INTERVENTION UNIT BASED OFF OF FASTBRIDGE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

IN KINDERGARTEN

by

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To my husband Andy, children Mira and Oscar, along with friends and family. Thank you for always cheering me on. Your support continues to motivate me. Thank you to my project committee members. You helped me persevere throughout this process.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Fundamental Question

Teachers have a wide variety of roles and duties that they assume each school year. An area that really has grown in importance and depth throughout my past 13 years in education is assessments. Assessments are the driving force to our teaching throughout each school year. Assessments are an expected part of our job as teachers. They help us show growth and areas of concern during the school year (Witte, 2010). First, I will briefly describe my interest in the subject and typical challenges learners face to reach reading benchmarks, while secondly trying to answer the question: *Does using specific interventions based off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by Fastbridge)?*

My Personal Story

In the fall of 2003, I began my student teaching experience. I student taught at an urban elementary school in Minnesota in a kindergarten classroom. I spent my time there observing, slowly taking over each subject during the school day, until finally I was teaching full-time. When reflecting on my experience, I do not remember completing very many assessments. When I compare my time in kindergarten in 2003 to my time as a kindergarten teacher in 2017, assessments have significantly changed. Assessments went from a casual practice to a way we as teachers drive our instruction. Working in an International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP) school has redefined our knowledge and practice using assessments. We teach six units of inquiry throughout the school year. Within these units, we assess using formative and summative assessments.

Our knowledge of assessments have transferred to all subjects. We are assessing many times throughout the year and using assessments to drive conversations during our PLC, Primary Years Programme (PYP) team meetings, staff development throughout the year, and with intervention teams.

My first full time teaching position began in 2006 at an urban elementary school in Minnesota. Not only did I finally obtain a full time position, but also it was my dream job teaching kindergarten. Although I spent two and a half years short term subbing, long term subbing, and working .5 FTE positions, nothing would prepare me to having my own kindergarten classroom. The past 14 years have taught me so much as a teacher and shaped my job as an educator.

My Career Path

When I reflect back on my 14 years of teaching kindergarten, so much has changed. Student numbers, family dynamics, student behavior, and student learning expectations are always changing. The most drastic learning expectation that has changed is the expectation of students reading at the end of the year compared to the expectation of knowing most letter names and sounds by the end of the year. Even teacher duties and expectations have changed drastically in the past 12 plus years. Some things that have changed include: weekly PLC meetings, weekly PYP team meetings, and our district's participation in Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System (ATPPS). ATPPS is used in our district to pair teachers with peer coaches who help teachers develop goals and action plans to address professional growth and student achievement. Each year teachers are observed by peer coaches and/or administration. We use these opportunities to discuss

progress on our goals and obtain constructive feedback on teaching methods and interactions within our classroom.

The past three years is where I have seen the most growth in the area of assessment. As teachers in our district, we have really grown our practice of our PLC (professional learning communities). We have moved from having a traditional PLC to a collaborative inquiry PLC. Our work in our PLC groups have aided our knowledge and growth as educators. We use the PLC model for best practices in teaching and learning. We follow the PLC model to build our shared knowledge. This model has provided our team with new experiences, as well as shifted our attitudes, beliefs, and habits over time. Essentially, the PLC model has helped our team of kindergarten teachers achieve our goals and meet the needs of our students in a more efficient way.

The Purpose

Our school district began utilizing NWEA Map Testing for grades kindergarten thru sixth grade in the 2010-2011 school year. Our district was looking for a way to use standardized testing throughout the school year to measure growth and proficiency, along with improving instructional practices. Students took these computerized tests three times during the school year: fall, winter, and spring in reading and math (on separate days). Teachers used the data obtained from this testing to figure out next steps for each child. It was used as a means for differentiation. Various reports would be sent home to families and/or discussed during parent/teacher conference time.

To date, students in grades one thru grades five continue to take the NWEA Map test three times a year. With the support of administration, kindergarten students stopped being assessed using this system after the 2013-2014 school year. The reasoning behind

discontinuing the use of these assessments with kindergarteners was that we did not feel that this computerized test gave us accurate results compared to the other individualized assessments we gave students one on one. Some of the reasons we did not feel this assessment was the best tool was because: many students had never used computers before, students were able to click thru the assessment very quickly, not giving accurate results. Kindergarten teachers were looking for more accurate information that was obtained verbally.

Beginning the 2016-2017 school year, kindergarten teachers in our school district began assessing all students using Formative Assessment System for Teachers testing (FAST). Students are assessed three times per school year (fall, winter, and spring) in both reading and math. Teachers assess their students one on one and these assessments are given orally. For reading, students are assessed in a variety of areas depending on the time of year. This includes: letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmentation. For math, students are assessed in a variety of areas depending on the time of the year. This includes: number identification, number sequencing, and decomposing. These tests are either one minute timed tests or open ended. These assessments give teachers more thorough and age appropriate data than any of assessment tools we have used in the past. Now that we are using this assessment tool again this year, I want to use more data from the assessments to drive my instruction and provide interventions. We use aspects of the RTI (Response to Intervention) model which is a multi-tiered approach to early identification and support of students with learning needs. It begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all students in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of

intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. The goal of my project is to use fall FAST assessment reading scores to plan a two week unit on invention tools to aid in my students reaching their winter benchmarks.

Conclusion

Assessments are a big part of an educator's day. Assessments are used for a variety of purposes: to find out where students are, what knowledge they have gained, and to help plan next steps for their learning. Now that our team of kindergarten teachers has found a kindergarten appropriate assessment tool in FAST, we are diving deeper into this tool to aid in students' learning, along with looking for holes in our curriculum. We are using our PLC time to help us continue to move forward with this tool and plan our next steps. Teachers are collaborating to learn more about this tool, along with teaming with other support teachers in our school to provide best practices with our teaching for our students.

Assessments are also used to help make decisions that drives our teaching. With that, I want to develop a two week intervention curriculum that can be used after completing fall testing. With the use of Fastbridge testing, I will develop a two week intervention unit that is tailored to students' needs based on the outcome of the fall scores. These intervention practices will help students meet their winter benchmarks in the areas of: letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmentation. My research question that correlates with my project is *does using specific interventions based off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by Fastbridge)?*

Chapter Two will discuss many key topics through a literature review. Topics discussed include: differentiation, assessment tools, intervention models, early literacy skills, assessment tools for early literacy skills, and differentiation models. The topics will be discussed thoroughly, along with providing examples of pros and cons of each, as well as connections to best practices.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In chapter one I introduced my research topic and rationale for the research project. I included my own experience and growth in the area of assessments, along with my biases linked to the topic. My background was also provided in chapter one. In the second chapter I will provide a literature review relevant to teaching a differentiated reading unit based off Fastbridge fall data with the goal of my students reaching their winter benchmarks. The purpose of my research is to investigate different interventions teachers can use to help their students reach reading benchmarks. This connects with my research question: *Does using specific interventions based off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by Fastbridge)?*

Differentiation

Differentiation is a practice that has evolved since I began teaching 14 years ago. Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Teachers can differentiate content, process, products, and/or the learning environment. It can be done with the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping (Tomlinson, 2000). I believe that differentiation is imperative to reach the needs of all students. Differentiation may look and sound very different depending on the situation.

Differentiation has been a part of my knowledge and skill set since beginning as an undergraduate student in the education department in college in 2001. I have

understood the term differentiation with a consistent definition. Carol Ann Tomlinson

defines differentiation as "means for tailoring instruction to meet the individual needs."

This can be done through content, process, products, the learning environment, on-going

assessments, and/or flexible grouping (Tomlinson, 2000). Differentiation has always been

a part of education, but I think the drive to incorporate differentiation within all subject

areas has increased significantly, especially within the past 5 years.

Differentiation works on three key aspects: readiness to learn, learning needs, and

interest. Differentiation can be done with a specific task - depending on students'

abilities. Differentiation can happen within group, pacing, and outcome. In mixed ability

groups, lower achieving students can benefit from learning alongside higher achievers.

Teacher's lesson planning can account for differentiating pace of a lesson or unit.

Teachers can also differentiated the outcome of an expected task. Although these three

areas can be differentiated within, some teachers may be apprehensive about doing so.

Some teachers may differentiate a task by producing different sets of worksheets or

activities. Yet, some may steer away from this due to social implications and the

additional time it takes to plan and prepare these items. When it comes to differentiating

outcomes, some teachers may differentiate by expecting a personalized outcome for

students based on their level of ability. Other teachers may be apprehensive about that

due to the idea that less abled students may fall below an acceptable level of

understanding (Pearson, 2010).

Other areas where teachers may differentiate may be within dialog and support as

well as assessment. Dialogue and support emphasizes the role of the teacher, who helps

problem solve by identifying which students need detailed explanations in simple

language, compared to students who can converse using more high levels of dialog. Teachers may use target questioning to produce a range of responses and challenge certain students. Verbal support and encouragement plays a vital role in differentiating within dialog and support (Pearson, 2010). Assessments are completed through the entire school year and used to drive instruction. Therefore assessments are used to continue differentiating throughout the entire school year based off of assessment results.

One study that shows the power differentiation (along with school wide enrichment in teaching and learning) has within classrooms in an elementary school will be discussed. Central Elementary School was one of eleven elementary schools in a high performing suburban area in the United States. The problem: this particular school was deemed a failing school because students were performing in the 30th percentile in state assessments (Beecher, M., & Sweeny, S., 2008, p. 506). Ongoing assessment, both formal and informal, and formative and summative, informed instruction; student progress was measured on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis (Beecher, M., & Sweeny, S., 2008, p. 524). To help this particular school lessen the achievement gap there was an addition of enriched and differentiated curriculum, along with an extension of learning beyond the school day and carefully planned staff development. At the end of the four year study it was shown that the success of the school improvement efforts was demonstrated in students' positive attitudes about school, increased engagement in learning, and improved achievement on district and state assessments by all stakeholder groups (Beecher, M., & Sweeny, S., 2008, p. 525).

The uses of differentiation within my classroom has continued to evolve. When I first began teaching, differentiation was a part of our classroom English language arts

block. As I continued to learn more about differentiation, I transferred my knowledge to include all content areas. To date, I differentiate in the following content areas that are taught within the kindergarten year: English language arts, math, writing, science, and social studies.

These beliefs are the foundation of my research question *does using specific interventions based off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by Fastbridge)?* The subtopics that will be addressed throughout this chapter are; assessment tools, intervention models, early literacy skills, and differentiation models. The first section of chapter two addresses the assessment tools used in our kindergarten classrooms. The next section examines current intervention models used in reading. The third section highlights early literacy skills that are taught and assessed in kindergarten. Finally, the fourth section discusses how teachers can use differentiation and best practices to support their students in reaching grade level benchmarks.

Assessment Tools

The Fastbridge Learning system was designed to reduce the typical ten to thirty year gap between research at universities and results in the classroom. The team of Dr. Zoheb Borbora and Dr. Ted Christ from the University of Minnesota had a goal of using research and technology to make it easier for teachers to collect and use data to improve student outcomes. Not only does this team provide assessments using their system, they also strive to facilitate school-based systems change that utilizes a Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) that benefits all students. Fastbridge is based off the following values

which include: Tell the Truth, Respect the Teacher, and Deliver High-Value Solutions (Christ and Colleagues, LLC, 2017).

Three times a year, kindergarten students at our school are tested using Fastbridge Testing. The early reading assessments are given to students in the fall, winter and spring. These tests usually take about 5-10 minutes per student, per test. Some tests are one minute timed tests, while others are open ended. The goal is to help identify student risk (low risk, some risk, or high risk), while informing instruction. Areas which students are tested in the fall include: concepts of print, onset sounds, letter names, and letter sounds. Areas which students are tested in the winter include: letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmenting. Fastbridge has set up benchmark standards that are built into their systems to aid in determining which students are at risk for academic failure, on target for success, or in need of enrichment instruction (insert table from Fastbridge). The benchmark standards in Fastbridge provide data for both nationwide and school wide. This compares students to peers within our school district.

Fastbridge has designed flexible progress monitoring which is quick and easy. This tool was designed to support teachers' understanding of a student's response to an intervention. It also gives teachers timely feedback and support to quickly adjust instruction. Other benefits include: accelerated learning because students are receiving more appropriate instruction, more informed instructional decisions, more efficient communication with families and other educators about students' progress, higher expectations for students by teachers, and fewer special education referrals (Fastbridge Learning, LLC, 2017).

The inclusion of progress monitoring has aided in the use of interventions within the classroom. It has also lead to more effective interventions that can be completed in the regular education classroom. The use and of progress monitoring increased based off the changes to the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 which allowed for the use of response to intervention (RtI) models to determine students' eligibility for special education services. Within RtI models, empirically-based interventions are implemented and decision rules are used to determine whether a student's rate of progress is indicative of a student responding or not responding to intervention" (Ardoin, Christ, Morena, Cormier, & Klingbeil, 2013).

Teachers are able to better plan and execute interventions with the use of progress monitoring. Progress monitoring gives teachers and families' information about what students are understanding. It also provides detailed information about what skills are at high risk. Progress monitoring can be set-up in the Fastbridge system for each of the follow twelve sub-tests: concepts of print, onset sounds, letter names, letter sounds, word rhyming, word blending, word segmenting, sight word reading, decodable word reading, nonsense word reading - sentence reading, and oral language (sentence repetition).

Assessments are used throughout the entire school year to gauge learning and understanding, as well as to guide teaching and instruction. Assessments that are commonly given in the primary years include (but are not limited to): formative assessments, summative assessments, benchmark assessments aligned to common core state standards, running records, oral reading records (ORR), some standardized tests and universal screeners aligned to state standards. Teachers are using these assessments to look for deficient in learning, find areas of strength, and to gauge the learning and

understanding of all the state standards that are assessed throughout the school year. Teachers may work alongside other support staff such as special education teachers, specialist teachers, and intervention teachers to share assessments and findings, as well as support students learning.

There are pros and cons to the amount of assessing that is happening throughout the school year. One advantage to assessments is the information assessments give teachers. It helps guide teachers to know what needs to be taught, what has been learned, and what needs to be revisited. This can lead to less wasted instructional time as well as a clear path to planning lessons. Assessments give parent/guardians a good idea of how their students are doing throughout the year. They give clear information to share with families. This can be helpful all school year, but especially during mid-term and at the end of a grading period (quarter, trimester, and semester). This information can be useful to share during conference time. Assessments allow students to track their progression throughout the school year and track from year to year. Assessments can also give an accurate comparison across groups (gender, race, special services, etc.).

Assessments are sometimes deemed as the most important aspect of a students' school year. Some families seem to focus only on this and not about the whole student. This can lead to difficult relationships between families and the classroom teacher because it might be the only thing that "matters" to the family. Assessments, which take a lot of time and energy to complete, can cause a deficiency in other important areas of school. Some teachers feel that they have lost critical time to build relationships with their students. Time that used to be devoted to get to know the whole child, is having to be used to assess them instead. For example, kindergarten classrooms at our school have

a devoted "free choice" play time. We feel this is very necessary to build and grow in the area of social skills and awareness. The time for assessments used to be used for teachers to build relationships by joining students during this play time, having conversations, and making personal connections. Many teachers now have to use this time to prepare assessments, assess students, and compile and interpret scores.

There can also be other cons associated with assessments. Teachers may feel pressured by the amount of assessments needed to be given throughout the school year. The amount of assessing can lead to a loss of teaching time. Assessments can vary on length of time it takes to give them. While some assessments can be very short and quick, others can be very long. The time lost on giving assessments, especially when done so within a one on one basis, can take away from teaching time. Another con would be that some assessments and/or the amount of assessing may not seem developmentally appropriate within certain ages and grade levels, as well as within certain groups. Some students may feel much pressure or have anxiety by being assessed. This may lead to students not showing their true abilities because of the feeling of being pressured or uneasy with the process.

A parent's reaction to assessments can also vary. Some parents might see the assessments as ineffective or untrue to the child's real abilities. Some parents might use assessments to see how their child is really performing at school, while some parents do not seem to be affected by them (no matter if the assessment shows real progress or high risk).

Intervention Models

Schools and teachers use a wide variety of intervention models. Some schools have adopted specific intervention models to use school wide, while other schools have not. Some teachers prefer some interventional models that might be the same or different to those used in other classrooms within the same grade level and/or school. Although some decisions regarding resources and reading programs are mandated by administrators or district leaders, the classroom teacher has the responsibility to make sure that the instructional needs of all students are met (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). A school wide intervention model we use at our schools is Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS). This model is used kindergarten through grade five, in both regular education classrooms and special education classrooms. Our school also follows aspects of the Response to Intervention model (RtI). Both these models will be discussed more in depth in the following sections.

Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS) is a framework for multi-tiered systems of support (PRESS, 2017). The four pillars of PRESS include: quality core instruction, data driven decision making, tiered interventions, and ongoing, embedded professional learning. "Driven by research-based approaches to literacy, the PRESS framework addresses quality core instruction, data-based decision making, tiered interventions, and effective professional development to support systemic change" (Press, 2016). The primary goal of PRESS is to establish school based systems and practices for all students to become capable readers. "In addition to advocating for class wide interventions, the PRESS framework uses small group Tier 2 interventions directly targeted to the students' area of need in reading" (Press, 2017).

Response to Intervention (RtI) is an intervention model some schools follow. Figure 1 (in the appendix) shows how schools organize their tiered instruction using the RtI model. The model shows the continuum of time, intensity, and data on the left side. The right side shows the percentile of students requiring intensive supports (RTI Action Network, 2017).

Tier one is the key part of the Response to Intervention model (see Appendix). Tier one is where all students receive their core instruction. At our school, tier one happens within the mainstream, general education classroom. Tier one is the core of the program. Students receive "delivery of a high-quality instructional program in reading or math that has established known outcomes that cut across the skill development of the targeted area" (Shapiro, 2017). According to the RtI model, 75-80% of students should be expected to reach successful levels of competency in tier one. That expectation is usually attainable after schools have successfully implemented this model for a few years. Reality is, for the few years of implementing this model, most schools see a 50-70% success level in tier one (Shapiro, 2017).

Tier two is for the students who need additional interventions. Tier two is designed for students who are falling far below benchmark expectations. Students within this tier are designated "some risk" for academic failure. Students are identified with tier two needs based off assessments. This tier helps students with specific needs, defined by assessments. Tier two is implemented in a small group of five to eight children.

Tier three is mostly considered as special education. Students receive interventions in a smaller group than tier two. The group size is usually three to five students (Shapiro, 2017).

There are both pros and cons to the RtI model. Some pros may include: ability to differentiation between groups, use of progress monitoring to gauge teaching and learning, and the amount of overall specialized support given to all students. Some cons may include: being able to meet the needs of all students, the time needed to plan and effectively teach the interventions, ability to set up needs groups within the classroom, and the use of time that was supposed to be devoted to other curriculum.

There are a wide variety of field studies which show the effectiveness of the RtI model. Rollanda O'Connor et al. (2005) conducted a study to identify the effects of the tiered reading intervention model on student reading outcomes (along with special education placements). The purpose of the study was to answer the effects of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions on word identification, word attack, passage comprehension, and fluency. The study was conducted during a four year period. This study was conducted with K–3 students (100 students per grade level) from two schools. Teachers who participated were provided with intensive professional development in evidence-based instruction for the first three months of the study to aide in improvement of instruction and decrease the possibility that students were selected for Tier 2 intervention due to poor instruction (O'Connor, R., et al., 2005). The results from the survey showed that students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions showed improvement on all reading measures when compared to the contrast group from the same school.

Early Literacy Skills

Helping all children become readers requires a lot of time and dedication. Early home and school instruction is vital to this process. Students must learn through proven research and effective practices. There is a direct correlation between students reading,

writing, and outcomes factored by the programs, interventions, and environments the students were and are a part of (A S H A Leader, 2009, p. 3).

Early literacy skills include: alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness. One area of alphabet knowledge is letter naming. The goal with letter naming is being able to fluently say letter names with accuracy and speed. There is a direct correlation between students who are able to say letters fluently to students who have the ability to read words (Lee, J. & Al Otaiba, S., 2015, p. 42).

Another area of alphabet knowledge is letter sound knowledge. The goal with letter sounds production is being able to produce letter sounds with accuracy and speed. Student who are able to fluently say letter sounds are often also able to predict spelling (Lee, J. & Al Otaiba, S., 2015, p. 42).

A very serious issue within the United States education system is the achievement gap between socioeconomic disadvantaged students and their peers (Lee, J. & Al Otaiba, S., 2015, p. 40). The achievement gap is seen nationwide, especially within the students that have low socioeconomic backgrounds. Students who qualify as low socioeconomic status are those whose families receive federally funded free or reduced price lunch. To receive free or reduced lunch, families must have a combined family income of under $21,600 (Cheng Lee & Al Otaiba, 2015, p. 41).

Research has shown, specifically by the National Reading Panel in 2000, that children's phonological awareness is crucial for the learning of future skills. Phonological awareness is a student's ability to detect, manipulate, and/or analyze sounds in spoken language. This can be developed in words, syllables, and phonemes (sounds that distinguish one word from another) (Lee, J. & Al Otaiba, S., 2015, p. 42).

Many students who lack in early literacy skills have not been exposed to print or instruction resources. Their lack of skills can also be attributed to poor quality teaching. Many students who lack in early literacy skills continue to lack in skills as they get older. Students who start out as poor readers, often time continue on the same track throughout their educational experience. Usually, the reading gap widens over time and can transfer over to other issues as well. These may include: reading difficulty, poor motivation, and low self-esteem, dropping out of school, and restricted employment opportunities (Lee, J. & Al Otaiba, S., 2015, p. 41).

One way to work on building early literacy skills within the classroom is through a morning message (Waskin & Hidman, p. 183, 2011). Although the morning message can be different within many settings, it mostly consists of a few sentences. These sentences can be written by the teacher, by the students, or a combination of both. Morning meeting is usually done as a whole group, positioned specifically during a set aside time of day. The morning message is often during a morning meeting time, where students are gathered up in a group to talk about what experiences they will share during the school day. The students and teacher may also come back to the message during other parts of the school day to make connections between the skills and words on that day (Waskin & Hidman, p. 183, 2011).

The sentences that are part of the morning message give information about the day and/or speak to what the class will be working on throughout the day. These sentences may also speak directly about a certain topic tied to the classroom curriculum and may be used as a way to reflect on recent learning experiences. The sentences usually make a personal connection to the students, as well (Waskin & Hidman, p. 183, 2011).

The morning message provides multiple opportunities for students and teachers to interact with the text. It can give the group opportunities to read together and look for certain aspects of the writing. Teachers may use the morning message to point out: certain letters for letter recognition, omit letters to be written by students in the class, sight words in the writing in which students can write or circle (if words are already written). Often times the morning message has a question of the day and/or a chance to reflect on previous work. Students have the opportunity to respond to these questions or add to a statement.

A lot of research has been done to show the importance of exposure to print for children's pre-literacy skills. The following research based guidelines help teachers promote effective practices. The morning message should be connected to the classroom content and communicate important information about the day's events. The morning message should be constructed in front of the children. It gives the teacher opportunities to model the formation of letters for the children to observe. It helps model and show that letters are strung together to make words that can be read and carry meaning. Also, as the message is being written, the teacher can identify the letters that they are writing and, when each word is finished, identify that particular word. This process can help children learn the connections between the individual letter shapes and letter names, and the association that letters comprise words. The morning message should contain at least one key vocabulary word that the children are learning. The morning message should be written at a level of complexity that is developmentally appropriate for children, keeping in mind that a classroom has young children who have very diverse levels of print and language acquisition (Waskin & Hidman, p. 186, 2011).

Assessment Tools for Early Literacy Skills

The beginning of the school year is always an exciting time, especially in kindergarten! Many students come in eager to start the school year. Each student brings in their own previous experiences. Some students come in with a background in some of the following experiences: Head Start, early childhood family education, preschool, pre-kindergarten, and/or part time or full time daycare (in home or center based). Some students come in without any of those experiences. This can be for many reasons including a stay home parent and/or family member who provides their daycare. Students also come in with a wide variety of academic experiences. This can be directly linked to their early childhood and family experiences. Some students have experienced academic opportunities within the household, while some have not. It is fascinating to see how these experiences mold them into who they are as a young students.

After the school year has begun, kindergarten teachers begin to individually assess each of their kindergarten students. To get an idea of what skills they have brought to kindergarten, teachers assess in the areas of: letter recognition (both uppercase and lowercase), letter sounds (both uppercase and lowercase), and rhyming (both hearing and producing rhymes). Each school year provides a wide variety of assessments results. Some students are not able to recognize any letters, produce any sounds, or hear/produce any rhymes. Some are able to recognize and/or produce some. Some students are able to complete all this work. A next step if students have mastered the ability of letter name recognition, letter sound production, and rhyming skills would be to assess their sight word knowledge. Depending on the results of their sight word assessment, a teacher may take the next step of doing an oral reading record (if they seem to be a reader). This

would help the teacher understand if the student is reading, along with giving them information about a specific reading level for them. Teachers could use this information to help student find books that are appropriate to read in their independent level, as well as teach them in their instructional level.

Regardless of their experiences, teachers need to devise and execute a plan to get all students up to state standards by the end of kindergarten. This past school year, with the adoption of using Fastbridge testing along with PRESS interventions, we have taken a closer look at our state standards and benchmarks to devise a curriculum map for our kindergarten teaching team, along with other teachers who help to service and support our students (including but not limited to: special education teachers, specialists, intervention teachers, ELL teachers).

It is important to understand that best practices are no longer using a letter of the week during an English/language arts block. This is so important to know because that is exactly how we used to base our ELA lessons for the week. What researchers have found much more effective are environments filled with opportunities for students to engage with print. Effective teachers provide their students with opportunities of meaningful shared writing that incorporates their students' ideas. "Recent evidence has suggested that a mix of explicit instruction, teacher-directed shared reading and writing, and free exploration of print does in fact lead to increased understanding of print concepts" (Casbergue, 2017, p. 644).

Some next steps that our team of kindergarten teachers need to make as educators in our district is to see these practices become a reality in our classrooms. We need to show the evidence behind these key ideas to help drive instruction and practice. With the

use of these practices in preschool, pre-k, and kindergarten, we should see an increase of students being able to recognize and produce a significant number of alphabet letters, letter sounds, and rhymes (Casbergue, 2017).

Differentiation Models

Providing our students with an education based around best practices is imperative. According to the U.S. Department of Education report in 2012, evidence learning practices need to include instruction that is focused on students strengths and needs in: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, instruction that is systematic and sequenced, instruction that uses materials that are engaging and relevant to students' needs, and instruction that in continuously monitored to gauge effectiveness (as cited in Gambrell, Morrow, Mandel, & Shanahan, 2015). It is vital to differentiate instruction as to meet the needs of all students within the classroom. Differentiation allows the teacher to address multiple students' needs. We differentiate within our classroom by using flexible grouping. The flexible groups are based off of the on-going assessing that happens throughout the school year. Flexible grouping can happen within a variety of skill and subject areas.

Our school also differentiates using some of the ideas of Response to Intervention model (RtI). RtI is a multi-tier system of approach to support students with learning (and behavior) needs (RtI, 2017). Interventions are provided based on the needs of each student. Progress is closely monitored in the model and interventions are based off of student's response to instruction (RTI Action Network, 2017). Each tier, of the three tiered model, encompasses essential components. Tier one involves high quality classroom instruction, screening, and group interventions. Tier two includes targeted

interventions for students who are not making adequate progress in the regular classroom setting. Tier three involves intensive interventions and a comprehensive evaluation to consider to be eligible for special education services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) encouraged schools to adopt the RtI model. A main reason for this is due to the dissatisfaction with the traditional method for identifying students with learning disabilities in reading. The discrepancy, or disparity, often misses students leading to students not being eligible for intensive intervention through special education services until second grade or later. "By delaying identification of LD, students lack opportunity for early intervention in reading, which often has positive effects on short- and long-term reading achievement" (O'Connor, Bocian, & Sanchez, 2012, p. 307).

Another reason why IDEA supports RtI is due to some students being identified for LD because of instructional failure. This means some students demonstrate poor reading achievement because of instruction that was not rigorous in the general education setting. "By providing small-group, explicit, and intensive instruction (also called Tier 2) and monitoring whether reading improves, RtI models may help to differentiate for students who have need for a special education from those who would grow adequately with better instruction" (O'Connor, Bocian, & Sanchez, 2012, p. 307).

Summary

Differentiation is a practice that has evolved since I started teaching years ago. Differentiation can take on many forms for teachers and students. It means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Teachers can differentiate content, process, products, and/or the learning environment, among other things.

Chapter two discussed many key topics through a literature review. Topics discussed included: differentiation, assessment tools, intervention models, early literacy skills, and differentiation models. The topics were discussed thoroughly, along with providing examples of pros and cons of each, as well as connections to best practices.

Chapter three will provide a product description, discussing the method, setting and audience, timeline, and summary.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Assessments are a big part of an educator's day. In kindergarten, our team uses assessments to help make decisions that drive our instruction. Assessments are also used to gauge students' learning. Assessments can be used to check where students are prior to teaching specific skills and they can be used after completing the teaching of a skill. In conjunction with assessments, progress monitoring can be used to gauge learning throughout the process.

Now that my school district, along with the kindergarten teachers and administration, has found an assessment tool we feel is valuable to use with kindergarten students, we have worked hard to thoroughly understand all of its components. Fastbridge early reading assessments are given to our students three times per school year: fall, winter, and spring. The fall assessments help teachers learn what skills students are coming into kindergarten with. If there are areas of concern, it will be evident when looking at the final data. We can use this data to help us drive our instruction and figure out areas of concern, along with areas of knowledge that is mastered in our students.

The validity of the Fastbridge learning system, along with the time and effort we put into giving the assessments and studying the results, has encouraged me to continue on progressing with this system. The use of this system has provided me with ways of rethinking my teaching, completing more interventions than ever before with my students, and has aided in changing our scope and sequence of our English language arts curriculum. We have made some changes in the order of how we teach some skills so

they are more in line with assessments given in Fastbridge. These changes have helped

encourage me to develop a two week intervention curriculum that can be used after

completing fall testing. With the use of Fastbridge testing, I will develop intervention

curriculum, for each winter benchmark, that is tailored to students' needs (based on the

outcome of the fall scores). The areas of focus that I will plan specific interventions for

include: letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmenting. My goal is

for these intervention practices to aide in helping students meet their winter benchmarks.

The overarching question I am investigating is: *does using specific interventions based*

off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by

Fastbridge)?

Method

It is vital that elementary school aged students are working on building their

fluency and comprehension skills. It is imperative that students are solidifying these skills

as they will be building off of them as they continue on advancing their literacy skills

throughout their elementary years and beyond (Jones, Yssel, Grant, 2012). Our school

uses PRESS interventions to aid in differentiation. Teachers know that all students can

learn, yet there are a variety of means to help students in the learning process. The

PRESS model provides a framework for multi-tiered systems of support that

complements our core reading curriculum.

A big push in the primary grades is fluency. Fluency begins with letter

recognition along with letter sound production. Fluency aides in the ultimate goal of

students being able to read with comprehension. A student's word count per minute

(WCPM) predicts reading comprehension. Fluency work has a key role in students

moving to the end goal of reading with comprehension. There are three key elements that play a huge role in this process: rate, accuracy, and prosody. Rate is effort put in to decode words. Accuracy is the amount of correct words. Prosody is expression and phrasing that supports meaning. "Research is showing that when we attend to a student's prosody in addition to their rate and accuracy, we get better insight into their path to reading with comprehension" (Jiban, 2012).

Given what we have learned and know about the importance of fluency, our school district decided to adopt the use of Fastbridge Learnings early reading assessments. These assessments are given via the use of the following twelve subtests: concepts of print, onset sounds, letter names, letter sounds, word rhyming, word blending, word segmenting, sight word reading, decodable reading, nonsense word reading, and oral language. These early reading assessments are given three times a school year with additional assessments given via progress monitoring. There are benchmark standards built into these assessments to determine which students are at risk, on target, and which students are in need of enrichment. This school year we began using the progress monitoring option within Fastbridge. Progress monitoring is a quick, easy way to assess students in a specific area. It can be used as a means for evaluating instructional effects and to help determine the effectiveness of differentiated instruction (Fastbridge Learning, LLC, 2017).

We have found these assessments to be very kindergarten appropriate. We feel this way because students are assessed one and one with a teacher. There are detailed directions for each assessment. There is dialog to complete preparation, students practice, and dialog to begin test. Each student assessment is given the same way, with the same

expectations for all students. We have also found value in using progress monitoring so far this school year. Progress monitoring is a way teachers can keep track, on a weekly basis, of how each student is progressing. This had lead me to want to build an intervention bank of specified activities to use with my kindergarten students after completing fall early reading assessments. These activities would be used as a means of interventions to help my kindergarten students reach their winter benchmarks and obtain "on target" status on their winter testing.

Setting/Audience

The school I work in has around 900 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Our school's student demographics include: white - 63%, Black/African American - 7%, Asian - 2%, Hispanic/Latino - 20%, and two or more races - 8%. Special populations in our school include: English Learner - 8%, Special Education - 15%, free/reduced price lunch - 38%, and homeless - 1%.

This school year our classroom has twenty two full-day kindergarten students. Of these twenty two students, ten students are on individualized educational plans (IEPs). Five of these students have the label of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), one student has the label of developmental delay (DD), one student has a dual label of cerebral palsy and developmental delay (CP and DD), one student has the label of emotion and behavior disorder (EBD), and two students are on an IEP for speech needs. All twenty two students are serviced by one regular education teacher while the students on IEPS are also serviced by a variety of special education teachers based on the goal specifically stated on their IEP. The services may include: speech, occupational therapy, and DAPE (developmental adapted physical education).

The lessons and differentiating opportunities will be completed within our classroom by myself during our English language arts block. All students who are tested using the Fastbridge early reading assessments will be part of the intervention and differentiating lessons. Special education students on an IEP with academic support will NOT be participating. However, I will be sharing my ideas and the curriculum I built with the special education teachers who serve my students.

Project Description: Timeline

Students will be tested using Fastbridge assessments in September. The assessment window, which is finalized by the administration team in our school district, usually lasts for two weeks. Scores become available for the students who are assessed at the completion of the assessment for each child. Based off the testing, students will work on certain areas of need in early October. After their ten day interventions, students will be reassessed in their area of concern using Fastbridge progress monitoring. When the students have completed their intervention and their score shows "low risk" on their individual scores report, they can move on to the next intervention (if applicable). Although my goal is to develop and teach a ten day intervention, it is always subject to changes and modifications. The process may take much longer than anticipated. I feel that if I have set up a plethora of lessons and activities, students should have access to them all year long.

My goal is to put together ten intervention lessons and activities for each benchmark that will be assessed during winter testing. The four skills that are tested in the winter include: letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmenting. It will take me one month to research best practices for each skills assessed. I will be using

the Fastbridge website to find ideas, along with searching for other ideas using the internet. I will collaborate with the other kindergarten teachers on my team and the intervention teachers that help support our students to ask for suggestions and resources they currently use. I will also consult with them during our PLC time when we are meeting regarding these assessments. I will ask for input in areas of concern or needs that will benefit all the kindergarten students at our school.

After I compile my ideas, it will take me another month to prepare the documents I need for each intervention. I will be making copies, cutting and sorting pieces and pictures to use, along with laminating items so I am able to use these items from year to year. I will upload my documents and materials to a Google document that will be able to be shared with my kindergarten team and any other teachers who help support my students. Other teachers may contribute sources and materials and be able to upload them directly to the Google document for sharing purposes.

Summary

Chapter three has provided a thorough description about my capstone project. My end goal is to build an intervention menu of activities to help support kindergarten students who are at "some risk" and "high risk" in the areas of: concepts of print, onset sounds, letter recognition, and letter sounds.

Chapter four will lay out the areas students are assessed in using Fastbridge testing. It will also discuss the areas that will be assessed again in the winter. This chapter will discuss the variety of scores students could get, along with what interventions will be place after testing is complete. It will also talk about the use of progress monitoring in Fastbridge. I will discuss the menu of interventions that will be

put in place based off what the student score on each assessment. I will use Chapter Four to reflect on my project and the capstone process. This chapter will include what I have learned by going through the capstone process, reflecting on what literature was most useful and important for my capstone, and new understandings that were gained during the process. This chapter will also include the benefits and limitations this project had to the teaching profession. Finally, this Chapter Four will conclude with ideas for future projects, recommendations for others who want to complete a project similar to mine, and how I will use my capstone project within my classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The goal of my final project was to answer the research question: *Does using specific interventions based off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by Fastbridge)?* After using Fastbridge assessments for the past 2 years, I have noticed gaps in our literacy instruction. These gaps include introduction and instruction of some of the benchmarks that we now assess in Fastbridge. Based on the research I have conducted with my literature review and the plan I outlined in Chapter Three, I have completed a set of ten lesson plans for each of the four benchmarks that will be assessed during winter testing. These lesson plans can be used by kindergarten teachers to aide their students in understanding and mastering each benchmark expectation for letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmenting.

I will use this chapter to reflect on my project and the capstone process. This chapter will include what I have learned by going through the capstone process, reflecting on what literature was most useful and valuable for my capstone, and new understandings that were gained during the process. This chapter will also include the benefits and limitations this project had to the teaching profession. Finally, this chapter will conclude with ideas for future projects, recommendations for others who want to complete a project similar to mine, and how I will use my capstone project within my classroom.

Learning from the Capstone Process

Being a part of the capstone process has taught me a lot about myself. Probably the biggest thing I learned was that I am an inquirer. There was so much that I wanted to take from this process and being an inquirer to find a plethora of information made me really validate this attribute. It took me awhile to pinpoint a specific research topic and research question. At first it was hard to solidify the topic not only I was interested in, but also that I thought would be of extreme value to my classroom. Being an inquirer helped me ask questions and research a variety of topics. I gained a lot of information through the literature review. Using a variety of sources such as: textbooks, Google, Hamline University Bush Library databases and articles, classroom curriculum, and my colleagues' expertise helped me as a inquirer as well. All these sources were vital pieces to my capstone experience.

Being an inquirer helped me move through the process as a problem solver. There were many times I was confused or unsure during this process. When I had those moments I pushed forward, asked questions, emailed my professors, and/or connected with my colleagues in the program. I used many of the resources that were included within the Hamline University Learning House site. Being an inquirer and problem solver helped me get through the process of APA guidelines and citations. A lot has changed since completing my undergraduate degree in 2003. I had to relearn and update my knowledge regarding proper APA guidelines and citations.

Finally, the biggest thing I learned about myself and the capstone process was perseverance. At times this process felt overwhelming. At times it was hard to juggle my day with teaching kindergarten, being a mom of two young children, being a wife, and

being a graduate student. At times it felt overwhelming after a long day at school, to come home and be energized to complete my graduate school work. Some weeks I was right on track with pacing guides. Some weeks it was extremely difficult to stay on track. But, I got through each course and was supported by so many wonderful colleagues, friends, and family members. The feeling of gratitude and appreciation for persevering through the hard work and emotions is indescribable.

In summary, I learned so much as I navigated through the capstone process. This process has made me see myself as a inquirer. I used the attribute of being an inquirer to learn about a variety of topics, to solve problems, and to solidify a research topic and research question that guided my capstone experience. Being an inquirer through this process helped me complete my capstone project and helped me find value in creating a variety of lessons to help my kindergarten students succeed.

The Literature Review

The literature review was a vital piece to my capstone project. I needed to complete the literature review to gain more of an understanding along with resources about intervention models, differentiating, progress monitoring, and assessing. I have had a plethora of experience around each of these topics, but I needed scholarly writings about each one to support my experiences in the classroom.

The literature review was a long process. I have not needed to research a topic in quite some time. It was a learning curve to figure out what sites to go to, what subject headings were going to get me the most useful resources, and what articles were going to give me the information I needed to be presented as part of my project. After completing my literature review, I was able to incorporate a lot of the information I found into my

project. I found specific information and data on intervention models, differentiating, progress monitoring, and assessing, all of which were informational and vital pieces to connect to my project.

Overall, the literature review was a difficult, yet essential piece to my capstone project. It was a learning experience to find reputable and scholarly work that connected to my project. The literature review helped me gain new insights and information about intervention models, differentiating, progress monitoring, and assessing.

The Final Project

I feel each part of my capstone project has been successful. Writing each chapter has helped set up my project and complete it. My final project is a set of intervention lesson plans to help kindergarten students reach their winter benchmarks using Fastbridge assessments. I wrote five lessons plans for each of the following benchmarks: letter sounds, onset sounds, nonsense words, and word segmenting.

This project is a benefit to the teaching profession because each kindergarten teacher has specific lessons to teach for each benchmark. As students progress through each benchmark, teachers can then move on to the next benchmark. These lessons will benefit all kindergarten teachers because they provide the resources needed to differentiate within the classroom. These lessons provide all the pieces teacher need to teach each benchmark including, but not limited to: lesson goals, performance tasks, learning activities, lesson materials, and connections to each lesson.

Although I felt that this project was successful, there are a couple limitations to it. One limitation would be finding the time during the school day to include the lessons and complete them for validity to the process. Every day I feel pressure to complete all the of

the lessons expected of me as a kindergarten teacher. These lessons are very important to the success of our kindergarten students and should not be thought of as "just another thing to do." Another limitation is sticking with the flow of the lessons so students can gain the skills they need to obtain "low risk" on each benchmark. It sometimes seems "easier" to skip a lesson or two, especially to catch up on something else, or due to lack of time/energy. But, keeping up with the flow of the lessons is important so teachers can progress monitor their students every five days. This will give teachers the information they need to know exactly where each student is performing within each benchmark.

Overall, I'm very proud of my project and feel it has been completed successfully. I feel that my project answers the question: *Does using specific interventions based off of Fastbridge fall data help students reach the winter benchmarks in reading (set by Fastbridge)?* My project will benefit any kindergarten teacher because it provides specific lessons along with materials for each of the winter benchmarks that will be assessed in Fastbridge. My project is complete, but there are many more things that I could continue to work on. I will lay out these ideas in my next section.

Where to go From Here

Completing this project has given me motivation to keep going! Now that I have completed specific lessons for each benchmark that will be assessed during winter testing, I want to do that same for the fall and spring benchmarks. Doing this will help set my classroom up for success with each assessed benchmark throughout the school year. I will have clear lessons to follow and materials and resources prepped for use.

Summary

Overall, I feel very accomplished and proud of my project. The lessons that I built will be very useful and accessible for all kindergarten teachers and students. They are clear and have a plethora of activities linked to each benchmark to support all students' needs. I look forward to incorporating these lessons and activities within my classroom come fall 2018.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan Template

Date:	Benchmark Group:
Established Goals:	
Understandings (Students will understand that…):	
Essential Question(s):	
Knowledge (Students will know…):	
Skill (Students will be able to…):	
Performance Tasks:	
Learning Activities:	
Materials Needed:	
Teacher Preparation:	

Figure 1: Effectiveness of PRESS

Percentage of Students Making One Year's Growth with PRESS intervention
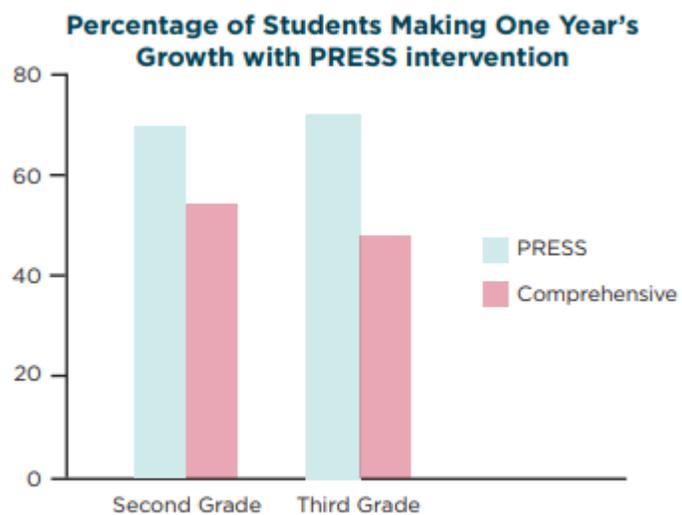
PRESS data showing percentage of second- and third-grade students making one year's growth on Curriculum-Based Measurement Reading (CBM-R) and/or Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) for reading.
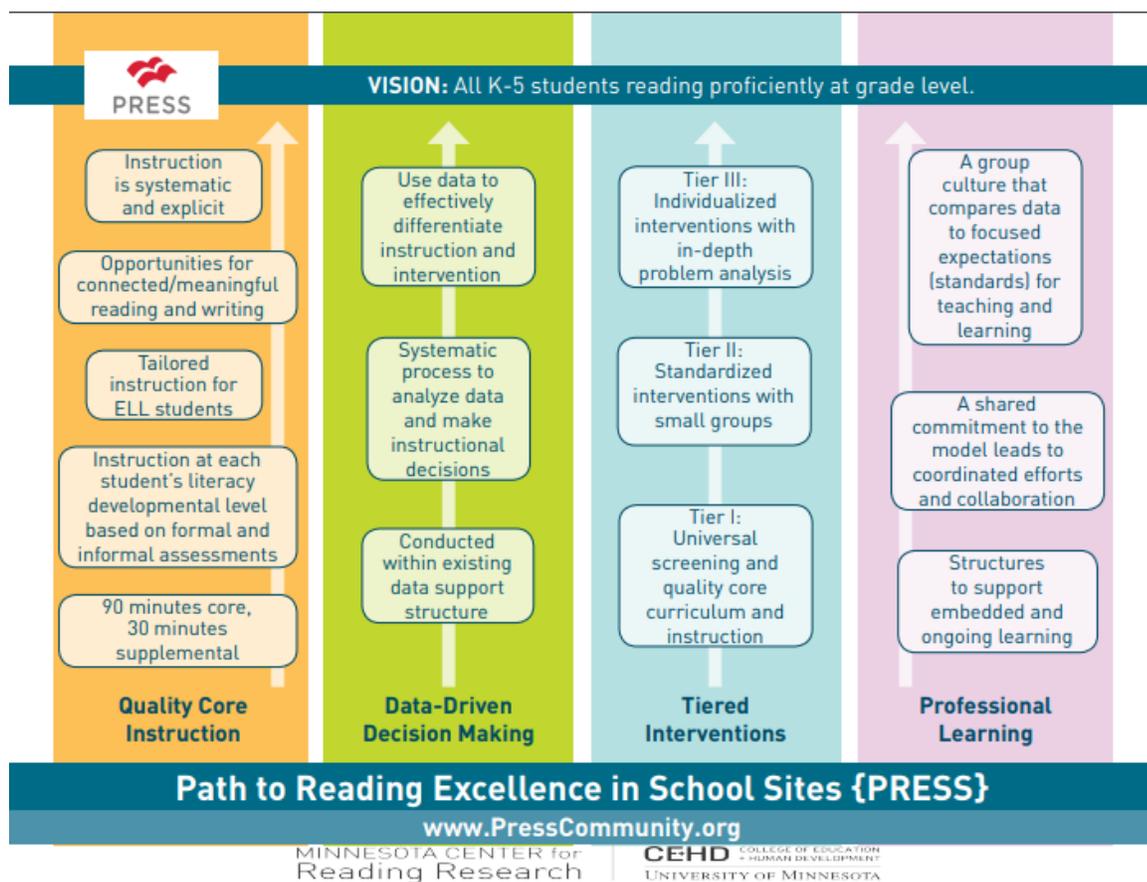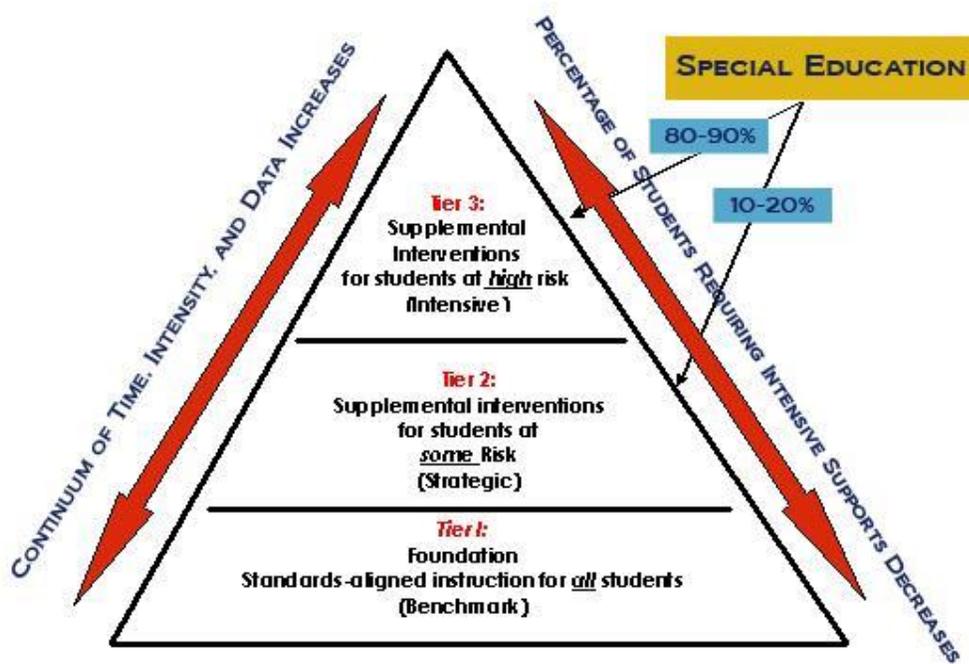
Figure 2: PRESS' Vision

VISION: All K-5 students reading proficiently at grade level.

Quality Core Instruction	Data-Driven Decision Making	Tiered Interventions	Professional Learning
Instruction is systematic and explicit	Use data to effectively differentiate instruction and intervention	Tier III: Individualized interventions with in-depth problem analysis	A group culture that compares data to focused expectations (standards) for teaching and learning
Opportunities for connected/meaningful reading and writing	Systematic process to analyze data and make instructional decisions	Tier II: Standardized interventions with small groups	A shared commitment to the model leads to coordinated efforts and collaboration
Tailored instruction for ELL students	Conducted within existing data support structure	Tier I: Universal screening and quality core curriculum and instruction	Structures to support embedded and ongoing learning
Instruction at each student's literacy developmental level based on formal and informal assessments			
90 minutes core, 30 minutes supplemental			

Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites {PRESS}

www.PressCommunity.org

MINNESOTA CENTER for Reading Research

CEHD COLLEGE OF EDUCATION + HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Figure 3: RTI TIERED FRAMEWORK

Figure 4: Benchmark Academic Measurements

2017-18 Academic Year

FastBridge Learning

Benchmark : Early Reading English : KG

Measure	Metric	Risk Level	Fall	Winter	Spring
Concepts of Print	# Correct/12	Some Risk	< 8.0	< 11.0	< 12.0
		High Risk	< 6.0	< 9.0	< 10.0
Onset Sounds	# Correct/16	Some Risk	< 12.0	< 16.0	< 16.0
		High Risk	< 7.0	< 14.0	< 14.0
Letter Names	Rate	Some Risk	< 20.0	< 42.0	< 50.0
		High Risk	< 7.0	< 30.0	< 38.0
Letter Sounds	Rate	Some Risk	< 5.0	< 29.0	< 41.0
		High Risk	< 1.0	< 18.0	< 30.0
Word Rhyming	# Correct/16	Some Risk	< 6.0	< 13.0	< 14.0
		High Risk	< 3.0	< 7.0	< 9.0
Word Blending	# Correct/10	Some Risk	< 5.0	< 6.0	< 9.0
		High Risk	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 7.0
Word Segmenting	# Correct/34	Some Risk	< 3.0	< 26.0	< 30.0
		High Risk	< 0.0	< 17.0	< 26.0
Decodable Words	Rate	Some Risk	< 0.0	< 7.0	< 12.0
		High Risk	< 0.0	< 3.0	< 8.0
Nonsense Words	Rate	Some Risk	< 3.0	< 8.0	< 12.0
		High Risk	< 0.0	< 3.0	< 8.0
Sight Words	Rate	Some Risk	< 1.0	< 9.0	< 20.0
		High Risk	< 0.0	< 4.0	< 8.0
Sentence Reading	Rate	Some Risk	< N/A	< N/A	< N/A
		High Risk	< N/A	< N/A	< N/A
Oral Repetition	# Correct/40	Some Risk	< 18.0	< 22.0	< 25.0
		High Risk	< 10.0	< 17.0	< 21.0
CBMR-English	Rate	Some Risk	< N/A	< N/A	< N/A
		High Risk	< N/A	< N/A	< N/A
Early Reading English	Composite Score	Some Risk	< 34.0	< 52.0	< 65.0
		High Risk	< 30.0	< 46.0	< 59.0