ABSTRACT

Linda Carol Layden White, AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF HOW COMMON LITERACY ASSESSMENTS IMPACT THE LITERACY SKILLS OF STUDENTS TRANSITIONING FROM SECOND TO THIRD GRADE (Under the direction of Dr. William A. Rouse, Jr.). Department of Educational Leadership, November 2015.

An increased accountability in literacy performance for third grade students drew statewide attention in North Carolina upon the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law. Elementary educators have worked to implement this mandate by monitoring the state's reading curriculum, instruction, assessments, and approaches to educating students. This study investigated the impact of common literacy assessments on the literacy skills of students transitioning from second to third grade. This research was conducted using a case study approach, with a primary use of the qualitative method. A small quantitative method was blended by review of the student data. The setting was two elementary schools in a small, low-wealth district in northeastern North Carolina. The participants included the second and third grade teachers and principals. The teachers were led in grade level focus group sessions and the principals were interviewed individually. The responses from all focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed. A variety of student test data, teacher surveys, and other documented collections were observed and analyzed. Tables and charts were constructed to outline the student data and to record the trends. The results of this study are consistent with previous research on this topic, indicating the significance of using common literacy assessments to enhance third grade literacy skills, literacy performance, and providing the foundational skills students need to be effective readers. This study may provide elementary educators further insight on the assessment cycle between second and third grade and how it supports the implementation of the Read to Achieve law.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF HOW COMMON LITERACY ASSESSMENTS IMPACT

THE LITERACY SKILLS OF STUDENTS TRANSITIONING

FROM SECOND TO THIRD GRADE

A Dissertation Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Linda Carol Layden White

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is first dedicated to my parents, the late Charles and Mittie Jean Layden, as a fulfillment to a promise I made to them years ago. Their limited education and struggles in life empowered me to reach this achievement, as often times, while having parent-child conversations in the old, wooden rocking chairs on the front porch of our family home place, they would prompt the idea of me becoming the first "Dr." in our family. I specifically remember my dad telling me two pieces of advice while referencing personal scenarios. First, as we were chopping in the garden one hot summer day, while wiping sweat, he said, "Linda Carol, if you don't want to work this hard for the rest of your life, you need to get a good education." The second word of advise he gave me as we watched a friend water his flowers in a rainstorm was, "Don't ever get so smart that you lose your common sense." My dad was quite a funny storyteller and my mom was a pillar of strength. I wish they were here to see this goal complete – but in many ways their legacies are alive in me. I truly believe I had the best!

Secondly, I dedicate this work to my oldest sister, the late Peggy Josie Layden. For all the years of coaching me through homework and for the many life-lessons, I will proudly walk across the graduation stage in honor of you- noting the highest graduation possible, because you deserve the best!

Ultimately, this dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Whitney Jo Layden White. Doctors and specialists speculated I would never be able to have a child. Life took its course and I moved on from the thought of motherhood and focused solely on my career. At almost the age of forty, the initial shock of conception, pregnancy, and birth created a blur that often revisits, yet her liveliness creates a clear sparkle in my life that impels me to do well for her! I will always remember her saying to me while resting in bed one day, "Mommy, you need to finish this

dissertation. I believe in you." Wow. From the mouth of a child – that was the final push I needed to complete this task. I love you and I am so proud that your dad and I get to grow with you and embrace you forever! Whitney: Learn to fly early so you will have longer to soar!

Finally, along with my own children, Whitney, Clayton, Chase, and Amber, this dissertation is dedicated to all of the loved ones in my life who represent the next generation. Family is so important – and in addition to my parents and in-laws, I am thankful for my brothers and sisters: Peggy Layden, Douglas & Geri Layden, Brenda & Steve Dail, Barbara & Perry Robbins, and Elton & Arlene Layden, as well as my sister-in-law, Dena White-Waters.   To their children- my nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews (present and future) - I love you all and I dedicate this work to you. There is an expectancy for you to continue to be the very best you can be. As others from my past have inspired me, I hope you, too, will be inspired by what you learn from us. Set your standards high, always do your best, and never give up. I am here for each of you always. The world awaits you. Go forth and do great things. The best is yet to come.

May this dissertation be yet another framework to promote foundational literacy skills for all children in anticipation of future success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My favorite verse of scripture comes from Ecclesiastes 3: A Time for Everything

3 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
[2] a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot;
[3] a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build;
[4] a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
[5] a time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
[6] a time to search, and a time to give up; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
[7] a time to tear, and a time to mend; a time to be silent, and a time to speak;
[8] a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.
[9] What do workers gain from their toil? [10] I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. [11] He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. [12] I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. [13] That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. [14] I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

The completion of this dissertation took much longer than I ever imagined! From when I first set out to complete this milestone in my life, throughout the length of time it took to complete this goal, I feel like I have lived every verse of Ecclesiastes 3. At many times in my life, I felt as if I was faced with equal magnitudes of encouragements and accomplishments, yet the same amount of delays and hardships. As a result of the ups and downs that were encountered, each one helped shape the overall product of this paper, as well as strengthened me as a professional and as a person. For the lessons on patience and perseverance – I thank the Lord for allowing me to complete this achievement in His timing – as all along He helped me keep things in perspective.

I am further certain that I have been blessed with some of the best people in the world in my life. Professionally and personally – "my people" are the best! First, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee. My chairperson, Dr. Rouse has been a consistent supporter throughout my entire graduate program. I am thankful for the days he would redirect

me and, like the story of the Starfish, he never gave up on me. I am additionally thankful for my committee members, as without their recommendations and votes of confidence, this achievement would not be possible. Thank you, Dr. Kermit Buckner, Dr. Carol Greene, Dr. William Grobe, and Dr. James McDowelle.

A very heartfelt acknowledgement is extended to committee member and dear friend, Dr. Carol Greene, as during the completion of this dissertation she was diagnosed with Stage Three cancer. Dr. Greene and I have been college friends from the mid 1990's – and have often laughed (and cried) about the many circumstances that we have experienced throughout our lives. As we would often ask "What next?" with the content focusing on the next big life event, we were neither prepared for the day that we learned her diagnosis. For Carol's unconditional love, support, and friendship – there is no way to properly grant the recognition of which she is worthy of as a professor, friend, or person. Carol: The best is yet to come!

Along with the support from Carol came "Team Procrastination." This team consisted of Carol's daughters, Emma Kate and Tori. It is truly an honor to acknowledge them in this dissertation for their tireless nights of checking on me while I was working at their dining room table, making me coffee, babysitting my daughter, and even giving up their bedroom so I would have a comfortable place to sleep while in Greenville. Much love to these girls who have been and remain such a motivation.

Another acknowledgement is extended to the faculty, staff, students, and families of Perquimans, Dare, and Edenton-Chowan Schools. Over the years, I actually attempted the start of at least three different dissertation topics – each of which was prevalent to me during my career time in each district. As the dissertation culminated in the end, each school system provided valuable insight and support to help shape the framework of the research that was

selected. Special acknowledgement is given to the superintendents who have shaped my career and motivated me to advance as a leader in education by providing both indirect and direct support along the way: Dr. Ken Wells (Perquimans County Schools, Retired), Dr. Dwayne Stallings (Perquimans County Schools), Dr. Sue Burgess (Dare County Schools), Dr. Allan Smith (Edenton-Chowan Schools, Retired), and Dr. Rob Jackson (Edenton-Chowan Schools).

To my principal friends who have been my teammates through this process - you actually understand the method to the madness of this research study! Thanks: Michelle White, Jamie Bowers, and Sheila Evans. To my friend, Julie Roberts: hugs and smiley faces.

I have been blessed to work with colleagues who are second to none! However, one in particular stands out as my number one professional supporter: my sister and role model, Brenda Dail. From birth, she told me I would be a teacher. Then she told me I would be a principal, director, and so forth. I'm staying tuned-in for what she tells me to do next because as my big sister – I tend to always listen to her advice. For the unconditional love, support, understanding, editing, and babysitting - Many hugs on both a professional and personal level!

Along with support from colleagues, the greatest support has come from within my home. I could not have done and could not do anything without my husband, Chad. He has been my rock and there are no words that can express his behind the scenes love and encouragement that truly kept me going on days I wanted to give up. We're a team – and in many ways, he owns a part of this degree. I love you, Chad!

To the kids in our house: Clayton, Chase, and Whitney – Wow! Throughout this process, you have fueled me with energy, yet drained my tank! You all have been my inspiration and I will never forget your words of encouragement. It is because of you three, I never gave up. I could not let you see me fail. And, I never want to see you fail. To Clayton and Chase – you

had the unique early experience of having me as your stepmother and as your elementary principal through the early research of this project. I hope in your hearts the journey was as special to you as it was to me. To my stepdaughter, Amber: It was during my first experience as a stepmother that you pushed me to achieve my goals. As you were learning from me, I was learning from you. To my baby boys in heaven, Baby Daniel and Baby Pete: I can only imagine how life would have been with you here with us on earth. Even in your physical absence, the two of you have taught me determination and have given me strength. It is because of the two of you that I hope I am able to be sensitive to the special needs of children.

To my sister, Barbara: You were the one who kept me calm on a personal level. From the excessive hours of babysitting Whitney to making sure everyone in my family maintained some type of regular routine on days I was away – there is no way I can ever repay you for stepping in for me and handling my life! Never did you question or doubt me! There was always a calming peace in your unconditional encouragement. We did it!

To my in-laws, Joe and Mary White, all immediate and extended family, members of Whiteville Grove Baptist Church, and my special friends – of which I can't even attempt to begin naming – thank you, thank you, thank you – for the multiple ways in which you stood behind me, accepted the unknowns, prayed, and cheered from behind the scenes. I could feel the anticipation in your support, and often times that gave me a renewed strength and focus.

I could go on, but there is not enough paper to properly write the list of acknowledgements. So, to everyone: thank you!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For the past few decades, educators across the United States focused on meeting

academic achievement goals under the national act of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (North

Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). This law required schools to implement

annual tests that measure proficiency in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight,

and grades ten through twelve. It also required school districts and schools to publicly report test

results, including a breakdown of the data by sub-groups of students. The sub-groups include

areas such as low-income students, students with disabilities, and the major racial and ethnic

groups and variations of the groups. The sub-group data demonstrates student academic

performance achievement to show trends, or lack of trends. In this model, schools were expected

to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), noting student proficiency rates increasing in years

leading up to 2014. Each state was given the flexibility to determine the rate of increase required

for meeting the AYP determination for each target area (White House, Retrieved from

http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/reforming-no-child-left-behind).

Schools across the nation worked to ensure that students were 100% proficient on state

assessments (White House, Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/

reforming-no-child-left-behind). Clearly, there were obstacles that many of the schools faced in

order to ensure they were meeting the standards (White House, Retrieved from

http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/reforming-no-child-left-behind). The

obstacles included both internal and external constraints. Internally, there were obstacles within

the classroom. These internal issues usually consisted of time, money, resources, and the

opportunities to differentiate instruction for students. External obstacles included the perception

of lack of parent support, lack of administrative direction, and lack of an aligned curriculum for the grade levels and schools. There was a perception that the results of testing were a punishment rather than a reward. Schools tended to focus on the actual scores, as opposed to the student academic growth and progress of student performance (White House, Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/reforming-no-child-left-behind).

Locally, in North Carolina, the North Carolina School Boards Association reports through the Center for Public Education that while the No Child Left Behind act issued an intensified focus on student assessments in national education that was actively encouraged and mandated, there is controversy over the instruction that is connected (Mitchell, 2006). Mitchell (2006) further reports education officials in 50 states and 299 representative districts participated in a large-scale survey on questions related to the value of No Child Left Behind legislation. Seventy-one percent of the districts reported that NCLB's testing requirements prompted districts to increase the curricular time in reading and mathematics for students at risk of failing, yet reduced the time for other curriculum areas. Researchers from the Education Center in Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System in Charlotte, North Carolina report the NCLB Act of 2001 turned local, state, and national accountability models into high-anxiety, stressful environments for students and teachers (Salvaodr, Schoeneberger, Tingle, & Algozinne, 2012).

As teachers throughout the United States debate the implementation of common assessments, The North Carolina School Boards Association reports that when teachers expand on the opportunities that tests offer them, the assessments can help students learn (Mitchell, 2006). Eva Baker completed a study which concludes that the alignment of instruction with assessments are linked to two main interventions: (1) alignment of curriculum and tests with standards; and, (2) use of the test results to target instruction areas that need improvement

(Mitchell, 2006). Baker summarized the research with a quote from Dietel: "Succeeding at tests means knowing the curriculum, not acquiring few tricks. Getting good at format and knowing the tricks of test taking only takes you so far if you don't know the relevant content and skills" (Mitchell, 2006).

In North Carolina, third grade is the first grade level tested on state and national accountability models and some elementary schools are working to overcome the obstacle of connecting the second grade assessments to the third grade assessments. In second grade, local assessment scores in reading tend to be higher than third grade state pre-test scores, and end-of-grade reading assessment scores tend to be lower (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). This creates questions about the lack of growth between second and third grade and potentially inconsistencies between schools. The inconsistencies could be specifically challenging for school systems that have elementary school facilities that are physically divided between the second and third grade levels.

Student literacy performance in the third grade has shown trends of achievement regression due to the lack of effective transitions, noting inconsistencies with assessments from second to third grade (Docket & Perry, 2001). Some teachers and principals argue for the need for consistent reading assessment tools to produce comparable data. Others debate the reasons to ignore trend data, as students experience transition from one grade to another (Hattie, 2009). Specifically across transitional grades, second and third grade teachers have long debated the causes of differing skill level reports of students who have transitioned from second to third grade (Docket & Perry, 2001). Most elementary school teachers and principals have opinionated rationales as to why the academic data have varied over the years (Docket & Perry, 2001). As a result, educators have initiated efforts to promote effective grade level transitions for students

that ensure academic success as measured by a variation of standardized tests to eliminate

discrepancies in data. Additionally, there is a potential of heightened rigor in the delivery of the

curriculum content as a result of the emphasis on accountability. Teachers and school leaders

place great value in assessments, yet when reviewing elementary data, the comments have often

been made that elementary test data, when analyzing from second to third grade, is like

comparing apples to oranges. The comparison of apples to oranges is symbolic to the different

types of tests administered within the second and third grade, respectfully, noting that each test

measures different skill-sets, producing proficiency results that are often not consistent. Since

North Carolina has implemented more rigorous laws and policies for literacy assessment, there is

an increased need for research, as the changes in the policies require measures of increased

proficiency (White House, Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/

reforming-no-child-left-behind)**.**

In July 2012, the North Carolina General Assembly approved the Read to Achieve

legislation (www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). The purpose of the Read to Achieve

program is to provide components that will improve reading proficiency for students in

kindergarten through third grade. Noting reading is the center-focus of all instruction, the

legislation supports that all subjects, including math, science, and social studies require literacy

skills. In the Read to Achieve model, students are to read, and are to be read to, daily in order to

build literacy skills. At the end of the third grade year, students are given an End-of-Grade

(EOG) test that measures achievement in reading comprehension. The students are assessed on

literacy standards taught during the third-grade year and final assessment scores are given to

determine proficiency (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/

play/850102).

The calculations of student proficiency are documented and used as measurements to publicly outline the performance of each grade, school, and system. These data have been collectively compared across North Carolina, as noted on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's annual release of Report Cards (www.reportcards.org) for every school and district. Just as school report cards measure student performance for individual students, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction provides the publication of the state's public schools' report cards on the website www.ncreportcards.org, one of the state's most comprehensive resources for information about district and school information. Specifically, the website provides data on the following measures: (a) district and school profile; (b) high student performance; (c) safe, orderly, and caring schools; and, (d) quality teachers and administrators.

In summary, instructional standards and literacy curriculum are used to prepare students for literacy assessments, and conversely, literacy assessments can be used as teaching tools to refine curricular goals and objectives (Mitchell, 2006). There is limited research on the consistent instructional connections with assessments between second and third grade, specifically as it relates to the Read to Achieve law. This study provides an opportunity for in-depth exploration of how common literacy assessments impact the literacy skills of students transitioning from second to third grade at a time where this is a high focus on third grade literacy performance.

Problem of Practice

After the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Standards, states began building systems of increased student accountability. The former accountability model of NCLB measured proficiency for all students in an all-or-nothing format. As this act phased out, North Carolina implemented the READY accountability model during the 2012-2013 school year.

The Read to Achieve law of 2012 immediately followed the READY initiative, requiring third grade students, beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, to meet even more rigorous expectations in reading prior to being promoted to the fourth grade (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). A number of elementary schools in North Carolina have documented inconsistent proficiency scores on local and state tests when measuring the accuracy of literacy skills for second grade students when compared to scores of third grade students. There is little published documentation on these results, as the state of North Carolina only reports the proficiency ratings of students in grades 3-12. The North Carolina School Report Cards (www.reportcards.org) are one of the state's most comprehensive resources for information provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The web-posted information reports student achievement, as well as class size, school safety, technology information, and the quality of teachers at the school, district, and state level.

Table 1 presents data to show no students were tested at the K-2 elementary school in Edenton-Chowan Schools. The www.ncpublicschools.org website also verifies these data are consistent with other elementary schools prior to when state testing begins in third grade.

Table 2 is found at www.ncpublicschools.org on the state's Report Card page. It reports data for D.F. Walker Elementary School during the 2012-2013 school year, the same year as White Oak's data are listed. The two charts comparatively show the district's K-2 school's data from White Oak Elementary School are not published, while the district's 3-5 school, D.F. Walker, data are published by grade and subject.

Consequently, several schools have also reported discrepancies between second and third grade literacy skills as measured by local and state assessments. Once entering third grade, these students are additionally introduced to a new learning environment, new school and classroom

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Table 1

Percentage of Students Tested in Grades K-2 at White Oak Elementary School

Type	School	District	State
All	N/A	>95%	>95%
Male	N/A	>95%	>95%
Female	N/A	>95%	>95%
White	N/A	>95%	>95%
Black	N/A	>95%	>95%
Hispanic	N/A	>95%	>95%
American Indian	N/A	N/A	>95%
Asian	N/A	N/A	>95%
Pacific Islander	N/A	N/A	>95%
Two of More Races	N/A	>95%	>95%
E.D.	N/A	>95%	>95%
N.E.D.	N/A	>95%	>95%
L.E.P.	N/A	>95%	>95%
Migrant	N/A	NA	>95%
Student with Disabilities	N/A	>95%	>95%

Note. * If the number of students in a category is fewer than five, then results are not shown and are represented by a N/A. E.D. – Economically Disadvantaged; N.E.D. – Not Economically Disadvantaged; L.E.P. – Limited English Proficient Students.

Table 2

Performance of D. F. Walker Elementary End-of-Grade Tests, 2012-2013

	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Overall	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Our School	35.5%	46.1%	40.9%	45.1%	31.7%	32.8%	35.8%	40.7%
# of Tests Taken	141	141	164	164	186	186	491	491
District	35.5%	46.1%	40.9%	45.1%	31.7%	32.8%	37%	36%
State	45.2%	46.8%	43.7%	47.6%	39.5%	47.7%	43.9%	42.3%

expectations, an increase in work habits, and a change in the expectations and procedures of learning.

Due to the change of both instructional and accountability mandates, it is imperative that students be prepared to meet the demands of the both the curriculum and the accountability model. The alignment of consistent assessment measurement tools can ensure a more accurate picture of how well students are learning, and where educators must make improvements within the curriculum, instruction, and assessments. This study examined the implementation of a common literacy assessment and its impact on the literacy skills of students transitioning from second to third grade.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of a common literacy assessment as it measures literacy skills of students transitioning from second grade to third grade in two schools in northeastern North Carolina. The data were used to compare the end of second grade and beginning of third grade literacy assessment, as well as the inclusive instructional practices that occur within the assessment tool to determine student literacy performance.

The results from this study may provide clarification and direction for elementary schools for future implementation of literacy assessments. It may also help school leaders decide how they want to collaboratively partner with other elementary schools, specifically focusing on the second to third grade transition, as they establish effective accountability standards within their elementary programs.

For this study, there was also a review of the assessment cycle which researches the impact of curriculum, instructional delivery, assessment, measurement of results, and a revised action plan for potential remediation. Figure 1 displays a flow of the Assessment Cycle.
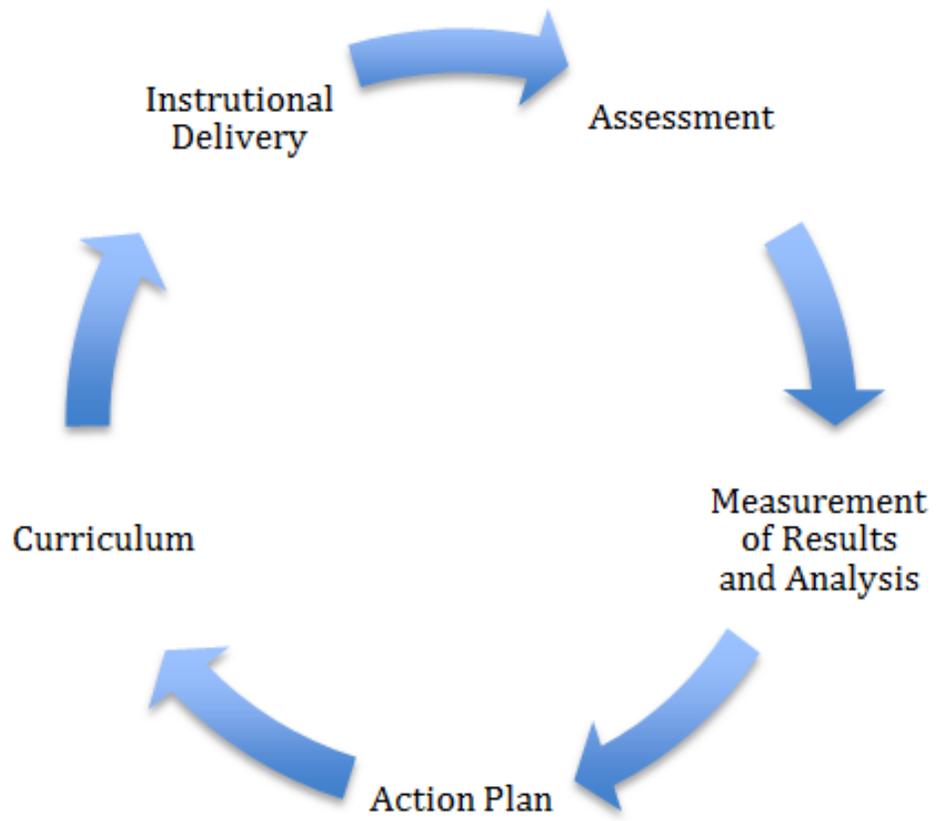
Figure 1. Assessment cycle.

During this research, there was an evaluation of the literacy assessment trends using a variety of data. First, there was a review of the effectiveness of the organizational make-up of the instructional setting and staff. This includes (1) teacher evaluations under the North Carolina Evaluator Effectiveness System, (2) the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, (3) the North Carolina Report Cards (www.reportcards.org), and (4) a review of the programs that have been implemented in reading as well as initiatives that have been directed to assist with the transition. Looping, summer camps, and transition camps are just a few of the programs that support transitions. The benchmark data, Reading 3D data, and pre- and post-test end-of-grade test data from the local and state levels were also be evaluated.

The effectiveness of a common assessment was collected to verify if the data collected from second grade and beginning of year in third grade measures consistently as the students move from one grade and school to another grade and school. The essential factor in viewing the methods was to determine a consistency of what has worked to help students be successful. The common assessment to be evaluated was the Reading 3D mClass. Student success was determined by the results of the benchmark assessments, which were given three times per year with progress monitoring that was assessed every one to four weeks.

The overall significance of this study is to determine if the use of a common reading assessment will increase the measurement of reading performance proficiency for students in third grade. Because third grade students are required to pass the Read to Achieve reading standards in order to be promoted, the literacy efforts in the transitional shift from second to third grade establish the foundation for literacy measurement.

Setting

Located in northeastern North Carolina, the Edenton-Chowan Public Schools (ECPS) system is nestled in the smallest geographical county in the state, covering only 233 square miles. The school system, which is the second largest employer in the county, just under the number of employees at Vidant-Chowan Hospital, oversees approximately 2,400 students and 175 teachers in grades prekindergarten through twelve. Information from the 2010 Census Report documented the population for the county as 14,739 residents, most of which work in agriculture or public service careers. ECPS has the second highest number of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) in the state of North Carolina and 25% of the teachers have a Master's Degree.

This study was conducted in the two elementary schools located in the Edenton-Chowan Schools System (ECPS). The two elementary schools in this study are the only elementary schools in the district. There is only one middle school and one high school. All schools in the district are accredited by the state of North Carolina through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

White Oak Elementary School (WOS) is the system's only primary school, serving students in prekindergarten through second grade. There are 626 students at WOS. Currently, during the 2014-2015 school year, there are 194 second-grade students, 196 first grade students, 174 kindergarten students and 62 prekindergarten students.

D.F. Walker Elementary School (DFW) is the system's only intermediate elementary school, serving students in third through fifth grade. There are 463 students at DFW. During the current 2014-2015 school year, there are 172 third grade students, 154 fourth grade students, and 138 fifth grade students.

Each elementary school is a federally-funded Title 1 school. Title 1 schools serve students who are considered economically disadvantaged, as determined by free-reduced lunch applications and census collections. Every school in North Carolina is held accountable for each and every child with the goal that all students will graduate high school being prepared for college and possessing skills necessary for careers in a global economy. The goal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is to ensure that all students have a fair and equitable opportunity to meet the state's high achievement standards. Title I, Part A, provides federal dollars for supplemental educational opportunities for disadvantaged children who are most at risk of failing to meet the state's challenging content and performance standards. Local education agencies (LEAs), such as Edenton-Chowan Schools, decide on an annual basis which schools will receive Title I school allotments. Edenton-Chowan Schools has gathered input from all stakeholders to determine a formal, annual plan in which each schools' needs assessments will be met. Schools are considered a Title I school from July 1st of each fiscal year. Under the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's collaborative plan, the Divisions of Elementary Education, Curriculum, Accountability and Read to Achieve work together to guarantee Title 1 students, such as the ones at WOS and DFW, have the resources necessary to promote success. These groups enhance the support necessary to implement this study.

D.F. Walker is identified as a Focus School. A "focus school" is a Title I school that, based on the most recent data available, contributes to the achievement gap in the state. Under Title 1 guidelines, a state must have a number of focus schools that equal at least 10% of the Title I schools in the state. A Title 1 focus school is:

- a school that has the largest within-school gaps between the highest-achieving

  subgroup or subgroups and the lowest-achieving subgroup or subgroups or, at the

  high school level, has the largest within-school gaps in graduation rates; or
- a school that has a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement or, at the high school

  level, low graduation rates.

A state determines "focus school" identification based on the school's end of year achievement data (Focus School, 2015). Schools identified as "focus schools" have four years to demonstrate sustained proficiency. Each state must have at least 10 percent of their schools identified as a focus school (Focus School, 2015). Elementary focus schools must have a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement, as well as the largest in-school gaps between the highest performing subgroups and the lowest achieving subgroups (Focus School, 2015). According to the Federal Programs Title 1 page on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website, the determinations of a Title 1 Focus school must be based on the achievement and lack of progress over a number of years of one or more subgroups of students identified under the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) (Focus Schools, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/program-monitoring/esea/focus/).

The two elementary schools in this study are housed in separate buildings, yet they are joined together by an enclosed hallway on the same physical campus. Each school has its own entrance and its own operational procedures. The primary unique setting for the two schools is the hallway divider, but it has become a necessity, due to increased rigor with curriculum and assessments, that there be a bridge of common expectations and assessments to support the transition down that hallway.

The controversial issue of whether assessment data from students exiting second grade and entering third grade is valid exists between the two schools. The need for transparency with reading assessments and data analysis exists, as there are debatable discussions between the stakeholders at each school. The problem of practice researched in this study provided an examination and analytical study of the reading assessments for second and third grade students within the settings of these two schools.

Study Questions

Two questions were examined in this study. Those questions are as follows:

1. Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

2. What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

Overview of Study Design

This research case study was a qualitative design using mixed methods analyses. A mixed methods approach to the analysis was chosen to provide a thorough description of the data under study using both qualitative and quantitative measures. Data collected included interview samples and survey results. This process allowed for semi-structured interview questions (Patton, 2002). After the interviews were conducted, the responses were analyzed and compared using a content analysis and constant-comparative method approach. The interview questions were available for review by stakeholders who may use the results. This case study approach allows information to be gathered and added to current practices such as Yin (1984) described as necessary for good case study research.

Nine second grade and nine third grade teachers were in a focus group. Chowan County's two elementary principals were interviewed. The range of views included an internal perception from the teacher and principal interviews. A specific comparison of second to third grade data from 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years were analyzed to examine the success of second to third grade transitional support as the students have shifted into a new grade and school setting with consistent literacy assessments in place.

Following the research of Patton (2002), the interview process utilized semi-structured interview questions. The purpose of this semi-structured interview process is to document and examine the perceptions and opinions of teachers and principals to determine whether there were successes or dilemmas associated with the assessment measurements during transitions (Patton, 2002). Each interviewee was asked to answer the same questions in the same way and in the same order as one another (Patton, 2002). The principals were interviewed individually and each grade level was interviewed as a focus group. In this type of interview, the same questions were asked to all interviewees, and did not require yes or no answers (Patton, 2002). In the four different sets of questionings, the focus was to determine what patterns would arise in the answers relating to the trends of testing and assessment measurements as students transition from second to third grade. Further details focused on what the answers revealed about perceptions of transitioning from second to third grade using a common assessment practice.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the research of the problem of practice, there were terms specific to the educational experience of the students in second and third grade. Several terms are defined.

Academically and Intellectually Gifted: The state's definition of AIG Students as defined by he Department of Public Instruction, references Article 9B (N.C.G.S. § 115C-

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150.5). "Academically or intellectually gifted (AIG) students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experiences or environment. Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both the intellectual areas and specific academic fields. Academically or intellectually gifted students require differentiated educational services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program. Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor." Many elementary students are not often identified as AIG until their third grade year due to it being the first year they take the state's standardized End-of-Grade test. Many districts include their local literacy assessments as part of the indicators to determine placement for the AIG services.

A*ccountability* measurements document the academic achievement of all North Carolina public school students. The data are used to assist stakeholders in understanding and gauging the data collection of achievement against state and national standards. The mission of the state's accountability program is to design and develop reliable and valid assessment instruments, to oversee the uniform implementation of and access to suitable assessment instruments for all students, and to ensure an accurate and statistically appropriate collection of reports (Accountability Services, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): This is the term used to explain how students meet state reading and math goals under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This information is posted annually on each district's report card and explains the sub-groups under AYP (Accountability Services, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/).

Alternate assessment: A valid and reliable standardized assessment of reading comprehension, approved by the State Board of Education, that is not the same test as the State-approved standardized test of reading comprehension administered to third grade students under the Read to Achieve law (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

Benchmark testing: This is a program that is primarily school or district-led in assessing reading comprehension and mathematics. The test is often a multiple-choice test administered periodically throughout the grading period. Schools that are on a nine-week grading period may offer benchmark assessments at the end of every nine weeks. These tests allow schools to establish benchmarks to compare individual and group scale scores and achievement levels in an on-going manner. In addition, a comparison of the results from each test allows schools to measure growth in achievement in reading comprehension and mathematics in each grade as part of the local accountability program. These tests are often designed to assist the teachers with diagnostic decisions on how to differentiate instruction and provide enhanced instructional support (North Carolina K-2 Literacy Assessment, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/languagearts/elementary/k2literacy/2009k2-literacy.pdf).

Common Core: This curriculum is the Common Core State Standards in K-12 Mathematics and K-12 English Language Arts released by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers in June 2010. North Carolina is in the first group of states to embrace clear and consistent goals for learning to prepare children for success in college and work based on these increased curriculum standards (Common Core State Standards Initiatives, Retrieved from www.corestandards.org).

Formative Assessment: This type of measurement is found at the classroom level and happens minute-to-minute or in short cycles, allowing teachers to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, or academic progress (North Carolina K-2 Literacy Assessment, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/languagearts/ elementary/k2literacy/2009k2-literacy.pdf).

Looping: The looping initiative allows students to remain with their peers and with the same teacher for a period of two to three years. The advantages of learning amongst the same peer group and with the same teacher for multiple years have proven to be an immeasurable strategy for many students. Looping has been documented as an ideal strategy to help reduce anxiety in elementary students (American School Counselors, 2005).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): NCLB is the federal act that drives student accountability. North Carolina was granted flexibility waivers from many of the NCLB provisions in May 2012. These waivers allow North Carolina's public school system to implement College- and Career-Ready expectations for all students, new ways to measure the accountability of Title I schools' academic proficiency, and new initiatives to effectively evaluate instruction and leadership. Many of the former federal requirements regarding Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and sanctions for schools that do not make AYP, are no longer required statewide, but are local school district decisions. Schools will now be measured against annual measurable objectives (AMO's), which are calculated and reported under NCLB. The targets are intended to recognize growth in performance as opposed to the "one size fits all" score (White House, Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/reforming-no-child-left-behind).

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey: This is a statewide survey of educators that is administered at the local level by schools and districts. The data collected can

be used to determine needs for leadership, instruction and parental/community partnerships

(North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014).

Read to Achieve (RTA): Also known as RTA, Read to Achieve is a part of the Excellent

Public Schools Act, which became law in July of 2012 and applies to all schools at the beginning

of the 2013-2014 school year. This program focuses on the reading achievement of third graders

and offers a number of requirements third graders must master within the plan. Third grade

students who do not measure proficiency on the first end-of-grade test may have to re-test, attend

a summer camp, complete a portfolio, or be retained with or without provisions in the fourth

grade (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

Reading deficiency: This means no treading at the third grade level by the end of the

students' third grade year, demonstrated by the results of the State-approved standardized test of

reading comprehension administered to third grade students (North Carolina K-2 Literacy

Assessment, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/languagearts/

elementary/k2literacy/2009k2-literacy.pdf).

Reading interventions: These are evidence-based strategies frequently used to remediate

reading deficiencies and include, but are not limited to, individual instruction, tutoring, or

mentoring that target specific reading skills and abilities (North Carolina K-2 Literacy

Assessment, Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/languagearts/

elementary/k2literacy/2009k2-literacy.pdf).

Reading proficiency: Reading at or above the third grade level as noted in the Read to

Achieve law (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

Summative assessment: A measure of achievement to provide evidence of student

competence or program effectiveness. These assessments are found at the classroom, district,

and state level accountability systems. The information gathered is used to categorize student

performance and data can be compared (North Carolina K-2 Literacy Assessment, Retrieved

from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/languagearts/elementary/k2literacy/

2009k2-literacy.pdf).

 Title 1: Title 1 is the federal program that supports low-income families and schools.

Under No Child Left Behind, funds are provided to schools under the United States Department

of Education. Title 1 schools serve students who are considered economically disadvantaged, as

determined by free-reduced lunch applications and census collections (Title 1, Retrieved from

http://www.ncpublicschools.org).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Students across the nation have historically been faced with academic challenges in making transitions within schools as they advance into an upper grade each year, and then from elementary school, middle school, and into to high school (Evangelou, Taggarat, Melhuish, Sammons, & Siraj-Batchford, 2008). Challenges within those transitions may include social, developmental, and academic needs of the students. The research supports that whatever the transition is for students, an effective transition program must support academic achievement within any progression and guarantee continuity (Evangelou et al., 2008).

This study focused on the attention of formative assessments bridging students from one grade to another to improve teaching and learning, specifically from second to third grade, noting attention to literacy instruction as an inclusive component of the assessment. Research supports the notion that students' ability to read and understand text at a proficient level is a critical factor that is required for academic and life success (Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Giuliani, Luck, Underwood, & Schatschneider, 2011). Connor and other researchers completing this study note that an alarming 70% or more students across the nation reach fourth grade unable to read and comprehend text at or above proficient levels (Connor et al., 2011). They further elaborate that the percentages are usually higher in more poverty-stricken schools, such as Title 1 schools.

This review of the literature includes a review of transitions for students from one grade to another and literacy assessments that measure the commonalities. This literature review also address the following topics as it individually relates to the study of inclusive common literacy assessments and instructional practices:

- An overview of transitions with a focus on second to third grade
- National, state and local standards and accountability expectations

- Literacy assessments and measurements of the past and present

- Current curriculum expectations

- A need for a common literacy assessment

- Literacy assessment studies with a review of the local content

An Overview of Transitions

Within each school's setting, the students have been met with internal challenges of transitioning from one grade to another. Students have to learn new classrooms, hallways, and teachers. Students are expected to know and be able to model school-wide positive behaviors with often little support throughout these changes within a building. The normal consistencies for students in a single building may include classrooms such as the physical education gymnasium, the school's cafeteria, and the media center. In these schools, administrative offices rarely change, allowing students an opportunity to have adequate access to the school's top administrative team including the principal, assistant principal, counselor, secretary, and in most schools, the school nurse.

Kristie Kauerz (2012), a professor at the University of Washington, shares there are eight elements to a comprehensive approach to elementary transitions. First, she notes there should be shared governance in the school's leadership and strategic planning. Second, the building level administration should support relations, both internally and externally. This includes teamwork and instructional leadership. Additionally, she notes that teacher and teaching quality needs to be engaging, meaningful, and effective across both the horizontal teams and the vertical teams. Fourth, in order to ensure a more comprehensive approach, the instructional tools, including the pacing guides and curriculum, need to be aligned and balanced, as well as assessed based on the objectives taught. A supportive learning environment is the fifth element, which includes the

structural quality of the environment, as well as the climate, space and materials. Next, data-drive improvements should focus on child-based data to identify and focus on achievement gaps and to identify targets so the resources may be realigned as needed. Family engagement should be a top priority for all school and program-based staff. The engagement should be purposeful to parents and should reinforce the shared responsibility for student success. Finally, an expansion to high quality learning opportunities should exist to extend opportunities for the students. Kauerz's (2012) eight principles are practical methods of ensuring effective transitional practices.

To assist with the transitions for students, school leaders often organize and facilitate PLCs – known as professional learning communities. These meetings allow teachers time to professionally reorganize by analyzing, discussing, and interpreting instructional best practices and data. Teachers are able to discuss student needs and target areas that may need improvement. During the PLCs, the teachers can formulate consistent plans of assessment and future action, implementations of materials, and even budgetary needs to submit to administration (Reese, 2013).

Second to Third Grade Transition

While research is available that provides tips on how to transition from each developmental level, Linden (2008) reports there is limited research on how students adapt to the third grade shift inside an elementary program. Third graders face many "first" experiences such as their first state-mandated test and potentially their first relocation ever into a new building.

For decades, schools across each grade level have implemented a variety of programs to help support the students with the adjustments (Tomlinson, 2014). Summer programs have served as bridges to connect the end of one school year to another, with hopes the students will retain academic knowledge over the summer and will avoid the "summer slide." A variety of

approaches may be used to accomplish this; however, summer programs are designed by observation of data, monitored by progress, and evaluated at the end of the summer to determine the success of the program (Tomlinson 2014).

Transitioning into high-standard state testing. Third grade students across the state of North Carolina are faced with meeting the requirements of high-standard state testing for the first time upon completion of the third grade school year (NCDPI, 2007). For some third grade students, the task may be a natural part of their academic progression. However, Linden's (2008) research suggests that most students show regression from second to third grade as noted in the comparison data of most second grade assessments and third grade end-of-grade scores. This same research also noted that student performance at the third grade level appears to have demonstrated a loss in reading achievement due to the lack of successful transition from second to third grade.

The literacy expectations of third graders shift from being able to decode words to being able to read passages about real-life scenarios, such as the Civil War and Native Americans (Paul, 2012). Many third grade students are simply not ready for those types of literature exposures (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). Paul (2012) references a study conducted by Donald J. Hernandez with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, concluded that third-graders who lack proficiency in reading are four times more likely to become high school dropouts.

Physical barriers to transition. Kindergarten-through-fifth grade schools have fewer physical barriers than elementary schools that are divided into partial grades. As noted in numerous North Carolina districts such as Edenton-Chowan and Perquimans, the elementary schools consist of one school, serving students in kindergarten through the second grade, and a

second school that serves students in third through fifth grades. In most cases, each grade level is housed in an individual wing of that building. Teachers have opportunities to plan together and students and parents are able to visually see the communication and collaboration that exists horizontally among the grade level. Vertical conversations among teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth are more likely to enhance planning and support of one another within the framework of one building. The vertical conversations and planning are more likely to be able to happen because the teachers are able to communicate with colleagues under their grade level and above their grade level.

Instruction and the transition. Students transitioning from the second grade to the third grade from one school to another pose the challenge for teachers to present a broader, more creative approach to instruction. According to Akos and Felton (2011), there is a need for a connection of the two schools that support one curriculum and one common goal, ensuring academic success for the students. The transition into third grade opens up a window of opportunities in which elementary schools need to take action for third grade students so they are prepared for the academic challenges they will face (Akos & Felton, 2011), especially as students transfer into a different facility.

Due to an increase in academic demands, specifically as assessed on state end-of-grade tests, third grade students who are already struggling in reading either before or after third grade may fall further behind (Akos & Felton, 2011). At the ages of seven and eight, students are often developmentally sensitive to criticisms from adults and may be reluctant to take risks (Akos & Felton, 2011). They are often more likely to give up on tasks and will need multiple levels of intervention from a variety of sources that are from the inside and outside of the traditional classroom (Akos & Felton, 2011).

States across the United States are being required to show reading proficiency at the third grade level (White House, Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/ reforming-no-child-left-behind). For example, in Arizona, students must pass the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards. In North Carolina, students must pass the North Carolina End-of-Grade Test in reading based on Common Core Standards. Therefore, schools have implemented strategies and programs to help build emerging readers. Both Arizona and North Carolina have placed an emphasis on fluency and DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). Data collected from the Dibels set the stage for foundational skill assessments and teachers' reports of running records. The teachers then assign reading levels and monitor the progress to support mastery. Data are collected and student progress is compared to benchmark goals. The data are translated into instructional support, based on individual student needs, which allows teachers to make accurate predictions in reading performances.

With a more computerized approach, these tests provide consistent progress-monitoring data. Some indicators may show a student is in the "red" area, which indicates they are below the anticipated benchmark reading level. This is supported by "yellow" for the cautionary reader and "green" for the at-standard reader (Reese, 2013).

Providing students an awareness of testing procedures as part of a routine instructional practice can help with the transition from second to third grade. As students transition from second to third grade, most third grade students are not familiar with the format of the state's standardized test. Teachers begin testing preparation early in the year and counselors may meet with students to give test-taking and stress-reduction tips. Research shows that students benefit from direct instruction on test-taking strategies (Akos & Felton, 2011). Data from Hilburn and other schools note that third grade students need further instruction on test-taking vocabulary,

test format, and anxiety. Not only will the awareness help prepare for the tests, but it will increase the students' confidence. It was noted in the Hilburn study that 85 % of the third grade students indicated they were nervous about testing. Yet, after the preparations, 60% fewer noted they were nervous about testing.

  Collaboration within the transition. Collaboration is an essential component in helping third grade students experience a successful transition (Rentfor, 2007). It is imperative that all stakeholders are involved in the process because this is one method of aiding in the transition from one grade to another. This includes, but is not limited to, the teachers, administrators, parents, community and the students. Many schools employ school counselors and specialist-type teachers. Some schools are identified as a Title 1 school, which means the school is mandated by federal guidelines to implement programs to support all students, specifically the underachieving. Hilburn Drive Elementary School, located in Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina, recently shared how educators worked together in learning teams to establish a watch-list of students who were not proficient at the end of the second grade (Akos & Felton, 2011). Their list noted individual strengths, areas of difficulty and interventions that were successful for each student. At the beginning of third grade, the watch-list was given to a support staff member known as an Intervention Specialist. This person's role was to help teachers design, implement, and progress-monitor the interventions for each student. The Intervention Specialist then meets with the third grade teachers within the first few weeks of school, and throughout the year, to analyze student progress and any on-going intervention needs (Akos & Felton, 2011).

  Vertical planning in Professional Learning Team meetings provides a direct collaboration for the second and third grade teachers. In the research conducted at Hilburn Drive Elementary

School, the teachers met at least two times during the school year. During these meetings the teachers were able to share instructional tips, expectations and classroom practices to ensure continuity in the transition (Akos & Felton, 2011).

An established collaboration between the second and third grade teachers proves to be helpful in reducing the stress-level of the students. Therefore, targeting individual student needs is another practice to promote student success in a transition from second to third grade. Some schools, such as Hilburn Drive Elementary, hired tutors and mentors to reach out to the most at-risk students. The tutoring sessions occurred before school and after school. They consisted of whole-group meetings with weekly progress checks. This was a very personable approach as the adults wrote individual letters to the students to provide encouragement and support. One student, Jasmine, reported that she had low confidence at the beginning of the year. But, as a result of working with a mentor, her benchmark scores improved and she exceeded the expectations at the end of the year. Hilburn (2011) reported that 70% of the students who participated in the mentor program showed academic growth. Twenty-five percent of those students exceeded the benchmark growth (Akos & Felton, 2011). The collaboration of second and third grade teachers helped improve test scores (Akos & Felton, 2011).

A successful transition program from second to third grade involves consistent communication and assessments in evaluating a school's practices. When all stakeholders come together to promote and be part of the transition, the students are the benefactors.

The Mandates of Literacy Accountability

READY is not an acronym, but is rather the conceptual message of the Department of Public Instruction that North Carolina students will graduate "ready" for either college or career. Together, these elements encompass the state's READY initiative:

- new common core state standards and essential standards;

- a new state accountability model;

- additional professional development support for principals and teachers;

- new uses of technology to support learning; and

- an enhanced teacher and principal evaluation model

The READY initiative requires teachers to learn and write the curriculum. READY implements the following three standards for teachers, which support the skill-sets for students:

1. Professional development:

   a. support and promote effective leadership, quality teaching, and student learning

   b. improves instruction and enhances professional practice

2. Data tracking:

   a. Teachers understand technologies and methodologies to enable one-to-one teaching.

3. Student growth:

   a. Teachers and students have increased focus on standards and assessment.

In this model, students in grades K-12 in North Carolina are exposed to the READY accountability measurements, which support the new curriculum with the Common Core and Essential Standards, also referred to as the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. The state of North Carolina has designed the North Carolina K-2 Literacy Assessment (Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/languagearts/elementary/k2literacy/2009 k2-literacy.pdf). This measurement is intended to assess the reading and writing skills of students in kindergarten, first, and second grade. The goal of the K-2 Literacy Assessment is for

the tool to be an instructional process including formative, interim, benchmark, and summative assessment. Each component in the assessment cycle contains detailed directions for the administrator. Similar to the state's end-of-grade testing process, it is critical the steps in this procedure are clearly understood and followed to maintain consistent validity and reliability. This is found in Table 3.

In Chapter 115C - Article 8 - General Education Elementary and Secondary Education, the North Carolina General Statue notes in 115C-83.6: Facilitating early grade reading proficiency:

> (a) Kindergarten, first, second, and third grade students shall be assessed with valid, reliable, formative, and diagnostic reading assessments made available to local school administrative units by the State Board of Education pursuant to G.S. 115C-174.11(a). Difficulty with reading development identified through administration of formative and diagnostic assessments shall be addressed with instructional supports and services. To the greatest extent possible, kindergarten through third grade reading assessments shall yield data that can be used with the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS), or a compatible and comparable system approved by the State Board of Education, to analyze student data to identify root causes for difficulty with reading development and to determine actions to address them.
> (b) Formative and diagnostic assessments and resultant instructional supports and services shall address oral language, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension using developmentally appropriate practices.
> (c) Local school administrative units are encouraged to partner with community organizations, businesses, and other groups to provide volunteers, mentors, or tutors to assist with the provision of instructional supports and services that enhance reading development and proficiency. (2012-142, s. 7A.1(b).)

Table 3

Suggested Timeline for Interim and Summative Assessment for Second Grade

Task	Beginning of Year	Middle of Year	End of Year
Letter and Sound Identification	If needed	If needed	If needed
Book and Print Awareness	If needed	If needed	If needed
Phonemic Awareness	Tasks 1- 11 If needed Task 12	Tasks 1-12 If needed Tasks 13-15	Tasks 1-15 If needed
Running Record (including Oral Retell, Quantitative and Qualitative Fluency)	X	X	X
Spelling Inventory	X	X	X
Writing	X	X	X

Note. *As teachers complete formative assessments throughout the year, this timeline may be adjusted based on the individual needs of the student.

The North Carolina General Assembly further amended this law by implementing the

North Carolina Read to Achieve Program:

> PART I. IMPROVE K-3 LITERACY 15 16 SECTION 1.(a) G.S. 115C-81.2 is repealed. 17 SECTION 1.(b) Article 8 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes is amended by 18 adding a new Part to read: 19 "Part 1A. North Carolina Read to Achieve Program. 20 "§ 115C-83.1A. State goal. 21 The goal of the State is to ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end 22 of third grade and continue to progress in reading proficiency so that he or she can read, 23 comprehend, integrate, and apply complex texts needed for secondary education and career 24 success. 25 "§ 115C-83.1B. Purposes. 26 (a) The purposes of this Part are to ensure that (i) difficulty with reading development is 27 identified as early as possible; (ii) students receive appropriate instructional and support 28 services to address difficulty with reading development and to remediate reading deficiencies; 29 and (iii) each student and his or her parent or guardian be continuously informed of the 30 student's academic needs and progress. 31 (b) In addition to the purposes listed in subsection (a) of this section, the purpose of this 32 Part is to determine that progression from one grade to another be based, in part, upon 33 proficiency in reading. 34 "§ 115C-83.1C.

Local Literacy Accountability Model

It is the responsibility of the local school boards in North Carolina to support and

implement the legislative requirements and North Carolina State Board of Education policies on

assessment. The North Carolina State Board of Education Policy requires assessment

instruments for K-2 Literacy Assessment. The Policy (HSP-C-016) reads as follows:

> "The State Board of Education requires that schools and school districts implement assessments at grades K, 1, and 2 that include documented, on-going individualized assessments throughout the year and a summative evaluation at the end of the year. These assessments monitor achievement of benchmarks in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. They may take the form of the state-developed materials, adaptations of them, or unique assessments adopted by the local school board."

The mandates that support the policy include (1) to provide updated information on the

progress of each student to allow instructional adaptations and early interventions, (2) to provide

teachers in the upcoming grade data about their incoming students, (3) to inform parents about

the status of their children's academic performance and grade level standards at the end of the

year, and, (4) to provide the school and the school system data about the achievement and progress of sub-groups of students (North Carolina K-2 Assessment).

In the local district of Edenton-Chowan Schools, the Board of Education has promotion policies posted on the website which note the criteria used to decide promotion, including at the K-2 and third grade levels (School Board Policy, 2015). Figure 2 lists the criteria used to determine promotion for Edenton-Chowan Schools.

Evaluative Studies of Literacy Assessments

Historically, there are five measureable domains essential to the development of early reading. These include phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). As the reading assessment tools have emerged from the past to the present, they continue to be interrelated in the development, instruction, and assessment.

Shapiro, Solari, and Petscher (2010) conducted a research on the use of a measure of reading comprehension to enhance the prediction on high stakes testing. Noting statewide assessments usually do not provide adequate information about student growth or adequate information to guide the instruction for students, this trio of researchers conducted an evaluation that suggests reading fluency is a good predictor of reading comprehension on standardized tests. The research further concludes their research is consistent in its findings, as related to other researchers. Shapiro et al. (2010) concluded from a study that there were numerous reports of moderate to strong correlations between the local and standardized state assessment in the relationship between oral reading fluency and reading assessments in Washington state.

Factors to be considered in promotion of kindergarten through second grade students
• All students must be assessed using developmentally appropriate reading and math measures • Teacher documentation • Parental input • Test results (including standardized tests) • Results of intervention strategies • Attendance (a student may not have more than 20 unexcused absences)
Factors to be considered in promotion for grades 3-8
• Academic progress in all subject areas as defined by the Edenton-Chowan Schools administrative procedures • Performance on state and local tests and classroom assessments • Medical, social and behavioral information • School assistance team recommendations • Teacher documentation • Parental input • Attendance (a student may not have more than 20 unexcused absences)
Factors to be considered for grade 3: Reading Camp (Read to Achieve Law)
• Board will provide reading camp opportunities at no fee for students who have not demonstrated reading proficiency on a third grade level at the end of the student's third grade year. • The board will offer a fee-based reading camp to students who have successfully demonstrated reading proficiency. • Annually, the board will establish criteria for enrollment in the fee-based reading camp. • The superintendent shall notify interested parents of the application procedure for the fee-based reading camps. • "Reading proficiency" means reading at or above the third grade level by the end of a student's third grade year, demonstrated by the results of the state-approved standardized test of reading comprehension administered to third grade students.

Figure 2. Edenton Chowan Schools criteria used in deciding promotion for students.

Second and Third Grade Reading Assessments

Formative assessments are an ongoing exchange between a teacher and his or her students (National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing; State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards of the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The data from the assessment is to help teachers understand the academic successes and needs of the students (Tomlinson, 2014).

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, improving the reading skills of children is a top priority for local, state, and national leaders, as well as teachers, businesses and citizens. Children are required to be proficient at the end of the third grade. The United States is making ambitious strides that are guided by intense research to link insights on how children learn to read, the components for effective reading, and the consistent measurement of achievement by the end of third grade (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

In 1995, the North Carolina General Assembly implemented the ABC's for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's accountability program. The ABC's represent the focus on (A) accountability, teaching the (B) basics, with an emphasis on high educational standards to (C) minimize the local control. The ABC's of public education have included accountability for third grade. In the 2009-2010 academic year, third grade students were required to take pre-tests for the first time. This test has been administered in reading and mathematics. Prior to this, ABC accountability status for K-3 schools was based on performance composites of feeder schools.

The Department of Public Instruction has posted on its website that the pretest at grade three measures the knowledge and skills specified for grade two, as noted in the state's *Standard Course of Study*. The pretest allows schools to compare individual and group scale scores and

achievement levels. The end-of-grade test is administered at the end of the school year in the spring. A comparison of the results from the pre-test and from the end-of-grade test allows schools to measure growth in achievement for the ABC's accountability program (NCDPI, 2007).

Through memberships of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states launched state-led efforts to develop the Common Core State Standards in 2009. These leaders recognized the value of consistent, real-world learning goals and initiated this effort to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, graduate high school prepared for college, career, and life (Common Core, 2014).

Thomas Luna, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of Idaho summed it up by stating:

> We all recognize a need to raise academic standards in the core subject areas of mathematics and English language arts. So we decided, as states, to partner and work together to develop more rigorous standards that we all agree are fewer, clearer, higher and competitive with any other country in the world (Common Core, 2014).

Current Curriculum Expectations

The reading curriculum for grades two and three is similar, yet varies in content. As referenced earlier, there have been changes within the state's curriculum, including second and third grade. Table 4 outlines the Second Grade English/Language Arts Common Core Curriculum and Table 5 outlines the Third Grade English/Language Arts Common Core Curriculum.

Table 4

Common Core Curriculum: Second Grade English / Language Arts Standards

Standard	Foundational Skills	Informational Text	Literature
Key Ideas and Details	*Phonics and Word Recognition:* 2.3 Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. 2.3A Distinguish long and short vowels when reading regularly spelled one-syllable words. 2.3B Know spelling-sound correspondences for additional common vowel teams. 2.3D Decode words with common prefixes and suffixes. 2.3E Identify words with inconsistent but common spelling-sound correspondences. 2.3F Recognize and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.	2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text. 2.2 Identify the main topic of a multi-paragraph text as well as the focus of specific paragraphs within the text. 2.3 Describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text.	2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text. 2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral. 2.3 Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

Table 4 (continued)

Standard	Foundational Skills	Informational Text	Literature
Craft and Structure	*Fluency:* 2.4 Read with sufficient accuracy ad fluency to support comprehension. 2.4A Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding. 2.4B Read grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings. 2.4C Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.	2.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 2 topic or subject area 2.5 Know and use various text features (e.g., captions, bold print, subheadings, glossaries, indexes, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text efficiently. 2.6 Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain or describe.	2.4 Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song. 2.5 Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action. 2.6 Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

Table 4 (continued)

Standard	Foundational Skills	Informational Text	Literature
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas		2.7 Explain how specific images (e.g., a diagram showing how a machine works) contribute to and clarify a text. 2.8 Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text. 2.9 Compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.	2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot. 2.8 Not applicable 2.9 Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity		2.10 By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history / social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 2-3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.	2.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2-3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Table 5

Common Core Curriculum: Third Grade English / Language Arts Standards

Standard	Foundational Skills	Informational Text	Literature
Key Ideas and Details	*Phonics and Word Recognition:* 3.3 Know and apply grade level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. 3.3A Identify and know the meaning of the most common prefixes and derivational suffixes. 3.3B Decode words with common Latin suffixes 3.3C Decode multi-syllable words. 3.3D Read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.	3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers. 3.2 Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea. 3.3 Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause / effect.	3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers. 3.2 Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, less, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text. 3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g.) their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

Table 5 (continued)

Standard	Foundational Skills	Informational Text	Literature
Craft and Structure	*Fluency* 3.4 Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. 3.4A Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding. 3.4B Read grade-level prose and poetry	3.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 3 topic or subject area. 3.5 Use text features and search tool (e.g., key words, sidebars,	3.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language. 3.5 Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing
	orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings. 3.4C Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.	hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently. 3.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the author of a text.	or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections. 3.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

Table 5 (continued)

Standard	Foundational Skills	Informational Text	Literature
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	Not applicable	3.7 Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur). 3.8 Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause / effect, first / second / third in a sequence. 3.9 Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.	3.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting) 3.8 – Not applicable 3.9 Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g., in books from a series)
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity	Not applicable.	3.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history / social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 2-3 text complexity band independently and proficiently.	3.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 2-3 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

K-2 Literacy Skills

As part of the Excellent Public Schools Act, the Read to Achieve initiative became a law in July 2012. Beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, this law requires third-grade students receive extra attention in North Carolina because of the state's legislative initiative. Under this state law, third-grade students who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade will receive special help, including summer reading camp and other interventions to make sure that they can read well enough to be able to do fourth-grade work (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). Table 5 presents the literacy skills third grade students are required to master.

Schools in North Carolina use the mClass Reading 3D formative assessment system to measure students' reading skills and comprehension in grades K-3. The basic early literacy skills and the assessments used to evaluate each skill are consistent with the Common Core and the state's accountability model. The assessments and measures that come under Read to Achieve for third graders include individual assessments as determined by class assessments, progress monitoring, benchmarks, and statewide tests.

Through the implementation of Read to Achieve, the mClass Reading 3D literacy assessment tool provides a consistent measurement between the North Carolina Standard Course of Study Common Core and Essential Standard curriculum and the accountability model.

Types of Reading Assessments and Measurements

Inclusive of testing, teachers are overwhelmed by the many demands in a classroom (Duckor & Holmberg, 2014). While the results of formative assessments have such a great effect on student outcomes, teachers are prompted to follow the more standardized, research-based, assessments. Figure 3 identifies the specific K-2 literacy guidelines for assessments.

Letter and Sound Review
Book and Print Awareness
Phonemic Awareness
Running Records
Fluency
Oral Retell
Writing about Reading
Primary Spelling Inventory
Writing Continuum

Figure 3. Specific K-2 literacy components guidelines for teachers (K-2 assessment source).

Duckor and Holmbeg (2014) further elaborate that assessments help teachers build stronger relationships with their classrooms and help principals build stronger relationships with their schools and their teachers. Tomlinson (2014) noted that formative assessments improve teaching and learning. Students may feel, however, that tests equal grades, and therefore, this may discourage them from seeking risks. Many high-achieving students may tend to focus on grades, rather than the process of learning (Tomlinson, 2014). It is further noted in the research that instructive feedback is necessary for formative assessments to be meaningful (Wiggins, 2012). Feedback, serving as an instructional purpose, should be clearly focused on the learning targets, followed by opportunities for improved performance. The feedback should be clear, focused, and meaningful for each individual learner (Wiggins, 2012).

As the teacher participates in the assessment process, he or she should be watching what the students are doing, even at the level of simple monitoring. This monitoring includes walking around the room and asking students to give simple feedback such as raising their hands or giving a thumbs-up or thumbs down, for example (Wiggins, 2012).

While students benefit from a rigorous instructional process, it is also imperative teachers assess continually so the data which measure the academic understanding can be internalized and potentially retaught if needed. The feedback must result in students being part of the process on how to improve (Tomlinson, 2014). Extensive research on assessments conducted by Herman (2004) show teachers tend to focus on content that is tested and have tendencies to ignore the content that is not tested. Directly, the English Language Arts curriculum requires that students are able to independently read and analyze an increasing range of complex texts (Herman & Linn, 2014). This is referenced earlier in Tables 4 and 5, which documented the English / Language Arts Reading Common Core Curriculum.

Teachers are expected to teach the reading curriculum and produce results from students that showcase mastery of learning. The use of a formative assessment, as noted by Tomlinson (2014), concludes there is a connecting factor between teaching, learning, and academic growth. There are several reading assessments, which support the measurement of literacy achievement, while reinforcing the instructional content. The number of reading assessment tools is considerable across the nation and the state. The following literacy assessment tools are a few that are well-known in North Carolina elementary schools:

Lexile

A Lexile is a score a student gets from a Lexile reading test or program. A book, article, or piece of text gets a Lexile test measure when it is analyzed by MetaMetrics. The Lexile level provides valuable information about a students individual reading ability and the difficulty of a text. As an example, if a reader has a Lexile level of 600L (600 Lexile), the reader would be predicted to comprehend approximately 75% of a book with that same measure. Lexile measures help students find books and articles that are at an appropriate level of difficulty. Teachers and parents can use Lexile measures to help serve student literacy needs. When a student tests at a Lexile level that matches his or her Lexile reader measure, he or she is meeting their "targeted" reading measurement. Overall, the use of the Lexile tool focuses on a student's individualized range of reading ability.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) are standardized tests provided by the University of Iowa's College of Education. Dating back to 1935, this test was originally named the Iowa Every Pupil Test of Basic Skills as a tool to improve instruction. Over the years, the participation of this test expanded and nearly all schools in Iowa, and many schools across the

United States, administer this test to students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The ITBS are written in test levels. Test levels 5-8 are directed for kindergarten through second grade students. The sections in this level include: vocabulary, word analysis, reading comprehension, listening, language, and mathematics. Overall, the ITBS is an assessment tool that is intended to improve instruction based on scores and redirected teaching opportunities.

Reading Renaissance – STAR

The Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) is a measurement tool that allows educators to monitor achievement on the Common Core state standards while targeting instructional needs for individual students. This computer-assessment created by Renaissance Learning, can be used for students in grades kindergarten through twelve. STAR reports that students can complete the STAR reading assessment in less than 10 minutes. The purpose of the STAR assessments is to provide student growth data for grades one through 12. The benchmark measures student growth, progress monitoring and future instructional planning based on data to improve student performance (William, 2011). Teachers can review the data and tailor instructional plans to meet the individual needs of students. The software reports grade equivalents and percentile ranks. Overall, based on the summative exams and on-going assessments with STAR, teachers are able to use the results of this tool to predict future performances.

Amplify- mCLASS

Amplify's mCLASS program is part of a way to reset the way teachers teach and students learn. Amplify is an educational software company that credits their software to allow teachers to manage whole classrooms while empowering them to provide personalized, engaged instruction to students.

Once the teachers assess the foundational skills, the teachers record observations with a running record to quickly analyze reading comprehension. The teacher then assigns reading levels and monitors progress to support mastery of increasingly complex texts. Amplify notes on its website the steps of mCLASS for teachers:

- Quickly log observations and easily identify error patterns for any level.

- Compare student progress with predictive, research-based benchmark goals.

- Translate assessment data into instructional support.

- Track progress and target instruction to individual student needs.

Deanna M., an instructional coach for a district in West Virginia reported through the use of Amplify's reading assessments, teachers now understand how the features of the program work, including the use of electronic devices, the built-in reports and the individual break-down of data which targets individual student measurements (Amplify, Retrieved from www.amplify.com).

Reading 3D: A Common Assessment

The mClass Reading 3D model provides a complete picture of each student's individual ability to read with comprehension and understanding. The program has been researched through a series of students on each grade level. The program combines indicators that are quick measures of foundational-skill development by using a running-record measurement and the Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) diagnostic tool to determine how meaning is found in text. The Wireless Generation company developed the mCLASS Reading 3D by unique collaboration with authors from the University or Oregon, the Dynamic Measurement Group, and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland (Amplify, Retrieved from www.amplify.com). The evaluation measures for the TRC were conducted to examine the

impact on instruction and the internal and external predictive validity. During this research, it was concluded that the fall and winter benchmarks correlated to the end-of-year performance. It was additionally found that the end-of-year performance in grades K-2 correlated with performance on the Grade 3 Maryland State Assessment (Amplify, Retrieved from www.amplify.com). These reports, designed with input from educators, track progress, review overall program effectiveness, and unveil the resources and strategies that will improve student outcomes. Multiple format reports are easily available and can easily be exported. Amplify reports that mCLASS Reading 3D is a high predictor of students' proficiency on certain statewide English Language Arts assessments. In 2010-11, Amplify reported the mCLASS reports for students in North Carolina were 79% accurate in predicting performance on the state's End of Grade (EOG) reading comprehension test in third grade.

mCLASS Dibels

This set of indicators was developed by researchers at the University of Oregon and includes a widely used assessment of oral reading fluency (Salvador, Schoeneberger, Tingle, & Algozzine et al., 2012). Researchers have studied this widely-used assessment of oral reading fluency and determined there are high correlations between and among DIBELS early literacy measures, oral reading fluency, and scores for third grade students on state-wide reading tests (Salvador et al., 2012).   This group of researchers also documented the predictions of End-of-Grade test performance based on the accuracy of student classifications in DIBELS (Salvador et al., 2012). Teachers reported in this research that the use of DIBELS also helped build on specific instructional goals (Salvador et al, 2012), further elaborating that the process was not time consuming, the graphs and charts produced by the system were easily interpreted, and the

core reading instruction and assessment practices were practical and purposeful (Salvador et al., 2012).

The data collected from the Dibels set the stage for foundational skill assessments and teachers' reports of running records. Collectively, the teachers then assign reading levels and monitor the progress to support mastery. The data are collected, student progress is compared to benchmark goals and the data are translated into instructional support based on individual student needs. The program allows teachers to make accurate predictions about reading proficiency by streamlining connections to target individual student needs. The teacher quickly identifies the student needs based on quick analysis, reports, and planning. There is a one-minute fluency measurement for foundational reading skills. Teachers compare student progress with the research-based benchmark goals, they track progress and target individual student needs for instruction, and use the overall collection of data to support decision-making at every level. Collectively, the data gathered from Dibels is used to help teachers redirect instruction for re-teaching purposes and for future predictions of student progress.

A Need for Common Assessments in Reading

The research supports that each step of a testing process builds on the previous ones (Herman & Linn, 2014). If evidence targets are not well reflected in earlier stages, there is a higher chance for the final test to be flawed. Tomlinson (2014) includes patterns in the assessment targets to be a direct correlation of content taught and learned. Patterns of achievement may vary with a wide-range of tests, yet the goal remains to look at the cluster of students who have specific needs and establish ways to help each group of students advance (Tomlinson, 2014). Research from Hattie (2012) further supports that the information collected from assessments meets the urgency of directing teachers to differentiating instruction to

influence certain skills (Hattie, 2012). As opposed to teachers who move forward with no formal

progress monitoring, teachers who provide instruction based on the academic measurement of

individual student needs, will more likely experience success with teaching and learning

(Tomlinson, 2014).

It is recommended that schools give students quality preschool and early age programs to

provide the solid foundation, which targets early intervention programs (Szekely, 2013). Like

many elementary schools in northeastern North Carolina, Irving Elementary School of South

Berwyn, Illinois provides a success story for student achievement (Szekely, 2013). It has noted

that accomplishments, as a result of early interventions, include differentiation for all students,

providing individualized instruction, teachers co-teaching, implementation of technology, and

the interpretation of data as some key factors for success, in addition to providing a positive

culture within the school. In celebrating the successes, it is worthy to diagnostically ask, what

happens to students from second to third grade that causes a potential decline in academic

performance?

Chappuis (2014) reported from research that information assessed should be specifically

addressed based on learning needs. When errors exist in assessments, teachers may have to

assist the students with the flaws. Challenges such as misconceptions can lead to further

challenges. The use of data-driven decision-making, based on assessment trends, allows teachers

a common design to track results of the data. By collecting this student progress on a regular and

consistent basis, the expectation is the teacher and student can move forward in covering

material (Chappuis, 2014).

Hattie (2009) shares that an effective feedback system connected with the assessment

data starts with the teacher's feedback. This allows the teacher to look for evidence of the parts

of the learning that need additional focus as the most crucial part in helping students learn

(Chappuis, 2014).

This study contributes to the research by providing an exploratory study of one school's

experience transitioning to the use of mClass' Reading 3D as a common assessment for literacy

measurement in second and third grades.

<p style="text-align:center">**Reading Assessment Studies: A Review of the Local Context**</p>

During the end of the 2009 school year, it was noted that Perquimans County's third

graders at Hertford Grammar School were performing below state average in reading. It was

also noted that the school was quickly merging into a turnaround status, which meant the North

Carolina Department of Public Instruction was preparing to send in state-led teams to perform a

needs assessment, review the trend data, and urgently make changes to adjust any parts of the

instructional implementations that were not at standard. This mandate was part of the No Child

Left Behind Act under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. Schools in the bottom ten-

percent of academic standings were placed under the North Carolina Department of Public

Instruction's District and School Transformation. During this process, teams of the state's top

educators were sent into the low-performing schools to complete a needs assessment and

determine interventions that needed to be put into place to make immediate, positive changes.

It had been noted in systemic trend data that while the third graders were below proficient

in reading on the state's pre and post end-of-grade tests, their overall second grade end-of-year

tests in reading were well-above that of the third grade. Thus, it showed a regression in literacy

skills over the summer and during the third grade. The first diagnosis was to analyze the two

tests the students were administered. The second grade test consisted of local benchmark data

and on-going assessments through research-based programs, such as Reading 3-D. This program

diagnoses developmental reading over a period of time and provides on-going fidelity checks with individual student growth. The third grade reading scores were directly determined by the North Carolina End-of-Grade test scale scores, reflecting an overall percentage of students who were less proficient in reading at the end of the third grade year than were proficient at the end of the second grade year.

Under the North Carolina mandate, there is a turnaround plan for low performing schools. The first step in refocusing the school is a change in administration. Research collected by Szekely (2013) for the National Governor's Association supports that high quality education in early years of school builds foundational knowledge and skills that prepare students for long-term success. Therefore, systems should support professional development opportunities for principals on how to promote high-quality early childhood instructional programs (Szekely, 2013). The research further suggests that building level administration is particularly influential in the most troubled schools, such as schools that are low-performing at the transitional years.

Consistent with Szekely's (2013) research, Hertford Grammar School's first change was the administration. Seeking a new leader for the school was in-line with the research noting that administrators who promote long-term student achievement at an early age will be influential in reducing costs for further interventions later in student's educational careers. One state in particular, Illinois, passed a principal preparation reform law to ensure principals are better informed of early childhood education (Szekely, 2013). The process was very specific in its mandate, and particularly offered principals opportunities to monitor elementary programs and demonstrate leadership to help improve instructional outcomes by the end of third grade. North Carolina's standards for principals is not as stringent as Illinois, but does have the Principals Evaluation that measures standards to ensure student achievement is at least at-standard.

After making changes in administration, the next step was to reassign teachers. High-performing teachers were necessary in the state-tested grade, yet they were also imperative to be placed at the preparatory grades. Therefore, teacher performance was measured by observations, data collections, and the standards in the teacher evaluation instrument.

Read to Achieve Law: The Mandate for Literacy Accountability in Third Grade

The Read to Achieve initiative became a law in July 2012. The North Carolina General Assembly passed the 2012 budget act, House Bill 950/S.L. 2012-142 Section 7A, which included the Read to Achieve program as part of the Excellent Public Schools Act. This law requires third-grade students, beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, to receive extra reading attention in North Carolina because of the state's legislative initiative. In June of 2013, the newly developed K-3 Literacy Division conducted focus group sessions in all eight state board districts of North Carolina. Session participants included parents, teachers, administrators, reading and literacy specialists, central office personnel, curriculum coordinators, and representatives from Institutes of Higher Education. The framework for the Comprehensive Reading Plan was developed from the perspective and input of all of these stakeholders. It focuses on six areas: standards-based curriculum, leadership, instruction, professional development, assessment, and partnerships and communication (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

The overall focus of the program was the development, implementation and plan for continuous evaluation of a comprehensive plan to improve reading achievement in the public schools of North Carolina. Per state law, third-grade students not reading at grade level by the end of third grade face the requirement of special help, including summer reading camp, and

other interventions to make sure that they can read well enough to be able to do fourth-grade work (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

The mandate of Read to Achieve is the most recent model of literacy assessment at the elementary level. The assessments for Read to Achieve are completed in third grade, but the efforts in grades kindergarten through second grade prepare students for this new law.

How Reading 3D Provides Consistency under Read to Achieve

Under the Reading 3D model, students are tested in an ongoing manner in what is known as benchmarking windows. The Beginning of Year (BOY) testing window is 15 consecutive days of testing within the first 25 days of the school year. The Middle of Year (MOY) testing window is 15 consecutive days within the 80-105 days of the school year. The End of Year (EOY) test is tested for 15 consecutive days within the 150-180 day of school. These testing dates are a Local Education Agency (LEA) decision and have to be confirmed with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Amplify.

Amplify has teachers assessing his or her own students in this model to additionally use the Reading 3D results to guide individualized instruction (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). During the administration of any parts of the assessments, the directions cannot be altered in any way. The teacher must read the directions verbatim. If the directions must be altered, those alterations must be written in the notes section of the students testing information.

As new students enter school, they should be progress monitored. This will allow the teacher to use those results to determine and target personalized needs.

Students who are identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) or as a high-flyer also have room for growth using Reading 3D. The data collected aids the teacher in

building on literacy skills such as writing and character analysis. Teachers are able to analyze and document error patterns and determine the growth in reading comprehension to ensure students sustain and maintain their learning as they exceed performance in literacy skills (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

The benchmark goals for Reading 3D progress from well-below benchmark to at or above benchmark. These are described below:

- Well-below benchmark data are a red-colored status of measurement. The odds of achieving subsequent benchmarking goals gauges 10%-20%. The student is likely to need intensive support to make adequate progress.

- Below benchmark is the yellow-colored status of measurement. The odds of achieving subsequent benchmark goals increases to 40%-60%. The student is likely to need strategic support to make adequate progress in the next steps.

- At or above benchmark is the green-colored status. There are 80%-90% odds of achieving subsequent benchmark goals in this status. In the next steps, the student is likely to make adequate progress with effective core instruction.

The data are only valuable if they are used to change student outcomes.

Connecting the Cycle of Literacy Assessments with Literacy Instruction

Formative Assessments

John Hattie conducted research in 2012 noting the most influential practices that improve student outcomes are formative assessments (Duckor, 2014). Further research from Wiggins in 2012 adds that the best feedback practices should be specific, targeted, timely, on-going and rich in content. Upon thorough observations and videotaped lessons, a team of Duckor, Honda, Pink, Wilmot and Wilson determined seven basic steps for quality assessment practices. Inclusive in

those steps, the team notes the routine and structure of the students to be part of the priming process for assessing. In reviewing reading assessments, Stiggins (2002) contributes the success of on-going progress monitoring to everyone being engaged in practices that focus on furthering learning based on needs.

Using formative assessment as a daily implementation of instruction has been proven to improve student learning for both low-performing and high-performing students (Black & Williams, 1998). Providing appropriate feedback on specific errors helps students understand the concepts not mastered with opportunities to be provided suggestions for improvement and to be re-taught (Ross, 2006). Additionally, Ross (2006) adds that when teachers have an opportunity to focus on errors and students have an opportunity to reflect on their work, the assessments and student achievement improve.

Ducker (2014) summarizes that regardless of the assessment, teachers need to know where kids get stuck and why. Consistently from the past and into the present, this is done through practical training and rich, engaged classroom experiences.

One of the areas that researchers such as Dutro and Selland (2012) present is the concern that high-stakes testing causes anxiety, frustration, anger, and other dreadful emotions. Consequently, when given opportunities to focus on testing forms and test-taking strategies as part of instructional practices, there is often less pressure on the testing (Dutro & Selland, 2012). The duo of Dutro and Selland (2012) conclude that tests can play a role in providing useful and generative data if assessments are challenging and meaningful.

Principal Leadership

One key factor to ensure the effectiveness of appropriate connections with literacy assessments and instruction is through the leadership role of the principal (Berebitsky, Goddard,

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& Carlisle, 2014). Teachers report that supportive principals that lead positive change in instruction and assessment, focusing on collaboration and communication around literacy, have an increase in student achievement (Berkebitsky et al., 2014).

Literacy Instruction and Assessment as a Predictor of Literacy Achievement

During the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, many elementary schools searched for practices to enhance student performance in an era of student and teacher accountability (Schilling, Carlisle, Scott, & Zeng, 2007). A problem that teachers reported in the study is that while there are anticipations that reading achievement measures are aligned with the curriculum, they do not find the information in high stakes testing useful in making instructional decisions for the classroom (Schilling et al., 2007). Schilling's research team from the University of Michigan gathered reading achievement data from 44 elementary schools in nine districts in the state of Michigan. The study concluded that in order to improve literacy achievement, teachers had to implement a high literacy instructional program including DIBELS with measures of reading comprehension and vocabulary practice, and followed-up with frequent, on-going progress-monitoring assessments. Together, the instruction and assessment served as a monitoring of performance that targeted where the feedback was needed (Schilling et al., 2007).

What is progress monitoring and how does it help support instruction and assessment? According to David J. Francis and his team of researchers (2008) from the Texas Institute for Measurement, there are five essential characteristics of progress monitoring assessments:

1. Progress monitoring assessments are administered to students on regular, fixed intervals.

2. Progress monitoring assessments are brief and easy to administer in the classroom by the classroom teacher or other professional.

3. Progress monitoring assessments need to provide scores on a constant measurement system in order to provide reliable data which measures progress, or lack of progress.

4. Progress monitoring assessment performances should be predictive of end of year outcomes for the student and the teacher.

5. Progress monitoring assessments need to be separated from practice effects to avoid distortions in the track of growth.

Also in Florida, another team of researchers conducted a similar study and found similar results. Led by Roehrig, this five-person research team evaluated the validity of DIBELS for predicting reading comprehension performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Stanford achievement Test (Roehrig, Petscher, Nettles, Hudson, & Torgesen, 2008). The results of their review indicated a consistent calibration of instruction and assessment, with third grade having the strongest correlations when the tests were administered concurrently (Roehrig et al., 2008). The DIBELS ORF is one of few validated standardized reading tests that embed the long-term progress monitoring (Roherig et al., 2008). In Roherig et al.'s (2008) findings, it is noted there is a continuous need for additional research to be done in the area of evaluating instruction and learning.

Petscher and Kim (2011) also conducted a similar research while reviewing elementary student literacy performance in Florida. After examining multiple reading passages, the findings report there is a validity in the prediction of reading comprehension for elementary grade levels, with the second and third grades having a means that noted the greatest predictor of literacy performance (Petscher & Kim, 2011). The work of Petscher and Kim (2011) modeled and supported earlier studies that were led by previous researchers who found that instructional practices are an integral consideration in the administration of assessments.

Summary

Schools implement quality preschool and early age programs to provide a solid educational foundation through early intervention programs. With increasing mandates for accountability in third grade, schools and systems are reevaluating early literacy programs and assessment measures to restructure the early-age educational foundation (Szkely, 2013). In celebrating the successes, it is worthy to diagnostically ask, what happens to students from second to third grade that causes a potential decline in academic performance?

This research is an exploratory study of one school's experience transitioning to the use of mClass' Reading 3D as a common assessment for literacy measurement in second and third grades. As noted by Chappus (2014), if we pay attention to the needs of the learner, when carried out thoughtfully, assessment practices can contribute to better learning for all students. Therefore, when improving the literacy learning of students, the heightened rigor of the content standards, the implementation of pacing guides and the data collected from assessments can be contributing factors of improved literacy skills from one grade to another.

Upon review of research on instructional transitions and assessments, the two topics blend and merge together to signify a correlation between the two. In seeking ways to aid grade-to-grade transitions and have valid reading assessment data, Reading 3D serves as a common assessment tool. Reading 3D proves to be a diagnostic and formative assessment tool that is used to inform instruction to meet the needs of readers of all levels. As a student transfers or advances from one grade to another, or from one school to another, he or she will take all of his Reading 3D historical assessment data with him or her, thus laying a foundation for the successful transition this review of the literature has identified as so important.

Carol Connor, a researcher at the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University in Tallahassee who partnered with eight other researchers, concludes through their intensive research that as students' skills-set change, so should the recommendation amounts and levels of instruction (Connor et al., 2011). Teachers are able to use forecasting intervention models to interpret complex data and then design instruction for students based on differentiated needs in word reading, reading comprehension, and vocabulary skills (Connor et al., 2011). The group of researchers summarizes their findings that by being proactive with instruction, there will be an improvement in students' literacy achievement (Connor et al., 2011).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Design

The design chosen for this proposed project was the case study approach. Case study research brings understandings to certain issues and can elaborate experiences or add strength to what is already known through previous practices on topics (Yin, 1984). For many years, and covering many disciplines, researchers have used the case study method as a means to expand on knowledge and practices to enhance what is being researched. The case study research design dates back to the popularity of social sciences, such as in the research of psychology with Freud, medicine in the late 1800's, and with law and political science case reports as well (Creswell, 2007).

According to Stake (1995), a case is an integrated system and a case study is a study of that system. It involves the study of the particulars and complexity of one case and provides understanding of activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995). There is an emphasis on detailed contextual analysis for a limited number of events.

Creswell (2007) further adds that a case study approach is a type of methodology, which is a type of design in qualitative research. The data collection involves multiple sources of information, including a review of documents, interviews, and reports (Creswell, 2007). The intent of a case study is to evaluate and determine how a specific topic works (Creswell, 2007). Due to the wide-range of collection data, one area to consider in a case study is the boundaries of which the research is covering (Creswell, 2007). This help keeps the study, which may include time, events, and processes, focused on the actual case being studied.

Specifically, the case study method is the choice of practice for several reasons. First, this study focuses on an integrated (Stake, 1995) and bounded system (Smith, 1978). The

participants, including students, teachers, and principals were part of the study that was conducted in a small range of time for assessment collection, referred to as intrinsically bounded (Merriam, 1998). Well-known researchers, such as Stake (1995) and Yin (1984), note six techniques for organizing a case study, which were followed in this case study:

1. Determine and define the research questions.

2. Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques.

3. Prepare to collect the data.

4. Collect data in the field.

5. Evaluate and analyze the data.

6. Prepare the report.

In this problem of practice, this was a case of students taking a common literacy assessment throughout third grade, as they did in second grade, to evaluate and understand the effectiveness of the assessment as part of the grade-to-grade transition. This study sought to understand the common progress monitoring literacy skills as third grade teachers implemented a common reading assessment and used the data to track skills and target individualized literacy needs.

This research examined the data of third grade students from 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 who were given differing assessments throughout second and third grade and that of third grade students from the academic years of 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015 who were given common assessments from second through third grade. Students during the current academic year, 2014-2015, completed a variety of literacy assessments through the mClass Reading 3D program. These data sources included:

- Letter Naming Fluency (LNF): The LNF test has students to recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.

- First Sound Fluency (FSF): The FSF has the students isolate and pronounce initial sounds in spoken single-syllable words.

- Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF): Students speaking single-syllable words into their complete sequence of individual sounds is the PSF test.

- Non-sense Word Fluency (NFW): The NWF measurement has students to demonstrate basic knowledge of one-to-one letter sound correspondences by producing the primary or most frequent sound for each consonant, associates the long and short sounds with the common spellings for the five major vowels, and decodes regularly spelled one-syllable words.

- Dibels Oral Reading Fluency (DORF): The DORF/TRC measurement has students to recognize and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words, read on-level text with purpose and understanding to support comprehension and to read on-level text orally with accuracy, at an appropriate rate and to exhibit expressions on successive readings.

- DAZE (not an acronym): The DAZE tests measure students reading on-level text with purpose and understanding to support comprehension, use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, and re-read as necessary.

- Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC): In the TRC assessment students read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences, cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

- Word Recognition (WR): Students may also be measured with the WR assessment, which evaluates the students' ability to recognize and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.

These data were examined to determine if the use of a common literacy assessment alleviated the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores of third grade students in one LEA in northeastern North Carolina. An additional data source included interviews of the principal participants. The teachers were asked to participate in one of two focus groups. One focus group consisted of second grade teachers while the second focus group consisted of third grade teachers. Both the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The ensuing data were analyzed using a content analysis approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) followed by the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 1998).

Introduction and Overview

This study investigated, through a qualitative lens, the need to determine the effectiveness of a common literacy assessment for second and third grade students. This study focused on two main areas: (1) the use of a common literacy assessment between 2nd and 3rd grade as a means to alleviate the discrepancies between 2nd and 3rd grade literacy assessments, and, (2) the experiences of the teacher and principal participants in implementing both differing and common assessments. The research questions were as follows:

1. Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

2. What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of implementing common literacy assessments?

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Participants

The participants in this study included second and third grade students, teachers, and administrators in Edenton-Chowan Schools during the 2014-2015 school year (see Appendix A). Each participant was a critical member of the project, as each contributed a measurable perspective to the study.

One hundred seventy-two third grade students at DFW participated in the study. There were nine third grade classrooms. Each classroom had 19 students. The students were heterogeneously placed in third grade classrooms based on multiple criteria. One of the criterion used was the mCLASS Reading 3D assessment data from their second grade year at WOS.

The students' role in this study was to serve as the learners, academic performers, and test-takers. The assessment data were collected from the students and were used to track and compare the research over a series of reading assessments from the beginning of the year through the middle of the year and with on-going progress monitoring.

Nine third grade teachers and nine second-grade teachers were in a focus group during this study. The selection as participants was by the nature of their position, as they were the assigned teachers for each respective grade level. The nine third grade teachers were divided evenly into nine classrooms. Five of the nine third grade teachers had five or more years of third grade experience at D. F. Walker; one teacher was in her second year of teaching, but her first year of teaching third grade. The remaining three teachers had three years of experience or less and were new teachers to D. F. Walker. One hundred percent of the third grade teachers were highly qualified in the elementary education content licensure area.

Like the teachers, the two principals who were interviewed were participants by default of their positions within the elementary schools. Both principals were in their third year of

administration. Each had served their entire administrative career at the current schools in this study. Prior to advancing into school-leadership positions, each had served as a teacher and some type of instructional coach at the elementary or secondary level.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The purpose of this research was to investigate the use of a common reading assessment between second and third grades. The concepts of trustworthiness and credibility replace issues of reliability and validity typically found in a quantitative study. The following methods were used to ensure this research is trustworthy and credible.

1. Triangulation- the use of multiple sources of data including documents, test reports, and interviews will serve to triangulate the data.

2. Member checking – interview transcriptions will be sent to participants via email; participants will each be asked to review his or her transcript for accuracy.

Triangulation was used to ensure an accurate interpretation of the multiple methods of data collected. This included student literacy assessment scores, the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and face-to-face interviews. Using multiple layers of analyses, these data were used to ensure accurate interpretation. Member checking was used throughout the review of the teacher focus groups and the principal interviews. All results were checked within one week of the sessions. The participants are charted in Table 6.

Choice of Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach is appropriate for this study due to the need for examining this problem of practice through a review of information collected on a particular case to be studied (Creswell, 2007). In this particular case, data from interviews and documents were analyzed through a qualitative lens. The analysis provided school administrators with detailed information

Table 6

Participant Summary: Number of Participants in Case Study

School Name	Total Students	Total Teachers	Total Principals
White Oak Elementary	194	9	1
D.F. Walker Elementary	172	9	1

to help them make informed decisions when considering vertical, grade-to-grade, reading assessment options. This study reports on findings from (1) a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, (2) a mixed methods analysis of written documents including assessment tools and working conditions survey, and (3) descriptive statistics describing the results of the assessment tools and working conditions survey.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section defines the interview and focus group participants and the data collected. It further expands on how each of the data were gathered, analyzed, and interpreted.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Individual interviews were held for each of the principals, while focus groups were held for second grade teachers and third grade teachers respectively, found in Appendices G-N. The semi-structured interview format noted by Patton (2002) was utilized for the principal interviews and teacher focus groups. The purpose of this semi-structured interview process was to document and examine the perceptions and opinions of teachers and principals to determine whether there were successes or dilemmas associated with the assessment measurements during transitions (Patton, 2002). Each of the participants who consented to be interviewed was asked a series of eight questions. Each interviewee was asked to answer the same questions in the same way and in the same order as one another, and responses were not able to be answered by either yes or no (Patton, 2002). The data collected within the four different sets of research were used to determine what patterns arose in the answers relating to the trends of testing and assessment measurements for students who transition from second to third grade.

The questions included in the interview were comprised of two different types: (a) knowledge questions and, (b) opinion and values questions. These types of interview questions

target interpreting the opinions, judgments, and values of people, whereas the knowledge questions inquire about the participants' experience or issues and were situational and job-related (Patton, 2002). Interview questions were determined by the interviewer's knowledge of the assessment practices within second to third grade transition and with the research that had been collected. Questions and answers were recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted by the researcher. The researcher began categorizing the analysis by the responses. Table 7 was designed to show the number of principals interviewed.

A written summary of the responses was then completed and a list of the interview questions were listed in Appendices G-N of the final document. This semi-structured research tool, as defined by Patton (2002), was used to collect information on the ideas, opinions, and experiences of the second and third grade teachers and principals and could potentially be used as part of the system's needs assessment for evaluation purposes or future program designs (Patton, 2002).

Research conducted by Barriball and While (1993) supports the validity of the personable, face-to-face interview questions and process by noting numerous advantages of this approach. First, there are greater opportunities for enhanced responses to the questions, as opposed to an anonymous survey. The interviews allow the researcher to explore attitudes, beliefs, and motives, as well as to evaluate the respondent's answers by observing non-verbal indicators. Often due to the sensitivity of topics, respondents will be able to receive assistance from others in the formulation of responses. Additionally, this type of research tool gives the interviewer options to probe (Barriball & While, 1993). Probing allows the interviewer to ask for clarification of relevant, interesting issues raised by the respondents (Barriball & While, 1993). Barriball and

Table 7

The Principal Interview Participants

Elementary Principal	Level of Administration During Data Collection	Years of Teaching Experience that includes Literacy Instruction	Years of Administrative Experience that includes the Evaluation of Literacy	Total Years in Education
#1	Prekindergarten – Second Grade	12	3	15
#2	Third Grade – Fifth Grade	10	3	13

While (1993) further elaborate that probing may give the interviewer a more in-depth perspective of sensitive issues and inconsistencies within program areas. Details within the collection of the data will focus on what the answers reveal about perceptions of transitioning from second to third grade using a common assessment practice.

Documents

Two sets of documents were collected and analyzed. The first was the Individual Reading 3D Assessment. Data were collected from the current third grade students dating back to their second grade year. The data included second grade beginning of year (BOY), middle of year (MOY), and end of year (EOY) measures. Third grade Reading 3D BOY and MOY performances were included. Progress monitoring and benchmarks were included in the final results, as well as the third nine-weeks progress monitoring reports. The EOY data were not available at the conclusion of this study. Data from these assessments were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically through the use of statistics and frequencies.

The second set of documents collected was a survey known as the North Carolina Teacher's Working Conditions Survey. This survey is a measure of perception data. The data reviewed from this survey focused on the value of professional development and assessment data analysis within the schools. The area that was analyzed from this survey is question 9.1 to rate how strongly the teacher agrees or disagrees with the following statements about instructional practices and support in their respective schools:

1. State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices;

2. Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices;

3. Teachers use assessment date to inform their instruction;

4. The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Common Core Standards;

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5. Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.

6. Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers;

7. Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction;

8. Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students;

9. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy);

10. State assessments provide schools with data that can help improve teaching; and

11. State assessments accurately gauge students' understandings of standards.

While the data were not specific per grade level, these surveys included valuable perceptions and insight on how teachers view the instruction and assessments at the two elementary schools.

Summary

Best practice and national standards expect that state and local accountability programs have clear assessment measures in place to gauge student performance. In this study, the measurement directly focused on a reading assessment for third graders, noting trend data they brought up from second grade. A number of states and local school systems have recently suggested that the increased rigor in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study "Common" Core calls for a "Common" assessment.

While there is little research or data to specifically support this topic, it has become common today to dismiss the fact that schools can no longer test reading using a variety of assessment tools to measure performance. The benefit, however, is that the potential need for a common assessment in reading is being mandated by new accountability standards, and

educators are being forced to evaluate practices and establish an accountability plan that

accurately and consistently identifies reading abilities. The methodologies used in this research

take an important first step in that direction for the participants involved in this case study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

This research, as noted in previous chapters, studied the impact of a common literacy assessment as a tool to determine student proficiency within the transition of second and third grade students. The results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter through the control points of two research questions. The research questions sought to gather findings on how or if the use of a common literacy assessment alleviates the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores and, from teacher and principal perspectives, the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments between those two grade levels. The findings in this chapter support the use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade, and demonstrates the need for further recommendations.

A case study approach was chosen to help the researcher and research participants understand the issue being studied, and to potentially add strength to what is already in practice (Yin, 1984). The initial approach of the study involved the quantitative review of student data and teacher surveys, yet was expanded through a more in-depth qualitative approach by using face-to-face principal interviews and face-to-face focus group sessions with the second and third grade teachers in a small, rural school system in northeastern North Carolina. This type of case study provided the opportunity to view multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007).

Data triangulation was used by collecting multiple sources of data including: tests, documents, teacher focus group transcripts, and principal interview transcripts, followed by member checking for accuracy of responses among the participants. This semi-structured research approach, used to collect opinions and experiences, modeled Patton's (2002) research design.

It could potentially further be used as part of the school and school system's evaluation in future literacy program designs.

Overall, this qualitative study utilized interviews and focus groups using a semi-structured approach to unveil the evolving themes from the collective experiences of second and third grade teachers and principals who had experienced the implementation of common literacy assessments during the transition of second and third grade students. Face to face interviews and focus groups allowed the participants greater opportunities to respond to the questions, as opposed to solely answering specific survey questions (Barriball & While, 1993).

A Review of the Participant Demographics

Participant demographics were presented earlier in Chapter 3, yet this section will provide more detailed demographic information about the framework of all teacher and principal participants. The rationale for a review of updating the participant demographics is because students and personnel vary each year in school settings and the actual participants were not clearly defined until the placement of students and personnel were confirmed for the particular school year being evaluated. All participants in this study were from one small, rural school system in northeastern North Carolina and are recognized throughout this problem of practice as samples of both direct and indirect contributors to the conclusions of this study. The two indirect contributors who were in this study: (1) the students who produced the literacy test data for review and (2) the teachers who provided measurable responses to questions in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.

The indirect student participation came from the collection of student test scores from multiple sources. These data points were from second and third grade students participating in the elementary program who are accommodated in two separate buildings. The K-2 students

attend one elementary school, while the 3-5 students attend another elementary school. An enclosed hallway physically connects the two elementary schools together. The original grade level data that were examined were from third grade students during 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 using performance measures from second and third grade common literacy assessments within the mCLASS Reading 3D program. As the research study surfaced, the researcher readdressed the incorporation of student data by including additional grade levels of students for additional years. The number of student data samples can be found in Table 8.

Tables 9 and 10 provide a record of the number of students who were enrolled and participated in the Reading 3D mCLASS common literacy assessment during the 2011 – 2015 school years in grades two, three, and four. These students, per district data, are comprised of an estimated 60% white, 40% black, 30% exceptional children, 70% economically disadvantaged, and 10% academically gifted.

Data were collected from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey and included input from teacher participants. As noted in Figure 4, during the 2012 survey, the K-2 school had 51 teachers on staff with only 38 (75%) participating in the TWC survey. During that same year, the 3-5 school had 43 teachers on staff, and 36 (84%) of the teachers completed the TWC survey. The TWC survey is administered every two years and the data reviewed compared the two years of whole-school perspectives.

During the 2014 school year, the participation levels increased at both schools, yet each school noted decreases in the overall numbers of teachers in each school. The K-2 school reported 46 teachers on staff with 46 completing the survey (100%) and the 3-5 school had 37 teachers on staff, with 36 (97%) of the teachers providing input.

Table 8

Number of Student Data Samples

Year of Review	Grade Level/# of Students	Total Student Participant Data Reviewed
2011-2012	2 – 116 3 – 139	255
2012-2013	2 – 131 3 – 139	270
2013-2014	2 – 128 3 – 159 4 – 139	426
2014-2015	2 – 137 3 – 169 4 – 159	465
2015-2016	2 – 190 3 – 174	364*

Note. *Only includes #s of BOY data participants.

Table 9

The Second Grade Focus Group Participants

Second Grade Teacher Participant #	Years of Teaching Experience	Highly Qualified Teacher
1	20	Yes
2	22	Yes
3	3	Yes
4	7	Yes
5	11	Yes
6	19	Yes
7	2	Yes
8	2	Yes
9	6	Yes

Table 10

The Third Grade Focus Group Participants

Third Grade Teacher Participant #	Years of Teaching Experience	Highly Qualified Teacher
1	11	Yes
2	2	Yes
3	14	Yes
4	1	Yes
5	3	Yes
6	8	Yes
7	13	Yes
8	5	Yes
9	4	Yes

2012 & 2014
Teacher #'s & Participant #'s
Per School

━━ 2012   ━━ 2014

51
46   46
                                      38

                    43   36
                    37   35

K-2 Teachers   K-2 Participants   3-5 Teachers   3-5 Participants
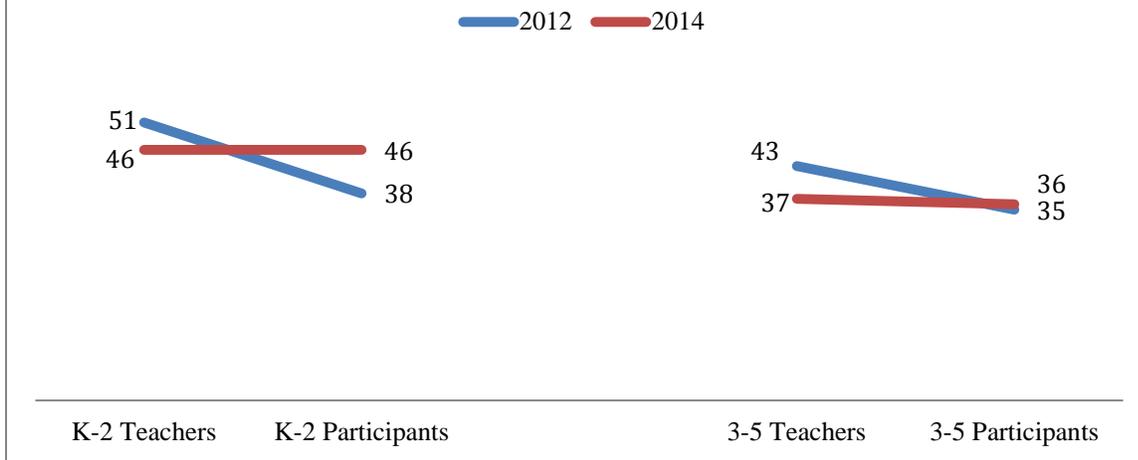
Figure 4. 2012 & 2014 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey participant comparison.

An overview of the teacher and principal demographics from the second and third grade levels is presented with relevance to individualized connections with direct participation of research within the grade level teams and schools. The participant data in this section explicitly notes by grade level, the number of teachers and their years of experience in Tables 11 and 12 are followed by summaries of participant credentials relevant to the study.

Two elementary principals contributed to the interview sessions of this study. Both of the two elementary principals participated in the face-to-face interviews, which supported the 100% principal participation rate in the interviews. The first principal to be interviewed was the former K-2 principal who led the school during the time these student data were collected. The second principal to be interviewed was the former 3-5 principal during the time these student data were collected.

The years of experience for all teachers and principals is relevant to the formation of each grade level, as the accountability model is the most recent mandate for measuring student literacy proficiency and skills. The Read to Achieve law, which came into effect at the end of the summer in 2012, required elementary teachers to have an urgent review of literacy proficiency for students. Second and third grade teachers were chosen to be part of this study because of their direct participation with the NC Read to Achieve Law and the need for clarity on the performance and measurement of student literacy data prior to third grade students being assessed at the end of one year which ultimately measured promotion standards.

The RTA law established clear expectations for elementary teachers and principals to enforce. The participants in this study had a developing knowledge base on RTA program: K-3 literacy assessments, a comprehensive plan for reading achievement, a plan to help students who did not meet proficiency standards, and a plan to support cooperating teachers.

Table 11

Second Grade Reading 3D/mCLASS Trend Data, 2011 - 2015

Grade 2	Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Total Students	*Total Proficient*
11-12 BOY	23 (15%)	41 (36%)	36 (23%)	56 (36%)	156	92 (59%)
11-12 MOY	25 (16%)	32 (21%)	22 (14%)	75 (49%)	154	97 (63%)
11-12 EOY	19 (13%)	14 (9%)	41 (28%)	75 50%)	149	*116 (78%)*
12-13 BOY	26 (15%)	43 (26%)	39 (23%)	60 (36%)	168	99 (59%)
12-13 MOY	29 (17%)	35 (21%)	19 (11%)	85 (51%)	168	104 (62%)
12-13 EOY	24 (15%)	9 (5%)	38 (23%)	93 (57%)	164	*131 (80%)*
13-14 BOY	30 (18%)	43 (25%)	46 (27%)	52 (30%)	171	98 (57%)
13-14 MOY	25 (14%)	44 (25%)	20 (12%)	84 (49%)	173	104 (61%)
13-14 EOY	38 (22%)	4 (2%)	53 (31%)	75 (45%)	170	*128 (76%)*
14-15 BOY	46 (24%)	47 (25%)	45 (24%	53 (27%)	191	98 (51%)
14-15 MOY	47 (25%)	66 (35%)	16 (8%)	62 (32%)	191	78 (40%)
14-15 EOY	32 (18%)	12 (7%)	59 (33%)	78 (42%)	181	*137 (75%)*

Table 12

Third Grade Reading 3D/mCLASS Trend Data; 2012 - 2015

Grade 3	Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Total Students	*Total Proficient*
12-13 MOY	48 (34%)	31 (22%)	10 (7%)	54 (37%)	143	64 (44%)
12-13 EOY	44 (32%)	19 (14%)	23 (17%)	53 (37%)	139	*76 (54%)*
13-14 BOY	42 (26%)	13 (8%)	37 (23%)	70 (43%)	162	107 (66%)
13-14 MOY	46 (28%)	31 (19%)	7 (4%)	78 (49%)	162	85 (53%)
13-14 EOY	39 (25%)	17 (11%)	26 (16%)	77 (48%)	159	*103 (64%)*
14-15 BOY	78 (45%)	3 (2%)	27 (16%)	64 (37%)	172	91 (53%)
14-15 MOY	38 (22%)	43 (25%)	10 (6%)	81 (47%)	172	91 (53%)
14-15 EOY	25 (15%)	9 (5%)	49 (29%)	86 (51%)	169	*135 (80%)*
15-16 BOY	76 (23%)	10 (6%)	36 (21%)	52 (30%)	174	88 (51%)

There were a total of 20 eligible educator participants and each was sent an email invitation to participate in the voluntary study. The second grade educators were housed in one school building, while the third grade educators were housed in a separate building, which connects the two schools by a hallway divider. There were nine-second grade teachers and nine third grade teachers invited to participate in the research. Sixteen of the 18 teachers participated in the face-to-face focus group meeting, noting 89% of the teachers were physically present during the questioning and answering session. There was one teacher from the second grade and one teacher from the third grade who were not physically present for the focus group sessions, but they responded to the study questions by email within a 24 hour window. Their responses were recorded along with the focus group answers to better assist with the collection of data. As a result, 100% of the second and third grade teachers participated in the focus groups.

Answering the Study Questions

This study directly focused on the goal of gaining insightful data to better understand the impact of using a common literacy assessment for both second and third grade students and to determine how or if this study could enhance the overall academic achievement in elementary schools through the primary study questions:

1. Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

2. What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

Subsequent questions followed each research question, providing more specific details and data to support the practices of the students and teachers. The data, which were formalized

from the subsequent questions and overall approach of the design, correlate directly to the research questions and approach used in this interactive, real-world exploration.

This chapter reports three major domains in this study as a result of the research process. The three findings are: (1) The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students supports an increase in student literacy skills and literacy achievement and alleviates discrepancies in data between testing tools, (2) The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students increases the common language and best practices for students, teachers, and administrators, and (3) As a result of implementing common literacy assessments between second and third grade students, there is a continued need for all stakeholders to be active participants in the progression of reorganizing procedures that vertically connect the two grade levels. The three domains are encapsulated in Figure 5.

Study Question One

Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores? Research question number one is answered by the first domain and includes two precise conclusions.

Domain One: Increase in Consistency and Achievement in Literacy Skills

A qualitative approach instigated the answer to research question one as the study primarily blended both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were used to combine an accurate response to research question one. The quantitative data were collected from the compilation of second and third grade student literacy data, including Reading 3D mCLASS assessments and the third grade NC BOY and EOG Tests. The qualitative data were collected from the examining transcripts from the second and third grade teacher focus group sessions, the elementary principal interview sessions, and connections to past correspondences. These results

Domain One: The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students supports an increase in student literacy skills and literacy achievement.

Domain Two: The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students increases the common language and best practices for students, teachers, and administrators.

Domain Three: There is a continued need for all stakeholders to be active participants in the progression of reorganizing procedures that vertically connect the two grade levels.

Figure 5. A summary of the three domains to answer research questions.

concluded that the use of a common literacy assessment has opportunities to alleviate discrepancies in student performance scores and has evidences of increasing the proficiency of literacy skills and literacy achievement between second and third grade students.

Common language and purpose. Consistencies in assessment practices, through common language, contributed to the success of alleviating discrepancies in literacy assessment data across the second and third grades. This data are supported by the student literacy data analysis, the teacher focus group data, and the principal interview data.

The literature review in chapter two defined a variety of second and third grade tests, yet the actual examination of the tests captured common language in the execution of the assessments. The commonalities of the language expressed amongst students and teachers included precise delivery methods and instructional standards. Clear scripts existed for teachers to read in most instructional and assessment opportunities. The Reading 3D mCLASS model was technology-based, so there were little to no opportunities for mishandling. Each time a student finished an assessment, the technology device had to be synced, which automatically recorded student responses.

The formatting and language of the literacy assessments were also similar, which aided the students in the common language. It was verbalized in the teacher focus groups that the students were able to follow assessment language easier after they had been exposed to the common language throughout the instructional delivery. This language was comparative for the different types of literacy assessments given and were established through language learned during instruction in the classroom.

Examples to support common language to alleviate discrepancies in data are recorded as evidences throughout this chapter in countless samples of test practices. Common language was

a reoccurring theme that is embedded throughout the discoveries of numerous test measures, the focus group sessions, and the principal interviews.

      Growth in student performance and literacy skills. In addition to alleviating any potential discrepancies between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessments, a bigger theme emerged to conclude that student performance scores actually increased and noted potential increases in literacy skills. As a comparison, each literacy assessment data set served as one puzzle piece that contributed to the overall big-picture product to indicate if the use of a common literacy assessment was correlated with student success. The teachers shared their overall observations of disaggregating the test data as being positive and the results of increased literacy skills to be promising.

      The second grade teachers gave specific points to reinforce their annotations of positive gains in skills and growth from the common literacy assessments. Second grade teachers were aware that third grade teachers have multiple assessments that are compared for proficiency: The EOG's, the RTA portfolio, and mCLASS. They also agreed that assessment scores are in alignment from one grade to another and provide a more consistent measurement in all skills being assessed. The group reported all teachers had been trained to prepare for and administer these tests, so the outcomes of interpreting the data were consistently aligned to predict the growths achievements.

      This group concurred data driven instruction helped make decisions on what each child needs. The Reading 3D mCLASS measurements and data have helped bridge the gap between the second and third grades. The numbers show it on all reports. The written components of the literacy measurements, furthermore, showed there were more consistencies with fiction and non-

fiction texts. Therefore, teachers reported the measurements, which showed growth, were more accurate than in the past.

One-second grade teacher summed up the view of the commonalities in relation to the assessment measures by stating, "If they (students) can read at a level 40, they should be able to write at a level 40." According to the teachers, the use of the common assessments has helped align that goal.

Third grade teachers gave similar responses to the second grade teachers, which support steady examinations of results. The third grade teachers eagerly reported that their students participate in numerous required literacy assessments: The state's mandates of the BOY, EOG, RTA, and mCLASS, as well as local benchmark testing. The second grade only has mCLASS, which third grade teachers remarked, "makes sense to use mCLASS as common comparison factor" in determining accurate measurements between the two grades. The opportunities of assessment are comparative in connection with the instructional and assessment language. Even though there have been inconsistencies in the data, the trend of data support patterns that potentially lead to growth in measurement and skills. The third grade focus group teachers agreed that the second grade Reading 3D mCLASS proficiency and performance scores gives third grade teachers data from second grade which allows them to have a starting point to build upon. This expands the teachers' opportunities to detect specific skills to work on and how to group them in leveled-base goals.

A final connection from the third grade teachers is that the knowledge of the teachers contributes to the results of the testing. Third grade teachers tend to know more about the 3-5 curriculum, testing practices, and score results because of the required state tests at that level. Third grade teachers added that the RTA has forced the third grade teachers to look back on what

was taught in second grade and expand upon those goals and objectives. Some third grade teachers admitted they had never been in a second grade classroom and confessed that teachers don't know enough about one another's grade levels. While the overall teacher observations and student results were more positive than not, teachers also remarked that this strength also has areas to improve upon.

The comments from the third grade principal were very similar to those of the third grade teachers. Before mCLASS was state mandated, teachers did not know what to do with data. The requirement of using mCLASS has helped teachers have better understanding of their overall instructional program, not just in grades two and three, but kindergarten through fifth grade, as well. The principal further elaborated that once teachers understand the purpose of the common assessment, integrated with the state and local assessments, third grade teachers were able to base instruction from data which they interpreted. The reporting and interpretation of data not only held students and teachers accountable for tracing the progress, but it held principals equally responsible to promote a constant push of skills for every student and to monitor increases in proficiency ratings. The principal summed up the idea of increased skills and performance by affirming, "(the common literacy assessment) helps teachers disaggregate down to the nitty-bitty needs of individual students."

In conformity with the third grade principal, the second grade principal referenced the curricular goals that prep students for these performance measure opportunities. According to this administrator, there was a longstanding perception that second grade students "learn to read," while third grade students "read to learn." From second grade, students merge from focuses on diagnostics of phonics and fluency to more individualized mechanics of being good, comprehensive readers in the third grade.

Referencing former types of reading assessments including the K-2 running records and other teacher-designed tests, the second grade principal gave support of the potentials for increased achievement to the use of a common literacy assessment. She noted, "mCLASS is powerful tool and has been used transformational in ability to diagnose and prescribe reading interventions for children." She furthermore elaborated that the data from the assessments tool were built-in as a charge for diagnosing student literacy needs that focuses on skill deficits and opportunities to advance growth. Understanding what to do with data is a critical piece, according to this second grade leader. Recognizing the data were only from the first few years of program implementation, this chief administrator raised attention to the need for a well-defined drive for instruction, and that having a purpose of measurement and diagnostic teaching are imperative to continue the patterns of success. Summing up the observations from her viewpoint, she said, "It is a lot with the constant progress monitoring, mixed with the constant intervention. But frankly, that's good teaching!"

The analysis and results of the different student literacy data are identified as exclusive factors in this domain because they validate the contributing figures in the quantitative appraisal. Throughout the study, the actual data charts reiterate the emerging themes by providing supporting visual diagrams as reference points that contribute to the speculations and projections of this study for now and for future research.

Reading 3D mCLASS data. The mCLASS data were reported through Amplify's technology-based reporting system. Both the second and third grade teachers repeatedly shared that the student data are synced into a computerized system that produces final proficiency scores for the students based on the guidelines of the Reading 3D assessment measurement of the set

curriculums. This step limits opportunities for the mishandling of student performance and potential mistakes on the part of the test administrator.

Reading 3D's designer, Amplify, shared in its promotional materials their extended efforts of attempt to make the reporting system meaningful for all stakeholders to understand. The use of a color system is in place to help students, teachers, parents, and all stakeholders have a precise explanation that is purposeful for future projections. Students scoring in the color red are extremely below proficient, students scoring in the yellow are below proficient, students scoring in the green are proficient, and students scoring in the blue are above grade level proficiency.

Since the beginning of Reading 3D mCLASS, third grade teachers reported little attention to the details of the reports until the enforcement of the Read to Achieve law. Once the Read to Achieve law went into place, third grade teachers admitted to increasing their studies of the second grade student literacy data that were approaching. Those comments, which stemmed from teacher reviews of Reading 3D mCLASS scores, were revealed throughout the focus group sessions of both second and third grade teachers. Tables 11 and 12 produce the initial, official proficiency percentages, which were compared throughout this study and presents a number of obvious findings that endorses the Reading 3D mCLASS literacy assessment as a common measurement tool (see Table 13).

The second grade data set the literacy performance framework for third grade with the following notations to support the outcome of achievements for students who were tested with the common literacy assessment. The end of year proficiency ratings over a four-year period showed at least three-fourths of the second grade students are proficient in grade level literacy

Table 13

The North Carolina End of Grade Reading Test Data, Grades 3 and 4; 2012 - 2015

Student Data Measured by the NC End of Grade Reading Test	2012-2013 EOG Scores - % proficient	2013-2014 BOG Scores -% proficient	EOG Scores- % proficient	2014-2015 BOG Scores- % proficient	2014-2015 EOG Scores- % proficient	2014-2015 EOG State Avg.
Third Grade Cohort	35.5	34.78	58.8 (+24.02)	58.8	55.6 (-3.2)	59
Fourth Grade Cohort	40.9	N/A	60.1 (+24.6)	N/A	61.64 (+2.84)	58

skills each year with end of year averages at 78%, 80%, 76%, and 75%. The percentages varied

slightly between the years, but the number of students tested also varied over the years, causing

only a slight skew in the numbers. Out of the four years reviewed, the end of year proficiency

percentages averaged 20.75 points in percentage growth from the beginning of the year data.

This was calculated based on the final growth reports. In 2011-2012, students had 19 points

growth. In 2012-2013 students had 21 points growth. Students in 2013-2014 demonstrated 19

points growth and in 2014-2015, students ended the year with 24 points growth in proficiency.

When viewing the color charts of the Reading 3D mCLASS assessment reports, the student data

in the red and yellow sections note the percent of non-proficient students. The actual number of

students tested and the percentages of the red and yellow reports support growth in emerging

literacy skills by the progressions of scores between the BOY test to the EOY test. Students

made positive gains every year: 2011-2012 (+4%), 2012-2013 (+10%), 2013-2014 (+20%), and

2014-2015 (+11%). Table 12 provides a common visual of the third grade Reading 3D

mCLASS to provide a comparison of the two grade levels.

The overall end of year percent of the second grade students proficient in literacy skills,

as compared to the third grade beginning of year data in Table 12, conveys inconsistent trend

data, which does not solely support the original framework of this problem of practice. The

research study year alone reported in 2013-2014 the second grade EOY proficiency was 76%,

yet the third grade BOY data in 2014-2015 dropped to 53%. Additionally, the second grade

EOY in 2014-2015 reported 75% proficient, yet the third grade BOY for the 2015-2016 year

peaked at only 51%.

The third grade Reading 3D data record two different scenarios for growth in proficiency from the BOY to the EOY for two consecutive years. During the 2013-2014 year, the percentage of students proficient dropped from 66% to 64%, while during the year of this research review, 2014-2015, the student proficiency percentage increased from 53% at the BOY to 80% at the EOY, noting an increase in +27% growth in students proficient by the end of the year.

Through the use of this computer-based program, which monitors student literacy performance consistently, the second grade Reading 3D data began the trend data that strengthened the validity of the third grade literacy performance data. As reviewed in the statement of the first domain, the Reading 3D reports explicitly set the groundwork for creating and at least maintaining consistent language and performances with literacy skills for second grade students.

The North Carolina third grade end of grade reading test data. In addition to the Reading 3D mCLASS, a review of the NC EOG Test trend data for third grade students showed interjecting evidence points that supported the quantitative piece of this study and made direct connections to potential opportunities for student growth in literacy skills. This was evidenced in the review of the Beginning of Year (BOY) tests and the End of Grade (EOG) tests mandated through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's READY accountability model.

The North Carolina BOY data. An understanding of the BOY data is the first scale that connects student growth in performance. Figure 6 explains the correlation to the READY model, which documented the number of students identified as being college and career ready at the beginning of the third grade year. In the Read to Achieve mandate, third grade students must be proficient at the end of the year, which is identified as a level 3,4 or 5. The comparison chart from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015 measured grade level performance for two consecutive years, not

Reading Achievement Levels	Percent of Total 2013/14 Total test takers: 161	Met College and Career Readiness & On-Grade Level Standards 2013 – 2014:	Percent of Total 2014/15 Total test takers: 172	Met College and Career Readiness & On-Grade Level Standards 2014 – 2015:	Proficiency Growth by levels from 2013/14 – 2014-15	Growth for Met College and Career Readiness & On-Grade Level Standards:
1	49.69		52.91		+ 3.22	
2	28.57		20.93		- 7.64	
3	8.70		8.72		+ 0.02	
4	9.94		16.28		+ 6.34	
5	3.11		1.16	43.6 %	- 1.95	+ 8.82
		34.78 %				

Figure 6. BOG data; third grade end of year test comparison; 2013-14 / 2014-2015.

a third grade cohort group within one year. The green highlighted growths in achievement levels and the yellow highlighted decreases in achievement levels. Figure 6 is a comparison of third grade BOY scores in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015.

During the 2013-2014 school year, third grade students were 34.78% ready for college and career at the beginning of the year. The following year, in 2014-2-15, the third grade students were 43.6% ready for college and career at the beginning of the year. Students grew in levels one, three and four. Overall there was a +8.82% increase in the number of students who were prepared for third grade based on the BOY early assessments. Figure 6 is an additional way to view and compare the third grade student literacy data.

Additionally, when other school and district data within the northeastern region were compared, the BOY data for third grade students in this school were relative. Table 14 outlines the BOY data for the top ten performing third grade reports in northeastern North Carolina. The regional third grade reading proficiency reports were equivalently in alignment with the proficiency reports of the reading EOG scores across northeastern districts in North Carolina.

EVAAS data. As another tool to contribute to the successes attributed to using common literacy assessments to assist with the transitions of second and third grade students, Table 15 outlines additional details from the NC EOG reports to accompany the Reading 3D mCLASS reports. In 2013-2014, third grade students grew from 34.78% proficient on the BOG test to 58.8% proficient on their EOG test. That was a positive growth of +24.02% gains. In 2014-2015, the third grade students scored 58.8% proficient on the BOG test nevertheless regressed to 55.6% proficient by the EOG test, noting a decrease of -3.2 points. In 2014-2015, the state average of proficiency for third grade students was 59 %. Students in this study were below the state average at 55.6%.

Table 14

2014-2015 BOY Data of Top Ten Districts in Northeastern North Carolina

	Camden	Currituck	Dare	Edenton-Chowan	Hyde	Beaufort	EC Pasq	Perq.	Pitt	Gates
1 – Students proficient	77.4	63.3	62.3	58.8	58.7	58.4	56.4	55.1	53.7	53.3
2 - Did not demonstrate reading proficiency	22.6	36.7	37.7	41.3	41.3	41.6	43.6	44.9	46.3	46.7
3 - Students exempt for good cause.	*	9.4	10.5	10	*	7.1	6.4	*	6.0	*
4 - Students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the State BOE	73.3	48.1	50	58.0	57.9	46.2	15.4	71.7	34.1	49.1
5 - Students retained for not demo. reading proficiency	5.3	14.1	6.2	11.3	13.0	14.7	19.4	12.5	23.3	15.8
6 – Charter Schools	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Explanation of percentages:
1 - Demonstrated reading proficiency on the Beginning-of-Grade 3 (BOG3) ELA/Reading Assessment, the End-of-Grade (EOG) ELA/Reading Assessment, or the EOG ELA/Reading Retest (scored Level 3 or higher). 2 - Did not demonstrate reading proficiency on the BOG3 ELA/Reading Assessment, the EOG ELA/Reading Assessment, or the EOG ELA/Reading Retest. 3 - The number and percentage of students exempt from mandatory retention in third grade for good cause. Students may be counted in this category only once. 4 - The number and percentage of students who took and passed an alternative assessment approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) (i.e., Read to Achieve Test or locally determined SBE-approved alternative assessment). Students may be counted in the numerator and/or the denominator only once for this category. 5 - Total number and percentage of students retained for not demonstrating reading proficiency on third-grade standards (For 2014-15, students who are not proficient will be either:

Table 14 (continued)

(1) retained in third grade accelerated class,(2) placed in a transition class with a retained label, or(3) placed in a fourth-grade accelerated class w/a retained reading label. 6 - Charter schools must indicate the number and percentage of retained students recorded in number 5 who do not return to the charter school for 2014–15

Note. Privacy laws dictate that for fewer than 5 students, the specific number and percentage should not be given. Therefore, if the number is fewer than 5 students, schools should use an asterisk (*) to represent fewer than 5 students and the percentage. An * indicates that the student population number and percentage is too small to report the value. The percentage and number of students are not shown if the percentage is greater than 95 percent (>95) or less than 5 percent (<5).

Table 15

2013 – 2015 Reading EVASS Data, Grades 3 and 4

EVAAS Data	Grade 3	Grade 4
2013 Growth	N/A	*4.8
2014 Growth	**0.5	*3.3
2015 Growth	**- 1.2	**1.1
3 year Growth	N/A	*3.1

Note. *Significant evidence that the district's students made more progress than the growth standard. **Evidence that the district's students made progress similar to the growth standard.

While intense focus had been on reviewing the data of second and third grade students, the most significant notice of positive growth was found with the fourth grade students. The fourth grade data exemplifies the work of students who had been part of the consistent literacy assessments for three years, 2012-2013, 2013 – 2014, and 2014-2015. Using Reading 3D mCLASS as the local literacy assessment in 2012-2013, the most recent fourth grade students, who were second graders during that year, had an overall percentage proficiency score of 80% when leaving second grade. Their EOG data during the 2013-2014 year was 58.8% proficient and their EOG data during the 2014-15 year was 61.44% proficient. These students exceeded the state average, which was 58% during the year of this research. The overall end of year percent of the third grade students proficient in literacy skills using the Reading 3D mCLASS assessment, as compared to the third grade EOG reading assessment, linked the data to support the implementation of a common literacy assessment between second and third grades to impact student performance for the specific year this problem of practice was explored.

The last review of the third and fourth grade literacy achievements were concluded in the final examination of information through EVAAS, the Education Value Added Assessment System. EVAAS is not a literacy assessment tool, but is a predictive assessment system, which measures student growth over a period of time. EVAAS was implemented for grades K-12 in 2012-13 as part of the READY accountability and school improvement model at the same time as the Read to Achieve law was exposed. EVAAS not only measures student performance, but also teacher effectiveness by calculating the consistencies within the data. These ratings are intended to provide additional documentation on evaluation instructions. Teachers are evaluated with EVAAS data on Standard 6 and principals are evaluated on Standard 8. Additionally, these

proficiency ratings and growth data calculations are being used to calculate overall school-wide performance grades, A-F.

The review of EVAAS data for this study revealed predictive increases in proficiency ratings and the met growth standards for third grade students and teachers in 2014, yet regressed -1.2 points at the end of the 2015 school year. Fourth grade teachers and students consistently met and exceeded growth standards during the 2013-2015 three-year growth measurement, concluding a trend of facts to add to the exploration of calculations reviewed during this study. These data are exhibited in Table 15.

During the review of this research study on the third grade proficiency scores of students in one school district in North Carolina, Carolyn Guthrie, Director of K-3 Literacy for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, released an email statement which summarized the state's trend data, implementing the use of common assessments in preparation for literacy achievement to Elementary Curriculum Directors and State Superintendents. Guthrie's statement aligns state findings with exploration of this research study:

> "In 14-15, fourth grade EOG proficiency scores in reading (across North Carolina) went up 2.6% points! This was the highest percentage gain for any grade level in grades 3-8. We believe that there is a direct relationship between this jump and the hard work of the third and fourth grade teachers across this state in the first two years of Read to Achieve. The increased emphasis on reading in these two grade levels is paying off for our students! Please let your teachers know that we are so proud of their hard work to help make a difference in the lives of these children. (C. Guthrie, personal communication, September 2, 2015).

Summary of Research Question Number One and Domain One. The direct and indirect participation data from students, teachers, and principals summarize that use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students support opportunities to alleviate discrepancies in data and potentially increase student literacy skills and literacy achievement. The student data artifacts from a variety of literacy assessment measures support

the combined goal of how the implementation of a common literacy assessment can be presented to students in second and third grade classes with minimal discrepancies and student literacy success.

Further recognizing the inconsistencies within the data collected over a limited time, evidences to support this response were expanded upon from the qualitative studies involving the face-to-face teacher focus groups and principal interview sessions.

Study Question Two

What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments? The second study question is answered in two domains.

Domain Two: The Benefits of a Common Literacy Assessment

Domain two responds to research question number two by documenting the benefits of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students that duplicate the findings to the first domain from question number one. Domain two continues to elaborate on the elements that were discovered through a quantitative view for question one, yet were answered through a qualitative view in this second question. The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students (1) increases the common language and best practices for students, teachers, and administrators and (2) alleviates discrepancies in student performance data while projecting an increase of proficiency in literacy skills and literacy achievement. The data are supported by numerous collections of second and third grade student literacy performance data, second and third grade teacher focus group sessions, the transcriptions from the elementary principal interview notes, and The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.

Common language and purpose. The common language and a common purpose of

testing students is a primary benefit discovered in this study. Not only was this theme answered

as a finding in research question number one, it provides a separate, stand-alone benefit of

research question number two. As charted in the benefits and challenges chart of Tables 16 and

17, both the second and third grade teachers and principals, respectively, consistently reported

more positive comments than negative. An X was recorded in each box for the benefits and

challenges that were expressed during the face-to-face meetings. Question numbers 4, 5, and 12

directly asked questions that prompted any benefits the participants wanted to share. The

remaining benefits, as noted by the X, were independent thoughts that transpired from the

participants. Spaces with no X's were neutral statements that neither gave positive or negative

feedback.

The Tables 16 and 17 report overall more benefits than challenges of the common

assessments. The group of teachers, noted in Table 16 collectively had 64 positive comments

and 64 areas of challenge. Both areas compared between the benefits and challenges were close

in numbers. The second grade teachers had 38 benefits and 26 challenges. The third grade had

37 benefits and 27 challenges. Each grade level had similar numbers when compared to benefits

and challenges. The principals' results are found in Table 17.

The second grade principal gave more specific details in the benefits and reported a total

of 55 benefits and 28 challenges, calculating almost double the number of benefits than

challenges. The third grade principal shared 37 benefits and 17 challenges, also reporting almost

double the comments for benefits as opposed to challenges. Collectively, the two principals

reported 83 benefits and 54 areas of challenges. Figure 7 displays a comparison of benefits and

challenges from the teacher and principal groups.

Table 16

Benefits and Challenges Chart from Teacher Focus Groups

| Question Number | Benefits / Positive Responses | | Challenges / Opportunities to Improve Responses | |
	Second Grade	Third Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade
Question # 1	3	2	-	-
Question # 2	-	-	1	1
Question # 3	3	3	1	1
Question # 4	6	4	1	-
Question # 5	6	1	2	2
Question # 6	4	2	1	-
Question # 7	1	2	11	8
Question # 8	3	3	-	-
Question # 9	5	4	-	-
Question # 10	-	1	5	5
Question # 11	3	-	8	4
Question # 12	4	4	1	2
Question # 13	-	-	6	4
Total By Grade Level	38	26	37	27
Total Overall	64		64	

Table 17

Benefits and Challenges Chart from Principal Interviews

| Question Number	Benefits / Positive Responses		Challenges / Opportunities to Improve Responses	
	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
Question # 1	5	-	2	2
Question # 2	3	1	4	1
Question # 3	7	8	-	-
Question # 4	11	6	-	-
Question # 5	7	2	1	3
Question # 6	3	3	-	-
Question # 7	4	-	7	3
Question # 8	2	-	5	3
Question # 9	-	-	8	2
Question # 10	2	4	5	-
Question # 11	4	3	-	-
Question # 12	2	1	5	3
Question # 13	5	-	-	-
Total By Grade Level	55	28	37	17
Total Overall	83		54	
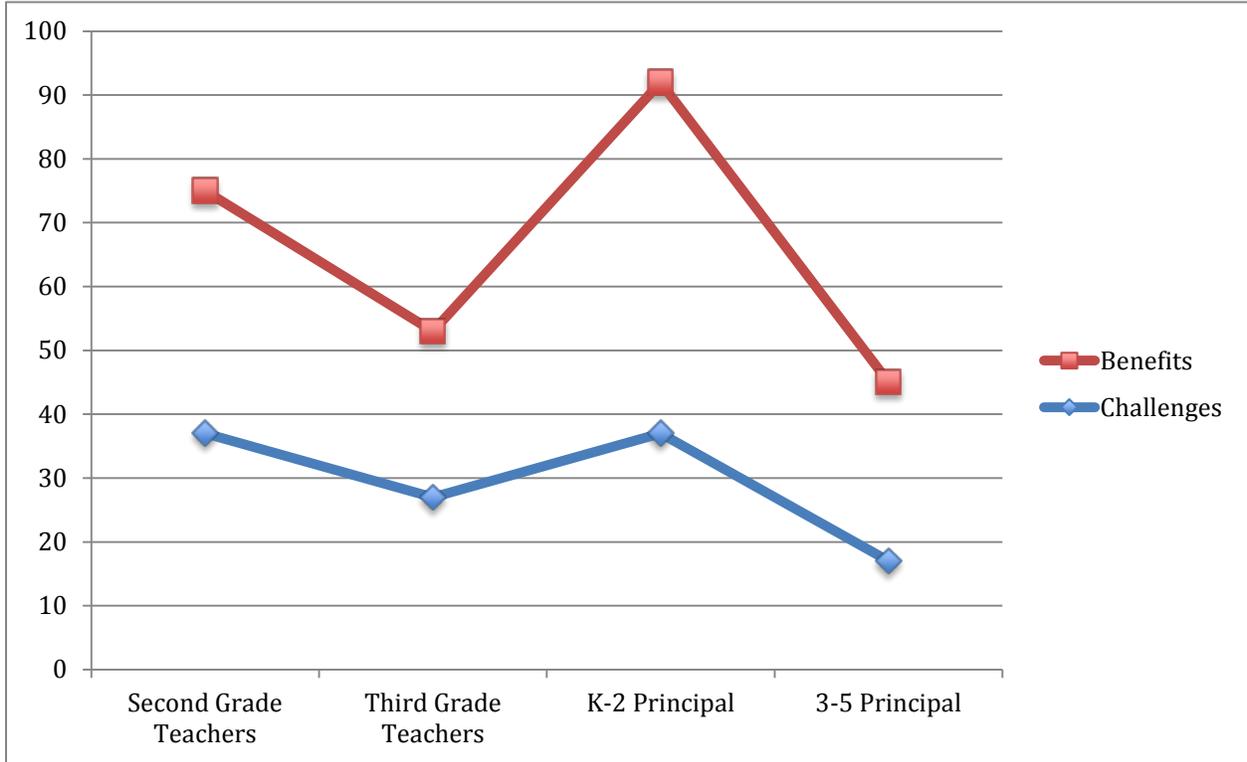
Figure 7. Comparison of benefits and challenges from teachers and principals.

When asked how the use of a common literacy assessment affected the transition between second and third grades both principals elaborated at length. The two leaders communicated that a better understanding of needs surfaced for the teachers and administration.

The second grade principal verbalized that both the students and teachers became more familiar with instructional and testing approaches when using common literacy assessments between the two grades. She said, "In the past, it (assessing student literacy skills) was like second grade was speaking Spanish and third grade was speaking English and the two could not communicate." Although the question asked by the researcher directly referenced the second and third grade vertical connections, the third grade principal additionally declared that the exploratory study conducted revealed that, "it (the use of a common literacy assessment) was not only good for grades two and three, but (in) all grades, kindergarten through fifth." Comments from the focus groups and interviews that aligned with this benefit were previously shared in response to research question one. Nevertheless, due to the number of times the participants repeated their favor of this measurement procedure, the participants overwhelmingly expressed agreement for the need of a common literacy assessment to support the transition between second and third grade.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS) provided additional research input. From the focus group sessions with the teachers, it was insinuated that the increase in teacher participation in the past TWCS and other opportunities to express opinions may be due to teachers wanting a more active voice in the overall instructional and assessment management plan for their grade levels and schools.

In this method, the new data collected in 2014 were compared with previous data that were collected in 2012 (Glasser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 1998). As explained in previous

chapters, the TWCS is given every two years to teachers to determine an overall assessment of multiple criteria within the school. The information compared in this study is between the schools of the K-2 teachers and the 3-5 teachers, all within the same district. The benefits of instilling a common language for curriculum design, instructional design, and assessment practices were threaded within the school-wide responses throughout the individual survey statements.

The 2014 TWCS is the first and only TWCS available at the time of this study that was given after the implementation of the Read to Achieve law for third grade, focusing on a consistent endorsement from second grade. As the results of the survey are reviewed and compared, it is important to note the participation level for each year. The participation data notes a decrease in the number of teachers at each school from 2012 to 2014, yet it also notes an increase in teacher participation at both schools. Figure 4 compares the number of teachers at each school during the 2014 TWC survey. The 2-5 school had 46 teachers with 46 teachers completing the survey. The 3-5 school had 37 teachers with 36 completing the survey. Overall, the K-2 school had 100% teacher participation and the 3-5 school and 97.3% teacher participation and concluded with a decrease in 10 of the 11 areas evaluated. This resulted in a dissatisfaction percentage of 91% for the area of Instructional Practices.

In 2012, the K-2 school had 51 teachers on staff with 38 teachers completing the survey. The 3-5 school had 43 teachers on staff with 35 teachers completing the survey. Overall, in 2012, 74.5% of the teachers completed the K-2 survey at the K-2 school and 81.4% of the teachers at the 3-5 school completed the survey. This TWCS was administered prior to the implementation of the Read to Achieve law and the promotion of strongly considering consistent literacy assessments for students in second and third grades.

The information presented in the TWCS for this particular study was the section on Instructional Practices, which is question nine in the survey. The TWCS directed teachers to answer, with agree or disagree, the following statement: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support in your school.

Tables 18 and 19 portray the comparative data of the TWC survey between the K-2 school and the 3-5 school at the end of the 2012 and 2014 school years. The data to support the benefits of this study are presented in Tables 18 and 19 with information in the first two columns reporting the percentage of teachers in agreement with the statement for each year. The third column records the gains or loses in the percentage of the teachers who supported the statement. Table 18 reports data from the K-2 school and Table 19 reports data from the 3-5 school.

Teachers at the K-2 school made strong gains in assessment data usage as noted in letter b: Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices 100%), letter c: Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction (97.7%), and letter d: The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Common Core Standards (97.7%). There was growth in each of those areas.

Meanwhile, the data from the 3-5 school tallied up gains from the measurement of letter c: Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction. Ninety-four and four tenths % of teachers reported they used assessment data to inform their instruction. Letter d reported 100% of teachers agree that the curriculum taught in this school is aligned with the common core standards and letter i reinforced that teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instruction. Each of these survey responses contributed the implementation of more differentiated instruction, as gathered by the on-going progress monitoring assessments.

Table 18

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Question #9 for the K-2 School

Statement & % of Teachers in Agreement each year	2012	2014	+ or -
a. State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	88.9	95.3	+ 6.4
b. Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	93.7	100.0	+ 6.3
c. Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	91.9	97.7	+ 5.8
d. The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Common Core Standards.	89.5	97.7	+8.2
e. Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	94.7	97.8	+ 3.1
f. Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	89.5	100	+ 10.5
g. Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.	91.7	100	+ 8.3
h. Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	45.5	87.8	+ 42.3
i. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials, and pedagogy).	73.7	93	+ 19.3
j. State assessments provide schools with data that can help improve teaching.	87.55	95.3	+ 7.8
k. State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards.	71.9	79.1	+ 7.2

Note. Question #9: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support in your school.

Table 19

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Question #9 for the 3-5 School

Statement & % of Teachers in Agreement each year	2012	2014	+ or -
a. State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	64.7	36.1	- 28.6
b. Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	93.9	91.4	- 2.5
c. Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	97.1	94.4	- 2.7
d. The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Common Core Standards.	88.6	100	+ 11.4
e. Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	97.1	83.3	- 13.8
f. Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	97.1	82.9	- 14.2
g. Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.	97.1	94.4	- 2.7
h. Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	67.6	50	- 17.6
i. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials, and pedagogy).	85.3	82.4	- 2.9
j. State assessments provide schools with data that can help improve teaching.	72.7	61.8	- 10.9
k. State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards.	55.9	41.2	- 14.7

Note. Question #9: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support in your school.

Within two years of evaluating the instructional and assessment program of the K-2, there were significant increases in every area. From 2012 to 2014, after the implementation of the common literacy assessment supporting the Read to Achieve model, the K-2 school had 100% of the teachers in agreement that both the instructional and assessment practices were positively impacting the school in 100% of the areas surveyed. The top areas of instruction and assessment, which note the greatest support from teachers at the K-2 level, include:

- Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices (100%),

- Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers (100%),

- Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction (100%),

- Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices (97.8%),

- Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction (97.7%), and

- State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices (95.3).

As a trend, each of the above areas that were ranked the highest by the K-2 grade teachers demonstrate teacher knowledge, strength, and fidelity in the relationships of daily instruction, local and state assessments, and professional development. Areas that reported the greatest increase of teacher satisfaction at the K-2 school included, in order of the increased percentage of teacher satisfaction:

- Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students (from 45.5% to 87.8%, noting a 42.3% increase in teacher satisfaction).

- Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (from 73.7% to 93%, noting a 19.3% increase in teacher satisfaction).

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- Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers (from 89.5% to 100%, noting a 10.5% in teacher satisfaction).

In direct contrast to the K-2 school, the outcomes of the TWC survey for the 3-5 teachers decreased in 10 of the 11 areas evaluated, noting a dissatisfaction percentage of 91% of the rated areas. The areas that reported the greatest decrease of teacher satisfaction at the 3-5 school included, in order of decreased satisfaction:

- State assessments data are available in time to impact instructional practices (from 64.7% to 36.1%, noting a decrease of 28.6% in teacher satisfaction).

- Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with the students (from 67.6% to 50%, noting a decrease of 17.6% in teacher satisfaction).

- State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards (from 55.9% to 41.2%, noting a 14.7% decrease in teacher satisfaction).

- Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) to improvements in instructional practices by teachers (from 97.1% to 82.9%, noting a 14.2% decrease in teacher satisfaction).

In spite of the negative reports filtered in by this one group, all other data contributed to the overall successes found in the conclusion. One area, however, noted an increase in teacher satisfaction. Letter d unanimously reported that the curriculum taught is aligned with Common Core Standards. That highlighted an increase in teacher agreement from 91.9% in 2012 to 97.7% in 2014 in believing the curriculum is in alignment. Since the implementation of the common literacy assessment, which supports the Read to Achieve model, the K-2 school had 100% of the

teachers in agreement that both the instructional and assessment practices were positively impacting the school in 100% of the areas surveyed.

In comparison, the two schools did share at least two areas that reflected common positive perceptions of instruction and assessment for their respective schools: (a) Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices and (b) Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction. Although the 3-5 school's overall satisfaction percentages decreased in two of the above areas, those areas remained to be areas that create the most attention for both schools.

Growth in student performance and literacy skills. Comments from teachers and principals support the growth of student literacy proficiency and skills. These data were presented in Tables 11, 12, 13, and 15. Table 20 further elaborates on responses from the participants that reinforced the literacy successes of the student participant data.

Summary of domain two. The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students presented two major reoccurring strengths. The common literacy assessment in this research supported an overall increase and implementation of best instructional practices for students and concludes with student performance data that showed alleviated discrepancies in the tests and potential increases in proficiency of early elementary student literacy skills.

Domain Three: The Challenges of a Common Literacy Assessment

Domain three provides a second response to research question number two by outlining the challenges teachers and principals have described from using a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students. The challenges are supported in the recordings of

Table 20

Teachers' and Principals' Response to Student Literacy Performance

Reason	Supporting Quotes
The transition	"In the past we didn't know if our students made growth or not. It was like comparing apples to oranges. Now, we know our students are making growth because we are all testing the same way. It has to help the kids because if we know they are making progress, then we know how to keep pushing them to higher growth. It makes the transition easier to push growth targets in skills."
The needs of students	"So far the test scores match student work in the classroom. That shows fidelity in what the are testing and teaching based on student needs."
The common assessment	"I like using the same test. Students know what we are looking for in every grade so their scores are better. They understand it."
The mCLASS assessment	"mCLASS is a powerful tool to use and has been transformational in the ability to diagnose and prescribe based on accurate skill-set data."
The data from the assessments	"So, we've got the assessments, what do we do with it? We keep teaching and testing and keep getting better scores. It's also good to have that consistent data from the similar tests to share with parents."
Instructional connection	"Instruction and assessment equals growth."

notes from the second and third grade focus groups and both of the elementary principal interviews.

Challenges. Three overall themes emerged in the collection of data focusing on challenges within the implementation of a using a common literacy assessment for students in both second and third grades to promote growth and consistency. The themes highlighted in this research are: (1) creating an awareness of time management, (2) a need for consistent and on-going professional developments, and (3) an overall restructure of how elementary educators reform the structure of overall elementary settings that are inclusive of an awareness of physical barriers, a common curriculum and assessment alignment, and the appointment of high-quality personnel to these demanding positions.

Time. Does anyone ever really have enough time in the day to get it all done? Time is a challenge for elementary teachers in general, and was first unwrapped in a review of the North Carolina TWC survey. Of the K-2 teachers, 95.3% agreed that the state data were available in time to impact instructional practices while only 36.1% of the 3-5 teachers agreed, seeing a decrease in agreement of 28.6% of the teachers with two years. In 2014, 100% of the K-2 teachers agreed that local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices, which was a gain of 6.3% from the 2012 survey. The 3-5 showed another decrease in agreement with 2.5% of the teachers not agreeing.

When teachers were asked about alignment of in letter e of the TWC survey, the 3-5 school had a decrease of 13.8% agreement. Teachers made connections to this response in their focus group sessions by discussing the work done in PLC's that have been to design assessments with instructional practices embedded. Those types of statements were echoed throughout the investigation by both the teacher focus group and principal interview participants.

According to the teachers and principals who participated in this study, there were more benefits of a common literacy assessment for all teacher and principal participants, yet one of the major struggles was finding the time to "learn it, teach it, test it, report it, and do it all over again." A third grade teacher provided an immediate statement on the demands of the amount of time literacy assessments took in her class by saying, "I can take my child's temperature everyday when they are sick, but if I never treat him, he won't get better."

When exclusively asked about the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment, almost all second grade teachers chimed in on areas that were challenges as a result of time factors. When asked how teachers believe an effective transition between second and third grade could be ensured in terms of literacy achievement, second grade teachers added the need to spend more time together to build the improved commonality.

Time to learn how to implement the Read to Achieve portfolios, losing instructional time for all students while using designated time to test some students, the number of tests administered throughout the year as progress monitoring measurements, and limited opportunities of time to focus on the developmental needs of students in areas other than reading were areas all participants voiced in the collection of responses that built the concluding factors of this study. The third grade teachers were not as aggressive in their responses, yet did fully agree that time constraints within the whole implementation of teaching and measuring literacy skills presents time constraints. In association of time being a challenge, the third grade teachers directly made notation of having to set aside time to facilitate the assessments required by all state orders. Time to focus on instructional and curriculum practices is another hindrance for teachers. Simply put by one of the teacher participants, "It (assessing student literacy) just takes a lot of time."

When asked if there were additional types of support that would help alleviate the challenges for the implementation of the common literacy assessment between the two grades, both second and third grade teachers responded with the need for more planning time, establishing creative ways to get time during the day to do assessments (while other students are working), and ways to avoid double time-scheduling of in-class and in-school activities beyond a normal instructional day.

In accordance with the opinions of the teachers, the principals also shared their consistent opinions on how time is recognized as a challenge by the teachers, but also by them as the primary instructional managers of the schools. Particularly, the third grade principal spelled out areas in which time had been a challenge. Those included challenges of finding time to implement the Reading 3D mCLASS assessments, the state mandated beginning of year and end of year tests, as well as local benchmarks each quarter and middle of the year. The principal also noted the challenges of finding time for the teachers to meet for content, as grade levels, and rarely finding the time to meet vertically amongst the second and third grades.

When asked about the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades, the third grade principal had no comment, while the second grade principal immediately chimed in with defending responses in support of teachers on how the realization of implementing something new, such as the common literacy assessment between the two grades, required teachers a longer amount of time to learn the program because they are also busy trying to use their time to teach. The principal further elaborated on how she, as the leader of the school, had to take time to "paint a vision" for the school for what instruction with the Reading 3D mCLASS assessment should look like, adding the necessity of taking the time to show teachers the value of what they were doing.

It was suggested by the third grade principal for administrators to create common schedules between the second and third grade teachers to allow more common planning time when possible. Investing time for teachers to meet can improve collaborative conversations, the quality of student literacy portfolios, understanding of mCLASS data, and relationships with the teacher and principal teams.

Professional development. Effective teachers often live by the proverb of being life-long learners. On-going learning through professional development in a school setting, as concluded from the study participants, presented an endless challenge. The operation of successful Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), as interpreted throughout the dialogues of the participants as professional development sessions, was a challenging factor as participants considered enriched PLC's as a challenge of cultural change within the schools. Referencing back to previous chapters, successful professional development sessions are relevant to strengthening purposes of the trainings. The information gathered from the participants reported professional development sessions had been strengths of implementing a common literacy assessment, nonetheless professional developments also remained a constant challenge for the participants.

The TWC survey pointed out professional development as an on-going challenge through the number of response ratings that linked back to trainings. When asked about their work in PLC's to design aligned practices (Statement E), the 3-5 school had a decrease of 13.8% of teacher agreement from the 2012 to the 2014 school year. This response was deeply examined in comparison to other questions asked and found that inclusive in the dissatisfaction with the past professional developments, there were areas that contributed to the decline. Teachers reported opportunities to improve the struggles of professional developments by citing the insufficient

resources available to teachers and principals to conduct in-depth meetings. Teachers also

reported that professional developments have not always been in alignment with the School

Improvement Plan and are not continually data-driven. Follow-up from administration was

another area of displeasure amongst the teachers. Each of these topics, as noted from varied

results of the TWC survey, concluded there are many unsettled areas that contribute to

professional development being a challenge.

The second and third grade teachers additionally echoed challenges of effective

professional developments in the focus groups. The units firstly cited the occasions for all

stakeholders to have more emphasis on instructional practices. Teachers commented they want

to learn about mandates and laws, such as Read to Achieve, however, during these professional

developments, there has often been little time to study the curriculum, instruction, and testing

protocols for second and third grade levels. Teachers additionally gave supporting comments

that matched the TWC survey by particularizing their desire to learn about data made available

by NCDPI and programs, such as mCLASS. More importantly, when viewing quality

professional developments as a challenging factor, the teachers gave direct examples of how they

are missing opportunities to collaborate with one another as professionals and to maximize data

for future planning.

The two principals interviewed agreed with the professional development concerns of the

teachers. The principals shared two direct concerns of professional development sessions:

consistency and vertical alignment as controlled by transitional practices between the two known

growth opportunities. Those concerns were considered to be legitimate planning templates that

shaped program planning. Noting challenges within the design and make-up of past and current

professional development opportunities, the leaders were also eager to add suggestions of how

the team meetings could be shaped by purpose, activities, and consistencies between the two grade levels. Every participant, through comment or documented gestures of their physical body language, concurred that when schools, such as the two in this study, go through any type of shift in program mandates, grade level, school, and district professional developments are critical in the transformation.

A need to restructure. The larger theme of "restructuring" merged additional challenges within the schematics of the overall curriculum, instruction, assessment, and transition variables of this exploration. The action of restructuring collectively stands alone as the third common trend of this research and encompasses three specific essential, and potential, impediments within the overall operation of a school: the physical barriers, the curriculum and assessment alignment, and the placement of highly qualified teachers and principals in these affected grade levels.

Physical barriers. The demographics of this school were outlined in Chapter 3 and in the summary of Chapter 4 as a review. It was observed that the two grade levels of students, teachers, and principals were housed in two separate buildings joined by a hallway, yet were expected to enforce common instructional and assessment practices. The physical separation of the two grades being compared in this study presented itself as a challenge inside this study.

The information from the teacher focus groups conveyed an unsettled impression of the physical barriers that divided the two grade levels and schools. Opportunities to collaborate were hindered, voicing missed chances to connect daily with face-to-face encounters. The division of the two schools has triggered limited opportunities for peer observations, common planning times and partnering with testing. Teachers suggested that if the grades were not divided into schools, they could potentially have the extra resources in one location for K-3, as

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opposed to separate resources for K-2 and 3-5 respectively. There was an overall consensus that the physical barrier of the walls contributed to the stigma comparison of "us vs. them" when being compared within the district. Teachers asked for more opportunities to get together and requested future professional development meetings for areas such as Read to Achieve and curriculum connections to assessments.

The principals suggested similar, yet different discomforts with the physical barriers between the two schools. The second grade principal answered question one about the need for a common literacy assessment between the two schools by immediately noting fundamental points. Each grade level is a different school and there are separate features that have needed to be studied. The difference in leadership between each school is part of the management plan for each school, yet there tended to be perception of two visions, as opposed to one common goal between the two leaders. In order to create a common vision, the two administrators have had to spend extra time focusing on relationships and team building, as opposed to the necessary instruction and curriculum.

A relative importance shared by the principals was that a K-5 school could make it easier to implement the K-3 assessments, as the majority of the testing is banked at the third grade level. If a K-5 school were not an option, it was questioned if at least a K-3 school could be considered in future planning. The third grade principal agreed that one school would be a huge support, especially in the management of communication. Types of improved communication through revised physical settings could include blended meetings between staff, blended scheduling, better use of personnel, and opportunities for teachers to assist one another more easily with progress monitoring of literacy skills.

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Final arguments that defended the challenge of having two buildings testing one assessment were the use of literacy resources. Not only did the physical walls lessen the collaboration amongst the staff, but participants noted the extra costs of books, materials, and technology devices that have been required for each setting.

Curriculum and assessment alignment. As noted in Chapter One, the assessment model demonstrated a theme that emerged as a challenge from the teachers and administrators. When considering the challenges of a common literacy assessment during the transition of students from second to third grade, the model highlighted the necessary areas of: curriculum, instructional delivery, assessment, measurement of results, and an action plan to review. From the insight gained from the elementary educators, a new model was created to show how the actual assessment has worked, and can continue to work, as an instructional piece aiding a more effective transition for the students.

Respondents were asked to describe how the common literacy assessment meets the needs of the students. Second grade teachers made direct reference to, "A common assessment drives everything you do and assessments scores should match from one grade to another." An effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured from the perspective of the second grade staff with more understanding from both parties. This includes time together and commonalties in ways assessments are administered, scored and created. All implications insinuated that teachers are speaking the same language with more fidelity than ever, yet full understanding and accomplishment of connecting curriculum, instruction, and assessments in the second to third grades remains a challenge.

Common practices in the Reading 3D Dibels data and how the data drive instruction to help make decisions on what each child needs remains a growing area with challenges that are

still connected. One second grade teacher gave an example of guided reading, "The second grade teaches it one way, but they are still not sure how third grade does it. We've never seen it. We need opportunities to peer observe."

A few of the teachers expressed the resurrection of looping, a former instructional method that the district had used in the past to support curriculum, instruction, and transitions between second and third grades. Third grade teachers agreed that instructional practices for teachers who do not know about one another's grade is a hindrance.

Read to Achieve standards and assessments have held administrators and teachers accountable for curriculum and assessment measures. The second grade curriculum expresses practices on learning to read and the third grade curriculum emphasizes reading to learn. The second grade curriculum determines levels of phonic segmentation, phonemic awareness, and letter naming. Understanding what to do with data was a big part of the participants feeling frustrated about making connections to instruction and assessment. Third grade students had to move on from a diagnostic piece to individual components of being a good reader. Purposeful, diagnostic data driven instruction remains to be part of the challenge, as teachers and administrators are now, more than ever, using the data from formative assessments and progress monitoring assessments to drive the interventions they have been prescribing for the students.

Additional statistics from the TWC survey found positive responses at the K-2 school for four out of five areas that connected the use of data analysis to curriculum and instruction (Element B, C, J, and K). Each of these areas supported teacher satisfaction with the state making data available, teachers using data effectively, common core curriculum implementation, and how state data improves teaching and state assessments in order to gauge student understanding. The 3-5 school, reversely reported negative responses in the same elements

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(Element B, C, J, and K). The only positive response in this comparison for the two schools was Element D, noting a true practice of the Common Core Curriculum Standards. Therefore, there is a continued need to evaluate all instructional and assessment areas from this study.

   Personnel. The proper placement of personnel, including teachers and principals, swelled as a challenge for restructuring the design of elementary literacy success. The facts to support personnel as a challenge were hidden in the comments from both the teacher and principal groups, but were subconsciously exploited in segmented collections of data. Overall, the teachers demanded colleagues who shared common attitudes and work habits. A majority of the teachers insisted that their teammates be knowledgeable of content and pedagogy. This was indicated during questions that prompted areas that were benefits. Body language, such as smiles and head nods, contributed to the silent opinions of teachers who said without saying, "We want our team to be the best we can be!"

   The hiring of an Instructional Facilitator had positive feedback from all teachers and administrators when they were asked about the types of support in place. Teachers gave examples of what helped them produce growth, but like several other successes, noted it as a personnel area to improve due to the longevity of the position.

   There several areas in the TWC survey that targeted personnel being a challenge.   At the K-2 school, Element H, teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students, had only 45.5% of the teachers agree in 2012. That increased to 87.8% in agreement in 2014, with an overwhelming increase of 42.3% teacher agreement   Conversely, teachers at the 3-5 school reported a decrease in satisfaction from 2012 to 2014, declining from 67.6% satisfied to only 50% satisfied. That was a decrease of 17.6% of the teachers being satisfied with Element H. In comments, teachers justified their ratings by criticizing the number

of students per teacher ratio changes over the years. With programs such as Read to Achieve in place, the teachers expressed concerns about personnel decisions being made by the state and local district.

The EVAAS data, as presented in Table 15, charted growth performances that met and exceeded targets in third and fourth grades. While this is a great celebration of the state's accountability expectations, the challenge for personnel to maintain exists. Personnel, including teachers and principals, consider their positions as part of the challenge with meeting the goals in the EVAAS projections. Several reasons have influenced the nervousness of the staff, which sense challenges by the definition of their roles. Challenges within the personnel cover national, state and local directives that include, but are not limited to: increased performance measures in the state's evaluation system, spotlighted news and media publications of student, grade, and school performance, and clear statements that define the removal of personnel from a low-performing situation.

Summary of Domain Three. In summary, Domain Three presented three parts of challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment between the second and third grades: time, professional development, and the need to restructure within a school's organization.

Summary of Research Question Two and Domains Two and Three. Two domains answered research question two: What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments? As a summary of the two domains, there were several occasions that the benefits and challenges were in alignment. The variations in how they were measured, however, swayed the overall determination for being a benefit or a challenge. It can be concluded from research question number two that the district in this study experienced many great gains from implementing a

common literacy assessment during the transitional grades of two and three. Likewise, documentation gathered challenges that need to be leveled out. Because of the variations within the benefits and challenges, the findings from the results of this problem of practice can be further enhanced by more years of observations and data collection.

Summary of Chapter Four

The two research questions answered were: (1) Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores? (2) What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments? The findings were presented as domains: (1) The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students supports an increase in student literacy skills and literacy achievement; (2) The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students increases the common language and best practices for students, teachers, and administrators and (3) As a result of implementing common literacy assessments between second and third grade students, there is a continued need for all stakeholders to be active participants in the progression of reorganizing procedures that vertically connect the two grade levels.

The second grade principal recaptured every aspect of this problem of practice, inclusive of the elementary literacy curriculum, instruction, assessments, and transitions to culminate a final statement: "We're on the right track and we're going in the right direction. I do believe within the next several years we are going to reap the rewards in our data that will show success."

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study, as indicated in Chapter One, was to determine if the implementation of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students would impact student literacy achievement. Initially, this study began as a result of the specific North Carolina literacy assessment mandate for third grade students with the Read to Achieve law of 2012 after following the originally set standards of the former No Child Left Behind Act. Specifically, to evaluate this particular problem of current practice, the researcher investigated the direct literacy performance of one second and third grade elementary program in one northeastern North Carolina school system. Due to the timeline of this study, the researcher examined the first and only available trend data provided for this direct study, which began in the fall of 2013 and ended in the spring of 2015. Partial beginning-of-year data for 2015-2016 were also presented as documentation for potential continuation of studies beyond this research. This chapter is presented in five sections: (a) Summary, (b) Research Design and Implementation, (c) Conclusions, (d) Implications, and (e) Recommendations.

Summary

This research examination concluded by unveiling the experiences of the participants involved with the implementation of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade as they worked to discuss, evaluate, and learn from the transitional practices deemed appropriate for student achievement. The summary of this research provides a brief synopsis of the information that was presented in Chapters 1, 2, and 3. The summary includes a specific recapitulation of the historical perspective, the intentions of the study, a review of the related literature, the statement of the problem, the limitations of the study, the research design, and the data collection, analysis, and findings.

Historical Perspective

As noted in Chapter One, the implementation of the national No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) began an increased shift of the direct focus on individualized student assessments (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). Part of the NCLB Act mandated annual tests in reading and mathematics, which ultimately created intensified emphasis at the national, state, district, and school levels.

In North Carolina, third grade has been, and remains, the first grade level of students tested within the state's accountability model in reading and mathematics. Second grade students have been historically tested on district-designed assessments. These local assessments for grades K-2 are usually designed by teachers or district level curriculum facilitators. Teachers have often struggled to create self-made early literacy assessments based on their own understandings of literacy needs and have thus referred to a variety of assessments including Lexile scoring, the STAR test from Accelerated Reader, paper-based running records, and a number of other literacy assessments designed by private companies which schools could purchase. As a result of the differences and inconsistencies in literacy assessments for grade two, many schools and districts across the state of North Carolina reported the perception that local second grade reading assessments perpetuated higher results than the third grade state pre-test scores and end of grade reading assessments (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). This has created questions about the lack of growth and performance in literacy skills between the second and third grade levels and has further created intensified conversations among all stakeholders in elementary education in relation to potential discrepancies in the measurement of literacy skills for students between grades two and three.

Docket and Perry (2001) contributed to this perception from their research by noting student literacy performance in the third grade has shown trends of achievement regression due to the lack of effective transitions, making a note of inconsistencies with assessments from second to third grade. Docket and Perry (2001) further added that students across transitional grades, such as from second to third in separate buildings, need initiated efforts from teachers and administrators to effectively transition from one grade to another in order to ensure success on third graders' first-time taking standardized end-of-grade (EOG) tests.

As part of the Excellent Public Schools Act, at the end of the third grade year, students take the EOG in reading to measure proficiency in reading comprehension and to contribute to a determination of promotion or retention. The third grade EOG reading test includes multiple-choice items from the genres of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, content, and consumer comprehension.

These student data have been reported on the state's website and the data from the schools and districts are collectively compared to one another. Every school district in North Carolina is required to submit annual test data to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. That data are compiled and then published in the form of a school and district report card on the NCDPI website at www.ncpublicschools.org. The report cards (www.reportcards.org) showcase individual school-wide and district demographics, and student and teacher accountability performances.

In an effort to enhance the support for third grade students, and to have more rigor in the reading proficiency of students in third grade, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the Read to Achieve legislation in July 2012 (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). In addition to the pre-established End of Grade Tests

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for third graders, the implementation of the Read to Achieve law was an additional assessment presented to third grade students and teachers. The purpose of the Read to Achieve mandate is for third grade teachers and administrators to ensure elementary students reach a grade level appropriate level of literacy and are literate prior to exiting third grade. The Read to Achieve process includes support for all children that identifies strengths and weaknesses in reading, focuses on individualized instruction, requires research-based literacy instruction for all children, emphasizes the importance of solid foundational reading skills to ensure deep comprehension of stories and text, and continuously tracks students' academic needs and progress through portfolios and progress monitoring of comprehension passages (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

As a result of the attention to literacy skill assessment at the elementary level with increased demands on third grade students and teachers, there has also been an equivalent push for enhanced instructional connections with assessments, noticing the need to begin preparing students for the third grade reading assessments prior to third grade. Consequently, in preparation for these third grade accountability mandates, and to ultimately ensure students are obtaining necessary literacy skills early, the impact on student literacy instruction and assessment methods in second grade is foremost essential in the preparation of these rising third grade students' success. As noted in Chapter 2, the revised North Carolina curriculum provides direct alignment with the building of foundational literacy skills in the second and third grade curriculums.

How does all of this fit together? While the EOG was the sole target of measurement for reading proficiency in third grade for many years, North Carolina has since built upon the research to assure students are proficient readers by the end of third grade by implementing the

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Read to Achieve model. Additionally, state, district, and local elementary educators have worked to provide curricular and instructional opportunities for students in second grade to emerge in comprehensive literacy skills prior to being assessed for promotion standards at the end of third grade.

The Reading 3D mCLASS evaluation tool, which evaluates students in grades kindergarten through fifth, was recently introduced to elementary schools across the state as a common assessment tool for literacy in 2012. One purpose of this common assessment tool for measuring literacy skills was to provide commonality and consistency in the instruction, assessment, and differentiation for students. Elementary schools across the state have been exploring the impact of how a common literacy assessment, such as Reading 3D, could impact the measurement of literacy skills and proficiency for students from second to third grade. Additionally, there has been a need to review how reading instruction blended in with the literacy assessments in connecting not only the assessment measures, but also the instructional practices.

Review of Related Literature

An examination of the related literature concerning how a common literacy assessment impacts student achievement from second to third grade revealed limited literature on the specific topic, yet the literature unpacked exposures to specific areas of focus within the overall theme of the research. This could be contributed to the fact that the overall specific topic of this research is an emerging issue for elementary educators. Based on the information obtained from the various literature searches of this subject, four consistent themes surfaced and are the four sections that are used to describe this research: (a) student transitions in school, (b)

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accountability mandates, (c) second and third grade literacy assessments, and (d) connecting the curriculum and instruction to student performance.

Student transitions in school. The origination of this study began with literature reviews that encompassed a wide variety of transitions. Historically, students have dealt with the challenges of making transitions within schools as they advance from one grade to another, and then within different schools (Evangelou et al., 2008). One theme that remained consistent in the review of student transitions is that an effective transition program must support academic achievement within a progression and guarantee aligned, consistent practices (Evangelou et al., 2008).

The research of Kristie Kauerz (2012) shares eight practical elements to a comprehensive approach in elementary transitions: (1) shared governance in the school's leadership, (2) internal and external support from school administration, (3) engaging, meaningful, and effective teacher quality in horizontal subjects and vertical grades, (4) alignment of instructional tools, (5) a supportive and appropriate structural environment, (6) data-driven improvement targets, (7) purposeful parent and family engagement, and (8) opportunities for high quality learning. These elements helped shape the framework for this connection of instruction and assessment to the nature of the transitions between second and third grade.

Narrowing the focus of the literature reviews to specifically third grade transitions, Linden (2008) reports there is limited research on how students make the transition within the third grade shift in elementary schools. During this third grade year, the students deal with many "first" experiences, one particular being a potential transition which is created by physical barriers. Many elementary schools, as noted in the literature review, are divided by grades kindergarten through second and third grade through fifth. The physical barrier that separates

the two grade levels at an early age has an indirect effect on the students, and can potentially

have a direct impact on the face-to-face opportunities that teachers and principals have to

vertically communicate and make connections. In a review of research conducted by Rentfor

(2007), collaboration amongst all stakeholders including students, teachers, administrators,

parents, and community, was considered imperative in order for student transitions to be

successful. This further capitalized on the need for physical accessibility between the two

comparative grade levels, which was also part of the findings as part of restructuring a school.

    Accountability mandates. A review of North Carolina's accountability mandates over

the past several decades conclude with the READY model, which communicates the message

that all North Carolina students will be ready for either attendance at a college or advancement

into a career upon the completion of high school. In this accountability model, which contains

the current mandates for third grade, there is a new curriculum, a new assessment model, new

uses of technology, and enhanced methods of teacher and principal evaluations. The standards,

which were set for teachers, include professional development, data tracking, and student growth.

These standards ultimately expose the students to the READY model and impact the skill-sets

for the students. Students who score a Level 3, 4 or 5 are considered to have met college and

career readiness and are considered to be on grade level.

    As third grade students make the transition into a new grade level and possibly a new

school, they are also making the shift into an increased accountability model by taking their first

state-mandated EOG test. As noted in the North Carolina Common Core Standard Course of

Study, and in the Read to Achieve mandate, students transition from learning to read in second

grade to reading to learn in third grade. Details of the second and third grade curriculum are

demonstrated in Tables 4 and 5 in Chapter 2.

The Read to Achieve law was created to ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade and continue to progress in reading proficiency so that he or she can read, comprehend, integrate, and apply complex texts needed for secondary education and career success (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports that students have 720 days between the entry of kindergarten and the end of the third grade year. Appropriate interventions and focused instruction begins in kindergarten and continues for the 720 days of preparation. NCDPI further supports the Read to Achieve model by establishing that children need a mastery of reading foundational skills to be able to succeed in other content areas.

Second and third grade literacy assessments. The research of Linden (2008) shows that most students show regression from second to third grade by comparison of past data from former assessment tools. Linden's research also noted that student performance at the third grade level appeared to have a loss in reading achievement due to the lack of successful transitional practices between the two grades, including assessment measurements. Yet, per North Carolina State Board of Education Policy (HSP-C-016), each LEA has been required to support literacy assessments in grades K-2 and 3-5.

Prior to the review of this literature review and research study, elementary schools followed the ABC's Accountability model and designed and conducted their own formative literacy assessments. Elementary schools used a variety of assessment tools to measure individual literacy skills. Some of the most popular reading evaluation instructions include: Lexile scoring, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Reading Renaissance STAR test, and Amplify's Reading 3D mCLASS. The performance status of the K-2 schools in the past has been reflective based on the performance of composites of the 3-5 school it fed into.

As part of the Excellent Public Schools Act, the Read to Achieve law formalized the assessment tool for elementary schools by requiring elementary schools to comprehensively design and follow a consistent assessment model. The third grade reading assessments are early predictors of a student's long-term academic achievement. Their reading scores are a leading indicator of high school graduation rates and data show that struggling readers are at a far greater risk of dropping out of school (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102).

There are five measureable domains essential to the development of early reading skills, which are in the early literacy assessments of Read to Achieve. These include phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). Phonological and phonemic awareness are terms that have been used interchangeably, yet phonological awareness recognizes the words made of sounds and phonemic awareness is the actual sound.

Findings in literature support the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as the ones mentioned. One recent assessment tool that directly aligns with the second and third grade curriculum is Reading 3D's mCLASS. It is a common literacy assessment tool that is being supported by the state of North Carolina for K-5, which directly influences the literature connections for second and third grades. The data collected in this assessment tool includes running records, progress monitoring, and connections to target individual student needs (Amplify, Retrieved from www.amplify.com). The progress monitoring sessions are brief and easy for the teacher to administer. They provide a constant tracking in order to provide measureable progress, or lack of, and are predictive measures of end of year outcomes (Francis, Santi, Barr, Fletcher, Varisco, & Foorman, 2008). Amplify reports that the mCLASS tool is a

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high predictor of students' proficiency on statewide reading assessments. In 2011, Amplify reported a 79% accuracy rate in predicting performance on the state's EOG reading test in third grade (Amplify, Retrieved from www.amplify.com).

Connecting the curriculum and instruction. Due to an increase in the third grade literacy assessments, the literature provided current support of connecting the curriculum and instruction to assessment models. The literature review reported a team from the University of Michigan concluding that a high-literacy instructional program, such as what is gathered from Reading 3D mCLASS, followed-up with frequent on-going progress monitoring, encourage improvements in literacy skills for elementary students (Schilling et al., 2007). Together, the curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices served as monitoring tools of performances that targeted where feedback, including re-teaching, was needed (Schilling et al., 2007).

In a research study conducted by Tomlinson (2014), he reported there are connecting factors between formative assessments and teaching, learning, and academic growth. Tomlinson (2014) further elaborated that feedback from assessments must be inclusive in the process of curriculum being internalized and understood for improvement. Additionally, Akos and Felton (2011) conclude there is a need for a plan of connectivity between two schools, such as the ones being studied, that support one curriculum, instruction, and assessment goal. Carol Conner, a researcher at the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University, likewise shared support in the literature noting when teachers are proactive with instructional delivery, the data authenticate improvements in students' literacy achievement (Conner et al., 2011). Evidence supports teachers are able to use forecasting intervention models to interpret the data and then design instruction for students based on differentiated needs in a range of literacy skills (Connor et al., 2011).

There are well-defined goals from the Department of Public Instruction to encourage the endorsement of early literacy for students tested in third grade, but prepped in grades kindergarten through second. The K-3 Literacy model at NCDPI encourages teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in reading for their students. Teachers are required to focus instruction to meet individual student needs while continually adjusting instruction. Differentiated instruction may be individualized or in small groups, each of which should promote language and communication skills along with reading comprehension.

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in July 2012 has forced elementary educators in North Carolina to re-evaluate the literacy curriculum, instructional best practices of reading fundamentals, and assessment of literacy skills in order to produce students who are proficient in reading at the end of their third grade year. The RTA directive follows the former implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards and blends in directly with North Carolina's current READY model. Under the current RTA mandate, beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, third grade students were required by law to meet proficiency targets in reading prior to being promoted to the fourth grade (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102). While the direct assessment of this law measures the final proficiency of third grade students, educators in earlier grades, specifically second grade, have been working collaboratively to provide support for this demanding third grade proficiency goal. Third grade teachers and administrators have increased conversation and reviews of best practices to determine how to effectively merge the literacy curriculums and assessments at the K-2 level to ensure success for third grade students on the state's End of Grade Test. Over a course of years of trying a variety of random tests, North Carolina has introduced Amplify's

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Reading 3D mCLASS literacy assessment as a common thread tool for elementary students. The underlying question for this research was to determine if a common literacy assessment between second and third grades alleviate discrepancies in data and impacts the literacy skills of students.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the nature of this study, the following limitations were made to assist in the design and execution of the study.

1. Participants in this study were limited to one local educational agency in northeastern North Carolina.

2. The selection of the participants was deliberate and although was useful for the purose of this study, the results can only be generalized to this sample.

3. The researcher in this study also served in a supervisory role in this local educational agency. Therefore, to prevent skewed participant responses, the researcher stated in writing prior to the interviews that the responses would be used solely for this study and in no way would impact the participant's job.

Research Design

The design chosen for this problem of practice study was the case study approach. A case study approach is a type of methodology design in qualitative research. The case study approach has been used for years by researchers and has proven to be able to elaborate on experiences or add strength to what is already known through previous practices on topics (Yin, 1984). The case study research approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to bring understandings to a certain issue: the exploration of the impact of a common literacy assessment between the second and third grade transition.

The research of Stake (1995) also influenced the design of this research as a case study as it involved the study of one case and provided understanding within important circumstances with emphasis on detailed contextual analysis for a limited number of events. The data collection involved multiple sources of information, including a review of documents, focus groups, interviews, and reports. The intent of this case study was to evaluate and determine how a specific topic works, in this problem of practice: a common literacy assessment between second and third grades. This case study approach mirrors the work of Merriam's (1998) interpretation of this design by conducting research in a small range of time for the collection of intrinsically bounded assessment purposes.

The process and procedures in this problem of practice reviewed a case of students taking a common literacy assessment throughout third grade, as they did in second grade, to evaluate and understand the effectiveness of the assessment as part of the grade-to-grade transition. This study sought to understand the common progress monitoring of literacy skills as third grade teachers implemented a common reading assessment and used the data to track skills and target individualized literacy needs.

This research examined the trend data of third grade students during 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 using performance measures from second and third grade common literacy assessments within the mCLASS Reading 3D program. The data were examined to determine if the use of a common literacy assessment alleviates the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores of third grade students in one LEA in northeastern North Carolina. Additional data included interviews of the principal participants and second and third grade teacher focus group data. Both the interviews and focus groups were

transcribed and were analyzed using a content analysis approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) followed by the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 1998).

Demographics. The small, rural school in which the study was conducted is located in northeastern North Carolina. This district is nestled in the smallest geographical county in the state, covering only 233 square miles with a 2010 Census Report of a population of 14,739 residents. The school in which the third grade student test data was reviewed is the system's only intermediate elementary school, serving students in third through fifth grades. There were 463 students at this 3-5 school during the 2014-15 school year. A second elementary school is the system's only primary elementary school, serving students in grades prekindergarten through two. There were 626 students at the Prek-2 school during the year of the study, noting 194 of those students in the second grade during the primary year of the research. Both elementary schools are identified as a Title 1 school based on the large percentage of students who are considered economically disadvantaged, as outlined by the national requirements of the free and reduced lunch applications. The 3-5 school is also identified as a Focus School, based on federal and state Title 1 guidelines which include having large achievement gaps between the highest and lowest achieving students within the school and continuous low performance on the North Carolina EOG accountability tests. While the two schools are under one elementary program, each school is housed as a separate building with two separate names and two separate operational methods for daily instruction and overall management.

Students. During the school year in which the data were collected, there were 172 third grade students whose scores were reported in the study. There were 194 students in the second grade. The student populations represent sub-groups for all students, white, black, male, female, economically disadvantaged, exceptional children, and AIG.

The students are recorded as participants in this study, yet they were never physically nor directly involved in the research. The actual testing data from the students served as their indirect participation. The types of student participation data reviewed were Reading 3D mCLASS reports, the North Carolina End of Grade Reading Test reports, and Read to Achieve BOY and EOG test reports.

Teachers. Eighteen teachers participated in this research. There were nine second grade teachers and nine third grade teachers who shared their input in focus group sessions. One hundred percent of the 18 teachers were highly qualified in the content area of elementary education. Four of the nine second grade teachers have more than 10 years of experience, while the remaining five teachers have seven years or less. Together, the second grade group of teachers has an average of 10.2 years of experience. Of the nine third grade teachers, three teachers have more than 10 years of experience, while the remaining six have eight years or less. The third grade group of teachers has an average of 6.89 years of experience. One hundred percent of the third grade teachers were active participants in the RTA model and had been trained by in-house administrators to implement the RTA practices with the third grade students.

Principals. Two elementary principals participated in the study. The K-2 principal had a total of 15 combined years of experience, including 12 years teaching and three years in administration. Her original teaching experience started in music education, and then later expanded into reading and technology. Prior to becoming a K-2 principal, she was an Instructional Facilitator at the K-2 level. The 3-5 principal had a total of thirteen years in education, including ten years of teaching and 3 years in administration. Her teaching experience focused in the areas of exceptional children. Prior to becoming the assistant principal at her current school for only a short few months before being tapped as principal, all of her

teaching and coordinator experiences were at middle and high school grade levels. Both

principals are natives of northeastern North Carolina and both graduated with advanced degrees

in North Carolina University Systems with public school preparation aligned with the North

Carolina Department of Public Instruction. During the time this research was conducted, each of

the two elementary principals were enrolled in The University of North Carolina's LEARN NC

Distinguished Leadership Principal's Program. This program has been established in North

Carolina to help develop leadership for practicing principals. Funded by the NC Principals and

Assistant Principals Association, it is aligned to the performance evaluation standards adopted by

the State Board of Education for North Carolina's school leaders. During this training, these

principals have been coached through problem-based, real-world approaches that have allowed

them to study behaviors, attitudes, and best-practices of leading a model school as distinguished

leaders on their principal evaluation instrument.

Data Collection and Analysis

Eighteen teachers and two administrators participated in the face-to-face study of this

research. Over 300 second and third grade student literacy assessment scores were recorded,

tracked, and reviewed. This study involved the collection of data through the observation of the

student test scores, focus group discussions with the second and third grade teachers, and the

interviews from the K-2 principal and the 3-5 principal. The data analysis began during the

initial collection of second and third grade student literacy assessment data from both the

Reading 3D mCLASS tool and End of Grade Reading Test, and ended with the analysis of all

documents including the two teacher focus group transcripts, the two principal interview

transcripts, and a collection of field notes from the research.

Based on teacher and administrative conversations, RTA has forced second and third grade teachers to ultimately study and analyze student data at a higher and more intense degree. Teachers have reported that these data have provided excellent personalized information on every child that was tested. Principals and teachers shared that the student data allowed them to study subgroup results and make a variety of comparisons for student and personnel purposes. The data have assisted with decisions on student grade placement and class assignment for the upcoming school year. Principals have shared that collecting data at a greater level held teachers and themselves more accountable and responsible for providing authentic student performance observations. One principal used the data as a major factor to help evaluate closing the gap issues and concerns, which proved the greatest success. Jointly, all aspects of the findings in this study build an evolving need for further research to continue the effective practices that are in place upon the conclusion of this research project.

Conclusions of the Study

In the research findings, there were several domains that emerged from the collection of student data and teacher documents, teacher focus groups, and principal interviews. This study answered the two questions which initially framed the purpose of this study: (1) Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade post-test and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores? (2) What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments? The data collected concluded three domains noting an increase in consistency and performance with the use of a common literacy assessment for second and third grade, benefits that include commonalities in language and best practices, and the need for continuous action for program improvement. The three domains serve as the results of the study questions asked in this study.

Study Question One

Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores? Research question number one is answered in domain one.

The first domain verifies that the use of a common literacy assessment between students in the second and third grade provides consistency in scoring and results in an increase in student literacy skills and achievement. As summarized in Chapter 4, teachers and school administrators, along with the actual testing trend data findings, validate that common literacy assessment contributed to student reading growth. While the actual numbers signify a slight stagger, all trends migrate toward consistency and growth.

Second grade teachers shared that the student data have allowed them to focus more on the individual student needs and how to better prepare them for the next grade level. They also reported that as a result of teacher performance ratings and school performance scorings based on the 3-5 data, they are more eager to encourage the implementation of common instruction and assessments to help be part of the overall evaluation system. Third-grade teachers commented that because of the increase in rigorous testing standards in third grade, second grade students are coming to the third grade better prepared in literacy skills and are more comfortable and confident with the RTA reading expectations, as supported by the mCLASS literacy assessment.

Administrators reported that most teachers confidentially accepted the fact that other teachers would test their students at the end of the year because there had been consistency and ongoing common literacy assessment throughout the entire year. One principal shared that the RTA data provided was extremely helpful in making decisions on student retention.

Educators and elected officials have taken the initiative to develop the Read to Achieve program and process to increase student literacy skills and achievement by holding everyone more accountable by using the third grade as a high-standard year of accountability. Through the obligation of the Read to Achieve law, the implementation of continuity in curriculum and instruction, as well as a common literacy assessment, strengthens the importance and value of students being on grade level by the third grade. Most importantly, the data presented shows that students at the second and third grade levels are making progress with literacy skills and are becoming more proficient readers.

Study Question Two

What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments? Research question number two is answered in domains two and three.

Domain two demonstrates that the use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade students presents benefits to an elementary program. The benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment between the second and third grade includes the increase of common language and best practices for students, teachers, and administrators.

Based on the research presented, teachers at both grade levels have shared that meeting together to discuss and collaborate have been of great value and service to them, as well as increased student literacy achievement results. A first benefit for the two grade levels is the use of a common language between all aspects of the two grades. The apparent trends within the common language include consistencies with curriculum, instructional practices, assessment measurements, and staff developments. The increased face-to-face dialogue has been of tremendous value in improving teacher awareness and understanding of being consistent in the

RTA implementation process. Professional development training and focus group sessions have contributed to the success of implementing a common language and improving student literacy skills and growth. One cannot emphasize enough the importance of having the same expectations and requirements for all students.

Another benefit of a common literacy assessment is that the assessment drives best practices for students, teachers, and administrators. As seen throughout the research, the assessment is a cycle. Teachers who use the common literacy assessment as both an assessment and instruction tool have reported the greatest benefits. Chapter 4 gave specific examples of teacher comments supporting the flow of consistencies with curriculum, instruction, and assessments, with specific attention in making those common connections for two early grades that also have to experience transitions from one grade and school to another.

One particular third grade teaching staff shared numerous times that having a shared Instructional Facilitator between the two grade levels contributed greatly to their success with implementing the common language and the common literacy assessment which supported the consistencies with data and improvements in student literacy growth. The Facilitator provided an ongoing routine with necessary materials and a lot of monitoring to check for fidelity. This coach was also responsible for the second and third grade collaboration meetings and for sharing student data. Principals also shared data presentations to their staff, superintendent, directors and parents to better understand the process and the actual literacy assessment.

As a result of implementing a common literacy assessment for students in the second and third grade, the third domain shows, in response to research question number two, there are challenges that remain to be addressed. Time to learn and consistently implement the second and third grade curriculum, instruction, and assessment is the primary challenge that teachers and

principals face. Under the area of time, teachers and principals specifically noted the need for

allocations of time to learn the updates with curriculum and assessments, participate in staff

developments with other teachers, and ultimately more designated times in the classrooms to

complete the rigorous demands of the on-going progress monitoring within the accountability

models.

A need for on-going, updated professional development was the second challenge. It was

concluded that all stakeholders need to be active participants in the progression of reorganizing

procedures that vertically connect the two grade levels. The roll out of the RTA mandated

initiative was slightly overwhelming at first, but once everyone started to work together and the

state department provided much needed regional support, the process of using a common literacy

assessment became a positive reality. The ongoing meetings of second and third grade teachers

are also a must in order to see student improvement on this common literacy assessment. Based

on conversations with second and third grade teachers, they want time to plan together and to do

more transitional activities to improve student literacy growth and improvement.

As gathered in the literature review of Chapter 2, collaboration is an essential component

in helping third grade students experience a successful transition (Rentfor, 2007). It is

imperative that all stakeholders are involved in the process because this is one method of aiding

in the transition from one grade to another. This includes, but is not limited to, the teachers,

administrators, parents, community and students. This challenge of a need for more enhanced

staff developments particularly provides connections with the literature reviewed.

An overall need for the restructuring of a school setting is a third challenge that emerged

from this research. The arguments that continued to be echoed by the teachers and principal

groups included limitations within physical barriers, a need for a curricular and instructional

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alignment, and a purposeful placement of personnel for these targeted grade levels of high accountability.

Within the two schools in which the one elementary program was evaluated, there were several areas in which the physical structure of the school created challenges for the implementation of a common literacy assessment. First, upon the introduction of the increased standards for literacy assessment at the early grade levels, school administrators and teachers found themselves having to quickly explain the process and requirements to parents and students in a very inert manner. In this process, the teachers and administrators both reported they had to create intentional communication within the physical barriers of the school to design and send out consistent local information, which supported the state's directive. Brochures were provided by the state department and from the district's central office that shared a great deal of information, but based on comments by numerous stakeholders, the teacher-parent conferences were the most beneficial because teachers were able to explain one-on-one the rigid process in a face-to-face setting. Ultimately, the parents were more concerned about meeting with teachers to discuss their own child's assessment results than the literacy assessment itself, yet many expressed ideas on perceptions or myths of the K-2 school as compared to the 3-5 school. There were apparent comments prompted to determine the advantages of potentially having the K-2 school and the 3-5 school physically merge into one K-5 school site.

A continual review of the curriculum and instruction alignment is another challenge that surfaced in the area of restricting an early literacy program. As the curriculum, instructional, and assessment expectations and procedures change, the opinions of the teachers and principals is that this cycle needs to be an active, functioning part of a school's daily operation. The groups

also noted that in order for that to happen with fidelity, a concise plan would need to be streamlined and managed.

The placement of essential and highly qualified personnel was a final challenge that emerged in this research. From the principals to the teachers, all stakeholders agreed that a strong instructional leader, whether it is a principal, director or facilitator, leadership positions are necessary to maintain the literacy expectations that are under the Read to Achieve law for grades three and below. Moreover, quality teachers who are highly qualified in elementary education and in literacy instruction design, implement, and progress-monitor skill-sets and interventions for each student. In alignment with the research in Chapter 2, leaders in elementary education should meet with the third grade teachers within the first few weeks of school, and throughout the year, to analyze student progress and any on-going intervention needs (Akos & Felton, 2011) and should be expanded to include second grade singly and collectively with third grade. Together, all personnel are essential to the success of any instructional program, particularly in grade levels and content areas that hold the highest levels of liability for student performance that determines promotion or retention status.

Implications of the Study

Based upon the analysis and conclusions of this research, there is a demonstrated importance in providing students with a solid, consistent framework of literacy at an early age. Three implications are presented in three sections: (a) Consistent, appropriate instructional practices and interventions between grades K-2 and 3 to support comparable student achievement levels in third grade literacy skills, (b) direct placement of teachers and principals in second and third grade schools, and (c) comparability with a common literacy assessment tool

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for students in second and third grades in relation to the NC EOG's, with consistent support in the transition of the two grade levels.

1. If the goal of the Read to Achieve law is to ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade, appropriate instructional practices and interventions should be in place in grades K-2 to support comparable student achievement levels in literacy skills.

North Carolina's Curriculum has changed to the Common Core. Pacing guides are required at each grade level. Administrators are saying that even the accomplished teachers can hardly keep up with the numerous changes and demands in their teaching areas and statewide initiatives. Based on teacher comments and reflections, the rollout of the Common Core in our state was very uneven. Testing results are validating many concerns. Some districts had more resources and better training in transferring over to the Common Core curriculum, new and different assessments. Several subject matters were presented and implemented at different levels with little emphasis and support being provided to and for elementary teachers and grades. Students were tested on materials that had not been taught in previous grades.

Students have a variety of learning abilities. In this small, rural, low-wealth elementary school, over 75% of the kindergarten children historically enter elementary behind and it is the responsibility and challenge of elementary educators to expedite results. However, careful considerations need to be respected on how this is done and should be permitted based on numerous factors. A great deal of research has already shown that low-income students have additional challenges when placed in the academic arena. Most of the students in this study have had very few opportunities to be exposed to reading materials and learning activities prior to starting school. Many have a lack of vocabulary exposure, traveling experiences, pre-school

training, and most of all, parental support, encouragement, and involvement. Therefore, the vast majority of these students may not be ready to be tested at the third grade and equipped to be proficient.

After Read to Achieve became law in 2012, there was a more rigorous approach to literacy instruction and assessment for second and third grades. Even though graduation rates are improving in many districts and state wide, there is a greater awareness of people who cannot read. Students were constantly being placed in the next grade level, not promoted, causing a huge increase in adult illiteracy. The state decided it was time to hold staff and students more accountable. The state has provided many resources and support to make this happen, but as always, the ultimate job has fallen on the classroom teacher, especially the third grade teachers. There is much debate still happening on what to do with students that cannot meet the RTA expectations and requirements. There is also inconsistency with student assessments based on teacher observations, practice, and trainings. The state is trying to address some of the concerns by having alternative assessments and by also having different teachers test students at the end of the year. Some principals are still choosing to place students in the next grade level for various reasons. Parents are pulling their children out of the public school system due to all the state testing requirements to provide home school training or a private school setting.

2. In grades two and three, direct assignment of personnel, including teacher and
   principal placement, may affect student achievement.

The teacher turnover, as noted in the participation data for the TWCS, has decreased and changed. Best learning takes place when students have a highly qualified classroom teacher teaching them. Unfortunately, in many school districts that is not always possible due to the shortage of classroom teachers. The high teacher turn-over rates and teacher shortage across the

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state seems to be increasing, especially in the northeastern part of the state. Many of the best and brightest college graduates are choosing not to go into teaching due to the pay and also the numerous demands and requirements being mandated. RTA is one of the newest demands and it brings along good and bad components based on pupil comments.

3. The proficiency ratings from a common literacy assessment tool in third grade, such as the Reading 3D mCLASS tool, may have an impact on student literacy achievement and compare to the North Carolina EOG's with on-going support such as: common planning times, consistent staff development and opportunities for teachers and principals to collaborate.

The North Carolina EOG tests have changed, which presents inconsistencies with data comparison. Teachers are sharing that they are very overwhelmed and tired of trying to meet all of the new mandates and testing requirements. Teachers are not happy that testing results will determine their evaluation rating when there are so many inconsistencies taking place. The testing program has lost a lot of credibility because now they are saying that the standards don't match the curriculum. So, now a study is being set up to look into this matter. In the meantime, stakeholders are becoming more frustrated with the public school system and they are beginning to think that home schooling and charter schools can do a better job of preparing our students for college and career ready opportunities. One thing that has remained true throughout this entire study is that basic literacy skills are fundamental and the work of teaching, inspiring, and growing readers is never complete.

Recommendations for Further Research

The three major findings noted in the domains were on-track with predictions of this study. In the research findings, there were several domains that emerged from the collection of

student data and teacher documents, teacher focus groups, and principal interviews. The three

domains are: (1) The use of a common literacy assessment between second and third grade

students supports an increase in student literacy skills and literacy achievement; (2) The use of a

common literacy assessment between second and third grade students increases the common

language and best practices for students, teachers, and administrators, and, (3) As a result of

implementing common literacy assessments between second and third grade students, there is a

continued need for all stakeholders to be active participants in the progression of reorganizing

procedures that vertically connect the two grade levels.

School and District Level

As North Carolina continues to emphasize more rigor in literacy at the elementary level,

there is a need to continue to personalize education for each child's literacy skills in order to

establish a literate foundation for now and in the future. At the school and district level, teachers

need to be able to differentiate; however, since this is often very hard to do – administrators and

teachers may have to rely more on the value of grouping children by ability. Holding students

accountable should not go away. The leaders in the district and schools, as presented in the

results of this research, should address the challenges. Teachers should have an active voice in

the restructuring of the literature instruction and assessments.

Upon reviewing the data collection from one focus group session with the teachers from

each grade level in grades two and three, it would be beneficial for principals and district leaders

to expand on the information already collected and document on-going PLC's with all groups.

The data from the on-going sessions would provide more details and comparative data over a

longer period of time. The focus groups could be part of the PLC's, which were noted as

positives, yet areas that needed to be heightened. The documentation could include, but not be

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limited to notes and minutes of the meetings that would be analyzed over a period of time. A researcher may consider creating a Google Doc where the supporting notes could be edited and tracked by all participants, potentially open to both second and third grade teachers and administrators. This method would enhance the immediate intentions for improvement, as opposed to waiting until the end of the year to evaluate the use of common literacy assessments for second and third grade students, and would provide the researcher a tool that could easily be analyzed as a working-document.

While insightful information was gained from the principals during their interviews, district leaders could continue the research of this problem of practice by having more sessions with the principals and other administrative leaders. These meetings could consist of on-going conversations about current literacy instruction and assessment, including instructional leadership in the process of managing the facilitation of the mandates at each grade level. The Instructional Facilitator could additionally be included in on the evaluative sessions, as this person's role is imperative to the unification of the two grades and schools.

Another opportunity for further research could build upon the suggestion unveiled in this study of having one principal to lead both schools. While the strength of the data was not convincing enough to support one principal for both schools, both of the teacher groups and the principals communicated the concept of having one instructional leader to serve the students kindergarten through fifth grade. It is worthy of additional examination.

For now, there are immediate changes that can be made within the two schools that focus on basic instructional methods. First, it is a responsibility of the district to ensure the reading classes are taught by highly- qualified teachers. The teachers need to learn and be able to implement multiple ways to show reading proficiency. They should be provided uninterrupted

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instructional blocks of reading time and given opportunities to have assistance as much as possible. Providing intensive interventions, with additional instructional time, can help students achieve grade level goals. Revising schedules may be a simple adjustment.

Based on state and local test results and comments, the summer reading camps have been one of the greatest contributing factors to student growth in literacy. Districts and schools should continue to host reading camps to develop literacy skills. District and school administrators should constantly search for additional funding and opportunities to help students catch up in order to be successful on the third grade state reading assessment.

A lot has been noted in this research about what teachers and principals can do at the local and district level, but there is also a significant influence from the parents that supports the literacy success of children. Parents should be encouraged to read with their child every night. They should be taught and encouraged to reinforce and review schoolwork with their child. Parents can help their children build vocabulary and language by effective communication such as engaging in conversations with their children. And finally, parents can be urged to expose their children to a variety of content areas. Many of these parenting recommendations can be found in pre-published materials from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's K-3 Literacy website (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/k-3literacy/), on the NC Read to Achieve Live Binder (http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=1326906), or on the local district and school webpages.

State Level

This research began upon the implementation of the Read to Achieve law after 2012, so there is still much data to be collected as the misalignments of this initiative continue to be improved. As the Read to Achieve law expands and a more rigorous approach and assessment of

literacy skills emerge, consistent literacy assessment mandates are becoming more of a constant, daily routine in second and third grade classrooms across the state.

Upon the final days of determining the conclusions of this research, the Read to Achieve Law, and other school mandates, were under review. North Carolina legislators presented before the Governor pertinent information related to future developments of this study. The North Carolina Association of School Administrators reported the most recent report of the state's budget on their legislative link within their website (http://www.ncasalegislativelink.org/2015-2017-state-budget.html). The state is projecting twenty-million dollars in recurring funds to expand the RTA summer camps. As noted in Sec. 8.48 of the proposed legislation, LEA's will be able to expand reading camp opportunities to serve students in first and second grades that demonstrate reading comprehension proficiency below grade level. This legislation requires that parents or guardians of these students be encouraged, but not required, to enroll their student in a summer reading camp. It also will allow parents and guardians of first and second grade students who are at grade level to attend a summer reading camp for a fee, as determined by the local district not over $825.00 per student, if space is available within the district. Finally, just as the state requires of third grade data, the state legislation will require local school boards to publish the number and percentages of first and second graders demonstrating and not demonstrating reading proficiency at grade level.

The legislators have also proposed that the State Board of Education be prohibited from granted waivers for class sizes in grades K-3 except under specified circumstances. To emphasize the seriousness of this class-size mandate, the legislation directs that a superintendent's pay be withheld if a district is found to willfully not comply with the class size requirement.

North Carolina has recently put into operation the use of the NCEdCloud Service System found on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's web-page. This management system is available as a service to help state educators have services in a more centralized and standardized way to manage accounts and roles within the school systems. Within this management system there will be numerous applications for school systems to utilize. Many of the larger-used programs, such as Follett, Discovery Education, and Google Apps, to mention a few, are anticipated to be in this system. Relative to the support of this research, mClass is also going to be part of the NCEdCloud system, effective 2016.

However, from the voices of the teachers, providing teachers with more pay, better resources, smaller class sizes and a teacher assistant are just a few of the needs to help with literacy success that remain on the radar of teachers, administrators, and local and state political decision makers.

<center>**Summary**</center>

A final conclusion of this study directs the need for frequent examinations of literacy assessments as documented in this research. The most rapid period of development in human life happens from birth to age eight. End of third grade outcomes predict academic achievement and career success.

The Read to Achieve implementation program, created in legislation and approved by the North Carolina General Assembly in July 2012, continues to be a relatively young program as upon completion of this study, the research timeline was limited to less than three years of review. While the RTA program has components in place to aid teachers and principals in improving reading proficiency for students in kindergarten through third grade, the final outcome

of student literacy performance is hugely significant as the assessments determine promotion standards.

A study conducted by Donald J. Hernandez with the Annie E. Casey Foundation concluded that third-graders who lack proficiency in reading are four times more likely to become high school dropouts (Paul, 2012). Future research from this study is readily available for educators who are attentive to or participating in the RTA law and who have interest with the common literacy assessments and the transition between second and third grade students. Further research could be collected almost daily within a school setting, as there is a need to monitor the consistent implementation and tracking of student data within the RTA program at the school, district, and state levels.

A final conclusion in the research of this problem of practice in one elementary program in one small, rural low-wealth district in northeastern North Carolina reverts back to the work of Kristie Kauzer's research in 2012 on transitions in the elementary school. Kauerz, a professor at the University of Washington, stressed the importance of eight key elements for a comprehensive approach to elementary transitions. While Kauerz's work focused on the general concept of elementary transitions, the eight elements discovered through her research reappeared in the common threads of the research of this problem of practice study focusing on how a common literacy assessment may impact the literacy skills of students transitioning from second to third grade. The data collections that support Kauerz's research include literacy assessment data from Reading 3D mCLASS, the North Carolina End of Grade tests, the Read to Achieve measurements, second and third grade teacher focus groups, second and third grade principal interviews, and The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.

The eight elements of an effective transition, shared by Kauerz and reiterated in this research are:

1. Shared governance in the school's leadership and strategic planning.

2. The building level administration should support relations, both internally and externally. This includes teamwork and instructional leadership.

3. Teacher and teaching quality needs to be engaging, meaningful, and effective across both the horizontal teams and the vertical teams.

4. In order to ensure a more comprehensive approach, the instructional tools, including the pacing guides and curriculum, need to be aligned and balanced, as well as assessed based on the objectives taught.

5. A supportive learning environment. This includes the structural quality of the environment, as well as the climate, space and materials.

6. Data-driven improvements should focus on child-based data to identify and focus on achievement gaps and to identify targets so the resources may be realigned as needed.

7. Family engagement should be a top priority for all school and program-based staff. The engagement should be purposeful to parents and should reinforce the shared responsibility for student success.

8. An expansion to high quality learning opportunities should exist to extend opportunities for the students.

While Kauerz's (2012) eight principles are practical methods of ensuring effective transitional practices in an overall elementary program, the principles are consequently areas that emerged in this research as domains or themes that connect curriculum, instruction, and the implementation of a common literacy assessment between the second and third grades. These

remain to be areas that are critical for the current outcomes of second and third grade students as

they work to build reading proficiency and meet the precise literacy goal of the North Carolina

Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina General Assembly:

> North Carolina's goal is to ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the
> end of third grade and continue to progress in reading proficiency so that he or she can
> read, comprehend, integrate, and apply complex texts needed for secondary education
> and career success. (NC Read to Achieve, Retrieved from
> www.livebinders.com/play/play/850102)

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM DISTRICT

EDENTON-CHOWAN SCHOOLS OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Post Office Box 206 Edenton, North Carolina 27932
Telephone: (252) 482-4436 Fax: (252) 482-7309
www.ecps.k12.nc.us

Rob Jackson, *Superintendent*

October 8, 2014

Dear Mrs. White,

I have reviewed your request and I approve of your use of the Edenton-Chowan Schools district data for the use of your research title *"An Exploratory Study of How The Use of a Common Assessment Impacts the Literacy Skills of Students Transitioning from Second to Third Grade."*

I grant permission for you to use the demographic and academic data of the students and staff in this district.

I look forward to experiencing the research of this data with you and hearing about your findings.

Sincerely,

Rob Jackson
Superintendent

John Guard
Chairman, Board of Education

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **www.ecu.edu/irb**

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: Linda White

CC: Art Rouse

Date: 9/2/2015

Re: UMCIRB 14-001722
        Common Literacy Assessment From Second to Third Grade

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 9/2/2015 to 9/1/2016. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 5, 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk. Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).
The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Approval Letter to Research - ECPS.docx	Dataset Use Approval/Permission
Consent Form w/Signature	Consent Forms
FINAL DISSERTATION; Submitted 7-3-15.docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

Linda White <lwhite@ecps.k12.nc.us>   Sep 2

to Parralee, Angie, LeAnn, Tracy, Penny, Paula, Danielle, Jennifer, June,

Good morning, second grade!

As part of a personal research study to complete my dissertation, I have to collect data from you - our second grade teachers - to share your opinions/findings of your work with Read to Achieve and using mClass as part of a consistent assessment tool as students transition from second to third grade.

I know you are super busy - and I totally respect your work and time - so I would never impose on your school day!

However, I will be holding an interview session THIS AFTERNOON for any second grade teachers who can and will volunteer to attend at 3:15 in the PLL.

PLEASE JOIN ME!

While I can't offer incentives or pay for this interview because we are colleagues, I will certainly be most appreciative and will express my gratitude!

This interview session should only take about 30 minutes and the questions are very specific to what you do daily.

While the original research was part of my personal interest in writing my dissertation- the data collected today through the input of those teachers who volunteer to participate - will be shared with WOS/DFW administration to help enhance what you/we are already doing to assist in the transition between the two schools.

I HOPE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO JOIN ME TODAY AT 3:15 IN THE PLL!

Thanks,
Linda

APPENDIX D: INVITATION TO THIRD GRADE TEACHERS

TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP

Linda White <lwhite@ecps.k12.nc.us>   Sep 2

to Kristie, Kristine, Jennifer, Brenna, Carisa, Nell, Angela, Nancy, Jennifer

Good morning, third grade!

As part of a personal research study to complete my dissertation, I have to collect data from you - our third grade teachers - to share your opinions/findings of your work with Read to Achieve and using mClass as part of a consistent assessment tool as students transition from second to third grade.

I know you are super busy - and I totally respect your work and time - so I would never impose on your school day!

However, I will be holding an interview session THURSDAY AFTERNOON for any third grade teachers who can and will volunteer to attend at 3:15 in the PLL.

PLEASE JOIN ME!

While I can't offer incentives or pay for this interview because we are colleagues, I will certainly be most appreciative and will express my gratitude!

This interview session should only take about 30 minutes and the questions are very specific to what you do daily.

While the original research was part of my personal interest in writing my dissertation- the data collected today through the input of those teachers who volunteer to participate - will be shared with WOS/DFW administration to help enhance what you/we are already doing to assist in the transition between the two schools.

I HOPE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO JOIN ME THURSDAY AT 3:15 IN THE PLL!

Thanks,
 Linda

APPENDIX E: INVITATION TO PRINCIPALS TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS

Linda White **<lwhite@ecps.k12.nc.us>**

to Michelle, Jamie

As you know, I am hopefully wrapping up my dissertation within the next 60 days.

As part of the final chapters, I have to conduct interviews to go along with the data I have already collected.

Would you please give me about 30 minutes of your time to answer a few interview questions in reference to the necessity (or not) of a common literacy assessment that is shared between second and third graders as they transition from WOS to DFW?

My data is based on last year's students.

I would need to interview you separately - and I can't do it until next week (Wednesday, Thursday or Friday). I can work around your time schedule.

Can you help me out, please? The questions are easy - I promise!

Thanks!

Linda L. White
Director of Elementary Education, Title 1 & AIG
Executive Director of Education Foundation
Edenton-Chowan Schools
www.ecps.k12.nc.us
P.O. Box 206
406 W. Queen Street
Edenton, NC 27932
Office Phone: (252) 482-4436
Fax: (252) 482-7309
Cell: (252) 333-0271

APPENDIX F: CONSENT SCRIPT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a research study, "An Exploratory Study of How Common Literacy Assessments Impact the Literacy Skills of Students Transitioning From Second to Third Grade," being conducted by Linda L. White, a student at East Carolina University in the Department of Educational Leadership. The goal is to conduct face-to-face interviews with two principals and (2) focus groups of up to 18 teachers from the elementary schools in the Edenton-Chowan Schools public school district. The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes each to complete and the focus groups should take approximately 45 minutes each. The information collected will assist administrators in understanding potential development and implementation of a common literacy assessment for second and third grade students. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is no penalty for not taking part in this research study.

Please call the principal investigator, Linda L. White, at (252) 256-1051 or Chairperson Art Rouse at (252) 328-6763 for any research related questions.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time. By checking the "I agree" box below, I am giving my consent to participate in this study. If I choose to not participate, I may leave the focus group/interview session at any time before the conclusion.

☐ *I agree to participate in this study with the understanding I may withdraw at any time.*

_____   _____

Signature   *Date*

APPENDIX G: QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

Research Question #1: Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

1. Do you feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment between second and third grade? Please describe why you believe there is either a need or no need.
2. Describe the assessments that came as part of the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in terms of how they either improve or hinder the literacy achievement for your students. If you feel they have no effect at all, please describe why you believe that is the case.
3. How has the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as mCLASS, affected the transition between students in second and third grades? How is this different from using the differing assessments?
4. Please describe how the common assessment meets the needs of the students at your school.
5. How do you believe an effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured in terms of literacy achievement?

Research Question #2: What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

6. Describe the benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grade.
7. Describe the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grade.
8. Describe how the curriculum is aligned for the use of a common literacy assessment in second and third grade. How could this be improved upon in the future?
9. Describe the instructional practices that are used consistently between second and third grade that support the use of a common literacy assessment.
10. Describe how instructional practices could be more consistent between second and third grade to support the use of a common literacy assessment better in the future.
11. Are there any instructional practices and/or curriculum requirements that create barriers to the transition between the second and third grade that hinder the use of a common literacy assessment?
12. What types of support do you have in place for the teachers as they implement these assessments?
13. Are there additional types of support you could describe that you believe would offer more support for the teachers as they implement the assessments?

APPENDIX H: QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS

Research Question #1: Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

1. Do you feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment between second and third grade? Please describe why you believe there is either a need or no need.
2. Describe the assessments that came as part of the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in terms of how they either improve or hinder the literacy achievement for your students. If you feel they have no effect at all, please describe why you believe that is the case.
3. How has the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as mCLASS, affected the transition between students in second and third grades? How is this different from using the differing assessments?
4. Please describe how the common assessment meets the needs of the students in your classroom.
5. How do you believe an effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured in terms of literacy achievement?

Research Question #2: What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

6. Describe the benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades.
7. Describe the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades.
8. What opportunities are presented to align the curriculum with a common literacy assessment in second and third grades?
9. What challenges are presented in aligning the curriculum with a common literacy assessment in second and third grades?
10. What types of instructional practices are consistent between second and third grade that support and/or hinder a common literacy assessment?
11. What types of support are in place for you as you implement these assessments?
12. Are there additional types of support you could describe that would support the transition for you as you implement the assessments?

APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIPT OF SECOND AND THIRD GRADE FOCUS GROUPS

Research Question #1: Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

1. **Do you feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment between second and third grade? Please describe why you believe there is either a need or no need.**

Second Grade Teachers:

- I feel like we do since we have EOG's at third grade.
- Statics/ Group nods heads.
- Yes, I think there should be common assessments to bridge the gap between the second and third grade year.

Third Grade Teachers:

- A common literacy assessment between second and third grade– especially in a district like ours where those grades are in different schools. Prior to Read to Achieve we used running records and sent them over to our 3-5 school. But our 3-5 school used different testing and so at least now there is a common assessment and a common language.
- As a newbie – a teacher just only here a few days, I had to learn the format when they came to me for what was expected of me. I …… they used it in the other school.
- The use of mClass TRC has alleviated some of the discrepancy between second grade EOY and third grade BOY, however there is still some difference in scores, which seems unattributable to summer slide.
- Yes, because educators on both sides of a child's education need to have similar information to look at and track student growth by.

2. **Describe the assessments that came as part of the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in terms of how they either improve or hinder the literacy achievement for your students. If you feel they have no effect at all, please describe why you believe that is the case.**

Second Grade Teachers:

- Read to Achieve gave us mClass. Teachers are seeing it.
- Our second grade students? I think there is a disconnect because I don't think we know enough about Read to Achieve and if what we are doing is helping or hindering. I don't feel we have been educated enough about what it is.
- We need to know what happens after third grade and after reading camp from a summer with providing extra help.
- The research I read this summer helped me.
- I'm really not sure, because I don't give these assessment directly and I don't know what affect they have had.

Third Grade Teachers:

- I feel that it prepares our children for reading longer passages, it improves their stamina and as teachers it holds us accountable for teaching all of those standards. And in knowing what kids need to be remediated.
- I think in a sense that the format and the page and the font is the same as they're going to see it on the end of grade, as well, so they are totally familiar with what it's going to look like. Like Jennifer said, the length, the types of questions, the question stems because it goes hand in hand with all of the questions on the EOG's it helps us make sure that we've targeted those twelve standards.
- Especially with the language. The language on the EOG's – they're used to seeing it all year, whereas, I don't think we'd be able to prepare them for that type of language without having something like that.
- The information from the assessments can be very useful in tracing student growth, but the massive amount of time that the assessments and progress monitoring takes up in the classroom is a hindrance… also, the progress monitoring does not, in itself, improve student performance, as some have said… I can take my child's temperature everyday when they are sick, but if I never treat them, they won't get better.

3. **How has the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as mCLASS, affected the transition between students in second and third grades? How is this different from using the differing assessments?**

Second Grade Teachers:

- I think mClass does give us some common grounds. We were assessing third grade with BOG and now there is that piece ….. because when we say a child at a certain level we know understand what that means for those children.
- Well, the good thing is that the third grade teachers get an idea of the abilities of the reader when they first enter third grade. The bad thing is that because of uncontrollable factors such as whether or not we end the year assessing fiction or nonfiction and summer slide, the third grade teachers continue to spend a lot of time reassessing the students because their EOY level has dropped. However, this is true for all grade levels. Second spends time reassessing first and first does the same with kindergarten.

Third Grade Teachers:

- I think it provides and bridges that gap. The year between second and third grade have kinda always been critical year for the kids and as I said that allows us to go back and talk to second grade teachers and we can talk about something that we are both familiar with.
- The assessments have made the transition a little better, although it is difficult for parents to understand the difference that can occur in scores.

4. **Please describe how the common assessment meets the needs of the students at your school.**

Second Grade Teachers:

- Our Diebels data drives our instruction and helps us make decisions on what each child needs, which direction to head. It basically drives everything that you do. Um.
- Although we are giving the same test, if the child isn't on grade level and lacks the foundational skills, his assessment is the same as the next grade level so it matches.
- More consistency. We've all been involved in training. We're all speaking the same language.
- It allows for fidelity within the assessment and grading practices of the entire school and helps the administration get a clear view of what the students can and cannot do.

Third Grade Teachers:

- We can see what level they are reading at so we can better reach them so we can have students with the same needs in our group settings and then we can work on them in a large class. If we didn't have them we wouldn't be able to place them in the correct spot and work on them where we need to.
- I also feel that reading with every single child and seeing what specifically I need to work on with them and then also grouping kids, not only in leveled based, but skill-based. That assessment allows me to look at that.

5. **How do you believe an effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured in terms of literacy achievement?**

Second Grade Teachers:

- Well I think we have it by putting in place the mClass testing that again we have that common ground and we're speaking that same language. In the past they would leave second grade, go to second grade, and because the language was different, the testing was different there was so many misunderstandings as to you know, a child leaving proficient and then going into and maybe not scoring where they would have hoped on the EOG's and so I think just that common language and a common understanding of what we are looking at and the comprehension pieces, the TRC's, the data that we collect bridges that gap.
- In my opinion, there needs to be more understanding from both parties as to the expectations of the opposite grade level. Then they need to spend time together to build more and increased commonality in the way assessments are administered, scored, and created.

Third Grade Teachers:

- I think you have to have a buy-in from both schools, from both teams. If you don't get that buy-in and that teamwork capacity then you are not going to reap the benefits of it.

Research Question #2: What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

6. **Describe the benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grade.**

Second Grade Teachers:

- Well, I know like with us, we start out the year with non-fiction……..
- Across the grade level, it gives us all some common language in curriculum planning to provide more instruction in there. We also can see the summer slide from when they leave second grade and enter third and how much they are losing so much over the summer in our rural place with poverty. We had to look at opportunities for what we are going to do to prevent that summer slide.

Third Grade Teachers:

- In second grade – coming into third grade; so we can have a starting point with them.
- Second and third grade teachers have a different idea of the end results needed…. As in mClass is the final word in second grade, but EOG is the final word in third… and those don't always mesh.

7. **Describe the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grade.**

Second Grade Teachers:

- It takes a huge amount of time in third grade for the portfolio process with the passages. The state recommends that they do it in a center where the teacher can be more serious when they do it that way and it is ……important so that the teacher is focused yet that is 30 minutes of time and they feel they are losing 30 minutes of instructional time for giving two passages a week.
- With a literacy assessment, I feel like in second and third grade we need more book selection. Ya know what I mean. We use a book multiple times, but I feel like we need a little more resources. Exactly.
- They slip back over the summer and so they end up reading the same books over – second grade and third grade.
- …As soon as they get here we're testing them and they're not doing their best because they don't know you yet and you're automatically testing them the first three days.
- I think another big challenge with instruction is what we do with instruction - well in fluency where it is measured has become a drill / kill. I've got my timer and it's a race. Just need to be careful that teaching and instruction doesn't become testing prep to raise scores.
- We need to have some on-sight training like we have because we focus on, but not to lose sight of the comprehension piece as well.

- I'm seeing now that after we get through testing at the end of the nine weeks it is time to test again. We test one whole quarter out of the year.
- And I don't know if it's just me or not, and I don't know if I'm answering this question, but I still have concerns with the 2-3 gap, and I understand everything but I don't. We have theses second graders who are level 40's, they can comprehend it but because they can't write to, I guess what is it according to fourth grade reading level, they are expected to be able to write at a fourth grade reading level and I don't know there is still that huge disconnect for me because I am seeing children who can read and comprehend but because of those two questions, I – I –I don't know. I don't know if that plays into it or not, but that is something that I've struggled with because we say constantly, "Well, if they can read at a forty they should be able to write at a level forty." And it's not that they're not understanding that level forty, it's just that maybe they're not able to write like a fourth grade writer. But they can still comprehend. Yes, it's a maturity factor of those higher-level kids – and I don't know if that goes with that prompt or not, but.
- You set that bar high and he has to reach it.
- I'm just thinking of a child that I have right now and he can read wonderfully – and he can comprehend. I'm 99.9% sure if I asked him any question – but because of some of the vocabulary, you know those questions are written you know at a higher level that he has not been taught and is not ready for it – he is going to be penalized. And I know that goes back to my instruction where I place him and the next steps and paths I take, but it's hard for parents to even understand –you know, my child can read, but because he can't answer two questions, he's – you know – Does two questions really measure comprehension?

Third Grade Teachers:

- Like I said, I'm a new teacher here and I think the time constraints are a challenge. We are just starting the beginning of the year having rules and procedures and as a community and then we need to be with our students and to be pulling them to test them.
- When second ends, then third grade picks up. That …. Going back and forth to figure out where their starting point is. So, if we could collaborate more about that with our second grade teachers – that might help us better in third grade at the beginning, time wise as well.
- It's difficult for third grade because they are also doing the 3-5 assessment, so they have to do the BOG, the EOG, which is a piece that the second grade doesn't have to do. So, double the assessments testing the same kid multiple times for the same information. That's when there is an issue.
- Time to do the assessments! Being sure that the assessment is scored in the same way.

8. **Describe how the curriculum is aligned for the use of a common literacy assessment in second and third grade. How could this be improved upon in the future?**

Second Grade Teachers:

- I think the state is taking steps by tweaking everything …. Can we go back to the standard – but they are trying to do a better job focusing on instruction.

- The standards build the assessment. Um, one thing that might be helpful is to periodically check in with the second and third grade teachers. There may be some trends and patterns that we can address.
- I think that the common core standards are aligned very well to promote the use of common assessments. The problem is that teachers don't always understand exactly what the standards mean and or don't teach the standards as deeply as they are intended to be taught.

Third Grade Teachers:

- Well, with our Common Core, it builds upon every previous grade level. You know, reading is reading is reading, but then you just dive deeper the more you grow in each grade level. So, we're just building off of what second grade has done, which is why the common assessment is good because then we can know, OK, they left off at an "L" I still have a lot of work to do with this child, let me keep building on that.
- I don't see an issue with the curriculum being a hindrance in any way.

9. **Describe the instructional practices that are used consistently between second and third grade that support the use of a common literacy assessment.**

Second Grade Teachers:

- I think since the implementation of mClass and I'm only speaking because I don't know what took place before, our third grade teachers are now doing guided reading groups within their classrooms whereas before reading instruction was more whole group or basil, you know, based on basal, so we're seeing that more consistency with guided reading with mClass, with progress monitoring, um.
- It goes back to where we're speaking the same language – whereas before in third grade it didn't mean anything to them and they were just kinda waiting.
- There was a strained philosophy.
- Within that literacy model, I know we had some concerns as a grade level, is writing. And they are using the Lucy Calkins units of study, but then when our students are going to third grade that doesn't continue – there is a huge disconnect between the writing program – well not necessarily program – but the writing instruction we use at White Oak and it's almost like they hit DF Walker and that true Writer's Workshop format stops. It ends. And reading and writing are so interrelated and so interconnected, um, ya know, we have concerns with that because we have to teach through Common Core: persuasive, narrative, um, informational writing, but then they go to third grade and that just stops. Not that they're not integrating writing into other things – it's just not a continuation – and I know as a grade level we have expressed concerns with that, um.
- Other than the mClass assessments, and maybe guided reading, I think third grade does guided reading, I'm not really sure about how the third grade teachers teach literacy.

Third Grade Teachers:

- I think definitely guided reading.

- We both have a solid 90 minutes, second grade and third grade and we both schools have another person that comes into our classrooms to help us with that literacy block.
- Second and third grade teachers using guiding reading groups.

10. Describe how instructional practices could be more consistent between second and third grade to support the use of a common literacy assessment better in the future.

Second Grade Teachers:

- I think I just answered that.
- I think that the Professional Development should be offered to second and third grade together about how our grades should be teaching guided reading and what materials are appropriate to use. I also think that there has to be more buy-in from both grades to agree to work together and think in terms of vertical planning instead of random meetings. Maybe if the second and third grade teams had a PLC that met once a month and discussed data and instructional practices and grouping for maximum success.

Third Grade Teachers:

- I think as third graders – third grade teachers at DF Walker, we probably know more about what goes on in the fourth and fifth grade classes. I'm not so sure I can answer that question because I have never been in their second grade literacy block. So, in my mind, I'm thinking it's very similar to ours.
- I don't know if the instructional strategies can be better necessarily, because you are working with two different age groups. I did teach second grade and I looped up to third grade with the same class. And what we'd find in the second grade was very similar to what went on in third grade, but in third grade you could give those kids a little more independence to do some seatwork or to do some rotations that don't necessarily require a teacher in front of them, where in second grade – because they come to you as seven year olds – you need to have a little more of that one-on-one.
- We need to continue to use guiding reading and share resources and information between the grade levels.

11. Are there any instructional practices and/or curriculum requirements that create barriers to the transition between the second and third grade that hinder the use of a common literacy assessment?

Second Grade Teachers:

- I think it is difficult for our third grade teachers because they have the EOG's, the portfolio. And then they also are in the K-3 group, so they have all the mClass assessment so by the amount of time mClass takes, they have to prepare for the EOG's, and I think it really takes away a lot of that instructional time. The teachers talk about the struggle and how important writing is, but in time, great things come out of the assessment and I think we assess our kids so much.

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- Another thing is we are two separate schools. It is hard to bridge a gap between two separate schools.   That is a barrier.
- I will say it helped when we met together. …… We also understood their expectations of them.
- Even though we are connected, we are so big – even within one grade level it is hard to be efficient.
- We have so many people and so many peoples' opinions and philosophy. And time! We're just all within the last year or two – transitioning and trying to work together more meaningful – like with classroom observations – let me see what you're literacy station looks like. Let me see what this looks like, whereas before we met one afternoon a month and naturally when I see something awesome in your room I want to go back copies… whereas we've built relationships.
- Last year we had to go observe third grade and I went into one class and where they had to read a third grade level and I actually had one of my second graders say they had already used that in my room.
- The major barrio is the lack of constructive conversation between the grades and proper knowledge what the common core standards mean and how they spiral up and down.

Third Grade Teachers:

- For a teacher who has never taught third grade, sometimes instructional practice wise those kids may have had a teacher who has taught third grade, would be trying to get her kids ready because here she would know what is coming next and she may not have that experience with that.
- We definitely have a bigger barrier being two separate schools where in an original K-5 school they're not going to have that barrier because everyone is sort of collaborating together like on a daily basis where we only collaborate with second grade not a lot.
- The only hindrance I see is that we have a different view of the end result. Third grade teachers have to teach in a way that prepares students for the EOG, while that goal is not foremost in the minds of the second grade teachers.

12. **What types of support do you have in place for the teachers as they implement these assessments?**

Second Grade Teachers:

- One initiative that we had at White Oak was two adults working with the students in the classroom.
- One thing we could do is hire a sub again. We can really get a lot accomplished in a day.
- That was huge for us and that is something I hope we'll be able to continue because I'm just looking at we're almost into two weeks of the school and we're no where near finished and you're talking two weeks of instruction and most of it has been spent on test, test, test whereas that one particular we were able to knock out, I'd say ¾ of the class, um, and you might have only had 5-6 students left that you had to pull – and that, that was tremendously huge.
- That saved so much instructional time.

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- It did, it did. And we have Mrs. Thach to go to and assist and answer our questions and guide us and that's powerful now that she's working between both schools and helping to bridge that gap again between 2-3, so I'm excited about that because she's been in both pairs of shoes I guess you could say, having been in second grade teacher and having been a third grade teacher and understanding both sides of the fence, that's powerful.
- And you see what third grade is doing and you can bring it back to us and vice versa, so it's nice to have that.
- And we need to have a Read to Achieve meeting so we can talk about it – it's just hard.

Third Grade Teachers:

- I think we're the biggest support for each other. If we are stressed out about something, struggling, we come together as a group. We are the best support. Whether it is making a calendar, going to progress monitor, or just to be able to go talk to the teacher across the hallway or beside us about something our kids are struggling with. Right now it's a little bit harder but as we get to the middle of the year it levels out.
- Our instructional facilitator. She was just ours but is coming to us as a second grade but she is at both schools so she is constantly seeing everything that is going on and where we go from here and that sort of thing.
- We also have someone in our room for an hour and a half so we can get these assessments done and they can do whole group activities or rotations or what we need them to do so that they are not just doing busy work.
- Leveled book resources to use in progress monitoring – some support staff to help in implementation of testing – but need more!

13. **Are there additional types of support you could describe that you believe would offer more support for the teachers as they implement the assessments?**

Second Grade Teachers:

- Time. Again.
- More creative ways to get the daylong assessment time in. We've even talked about a staggered enrollment for second grade so we can start testing them, like they do in kindergarten.
- Yes, like they do in kindergarten.
- Just being creative in the way we do business.
- And, back to the resource. The need for more books. The need for better progress monitoring books because we're seeing a huge disconnect between progress monitoring texts and the benchmark texts. And even though I know we purchased some, there are still some huge disconnects between the leveling of progress monitoring books and benchmarks. And a lot of times when we use progress monitoring for progress monitoring for report card purposes for reporting to parents, we see our children regress and it's not that they can't read, it's just that the books don't necessarily and the comprehension questions don't necessarily match. I know we're working on that I just don't think we're completely there yet – especially with the higher leveled um texts that we use.

<u>Third Grade Teachers:</u>

- I was just coming again thinking if there was a substitute that would come in for a day, then we would come and sit out in the hall and get these kids tested quickly.
- (can't hear teacher talking)……….. I need to help a teacher get what she needs but I am scheduled at both places.
- I think also more assessments in second and third grade with writing. I've never done some of it – but the writing because the beginning of the year takes so long to do because of summer slump and you know the writing is just so hard for them that the TRC takes up time anyway – and also I think in third grade we do non-fiction first, these folks are going to have to have some non-fiction experience in writing before they leave us in second grade and the third grade assessment. There is a lot of staff development to be made available to get us on the same page.

<u>Other:</u>
<u>Second Grade:</u>

- Before we were talking about benchmarks – before we had the fiction and non-fiction and while they're available – that would be a huge thing for me, assessing the kids on the same type of book.

Research Question #1: Does the use of a common literacy assessment alleviate the discrepancy between second grade posttest and third grade pretest literacy assessment scores?

1. **Do you feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment between second and third grade? Please describe why you believe there is either a need or no need.**

Principal 1:

Yes, I definitely feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment. It's actually in our district because each grade level has a different school. K-2 is it's individual school and 3-5 is it's individual school and often times they have different programs going on. A common assessment helps us speak the same language, even though we are in different buildings. Furthermore, I definitely think we have to have that common assessment because of the differences in the curriculum and the expectations. Second grade has more of a primary approach to educating children whereas in third grade they take an upper elementary approach and so the common assessment gives us that common language again so that we can see exactly where children left second grade and where to begin in third grade instruction. So, I think it is definitely a very clear need between the two grade levels.

Principal 2:

Um, in this instance, um, in our case I do feel like there is a need, um, because one we are at two different schools and students are transitioning from – not only from second grade to third grade but from one school to another school. And so I do feel that there is a need for a common literacy assessment.

2. **Describe the assessments that came as part of the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in terms of how they either improve or hinder the literacy achievement for your students. If you feel they have no effect at all, please describe why you believe that is the case.**

Principal 1:

Well, the Read to Achieve laws are rather strenuous and in some ways, whew, they have been difficult to manage. I will also say they have held us even more accountable. They have made us truly look at individual children and individualized to ensure that every child is reaching their maximum potential. The hindrance of the Read to Achieve law is the time. We have been given so much and the teachers have not been given the money to fund it or the manpower to meet the needs and requirements of this testing. …… In addition to those things, it's just simply the time. It is just constantly testing our children. We are testing and don't have time to teach. So, the pros of the program are that it really has force us to kinda take a step back and look at our literacy instruction and ensure that is differentiation that truly meets the individual needs of the

children. There are several cons including not funding the program, the time it takes and that we are constantly testing our children – and giving them adequate time to be instructed.

Principal 2:

We have the mClass assessments at DF Walker that was new for our school and we also had the port – portfolio assessments that we used weekly with our students.

3. **How has the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as mCLASS, affected the transition between students in second and third grades? How is this different from using the differing assessments?**

Principal 1:

I absolutely love mClass. I know that a lot of principals would say that. MClass has given us a strong common language. It's almost like in second grade we're speaking Spanish and in third grade we're speaking English and the two cannot communicate. MClass has allowed the two grade levels to truly see each other's perspectives. We now know when a child leaves second grade reading an M and comes into third grade reading that M, we know exactly what that means. We know in second and third grade what it takes to read that M. We know what it looks like. We know what the comprehension ability is. What their writing ability is. So, it's just again – it has serve to be that common language piece. And mClass has also given us the differentiation piece – the ability to look at our children's data and differentiate instruction according to the interventions that they need. It's so diagnostic it allows us to go back and pick up skill deficits that we may not have seen without this diagnostic tool. It is so specific and individualized that without it, we would miss a lot of the skill deficits that the children have. And I feel that because we are using mClass K-2, it better prepares children for third grade when they do have to take that state test. Third grade was also not as familiar with running records and the process that K-2 used for their primary form of diagnostic assessment in order to drive their instruction. So, mClass has made them familiar with that approach and has helped them see and understand the children's' needs so much better when they are coming to them in third grade.

Principal 2:

Um, I am going to start with using the different assessments because, um, before mClass was state mandated for third grade, we were receiving mClass data from our feeder school, White Oak, and the teachers really didn't know what to do with that data because they weren't trained in how to read it and how to disaggregate it. Now that it has been state mandated and we are using it from down at White Oak all the way to fourth grade, when teachers receive that information from White Oak, they look at it instantly, know what it's saying, understand it and they base their instruction and interpretation based on what they receive from mClass.

4. **Please describe how the common assessment meets the needs of the students in your classroom.**

Principal 1:

Well, the common assessment, I know that I have said that several times – it helps us speak the common language, but, um, what it does is that differentiation piece. It is so much more personalized, so much more individualized. It's one on one so that teacher – I hate to use the word forced, but she is – she is required to sit one on one with every child in her classroom, and basically, just like a doctor would listen to a patient's needs, the teacher is listening to that child's reading needs. Then the program is such that it is able to prescribe interventions for our children – or at the bare minimum give our teachers the data that they need to implement – to research and implement- appropriate interventions for the children. The common assessment is a powerful thing. You know, we have eight teachers in third grade. Those eight teachers are then able to go back and discuss the needs that they see prevalent among the grade level and as a grade level team, they are able to work to implement common instruction throughout the grade level to meet the needs of that group of children. And so, we take it from the individual level when we see certain prevalent needs we're able to address it as a group as well. So, the common assessment has definitely served as a powerful role in that area.

Principal 2:

Um, mClass for example gives you a detailed diagnostic of the whole student – what their needs are, um, as far as having reading difficulty. What is that difficulty specifically in? And it could be in comprehension or fluency or something of that nature. So I think the common assessment from mClass helps all the teachers disaggregate down to the nitty bitty needs of that individual student.

5. **How do you believe an effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured in terms of literacy achievement?**

Principal 1:

I think mClass is a critical piece to the second and third grade transition. I think that we definitely need to continue doing that. It is a lot, but the constant progress monitoring mixed with the constant intervention, but frankly, that's good teaching. Looking at the individual needs of our children and prescribing interventions and then reassessing to make sure those interventions work for the children. It's just good teaching. I think in looking at second to third grade we have to have lots of collaboration between the two grade levels. We have to have open lines of communication where they always feel that they can talk to the other team about what they're seeing. You known, the third grade teachers need to be able to say, "Hey, we saw this as a weakness in our kids this year. Come talk to us about this. Is this something you say in second grade?" And, second grade needs to be able to feel like they can talk openly about that particular group of children and what their needs may be. Um, so there's lots of things that need to happen for second and third grade to have a successful transition. But, open communication is a critical

piece, whether it be with the teachers or the administrators. You know, we're in a unique situation because K-2 is a school and 3-5 is a school. And since we are completely separate entities, for us to have a successful transition we really have to be able to work together between schools which means that our leadership has to be on the same page. We have to constantly collaborate and communicate to make sure that K-2 is preparing the children for 3-5 and that the 3-5 has a keen awareness of the developmental needs of K-2 students so that we understand the history of those students when they come to us. But, communication for everybody is the critical piece and beyond that, I do believe that mClass is a pro for both schools because it is our common language. It is our common assessment and it helps us all stay on the same page and helps us to be able to evaluate our children and discuss them using the same tools.

Principal 2:

Um, time, training and – and they – they kinda coincide. Just having time to meet – meetings between those two grades in particular and having training for them – to see - for third grade to see what going on in second grade and what they would need for the students when they get them in third grade and vice versa – having those second grade teacher see that ok – this is what third grade did with these students – and we're seeing what you're doing with them after we've had them.

Research Question #2: What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

6. **Describe the benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades.**

Principal 1:

Well, the benefit is that common language piece. We all know mClass. Before mClass third thru fifth grade did one thing and K through two did another. So, second grade was taking the running record approach where the third grade was taking the more reading to learn approach. You know you learn to read in second grade and third grade is looking at a more reading to learn approach. And they learn, in third grade, to go back and pick up those diagnostic skills. So, a common assessment allows us to speak the same language, know the of the history of the student because we can look in mClass and say, "This is what this kid did in second grade, this is what happened in first grade." And we're seeing those skill deficits so that perhaps when the child gets to third grade they may not be on grade level but they can follow that mClass record back and see, "Oh my, they're not on grade level, but look how far they came. They came in so much lower." The common assessment is powerful if for nothing more than the common language. But beyond that, it gives us such good tools for diagnosing and prescribing interventions for our students that that tool is also a major component.

Principal 2:

The prime benefits is the consistency and the continuity of um those common assessments.

7. **Describe the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades.**

Principal 1:

Well, the challenges for mClass, it was a lot when it first came out. Any – any change is always an adjustment, but mClass entails a lot. You really have to understand the program. Also, the teachers who had done running records, they weren't computerized and so teachers that struggled with technology really had a hard time with mClass in the beginning. Now we have used it so long it is second nature and second… that we really have not experienced those problems. But, in the beginning technology was something we really had to overcome. We've had lots of professional development just to be able to use the program – just be able to get the very basic, bare minimum things. Once we got the technology down – you know, there were some glitches with mClass. It was new. We had - just some issues they had to work out on the mClass end. Teachers would do things and it wouldn't sync and they would lose their data and it was just very frustrating. Um, beyond that – the time at the beginning was a big constraint because again it's new, it takes you longer to do something that's new because you're still learning. It was so individualized that that, too, took a lot of time that was, "Ok, well, what's the rest of the class doing when I'm working with this one individual child?" And, it took time, um, for school leadership, for grade levels and individual teachers to paint a picture with a vision for what instruction with mClass would look like. In the beginning the challenge was buy-in as well. You know teachers are sometimes so overloaded and have so many expectations so we had to make a cultural shift where we made mClass the common assessment – an expectation. We had to show teachers the value in it and that we believed in it so that it would be bought into – because what's bought into is utilized for student success. So, there were quite a few challenges in the beginning, but I can say now, that I think most teachers would agree that mClass is a powerful tool for us to use and that it has been transformational in our ability to diagnose and prescribe reading interventions for our children.

Principal 2:

For our case the biggest challenge is having two different schools for those two different grade levels; two different administrators and to not necessarily the two different sets of teachers, but having those teachers in different schools under different administrators.

8. **What opportunities are presented to align the curriculum with a common literacy assessment in second and third grades?**

Principal 1:

Um, well some things that we have done have been collaborative planning where we have actually focused on the professional development of the common assessment during collaborative planning, um, and we do that for second and third grade. Also, giving both grade levels we had collaborative sessions with the two grade levels together so that we can look at, um, the assessment and how its been implemented. Making sure we have done it with fidelity across

both grade levels and that everybody's expectation is equal and most of all that we are meeting the state's expectation for the mClass program. Um, beyond that in our collaborative sessions we also paint the picture for what instruction looks like in alignment with this assessment. So we've got the assessment now what do we do with it? WE look at our data. We divide our children into groups and then we discuss what types of instruction need to occur for the children to be successful based on the common assessment.

Principal 2:

Our PLC's. The common planning and in the past we've tried to have those two particular grade levels have common planning time at the same time.

9. What challenges are presented in aligning the curriculum with a common literacy assessment in second and third grades?

Principal 1:

Well, the challenges I kinda spoke to earlier, uh, the buy-in in the beginning. Again – teachers have the support to see the future vision and to see how this is going to work for their children. Technology in the beginning was a huge curve because it is – this common assessment is very technology rich. We had to really have a lot of professional development so that teachers did feel comfortable using the technology so that we could move into the next step. One challenge that I haven't talked about was the data. Once you have the data once you've learned what you're doing you don't want it to be done for the sake of being done. You want it to be done so that teachers can use the data to drive their instruction. So, that was a challenge that we had to overcome. Especially in second grade. We weren't as used to or as accustomed to being diagnostic with our data. "Ok, we have it, now what do we do with it?" So we had to really teach teachers how to really use that data to group their children then how to use that data to further their instruction so they can use it for a formative assessment piece with their progress monitoring to drive the interventions they were prescribing for the kids. So, in addition to buy-in, technology development, time-constraints, data would be an additional challenge that I haven't spoke about yet and just being familiar with how to use the data.

Principal 2:

Oh, the time again – and not always being able to have those two grade levels or teams meet at a time that is beneficial for the group.

10. What types of instructional practices are consistent between second and third grade that support and/or hinder a common literacy assessment?

Principal 1:

Um, well, second grade really focuses more on learning to read. That is part of the culture in any K-2 program. They are very diagnostic. They are looking at things like phoneme segmentation, phonemic awareness, and letter name and fluency. The different tests that mClass requires really fits with that learning to read mentality. In third grade the whole focus shifts because there is no end of grade assessment and that comprehension piece is so huge on the EOG. Third grade it focuses more on reading to learn. So they – I won't say they've left those diagnostic pieces – those individual components that it takes to be a good reader – but they have to move on for what the curriculum calls for. So that's something that is very different between the two grade levels and a common literacy assessment has had to basically force the two to talk to each other. So, we have the DIEBLES component of mClass for third grade that helps them go back and pick up those skill deficits that others – that the kids may have missed, you know, before coming into third grade and be diagnostic about how to help the children move forward.

Principal 2:

Um, the small group instruction, um, has been awesome. The, um, using the Daily 5 and having those teachers meet during, um, PLC time to discuss, um, the portfolios, the mClass, um, data and having, um, the administrators to come in and meet with, um, the second grade group or either the third grade group all at one time.

11. What types of support are in place for you as you implement these assessments?

Principal 1:

Um, well we've had –initially – we've had lots of professional development and training offered, you know, by the state. We've had regional facilitators that are available to come in to support us with mClass as needed. We also have a district and Title 1 elementary director who is always willing to help and available and to assist as needed. And so I do feel like we've had lots of resources on the leadership end to be successful with the program.

Principal 2:

Um, yea, I didn't want to be redundant. (question answered above)

12. Are there additional types of support you could describe that would support the transition for you as you implement the assessments?

Principal 1:

Well, we've tried a lot of things. We've tested a lot of possibilities between the two. I sometimes, I do feel that K-5 school would be much easier to implement the K-3 transition. I really feel that some of the major challenges that we experienced was because of two different leadership styles at the elementary schools. Not that one was right and one was wrong – I don't mean that by any means at all. I just mean we were very different and the schools were kinda going in different directions and it seemed as if no matter how hard we tried we just could not get going in the same direction. And so I do feel that one K-5 school would eliminate a lot of the challenges of the 2-3 transition. I'm not saying that's the only one – there's still some things - that learning to read, reading to learn curve that we would have to overcome – and just the differences in the curriculum. The curriculums are very different. But, many of our challenges would have been eliminated with a K-5 program.

I do think we've come a long way with our transition. I've had the privilege to work in two school systems both of which had K-2 schools and 3-5 schools and I can see evidence in both districts that the common assessments have greatly helped the 2-3 transition. So, I do think we've come a long ways – I want to give credit where credit is due. We still have a ways to go, but I think we are on the right track and going in the right direction. I believe within the next several years we are going to reap the rewards in our data that will show success.

Principal 2:

Um, continue training as teachers come in and out, um. We've tried looping, and having, um, those teachers wear different hats to see what's on the other side of the fence, um, to try to have more planned PLC's together. That is hard to do between the two schools, but that would be a huge support and the continued, um, blended meetings with the administrators of those two schools for second and third grade.

The instructional facilitators have been a big help as well – not only for the whole school – but specifically for the second and third grade teachers as far as Read to Achieve, as well.

APPENDIX K: ANALYSIS OF TEACHER FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #1

Focus Group Question #1:

Question #1	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Do you feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment between second and third grade? Please describe why you believe there is either a need or no need.	• Yes, since we have EOG's (end of grade tests) at third grade • *Heads nod within group.* • Yes, common assessments to bridge the gap between second and third grade.	• Yes, noting two grades are at different school buildings. • Yes, a need to learn the two grades. • Yes, some discrepancies have been alleviated, but there are still differences. • Yes, both sets of educators need to have similar information to track student growth.

Focus Group Question #2:

Question #2	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Describe the assessments that came as part of the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in terms of how they either improve or hinder the literacy achievement for your students. If you feel they have no effect at all, please describe why you believe that is the case.	• Read to Achieve (RTA) gave us mClass. • There is a disconnect due to lack of information about RTA. • There is a need to know more about each grade level. • Summer reading helped to learn about RTA. • Don't know.	• RTA prepares children for reading longer passages, improves stamina, holds teachers accountable. • Similar format to the NC End of Grade Test (EOG) • The language is similar to EOG's. • Information gained from RTA can be useful in tracking growth, but it is time consuming. • Progress monitoring within RTA does not improve student performance. • Quote in relation to progress monitoring in RTA: *"I can take my child's temperature everyday when they are sick, but if I never treat him, he won't get better."*

Focus Group Question #3:

Question #3	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
How has the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as mClass, affected the transition between students in second and third grades? How is this different from using the differing assessments?	• Gives us common ground • We know and understand what it means • Good thing: third grade teachers get an idea of abilities of the reader when they enter third grade. • Bad thing: consistency with fiction / non-fiction texts – need to be more consistent.	• Provides and bridges the gap. • Allows teachers to talk back and forth about something they are familiar with. • Assessments have made the transitions better. • Can be difficult for parents to understand differences in scoring.

Focus Group Question #4

Question #4	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Please describe how the common assessment meets the needs of the students at your school.	• Dibels data drives instruction and helps make decisions on what each child needs. • Common assessments drive everything you do. • Assessment scores should match from one grade to another. • More consistent (all teachers have been trained) • Speak same language • Allows for fidelity within assessment and grading practices within the school. • Administration can get a clear view of what the students can / can not do.	• We can see what level they are reading at • We can better reach them • Can have students with same needs in groups • Without common assessments, we wouldn't be able to place students in correct groups. • The reading with every child allows teacher to know specific skills to work on and how to group them in level-base and in skill base.

Focus Group Question #5:

Question #5	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
How do you believe an effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured in terms of literacy achievement?	- The mClass testing itself - Common ground - Common language - Common understanding - TRC's and data bridges the gap - Needs to be more understanding from both parties in reference to the expectations. - Need to spend time together to build more - Increase commonality in the way assessments are administered, scored and created.	- Need buy-in from both schools. - Need buy-in from both teams. - If not, then you are not going to reap the benefits of it.

APPENDIX L: ANALYSIS OF PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW RESPONSES

FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #1

Interview Question #1:

Question #1	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
Do you feel there is a need for a common literacy assessment between second and third grade? Please describe why you believe there is either a need or no need.	- Yes, there is a need. - Reason: each grade level has a different school. - Prek-2 & 3-5 - Helps speak the same language - Differences in curriculum and expectations - Second grade: primary approach to teaching - Third grade: upper elementary approach to teaching - Can see where children left second grade and where to begin in third grade - Clear need between two grade levels	- There is a need. - Two different schools - Students are transitioning - Grade to grade - School to school

Interview Question #2:

Question #2	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
Describe the assessments that came as part of the implementation of the Read to Achieve Law in terms of how they either improve or hinder the literacy achievement for your students. If you feel they have no effect at all, please describe why you believe that is the	- RTA is rather strenuous and in some ways have been difficult to manage. - Hold principals and teachers accountable. - Made us look at individual children - Individualized reading potentials. - Been given so much (to do) with limited money or funds to meet the requirements. - Constantly tests the children.	- mClass Assessments were new to the school. - Implementation of the portfolio - Used weekly

| case. | • Testing without time to teach.
• Made us make sure that differentiation truly meets individual learning needs.
• Cons: Funds & Time | |

Interview Question #3:

Question #3	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal

How has the implementation of a common literacy assessment, such as mClass, affected the transition between students in second and third grades? How is this different from using the differing assessments?	• I love mClass!
	• mClass provides a strong common language.
	  o *"In the past, it was like second grade was speaking Spanish and third grade was speaking English and the two could not communicate."*
	• mClass has allowed two grades to see each other's perspectives.
	• mClass allows for differentiation
	• Diagnostic; able to go back and pick up on deficits
	• mClass has made third grade more familiar with the running records approach.
	• Third grade has a better understanding of children's needs going into third grade.
	• Quote on tape.
		• Before mClass was state-mandated, the teachers from the feeder school didn't know what to do with the data because they were not trained.
		  o How to read it
		  o How to disaggregate it
		• mClass as a common assessment, teachers have better understanding from second grade and even up to fourth grade.
		• Teachers at the 3-5 school look at the data instantly now
		  o They know what it's saying
		  o They can understand it
		  o They can base their instruction from the data.
		  o They have clear interpretations of the data.

Interview Question #4:

Question #4	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal

Please describe how the common assessment meets the needs of the students in your classroom.	• Provides a common language.
	• Helps with differentiation
	• Personalized
	• Individualized
	• One-on-one
	• Teacher has expectations
	• Accountability
	• Quote on tape
	• Teachers are able to discuss the needs they see among the grade level
	• Teachers are able to implement common instruction throughout the grade level
	• Teachers are able to address needs - from individual to group.
		• mClass gives a detailed diagnostic of the whole student.
		  o Individual needs
		  o Determines area of reading difficulty
		• Measures comprehension
		• Measures fluency
		• Quote: Helps teachers disaggregate down to the nitty-bitty needs of that individual student

Interview Question #5:

Question #5	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal

How do you believe an effective transition between second and third grade can be ensured in terms of literacy achievement?	• mClass is a critical piece to the second and third grade transition.
	• Quote: "It is a lot with the constant progress monitoring, mixed with the constant intervention. But frankly, that's good teaching!"
	• Looks at individual needs
	• Prescribes interventions
	• Reassess to make sure the interventions work.
	• Collaboration between two grade
		• Time
		  o Time to meet
		  o Grade level meetings
		  o 2nd and 3rd Grade joint meetings
		• Training
		• Awareness of what is going on in 2nd grade for 3rd grade teachers.
		• Awareness of what is going on in 3rd grade for

	levels.
	• Open lines of communication
	    o Teachers
	    o Administrators
	    o Preparing 2nd for 3rd and knowing that 3rd has keen awareness of K-2 needs.
	• Common language
	• Common assessment
	• Common evaluation
	• Same tools
	    o "Same page"
	    o Same tools
		2nd grade teachers.

APPENDIX M: ANALYSIS OF TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS

FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #2

RESEARCH QUESTION #2: What do teachers and principals of second and third grade students report as the benefits and challenges of common literacy assessments?

Focus Group Question #6:

Question #6	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Describe the benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grade.	- Consistency with fiction and non-fiction texts - Common language in curriculum planning - More instructional time - Can see the summer slide from second to third grade and how much they are losing over the summer - Have had to look at opportunities to determine what to do to prevent summer slide.	- It gives third grade teachers a starting point from where second graders are entering third grade. - Second and third grade teachers have different idea of what the end result is. This has helped. - The final measurement in second grade is mClass - The final measurement in third grade is the EOG.

Focus Group Question #7:

Question #7	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Describe the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grade	- The portfolios take a huge amount of time - State recommends completing passages in a center. - May lose instructional time for all students - Need more book selections. - Have to use same books multiple times. - The summer slide between	- Time constraints - At the beginning of the year teachers are trying to implement rules and procedures, along with the testing. - When second grade ends, the third grade picks up and has to go back and forth with testing. - Need to collaborate more about target areas between grade levels. - Will help with

	second and third grade
	• Little time to get to know the students before they get tested within first few days of school
	• Instruction often could become a drill and kill.
	   ○ Example: Teacher sets timer "and it's a race."
	• Need to be careful that teaching and instruction do not become solely test prep
	• Need on-site trainings
	• By testing every nine weeks, it seems there is always a test.
	• Discrepancies between reading comprehension and writing scores.
	   ○ "If they can read at a level 40, they should be able to write at a level 40."
	• Maturity is a factor between second and third grade.
	• Set the bar high and student has to reach it.
	• Example: A student who can read and comprehend wonderfully may be penalized based on two comprehension questions if he has a bad day of testing
		instruction and time
		• Grade 3 already participates in the 3-5 assessments
		   ○ BOY
		   ○ Benchmarks
		   ○ EOG
		   ○ RTA
		   ○ mClass
		• Second grade only has mClass
		• Issue for third grade: double assessment testing the same students multiple times for the same information.
		• Time to do the assessments
		• Making sure the assessments are scored the same way.

Focus Group Question #8:

Question #8	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group

Describe how the curriculum is aligned for the use of a common literacy assessment in second and third grade. How could this be improved upon in the future?	• The state (NC) is taking steps to tweak the curriculum
	• Standards build the assessments
	   ○ Suggestion to periodically have second and third grade teachers check in with one another. There may be trends or patterns to address.
	• The Common Core standards are aligned to promote the use of common assessments.
	   ○ Problem: Teachers do not also understand what the standards mean or don't teach the standards as deeply as they could be taught.
		• With Common Core, the curriculum builds upon previous grade level.
		• Third grade is building off of what second grade has done.
		• No issue as a hindrance.

Focus Group Question #9:

Question #9	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Describe the instructional practices that are used consistently between second and third grade that support the use of a common literacy assessment.	• Presently: Guided Reading groups; In the past: whole group or basal. ○ Provides more consistency • Speaking the same language • Former strained philosophy of reading • Reference to the Lucy Calkins units of study and the K-2 vs. no set program at the 3-5 school: There is	• Guided Reading • 90-minutes of reading • Utilization of a second person in the room to aid with the literacy block • Guided Reading

	a huge disconnect between the writing program / instruction between the two schools. • mClass • Guided Reading o Still not real sure about how third grade teaches literacy

Focus Group Question #10:

Question #10	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group

Describe how instructional practices could be more consistent between second and third grade to support the use of a common literacy assessment better in the future.	• Professional development for second and third grade teachers together
	  o How to teach guided reading consistently
	  o More buy-in from both grades to work together
	  o Vertical planning
	  o Planned PLC's for maximum success
	    ▪ Discuss data
	    ▪ Discuss instructional practices
		• Third grade knows more about fourth and fifth grade because of location in building. There is a need to know more about second grade.
		  o Never been in a second grade literacy block.
		• Two different age groups
		• Looping
		  o There are similarities
		• Third grade has more independence
		• Need to continue guided reading
		• Share resources and information between the grade levels.

Focus Group Question #11:

Question #11	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
Are there any instructional practices and/or curriculum requirements that create barriers to the transition between the second and third grade that hinder the use of a common literacy assessment?	- Third grade teachers have the EOG's, the portfolio for RTA, and mClass. - Takes a lot of instructional time. - Assess kids too much - Two separate schools - Helps when meet together - Big – even within school - So many people and so many opinions and philosophies. - Time - Working on working together more - Observing others is helpful, just little time - Lack of constructive conversation between the grade levels, including curriculum	- Instructional practices for teachers who do not know about the other grade level. - Bigger barrier by being two separate schools - Hinders collaboration - Different views of the end result - Third grade prepares for the EOG - Second grade does not have the EOG

Focus Group Question #12:

Question #12	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group
What types of support do you have in place for the teachers as they implement these assessments?	- Two adults working with students in reading block - Have hired a sub to help cover the classes during assessments - With the substitute in place, teachers were able to get 2/3 of the class complete - Saved instructional time - Use of Instructional Facilitator	- Teachers are one another's greatest support. - Make calendar - Progress monitor - Talk to one another for support - Instructional Facilitator - Knows the dynamics of both schools/grades

	o Assist and answer questions o Serves both the 2nd and 3rd grade o Knowledge of 2nd and 3rd grade teaching o Understanding of both grades • Need to have more meetings, such as the RTA meeting	o Knows the curriculum and assessments of both schools/grades • Second person in room during reading block o Teacher can complete assessments • Leveled book resources to use in progress monitoring o But there is a need for more

Focus Group Question #13:

Question #13	2nd Grade Focus Group	3rd Grade Focus Group

Are there additional types of support you could describe that you believe would offer more support for the teachers as they implement the assessments?	• Time
	• Creative ways to get time to do assessments
	• Creative in way we do business w/current resources
	• Need more resources:
	  o Progress monitoring books
	  o Specifically higher leveled books
	• There is a need to make sure each grade level is testing the students with the same type of book: fiction or non-fiction to ensure appropriate comparisons in measurements of data
		• Hire a substitute again to help cover the classes so the teachers can assess.
		• Avoid double scheduling / time.
		• There is a need for more assessments in second and third grade with writing.
		• There is a need for more staff development to get teachers on the same page.

APPENDIX N: ANALYSIS OF PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW RESPONSES

FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #2:

Interview Question #6:

Question #6	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
Describe the benefits of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades.	- Common language - Before mClass, third grade did one thing and K-2 did another. - K-2: Running Record approach - Third: Reading to Learn approach - With the same language, teachers know the history of the student by viewing the student data in mClass. Quote Gives good tools for diagnosing and prescribing interventions	- Consistency of assessments - Continuity of assessments

Interview Question #7:

Question #7	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
Describe the challenges of implementing a common literacy assessment in both second and third grades.	- An adjustment - Have to understand the program - A challenge for teachers who struggle with technology. - A lot of professional development already for the basic implementation. - There were some glitches with the program. - Teachers would lose data. - Information would not sync - Frustrating - Takes longer to implement	- Having two different schools for two different grade levels - Two different administrators - Two sets of teachers

	something new because of time to learn.	
	• Took time to pain a vision for the school for what instruction with the mClass assessment should look like.	
	• Had to show teachers the value.	
	• mClass is a powerful tool to use and has been transformational in ability to diagnose and prescribe reading interventions for the children.	

Interview Question #8:

Question #8	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal

What opportunities are presented to align the curriculum with a common literacy assessment in second and third grades?	• Collaborative planning by grade levels
	  o Focus on professional development of the common assessment
	    ▪ Second and third grades
	• Collaborative sessions jointly with second and third grade together
	• Equal expectations
	• Meeting the state's requirements of Read to Achieve and the implementation of mClass.
	• "Paint a picture" of what instruction looks like in alignment with this assessment.
	  o Quote: "So, we've got the assessment, now what do we do with it?"
	• Assessment requires educators to look at data and determine instruction
	  o Divide students in groups
	  o Discuss different type of instructional needs.
	• Connecting instruction to the assessment
		• The PLC's (Professional Learning Communities) – professional development for teachers.
		• The common planning.
		• Two grade levels with common planning times when possible.

Interview Question #9:

Question #9	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
What challenges are presented in aligning the curriculum with a common literacy assessment in second and third grades?	- Teacher buy-in at the beginning of implementing a common literacy assessment. - Technology - Professional development - Data - Understanding what to do with the data once it is gathered - Needs to drive instruction - Purposely being diagnostic with interpretation of data - Use the data from formative assessments / progress monitoring to drive the interventions they prescribe for the kids. - Time-constraints	- Time - Not being able to have those two grade levels or teams meet at a time that is beneficial for both groups.

Interview Question #10:

Question #10	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal
What types of instructional practices are consistent between second and third grade that support and/or hinder a common literacy assessment?	- Second Grade - Learning to Read - Very diagnostic - Measures phoneme segmentation, phonemic awareness, and letter name and fluency. - Different tests from mClass fit with the "learning to read" mode. - Third Grade - Reading to Learn - Students have to	- Small group instruction has been awesome. - Using the Daily 5 program along with assessments. - Teachers meeting during PLC times - Discussions - Portfolios - mClass - Data - Having administration present at PLC's - Collaborative PLC with 2nd and 3rd grade teachers and administrators

	move on from diagnostic pieces to individual components of being a good reader. • The Dibels component of the mClass for third grade helps them pick up the skill-deficits. • Teachers can be more diagnostic about how to help the children move forward.	

Interview Question #11:

Question #11	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal

What types of support are in place for you as you implement these assessments?	• Professional Development
	 • Trainings by the state
	 • Regional Facilitators to provide support
	 • District Elementary and Title 1 Director
	 • Resources on leadership end
		(Same as last answer)
		 • Small group instruction has been awesome.
		 • Using the Daily 5 program along with assessments.
		 • Teachers meeting during PLC times
		     o Discussions
		     o Portfolios
		     o mClass
		     o Data
		     o Having administration present at PLC's
		 • Collaborative PLC with 2nd and 3rd grade teachers and administrators

Interview Question #12:

Question #12	K-2 Principal	3-5 Principal

Are there additional types of support you could describe that would support the transition for you as you implement the assessments?	• We have tried a lot of things and tested possibilities between the two schools.
	• A K-5 school could make it much easier to implement the K-3 transition.
	   o Some of the major challenges have been due to different leadership styles
	   o Would assist with the merging of the concept of "learning to read" and "reading to learn" in one building
	   o Better connections with curriculum in one building.
	• The two schools have come a long way with the transition.
	• Common assessments have helped with the 2-3 transition.
	• Quote: "We are on the right track and going in the right direction. I do believe within the next several years we are going to reap the rewards in our data that will show success."
		• Continue training as teachers come in and out.
		• We've tried looping
		   o Teachers wear different hats to see what's on the other side of the fence.
		• Try to have more planned PLC's together
		   o That's hard to do between two schools
		   o But, would be a huge support
		• Blended meetings with administrators of the two schools for the two grades.
		• Use of Instructional Facilitators
		   o Whole school
		   o Grades two and three for RTA

APPENDIX O: NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS SURVEY

FOR WHITE OAK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, 2014

NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey for WOS – Instructional Practices 2014 – 2012

Q9.1	**Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support in your school. (White Oak School)**		
	a. State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	95.3%	88.9%
	b. Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	100.0%	93.7%
	c. Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	97.7%	91.9%
	d. The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Common Core Standards.	97.7%	89.5%
	e. Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	97.8%	94.7%
	f. Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	100.0%	89.5%
	g. Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.	100.0%	91.7%
	h. Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	87.8%	45.5%
	i. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy).	93.0%	73.7%
	j. State assessments provide schools with data that can help improve teaching.	95.3%	87.5%
	k. State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards.	79.1%	71.9%

APPENDIX P: NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS SURVEY

FOR D.F. WALKER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, 2014

Teacher Working Conditions Survey for DFW – Instructional Practices 2014 – 2012

Q9.1	**Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support in your school. (DF Walker)**		
	a. State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	36.1%	64.7%
	b. Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	91.4%	93.9%
	c. Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	94.4%	97.1%
	d. The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Common Core Standards.	100.0%	88.6%
	e. Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	83.3%	97.1%
	f. Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	82.9%	97.1%
	g. Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.	94.4%	97.1%
	h. Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	50.0%	67.6%
	i. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy).	82.4%	85.3%
	j. State assessments provide schools with data that can help improve teaching.	61.8%	72.7%
	k. State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards.	41.2%	55.9%