

1-1-2011

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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF READING FIRST PROGRAMS ON STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT IN K-3 CLASSROOMS IN SELECTED
MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

By

Angel LaKease Day-Meeks

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Administration
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

December 2011

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Title of Study: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF READING FIRST PROGRAMS ON
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN K-3 CLASSROOMS IN SELECTED
MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS

Pages in Study: 124

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This study investigated the implementation and impact of Reading First programs in 8 elementary schools across the state of Mississippi. The study assessed how principals, literacy coaches, and kindergarten through third grade teachers perceived the implementation of the Reading First program at their respective schools. Data from these three groups of research participants were analyzed to determine if there were differences in perceptions regarding program implementation. This study also examined if there was a relationship between participants' judgment about implementation and second and third grade students reading scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT).

This study employed descriptive, survey, causal-comparative, and correlational research. Descriptive data were used to describe research participants' gender, years of professional experience, highest degree held, and type of license held. Survey data were

used to determine the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools. An analysis of variance was used to determine if there were differences in the perceptions of the groups. Correlational statistics were used to analyze the possible existence of a relationship between principals', literacy coaches', and teachers' perceptions about implementation and second and third grade students' MCT reading scores.

The study found that principals and literacy coaches perceived that the Reading First program was being fully implemented, but teachers believed that the program was being moderately implemented. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers. However, the study did reveal that principals, literacy coaches, and teachers had similar ratings regarding the implementation of specific Reading First program components. There was no correlation between perceived implementation fidelity of the Reading First program and students reading test scores on the MCT.

Survey results revealed that most schools had fully implemented: (a) the uninterrupted, 90 minute reading block, (b) the 5 core elements of reading, (c) instructional strategies, and (d) support for struggling readers. Additionally, survey results indicated that schools need to strive toward fully implementing: (a) appropriate assessment strategies, (b) professional development activities that focus on reading instructional content and (c) instructional support activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must begin by thanking God for enabling me to reach this milestone. In the last few months, I have listened to and been inspired by Vashawn Mitchell's song, "*No Body Greater,*" for truly there is no one greater than God, and I am grateful for His grace, mercy, and provision.

Thank you to my husband, David, for literally "making the trip" with me. Thank you to my children, Latrisha, Jamal, Angeneka, and D'angela for being patient, understanding, and tolerant. Thank you Grandma Lillie Mae, for everything you have done to help me become the lady I am. Thank you Ma and Irish for instilling in me the value of hard work.

Thank you to all my family, friends, colleagues, church members and "experts" in the field. You are too numerous for me to name one by one, but I appreciate everything you have done for me.

Thank you Dr. Debra Prince for always being there and for bringing out the best in me. "You're Simply the Best!!!". Thank you Dr. Margaret Pope for co-directing my dissertation and helping me to get through the proposal writing stage. Thank you Dr. Donna Brocato and Dr. Frankie Williams for serving on my committee.

Thank you to the schools that participated in the study. Without your participation, this research study would not have been possible.

To everyone who played a role in me finishing this dissertation, I am eternally grateful and this research study is dedicated to each and every one of you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) into law, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of NCLB established the Reading First program, President Bush's and Congress' response to students' stagnate reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The Reading First program, Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of NCLB, was designed to significantly improve students' reading achievement by ensuring that early reading instruction in classrooms focused on scientifically research-based methods (Carlisle, Schilling, Scott, & Zeng, 2004). The theoretical foundation for the Reading First program was based upon the work of the National Reading Panel's *Teaching Children to Read* and the National Research Council's *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Theoretically, the overarching goal of the Reading First program was to improve the quality of reading instruction and, as a result, improve the reading skills and achievement of children in grades K-3 by providing substantial resources at both the state and local levels. Another goal of the Reading First program was to increase access to and the quality of professional development for all teachers in

these grades to ensure that teachers possess the skills needed to teach research-based reading programs. The last goal of the Reading First program was to ensure that teachers use assessments to monitor student progress and to identify students' reading problems early (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2008). Since the release of the National Reading Panel's report, many states have adopted phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as the five essential elements of core reading instruction, and local school districts have been required to adopt programs that follow the guidelines of the Reading First program.

In April 2002, the USDE began inviting state education agencies to apply for Reading First grants. Each year since 2002, the USDE has awarded approximately \$1.1 billion in Reading First grants to state education agencies. According to the most recent reports available, over \$6 billion in Reading First grant awards were given to 5,884 schools in 1,808 districts in all 50 states and other jurisdictions including American Samoa, Washington, DC, the schools of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Virgin Islands (USDE, n.d.).

Section 1205 of the Reading First legislation required the USDE to contract with an outside entity to evaluate program implementation (USDE, 2004). To meet this requirement, the USDE contracted with Abt Associates in October, 2003 to design and conduct the *Reading First Impact Study* (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008). Summary results from this study reported several findings. First, the majority of Reading First schools were implementing the major elements of the program as intended. Second, Reading First schools received more than adequate financial and nonfinancial support in

resources such as personnel, instructional materials, assessments, and professional development. Last, Reading First schools exhibited some gains in students' reading achievement, but the gains were not substantial enough based upon the enormous amount of resources provided (USDE, 2008).

Background Information

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the ESEA into law. The ESEA was designed to improve educational opportunities for poor children and has been the largest compensatory education program in America's history (American Youth Policy Forum, 1999; Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2001; Orfield, Debrary & McPartland, 1999). Title I, the educational centerpiece of the ESEA, was designed to narrow the educational gap between middle class and poor children by providing extra funding to schools with a large representation of low-income students (American Youth Policy Forum, 1999).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Title I funds were simply given to local schools as additional funds to operate programs for disadvantaged students. After the desired results of improving student achievement were not realized, the federal government provided more regulatory guidance to schools on how to "target" Title I services toward specific groups of students (Rowan, Barnes & Camburn, 2004). According to Yu and Taylor (1999), the guidance provided by the federal government led to pullout programs and other supplemental programs that had little to do with promoting systematic change within schools.

In 1969, the NAEP was administered for the first time as a means of monitoring student achievement results across the nation (National Center of Educational Statistics [NCES], 2003). Research trends showed the need for systematic change had been consistently evidenced by subpar student achievement results on the NAEP for more than three decades. For example, in 1994 less than 40% of fourth grade students across the nation were reading at the proficient level on the NAEP (Williams, Reese, Campbell, Mazzeo, & Phillips, 1995). In an effort to address this growing need, the USDE and the United States Department of Health and Human Services asked the National Academy of Sciences to establish a committee to examine the prevention of reading difficulties (Snow et al., 1998). According to Snow et al., the National Research Council (NRC), with support from the National Academy of Sciences, established a committee to review research on normal reading development; reading instruction; risk factors useful in identifying groups and individuals at risk of reading failure; and prevention, intervention and instructional approaches that yield optimal reading outcomes for students. The NRC was comprised of psychologists, neurobiologists, and educators. In 1998, the NRC published *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. The report offered the following recommendations for first through third grade reading curricula:

1. Beginning readers need explicit instruction and practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, sight word recognition, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing;
2. Time, materials, and resources should be provided with two goals: (1) to support daily independent reading of texts beneath the student's frustration

level and of interest to the individual student and (2) to support daily assisted reading and rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in linguistics or conceptual structure in order to promote advances in the student's capabilities; and

3. Schools should promote independent reading outside of school by such means as daily at-home reading assignments, summer reading lists, encouraging parent involvement, and by working with community groups, including public librarians, who share this goal (Snow et al., 1998, pp. 7-8).

Considering the foundational recommendations presented in the NRC's report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, Congress asked the Director of the NICHD, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children in grades K-3 to read (NICHD, 2002). This panel, known as the National Reading Panel (NRP), was comprised of 14 individuals including leading scientists in reading research, college of education representatives, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents. For more than two years, panel members reviewed research-based knowledge on reading instruction, held open panel meetings in Washington, DC, and hosted regional meetings across the United States (NICHD, 2002). The final report, entitled *The Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*, articulated that in order for children to be good readers, they must receive systematic, direct instruction in phonemic awareness skills, phonics skills, fluency, and comprehension (NICHD, 2002).

During his 1997 state of the union address, President William Clinton also put literacy instruction, particularly primary literacy instruction, at the center of national attention. In his address, he outlined three goals for education. His first goal was that every eight year-old must be able to read. Second, he challenged every state to adopt high national standards, and third, he recommended that by the year 1999 every fourth grade student be tested in reading. To support this early literacy goal, President Clinton launched the America Reads initiative which provided volunteers through the AmeriCorp program to tutor public school students in reading (Cable News Network [CNN], 2005). In addition, President Clinton's administration created the Reading Excellence Act of 1999 and Goals 2000 legislation which were to support literacy instruction in America's public schools (Good, Gruba, & Kaminski, 2001).

The national focus on literacy instruction continued throughout President George W. Bush's presidency. As previously mentioned, the Reading First program, was President George W. Bush and Congress's response to having less than 40% of fourth grade students scoring at a proficient level on the NAEP in 1994 (Williams et al., 1995). In comparison, the most recent NAEP reports revealed that in 2009, only 32% of fourth graders tested across the nation were reading at a proficient level (NCES, 2010).

In addition to the results found from USDE's *Reading First Impact Study*, other states like Michigan conducted their own evaluation of Reading First programs. Similar to USDE's report, Michigan reported that Reading First schools were implementing the Reading First program as designed. However, Michigan's Reading First schools reported yearly increases in the number of students reading at or above grade level and annual

decreases in the number of students considered to be substantially at-risk of reading failure (Carlisle & Zeng, 2007). Like Michigan, Mississippi was not included in the USDE's report. Therefore, there was a need to examine the implementation of Reading First programs in Mississippi.

Problem Statement

In 2005, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) released a report on the Mississippi Accountability System which assigned school levels based upon the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced and the extent to which schools met annual growth expectations in student achievement. School levels ranged from 1 (low-performing) to 5 (superior performing; MDE, 2005). Student achievement in Mississippi is reported according to proficiency levels – minimal, basic, proficient, and advanced. Students in the minimal category do not demonstrate mastery of content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade. Students in the basic category demonstrate partial mastery of the content knowledge and skill required for success at the next grade. Students scoring in the proficient category demonstrate solid academic performance and mastery of content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level, and students scoring in the advanced category consistently perform in a manner clearly beyond that required to be successful at the next grade level.

The 2005 Mississippi Accountability System data report indicated that student achievement in Mississippi was steadily increasing on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT), which is the state's annual summative assessment for students in Grades 2-8.

The same 2005 report also compared students' performance on the MCT to students' performance on the NAEP. Student achievement results indicated that the percent of students scoring proficient on the MCT reading assessment had increased from 2000 to 2005. Student achievement results on this comparison measure revealed that although 87% of fourth grade students scored proficient on the MCT reading assessment, only 18% of Mississippi's fourth grade students scored proficient on the NAEP reading assessment administered the same year. This disparity caused great concern for many Mississippi educators (MDE, 2005).

Given the above reason, the MDE applied for the Reading First grant. As previously mentioned, in April 2002, the USDE invited state education agencies to apply for Reading First grants. State education agencies submitted applications to the Secretary of Education for a six year period. State allocations were made available according to the proportion of children aged 5 to 17 who resided within the state and were from families with incomes below the poverty line (USDE, 2002). In turn, state education agencies made competitive subgrants available to local education agencies. Priority was given to local education agencies in which at least 15% of the children served, or at least 6,500 children served, were from families with incomes below the poverty line (USDE, 2002). In addition, USDE (2002) also required states to provide sufficient levels of funding to local education agencies to improve reading instruction and to provide funds to school districts based upon the number or percentage of students in kindergarten through third grade who were reading below grade level. Likewise, local education agencies had the responsibility of allocating funds to local schools that had the highest percentages or

numbers of students in kindergarten through third grade who were reading below grade level and were identified for school improvement (USDE, 2002).

Mississippi was one of 21 states to receive initial Reading First funds to support reading instruction in high poverty, low performing schools. In 2002, the state received more than \$11 million in Reading First grant funds (MDE, 2002). In each subsequent year from 2003 through 2007, Mississippi received between \$15 and \$16 million annually. According to the 2009 data report, Mississippi had received a total of \$93 million in Reading First funds (USDE, n.d.).

To date, 66 Mississippi schools have received funds to implement a Reading First program (USDE, n.d.). Of the 66 schools, 34 schools participated in the Reading First program for three or more years. Out of these 34 schools, 16 achieved and sustained growth to accountability levels of 3, 4, or 5 based upon the Mississippi Accountability System, while the other 18 schools had inconsistent accountability levels ranging from level 1 to level 4. Although several measures were used to determine accountability levels for schools, measures of reading achievement were considered the best single indicator of academic achievement (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2001). Therefore, examining perceptions of educators at these 34 schools with regards to the implementation fidelity of Reading First provided the most conclusive information regarding the implementation of Reading First within the state of Mississippi.

Purpose Statement

The state of Mississippi mirrors national efforts to implement effective research-based reading practices in K-3 classrooms as a means of increasing students' learning. Examining schools' adherence to implementing Reading First guidelines and examining the impact of Reading First programs on improving and sustaining improvements in students' reading achievement was important. Therefore, the purpose of this study was (a) to determine educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools; (b) to determine if there were differences among educators' perceptions; and (c) to determine if a relationship existed between educators' perceptions and the MCT reading scores of second and third grade students.

Significance

Educators' perceptions of implementation fidelity of the Reading First program are significant for several reasons. The Reading First program is based on scientifically research-based principles which can be replicated from school to school (USDE, 2002). Second, many nation-wide reading programs now reflect the principles mandated by Reading First (Manzo, 2005). Third, knowing the impact of programs such as Reading First on student achievement when the program is implemented with fidelity is important. Likewise, knowing the impact on student achievement when programs such as Reading First are not implemented with fidelity is equally important. Research results that address these concerns can be useful to schools and districts that are continually purchasing new programs in an effort to improve student achievement. If a district or school is not

achieving the desired results after purchasing a variety of programs, materials, and resources, the problem may be with implementation fidelity. Lastly, factors such as implementation fidelity must be considered when politicians and administrators are deciding whether to continue or discontinue funding for a program.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the principals' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?
2. What are the literacy coaches' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?
4. Are there differences among the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program within each school?
5. How do the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding implementation fidelity of the Reading First program relate to second and third grade students' reading outcomes on the 2004-2007 Mississippi Curriculum Test for each respective school?

Definition of Terms

The definitions that follow provide clarification for important terminology utilized throughout this research study.

1. Accountability system: The entire process that holds all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards) accountable for student achievement and growth. The accountability system includes the statewide assessment system, individual student accountability standards (grade level benchmarks and graduation requirements), rewards and sanctions for both school districts and individual schools, and procedures for the intervention in priority schools and schools that fail to improve over time (MDE, 2002).
2. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): The measure by which schools, districts, and states are held accountable for students' performance under Title I of the NCLB. States have the flexibility to define AYP, but the definition must include the use of students' performance on state reading, language arts, and mathematics tests and at least one other academic indicator. Secondary schools that have a Grade 12 must use their high school graduation rate as the other indicator. In Mississippi, average daily attendance is used as the other academic indicator for elementary schools, middle schools, and secondary schools without Grade 12. To make AYP, schools must test at least 95% of students in the entire school, along with testing at least 95% of students in each of four subgroups – economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency (*Education Week*, 2004).

3. Core elements of reading: The core elements of reading as defined by the National Reading Panel Report include the five key areas of reading instruction - phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NICHD, 2002).
4. Effective instruction: Practices and behaviors designed to establish and implement conditions that promote student learning (Armbruster et al., 2001).
5. Implementation fidelity: The delivery of instruction in the way in which it was designed to be delivered (Gresham, MacMillan, Boebe-Frankenberger, & Brocian, 2000).
6. Instructional strategies: Methods used to deliver curriculum standards to students in order to increase their knowledge and skills (Blair, Rupley & Nichols, 2007).
7. Proficient: The achievement of students who demonstrate solid academic performance and mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade. Students who perform at this level are well prepared to begin work on even more challenging material that is required at the next grade level (MDE, 2002).
8. Reading achievement: The proficiency standards set forth by the state of Mississippi for reading that determines students' success on curriculum tests for state standards and for AYP for federal standards (MDE, 2002).
9. School performance classification: The performance classification assigned to a school. A school's performance classification is determined by (a) the percentage of students at the school who are performing at criterion levels (basic and

proficient) and (b) the degree to which student performance has improved over time (based on an expected growth value for the school). The results from the Achievement Model and the Growth Model are combined to assign each school a school performance classification as follows: Level 5 - Superior - Performing School, Level 4 - Exemplary School; Level 3 - Successful School; Level 2 - Under - Performing School; Level 1 - Low-Performing School, and Not Assigned Schools - Schools that do not have assessment data, including schools serving grades K-2 (MDE, 2002).

Organization of the Study

This research study consisted of five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study. The introduction gave background information about student achievement concerns that led national leaders to enact Reading First legislation. Chapter 1 also addressed the need to review and conduct research on the implementation and achieved outcomes of Reading First programs.

Chapter 2, the review of related literature, presents findings from research studies related to Reading First program requirements, Reading First implementation, and Reading First student achievement outcomes. Results from previous studies are synthesized and summarized as a part of Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to conduct this research study. A description of the participants, instruments, procedures and analysis techniques used are given. Delimitations, limitations, and assumptions are also provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 reports the results obtained from this research study. Descriptive data are presented to describe participants. ANOVA and Pearson r statistical results are utilized to answer research questions related to educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program and the relationship between educators' perceptions and students' reading achievement outcomes on the MCT. Chapter 5 provides the study's conclusions. Chapter 5 also discusses implications of the study and presents recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature addresses various elements related to the Reading First program. The review highlights reasons that caused the nation to focus its attention on early literacy. In addition, the researcher presents the Reading First program's impact on changes in instructional strategies, student assessment, support for struggling readers, professional development, and instructional support. The importance of implementation fidelity and Reading First's impact on improving student achievement were examined.

Lack of Improvement in Students' Reading Achievement

The American public was exposed to an intense debate regarding real and perceived inadequacies of public education, particularly the lack of improvement in reading instruction and student achievement (Blair et al., 2007). The report from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) entitled, *How Does the United States Stack Up? International Comparison of Academic Achievement* declared that American educational progress remained idle even though academic opportunities, communication, technology, and production throughout the world advanced. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), reported that American secondary school students' performance varied from poor to average on almost every international assessment of academic proficiency. Moreover,

research conducted by Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto and Sum (2007) showed that the performance gap between the most and least proficient students in the United States was among the highest of all well developed countries. Additional statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2007) pointed out that many countries do a better job of educating their minority and high-poverty populations than the United States.

On a national level, the American College Testing Corporation (ACT, 2006) disclosed that in 2005 only 51% of ACT-tested high school graduates were ready for college-level reading. Similarly, the most recent statistics from the NAEP reported by NCES (2007) showed that nationally 32%, or less than one-third, of all fourth grade students were reading at or above the proficient level. The NAEP data also revealed the disparity between the reading performance of Caucasian and minority students. There were 42% of Caucasian fourth grade students tested reading at or above proficient on NAEP, while 16% of fourth grade African American students tested were reading at or above the proficient level on NAEP, and 20% of fourth grade Hispanic students tested were reading at or above the proficient level on NAEP. This represents an approximate reading achievement scale score gap of about 27 points between Caucasian students and minority students. These figures caused concern at both the national level and state level (NCES, 2007).

The Reading First Program

Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of the NCLB established the Reading First program (USDE, 2002). This program was specifically designed to improve students' reading achievement for kindergarten through third grade students by ensuring that K-3 classroom teachers implemented reading instructional methods that were scientifically research-based (USDE, 2002). The Reading First program required that schools implement several key components (USDE, 2002). First, schools were obligated to implement a 90-minute, uninterrupted reading block that included whole group and small group instruction that was scientifically research-based and that contained instruction in the five core elements of reading, namely phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Second, schools were required to implement an assessment system that included screening, diagnosis, progress monitoring, and formative and summative assessments. Third, schools were required to provide intense interventions for students who struggled to read. Lastly, Reading First schools were to provide a literacy coach that assisted with the provision of appropriate professional development and support for teachers to help them with program implementation (USDE, 2002).

Instructional Time

All Reading First schools were expected to include a 90-minute, uninterrupted, protected block of time for reading instruction (USDE, 2002). The foundation of the 90-minute reading block resulted from reading research that supported the need for additional time for struggling readers. Research by Gumm and Turner (2004) suggested

that students need at least 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction each day in order for them to develop into proficient readers. Gumm and Turner also found that at-risk students required additional time in contrast to other students who were reading on grade level. A report by Reeves (2007) on Mead Valley Elementary School in California also confirmed the benefits of increased instructional time. Reeves found that at Mead Valley, 90% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch, 90% of the students were minorities, 90% of the students were meeting the states' academic standards, and there was a three hour "sacred" literacy block. Consequently, Mead Valley's principal attributed extended learning time in literacy as a factor in students' success (Reeves, 2007). Similarly, Reading First schools in Arizona, Nevada, Michigan, and South Carolina reported having 97-100% of K-3 classrooms implement a 90-minute reading block (Bennett et al., 2008; Carlisle & Zeng, 2007; MGT, 2008; Wolfersteig, Moratto, Emge, Katz, & Valdivia, 2009).

Five Core Elements of Reading

Reading First schools were obligated to include the five core elements of reading - phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension - as the major content of their early literacy instruction (USDE, 2002). These elements were researched by the National Reading Panel and were determined to have a significant impact on improving students' reading achievement (Snow et al., 1998). Listed below is a synopsis of the Panel's findings for each element, along with results from research studies conducted by states that implemented the Reading First program.

Phonemic awareness

According to Brown (2006), phonemic awareness refers to the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds called phonemes. Brown further indicated phonemic awareness instruction gives students strategies for sounding out and using new words. Loizou and Stuart (2003) and Manzo (2005) both stressed the importance of phonemic awareness as an important skill that facilitates reading acquisition for young students. The focus of phonemic awareness instruction includes having student to identify and manipulate larger parts of spoken language such as words, syllables, and onset, and rimes (NICHD, 2002). Phonemic awareness instruction also encompasses aspects of sound, such as identifying and producing rhyming words, matching sounds (alliteration, ending sounds, and beginning sounds), segmenting sounds in words, blending sounds to make words, and substituting phonemes to make new words (Armbruster et al., 2001).

The National Reading Panel's overall findings on phonemic awareness were derived from 52 studies that involved 96 comparisons of treatment and control groups (NICHD, 2002). Data from these studies indicated that teaching children to manipulate phonemes in words was highly effective under a variety of teaching conditions and with a variety of learners across grades and age levels (NICHD, 2002). Study results also revealed that phonemic awareness instruction significantly improved students' reading skills more than reading instruction that did not include phonemic awareness (NICHD, 2002).

In many Reading First schools, phonemic awareness was assessed using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Phoneme Segmentation Fluency subtest. Student achievement results for this indicator found by Good et al (2001) were generally positive. MGT of America (2008) reported that Nevada's Reading First schools demonstrated consistent gains across the board on the DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency subtest. In the spring of 2005, 32% of kindergarteners and 67% of first graders in Nevada scored at or above the established goal for phoneme segmentation (MGT, 2008). Three years later in the spring of 2008, the percent of students in Nevada meeting the established goal had increased to 65% and 92% respectively (MGT, 2008).

In Michigan, Reading First schools were separated into two groups – Round 1 and Round 2 schools (Carlisle et al., 2004). Round 1 schools began implementation of the Reading First program in 2002, and Round 2 schools began implementation of the Reading First program in 2003 (Carlisle et al., 2004). In 2003, 28% of kindergarteners in Michigan's Round 1 Reading First schools were at or above the established standard on the DIBELS-Phoneme Segmentation Fluency assessment (Carlisle et al., 2004). In 2006, the percentage of kindergarteners scoring at or above the established standard in the Michigan Reading First schools increased to 63% (Carlisle & Zeng, 2007).

Likewise, Bennett et al. (2008) found that 65.7% of all first through third grade students in South Carolina scored at grade level on the phoneme segmentation subtest of the *Stanford Reading First Assessment* in the fall of 2007. In the spring of 2008, the percentage of students scoring at grade level on the same measure increased to 79.6% (Bennett et al., 2008). Essentially, Reading First schools increased the percent of

students scoring at or above grade level on phonemic awareness assessments by 30% in a three year period (Bennett et al., 2008; Carlisle et al., 2004; Carlisle & Zeng, 2007; MGT, 2008).

Phonics

The primary focus of phonics instruction is to help students understand the relationship between written letters (graphemes) and spoken sounds (phonemes) (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Phonics instruction helps students to learn how to apply letter-sound correspondences in their reading (Chall, 1996). The meta-analysis results of the National Reading Panel indicated that systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and for students who have difficulty learning to read (NICHD, 2002). The ability to read and spell words was greatly enhanced for kindergarten students (NICHD, 2002). Manzo (2005) claimed that first grade students who received systematic phonics instruction were better able to decode, to spell, and comprehend text. Heller and Greenleaf (2007) noted that older students who received systematic phonics instruction were better able to decode words and read texts orally, but their comprehension of text was not significantly improved. The National Reading Panel's summary reports also indicated that systematic phonics instruction offered benefits for achieving students, struggling students, disabled students, and students who were from low socioeconomic backgrounds (NICHD, 2002).

Based on reports from MGT (2008) and Bennett et al. (2008), phonics instruction in Nevada's Reading First schools was assessed using the DIBELS Nonsense Word

Fluency Assessment, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) language subtest, and local state assessments. In the spring of 2005, Nevada's Reading First schools reported 33% of kindergarteners and 28% of first graders scored at or above the goal on the Nonsense Word Fluency assessment (MGT, 2008). In the spring of 2008, the percents increased to 66% in kindergarten and 73% in first grade (MGT, 2008). Nevada's students demonstrated limited improvement on the ITBS Language test. Assessment results reported by MGT (2008) detailed that 52% of first graders, 57% of second graders, and 53% of third graders scored at or above the 40th percentile, which is considered grade level performance on the ITBS language test (MGT, 2008). Likewise in 2008, 58% of first graders, 52% of second graders, and 56% of third graders scored at or above the 40th percentile on the ITBS language test (MGT, 2008). The percent of first through third grade students who scored at grade level in phonics on the *Stanford Reading First Assessment* increased from 15.3% in the fall of 2007 to 27.3% in the spring of 2008 (Bennett et al., 2008; Gilmore et al., 2008). In general, Reading First schools demonstrated a range of success in improving students' phonetic skills.

Vocabulary

Armbruster et al. (2001) defined vocabulary as knowledge about the meanings and pronunciations of words necessary for communication. According to Armbruster et al. (2001), there are two types of vocabulary – oral and print. Beer (2003) further explained the process that students must go through to determine word meanings. According to Beer, the student begins by decoding the word to speech. Next, the student

determines whether or not he/she understands the word as a part of his/her oral vocabulary. If the word is in the student's oral vocabulary, he/she is able to understand it. If the word is not in the student's oral vocabulary, then he/she uses other means to make sense of the word (Beer, 2003). Thus, the larger a student's oral vocabulary, the better the student is able to make sense of various texts. According to the NICHD (2002) the ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction is to have students learn, understand, and use a variety of words to acquire and convey meaning. Brown (2006) concluded that because learning is a language-based activity, it is primarily contingent upon vocabulary knowledge and comprehension.

Studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel suggested that vocabulary instruction does lead to gains in comprehension, but instructional methods must be appropriate to the student's age and ability (NICHD, 2002). Effective strategies for teaching vocabulary cited by the National Reading Panel included: using computer-assisted instruction, incidental learning of vocabulary in the context of storybook reading or in listening to others, teaching selected words to students before having them to read the text, repeatedly exposing students to increasingly difficult words, and substituting easy words for more difficult words (NICHD, 2002). The National Reading Panel found that unlike phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, there is no one way that is best for teaching vocabulary instruction. In fact, the National Reading Panel recommended that vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly, in rich learning contexts, and in an environment where students are repeatedly exposed to a variety of words (NICHD, 2002).

In Nevada, vocabulary and reading comprehension results were reported as a combined score on the ITBS Reading test (MGT, 2008). In 2005, 43% of first graders, 47% of second graders, and 49% of third graders in Nevada's Reading First schools scored at or above the 40th percentile (MGT, 2008). In 2008, 60% of first graders, 56% of second graders, and 53% of third graders scored at or above the 40th percentile (MGT, 2008). Carlisle et al. (2004) reported that in Michigan's Round 1, Reading First schools, 35% of first graders, 31% of second graders, and 23% of third graders scored at or above the standard on the ITBS reading test in 2003. In 2006, Michigan's Round 2 Reading First schools reported 43% of first graders, 37% of second graders, and 30% of third graders scored at or above the standard on the ITBS reading test (Carlisle & Zeng, 2007). According to Bennett et al. (2008), 35.5% of first through third grade students in South Carolina scored at grade level on the *Stanford Reading First Test* administered in the fall of 2007. In the spring of 2008, the percent of South Carolina students at or above grade level increased to 39.9% (Bennett et al., 2008). In many instances, Reading First schools demonstrated gains in improving students' vocabulary skills; however, student achievement in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension was not as substantial as the increases displayed by students in phonemic awareness and phonics.

Fluency

As with other elements of reading, Reading First schools were expected to teach fluency as a part of reading instruction (USDE, 2002). Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, and Jenkins (2001) defined fluency as speed, accuracy, and prosody. According to Armbruster et al.

(2001) fluency and oral reading skills refer to a student's ability to read text accurately and quickly, while prosody refers to a student's ability to use expression while reading. Fluency is also called automaticity (Armbruster et al., 2001). In essence, fluent readers are students who can read quickly, with few errors, and do so in a way that reflects the meaning of the text.

The National Reading Panel identified fluency as one of several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension (NICHD, 2002). According to Allington and Johnston (2002), there are two approaches mainly used to teach reading fluency. They are guided repeated oral reading and independent silent reading. Of the two, guided repeated oral reading, in which the teacher provides direct and explicit feedback to students, has significant research which supports the strategy's effectiveness (Beers, 2003). Independent silent reading, on the other hand, has not been substantiated through research as an effective means for improving student achievement (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). The available studies do not negate the impact of silent reading on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; however, the National Reading Panel cautioned that silent reading is not an effective practice when used as the only type of reading instruction to develop other critical reading skills (NICHD, 2002).

In most instances, fluency was assessed in Reading First schools using the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency subtest (Carlisle et al., 2004; Good et al., 2001; MGT, 2008). In 2005, 25% of first graders, 45% of second graders, and 30% of third graders in Nevada's Reading First schools scored at or above the goal on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency assessment (MGT, 2008). In 2008, the percentage of Nevada's Reading First

students scoring at or above the goals on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency assessment was 65% of first graders, 59% of second graders, and 56% of third graders (MGT, 2008). According to Carlisle et al. (2004) 32% of first graders, 25% of second graders, and 23% of third graders in Michigan's Reading First Round 1 schools scored at or above standard on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency assessment. In 2006, the percentage of Michigan's Reading First students increased to 47% of first graders, 41% of second graders, and 33% of third graders (Carlisle & Zeng, 2007). From the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2008, South Carolina's Reading First schools increased the percentage of first, second, and third grade students scoring at grade level on the *Stanford Reading First Assessment* from 32.8% to 46% (Bennett et al., 2008). Again, Reading First schools demonstrated significant gains in increasing student achievement for the fluency element of reading.

Comprehension

Harris and Hodges (1995) defined reading comprehension as intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between the reader and the text. Brown (2006) noted that literacy educators are not all in agreement as to what exactly constitutes comprehension. Miller (2006) furthered that although researchers differ on the meaning of comprehension, most agree that students should be explicitly taught comprehension strategies, that knowledge of strategies increase students' awareness of reading, and that such strategies can have a positive and significant impact on overall comprehension. According to researcher from MGT (2008) Reading First

schools were expected to provide high quality comprehension instruction with multiple opportunities for children to read and discuss quality literature from a variety of genres that not only focused on sounds and language, but also included comprehension strategies such as: making predictions, generating questions, summarizing, making inferences, comparing and contrasting, and drawing conclusions.

Blair et al. (2007) stated that explicitly teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or reasoning skills when they encounter barriers to understanding what they are reading has been shown to aid in improving students' reading comprehension skills. According to Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Walpole (2000) there are some comprehension skills which students will acquire informally; however, explicit instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing students' understanding. Blair et al. (2007) detailed explicit instruction as the teacher demonstrating specific strategies and continuing to provide support for students in using the strategies until the students are able to apply the strategies independently. This process is referred to as coaching (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Beer, 2003; Taylor et al., 2000).

In its review, the National Reading Panel documented 16 categories of text comprehension instruction (NICHD, 2002). Of these, seven appeared to have a solid, scientific basis for concluding that they improved comprehension in non-impaired readers. These strategies were:

1. Comprehension monitoring, where readers learn how to be aware of their understanding of the material;

2. Cooperative learning, where students learn reading strategies together;
3. Use of graphic and semantic organizers (including story maps), where readers make graphic representations of the material to assist comprehension;
4. Question answering, where readers answer questions posed by the teacher and receive immediate feedback;
5. Question generation, where readers ask themselves questions about various aspects of the story;
6. Story structure, where students are taught to use the structure of the story as a means of helping them recall story content in order to answer questions about what they have read; and
7. Summarization, where readers are taught to integrate ideas and generalize information from the text (NICHD, 2002).

Overall, previous research suggested that teaching a combination of reading comprehension techniques is most effective. When used in combination, these techniques can improve results on standardized comprehension tests (Blair et al., 2002; NICHD, 2002).

Although much is known about effective reading instructional strategies, questions regarding the teaching of reading comprehension still remain. Such questions include: (a) which strategies are most effective for different age groups, (b) which techniques apply to various genres, and (c) how text difficulty impacts on the efficacy of the strategy (NICHD, 2002).

A specific example of the impact of using various techniques to teach reading comprehension was exemplified in Arizona's Reading First schools in which more than half of their third grade students passed the Arizona Instrument of Measuring Standards (AIMS) reading assessment in 2008 (Wolfersteig et al., 2009). Although these reading achievement results were below the state's average, they were above the averages Arizona's Reading First schools had prior to the implementation of Reading First. Moreover, Arizona students who attended Reading First schools for four or more years performed at the state average, indicating that students who received continuous, sustained instruction in Reading First schools improved their achievement to a level that was comparable to the state's average (Wolfersteig et al., 2009).

Student Assessment

Assessment programs in Reading First schools included four aspects: screening, diagnosis, progress monitoring, and outcomes (USDE, 2002). According to Joyner (2007) screenings usually occurred at the beginning of the year and were re-administered during the middle of the year and at the end of the year. The purpose of these screenings was to identify children who were in need of extra support in order to ensure that they could read at grade level. Diagnostic assessments were given as follow-ups to the screening process (Teale, Paciga & Hoffman, 2007). The diagnostic assessments were made up of a series of different tests aimed at obtaining in-depth information about students' literacy and language strengths and needs. Denton and Hasbrouck (2006) described progress monitoring assessments as short, individualized, curriculum-based

measurements that were frequently given to determine how well a student responded to specific instruction. Summative assessments usually given at the end-of-the year were used to measure annual student performance. Teale (2008) explained that summative assessments measured how each child and relevant group of children performed in literacy and language over a specified period of time. To make the use of assessments meaningful, Reading First schools received technical assistance in selecting assessments that helped teachers make informed decisions about instruction, such as, what materials to use, how to group students for instruction, which strategies to employ, and in which areas students needed additional practice (Joyner, 2007).

The Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2007) reported that Reading First increased the number of schools using valid and reliable assessments in guiding instruction and program evaluation. Manzo (2005) reported that Reading First schools were using assessments in a variety of ways to better inform reading instruction and to determine areas where students needed more targeted instruction. Manzo elaborated that some school officials reported using assessment data to determine which teachers had more effective instructional strategies. In addition, Teale (2008) shared that states and districts were moving toward implementing more uniform, systematic assessment systems in order to track and compare reading scores more easily.

Nevada's Reading First schools used three main assessments to evaluate the impact of the Reading First program on students' reading outcomes (MGT, 2008). These assessments were DIBELS, the ITBS, and the Nevada Criterion Reference Test (CRT). DIBELS was used to assess students' literacy skills and to provide appropriate

instructional focus for students who were not meeting performance goals. The ITBS was used to assess K-3 student achievement in reading and language skills at the end of the year (MGT, 2008). The CRT was developed by the state of Nevada in conjunction with Measured Progress to assess vocabulary and reading comprehension skills that were aligned with the Nevada State Content Standards. Lastly, a large percentage of teachers reported using DIBELS data and end of unit tests from the core reading program to identify students who needed intervention (MGT, 2008).

In Arizona, 80% or more of principals and literacy coaches from Cycle 1 schools (schools that have implemented the Reading First program for four or five years) and Cycle 2 schools (schools that had implemented the Reading First program for two or three years) reported that they systematically and regularly collected reading assessment data (Wolfersteig et al., 2009). Both groups reported that there was an organized system in place for reviewing and sharing assessment data; there was regular progress monitoring of students receiving intensive and strategic interventions; and there were systems in place to administer, score, report, share, and analyze data. According to Wolfersteig et al. (2009), in both, Cycle 1 and 2 schools, 90% or more of teachers, literacy coaches, and principals reported using assessment data to identify student needs, group students, and monitor progress of interventions. Wolfersteig et al., indicated that although the use of DIBELS as a benchmark and progress monitoring assessment was viewed positively by principals and literacy coaches, teachers, on did not express the same viewpoint. While most teachers felt comfortable using data to group students and

to identify students' needs, most teachers expressed difficulty in using the data to identify and understand school-wide trends (Wolfersteig et al., 2009).

Prior research and lessons learned from Reading First program activities offered several concerns that should be considered as assessment systems are implemented (Teale, 2008; Tierney & Thorne, 2006). First, the content of the assessment must thoroughly cover reading standards that are developmentally important at a particular time. Tierney and Thorne (2006) emphasized that teachers and school leaders must understand the relationship between assessment and curriculum. Tierney and Thorne (2006) also observed that often the assessment becomes the curriculum and teachers teach what is on the test versus teaching the content that is embedded in the standards. Teale et al. (2007) expressed concerns that in many urban schools and in virtually all urban schools that received Reading First grants, the literacy curriculum developed mainly into a reading curriculum because writing was not one of the "big five" components of reading instruction. Moreover, because of what was and was not measured on DIBELS, some reading curricula only emphasized phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency, excluding comprehension and vocabulary (Tierney & Thorne, 2006, p.50). Consequently, Teale (2008) argued that what should have been a useful tool in helping to raise reading achievement had a harmfully narrowing effect on teachers' instructional practices and the scope of various literacy curriculums). Overall, improving student achievement can be enhanced when teachers systematically share student assessment data and carefully examine students' performance on curriculum-embedded

measures to guide instructional decisions (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Taylor et al., 2000).

Support for Struggling Readers

The ultimate goal of the Reading First program was to ensure that all students could read at grade level by the end of third grade (USDE, 2002). Tiered interventions for struggling readers were considered one of the key means for meeting this goal (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Despite effective classroom teaching and early intervention programs, there were some children who continue to struggle with learning throughout the middle-school years and whose academic needs require focused intervention (Louden et al., 2000).

Neuman (2007) declared it is more cost-effective to prevent reading difficulties early than it is to wait until more serious problems occur, which will incur costly remediation. Lyon (2003) found that without systematic, focused, and intensive interventions, the majority of children who are behind rarely ever read at grade level. Hann (2007) reported that early, intensive intervention can have long-lasting effects in a child's school years when the intervention is focused on core deficits.

According to Denton and Hasbrouck (2006), early intervention in reading consists of providing a special program to help children improve their reading and writing skills before they fall behind other students in their classes. They further emphasized that early intervention programs are most effective if: (a) they are provided daily for at least 20 to 30 minutes; (b) they are temporary; (c) they do not take the place of the child's regular

reading instruction; and (d) they supplement the child's regular reading instruction with intensive, individualized instruction designed to help the child overcome difficulties with early reading skills.

Providing support to struggling learners through an approach known as Response to Intervention (RTI) is considered to be a hot topic among prominent literacy researchers (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). RTI was introduced in 2004 as a part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 108-446 (USDE, 2006). This same process was reflected in the Reading First provisions of the NCLB, which calls for proven methods of instruction to reduce the incidence of reading difficulties (Lose, 2007). The Reading First program requires that instructional interventions are appropriate and research-based (USDE, 2002). In other words, interventions must be based on practices that match the student's current skill level and that have produced verifiable results through research studies.

The RTI process for providing support for struggling readers involves several steps (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2006). A description of the RTI process as described by Brown-Chidsey (2007), Mesmer and Mesmer (2008), and Muoneke (2007) follows. The process begins with all students being screened three times per year. Students who do not meet the established benchmark receive extra help. Initially students identified as in need of help receive scientifically valid interventions in small groups. These interventions are intended to assist students in developing skills that will allow them to improve their reading proficiency. According to Brown-Chidsey (2007) as the intervention takes place, each student's progress is monitored through weekly or bi-weekly assessments which are

designed to address the skills that are targeted for intervention and indicate if the intervention is successful in improving the student's reading skills. Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) explained that individualized interventions are developed for students who continue to struggle. These interventions may require additional assessment to further clarify the nature of the difficulty or to determine if more time is needed. The student's progress is continuously monitored, and if the student repeatedly fails to show progress, then a decision is made to refer the student for special education services (Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008; Muoneke, 2007).

In Arizona, 62%-91% of teachers, literacy coaches, and principals in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 Reading First schools perceived their schools were doing an excellent job of providing interventions (Wolfersteig et al., 2009). A range of 57%-72% of teachers, literacy coaches, and principals reported being able to provide interventions to all students needing strategic and intensive interventions. Wolfersteig et al. further reported that teachers and literacy coaches reported high levels of satisfaction with training on interventions. The two major obstacles to interventions reported by Arizona's Reading First teachers and literacy coaches were having enough staff to provide interventions and having intervention groups that were too large (Wolfersteig et al., 2009).

In Nevada, 97% of Reading First schools reported using a screener to identify students who needed supplemental instruction (MGT, 2008). Screening data were then used by local staff to group students according to their needs and to provide appropriate interventions. Although the effectiveness of the interventions was not directly reported,

providing interventions was one way these Reading First schools attempted to achieve the goal of having all students read on grade level by the end of the third grade (MGT, 2008).

Professional Development

Professional development was also a cornerstone of Reading First legislation (USDE, 2002). The Reading First program was designed to provide school personnel with the professional development activities that were centered on reading instructional content. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1992) defined staff development as the processes that improve job-related knowledge, skills, or attitudes of school employees whose purpose is to enhance student learning. Fenstermacher and Berliner (1985) stated that the goal of staff development is to advance the knowledge, skills, and understandings of teachers in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behavior. Richardson (1994) pointed out that professional development refers to the continuing development of the individual teacher.

Reading First guidelines for professional development called for high-quality professional development which addressed several key concepts (USDE, 2002). Professional development was expected to help teachers implement effective reading programs by preparing them to teach the core elements of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. According to USDE, Reading First professional development was also expected to help teachers understand the progression in which reading skills should be taught, the underlying structure of the English language, and why some children have difficulty learning to read well. Additionally, professional

development was required to help teachers learn how to administer and interpret assessments of students' progress and how to effectively manage their classrooms to maximize time on task (USDE, 2002).

Structural guidance was also provided for Reading First professional development. First, Reading First professional development was expected to be aligned with state and local academic and performance standards (Miller, 2006). In addition, schools were to provide adequate time for teachers to learn new concepts and to practice what they had learned in Reading First professional development sessions in their delivery of daily reading instruction (USDE, 2002). As well, literacy coaches, mentors, peers and outside experts were expected to provide feedback to teachers on new concepts and techniques that were being put into practice (USDE, 2002).

In many states, Reading First professional development activities were delivered using several different venues. Various state evaluation reports provide evidence that state level professional development for Reading First programs was provided through annual summer conferences and institutes. Joyner, Slack, and Theodore (2005) reported these events were hosted to help administrators, literacy coaches, and teachers become knowledgeable about Reading First guidelines and program requirements. Throughout the year, Reading First state coordinators held quarterly or monthly meetings for administrators to help them with their skills as instructional leaders (Carlisle & Zeng, 2008; MGT, 2008; Wolfersteig et al., 2009). State coordinators also monitored implementation of the Reading First program and provided technical assistance to schools through on-site visits. Nevertheless, the most critical aspect of Reading First

professional development was found within the daily activities of the Reading First literacy coaches (Carlisle & Zeng, 2008; MGT, 2008; Wolfersteig et al., 2009).

The Nevada Reading First evaluation report used activity logs maintained by principals and literacy specialists/coordinators and surveys completed by principals, literacy specialists/coordinators, and teachers to examine the implementation of professional development (MGT, 2008). According to the MGT report principals reported receiving an average of 16 hours; literacy specialists/coordinators averaged 17 hours, and teachers reported an average of 15 hours of professional development in Level I academies that focused on the key elements of effective reading instruction, scientifically-based reading research, and the use of assessments to inform instruction. Overall, professional development activities were rated “Generally Effective” to “Very Effective” by teachers, specialist/coordinators, and principals (MGT, 2008). With regard to continued Reading First professional development, several areas of interest were identified by Nevada’s literacy specialists/coordinators and principals. According to MGT results, principals indicated a high interest in professional development on writing instruction, literacy instruction for children with limited English proficiency, and the use of supplemental materials. Literacy specialists/coordinators indicated a high interest in writing instruction and literacy instruction for children with limited English proficiency (MGT, 2008).

Participation in South Carolina’s Reading First professional development activities remained high over several years, and participants stated that the professional development activities were helpful (Bennett et al., 2008). Participants indicated that

Reading First professional development helped them to understand the program's goals and their own roles and responsibilities, understand the roles of the individuals and groups with whom they closely worked, and build high levels of trust, respect, collaboration, and support . According to Bennett et al. participants identified their greatest needs for professional development in the areas of comprehension, instructional strategies to use with students performing below grade level, small group instruction, interpreting score reports for making instructional decisions, and addressing the needs of English language learners. In addition, participants identified changing the format and content of study group meetings, changing the organization of the program to allow for more flexibility within the 120 minute instruction block, placing an increased emphasis on writing, and changing practices related to progress monitoring and assessment as areas in need of improvement (Bennett et al., 2008).

Arizona's Reading First professional development activities were assessed using surveys from principals, literacy coaches, and teachers (Wolfersteig et al., 2009). In 2009, professional development attendance for Cycle 2 schools among principals, literacy coaches, and teachers was down slightly, while attendance by Cycle 1 school principals, literacy coaches, and teachers remained steady. Over time, principals' views about Reading First professional development varied. In 2009, more principals indicated that training included adequate opportunities to reflect and share with colleagues, but fewer principals said that sessions met their specific needs as a Reading First principal (Wolfersteig et al., 2009). More than 50% of literacy coaches and more than 60% of teachers were satisfied with most aspects and the quality of Reading First training they

received. In contrast, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers alike all reported that more training was needed to support the needs of English language learners.

Instructional Support

Although teacher educators plan professional development experiences that are designed to help teachers implement new and different instructional strategies, these sessions alone have not been sufficient, extensive, or cohesive enough to bring about lasting changes in teacher practices (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). These findings are not new. Over 15 years ago, Liberman and Miller (1986) pointed out that large amounts of money have been spent on telling teachers what to do and how to do it, but without the supportive processes needed to effect permanent change.

According to Feiler, Heritage, and Gallimore (2000), teachers need excellent and repeated modeling by experts; time to practice and try out new learning without being evaluated; coaching by mentors and peers; and time for collegial collaboration, reflection, and sharing. Kose (2007) confirmed that ongoing, professional interactions on specific teaching and learning issues helps teachers to make meaningful, lasting changes that improve student learning.

According to Joyner (2005b), central office personnel, principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches play an important role in providing instructional support to assist with the implementation of Reading First programs. According to Joyner, superintendents had to be well versed in Reading First requirements and the specifics of the district's plan. Superintendents also had to give principals the autonomy

and flexibility to provide time for teachers to participate in needed professional development. Moreover, superintendents had to monitor progress and implementation to ensure that all Reading First activities were directly connected to classroom instruction and student achievement. Spillane et al. (2000) elaborated that central office administrators had to assist in the implementation of Reading First programs. For example, district leaders had to schedule alignment meetings with K-3 teachers or personally attend these meetings. Central office administrators also had to monitor schools to ensure alignment efforts were implemented, provide support as needed, and develop a workable district-wide assessment plan (Spillane et al., 2000). The pivotal responsibilities of principals and assistant principals in Reading First schools were those of establishing priorities within their schools, arranging instructional schedules, setting aside time for grade-level teams to meet, providing release time for teachers to attend professional development, monitoring the progress and implementation of various Reading First components, assisting teachers in interpreting the curriculum and assessment standards, and providing guidance to teachers in the administration, scoring, reporting and utilization of various assessments.

Reading First literacy coaches also played a critical role in leading the implementation of the Reading First program. Literacy coaches had to build trusting relationships with both the principals and the entire faculty (Joyner, 2005c). Reading First coaches were responsible for helping teachers set goals, organizing workable schedules, observing instruction, demonstrating effective lessons, providing constructive feedback, and serving as a resource for effective reading interventions (Symonds, 2003).

Occasionally, the coach realized that teachers were best served by the expertise of an outsider. In essence, the success of the literacy coach had a considerable bearing on the effectiveness of a school's implementation of Reading First (Joyner, 2006; Symonds, 2003).

Implementation Fidelity

Implementation fidelity is the delivery of instruction in the way in which it was designed to be delivered (Gresham et al., 2000). Kisker, Paulsell, Love, and Raikes (2000) offered operational definitions for describing five different levels of implementation. According to Kisker et al., the five levels of implementation and their definitions are:

1. Minimal implementation – The program shows no evidence or effort to implement the relevant program elements;
2. Low-level implementation – The program has made some effort to implement the relevant program elements;
3. Moderate implementation – The program has made some aspects of the relevant program elements;
4. Full implementation – The program has substantially implemented the relevant program elements; and
5. Enhanced implementation – The program has exceeded expectations for implementing the relevant program element.

Implementation fidelity is critical when it comes to research effectiveness because researchers must be able to verify that any resulting gains are accurately attributed to the program's implementation and that appropriate measures can be taken to remedy deficiencies rather than abandoning the entire process (Joyner, 2005c). As it relates to Reading First, Joyner et al. explained that school leaders, including district administrators, principals, and literacy coaches were directly responsible for monitoring the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program.

Arizona reported several findings about the implementation fidelity of their Reading First programs. Wolfersteig et al. (2009) reported that Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 groups met most of the Reading First program's implementation requirements. Both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 schools had fully implemented a reading block of 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction. The core curriculum was also in place at both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 schools, and teachers were receiving ongoing professional development related to the core reading program and effective reading instructional strategies. One area that was not sufficiently met by principals and literacy coaches was observing the required number of classrooms and providing feedback to teachers. In 2009, 76% of Cycle 1 teachers were observed monthly. In Cycle 2 schools, 68% of teachers were observed monthly (Wolfersteig et al., 2009).

Monitoring the implementation of the Reading First program was a vital component of the school administration's responsibility (RMC, 2009). Monitoring confirmed that the school's Reading First program was implemented with fidelity and that any instructional changes indicated by the data were valid (Joyner, 2005a). To

maintain the implementation of the Reading First program, principals in Reading First schools were asked to conduct implementation walkthroughs. Implementation walkthroughs entailed principals actively monitoring the implementation plans and results produced along the way to determine if established goals were achieved and sustained over time (RMC, 2009). Implementation walkthroughs involved principals in observing instruction, planning and conducting meetings, engaging in focused discussions, and reviewing formative data. These activities allowed the leader to draw conclusions about the fidelity of implementation, identify variations in implementation and instructional practices, and take necessary action in a timely manner to correct observed deficiencies (Joyner, 2005a). According to Washington’s Reading First director, Mo Anderson, “The effectiveness of implementation walkthroughs was maximized when school leaders observed different parts of the reading block by observing daily in different rooms, at different grade levels, and at different times” (Joyner, 2005a, pp. 5-6). In short, research studies by RMC (2009) and Joyner (2005a) suggest that frequent monitoring by principals assured that progress was being made and that the Reading First programs within each school were implemented with fidelity.

Reading First Research Results

Since the inception of the Reading First program, several research studies have been conducted. These studies examined factors such as implementation of the Reading First program, the effectiveness of literacy coaches, alignment between individual state content standards and the five essential elements of reading, the role of state assessments

in measuring Reading First outcomes as presented in the Reading First state applications, and evaluation of the impact of Reading First on classroom reading instruction and students' reading achievement (Blair et al., 2007; Carlisle & Zeng, 2007; Gamse et al., 2008; GAO, 2007; Zugelder, 2006).

In a study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of Reading First literacy coaches in one urban school district, Zugelder (2006) found that in most Year 1 and Year 2 schools, literacy coaches reported that most teachers had improved their instructional practices. According to Zugelder (2006) coaches reported that teacher improvement in incorporating the five core elements of reading varied daily. Year 1 schools reported that only some or a few teachers improved instructional practices in phonemic awareness, while Year 2 schools estimated that all or almost all teachers had improved in teaching phonemic awareness (Zugelder, 2006). In the area of phonics instruction, Year 1 and Year 2 schools reported that all or almost all teachers had improved. Zugelder reported that the majority of Year 1 schools reported that some or a few teachers improved in vocabulary instruction, while Year 2 schools reported that all or almost all teachers had improved in delivering vocabulary instruction. Both Year 1 and Year 2 schools reported that all or almost all teachers improved in teaching reading fluency skills. In the area of comprehension, Zugelder reported that while Year 2 schools felt that all or almost all of their teachers improved in teaching comprehension, Year 1 schools reported that only a few teachers improved in teaching comprehension skills.

Zugelder (2006) further reported that data revealed that the majority of the Reading First schools in the targeted district had increased the number of third grade

students scoring on grade level or above in reading on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Year 1 schools appeared to have stronger gains than Year 2 schools. There was not, however, any significant changes in student achievement for first and second graders on the Standard Achievement Test 10 (SAT 10). The majority of Year 2 schools improved student achievement for kindergarteners on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 3, and Year 1 schools performed better in increasing the number of on-grade level kindergarten readers as measured by the DIBELS (Zugelder, 2006).

A longitudinal study of Reading First schools in Michigan by Carlisle and Zeng (2007) reported that schools demonstrated annual growth in improving the number of students performing on grade level for students in kindergarten through third grade on DIBELS, the Gates-McGinnite, and the ITBS. Round 1 schools appeared to show more growth than Round 2 schools. Carlisle and Zeng noted that this was possible because Round 1 schools began with more underachieving students than Round 2 schools. In both Round 1 and Round 2 schools, there was more consistent improvement on the DIBELS subtests than on the ITBS Reading Comprehension test. Data from the study had not been analyzed to determine if the yearly gains were statistically significant (Carlisle & Zeng, 2007).

According to a report on Reading First from the GAO (2007), individual states reported changes as well as improvements in reading instruction due to increased emphasis on reading instruction, assessments, and professional development, despite limited changes to instructional materials. Of all states surveyed, 69% reported great or very great improvement in reading instruction. One specific area in which states reported

an improvement is the degree to which classroom instruction explicitly incorporated the required instructional components of the Reading First program. In addition, state and local officials reported that the use of assessment changed after Reading First, especially in the way that teachers used data from these assessments to better plan for reading instruction. Over 75% of states reported increases in the frequency of professional development and the resources devoted to reading teachers.

Results from the Gamse et al. (2008) *Reading First Impact Study* established several key findings related to Reading First schools when compared to non-Reading First Title I schools:

1. Classroom instruction in Reading First schools was significantly more likely to adhere to Reading First legislation than that in non-Reading First Title I schools.
2. Reading First schools received more financial and non-financial support from a variety of external sources than non-Reading First Title I schools. Reading First principals, specifically, reported receiving more external support in selecting reading programs, diagnosing student needs, conducting demonstration lessons, and reviewing program effectiveness.
3. Reading First teachers were significantly more likely to place struggling students in intervention programs than their non-Reading First counterparts.
4. Assessment played an important role in reading programs at both Reading First and non-Reading First schools. Teachers in Reading First schools were more

likely to report applying assessment results for instructional purposes, such as grouping students, progress monitoring, and identifying struggling readers.

5. Principals in Reading First schools were significantly more likely to report having a literacy coach than were principals at non-Reading First Title I schools.
6. Reading First staff received significantly more professional development than staff at non-Reading First schools. This professional development was focused on the five essential elements of reading and overall teaching strategies. Professional development in Reading First schools was also more likely to offer incentives and consist of follow-up sessions.

Results from the *Reading First Impact Study* (Gamse et al., 2008) further revealed that there was limited, but statistically significant evidence that successive cohorts of third-and-fourth grade students in Reading First schools improved their reading performance over time more quickly than did their counterparts in non- Reading First Title I schools. Data from 24 states for third graders indicated that Reading First schools gained between two and three percentage points more, from pre-to post- Reading First implementation, than non-Reading First schools on the proportion of students meeting standards on states' third-grade reading assessments. Data from 17 states reported the same for fourth grade students (Gamse et al., 2008; GAO, 2007).

Finally, the *Reading First Impact Study* (Gamse et al., 2008) analyzed the relationship between schools' third grade reading scores on the state's assessment and four constructs that were reflective of alignment to Reading First requirements. These

constructs consisted of classroom reading instruction, strategies to help struggling readers; participation in professional development; and uses of assessment to inform instruction. Of the four constructs, only one area was found to have a statistically significant relationship with third grade reading achievement. This construct was strategies to help struggling readers (Gamse et al., 2008).

Summary

In summary, the Reading First program was instituted to address the lack of improvement in students' reading achievement. The program was designed to assist primary grade reading teachers in implementing scientifically research-based methods of early reading instruction (Carlisle et al., 2004). The review of related literature presented research findings related to the impact Reading First has had on changing instructional strategies, student assessment, support for struggling readers, professional development, instructional support, implementation fidelity, and student achievement. An examination of each of these elements revealed that much progress has been made since the inception of the Reading First program. Nearly all Reading First schools implemented a 90-minute, uninterrupted reading block, and most Reading First schools reported improvements in student achievement and the instructional delivery of phonemic awareness and phonics. Students in Reading First schools also demonstrated improvements in reading comprehension and vocabulary on state exams, but these are two areas that continue to need additional attention.

The Reading First program also advanced the use of different assessments, early support for struggling readers, and job-embedded professional development. Teachers from Reading First schools reported using assessment data more to guide instruction and to provide the appropriate interventions for students who were experiencing reading difficulty. Reading First schools also employed literacy coaches to provide job-embedded professional development to ensure the program was carried out well and with high levels of fidelity. Overall, evaluation reports from states such as Michigan, Arizona, Nevada, and South Carolina indicated that teachers implemented the Reading First program with fidelity. It was also determined from the research that students' test results from these states demonstrated that the Reading First program had a positive impact on improving student achievement (Bennett et al., 2008; Carlisle & Zeng, 2007; MGT, 2008; Wolfersteig et al., 2009).

USDE (2008) provided funds to more than the states referenced in this literature review. However, research information presented in this literature review was limited to studies that addressed educators' perceptions about the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the impact Reading First programs have had on improving student achievement. In addition, individual state reports results varied from the findings of the *Reading First Impact Study Interim Report* which stated, "that across the 18 participating sites, estimated impacts on student reading comprehension test scores were not statistically significant" (Gamse, et al. 2008, p. ix). Thus, the need for additional research on the Reading First program continues to exist.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined educators' perceptions of the implementation of Reading First programs at eight elementary schools in the state of Mississippi. In addition, the researcher sought to determine if there were relationships between educators' perceptions and students' reading achievement on the MCT. Specifically, the goals of this study were to determine educators' perceptions of implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools, to determine if there were differences among the perceptions of educators concerning the implementation fidelity of the Reading First programs, and to determine if the educators' perceptions were related to the MCT reading scores of second and third grade students. Chapter 3 consists of the methodology that was used in this study. This chapter includes: (a) the research design, (b) study participants (c) instrumentation, (d) procedures, and (e) data analysis. The chapter concludes with limitations and assumptions.

Research Design

Educators, politicians, and government officials often use data about the costs, benefits, and problems associated with a specific program to make decisions about particular legislation, whether a program's benefits justify the costs needed to support the

program, and other factors, such as design and personnel (Kirsch et al., 2007). The Reading First program was built upon legislation (USDE, 2002). Funding was provided to support the program, and there was a need to assess the impact that the program had on student achievement (Gamse et al., 2008). Thus, this study employed descriptive, survey, causal-comparative, and correlational research to assess the impact of the Reading First program in Mississippi schools.

According to Gay and Airasian (2003), descriptive research, also known as survey research, is designed to determine and describe the way things are. Gay and Airasian also explain that descriptive research compares how subgroups view different issues and topics. As a part of descriptive research, a phenomenon at one point in time may be examined, or a phenomenon may be examined as it changes over time (Gay & Airasian, 2003). For this study, survey data were collected to provide a description of educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) define causal-comparative research as an investigation that seeks to discover possible causes and effects by comparing one variable to another. Therefore, an ANOVA was used to determine if there were differences among the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers concerning the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs in their schools.

Correlational research is used for two major purposes: (a) to explore the existence of relationships between variables and (b) to predict research participants' scores on one variable from scores on other variables (Gall et al., 2003). The basic

design of correlational research involves collecting data on two or more variables for each individual in a sample and computing a correlation coefficient (Gall et al., 2003). Correlational research also helps researchers to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables (Gay & Airasian, 2003). For this study, correlational research was used to determine if there were relationships between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of Reading First program within each school and second and third grade students' reading scores on the Mississippi Curriculum during the years of 2004-2007.

Study Participants

Participants for this study included 62 teachers; 8 principals; and 5 literacy coaches from eight Mississippi schools that had implemented the Reading First program for at least three years. The eight schools that implemented the Reading First program for three or more years included: two K-6 schools, two K-3 schools, one 2-5 school, one K-5 school, and two K-8 schools. Together, these eight schools served approximately 2,584 students in kindergarten through third grade. Of these students, 71% were African-American, 27% were Caucasian, 1% was Hispanic, and less than 1% was American Indian/Native Alaskan or Asian/Pacific Islander. Students in kindergarten made up 21% of the population. Students in first grade made up 13% of the population, students in second grade made up 28% of the population, and students in third grade made up 28% of the population. More than 80% of the students served at these Reading First schools

qualified for free or reduced lunch. One hundred percent of the staff in Mississippi's Reading First schools met the highly qualified or fully licensed definition of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (MDE, n.d.; USDE, n.d.).

Contact information for research participants was secured from the state's Reading First project coordinator at the MDE. District and school websites were used to add any missing data. All contact information was confirmed by research participants once the study began.

Instrumentation

The instruments, *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* (see Appendix A) and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers* (see Appendix B), that were used for this study were modified versions of the *Reading First Impact Study* teacher survey. The *Reading First Impact Study* teacher survey (Gamse et. al, 2008) was developed for classroom teachers in Grades 1 through 3 to learn about how schools were implementing scientifically-based reading programs in Reading First and non-Reading First schools. The *Reading First Impact Study* teacher survey addressed student characteristics; reading instruction including materials, content, time, and allocation; assessment; and collaboration and support from other teachers and staff (Gamse et al., 2008). Content validity of the *Reading First Impact Study* teacher survey was established by specifically matching survey items to information contained in Reading First legislation and non-regulatory guidance (USDE, 2002; 2004). The internal

consistency reliability of the *Reading First Impact Study* teacher survey was established using the Cronbach's alpha (Gamse et al., 2008).

The *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers* are Likert scale rating surveys that were adapted from the *Reading First Impact Study* teacher survey by the researcher with permission from Abt and Associates (Gamse et al., 2008). Each survey contained 40 items and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The surveys used in this study were shorter than the original survey adapted from Abt and Associates and contained only items from the original survey that specifically addressed: (a) Core Elements of the Reading First program, (b) Instructional Strategies, (c) Student Assessments, (d) Support for Struggling Readers, (e) Professional Development, and (f) Instructional Support. The modified surveys were reviewed for content validity by a group of five reading teachers and five literacy coaches who were not included in the Reading First schools identified for this study. Reading teachers and literacy coaches were asked to provide criticisms and recommendations for survey improvement in order to ensure the validity of each survey.

The survey was then administered to the same reading teachers and literacy coaches to establish the reliability of the instrument. Group responses to the survey were analyzed using the Cronbach alpha to establish internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach alpha for the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* was .89, and the Cronbach alpha for the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers* was .79.

Tables 1 through 6 show the specific items for each survey section on the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers*. The complete surveys are shown in Appendices A and B.

Table 1 Core Elements of Reading First

SURVEY SECTION 1: CORE ELEMENTS

1. The students in our school receive at least 90 minutes of ***uninterrupted*** reading instruction daily.
 2. Phonemic awareness is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.
 3. Phonics is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.
 4. Vocabulary is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.
 5. Fluency is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.
 6. Comprehension is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.
-

Table 2 Instructional Strategies

SURVEY SECTION 2: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

7. I use phonics based letter-sound relationships to assist students in reading text.
 8. I use fluency building activities (repeated reading, guided reading, etc.).
 9. I explicitly teach comprehension strategies.
 10. I provide vocabulary building exercises.
 11. I use in-class grouping, including small group instruction, to meet students' needs.
-

Table 3 Student Assessment

SURVEY SECTION 3: STUDENT ASSESSMENT

12. Universal screeners are administered to identify students who need supplementary reading instruction.
 13. Diagnostic assessments are given to identify the specific needs of individual students.
 14. Progress monitoring assessments are given to determine if students are achieving the desired results of a specific supplementary intervention.
 15. Formative assessments are given to determine if students are achieving grade level reading standards.
-

Table 3 (continued) Student Assessment

SURVEY SECTION 3: STUDENT ASSESSMENT

16. Summative assessments are given to determine if students have met established reading standards.

17. Assessment data is used to organize instructional groups for reading instruction.

Table 4 Support for Struggling Readers

SURVEY SECTION 4: SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

18. Struggling readers are given diagnostic assessments to determine their core deficits.

19. Scientifically research-based or evidence based reading interventions are provided to struggling readers.

20. Struggling readers receive extra instructional time.

21. Struggling readers receive extra practice in one or more of the five elements of reading.

22. Struggling readers receive small group or individualized instruction.

Table 5 Professional Development

SURVEY SECTION 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

23. How to teach the core reading program

24. How to teach the five core elements of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension

25. How to understand the progression in which reading skills should be taught, the underlying structure of the English language, and why some children have difficulty learning to read well

26. How to administer and interpret assessments of students’ progress

27. How to effectively manage the classroom to maximize time on task

28. I received release time to participate in either on-site or off-site professional development sessions or to observe other teachers modeling instruction.

29. I participated in regularly scheduled collaborations that were devoted to reading with other teachers in my grade level.

Table 6 Instructional Support

SURVEY SECTION 6: INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

30. I participated in regularly scheduled collaborations that were devoted to reading with teachers across grade levels.

31. An instructional leader observed my teaching and gave me feedback on how to improve my teaching techniques.

33. Other teachers observed my teaching and provided feedback.

34. A literacy coach provided mentoring on programs, materials or strategies.

During survey completion, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers responded to survey items from their individual job perspectives. Participants selected the rating that best reflected their position to a particular survey item. For each item, participants chose a rating score between 1 to 5. A score of 1 reflected that the participant “strongly disagreed” with the survey item or that the program element was implemented with less frequency. A score of 5 reflected that the participant “strongly agreed” with the survey item or that the program element was implemented more frequently.

Research data were analyzed using the SPSS 19.0 software. First, the researcher generated participants’ descriptive demographic data. Next, the researcher used the obtained frequencies from participants’ survey responses. The results from the survey data were analyzed to determine principals’, literacy coaches’, and teachers’ perceptions regarding implementation fidelity.

MCT reading test data were collected and analyzed for the years of 2004 through 2007 from Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System (MAARS) to determine how perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers on the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of*

Mississippi Reading First Schools - Teachers related to second and third grade students' reading outcomes on the MCT. The MCT was a criterion referenced test developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill and the Mississippi Department of Education to assess students' achievement in Grades 2-8 in the areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics against objectives outlined in the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks (MDE, 2007). Proficiency on the MCTs was divided into four categories: minimal, basic, proficient and advanced (MDE, 2007). Minimal scores represented students who did not demonstrate mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level. Basic scores represented students who demonstrated partial mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level. Proficient scores represented students who demonstrated solid academic performance and mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level. Advanced scores represented students who consistently performed in a manner clearly beyond that required to be successful at the next grade level. A student's proficiency level was determined by how many score points earned on each section of the test. Students' raw scores, or actual points earned, were then converted to scale scores or statistically common scores that allowed for numerical comparison between students and over time (MDE, 2007).

Procedures

The researcher began by gaining permission from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study (see Appendix C). Next, the researcher

contacted local superintendents by mail and by phone to gain consent to conduct the study in their local schools (see Appendix D). Once permission was received from local superintendents, the researcher contacted building principals by mail, then by phone, to explain the research study and to coordinate the administration of the surveys. The consent form, which was the first page, explained the research study and indicated to participants that by completing the survey they were consenting to participate in the research study. The surveys were provided to participants through an emailed survey link. The researcher's email address was provided as a part of the online survey so that participants could contact the researcher if they had questions about the survey or the research study. The researcher coded participants' emails by school so that survey results could be correlated with students' MCT reading scores. Participants were given a two-week period for survey completion. At the end of the two week period, the researcher contacted principals by phone and by email to follow up with participants who had not responded. Non-respondents were given another week to complete the survey. At the end of the third week, data results were analyzed.

Data Analysis

Survey data were collected using Survey Monkey, an online survey tool. Once the completed consent form (see Appendix D) was received from research participants, they were emailed a link that allowed them to complete the survey online. The online survey tool was used to tally the results. When the timeframe for data collection expired, the researcher retrieved the data using the Survey Monkey reporting tools. The

researcher used the program's filters to download participants' responses by school. The survey data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the principals', literacy coaches', and teachers' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there were differences among the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program within each school.

Student assessment data were collected from the MAARS. The researcher downloaded MCT reading assessment reports by school for the years 2004 through 2007. The Pearson r was used to look for relationships between MCT reading assessment outcomes for second and third grade students and principals', literacy coaches', and teachers' perceptions of implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited to principals, literacy coaches, and teachers at Reading First schools in the state of Mississippi in grades kindergarten through third grade who had implemented the Reading First program for three or more years. These schools were chosen because they had a sufficient amount of time to implement the program with a high degree of fidelity, and they are possibly the most reliable source of information about implementation of the Reading First program in Mississippi schools. This study was also limited by time. Since the study examined data from 2004-2007, faculty and

staff attrition, adoption of new state assessments, and reduction in resources were all factors that affected the outcome of the study.

Limitations of the Study

Findings from this study were limited by several factors. First the research study examined events that occurred in the past. Second, staff attrition and the lack of continued funding had an impact on the way current staff viewed program implementation. Third, staff members were also asked to respond to surveys during the spring semester of the 2010-2011 school term. For many schools, the spring semester is a frantic time of preparation for state exams, year-end activities, and close out reports. Fourth, the study relied on self-reported data which depends on the truthfulness of the participants. Finally, the small sample size also limits the generalizations which can be made to the larger population.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that all participants in this study provided honest and accurate responses to all items on the questionnaire. The researcher further assumed that participants had a working knowledge and understanding of the Reading First program.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

In order to assess the level of implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the impact that Reading First programs had on student achievement in K-3 classrooms in selected Mississippi Schools, the researcher used data collected from the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches*, the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools -Teachers*, and test data from the Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Rating System. Of the 16 schools identified as having implemented the Reading First program for three or more years, eight schools agreed to participate in the study. In total, 75 out of 94 (79.7%) individuals responded to the survey. As listed in Table 7, 8 principals (10.7%), 5 literacy coaches (6.7%), 18 kindergarten teachers (24.0%), 14 first grade teachers (18.7%), 16 second grade teachers (21.3%), and 14 third grade teachers (18.7%) completed surveys.

Table 7 Position of Participants

Position	Frequency	%
Principal	8	10.7
Literacy Coach	5	6.7
Kindergarten Teacher	18	24.0
First Grade Teacher	14	18.7
Second Grade Teacher	16	21.3
Third Grade Teacher	14	18.7

Additional demographic data which addressed gender, years of professional experience, highest degree held, and type of educator license held are shown in Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11, respectively. Of the 75 participants, 10 (13.3%) were males and 65 (86.7%) were females. The years of participants' experience varied; 17 (22.7%) participants had 0 to 5 years of experience; 15 (20%) participants had 6 to 10 years of experience; 31 (41.3%) participants had 11 to 20 years of experience; and 12 (16%) participants had 21 or more years of experience. In regard to the highest degree earned, 31 (41.3%) respondents indicated they had a bachelor's degree; 33 (44.0%) respondents indicated they had a master's degree; 9 (12.0%) respondents indicated they had a specialist's degree, and 1 (2.7%) respondent indicated he/she had a doctorate degree. All participants had a standard educator's license.

Table 8 Gender of Participants

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	10	13.3
Female	65	86.7

Table 9 Years of Professional Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	%
0-5	17	22.7
6-10	15	20.0
11-20	31	41.3
21 or more	12	16.0

Table 10 Highest Degree Held

Highest Degree	Frequency	%
Bachelor's Degree	31	41.3
Master's Degree	33	44.0
Specialist Degree	9	12.0
Doctorate Degree	2	2.7

Table 11 Type of Educator License Held

Type of License	Frequency	%
Standard Educator License	75	100.0
Emergency License	0	0.0
Provision License	0	0.0

Reading First Survey Responses

Two surveys, the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools - Teachers* were used as a part of the study. The *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* was administered to principals and literacy coaches, and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers* was given to kindergarten through third grade teachers at each school to collect the data needed to answer research questions one, two, and three. Both surveys were divided into six sections: (a) Core Elements of the Reading First program, (b) Instructional Strategies, (c) Student Assessment, (d) Support for Struggling Readers, (e) Professional Development, and (f) Instructional Support.

Each survey item included a Likert scale rating from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement or a low implementation frequency and 5 indicating strong agreement or high implementation frequency. Data were analyzed using the average total score of the survey and subsection average scores of the survey. The total survey included 34 items. Each response on the survey was assigned a value from 1 to 5, corresponding to the respondent's answer. The maximum score for the total survey was 170 points. The average total survey score was computed by dividing the total score by 34. Each section average was calculated by totaling the participant's response on that section and dividing by the number of questions in that particular section. Sections one and three had six questions with 30 possible points each. Sections two, four, and five each had five questions with 25 possible points, and section six had seven questions with 35 possible points. Data for the survey were disaggregated for responding groups – principals, literacy coaches, and teachers.

Findings

Research Question # 1

What were the principals' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?

Data collected from surveys completed by principals revealed that principals had an overall mean score of 3.60 on the survey. This indicates that principals' average score was between "neutral" and "agree" on the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program. To further understand principals' average total score, principals' responses to

each survey section (Core Elements of the Reading First program, Instructional Strategies, Student Assessment, Support for Struggling Readers, Professional Development, and Instructional Support) were analyzed. Table 12 contains principals' survey responses.

Table 12 The Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools –Principals and Literacy Coaches (Principals' Responses)

	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Average Survey Score	8	3.24	4.38	3.60	.45
Average Core Elements	8	2.33	5.00	4.22	.88
Average Instructional Strategies	8	4.00	5.00	4.40	.39
Average Student Assessment	8	2.67	4.33	3.31	.56
Average Support for Struggling Readers	8	3.60	4.20	3.90	.28
Average Professional Development	8	3.00	4.40	3.58	.46
Average Instructional Support	8	1.57	4.43	2.55	1.05

The first section of the survey included six items that asked respondents to describe their perceived level of implementation of the Core Elements of the Reading First program. Respondents were asked to choose from a scale of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree for each construct listed in Core Elements. On the Core Elements of the Reading First program survey section, principals had a mean score of 4.22 suggesting that principals “agreed” that students in their school received at least 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction daily, and that phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension were essential elements of reading instruction.

The second section of the survey, Instructional Strategies, was comprised of five items. On this section, participants were asked to tell how often they implemented specific instructional strategies that aligned with Reading First program guidelines. Participants were asked to respond to the indicators listed in Instructional Strategies by selecting: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times a month, (3) once a week, (4) 2 to 3 times a week, or (5) 4 to 5 times a week. The highest possible score for section 2 was 25. In regard to Instructional Strategies, principals had an average mean score of 4.40, indicating that principals discerned that teachers implemented phonics based instruction, fluency building activities, explicit comprehension strategies, vocabulary building exercises, and in-class grouping activities “2 to 3 times a week”.

Section 3, Student Assessment, asked participants to describe the frequency with which various assessments were used to screen students for potential reading problems, diagnose specific reading difficulties, and monitor students’ progress in achieving desired learning results through formative and summative assessments. Participants responded to the six survey items found in the Student Assessment section by selecting: (1) never, (2) 1 to 4 times a year, (3) monthly, (4) 2 to 3 times a month, or (5) weekly. The maximum score for section 3 was 30. Principals had a mean score of 3.31 on the Student Assessment section of the survey. This suggests that on average, principals perceived that their schools were administering various assessments and using assessment data to organize instructional reading groups on a “monthly” basis.

Section 4, Support for Struggling Readers, addressed the level of support that each school provided for struggling readers. The five survey items outlined in the

Support for Struggling Readers section were used to ascertain how often participants provided extra instructional support for struggling readers. Participants rated survey items in section 4 by selecting: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times per month, (3) once a week, (4) 2 to 3 times a week, and (5) 4 to 5 times a week. The maximum score for section 4 was 25. On the fourth section of the survey, Support for Struggling Readers, principals had an average mean score of 3.90. In essence, principals noted that struggling readers were provided support “2 to 3 times per week”. Support services provided to students included: identification of core deficits, scientifically research-based and evidence-based interventions, extra instructional time, extra practice in one or more of the five core elements of reading, and small group or individualized instruction.

The fifth section of the survey, Professional Development, was organized into the five items. Professional Development survey items asked respondents to tell how often they participated in professional development sessions that focused on reading instructional content. Survey items in section five were rated using: (1) never, (2) once a year, (3) twice a year, (4) three times a year, and (5) more than three times a year. The highest score for section 5 was 25. On the Professional Development section of the survey, principals had a 3.57 average mean score. Generally speaking, professional development activities that focused on how to teach the core reading program, how to teach the five core elements of reading - phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension - how to understand the progression in which reading skills should be taught, how to administer and interpret student assessments, and how to

effectively manage the classroom, were provided “three times a year” during the school term.

Section 6: Instructional Support asked participants to describe how often they received or provided instructional support to assist with the delivery of reading instruction in classrooms. Participants responded to professional development survey items using: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times, (3) 4 to 6 times, (4) 7 to 9 times, and (5) 10 or more times. The maximum score participants could receive on section 6 was 35. In regard to Instructional Support, principals had a mean score of 2.55, suggesting that principals perceived that teachers received instructional support “4 to 6 times” in a year. In other words, teachers received release time, participated in same grade level and cross grade level collaborations about reading instruction, were observed and given feedback by an instructional leader, observed and provided feedback to other teachers, and/or were mentored by the literacy coach “4 to 6 times” during the school term.

In summary, principals perceived that the Reading First program was implemented with fidelity. Based upon the survey data, it is apparent that principals rated implementation of the Core Elements of the Reading First program, Instructional Strategies, and Support for Struggling Readers sections of the survey higher than they rated the implementation of Professional Development, Student Assessment, and Instructional Support.

Research Question # 2

What are the literacy coaches' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First Program at their respective schools?

Five literacy coaches responded to *The Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches*. Literacy coaches surveyed had a total average mean score of 3.60, suggesting that literacy coaches' perceptions were between “neutral” and “agree” regarding the implementation of the Reading First program. A breakdown of literacy coaches' survey responses are found in .

Table 13 The Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches (Literacy Coaches' Responses)

	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Average Survey Score	5	3.26	4.41	3.60	
Average Core Elements	5	3.83	5.00	4.37	.58
Average Instructional Strategies	5	3.80	5.00	4.64	.53
Average Student Assessment	5	2.83	3.17	3.00	.12
Average Support for Struggling Readers	5	3.40	4.40	3.88	.41
Average Professional Development	5	2.20	4.40	3.32	.88
Average Instructional Support	5	1.43	5.00	2.71	1.39

The first section of the survey included six items that asked respondents to describe their perceived level of implementation of the Core Elements of the Reading First program. Respondents were asked to choose (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree. On the first section of the survey, Core Elements

of the Reading First program, literacy coaches had a mean score of 4.36. This suggested that Reading First literacy coaches “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that students received 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction. This also implied that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension were core elements of reading instruction.

The second section of the survey, Instructional Strategies, was comprised of five items. On this section, participants were asked to tell how often they implemented specific instructional strategies that aligned with Reading First Program guidelines. Participants were asked to respond to Instructional Strategies survey items by selecting: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times a month, (3) once a week, (4) 2 to 3 times a week, or (5) 4 to 5 times a week. The highest possible score for section 2 was 25. On the second section of the survey, Instructional Strategies, literacy coaches yielded an average mean score of 4.64. In other words, literacy coaches perceived that teachers were implementing phonics based instruction, fluency building activities, explicit comprehension strategies, vocabulary building exercises, and in-class grouping activities “4 to 5 times a week.”

Section 3, Student Assessment, asked participants to describe the frequency with which various assessments were used to screen students for potential reading problems, diagnose specific reading difficulties, and monitor students’ progress in achieving desired learning results through formative and summative assessments. Participants responded to the six survey items by selecting: (1) never, (2) 1 to 4 times a year, (3) monthly, (4) 2 to 3 times a month, or (5) weekly. The maximum score for section 3 was 30. Literacy

coaches gave the Student Assessment section of the survey an average mean score of 3.00, indicating that assessment activities were generally conducted on a “monthly” basis.

Section 4, Support for Struggling Readers, addressed the level of support that each school provided for struggling readers. The five survey items were used to ascertain how often participants provided extra instructional support for struggling readers.

Participants rated survey items in section 4 using: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times per month, (3) once a week, (4) 2 to 3 times a week, and (5) 4 to 5 times a week. The maximum score for section 4 was 25. In regards to Support for Struggling Readers, literacy coaches had a average mean score of 3.88. On average, literacy coaches perceived that struggling readers received additional instructional support in the form of diagnostic assessments, interventions, extra time, extra practice, and/or small group or individualized instruction “2 to 3 times per week”.

The fifth section of the survey, Professional Development, was organized into five survey items. Professional development survey items asked respondents to tell how often they participated in professional development sessions that focused on reading instructional content. Survey items in section five were rated using: (1) never, (2) once a year, (3) twice a year, (4) three times a year, and (5) more than three times a year. The highest score for section 5 was 25. In terms of Professional Development, literacy coaches had an average mean score of 3.32. Thus, literacy coaches perceived that teachers participated in professional development activities that focused on: (a) how to teach the core reading program, (b) how to teach the five core elements of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, (c) how to

understand the progression in which reading skills should be taught, (d) how to administer and interpret student assessment, and (e) how to effectively manage the classroom “twice a year”.

Section 6: Instructional Support asked participants to describe how often they received or provided instructional support to assist with the delivery of reading instruction in classrooms. There were seven survey items found in section 6. Participants responded to professional development survey items using: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times, (3) 4 to 6 times, (4) 7 to 9 times, and (5) 10 or more times. The maximum score participants could receive on section 6 was 35. Concerning, Instructional Support, literacy coaches had an average mean score of 2.71, indicating that instructional support activities occurred “4 to 6 times” in a school term.

Overall literacy coaches’ perceptions about implementation of the Reading First program were between “neutral” and “agree.” The Core Elements of the Reading First program, Instructional Strategies endorsed by the Reading First program, and Support for Struggling Readers received higher implementation ratings from literacy coaches than did Student Assessment, Professional Development, and Instructional Support.

Research Question #3

What are the teachers’ perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?

Sixty-two teachers in kindergarten through third grade responded to the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers*. The total average mean score for teachers

was 3.31. Teachers generally took a “neutral” position regarding the implementation of the Reading First program at their schools contains teachers’ survey responses.

Table 14 The Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers (Teachers’ Responses)

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Average Survey Score	62	2.41	4.38	3.31	
Average Core Elements	62	1.00	5.00	4.09	1.10
Average Instructional Strategies	62	2.40	5.00	4.49	.46
Average Student Assessment	62	1.50	5.00	3.27	.82
Average Support for Struggling Readers	62	1.60	4.80	3.95	.63
Average Professional Development	62	1.40	5.00	3.29	1.24
Average Instructional Support	62	1.14	5.00	2.70	.87

Section 1: Core Elements of the Reading First program included six items that asked respondents to describe their perceived levels of implementation of the Core Elements of the Reading First program. Respondents were asked to choose (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree. On Core Elements, teachers had a mean score of 4.08 indicating that teachers “agreed” that students received 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction daily and that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension were core elements of reading instruction.

The second section of the survey, Instructional Strategies, was comprised of five items. On this section, participants were asked to tell how often they implemented

specific instructional strategies that aligned with Reading First program guidelines.

Participants were asked to respond to these indicators by selecting the phrases: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times a month, (3) once a week, (4) 2 to 3 times a week, or (5) 4 to 5 times a week. The highest possible score for section 2 was 25. On Instructional Strategies, teachers had a mean score of 4.49, signifying that teachers reported providing phonics based instruction, fluency building activities, explicit comprehension strategies, vocabulary building exercises, and in-class grouping activities “2 to 3 times a week.”

Section 3, Student Assessment, asked participants to describe the frequency with which various assessments were used to screen students for potential reading problems, diagnose specific reading difficulties, and monitor students’ progress in achieving desired learning results through formative and summative assessments. Participants responded to the six survey items on Section 3 by selecting: (1) never, (2) 1 to 4 times a year, (3) monthly, (4) 2 to 3 times a month, or (5) weekly. The maximum score for section 3 was 30. With regard to Student Assessment, teachers had a mean score of 3.27, suggesting that students were assessed “monthly”.

Section 4, Support for Struggling Readers, addressed the level of support that each school provided for struggling readers. The five survey items outlined in section 4 were used to ascertain how often participants provided extra instructional support for struggling readers. Participants rated survey items in section 4 using the following: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times per month, (3) once a week, (4) 2 to 3 times a week, and (5) 4 to 5 times a week. The maximum score for section 4 was 25. Teachers had an average mean score of 3.95 on section 4: Support for Struggling Readers. In other words, students

received diagnostic assessments, scientifically research-based or evidence-based interventions, extra time, extra practice, and/or small group or individualized instruction “2 to 3 times a week”.

The fifth section of the survey, Professional Development, was organized into the five items. Professional Development survey items asked respondents to tell how often they participated in professional development sessions that focused on reading instructional content. Survey items in section five were rated using: (1) never, (2) once a year, (3) twice a year, (4) three times a year, and (5) more than three times a year. The highest score for section 5 was 25. In terms of Professional Development, teachers had an average mean score of 3.29, suggesting that professional development activities related to reading instructional content were held “three times a year”.

Section 6: Instructional Support asked participants to describe how often they received or provided instructional support to assist with the delivery of reading instruction in classrooms. There were seven survey items that addressed Instructional Support. Participants responded to professional development survey items using: (1) never, (2) 1 to 3 times, (3) 4 to 6 times, (4) 7 to 9 times, and (5) 10 or more times. The maximum score participants could receive on section 6 was 35. On the Instructional Support section of the survey, teachers had a mean score of 2.69. In essence, teachers perceived that instructional support activities occurred “4 to 6 times” during the school year.

In general, teachers had a “neutral” perception about the implementation of the Reading First program at their schools. Teachers gave high ratings on survey sections 1,

2, and 4: the Core Elements of the Reading First program, Instructional Strategies, and Support for Struggling Readers. On the other hand, teachers scored Student Assessment activities, Professional Development on reading instructional content, and Instructional Support lower.

Research Question #4

Are there differences among the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program within each school?

Survey results from the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools - Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools - Teachers* were examined using the ANOVA which is sufficiently robust for analysis of data with 8 and 5 participants. Tables 15-21 show the ANOVA calculations for principals, literacy coaches, and teachers. A p value of .05 was used to determine statistical significance. Explanations of the results for the average mean total score and for each survey section's average mean score are provided.

When the total average mean scores were analyzed, there was not a statically significant difference among the respondents' scores, $F(2,72) = 2.176$, $MSE = .448$, $p = .12$. The average total survey scores for the principals ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .45$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .48$, $n = 5$), and teachers ($M = 3.3$, $SD = .45$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 15 demonstrates the ANOVA calculations on the average total score.

Table 15 ANOVA Calculations for Average Mean Total Score

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α</i>
Between Groups	.896	2	.448	2.176	.121
Within Groups	14.818	72	.206		
Total	15.714	74			

When the average Core Elements of Reading First scores were analyzed, there was not a statistically significant difference among the respondents' scores, $F(2,72) = .212$, $MSE = 2.18$, $p = .12$. The total Core Elements of Reading First average score for principals ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .39$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .54$, $n = 5$), and teachers ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .46$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 16 illustrates the ANOVA calculations on the Core Elements average mean score.

Table 16 ANOVA Calculations for Average Core Elements

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α</i>
Between Groups	.471	2	.236	.212	.810
Within Groups	80.060	72	1.112		
Total	80.531	74			

When the average Instructional Strategies survey scores were analyzed, there was not a statistically significant difference among the respondents' average mean scores, $F(2,72) = .42$, $MSE = .09$, $p = .66$. The Instructional Strategies average scores for principals ($M = .440$, $SD = .39$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .54$, $n = 5$), and

teachers ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .46$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 17 presents the ANOVA calculations on the Instructional Strategies average mean score.

Table 17 ANOVA Calculations for Average Instructional Strategies

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α.</i>
Between Groups	.177	2	.089	.422	.657
Within Groups	15.126	72	.210		
Total	15.303	74			

When the average Student Assessment survey scores were analyzed, there was not a statistically significant difference among the respondents' Student Assessment average mean scores $F(2,72) = .30$, $MSE = .18$, $p = .74$. The Student Assessment average mean score of principals ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .56$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .12$, $n = 5$), and teachers ($M = 3.27$, $SD = .81$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 18 shows the ANOVA calculations on the Student Assessment average mean score.

Table 18 ANOVA Calculations for Average Student Assessment

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α.</i>
Between Groups	.363	2	.182	.304	.739
Within Groups	43.100	72	.599		
Total	43.463	74			

When the average scores for Support for Struggling Readers were analyzed, there was not a statistically significant difference among the respondents' scores $F(2,72) = .05$, $MSE = .20$, $p = .95$. The average Support for Struggling Readers scores of the principals ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .28$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .41$, $n = 5$), and teachers ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .63$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 19 exhibits the ANOVA calculations on the Support for Struggling Readers average mean score.

Table 19 ANOVA Calculations for Average Support for Struggling Readers

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α.</i>
Between Groups	.039	2	.020	.055	.946
Within Groups	25.383	72	.353		
Total	25.422	74			

When the average Professional Development survey scores were analyzed, there was not a statistically significant difference among the respondents' scores, $F(2,72) = .20$, $MSE = .28$, $p = .82$. The average Professional Development scores of the principals ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .46$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .39$, $n = 5$), and teachers ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.24$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 20 displays the ANOVA calculations on the Professional Development average mean score.

Table 20 ANOVA Calculations for Average Professional Development

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α.</i>
Between Groups	.561	2	.281	.205	.815
Within Groups	98.380	72	1.366		
Total	98.942	74			

When the average Instructional Support survey scores were analyzed, there was not a statistically significant difference among the respondents' scores $F(2,72) = .09$, $MSE = .07$, $p = .92$. The average Instructional Support scores of the principals ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .105$, $n = 8$), literacy coaches ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.39$, $n = 5$), and teachers ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .87$, $n = 62$) were not statistically different. Table 21 illustrates the ANOVA calculations on the Instructional Support average mean score.

Table 21 ANOVA Calculations for Average Instructional Support

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>α.</i>
Between Groups	.149	2	.075	.086	.917
Within Groups	62.038	72	.862		
Total	62.187	74			

Research Question # 5

How do the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding implementation fidelity of the Reading First program relate to second and third grade

students' reading outcomes on the 2004-2007 Mississippi Curriculum Test for each respective school?

To answer research question 5, the survey scores of the principals, literacy coaches, and teachers were collapsed to form one group that would serve as one of the variables in a series of bivariate Pearson r correlations. The first series of Pearson r correlations were computed on the total average mean survey scores and the percentage of students at each respective school scoring proficient or advanced on the MCT in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. The second series of Pearson r correlations were computed on the total average mean survey scores and the 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 MCT scales scores of the respective schools. In all 16, Pearson r correlation coefficients were computed, the results did not reveal any statistically significant relationships between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers and students' reading achievement. For the most part, the results showed all weak or non-existent correlations. Tables 21 - 25 display the results of the 16 Pearson r correlation coefficients that were computed. For 2005 and 2006, the correlations between educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the percent of second grade students who scored proficient or advanced on the MCT were weak and negative, as shown in Table 22. For 2004 and 2007, the correlations between educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the percent of second grade students who scored proficient or advanced on the MCT were weak or non existence as shown in Table 22.

Table 22 Correlations – Total Average Survey Score and Percent of 2nd Grade Students who Scored Proficient or Advanced

	2004 MCT	2005 MCT	2006 MCT	2007 MCT
Average Pearson Score Correlation	.017	-.062	-.092	.141
Sig. (2- tailed)	.883	.595	.431	.229

For 2005, 2006, and 2007, the correlations between educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the percent third grade students who scored proficient or advanced on the MCT were negative and weak or nonexistence as shown in Table 23. For 2004, the correlation between educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the percentage of third grade students who scored proficient or advanced on the MCT was negative and weak or nonexistent as shown in Table 23.

Table 23 Correlations – Total Average Survey Score and Percent of 3rd Grade Students who Scored Proficient or Advanced

	2004 MCT	2005 MCT	2006 MCT	2007 MCT
Average Pearson Score Correlation	.093	-.051	-.092	-.187
Sig. (2- tailed)	.426	.662	.431	.109

Table 23 Correlations – Total Average Survey Score and Percent of 3rd Grade Students who Scored Proficient or Advanced

	2004 MCT	2005 MCT	2006 MCT	2007 MCT
Average Pearson Score Correlation	.093	-.051	-.092	-.187
Sig. (2- tailed)	.426	.662	.431	.109

For 2005 and 2006, the correlations between educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the average scale scores of second grade students on the MCT were very weak and negative as shown in Table 24. For 2004 and 2007, the correlations between educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the average scale scores of second grade students on the MCT were very weak and negative as shown in Table 24.

Table 24 Correlations – Total Average Survey Score and Average Scale Score of 2nd Grade Students

	2004 MCT	2005 MCT	2006 MCT	2007 MCT
Average Pearson Score Correlation	.062	-.078	-.080	.058
Sig. (2- tailed)	.597	.505	.493	.619

For 2005, 2006, and 2007, the correlations between educator’s perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the average scale scores of third grade students on the MCT were weak or non existence and negative as shown in Table 25. For 2004, the correlation between educator’s perceptions of the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs and the average scale scores of third grade students on the MCT was weak and negative as shown in Table 25.

Table 25 Correlations – Total Average Survey Score and Average Scale Score of 3rd Grade Students

	2004 MCT	2005 MCT	2006 MCT	2007 MCT
Average Pearson Score Correlation	.068	-.042	-.069	-.118
Sig. (2- tailed)	.562	.719	.559	.313

Based on these results, the perceptions of school personnel regarding the implementation of the Reading First program were not related to second and third grade students’ performance on the 2004, 2005, 2006, or 2007 MCT tests.

Summary of Findings

Research questions one through three asked, “What are principals’, literacy coaches’ and teachers’ perceptions of the Reading First program at their respective

schools?” Survey questions asked participants to rate each question using a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” or less frequent implementation and 5 indicating “strongly agree” or more frequent implementation. Based upon survey results, principals and literacy coaches had a total average mean score of 3.60 indicating that they were between “neutral” and “agree” in terms of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program. Teachers’ perceptions regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program was “neutral” as evidenced by them having an total average mean survey score of 3.31. All groups of research participants had average scores of 3.9 to 4.6 on the Core Elements of the Reading First program, Instructional Strategies, and Support for Struggling Readers sections of the survey. This implied that respondents either “agreed” that these program components were in place or that respondents perceived that these program components were being implemented with more frequency. Principals, literacy coaches, and teachers had lower average scores on the Student Assessment, Professional Development, and Instructional Support sections of the survey. The average mean scores for these sections ranged from 2.5 to 3.31. These results suggest that participants had “neutral” perceptions about program implementation or that participants perceived that the implementation of these program components occurred less frequently.

Research question four asked if there were any differences between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers within each respective school. While there was some variance in the way principals, literacy coaches and teachers responded to each section of the survey, there was not a statistically significant difference

between the principals, literacy coaches and teachers perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program within their respective schools. These findings suggest that the overall, principals', literacy coaches', and teachers' discernment of the Reading First program implementation were similar.

Research question five asked if the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches and teachers were related to second and third grade students' reading achievement on the MCT from 2004-2007. The researcher did not find a significant relationship between the perceived implementation of the Reading First program and second and third grade students' reading achievement results on the MCT. Specifically, there were weak or nonexistent correlations between the perceived implementation of the Reading First program and the percent of second and third graders scoring proficient or advanced on the MCT from 2004-2007. In addition, there were weak or nonexistent correlations between the perceived implementation of the Reading First program and the reading scale scores of second and third grade students.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine educators' perceptions of implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools, to determine if there were differences among educators' perceptions, and to determine if there was a relationship between educators' perceptions of implementation and the MCT reading scores of second and third grade students. Schools that implemented the Reading First program for three or more years were asked to participate in this research study. Of the 16 identified schools, eight schools made up the research population. Survey data were collected from principals, literacy coaches, and kindergarten through third grade teachers to determine the perceived level of implementation of the Reading First program. Second and third grade students' reading scores on the MCT were used to explore the relationships between perceived implementation and the reading achievement of students. This study was guided by five research questions:

1. What are the principals' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?
2. What are the literacy coaches' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?

3. What are the teachers' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools?
4. Are there differences among the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program within each school?
5. How do the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding implementation fidelity of the Reading First program relate to second and third grade students' reading outcomes on the 2004-2007 Mississippi Curriculum Test for each respective school?

The study was conducted in three phases. First, the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers* were emailed to participants. Results from the surveys were used to describe the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at their respective schools. Second, survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA to determine if there were differences between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers within each school. Finally, Pearson r correlation coefficients were calculated to determine if the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers were related to second and third grade students' performance on the reading section of the MCT. Chapter 5 presents the summary of findings, implications of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

Summary

The *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Survey of Mississippi Reading First Schools – Teachers* were given to principals, literacy coaches, and teachers at participating schools. Survey items on section 1 asked respondents to describe their perceived level of implementation of the Core Elements of the Reading First program by choosing (a) strongly disagree, (b) disagree, (c) neutral, (d) agree, or (e) strongly agree. The second section of the survey, Instructional Strategies, asked respondents to tell how often they implemented specific instructional strategies that aligned with Reading First program guidelines. Participants were asked to rate these indicators by selecting the terms: (a) never, (b) 1 to 3 times a month, (c) once a week, (d) 2 to 3 times a week, or (e) 4 to 5 times a week. Section 3, Student Assessment, asked participants to describe the frequency with which various assessments were used. Participants responded by selecting: (a) never, (b) 1 to 4 times a year, (c) monthly, (d) 2 to 3 times a month, or (e) weekly. Section 4, Support for Struggling Readers, addressed the level of support that each school provided for struggling readers. Participants rated survey items in section 4 using the following terms: (a) never, (b) 1 to 3 times per month, (c) once a week, (d) 2 to 3 times a week, and (e) 4 to 5 times a week. Professional Development survey items asked respondents to tell how often they participated in professional development sessions that focused on reading instructional content. Survey items in section five were rated using: (a) never, (b) once a year, (c) twice a year, (d) three times a year, and (e) more than three times a year. Section 6: Instructional Support asked participants to describe how often they received or

provided instructional support to assist with the delivery of reading instruction in classrooms. Participants responded to professional development survey items using: (a) never, (b) 1 to 3 times, (c) 4 to 6 times, (d) 7 to 9 times, and (e) 10 or more times.

Results from the principals' and literacy coaches' surveys revealed that both groups of participants had similar perceptions about the implementation of the Reading First program. This was evidenced by principals and literacy coaches both having an average total score of 3.60. These scores reflect that principals and literacy coaches took a stance between being "neutral" and "agreeing" that the Reading First program had been implemented with fidelity. According to survey results, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers "agreed" that the Core Elements of the Reading First program were in place. Moreover, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers "agreed" that Reading First Instructional Strategies and Supports for Struggling Readers were implemented "2 to 3 times a week." Principals, literacy coaches, and teachers reported that Student Assessment took place "monthly," Professional Development occurred "4 to 6 times" per school term, and Instructional Supports were implemented "4 to 6 times" per school term.

ANOVA results confirmed that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation fidelity of the Reading First Programs at their schools. A comprehensive examination of the descriptive survey data for principals, literacy coaches, and teachers revealed that participants from all three groups ranked the survey sections in the same order. The survey sections on Instructional Strategies and the Core Elements of the Reading First program had the highest rating. The section on Professional Development and Support

for Struggling Readers clustered in the middle, and the survey sections on Student Assessment and Instructional Support had the lowest rating.

Research results showed weak correlations between the perceived implementation of the Reading First Programs by principals, literacy coaches, and teachers and the MCT reading scores of second and third grade students. Pearson r correlation coefficients were calculated using the average total survey score and the percent of second and third grade students who scored proficient or advanced for 2004-2007. Pearson r correlation coefficients were also calculated on the average total survey scores and the MCT reading scale scores for second and third grade students for the 2004-2007 school terms. Again, there were no significant correlations found between the perceived implementation and students reading achievement.

Conclusions

Research questions one, two, and three addressed educators' perceptions about the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program. According to Gresham et al. (2000), implementation fidelity is the delivery of instruction in the way in which it was designed to be delivered. Kisker et al. (2000) offered operational definitions for describing five different levels of implementation. According to Kisker et al., the five levels of implementation and their definitions are

1. Minimal implementation – The program shows no evidence or effort to implement the relevant program elements;

2. Low-level implementation – The program has made some effort to implement the relevant program elements;
3. Moderate implementation – The program has made some aspects of the relevant program elements;
4. Full implementation – The program has substantially implemented the relevant program elements; and
5. Enhanced implementation – The program has exceeded expectations for implementing the relevant program element.

Using these definitions in conjunction with the survey results from the *Mississippi Reading First Survey – Principals and Literacy Coaches* and the *Mississippi Reading First Survey – Teachers*, the following conclusions related to research questions 1-3 are presented as follows:

Conclusion 1: Principals from the eight participating schools perceived that the required components of the Reading First program had been fully implemented with fidelity at their schools.

Conclusion 2: Literacy coaches from the eight participating schools also perceived that the required components of the Reading First program had been implemented with fidelity at their schools.

Conclusion 3: Teachers from the eight participating schools perceived that the required components of the Reading First program had been moderately implemented with fidelity at their schools.

In other words, principals and literacy coaches reported that a substantial number of required Reading First program elements were implemented with fidelity; whereas, teachers reported that only some of the required Reading First program elements were implemented with fidelity. Instructional Support, Student Assessment, and Professional Development were the three survey sections that received the lowest scores. Each group of participants had an average score that was less than 3.0 on the Instructional Support variable, and between 3.0 and 3.5 on the Student Assessment and Professional Development variables. Based upon the literature review, ratings on the Instructional Support construct are of extreme concern. According to Feiler et al. (2000), teachers need excellent and repeated modeling by experts; time to practice and try out new learning without being evaluated; coaching by mentors and peers; and time for collegial collaboration, reflection, and sharing. Kose (2007) confirmed that ongoing, professional interactions on specific teaching and learning issues help teachers to make meaningful, lasting changes that improve student learning. Hence, it is imperative that school leaders make the implementation of Instructional Support activities a priority if their goal is to improve instructional practices and student achievement.

Data from the Student Assessment section of the surveys support the need for educators to continue their efforts in this area. Lessons learned and prior research conducted by Teale (2008) and Tierney and Thorne (2006) from Reading First program activities provided several concerns that school leaders must consider as they implement assessment systems. First, the content of the assessment must thoroughly cover reading standards that are developmentally important at a particular time. Second, administrators

and teachers must not allow the assessment to replace the curriculum (Tierney & Thorne, 2006). Lastly, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers must systematically share student assessment data and carefully examine students' performance on curriculum-embedded measures to guide instructional decisions (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Taylor et al., 2000). Based on the results from the Professional Development section of the surveys, Reading First schools must continue their implementation of professional development activities. Fenstermacher and Berlinger (1985) stated that the goal of staff development is to advance the knowledge, skills, and understandings of teachers in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behavior. The demand to improve students' reading achievement requires that administrators and teachers continue to participate in professional development activities that (a) help teachers implement effective reading programs; (b) help teachers understand the progress in which reading skills should be taught, the underlying structure of the English language, and why some children have difficulty learning to read well; and (c) help teachers learn how to administer and interpret assessments of students' progress and how to effectively manage their classroom to maximize time on task (USDE, 2002). Based upon the results used to answer research questions four and five, several additional conclusions were drawn.

Conclusion 4: There were no differences among the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers at the eight participating schools in regards to the implementation fidelity of Reading First programs.

Conclusion 5: There were no statistically significant relationships between educators' perception of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program and the MCT reading scores of second and third grade students.

The disparity between perceived implementation and increase student achievements results from this research study and those found in the literature review have significant implications. According to studies by (Bennett et al., 2008; Carlisle & Zeng, 2007; MGT, 2008), gains in student achievement were attributed to the implementation of the Reading First program. While there were no statistical differences found between the perceptions of principals, literacy coaches, and teachers regarding the implementation of the Reading First program, school leaders must realize that the similarities in perceptions clearly indicate areas of strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of Reading First programs. In addition, these results provide a foundation for administrators and their staff members to investigate underlying factors that adversely affect program implementation and student achievement outcomes.

Based upon the correlational results used to answer research question five, there were no significant relationships between principals', literacy coaches' and teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Reading First program and students' reading achievement on the MCT. Bowers (2011) reported similar findings from a recent study of California's Reading First programs. Bowers also indicated that there was no significant relationship between program implementation and improved student reading outcomes. Bowers sought to determine if a relationship existed between the level of implementation of the Reading First program, as measured by the Reading First Program

Implementation Instrument and the literacy achievement of kindergarten through fifth grade students as measured by the English Language Arts California Standards Test and the Reading First Achievement Instrument. The English Language Arts California Standards Test data results which were analyzed by grade level and subgroup did not reveal any consistent patterns or trends that suggested that the implementation of the Reading First program was particularly successful at any specific grade level or with any specific group. Bowers (2011) also did not find a correlation between the level of Reading First implementation and student achievement on the RFAI for data collected between 2005 and 2009 . Findings from the *Reading First Impact Study* also indicated that the implementation of Reading First programs did not have a significant impact on students' reading achievement or changes in classroom instruction (Gamse et al., 2008).

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the results obtained from this study and the need for further research of the Reading First program or similar reading programs, the following studies should be considered:

1. A longitudinal study which examines the impact of Reading First programs on students' reading achievement over time;
2. An examination of the types and quality of interventions provided to students to determine if there is a correlation between interventions and student outcomes on state assessments; or

3. A study that examines the correlation between Instructional Support variables and student achievement.

The Reading First program was a substantially funded program designed to assist schools in improving the reading outcomes of students in kindergarten through third grade (USDA , n.d.). The overall purpose of the Reading First program was to ensure that all students exited the third grade reading on grade level. Substantial time, money, and personnel were expended to support program implementation. The review of related literature indicated that Reading First programs have improved student achievement in many states, but to varying degrees.

The majority of Reading First schools ensure that the five core elements of reading - phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension - are taught as a part of daily reading instruction. The use of student data for instructional planning purposes is becoming a customary practice. However, the full implementation of other elements such as the provision of professional development on reading related content, providing support for struggling readers, and providing instructional support for teachers is still a challenge for many schools. External and other administrative demands often take precedent over the quality of implementation required by Reading First. This has resulted in conflicting reports regarding a clear and direct relationship between the implementation of Reading First and improved student achievement results.

In a world of ever changing curriculum standards, high stakes accountability requirements, and diverse student populations, the need to implement effective programs is paramount. The days of trial and error are long gone and educators must now depend

upon programs and strategies that have a solid research foundation to help them improve student achievement. Therefore, district and school administrators must embrace the position of instructional leader. They must assume full responsibility for leading the implementation of academic programs, like Reading First. They must also have a well defined methodology for monitoring and evaluating program implementation and student achievement outcomes along the way.

By fully implementing comprehensive literacy programs like Reading First, educators will be making several contributions to the 21st century's global society. Most importantly, educators will increase the number of literate citizens within the general public. Second, students will be better prepared to learn new material in subsequent grades if they leave third grade reading on grade level. Third, students who are literate will be better prepared to compete in today's global market. Thus, the impact of developing students' reading abilities and their love for reading has the potential to have far reaching effects. Consequently, educators must do their part in ensuring that programs are implemented and that funds are used wisely to support the improved achievement of students.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF MISSISSIPPI READING FIRST SCHOOLS - TEACHERS

SURVEY OF MISSISSIPPI READING FIRST SCHOOLS - TEACHERS

Notice to Participants: This questionnaire is designed and administered to gather information on the implementation of Reading First in selected Mississippi schools. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All information will be kept strictly confidential. No respondent will be identified individually or by school. **Thank you for your participation.**

Instructions: Please select the response that best represents your position on each prompt. Select ***only*** one response per prompt.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Instructions: Please select one.

1. Gender

- A. () Male
- B. () Female

2. Years of Teaching Experience

- A. () 0 – 05
- B. () 06 -10
- C. () 11 – 20
- D. () 21 or more

3. Highest Degree Held

- A. () Bachelor’s Degree
- B. () Master’s Degree
- C. () Specialist Degree
- D. () Doctorate degree

4. Type of License Held

- A. () Standard Educator License
- B. () Alternative Certification
- C. () Provisional – Interim License
- D. () Provisional – Teaching Out of Area

5. Position currently held

- A. Kindergarten Teacher
- B. 1st Grade Teacher
- C. 2nd Grade Teacher
- D. 3rd Grade Teacher

6. School Name: _____

I. CORE ELEMENTS

Please respond to the following prompts about instructional strategies.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The students in our school receive at least 90 minutes of <i>uninterrupted</i> reading instruction daily.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Phonemic awareness is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Phonics is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Vocabulary is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

5. Fluency is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Comprehension is one of the core elements of my reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

II. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

How often do you implement the following instructional strategies in your literacy instruction?	Once a month or less	2 to 3 times a month	Once a week	2 to 3 times a week	4 to 5 times a weeks
7. I use phonics based letter-sound relationships to assist students in reading text.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I use fluency building activities (repeated reading, guided reading, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
9. I explicitly teach comprehension strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I provide vocabulary building exercises.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I use in-class grouping, including small group instruction, to meet students' needs.	1	2	3	4	5

III. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

How often are the following assessment activities implemented as a part of your school's early literacy program?	Less than once a year	3 to 4 times a year	Monthly	2 to 3 times a month	Weekly
12. Universal screeners are administered to identify students who need supplementary reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Diagnostic assessments are given to identify the specific needs of individual students.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Progress monitoring assessments are given to determine if students are achieving the desired results of a specific supplementary intervention.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Formative assessments are given to determine if students are achieving grade level reading standards.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Summative assessments are given to determine if students have met established reading standards.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Assessment data is used to organize instructional groups for reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

IV. SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

Please indicate your level of implementation in providing support for struggling readers.	Less than once a month	2 to 3 times per month	Once a week	2 to 3 times a week	4 to 5 times a week
18. Struggling readers are given diagnostic assessments to determine their core deficits.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Scientifically research-based or evidence based reading interventions are provided to struggling readers.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Struggling readers receive extra instructional time.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Struggling readers receive extra practice in one or more of the five elements of reading.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Struggling readers receive small group or individualized instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How often have you participated in professional development sessions that focused on the following reading instructional content?	Never	Once a year	Twice a year	Three times a year	More than three times a year
23. How to teach the core reading program	1	2	3	4	5
24. How to teach the five core elements of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension	1	2	3	4	5
25. How to understand the progression in which reading skills should be taught, the underlying structure of the English language, and why some children have difficulty learning to read well	1	2	3	4	5
26. How to administer and interpret assessments of students' progress	1	2	3	4	5
27. How to effectively manage the classroom to maximize time on task	1	2	3	4	5

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

How often did you receive the following instructional support?	Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	10 or more times
28. I received release time to participate in either on-site or off-site professional development sessions or to observe other teachers modeling instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

29. I participated in regularly scheduled collaborations that were devoted to reading with other teachers in my grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I participated in regularly scheduled collaborations that were devoted to reading with teachers across grade levels	1	2	3	4	5
31. An instructional leader observed my teaching and gave me feedback on how to improve my teaching techniques.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I observed an instructional leaders model reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Other teachers observed my teaching and provided feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
34. A literacy coach provided mentoring on programs, materials or strategies.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B
SURVEY OF MISSISSIPPI READING FIRST SCHOOLS –
PRINCIPALS AND LITERACY COACHES

**SURVEY OF MISSISSIPPI READING FIRST SCHOOLS -
PRINCIPALS AND LITERACY COACHES**

Notice to Participants: This questionnaire is designed and administered to gather information on the implementation of Reading First in selected Mississippi schools. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All information will be kept strictly confidential. No respondent will be identified individually or by school. **Thank you for your participation.**

Instructions: Please select the response that best represents your position on each prompt. Select only one response per prompt.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Instructions: Please select one.

1. Gender

- A. () Male
- B. () Female

2. Years of Experience

- A. () 0 – 05
- B. () 06 -10
- C. () 11 – 20
- D. () 21 or more

3. Highest Degree Held

- A. () Bachelor’s Degree
- B. () Master’s Degree
- C. () Specialist Degree
- D. () Doctorate degree

4. Type of License Held

- A. () Standard Educator License
- B. () Alternative Certification
- C. () Provisional – Interim License

5. Position currently held

- A. Principal
- B. Literacy Coach

6. School Name: _____

I. CORE ELEMENTS

Please respond to the following prompts about instructional strategies.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The students in our school receive at least 90 minutes of <u>uninterrupted</u> reading instruction daily.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Phonemic awareness is one of the core elements of teachers’ reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Phonics is one of the core elements of teachers’ reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Vocabulary is one of the core elements of teachers’ reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

5. Fluency is one of the core elements of teachers' reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Comprehension is one of the core elements of teachers' reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

II. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

How often teachers implement the following instructional strategies in your literacy instruction?	Once a month or less	2 to 3 times a month	Once a week	2 to 3 times a week	4 to 5 times a weeks
7. Teachers use phonics based letter-sound relationships to assist students in reading text.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Teachers use fluency building activities (repeated reading, guided reading, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers explicitly teach comprehension strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Teachers provide vocabulary building exercises	1	2	3	4	5
11. Teachers use in-class grouping, including small group instruction, to meet students' needs.	1	2	3	4	5

III. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

How often are the following assessment activities implemented as a part of your school's early literacy program?	Less than once a year	3 to 4 times a year	Monthly	2 to 3 times a month	Weekly
12. Universal screeners are administered to identify students who need supplementary reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Diagnostic assessments are given to identify the specific needs of individual students.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Progress monitoring assessments are given to determine if students are achieving the desired results of a specific supplementary intervention.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Formative assessments are given to determine if students are achieving grade level reading standards.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Summative assessments are given to determine if students have met established reading standards.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Assessment data is used to organize instructional groups for reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

IV. SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

Indicate your school's level of implementation in providing support for struggling readers.	Less than once a month	2 to 3 times per month	Once a week	2 to 3 times a week	4 to 5 times a week
18. Struggling readers are given diagnostic assessments to determine their core deficits.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Scientifically research-based or evidence based reading interventions are provided to struggling readers.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Struggling readers receive extra instructional time.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Struggling readers receive extra practice in one or more of the five elements of reading.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Struggling readers receive small group or individualized instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How often teachers at your school participated in professional development sessions that focused on the following reading instructional content?	Never	Once a year	Twice a year	Three times a year	More than three times a year
23. How to teach the core reading program	1	2	3	4	5
24. How to teach the five core elements of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension	1	2	3	4	5
25. How to understand the progression in which reading skills should be taught, the underlying structure of the English language, and why some children have difficulty learning to read well	1	2	3	4	5
26. How to administer and interpret assessments of students' progress	1	2	3	4	5
27. How to effectively manage the classroom to maximize time on task	1	2	3	4	5

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

How often did the following instructional support activities occur at your school?	Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	10 or more times
28. Principals, literacy coaches and principals received release time to participate in off-site professional development sessions.	1	2	3	4	5

29. I participated in or facilitated regularly scheduled collaborations that were devoted to reading with teachers in the same grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I participated in or facilitated regularly scheduled collaborations that were devoted to reading with teachers across grade levels	1	2	3	4	5
31. I observed and provided feedback to teachers on how to improve their teaching techniques for reading.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I modeled reading instructional strategies for teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I allowed teachers to observe and provide feedback to one another on reading instructional strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
34. The literacy coach provided mentoring on programs, materials or strategies.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CERTIFICATION

February 17, 2011

Angel Meeks
737 Franklin Road
Goodman, MS 39079

RE: IRB Study #10-344: Assessing the Impact of Reading First Programs on Student Achievement in K-3 Classrooms in Selected Mississippi Schools

Dear Ms. Meeks:

This email serves as official documentation that the above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 2/17/2011 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at <http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/aahrpp.php>. The first of these changes is the implementation of an approval stamp for consent forms. The approval stamp will assist in ensuring the IRB approved version of the consent form is used in the actual conduct of research. Your stamped consent form will be attached in a separate email.

As a reminder, prior to conducting research with any Mississippi school, you must receive written consent to do so.

A signed formal approval letter will only be mailed at your request. Please refer to your IRB number (#10-344) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at nmorse@research.msstate.edu or call 662-325-3994.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Assistant Compliance Administrator

cc: Debra Prince (Advisor)

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research

The survey you are about to complete is a part of a research study entitled, *Assessing the Impact of Reading First Programs on Student Achievement in K-3 Classrooms in Selected Mississippi Schools*.

The study will include Reading First schools in Mississippi who have implemented the Reading First program for at least three years.

Mrs. Angel Meeks, a graduate student at Mississippi State University, is the principal researcher.

The purpose of this project is to determine educators' perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program as implemented in at their respective schools and to determine if their perceptions are related to the MCT reading scores of second and third grade students.

Directions: You are being asked to complete an electronic survey regarding your perceptions of the implementation fidelity of the Reading First program at your school. The survey will take you about 30 minutes to complete. You will be asked to respond to survey items that address the literacy schedule, the five core elements of reading, instructional strategies, instructional assessments, support for struggling readers, professional development, instructional support, and implementation fidelity. You will be given two-weeks to complete the survey. If you have not completed the survey in two weeks, you will be given one reminder. At the end of the third week, data results will be analyzed.

There are no risks in completing this survey. Your responses to survey will be kept strictly confidential. If sitting in front of a computer for an extended period of time causes you discomfort, you can stop the survey and begin again at a later time.

Your participation in this study will contribute to educator's understanding of the relationship between implementation fidelity and student achievement outcomes.

The researcher will collect and code data by school, grade, and position versus individual names. This will allow the researcher to maintain each participant's confidentiality. In addition, each school will be given a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the school.

Please note that these records will be held by a state entity and therefore are subject to disclosure if required by law.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Angel Meeks at 601-278-6787 or aldmeeks@aol.com. You may also contact the principal

researcher's advisors, Dr. Debra Prince at 662-325- 7055 or Dr. Margaret Pope at 662-325-7104.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or to express concerns or complaints, please feel free to contact the MSU Regulatory Compliance Office by phone at 662-325-3994, by e-mail at irb@research.msstate.edu, or on the web at <http://orc.msstate.edu/participant/>.

Please understand that your **participation is voluntary**. Your **refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss** of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You **may discontinue your participation** at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Consent

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you do not wish to participate in this study, please close your internet browser now. Otherwise, your completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this research study.

Please print this consent page to keep for your records.