Leadership Challenges in Implementing a Balanced Literacy Model in Elementary Schools

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https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.25774/w4-r8w8-q628

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Leadership Challenges in Implementing a Balanced Literacy Model in Elementary Schools

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty and Staff of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Amy C. Colley
April 2014
Leadership Challenges in Implementing A Balanced Literacy Model In Elementary Schools

by

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Approved April 2014 by

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M. Jan Rozzelle, Ed.D.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to readers and writers everywhere; especially to the students whose literacy is our leadership responsibility.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Sheet</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I: Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Setting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Program</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic Model</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for All Grant Project</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Program Evaluation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II: Review of the Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report of the National Reading Panel</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

For years I resisted the commitment to a doctoral program, feeling that the theory-heavy, research-laden environment did not adequately reflect the real-world setting of school leadership, where practice and results drive what we do. I am grateful to the College of William and Mary for offering this Executive Ed. D. program, and I am proud to be a member of the first cohort. I appreciate and am indebted to the entire faculty and to each member of our diverse group. You have all challenged, inspired, supported and encouraged me on this journey. Thank you, Dr. Staples, for having the vision to get this program going and for keeping us going along the way!

My project would be incomplete were it not for the support of the district and its leadership who willingly let me establish it as my context. Thank you.

When I began graduate studies in school administration my first course in leadership was with Dr. DiPaola, and he has provided the appropriate push and pull that forced me to determine clearly the kind of school leader I would be. As my dissertation chair, he continued to stretch my thinking, support my project and encourage my leadership. This work would not be complete without his direction, including his role in fielding the rest of my dissertation committee. Dr. Grant set my program evaluation model on course, and Dr. Rozzelle offered rich feedback on literacy. Thank you.

My passion for learning and literacy has been simultaneously fueled and supported by my family, and their role in the completion of this project cannot be understated. With special acknowledgement to David, who has always been my number one fan, thank you, family. I’m done! No more degrees. I promise.
List of Tables

Table 1 State Standardized Assessment Reading Data for District

Table 2 Synthesis of Balanced Literacy Instruction Conceptions, Research & Implications

Table 3 Managerial Tactics During Implementation by Success Rate and Frequency

Table 4 Data Collection Plan for Year Three

Table 5 Means from Lesson Plan Rubric with Standard Deviation in Parentheses

Table 6 Percentage of Instructional Elements Present in Lesson Plans

Table 7 Percent of Resource Elements Present in Lesson Plans

Table 8 Means from Classroom Observation Checklist with Standard Deviation in Parentheses

Table 9 Percentage of Instructional Elements Present in Observations

Table 10 Percent of Resource Elements Present in Observations

Table 11 Comparison of Related Elements of Lesson Plans and Observations

Table 12 Extent of Implementation as Reported in Interviews and Focus Groups

Table 13 Aspects Facilitating Success as Reported in Interviews and Focus Groups

Table 14 Challenges as Reported in Interviews and Focus Groups

Table 15 Suggestions to Improve Balanced Literacy Implementation
List of Figures

Figure 1 Average Years’ Teaching Experience by Grade

Figure 2 Logic Model of Balanced Literacy Model in One District

Figure 3 Stages of the Implementation Process

Figure 4 Interrelated Stages of Data Analysis

Figure 5 The Implementation Dip

Figure 6 Large Scale Syntheses of Reading Research
Leadership Challenges in Implementing a Balanced Literacy Model in Elementary Schools

Abstract

The purposes of this study were to conduct a formative evaluation in the third year of one district’s implementation of a balanced literacy model to determine the degree of fidelity of implementation as well as to identify successes and challenges experienced by instructional staff. The evaluation model was designed from the constructivist paradigm using Scriven’s (1991) goal-free evaluation as a framework. In conducting the evaluation, lesson plans were analyzed, classroom observations were conducted and interviews and focus groups were facilitated. The resulting qualitative data and descriptive statistics revealed implementation gaps and needs in the areas of writing and word study instruction as well as in the use of some resources. Participants identified the materials, release time for planning and increased collaboration as successes, and identified lack of time to plan and to teach, the scope and sequence of the curricula, writing and word study instruction, assessment and professional development as challenges. Leadership behaviors emerged from the evaluation as an important consideration when implementing initiatives; in the end, the literacy model’s implementation evaluation served as the context from which leadership challenges at the school and district level emerged.

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Leadership Challenges in Implementing a Balanced Literacy Model in Elementary Schools
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Learning to read is the essential work of childhood. Literacy skills serve as building blocks upon which much learning is constructed, and gaps in literacy development are difficult to close as students get older. An Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011) study indicated that students who are not reading well by third grade are more likely than their same age peers who are reading well to drop out or not finish high school. Additionally, the study indicated that students living in poverty were at higher risk and that minority students were most at risk. The study cites 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results that indicate only 33 percent of fourth graders read at the proficient level (pp. 4-5). An analysis of graduation rates as compared to NAEP proficiency in reading led the group to conclude that:

- One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade fail to graduate from high school on time, four times the rate for children with proficient third-grade reading skills.
- Children who have lived in poverty and are not reading proficiently in third grade are about three times more likely to dropout or fail to graduate from high school than those who have never been poor.
- Black and Hispanic children who are not reading proficiently in third grade are about twice as likely as similar white children not to graduate from high school. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011 pp. 5, 7, 9)
This background research points to the significant needs our students have to acquire essential reading skills and the urgency with which educators should respond.

Societal perceptions complicate this issue. Since many in the general public can read, and since the reading wars have been waged for more than 30 years in educational, public and policy arenas, many non-educators have opined and cast judgment on reading education in the United States. A quick Google search reveals numerous resources promising to teach children to read in as few as 20 easy lessons. Moats (1999) however, in a paper prepared for the American Federation of Teachers, cited the critical and complex nature of teaching reading. “Teaching reading is a job for an expert. Contrary to the popular theory that learning to read is natural and easy, learning to read is a complex linguistic achievement” (p. 13). Learning to read involves sustained effort and skill development over time. Furthermore, teaching reading requires particular knowledge and skill, acquired over several years through intensive study and supervised practice.

In the meta-analysis of research on teaching and learning, Visible Learning, Hattie (2009) reported that “reading is one of the most contested curricula areas, as so many educationalists have made strong claims as to the best way to teach reading” (p. 129). Ultimately, learning to read is an intricate, nuanced process, one that is essential for all students to master, yet the means and methods continue to be fiercely contested on both educational and political agendas.

**Description of the Setting**

The setting for this program evaluation of the implementation of a K-5 balanced literacy model is a suburban school district in the Southeastern United States. Comprised of four schools (primary, K-2; elementary, 3-5; middle, 6-8; high, 9-12), the total student
population is slightly over 2,200. The district’s administrative instructional staff is comprised of an assistant superintendent for instruction and two instructional directors. All K-5 teachers in the district are highly qualified, having attained at least a bachelor’s degree, demonstrated competency in each subject taught and being fully licensed by the state, as required by federal law. More than half of the teachers also have a master’s degree. The district has a rich history of high achievement and success on state and federal accreditation and accountability standards. Decreased enrollment, sharp economic decline and higher state standards of accountability for schools contributed to a dip in achievement. Consequently, the elementary school failed to meet the federal standard of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the third year in a row and moved into school improvement for 2011-12. Historical data from statewide tests for third grade reading are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd Grade Reading Scores</th>
<th>2005-06</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Passing Scores</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Benchmark Met?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No – School Choice</td>
<td>No – School Improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) scores for students in grades K-3 showed an increase in the number of students not meeting benchmark scores from two percent to over five percent. While the changes in PALS’ performance reflect relatively low percentages of students not meeting benchmarks, the increases may be
related to both a changing student population and a fairly static teaching environment.

Figure 1 illustrates the longevity of teachers at both schools. The average years of teaching experience for the primary school is close to 20 years while the elementary school’s average years of teaching experience is closer to just ten.

![Figure 1. Average years’ teaching experience by grade.](image)

The years’ teaching experience of teachers may impact the degree to which they are able to provide appropriate instruction and intervention, at both ends of the longevity spectrum. Veteran teachers may not have adequate contemporary tools in their teaching toolbox to meet the changing needs of students; likewise, novice teachers may possess the contemporary tools for teaching in the 21st century but lack the experience to implement them well. Regardless, the difference in years of teaching experience between the teachers in the non-state mandated testing grades and the state mandated testing grades is notable.

Finally, the percent of economically disadvantaged students increased from 10% in 2005 to 13% in 2010 for the district, and the number of homeless students in the district continues to rise. Test and screening scores, teaching experience in the district and percent of economically disadvantaged students all contribute to a changing context
for the district. Fiscal limitations due to decreased state funding and the economic recession restricted the district’s ability to implement large scale change to address the decline in reading scores.

During 2010-11 the district applied for and received a three-year federal grant in order to address the growing literacy issues through a project entitled, “Reading for All.” The project has been translated into a balanced literacy model for the district and while the project has a mandatory evaluation component (formative by the quarter and year as well as summative); I am most interested in the implementation of the program, particularly for the generalizations that might be applied to other large-scale curricular changes in a district.

**Description of the Program**

In an effort to conceptualize the project and its inter-related components, I developed a logic model using the original literacy grant application and program descriptions. Lipsey (1988, 2007) noted that a logic model affords the researcher an opportunity to determine the “underlying theory of programs, identify mediating variables that influence outcomes, and develop designs reflecting more real-world conditions” (as cited in Mertens and Wilson, 2012, p.43). According to Frechtling (2007), the representation of the resources, strategies, actions, participation and outcomes (see Figure 2) “helps to clarify the critical components and linkages within a project, offering a blueprint of possible areas on which an evaluation might focus” (p, 65).
Figure 2. Logic model of balanced literacy model in one district.

Reading for All Grant Project

The critical resource for this program was financial; therefore the three-year Department of Defense Educational Activity (DoDEA) grant funding drove the initiative to a large extent. Although assessment data indicated great need for change in practice, the grant funding made the project scalable, K-5, providing needed consistency in the district. Describing the strategies, actions, and participation in the year in which they occurred illuminates exactly how the project unfolded, and it helps to identify external factors that may have impacted the program.

Year one (2011-12). District leaders chose three key strategies in developing the project. The first was to develop and implement a research-based literacy program, and
this required multiple actions. In the spring prior to the grant funding (2011), the district contracted with a network for school districts at a university to conduct an external reading audit so that district leaders and key stakeholders (school principals, reading specialists and representative teachers) could ascertain strengths and weaknesses in the current program.

In the fall (2011-12), the district contracted with university experts to provide professional development over the course of the year on explicit teaching and reading comprehension strategies. At the same time the district formed a K-5 reading committee and reached out to experts in the field of literacy to guide them through the process of researching effective literacy programs. These experts included external consultants and nationally recognized university professors of literacy education. The committee also looked to exemplary school districts in the state for literacy models. In the spring committee members attended vendor presentations of three publishers’ literacy materials and chose one for division purchase and adoption. Ultimately, three committee subgroups drafted a literacy model based on an approach that a balance of reading, word study and writing was best practice in literacy instruction. District and school based administrators presented the framework of the model to teachers, grades K-5, in late spring. During that kickoff event, the district presented teachers with iPads purchased with grant funds to support literacy instruction and teacher productivity in literacy instruction. As the school year ended, the key central office administrator leading the initiative left the district for a promotion elsewhere in the state.

**Year two (2012-13).** As the second year (2012-13) began, a newly hired administrator at the central office was charged with continuing the implementation of the
project, including finalizing the draft of the literacy model, purchasing the new materials and arranging for professional development to start the school year. In preparation for the new model and materials, principals removed previous reading materials (e.g., the basal series and ancillary materials, supplemental materials such as Wilson Reading’s FunDations for primary readers) from the classrooms. While the balanced literacy model existed in draft form, no formal curricula had been written at this point, and as a result, the teachers worked to implement the new literacy model with new materials (Benchmark Literacy), no pre-existing materials, state standards’ frameworks but no district curricula.

Just prior to the start of the school year, the district provided professional development on integrating the balanced literacy model into the explicit teaching framework, using instructional technology (several iPad applications for literacy) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) for determining students’ reading levels. Representatives from Benchmark Literacy provided a one day workshop and orientation for the new materials for reading, writing and word study. Despite professional development activities and communication at the school level, the lack of curricula coupled with all new materials, created anxiety among teachers.

In an attempt to move the program forward and alleviate some pressure on teachers, the district provided release time for ongoing project development. Each grade level was given one half day per quarter to plan literacy instruction together. In late fall a Benchmark Literacy representative returned and met with teachers throughout the day to answer questions and to provide staff development on the assessment components of Benchmark Literacy. As the year progressed, volunteer teacher teams of two per grade level worked with a contracted consultant to explore and understand the curriculum
framework and to write curricula during February and March, 2013. The district reading committee convened again to analyze the new curricula, discuss lesson planning for literacy and explore available interventions for students who struggle. The committee recommended resources for handwriting instruction (production of writing) and online components of the purchased materials (Benchmark Literacy). Last, the committee provided updates and revisions to the literacy model itself. These revisions included the research base for the model, a model for tiered interventions, a menu of tiered interventions and sample instructional models. Appendix A provides a redacted version of this updated model.

In late May and early June, teachers met by grade levels for orientation to and exploration of the new curricula. During this time, the framework and curricula were presented; grade levels explored the documents and learned about revisions to the literacy model. The district provided the curricula in both hard copies and hyperlinked electronic versions on the district’s intranet, EdLine (see Appendix A, p. 24, for detailed professional development activities associated with the Reading for All grant).

As the district prepared for the third year of implementation, findings from the teacher evaluations of professional development sessions, audits conducted by researchers in a network of school districts at a university in 2011 and 2013 and the Reading for All grant annual reports impacted and informed decisions. Teachers consistently reported the need for continuity and no new initiatives, asking instead for the time they needed to implement balanced literacy well first. They reported the need for materials, such as online resources, low-level, high-interest leveled reading material, classroom library books and professional development for teaching word study and
writing. They also asked to continue to work with university experts on a peer observation model in an effort to learn from one another and improve practice.

At year’s end, teachers received 400 dollars’ worth of self-selected classroom library books. The district purchased online access to books, assessments and an interactive whiteboard in the Benchmark Universe as well as a handwriting program. Teachers in grades 3-5 received additional low-level high interest reading books and several writing resources, including the Trait Crate® for writing instruction. Finally, principals at the two schools worked together on a professional development plan that would support teachers’ working together in professional learning communities (PLCs) when they returned in the fall. This was intended to support the need for peer observation, and it signaled the gradual release of responsibility from the district to the schools.

**Year three (2013-14).** The study described in this paper was designed to evaluate implementation during this third and final year of the grant. Teachers began the year with professional development sessions led onsite by their administrators, in the K-5 setting, to continue encouraging the two schools to work together to implement a consistent model across the grades. Planned activities for the year included more professional development on the use of technology tools in literacy instruction, professional development on identifying and supporting struggling students and release time as grade level teams to collaborate on the implementation of the curriculum and literacy model.

**Rationale for Program Evaluation**

Implementation evaluations can serve multiple purposes. They can be focused on identifying the perceived strengths and weaknesses during implementation. They may help reexamine the relevance of a program under fluctuating conditions. Implementation
evaluations may be used to gauge the extent to which suitable resources were available for a given program, to measure the perceptions of the program by key stakeholders or to monitor the experiences of the stakeholders (Mertens, 2012, p. 275). These purposes are appropriate to this district’s context for several reasons, particularly as they relate to identifying strengths and challenges and reassessing a program’s appropriateness under changing conditions. Given the current political climate in education, nationally and in the state of Virginia, continued large scale changes to instructional programs are likely. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of programs helps not only to modify the existing program, but may inform subsequent programmatic change initiatives. The formative program evaluation used in this project most closely resembles what Scriven (1991) described as a goals-free evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide meaningful feedback during the implementation phase of a project in order to make improvements. The problem, implementing a large-scale balanced literacy model across grades K-5, drives the design of the evaluation, not the end goals. Evaluating the implementation in year three is designed to yield suggestions for improvement and the future direction for balanced literacy implementation for the district. I developed the following evaluation questions to explore the problem.

**Evaluation Questions**

1. To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by:
   a. Lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy; and
   b. Instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy?
2. What aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in a school district are facilitating successes or creating barriers or stumbling blocks to success for teachers and ultimately student achievement?

These research questions drove the design of the evaluation. I discuss the evaluation paradigm and model, as well as the complete methodology in detail in chapter three.

**Definition of Terms**

Balanced Literacy – For the purposes of this study, balanced literacy refers to this district’s approach to literacy instruction as threefold and taught through reading, word study and writing. It refers to the notion that instruction is balanced across the structure (e.g., phonics, word study) and the meaning (e.g., comprehension) of language.

Explicit Teaching – Explicit teaching refers to a direct approach to teaching and is characterized by attention to supporting students as they learn. Teachers provide unambiguous purposes for learning, deliver clear content, demonstrate or model the instruction and allow for guided practice with feedback until students achieve a level of mastery (Archer and Hughes, 2011).

Program Evaluation – Program evaluation “is a profession that uses formal methodologies to provide useful empirical evidence about public entities … in decision-making contexts that are inherently political and involve multiple often conflicting stakeholders, where resources are seldom sufficient, and where time pressures are salient” (Trochim, 1998, p. 248).

Word Study – Word study involves both the development of a general knowledge of spelling conventions and the ability to make generalizations about spelling. This is accomplished by hands-on manipulation of words and word parts. Word study also
increases knowledge about the meanings of words and word parts (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton and Johnston, 2012).
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides an overview of research and literature pertaining to the key components of the program evaluation. The importance of reading for young children is critical, and the literature points to both the complexity and the general lack of agreement among researchers on one best approach to teaching reading. It is highly evident that politics and policy drive educational reform in both national and state approaches to reading instruction and intervention, particularly given mandates to implement evidence-based programs in education. Finally, research in implementation practices points to the complexity and the challenge of implementing research based programs in education.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children

The National Research Council’s (1998) *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, attempted to address fundamental issues raised by the reading wars of the 1970s, 80s and 90s and served as an early synthesis of research in the field of reading. “The assumption that empirical work in the field of reading had advanced sufficiently to allow substantial agreed-upon results and conclusions that could form a basis for breaching the differences among the warring parties” (p. v) provided sufficient structure to the committee’s work, chaired by Catherine Snow, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University and directed by Susan Burns. They conclude that schooling in and of itself, with effective teachers employing strong instructional strategies is the first and best prevention strategy. The synthesis of their research provides a framework for literacy goals for kindergarten and first through third grade.

The National Research Council (1998) found that for kindergarten literacy, a focus on a rich read-aloud environment supported by strong instruction in alphabetic
(phonemic awareness and phonics) principles produced learners who were considered ready to read. While basal reading series provide multiple supports and structure for beginning teachers, researchers discovered that basal series were rarely evaluated for effectiveness, thereby limiting researchers’ ability to draw substantial conclusions about their efficacy in kindergarten reading instruction.

First grade is typically the year students learn to read, and the National Research Council (1998) reported the following characteristics of effective instructional programs for first grade reading: direct instruction and repetition with sound structures that lead to phonemic awareness; awareness of letter-spelling-sound correspondences and conventional spelling patterns and their usefulness in identifying printed words; sight recognition of everyday words; and independent reading, both silent and aloud. The Council reviewed research across three types of first grade reading instructional models in Houston schools: whole language, with implicit alphabetic learning; embedded phonics; and direct code instruction. Researchers found that actual improvement in word reading was accelerated in students whose instruction consisted of explicit code instruction; however, they noted a stronger desire to read and more positive attitudes toward reading among students in whole language classrooms. Additionally, they found that while most American public schools utilized some sort of basal for instruction, that instruction was often poorly aligned with research (pp. 194-207).

Finally, the National Research Council (1998) discussed the importance of second and third grade for encouraging independent reading while at the same time ensuring that all students have actually learned to read. They emphasize the importance of spelling, moving from the invented sound-letter spellings of grade one to the systematic, regular
spelling patterns, word families and beyond to affixes and derivations. The National Research Council (1998) asserted the imperative that by the time students reach fourth grade their reading ability be developed enough so as not to interfere with their comprehension and ability “to analyze, critique, abstract and reflect on text” (p. 210). If this cannot be achieved, then it is unlikely that those students will profit from future learning opportunities. The Council (1998) concluded that the way for students to progress in reading beyond a basic level is to have a solid foundation in alphabetics and adequate practice in reading fluently for understanding.

During the same time period, the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998) found that a thorough review of research to date yielded a synthesis of shared aims in reading instruction. They concluded the following:

Adequate initial reading instruction requires a focus on:

- using reading to obtain meaning from print;
- the sublexical structure of spoken words;
- the nature of the orthographic system; the specifics of frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships;
- frequent opportunities to read; and
- opportunities to write.

Adequate progress in learning to read English beyond the initial level depends on:

- having established a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically;
sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts written for different purposes; and

control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings. (p. 114)

In summary, while acknowledging the ongoing debate for best reading practices, the committee was able to reach some common ground and make a case for a balanced approach to literacy instruction. While the National Research Council (1998) was collecting, reviewing and reporting on the state of reading in 1996, the United States Congress was making similar plans.

**Report of the National Reading Panel**

In 1997 Congress charged the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to work with the Secretary of Education to convene a national panel to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching students to read and, if warranted, to recommend plans for additional research and/or changes in reading instruction. Regional hearings aided the panel in creating a framework of topics for intensive study: alphabetsics (phonemic awareness instruction and phonics instruction), fluency, comprehension (vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction and teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction), teacher education and reading instruction and computer technology and reading instruction. In conducting their meta-analyses and qualitative analyses of current research, the National Reading Panel (NRP) established standards, and studies were selected if they met these criteria:

1. Published in English in a refereed journal;
2. Focused on children’s reading development in the age/grade range from preschool to grade 12; and

3. Used an experimental or quasi-experimental design with a control group or a multiple-baseline method. (NICHHD, 2000, p. 5)

They found that reading instruction that included “teaching children to manipulate phonemes in words” (p. 7) was highly effective, across ability, age and grade ranges. Furthermore, the NRP (2000) concluded that “systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read” (p. 9). Ultimately, policy movements gained momentum based on the significant conclusions the NRP drew regarding phonics instruction.

**Response to the Report of the National Reading Panel**

The research findings within the NRP report and elsewhere reveal mixed results supporting phonics instruction for pre- and early readers. Research from the National Institute for Early Education Research and Rutgers University highlights the public debate driven by the NRP’s conclusions about phonics instruction. Camilli, Vargas and Yureko (2003) re-examined the studies and attempted to replicate the results of the phonics meta-analyses in the NRP’s report. They detailed criticisms with the methodology, conclusions and procedures used by the NRP. The criticism with the methodology concerns the relatively constricted population of children represented in the 38 studies; the students were nearly all below grade level, making it difficult to generalize the results across populations of average and high ability students. The second criticism came from the NRP’s failure to adequately define reading and to distinguish word calling from the more complex derivation of meaning from text. They further
concluded that the NRP report inaccurately attributed substantial weight to stand-alone phonics instruction, confusing explicit with prescriptive. Finally, Camilli, Vargas and Yureko (2003) expressed concerns with the compressed timeframe allocated to the study of the research on phonics. Contrasting sharply with the roughly 3 years spent on the entire report was the short 5 month span the subcommittee on phonics instruction spent on its meta-analysis, compounded by the fact that the subcommittee commissioned a researcher outside of the NRP to conduct the meta-analysis.

Countering Camilli, Vargas and Yureko (2003), Steubing, Barth, Cirino, Francis and Fletcher (2008) agreed with the NRP’s assertion that systematic phonics instruction is a necessary precursor to reading and presented research findings that challenged Camilli, Vargas and Yureko’s original work. They argued that effects for phonics instruction are high and are in fact increased when combined with other literacy activities. Their research did not refute the findings of the NRP. In response, Camilli, Kim and Vargas (2008) found agreement on this point asserted by Steubing (2008). Teaching ideologies ought not be dissected and split, because in general they exist on a continuum. In analyzing the continuum for the alphabetic principle, “it may be more that the more important component is explicitness and the deliberate attempt to instruct the child as opposed to a scripted approach to phonics” (p. 132). Both sets of researchers agree that there are multiple ways to provide explicit instruction.

The best methods for teaching reading have been debated for decades. While the debate continues, the role that phonics plays in reading has also become a political issue. The International Reading Association (1997) received so many inquiries in the wake of
the NRP’s report, that they issued their own position statement. They make three assertions.

1. The teaching of phonics is an important aspect of reading instruction.
2. Classroom teachers in the primary grades do value and do teach phonics as part of their reading programs.
3. Phonics instruction, to be effective in promoting independence in reading, must be embedded in the context of a total reading/language arts program.

They share concerns with overstated assertions made by the press, the growth of legislated mandates for highly prescriptive phonics programs and setting phonics instruction in opposition with literature-based instruction.

Current policy and educational leaders would be wise to take note of the ongoing debate regarding phonics instruction in the primary classroom. They must consider the complexities of teaching reading and learning to read as well as the vast quantity of competing research available. Leaders must resist the urge to place too much or too little emphasis on phonics instruction, bearing in mind that “systematic phonics instruction is only one component – albeit a necessary component – of a total reading program; systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies to create a complete reading program” (NICHHD, 2000, p.11). Furthermore, leaders must consider the massive ability ranges among young children and account for such differences when developing policy and making curricular decisions about reading instruction.
Contradictory research, like that of Camilli, Vargas and Yureko (2003) provides additional cautionary evidence. That two “independent teams of researchers arrived at substantially different interpretations of the same evidence” (p.36) is compelling and bears further investigation. Leaders should note that such widespread conclusions and application warrant meta-analyses on substantially more studies. As more federal, state and even local policies are considered around early reading and instruction, it is imperative not to over-emphasize one element, such as phonics instruction, of such a complex and intricate process.

The Case for Balanced Literacy

At the height of the reading wars, a notion emerged that challenged the wide pendulum swings in literacy instruction and instead promoted a balanced approach to instruction. Freppon and Dahl’s (1998) theory into practice report for the Reading Research Quarterly made the case for a balanced approach to literacy instruction and emphasized the contrasting and even contradictory views on such an approach in their synthesis of the extant research on balanced literacy. They pointed out that very few research reports exist that actually evaluate a balanced approach to literacy instruction; however, they did examine the various versions of balanced literacy promoted in books and reports, supported by research. Additionally, they conducted interviews and provided commentary on those findings. During his interview, researcher Dick Allington noted that defining balanced instruction was a problem in and of itself due to the “many kinds of research being used as supporting evidence by so many people with quite divergent notions” (Freppon & Dahl, 1998, p. 246). A synthesis of the main conceptions of
balanced literacy, supporting research, major works and implications for teaching and learning is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

*Synthesis of Balanced Literacy Instruction Conceptions, Research & Implications*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception of Balanced Instruction: Research &amp; Theory</th>
<th>Resources and Reports</th>
<th>Implications for Classroom Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The California Reform</strong></td>
<td><em>Every Child a Reader</em> (California Department of Education, 1995)</td>
<td>• Phonics &amp; word knowledge precede reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Teaching Reading: A Balanced Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Reading in Prekindergarten Through Grade Three</em> (California Department of Education, 1996)</td>
<td>• Skills should be taught in a systematic sequence by grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Teaching Our Children to Read: The Role of Skills in a Comprehensive Reading Program</em> (Honig, 1996)</td>
<td>• Decodable text is used for learning phonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Other texts are used to motivate and teach concepts of print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Continuously probe learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conduct both whole class and small group activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture, Motivation &amp; Skills</strong></td>
<td><em>Balanced Literacy Instruction: A Teacher’s Resource Book</em> (Au, Carroll, &amp; Scheu, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• No one way to achieve balanced literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students’ needs/interests are important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Curriculum important, with no requirement for a set sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conduct whole group, small group and 1:1 instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reading and writing in a workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• No emphasis on normed assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teach word patterns using mini lessons and word sorts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use word walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hold discussions about literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher provides scaffolding through 1:1 and small group instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Not as much emphasis on whole group instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Separate explicit skill instruction and language-rich literature instruction divided among 120 minutes daily
- Milestone is reading independently by the middle of first grade

- Motivation as key
- Teach children to love books first
- Do not overemphasize phonics
- Critical components: student ownership, comprehension, writing and skills

- Provide manual for beginning teachers
The wide variation across the conceptions about balanced instruction creates issues for practice. Teacher development is critical and the research base here provides a good starting point with clear implications for classroom instruction. Districts must apply the research as they grapple with the issue of how best to instruct students using a balanced approach to literacy. Freppon and Dahl (1998) observed, “those involved in education are bombarded with advice, management, criticisms, and actual control by those outside the profession” (p. 241). Again, as more federal, state and even local policies are set for early reading and instruction, the case for balanced literacy substantiates the imperative of not over-emphasizing one element in such a complex and intricate process.

**Policy Implications**

Other national and state policies have impacted the design of elementary reading instruction. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was
reauthorized in 2001 as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and has long served education by providing federal resources to ensure equal access to education and to hold school districts responsible for the academic progress of their students. NCLB (2001) emphasizes reading by requiring annual testing and by its ambitious aim of 100 percent of students passing reading achievement tests by 2014. NCLB (2001) also defines the essential components of reading instruction to mean “explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, including oral reading skills and reading comprehension strategies” (Part B, Sec. 1208(3)). Further, under NCLB, funds can be allocated to districts seeking to apply scientifically-based early reading instruction. The act defines scientifically-based research as research that

(A) applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction and reading difficulties; and

(B) includes research that –

i. employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

ii. involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

iii. relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
iv. has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved
by a panel of independent experts through a comparable
rigorous, objective and scientific review. (Part B, Sec.
1208(6))

These stipulations force schools using federal dollars to select reading programs
whose instructional content and design are backed with empirical evidence for
effectiveness.

At the state level, Virginia’s Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) was
established by the 1997 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 924, Item 140. The purpose
of the initiative is to provide funding for early intervention for students in grades
kindergarten through three. According to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review
Commission (2011), for the 2010-12 biennium, 13.4 million dollars in State funds fund
the EIRI, with local matches based on ability to pay. The funding is designed to cover
intervention and remediation services for 100 percent of below benchmark K-2 students
and 25 percent of third grade students below the benchmark. School divisions, however,
have flexibility in how they determine to provide intervention and remediation services.

The EIRI relies on the results of the Phonological and Literacy Screening (PALS)
assessment to place students. Schools receiving EIRI funds commit to providing
remediation equal to an additional half hour of phonemic awareness, phonics or
alphabets instruction per day for students below the benchmark on PALS measures.
The PALS office in Charlottesville, Virginia, maintains a telephone hotline and e-mail
system for teachers and administrators, hosts an annual early reading intervention
symposium and provides both electronic lesson plans and guidance documents on reading
instruction. Teachers have access to quick checks as well, to monitor progress in between administrations of PALS.

In 2010, the Virginia General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution 31 (SJR31), sponsored by Senator John C. Miller. SJR31 directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to examine ways to ensure that the Commonwealth’s third graders were reading on or above grade level prior to the end of the school year. Specifically, JLARC was to indicate how many students were on grade level by the end of grade three, rank divisions accordingly, identify best practices in highly effective school divisions, review the available research and make recommendations to the General Assembly during the 2012 session (VDOE, 2010).

**Promoting Third Grade Reading Performance in Virginia: The JLARC Study**

As JLARC (2011) organized its study, the committee analyzed SOL scores at the student level as well as other school and socioeconomic data. The committee surveyed all 132 Virginia school divisions and experienced an 88 percent response rate. In addition, the committee visited 13 divisions and observed in 44 third grade classrooms, interviewed department of education staff and experts in early literacy and reviewed literature germane to early reading instruction. In its brief to the Virginia General Assembly, JLARC (2011) noted that “key strategies, particularly related to training and support for classroom teachers, can help improve reading instruction and student performance” (p. 4).

JLARC (2011) made observations about successful reading programs in Virginia schools. Successful reading programs are comprised of the same key components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension and writing. The
committee further noted that the “reading block should be of sufficient length, frequency, and scope” (p. 33) by meeting for at least 90 to 120 minutes daily and include daily writing. The committee acknowledged the importance of small, flexible reading groups to meet the wide variety of needs and reading levels within a single classroom in a grade and noted that small group instruction is instrumental in identifying students for intervention as early as possible.

JLARC (2011) also drew conclusions and made recommendation regarding particular materials and methods for successful reading instruction. Successful schools maintain leveled literature selections comprised of high-interest, quality and engaging reading material. Successful schools use data for instructional purposes. JLARC’s (2011) brief to the Virginia General Assembly stated that “assessment results reveal the students’ current knowledge base and their need for future growth” (p.37). In addition, JLARC concluded that technology, while not a substitute for direct, first instruction, may enrich learning. Among school divisions, top-performing ones use technology more during the reading block than do lower performing divisions. Finally, guidance from the school division, in the form of clearly written division-wide plans for reading, helps schools make reading progress.

Finally, JLARC (2011) shared personnel implications for effective reading instruction. First, classrooms of strong teachers share common characteristics:

- “Effective comprehension strategies [are] explicitly taught and higher-order questioning [is] employed.
- Students are extensively monitored.
- Different types of reading occur.
• [The teachers] focus on student motivation.

• Students highly are engaged.

• [Teachers have] exceptional classroom management” (p. 45).

Next, JLARC (2011) found that ongoing, job-embedded professional development encourages effective teachers of reading, particularly if the professional development is focused on the foundations of teaching reading and comprehension, differentiated instruction and classroom management. Last JLARC (2011) noted that in high performing schools reading specialists work with students who are experiencing reading difficulties. These specialists “assess and diagnose reading difficulties” (p. 57) as well as provide supplemental reading instruction using pull-out and push-in models of reading remediation.

Key findings from divisions across the commonwealth were detailed in JLARC’s brief to the Virginia General Assembly:

• Pass rates on third grade reading SOLs have increased substantially, but a 95% statewide pass rate may not be feasible.

• Key socioeconomic factors impacting pass rates are economic status, disability, and race.

• Some divisions perform better than expected considering these factors, but others perform worse.

• Key practices provide the foundation for a good reading program

• While non-school factors strongly impact achievement, teachers are the critical factor for classroom effectiveness and they must be well trained and well supported to teach reading.
• Options that can be implemented at the State and local level could help improve reading performance.

• A cost-effective State action would be to increase the professional development and mentoring capabilities of the PALS office. (pp. 72-73)

The JLARC study’s research and findings should assist school divisions in their pursuit of stronger readers in the formative years of elementary school.

Given the policy mandates, particularly related to student achievement in reading, schools become fertile fields for new programs or initiatives. They are held closely accountable for the programs they choose to implement, as most federal and state funding streams require schools to use research-based strategies and programs as they expend their funding as previously noted and defined in this chapter. Stipulations that force schools to select reading programs whose instructional content and design include empirical evidence for effectiveness create significant competition in the educational market and present educators with countless products and interventions that promise to raise student achievement. It can become challenging to weed out false claims from valid ones in the marketplace. Consequently, the effective use of evidence-based programs in education becomes even more critical to schools and ultimately to learning.

**Effective Use of Evidence-based Programs in Education**

Effective use of evidence-based programs in education is dependent on implementation, particularly the fidelity of program implementation. It is important to recognize that implementation should be defined as a progression over time, not an event in time, according to the work of Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman and Wallace (2005).
In their monograph, “Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature,” they identify six stages of the implementation process:

- exploration and adoption
- program installation
- initial implementation
- full operation
- innovation
- sustainability (p. 15)

They further suggest that the process of implementation from exploration through full operation might take up to four years, reiterating their strong belief that implementation takes time. Effective use requires systematic and ongoing evaluation, particularly during implementation.

Implementation evaluation serves to identify areas in need of improvement or to change particular practices. Mertens and Wilson (2012) noted that implementation evaluation focuses on the “processes, materials, staffing and other aspects of the program in process” (p. 275). Implementation evaluation is particularly helpful if the focus is on “why or why not desired outcomes are achieved, and what needs to be changed if the outcomes are not being successfully achieved” (p. 275). Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, Van Dyke and Wallace (2007) presented research indicating that organizational change was a precursor to effective implementation and that effective implementation required “high fidelity, consumer benefits and sustainability” (p. 8). The absence of effective implementation creates gaps that impact program success.
Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, Van Dyke and Wallace (2007) noted two kinds of issues that create gaps in implementation: science to service and implementation. In science to service gaps, what is known (research-based program) is not adopted for numerous reasons. This is frequently evidenced in textbook adoption cycles. States or districts adopt texts based on a fixed cycle; however, funding dictates the purchase and actual implementation. On the other hand, with implementation gaps, conditions during early phases of a research-based program are not conducive to effectiveness. They identified three conditions that lead to implementation gaps.

1. What is adopted is not used with fidelity and good outcomes for consumers.
2. What is used with fidelity is not sustained for a useful period of time.
3. What is used with fidelity is not used on a scale sufficient to impact social problems. (p. 2)

Given the increasingly high stakes and moving targets of federal and state accountability for student achievement, schools implement any number of new initiatives annually to close achievement gaps and attempt to avoid sanctions or loss of accreditation.

The educational result can be overwhelming. As schools embrace many new enterprises at once teachers and students alike face initiative overload. Despite these challenges, some new programs work well and become part of a school’s instructional practices over time. What makes the difference? A growing body of research points to implementation as a critical factor in an initiative’s success or failure.
Implementation of Research-based Practices and Programs

Implementation research has many and complex parts. The relatively small body of research, lack of shared vocabulary and understanding as well as the mitigating factors influencing implementation contributes to unclear definition and replication of implementation research in education. However, Fixsen (2012) highlighted the importance of effective implementation methods when he suggested their importance through this conceptualization: “Effective education practices X Effective implementation methods = Effective student outcomes” (p.3). Strong implementation can maximize the impact of research based effective practices. Fixsen (2012) also compared the principles of implementation to gravity; “implementation factors are present and working all the time whether we intend them to be or not” (p.3). Consequently, if the implementation of research-based programs is to result in increased student achievement, educators must evaluate and apply best implementation practices from the field of available research.

**Stages of implementation.** As defined by Goggin (1986), “implementation is a problem-solving activity that involves behaviors that have both administrative and political content” (p.330). Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman and Wallace (2005) describe implementation as a progression over time, not an event in time. In their monograph, “Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature,” they illustrate the implementation process as reflected in Figure 3.
Figure 3. Stages of the implementation process Adapted from *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature* by D.L. Fixsen, S.F. Naoom, K.A. Blase, R.M. Friedman & F.Wallace, 2005, Tampa, FL: University of South Florida.

They also suggest that the process of implementation from exploration through full operation may take up to four years, reinforcing their finding that implementation takes time.

**Implementation components.** Fixsen et al., (2005) further concluded from their review of the research on implementation that the process of effective implementation is characterized by certain central components. They are “staff selection, preservice and inservice training, ongoing consultation and coaching, staff and program evaluation, facilitative administrative support and systems interventions” (p. 28). Some programs require more or less of any one component and over time one or more components may no longer be necessary; however, “careful consideration should be given to each implementation driver” (p. 30). Bridging the gap between research and practice rests in
implementation practices (Fixsen et al., 2007; Fixsen et al., 2005; Stein, Berends, Fuchs, McMaster, Saenz, Yen, Fuchs & Compton, 2008).

Research on Implementation: Programs, Context and Leadership

Program characteristics. The body of research on implementation practices is complex with variables that are difficult to isolate; therefore, it becomes challenging to interpret or reach cogent conclusions. Some research suggests that fidelity of implementation can vary across program characteristics, context and behavior. Glennan, Bodilly, Galegher & Kerr (2004) demonstrated that “specific materials to support implementation, a targeted focus of the intervention and training, and supportive professional development of teachers” (as cited in Stein et al. 2008, p. 371) resulted in better fidelity of implementation. Stein et al. (2008), in their research of the relationships among teacher support, fidelity of implementation and student performance across years within the context of an early reading program, Kindergarten Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (K-PALS), concluded that the explicit K-PALS manual and essential program materials provided to teachers enhanced teacher support of K-PALS’ implementation and improved student outcomes. Further, their research found that the workshop approach to professional development, paired with booster support in two follow up sessions was effective in producing the desired effects on early reading achievement.

Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco and Hansen (2003) researched fidelity of implementation on drug abuse prevention programs in school settings and determined program characteristics have the potential to impact implementation. Complex programs that require high skill level and extensive coordination were less likely to be perceived as
potentially effective; however, as in the K-PALS, Dusenbury et al. (2003) also found that detailed implementation manuals showed potential for enhancing implementation fidelity.

**Context.** Researchers generally agree that context plays a significant role in implementation of change (Fixsen et al., 2005; Fixsen, et al., 2007; Kitson, Harvey & McCormack, 1998; Stein et al., 2008). Kitson et al. (1998) wrote, “Context implies an understanding of the forces at work which give the physical environment a character and feel” (p.152). Their research into clinical nursing interventions found that low context measures (poor culture, leadership and feedback) might be ameliorated by high facilitation (characterized by respect, clear change agenda and consistent leadership support); however, such context limits resulted in a lengthier change process, “to ensure that sufficient infrastructure and staff development issues were considered” (p. 156).

Dusenbury et al. (2003) further identified school culture and staff morale as organizational features related to fidelity of implementation. These findings while important in a broad sense, do not offer consistent application, as Stein et al. (2008) discovered in the K-PALS study. Site measures (“e.g., experience, sense of efficacy, and perceptions about classroom and school climate” p. 386) did not individually produce significant impact on implementation; however “together, the site measures added significantly to the model fit” (p. 386).

**Leadership and organizational behaviors.** Organizational behaviors also seem to add to the model fit and ultimate success of implementation. In an analysis of implementation tactics of 91 case studies, Nutt (1986) found four common managerial tactics, summarized in Table 3.
Table 3.

Managerial Tactics During Implementation by Success Rate and Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edict</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leaders using the intervention tactic assumed control and responsibility for the change process. They “were quite good at creating new norms in systems they sought to change. They offered new definitions of acceptable performance, justified these new norms, and showed how practices could be improved” (p. 255). Literature suggests that stakeholders respond more favorably when they are fully engaged as participants in the change process; however, in Nutt’s (1986) observations participation was scaled down narrowly, limiting participation to cooption, and making conclusions about leadership or participant behaviors difficult. Persuasion tactics were observed in changes delegated by managers to experts in the field. Edict tactics involved the wielding of power with compensatory rewards. Nutt (1986) concluded that the “frequent use of power can strain organizations and gradually drain manager-sponsors’ stores of social credit” (p.257). While intervention tactics met with 100 percent success, all implementation tactics met with some form of success in Nutt’s (1986) research.

Since other research points to the principal as the school leader most likely to influence implementation and change (Dusenbury et al., 2003), leadership behaviors are important to consider. Stein et al. (2008) opined and observed that principal leadership
“may translate into the ability to encourage teachers to implement programs and obtain sufficient resources for teachers in their efforts to implement change” (p. 373).

Leadership behaviors, context and program characteristics are common features of implementation that seem to influence change outcomes.

**Implications for Practice**

Discoveries from the extant literature on implementation can serve as a framework for implementing research-based programs with fidelity. Findings about time requirements, the climate needed for change, leadership behaviors and evaluation seem particularly consistent across research (Adelman & Taylor, 2003, Fixsen et al., 2005; Goggin, 1986) and generalizations from them hold implications for practice.

**Time.** Programs in education need time to be fully implemented, and they need even more time to be sustained. Accountability demands, such as meeting annual measurable objectives for federal accreditation, tempt educators to move from program to program in an effort to achieve timely and measurable gains. As Fixsen et al. (2005) noted, fully establishing an evidence-based program requires two to four years, prior to any innovations on the practices and prior to reaching a point of sustainability. Given the transience of teachers, administrators, policy makers and programs in education the time factor has significant implications for “long-term survival and continued effectiveness” (p.17) of research-based educational initiatives.

**Climate for change.** Time as a factor is closely connected to creating a climate for change in educational organizations. According to Adelman and Taylor (2003), “one of the most fundamental errors related to facilitating systemic change is the tendency to set actions into motion without taking sufficient time to lay the foundation needed for
substantive change” (p. 12). They suggest that prior to embarking on any program implementation, educators might consider these readiness factors: a high level of policy assurance including appropriate leadership, financial, space and time resources; appropriate motivation for change including the promise of success, recognition and rewards; options for implementation processes; the willingness to change the organization during implementation in a manner that will facilitate the change; use of “change agents” who are both practical and idealistic; willingness to accomplish the change over time, not all at once; a provision for feedback; and the establishment of support structures to maintain the implemented change and to provide for periodic renewal. Considering these factors might help ensure fertile climate for implementation success and sustainable change.

**Leadership.** Preskill and Torres (1999) cited the need for leadership as one of four main factors needed to build capacity for change initiatives. The other four are organizational structures, culture and communication (as cited in Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 265). Fullan (2003) defines leadership as a moral imperative, one that, in light of a leader’s impact on implementation of interventions in education, I might argue is more important now than ever. Fullan (2005), reminded us of the difficulty of sustainability in improvement initiatives. He challenged us to rethink leadership in terms of sustainability. “More importantly,” Fullan (2005) wrote, “it is clear that new conceptions and actions of leadership are the key levers for system transformations. This new leadership focuses as much on developing other leaders as it does on student learning and achievement” (p. 180). Perhaps there are leadership tactics observed in Nutt’s (1986) study that can be
generalized to implementation of education programs, particularly the 100 percent successful intervention tactic. The steps seem conducive to educational implementation:

1. Acquire the authority to manage a change process and appraise performance.
2. Apply new norms to identify performance inadequacies.
3. (a) Justify the new norms, or (b) demonstrate the feasibility of improving practices.
4. Development.
5. [Further] development.

If implementation research points to leaders as pivotal in change, then leadership development becomes the responsibility of those seeking to improve educational outcomes through implementing research-based programs.

**Evaluation**

It also seems that evaluation in education continues to be a vague, undefined construct at the implementation level. Proctor et al. (2011) noted that “a critical yet unresolved issue in the field of implementation science is how to conceptualize and evaluate success” (p. 65). Educational leaders might assume some responsibility by advocating more program evaluation, including program evaluation at the implementation level. Mertens and Wilson (2012) define program evaluation as “a profession that uses formal methodologies to provide useful empirical evidence about public entities in decision making contexts that are inherently political and involve
multiple often-conflicting stakeholders, where resources are seldom sufficient, and where
time-pressures are salient” (p. 5). Implementation research (Adelman & Taylor, 2003;
Dusenbury et al., 2003; Fixsen et al., 2005) highlights the need for proper and systematic
evaluation during the change process, including during the implementation period. It
follows that in the pursuit of the most effective and research-based programs in our
schools we would seek out implementation evaluation to ensure fidelity and positive
outcomes.

In summary, Fixsen et al. (2005) noted that “the science of implementation is
beginning to yield data and information that can help ensure that what is known through
science is implemented with integrity” (p. 77). The stages and components of
implementation provide practitioners with a roadmap for effective implementation of
research-based initiatives. A body of research supports some program characteristics,
contexts and leadership behaviors for effective implementation. Furthermore, program
evaluation, as a formal process, yields results that improve such implementation when
leaders are able to commit adequate time, create a climate and infrastructure for change
and engage in ongoing evaluation and feedback.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this program evaluation was to examine one school district’s implementation of a balanced literacy model in the third year and to discover the aspects that facilitated successful implementation as well as the aspects that presented challenges. Given state accreditation benchmarks are higher in reading than other subject areas and given the need to meet increasingly higher annual measurable objectives (AMOs) in reading for multiple subgroups to meet benchmarks for federal funding, districts find it necessary to seek out new initiatives to improve student achievement.

Chapter two explored research related to the importance of reading in the early years as well as an overview of the policies and politics surrounding reading instruction and achievement at both a national and state level. Particularly telling of the polarizing nature of politicizing instruction has been the U.S. Congress’s inability to reauthorize NCLB. As Wolfe and Poyner (2001) pointed out, “the danger in politicizing education, however, is that when one party is found to be wrong, the tendency is to swing to the other party. It perpetuates the pendulum and eliminates the middle ground, which is exactly where the practice should be” (as cited in Nichols, 2009, p. 6). Chapter two also investigated research on the implementation of programs, context and leadership. According to Fixsen et al. (2005), “during the initial implementation stage, implementation success was associated with a range of contextual, organizational, and purveyor variables and with fidelity to the evidence-based practice or program” (p.19). Ultimately this program evaluation focused on implementation in order to identify successes and challenges and to make improvements. Two broad questions guided the research.
Research Questions

1. To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by:
   a. Lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy; and
   b. Instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy?

2. What aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in a school district are facilitating successes or creating barriers or stumbling blocks to success for teachers and ultimately student achievement?

Methods and Program Evaluation Model

I conducted the evaluation of the implementation of a balanced literacy model in the third year in one district using qualitative research. Creswell (2013) synthesized the common characteristics of qualitative research, and they provide a framework for understanding how this case study was particularly suited for qualitative inquiry.

1. Natural setting – This research occurred in the field. I spoke directly with teachers, and I observed them in the context of their classrooms and schools.

2. Researcher as key instrument – I developed an original open-ended instrument for data collection. I observed and interviewed participants as well as analyzed documents such as lesson plans and the district’s balanced literacy model.

3. Multiple methods – I did not rely on a single form of data. Interviews, including one-on-one and focus group interviews, observations and documents provided rich data for review, analysis and organizing as I worked to interpret and to make sense of the data.
4. Complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic – I used an interactive process to identify patterns and themes from the data.

5. Participants’ meanings – The multiple perspectives of participants drove the meaning of the study, rather than my own or the extant research in the field.

6. Emergent design – As I attempted to learn about the project from participants, the research process emerged and changed. I made a conscious effort to exhibit flexibility and be receptive to an emerging design.

7. Reflexivity – As a participant in the study, I conveyed my prior experience and knowledge related to the study.

8. Holistic account – Qualitative researchers develop the big picture in a study. They identify the complex interactions between participants and context, and I was aware of the need to capture these interactions as I worked to create a big picture of the implementation of a literacy model in this district.

The program evaluation of the implementation of the balanced literacy model in one district yielded a “complex and detailed understanding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48) of the implementation process. By design, qualitative research methods seek to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p.48). Furthermore, by design, I approached this qualitative research study through the lens of the constructivist worldview.

In general, a constructivist worldview seeks to gain an understanding of the lived experience of those implementing a program; the intent of the research is to make sense of meanings the participants hold about a given construct, in this instance balanced
literacy instruction (Mertens and Wilson, 2012). I intentionally kept the research questions rather broad so that participants’ responses to interview and focus group questions would allow me to inductively cultivate a pattern of meaning from their shared experiences. Crotty (1998) identified three assumptions of the constructivist worldview:

1. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.
2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives.
3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. (as cited in Creswell, 2009, pp. 8-9)

Qualitative research of this nature is comprised of personal, contextual, social and inductive processes, and is therefore particularly situated in the constructivist worldview.

For the purposes of this research study, the constructivist paradigm supports a qualitative design similar to the goal-free evaluation (GFE) of Michael Scriven. GFE seeks to determine as exactly as possible what effects a given product had, and it evaluates those effects, regardless of whether they were the goals. Scriven (1991) suggests that project goals are typically vague and designed to accommodate both positive and negative activities within the project. Furthermore, “since almost all projects either fall short of their goals or over-achieve them, why waste time rating the goals; which usually aren’t what is achieved?” (p. 58). Because GFE is not tied to goals, it allows for the shifting of goals in the middle of a project, which may provide a benefit to participants who often feel resentful of the rigidity required in other evaluation models. Because a GFE is grounded in conversation, interaction and observation of participants, a
researcher is likely to pick up on nuances; “the value of GFE does not lie in picking up what everyone already ‘knows,’ but in noticing something that everyone else has overlooked, or in producing a novel overall perspective” (Scriven, 1991, p. 59). GFE, then, is particularly helpful in evaluating a program like this third year implementation of the balanced literacy model, as I can examine the previous two years’ implementation, materials, curriculum and extant literature alongside the lived experiences of the participants and formulate some ideas about effects, positive, negative and promising for improvement.

Participants

The primary participants in the study were classroom teachers, special education teachers, gifted education teachers, reading specialists and principals. At the primary school there are 18 classroom teachers, three special education teachers, one half-time gifted education teacher, one reading specialist and one principal. At the elementary school there are 20 classroom teachers, three special education teachers, two gifted education teachers, one reading specialist and one principal. Participation in the study via observations, interviews and focus groups was voluntary and responses will remain confidential. Ethical considerations related to participants are discussed later in this chapter.

Data Sources

As is standard in qualitative research, I gathered multiple forms of data, and as Creswell (2009) suggested, I reviewed all the data, tried to make sense of it, and attempted to organize it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources (p.
Lesson plan reviews, observations, interviews, focus groups and document reviews served as the data sources for this project.

**Lesson plans.** Lesson plans represent intended instruction, including objectives, procedures, activities, assessments, materials and methods for differentiating instruction to meet student needs. In addition, lesson plans typically reflect teaching method. A review of teacher lesson plans using a standard rubric assisted in determining the degree to which the intended model was planned for implementation. For the purposes of this project, I reviewed 37 lesson plans, one from each classroom teacher, K-5 during the first half of the 2013-14 school year.

**Lesson plan rubric.** Based on data gathered in the spring of year two, I revised the lesson plan rubric for the purpose of this evaluation in the third year of implementation. The writing process, for example, was originally divided into discrete segments: modeled writing, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. After observations and lesson plan checks last year, it became evident that these kinds of writing often overlapped and/or were not all present in every lesson; therefore the rubric was adjusted to reflect that reality. For the actual lesson plan rubric for this study see Appendix D.

**Classroom observations.** For the purposes of this study, I conducted classroom observations using an observation checklist that the district created in year two and revised for year three. I observed approximately one third of the classroom teachers during the entirety of one literacy block (two to three hours each) for this study, two teachers per grade level, K-5. The observations provided a fidelity measure for the extent to which teachers were using the core components of the literacy model and provided
insight into the level of skill teachers have acquired in the delivery of a balanced literacy lesson (Fixsen et al., 2005).

**Observation checklist.** The observation checklist was originally created in year two of the implementation by an external evaluator. The checklist provides a framework for observing the essential components of the K-5 balanced literacy model (Fixsen et al., 2005). At the end of year two, the external evaluator and I revised the checklist to reflect modifications made by the reading committee. We designed the observation checklist to assess a single day in balanced literacy instruction. The checklist directs the observer to use observations and teacher lesson plans as the sources of evidence for completing the checklist. Every effort was made to use only objective, observed evidence to complete the checklist and not use self-reported information from the teacher or my own previous knowledge. For the purposes of program fidelity evaluation for this study, I collected, analyzed and compiled the data gathered on the observation checklists. The observation checklist for this study is appended in Appendix C.

**Interviews and focus groups.** I designed and held semi-structured interviews and focus groups and in an effort to help reveal strengths of the balanced literacy model as well as roadblocks to successful implementation. In conducting interviews, I followed these guidelines proposed by Sanders and Sullins (2006):

- Keep the language pitched to the level of the respondent.
- Clearly explain the purpose of the interview – who has access to the recordings or transcripts, and how it will be kept confidential.
- Encourage honesty, but let people know they can refuse to answer a question if they choose.
• Establish rapport by asking easy, impersonal questions first.
• Avoid long questions.
• Avoid ambiguous wording.
• Avoid leading questions.
• Limit questions to a single idea.
• Do not assume too much knowledge. (p. 31)

I designed questions to probe, but not to lead. I conducted eight individual interviews (1 teacher per grade level, K-5, 1 reading specialist, 1 administrator) and two focus group interviews (K-2 teachers, 3-5 teachers).

**Interview protocol.** The interview protocol for asking questions and recording answers during one-on-one interviews and focus groups included the following components, suggested by Creswell (2009): appropriate descriptive data (date, location, interviewer, participant; the same instructions for each interview; between four and five questions from the research plan, including an introductory icebreaker; follow up probes as needed if elaboration is required; space for answers; final statement of appreciation for participation. After I developed a draft protocol, I submitted it to an independent evaluation group for review.

The president of the evaluation group provided several recommendations for revision. I revised the protocol to reflect plainer language, personalized for the audience. I adjusted my probes in order to solicit evidence for respondents’ claims and to keep the interview grounded in evidence rather than opinion. Next I looked at the order of the questions, and I revised the order and focus of the questions so that the personal, classroom-level questions came before the larger, district questions and so that it was
clearer to the respondent what the appropriate response lens might be. In addition, I added a descriptive question to start, so that I might be able to gauge each respondent’s understanding of the initiative.

Once the protocol was finalized, I scheduled and conducted the interviews and focus groups at mutually agreeable times for each volunteer. I recorded the interviews and exported the audio files for third party transcription. To examine the actual interview protocol for this study refer to Appendix B.

**Balanced literacy model.** I based both the observation checklist and the lesson plan rubric on the main components of the district’s K-5 balanced literacy model. The model defines balanced literacy and teacher responsibilities, details instructional time, resources, assessments and interventions and provides sample instructional models. The K-5 Balanced Literacy Model for this district can be found in Appendix A.

**Data Collection**

Data collection for this study occurred during the first half of the 2013-14 school year. Following appropriate guidance from the College of William and Mary’s Institutional Review Board and from the Program Evaluation Standards (JCSEE, 2011 as cited in Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, and Caruthers, 2011), I sought and solicited voluntary participation from teachers for interviews, focus groups and observations. Lesson plan reviews were required of teachers, as part of a larger study of the implementation of the literacy model over three years. For that study lesson plans are collected once each semester. I collected plans for this project in November, 2013. Data collection for this project occurred during the period of November 11, 2013 through
January 27, 2014 and analysis followed. The data collection plan and data analysis methods are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Data Collection Plan for Year Three Implementation Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Question(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Instruments or Sources</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented according to the</td>
<td>✓ Lesson plan rubric</td>
<td>✓ Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by:</td>
<td>✓ Classroom observation fidelity of implementation checklist</td>
<td>✓ Qualitative data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy; and</td>
<td>✓ Teacher interviews</td>
<td>✓ Triangulate data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy?</td>
<td>✓ Focus groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in a school district are</td>
<td>✓ Teacher interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitating successes or creating barriers or stumbling blocks to success for teachers</td>
<td>✓ Reading specialist interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and ultimately student achievement?</td>
<td>✓ Administrator interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

As Table 4 indicates, this project relied on inductive data analysis. As Creswell (2009) described, “qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (p. 175). This process was inductive and included moving back and forth between the categories and themes until I was able to establish a comprehensive set of themes.
I used an interactive approach to data analysis, adapted from the work of Creswell (2009) and represented in Figure 4. After organizing all data from the evaluation, I read through all of the data to get a general sense of the data and its meaning. The detailed analysis began with the coding process. According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), “coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p.186).


Once I identified the themes and developed codes, I used an online application, DeDoose, to code segments of text and to identify meaningful quotations. The application helped to tabulate and track code occurrence and co-occurrence as well to examine code application by media (interview, focus group).

In examining the lesson plan rubrics and observation checklists, I used Excel spreadsheets to tally and average scores by teacher. This allowed me to gather descriptive statistics K-5 about both the lesson plans and the observations while affording me the opportunity to examine each at the individual, grade, school and district level as well. Because I was able to interview one of the teachers I observed at each grade level, I had
an interview, observation and lesson plan that I could analyze separately and collectively for six different teachers, K-5. This would serve to strengthen the results by providing data for triangulation.

**Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the evaluation I engaged in ethical practices and worked to anticipate what ethical issues would likely arise (Creswell, 2009, p. 73). Adhering to the guidelines developed by the College of William and Mary’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JSEE, 2011 as cited in Yarbrough et al., 2011) ensured that the project was conducted ethically. Anticipating ethical issues helped to protect research participants, develop trust, advance the research with integrity, prevent misconduct and deal with problems as they arise (Israel and Hay, 2006 as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 87).

This project also required consideration of personal disclosure by participants. I took care to respect confidentiality and the needs of participants. Furthermore, the nature of this internal evaluation meant acknowledging my bias, values and background. The ethical considerations for a central office administrator conducting an internal evaluation in two schools are important. I worked with both faculties to establish a trusting, respectful and open environment throughout the implementation of this model. I anticipate that my established collegial and ethical relationships with the participants in the study will not prove limiting, as discussed later in this chapter.

I found three guiding principles of the AEA, integrity and honesty, respect for people and responsibilities for general and public welfare (AEA, 2004 as cited in Mertens and Wilson, 2012), useful in anticipating ethical issues. For the purposes of this
evaluation the IRB and the Program Evaluation Standards provided useful direction for an ethical program evaluation.

**Institutional review board.** Following the proposal defense for this project, I received an exemption from the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of William and Mary for my protocol. As noted on the college’s IRB webpage “a properly completed protocol will include a brief rationale for the study, full procedures, description of the participants, copy of all tests, questionnaires, all interview questions, the informed consent form, and other pertinent information.” Although the project was found to be exempt, I exercised great care in following ethical guidelines.

**Program evaluation standards.** The study also followed the Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The standards provide a framework for ethical considerations of the main components of an evaluation. In terms of utility, the policy implications of reading and other content based initiatives drive much of what a district does, and I worked closely with administrators to ensure utility standards were met through the evaluation. Likewise, district administration fully supports the evaluation and its implications and therefore was willing to assist in feasibility considerations. Much effort has been exerted in adhering to the propriety standards, particularly in regard to protecting human rights, respecting dignity and being responsive to the needs of the participants. No one data source formed the basis of a conclusion. I considered multiple perspectives and sources in an attempt to adhere carefully to accuracy standards. Furthermore, I took care with data transcription, review and analysis to ensure a high level of accuracy. Given the participants’ personal ownership as teachers and on site
implementers of this initiative, I also provided special care for ethical considerations during the implementation evaluation.

Last, the evaluation of the implementation of this district’s balanced literacy model was conducted internally. Scriven (1991) noted the importance of considering the tradeoffs between external and internal evaluations. The internal evaluator “knows the program better and so avoids mistakes due to ignorance, knows the people better and can hence talk to them more easily, will be there after the evaluation is finished and can hence facilitate implementation, probably knows the subject matter better, costs less, and is sure to know some other of comparable projects for comparison” (p. 61). The external evaluator, however, is not as likely to be affected by personal or job advantage considerations, and can speak more honestly because there is less risk of job loss or personal retribution. Furthermore, an external evaluator is likely to be more experienced in evaluation and is therefore better at it, having considered closely similar programs in the past. Scriven (1991) also noted that externality carries with it implicit cachet. In this instance, the federal grant funding the reading initiative requires an external evaluation, which will provide rich data; however, given the nature of the evaluation and the likelihood that full implementation of the project will take longer than the grant period, the presence of an internal evaluator will allow the district to implement change even beyond the grant period.

**Rationale for Program Evaluation Model**

As previously noted, Mertens (2012) determined that implementation evaluations serve many purposes. They can be focused on identifying the perceived strengths and weaknesses during implementation. They may help reexamine the relevance of a program
under fluctuating conditions. Implementation evaluations may be used to gauge the extent to which suitable resources were available for a given program, to measure the perceptions of the program by key stakeholders or to monitor the experiences of the stakeholders (p. 275). These purposes are appropriate to this district’s context for several reasons, particularly as they relate to identifying strengths and challenges and reassessing a program’s appropriateness under changing conditions. Given the current political climate in education, nationally and in the state of Virginia, continued large scale changes to instructional programs are likely. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of programs helps not only to modify the existing program, but may inform subsequent programmatic change initiatives.

The evaluation of the implementation of this district’s balanced literacy model was conducted internally. Scriven (1991) noted the importance of considering the tradeoffs between external and internal evaluations. The internal evaluator “knows the program better and so avoids mistakes due to ignorance, knows the people better and can hence talk to them more easily, will be there after the evaluation is finished and can hence facilitate implementation, probably knows the subject matter better, costs less, and is sure to know some other of comparable projects for comparison” (p. 61). The external evaluator, however, is not as likely to be affected by personal or job advantage considerations, and can speak more honestly because there is less risk of job loss or personal retribution. Furthermore, an external evaluator is likely to be more experienced in evaluation and is therefore better at it, having considered closely similar programs in the past. Scriven (1991) also noted that externality carries with it implicit cachet. For the district in this study, the federal grant requires an external evaluation, which will provide
rich data; however, considering the nature of this study’s implementation evaluation and the likelihood that full implementation of the project will take longer than the grant period, the presence of an internal evaluator will allow the district to improve and change the balanced literacy model beyond the grant period.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations assist in understanding the limits of a study; they make explicit “what the researcher is not going to do” (Leedy and Omrod, 2005). I purposefully rejected the use of SOL data as a part of this evaluation. During the second year of implementation of the balanced literacy model in this district, the state implemented a new reading test, limiting the utility of year to year comparisons. The external evaluator for this project further noted an implementation dip in PALS results during year two of the study; therefore, I chose to also leave out that data. Instead, I focused on a more narrow scope of implementation fidelity as well as perceived strengths and challenges.

Limitations refer to “potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher” (Creswell, 2005, p. 198). This project has several limitations. First, as a central office administrator in the school district, I may inhibit teacher participation and/or trust. However, I am not the direct supervisor for any of the participants, and I spent time in year two listening and building trust with teachers. Another limitation is significant changes in staffing. Between years two and three the principal at the primary school resigned and a replacement had to be found. The new principal has teaching and administrative experience at the primary level. Additionally, a first grade classroom teacher was unable to start the year the day before school started, and in the fourth week of the school year, the primary school reading specialist chose to transfer into that
classroom to fill the vacancy. The late September vacancy made by the reading specialist was filled at 80 percent full time in mid-November by a retired specialist from another district. Also, among K-5 teachers, two are beginning the year on Family Medical Leave (FMLA), leaving long term substitutes in those classes. Finally, other teachers left the district, resulting in new teachers coming into the schools. This included one involuntary transfer from the middle school to the elementary school. Staffing changes present multiple limitations for this study.

**Summary**

This fidelity of implementation evaluation of one district’s third year implementation of a K-5 balanced literacy model afforded a formative look at participants’ perceived successes and challenges while also gauging the participants’ fidelity of implementation. Findings from this study will be useful to the school district as it moves forward with its K-5 literacy initiative. They will also be useful as the district examines middle school literacy and/or other new programmatic initiatives.
Chapter IV: Results

In their pursuit of literacy for all students, school districts seek out exemplary reading models, strategies, interventions and programs. The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of one such district, in the third year of its implementation of a balanced literacy model. Mertens and Wilson (2012) determined that implementation evaluations serve many purposes. They can be focused on identifying the perceived strengths and weaknesses during implementation as well as help reexamine the relevance of a program under fluctuating conditions. Implementation evaluations may be used to gauge the extent to which suitable resources were available for a given program, to measure the perceptions of the program by key stakeholders or to monitor the experiences of the stakeholders (p. 275). These purposes are appropriate to this district’s context for several reasons, particularly as they relate to identifying strengths and challenges and reassessing a program’s appropriateness under changing conditions. Lesson plans, classroom observations, interviews and focus groups provided data for the implementation evaluation, and I discussed the complete methodology including the methods, evaluation model, participants and data sources in chapter three. I collected data for this evaluation beginning on November 20, 2013, and ending on February 5, 2014.

Lesson Plan Rubric

The first part of the first evaluation question was: To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy? To answer that part of evaluation question one, I used a lesson plan
rubric (Appendix D) to analyze 37 lesson plans gathered from all classroom teachers, kindergarten through grade five, in November 2013. The rubric was designed to assess written lesson plans for balanced literacy instruction in the district. I based the ratings only on objective evidence stated in the lesson plan. Application of the rubric yielded a rating of the lesson plan on a scale from one to five on each of ten components of the balanced literacy model. Specific elements (read aloud, comprehension strategies, handwriting instruction) and the use of certain resources (Benchmark Literacy materials, leveled fiction texts, leveled nonfiction texts, state resources, assessments and technology) were evaluated as to their presence (yes/no) in the lesson plan. The district reading committee developed several lesson plan templates for teachers to use when planning reading instruction; however, teachers have been given the flexibility to use a template that best meets their needs, provided they include the core components of the balanced literacy model.

I applied the lesson plan rubric and examined the results across the district (K-5) and within schools, primary (K-2) and elementary (3-5). Table 5 provides the means and standard deviations from rating each lesson plan item using the rubric (Appendix D).
Table 5

*Means from Lesson Plan Rubric with Standard Deviation in Parentheses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Item</th>
<th>K-2 Primary School N=17</th>
<th>3-5 Elementary School N=20</th>
<th>K-5 District N=37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Components of reading instruction</td>
<td>4.29 (1.57)</td>
<td>4.10 (1.65)</td>
<td>4.19 (1.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Components of modeled reading</td>
<td>3.59 (0.87)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.08)</td>
<td>3.81 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Components of guided reading</td>
<td>3.88 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.05 (1.00)</td>
<td>3.43 (1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Components of independent reading</td>
<td>2.18 (0.64)</td>
<td>2.70 (1.08)</td>
<td>2.46 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Components of writing instruction</td>
<td>4.53 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.30 (1.75)</td>
<td>3.32 (1.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Components of modeled writing and shared writing</td>
<td>4.24 (1.09)</td>
<td>2.80 (1.40)</td>
<td>3.46 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Components of guided and/or independent writing</td>
<td>4.29 (1.21)</td>
<td>2.25 (1.48)</td>
<td>3.19 (1.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Components of word study</td>
<td>3.82 (1.88)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.78)</td>
<td>2.84 (1.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Components of word wall</td>
<td>2.29 (1.10)</td>
<td>1.70 (1.08)</td>
<td>1.97 (1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Components of word work</td>
<td>3.88 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.21)</td>
<td>3.54 (1.18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, a rubric score of one reflected the absence of an element; a score of three reflected the presence of some parts of the element, and a score of five indicated the presence of all the required components of an element. Across the district and at each school, implementation fidelity of the components of reading instruction was consistently positive, in the three or higher average range, with the exception of independent reading which was underrepresented in lesson plans. Lesson plans for writing revealed a difference between the schools. Despite consistent dispersion of data at the schools, the means for the components of writing instruction, modeled and shared writing and guided and/or independent writing were in the four to mid-four range at the primary (K-2) school and in the two to mid-two range at the elementary (3-5) school. While there is also a discrepancy between how the components of word study are represented in lesson plans.
between schools, the components of word walls were underrepresented in the plans at both schools.

I applied a yes/no rating to the second half of the items in order to evaluate the presence of three instructional elements, a read aloud, any one of seven comprehension strategies and handwriting instruction. Handwriting instruction (the production of writing) applied to grades K-3 and was underrepresented in the lesson plans, particularly at the primary (K-2) level. Comprehension strategies, the foundation of explicit instruction in reading and the focus of the year one implementation of balanced literacy in the district, was represented 90 percent of the time in the elementary (3-5) school’s lesson plans and was represented almost 65 percent of the time in the primary (K-2) school’s lesson plans. Read alouds were consistently represented at the 80 percent level across the district. These data are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K-2 Primary School</th>
<th>3-5 Elementary School</th>
<th>K-5 District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Aloud</td>
<td>82.35%</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>81.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Strategies</td>
<td>64.71%</td>
<td>90.00%</td>
<td>78.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also applied a yes/no rating to second half of the items in order to determine the presence of six kinds of resources in the instructional lesson plans, Benchmark Literacy materials, leveled fiction, leveled non-fiction, state standards’ resources (3-5), assessment and technology. The presence of leveled non-fiction is notably lower than other elements in the district’s lesson plans, particularly at the primary (K-2) where just fewer than 18 percent of the plans indicated the use of leveled non-fiction for reading instruction.
Inclusion of instructional technology in the balanced literacy lesson plans is represented in about half of the district’s plans; however twice as many primary (K-2) lesson plans indicated the use of instructional technology than did the elementary (3-5) plans. The percentage of these resource elements present in the district’s balanced literacy lesson plans are detailed in table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Resource Elements Present in Lesson Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark Literacy Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveled Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveled Non-Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA SOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the lesson plan rubric, the evidence of planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy, together with the results of the observation checklist, will provide two points of data that will inform understanding as to the extent to which the district is implementing its balanced literacy model with fidelity.

**Classroom Observation Fidelity of Implementation Checklist**

The second part of the first evaluation question focused on the extent to which the balanced literacy model is being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy. To answer this part of question one, I used a classroom observation fidelity of implementation checklist as I observed the balanced literacy block in six classrooms, two at each grade level, K-5. The checklist was
designed to rate the level of fidelity of implementation of balanced literacy during instructional observations. Prior to the lesson each teacher observed provided written lesson plans for the literacy block. I based the ratings only on objective evidence observed during the literacy block. Application of the checklist yielded a rating of the lesson plan on a scale from one to five on each of 11 components of the balanced literacy model. Specific elements (read aloud, comprehension strategies, handwriting instruction) and the use of certain resources (Benchmark Literacy materials, leveled fiction texts, leveled nonfiction texts, state resources, assessments and technology) were evaluated as to their presence (yes/no) during the observation.

To inform this evaluation question I observed approximately one third of the teachers in the district for the duration of one balanced literacy block during December and January, 2014. I used the observation checklist (Appendix C) when observing in the 12 classrooms to check items observed in the teaching, lesson plan and classroom environment, and I took copious field notes in the margins. The means and standard deviations are represented in Table 8.
Table 8

Means from Classroom Observation Checklist with Standard Deviation in Parentheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist Item</th>
<th>K-2 Primary School N=6</th>
<th>3-5 Elementary School N=6</th>
<th>K-5 District N=12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Components of balanced literacy instruction</td>
<td>4.33 (1.49)</td>
<td>4.67 (0.75)</td>
<td>4.50 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Components of reading instruction</td>
<td>4.33 (1.49)</td>
<td>4.83 (0.37)</td>
<td>4.58 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Components of modeled reading</td>
<td>5.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>4.67 (0.47)</td>
<td>4.83 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Components of guided reading</td>
<td>4.50 (0.76)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.76)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Components of independent reading</td>
<td>4.17 (1.46)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>4.08 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Components of writing instruction</td>
<td>3.50 (1.80)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.53)</td>
<td>3.75 (1.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Components of modeled writing and shared writing</td>
<td>3.33 (1.80)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.37)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Components of guided and/or independent writing</td>
<td>4.33 (0.94)</td>
<td>4.50 (1.12)</td>
<td>4.42 (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Components of word study</td>
<td>3.00 (2.00)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.41)</td>
<td>2.50 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Components of word wall</td>
<td>3.00 (1.63)</td>
<td>2.67 (1.80)</td>
<td>2.83 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Components of word work</td>
<td>4.00 (1.53)</td>
<td>2.67 (1.80)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, a checklist rating of one reflected the absence of an element; a score of three reflected the presence of some of the element, and a score of five indicated the presence of all the required components of an element. The checklist ratings, based on evidence in the teaching, the lesson plan and the classroom environment were nearly all higher than the lesson plan rubric ratings. I observed independent reading in 11 of 12 classrooms, rating it an average of 4.08, up from the 2.46 rating of the same element in the lesson plan review. Word study emerged with underrepresented presence in the observations. While the median checklist rating was 2.50, seven observations received a rating of one, two a rating of four, and three a rating of five. The word wall component, however, was rated nearly one level higher in the observations than in the lesson plan checklists.
Multiple field notes reflected the presence of sight word, content area and reading vocabulary word walls visible in the classrooms. I have provided a side-by-side comparison of the lesson plan rubric means and the classroom observation checklist means later in this chapter.

In observing during the literacy block, I observed teachers using a read aloud in whole group instruction 100 percent of the time, and I observed teachers providing instruction in whole and small groups using one or more comprehension strategies 100 percent of the time. These data are higher than those determined from reviewing only the lesson plan for those elements. In both grade 3 observations I observed handwriting (cursive) instruction, while for the primary (K-2) observations, I observed handwriting (manuscript) instruction in the kindergarten classes, not the grade one or two classrooms. The presence of these instructional elements is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K-2 Primary School</th>
<th>3-5 Elementary School</th>
<th>K-5 District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Aloud</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, I observed the presence of resource elements in the classrooms. Again, the observations yielded higher percentages than did the lesson plan reviews. In my observations Benchmark literacy materials, leveled fiction readers and technology were used 100 percent of the time. In fact, the two missing elements to any degree in my observations were in leveled non-fiction and assessment, absent from just one classroom
observation in the elementary (3-5) school. The tabulations of these percentages are represented in Table 10.

Table 10

*Percentage of Resource Elements Present in Observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>K-2 Primary School</th>
<th>3-5 Elementary School</th>
<th>K-5 District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benchmark Literacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leveled Fiction</strong></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leveled Non-Fiction</strong></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>83.00%</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VA SOL</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>83.00%</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of both the lesson plan review and the classroom observations provide data to inform the first evaluation question:

To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by:

a. Lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy;

and

b. Instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy?

Table 11 provides a comparison of the similar items from the lesson plan rubric and the observation checklist. This data comparison between a paper-pencil review of a lesson plan and an in-person observation of actual teaching in a classroom with an accompanying lesson plan indicates that an observation provided a more complete picture of implementation fidelity than did a lesson plan review. With the exception of modeled and shared writing, all observation means are higher than lesson plan review means.
In further research of this evaluation question, I coded participant responses to interview and focus group question four: *Thinking about your classroom, to what extent do you feel that you are implementing the balanced literacy model according to the core components of reading, writing and word study?* Several themes emerged from the analysis, with implementing the core components of reading, writing and word study being consistent across most groups. Participants also reported the integration of literacy components across disciplines, specific content strength of implementation (e.g., writing, reading and writing, reading and word study), differentiated word study and improvement each year when recounting the degree to which they were implementing balanced literacy.

Table 11

*Comparison of Related Elements of Lesson Plans and Observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Lesson Plans (Rubric)</th>
<th>Observations (Checklist)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Components of reading instruction</td>
<td>4.29 (1.57)</td>
<td>4.10 (2.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.19 (2.00)</td>
<td>4.33 (1.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.83 (0.37)</td>
<td>4.58 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Components of modeled reading</td>
<td>3.59 (0.87)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.81 (0.98)</td>
<td>5.00 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.67 (0.47)</td>
<td>4.83 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Components of guided reading</td>
<td>3.88 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.05 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.43 (1.10)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.50 (0.76)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Components of independent reading</td>
<td>2.18 (0.64)</td>
<td>2.70 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.46 (0.92)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>4.08 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Components of writing instruction</td>
<td>4.53 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.30 (1.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.32 (1.83)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00 (1.53)</td>
<td>3.75 (1.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Components of modeled writing and shared writing</td>
<td>4.24 (1.09)</td>
<td>2.80 (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.46 (1.43)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.33 (1.80)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Components of guided and/or independent writing</td>
<td>4.29 (1.21)</td>
<td>2.25 (1.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.19 (1.67)</td>
<td>4.33 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.50 (1.12)</td>
<td>4.42 (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Components of word study</td>
<td>3.82 (1.88)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.84 (1.99)</td>
<td>3.00 (2.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00 (2.00)</td>
<td>2.50 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Components of word wall</td>
<td>2.29 (1.10)</td>
<td>1.70 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.97 (1.10)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.67 (1.80)</td>
<td>2.83 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Components of word work</td>
<td>3.88 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.54 (1.18)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.67 (1.80)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
according to its core components. I tabulated responses, captured emerging themes and provided noteworthy excerpts in Table 12.

Table 12

**Extent of Implementation as Reported in Interviews and Focus Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Fidelity Code</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Noteworthy Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Interviews n=3</td>
<td>• Teaching core components</td>
<td>“I focus on the core components all day, not just during the literacy block, but in my science and social studies, and even in my math time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexibility in schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Integrating across the curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Differentiated word study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Focus Group n=1 5 members</td>
<td>• Teaching core components</td>
<td>“I feel like I’m incorporating them all, where I feel like right now the reading component of it is where I learned the most [so] I’m the best skilled at incorporating it. With writing I feel like I can do it. It is a time factor and then with word study we’ve changed how we do it, so it is a new learning process for me this year with it too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Presence of writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexibility in schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving each year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Interviews n=3</td>
<td>• Reading and writing work together</td>
<td>“I would have said three years ago if you’d have asked, I’d have said we needed to work on the reading component, and now, we’ve grown so far from three years ago, and it’s because we did get [professional development].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Modeling/think aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving each year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Focus Group n=1 3 members</td>
<td>• Teaching core components</td>
<td>“I think I am touching on it every day the best that I can.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reading and word study work together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Specialist Interview n=1</td>
<td>• Teaching core components</td>
<td>“I do differentiated word study with three of my small groups, two of my third grade groups and one of my fourth grade groups. That’s proven to be really beneficial.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Differentiated word study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Interview n=1</td>
<td>• Teaching core components</td>
<td>“I think that we’re touching on each component and even more so this year than last year because I think they’re understanding that more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving each year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most participants identified teaching the core components in their response to the degree of implementation fidelity they were achieving, indicating as one teacher stated, “I think
I’m getting it all in.” In this third year of implementation, many also indicated that having some flexibility in their scheduling, timing and use of materials had improved the fidelity of implementation. Teachers reported that they were improving implementation with each year. One teacher responded, “I feel that I’m implementing it pretty well in making sure all those three components are met. I’m also including all those language arts opportunities of reading, writing, listening, speaking and doing.” These responses in interviews and focus groups provided a third data point for this first evaluation question. These data were confirmatory of the of the observation data.

**Interviews and Focus Groups**

Following the lesson plan analysis and observations, I interviewed six of the 12 teachers I observed. These teachers volunteered to be interviewed, and I conducted the interviews during January and early February, 2014. I also interviewed one administrator and one reading specialist. I gathered descriptive information about years’ experience and participants’ conceptions of a balanced literacy model and asked questions specifically designed to elicit challenges, successes and suggestions from them.

In addition, I opened the opportunity to participate in a focus group to the rest of the staff of each school implementing the balanced literacy model in the district. I held two focus groups, one at each school, in February, 2014. At the primary (K-2) school, five teachers participated, and of those five, four had been observed, but not interviewed previously for this study, by me. The teachers were representative of the grade span at the school. Three teachers participated from the elementary school (3-5), none of whom I had previously observed, and all from the same grade. The participation for the focus groups may have been affected at both of the schools because inclement weather resulted in each
of them being rescheduled. For the focus groups, I gathered descriptive information about
years’ experience and participants’ conceptions of a balanced literacy model and asked
questions specifically designed to elicit challenges, successes and suggestions from them.
The qualitative data that resulted from these interviews and focus groups informed both
evaluation questions:

1. To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented
according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as
evidenced by:
   a. Lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced
      literacy; and
   b. Instructional delivery aligned with the core components of
      balanced literacy?

2. What aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in a school district
are facilitating successes or creating barriers or stumbling blocks to success for
teachers and ultimately student achievement?

The findings for this implementation evaluation from the interviews and focus groups are
discussed in the rest of this chapter.

To begin each interview or focus group, I asked each participant to share his or
her years of experience and grade level in an effort to break any tension and ease into the
interview. Likewise, to establish rapport and obtain participants understanding of
balanced literacy as a model for instruction, I asked each participant/group what a
balanced literacy model meant to them. Among the 16 participants, I coded 25 defining
statements. Close to half of the statements defined balanced literacy as a model that
spirals, that contains common reading vocabulary and builds from kindergarten up through grade 5, as was reflected in this participant’s response: “A K-5 Balanced Literacy Model basically means a reading, writing, word study approach that’s carried through kindergarten all the way through grade 5, using the same language, the same strategies throughout.” Another common theme centered on the core elements of reading, writing and word study, particularly on their interrelatedness and incorporating them together.

One participant summed it up this way: “I believe that a balanced literacy model contains all of the components that are necessary for students to learn reading and writing, increase the balance of direct and indirect instruction with a lot of modeling, independent work and also shared reading experiences.” Others added to these ideas by noting the importance of assessment, of the gradual release of responsibility to students, the literacy components of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary instruction, fluency and comprehension as well as the importance of reading, writing, listening, thinking and speaking. All participants were able to define balanced literacy within these parameters.

The interviews and focus groups then concentrated on what was going well and what was proving challenging, and I ended each interview or focus group by asking participants for suggestions for moving ahead with the balanced literacy model in the district.

In coding the interview and focus group transcripts, emerging themes regarding the aspects of balanced literacy that were going well included having the materials needed to teach using the model, being able to participate in half day planning sessions with their team and increased collaboration. Success code incidence counts, themes and noteworthy excerpts are presented in Table 13.
Table 13

Aspects Facilitating Success as Reported in Interviews and Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Code Incidents</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Noteworthy Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Interviews n=3</td>
<td>• Materials</td>
<td>“What’s really working is the use of common vocabulary from grades K through 2.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balanced literacy model and components</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Common vocabulary (comprehension strategies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Focus Group n=1</td>
<td>• Materials</td>
<td>“As a teacher [I feel] the discussions are consistent and in other words, we are all teaching the same thing at the same time so that when we come to our PLC or we have a grade level meeting we are all talking about the same thing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 members</td>
<td>• Release ½ days for implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Common vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Interviews n=3</td>
<td>• Balanced literacy model and components</td>
<td>“I think reading, especially with [sic] the explicit instruction and having the workshops on that, I really think even as a building, we're doing really [well] in the reading area for that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Following the same routine, 3-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Focus Group n=1</td>
<td>• Reading components of balanced literacy model</td>
<td>“I like the idea of a mini lesson and guided reading and reaching them for the strategies through the mini lesson and then guided reading, to address their differentiated and structural needs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Specialist Interview n=1</td>
<td>• Materials</td>
<td>“…providing valuable input and feedback to teachers during those half day reading planning release days.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Release ½ days for implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Differentiated word study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Interview n=1</td>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
<td>“I feel like the teachers are collaborating better each year. I've seen that. They're really working together. I think that working with each other, it's helping those that are struggling a little bit more to have the others to lean on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likewise, participants responded to questions regarding challenges or stumbling blocks to implementing balanced literacy in their school. I applied the same strategy in
coding incidents mentioning challenges and determining emerging themes. At the primary (K-2) level eight teachers participated in the interviews (3) and focus group (5) and together reported 22 incidents of challenges or roadblocks to implementation, a participant to challenge ratio of 1:2.75. At the elementary (3-5) level six teachers participated in the interviews (3) and focus group (3) and together reported 28 incidents of challenges or roadblocks to implementation, a participant to challenge ratio of 1:4.66. The common themes for challenges among the participants emerged as the scope and sequence of the literacy curricula, time, instruction in writing and word study, assessment and professional development. An isolated theme related to professional development and leadership emerged from the elementary (3-5) focus group and was illustrated in excerpts such as this: “We are getting to the point, like it was mentioned before, where we do not even know what we are supposed to be doing. At times, we feel so ... We did PLCs and then we did data wall and now, we have got to make these quarterlies, but then we have got to talk about implementation. It just feels like we are, at times (pause) not a lot of direction.” Challenges reported in interviews and focus groups by code incidence counts, themes and noteworthy excerpts are presented in Table 14.
### Challenges as Reported in Interviews and Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge Code</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Noteworthy Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Interviews n=3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Curricula: Scope and sequence, Time to teach and to plan, Instruction: Writing, Assessment: Alignment, Formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Focus Group n=1 5 members</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Curricula: Scope and sequence, Time to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Interviews n=3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Curricula: Scope and sequence, Time to teach, Professional development, Instruction: Writing, Word Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Focus Group n=1 3 members</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Curricula: Isolated components, too chopped up, Time to teach and to collaborate, Professional development, Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Specialist Interview n=1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Assessment, Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Interview n=1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Time, Instruction: Writing, Word Study, Assessment, Professional Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, “needs” emerged as a theme from the interviews and focus groups, rising from the discussion of challenges. In the interviews, needs were coded in 31 instances and in the focus group they were coded in ten instances. Four main needs emerged. Participants pointed out the need for more work in writing, including curricular work on the scope and sequence, explicitly describing what should be taught in each grade, improving the grammar component and providing professional development on the resources they had, e.g., the Trait Crate. Participants discussed the evolution of word study from the Benchmark materials to the Words Their Way materials and a need for flexibility, support and professional development as they improved word study. Third, participants expressed the need to continue to improve, add to and revisit the curricula as an evolving set of documents. Finally, those interviewed indicated the need for developmentally appropriate assessments, particularly informal ones and also pointed out that a discussion on report card grading might be an appropriate follow up to the balanced literacy model’s implementation. These needs parallel the challenges identified participants, and, in the instance of writing and word study, are reflected by lower ratings on the lesson plan rubrics and the observation checklists.

In closing each interview or focus group, I asked for suggestions to improve the implementation of the K-5 balanced literacy model in the district. Across all groups, participants noted the need to “stay the course” and focus on doing one thing well before moving to “the next thing.” One participant related it this way, “Choose one thing. It does not matter what it is, whether it is writing, word study/ Choose one thing and have your professional development before school starts so you feel like you have a really good foundation and you really know where you are going and then do a follow-up to it
throughout the year.” Another participant suggested that “[we] just continue to look at the model each year and make changes as necessary,” and this emerged as a theme, particularly as it related to adjusting the model and schedules based on participants’ experiences and time constraints in the third year of implementation. The themes emerging from participants’ suggestions are organized in Table 15.

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions to Improve Balance Literacy Implementation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>K-2 Interviews n=3</td>
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<tr>
<td>K-2 Focus Group n=1 5 members</td>
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<td>Reading Specialist Interview n=1</td>
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Again, these suggestions mirror the challenges and needs identified by participants in previous interview or focus group questions and results.

**Summary**

This chapter presented multiple sources of data for informing the two research questions for this study. The first question was to what extent is the balanced literacy
model being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced by lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy; and instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy? I found that the curricula need ongoing revisions as to increase fidelity of implementation. Evidence from lesson plans, observations and interviews/focus groups supports this finding, particularly in all areas of writing and in word study as well as in the actual scope and sequence of skills in the various curricula for each grade level. I also found that elements not readily apparent in lesson plans were indeed implemented, as evidenced in my observations. Finally, I found that the lesson plan review, my observations and teacher reporting indicated a higher level of implementation fidelity respective to the components of reading instruction: modeled, guided and independent. This included the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies.

The second research question was what aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in a school district are facilitating successes or creating barriers or stumbling blocks to success for teachers and ultimately student achievement? In analyzing the collective data from the interviews and focus groups, participants were twice as likely to report a challenge as they were to report a success, and at the grade 3-5 level, challenges were reported three times as often as were successes. I found that the curricula (scope & sequence as well as gaps) as well as instruction (writing and word study) were implementation challenges, and this strengthened my findings relative to question one. I also found that time, both to teach and to plan, professional development and assessment presented challenges in the implementation of the balanced literacy
model for this district. In chapter five I will explore the implications of these findings for practice and further research.
Chapter V: Implications for Practice

Policy mandates, federal requirements, local initiatives and even teacher preferences drive literacy instruction in classrooms. The debate over best practices in literacy instruction is not new, neither is there is dearth of studies, strategies and products purporting to be the panacea for every child to be a reader. The purpose of this study was to evaluate one district’s implementation of a balanced literacy model during the third year of implementation. The evaluation model, designed after Scriven’s goal-free evaluation, focused on evaluating the actual effects of implementing a new literacy model by exploring the lived experiences of the teachers and staff. In chapter four I summarized and provided tabular representations of the results of applying a lesson plan rubric to written literacy lesson plans, observing balanced literacy instruction and completing checklists as well as conducting interviews and focus groups and analyzing the transcripts. The data were presented in relation to the evaluation questions it might inform, and in this chapter, I expand upon those results and findings to explore this study’s implications for practice and further research. The questions driving this implementation evaluation of one district’s balanced literacy model were:

1. To what extent is the balanced literacy model being implemented according to the core components of reading, writing and word study, as evidenced
   a. by lesson planning aligned with the core components of balanced literacy, and
   b. instructional delivery aligned with the core components of balanced literacy?
2. What aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in a school district are facilitating successes or creating barriers or stumbling blocks to success for teachers and ultimately student achievement?

The data and findings from this study, while contextualized within the evaluation of one district’s implementation of a balanced literacy model, revealed consistent themes connected to the leadership challenges inherent in change initiatives. I began the project focused on challenges and successes when implementing standard literacy instruction through a district model, but leadership behaviors emerged with compelling implications beyond the scope of a literacy model implementation.

**Leadership Challenge: Systemic Change Takes Time, Resources and Structure**

Educational leaders at all levels, classroom, school, district and beyond, are tasked with implementing research-based programs to improve outcomes for students. If schools are to move beyond the initial implementation to full operation, innovation and ultimately sustainability of a program, they need to invest the time and support needed (Fixsen, 2005). This study focused on the third year of implementation. I looked for evidence of fidelity to the balanced literacy model in both lesson plans and teaching. While I would like to have examined the quality of implementation, I realized that the fidelity to the model had to precede any innovations or adjustments that might have led to an investigation of instructional quality. This has implications for all who would implement instructional initiatives. Implement the initiative with fidelity prior to innovation. This, according to the Dissemination Working Group (as cited in Fixsen, 2005), firmly establishes that a change to a program is not an attempt to avoid implementation evaluation, but rather is a response to practiced performance. Winter and
Szulanski “noted that adaptations made after a model had been implemented with fidelity were more successful that modifications made before full implementation” (as cited in Fixsen, 2005, p. 17). District leaders should plan carefully for implementation, allowing time for practice and reflection, so that the initiative becomes systemic and the change process relies on formative processes. Given three years of implementation, this district is in a position to innovate in reading instruction while continuing the implementation of writing and word study.

Leaders also bear responsibility in planning projects, and as an organization moves through the implementation process, the leaders must consider sustainability of the initiative. They must answer the question, how will we ensure the longevity and effectiveness of our initiative? For this district, the question came early in the implementation process. In month nine of the first year, the project director left the district. The succession gap this caused resulted in materials not being available to teachers until the week before school started, in the final model not being reviewed by the reading committee and the implementation beginning without a curriculum. In year two, these gaps had to be proactively addressed and filled, significantly slowing the process of implementation and creating avoidable stress and challenges for the teachers. Additionally, between years two and three, teachers left each school; the reading specialist at one school changed, and one principal retired. Attrition must be planned for and addressed in advance. District leaders implementing large scale instructional changes should create written project plans for all aspects of an initiative, including succession plans for leadership and participants.
For this district’s balanced literacy implementation process the funding stream will cease after year three. The district can apply for a fourth year no penalty extension, an action that might mitigate the rushed and often not planned spending typical of grant programs in their final months. My evaluation uncovered a failure in planning on the part of the district leadership, and actions to extend the project would show participants that leadership is committed to creating a system for doing new things and engaging in a formative process for determining effectiveness. The district leaders must consider the priorities of the teachers, particularly with regard to the implementation gaps in writing and word study, when deciding which activities to carry forward with grant funding. Ultimately, the goals beyond the funding should be the long-term sustainability of the balanced literacy model and continued effectiveness of literacy instruction despite any changes in policy, finances and staffing. This is a district leadership responsibility.

District leaders may find it challenging to engage in formative evaluation. In my experience in education, program evaluation is not a systemic component of initiatives. In 23 years in education, 14 as an administrator, I have worked through program evaluations only when they have been a required component of a grant administration. Policy mandates, assessment sanctions, audits and needs assessments often result in districts implementing large scale initiatives with little or no thought to whether what is planned is best for student learning and with little or no means to measure outcome success. Large scale district initiatives should have the same kind of preset learning intentions as do classroom teacher lesson plans. District leaders must ask themselves, “How will we know if we achieve these intentions?” They must engage in systemic long-term planning with built in accountability measures. Program evaluation can assist in accomplishing this.
The data I gathered in this study were rich and provided concrete and meaningful feedback to inform continued implementation. I recommend that district leaders implementing initiatives engage in a program evaluation model that will assist in planning, implementation, evaluation and communication throughout the lifespan of the project. Stufflebeam (2001) considered many approaches and theories of evaluation; however, for the purposes of practitioner-based program evaluation, I suggest assuming broadly, as Frechtling (2007) did, “that the purpose of evaluation is to yield information about how well an intervention, product or system is working” (p. 3). This definition includes both formative and summative elements and assumes that evaluation is present at the beginning of an initiative and that it is based on a comprehensive understanding of the project. Given the responsiveness of the participants in this study and given their willingness to improve the balanced literacy model in the district, it seems that program evaluation would be a positive addition to any large scale instructional initiative.

District leaders interested in program evaluation at any juncture of a project’s lifespan might be interested in following the six phases proposed by Frechtling (2007).

1. Development of a conceptual model of the program and identification of key evaluation points
2. Development of evaluation questions and definition of measurable outcomes
3. Development of an evaluation design
4. Collection of data
5. Analysis of data
6. Provision of information to interested audiences (p. 127)
The reporting elements need not be conducted nor delivered at the end of a project, but can and should be an ongoing and formative component of evaluation. The reports should be accessible, non-technical and tell the story of the project’s successes and challenges with a focus on continuous improvement. My experience in this study has shown that participants are willing to share and be a part of that improvement cycle. This was most keenly evidenced when inclement weather forced me to reschedule the focus groups; teachers who subsequently could not attend were more than happy to email me their feedback. Teachers know evaluation from an assessment of student progress perspective. District leaders owe it teachers to involve them in program evaluation of instructional initiatives. Principals should play a critical role in program evaluation, and they must lead and provide building level ownership of change initiatives.

**Leadership Challenge: Principals Own the Initiatives**

Principals serve on the frontline with teachers and as such should protect them from outside attempts to interrupt and derail instruction. The results of this study suggest that principals should exercise instructional leadership practices when implementing large-scale initiatives in school. They should prioritize, advocate and create support systems for the teachers, and they should recognize successes incrementally during implementation.

Principals set the tone for a school. They must lead by example, prioritizing instructional goals and protecting teachers and instruction from outside distractions. In a district such as the one in this study where a balanced literacy model was introduced in response to an achievement drop in reading that was significant enough to land the school in an improvement status, literacy instruction became an instructional priority and needs
to continue as an instructional priority throughout the life cycle of implementation, which according to Fixsen (2005) can take minimally two to four years. Other important instructional demands, such as math achievement, or significant non-instructional mandates, such as bullying prevention, may threaten the focus on a program’s implementation, and the principal bears the responsibility for keeping the “main thing the main thing” (Covey, 2005, p. 160). If not, teachers feel pressured and overwhelmed and are unable to focus well on the implementation. A good example from this study was illustrated by a teacher referencing the large amount of paperwork required to track data in her school:

> We’ve begun to streamline a little bit. We used to write down information in four or five different places, and now we’re not asked to do that. We are to record it on the computer, and in a grade book and on this piece of paper to turn in. That’s getting a little better where we only have to write down something a couple of times. So if we could [sic] get it to one. It’s just, how can I not do something two or three times so that I can spend more time focused on my plans and preparing material rather than that business part? I feel like I have two or three different jobs. One is to instruct, one is to prepare and one is the data collecting business part. It’s hard to get all of that done in 10-12 hours and still have a life outside of it.

The “streamline” came from a new principal, who assumed leadership of the school between years two and three of the balanced literacy implementation, and yet streamlining from writing something down in five places to two or three is not quite satisfactory. In prioritizing instruction, principals must think about eliminating
extraneous paperwork and tasks; otherwise, as one teacher noted, “A lot of the extra time is being placed on that stuff instead of the good instruction and things like that.”

Likewise, in prioritizing an initiative such as this implementation of a balanced literacy model, principals need to resist the urge to pile new enterprises on top of the existing one, even if something new seems aligned. One of the focus groups in this study pointed to the need to stay focused on implementing the literacy block well, before shifting to a new focus. One teacher said, “We are dabbling and doing lots of things, but we are not doing it well. We are jumping all over the place and sometimes, we do not even know what road we are on because we are jumping from one topic to another.” Fixsen (2005) noted that at this juncture of implementation, when the work is difficult and complex and when the confidence of implementers is tested, many programs are abandoned, due to negative influences on practice and management (p.16). The school principal is responsible for making implementation a priority and providing the focus and means for teachers to implement without competing initiatives or unreasonable administrative demands.

How do principals manage this? They advocate for the program and for their teachers, by providing concrete support. During this project’s implementation, one half day of release time was provided each quarter of the school year for grade level teams to meet, discuss implementation, plan and collaborate. In making this a priority, principals raise the expectation for fidelity of implementation, and they concurrently provide the necessary support structures to make it happen. Saphier and King (1985) have long promoted the notion that cultural norms such as collegiality, high expectations, tangible support and protection of what is important affect the change process in substantive ways.
In this study I found that teachers repeatedly looked to the principal to advocate for them and to provide them with concrete support structures like collaborative planning time, peer observations, adequate materials and flexibility in order to implement the balanced literacy model well. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2008) agreed, stating that “effective principals create conditions and structures for learning that enable continuous improvement of performance not only for children, but for adults in the school community as well” (p. 2). This means they might ignore some initiatives or tempting new programs to keep the focus on the learning and the single project at hand.

Principals should also lead change initiatives by recognizing successes throughout the implementation process. Initial implementation of a project is subject to resistance and over time, to what Fullan (2001) referred to as the “implementation dip.” Although normal and expected, the implementation dip occurs when teacher performance and efficacy dip as a result of a challenging change, often leaving teachers frustrated, confused and overwhelmed. The implementation dip is illustrated in Figure 5.

![Figure 5. The implementation dip. Reprinted from Dangerously Irrelevant, by S. McLeod, 2007, retrieved from http://dangerouslyirrelevant.org/2007/07/implementation.html.](image-url)
In order for teachers to build confidence and to reduce the length and depth of the implementation dip, principals should consider recognizing and celebrating implementation successes incrementally. In this study the data from interviews and focus groups revealed that teachers are two times less likely to report a success than they are to report a challenge in implementing a balanced literacy model, even in the third year. Furthermore, they continued to report feeling like a novice teacher, e.g., “It’s just overwhelming. It shouldn’t be after 28 years.” The responsibility for recognition and praise falls on the principal in such situations, and Saphier and King (1985) held that appreciation and recognition build a culture conducive to school improvement. What can principals do? Principals can recognize exemplary practice in faculty meetings. They can offer specific, meaningful feedback during post observation conferences to reward effort and gains. They can schedule faculty celebrations at milestone junctures over the course of implementation or create structures for communal self-reflection and recognition of success.

During my observations I took significant field notes on the quality writing I observed in two primary classrooms. In debriefing with the teachers, I shared my observations about the caliber of the writing. Both teachers reported feeling quite the opposite and revealed that they continued to struggle with a lack of efficacy in their own teaching. It is the responsibility of the building level administrators to provide appropriate avenues for recognition and praise during implementation. Furthermore, principals are responsible for creating support structures, for advocating for teachers and for prioritizing instructional initiatives and operational demands if change is to have a positive impact in a school.
Principals also have a responsibility to provide adequate and appropriate professional development throughout the implementation process. For this study, principals were allowed to drive building level professional development in the third year of implementation of the balanced literacy; however, teachers noted inconsistencies in the professional development. The Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Development (2014), specify that professional development for teachers should be standards based, results driven, and job embedded, a model that ostensibly takes time, practice, reflection and adjustment. Examples of such professional development include peer observations, site visits, release time for planning and collaboration as well as ongoing time to practice skills in the classroom and a venue for meaningful feedback. The data from this study support this notion. Contrast the year one model for learning how to explicitly teach seven reading comprehension strategies with the year three reflections of teachers, as captured by this teacher:

If you think about what helped previously, we said we really felt comfortable with guided reading and whole group mini lessons. I think the [year-long] professional development that we did [with the university on explicit teaching] really helped build that idea of these strategy-based mini lessons to help anchor your reading instruction and I think that, because we went in on that and because it was several years of developing that idea, it has done a lot more, it seems to have been way more successful as a whole for the faculty; whereas since then, we have jumped around a lot and I agree that that has been a problem.
For professional development to impact practice, principals must build in real time for teachers to learn, practice, reflect and refine, knowing that the implementation process may take up to four years (Fixsen, 2005). Repeatedly I heard from teachers, “we need to stay the course.”

Beyond time, reflection and practice, teachers need professional development on each aspect of an initiative. Data from lesson plans and observations indicated potential professional development needs in both writing instruction and word study. These findings were supported in the interviews and focus groups. Just as the professional development for explicit teaching and comprehension strategies was spread out over year one of the implementation process (with built in time for learning, practice, reflection and revision), so should be the professional development for writing and word study. One teacher in particular noted the following:

I know I've been talking about writing a lot. We all received a Trait Crate this year, and I haven't had any training on how to use that. I would love to use it, but I don't know how to. I want to make sure I use it the right way.

That's also part of the curriculum; it talks about the trait crate and how we can use it, but I don't have any training in that.

It has to be frustrating for teachers to have materials they are supposed to use and not know how to use them. Principals must ensure that teachers have the training they need to implement initiatives on a timeline consistent with the likelihood of that training becoming systemic and operational. As Fixsen (2005) noted “full implementation of an innovation can [only] occur once the new learning becomes integrated into practitioner … practices and procedures” (p. 16). In a difficult and complex implementation such as
this study’s balanced literacy model, careful attention to professional development is imperative for principals who are observing teachers and learning in the buildings. Although I began this study examining the implementation of a balanced literacy model, I ended up discovering leadership challenges that could not be ignored; however, the study did yield implications for literacy instruction as well.

**Implications for Literacy Instruction**

A basic search in any education database yields tens of thousands of articles, studies and programs on literacy instruction. Many are contradictory, as illustrated by the National Panel’s push to rank phonics and phonemic awareness as “first among equals” in literacy acquisition (Pearson & Hiebert, 2010, p. 294) and the subsequent response from the field to disprove the findings. Much has been written and reported in an attempt to synthesize and promote consensus within the field of reading. Pearson and Hiebert (2010) shared their synthesis of large scale reports in an effort to build a scientific base for practice and policy. A timeline of those reports is presented in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** Large scale syntheses of reading research.

- **1967**
  - *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (Jean Chall)
  - *First-Grade Studies* (Office of Education)

- **1985**
  - *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Richard Anderson)

- **1990**
  - *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (Marilyn Adams)

- **2008**
  - *National Early Literacy Panel* (National Institute for Literacy)

- **1997**
  - *National Reading Panel* (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development)

- **1998**
  - *The Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (National Research Council)
Pearson and Hiebert (2010) hoped that the report of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) would provide much needed evidence that meaning (comprehension) was as important as code (phonics, phonemic awareness) in shaping reading performance, and to some degree it did. However, I share this figure and research to illustrate how complex, longstanding and politically driven the ongoing reading wars have been and continue to be. What if, instead, we took this wealth of knowledge and synthesized it into working practices for teachers, regardless of specific materials, programs, curricula or funding?

An important implication of this study is that strategies, not programs, drive good literacy instruction. Teachers repeatedly pointed out the professional development they received on the intentional use of comprehension strategies during year one of the implementation changed how they taught reading. Those strategies, dubbed “The Magnificent Seven” by Rozzelle and Scearce (2009) are listed here:

1. Making connections to prior knowledge  
2. Inferring and predicting  
3. Asking questions  
4. Determining important ideas and summarizing  
5. Visualizing  
6. Synthesis and retelling  
7. Monitoring and clarifying understanding of text

If students learn to use these strategies purposefully while reading, the likelihood of their understanding the text increases. That understanding is not dependent on materials or programs. All students need is text. Allington and Gabriel (2012) concurred and
suggested “six elements of instruction that every child should experience every day” (p. 10). They suggested that every day, every child:

1. Reads something he or she chooses;
2. Reads accurately;
3. Reads something he or she understands;
4. Writes about something personally meaningful;
5. Talks with peers about reading and writing; and
6. Listens to a fluent adult read aloud. (pp. 10-14)

Each element is grounded well in research. It is fairly easy to find time and resources to implement each one. Participants in this study indicated time and curricular gaps as challenges to implementation of balanced literacy in their district. As they revise and modify their model and curricula, consideration of these elements may result in a more streamlined approach to literacy instruction. Given the push from policy makers for research-based instruction, perhaps all districts might consider literacy practices and strategies consistent with the robust extant literature and research and not contingent upon a specific program before purchasing another product, program or set of materials guaranteed to make each child a reader.

**Concluding Considerations**

The extant literature on balanced literacy and reading instruction is rich. We know more than ever about successful practices and strategies for literacy instruction. In this paper alone I have referenced close to 60 studies, reports and articles on teaching reading. Some research finds common ground in literacy instruction. Some research contradicts previously held notions of literacy instruction. What remains unclear is this: Is there one
best way to teach students to read, decode, write and communicate well? I propose that the answer is no. There is not one way to teach students to read, decode and write. Students need to read a lot and they need to write extensively to master the language, and this premise is pervasive in the literature; however, placing our focus on the implementation of reading programs is at the least insufficient. In this chapter, I have proposed that reading strategies (Rozzelle & Scearce, 2009), paired with key instructional elements (Allington & Gabriel, 2012) will provide the necessary framework and substance for literacy instruction. Literacy is a complex and vital construct; we should stop looking for a one-size fits all approach and instead provide rich learning communities for teachers to learn and grow, to practice and apply, and to reflect and refine their craft by making well-informed and grounded decisions about their students’ literacy needs.

Policy related to reading achievement drives school districts to search for research-based programs and products to improve achievement, and when they adopt one or more, the results are mixed at best. This study, a program evaluation of one district’s implementation of a balanced literacy model during the third year, makes a case for evaluation as a powerful tool in examining initiatives. Through the evaluation process I was able to elicit strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement from participants. This will inform the district’s implementation beyond this initial three-year grant cycle. The grant funding over three years in some ways imposed an artificial timeline. Based on the initial grant, which came in the wake of school improvement, the district was forced to make spending decisions early in the grant period. In particular, the district purchased balanced literacy materials based primarily on sales’ presentations, not
on use or experience. Not all teachers were involved and the materials arrived after other materials were removed, but before a set of curricula were written. District leaders need to take their time and not be rushed by policy demands and inadequate timelines that are often the norm. They receive money one week and have to spend it the next week. At some point, district leaders have to either say no or be better prepared for short turnaround. Fortunately, as noted above, good literacy instruction need not be dependent on any given program or set of materials. The change process forced the district to engage together and to explore the research on literacy instruction in order to make decisions about what to include in a balanced literacy model, and it forced them to analyze and evaluate successes and weaknesses each step of the way. Too often in education we implement a program and never revisit or improve it. We check the box on a federal form indicating our adherence to a research-based program, and we are done. Teachers, not programs, are the most important ingredient in literacy instruction; therefore, district and school leaders must make ongoing, formative program evaluation a priority for school improvement.

Leadership behaviors are vital, and perhaps none are so important in the implementation of district initiatives than those of the school principal. The principal’s impact is significant; the principal’s focus becomes the school’s focus (Whitaker, 2002, p. 30). Principals must be able to prioritize, provide tangible support and recognize and reward success during the implementation of a large scale instructional initiative, or it will flounder. Teaching reading is complex and students in any given class are likely at many different reading levels. We are asking a lot of teachers, and the principal must support and protect teachers throughout the implementation process.
In telling the story of this district’s implementation, like other qualitative research, I attempted to capture the lived experiences of participants by collaborating with them, so that we might have a better understanding of what is next in the implementation process. This kind of evaluation lends itself to actionable results. This district will focus its next professional development on writing and word study instruction. It will “stay the course” and not add other large-scale K-5 initiatives until this one is at least operational (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005), and it will continue to improve its leadership behaviors in support and recognition of the hard work teachers do each day to improve literacy for their students.
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Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Reading Program Committee for their conscientious and thoughtful efforts in developing the balanced literacy model for XXXXXXXXX Public Schools. Members of that committee included:

- Teacher, XXXXXXXXXElementary School
- Teacher, XXXXXXXXXPrimary School
- Reading Specialist, XXXXXXXXXElementary School
- Teacher, XXXXXXXXXPrimary School
- Teacher, XXXXXXXXXPrimary School
- Principal, XXXXXXXXXPrimary School
- Special Education Teacher, XXXXXXXXXPrimary School
- Gifted Education Teacher, XXXXXXXXXElementary School
- Teacher, XXXXXXXXXElementary School
- Reading Specialist, XXXXXXXXXPrimary School
- Teacher, XXXXXXXXXElementary School
- Principal, XXXXXXXXXElementary School

We also wish to thank the following experts from the field who graciously provided research, resources and professional development to guide us.

- educational consultant, XXXXX Research Network
- assistant professor, XXXXX University
- professor of literacy education, XXXXX State University
- executive director, XXXXX Research Network

Furthermore, we wish to thank colleagues in other school divisions who shared models and resources with us. Those divisions are not limited to but include:

- XXXXX City Public Schools
- XXXXXXX County Public Schools
- XXXXXXX Central School District

Finally, we acknowledge and thank additional members of the Reading Program Committee and experts in the field for their contributions during implementation:

- educational consultant
- Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Support Services
- educational evaluator, XXXXX Evaluation Group
- Reading Specialist, XXXXXXXXXElementary School
Table of Contents

Part I: Introduction
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 3
Beliefs ......................................................................................................................... 4
Balanced Literacy .................................................................................................... 4
Literate Environments ............................................................................................ 5
  Teacher Responsibilities ....................................................................................... 5
  Student Responsibilities ..................................................................................... 5

PART II: Balanced Literacy
Instructional Time .................................................................................................. 6
Literacy Resources .................................................................................................. 7
Reading .................................................................................................................... 8
Writing ...................................................................................................................... 11
Word Study .............................................................................................................. 14
Sample Instructional Models ................................................................................ 16
Assessment and Monitoring .................................................................................. 19
Intervention ............................................................................................................ 22

Professional Development Timeline and History ................................................. 24
References .............................................................................................................. 25
Introduction

During the spring of 2011 the XXXXXXXX Research Network conducted an audit of the K-5 reading instructional program in XXXXXXXXX Public Schools (XXXX). The audit was conducted in response to lower than expected performance by students on the state tests in reading. The following recommendations resulted:

**Recommendation 1:** Align the literacy program within and across schools to allow for consistency in teaching and learning.

**Recommendation 2:** Increase the focus on explicit teaching of comprehension strategies within the context of authentic text, rather than in isolation.

**Recommendation 3:** Identify, develop and improve common reading assessment within and across schools to inform instructional decision making.

**Recommendation 4:** Update reading resources, including book rooms in each school with varied, leveled fiction and non-fiction texts for students with varied interest.

**Recommendation 5:** Revise schedules and implement strategies to increase instructional time devoted to literacy development.

**Recommendation 6:** Implement ongoing, comprehensive individually and school-wide professional development that targets teacher and student achievement needs for literacy instruction.

**Recommendation 7:** Foster collaborative practices and a culture of inquiry.

**Recommendation 8:** Provide formative, nonjudgmental feedback to teachers.

XXXX received a Department of Defense Educational Activity (DoDEA) grant in 2011 to fund efforts to create a cohesive balanced literacy model for K-5 instruction. The grant, Reading for All, provides funding for materials, professional development and technology resources to support literacy instruction in XXXX.
Balanced Literacy

**Public Schools Beliefs**
We believe in implementing research based best practices that support a cohesive, multi-dimensional framework for literacy instruction.

We believe in utilizing curriculum, instruction and assessment to anchor and guide literacy development.

We believe in a K-5 continuum of instruction that respects the individual developmental level of each student and that cultivates lifelong readers and writers.

We believe in fostering academic excellence in our students by providing literacy rich environments throughout the school community.

We believe in optimizing student learning through active engagement in authentic literacy activities.

We believe in a developmentally appropriate release of responsibility for learning from teachers to students. A gradual release of responsibility suggests that the cognitive load should shift slowly and purposefully from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility, to independent practice as a learner (Fisher & Frey, 2008). Another variation of the gradual release model is teacher model, teacher guides student, student guides teacher, students work in cooperative pairs, and individual students practice the new learning (T, T-S, S-T, S-S, S).

**Definition**
Balanced literacy is a framework that integrates the elements of reading, writing, and word study, focusing on specific literacy components while also recognizing their interdependence. This framework provides a unified structure which allows teachers flexibility to honor the needs of individual learners.

Balanced literacy is developmental in nature, building upon student prior knowledge, developing literacy strategies which extend across all curricula to foster student independence as learners.
Responsibilities of Teachers and Students in Literate Environments

In a literate environment:

- A variety of print and other materials is available
- Classrooms are flexibly arranged to take advantage of opportunities for interactions between students
- There is an easy access to reading, writing, listening and speaking
- Student work is displayed to promote ownership

**In a literate environment, teachers:**

- Are involved in the reading/writing process themselves and they share their experiences with their students
- Review the District’s standards and curriculum
- Design instructional blocks for in-depth study
- Support, encourage and model application of skills and strategies
- Support a dialogue that allows for student ownership and collaboration
- Provide instruction in small group and whole class depending on instructional needs and/or interests
- Confer with students
- Assess prior knowledge and help students build connections to new learning
- Celebrate students’ efforts and accomplishments
- Facilitate an environment in which students are engaged in active and authentic learning experiences to include the use of technology
- Assess using informal/formal assessments

**In a literate environment, students:**

- Make choices and accept responsibility for their own learning
- Accept responsibility to contribute to a community of learners
- Share their knowledge and learning
- Use time in meaningful ways
- Develop flexible strategies in reading, word study, and writing multiple ways to demonstrate learning
- Take risks by trying out new ideas, voicing an opinion or response, attempt increasingly complex tasks and use new strategies
- Demonstrate higher level thinking abilities as they engage in literacy activities
- Engage in active learning experiences, share responses/products and metacognitive thinking
Instructional Time

The Balanced Literacy Model for XXXX provides the opportunity for teachers to work with students for sustained and uninterrupted periods of time. Teachers should create an environment for learning so that students are working in reading, writing and word study every day. The amount of time allotted to any given activity and the order in which activities are completed must be flexible for teachers to meet the diverse literacy needs of their students. As developmental hurdles are cleared, the time spent in each area should be adjusted to meet new needs. Timeframes and pacing should reflect the gradual release of responsibility for learning from teacher to students.

Principals will create master schedules that support the following time allocations for balanced literacy instruction in XXXX, and teachers will create lesson plans and instructional activities using these timeframes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balanced Literacy Elements</th>
<th>K-1</th>
<th>2-3</th>
<th>4-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range of Minutes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modeled</td>
<td>85-100</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>40-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Guided/Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modeled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Guided/Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Study</strong></td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>10-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Word Wall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Word Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Total Time</strong></td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literacy Resources

The K-5 XXXX Balanced Literacy Curriculum is intended to be taught through a balanced literacy framework for instruction, allowing teachers flexibility to honor the needs of individual learners and enable students to become strategic readers, writers, thinkers, and communicators. The XXXX Balanced Literacy Model and the Virginia Standards of Learning were guiding documents in the development of the XXXX K-5 Balanced Literacy Curriculum. Each grade level curriculum is structured into three sections: Reading, Writing, and Word Study. The following are literacy resources teachers will have access to when planning for classroom instruction:

**Reading: Modeled/Shared/Guided**

- XXXX Balanced Literacy Curriculum
- Virginia Standards Of Learning Resources
- Benchmark Literacy materials
- SURN Professional Development Resources
- Each school maintains a bookroom with leveled readers and a professional library with additional appropriate resources
- Additionally, teachers will maintain a classroom library for students to access for independent reading

**Writing**

- XXXX Balanced Literacy Curriculum
- Virginia Standards Of Learning Resources
- Benchmark Literacy materials
- Zaner Bloser handwriting materials
- *Crate Traits* (Grades 3-5)

**Word Study**

- XXXX Balanced Literacy Curriculum
- Virginia Standards Of Learning Resources
- Benchmark Literacy materials
Reading

Reading is a complex process that requires students to make meaning of text. Through reading instruction, teachers guide students to be able to successfully and independently decode both familiar and unfamiliar words, read fluently, and utilize strategies to bring meaning to text. In order to develop proficient readers, students must be exposed to and engaged in different types of text through modeled, guided, and independent reading.

Components of Reading

Modeled Reading
In a whole group setting, the teacher provides explicit reading instruction through a shared reading experience. The process is purposeful to model specific reading skills and strategies before, during and after reading.

The teacher will...
- Set a purpose for the shared reading experience
- Choose appropriate text for strategy/skill instruction
- Highlight important vocabulary and build background knowledge
- Utilize think aloud while reading

The student will...
- Be able to read and understand text above their reading level
- Actively participate in discussions/reflections before, during, and after shared reading experience
- Share thinking about reading strategies/skills when appropriate

Guided Reading
In a small group setting, students have the opportunity to practice reading strategies and skills before, during and after reading. Reading material is on the students’ instructional level, but groups are flexible allowing for individual student needs and growth.

The teacher will...
- Set instructional focus
- Listen to student reading (coach as needed)
- Assess using informal/formal assessments (running record, anecdotal notes, rubrics, checklists)
- Elicit student responses

The student will...
- Read (choral, echo, whisper, silent)
- Share responses and metacognitive thinking related to reading
Independent Reading
The purpose of independent reading is to build stamina and fluency while instilling in students the importance of reading for enjoyment. Students read self-selected text at their independent reading level and/or to satisfy individual interest. Students are accountable for what they have read through teacher monitoring and conferencing and/or through a variety of responses to reading activities.

The teacher will...
- Provide access to a variety of texts and materials
- Monitor student progress
- Provide response activities and/or opportunities

The student will...
- Read self-selected texts and material independently
- Respond to their reading (to teacher, to other students, or by writing)
- Increase stamina
- Set reading goals

Read Aloud
It is important to read aloud to students in order to model fluency, expression and metacognitive strategies. Teachers select varied and appropriate real alouds and incorporate them into daily practice. This component is considered informal and supplements daily reading instruction. It is designed to encourage the enjoyment and love of reading.

Understanding Skills and Strategies
Skills are the basic ability to make meaning by identifying key elements of the text. Skills are important but not sufficient in isolation. It is important for readers to interconnect skills and strategies while reading. Examples of this include identifying story elements, main idea and details, fact and opinion, sequencing, cause and effect, etc. within the context of authentic text.

Strategies are complex, interconnected decisions that require high-level thinking. Readers are actively involved with the author and the text to create meaning. By using strategies, readers develop metacognition, which stimulates their ability to understand at a deeper level and form original ideas and interpretations of the text.
**Comprehension Strategies**

Specific strategies can and should be used to increase comprehension. XXXX teachers intertwine comprehension strategies into daily literacy instruction. Students learn to use multiple comprehension strategies together. The following strategies are used to both teach comprehension and improve comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making connections</td>
<td>using background knowledge and experiences to bring meaning to text (text-text, text-self, text-world)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing</td>
<td>creating pictures in the readers’ minds using their five senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicting</td>
<td>using clues from the text to think ahead about what might happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>generating and reflecting on questions to guide thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing Inferences</td>
<td>combining clues from the text with what is known to figure out what the author did explicitly state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining Importance</td>
<td>identifying the most essential information and themes in the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizing/summarizing</td>
<td>sifting and sorting to find important information and form new interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying/fix-up</td>
<td>monitoring understanding of text and applying appropriate corrective actions when meaning breaks down (re-reading, chunking words, using context clues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benchmark Literacy materials refer to comprehension skills as comprehension strategies and refer to comprehension strategies as metacognitive strategies. As explained above, The XXXX Balanced Literacy Model and Balanced Literacy Curriculum use the term comprehension strategy to define strategies that require metacognition and the term comprehension skills to define those skills requiring the reader’s basic ability to make meaning.**
Writing

Writing is a process by which we communicate thoughts and ideas through the act of putting letters, symbols, numbers, or words on paper or a computer screen. This occurs when there is explicit instruction through modeled, shared, guided, and/or independent writing. Writing is done purposefully and intentionally through students having an opportunity to apply phonetic principles, understand the basics of written communication, learn about the writing process, and celebrate their work. Writing skills develop simultaneously and in support of reading and word study skills.

Components of Writing

Modeled Writing/Mini Lesson
Whole group instruction occurs as the teacher writes, thinks aloud, and provides explicit modeling of the strategies and skills that proficient, thoughtful writers implement to clearly convey their intent.

The teacher will...
- Share teacher writing or mentor text that shows a specific style or type of writing
- Think aloud while writing in front of the class
- Use mini lessons to model steps of the writing process as well as grammar and mechanics

The student will...
- Listen actively
- Responds to the teacher’s prompts and questions

Shared Writing
Teacher leads whole class or small groups in collaborating while adding onto the teacher model or creating an example that reflects the strategies and skills being taught.

The teacher will...
- Work together with students to compose messages and stories
- Support the process as scribe

The student will...
- Work together with other students to compose messages and stories
- Support the process as scribe

Note: In a writer’s workshop approach, modeled writing and shared writing blend seamlessly and may even be interpreted as one instructional event.
**Guided and/or Independent Writing**
Teacher conferences and supports small groups or individual students at their instructional level(s) while remainder of class works independently on their writing pieces. Students will have opportunities to celebrate their writing by sharing or displaying.

The teacher will...
- Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate effective writing skills or strategies through conferencing and assessing their work
- Support the process as scribe

The student will...
- Make choices and take responsibility for his/her own writing
- Publish and/or share writing

**Writer’s Workshop Model**

**Production of Writing**
Handwriting is taught throughout the grades. Manuscript letter formation is explicitly taught in Kindergarten during word study and is reinforced during writing. In first grade, correct manuscript print is reinforced during writing time. At the mid-point of second grade, cursive handwriting is explicitly taught (3 times a week for approximately 15 minutes). Grades 3, 4, and 5 reinforce cursive handwriting through authentic writing experiences. All handwriting instruction should be applied authentically to the student’s daily work and should be
balanced with appropriate uses of technology for writing and productivity. In grades 3 – 5, at a minimum, one writing sample should be constructed on the computer start to finish, and at a minimum, one writing sample should be hand written in cursive.

Foundation of Writing
The writing component of balanced literacy in XXXX is undergirded by the writing domains found in the Virginia Standards of Learning and the six traits of writing.

**SOL Writing Domains**

**Composing**
- Central Idea
- Elaboration
- Organization
- Unity

**Written Expression**
- Vocabulary
- Information
- Voice
- Tone
- Sentence Variety

**Usage & Mechanics**
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Capitalization
- Sentence Formation

**Six Trait Correlation**

**Ideas**
- Organization

**Voice**
- Word Choice
- Sentence Fluency

**Conventions**
Word Study

Word study is a systematic, sequential structure for exposing students to grade level word knowledge while also differentiating individual student needs. The explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics, high frequency words, vocabulary and word structure is done purposefully and intentionally through comparing/contrasting, categorizing, and by manipulating letters, sounds, words, and word patterns. Word study is integrated into and supportive of reading and writing.

Components of Word Study

Word Wall
A word wall is a literacy tool composed of an organized (typically in alphabetical order) collection of words which are displayed in large type on a wall. The word wall is designed as an interactive tool for student use during reading and/or writing. In grades K-3 classrooms, the word wall is used for high-frequency and commonly used words, to include student names. In grades 4 and 5 classrooms, the word wall is used for content vocabulary and/or meaning patterns including but not limited to Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, suffixes.

A word wall is part of an explicit instructional program and designed to be flexible, interactive and used in daily literacy activities.

The teacher will...
The student will...

Teach and Model
• Introduce new words each week
• Reinforce previous words

Reflect and Close
• Discuss importance of using this resource during reading and/or writing

Practice and Apply
• Practice reading and spelling new words and previous words
• Will be responsible for using the word wall as a resource in his/her reading and writing
• Define words as appropriate

Word Work
Word work consists of recognizing, manipulating, sorting and comparing letters, sounds, word patterns and word meanings for reading, writing and spelling. This will be done using a variety of multisensory tasks and using resources such as letter tiles, word sorts, graphic organizers and available technology.
The following is a continuum of spelling development:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alphabet Emergent</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letter Names</strong></td>
<td><strong>Within Word Pattern</strong></td>
<td><strong>Derivational Relations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- letters</td>
<td>- consonants</td>
<td>- prefixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- beginning sounds</td>
<td>- long vowels</td>
<td>- open syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rhymes</td>
<td>- r-controlled</td>
<td>- closed syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- triple blends</td>
<td>- prefixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- complex consonant</td>
<td>- suffixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- vowel patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Greek &amp; Latin roots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Word work is a daily component of word study.

**Teach and Model**
- Introduce and explicitly teach letters, sounds, word patterns, and word meanings
- Group for instruction based on student’s developmental spelling

**Reflect and Close**
- Restate the generalization that explains the letters, sounds, and word patterns

**The teacher will...**

**Practice and Apply**
- Manipulate letters, sounds, and word patterns using resources such as letter tiles, word sorts, or graphic organizers
- Write sounds, words, and/or sentences from the lesson
- Define word parts and word meanings

**The student will...**
Sample Instructional Models

The following sample instructional models are examples of how to structure time during a balanced literacy instructional block. Inherent in each sample instructional model is a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student. Sample models and times are formulated with the maximum number of minutes available as detailed in the Instructional Time section on page six. Therefore, teachers may have to flex times accordingly to adjust to the demands of the instructional school day. In addition, schedules may be merged to adjust to classroom instructional needs. For example, Instructional Model 1 for reading may combine with Instructional Model 2 for writing.
Sample Instructional Model 1:
Strategy/Concept/Skill Introduction

The table below represents an example of a daily balanced literacy instructional block when new learning is introduced to students through explicit instruction in the areas of reading, writing and word study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balanced Literacy Component</th>
<th>K-1</th>
<th>2-3</th>
<th>4-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Model</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Practice</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Pairs</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Practice</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Re-teaching/Independent Practice</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative Assessment</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Writing *</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice/ Apply</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Shared Writing is not necessarily part of Writer’s Workshop, but another time within the instructional reading block when teachers and students collaborate to write text (i.e., morning message). Grades 2-5 may find it most appropriate to add this time into their modeling or practice/apply in the Writer’s Workshop model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Study</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Wall</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Work</td>
<td>20-30 minutes</td>
<td>15-25 minutes</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Reference Weekly Word Study Schedules in the K-5 Balanced Literacy Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sample Instructional Model 2: Continued Learning**
The table below represents an example of a daily balanced literacy instructional block when students are continuing to practice and apply a reading, writing, or word study concept that has been explicitly taught on a previous day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balanced Literacy Component</th>
<th>K-1</th>
<th>2-3</th>
<th>4-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Model/Shared Practice</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Use formative assessment from previous day to re-model new learning)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading/Independent Reading/Literacy Centers</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Writing *</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice/Apply</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Shared Writing is not necessarily part of Writer’s Workshop, but another time within the instructional reading block when teachers and students collaborate to write text (i.e., morning message). Grades 2-5 may find it most appropriate to add this time into their modeling or practice/apply in the Writer’s Workshop model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Word Study</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word Wall</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Work *</td>
<td>20-30 minutes</td>
<td>15-25 minutes</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reference *Weekly Word Study Schedules* in the K-5 Balanced Literacy Curriculum
# Assessment and Monitoring

Formative assessment is embedded within the XXXX Balanced Literacy Curriculum and should be used on a daily basis to guide teacher instructional practice and respond to student learning with differentiation, remediation, and/or enrichment. Below are universal screening measures with established benchmark scores intended to provide targeted student data to assist in determining individual students in need of intervention. Intervention can be provided both in the classroom and outside the classroom in a small-group setting. Students receiving interventions need to be assessed regularly using an aligned AIMS Web progress monitoring tool to determine intervention effectiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sight Word Inventory</th>
<th>PALS</th>
<th>DRA</th>
<th>SOL Tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>End of Quarter 2*</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End of Quarter 3*</td>
<td>Mid-Year**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End of Quarter 4*</td>
<td>EOY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-Year**</td>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>EOY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-Year**</td>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>EOY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Fall*</td>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Quarter 2</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Quarter 4</td>
<td>Math</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*K Sight Word Inventory will consist of words explicitly taught during current and previous quarters.
** PALS mid-year testing is required for students not meeting the fall benchmark in grades K-2; PALS is required in the fall for third grade for students not meeting the spring benchmark in second grade.

Below are the DRA Independent Reading Benchmarks and ceilings for beginning of year, Quarter 2, and Quarter 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning of Year DRA Independent Benchmark Reading Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Grade</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Quarter 2) Mid-Year DRA Independent Benchmark Reading Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Grade</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>38</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Quarter 4) End-of-Year DRA Independent Benchmark Reading Levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Grade</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>38</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

|                          |             |             |         |           |             |
| 1st Grade                | 10          | 12-14       | 16-18   | 20        | 24          |
| 2nd Grade                | 20          | 24-26       | 28-30   | 34        | 38          |
| 3rd Grade                | 34          | 38          | 40      | 50        | 50          |
| 4th Grade                | 38          | 40          | 50      | 60        | 60          |
| 5th Grade                | 40          | 50          | 60      | 70        | 70          |
Intervention

- **Look For:** Students in need of intensive help and whose response to Tier 2 was not adequate. These students are 1 to 2 years below grade level.

- **Teacher Response:** Intensive Individual Intervention

- **Look For:** Students who lag well behind their peers and demonstrate weak progress on screening measures.

- **Teacher Response:** Targeted small-group instruction in classroom or in a small-group setting outside of the classroom

- **Look For:** Students who learn on grade level, slightly below, or above, and are least likely to fall behind or need intervention.

- **Teacher Response:** Core instruction; Classroom intervention; Differentiated instruction by level and learning style
## Interventions: Table of Corresponding Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1 Interventions</th>
<th>Benchmark Literacy Resources for Reading, Writing, and Word Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research-based Reading Interventions Menu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Pre-Referral Intervention Manual (PRIM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florida Center for Reading Research Materials (FCRR)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- K&amp;1: Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2&amp;3: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 4&amp;5: Advanced Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 2 Interventions</th>
<th>Fountas &amp; Pinnell Guided Reading with Reading Specialist (K-2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small-group with Reading Specialist (3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fundations: Classroom Teacher/ Para educator in a group of 6 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florida Center for Reading Research Materials (FCRR):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Targeted Small-Group*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- K&amp;1: Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2&amp;3: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 4&amp;5: Advanced Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 3 Interventions</th>
<th>Fundations: Special Education Teacher in a group of 3 or less</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilson: Special Education Teacher in a group of 3 or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* FCRR Activities in Tier 1 are provided to all students, typically as a literacy center rotation. FCRR Activities in Tier 2 are used in a targeted small-group setting for students presenting difficulty in a specific area of reading.
### Professional Development Timeline and History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Date &amp; Participants</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Professional Development Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/13/2011 &amp; 12/14/2011 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Explicit Teaching of Reading and Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/18/2012 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Peer observations and coaching sessions; Collaborative planning with administration and literacy leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/30/2012 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Visible Teaching for Engagement in Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/22/12 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Peer observations and coaching sessions; Collaborative planning with administration and literacy leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/12/2012 &amp; 3/13/2012 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Increasing Thinking and Learning Using Non-Fiction Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/3/2012 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Reader’s Theatre Implementation; Creating a Culture of Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13 Preservice Week XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Interactive Walkthrough of XXXX Balanced Literacy Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/27/2012 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>Benchmark Literary Staff</td>
<td>Benchmark Literacy Management Phonics/Word Study Writer’s Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/30/2012 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Creating a Crosswalk to the XXXXXXXXXXXX Public Schools’ Balanced Literacy Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/28/2013 XXX &amp; XXX</td>
<td>SURN</td>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/22/2013 Reading Committee</td>
<td>Assistant Superintendent for Instruction; Educational consultant</td>
<td>Revised Balanced Literacy Model: Lesson Planning Template, Assessment, and Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/ June 2013 XXX &amp; XXX(Grade Level Teams and Resource Teachers)</td>
<td>Educational consultant</td>
<td>Orientation to the XXXX Balanced Literacy Curriculum Framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both XXX and XXX teachers participated in site-based professional development throughout the implementation years, based on need and to include: Word Walls, Word Study, iPad applications and utility, other technology to support literacy instruction, planning, implementation and intervention.
References


Gewertz, C. (29011)States target early years to reach 3rd grade reading goals. Education Week (June 29, 2011). Retrieved from


National Institute for Literacy. (n.d.). *Literacy begins at home: Teach them to read.* Washington, DC: Author

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching Children to Read: An evidence-based


Appendix B

Interview/Focus Group Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to meet today to discuss the implementation of a balanced literacy model in our district. The purpose of this initiative is to implement a consistent, research based K-5 literacy model in the district and is ultimately designed to improve reading achievement for students.

As a part of my doctoral studies and in an effort to improve implementation practices in our district, I would like to ask you some questions related to the implementation of the balanced literacy model.

I would like you to answer each question honestly, knowing there is no “right” or “wrong” answer. I appreciate your time, and this interview/focus group will last no longer than 45 minutes.

I am recording the audio for our discussion and will transcribe it for analysis. All responses will remain confidential. I will share responses in my report as “a primary/elementary teacher said,” with no other identifiers. For specialists (reading, special education, gifted, principal) I will not identify the school.

Responding to this interview/focus group is voluntary; you may choose to withdraw from the interview/focus group at any time.

Finally, please observe the following ground rules for the interview/focus group:

1. Do not identify persons by name. Instead, please say, “the teacher” or “a female student.”

2. Please do not discuss your responses or the responses of others outside of this session.

3. During the focus group, expect and respect differences of opinion.

4. During the focus group, please wait until one person finishes talking to begin your comments.

Are there any questions?

1. To start, please remind me of the grade level you teach, years teaching in this grade, years teaching in the district and total years teaching?

2. What does a K-5 balanced literacy model mean to you?

3. Thinking about your classroom, to what extent do you feel that you are implementing the balanced literacy model according to the core components of reading, writing and word study?
   a. Do you have the materials you need?
b. Has your training helped?

c. If your answer is on the low end, what might help you improve your implementation?

d. Additional probes, if needed:
   i. Why do you say that?
   ii. What do you see happening that makes you say that?
   iii. Help me understand why that is true?

4. This is the third year of implementation of a K-5 balanced literacy model in our district, but this is the first year of implementation with both materials and a written curriculum. Based on teaching and learning in your classroom, what changes might be necessary to improve the successful implementation of a balanced literacy model in your classroom?
   a. Support/professional development
   b. Resources/materials
   c. Strategies/actions
   d. Additional probes, if needed:
      i. Why do you say that?
      ii. What do you see happening that makes you say that?
      iii. Help me understand why that is true?

5. What aspects of implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model in our district are going well for you?

6. Think about the way the school district is implementing a K-5 balanced literacy model at your school. Is there anything we could do better?

7. If you could give me a suggestion or two about the overall implementation of a K-5 balanced literacy model, what would you say?

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate and value your input. If you have any questions about this interview/focus group and/or the results, please contact me directly.
Appendix C
K-5 Balanced Literacy Model
Fidelity of Implementation Checklist

Directions: This checklist is used to assess a single day in Balanced Literacy instruction. School administrators should use teacher lesson plans and observations as sources of evidence for completing this checklist. Checklist ratings must be based on objective evidence and not on self-reported information provided by the teacher or the administrator's previous knowledge.

Grade: ____________________________
Teacher Last Name: __________________
Date (month/day/year) __________________

1. Teacher's daily instruction includes Reading, Writing, and Word Study components consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft.

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<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher does not provide daily instruction in each of three components.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of the three components but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of the three components and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</table>

Comments: ____________________________

2. Teacher's daily Reading instruction includes Modeled Reading (whole group), Guided Reading (small group), and Independent Reading consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher does not provide daily instruction in each of Modeled Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of Modeled Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading, but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of Modeled Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading, and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</table>

Comments: ____________________________

3. When conducting Modeled Reading, the teacher 1) sets a purpose for the shared reading experience; 2) chooses appropriate text for the strategy/skill instruction; 3) highlights important vocabulary and builds background knowledge; and 4) utilizes think aloud while reading.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Modeled reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>At least two Modeled reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>All four Modeled reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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Comments: ____________________________
4. When conducting Guided Reading, the teacher 1) sets instructional focus; 2) listens to student reading and coaches as needed; 3) assesses using formal and/or informal assessments; and 4) elicits student responses.

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Guided reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>At least two Guided reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>All four Guided reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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</table>

Comments:

5. When facilitating Independent Reading, the teacher 1) provides access to a variety of texts and materials; 2) monitors student progress; and 3) provides response activities and/or opportunities.

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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Independent reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>At least two Independent reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>All three Independent reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

6. Teacher's daily Writing instruction includes Modeled Writing (whole group), Shared Writing (whole or small group), and Guided and/or Independent Writing (small group or individual) consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft. Note: In a writer’s workshop approach, modeled writing and shared writing blend seamlessly and may even be interpreted as one instructional event.

<table>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher does not provide daily instruction in each of Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Guided and/or Independent Writing.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Guided and/or Independent Writing, but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Guided and/or Independent Writing, and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</table>

Comments:
7. When conducting Modeled Writing, the teacher 1) shares teacher writing or mentor text that shows a specific style or type of writing; 2) thinks aloud while writing in front of the class; and 3) uses mini lessons to model steps of the writing process as well as grammar and mechanics. When conducting Shared Writing, the teacher 1) works together with students to compose messages and stories; and 2) supports the process as scribe. *Note:* In a writer’s workshop approach, modeled writing and shared writing blend seamlessly and may even be interpreted as one instructional event.

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Modeled and/or Shared writing strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>At least two Modeled or one Shared writing strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>All three Modeled and/or both Shared writing strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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Comments:

8. When conducting Guided and/or Independent Writing, the teacher 1) provides opportunities for students to demonstrate effective writing skills or strategies through conferencing and assessing their work; and 2) supports the process as scribe.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Guided and/or Independent writing strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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<td>Both Guided and/or Independent writing strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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</table>

Comments:

9. Teacher's daily Word Study instruction includes Word Wall and Word Work consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher does not provide daily instruction in each of Word Wall and Word Work.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of Word Wall and Word Work, but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Teacher provides daily instruction in each of Word Wall and Word Work, and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</table>

Comments:

10. When facilitating a Word Wall, the teacher 1) introduces new words each week; 2) reinforces previous words; and 3) discusses importance of using this resource during reading and/or writing.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Word Wall strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>At least two Word Wall strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>All three Word wall strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
11. When facilitating Word Work, the teacher 1) introduces and explicitly teaches letters, sounds, word patterns, and word meanings; and 2) restates the generalization that explains the letters, sounds, and word patterns.

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<tbody>
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<td>No Word Work strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Word Work strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Teacher's daily instruction includes the following strategies: Y/N

- Read Aloud
- Comprehension Strategies, including one or more of the following:
  - Visualizing
  - Predicting
  - Questioning
  - Drawing Inferences
  - Determining Importance
  - Synthesizing/Summarizing
  - Clarifying/Fix-up

- Handwriting Instruction

Comments:

13. Teacher's daily Balanced Literacy instruction includes use of:

- Benchmark Literacy materials
- Leveled fiction texts
- Leveled nonfiction texts
- VA SOL resources (grades 3-5 only)
- Formal and/or informal assessments
- Technology

Comments:
Appendix D

K-5 Balanced Literacy Model
Fidelity of Implementation Lesson Plan Rubric

Directions: This rubric is used to assess written lesson plans for Balanced Literacy instruction. Ratings must be based on objective evidence and not on self-reported information provided by the teacher or the evaluator's previous knowledge.

Grade:  
Teacher Last Name:  
Date (month/day/year):  

1. Lesson plan for Reading instruction included Modeled Reading (whole group), Guided Reading (small group), and Independent Reading consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plan did not provide evidence of daily instruction in each of Modeled Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading.</td>
<td>Lesson plan provides evidence of daily instruction in each of Modeled Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading, but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Lesson plan provides evidence of daily instruction in each of Modeled Reading, Guided Reading, and Independent Reading, and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</table>

2. Lesson plan included all required Modeled Reading components, including 1) purpose for the shared reading experience; 2) appropriate text choices for the strategy/skill instruction; 3) inclusion of important vocabulary and builds background knowledge; and 4) use of think aloud while reading.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Modeled reading strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td>At least two Modeled reading strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td>All four Modeled reading strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
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3. Lesson plan included required Guided Reading components, including 1) teacher setting of instructional focus; 2) teacher listening to student reading and coaching as needed; 3) formal and/or informal assessments; and 4) call for student responses.

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>No Guided reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>At least two Guided reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
<td>All four Guided reading strategies are evident in teacher's daily instruction.</td>
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4. Lesson plan included key Independent Reading components, including 1) provision of access to a variety of texts and materials; 2) monitoring of student progress; and 3) provision of response activities and/or opportunities.

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Independent reading strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td>At least two Independent reading strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td>All three Independent reading strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
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5. Lesson plan for Writing instruction included Modeled Writing (whole group), Shared Writing (whole or small group), and Guided and/or Independent Writing (small group or individual) consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft. Note: In a writer’s workshop approach, modeled writing and shared writing blend seamlessly and may even be interpreted as one instructional event.

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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Lesson plan does not provide evidence of daily instruction in each of Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Guided and/or Independent Writing.</td>
<td>Lesson plan provides evidence of daily instruction in each of Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Guided and/or Independent Writing, but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Lesson plan provides evidence of daily instruction in each of Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Guided and/or Independent Writing, and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6. Lesson plan included key components of Modeled Writing, including 1) sharing of teacher writing or mentor text that shows a specific style or type of writing; 2) use of think-aloud while writing in front of the class; and 3) use of mini lessons to model steps of the writing process as well as grammar and mechanics. Lesson plan included key components of Shared Writing, including 1) teacher and students working together to compose messages and stories; and 2) teacher support of the process as scribe. *Note: In a writer’s workshop approach, modeled writing and shared writing blend seamlessly and may even be interpreted as one instructional event.*

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Modeled and/or Shared writing strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td>At least two Modeled or one Shared writing strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td>All three Modeled and/or both Shared writing strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
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</table>

7. Lesson plan included key components of Guided and/or Independent Writing, including 1) provision of opportunities for students to demonstrate effective writing skills or strategies through conferencing and assessing their work; and 2) teacher support of the process as scribe.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Guided and/or Independent writing strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Guided and/or Independent writing strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
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8. Lesson plan included Word Study instruction, including Word Wall and Word Work consistent with the time allocations presented in the Balanced Literacy Model Implementation Draft.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plan does not provide evidence of daily instruction in each of Word Wall and Word Work.</td>
<td>Lesson plan provides evidence of daily instruction in each of Word Wall and Word Work, but does not allocate time according to Implementation Draft guidelines.</td>
<td>Lesson plan provides evidence of daily instruction in each of Word Wall and Word Work, and according to Implementation Draft guidelines for time allocation.</td>
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</table>
9. Lesson plan included the key components of Word Wall facilitation, including 1) introduction of new words (weekly); 2) reinforcement of previous words; and 3) discussion of importance of using this resource during reading and/or writing.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Word Wall strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
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<td>All three Word wall strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
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</table>

10. Lesson plan included the key components of Word Work facilitation, including 1) introduction and explicit teaching of letters, sounds, word patterns, and word meanings; and 2) restatement of the generalization that explains the letters, sounds, and word patterns.

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<td>No Word Work strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Word Work strategies are evident in lesson plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Lesson plan included the following strategies: Y/N

11.1 Read Aloud

11.2 Comprehension Strategies, including one or more of the following:
11.2a Visualizing
11.2b Predicting
11.2c Questioning
11.2d Drawing Inferences
11.2e Determining Importance
11.2f Synthesizing/Summarizing
11.2g Clarifying/Fix-up

11.3 Handwriting Instruction

12. Lesson plan included the following resources: Y/N

12.1 Benchmark Literacy materials
12.2 Leveled fiction texts
12.3 Leveled nonfiction texts
12.4 VA SOL resources (grades 3-5 only)
12.5 Formal and/or informal assessments
12.6 Technology
Vita

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