to make better in the moment decisions of how to deliver the content to the students for learning. Griffith et al. (2015) learned teachers made numerous in the moment decisions based on what they knew about the students, the text, and the assignment to be completed.

### **Student Motivation**

The classroom teacher has a responsibility to assure the academic needs of all of the students in their classroom are being met. Successful academic achievement is not solely based on the content being taught in class. Motivation also has a very important role in contributing to a student's academic success (Parsons et al., 2018; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Earlier research on student motivation in relation to academic achievement was viewed as having

separate cognitive and motivational factors (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Since the 1980s more research has been done to demonstrate how cognitive and motivational factors intertwine to impact student learning (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). There are many ways to motivate students; however, it is important to have an understanding of how to motivate students.

Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) focused on four significant parts of motivation: self-efficacy, attributions, intrinsic motivation, and achievement goals. This study also focused on the research contributing to each of these factors. Students who have a consistent motivation to want to read exhibit an increase in reading achievement over those who were less motivated to read (Parsons et al., 2018).

According to Parsons et al. (2018) student motivation to read decreases as the students move from grade to grade. The study led by Parsons et al. (2018) was conducted on 1,104 upper elementary students in schools in Maryland, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia. A total of seven schools participated: four public, two charter, and one private. The students were administered a paper and pencil assessment. Parsons et al. (2018) research demonstrated students were more inclined to read fiction text than non-fiction text. This study concluded girls were more motivated to read fiction text than boys. The researchers also found students did not value reading as they became older; however, the students did have confidence in their ability to read (Parsons et al., 2018).

To help with motivating students to read, teachers should be aware of student interests. Students will be more motivated to read a text which sparks an interest in them. Brenna (2013) conducted a case study on the utilization of graphic novels in a fourth-grade classroom to help improve reading comprehension in students. The study observed 21 students over a five-week period in a classroom at Cloverdale Schools. The students took part in 10 one-hour long

instructional period. Classroom observations, informal discussions with students, written questionnaires on the utilization of reading comprehension strategies to graphic novels, and student preferences to graphic novels were all collected as data for this study. The researcher found the students taking more interest in wanting to read graphic novels even during their independent reading time. The students also learned to utilize the comprehension strategies they were taught to better help them with the text they were reading. The teacher was able to motivate the students to read by choosing a content they were interested in reading, increasing their motivation to spend more time reading.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the importance of students knowing how to comprehend the text being read is relevant and needed. Many factors contribute to increasing student comprehension. The action plan for this study was designed from the implications outlined in this research literature. The research suggests teachers should be utilizing a variety of teaching strategies in the classrooms. Teachers should also incorporate interventions to assist struggling readers, build a positive teacher-student relationship, and incite student motivation as a means to promoting proficiency in reading comprehension. The studies conducted provide essential information for improving students' reading comprehension.

## **Chapter III**

### **Design and Research**

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of this applied research is to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading. My research was conducted on three fourth-grade English language arts (ELA) classrooms at Bayside Upper Elementary School. There are a total of 121 fourth-grade reading students and three ELA teachers. This chapter describes how the action plan has been developed to promote proficiency in reading. The action plan focuses on the following elements: teacher instructional strategies, student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation. This research will be conducted using a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative methods of study will be used to collect data from students and teachers participating in focus groups, surveys, teacher interviews, and classroom observations during the implementation of the action plan. This data will be analyzed to identify trends in student or teacher perceptions of the elements in this action plan. Quantitative data from i-Ready diagnostic screener and STAR diagnostic results will provide baseline data from the fourth-grade students, progress monitoring to track student growth from the middle of the year to the end of the year, and identify the students' predicted end-of-year performance level. Both methods of research will be conducted to gain a better understanding of the fourth-grade student academic achievement at Bayside and provide explanations as to why the students performed the way they did. The central focus question for this applied research seeks to determine if teacher instructional strategies, student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation contribute to growing student achievement



in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School. The following are research questions used to help further develop this study.

### **Teacher Instructional Strategies**

1. Do vocabulary strategies affect student performance outcomes?
2. Does implementation of the iReady reading program affect student performance outcomes in reading?
  - a. How do students respond to digital lessons?
  - b. Is there a relationship between the amount of time spent on individual online lessons and student reading performance?
3. Do guided reading instructional strategies affect student performance outcomes?

### **Student interventions**

4. Do student interventions help promote proficiency in reading?

### **Teacher-student relationships**

5. What type of relationship is established between reading teachers and students?
  - a. How can reading teachers improve relationships with students?
  - b. How can students improve relationships with reading teachers?
  - c. Are there academic benefits to having a positive teacher-student relationship?

### **Student motivation**

6. How can students be motivated to read?
  - a. Are there specific genres fourth-grade students at Bayside like to read?
  - b. Do teachers incorporate a variety of text to motivate students in reading?

Professional development was provided for the fourth-grade teachers on vocabulary instructional strategies and reading strategies. Teachers participated in an interview pertaining to

reading instruction, student relationships, and student motivation. Data were to be collected from student surveys and a student focus group to gain an outlook on their perspective on reading, motivation, and teacher relationships. This chapter includes an explanation of how the action plan was developed, a detailed description of the action plan with elements, stakeholders who will be involved in the research, and a program evaluation to analyze the action plan and the effectiveness of the plan.

### **Development of the Action Plan**

In April of 2018, I was approached by a group of teachers with concerns for the upcoming 2018-2019 school year (SY). Some of the teachers' concerns were focused on academic issues while other concerns pertained to building issues. After I spoke with the principal about the teachers' concerns, the principal decided to meet with the teachers from each grade level. An end of the year reflection meeting with grade level teachers had never been done previously. The principal and I wanted to hear feedback and suggestions from the teachers as to how things could be improved to make the next school year better. The principal asked the teachers to provide a list of "changes" and "keeps" they wanted for the next school year. The principal and I met with all fourth-grade teachers at the end of the 2017-2018 SY to discuss teacher concerns and ideas for the upcoming 2018-2019 SY. Although our school had not received test results from the 2018 MAAP assessment, teachers wanted to express concerns for the following school year. The teachers voiced their reasons for wanting a reading program as a basis for their instruction instead of having to constantly search for and pull material from a variety of resources. In previous years, the reading teachers did not have a basal program. The teachers used articles from Storyworks Magazine. The problem with using this magazine was teachers could not plan ahead. They did not know if next month's magazine would be able to be

used to teach their focus standards until it arrived. This made it difficult for teachers to plan ahead appropriately. When they were unable to use the magazine to teach the standards, the teachers utilized passages from other resources. As the teachers reflected about their current school year, they stated it was very time consuming to locate adequate and sufficient material to use in their classrooms. The teachers believed more time could be spent working on student areas of need. The teachers also mentioned having a basal reader would be an excellent resource for any new teachers who would be working in the school. Teachers would continue to use supplemental materials; however, they wanted a standard reading program to assist with helping the students learn. Rupley, Blair, and Nichols (2009) contended when students are taught explicitly and systematically, students have a better chance of fostering reading growth. The fourth-grade reading teachers wanted to have the necessary materials available to teach the standards according to the teachers' fourth-grade ELA pacing guide.

Another request made from the teachers was a set intervention time in the school day to work with students who scored in the bottom 25 percent on the previous year MAAP assessment. These students contribute a great deal to Bayside's accountability model and are in the greatest need of reading instruction according to their performance data. During times of intervention, teachers can work closely with students in a small group setting focusing on targeted standards. Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzekanani, Bryant, Dickson, and Blozis (2003) suggested students have a better chance of increasing their academic success when the instruction is based on individualization in smaller groups. According to the Mississippi School Accountability Model (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017), schools can earn the most accountability points from students in the bottom 25 percent. This means if the bottom 25 percent students' scores improve, those scores will account for points toward proficiency, growth for all, and growth for

the bottom 25 percent. Whereas, a student who is not in the bottom 25 percent only obtains points for proficiency in ELA and/or growth in ELA.

When the 2018 state MAAP assessment results were released, fourth-grade ELA did not have the lowest proficiency percentage at Bayside Upper Elementary. In 2017, the MAAP data resulted in fourth-grade ELA scoring 41 percent as proficient. In 2018, the MAAP data results showed fourth-grade ELA scoring 61 percent proficient. There was a 20 percent increase in proficiency in fourth-grade ELA between the 2016-2017 SY and the 2017-2018 SY at Bayside Upper Elementary.

The teachers met with the principal and I at the end of August 2018. The fourth-grade ELA teachers were troubled about the incoming fourth-grade students' lack of motivation in class. The teachers seemed to think since the students did not have the pressure of passing the fourth-grade as in third-grade, the students were unmotivated to do their best work. Students were more motivated to do well in third-grade because of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA). The LBPA states students in third-grade would not be promoted to grade four if the student did not score a Level 2 or above on the state MAAP assessment (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018). A cut score determines which level student performance is assigned. The results are sent back to the school district as either having "Met" or "Not Met" the readiness requirements (Mississippi Department of Education, 2019). Beginning in the 2018-2019 SY, third-graders were required to score at least a Level 3 on the MAAP assessment to pass to the fourth-grade. This influenced a level of student motivation for not wanting to be retained in third-grade, so students put more effort into their work.

According to Lee (2012), 25 to 60 percent of students attending school in the United States do not have any connection with what is being taught in the schools. Teachers have a

significant influence on how well students perform in the classroom. Students who have a good relationship with their teachers and classmates are more inclined to participate in the classroom activities (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). The research conducted by Lee (2012) concluded positive teacher-student relationships have a positive influence on student perseverance, work efforts, and academic success.

### **Description of the Action Plan**

Bayside Upper Elementary School's goal is to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading. The elements of this action plan are teacher instructional strategies, student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation. The application of these elements will aid in promoting student proficiency in fourth-grade.

**Teacher Instructional Strategies.** The Riverdale School District superintendent and curriculum director chose to purchase a new reading program titled iReady for grades three to twelve. Beginning the 2018-2019 SY, the teachers will be using the iReady program. This program has interactive instructional videos and individual student online lessons. In the meeting with administrators, teachers asked for a basal reading program for the 2018-2019 SY. This reading resource will be used to help students better understand reading, track student progress, and provide a more strategic plan for helping teachers grow students' academic performance. Teachers will receive professional development training on how to best use the i-Ready program in the classroom. Students began using i-Ready at the beginning of the 2018-2019 SY.

Professional development training will be conducted on implementing highly effective guided reading instructional strategies and the Frayer Model and Nancy Fetzner vocabulary strategies in the ELA classrooms. Observations will take place in the teacher classrooms to

monitor implementation of the professional development trainings. Teachers will also be given an individual interview. These interviews will provide individual perspectives on reading, interventions, teacher-student relationships, and motivation.

**Student Interventions.** At Bayside, interventions are monitored through the teacher support team (TST). Bayside tier intervention process is comprised of three tiers. Tier I is whole group instruction where all students receive the same information in the same delivery format. Tier II is small group instruction (three to four students) two to three days a week on targeted skills. Tier III is an even smaller group instruction (one to two students) five days a week on a targeted deficit skill or skills. The interventions used in Tier III must be research based interventions. Students who have a “D” or an “F” average are placed into Tier II after the first nine weeks of school. This placement can occur before the end of the nine weeks if a student is identified early, particularly when struggling in his or her class. Interventions are used to target specific standards with low performance by students. The delivery of an intervention in Tier II or Tier III is completed in a small group or individual setting. Students are progress monitored every two weeks to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. Depending on the results of the progress monitoring, the intervention may change or student placement may change.

The teachers requested to have an established time in the daily schedule because teachers were having difficulty finding enough time to work with their students with the greatest needs. Since the fourth-grade teachers have two classes of students, the ELA teachers will have two established sessions for interventions. The morning ELA classes will have intervention times from 10:30-11:00, while the afternoon classes will have intervention times from 2:30-3:00. Student interventions will take place four days a week. During this time, teachers will work with

students who are in Tier II of the tier process. Tier II is for any student in the class who has a "D" or an "F" average. The teacher will work with students in a small group or one on one. The teacher will provide instruction on the standards identified below grade level from the students' iReady diagnostic screener. The activities the students practice are based on individual needs. The work will derive from one or more of the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). The teachers implemented the established intervention sessions at the beginning of the 2018-2019 SY, and the sessions continued throughout the entire school year. The building administrators are required to conduct integrity checks every four weeks in the classroom of teachers who have students in Tier II. Integrity checks are observations conducted during a teacher's intervention session time. Administrators are observing if the teacher is providing the intervention, the number of students being taught, the delivery of the intervention (direct, indirect, technology based, manipulatives), progress monitoring completed every two weeks, and graphing the results of the progress monitoring every two weeks. Integrity checks will be kept in the students' Tier II red folder in the classroom. The goal of working with students during this time is to close the gap of missing information the student needs to be successful in class.

**Teacher-student relationships.** Positive teacher-student relationships cultivate a positive classroom learning environment (Liew, Chen, & Hughes, 2010). The fourth-grade ELA teachers will work with the counselor and administrator to help strengthen relationships between teachers and students. Four professional development sessions will be conducted with the teachers focusing on making a conscious effort to build a positive rapport with students. These meetings will be held once a week for four weeks from February to March. Teachers will have the opportunity to role-play situations and will be given ways as to how to build a classroom

community of trust. Teachers will be allowed to write a positive note to their students on a postcard and mail the documented outreach effort to students. Bayside will provide the teachers with postcards and stamps.

**Student motivation.** Teaching a student how to become a better reader is difficult when the student does not value reading. Research has shown as students move into higher grade levels, the students become less interested in reading (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). The counselor, administrator, and the fourth-grade ELA teachers worked together to generate ideas as to how to increase student motivation within the classrooms. This is a topic of focus because the teachers have voiced concerns regarding several of the students displaying a lack of enthusiasm for reading. The teachers decided to have each parent write a letter of encouragement to their child. The letters would be turned in a few days before assessments were to begin. This would allow the teachers enough time to have another adult in the building, who knew the student, to write the student a letter in case their parent was unable to provide a letter. The letters would be placed on the students' desk the morning of their state assessment for the student to read. Also encouraging post cards from the ELA teachers will be mailed to the students. The postcards will say "Dream big & work each day to do and be your best". An online student survey will be administered to students to gain a better understanding about student motivation in reading. The counselor will administer this survey to the students. The survey results will be shared with the teachers to increase student motivation in the classrooms. Some fourth-grade students will also be asked to participate in a focus group including two students randomly selected from each fourth-grade ELA class. The students participating in the focus group will be asked to answer 19 questions. These students will be prompted with questions to gain insight into how the students



are motivated to do well in school. Implementation of this element will begin in March 2020 and end in May 2020.

### **Program Evaluation Data Collection and Analysis**

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected during the program. The researcher conducted individual teacher interviews with the fourth-grade ELA teachers. The teacher interview protocol is located in Appendix A. The teachers answered questions about reading achievement, reading motivation, teacher-student relationships, and interventions. These interviews were completed before the program evaluation began. The fourth-grade students were to participate in an online survey. The student survey is located in Appendix B. The survey would identify information about student motivation. The researcher was to also conduct a student focus group with some of the fourth-grade students to gain student perspectives on reading. The student focus group protocol is located in Appendix C.

Data was collected from the beginning of the year and middle of the year universal screener i-Ready program and the STAR beginning of the year and middle of the year diagnostic assessments. The i-Ready diagnostic assesses six placement domains: phonological awareness, phonics, high frequency words, vocabulary, literature comprehension, and comprehension of informational text. The quantitative data displayed any numerical growth or reduction from the students' diagnostic assessments. Descriptive statistics were used to discuss the students' quantitative data. Some elements of the action plan were to be implemented after the winter diagnostic. The fall and winter diagnostics were analyzed to identify any changes or patterns in student performance. The data collected after the implementation of the action plan assisted with identifying student growth results. This analysis will be a deciding factor about future implementation of the action plan in other grades in the building and throughout the district.

Descriptive data analysis provided an average of how well the students' performed from the fall to the winter on the diagnostic assessments as a fourth-grade class. The data analysis also showed how each fourth-grade class average compared to each another.

A data analysis utilizing correlations was to be conducted between the students' mid-year STAR scale scores and the students' end of the year Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) scale scores. An analysis was to be conducted between the students' mid-year i-Ready scale scores and the students' end of the year MAAP scale scores. This analysis would identify if there was a relationship between the two variables STAR and MAAP and the two variables i-Ready and MAAP. If the results did conclude a correlation between the variables, it would also determine if the relationship was positive or negative and how strong of a relationship. Due to an order from the governor, school buildings were closed in March 2020 resulting in Bayside Upper Elementary not administering the end of the year assessments and diagnostics.

The current fourth-grade students have not taken the end of the year MAAP assessment, so the researcher will be using last year's fourth-grade students' scale scores to conduct this analysis. As mentioned previously, the researcher will also conduct a simple regression analysis between the students' STAR scale scores and the students' MAAP scale scores to determine if STAR is a predictor of how well students will score on the MAAP assessment. A multiple regression analysis will also be performed between the iReady scale scores and the MAAP scale scores. If the iReady and/or STAR scale scores are strong predictors of how well students could perform on the MAAP assessment, this could be used to determine student outcomes before the official test results are back.

The researcher planned to use comparative statistics to identify any statistical growth differences between the students' mid-year STAR diagnostic results and the students' end of the

year STAR diagnostic results. The researcher chose to use the students mid-year scale scores as the base line data because it will be the most current data collected from the fourth-grade students before the implementation of all of the research elements. The fourth-grade students at Bayside Upper Elementary will be taking the mid-year STAR diagnostic in January and the end of the year diagnostic in May. When comparing these two sets of scores, the researcher will use a *t* test to conduct the analysis. This test will determine if there is a significant difference in the fourth-grade students' growth from the mid-year STAR diagnostic to the end of the year STAR diagnostic. The qualitative data will provide the reasoning as to why the study concluded those numerical results. Qualitative data will be collected from the individual teacher interviews, student surveys, and student focus group questions. The researcher will be using a survey created with Qualtrics ©. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and school building closure, the above mentioned analyses were unable to be performed by the researcher at Bayside Upper Elementary School.

At the end of the program, the researcher analyzed the data collected to see how effective the implementation of the elements were on promoting proficiency in fourth-grade reading. Areas of strength and weakness were identified. A developed plan for future actions to improve the areas of weakness or areas which need more focus to see more significant gains was created.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, with the help of the teachers, administrators, counselor, and students at Bayside Upper Elementary School, an action plan will be implemented to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading. The program will be evaluated at the end of the implementation timeframe. There will be specific intervention times, teacher professional development, and training on instructional reading strategies to be used in the ELA classrooms, teacher-student relationships,

and student motivation. An evaluation will be completed of the program to identify the program's strengths and weaknesses and how to proceed in the future. The next chapter will discuss the action plan results.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results and Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this applied research was to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School. As described in chapter three, reading and vocabulary instructional strategies, student interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation were implemented at Bayside. This dissertation in practice was completed during the 2019-2020 academic school year (SY). Data was collected from three, fourth-grade ELA teachers and 121 fourth-grade students. Quantitative data from the beginning of the year STAR and i-Ready diagnostics and middle of the year STAR and i-Ready diagnostics were collected. Individual teacher interviews were also conducted to gather information on teacher perceptions pertaining to reading achievement, interventions, teacher-student relationships, and motivation. Unfortunately, due to the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020, the action plan for teacher-student relationships and student motivation were not implemented. Due to an executive order issued by Governor Tate Reeves, the public school buildings were closed for the remainder of the school year. There was no summative assessment given to the fourth-grade students at the end of the 2019-2020 academic school year. Thus causing some of the research data in this study to be inconclusive.

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistics for the fourth-grade STAR scaled score results for the fall and the winter diagnostics. On the students' fall diagnostic, there was an average score of 474. On the winter diagnostic, the fourth-grade students had an average score of 560.

The standard deviation (SD) for the fourth-grade classes was 159.9 in the fall and 162.7 in the winter. The winter diagnostic showed an increase in the SD which means the student scores were distributed farther away from the mean score than on the fall diagnostic.

Table 4.1

*2019-2020 Fourth-Grade Fall and Winter STAR Scaled Score Results*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Fourth (fall)</b>	119	474	458	457	159.9
<b>Fourth (winter)</b>	121	560	547	378	162.7

### **Research Question One**

The first research question was: Do vocabulary strategies affect student performance outcomes? During classroom observations, the teachers used two vocabulary instructional strategies. The first vocabulary strategy was the Frayer Model consisting of students defining a vocabulary word, drawing a picture to illustrate it, provide examples, and non-examples. Students were divided into groups and each person had an assignment. When the timer went off, the students rotated to the next station. There were two vocabulary stations with three words to use with the Frayer Model at each station. Students participated in this activity twice a week. The teachers used this strategy to help reinforce the learning of the weekly vocabulary words.

The second vocabulary instructional strategy employed in the classrooms was one of Nancy Fetzer’s vocabulary instructional strategies. The teacher created a story blaster using the new vocabulary words. A story blaster is a fictitious story made with the weekly vocabulary words. The class was divided into teams of boys versus girls. One group of students were the “readers” and the other group of students were the “definers”. When the readers read the story blaster aloud, the readers would stop at a vocabulary word, and the definers would read aloud the

word and definition. Then act out the word. The participants switched places and read the text aloud again as readers and definers. The teachers used this strategy during whole group instruction twice a week to assist with reviewing the weekly vocabulary words.

**Results.** Table 4.2 displays the fourth-grade classes' i-Ready vocabulary domain grade level results for the fall and winter diagnostics. The i-Ready diagnostic assess students in six domains: phonological awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, vocabulary, literature comprehension, and informational text comprehension. The winter diagnostic was given to the students after the classroom teachers utilized the above vocabulary strategies in their weekly lessons. In Table 2, each class resulted in an increase in the percentage of students scoring on or above grade level in vocabulary from the fall to the winter diagnostic except Class 2A. The percentage of students in Class 2A on or above grade level remained the same at 43%. Class 1B was the only class with an increase in two or more grade levels below. Class 1B increased from five percent to 11 percent in this category. Class 1A had the highest percentage of students scoring on or above grade level on the winter diagnostic. Class 1B had a 231% increase in on or above students. Class 2B had a 181% increase in on or above students. Class 1A had a 65% reduction in one grade level below students. Class 1B also had a reduction of 53% in one grade level below students. Class 3A had an 83% reduction of students in two or more grade levels below. Class 2B and 3B had a 100% reduction of students in two or more grade levels below.

Table 4.2

*i-Ready Diagnostic Vocabulary Domain Grade-Level Results*

<u>Class</u>	<u>Diagnostic</u>	<u>On or Above</u>	<u>One Below</u>	<u>Two or More Below</u>
Class 1A	Fall	40%	40%	20%
	Winter	71%	14%	14%
	Change (Percent Change)	+31 (78%)	-26 (-65%)	-6 (-30%)
Class 1B	Fall	16%	79%	5%
	Winter	53%	37%	11%
	Change (Percent Change)	+37 (231%)	-42 (-53%)	+6 (120%)
Class 2A	Fall	43%	38%	19%
	Winter	43%	43%	14%
	Change (Percent Change)	0 (0%)	+5 (13%)	-5 (-26%)
Class 2B	Fall	16%	79%	5%
	Winter	45%	55%	0%
	Change (Percent Change)	+29 (181%)	-24 (-30%)	-5 (100%)
Class 3A	Fall	29%	43%	29%
	Winter	43%	52%	5%
	Change (Percent Change)	+14 (48%)	+9 (21%)	-24 (-83%)
Class 3B	Fall	32%	47%	21%
	Winter	37%	63%	0%
	Change (Percent Change)	+5 (16%)	+16 (34%)	-21(100%)

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## Research Question Two

The second research question was: Does implementation of the i-Ready reading program affect student performance outcomes in reading? Research question number two also had two sub questions which are: How do students respond to digital lessons? Is there a relationship between the amount of time spent on individual online lessons and student reading performance? Teachers utilized the i-Ready reading program on a daily basis in their classrooms. The students participated in online instructional videos along with individual online lessons either assigned by the teacher or lessons generated by the program to improve identified deficits from the students' recent diagnostic results. Table 4.3 displays the overall on or above grade level growth percentage of students from the fall to the winter diagnostic. Table 4.4 shows the i-Ready fall to winter overall one grade level below results, and Table 4.5 shows the i-Ready fall to winter overall two or more grade level results.

**Results.** All of the fourth-grade classes demonstrated positive growth on and above grade level from the fall to winter i-Ready diagnostic. Some classes demonstrated more growth than other; however, overall growth was shown in all the fourth-grade classes. In Table 4.3 Class 1A with 71% had the highest percentage of students scoring on or above grade level on the winter diagnostic. Class 1B had a 282% percentage change from students scoring on or above grade level from fall to winter. Class 3B also had a large percentage change (124%) from the on or above grade level fall to winter diagnostic.

Table 4.3

*i-Ready Fall to Winter Overall On or Above Diagnostic Results*

<u>Class</u>	<u>Fall Diagnostic</u>	<u>Winter Diagnostic</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
Class 1A	43%	71%	+28	65%
Class 1B	11%	42%	+31	282%
Class 2A	38%	52%	+14	37%
Class 2B	45%	55%	+10	22%
Class 3A	24%	52%	+28	117%
Class 3B	21%	47%	+26	124%

In Table 4.4, Classes 1A and 1B had the two highest percentage reduction of students scoring one grade level below from the fall to winter diagnostic. Each class resulted in a decrease in the percentage of students who performed one grade level below except Class 2A. Class 2A demonstrated an increase of five percent in the category of one grade level below. This may be attributed to the decreased percentage from 19% to 0% of students scoring two or more grade levels below in Table 4.5.

In Table 4.5, Class 2B also saw a reduction from 5% to 0% in students scoring two or more grade levels below from the fall to winter. All fourth-grade classes resulted in a percentage decrease of students scoring two grade levels below except for class 1B. Class 1B had a six percent increase in students scoring two or more grade levels below.

Table 4.4

*i-Ready Fall to Winter Overall One Grade Level Below Diagnostic Results*

<u>Class</u>	<u>Fall Diagnostic</u>	<u>Winter Diagnostic</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
Class 1A	38%	14%	-24	-63%
Class 1B	84%	47%	-37	-44%
Class 2A	43%	48%	+5	12%
Class 2B	50%	40%	-10	-20%
Class 3A	52%	38%	-14	-27%
Class 3B	63%	47%	-16	-25%

Table 4.5

*i-Ready Fall to Winter Overall Two or More Grade Levels Below Diagnostic Results*

<u>Class</u>	<u>Fall Diagnostic</u>	<u>Winter Diagnostic</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
Class 1A	19%	10%	-9	-47%
Class 1B	5%	11%	+6	120%
Class 2A	19%	0%	-19	100%
Class 2B	5%	0%	-5	100%
Class 3A	24%	10%	-14	-58%
Class 3B	16%	5%	-11	-69%

Due to the school building closure, students were unable to participate in the student focus group. The focus group may have provided more insight as to how students reacted to participating in digital lessons.

A Pearson Correlation (r) analysis was computed to determine if a relationship existed between the fourth-grade students' winter diagnostic scaled scores and the amount of time spent on task completing instructional online lessons from August to December. The Pearson correlation was .01. The analysis indicated a weak, almost non-existent correlation between the two variables. The amount of time students spent on task using the i-Ready online lessons had very little to no effect on how students performed on their winter diagnostic.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question was: Do guided reading instructional strategies affect student outcomes? During classroom observations, the teachers utilized guided reading strategies such as activating prior knowledge, use of differentiated text, and utilization of more nonfiction text to help students improve their understanding of texts being read aloud. The teachers activated prior knowledge on a given topic by working as a class to complete KWL charts (what they know, what they wanted to know, and what they learned). When available, teachers would show online videos to the class for building or strengthening the student knowledge base. When online videos were not available, teachers used other sources of media to help students develop a better understanding. In classroom settings, students rotated to the teacher table, wherein the teacher utilized differentiated text for student reading. The teachers asked questions which covered the weeks focus standards; however, students were able to read text aloud which was more suited for their reading level. The fourth-grade teachers used a variety of texts in their classrooms such as poems, news articles, plays, fiction, and nonfiction texts. Students were exposed to these various texts to help them learn how to comprehend what they were reading.

Table 4.6

*2019-2020 Fourth-Grade Fall and Winter STAR Scaled Score Results*

Classes	<i>n</i>	Fall		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	Winter		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			(Change)	<i>SD</i>	(Change)
Class 1A	20	513	210	21	586	(+73)	241	(+31)
Class 1B	19	412	128	19	525	(+113)	154	(+26)
Class 2A	21	495	170	21	574	(+79)	161	(-9)
Class 2B	19	482	105	20	565	(+83)	102	(-3)
Class 3A	21	478	189	21	545	(+67)	166	(-23)
Class 3B	19	459	120	19	560	(+101)	120	(0)

**Results.** As shown in Table 4.6, Class 1B had a 113 point increase from the fall to winter average STAR scaled scores. Class 3B also had more than a 100 point increase from the fall to winter average scaled scores. The *SD* for classes 2A, 2B, and 3A decreased from the fall to the winter. These three classes' winter *SD* indicates the students' winter scores were closely distributed around the class mean. Students in class 3B had the same *SD* for the fall and the winter even though the class average increased by 101 points. Class 1A had the highest *SD* for the fall and the winter (241). Students in Class 1A had a wide distribution of scale scores away from the class 586 mean.

**Research Question Four**

The fourth research question was: Do student interventions help promote proficiency in reading? Teachers worked with students in small group settings during the scheduled Tier 2 intervention times. The teachers targeted skill deficits which were identified from the students' latest diagnostic. Students were progress monitored every two weeks to track how well the student was or was not responding to the intervention. Depending on when the student was

moved into Tier 2 indicated how many times the student was progress monitored. This fluid timeline meant each student would not have the same number of assessments where they were progress monitored. There was a total of 10 students out of 121 students in the fourth-grade who were receiving Tier 2 interventions. The fourth-grade students did not return to school after March 13, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, causing student interventions to be discontinued. The data collected pertaining to student interventions is insufficient to make a determination as to whether the interventions helped promote proficiency in the students' academic performance in reading.

### **Research Question Five**

The fifth research question was: What type of relationship is established between reading teachers and students? Research question number five also had three sub questions which were: How can reading teachers improve relationships with students? How can students improve relationships with reading teachers? Are there academic benefits to having a positive teacher-student relationship? Acknowledging the importance of building a relationship with students is a movement toward helping students succeed in the classroom. Identifying the various ways of how to improve the relationship was challenging. The teachers at Bayside Upper Elementary believed was important to have a good relationship with their students, but the methods for accomplishing this were difficult to agree upon.

Bayside Upper Elementary has three fourth-grade ELA teachers. Each teacher participated in an individual interview. The teachers were asked how they build relationships with their students? The teacher responses are as follow:

- We do a lot of community building. I teach them we are a family.
- Letting them get to know is just as important as me getting to know them.

- I try to learn information about their lives outside of school (interests, sports, family) and ask them questions or listen to information they want to share.

**Results.** In the interview, the teachers were asked how they learned how to build a relationship with their students. The teachers responded with learning from colleagues, personal experiences inside and outside of the school, and learning from a cooperating teacher while student teaching. One teacher mentioned using student surveys in her classroom helped her gauge the students' perspective on their teacher-student relationship. Another teacher discussed having high expectations in the classroom, so students always knew what she expected. She expected students to always follow the golden rule of treating others how you would want to be treated. There are many discussions between her and her students about what has transpired, and how it should have been handled. She believed in talking to her students to strengthen the relationship. The teacher used her talks to build trust with her students. Another teacher believed in not focusing on the negative when correcting student behavior. She would lead with a compliment, give constructive advice for improving improper behavior, and then end with another compliment. She also said paying attention to her students' facial expressions and body language helped her understand how to approach them. By being more observant and not always focusing on the students' negative behavior, her students became close to her. She said her students would open up about how they were feeling and would communicate to her what they needed or did not understand.

### **Research Question Six**

The sixth research question was: How can students be motivated to read? Research question number six also had two sub questions, specifically: Are there specific genres fourth-

grade students at Bayside like to read? Do teachers incorporate a variety of text to motivate students in reading?

Reading comes easy for some students and other students have to be motivated to open a book. It is a challenge for teachers to motivate students to read, especially if the students' have encountered a bad experience with reading and/or knows they struggle with reading and comprehending. The unmotivated student would rather deflect instead of shining a spotlight on his or her inability to read.

**Results.** All of the fourth-grade ELA teachers said the Accelerated Reader program incentives used at Bayside played a vital role in motivating students to read. The incentives offered by the school motivated the students to reach their AR reading goals. Students were able to participate in quarterly rewards such as the Fall Festival, Glow Party, Reader's Raffle, and the Spring Festival. Students who attained each of their monthly goals were eligible to participate in the Big Water Fun Day consisting of water slides, a dunking booth, and water relay games. A teacher said learning about student interests also contributed to helping students become more motivated to read in the classroom. The teacher was able to find books which covered certain interest topics and specific students wanted to read those books. One teacher allowed students in her classroom to pick the read aloud books for class. This helped generate more interest in wanting to read. Students having some ownership in their book selection contributed to encouraging their desire to read more outside of class.

## **Conclusion**

The fourth-grade students at Bayside demonstrated growth from the fall to winter STAR and i-Ready diagnostics. The implementation of specific reading and vocabulary strategies contributed to students moving in an upward trajectory toward improvement. The students who



demonstrated recession in growth and/or showed no improvements were moved to Tier 2 in order to receive more targeted, small group instruction. In addition to additional strategies, teacher student relationships and student motivation was deemed important from the teachers' perspective. Students were not allowed to return to school because of the COVID-19 pandemic, unfortunately, the researcher was unable to obtain the fourth-grade students' perspectives on reading achievement, interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation. Upon returning to Bayside for the 2020-2021 SY, not all students returned back to the school. Some students withdrew to be home schooled, some students moved away, some students became virtual, and some students returned as traditional students in the building. Due to students and teachers experiencing abnormal absenteeism due to a change in school placement and exposure to the Coronavirus, this year would have been challenging to gauge a clear and true perspective from students in regards to reading achievement, interventions, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this applied research was to promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading at Bayside Upper Elementary School. A need for increased student proficiency in fourth-grade reading became a concern when the students received the lowest proficiency percentage in comparison to the math and science proficiency percentages. Also, Bayside had the lowest ELA proficiency percentage of the entire Riverdale School District.

Students who are proficient in reading are not only good readers, but are also able to understand the text. When a student is proficient in reading, the student has a high degree of comprehension of the text being read. Academic success is built, in large part, upon the students' ability to understand the text read (Ritchey et al., 2017). According to Duke and Pearson (2002), "Comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive" (p. 206). Good readers are able to multi-task while reading a text to help gain a conceptual understanding of what is being read.

The administrative team decided to address this deficiency with a collaborative effort with the teachers. An action plan was created and implemented which highlighted the use of specific reading and vocabulary instructional strategies in the classroom, student intervention implementation, strengthening of teacher-student relationships, and increased student motivation to help students demonstrate improvements in reading.

Chapter one of this applied research identified the purpose of this study, the problem which needed to be addressed, and the research questions to be answered through this study. Chapter two provided a literature review of research conducted to help promote increased reading achievement among students. This chapter included research on various academic strategies and best practices which helped students become better readers in school. Chapter three reviewed the research questions and outlined the methodology which was used to conduct the study. Chapter four contained the analysis of data collected from the implemented elements of the action plan. Chapter five presents the conclusions, analysis of the findings, the study limitations, and next steps for improvement at Bayside Upper Elementary School (BUES).

### **Analysis**

**Reading and vocabulary instructional strategies.** The teachers participated in trainings to utilize reading and vocabulary instructional strategies in their classrooms. These trainings were conducted to help students expand their vocabulary and assist with developing better comprehension skills when reading text. The teachers of BUES were receptive to the information presented in the trainings. The information learned by teachers from the trainings were used in their classroom lessons and activities. The teachers shared in conversation how the students enjoyed participating as readers and definers. Teachers also expressed students were able to better understand the vocabulary in the text thus giving students a better understanding of what was being read. The flow of understanding was not compromised by students not knowing the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Before reading aloud to the students, the teachers would activate prior knowledge using a variety of practices (questions, videos, KWL charts, etc.). This gave students the opportunity to construct meaning of the text with a prior experience and also generate questions about the text. More proficient readers know the reason for reading and are able to create questions relating to the text while reading (Thomas & Vannatta Reinhart, 2014).

According to Kuhn et al. (2017), “Research supports the use of informational text in the primary grades” (p. 286). Teachers used a variety of text in their classrooms such as fiction and nonfiction. This has become a shift in classrooms over the years. Although some of these teachers may have been using a few of the strategies addressed in their training, it was not being implemented consistently and intentionally in every classroom. The teachers all agreed their student performance was better overall when they intentionally planned each lesson to include a combination of fiction and nonfiction text. They also agreed their lower performing students did better comprehending what was read when they had a better understanding of the meaning of unfamiliar words. Incorporating informational text in the lessons expands student vocabulary as well as help them become competent and attentive readers (Kuhn et al., 2017).

**Classroom Observations.** The purpose of the fourth-grade teachers utilizing specific reading instructional strategies in their classroom was for the students to gain a better understanding of what they were reading. The majority of the students did not have a problem with identifying and calling words in the text. However, there were several students who did not understand what they were reading when asked questions about the text. This was supported by the classroom diagnostic results as well as classroom observations performed by the researcher.

During the classroom observations, the researcher observed students who would understand the text the teacher read aloud better than the text they had to read independently. When the teacher read aloud, students were able to focus on the entire body of text rather than stopping and decoding words. When the students read aloud, some students spent time focusing on what was on the page instead of gaining an understanding of the overall concept for reading.

The researcher observed students who were able to follow the storyline of a fiction text better than remembering the factual information from a paired nonfiction text. The vocabulary in the nonfiction text was unfamiliar to some students. The teachers had to spend time building background knowledge for the students, particularly when reading nonfiction.

When teachers were being trained on implementing strategic vocabulary and reading strategies, they commented the students were more interested in the fiction stories than the nonfiction stories read in class. During the classroom observations, the researcher observed students who were engaged in the reading were also the same students who actively participated in the class discussion of the text. More students were able to answer the fiction text questions than the nonfiction text questions. Students generated an interest in the text they knew something about. It was easier for them to respond to questions about a familiar or relatable content.

**Quantitative Data.** The fourth-grade students at Bayside took the beginning of the year STAR and iReady diagnostics in August and the middle of the year diagnostics in January. The data collected from both diagnostics showed the students demonstrated an improvement from where the students were at the beginning of the year to the middle of the year. Eighty-three percent of

the fourth-grade students demonstrated growth from the fall STAR diagnostic to the winter diagnostic. Although there were some classes whose data was stagnant, the group mean of the students showed growth from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year on both STAR and i-Ready diagnostics.

**Student interventions.** Student interventions began in August after the fall diagnostics were administered. Students who demonstrated a deficiency in reading on the fall diagnostic were placed in Tier 2. The students who ended the previous school year with Tier 3 instruction were automatically provided Tier 3 support when school began in August, 2019.

As the year progressed, if Tier 2 students demonstrated low growth on common assessments, weekly assessments and/or were not performing well on their bi-weekly progress monitoring, these students were brought before the school's teacher support team (TST) to have a decision made pertaining to the next steps to help the students. There were ten fourth-grade students in Tier 2 for ELA. Although, six of the ten students demonstrated an overall increase in their bi-weekly progress monitoring data, it did not change their placement in Tier because their data points fluctuated each week. In order for students to change placement in Tier, the students must demonstrate at least three consecutive increases on their progress monitoring data above their targeted goal.

In addition to the regular classroom instruction (small group and whole group), the fourth-grade teachers used time to provide their lowest performing students with extra instruction. The Tier 2 instruction provided by the teachers helped target the learning gaps students were missing.

**Student Survey and Focus Group.** The purpose of the student surveys and student focus group was to gain an understanding of the student's perspective about reading, motivation, the relationship with teachers, and interventions. Part of this study, required the researcher to hear from students on issues which impacted their reading. Typically, students are not asked what they think and/or want. This study was to provide students with a voice on how to improve the issues which will help more students become successful in school. The feedback from students would have been a guide for teachers on how to improve their relationships with the students, and how to better engage students in the ELA lessons. Due to school building closures, the researcher was unable to administer the student surveys and conduct the focus group at Bayside Upper Elementary.

### **Limitations**

**Time.** The 2019-2020 school year ended differently than expected. The implementation of this complete action plan was shortened by an order from Governor Tate Reeves for students to not return to the school building after March 13, 2020. Therefore, the researcher was unable to conduct a focus group with the fourth-grade students, and the students were unable to complete the student survey.

The survey and focus group was intended to gain student perspectives about reading, interventions, student motivation, and teacher-student relationships. Since students did not return to the school building, due to the governor's order, the Mississippi Department of Education waived the end of the year state assessments, and the school district did not administer spring diagnostics.

Although the majority of the students were able to show an increase from the fall to winter diagnostics in STAR and i-Ready, the data is inconclusive as to whether or not full implementation of all elements would have made a significant difference in promoting proficiency in fourth-grade reading on the end of the year diagnostics and state assessments. The students were on a positive growth trajectory based on the data from the middle of the year diagnostics. The more time students are exposed to best teaching practices and have the opportunity to utilize these strategies when reading, the students become good readers.

**Participants.** This study involved 121 fourth-grade students and three ELA fourth-grade teachers. This study did not include data from the special education teacher classroom perspective and classroom observations. The data collected may have shown different results if there were more students and teachers involved in the study.

**Social Desirability Bias.** An individual teacher interview protocol, student surveys, and a student focus group protocol were to be conducted in this study. Since the building administrator was the researcher giving the interview, one limitation of this study was social desirability bias.

Social desirability bias is when the participants in the study do not answer the questions according to the truth but according to perceived expectations. The fourth-grade teachers were interviewed by the researcher who was also their building administrator. The teachers may have felt compelled to answer according to how they thought the researcher wanted them to answer. Due to the role of the teachers and the researcher in the school setting, the teachers' responses may not have been completely honest. The same could have been said for the students who were to take a student survey and participate in the student focus group.



**School Building Closing.** The governor, Tate Reeves, issued an executive order in March 2020 for all schools in the state to close their building and provide instruction to students by other means due to the increased number of coronavirus cases in the state. This study was to include conducting a student survey and a student focus group. These elements of the study were not implemented due to the students not returning to the school building.

Bayside Upper Elementary transitioned from face to face teaching to printed packets. These packets were either picked up from outside the school building, mailed to the student's home address, or delivered to the student's home. This type of experience in student learning was different and unfamiliar to both the teachers and students. The teachers missed the act of teaching their students and knowing where their students were with their learning. With the distribution of packets, students were completing work and depending on parents at home to explain their misconceptions or mistakes. This was not what the students were used to and many parents did not know how to help the student. Some teachers were able to provide limited instruction to the parents when contacted. However, this was not the same as having the students in the classroom with a structured routine and expectations. Since all students were working at home, the school did not conduct any end of the year diagnostics or state assessments.

### **School Culture Expectations**

Bayside Upper Elementary School is one of four schools in the Riverdale School District. This district has a historic record of having one of the best educational systems in the Northeast part of the state. There is a culture of high expectations embedded within the school community. Students, teachers, and school leadership work hard to achieve or go beyond these high

expectations. Therefore, it seldom occurs for anyone to not give their full effort, not reaching their potential to successfully grow. People moving into the community may not share the same motivation of high expectations. This way of thinking causes a strain on the school and home relationship when parents do not value education the same as the school district. It becomes difficult to improve learning when parents are in denial about the problem. Student achievement is held in high regard in the school district. The superintendent's motto is "Every student, every day." With this motto everyone plays a vital role in making sure to give students the best of themselves in order for students to experience successful academic achievement.

### **Recommendations**

At the conclusion of this study, it is recommended further research is needed to continue exploring promoting proficiency in reading in the fourth grade. Increasing proficiency with students has to be an intentional plan of action which teachers must utilize every day. Many factors influence how well students comprehend the text being read. The ability of students gaining understanding from reading a text has a significant impact on (not only the current student but also their future learning.) As students advance to higher grade levels, they will encounter challenging terminology in text which will make it difficult to understand what is being read. As the world continues to evolve with new technologies, there will always be a need for continuous development of best practices to help teachers reach students at becoming better readers.

The elements which were discussed in this study should be implemented in other grades. The instructional strategies used by the fourth-grade teachers can be adapted to utilize in other

grades to help students strengthen their reading comprehension skills. Each year, teachers are able to build on the reading skill set developed from the previous school year. The third-grade students are required to pass the end of the year Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) ELA Part 1 with a score of three or higher to be promoted to the fourth grade. This is an important assessment for all third-grade students. By implementing uniform instructional practices across all grades, students are able to expand in vocabulary and gain a deeper understanding of the text. Strengthening the proficiency of the third-grade students would allow the students an even greater opportunity to pass the end of the year assessment.

Student surveys and focus groups should also be collected to receive student views on how to help them become better readers. This gives the opportunity for students to have a voice about how they learn. Teachers and administrators would be able to use this information to help guide the resources used to teach students how to become proficient readers.

This study opens avenues for not only improving student achievement in reading, but also possibly targeting specific instructional practices in math and other subjects which would help students become more proficient in those disciplines as well. Reading is the basis for all learning. It is part of all subject areas. Reading influences how students learn concepts within other subjects.

Another recommendation would be to receive input from the students' parents. Parents are an important piece of the puzzle in increasing student academic achievement. Parental involvement in student learning helps establish an open relationship between the school and home. All persons involved can work together to help students reach their full academic

potential. The professional educators at Bayside Upper Elementary had to depend on parental involvement when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sudden shift in how students were being taught and how the students were learning.

### **Conclusion**

Reading is an evolving skill which begins before students enter formal school and continues to develop throughout the years in school (Kuhn et al., 2017). Reading comprehension is also a process which develops with practice. Meeting the academic needs of students involves starting where the students are, working to catch the students up on what they may be missing, and challenging students to excel beyond the minimum requirements.

Although the statewide school closures did contribute to the abrupt learning and growing path these students were traveling, the students were headed in the right direction for improvement. This study revealed there was growth from the fourth-grade students at Bayside Upper Elementary School on their middle of the year STAR and i-Ready diagnostics. Would this have been enough growth to move the number of proficiency students in ELA? This is still a question to be answered. This study did produce results with the utilization of specific teacher instructional strategies in reading and vocabulary. Some students who were in the Tier 2 process also experienced growth according to their progress monitoring data. The information which was scheduled to be collected from students would have provided student insight about reading.

Understanding what a person reads transfers over into daily activities as well as reading academic text. Being able to read and understand as adults begins with proficiently reading as a child. Students who struggle with reading may grow up to become adults who continue to

struggle with reading. Adult readers who have difficulty comprehending text have a hard time understanding daily readings such as mortgage loans, vehicle purchases, printed weekly news, etc. Improving the reading proficiency of the fourth-grade students will enact a shift in the Riverdale community of having adults who are capable of creating and sustaining a thriving community. Adults who are literate usually value education and have the monetary means to provide for their families and generations thereafter a better way of living. All of these would be positives for improving the life of working and living in the Riverdale School District and the state of Mississippi.

As educators, it is our responsibility to create a better future for not only the students in our schools, but also the society we live in. Proficiency reading will not occur overnight. It takes teachers using best practices while motivating the unmotivated to persevere when it seems difficult. Every student may not achieve proficiency, but everyone can strive and work hard to make sure students are working and applying their full potential in becoming the best readers.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

## **APPENDIX A: Teacher Interview Protocol**

**General Research Topic:** Promoting Proficiency in Fourth-Grade Reading

**Specific Research Questions:** Which factors promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading?

**Conceptual Framework:** reading achievement, reading intervention, teacher-student relationships, student motivation

**Statement of Consent:** Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a reading teacher. The information you share with me will be used to help our research team better understand how proficiency in reading is achieved. Your name or other identifiable information will not be attached to any reporting of findings that we gather, as we want you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences with us. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

**Icebreaker Questions:** 1) How are you doing today? 2) What was one thing that made you smile today?

### **Interview Questions:**

#### **Reading Achievement**

- 3) How would you describe reading in your classroom?
- 4) What does reading achievement mean to you?
- 5) How do your students obtain reading achievement in your classroom?
- 6) What do you do when students do not obtain reading achievement in your classroom?
- 7) What has contributed to you teaching reading successfully in your classroom?

#### **Interventions**

- 8) What types of interventions do you do in your classroom?
- 9) How well do your interventions work or do not work?
- 10) What contributes to how well the interventions work or do not work?
- 11) How would you describe your relationship with your intervention students?

#### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

- 12) How do you build a relationship with your students?
- 13) Where or how did you learn to build relationships with your students?
- 14) What methods do you use to gauge student perspectives of the relationship?
- 15) Tell me about a time when the relationship with the student changed his/her success in your classroom.
- 16) Tell me about a time when the relationship with the student changed you as a teacher.

#### **Reading Motivation**

- 17) What motivated you to become a reading teacher?
- 18) Is there a teacher in your past who motivated you or demotivated you? Tell me about



that teacher and what he/she did in the classroom?

- 19) How are students motivated to read in your classroom?
- 20) How do you address those students who do not like to read?
- 21) Where have you learned how to motivate students in your reading class?

## **APPENDIX B**

## APPENDIX B: Student Motivation Survey

### Student Motivation Survey

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#### Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Choose one

Male (1)

Female (2)

---

Q2 Who is your ELA teacher?

Mrs. Carruth (1)

Mrs. Clay (2)

Mrs. Pace (3)

---

Q3 When is your ELA class?

First Block (1)

Second Block (2)

---

Q4 I like hard, challenging books.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q5 I know I will do well in reading next year.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q6 I do as little schoolwork as possible in reading.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-

Q7 If a teacher discusses something interesting I might read more about it.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q8 I read because I have to.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q9 I am a good reader.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-

Q10 I like it when the questions in books make me think.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q11 I read about my hobbies to learn more about them.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q12 I read stories about fantasy and make believe.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-

Q13 I like being the only one who knows an answer in something we read.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q14 I read to learn new information about topics that interest me.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q15 I learn more from reading than most students in my class.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-

Q16 I like to read about new things

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q17 I like hearing the teacher say I read well.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q18 I like being the best at reading.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-



Q19 I don't like reading something when the words are too difficult.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q20 I make pictures in my mind when I read.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q21 I don't like vocabulary questions

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-

Q22 Finishing every reading assignment is very important to me.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q23 In comparison to my other school subjects, I am best at reading.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q24 It is very important to be a good reader.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
-

Q25 I am happy when someone recognizes my reading.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q26 I always try to finish my reading on time.

- Very different from me (1)
  - A little different from me (2)
  - A little like me (3)
  - A lot like me (4)
- 

Q27 In comparison to other activities I do, it is very important to me to be a good reader.

- Very different from me (1)
- A little different from me (2)
- A little like me (3)
- A lot like me (4)

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Wigfield, A., Guthrie, J. T., McGough, K., & Educational Resources Information Center (US) (1996)

## **APPENDIX C**

## **APPENDIX C: Student Focus Group Protocol**

**General Research Topic:** Promoting Proficiency in Fourth-Grade Reading

**Specific Research Questions:** Which factors promote proficiency in fourth-grade reading?

**Conceptual Framework:** reading achievement, reading interventions, teacher-student relationships, student motivation

**Statement of Consent:** I am so happy to have you all take the time to speak with me about your experiences as fourth grade reading students. The information you share with me will be used to help our research team better understand what influences student achievement in reading proficiency. Your name or other identifiable information will not be attached to any reporting of findings that we gather, as we want you to feel comfortable sharing your experiences with us. Are you willing to proceed with this focus group?

**Icebreaker Questions:** 1) Pick a number between 1 and 10 to see who guess my number or closest to it. 2) How are things coming along this school year?

### **Reading Achievement**

- 3) How would you describe reading in your classroom?
- 4) What do you like to read?
- 5) Have you ever experienced success in reading? Tell me about your experience.

### **Interventions**

- 6) What do you think about reading interventions?
- 7) What do students achieve when they receive reading interventions?

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

- 8) Who is your favorite reading teacher and why?
- 9) What do you expect from your reading teacher?
- 10) What kind of relationship do you have with your reading teacher?
- 11) Tell me about a time you achieved success in reading.
- 12) How did your teacher help with your success?

### **Reading Motivation**

- 13) Do you like to read? Why or why not?
- 14) Have you always enjoyed or not enjoyed reading?
- 15) Did a teacher influence your love to or not to read? Tell me about that time.
- 16) What motivates you to read or could motivate you to read?
- 17) How do your teachers motivate you to read?
- 18) How do your teachers not motivate you to read?

## VITA

DEIRDRE E. HUNTLEY

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### **Educational Credentials**

**University of Mississippi-Oxford, MS**

Ed. D. in Educational Leadership (K-12), 2021

**MAPQSL-Itawamba Community College -Fulton, MS**

Administrative License (Alternate Route), 2009

**University of Mississippi- Oxford, MS**

M. Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction, 2007

**Mississippi State University-Starkville, MS**

B.S. in Elementary Education, 2001

### **Employment**

**East Amory Elementary School Principal, 7/2020-Present**

Amory School District-Amory, MS

**East Amory Elementary School Assistant Principal, 7/2015-6/2020**

Amory School District-Amory, MS

**West Amory Elementary School Teacher, 8/2012-6/2015**

Amory School District-Amory, MS

**Upward Bounds (Only Summers) English I Teacher, 6/2013-7/2016**

Mississippi Valley State University-Itta Bena, MS

**Davis Elementary School Teacher, 8/2010-7/2012**

Greenwood Public School District-Greenwood, MS

**James C. Rosser Elementary School Teacher, 8/2009-7/2010**

Sunflower County School District-Indianola, MS

**West Amory Elementary School Teacher, 8/2002-7/2009**

Amory School District-Amory, MS

### **Certifications**

Mississippi Teacher Certification

Administrator (Endorsement 486)

Social Studies 7-12 (Endorsement 192)

Elementary Education K-6 (Endorsements 152, 117)

### **Honors**

Special Teacher Award- James C. Rosser Elementary- May 2010

Teacher of the Month-Davis Elementary-October 2010

Teacher of the Month-West Amory Elementary-August 2012

Teacher of the Year-West Amory Elementary- 2013-2014

### **Professional Membership**

Mississippi Professional Educators Association