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Moving To A District Balanced Literacy Program: A Change Leadership Plan

Cynthia A. Marks
National Louis University

Carol A. Benda
National Louis University

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MOVING TO A DISTRICT BALANCED LITERACY PROGRAM:

A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

Carol A. Benda and Cynthia A. Marks

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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ABSTRACT

Based upon the requirements of the No Child Left Behind mandate, schools that failed to achieve the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) designation for two consecutive years were required to implement a comprehensive school reform model. This change plan examined the movement from the comprehensive school reform model Success For All (SFA) to a balanced literacy framework within Harmony District 841. The framework advocated for balanced literacy instruction that supported the integration of authentic reading and writing experiences, application of literacy strategies and skills, implementation of a culturally relevant text, focus on professional development for teachers, and provision for effective instructional tools that support and nurture implementation with fidelity.

PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

Vince Lombardi once said, "The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand." This statement has proven true in creating a balanced literacy framework. One of the most valuable lessons learned in creating the balanced literacy framework is that collaboration is not only encouraged in learning, but also is the spirit that gives life to all that we do. When one learns to collaborate, one is equipped with effective problem-solving skills, innovation, and the mindset of a life-long learner. The second lesson learned is that both change and growth are painful, but necessary. It takes time to realize that not all change promotes growth, and not all change necessarily moves one forward. The biggest impediment to growth is in one's mind. Perhaps the most meaningful engine of change when developing a balanced literacy framework, one powerful enough to confront state and federal mandates, may not be the quantity of programs, but rather the quality and fidelity in which the programs can be implemented. The final and most important lesson learned is that it is okay to celebrate successes along the way, but celebrants must also notice and respond to the lessons learned from failures along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

According to Wagner and Kegan (2006), the National Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP) reported that accomplishments in reading and writing were sobering at

best. Based on their analysis, the average reading scores of both elementary and

secondary school-age students showed virtually no change since 1980. Realizing that

improving academics was even more critical for the growth of its students, Harmony

District 841 adopted the Success for All (SFA) reading program, which teachers have

implemented since 2004. SFA is a comprehensive school reform model designed to

improve student achievement in response to low reading scores on the state standardized

test. Based upon the requirements of the No Child Left Behind mandate, schools that

failed to achieve the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) designation for two consecutive

years were required to implement a comprehensive school reform model.

Two of the three junior high schools in Harmony District 841 fell within this

guideline. Each building explored different models with the staff, eventually voting on

the model that would be selected. The model chosen by the two junior high schools was

the SFA program (n.d.). This program was designed to provide a means to increase

reading comprehension, writing, word attack, and fluency skills, which were areas that

the state standardized test identified as areas of concern. The third junior high showed

consistent growth; therefore, they were not required to implement any school reform

program. The third junior high was utilizing a literacy program they entitled RAMS

(Reading and Math Success), based on a data-driven program created by the University

of Kansas. This program focused on the basic skills needed and provided in-depth

enrichment in the areas of reading and math. Comparing the reading data from schools

implementing SFA strategies to the junior high utilizing the RAMS program, central

office administration began to question the effectiveness of the SFA program and its

ability to meet the needs of the students in District 841.

Wagner and Kegan (2006) explained in their book, *Change Leadership: A*

Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools, that identifying the actual problem is often

more complicated than finding the solution. "Misunderstanding the problem," they

explained, "leads to selecting strategies that fail to meet the challenges at the national,

state, and local levels that have not met the challenge head-on" (p. 3). Maintaining the

focus of our previous work, the purpose of this change plan will be to provide a

sustainable system of literacy instruction that reliably increases the reading ability of

students in the junior high setting.

<div align="center">Statement of Problem</div>

The current reading program, SFA, utilized in Harmony District 841 no longer

met the needs of the students, as demonstrated by student scores on state achievement test

(see Appendix A). The SFA program materials, though designed to address students

struggling in the areas of comprehension, writing, word attack, and fluency skills, were

scripted. This left teachers with little to no autonomy on what or how to teach in their

classrooms. Literature suggested by the program failed to reflect the cultural heritage of

the students in Harmony District 841. Due to their inability to relate to the literature,

students lacked motivation to read. Additionally, surveys taken at Open House and other

family events indicated that many of the students in District 841 did not have books in

their homes. Furthermore, many did not possess a library card; hence, reading was not an

exercise often practiced in the home. Adding to the problem, the state made changes in achievement requirements through the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). With the lack of cultural relatedness, lack of access to reading materials, and the introduction of new achievement standards, SFA failed to provide the framework for students' success.

Walberg and Greenberg (1998) referred to a study of one Success for All school in Charleston, South Carolina. The study was conducted by three University of Maryland researchers. The study showed that the program had "an average effect of near zero" (p. 132-135). The study went on to show that Success for All students scored around the 50th percentile or the same as matched control groups, according to Walberg and Greenberg. SFA founder Robert Slavin disputed the claim of Walberg and Greenberg by charging that the Charleston school "never" implemented the program adequately.

Harmony District 841 teachers stated that they have not seen the student improvement promised by the program; as a result, they became disengaged and lacked enthusiasm and rigor while teaching. One teacher in the district lamented, "There is not enough autonomy in the SFA program. The lessons are too scripted and don't allow for the addition of supplemental materials that might enhance student learning and leaves little room for independent study, reading and growth." Another teacher stated that the vocabulary and the literary elements, seem to be "hidden" in the program. The students do not realize they have been taught this information when they need to reproduce it on the state standardized test. Student interviews revealed that they were bored with the same routine day in and day out, reading materials lacked relevance to their everyday lives, and the materials failed to provide interest and motivation to improve.

When first adopted, comprehensive school reform grants were available through the state. With these funds, Harmony District 841 was able to purchase not only the program, but also the professional development required to implement the program with fidelity. The SFA Foundation provided intensive professional development both in-house and through conferences for teachers and administrators. Teachers and administrators regularly attended these conferences and workshops and brought back current information and strategies to implement within the classroom. As with many other initiatives, our perception is that comprehensive school reform funds provided through the state have decreased. Harmony District 841 had to decide whether or not to utilize Title 1 funds to continue the purchasing of the program and materials or to provide teachers and administrators the professional development offered by the SFA Foundation.

Harmony District 841 had a teacher turnover rate of 31.1% compared to the states' 14.3% turnover rate for the same period, according to the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC). These were teachers who had not received formal training in the SFA program. In an attempt to abate this problem, Harmony District 841 began working with the SFA Foundation to bring trainers into the district to provide professional development. The training proved to be insufficient, as the turnover in staff occurred faster than the professional development, resulting in too many ill-prepared new teachers to teach the reading program with fidelity. Through this change plan, we hope to provide the evidence needed to encourage teacher autonomy, the gradual release of responsibility to students, and a sense of ownership to both students and staff. We believe this accomplishment could take place through a balanced literacy framework.

Rationale

Culturally responsive teaching is one component of a balanced literacy framework. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), "Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning" (p. 17-18). This not only impacts a student's academic work, but their behavior as well. Our belief, therefore, is that when teachers understand students and actively work to include students' culture into teaching, students feel valued. When students are valued, the number of referrals to the office for inappropriate behavior due to disengagement by the students decreases. The district provided two in-depth professional development opportunities to assist teachers on culturally responsive teaching. One opportunity was a presentation by Mr. Larry Bell. Mr. Bell, an educational consultant for the last 20 years, has worked with hundreds of schools across the nation sharing his strategies with teachers and administrators to help them increase their students' achievement scores.

Dr. Sonya Whitaker, a national speaker and superintendent from Lockport, Illinois, presented another opportunity. Dr. Whitaker released a professional development DVD in 2010 entitled, *The Culturally Responsive Teacher: How Understanding Culture Positively Impacts Instruction and Student Achievement*. These professional development opportunities were designed to support teachers' transition back into the classroom and to better prepare them to implement the 21st century teaching and learning skills required to meet the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). We believe this would then translate into teachers being able to engage more efficiently with students in lessons, thereby increasing student achievement.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data gathered to assess a program's effectiveness require a close examination of the strategies and methodologies needed to develop a balanced literacy program that reaches and meets students' needs. Accordingly, "The best practices of any profession are not gained in a vacuum but implemented and sustained in environments that intentionally support, enhance, and sustain those practices and include several dimensions" (California, California, & California, 1999, p. 11).

Developing an effective literacy program that builds reading competence for all students through proven instructional practices is vital to student success. When developing this program, we considered three components that are critical to the design, implementation and sustainability of a robust literacy program:

- Professional development that equips teachers with a solid knowledge base
- Effective instructional tools aligned with the knowledge base
- School systems that support and nurture implementation

According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), "One way you know that there is an adaptive challenge facing your organization or community is that the problem persists even after a series of attempted technical fixes" (p. 182). Harmony District 841 attempted to fix the problem when it adopted the SFA comprehensive school reform model. They, however, failed to realize the problem they faced was not a systemic one, but an adaptive one that would require a more intensive change plan.

Over the past decade, there have been minor reforms. Individual changes in buildings, such as time dedicated to SFA or materials used to teach SFA, were allowed as modifications to the current program to increase student achievement. The reforms, though minor in nature, did not directly challenge the fundamental tenets of what needed

to happen in the classroom. Even with modifications, student growth continued to fall short of the state expectations.

Table 1

ISAT Reading Percentage

ISAT Reading % Total Correct - 5 Year Average 2009-13

	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
District	59%	61%	60%	61%	61%	64%
State	67%	69%	69%	71%	69%	74%
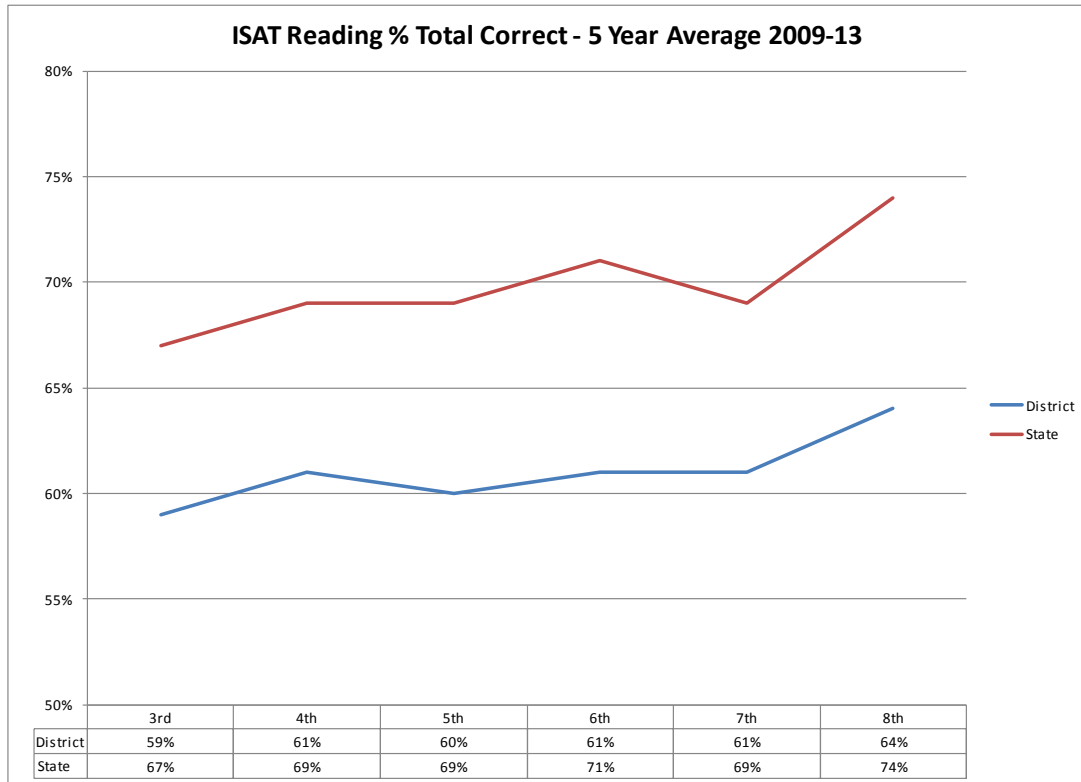
Harmony District 841 worked under the basic assumption that teachers know how to teach all students new skills. Wagner and Kegan's (2006) philosophy is in opposition to that thought process. They would challenge the district to look at the problem, not from a technical standpoint, but rather as an adaptive challenge that would require a more in-depth understanding of the problem as well as the solution.

Designing, implementing, and sustaining an effective literacy program was everyone's concern and obligation. It required a well-designed and ongoing professional

development program that would equip teachers with the knowledge base needed for effective literacy instruction. It also required a support system and appropriate tools tightly linked to the research. Moreover, an effective literacy program required a support system that was introduced by local leadership to ensure smooth implementation and an enduring effect.

Goals

The goal of this change plan was to develop an efficient, balanced literacy framework that provided teachers the tools and professional development needed to improve junior high student's literacy skills. The plan was influenced, in part, by the work of Reeves (2009), who offered four essential components consistent across many leadership contexts: what will or will not change, the organizational culture, ensuring the right tools are in place, and relentless personal attention and "scut work" by the leader (p. 38-39). With these essentials in mind, several goals have been identified for this change plan:

- Creating independent readers by providing autonomy
- Increasing student vocabulary, oratory, and writing skills
- Identifying materials that value the students' cultures and promote growth

Reinventing the district literacy program was an adaptive venture. This venture required administrators and teachers to achieve a greater understanding of their accountability for "scut work" tasks that may be tedious, monotonous, or trivial and menial, and often inherent to a project.

Change did not come easy. District and building administrators fully understood that if this change plan was to be successful, they must unite the entire staff in

collaborative support of a collective vision of balanced literacy instruction. School leadership had to be versed and united in the message given to the staff and responsible for marshaling the resources needed, providing the time, and staying the course of the program as it was developed. Leadership proved to be heroic and able to resist the many forces and naysayers that tried to inhibit implementation of an effective literacy program. Identifying other leaders within the building and utilizing their expertise while building a solid leadership team were essential to a successful program implementation.

Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, Harmony District 841 had evidence to show that they needed to change the literacy program. This need provided the researchers with the perfect opportunity to provide the district with evidence and current research that would support a balanced literacy framework and thus, this change plan. By applying Wagner and Kegan's 4C's Change Leadership Model (2006) — culture, content, conditions, and competencies — we were able to develop "As Is" and "To Be" diagrams (see Appendices B and C). These diagrams were used to assist the district in analyzing its current position and its possible situation at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year. Our role as researchers was to continue to provide the research and evidence needed to support the district's proposed change plan. We also continued to refine the "As Is" and "To Be" diagrams to display the district's current status (see Appendices B and C).

<center>Demographics and Context</center>

Harmony District 841 is a K-8 suburban district located just south of a city in the Midwestern United States, with feeder schools in two surrounding suburbs. District 841 services approximately 2,300 students from both communities. Based upon the new scores from the state standardized test, only 37% of the students in grades K-8 have

<center>9</center>

successfully mastered the state reading standards. The four status designations given by the federal government for schools in school improvement are Choice, Corrective Action, Restructuring, and Restructuring Implementation.. All nine of Harmony District 841 schools fall in one of the above categories as reported in the IIRC.

The racial makeup of Harmony District 841 is 96.5% Black, 0.4% White, 1.4% Hispanic, 0.1% Indian, and 1.6% Multiracial. Located in an impoverished community, 87% of Harmony District 841 students were reported as low-income. Homeless students account for 3.2% of the school population, and the District has a mobility rate of 26%. Based on this data, Harmony District 841 has been identified as a Title 1 district. The IIRC data show that Harmony District 841 invests $7,256 per student, which is comparable to the $6,794 spent by the state (see Appendix D).

The demographic report of this suburban area indicates that 15.4% of the children live in single parent homes, 9.6% of them live with other relatives, and 4.5% live with non-relatives. The report also showed that 3.2% of Harmony District 841 students were homeless. Literacy is often not a priority within these students' homes ─ it is survival. Harmony District 841 utilized the data provided through the 5Essentials Survey to substantiate parents' feelings and attitudes towards administrators, teachers, and the curriculum (see Appendix E).

SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE FOUR C'S

Introduction

To develop a substantial change plan for Harmony District 841, we applied Wagner and Kegan's (2006) Four C's change plan to the current reading programs being utilized in the district. Wagner and Kegan's Four C's are culture, content, conditions, and competencies. Prior to developing a change plan, obtaining an accurate descriptor of the needs of Harmony District 841 was essential. The "As Is" and "To Be" charts in Wagner and Kegan's book provided an opportunity to evaluate the culture, content, conditions, and competencies of Harmony District 841. The chart revealed the District's current status and what it could be under a unified, balanced literacy framework (see Appendix B and C).

We examined Wagner and Kegan's (2006) Four C's as it applied to a balanced literacy framework. Areas analyzed for culture, context, conditions, and competencies were supports and resources, a thorough understanding of content, and a strong positive culture. First we had to determine if Harmony District 841 had the ability to provide the supports and resources needed to improve teaching and learning. We also had to analyze whether teachers had a deep and thorough understanding of the content taught in such a manner that students could grasp the material. Finally, we had to determine whether a strong positive culture existed within the schools and district to support the change. Through our readings, we have come to understand that the district's transformation effort must consider what Wagner and Kegan (2006) referred to as "arenas of change."

Culture

Wagner and Kegan's (2006) definition of culture is, "the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (p. 102); their definition resonated as we examined Harmony District 841. Harmony District 841 believed that education was the key to the social and economic growth of the students and their families. Basic skills, such as math and reading, were and continued to be a focus of the educational curriculum and remediation programs within the district. Identifying that many students are reading below standards based upon both STAR Enterprise and former state standardized test, Harmony District 841 consistently examined its reading and literature programs to encourage and support student growth and development.

Over the years, the social-economic status and ethnicity of the students within the district changed, but the staff mostly remained the same. Despite these cultural changes, Harmony District 841 maintained its high educational expectations for students as implied in its mission statement, "to challenge and support all students to reach their highest level of performance." To support its mission statement, Harmony District 841 worked to ensure that it employed highly qualified teachers to work in the classrooms. Understanding the research investigating student growth, Beck and Malley (2003) found that "most children fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills, but because they feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and the educational process." To address this deficit, Harmony District 841 consistently provided

professional development for its teachers to promote their growth and development, both academically and socially.

The inclusion of families in the educational process was a continuing effort on the part of the district. Harmony District 841 routinely hosted parent advisory meetings, parent and teacher conferences, and other subject area family nights to encourage parent and family participation in the educational process. Working under the belief that parents send their best and brightest to school every day, Harmony District 841 continued to promote and host parent-friendly events.

In summary, the culture of Harmony District 841 firmly exemplified that education in general, and literacy specifically, was the key to success for its young population. Thus, with their mission statement in mind, Harmony District 841 continued to support and promote excellence in both its staff and student population.

Context

Wagner and Kegan (2006) defined context as "the 'skill demands' all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens, and the particular aspirations, needs, and concerns of the families and community that the school or district serves" (p. 104). As student skill demands increase, schools and districts must reevaluate how and what they are teaching in the classrooms. Schools and districts must find ways of capturing and retaining students' attention in today's technology-driven, fast-paced environment to engage students in the discussions and lessons taught in the classroom.

The key to students being able to meet the skill demands required under the new CCSS is that they must be able to read, comprehend, and express themselves both orally

and through writing. To address these needs, Harmony District 841 continued the application of the SFA program in two of its three junior high schools. The third junior high school was allowed to continue its implementation of a program based on a literacy framework.

Classification as a priority district afforded Harmony District 841 the opportunity to receive additional funds from the state to supplement after-school programming. These after-school programs focused on enhancing students' reading and comprehension skills. The needs identified through local assessments, teacher recommendation, parent request, and state standardized test scores were used to determine the programs offered to students.

Families often expressed concerns about the lack of support programs and resources available to their students. During one-on-one conference and district meetings, parents articulated that the community as a whole lacked the resources needed to provide students both academic and extracurricular activities. In these same meetings, parents frequently expressed a need for financial support in the way of supplies, clothing, and transportation. Thus, understanding the context of Harmony District 841 illuminated the need for a literacy framework that met the "skill demands" required for students to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens within the community.

Conditions

Wagner and Kegan (2006) defined conditions as "the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources" (p. 101). Under the current reading program, SFA, students lacked autonomy in selecting what they wanted to read. During walk-throughs and informal classroom observations

performed by administrators and reading committee members, students were observed

engaging in off-task behaviors and conversations unrelated to the topic being discussed.

Utilizing the opportunity to speak with students during informal discussions within the

classroom, many students made statements such as, "I wish the teacher had some books

on what I want to read." Alternatively, "I wish they had some books with pictures of

people who look like me." Statements of this nature directly correlated to the absence of

culturally relevant materials or ability-level reading materials in the classroom library.

One of the strategies of Success for All was grouping students according to

ability. These groups were created based upon assessment data obtained from the STAR

reading assessment. At the junior high level, students participated in Reading Edge, the

junior high level of the SFA program. Students were grouped according to reading levels,

from basic to advanced in the Reading Edge program. They were evaluated each quarter

and should have rapidly progressed toward or above grade level. Reading Edge, however,

lacked the instruction of basic foundational phonemic and vocabulary skills.

Through random discussions with administration and staff, teachers were

overheard to say that one of their greatest areas of concern was the availability of time

sensitive and culturally relevant materials. When conducting classroom inventories,

teachers expressed concern that their classrooms were void of materials that reflected age

and ability-level-appropriate materials. As previously noted, SFA materials were

extremely scripted and provided little to no autonomy for teachers. Prepared lessons, skill

selection, preselected engagement time, vocabulary, and assessments were all provided

through the SFA program.

Fifteen years ago, experts from the SFA Foundation provided the district's staff with formal professional development training. Today, teachers and administrators received professional development from staff members who understood the program, but were never formally trained. Many of these trained staff members now teach the SFA program based upon the information they received. The district modified the program to meet time constraints, staffing issues, comfort levels of the teachers, or in some cases, the changing needs of the students.

Competencies

The key to competencies was identifying the repertoire of skills and knowledge that positively impacted student learning and supported high-quality staff development, according to Wagner and Kegan (2006). Keeping this in mind, we needed to examine what skills, knowledge, and professional development was required to improve the literacy skills of the students in Harmony District 841.

The SFA program, which was the reading program currently being implemented, was not a CCSS-based curriculum. With scripted lesson plans, teachers were not required to develop independent lessons that reflected the needs of their students. The CCSS required teachers to write and enact practical lesson plans that engaged students in active participation and cross-curricular learning. It also required the utilization of data to drive instruction as a critical piece of lesson planning. Harmony District 841 provided teachers with substantial amounts of data, but conversations outside of the classroom reflected teachers' concerns as to how to utilize these data to impact instruction in the classroom.

Possessing an in-depth understanding of the curriculum demands and the skills needed by the students to be successful was crucial. Participating in professional

development was the best way to provide these opportunities. Harmony District 841 provided teachers with multiple professional development opportunities. Though plentiful in nature, teachers often asserted that the professional development provided did not address their needs.

Common planning time was another approach that Harmony District 841 utilized to offer teachers the opportunity to share and collaborate their ideas, strategies, and methodologies to improve teaching and learning. The district also developed an in-house social media account called SharePoint that encouraged teachers to share best practices and ideas. In summary, assessing the skills, knowledge and professional development needs of teachers to enhance student learning and growth continued to be a priority in Harmony District 841.

SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

Our change plan focused on creating a teachable and balanced literacy curriculum framework within the junior high classroom. Most importantly, the framework needed to be consistent with 21st century reading and writing. Quantitative data were gathered by reviewing scores from the state standard achievement test, STAR Enterprise Reading, and classroom assessments. Qualitative data collected by interviewing and surveying the staff, building and District administration, reading coaches, and students were also utilized. Surveys were structured to assess teacher and administrator viewpoints on the current reading program, its positives, and deltas. Interviews, structured in such a way as to gain insight into the teachers' and administrators' thoughts and to provide qualitative responses to support or dispel the quantitative data obtained, were utilized. Students and parents were surveyed and interviewed to gather their perspectives as stakeholders within the process.

As previously stated, there are three junior high schools within the district: two utilizing the SFA comprehensive school reform model and a third using a standards-based program supplemented by creating an enrichment piece. Through both quantitative data (state assessment, STAR) and qualitative data (interviews, surveys), we compared student results from each of the buildings to determine which program best met the needs of the students. We examined various reading and literacy programs as we searched for a program that would meet and support the requirements of the CCSS. This change plan focused on developing a research-based balanced literacy framework that engaged the

faculty and motivated the students in the classroom. Through surveys and interviews with teachers and students, the intent of these researchers was to determine the following:

- What are the stakeholders' perceptions of the current reading program?

- What suggestions for improvement would they recommend, if they could change things?

- What did the data say?

- How can the data be used to support the change plan proposed?

The literacy committee received the disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data for their review. These researchers' goal was to have this change plan completed in time for implementation at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year.

Participants

The participants in this study were teachers, students, and parents. Harmony District 841 has six elementary schools, which serve kindergarten through sixth grade, and three junior high schools that serve students in grades seven and eight. The elementary schools maintain the typical classroom setting where one teacher instructs students in multiple subjects. In contrast, each teacher in the junior high school teaches a specialty area.

Teachers

This study included approximately 30 junior high (grades 7-8) teachers and reading specialist teachers. A total of approximately 15 teachers had an average of 13 years of teaching experience. Within this group of teachers, approximately 51.6% held master's degrees, 48.4% bachelor's degrees, and 15% held specialist degrees. Less than

2% of the junior high staff held a specialist degree in reading. Teacher ethnicity within the district was fairly even with Caucasians (53.2%) and African Americans (44.8%). The primary gender of teachers was female (80.1%).

Parents

For the purpose of this study, approximately 75 parents were asked to participate. Obtaining a diverse grouping of parents for the qualitative portion of the research was important. Twenty-five parents from each junior high school were randomly selected to receive either the survey or to participate in focus groups from students who were "at-risk," high achievers, or had siblings across multiple grade levels.

Students

Randomly selected students from seventh and eighth grade from the three junior highs within Harmony District 841 were selected. Students would be allowed to participate only with the consent of their parent or guardian (see Appendix F).

Data Gathering

For any change to be received and implemented with fidelity, Harmony District 841 included pertinent stakeholders who could share insights that created an improved approach designed for an effective literacy instruction process. Examination of the District's existing reading program determined where and how the District should make improvements to the existing curriculum.

Hearing and acting on the multitude of concerns expressed by teachers, the Superintendent saw the need to develop a reading committee to assist in gathering quantitative and qualitative data. As they worked with the researchers, this committee

assisted in proposing any changes or recommendations needed to enhance the literacy program in Harmony District 841. The Superintendent expressed a need to be very selective in recommending individuals for participation on the committee and to ensure equity in the process. Both classroom teachers and reading coaches from all three junior high schools were involved. Administrators were also asked to participate in the process to provide input and perspective. Although parents and students did not actively participate in committee meetings, their contribution was recognized by focus group and survey responses.

<div align="center">Qualitative Data</div>

An integral part of the qualitative gathering process for developing a balanced literacy framework was designing the parental and student input components. Two ideas were considered: conducting a district-wide parent forum night or parent focus groups at each of the junior high school. Also taken into consideration was when and how student focus groups and surveys were developed and administered. Of primary importance was the committee's ability to obtain the maximum participation and high-quality input from parents.

Qualitative data were collected from administrator, teacher, parent, and student interviews to provide clarification as to the strengths and weaknesses of the existing program. This information provided better understanding of the shortcomings of the current program in addressing student needs in the area of reading. One-on-one interviews and focus groups were used to collect additional qualitative data.

The committee also worked on developing procedures for conducting both the parent and student focus groups. Once the literacy committee was formed under the direction of the researchers, the committee assisted with:

- Interviewing teachers to get feedback on their perception of the current reading program

- Creating a chart to list the pros and cons from the teacher interviews

- Working with the researchers to develop both an electronic and paper-pencil survey for teachers and administrators to determine their perceptions of the current reading program. Questions were formulated based upon information gained from the t-chart created from the interview process

- Assisting with conducting phone and personal interviews with staff and parents to gain a deeper understanding of their perception of the current literacy program and its impact on student reading and writing abilities

- Helping to create focus groups comprised of teachers, parents, and students. Again, questions were developed from information obtained through the surveys given

- Helping to collect and disaggregate standardized and classroom assessment scores between the three schools to find common weaknesses in student skill sets

We created a document governing the identification of participants. This document provided the committee the structure for having a diverse representation of parents and students from the population at each school, to include but not limited to, parents and students in the following categories:

- "At-risk" students

- High achieving students

- Parents/siblings across multiple grades and levels (elementary and junior high)

Focus Groups

Communication was the key to the successful implementation of the focus groups and interview process. This ensured a high degree of participation and a successful response of parents and students for input on literacy instruction in Harmony District 841. Communication plans included multiple opportunities to inform committee members of their role and responsibilities in organizing and facilitating the focus groups. The researchers informed committee members of the process and guidelines needed in meetings, email communications, and Outlook schedule invitations with two-week alerts. Committee members also received reminders to ask their building administrators to make phone blasts to parents of the upcoming dates and times of meetings. Committee members were provided with the format and structure of the focus group sessions as well as talking points to ensure parents and students were given consistent information about the purpose of the meeting (see Appendices G, H and I).

Interviews

Individuals interviewed one-on-one were selected from the groups of parents and students who participated in the focus groups. These interviews were conducted before and after school by the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of both the parent and student perception of the current reading curriculum. Interview questions centered on student interest, availability of materials and family support.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were obtained from the State standardized test and STAR

Reading (Renaissance Learning), which were important sources for data. The STAR

Reading assessments provided the most valid, reliable, and actionable data in the least

amount of testing time and empowerd educators to focus on what mattered most while

individualizing instruction to accelerate learning for all students. Classroom assessments

of students in grades six, seven, and eight from all three junior highs provided additional

data. These data were gathered, analyzed, and compared.

Surveys

Each committee member was given 25 surveys to distribute to the junior high

schools. Committee members engaged the assistance of the building administrator to

select students using the same random parent focus group guidelines to distribute the

surveys. Survey participants remained anonymous to the committee and parents were

instructed to return the surveys to the school office. Committee members arranged to pick

up the surveys from the office on a particular collection date (see Appendices J, K and L).

Assessment Data

The STAR Reading Assessment is given three times a year with a baseline in the

fall, mid-term in the winter, and final assessment in the spring. This test, along with the

state standardized test, provided the quantitative data needed to assess the current reading

program and develop a new literacy based reading framework.

Five years ago, Harmony District 841 understood the need for acquiring a

research-based reliable assessment tool that would provide opportunities for progress

monitoring. This tool also provided the data that would assist the district in making data-

driven decisions. As a result, Harmony District 841 purchased the Renaissance Learning assessment program, STAR Enterprise, for reading. Classroom assessment scores were utilized to provide quantitative data to perform a comparison of the three junior highs. In addition to gathering data, the data were disaggregated to find the common strengths and weaknesses of the students. The program was developed to address any concerns.

The state standardized reading assessment data were disaggregated to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses. Researchers then compared and contrasted these data with the data obtained from STAR Enterprise.

By utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data, Harmony District 841 was able to see a more in-depth picture of its current reading program. Patton (1999) and Cook (1995) agree that utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data increases the focus on the parallel potential to inform and empower. This element was particularly important among stakeholders at the grassroots level (Patton, 1999, p. 8). For these reasons, we utilized both qualitative and quantitative data to provide the data necessary to support and implement this change plan for balanced literacy.

Data Analysis

Mixed-method research allows one to tackle a given research question from many relevant angles, making use where appropriate, of previous research and more than one type of investigative perspective. This process is also sometimes referred to as mixed methodology, multiple methodology, or multi-methodology research. Mixed-methods research offers both an in-depth, contextualized, and natural but more time-consuming insight of qualitative research and a more efficient but less convincing analytical power of quantitative research.

These approaches are far more comprehensive than attacking a problem from only one point of view. The emergence of strategies and tools for blending these different types of data allows for the crossing of disciplinary boundaries (Morse, 2003).

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data such as focus groups and interviews were analyzed to look for commonalities within responses and to gain clarification of the quantitative data. The individual and focus group data are presented in a thematic format.

Focus Group

During the student, parent, and teacher focus groups, the researchers concentrated on determining the amount of independent reading, availability of reading materials, and students' overall attitudes towards the current reading program and reading in general. The researchers wrote down responses.

Interview Data

During interviews, the researchers worked to clarify responses given during the various focus groups. Interview questions once again focused on students' attitudes towards the current reading program, their willingness to read independently, and the availability of materials that they found interesting. Again, the interviewers recorded these responses.

Quantitative Data

Classroom assessments, STAR Enterprise data, and state standardized test data were used to provide evidence of areas of weakness and strengths within the students understanding of literacy.

Survey Data

Survey data collected through SurveyMonkey and paper surveys were analyzed to determine students, parents, and teachers' responses to the four identified areas of concern. The researchers were curious to see if there was a correlation between verbal responses given during interviews, focus groups, and anonymous responses provided on the surveys.

Assessment Data

The researchers performed an analysis of both the STAR Enterprise and state assessment data to expose the commonalities and differences within the data. These data provided an insight into the specific areas where students were either mastering or struggling with specific concepts. The analysis was then used to determine whether or not the current reading program was meeting the needs of the students.

In the end, qualitative, quantitative, and descriptive analyses were used to evaluate the current reading program and begin the process of developing a new program. This program was designed to meet the needs of the students in Harmony District 841.

SECTION FOUR: RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

In the review of the literature relevant to this change plan, we elected to compare and contrast the current program of Success for All (SFA) with the suggested framework of balanced literacy. As noted in much of the literature, the CCSS are demanding more than a standard reading program to be successful. As the students continue their education, it was mandatory for them to experience a more complete or balanced literacy program to compete in the 21st century educational world.

With the focus on preparing students for college and career readiness, a growing interest in adolescent literacy is occurring. Students need to obtain the literacy skills needed to perform in today's colleges and workforce as well as manage their everyday lives. College readiness and career preparation demand that schools re-evaluate their present literacy programs and look to the needs of their student population. The crisis in adolescent literacy requires focused action at the local and state levels. New literacy plans are needed that acknowledge the variations in students' literacy achievement. According to Salinger and Bacevich (2006), schools need to lay out ways to address this change, "and never lose sight of postsecondary school outcomes for students with low literacy skills" (p. 15). The inception of the CCSS and the premiss of having students "college and career ready" requires the re-evaluation of literacy programs. This is an essential topic of discussion not only for many school districts, but also for many researchers.

Many schools today are faced with junior high students that are reading significantly below grade level. In her article *Middle and High School Reading Achievement: A School-Wide Approach*, Sedita (2001) pointed out:

There is no single explanation for why some students have difficulty reading beyond grade five. Although adolescent reading problems are sometimes attributed to lack of study, motivation, or attention, research in reading and literacy has shown that these issues are often secondary consequences of underlying problems, not the primary causes of poor reading. (Peterson et al., 2000; Moats, 2001, page 1)

Correcting the problem, Sedita (2001) insisted, would require a bifurcated approach. A school-wide model that provides reading instruction to advanced readers is one solution. That plan would include providing materials at or above grade level. The second solution is a plan for providing reading instruction to struggling readers (extended English or language arts blocks and individual or small group settings).

On the basis of the state-implemented benchmarks and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) percentages, the state holds schools and districts accountable for increasing student literacy skills. When schools or districts failed to meet these benchmarks, they were required to implement comprehensive school reform models that were research-based and designed to improve students' reading levels. Such was the case for Harmony District 841. The comprehensive school reform model chosen by Harmony District 841 was Success for All (SFA).

<div align="center">Success for All</div>

Success for All (SFA) was initiated in the 1980s as a partnership between the Baltimore City School System and Johns Hopkins University to facilitate best practices across education. This research-based model, designed by Robert Slavin, Nancy Karweit, and Nancy Madden contained various elements that proved to be successful in preventing school failure in schools following the program with fidelity.

Challenged by one member of the Baltimore City Public School Board, Slavin, Karwelt, and Madden were asked to apply this knowledge in the Baltimore schools to ensure students' success. They readily accepted the challenge, and the first school began to use the program in 1987. The research-based elements of the SFA model instituted included:

- Using cooperative learning

- Regrouping for reading instruction

- Conducting frequent assessments and feedback

- Conducting school-wide quarterly assessments

- Instituting one-on-one tutoring

- Engaging and supporting families

In the instructional design, there are four areas of focus:

- Providing Active Instruction – utilizing questioning and modeling, students are led through new content; often videos are used to introduce books

- Creating Partner/Team Practice – students take control of learning, working as partners or teams while teachers circulate checking with individuals or small groups monitoring comprehension and clarifying material

- Developing Assessments – both formally and informally, which take place weekly

- Creating Celebrations – teams earn daily points for working well together and meeting behavioral objectives; teams receive formal recognition based on academic improvement and team cooperation

SFA's middle school programs extended cooperative learning and detailed lessons into the upper grades. Students learned skills and strategies they needed to read,

comprehend, and analyze the complex content of the texts they encountered. The program was designed to accelerate the academic development of struggling older students until they were achieving at or above grade level. The program, however, lacked the necessary phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, text comprehension, and vocabulary skill sets needed to become fluent readers.

Student SFA data from Harmony District 841 showed that students participating in this comprehensive school reform model were not making the gains needed to succeed on the state test between 2000 and 2014. As a result, Harmony District 841 brought together a group of classroom teachers, reading coaches, and administrators to research other literacy programs. They worked to develop a balanced literacy program that addressed the requirements of the CCSS and to propel students into the 21st century.

<div align="center">Balanced Literacy</div>

Before balanced literacy instruction appeared on the scene, reading instruction was rather unbalanced. First, the "look-say" method was used, then phonics, and then the whole language made a grand appearance in the 1980s. As the name implies, "balanced literacy" instruction creates a balance between both whole language and phonics. Balanced literacy incorporates the strongest elements of each into a literacy program that aims to guide students toward proficient and lifelong reading. As researchers have found:

> The truth is that good early literacy instruction does not inoculate students against struggle or failure later on. Beyond grade 3 adolescent learners in our schools must decipher more complex passages, synthesize information at a higher level, and learn to form independent conclusions based on evidence. They must also develop special skills and strategies for reading a text in each of the differing content areas- meaning that a student who "naturally" does well in one area may struggle in another. (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, page x)

The overall purpose of balanced literacy instruction is to provide a differentiated instructional program that supports students' reading, writing, and verbal skills development. Balanced literacy is a program that utilizes both whole language and phonics and strives to incorporate the best of each. A well-developed balanced literacy program contains five different components: oral (read-aloud) reading, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, and vocabulary. Each of these skills is taught when reading aloud to the students. During interactive read-aloud, the teacher reads a section, periodically stopping to model internal dialog. A teacher might relate an event in the story to another story, for example, or something that has happened to them in real life.

Guided reading is a small group activity with more student responsibilities. Students read from leveled text (ability leveled). They use skills directly taught during the interactive reading process and shared reading to increase their comprehension and fluency. The teacher's role is to provide prompting and to ask relevant questions to guide students thinking. Guided reading provides differentiation within the classroom and allows the teacher to develop groups that can move forward when the entire group is ready. During this period, other students in the classroom are engaged in workstations that reinforce other reading skills. Students often work in pairs at various stations that utilize supplemental materials, library, vocabulary, poetry, computer, listening centers, puzzles, buddy reading, projector/Smart Boards, science and social studies centers.

During shared reading, a student reads from a shared text. Both the student and the teacher read the material and share their thinking. During both interactive reading aloud and shared reading, the class creates an anchor chart. Anchor charts often display

different skills and strategies that students may use. These strategies remind students of how and when to use these different skills and strategies.

Independent reading gives students the opportunity to select the text and read it on their own. Usually the reading level selected for this activity is slightly lower than that used in guided reading so that students do not struggle with the text.

Sharing time allows students to orally present material from their reading that they find interesting. This skill helps to promote dialogue, discussion and strengthen students' oral presentation skills.

When working with vocabulary or word study, attention should be given to terms that envelope the grade level curriculum as a whole. The inclusion of science, social studies, math, and language arts terms should encourage vocabulary development across the curriculum.

Writing workshops are similar to reading workshops in that skills are directly taught by the teacher modeling the process of how to write a sentence, and then a paragraph, and finally an entire paper. The next phase, interactive writing, has students as a class or in small groups writing together until they are able to write independently.

<div align="center">Implementation</div>

Data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that 69% of eighth-grade students fall below the proficient level in reading. They also lack the ability to comprehend the meaning of the text at their grade level. Twenty-six percent read below the basic level (Lee, Griggs, & Donahue, 2007). Heller and Greenleaf (2007) found that the achievement gaps in upper grades have not narrowed. In 2005, only

12% of African-American and 15% of Hispanic eighth graders read at or above the "proficient level, compared to 39% of Caucasian eighth graders. In a typical high-poverty urban school, approximately half of incoming ninth-grade students read at a sixth- or seventh-grade level or below" (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). Research also shows that the 25 fastest growing professions have a far greater than average literacy demand when compared to the fastest-declining professions (Barton, 2000). Almost 40% of high school graduates lack the reading and writing skills that employers seek, and almost one-third of high school graduates who enroll in college require remediation (National Governors' Association, 2005). Evaluating the most current data, it appears little has changed over the years. According to the 2013 National Association for Educational Progress Report, only 38% of students tested at or above Proficient in reading in 2013, which was lower than the 40% in 1992. At the same time, the proportion of students scoring below Basic increased from 20% in 1992 to 25% in 2013, remaining essentially flat from 1994.

According to research, implementing a balanced literacy program that assists students in becoming college and career ready as outlined within the Common Core State Standards is crucial for schools. Balanced literacy can assist in this area. By implementing a reading and writing workshop model, teachers can focus the workshops on strategies that model and enhance students' reading and writing skills. In these workshops, students practice the focal strategy in small groups or independently, as the teacher monitors and provides guidance. Once the work is completed, selected students are asked to share their assignment. Discussions around the work presented by students provide teachers an opportunity to facilitate students in their leveled-text selection for the

next phase. During this stage, students read leveled texts independently or write independently for an extended period as the teacher circulates amongst the students observing, recording observations, and conferring with students who need assistance. At the culmination of the workshop session, selected students present and share their work with the class explaining the strategies that they utilized in their work.

The implementation of guided reading should take place during the extended reading period. Utilizing assessments, the teacher works with small groups of students (no more than six students in each group) on a leveled text (authentic trade book). Modeling specific strategies, the teacher reads and monitors students while they read independently. After reading, the teacher and students engage in various activities in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Again, the purpose of guided reading is to scaffold systematically the decoding and/or comprehension strategy skills of students who are having similar challenges ("Balanced Literacy").

Within a balanced literacy program there is also direct instruction in phonics and vocabulary. The teacher explicitly teaches a phonemic element as the student's practice reading or writing other words following the same phonemic pattern. The teacher should also focus on the etymology of a word. Students who are reading at this stage are engaged in analyzing the patterns of word derivations, root words, prefixes, and suffixes. This engagement allows students to increase the vocabulary skills needed to understand complex text dramatically.

Comprehension Strategies

According to Mermelstein (2013), students are taught to use nine comprehension strategies within a balanced literacy program which include:

- Sequencing – the order in which things happen or should happen

- Relating background knowledge – information that is essential to understand a situation or problem

- Making inferences – the act or process of deriving logical conclusions from premises known or assumed to be true; the act of reasoning from factual knowledge or evidence

- Comparing and contrasting – to set side-by-side to show differences and likenesses. Comparing shows relative values or excellences by bringing out similar or divergent characteristic qualities

- Summarizing – a presentation of the substance of a body of material in a condensed form or by reducing it to its main points; an abstract

- Synthesizing – to form (a material or abstract entity) by combining parts or elements

- Problem-solving – the process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues

- Distinguishing between fact and opinion – a fact is a statement that is provable. An opinion, in contrast, is a statement that reflects the writer's or speaker's belief, but cannot be supported by proof or evidence

- Finding the main idea and supporting details – the main idea is the most important or central thought of a paragraph or larger section of text which tells the reader what the text is about. Supporting details are statements that support the topic or theme. They support the main idea by explaining it, describing it, or otherwise giving information about it.

As stated earlier, a balanced literacy program requires the scaffolding of instruction. Scaffolding takes place during the reading and writing workshops. There are four scaffolding steps:

- Teachers modeling or showing students what a good reader does when reading the text, thinking aloud about the mental processes used to construct meaning while reading a book aloud to the class.

- Guided practicing that gradually gives the students more responsibility with the teacher stepping in to help as needed. Students practice a comprehension strategy during a discussion in a large group or smaller groups with peers.

- Independent practicing where children begin to work alone while reading books by themselves, conferencing individually, or in small groups with the teacher to make sure they are using a comprehension strategy correctly.

- Students applying comprehension strategies correctly to different kinds of texts. When they are no longer just practicing but are making connections and can demonstrate understanding through writing or discussion, application of the strategy has been achieved.

The goal throughout this process is to move students from having a great deal of instructional support to being independent learners. Gradually removing instructional support assists the students in acquiring the strategies needed to understand the text by themselves.

In today's schools, too many children continue to struggle to read, and research has found that no easy answers or quick solutions exist to solving this problem. Stanovich (1986) explained:

The very children who are reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings, and hence read even better. Children with inadequate vocabularies—who read slowly and without enjoyment—read less, and, as a result, have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability. (p. 381)

Stanovich (1986) added that adults can worsen these effects by lowering their expectations of student capability, or they can improve the effects by providing long-term interventions to increase students' knowledge and vocabulary. A plethora of research exists on best practices, strategies, and the kind of instruction needed so students can learn to read well. If students are to learn to read, all educators and parents must understand how to utilize reading strategies. Instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension can help meet the goal of every child being a reader by the end of third grade (Sedita, 2001).

SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

An examination of both qualitative and quantitative data from the three junior high schools was conducted. Qualitative data were obtained in the form of interviews and participation in focus groups. We began the analysis of our research by first focusing on student needs and desires in literacy. This approach was utilized to engage the students in the three junior highs in a literacy program that would not only address the requirements of the CCSS, but also increase their interest levels In this section, we will present the findings from the focus groups and academic data. We will begin with the quantitative data.

Quantitative Data

Student Survey Results

Although 75 students received permission slips, 62 of the students responded to the online survey (see Appendix J). The online survey was designed to determine the participant's views concerning their reading preferences, habits, and problems. The survey was anonymous and restricted to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The survey was open for five days. Students were asked to participate on their own time before or after school. Survey results indicated that students:

- Preferred fiction to non-fiction

- Preferred books below their Lexile levels

- Skipped words or concepts they did not understand

- Found it difficult to relate stories to their everyday lives

- Noticed few visual images on informational text

- Avoided using dictionaries to define words

- Gave up trying to understand text rather than use reading strategies

- Lacked time in school for pleasure or personal reading opportunities

Students overwhelmingly agreed that reading was not a pleasurable activity for them due to the lack of interesting materials and for some the difficulty they experienced in reading and comprehending the material. When questioned as to which types of materials students would find of interest, many chose magazines that displayed fashion or sports pictures as opposed to fictional text. When asked if they read the corresponding articles that went with the pictures, many responded no. To substantiate our findings, we questioned the librarians to determine what types of materials students tended to read or check out of the library during their library time. The librarians stated that students tended to look at magazines, or if they checked out a book, they were usually lower level Lexile books with little to no literary content such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

Reading Scaled Scores

The state assessment data for the three junior highs over the last eight years clearly showed that student scores were declining continuously. Although one school appeared to be slightly more successful than the other two, the lack of growth or decline in growth was noted.

Table 2 below represents the seventh grade in District 841. RJH (green line) scored consistently higher than WJH (purple line) and LJH (red line). During the 2011-2012 school year, it is noted that RJH and WJH declined while LJH remained flat. In the 2012-2013 school year, and with the new cut scores, RJH was able to rebound and show

growth while LJH and WJH continued to decline. This data were significant because

WJH and LJH were the two junior high schools utilizing the SFA model.

Table 2

Scaled Scores

7th Grade ISAT Reading Average Scaled Score 2006-13

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
State	240	240	242	243	244	245	244	243
								241
LJH	226	229	231	232	232	231	232	229
RJH	226	227	238	236	237	237	239	239
WJH	226	227	227	225	226	229	223	227
2012 Cut	225	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
2013 Cut	239	239	239	239	239	239	239	239
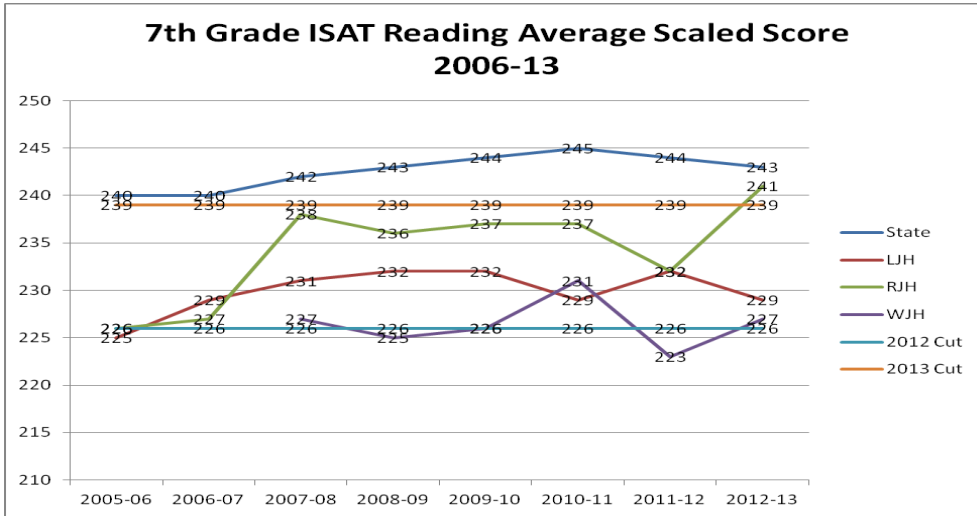
Table 3 shows the same concerns at the eighth grade level. Prior to the new cut

scores implemented during the 2012-2013 school year, all three junior high schools were

able to meet the state expectations. With the new cut scores required in 2012-2013, all

three junior high schools fell significantly below the new cut score.

Table 3

Scaled Scores
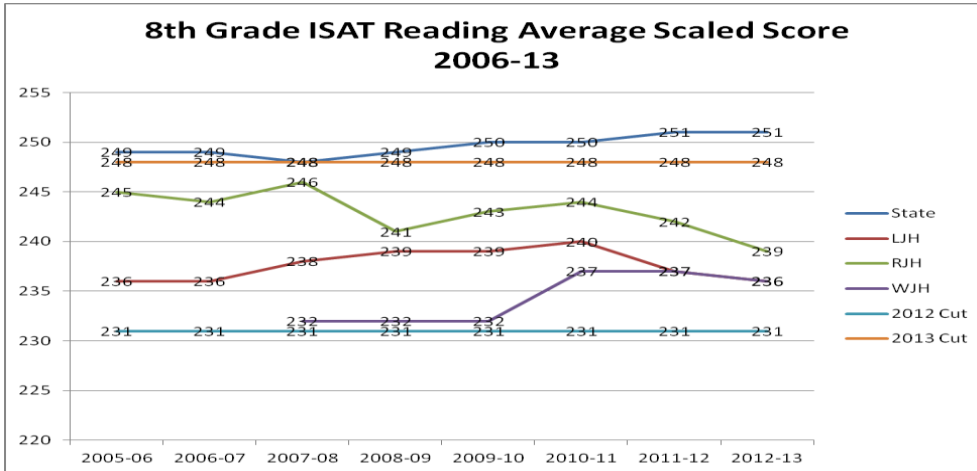
Further analysis showed that students were significantly failing in the areas of
word attack, vocabulary, comprehension, and analysis of supporting information in both
seventh and eighth grade (See Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4

IIRC Reading Data

Grade 7: Reading		# of Items/Response Analysis (% Correct)					
Results From Multiple-Choice Items	Assessment Objective	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
State Goal 1: Reading	State %	67%	68%	69%	72%	71%	-
	District %	36/ 67%	34/ 67%	33/ 68%	38/ 70%	42/ 65%	-
Standard 1A: Vocabulary Development	State %	66%	74%	79%	71%	77%	-
	District %	6/ 66%	6/ 72%	8/ 76%	8/ 66%	6/ 68%	-

Grade 7: Reading		# of Items/Response Analysis (% Correct)						
Results From Multiple-Choice Items	Assessment Objective	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	State %	68%	58%	60%	61%	57%	-
Standards 1B/C: Reading Strategies	District %	5/ 70%	4/ 57%	4/ 52%	5/ 61%	4/ 51%	-
	State %	68%	69%	66%	74%	74%	-
Standard 1C: Reading Comprehension	District %	25/ 67%	24/ 67%	21/ 67%	25/ 72%	23/ 70%	-

Table 4 (cont'd)

State Goal 2: Literature	State %	68%	70%	70%	69%	67% -
	District %	14/ 70%	16/ 68%	17/ 70%	12/ 67%	8/ 62% -
Standards 2A, 2B: Literary Elements and Techniques and Variety of Literary Works	State %	68%	70%	70%	69%	67% -
	District %	14/ 70%	16/ 68%	17/ 70%	12/ 67%	7/ 63% -

The seventh grade students in the table above averaged a score 3% lower than the state average in both reading and literature. This decline can be noted throughout the years.

Table 5

IIRC Reading Data

Grade 8: Reading		# of Items/Response Analysis (% Correct)					
Results From Multiple-Choice Items	Assessment Objective	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
State Goal 1: Reading	State %	72%	73%	71%	75%	-	-
	District %	38/ 62%	36/ 63%	32/ 64%	37/ 64%	-	-
Standard 1A: Vocabulary Development	State %	71%	72%	78%	74%	-	-
	District %	8/ 63%	6/ 61%	5/ 72%	8/ 66%	-	-
	State %	72%	73%	67%	65%	-	-

Grade 8: Reading		# of Items/Response Analysis (% Correct)					
Results From Multiple-Choice Items	Assessment Objective	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Standards 1B/C: Reading Strategies	District %	5/ 61%	5/ 63%	5/ 60%	4/ 57%	-	-
	State %	73%	74%	70%	77%	-	-
Standard 1C: Reading Comprehension	District %	25/ 62%	25/ 64%	22/ 63%	25/ 65%	-	-

Table 5 (cont'd)

State Goal 2: Literature	State %	72%	77%	77%	76%	--
	District %	12/ 62%	14/ 68%	18/ 69%	13/ 67%	--
Standards 2A, 2B: Literary Elements and Techniques and Variety of Literary Works	State %	72%	77%	77%	76%	--
	District %	12/ 62%	14/ 68%	18/ 69%	13/ 67%	--

The eighth grade students, showed a score 10% lower than the state average in both reading and literature. This data also substantiated the concern that the SFA model did not address the deficiencies noted in these two areas.

Qualitative Data

Student Focus Groups

The three junior high focus groups included two students from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The building administrator randomly selected students. Permission slips for participation in the pizza party and focus group were sent home with each student. Students who returned their permission slips were allowed to participate in the focus group (see Appendix F). A pizza party was scheduled at each of the junior high schools immediately after school. Focus groups held in this type of non-threatening environment allowed us to receive data and thoughts from all grades that would be impacted by a new literacy program. The 18 students (six students at each building) engaged in discussion surrounding the 16 focus group questions. The researchers recorded students' answers.

Questions asked during the focus groups centered on three areas: environment, genre, and response to reading (see Appendices G, H and I). A reoccurring theme throughout the three schools was that 90% of the students interviewed did not read or enjoy reading at home. When questioned in greater detail, many students related that few or no reading materials were available in the home, and that those that were present were not items that interested them. Although most students stated that they held library cards, they also were quick to add that they rarely used them. During the discussion, one student declared, "I go to the library to meet my friends, not to check out books." This statement received many affirmative responses from other students within the group.

When asking the focus group students who was their favorite author, approximately half could not name a specific author. Some students could, however, give the name of the book: *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The Gun*, *The Bully,* and *Hunger Games*. Others named authors such as Jeff Kinney, who authored the *Wimpy Kid Diaries* and Anne Schraff, who authored the *Bluford* book series. Several students questioned, "Why read a book when you can watch the movie?"

Utilizing the above responses to encourage students to talk about improving their reading skills, several of the students regurgitated responses that they had heard in the classroom: read every night and practice, practice, practice. When questioned about specific strategies, students were unable to recall any specific strategies they could use to improve their reading and comprehension abilities. When providing students with an example such as journaling, the response was collectively one of disinterest. Students stated that they disliked writing more than they disliked reading.

The types of responses stated above were consistent in all three junior highs regardless of the teacher, economic status, or academic success as demonstrated by the state assessment test. Students collectively agreed that they preferred engaging in watching movies or television over reading books, magazines, or newspapers. One final question posed to students inquired as to what would engage them to be more active readers within the classroom. Students were more than willing to share that they would prefer to have materials that contained characters that looked like them and with whom they could relate.

Teacher Focus Group Responses

All sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade teachers (N=47) were invited to participate in the teacher focus group regardless of subject area taught. Teachers from all content areas provided the researchers with data regarding students' reading habits within the reading class as well as within their other core subject areas. Of the 47 teachers invited, 17 teachers agreed to participate. Questions asked of teachers focused on the type of students they had in their classrooms, as well as the various strategies and text utilized (see Appendix H).

Quantitative data on the junior high shows that approximately 39% of the students in grade sixth, seventh, and eighth have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Keeping that in mind, we proceeded to interview staff members within our focus group. Literature teachers were the only teachers who acknowledged that reading was part of their curriculum as it related to teaching reading strategies. Teachers felt that, while it was important to address literary elements and conditions, it was critical to instill the basic skills that were addressed, but not achieved in the early stages of literacy. Non-literature

teachers stated that students read in their classes, but reading was not the main focus of their instruction. When asked how this impacted students' ability to understand and comprehend the text, many teachers felt unqualified to supply the students with the necessary reading skills to improve their comprehension levels. Others commented, "There's not enough time to teach reading skills; those (reading comprehension skills) should have been taught in the primary grades."

Within the focus group, the discussion around student reading habits brought mixed reviews. Most teachers stated that students only read when they have to. Teachers reported that students would rather "watch the movie" as opposed to "reading the book." Teachers continued by stating that when they asked students why, students responded "that books were boring," "they could not see the action in their minds," and that "it takes too long to get to the good part."

When questioned about students' independent reading habits, teachers replied that they did not have enough time to teach the core material, let alone time to provide students with independent reading opportunities. One teacher commented that "independent meant on their own, so it should be done at home." Teachers explained that their classroom libraries were limited at best and most did not contain books that students found interesting. One of the eighth grade teachers commented and many concurred that the school library has nothing but baby books and most of the kids have already read them."

The discussion in the teacher focus groups revealed that other than literature teachers, other content area teachers rarely taught reading strategies. The most common strategy taught overwhelmingly in one of the three schools was paraphrasing. This

strategy was taught during their intervention block and reinforced in all classrooms throughout the day. Monitoring the success this junior high was having utilizing this process and evaluating its effectiveness was important in developing the new reading curriculum.

Through the qualitative and quantitative research conducted, the painful and obvious conclusion was that if Harmony District 841 continued to utilize its current literacy program, students would continue to fall significantly behind in the new Common Core State Standards. It is for these reasons that the district has constructed a committee to begin the process of analyzing the current, comprehensive school reform model program. The task of this committee is to develop a balanced literacy framework that will address the weaknesses identified within the student population. The framework provided teachers with some autonomy within the classroom and helped structure reading in such a way that students developed the strategies necessary to become college and career ready.

SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

Introduction

As illustrated in our "As Is" and "To Be" diagrams, Harmony District 841 was required to drastically improve its literacy program if students were going to make the academic gains necessary in the area of reading to meet the new state standards (see Appendices B and C). This change plan focused on the district's desire to improve its literacy program to strengthen students' ability to understand and comprehend the information required to become college and career ready.

Culture

As discussed in Section Two of this paper, many students "fail in school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills, but because they felt detached, alienated, and isolated from the educational process" (Beck and Malley 2003). Data collected through both the student focus groups and surveys painted a clear picture that students must be included in the conversation concerning the types of texts being presented in order to gain and hold their interest. The new literacy framework contained a component that allowed students to have some autonomy in the selection of their reading materials as well as in how they illustrate comprehension of the materials read.

Teachers often commented that they regularly used the data from both STAR and state assessment analysis reports to guide their teaching in the area of reading. However, the data did not support this response. Observation of teacher practice supported evidence that teachers were focusing more on "teaching to the test," rather than providing students with the strategies needed to decipher, analyze, formulate, and interpret the information they read. The district used both quantitative and qualitative data to re-evaluate the

professional development needs of the teachers, the qualifications of the teachers expected to teach reading, and the ability of its literacy coaches to monitor the program selected.

Under this change plan, teachers were provided the autonomy to determine which best practices were most effective in reaching the students they had in front of them and supporting student growth. Giving autonomy to students to select their reading materials aligned to their interest and ability levels provided them the opportunity to have input into their learning.

<div align="center">Context</div>

Based on both the qualitative and quantitative data collected through this change plan, the district increased its focus on improving its literacy program. This data were used to address the areas of reading, writing, and oratory skills as they pertained to Bloom's taxonomy and in preparing students to meet the challenges of the Common Core State Standards. As the district moved forward, and with the requirement of Type III assessments under the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) , teachers are no longer allowed to utilize simple recall questioning as the basis of student assessment.

Faced with declining reading scores and the new PERA requirement, the district administration took this opportunity to formulate a reading committee designed to evaluate the current reading program SFA. Additionally, other balanced literacy programs were examined to determine if the current program could be modified or replaced to meet the needs of the students it served. Instructional improvements considered were:

- Direct, explicit comprehension instruction

- Effective instructional principles embedded in the content

- Motivation and self-directed learning

- Text-based collaborative learning

- Strategic tutoring

- Intensive writing

- Diverse texts

- Technology

- Ongoing formative assessment of students

Although no easy solution existed for improving adolescent literacy, these key components helped increase student's opportunity for success. In a report entitled *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy,* released by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2010, the above key elements were named as critical to successful middle and high school literacy programs.

Conditions

Many conditions that promoted high levels of student achievement required a change in the infrastructure of the district reading program. Since the implementation of one or two elements was unlikely to improve the achievement of many students, the report mentioned above recommended practitioners and program designers remain flexible. It also suggested that they try out various combinations in search of the most effective overall program. Any combination should include three specific elements: professional development, formative assessments, and summative assessments. These

researchers recommended that the district give serious consideration to a comprehensive and coordinated literacy framework that provided extended time for balanced literacy skills to be taught across the curriculums.

Based on the qualitative results, some of the most obvious changes in infrastructure that occurred were:

- Extended time for literacy

- Professional development

- Ongoing summative assessment of students and programs

- Teacher teams

- Leadership

- A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program

Harmony District 841 implemented the balanced literacy recommendations provided above and anticipates a gradual increase in students' reading and writing abilities as demonstrated on the STAR and state assessment test. As the district continues to evaluate its professional development needs, it must ensure that the professional development is engaging and unwavering, based on the strategies and techniques identified in the needs assessment performed by the district.

Competencies

As stated in Section Two, one of the prominent areas of concern is the availability of time-sensitive and culturally relevant materials for students to read. Improving both the school and classroom libraries was a requirement of the district so that students could find materials that they were interested in reading. To create effective classroom libraries, the district:

- Selected a variety of texts (humor, mystery, nonfiction, realistic fiction, science fiction, historical fiction)

- Used information from classroom surveys, questionnaires, inventories, and conversations with students to select books that appealed to students' interest

- Selected an abundance of young adult literature that provided characters, problems, and situations that students could relate to more quickly

- Paid attention to text features. Reluctant readers look for fiction and nonfiction texts with the following features: thin books, short chapters, and white space. They also are drawn to books with illustrations, well-defined characters, characters their age, and characters who face tough choices. Realistic language, visual features, high-interest topics, and vocabulary defined at the point of use are also important (Beers, 2003).

An additional area that Harmony District 841 focused on was its quality of professional development. Teachers voiced a preference for professional development that was more in-depth and provided an opportunity to practice and then come back together to analyze and evaluate its effectiveness and usefulness within the classroom. The formation of various subject-area committees comprised of teachers from each of the three junior highs with an administrative facilitator provided such an opportunity. Attending professional development provided through an Intermediate Service Center and sharing it with like subject-area teachers was a needed obligation of the committee. This structure provided a chance for teachers to discuss the standards applicable to their fields and make improvements for change.

These researchers believed that the suggestions provided under Wagner and Kegan's (2006) 4C's framework (culture, context, conditions, and competencies) allowed

the district to develop a balanced literacy framework. This balanced literacy framework

addresses the needs of the students in Harmony District 841 and ultimately should

prepare them to be college and career ready.

SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

Introduction

As Harmony District 841 contemplated changes to it literacy program in its three junior highs, there were several strategies it considered in order to ensure a balanced and effective literacy program. The analysis performed utilizing Wagner and Kegan's (2006) Four C's (culture, context, conditions, and competencies) provided a structure under which the district enacted its change.

Table 6

Strategy and Actions

Strategy	*Action*
Analysis of the current curriculum	Create a common literacy focus in the three junior high schools that focuses on the CCSS in English/Language Arts:
	Develop a balance literacy framework.
	Disseminate the literacy framework to all three junior high schools.
In depth professional development centered on the CCSS for English/Language Arts	The Superintendent and Curriculum Director will provide motivational professional development opportunities that translate into classroom practice:
	Obtain motivational speakers such as Larry Bell and Dr. Sonya Whitaker.
	Provide strategies such as chants, charts, physical routines and pneumonic devices that reinforce memory skills.

Strategy	Action
	Provide for professional development to enhance differentiated instruction
	Provide follow-up professional development over time.
	Purchase and create culturally relevant libraries in each classroom.

Table 6 (cont't)

Strategy	Action
Develop teachers as instructional leaders	The building Administrators and Instructional Coaches will do weekly classroom walkthroughs to ensure that the literacy framework is instituted with fidelity.
	Instruct teachers on writing CCSS based lesson plans in reading that provides differentiated instruction based upon identified student needs.
	Train teachers to effectively utilize data to improve teaching and instruction in the area of reading.
	Encourage the sharing of best practices on Sharepoint (a program which allows inter-district sharing.)
	Incorporate technology
	Encourage the gradual release of responsibility to the students
	Perform weekly fidelity walkthroughs.
	Hold weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) and Collaboration meetings.
Increase time for student literacy learning	Examine and adjust the students schedules to ensure adequate literacy instruction time:
	Development of an intervention block.
	Student autonomy in reading selections.
	Create reading hubs in classrooms

| Data-based decision making | Utilize state and local assessments to evaluate and make informed instructional decisions: |
| | Develop data retreats (state and local assessments) with each junior high school to track student progress and inform teacher strategies. |

Strategy 1: Analysis of the Current Curriculum

Unification of the three junior high schools to one common curriculum was essential for success. Creating a common focus between the three junior high schools was essential to uniting both the school and staff to focus on a common literacy goal. The establishment of a common balanced literacy framework provided the district with the data needed to create the professional development that teachers needed to implement the framework successfully.

Strategy 2: In Depth Professional Development Centered on the CCSS for

English/Language Arts

Developing a common balanced literacy framework allowed teachers to reach the second recommended action step. Harmony District 841 found ways to motivate teachers that translated into the classroom. The district obtained an inspirational speaker, Larry Bell, to energize teachers and give them applicable strategies that they could immediately use in their classrooms. His exuberance electrified the staff and provided a methodology for increasing rigor and motivation within the classroom. Many of the strategies provided by Mr. Bell were both noticeable and visible throughout the district in the behavior of teachers and students. Many teachers found his strategies to be exceptionally helpful.

Strategy 3: Develop Teachers as Instructional Leaders

The provision of 21st century learning opportunities to teachers is critical to developing them as instructional leaders. It encouraged teachers to not only provide a gradual release of responsibility to the students, but to work diligently to incorporate technology into the new framework. With the use of gradual release, students are able to assume more responsibility and direction for their own learning. The transition from teacher-centered to student-centered classrooms encouraged both teachers and students to be risk-takers. This transition took place over time. Teachers continue to participate in grade level meetings where they are provided the opportunity to share and discuss areas of success and concern. They then return to their classrooms, practice the skills discussed, and return to share their results. Through these collaborative sessions, teacher leaders were able to provide teachers with the supports needed to institute many of the balanced literacy strategies with fidelity. These sessions provided and encouraged teachers to become risk-takers affording them the opportunity to experiment with new modalities of teaching and receive feedback from teacher leaders and administrators on their successes and concerns. It is this type of collaboration that supported and lead to the balanced literacy framework that Harmony District 841 needed to support student growth in literacy.

Strategy 4: Increase Time for Student Literacy Learning

Cooperative as well as independent learning afforded students the opportunity to choose a format that best conformed to their learning style, giving them more ownership of their learning. An indirect benefit of this was the teacher's ability to focus on differentiating the instruction to meet the various learning styles within their classrooms.

Additionally, the development of culturally relevant libraries within the classroom along with reading hubs provided a relaxed atmosphere in which students can read at their own level and pace.

Strategy 5: Data-based Decision Making

Harmony District 841 developed bi-yearly data retreats that disaggregated the results from local and state assessments. The information received assisted teachers in understanding their student's growth over time and identified areas of student's strengths and concerns. Based upon all of this information, teachers were able to return to their buildings and hold more informative professional learning communities around their teaching practices and strategies.

Change was not easy, but Harmony District 841 realized that if the change was to be successful, then it had to include all stakeholders within the process. The district continues to utilize its parent contact hours to educate parents on the more rigorous requirements of the Common Core State Standards and its implications on student learning and assessment. The development of a common balanced literacy framework throughout the junior high schools opened the doors of discussion district wide as it continues to focus on preparing students to be college and career ready.

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Appendix A: Illinois Interactive Report Card AYP Results

As stated in the opening paragraph, the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC) data show that Harmony District 841 has continuously scored significantly below the state and below the required Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).
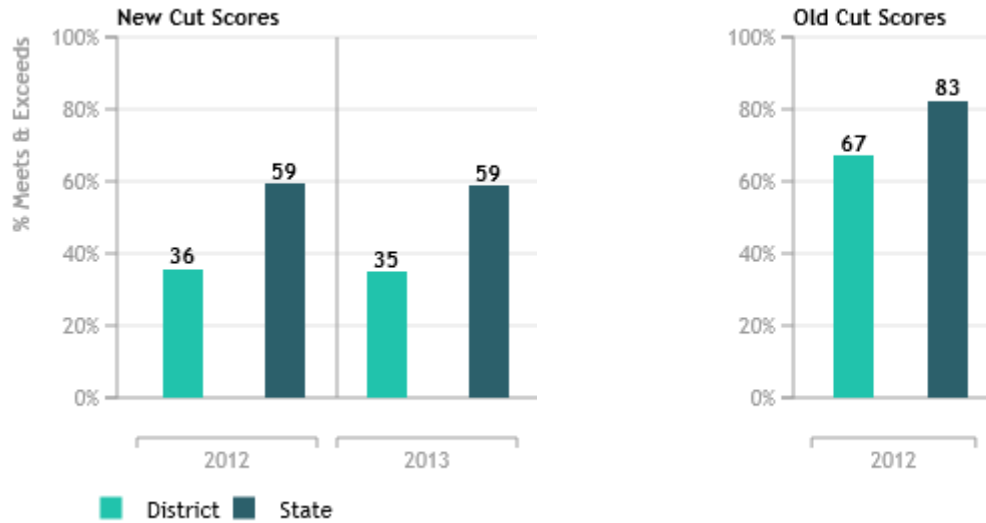
Appendix B: "As Is"

"As Is" Four C's Analysis for *Improving Reading Readiness in the Junior High*

Context
- Success for All (SFA)
- Economically depressed community
- Priority district
- District focus on literacy
- State funded after-school program

Culture
- Change in the social/economic status of families
- Education is important
- All teachers know how to teach reading
- Parent involvement
- Professional development is important

Conditions
- Materials are not always available
- Lack of effective professional development
- Based upon the need to ability group students, there is not always enough staff

Junior High students are 3-5 years behind in reading readiness.

68

Competencies

- Teachers are not adequately trained in the SFA reading program
- Ability of staff to write effective CCSS-based lesson plans in reading
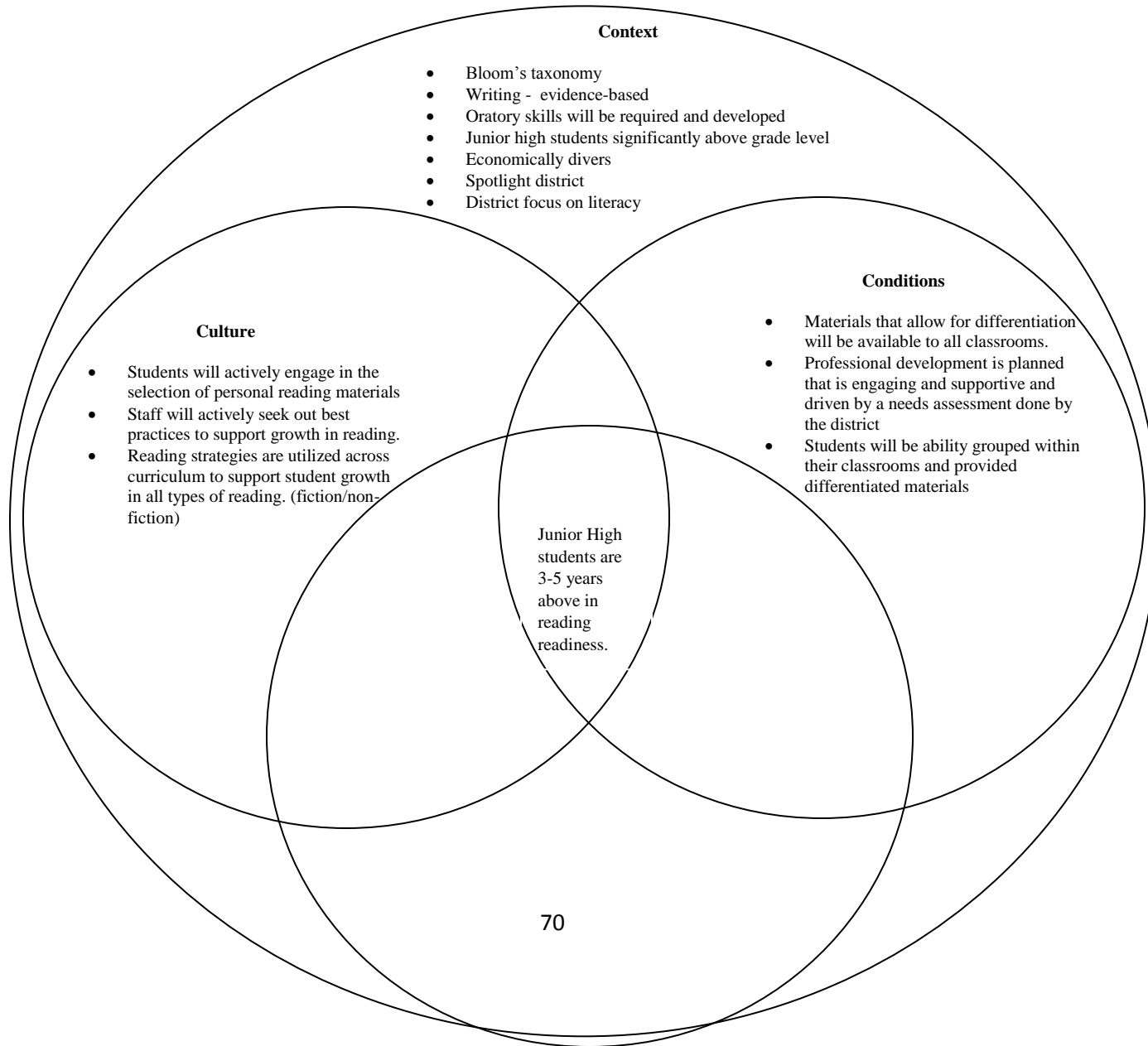- Not all teachers understand how to effectively utilize data to change classroom instruction or provide differentiated instruction.
- SharePoint, the district site developed for the exchange of ideas and best practices

Appendix C: "To Be"

"To Be" Four C's Analysis for ***Improving Reading Readiness in the Junior High***

Context

- Bloom's taxonomy
- Writing - evidence-based
- Oratory skills will be required and developed
- Junior high students significantly above grade level
- Economically divers
- Spotlight district
- District focus on literacy

Conditions

- Materials that allow for differentiation will be available to all classrooms.
- Professional development is planned that is engaging and supportive and driven by a needs assessment done by the district
- Students will be ability grouped within their classrooms and provided differentiated materials

Culture

- Students will actively engage in the selection of personal reading materials
- Staff will actively seek out best practices to support growth in reading.
- Reading strategies are utilized across curriculum to support student growth in all types of reading. (fiction/non-fiction)

Junior High students are 3-5 years above in reading readiness.

70

Competencies

- Teachers will receive in-depth training on the selected reading program with follow-up trainings over time
- Staff will be able to write CCSS based lesson plans in reading that provide differentiated instruction based upon identified student needs
- Staff will be able to effectively utilize data to improve teaching and instruction in the area of reading
- Staff will share best practices on SharePoint
  (a program, which allows the free exchange of ideas among teachers)

Appendix D: Instructional and Operational Spending Comparison

Student Instructional Spending and Operational Spending Comparison Data

Between Harmony District 841 and the State
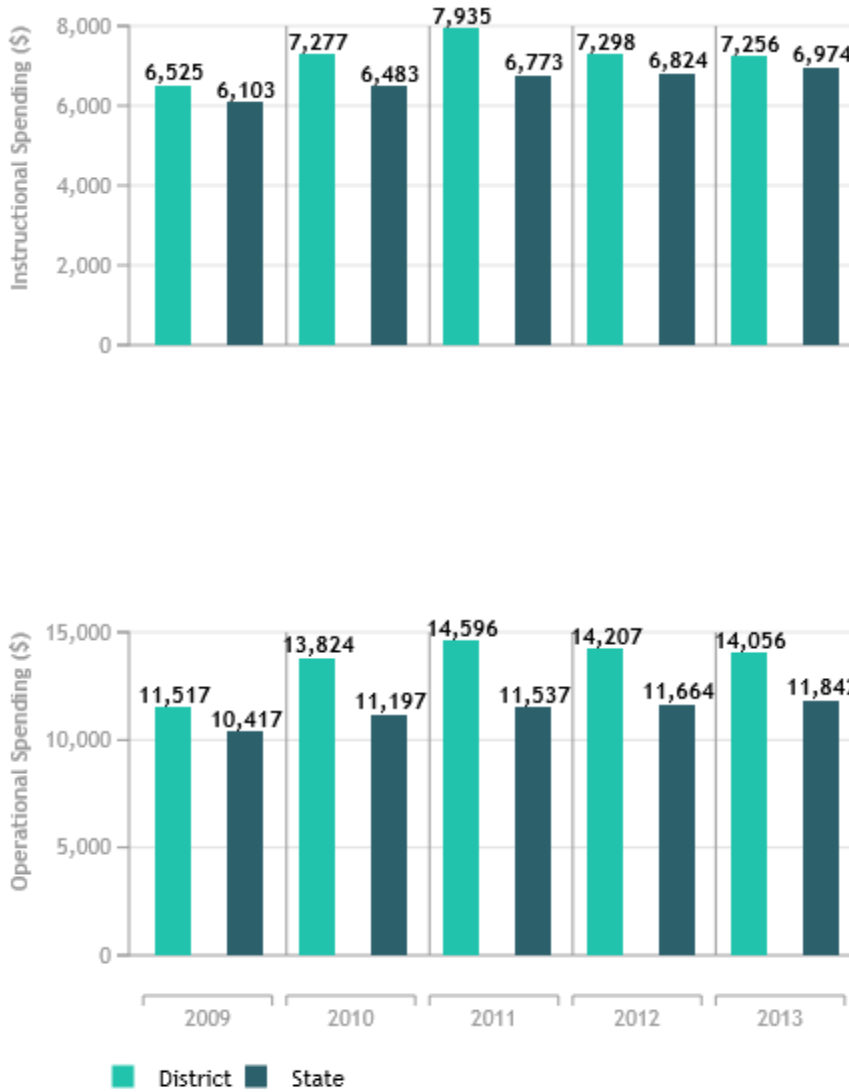
Appendix E: 5Essentials Survey Data

5Essentials (5E) is an evidence-based system designed to drive improvement in schools nationwide. The 5E system reliably measures changes in a school organization through its survey, predicts school success through scoring, and provides individualized actionable reports to schools, districts, parents, and community partners, and training to school leadership and teachers.

5Essentials is based on more than 20 years of research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research on schools and what makes them successful. What the Chicago Consortium has found is not surprising—schools that are well organized, safe, and supportive are much more likely to be successful.

Specifically, researchers determined five essential components for school success:

- Effective Leaders: The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.
- Collaborative Teachers: The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development, and works together to improve the school.
- Involved Families: The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.
- Supportive Environment: The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students are supported by their teachers and peers.

- Ambitious Instruction: Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.

The 5E system is based on findings described in Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago, written by UEI researchers and selected by Education Next as one of the best education books of the decade.

Appendix F: Student/Parent Permission Form

Parental or Guardian Permission Form

Title of Project: Promoting Growth and Change in the District Literacy Program

Researcher(s): Carol Benda and Cynthia Marks (Doctoral Candidates)

Your permission is being sought to have your child participate in this study. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to give your permission.

The Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to provide data and research to assist the district in developing a balanced literacy program.

Procedure to be Followed: During the surveys and focus groups, your child will be asked various questions regarding their reading habits and preferences both in and out of school.

Discomforts/Risks: The risks in this study are minimal. There are no foreseeable discomforts or dangers to either you or your child in this study.

Incentives/Benefits for Participation: There are no direct benefits to your child, but your child will receive a small incentive for participating. The results of this study, however, will increase our knowledge of the various reading techniques and strategies used by students.

The Time Duration of Participation: Participation in the study will not exceed 1 hour.

Statement of Confidentiality: All records are kept confidential and will be available only to professional researchers and district administration. If the results of this study are

published, the data will be presented in group form, and individual children will not be identified.

Voluntary participation: Your child's participation is voluntary. If you feel your child has in any way been coerced into participation, please inform the district superintendent. We also ask that you read this letter with your child and inform your child that participation is voluntary. At the time of the study, the researcher will once again remind your child of this.

Termination of participation: If at any point during the study you or your child wishes to terminate the session, we will do so.

Questions regarding the research should be directed to Dr. Superintendent (x-XXXX).

Questions or concerns regarding participation in this research should be directed to Dr. Superintendent (x-XXXX).

SIGNING THE FORM BELOW WILL ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY DURING SCHOOL HOURS WITHOUT YOUR PRESENCE.

Please return by Thursday, September 11th.If you do not sign and return this form, the researchers will understand that you do not wish to allow your child to participate.

Parent Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

I, the parent or guardian of _____, a minor _____ years of age, permit his/her participation in a program of research named above and being conducted by Carol Benda and Cynthia Marks (Doctoral Candidates).

Appendix G: Student Focus Group

Student focus group questions

Fill in the blanks.

1. What words pop into your mind when you think of reading a book?

_____

2. Do you read at home? _____ How often? _____

3. Where's your favorite place to read at home? _____ at school? _____

4. How do you find books you love to read? _____

5. Besides books, what other types of materials do you read?

_____

Why do you enjoy these? _____

6. Do you own a library card? _____ How often do you visit the library?_____

What do you do at the library (internet, check out books, read magazines, etc.)?

_____

Complete these sentences.

7. My favorite author is _____

8. The best book I read is _____

9. The best book someone read to me is _____

10. The topics I enjoy reading about are _____

11. The things that I'm great as a reader are _____

12. Things I need to work on to improve my reading are _____

13. I use these strategies as I read _____

14. I enjoy talking about books because _____

15. I enjoy responding to books in my journal because _____

16. I can choose books that I read for enjoyment because _____

Appendix H: Teacher Focus Group

Teacher Focus Group Questions:

1. In the classrooms, you teach how many students have learning disabilities?

2. What are your teaching goals and methods?

3. What are your students' reading habits?

4. How are your students test scores in reading comprehension?

5. Do you think your students understand the text their reading?

6. Do you encourage independent reading?

7. Does your school or your classroom have a library?

8. What comprehension strategy do you use in your classroom?

9. How effective is the strategy you use in the classroom?

10. If a student is completely unable to read and understand text independently, what strategies or strategy could be used to address this?

11. If a student independently reads, but only gets a few facts from the text, what strategies or strategy can be used to address this?

12. If a student reads easily, draws inferences, and evaluates the quality of text, what strategies or strategy will you use?

13. Do you use paraphrasing strategies? How effective do you think the strategy is in combination with other strategies?

Appendix I: Parent Focus Group

Focus Group with Parents

Reading was defined as (de-coding), understanding what they've read, writing, being able to analyze written material and write a summary, speaking, and ability to think through and solve problems.

1. Is reading important to your child's success in school? Why is reading important?

2. What are the most important activities you can do for your child to prepare for school success—both academic and social?

3. How are your children doing with reading? What do they like to read? Are they reading at grade level or do they need help?

     a. What motivates or encourages your children to enjoy reading?

     b. What are the barriers or things that keep them from reading more?

4. What are the most important things parents can do to help their children with reading?

     a. Is there anything that keeps parents from helping their children with reading?

5. Are there things the schools can do to better work with parents, (i.e., better communication about your child's progress, where/how you can get help, what they're expected to know and be able to do in their current grade, after-school programs, etc.)?

6. How can the community help children to be excellent readers? What supports can neighbors, friends, faith-based organizations, and community organizations provide to ensure your child's success with reading?

Appendix J: Student SurveyMonkey

SurveyMonkey Questions for the students

Answer the following questions about your reading habits. This survey is anonymous.
That means no one will know who you are. The reason for this is to encourage you to be
honest. Please answer all questions truthfully. There are no right or wrong answers.
Answering truthfully will help your teachers to help you become a better reader.

1. When I read a story or other information, I understand it.

☐   Yes. I always understand the story or information.

☐   I usually understand the story or information.

☐   Sometimes I understand the story or information but sometimes I do not.

☐   I often don't understand the story or information.

☐   I rarely understand the story or information.

☐   I never understand the story or information.

2. I use illustrations or titles to help me figure out what a story is about.

☐   Always

☐   Usually

☐   Sometimes

☐   Rarely

☐   Never

3. When I do not understand a word, I use the information I have already read to guess its
meaning.

☐ Always

☐ Usually

☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

4. When you find a story or written information difficult to understand, do you give up or do you use strategies to help you understand?

☐ I just give up.

☐ I usually give up but occasionally try strategies.

☐ I sometimes give up but other times I use strategies.

☐ I usually use strategies but occasionally have to give up.

☐ I always use strategies and rarely have to give up.

If you said you use strategies, then list your strategies here.

```
┌──────────────────────────────────┬─┐
│                                  │▲│
│                                  ├─┤
│                                  │▼│
├──────────────────────────────────┼─┤
│◄├───────────────────────┤        ►│ │
└──────────────────────────────────┴─┘
```

5. I use a dictionary when I cannot understand words.

☐ Always

☐ Usually

☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

If you do not use a dictionary often, explain why here

```
┌──────────────────────────────────┬─┐
│                                  │▲│
│                                  ├─┤
│                                  │▼│
├──────────────────────────────────┼─┤
│◄├───────────────────────┤        ►│ │
└──────────────────────────────────┴─┘
```

6. When you read, do you try to see the pictures in your head?

☐ Always

☐ Usually

☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

7. When you read, do you...

	Always	Sometimes	Usually	Rarely	Never
a) guess what will happen before you read the story?	○ a) guess what will happen before you read the story? Always	○ a) guess what will happen before you read the story? Sometimes	○ a) guess what will happen before you read the story? Usually	○ a) guess what will happen before you read the story? Rarely	○ a) guess what will happen before you read the story? Never
b) guess what will happen next, at different places throughout the story?	○ b) guess what will happen next, at different places throughout the story? Always	○ b) guess what will happen next, at different places throughout the story? Sometimes	○ b) guess what will happen next, at different places throughout the story? Usually	○ b) guess what will happen next, at different places throughout the story? Rarely	○ b) guess what will happen next, at different places throughout the story? Never

8. Do you ask yourself questions...

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) before you read the story?	○ a) before you read the story? Always	○ a) before you read the story? Usually	○ a) before you read the story? Sometimes	○ a) before you read the story? Rarely	○ a) before you read the story? Never

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) during the story?	○ b) during the story? Always	○ b) during the story? Usually	○ b) during the story? Sometimes	○ b) during the story? Rarely	○ b) during the story? Never
c) after the story?	○ c) after the story? Always	○ c) after the story? Usually	○ c) after the story? Sometimes	○ c) after the story? Rarely	○ c) after the story? Never

9. When you read, do you...

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) relate the story to your own life?	○ a) relate the story to your own life? Always	○ a) relate the story to your own life? Usually	○ a) relate the story to your own life? Sometimes	○ a) relate the story to your own life? Rarely	○ a) relate the story to your own life? Never
b) make a link to something similar you have read?	○ b) make a link to something similar you have read? Always	○ b) make a link to something similar you have read? Usually	○ b) make a link to something similar you have read? Sometimes	○ b) make a link to something similar you have read? Rarely	○ b) make a link to something similar you have read? Never
c) relate to something else e.g.,. tv programs watched?	○ c) relate to something else e.g.,. tv programs watched? Always	○ c) relate to something else e.g.,. tv programs watched? Usually	○ c) relate to something else eg. tv programs watched? Sometimes	○ c) relate to something else eg. tv programs watched? Rarely	○ c) relate to something else eg. tv programs watched? Never

Appendix K: Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey Questions

1. How many students are typically in the classroom?

2. Describe student reading levels.

3. What percentage of students have difficulty understanding oral instruction?

4. How many students appear to need reading remediation?

5. How many students receive reading remediation?

6. How much time is spent on reading skills daily?

7. How much time is spent exclusively teaching reading comprehension skills?

8. Which is the preferred method of teaching reading: whole group, ability group, mixed ability group, or independent instruction?

9. Circle the resources utilized to teach reading: reading series, workbook or worksheets, computer software, Internet, fictional stories, non-fiction.

10. What subject area are you responsible for teaching?

11. During your class, do you teach reading as a part of your curriculum?

Appendix L: Parent Survey

Parent Survey Questions

1. What are your child's major interests?

2. What are your child's strongest academic subjects?

3. What are you child's weakest academic subjects?

4. Which reading skill(s) would you like to see strengthened?

5. Which math skill(s) would you like to see strengthened?

6. Which writing skill(s) would you like to see strengthened?

7. Which study skill(s) would you like to see strengthened?

8. What should be your child's three main academic goals for the first nine weeks?

9. When your child receives a gift that needs to be assembled, does he read the directions first, or does he dive right in and try...