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Timing Is Everything: Adapting Rewards Intermediate For 4th And 5th Grade Striving Readers

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TIMING IS EVERYTHING: ADAPTING REWARDS INTERMEDIATE FOR 4TH

AND 5TH GRADE STRIVING READERS

By

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To my husband, children, family, coworkers, and capstone committee, you have given

me the opportunity to learn more about how to be a better teacher to my students. I could

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and love!

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I became a teacher with the goal of helping young children gain a love of learning. I live to see the spark of understanding and how mistakes can translate into a stronger ability and knowledge. It is my goal to support the growth of children into lifelong learners, or someone who is always asking questions and seeking out the answers. This practice is something we do throughout life, as each step in our journey brings new questions and new things to learn.

I began my career as an English teacher in a public school in Seoul, South Korea. While I was in this position I taught second through fifth grade students as a specialist. I saw how some students struggled with learning a new language while others found it to be easy. I watched those students who were struggling, trying to blend into the back wall of the classroom, hiding so that they wouldn't be called on to speak in class. I became passionate about helping these students so that they could gain confidence in their skills. When I moved back to Minnesota, I went to school to become a K-12 English as a Second Language teacher, and this additional license brought me to my first full-time teaching position in a large Midwestern metropolitan area.

My first position was as a Title 1 reading teacher at a charter school with a student population that was 99% Somali American. I had the challenging but rewarding job of

teaching students that were not only learning English as their second (or even fourth) language, but these students were not picking up literacy in English as quickly as others in the same English language learning program. I had very little curriculum to use when I started working with these students and often found myself at a loss as to what strategies to use to help them improve their reading skills as quickly as possible.

In this position, I was feeling like I was missing some important skills and conceptual knowledge about how to best teach reading to students that were not picking up English literacy skills as quickly as others. I was not sure about how to best work with students that were still working on basic reading skills in upper elementary grades, or how to change my instruction if a certain style of teaching was not supporting growth in a student. I went back to school again, this time to gain a reading license. Throughout the reading licensure program I learned more about how reading skills build throughout a student's development. I also learned, and became very comfortable with, different phonics, fluency, and comprehension strategies that I would be able to use with struggling readers. With the knowledge I learned in this program, I felt much more confident in teaching students that are not picking up reading in English as quickly as their English learning peers and making choices that would benefit them in learning how to read.

My next career step was to move to a larger district that provided ongoing professional development so that I could continue to learn how to support the struggling readers that I would be teaching. This move also allowed me to learn from, and collaborate with, a team of experienced teachers. I moved to my current position as a reading and math intervention teacher five years ago. In these years I have learned about

and embraced the Response to Intervention (RtI) model that my district uses to support all students. This program provides 30-minute daily lessons for second through fifth grade students that are struggling in reading. The lessons help students strengthen reading skills and are based on their highest need to support quick growth. In the process I have become the RtI Lead teacher in the same school.

While I work with struggling readers, it is always my goal to help support them in their individual learning needs. As the students get older, if they have gaps in their learning that have not been filled, they are less likely to be able to close the gaps. There is an expectation of students in fourth grade and above that they should be reading to learn instead of learning to read. If they are struggling readers and decoders, they will likely have trouble keeping up with their peers and learning the concepts that they need to from text. When I find that a fourth or fifth grade student is struggling with decoding skills such as vowel digraphs, or words with a silent "e", I know that we have a lot of work to do in order to help them read at grade level. This brings me to ask the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for struggling readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

What is Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a structure put into place within a school that aims to support every student where they are academically, and to push them forward by teaching them what they need next instead of what the whole group needs next. The Center on Response to Intervention tells us that RtI "integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems" ("Essential Components of RtI," n.d.). The implementation of

RtI is different at each school, but where I teach currently we screen all students with two assessments–fluency and comprehension. This assessment data allows us to see what each student's risk level is for reaching grade-level standards. We categorize students into three risk levels: high risk, moderate risk, and no risk (this includes students that are in need of above-grade level instruction). We can then make sure that students are receiving both grade level instruction and instruction that will help them reach grade level if that is what they need.

If students are at a high risk for not meeting grade-level standards we dig a bit deeper with diagnostic assessments to learn and locate the gaps in their knowledge. This helps us determine which interventions may best help them gain the most skills for that year. RtI structures utilize progress monitoring and data-based decisions to make changes to each individual student's instruction to help them grow in their skills and reach grade level standards as soon as possible. All of the information gathered in a RtI model helps us to decide on academic interventions to help the students. Even with all of this information, gaps do remain in finding solutions. The problem I have encountered is that I do not know the best way to teach phonics skills in a way that is appropriate for students in grades three and up. For example, I had a student that is was a fifth grader and new to our building the year the study was completed and she showed many gaps in her decoding skills. She was unable to identify and use vowel digraphs in her reading; she was also not using prefixes and suffixes to read new words. It seemed that once the words and text grew in complexity above basic-level phonics skills she had fallen through the cracks and not received the instruction that would have helped her with these skills. I had

the need to help her fill these gaps in her knowledge, but how? What is the best way to intervene so that she can be successful in the future?

Intervention for Students with Gaps in Their Decoding Skills

In order to determine if a student has gaps in their decoding skills we do two things. We start by doing miscue analysis on a students' running record. This allows us to identify which words they are making mistakes on and compile them into groups to see if there is a pattern in miscues (mistakes). We also may have a student read groups of words that have different phonics patterns in them. These words are both on their own and in context. This tells us which specific phonics patterns the student is struggling with, as well as if they are able to read the words in context, or only when they are on their own.

Once we know which phonics patterns the student is struggling with, we are able to identify which intervention is going to be the best fit to help teach them the skills they are missing. There are many interventions and strategies available to teach phonics and decoding skills; however, they are written for students in the primary grades. I find that my students in third through fifth grade that still need this instruction lose interest quickly and feel like they are doing "baby" work. Many of the programs include books that have phonic patterns repeated in them, but they are books with two to three sentences on a page, and they also can be flashcard based with cutesy pictures on them. The older students get turned off by these tools and do not put effort into learning the skills. This continuing problem is what led me to ask my research question.

One program that might help address this problem is REWARDS Intermediate. I have a limited amount of experience teaching REWARDS Intermediate, as my school

purchased it recently as a tool to use when fourth and fifth grade students have gaps in their decoding skills. REWARDS Intermediate includes an explicit teaching model created to teach students multisyllabic word decoding skills. As an intervention teacher, I have a list of different programs to use with students. Each program has a different purpose and focuses on different aspects of reading. REWARDS Intermediate is the only tool that we have that explicitly focuses on teaching 4th-5th grade students decoding skills and not a combination of different aspects of reading. The program is written to be taught in 50 sessions each day, whereas I only have 30 minutes available with my students. This makes it difficult to teach and I have wondered about its effectiveness in the shorter time frame. My intention in this capstone is to learn more about the research base behind this intervention and to collect data to find out if it actually helps fourth- and fifth-grade students read the longer, multisyllabic words they are encountering in their academic reading. Also, does it work when taught for 30 minutes each day instead of 50? This brings me to ask the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

As I work with students, it is my goal to support their growth in being lifelong learners. As the texts they are expected to read become increasingly difficult, many students begin to struggle. Through assessments we can get clearer pictures into the student's reading skills, and many students show a gap in decoding skills. My goal is to modify and monitor the REWARDS Intermediate multisyllabic word decoding program that my school has provided to support students and fill the gaps that have grown over time to see how upper elementary students respond.

In Chapter Two, I will analyze research that supports my question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for struggling readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?" The chapter also provides an analysis of how the REWARDS Intermediate program has been found to work in different settings. The four themes that are presented include: how reading is a process, phonics and decoding strategies, intermediate struggling readers, and theories of phonics and decoding interventions that support their learning including the REWARDS Intermediate intervention.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the literature that provides information and insight into research-based practices for teaching decoding and fluency skills to struggling readers in the fourth and fifth grades. The research supports four topics that provide insight into what is necessary to include when teaching decoding skills to struggling readers. The first section focuses on reading as a process and the five pillars of reading. The second section looks specifically at the research surrounding the learning of phonics and decoding skills. The third section focuses on struggling readers in the intermediate grades. The final section examines different phonics and decoding interventions that are researched and available to support these struggling readers and help them to become strong readers. Analysis of this research informed the manner in which I adapted the REWARDS Intermediate intervention program to meet the unique needs of my students within our given time constraints and then tested to determine whether the program remained effective. This is all done within the context of the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

Reading as a Process

"Reading is a complex process made up of several interlocking skills and processes. The sum of these pieces is a tapestry that good readers use on a day-to-day basis to process text in their world" (Tankersley, 2003, p. 2). As Tankersley describes reading as a complex process, it is important to remember that reading skills develop as a beginning reader goes from learning about print and letters to reading with automaticity so that they can understand what they are reading. Substantial research has been done on each step in the process of learning to read. This research was summarized and published in the *National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read* (2000). When this report was published, the panel identified five pillars of reading. The five pillars include, "Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension" (National Reading Panel, 2001, p. ii). Each of these pillars combine to help readers understand what they are reading, and support reading success for students (National Reading Panel, 2001, Beck and Beck, 2013, McEwan, 2009, Tankersley, 2003, Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, and Tankersley, 2005).

The different pillars are taught in varying ways in classrooms. In one classroom you may see a group of students doing reader's theater in order to build their fluency; another classroom may have students manipulating letters to build words to practice a phonics element. A third classroom may have students debating if a character made the correct choice in the text they are reading in order to comprehend the text in a different way. There are many strategies available to teachers when teaching the different pillars of reading (Tankersley, 2003, Cunningham, 2011, McEwan, 2009, Shefelbine, 1990, Kuhn

and Rasinski, 2011, Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, Almasi and Hart, 2011) and teachers are often able to choose which ones will meet the needs of their students.

The ultimate goal of teaching students to read is to provide them with the ability to learn from text and use their new knowledge to question the world around them and live in a broader community. In order to do this, students need to have a strong knowledge base in each of the different reading pillars. Some of these are building blocks for other pillars, such as phonemic awareness leading to phonics success and decoding and vocabulary leading to stronger fluency (McEwan, 2009, Tankersley, 2003, Shefelbine, 1990, and Kuhn and Rasinski, 2011). All of these skills come together to allow a student to comprehend what they have read, which is the reason we read.

Grossen and Carnine (1993) remind teachers that comprehension is the reason for reading. However, if a reader is not able to decode the words to create meaning from them, comprehension is impossible. The necessity of having a strong background in phonics and decoding leads this review of research into the next section on phonics and decoding strategies for all elementary grades. This is an important collection of research when asking if a decoding intervention will be successful for struggling readers.

Phonics and Decoding Strategies

Phonics is one of the pillars of reading, as explained in the previous section. When teaching a student phonics, the teacher is teaching "the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language" (Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. 2001, p. 18).

Phonics in the Primary Grades

Based on a student's age and where they are in the reading process, phonics is taught in the early grades, just as students are learning to read. Blevins (2001), Smartt and Glaser (2010), McEwan (2009), Tankersley (2003), and Armbruster, Lerhr, & Osborn (2001) define phonics as the connection between sounds and representing them as letters. Shefelbine (1990) adds a grade deadline to this idea and informs readers that, "By the end of second grade, students should be familiar with the common relationships that apply to single-syllable words, as well as some two- and three-syllable words. Formal phonics instruction for most students should be over by the end of third grade, if not earlier" (Phonics instruction and the developmental continuum section, para. 3). This puts the phonics pressure on our kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers. These primary grade teachers usually have a curriculum that supports systematic, explicit phonics instruction. In the "Put Reading First" document that summarizes what the National Reading Panel (NRP) found in reading research, Armbruster et al. (2001) state that "Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction" (p. 12). A systematic, explicit phonics curriculum includes direct teaching of specific letter/sound relationships in a "clearly defined sequence." The programs also provide students with a lot of time practicing these relationships as they are writing and reading. Cunningham (2011) adds to this research base, informing teachers that there are a variety of approaches to effectively teaching phonics. Grossen and Carnine (1993), Cunningham (2011), and Beck and Beck (2013) offer many different activities and strategies for teaching phonics effectively, including building words by sounds and finding patterns in words.

These activities support the idea that students need to continue practicing the phonics elements that they are learning. Teachers understand that it is important to have many different activities available for practice to utilize if students are not showing mastery. Francis, Shwaywitz, Stuebing, and Fletcher's 1994 study (as cited in Pressley and Allington, 2015) support this idea when they state that their research shows that, "Primary-grade difficulties in learning to read predict to some extent continuing reading difficulties throughout schooling…" (p. 83). The next section continues such thinking and discusses why reading gets much more difficult in the upper elementary grades and how to help older students if they are not able to master these phonics skills in the primary grades.

Struggling Readers in the Intermediate Grades

In order to support adaptation of a curriculum for students struggling with decoding skills in grades four and five, it is vital to understand what previous research shows to be important to include. Intermediate grade students, students in grades three, four, and five, are expected to be reading to learn new content instead of working on mastering the basic skills of reading. This causes many problems for students that are still struggling to master the basic building blocks of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency.

A struggling reader is a reader who is missing some of the key skills to help them develop into fluent readers that understand the text. Smartt and Glaser (2010) describe this type of reader as a student who is not able to read at the expected level, one who needs intensive, explicit instruction in the core aspects of reading to catch up to their peers. Between third and fourth grade, readers are expected to gain knowledge from text

instead of spending their time learning to read the text, and this is a point when many

students that have previously shown adequate progress in the primary grades begin to

struggle. Many teachers refer to this as "the fourth-grade slump" (Tankersley, 2005). The

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) supports what is seen in fourth-

grade classrooms across the country (Salinger, 2003, and Tankersley, 2005). In the year

2000, the NAEP showed that 40% of fourth graders were not able to read at what the

NAEP considers to be the basic level of reading. Salinger (2003) defines basic by stating,

"Students can read only at the most literal level and often lack the skills to learn from

content area textbooks" (p. 79).

Why is fourth grade reading so much more difficult than second and third?

Marcon (as cited by Salinger, 2003) informs us that fourth grade is when students switch

from learning how to read to reading in order to learn something new. However, some

students are not able to make this switch due to the inability to combine all of the skills

and strategies that they have been taught to create meaning from the text. Biancarosa and

Snow (2004) state that in order to be fully literate in the 21st Century you must be able to

read, write, talk, and listen through traditional and electronic texts, learn from text

information, and obtain the desire to read and write. Putting it in a much simpler way,

Cunningham (2011) reminds us that, "Thoughtful reading requires much more than just

the ability to quickly decode words" (p. 199). With reading requiring so much more than

the basic skills, the teacher's job is essential. Blevins (2001) challenges teachers to rise to

the challenge of preparing each and every student to meet these demands so that they are

able to read the texts with new, long words and complex ideas. How are teachers to help

struggling readers that are overwhelmed by these requirements in order to meet the expectations of text?

Mindset and Motivation

An important factor in learning something difficult is a person's mindset when taking on a new task. Dweck (2016) reports that, "The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life" (pg. 11). She goes on to discuss the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, focusing on how if a human being adopts a growth mindset they will be open to being challenged and will take failure in stride in order to learn from it. If teachers of struggling readers can help students attack a new or challenging situation with a growth mindset, leading them to understand they are capable of mastering the task, the student will be willing to stretch themselves and understand that mistakes are what help us learn. Adams (2013) provides the fixed and growth mindset idea in very student-friendly language to provide students with the ability to think about how they can get ready to learn and change their own mindset. She suggests using the image of a map, called the "choice map". This map has two paths that start together and then go separate ways. One path is called the learner path, and the other is the judger path. The learner path allows you to tackle challenges and learn from them; the judger path can get you into trouble when you are not open to challenges and mistakes. Adams focuses chiefly on the goal of helping students switch lanes from the judger path to the learner path with the goal of building a learner mindset (Inquiry Institute (n.d.) visual can be retrieved from http://inquiryinstitute.com/resources/choice-map/).

Mindset is closely connected to motivation and choosing the learner path. Struggling readers do not have a lot of motivation to learn to read. This could be due to a "learned helplessness" that has come from having years of difficulty mastering something as complex as reading (Blevins, 2001). They may have gone so far as to seeing reading as something seemingly impossible. In order to help students become self-motivated to do work that they do not believe they are able to complete, there are many different suggestions for teachers. These strategies include assigning work that is important and helpful to the students, making sure assignments are not too hard or too easy for students, explaining why what they are learning matters as a part of a bigger picture, teaching what expert readers do when they do not understand what they are reading, exposing students to a wide variety of text genres and types, doing read-alouds and thinking aloud while reading, encouraging students to read anything and everything, and providing specific modeled lessons on important vocabulary words and skills (Tankersley, 2005, Strickland, Ganske, and Monroe, 2002, and Pressley & Allington, 2015). These actions allow students to begin to care and not just give up before they start. Students need to take responsibility for their learning; they need to want to learn or they will continue to quit when it gets difficult. The key to all of these strategies is that teachers need to help struggling readers see why reading is key to learning more about the things that are important to them.

The idea that students should be finished acquiring the skills need to read well when they enter fourth grade goes against the goal of creating lifelong learners. If teachers believe that their students are finished learning to read, they do not provide support for the skills or the mindset that will help a student continue to improve and

explore different ideas throughout life. When helping support the idea that a lifelong learner is always gaining knowledge, even as an adult, teachers need to show how they themselves are always acquiring new words, new strategies, and ways to read new material. This does not mean that teachers should not teach students the skills that they need in order to tackle more difficult words and concepts in their reading before they reach the middle of elementary school. Some strategies for helping struggling readers continue to grow in their reading skills are shared in the next section.

The Next Steps for Helping Struggling Readers

The research shared above shows that starting in fourth grade, students are expected to do complex reading. By this time, struggling readers are giving up due to the task being too difficult for them. However, Salinger (2003) declares that, "Grade four is not too late to help struggling readers. The key is the kind of intervention that can help these students put the pieces of the puzzle together" (p. 81). The Response to Intervention (RtI) movement holds the goal to do just this. RtI is a federally-funded framework that was created to help all learners while using assessment and interventions to make sure they are receiving instruction right where they need it (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011 and Smartt & Glaser, 2010). It is important for teachers to monitor students on a regular basis, one of the requirements of RtI, to know if they are falling behind. As soon as they show signs of falling behind their age-level benchmarks, these students must receive targeted support to help prevent reading difficulties (Tankersley, 2005). If they continue to fall behind, the students must receive even more intensive and specific support.

What should this intensive instruction look like? Allington (2011) believes that children that are struggling when learning to read and write should not be labeled, but they should be taught with, "Sufficient and appropriate instruction and substantial opportunities to actually engage in high-success reading and writing activities" (p. 96). According to Salinger (2003), these reading and writing activities for struggling readers in interventions should not be taught in the same way that skills and strategies were taught in earlier grades, as those did not work for these students. Teachers also need to be careful about interventions heavily focused on only one skill at a time when working with older struggling readers. Almasi and Hart (2011) and Salinger (2003) found that these focused interventions were not as successful as interventions that included multiple pillars of reading as a part of the instruction. These two researchers are very clear in that teachers should make sure to intervene when a student is struggling and support them with explicit, purposeful interventions.

Tankersley (2005) gives many ideas of activities to address different phonics skills as well as vocabulary and fluency skills. As research shows, and is stated in previous sections, these are all necessary skills for becoming strong readers. What about a student that has very little phonics skill, yet is in the intermediate grades in school? How do teachers address their needs while keeping their age in mind so they can be motivated to learn and become readers?

Phonics and Decoding Instruction for Struggling Readers in the Intermediate Grades

Research suggests that reading struggles among older students is a serious issue that places unique demands on teachers. In addition to helping these older students catch

up on reading skills they are lacking, they need to attend to motivational challenges that can be very different from those of younger students in the primary grades. all the while, teachers need to help these students change their self-perception from struggling to striving reader. Harvey and Ward (2017) stress that that the term "striving reader" is more dynamic and effort-based, because it "connotes energy, action, and progress" (p. 10). In order to support students in changing their own self-perception, teachers, parents, and researchers also need to consciously shift their wording and belief. Research continues to use the concept of a "struggling reader," however from now on in this capstone the focus will be on "striving readers."

As indicated previously, phonics knowledge is an essential pillar of reading that will affect a student's ability to read more complex text. In the early grades, phonics is taught in a very systematic, concrete way, starting with letter sounds and letters in a specific order. However, the pressure that is placed on teachers of the early grades to teach phonics and decoding potentially discounts and/or ignores the unique phonics needs of older students. Cunningham (2009) found that if an older reader has not mastered decoding skills, it will support them better to teach phonemes, word families, prefixes, and suffixes, instead of starting with phonics instruction. This is a common strand throughout the research as Blevins (2001), Cunningham (2011), Salinger (2003), and Tankersley (2003) focus on the idea that older students should be taught word parts, syllable patterns, and the morphology of words in order to read multisyllabic words in complex text. As cited in Smartt & Glaser (2010), Norton and Wolf (2008) have found that there is a specific relationship between students' knowledge of morphology skills and their decoding and fluency for both beginning readers and struggling readers. The

research is clear that teachers need to focus on word parts and morphology when teaching struggling readers that do not have mastery of their phonics skills. These findings force the push to the next level of what needs to be taught to support fluent reading of multisyllabic words.

Beck and Beck (2013) discuss the problems students may have with decoding multisyllabic words. They say that students, "do not know where syllables begin and end, so they don't know which chunks to work with. That is, they are unfamiliar with what sequence of letters in a word constitutes a unit that they can decode separately from other subword units" (p. 101). Similarly, Flanigan et al. (2011) stress that a successful reader must have a complete knowledge of how letter patterns work within a word and focus on the idea that our minds are built as "pattern seekers" instead of cameras (pg. 7). These authors focus on the idea that a reader's ability to decode a word is based in both the patterns and word parts that they can see in the word. Beck and Beck (2013) also share that from their observations of students there are three required skills for success in reading multiple-syllable words. These skills are analysis, pronunciation, and synthesis. Analysis requires a reader to be able to separate syllables in a word. Pronunciation comes after a student has analyzed a word; the reader needs to be able to pronounce the different parts of the word, and the most difficult part of the word is usually the vowel sound. Synthesis requires the reader to put all of the parts of the word back together and read the word as a whole. Beck and Beck (2013) as well as Flanigan et al. (2011) share that fluent readers do all of these skills at the same time, but struggling readers are not able to do these three skills automatically. They need to have additional instruction in these skills.

What does this instruction look like? There are many strategies available for teachers to use to teach students how to decode multisyllabic words (Salinger, 2003, Cunningham, 2011, and Beck and Beck, 2013). One program available as a published intervention, REWARDS Intermediate, is a program used to teach multisyllabic word decoding skills to students. Written by Archer, Gleason, & Vachon (2014), it is a research-based program for fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. The goals of the program are to teach a flexible strategy for decoding multisyllabic words, help students to increase both oral and silent reading fluency, expand students' vocabulary, and allow students to grow in their confidence in reading. The program includes explicit instruction and the gradual release of responsibility so that students can master the decoding skills. The program is fast-paced, engaging, and sequential in order to ensure that students stay motivated and interested. REWARDS is designed to help students focus on the parts in multisyllabic words and break them into chunks so that students can recognize the patterns that occur in words. It also teaches the meaning of the word parts so that students can make sense of what they are reading when they come across unfamiliar words.

The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) clarifies the difference between the earlier version of REWARDS (2000) and the REWARDS Intermediate (2014) program. They share that in the REWARDS Intermediate program, "The number of lessons was increased, words, sentences, and passages are written at grade appropriate reading levels for students in 4th-6th grade, explicit instruction in vocabulary was added to all lessons, vowels and affixes are introduced at a slower rate, and sentence reading is introduced before passage reading" (Wahl, 2007).

Middle school and high school students made significant gains in their decoding skills and their oral reading fluency speed when they received instruction with the REWARDS curriculum. Graves, Duesbery, Plye, Brandon, and McIntosh (2011) found that when taught to sixth grade readers at a grade equivalent reading level of 3-5, in combination with comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary instruction, REWARDS Intermediate supported a higher growth in words read correctly per minute on an oral reading fluency assessment than students that did not receive the intervention. In their study, REWARDS was used as decoding instruction for 20 minute segments of the total 60 minute intervention time, three times a week, for ten weeks. During the instruction of the curriculum in this study, it was taught as written. This study supports the idea that the REWARDS Intervention curriculum can be taught successfully when taught for 20 minute segments; however, it does not address the question of if it can be successfully condensed in order to stick to the overall timeline that the authors lay out in the curriculum.

In a separate 2005 study, Shippen, Houchins, Steventon, and Sartor report that the curriculum was more effective for students that were reading at a fourth grade level or above. In this study seventh grade students were provided with instruction in the REWARDS Intervention curriculum for 55 minutes a day in a group of struggling readers. This shows that reading level may play a larger role than age in if the intervention will be successful.

A previous version of the REWARDS program was also found to be a successful intervention when taught three to four days a week in a one-on-one setting with a ninth grade student that was diagnosed with a learning disability, (Klee, Neyman, Brasch,

McLaughlin, and Stookey, 2015). The researchers found that the student quickly learned the skills needed to decode multisyllabic words.

Another study demonstrated positive results when the REWARDS Intermediate intervention curriculum was used for whole class instruction. In 2007 Zurybida found that fourth grade struggling readers' ability to read word parts moved from 60% accurate to 88% accurate and gained 7.32 correct words read in a minute. Zurybida (2007) continued to follow students' gains for nine weeks after the intervention session ended and there was a small drop in students' ability to decode multisyllabic words, decreasing an average of two word parts. However, the gains in students' reading rates continued to be higher than average without the daily intervention. Students' fluency increased by an average 15.73 correct words per minute (cwpm) in the nine weeks after the intervention finished. This growth is substantial, considering an increase of .85 words per week is thought of as a realistic rate of fluency increase (Zurybida, 2007).

These research studies show that the REWARDS Intervention program can support student growth in decoding skills and fluency rates. It is a program created to be taught as a six week intervention for 50-60 minutes each day of the week, and when taught with fidelity will cover one lesson each day. The results are positive when it comes to working with small groups of middle school and high school students. A combination of these positive results, as well as the need to find a curriculum to teach these specific skills, are what led to the purchase of this curriculum in the district. However, the challenge is to see how effective the program is when modified for an elementary intervention teaching context, which consists of younger students in a small group setting for only 30 minutes per day.

Summary

Four themes have run throughout the literature surrounding teaching intermediate grade readers struggling with decoding skills. This chapter described the reading process, phonics instruction in the primary grades, struggling readers in the intermediate grades, and the different interventions that are available to help these learners. These themes support the idea that the REWARDS Intermediate program includes strategies and instruction in skills that students need to successfully read multisyllabic words. Chapter Three will focus on how I will go about researching the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

Introduction

The impetus of this project came from working with fourth and fifth grade students for several years who lacked mastery of phonics and decoding skills and struggled with grade-level reading, I became frustrated with feeling like the only option I had was to teach them utilizing the same methods I would use to teach a first grader these skills. This led to a shared feeling for both the students and me of boredom and frustration with how slowly things were moving and how "babyish" it felt. I have been searching for the best way to teach these students for many years and this led me to ask the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

Research suggests phonics and decoding instruction are necessary for students that have not reached mastery. However, additional research suggests that instruction needs to be focused on multisyllabic words instead of individual sounds, and instruction should be focused not only on phonics and decoding, but also include fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction, making it balanced in order to support growth in struggling readers. The literature also shows that mindset and motivation is a large part of student growth in reading, which I will look at while I also examine the

students' attitudes and confidence surrounding reading. This chapter describes the details of the study that was created to test the research question.

Research Paradigm

In this action research study, I used quantitative research methods to determine if the REWARDS Intermediate intervention could be adapted to support fourth- and fifth-grade students' growth in reading fluency when reduced from five 50- to 60-minute sessions per week to four or five 30-minute sessions per week. Mills stated that quantitative research is the use of numerical data to "describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest" (2014. p. 6). I used quantitative methods to get an idea of how students felt about reading, to find out if they recognized that their reading became stronger, and to show that the students decoding skills and reading fluency grew throughout the time of the study. In particular, I used an attitude scale and a questionnaire to record students' mindset, attitude and confidence surrounding reading. The FAST CBM-Reading assessment was used for baseline, progress monitoring, and end of intervention data to show a weekly rate of improvement in reading fluency growth. The Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency Pretest and Posttest was used to measure students' growth in ability to correctly read multisyllabic words fluently.

Table 3.1 *Data Collection Tools*

Data Collection Tool	When Administered		
	Before instruction	During instruction	After instruction
Attitude scale	X		X
FAST CBM-Reading	Grade Level CBM	Weekly Progress Monitoring	Grade Level CBM
Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency	Pretest		Posttest

Combined, these data collection tools provided a more complex picture of how the

intervention supported growth in multisyllabic word fluency, attitude and confidence, and

connected text fluency growth. The data collection tools are provided in Table 3.1, as

well as the timeline for when the different tools were used. These multiple sources of data

allowed me to see if a student was growing in these three specific areas of reading, which

the literature shared in Chapter 2 shows will lead to more successful overall reading

skills.

Setting

The research took place in a second through fifth grade level suburban school

located in central Minnesota. During the 2017-2018 school year, the school served

around 710 students. The community was growing very quickly (the school's population

grew 20% from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018), and with this influx of population the student

body became more diverse every year, with a higher percentage of students living in

poverty and students that were struggling with academic skills.

The research study took place in a pull-out setting in an intervention room. There was one other teacher also teaching small groups in the same classroom. Instruction occurred in groups of four students in grades four and five. Each grade had a separate group, with four fourth graders and three fifth graders participating in the study. The students had a reading level of third or fourth grade and had gaps in their phonics and decoding skills. If a student had been in this same school for multiple years, they received direct phonics instruction each year starting in kindergarten, and may have already received different interventions through the school's intervention program. This action research study included 32 days of instruction and eight days of review/assessment in the winter/spring of 2018, with instruction occurring for 25-30 minutes per day. The REWARD Intermediate program describes the timeline taking six weeks; however, they did not include the time to complete the included review and unit assessments within the six week schedule. The next section will explain the participants that are included in the study.

Participants

During the study, the school had six sections of fourth grade and six sections of fifth grade. Students were selected from each grade based on school-wide screening tools including the NWEA MAP reading assessment, winter grade level reading Benchmark Assessment, Qualitative Reading Inventory - 5, and the FAST CBM-Reading Benchmark assessment. The scores that were required for instruction, in an intensive intervention in January of the school year, were grade specific and were set by the district; they are listed in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.2 *4th Grade Reading Levels in January*

Grade 4	Meets expectations	Moderate Risk	High Risk
MAP	> 210	201-210	< 201
FAST CBM-R ORF	> 135	110-135	< 110
Instructional Reading Level	> P	O-P	< O

Table 3.3 *5th Grade Reading Levels in January*

Grade 5	Meets expectations	Moderate Risk	High Risk
MAP	> 214	206-214	< 206
FAST CBM-R ORF	> 149	122-149	< 122
Instructional Reading Level	> S	R-S	< R

The findings shared in the literature review in Chapter Two stress the importance of providing research-based interventions for students who are struggling with reading skills. The students were selected after winter assessments were completed in early January. The study was done with students that meet the criteria set by REWARDS Intermediate, as well as by the district. Archer, Gleason, & Vachon state that REWARDS Intermediate is designed to use with students that are in grades four, five, and six that "read at the third-grade level or above but are unable to accurately and fluently read grade-level passages, read at least 60 correct words per minute, and would benefit from systematic decoding, fluency, and vocabulary instruction" (2014, p. F6). The district defines a third grade reader as one that has test scores reflective of the scores shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 *Third Grade Reading Levels*

Grade 3	Meets expectations	Moderate Risk	High Risk
MAP	> 194	180-193	< 179
FAST CBM-R ORF	>95	69 - 94	< 68
Instructional Reading Level	> M	K - L	< J

Fourth Grade Participants

The four fourth-grade students that participated in the study showed a need for this curriculum based on all of the pre-study assessments, including Benchmark Reading Level, NWEA MAP, and Oral Reading Fluency. Their scores range from beginning to middle of third grade reading abilities. They showed a strong need for multisyllabic word decoding instruction on the Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency Assessment, with between 5 and 11 correct words read in a minute.

All of the students in the fourth grade group had been in different reading interventions at the school in the past. One of them was an English Learner, which was taken into consideration when choosing which aspects of the curriculum to condense for this study. One of them had some behavior considerations and needed external motivation in order to stay on task.

Fifth Grade Participants

The three fifth grade students that participated in the study had a reading level of N through R on the classroom Benchmark reading level in January. This ranges from the beginning of third grade reading level to beginning of fourth grade reading level. Their Oral Reading Fluency score was between 99 and 129, which is in the expected range of

the beginning of 3rd grade to beginning of fourth grade. The students' winter NWEA

MAP assessment scores ranged from 181 to 205, 181 being at risk at the beginning of

third grade, and 205 being a reading level equivalent to on grade level at the beginning of

fourth grade. They showed a strong need for multisyllabic word decoding instruction on

the Multisyllabic Word reading Fluency Assessment, with between eight and 13 correct

words read in a minute.

      Unlike the group of fourth grade students, all of the fifth grade students were new

to our building this year; none had been in the intervention system at this school in the

past and most had very little data in their files from other schools that discuss previous

intervention programming. One of the students was an English Learner, and that was

taken into consideration when the curriculum was being taught.

      The two groups were similar in many ways; however, the intervention history

was still very different. All participants met the recommendations set by the authors of

REWARDS Intermediate; they were all reading at least a beginning of third grade level

when they entered the program. The district definition of a third grade reader was listed

in Table 3.4 above. The participating students demographics and entrance data is shared

in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 *Students Participants: Demographics and Initial Data*

Student	Male/ Female	English Learner?	Race	Jan FAST CBM	Jan NWEA MAP	Jan Reading Level	Multisyllabic words/parts
4.a	male	no	White	106	187	Q	11/33
4.b	female	yes	Black	104	185	N	5/20
4.c	female	no	White	92	187	O	7/17
4.d	male	no	White	117	189	Q	11/42
5.a	male	no	White	99	181	N	6/17
5.b	male	no	White	129	205	P	9/37
5.c	female	yes	Black	103	199	N	13/46

The following section describes what steps will be taken in order to protect the students, families, and school community members involved in this research study.

Ethics

During this study, steps were taken to protect the rights of the participants involved, their families, and others involved in the school community. Pseudonyms for the school, community, and students are used instead of given names to protect student identity when it is important for a reader to distinguish between participants. Consent was obtained from a legal guardian before the beginning of the research study (Consent letter and permission form are provided in Appendix A). Participation was not mandatory, and refusing to participate did not have a negative effect on the instruction given to the student in any way. Consent through Hamline University was obtained before research was started. These steps were be taken to guarantee that the students were protected

throughout the study. The next section describes the tools that were used to collect data throughout the study.

Data-Gathering Tools

Attitude Scale and Questionnaire

A pre-research scale and questionnaire (provided in Appendix B) was given to all students in the group asking them to identify how they felt about different statements addressing reading in their life. The questionnaire section of the document allowed students to identify how they felt and share positive and negative thoughts about reading. This provided the views of each student in a short amount of time (Mills, 2014, p. 93) and allowed me to compare the written responses from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. The attitude scale section of the document provided quantitative data that showed the impact of the instruction on student attitudes about reading (Mills, 2014, p. 102). Combined, these two parts of the document provided a good picture of how the students feel about reading, which directly connects with their motivation to gain skills in literacy as shown in Chapter Two.

Standardized Tests

I collected quantitative data from standardized tests students at the study site took three times a year as a part of school-wide data collection. These data add "to our understanding of how teaching practices affect our students" (Mills, 2014, p.101). The scores that students received on the FAST CBM-Reading Benchmark provided pre- and post-study data that allowed me to see how the instruction affected their reading skills as well as their weekly Rate of Improvement (ROI), which is a strong way to compare their growth to their peers that did not receive this intervention. Newell (2017) shares that

using an ROI to look at growth is beneficial when comparing students' growth when they are starting at different levels, and you can also see if they are growing at a faster rate due to the instruction they are or are not receiving.

Pretest/Posttest

One way that I collected information specific to the program is by giving the Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency pretest and posttest. This allowed me to compare scores from the beginning of the study to the end of the study, and I was able to clearly identify if the instruction supported growth in multisyllabic word reading. This assessment specifically addressed the main purpose of the program.

Progress Monitoring

FAST CBM-Reading was used to follow the progress that students made throughout the study. This helped guide my instruction and allowed me to identify if things were going as I hoped. The next section shares the process with which I used these tools in order to collect data throughout the study.

<div align="center">

Data-gathering Process

</div>

Prior to beginning the study, I considered fall and winter assessment data that had been collected on all students in the school, including a FAST CBM-Reading fluency assessment, NWEA-MAP assessment, and Benchmark reading level. The data collected allowed me to decide which students were in need of additional instruction and interventions, this process is the district's way to identify students in need of the intervention program. The students that were at high risk in more than half of the assessments were then assessed with the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) and the Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency Pretest. These assessments allowed me to

determine what the students' needs were in the subject of reading. As this data was

collected, I assembled the group of students that I worked with for this study. At this time

I sent out a consent letter and permission forms. Once permission was granted, I

administered the attitude scale and questionnaire in order to learn about the students'

feelings about reading. The attitude scale and questionnaire is provided in Appendix B.

Throughout instruction, students were progress monitored weekly with the FAST

CBM-Reading progress monitoring tool. This tool allowed me to track if they were

improving to meet the goal of fluency growth. As instruction concluded, students took

the Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency Posttest and FAST CBM-Reading Benchmark

assessment and they filled out the attitude scale and questionnaire for a second time. All

assessment data was added to the student profile sheet, found in Appendix C, creating a

summary of data for each student. The next section describes how the intervention was

taught.

REWARDS Intermediate Instruction

REWARDS Intermediate was a program created for fourth through sixth grade

students that need instruction in multisyllabic word decoding. As research suggests,

multisyllabic word reading is an important skill for students to have as they are expected

to learn from what they are reading starting in fourth grade. The program included 25

lessons that were meant to be taught in 50-minute sessions, with the final five lessons

requiring 90 minutes each. The lessons followed an "I do it, We do it, You do it" pattern,

allowing students to become independent in the skills for each lesson (Archer et al. 2014,

p. F5). For the first half of the lessons, there was a focus on teaching the students to break

up words into manageable chunks with circling prefixes and suffixes, underlining vowels,

saying parts of the word, saying the whole word, and making it a real word (Archer et al. 2014, p. F10). After they completed many lessons full of practice marking the words in order to read them, the program had students start internalizing these skills by slowly taking away marking and adding practice with automatically recognizing the word parts. The students then began to automatically look for the word parts and say the word, making it a real word (Archer et al. 2014, p. F11). The final lessons incorporated strategy skills that allowed students to attack new multisyllabic words that they find in content areas and reading.

In order to allow students to transfer these new skills into their fluency, the program included word-level fluency tasks, sentence-level fluency tasks, and story-level fluency tasks. As the program progressed these tasks became more difficult, pushing the reader to internalize the skills and strategies that they were learning.

Implementation of REWARDS Intermediate For This Study

Instruction of REWARDS Intermediate as related to this study contained 31 lessons. I taught these three to five days per week based on school scheduling and state testing days. Eleven additional sessions were used to implement the review and quiz assessments included in the REWARDS Intermediate curriculum. As noted earlier, the REWARDS Intermediate curriculum is designed for 50-minute lessons. However, my school schedule only allots 25-30 minutes per lesson. The first 15 lessons were condensed by completing half of the Vowel Identification by Underlining activity and half of the Prefixes and Suffixes Circling activity. I choose to take out half of these activities because the students were catching onto the concepts quickly and were

successful in them after only half of the practice words were completed. As the words became more difficult, the students showed they were able to continue at this pace.

Lessons 16-25 were condensed by combining elements of each of the three activities. They completed half of the Strategy Practice activities, getting practice internalizing the strategy, but not completing all ten words. The students practiced the Sentence Reading and Passage Reading activities with a partner. This allowed me to listen in and coach, but did not require me to listen to each individual on their own. The Rate Development activities in lessons 20-25 were condensed by taking out one of the practice reads, so the students read the passage three times instead of four. These three reads followed the initial read for comprehension. Lessons 20-25, which are written to take 90 minutes, were condensed into 60 minute lessons, with each lesson taking two days. Other than these adjustments due to the time restriction, I followed the program with fidelity in order to collect accurate data through my research to answer the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?" The next section explains how I analyzed the data collected.

Data Analysis

Throughout this study I was looking at three different goals: When set up in this way, did the program support fluency growth? Did the program support student growth in multisyllabic word reading? Did the program support the growth of students' attitudes and confidence in reading? As the study was conducted, the different pieces of data were collected and recorded on the student profile sheet (provided in Appendix C). This provides a summary page on each student's progress.

To discover if the REWARDS Intermediate program supported fluency growth, I used the FAST CBM-Reading Benchmark assessment to see if the students that received instruction in this program acquired a higher weekly Rate of Improvement (ROI) than their grade level peers. The ROI shows the "average weekly growth" (Newell, 2017), comparing their winter score to their spring score. The participant's ROI was then compared to the average ROI of grade level peers that did not receive the intervention due to being in a different intervention or not qualifying for the intervention program. This group of students includes 148 fourth and fifth grade students that are at or below grade level on the fluency measure.

When looking at fluency growth, I also took into consideration the REWARDS Intermediate program student's progress monitoring ROI. This data shows the weekly average based on weekly progress monitoring passages and does not always line up with the benchmark ROI data due to assessment environment change and different daily structures when the benchmark assessment is given in comparison to when the progress monitoring assessment is given.

To discover if the program supported student growth in multisyllabic word reading, I used the Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency Pretest and Posttest data to assess whether the students were able to read more multisyllabic words than they were when we began. I then examined the students' growth in how many words they were able to read in a minute.

To see if the program met the goal of seeing an increase in students' attitudes, mindset, and confidence in reading, I looked at the attitude scale and questionnaire

responses given at the beginning of the study and compared them to the responses of the attitude scale and questionnaire at the close of the study.

Summary

This chapter described the quantitative research paradigm that helped me answer the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?" I described the setting of the study, the participants involved, how the participants were protected, the tools used to collect data, and the implementation of the program during the study. The chapter concluded by explaining how the data was analyzed to determine the answer to the research question at the end of the study.

Chapter Four will share the results found after implementing the research study. The chapter will include data from all three of the assessments listed in order to determine if the REWARDS Intermediate intervention program is effective when taught in this structure, and how effective it was in promoting growth in multisyllabic word fluency, attitude and confidence, and connected text fluency.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

When I originally asked my research question, I was intrigued to find out if the REWARDS Intermediate curriculum would be a useful intervention to help my fourth and fifth grade students who were still struggling with decoding skills. They still needed instruction in complex vowel sounds, syllables, and reading multisyllabic words. Struggling with these things led to low fluency skills and, as Kuhn (2009) shares, fluency is a large prerequisite to understanding text. Additionally, because motivation is another key component to reading success among intermediate students, I chose to use "striving readers" throughout my actual study. Beyond the curriculum, I am constrained by a set teaching schedule. The basis for my teaching intervention time is based on 30- minute teaching blocks, which does not align with the recommended 50-minute block for REWARDS Intermediate. Therefore, I was led to ask the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

The curriculum is created to be taught in 30 lessons. When taught four to five days a week, this would take between six and eight weeks. It took 14 weeks from starting instruction to finishing this study, and there were many reasons for this delay. Three of

the weeks we did not meet due to state testing, and eight days of instruction were missed due to holidays, teacher absence from the classroom, or other meetings. These days caused some weeks to have only three instructional days instead of the four or five that were planned. The final reason for interruptions was that I took time to review and proctor the unit assessments that were included with the curriculum. I discovered that the six weeks that the authors described as the timeline for teaching this curriculum did not include the unit assessments or review sheets. Due to this fact, I took a day or two to review the meanings of the vocabulary words and affixes before giving each of the unit tests. This information is important while analyzing information and data that will lead to an answer to the research question.

In order to answer my research question, I looked for growth in multisyllabic word fluency, growth in attitude and mindset, and growth in connected text fluency. What follows are the results of the three assessments I used with participating students to determine whether the adaptations I made to the REWARDS Intermediate curriculum were impactful.

Multisyllabic Word Fluency

The Multisyllabic Word Fluency Assessment was chosen in order to see if the intervention program had a positive effect on the students' multisyllabic word decoding skills. The assessment came as part of the REWARDS Intermediate intervention program. It provides the student with a list of multisyllabic words to read, and the student reads the words for one minute. The words on the list begin as two syllable words and grow to six syllable words. There are two pieces of data collected; the first is the number of full words read by the students in one minute, and the second is the number of

individual word parts read in a minute. In Figures 4.1 and 4.2, the dark grey is the
student's January score and the light grey shows the amount of growth shown when the
students were assessed in May.

I will discuss the full word data first. This data is shown in Figure 4.1, and
compares each of the students' correct words read in January to their correct words read
in May. As shown in this figure, the REWARDS Intervention program supported growth
in all of the students; however, some students grew much more than others, with one
student (4c) tripling their score and student 5b nearly tripling as well. On the low end of
the range, students 4a, 5a, and 5c did not even double their score. Students grew in their
multisyllabic word reading skills, but not at a consistent rate across the group.

Figure 4.1 *Multisyllabic Word Growth by Student*
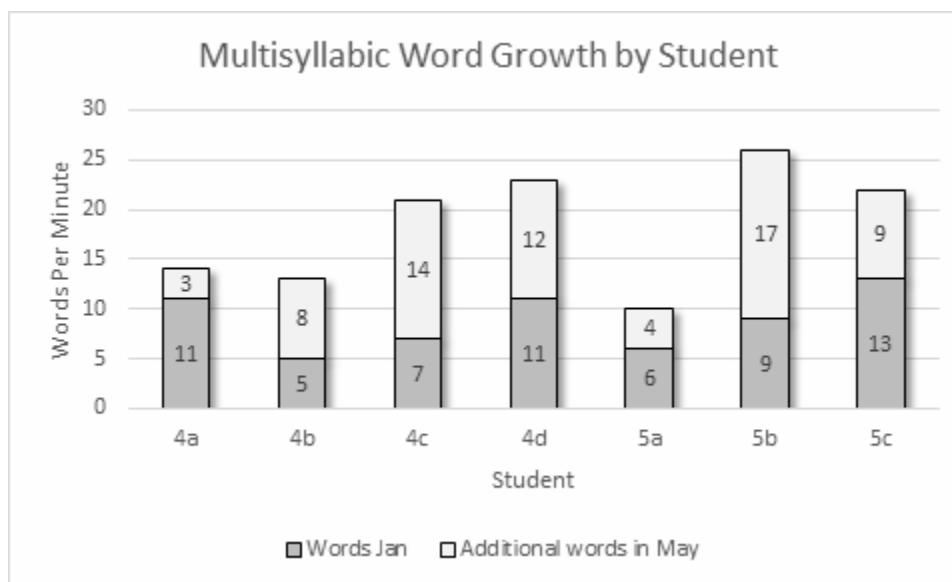
While growth in full-word data was variable, word part growth showed greater
gains. All seven students showed growth when working on recognizing and reading
individual word parts automatically. Figure 4.2 shows the data for student growth in word

parts instead of whole words. Based on the research shared in Chapter 2, learning word parts should support growth in fluency and whole word decoding.

Figure 4.2 *Word Part Growth by Student*
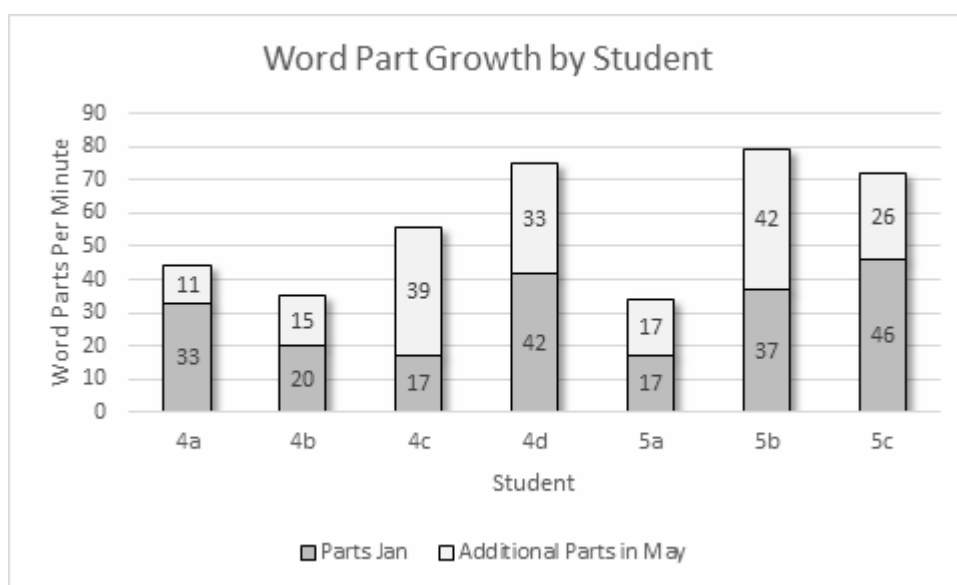
When looking at the intervention's effect on word part instruction, the students showed growth in their word part reading fluency. All added 10 or more word parts, with some gaining around 40 word parts. In word parts, the strongest growth was shown in students 4c, 4d, and 5b, and the weakest growth in students 4a, 4b, and 5a.

When comparing the data surrounding whole word growth in Figure 4.1 and word part growth in Figure 4.2, there are some similarities. Many of the students that had the strongest growth were the same across these two assessments. The next piece of the puzzle of answering the research question is to look at the how students' attitudes and beliefs about reading changed throughout this study.

Mindset and Attitude

With the Attitude Survey and Questionnaire, I was looking to see if the intervention program would have a positive effect on the students' mindsets and attitudes toward reading. I had them fill out the assessment (found in Appendix B) in January and then again in May when instruction was complete. As I scored the survey portion, I numbered the ratings from 0 to 4 and used those numbers to assign a score to the student responses. The data from the survey section is shown in Figure 4.3, with the light grey bar showing the student's survey score in January and the dark grey showing their score in May.

Figure 4.3 *Attitude Survey Scores by Student*
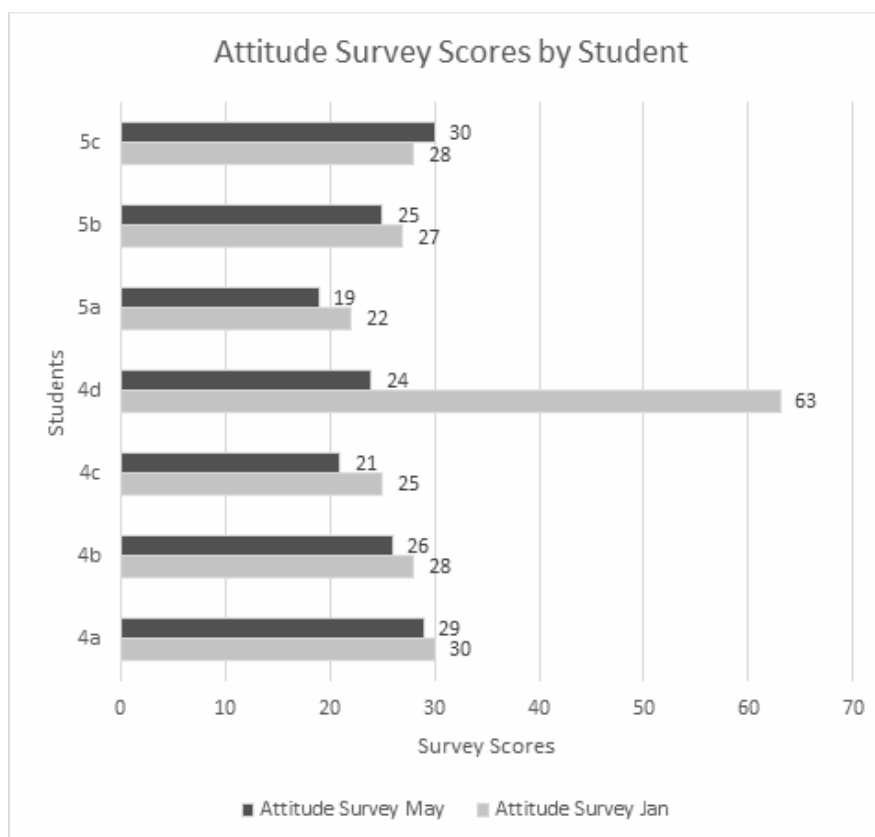
Almost all of the students showed a negative change in their attitudes toward reading from January to May. One of their scores dropped more than 50%, but most were

within five points. The one student that did score a higher survey score in May gained
two points.

Included in the Attitude Survey and Questionnaire were some open ended
questions in order for students to show their thinking in narrative form; these comments
are shown in Table 4.1. If their comments in January and May were related, I have listed
both in order to show growth and/or other changes in their mindset.

Table 4.1 *Comments Made by Students on the Attitude Survey*

Student	Comment 1 (January)	Comment 2 (May)
4a	I am really good at using my finger (Jan)	I am really good at making the words make sense (May)
	I struggle with words (Jan)	I struggle with understanding (May)
4b	I am really good at short words (Jan)	I am really good at understanding (May)
	I struggle with long words (Jan)	I struggle with words I don't know how to spell (May)
4c		I am really good at speeding up (May)
4d	I struggle with staying on a page (Jan)	I am really good at reading in my head (May)
5b		I am really good at going for a long time without stopping. (May)
5c		I am really good at breaking up the words (May)
	I like to read graphic novels	Adventures and fantasy

Connected Text Fluency

When examining students' growth in connected text fluency, I used the FAST

CBMr Benchmark and Progress Monitoring assessments. I focused on their Rate of

Improvement (ROI), which is defined by the FASTBridge Learning System as, "A measure of student progress over a particular interval, usually weekly or monthly," ("Glossary A-Z, n.d"). The ROI allows me to compare how quickly they gained words in their fluency instead of a pre/posttest idea of growth.

By comparing the weekly (ROI) data on the FAST CBMr Benchmark assessment of the students that received the intervention with the data of their peers that did not receive the intervention, I was looking to see if the intervention would show a greater ROI for the students that went through the REWARDS Intervention program. Included in this discussion is the data shown by the study group throughout the intervention on their weekly progress monitoring assessments.

While looking at this information, it is important to note that the control group of the intervention students' peers does not include the entire fourth and fifth grades. This group includes only students that are at or below grade level based on district-wide benchmark data (shown in Chapter 3: Tables 3.2 and 3.3). There were 148 students total in the control group.

Figure 4.4 shows the data points for the control group as well as the REWARDS Intervention group. The dark grey bar is the Progress Monitoring ROI for the study group, the medium grey bar is the Benchmark ROI for the study group, and the light grey bar is the Benchmark ROI for the control group.

Figure 4.4 *Average Weekly ROI for different groups and tests*
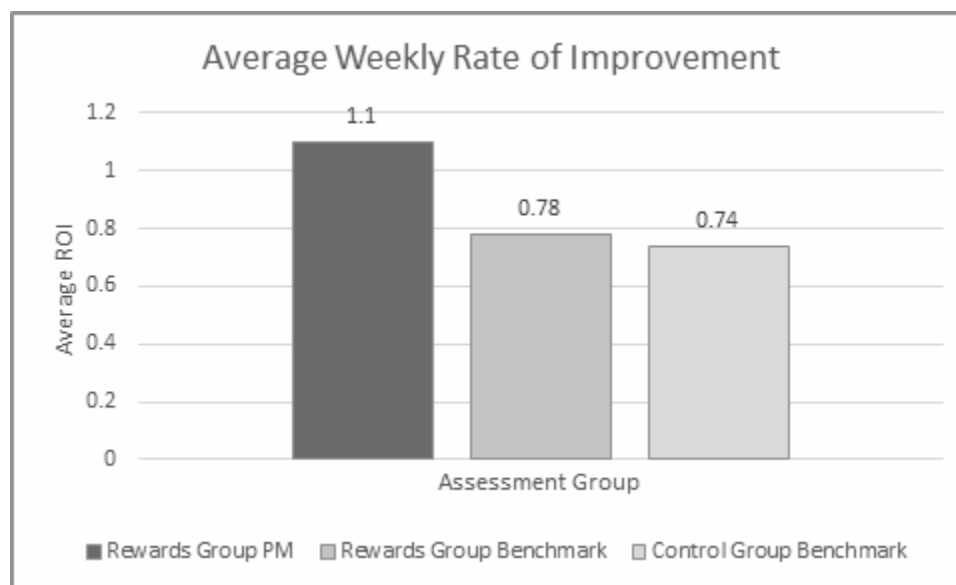
As this graph shows, the Progress Monitoring ROI is much greater than the

Benchmark ROI for both groups. The students participating in the study gained 1.1 words

per week as shown on their weekly fluency assessments, but when the benchmark

assessments were given in May the same students showed only 0.78 word growth per

week. This is a little higher than the Control group's growth of 0.74 words per week.

However, the Progress Monitoring data shows that the seven students that participated in

the study had an average growth of 1.1 words per week. Compared to the control group's

average ROI on the Benchmark Assessment, this is one-third more words per week.

The data from these three assessments paint a clearer picture of the answer to the

question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving

readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?" In the next chapter, I will discuss the

data in depth. Chapter Five will also discuss the limitations, major learnings, how the

information will be communicated to others, and future considerations for research and

study as based on the data and trends found during the semester of study on the

REWARDS Intervention.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Working with striving readers has become increasingly more important to me throughout my career. I am working to use research-based strategies with my students in order to maximize their learning experiences. I am also a teacher within a larger school community where I implement district curriculum. This study outlines my efforts to meld these two aspects of my professional life as I worked to determine the answer to my research question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?" I will now discuss what I learned from the data, the limitations of the study, how I will communicate my findings with others, and questions for future study that emerged from my research.

What I Learned

Each of the three assessments used, and their data, allowed me to gain information on whether the intervention was effective when taught in 30 minutes. The Multisyllabic Word Inventory, Attitude Questionnaire and Survey, and FAST CBMr gave a picture of how the intervention supported student growth in multisyllabic word fluency, growth in attitude and mindset, and growth in connected text fluency. Even as I included and collected data from three different assessments, I think it is important to mention that there are still gaps in my understanding of these students as learners based only on the

numbers and data. I was able to observe many things during my teaching, which caused me to adjust as I went through each lesson so that students were getting what they needed individually. These three assessments are not perfect, and are used for different purposes. It is important to view them as slivers of information instead of the whole picture of a complex young human.

Multisyllabic Word Fluency

The seven participating students were not consistent in their growth on the Multisyllabic Word Inventory. They all showed growth in both word part recognition (Figure 4.1) and full word reading fluency (Figure 4.2), however some showed much greater growth than others. This could have been due to many factors. One student was assessed toward the end of the study and showed a need for specialized instruction due to a learning disability, and another student that showed lower growth than others is working on figuring out the English language. I also noticed that students that were stronger readers when they began the program grew much more than their peers that were reading at a lower level. These stronger readers could have been more developmentally ready for the content, or the text may not have all been new to them.

The students that showed the most growth in their word part fluency were also the students that grew the most in their whole word fluency. This data shows that there is a correlation between learning to read word parts and whole word fluency, and the REWARDS Intermediate intervention program supports the growth of multisyllabic word reading and fluency as claimed by the authors (Archer, Gleason, and Vachon, 2014). However, I have found that, as with any instruction, it does not support consistent growth across all students in the intervention.

Attitude and Confidence

I will admit that I was frustrated with the students' May survey scores (Figure 4.3). To see the scores on the attitude toward reading survey drop was disheartening. As shared in Chapter 2, Adams (2013) and Dweck (2016) stress, the student needs to change their mindset and choose the learner path in order to be willing to stretch their thinking. Throughout instruction, conversations with the students gave me reason to believe they were enjoying reading more than before, they were seeing how the skills they were learning were transferring to their work outside of group, and they were using growth mindset language. I had expected to see a growth in the survey scores instead of a drop. The attitude survey score drop makes me wonder what other influences were at play. Did they rush through it and not take it seriously? Would I have gotten different results if I had had them fill out the survey before the state testing push at the end of April? If the responses to their May survey were 100% accurate, the curriculum does not support student's confidence in their reading ability, as is claimed in Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2014).

However, this is direct challenge to me as a teacher. As I reflect on the fact that I want my students to have a growth mindset, I also need to promote this and focus on it for myself. I need to make sure I am modeling and believing in growth through information such as this feedback on the survey. Gallagher and Thordarson's research in 2018 focuses on the fact that saying, "Yes, But" will immediately shut down the ability to take a risk and grow, instead, they push the idea of saying, "Yes, And…" (pp. 96). This is something that I as a teacher and advocate for striving readers needs to make a part of my

own mindset. Students and I, as a teacher, need to see the challenge of not always looking for the "right answer," but to see the process of learning in all difficult things.

With student growth and mindset as the goal, the comments that the students gave to the questionnaire (Table 4.1), give a different picture of their confidence in reading. Throughout the comments there were many common threads. Students are more comfortable reading longer words than they were before this instruction and they have moved from feeling like they are struggling to read the words to focusing on things like comprehension and spelling. They have also noticed that their fluency has become stronger through comments like "I am really good at speeding up," (Student 4c), "I am really good at reading in my head," (Student 4d), and "I am really good at going for a long time without stopping," (Student 5b). Even with a disconnect between the comments and the survey scores, I see their growth in the comments and how much their attitude and mindset has changed around reading. It is much more difficult to put your struggles and strengths into words than it is to circle a survey score, so I put more weight on comments that the students gave. With this data and information in mind, the REWARDS Intermediate intervention programs' claim that it "Allows students to gain confidence in their reading ability," (Archer, Gleason, and Vachon, 2014, p. F5) is accurate. As shown in the comments listed in Table 4.1, the students that participated in this study developed a stronger positive attitude and mindset toward their reading skills. The amount of growth varied between students; however, they all grew in their reading skills and demonstrated through their comments that they are more confident in their reading. Combined with the data surrounding multisyllabic word fluency, the students in this action study are meeting the growth expectations of the intervention curriculum. The next, and final, area of data

that we will examine surrounds the goal of students' connected text fluency through intervention instruction.

Connected Text Fluency

The participating students' benchmark data was a surprise to me in May. Figure 4.4 showed the comparison of the participating students connected text fluency ROI and the control groups. After progress monitoring the seven participating students each week throughout the instruction of the intervention, I had seen a large growth in their connected text fluency, a word growth of 1.1 words per week. This was one-third higher than the same group's benchmark assessment at the end of May (0.78). I had expected to see their scores to show a much larger ROI than that. This comparison is not what was expected. This discrepancy could be caused by many factors. Such factors might include the benchmark assessment being given when the regular schedule and structure of the group was not consistent or assessment exhaustion since the May benchmark was given after three weeks of state testing occurred. For these reasons, I feel that the Progress Monitoring data, with weekly assessments given, is a more accurate data point for the students in the Tier 3 study group. As Tankersley (2003) described reading as a process with many interconnected parts, my research showed how learning complex vowel sounds, implementing that knowledge into word parts, and transferring it into full words supports fluency growth on a progress monitoring assessment. The data shows me that there is a strong basis for the claim that Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2014, p F5) make about REWARDS students, saying that the program, "increases their oral and silent reading rate." The students grew in their decoding skills, confidence, and their connected text fluency, the three goals I had set out to accomplish at the beginning of my study. I

am excited about the results surrounding my goal of finding a strong intervention program to use with students that are lacking these skills.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of my study is the small size of the study group. There is the potential for results to be more statistically significant with a larger group. While acknowledging this, it is also important to recognize that group size is not always within a teacher's control. I can, however, continue to collect similar data for students who engage with this curriculum in subsequent years. Such longitudinal data could provide additional insights.

Another limitation was the amount of interruptions throughout instruction. As stated in the previous chapter, there were many interruptions to instruction throughout the study due to state testing, holidays, the teacher being out of the classroom for meetings or being sick, and review and unit testing days. These interruptions made it difficult to stick to the timeline set for the study before I began. I do not know how this affected the data, but it did affect the fluidity of instruction. When instruction is fluid, the group can move between lessons and assignments without having to review the structure or expectations each time. When review isn't needed, the lessons flow much smoother and more is accomplished in the 30-minute lesson time. Unplanned interruptions in the curriculum timeline made it difficult to continue without reviewing, and they also made it hard for students to stay engaged with the material. This is something that needs to be considered in the future, as the students may show more growth if the instruction is given more regularly.

As I was working with the data from the Multisyllabic Word Fluency Assessment, national norms or expected growth scores were not included with the assessment. I could not locate them online either. This is a limitation that makes it difficult to compare data and know how much the students' should have grown from beginning to end of instruction, and due to this there is not as much clarity in what the data means. I am not aware of how many words an average fifth grade student should have learned between the beginning and ending of instruction. Because of this limitation, I compared student growth to each other, instead of to a norm. I also counted any increase in score as growth. As a teacher it is important to know what would be expected growth in the same amount of time in order to see if a student is growing more or less than expected.

The final limitation that I found is the fact that the final assessments were completed after state testing was completed. This could have affected final data due to test exhaustion, the normal routine being mixed up, and students feeling ready to be done with school for the school year. The students' stamina decreased greatly after the state tests took place, a factor that was witnessed in all aspects of the intervention, including their willingness to continue the strengths they showed before the state testing occurred. The students were slower to get their materials out and get ready to start the lesson, they began to show behaviors, like interrupting each other, which I wasn't seeing before state testing took place; at times, it felt as if I was pulling them through the lesson.

It would be interesting to see the data from a similar study that did not include such limitations. As I continue to use this curriculum in 30 minute sessions, I will see how other students do and add their data to my knowledge of how well this intervention works in my teaching setting.

Next Steps

The learning gained from doing this study will not end with this capstone. I look forward to sharing this data with the rest of the RTI Lead Teacher team in my district as well as with my coworkers that work with struggling readers in fourth and fifth grade. I plan to meet with my colleagues the first few weeks of school in the fall to share this information. I will also be sharing the data and findings of this study at the first meeting that we have as an RTI Lead team in the fall, but will give some of the information over email before school starts due to our ordering information being due at the beginning of September and the want for my fellow teachers to know about this curriculum and how it supports student growth in the upper elementary grades.

I also will focus on helping my coworkers and peers throughout the district learn about the power of changing our language as teachers and mentors. One idea that Harvey and Ward (2017) feel is important is that we can help a student believe in their ability to learn more and succeed by changing our language from "struggling readers" to "striving readers" is powerful. This is something we all need to focus on as we work with all learners. Language is something we can change without going to our administrators and district for permission, it is a challenge to us as teachers to be aware of the language we are using with and about our students.

Final Reflections

I began my capstone by writing about my journey through the many different chapters of teaching that have brought me to where I am now in my professional career. This study was the next step, helping me solve a continuous problem that I find as I work with struggling learners in second through fifth grade. I hoped to find an intervention that

would support growth in decoding, confidence, and fluency for older elementary

students, which led me to ask the question, "Does REWARDS Intermediate remain an

effective intervention for striving readers when adapted for a 30-minute time frame?"

While I searched for the answer to this question, I explained my journey and

purpose for the study in Chapter One, and shared the research from experts in the field

that surrounds the process of reading and working with struggling readers in Chapter

Two. Chapter Three explained the study I completed and laid out the logistics of

condensing a 50 minute intervention into a 30-minute intervention. Chapter Four

examined the data that came out of studying if the REWARDS Intermediate intervention

would be effective in supporting reading growth when it is set up as described in Chapter

Three. Lastly, Chapter Five includes the limitations in this study, major learnings that

came out of it, and a plan for sharing this information with others. Throughout all of this,

my question was answered and I am excited that the students' growth does support the

aspects of reading that the curriculum is set out to instruct, and that it did so in 30-minute

lessons.

As I started this journey, I knew a great deal about the process of reading.

Through the journey of this capstone, I was excited to be able to focus on reading in the

intermediate elementary grades and even more so on struggling/striving readers in those

grades. I am now more prepared to work with students in these grades that are lacking

decoding skills, confidence, and fluency. I look forward to implementing this curriculum

regularly as students are placed in my classroom due to missing such skills. This study is

a starting point; more needs to be done to find out the best way to teach this intervention

in 30-minute lessons. I look forward to continuing to tweak it to support growth in my

students. I also hope that others will take this research and use it as a starting point for their own studies. We can all learn from each other when looking for the best ways to reach and support striving readers.

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Appendix A

Parent Consent Letter and Permission Form

Parent Consent Letter

January, 2018

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently a graduate student at Hamline University, in St. Paul, MN, working on an advanced degree in literacy education. As a part of my graduate work, I will be conducting action research in my classroom from February to April, 2018.

The purpose of this letter is to ask permission for your child to take part in this research study. It is important to note that this research will be cataloged in the Hamline Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic database. It may also be published. In all cases, your child's identity will remain confidential.

The research study will be looking at the intervention program REWARDS Intermediate, which is an intervention to help fourth and fifth grade students develop multisyllabic word decoding skills which will support fluency growth. As I conduct this study I will collect data through weekly fluency readings, word decoding assessments, and an attitude scale. These are no different than the students that are not in the study will complete.

There is no risk for your child to participate, the program will support decoding skills that readers need to obtain in order to read difficult text. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not publish information about individual students, such as their names, school, district or other characteristics that could be used to identify them. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your child from the study at any time without negative consequence.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University, the White Bear Lake School District, and from the school principal, Teresa Dahlem, to conduct this study.

If you agree to have your child participate, keep the first two pages of this document. Fill out the agreement page and return by mail, by copying and then emailing me, or by returning to _____ with your child no later than _____.
If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call me.

_____

Phone:
Email:

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

<u>Keep this full page for your records.</u>

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be observing students and collecting data. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the project at any time.

I also understand that test scores and data will be collected, analyzed, and possibly excerpted in the capstone project.

Please select the appropriate box.

☐ I give permission for my student to be a part of this instruction and study.

☐ I do not give permission

Student name _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

Participant Copy

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

<u>Return this page to by .</u>

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be observing students and collecting data. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the project at any time.

I also understand that test scores and data will be collected, analyzed, and possibly excerpted in the capstone project.

Please select the appropriate box.

☐ I give permission for my student to be a part of this instruction and study.

☐ I do not give permission

Student name _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher Copy

Appendix B

Attitude Scale and Questionnaire

Name _____

Attitude Scale and Questionnaire

Please circle the level of agreement you have with each statement.
Strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD)

1. I enjoy reading at home.   SA   A   U   D   SD
2. I would rather read than play a game.   SA   A   U   D   SD
3. I read on the weekends and during school breaks.   SA   A   U   D   SD
4. I like to choose the books I read.   SA   A   U   D   SD
5. I to read to learn about new things.   SA   A   U   D   SD
6. I enjoy reading the books and articles my teacher gives me.   SA   A   U   D   SD
7. I read for entertainment.   SA   A   U   D   SD
8. When I read and come to a word I do not know, I can figure out what the word is.   SA   A   U   D   SD
9 .I have strategies for understanding words with prefixes and suffixes.   SA   A   U   D   SD
10. I can break a long word up in order to read it.   SA   A   U   D   SD
Scores per rating: SA=4   A=3   U=2   D=1   SD=0

The first three words that come to mind to describe reading are: _____ _____ _____
I like to read about:
I do not like to read about:
When it comes to reading, I am really good at:
When it comes to reading, I struggle with:

Appendix C

Student Profile Sheet

Student Profile Sheet

Student Name: _____   Grade: _____

Teacher: _____

<u>FAST CBM-Reading Benchmark</u>   <u>NWEA MAP</u>   <u>Benchmark Reading Level</u>
 Fall   Winter Spring   Winter   Fall   Winter
Spring

<u>Multisyllabic Word Reading Fluency</u>
 Pretest   Posttest

Words	Parts	Words	Parts

<u>Attitude Scale</u> (see attached for written comments)
Pretest Posttest

<u>Progress Monitoring</u>

FAST CBM-R PM										
Unit Checks	1	2	3	4	5					