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A Generic Qualitative Study of District, School, and Teacher Leader Experiences With Increasing Reading and Writing Achievement

Jennifer Fowler

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A Generic Qualitative Study of District, School, and Teacher Leader Experiences With
Increasing Reading and Writing Achievement

by
Jennifer Fowler

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Jennifer Fowler
Name

August 18, 2023
Date

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin with thanking my family who supported me throughout this long exhausting, but powerful and transcending journey. All of my kids have been an inspiration and a motivation to travel this road and grow so much through my travels, which have made me a better and stronger, more knowledgeable person. Also, my amazing husband who supported me and encouraged me throughout this process.

I would also like to give thanks to my mom and dad who have always taught me the importance of education and that learning is a life-long journey and experience. I would like to give a special thank you to my mom for being here to help with the kids and to also encourage and support me in achieving this dream.

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Abstract

A Generic Qualitative Study of Leader and Teacher Experiences With Increasing Reading and Writing Achievement. Jennifer Fowler, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: increase reading achievement pre-K-12 urban, suburban, rural

English Language Arts (ELA) test scores have declined since the 2020 COVID-19 virus caused schools and districts in the United States and around the world to shut down for substantial periods of time. School and district leaders and teachers across the country are working to increase ELA achievement.

In this generic qualitative research study, local district, school, and teacher leaders were interviewed and asked questions about their experiences with increasing reading and writing achievement using semi-structured interview protocols.

Four research questions were addressed. They concerned the challenges, successes, supports, guidance, mandates, and advice offered by district, school, and teacher leaders who participated in individual interviews about how best to increase reading and writing achievement.

Major findings were that teachers, families, and students must work together to remediate weak academic preparation and motivation. Also, administrators must share and build collective efficacy and vision. District leaders must use resources wisely. Finally, all district personnel must keep excellence at the forefront.

Recommendations for future research would be to conduct a quantitative study to identify areas districts need to improve to increase reading and writing achievement and to determine trends in reading skills. Further qualitative research would also be beneficial in districts with different demographics and prior academic success.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Definition of Terms	17
Purpose of the Study	20
Chapter 2: Literature Review	22
Theoretical Framework	22
Continuous School Improvement Model	26
Driving Continuous Improvement	29
Data Driven Improvement and Organizational Practices	29
Research and Instructional Approaches	30
Managerial Impacts of Learning	32
Internal Systems for Improving Reading Instruction	33
Policy Impact on Improvement	35
Leadership Shaping Teachers' Work	35
Encouraging School Leaders to Improve Reading Initiatives	36
Increasing Reading and Writing Achievement	37
Teacher Leaders Guiding Improvement	39
Supporting Students During a Pandemic	39
Reducing Student Violence	40
Supporting Teachers to Reduce Attrition Rates	40
Summary	41
Research Questions	42
Chapter 3: Methodology	43
Aim of the Study	43
Qualitative Research Approach	44
Participants	45
Data Collection and Instruments	46
Procedures	46
Data Analysis	47
Ethical Considerations	48
Trustworthiness	49
Potential Research Bias	50
Limitations	51
Chapter 4: Findings	52
Participants	52
Data Analysis	62
Sequential Analysis Steps	63
Presentation of Results	64
Research Question 1	66
Pattern 1: Students Have Weak Academic Preparation and Skills	67

Pattern 2: Students Have Weak Academic Motivation.....	80
Theme for Research Question 1: Teachers, Families, and Students Must Work Together to Remediate Weak Academic Preparation and Motivation	90
Research Question 2	93
Pattern 1: Strong Collaboration at All Levels Improves Instruction	93
Pattern 2: Expert and Differentiated Instruction Builds Student Skills	118
Theme for Research Question 2: Share and Build Collective Efficacy and Vision.....	126
Research Question 3	129
Pattern 1: The District has an Abundance of Resources.....	130
Pattern 2: The District has an Abundance of Data.....	158
Theme for Research Question 3: Use Resources Wisely.....	171
Research Question 4	174
Pattern 1: Develop Great Leaders and Structures	175
Pattern 2: Teach Requisite Skills	197
Pattern 3: Keep High Expectations for All	202
Theme for Research Question 4: Keep Excellence at the Forefront.....	211
Chapter 5: Discussion	215
Study Overview	215
Research Background	215
Research Questions and Findings	216
Limitations	219
Conclusions.....	219
Recommendations for Future Research	220
References.....	222
Appendices	
A District Leader Interview Protocol	232
B School Leader Interview Protocol	236
C Teacher Leader Interview Protocol	240
D Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today’s Schools	244
E Summary of Research Questions, Patterns, Subpatterns, and Themes.....	247
Tables	
1 School Shootings in the U.S.	2
2 Florida Schools Test Results Percent Levels 3-5, 2019-2022	12
Figures	
1 Enrollment by Gender and Diversity 2017-2019.....	16
2 PDSA CYCLE	24
3 PDCA (Plan Do Check Act)	24

Chapter 1: Introduction

Schools across the country are looking for ways to improve student achievement. This has become even more of an effort as schools at all levels K-12 and higher education contend with instructional losses due to COVID-19 and are looking for ways to close achievement gaps that have only grown greater through the pandemic. Teachers, administrators, and local, state, and federal agencies are desperate to assist students with increasing reading achievement and increasing student opportunities for future success as literate members of society. Parents are also worried about the needs of their children being met and their children increasing their literacy achievement levels and skills (Solochek, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that student achievement in reading and writing on the state reading assessment, in the tested Grades 3 to 10, had declined in the state and target school district since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, data from 2022 showed that student achievement was recovering and showing gradual improvement. Based on current research there may be multiple factors that contributed to the decline. One major factor has been referred to as the COVID-19 slide (Solochek, 2022). While student academic performance declined and then gradually began to recover in 2022, the number of students and families dealing with mental health issues, bullying, and other factors that can affect student outcomes increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rodriguez, 2022). According to Education Week (2018), as shown in Table 1, violence in schools has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, many students lost instructional time with classroom teachers when

Table 1*School Shootings in the U.S.*

Date	School Shootings	Number Killed	Number Wounded
2018	24	35	79
2019	24	8	32
2020	10	3	9
2021	34	15	53
2022	27	27	56

Source. School Shootings Over Time: Incidents, Injuries, and Deaths (2021, March 23). Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-over-time-incidents-injuries-and-deaths>

they were home and out of school due to the COVID-19 virus that shut down the entire United States and most of the world. The focus of the study was on the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders as they recounted their experiences with increasing reading and writing achievement, successes, and challenges, as well as supports for students in the selected district. Major areas of support, such as additional instructional support for struggling learners, more defined and student-centered differentiated instructional approaches, and additional social emotional supports for students are some examples that school and district leaders have used to support students in reaching grade-level literacy proficiency (Odzer, 2021).

Background and Justification

With so many possible variables affecting student achievement, such as the learning gap for some students due to missing school and instruction due to COVID-19, the lack of support from parents, and the increased mental health issues affecting students, many states, along with school and district leaders look for ways to accurately assess students and appropriately provide student-centered instruction, while simultaneously addressing the heightened mental issues and incidents of behavior problems and bullying. For example, the state's governor has moved to progress

monitoring for student performance review rather than a one-time standardized test. This began in the 2022-2023 school year. The assessment system is called the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST). This made the state the first in the nation to move to progress monitoring rather than only end-of-year standardized assessments. Only time will tell if this will be a better way to assess students' and teachers' performance and to also better assist teachers with supporting students' academic needs (Florida Department of Education, 2021).

As schools struggle to meet federal, state, and local performance and accountability expectations, many schools and districts are looking for ways to provide struggling learners with additional learning time to close gaps. This was emphasized with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 signed into law by President George Bush on January 8, 2002, more emphasis was placed on the performance of various subgroups: minority students, students living in poverty, and English learners. This Act became a directive for education reform. The legislation was intended to improve reading and math test scores at schools across the United States, by holding schools, districts, and states accountable for going beyond solely meeting growth and proficiency requirements for their overall student population. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required that schools, districts, and states go beyond meeting growth and proficiency targets for the general population, but for all subgroups. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required disaggregation of data by subgroups by race, gender, special education, and socioeconomic status (Jones, 2022).

In 2015, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was replaced by the Every

Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which stressed the importance of literacy and math development using state assessments and data disaggregated by the various subgroups; however, it transferred much of the responsibility of holding schools accountable for educating children to achieve literacy goals to states. The passage of ESSA gave states more flexibility in developing their accountability plans. One of the key complaints about NCLB was the strict requirement that all students be proficient in reading and math. Since the transition to ESSA, schools and districts have been looking for ways to close the achievement gaps between students from minority and low economic backgrounds and their higher performing peers. Another concern was the lack of additional funding and resources provided to support these additional accountability demands. ESSA, on the other hand, provides funding through its literacy education grant program, in addition to regular federal funding provided as part of a state and district's funding calculation, based on a per-pupil calculation. The literacy education grant program authorized up to \$160 million in literacy grants to states and schools. The grants fund evidence-based instruction in literacy skills, including writing, phonological awareness, and decoding (Lee, 2015).

The state Department of Education, as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESAA), has districts and schools publicly report assessment results, other measures of student achievement, and funding information. Districts and schools must break these down by "subgroups" of students. The reporting must show the performance of students in special education, minorities, those in poverty, and those learning English. If a state identifies a school or subgroup as struggling or needing improvement it must tell parents. Accountability reports can easily be found on the state Department of Education

accountability site that shows a breakdown of how every school and district performed.

The data are further available on the site by the required subgroups: race, gender, special education, poverty, and English learner status (Florida Department of Education, 2022).

The state's ESSA plan made no changes to accountability systems. The plan also preserved the focus on increased student achievement and added a federal calculation to satisfy ESSA requirements. ESSA allows states to end policies that tie teacher evaluations to student test scores and continues to link teacher performance and pay incentives to student test scores. The state ESSA plan claimed that the state has maintained its accountability system, because students have made tremendous improvements in English language arts (ELA) on statewide assessments. Data from 1999 to 2010 collected from the administration of the state achievement test showed a positive trend. During 2001, the first year of the test administration, 47% of all assessed students were reading at or above grade level, in all tested Grades 3 to 10. By 2010, the final year the original version of the test was administered, 62% of students in tested grades were reading at or above grade level, showing an increase of 15 percentage points. After the adoption of more rigorous academic standards, assessments, and student expectations, a new trend line started in 2011 (Florida Department of Education, 2022).

Although student performance on the more rigorous standards and assessments declined in the final year of the test, it increased over the 4 years of administration. In 2014, 58% of students in Grades 3 to 10 scored at or above grade level in reading which reflected a two percentage-point improvement from 2011. Despite the fact more rigorous standards and assessments were put into place in 2011, the percentage of students in Grades 3 to 10 scoring at or above grade level on the reading assessment

increased by 11 percentage points than in 2001 under the previous state assessment (Florida Department of Education, 2022).

In 2015, the state changed again to more rigorous college and career-ready academic standards and assessments, the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA), and increased expectations for students. Yet again after increasing the rigor of standards, the state continued to illustrate improvements in student performance. In the fourth year of the FSA test administration in 2018, 54% of students in grades 3 to 10 scored at or above grade level on the state ELA assessment. This was a two-percentage point increase from the baseline year of 2015 and seven points higher than the previous assessment in 2001 (Florida Department of Education, 2022).

In 2020, the southern state in this study adopted the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards for English Language Arts. The goal for the creation of these new standards was to ensure the state became “the most literate state in the nation” (Florida’s B.E.S.T. Standards English Language Arts, 2020). The state Department of Education, in addition to the federal government noted that if students are to function effectively as adults, they must be literate persons and be able to use their literacy knowledge in their lives (Florida Department of Education, 2020). The B.E.S.T. standards were adopted by the state Department of Education in 2020, in order to move away from the Common Core State Standards that had been adopted in 2010, in an effort to develop standards more closely aligned to the needs of students in the state (Postal, 2020).

In 2020, the COVID-19 virus shut down most of the United States and the world. Many educators, parents, and school leaders worried about the possible effects to

students learning. According to Clark (2021), the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) reading scores in the fall of 2020 had no significant decline when compared to previous years. Consequently, researchers thought the changes to schooling and instruction experienced during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic might not have negatively impacted student academic performance. However, NWEA found that by the spring of 2021, reading scores were between 3 and 6 percentage points lower and the median math achievement decreased by 8 to 12 percentage points when compared to pre-pandemic student performance. NWEA utilizes Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests that assess individual student achievements compared to their peers in a cross-section across the nation. The 2021 report included results from 5.5 million students in Grades 3 to 8 who took MAP Growth assessments in math and reading during the 2020-21 school year.

Data from the Florida State Assessment (FSA) of reading showed a decline on the state reading assessment from 2018 to 2021 in Grades 3 to 10. The reading assessment combines students' scores in reading and writing for a total English Language Arts score. An overall 3.5 percentage point decline in 2022 scores compared to 2019 pre-pandemic FSA scores was seen (Florida Department of Education, 2022). See data in Table 2 from 2019 to 2022 for the state in English Language Arts. The decline in student test scores coincided with a rise in violence and mental health issues in schools across the nation and a recovery in 2022.

According to data collected by the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, in 2019, there were 112 non-active school shooter cases across the United States and in 2021, that number rose to 240 (Rodriguez, 2022). As schools seek ways to close

Table 2*Florida Schools Test Results Percent Levels 3-5, 2019-2022*

Grade	2020-22 N	Average Score	% Passed	2018-19 N	Average Score	% Passed
3	198,628	300	53	216,823	302	58
4	202,373	310	57	211,342	313	58
5	196,549	321	55	218,818	322	56
6	194,258	325	52	211,371	326	54
7	199,985	329	48	212,177	332	52
8	197,220	336	49	205,229	338	56
9	196,278	340	51	203,549	343	55
10	186,374	348	49	196,275	349	53

Source. <https://data.tallahassee.com/school/fsa/>

Note: 2022 results are from the new Florida Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (BEST) Standards

academic gaps and address mental health issues, educators seek strategies such as

Extended or Expanded Learning Time (ELT). ELT has become one of the strategies to

assist schools and districts with closing these gaps. The traditional school schedule

consists of approximately 180 days per year, with students in attendance for about 6.5

hours per day which has stayed relatively the same since the 20th century. ELT has seen

success in some schools and districts trying to close achievement gaps (Kolbe et al.,

2010).

Accountability efforts for student performance have increased with the goals of producing high test scores and closing achievement gaps across all subgroups especially for students from minority and low economic backgrounds, which have been major areas of focus. Expanded time reforms increase the amount of time students attend school. They differ from programs that provide learning and enrichment opportunities outside the regular school day, such as before- and after-school programming and intersession learning opportunities. Moreover, more time in school has been linked with increased student learning opportunities. Advocates for expanded learning-time reforms

contend that more time in the school brings more opportunities to increase time with academic focuses, enrichment activities for students, teacher collaboration, and professional development opportunities (Kolbe & O'Reilly, 2017).

ESSA has supported the use of ELT as part of the school improvement process. Many states and districts have seen success in increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps between all students, particularly, students from minority and low economic backgrounds. Most importantly, schools should use models and develop programs that match the needs of their students and community. This means that for some schools and districts, especially with the added learning gaps due to the COVID-19 slide, all students may need ELT. While in other schools and districts specific groups may need to be the focus, such as students from minority and low economic backgrounds. As research has shown when tailored to the needs of students and along with targeting resources appropriately and strategically, ELT can be an effective way to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps (Kolbe & O'Reilly, 2017).

School leaders are also looking at more student-centered approaches, such as differentiated instruction and targeted small group intervention and conferencing to close this gap in reading. Bondie and Zusho (2018) and other researchers across the nation have identified differentiated instruction as a means of improving students' literacy skills and development for all types of learners. Being able to use reading in everyday life to solve problems, analyze, evaluate, comprehend, and infer as readers is key to student success in school, life, and society. According to *Begin to Read*, two-thirds of students who are not proficient readers by fourth grade will end up in jail or on welfare (*Begin to Read*, 2021).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

School leaders at state, district, and school levels are looking for ways to increase student achievement, close academic gaps, and meet accountability expectations from ESSA and other federal funding requirements. They are looking for creative approaches and uses of resources to address the many issues plaguing today's students that play a role in these academic gaps, including the COVID-19 slide, minority and low economic status, and trying to learn English while simultaneously accessing rigorous grade-level standards. ELT and targeted small group differentiated support and conferencing have become some of the strategies being used to try to address these issues. Schools are seeking strategic, targeted, and creative ways to fund ELT programs and initiatives using a variety of sources such as federal, state, and local funding along with developing community-based programs and working with local businesses and corporations. There has been success in using ELT models to transform and improve schools, however, to achieve these successes, districts must ensure they develop these programs based on the needs of their students and the needs of their district or school and be smart about how they fund, implement, and monitor these initiatives (Kolbe et al., 2010).

The local school district is highly rated, boasting an A grade and high student performance at most of its 62 schools. There are 11 charter schools located in the county, each with its own operator and board. Out of the 11 charter schools, seven have an A grade, three have a B, and one has a C. There is a handful of traditional schools in the district located in Title I higher poverty areas that have grades of C. One school with a minority rate over 80% and a high free and reduced lunch rate received a D in 2022

(Florida Department of Education, 2022). The racial breakdown for the county schools is 62.2% White, 7.8% Black, 2.6% Asian, and 21.4% Hispanic students (US News & School Report, 2022).

In the county, the graduation rate for White students is 93%, for African Americans 79%, for Hispanics 88%, and for Asians 98%. Many charter schools do not have a high enough percent of students in each subgroup to compare graduation rates; however, a military academy has a graduation rate among Whites of 100%, and both African Americans and Hispanics have graduation rates of 98%. There are over 7,000 students with disabilities attending the county schools. This is 17% of the entire student population. In 2018, 77% of non-disabled students were proficient compared to 37% of disabled students based on state mathematics assessments. Of non-disabled students, 72% were proficient in reading and 26% of disabled students were proficient in reading ([the district] County Schools, 2018). There is a need to understand the strategies school and district leaders use to address deficits in reading and writing achievement and mental health while decreasing violence occurring in schools since COVID-19. Furthermore, there is a gap in the current data to show what strategies and approaches are working and effectively addressing the deficits and changes that have occurred since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Clark, 2021).

Audience

Administrators, teachers, along with local, state, and federal agencies are desperate to increase student reading achievement and opportunities for future success as literate members of society. As the number of cases of school violence increases, educators are also looking for ways to address the psychosocial issues affecting schools

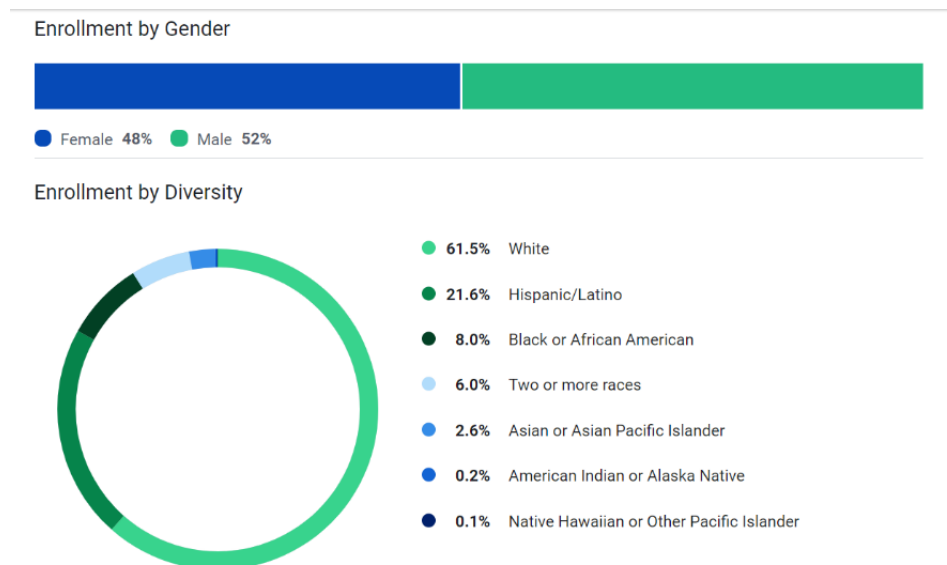
today. Parents also worry about how these deficits are being addressed (Rodriguez, 2022). In this qualitative research study, school, district, and teacher leaders in the large heterogeneous were interviewed about their challenges, successes, and supports to increase reading and writing, achievement. Findings are relevant to the above-mentioned stakeholders as well as to students.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted in a large heterogeneous school district in the south. The district has earned a state grade of A, based on state assessment and accountability data. The district site for the study has 62 traditional and 11 charter schools. The gender and racial demographics of students are shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Enrollment by Gender and Diversity 2017-2019



Source. Florida Department of Education retrieved from U.S. News & World Reports

Researcher's Role

The researcher in this study is employed by the district site's school board. A

snapshot of the district's demographic composition is presented in Figure 1. The researcher works as a teacher and teacher leader in one of the schools in the district included in this study. The researcher helps support student learning and the goals and initiatives of the district as part of the school's Guiding Coalition. As the study principal investigator, the researcher is independent, non-judgmental, and did not lead participants as they relayed their experiences, views, and stories through researcher-created interview protocols. While collecting data, transcribing, and analyzing the reported perceptions of leaders participating in the study, the researcher remained objective and used the voices of participants to determine patterns and themes from their validated self-reports.

Definition of Terms

Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) were created to move away from Common Core standards and to ensure state students become literate citizens. English Language Arts components of the B.E.S.T. standards were developed in 2019 by educators in conjunction with literacy experts and other vested stakeholders (Florida Department of Education, 2022).

The *continuous improvement model* "is based on the principles that making sustainable change takes time and involves collective effort; is context specific; and requires constant adaptation, data collection, and learning..." (Shakman et al., 2020, p. 4).

The *COVID-19 (coronavirus)* pandemic became "a global health threat. Coronaviruses (CoVs) are a group of highly diverse, enveloped, positive-sense, and single-stranded RNA viruses. They cause several diseases involving respiratory, enteric, hepatic, and neurological systems..." (He et al., p. 719). The virus caused a global

shutdown and interruptions to day-to-day life and activities for over a year across the world.

COVID-19 slide is the term coined to describe any gaps in learning or other areas that may have occurred during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (Solocheck, 2022).

ESEA or Elementary and Secondary Education Act “is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education... Originally enacted in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, ESEA was created to support the education of the country’s poorest children and that remains its overarching purpose” (EdSource, 2022, p. 17).

The *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* is “the 2015 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Every Student Succeeds Act replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Most provisions of ESSA went into effect in 2017-18” (EdSource, 2022, p. 17).

Florida's Assessment of Student Thinking (F.A.S.T) is Florida’s current state assessment that shifts one standardized annual state test to “progress monitoring that will minimize the stress of testing and change to three much shorter tests in the Fall, Winter and Spring” (Florida Department of Education, 2022, p. 1).

The *Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)* “consisted of criterion-referenced assessments in mathematics, reading, science, and writing, which measured student progress toward meeting the Sunshine State Standards (SSS) benchmarks” (Florida Department of Education, 2022, p. 1).

Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) were administered from 2015 to 2022. The assessments were in English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, algebra, and geometry and were used to measure student achievement and grade schools (Florida Department of

Education, 2022).

Florida Standards (FS) were “the original Common Core State Standards adopted in July 2010... The resulting new Mathematics Florida Standards (MAFS) and Language Arts Florida Standards (LAFS) were approved by the Florida State Board of Education on February 18, 2014” (St. John’s County School District, 2015, p. 1).

A Literacy Coach is

an instructional leader with specialized knowledge in the science of reading, evidence-based practices, English Language Arts state standards, as well as the knowledge of how to work with educators as adult learners. The coach provides collegial, job-embedded support to ensure literacy instruction is data-informed and student-centered. Coaches accomplish this by collaborating with leaders and teachers, engaging in practices such as co-teaching, co-planning, modeling, reflective conversations, and data chats with teachers to build teacher and school capacity to improve student achievement for all. (Florida Department of Education, 2022, p. 1)

A Local Education Agency (LEA) is

a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 1)

A Literacy Leadership Team (LLT)

is the central "cog" that turns the gears of the multi-tiered system of support

(MTSS) for literacy. The team should be made up of individuals representing a range of perspectives, including classroom teachers, literacy and second-language learning specialists, school leaders, and the site-based instructional leader in charge. (Lesaux et al., 2016, p. 1)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is “the 2002 update of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—effectively scaled up the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes” (Klein, 2015, p. 1).

A school leader is

a principal, assistant principal, or other individual who is (a) an employee or officer of an elementary school or secondary school, local educational agency, or other entity operating an elementary school or secondary school; and (b) responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary school or secondary school building. (U.S. Code, 2022, p. 19)

Purpose of the Study

Districts and schools across the country work to increase student achievement in reading and writing. The continuous school improvement model is recognized by many organizations as a model to facilitate improvements and address gaps in achievement (Young et al., 2017). The purpose of this proposed generic qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement in Grades 3 to 10 in a diverse community in the south. The researcher interviewed district, school, and teacher leaders regarding their experiences, including successes and challenges with increasing reading and writing achievement. Allowing practitioners’ voices to be heard provides current and full context to the

quantitative test data available in abundance to describe student achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the current literature surrounding efforts in the United States to increase reading and writing achievement is reviewed. As part of this review, the literature search strategy is presented as is the primary theoretical underpinning of the study, the continuous improvement model. Following this, the four research questions which were used to guide the study are presented.

Using Nova Southeastern University's Alvin Sherman library, the ProQuest education database was searched for current literature relevant to increasing student reading and writing achievement in modern times. Specifically, the reviewed literature included Deming's long standing continuous improvement model; this spanned a time frame from 1995 to 2022. Additionally, literature about supporting students during a pandemic, supporting student mental health, and supporting teachers so they can best teach their students and increase achievement were sought. Finally, specific strategies related to increasing reading and writing achievement across the full span of grade levels in public schools were searched. Key words included continuous improvement model, ,Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA), PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), differentiated literacy/reading instruction, writing conferencing, small group intervention, school improvement, data-driven instruction, reading achievement, and writing achievement.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of continuous improvement underpins and explains how learning organizations keep focus on the mission. In the case of public education, the focus is on continuously enabling, empowering, and expecting student achievement, and in the case of this dissertation, more specifically, on increasing reading and writing achievement. In

broad terms, the continuous improvement theory holds that organizations always seek better ways to carry out their missions. William Edward Deming popularized the continuous improvement model as early as 1986. According to Deming (2000), there are nine key components linked to the continuous improvement model: (a) driving continuous improvement, (b) data driven improvement and organizational practices, (c) research and instructional approaches, (d) managerial impacts of learning, (e) internal systems for improving reading instruction, (f) policy impact on improvement, (g) leadership shaping teachers' work, (h) encouraging school leaders to improve effectiveness in leading reading initiatives, and (i) teacher leaders driving improvement. The process involves an integrated learning approach to improvement. Initially, the process was predominantly used to study or gain useful input for the improvement of manufactured goods, procedures, or labor activities (Deming, 2000).

The continuous improvement process begins with developing a plan. Development of a plan involves setting a target or rationale, devising a theory, developing achievement systems of measurement, and implementing action steps. Next, the process involves what participants do and involves how the elements of the plan are executed, such as making a product. The following part of the process involves monitoring outcomes and assessing the soundness of the plan by reviewing what is working and what may need improvement. The process is finalized by actions that synthesize the knowledge produced. This step involves making adjustments or changes to the goals, methods, or theory. The improvement cycle can be used to address a variety of investigations or for the execution of bigger plans. These processes can be replicated when needed. The goal of Deming's work was to apply the scientific method to business

processes. His work has led to two main variants of his thinking: “Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA)” (see Figure 2) and “Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA)” (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle



Source: *PDSA CYCLE* (2022). The Deming Institute. <https://deming.org/explore/pdsa/>

The process has now been expanded to be used in many fields, including education and health to drive the improvement process (Chen et al., 2017, p. 9).

Figure 3

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA Cycle)



Source: *PDCA (Plan Do Check Act) Continually Improving, in a Methodical Way Also known as PDSA, the "Deming Wheel," and "Shewhart Cycle"* (2022). MindTools https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_89.htm

The theory of continuous improvement indicates that an organization can make improvements and review what is working and what is not working. Continuous improvement has become an approach used by many types of agencies to make improvements. The process involves a review of manufactured goods, procedures, labor activities, and each component of an agency to increase efficiency and achieve best outcomes. Deming's process starts with accessing what he calls profound knowledge.

Deming (1986) detailed 14 points of management as listed below from his MIT Press publication and as published by Holt (1995, p. 6).

1. Create constancy of purpose for the improvement of product or service.
2. Adopt the new philosophy.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality.
4. End the practice of awarding business on price tag alone. Minimize total cost by working with a single supplier.
5. Improve constantly every process for planning, production, and service.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Adopt and institute leadership.
8. Drive out fear.
9. Break down barriers between staff areas.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the work force.
11. Eliminate numerical quotas for the work force and numerical goals for management.
12. Remove barriers that rob people of pride of workmanship. Eliminate the annual rating or merit system.

13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement for everyone.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation.

(Holt, 1995, p. 6). Source: Reprinted from *Out of the Crisis* by W. Edwards Deming, 1986, MIT Press. Copyright 1986 by William Edwards Deming

Continuous School Improvement Model

The “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” and later the “Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)” has pushed districts, schools, and teachers to look for ways to increase student achievement, including, reading and writing achievement, in order to meet the higher academic and accountability requirements of these and other federal mandates. Young et al. (2017) in their study provided: (a) an overview of the attention federal policy has invested in educational leadership with a primary focus on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), (b) a summary of the critical role school leaders play in achieving the goals set forth within federal educational policy, and (c) examples of how states are using the opportunity afforded by the focus on leadership in ESSA (Young et al., 2017, p. 705). The authors used the historical research method to review and analyze education policy. As part of the review of federal policy and current research, Young et al. (2017) reviewed the amount of focus placed on educational leadership supported in the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA),” which is a component of ESSA that was reauthorized in 2015, along with a review of other federal education legislation. The researcher found that ESSA makes educational leadership one of its priorities and recognizes the value of state, district, and school leaders attaining federal education requirements. The authors additionally found that ESSA recognized that developing a strong leadership pipeline is also vital to the success of schools and districts by allowing the use of federal funding by states and districts for developing leaders (Young et al.,

2017).

The Continuous School Improvement Model is an important model that many organizations use to facilitate improvements and address gaps in achievement. Park et al. (2013) focused on recognizing and defining agencies involved in continuous improvement and conducting comparative analysis of what is working and what is not working. The primary aims of the researchers in this study were to ascertain how the continuous improvement process was executed in three educational organizations. The data were collected using a 90-day scan, which involved a review of literature and separate individual interviews that allowed for unstructured questioning with staff from organizations participating in continuous improvement. The organizational analysis revealed three ways organizations in the study committed to a continuous improvement approach. Organizations could be characterized as prioritizing improvement at the instructional level in schools, system-wide at the local education agency, or focusing on community level improvements. Six underlying premises found in each of the agencies participating in the continuous improvement process in the case studies. The assertions included: “leadership and strategy, communication and engagement, organizational infrastructure, methodology, data collection and analysis, and building capacity” (Park et al., 2013, p. 26).

The continuous improvement model originated from Deming’s (2000) business model of profound knowledge that later led to the development of the “Plan, Do, Study, Act” (PDSA) process that is also used to promote continuous improvement in other fields, such as, health. Deming’s process of profound knowledge provided synthesized considerations and pathways for leaders pursuing organizational transformation into a

thriving, systemically focused organization and has also been used as a way to support organizations in achieving continuous improvement. Chen et al. (2021) found that the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle is a simple Quality Improvement (QI) tool that requires minimal resources, that can be implemented quickly, and can lead to significant change.

Holt (1995) discussed Deming's 14 points of management developed to support the continuous improvement process for businesses that have been adapted to support continuous school improvement. The purpose of Holt's study was to compare and contrast the theories of Deming and Schwab and how they impacted the school improvement models schools and districts currently use. Holt found that the parallels amid the two methods were more significant than the variances. Holt also found that both approaches were applicable to education. Additionally, it was found that both involved strategies that disconnect the ending results from the methods used to obtain them (Holt, 1995).

Weller and Weller (1997) focused on using the continuous school improvement model to support improvements in reading achievement. The design of the study was the development of short- and long-term goals. Additionally, data from the state assessment "TAP" were also reviewed as part of the continuous improvement model to develop a school-wide improvement plan. The researcher found that students achieved higher reading scores and that teachers and administrators made a shift to seeing reading improvement as an on-going process using the continuous improvement model (Weller & Weller, 1997).

Driving Continuous Improvement

Andreoli and Klar (2021) demonstrated how districts can drive continuous improvement using a continuous improvement model. The purpose of this study was to examine a rural school with a high poverty rate and how school leaders implemented continuous school improvement utilizing a “research-practice partnership.” The researchers employed “qualitative research methods, improvement science, and Deming’s [system] of profound knowledge” to review the differences in how school leaders managed the improvement process after participating in the continuous improvement process of a “research–practice partnership.” The results of the study were that participating in a “research-practice partnership” as part of continuous improvement improved school leaders’ abilities “to prioritize and solve problems, incorporate multiple and diverse perspectives in problem-solving efforts and establish a culture of increased risk-taking and ownership of teaching and learning outcomes.” The results reflected how school leaders “became the drivers of their own change processes.” The results also gave “an insight into how school leaders in rural, high-poverty schools can build capacity within their schools to meet the demand for increased student achievement by leading collaborative, continuous improvement processes grounded in improvement science in research–practice partnerships” (Andreoli & Klar, 2021, p. 162).

Data Driven Improvement and Organizational Practices

Anderson et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of data in driving and informing an improvement process. The researchers reviewed how data were used and the circumstances affecting school leaders’ and educators’ use of data. The researchers also reviewed how using data affected student outcomes. The researchers used a multi-

faceted examination of state, district, and school leaders. The results highlighted how school leaders developed protocols on how to use data, systems, professional development opportunities, and how leaders develop knowledge and skills, and monitor for effectiveness. The researchers found that district leadership and state accountability systems largely impacted data use at the school level. The researchers also showed how organizational practices can impact the effectiveness of the improvement process (Anderson et al., 2010).

Similarly, Yoon (2016) focused on: (a) how principals' data-driven practices may vary by principals' and school backgrounds and how that changes over time; (b) how principals' data-driven practices influence teacher buy-in; and (c) how principals' data-driven practices and teachers' buy-in influence student outcomes (Yoon, 2016, p. 500). Yoon (2016) investigated data from the "Study of Instructional Improvement (SII)" and a significant "quasi-experimental study" of "Comprehensive School Reforms (CSR) models." The process targeted three school-based "CSR" initiatives. Data collection included survey responses from school leaders and educators and the implementation process along with student achievement outcomes. Results were that school leaders with more experience had fewer data used than school leaders without as much experience. Additionally, the author found that the potential for teacher buy-in increased when school leaders used data. Furthermore, Yoon (2016) showed it took over 3 years for overall teacher buy-in to improve and revealed that the focus on data resulted in positive increases in students' reading achievement (Yoon, 2016, p. 503).

Research and Instructional Approaches

Research is a key part of reaching success in the continuous improvement

process. This was evident in Honig et al.'s (2017) study. Honig et al. (2017) examined how research can play a major role in improvement efforts, particularly, in school district organizations and improve instruction and knowledge attainment. Honig et al. (2017) used sociocultural learning theory to examine six school districts. Interviews, observations, and documents were examined. Honig et al. (2017) found that district leaders were diverse in their use of five research-based concepts. Honig et al. (2017) also found that prior knowledge and assistance from other organizations were valuable in teaching others how to use the research. This also helped with capacity building. The findings supported the use of research as a process for attaining knowledge and skills that could necessitate more rigorous leadership techniques (Honig et al., 2017).

Penuel et al. (2017) also conducted a study focused on the impact of research as part of the continuous improvement process. The researchers investigated the research processes and perceptions used by school and district leaders. The researchers used a sample that represented districts in the United States. Survey data from school and district leadership were collected during the study. The aim of the research was to better understand the avenues research is used, attitudes held by school and district leadership concerning research, and the correlation between how individuals and each organization uses research. The researchers found that leadership at all levels described regularly using research and having mostly optimistic positions about research. The researchers showed that they reported retrieving research mainly from professional organizations. Additionally, the researchers found that educators working on or that have advanced degrees, and educators reporting that their agency had an established evidence-based culture were more likely to use research. Their results further suggested the value of

policy initiatives in encouraging the use of research among education leaders will be supported, however, policy developers must keep in mind the various types of uses for research in evidence-based approaches (Penuel et al., 2017).

Additionally, Penuel et al. (2016) studied research practices among district leaders. They focused on the types of research district-level leadership perceived to be most valuable. The researchers used data collected from interview questions and examining surveys of district leadership in three sizable inner-city United States local education agencies. The goal of the study was to investigate district leaders' perceptions on useful research as it pertains to their responsibilities and environments. The researchers employed structured interview protocols and electronic survey methods to collect data. The researchers, using a structured interview protocol, asked two question sets pertaining to research used by leaders within the past year. Penuel et al. found that while leadership reported using research, federal regulations required them to focus on instructional programming and resources to support struggling learners. The research district leadership found to be most useful was not usually influenced by peer-review. Often the research they found to be helpful presented guidelines and technical assistance from books. Leaders also reported accessing research to enhance professional learning opportunities, influence their instructional leadership practices, for progress monitoring purposes, and to support the implementation of district initiatives. The results further showed a need for a broader understanding of the research initiatives that are most applicable to the complex needs of district leaders (Penuel et al., 2016).

Managerial Impacts of Learning

Another important factor to successful outcomes through the continuous

improvement model is the impact managers and leaders play in its effectiveness. Kovach and Fredendall (2014) in their research attempted to show a direct link between quality management initiatives, including leadership management styles, quality assurance data review, customer service, and other key elements of great leaders achieving positive continuous improvement outcomes. They evaluated the extent to which continuous improvement practices affect organizational improvements and identified the role of learning throughout the process. Survey instruments and interviews were used to collect data. They used a structural equation model to review the data. The data did not support the first hypothesis that using the continuous improvement practices directly improves organizational outcomes. The authors found that learning was the important go-between step needed when using continuous improvement practices and obtaining organizational improvement. They also found that when organizations learn from using continuous improvement practices, the knowledge gained is what drives positive improvement outcomes (Kovach & Fredendall, 2014).

Internal Systems for Improving Reading Instruction

A key part of how districts and schools can support the continuous improvement process is in the development of appropriate infrastructure. Woulfin and Gabriel (2020) examined the importance of curriculum, professional development (PD), and effective leadership in improving reading instruction. The researchers shared empirical data collected from a review of literature focusing on implementation and reading initiatives. The researchers developed an outline describing how progress and improvement depended upon having sound systems in place. The researchers also determined that these systems were vital because they afforded the conditions needed for teachers and leaders

to collaboratively implement reading initiatives and meet achievement expectations. They determined that it is important to foster an interrelated infrastructure based on the needs of the district that supports changes based on the “science of reading (SOR)” (Woulfin & Gabriel, 2020, p. S109).

The researchers found three key aspects of infrastructure related to improvements to instruction required to implement an equitable and large-scale project. The researchers also learned that quality infrastructure (reading curriculum, PD, and leadership) to improve reading instruction had to be related, easily detectable, and reasonable. They contended that three areas promoted educators’ growth and development towards common goals. It was also found that the infrastructural approach is important for policymakers, leadership development, and advocacy. For example, Woulfin and Gabriel (2020) contended that policy developers and those looking for reform should focus on developing environments conducive to the implementation of the SOR and effective, unbiased reading instruction, instead of focusing on programs, adding additional training, or additional regulations to add to the plate of school leaders. Next, the researchers recommended that policymakers and reformers use the results of this study to develop more reliable, reasonable infrastructure, which could require more resources. Leaders engaged in literacy initiative at all levels should be aware of the components of the infrastructure that are supporting or hampering improvements in reading. Finally, school leadership must know and understand the instructional practices of reading, adult learners, and school improvement approaches. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that the training and knowledge taught in educator preparation programs be expanded to include effective strategies for taking the lead on improving reading

instruction (Woulfin & Gabriel, 2020).

Policy Impact on Improvement

As district and school leaders work to address high stakes testing and rigorous accountability systems often linked to student and teacher performance outcomes, the need to understand the role research practices and partnerships play in meeting these expectations and the impact policy development and changes has on implementing the improvement process has also increased (Young et al., 2017). Coburn and Penuel (2016) took a close look at how research, partnerships, and policy can be vital to the success of improvement processes. The researchers contended that “policymakers, funders, and researchers today view research–practice partnerships (RPPs) as a promising approach for expanding the role of research in improving educational practice” (p. 48). They also contended that the studies in education related to these aspects are limited. The researchers examined existing data related to RPPs in education and other areas of study. They outlined a research initiative for the review of RPPs that could influence policy development, investors, and help with developing successful partnerships (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

Leadership Shaping Teachers’ Work

Research has proven that another key factor in obtaining successful outcomes in the continuous improvement process studied by Salloum (2022) is leadership’s role in shaping teachers’ work. Salloum (2022) focused on “collective efficacy (CE)-a group's belief in its capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to reach a goal- as an important organizational property because it facilitates goal attainment” (Salloum, 2022, p. 203). The purpose of the study was to use a sequential explanatory

mixed method: (a) to affirm the link between CE and student achievement, (b) to understand the antecedents of CE, and (c) to illustrate how school leaders shape conditions to promote CE.

Salloum (2022) used state assessment data from a random sampling of schools. Data were analyzed using a tiered broad linear modeling approach, to determine the correlation between CE approaches and student performance outcomes. Quantitative results showed a direct correlation of CE with students' passing rates on standardized state reading and math assessments (Salloum, 2022).

Encouraging School Leaders to Improve Reading Initiatives

Supporting school administrators in leading reading improvements is another important factor in continuous improvement efforts. Townsend and Bayetto (2021) reviewed the effect of a professional learning initiative referred to as “the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL)” initiative and their ability to support school leadership in encouraging and involving teachers in school-wide initiatives to cultivate a common goal for creating a learning environment that supports students becoming more proficient readers. The researchers used data gathered from individuals participating in the PALL initiative along with data collected using case studies involving five schools to analyze the behaviors of school administrators when developing common goals designed to increase student reading achievement. The results were that school leaders experienced increased confidence in their capacity to implement school reading initiatives upon completion of the initiative and developing a common purpose. This resulted in enhanced instructional practices, increased student engagement, and increases in students' capacity to discuss and think about their learning, and overall improvement in students'

achievement levels in reading (Townsend & Bayetto, 2021).

Increasing Reading and Writing Achievement

Research over several decades has shown the importance of incorporating daily reading behaviors, as a key part in developing as a reader. Specifically, research shows a correlation between daily reading with better reading skills and greater academic success. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2021) in their research took this correlation a step further to examine the relation between reading volume and reading achievement. They found that the amount students read seems to have the greatest impact after the shift from learning to read to reading to learn, in which students begin using reading as way to grow as a learner and researcher. They found this more the case as students progress in age and their ability to read for more than just decoding. The researchers showed a relationship between reading quantity, students' exposure to print, and increases in student reading achievement. They found that the volume of reading and making daily reading part of the literacy block becomes even more important as students progress in age, particularly in the areas of oral language and word recognition.

Researchers have shown that students learn better when connections are made between what they are learning in school and other aspects of the world and their experiences. Menson (2015) showed in his research that students who participated in integrated reading and writing performed better in reading compared to students in non-integrated reading and writing classes. Another key factor in increasing student reading and writing achievement is motivation. Zhang et al. (2020) showed that a lack of motivation is one factor that can affect students' reading performance. The researchers in the study reviewed evidence from the 2015 NAEP assessments to support the need to

increase student motivation to increase students' reading achievement. The researchers showed that motivation can positively or negatively impact students' reading performance and because proficient reading skills compose a key role in students' success in every academic domain, including writing, motivation is critical to improving reading and writing achievement.

Furthermore, Tomlinson (2017) described differentiated instruction as a key strategy to meeting the needs of diverse learners. Teachers struggle with how to differentiate instruction based on individual student needs and with implementing more authentic learning opportunities for students. Parsons and Vaughn (2021) asserted that differentiated instruction along with authentic learning activities are key pieces to moving students to higher levels of literacy proficiency. Webb et al. (2019), after reviewing 35 years of data, contended that utilizing the gradual release model and differentiating instruction based on student needs, when implemented with fidelity and data and student-driven, are highly effective instructional strategies for meeting the needs of a variety of learners. Frances (2017) described the gradual release model as incorporating instruction at various levels of rigor using Webb's depth of knowledge taxonomy. This includes teacher modeling, then the class learning the strategy or skill together, and then students showing mastery by applying the strategy independently. The gradual release model allows for scaffolding and support for students as needed at various levels. Frances (2017) described Webb's depth of knowledge taxonomy as an approach to indicating how deeply students should know and understand what they are learning. It also describes the degree to which students are expected to transfer and use what they have learned in different academic settings and contexts. Additionally, Holtz et al. (2015) discussed the

importance of incorporating authentic text to increase reading and writing achievement.

Teacher Leaders Guiding Improvement

Teachers taking leadership roles can have a positive influence on school climate and achievement outcomes. Bond (2022), in a multiple case study, examined the efforts of three elementary school teachers who worked as instructional support professionals in reading, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESL), and gifted instruction. The goals of the study were to determine the influence teacher leaders have on positive student outcomes and school climate. Bond used a semi-structured focus-group interview with participants followed by semi-structured individualized interviews with participants. The researcher used the constant-comparative method, which involved reading transcripts, identifying codes, and then organizing the codes into matrices used to determine major themes. The researcher then ran a cross-case analysis. The findings of the study were that the teachers led by establishing a culture of collaboration in their school, utilizing research to inform instructional practices, encouraging professional learning communities, working to achieve instructional improvements, using testing to inform instruction, collaborating with families, and supporting positive student achievement outcomes (Bond, 2022).

Supporting Students During a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed some new challenges for teachers, students, and families. John (2020) discussed the importance of teachers, families, and school psychologists working together to support students during this time. The researcher discussed the importance of teachers and families receiving updated information about the pandemic from reliable sources and communicating the information in a

comprehensible and supportive manner to students and families. The researcher further claimed that the effects of a pandemic can lead to an increase in mental health issues resulting from anxiety stemming from the fears connected with the pandemic. Other changes such as online learning without the face-to-face supports of teachers also caused anxiety for some students. John (2015) discussed how school psychologists and teachers can work together to provide students with strategies, such as having online contacts with students to support them and help them feel more normalcy, rather than solely having students rely on online learning tools. John also discussed making school psychologists available for students remotely online during a pandemic.

Reducing Student Violence

Pincus et al. (2020) examined the potential increases in violence in schools as a result of the stress and isolation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Pincus et al. (2020), mental health experts predicted increased levels of depression, substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicide in students returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers shared the importance of employing a coordinated effort to assist students with trauma or stresses that students may be dealing with. The researchers proposed using school counselors to provide mental health services to students. The researchers further discussed the need for additional training for school counselors to support them in this initiative.

Supporting Teachers to Reduce Attrition Rates

As schools and districts worked to address the changes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher attrition continues to be a problem across the United States. Rosenburg and Anderson (2021) examined this issue and found many factors that

have led to the teacher shortage, including the COVID-19 pandemic being the reason that some teachers left the field. However, teacher attrition was a problem before the pandemic. The researchers cited several reasons for the issue, including technology challenges, too many modes of teaching, decreased student engagement, fear of contracting COVID-19, and balancing their own caretaking responsibilities, increased workloads, declining job satisfaction, and low morale. The researchers suggested using stimulus and other funding sources to improve the teaching profession. The researchers recommended using competitive compensation with growth potential, supportive school leadership styles, providing more time for collaboration, and reducing teaching loads to provide more time for relationship building with students and adjusting approaches to meet individual student needs.

Summary

In the final analysis, as schools across the country look for ways to improve student achievement and raise achievement among various subgroups, reviewing the many ways the continuous improvement model can be used in districts and schools to support leaders in improving student performance is important to the foundation of the research in this study. Using the continuous school improvement model to raise student achievement can help leaders make decisions that are research-based and proven to support positive outcomes. Additionally, the review showed the importance of having strong organizational leadership and practices at all levels in districts and schools. A review of these studies reflected how the day-to-day managerial practices can have a huge effect on the success of any school improvement process.

Additionally, the review showed the importance of policy and collaborative

partnerships across multiple departments within and outside of an organization in supporting continuous improvement. The review also overwhelmingly showed the importance of school and district leaders in supporting and developing teachers' work and practices and the value in empowering teachers as leaders. The review further demonstrated the impact school leaders can have on increasing student achievement increases when the leader is knowledgeable and uses research to get buy-in.

Research Questions

The purpose of the proposed study was to learn about the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders as they work to increase student reading and writing achievement. The study interview protocols were designed to collect data from district, school, and teacher leaders regarding their experiences, including successes and challenges with increasing student achievement and closing gaps. The four research questions were designed to provide key information about the perceptions and experiences of school, district, and school leaders in the selected district.

1. What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?
2. What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?
3. What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?
4. What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders increase reading and writing achievement?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement in state tested Grades 3 to 10 in a suburban-urban Florida school district. The problem addressed in this study is that student reading and writing achievement on the state reading assessments in Grades 3 to 10 had declined in the state of Florida, in the target school district, and across the country since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the data from 2022 showed that student achievement is recovering and showing gradual improvement in Florida. Semi-structured interview protocols were used to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing reading and writing achievement in Grades 3 to 10.

This study was designed to gain insight and add to the current body of knowledge of what district, school, and teacher leaders in a large southern district are doing to make improvements that have yielded a gradual increase in student reading and writing achievement and recovery after the decline following the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher is interested in learning the perceptions, experiences, and advice of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement in hopes of gaining insight into what this district did and can do to continue to increase student achievement in reading and writing following the instructional loss from the COVID-19 shutdowns. The study was designed to keep a focus on the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders as they recounted their experiences with increasing reading and writing achievement, successes, and challenges, as well as supports for students in the

selected district.

Qualitative Research Approach

The primary purpose of this generic qualitative research was to examine the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in the district, in increasing reading and writing, achievement in state tested Grades 3 to 10. The researcher inquired about the successes and challenges and what leaders at district, school, and teacher levels considered to have worked to support these efforts from with various subgroups. Kostere and Kostere (2021) defined generic qualitative research as a methodology that pursues an understanding of human perceptions and experiences using qualitative perspectives and methods. The generic qualitative research approach was used to investigate the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student reading and writing achievement. Percy et al. (2015) asserted that generic qualitative research examines people's subjective perceptions, experiences, philosophies, and values. Kahlke (2014) described generic qualitative research studies as research that does not consistently follow one conventional methodology. This generic qualitative research approach followed Percy et al.'s constant comparison method. Percy et al. (2015) noted that semi-structured interview protocols are effective when researching external and real-world issues. Semi-structured interview protocols (Appendices A, B, and C) will provide opportunities to learn about the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student reading and writing achievement by allowing open-ended responses offered by participants. Data from the semi-structured interviews were documented using recordings. Following member checking where participants were invited to review their transcripts and make any desired changes, transcriptions of the recordings were

thoroughly examined to discern patterns and themes across participants.

Participants

The participants in this study included 17 leaders each working at the district, school, or teacher level in a diverse public school district. The 17 participants were purposefully selected for the study based on their work at the district, school, and teacher levels in making decisions about reading and writing instruction and programs designed to increase student achievement in the areas of reading and writing. Teacher leaders from the target district were selected based on their participation in leadership activities at their school site. Following district permission to conduct the study and Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview via email. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with the researcher remotely via Zoom. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their role in their district or school as a district leader, school leader, or teacher leader. All participants held current administrative or teacher certifications. Gender and race of participants were collected for demographic purposes but were not used to group participants in this study. This researcher focused on the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student achievement; thus, all participants were leaders in their district or school in some capacity. Participants must have worked in the district or school as a leader, holding a leadership role or title in the district office or worked as a grade-level team leader or as part of a leadership team at school for a minimum of 3 years. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select teacher, district, and school leaders who have had success with increasing student reading and/or writing achievement

(Sharma, 2017).

Data Collection and Instruments

Four research questions were constructed after an exhaustive review of the current literature pertaining to the study objectives. Literature about increasing literacy achievement, the continuous improvement model, leadership practices, and qualitative research design were reviewed. The final interview protocols developed were reviewed by two subject matter experts in the content area of the study to allow participants to express their ideas.

The data collection instruments used in this research were researcher-created semi-structured interview protocols for district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders (see Appendices A, B, and C, respectively). Interview questions in each protocol were designed to gain an understanding of the experiences and thoughts of district, school, or teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement for students in Grades 3 to 10. Participants were provided a Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today's Schools document to reference during interviews (see Appendix D).

Procedures

Following Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process and receiving approval through the school district's office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation, participants were purposefully recruited and those showing interest and meeting inclusion requirements were selected for participation in the study. After agreeing to take part in the study and signing appropriate consent forms, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. Individual interviews were conducted

remotely using Zoom at a schedule mutually acceptable to the participant and researcher. All interviews were recorded to allow transcribing and data analysis. McMullin (2021) discussed that as technology improves and artificial intelligence tools become better able to create written text from recorded audio, these tools are becoming more and more useful to researchers. Participants were permitted and encouraged to express their ideas and insights as they answered researcher-created interview questions.

The researcher ensured interview questions were aligned to the research questions. Consequently, based on the literature review conducted by the researcher about how school and district leaders increase student achievement, the researcher developed interview questions aligned to the research question, in order to ensure the study was designed to gather specific information about the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders and how they have been able to increase student reading and writing achievement.

Data Analysis

Each participant was assigned a participant number based on their role in lieu of participant names. The initial research questions were used to establish a platform for interview questions. After transcribing, individual interview transcripts were provided to each participant for review, feedback, or corrections as a form of member checking. Candela (2019) described member checking as a vital part of upholding validity. She further stated that member checking should be used for more than validity purposes, but that researchers should also review participant experiences and view member checking as a reflective process. After completing the member checking process, interview data were analyzed and reviewed for patterns and themes in the data.

Thematic analysis was employed using constant comparison. Constant comparison, as detailed by Percy et al. (2015), is a data review process that analyzes the data as they are collected, comparing each interview to previous data collected. In accordance with the constant comparison process, patterns and themes within the data were highlighted. Patterns and themes were then be further reviewed for alignment with the research focus and questions. Unrelated data were removed from the analysis or documented for purposes of future study or analysis. The final remaining patterns and themes from the analysis were synthesized and included in a detailed analysis report detailing each (Percy et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Denzin and Giardina (2007) proposed that research should be evaluated in terms of tangible experiences and provide a sense of meaning and honesty. The researcher received approval from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board and the school district's Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation as suggested by Hammersley et al. (2014) prior to completing any research activities with potential participants. Care and respect were provided to all participants in this study, by providing opportunities for participants to provide input via interview responses and member checks of recorded and transcribed materials (Candela, 2019). Additionally, care was taken as participants participated in the study voluntarily. After answering any questions prospective participants may have by email or phone call, the researcher obtained written consent from each study participant. Furthermore, participants received assurances that their identities will remain confidential. All interview recordings, transcripts, and data collected will be kept on a password protected device for 36 months and then be

destroyed as per the university policy. Additionally, all identifiable characteristics were removed.

Denzin and Giardina (2022) suggested using qualitative research as a way to transform and promote positive change. Consideration was taken by the researcher during this study to listen carefully to participants in order to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences as district, school, and teacher leaders as they worked to meet the challenges of increasing student reading and writing achievement. It is the hope of the researcher that information gathered in this study will add to current research about increasing student achievement. As proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), while it is vital to the ethics and validity of research to remain neutral as a researcher, it is also important to maintain the human elements of the research. Consequently, semi-structured interviews and the care the researcher to respect and include participants will help to produce accurate, substantial, and beneficial data to add to the current body of research.

Trustworthiness

The study was conducted in a manner to ensure trustworthiness. The researcher followed the approved research guidelines from Nova Southeastern University and the district research site. The participant interviews using semi-structured interview protocols was the basis of the data collection and analysis conducted by the researcher for this study. To further ensure the validity of data collection instruments, the researcher took care in developing open-ended questions to obtain honest and accurate information. Candela (2019) detailed the importance of ensuring credibility and remaining neutral as important components of trustworthiness. Additionally, member checking was used as discussed by Candela (2019) to further ensure trustworthiness. All participants had an

opportunity to review their recorded transcripts to check for accuracy as a form of member checking. Interviews were recorded to reduce subjectivity in the data collection and analysis processes. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) discussed that analysis in qualitative research incorporates extracting patterns and themes to establish the larger meaning of the data collected. The researcher reviewed interview transcripts to note patterns and themes that emerged.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher has worked in the field of education for over 20 years as a classroom teacher, professional development facilitator, and as an administrator at the state, district, and school levels. The researcher has extensive experience with teaching and working with special populations, such as struggling learners, students in poverty, those in Title I, III, and other federal programs, gifted and talented students, students with disabilities, English and minority language learners, and students with behavioral issues. This includes experience with using best practices that are scientifically research-based and proven by data analysis and review to inform instruction, curriculum, and school improvement to increase academic achievement.

The researcher, as did many educators across the country, saw the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the classroom as teachers and students coped with instructional losses due to the shutdowns during the pandemic. Consequently, as the researcher observed a decline in student reading and writing achievement and the gradual recovery and improvements being made in her current district, the researcher wanted to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement in Grades 3 to 10 in a suburban-urban Florida school district.

The researcher is employed by the district site's school board. The researcher works as a teacher and teacher leader in one of the district's schools. The researcher conducted the research study in schools in which the researcher was not employed. The researcher helped support student learning and the goals and initiatives of the district as part of the school's Guiding Coalition. The researcher does not hold any supervisory role regarding the participants in this study. As the study's principal investigator, the researcher remained independent, non-judgmental, and did not lead participants as they relay their experiences, views, and stories through researcher-created interview protocols. While collecting data, transcribing, and analyzing the reported perceptions of leaders participating in the study, the researcher remained objective and used the voices of participants to determine patterns and themes from their reports.

Limitations

The research was conducted in a single school district site involving five district leaders, six school leaders, and six teacher leaders. The opinions, views, and feelings expressed by these leaders may be unique to the setting of the research and may not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of all district, school, and teacher leaders. Other limitations may include how forthcoming participants were in their interviews as well as small sample sizes for each participant group as is common in qualitative research.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement in state tested Grades 3 to 10 in a suburban-urban Florida school district. The problem addressed in this study was that student reading and writing achievement on the state reading assessments in Grades 3 to 10 had declined in the state of Florida, in the target school district, and across the country since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the data from 2022 showed that student achievement was and continues to recover and to make improvement in Florida and in the selected district. The findings present a broader understanding of the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement, specifically, since the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns.

Participants

Seventeen participants (five district leaders, six school administrators, and six teacher leaders) were interviewed using semi-structured interview protocols for the study based on their work at the district, school, and teacher levels in making decisions about reading and writing instruction and programs designed to increase student achievement in the areas of reading and writing. Teacher leaders from the target district were selected based on their participation in leadership activities at their school site. The researcher conducted individual face-to-face interviews via Zoom, which is a web-based conferencing tool. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their role in their district or school as a district leader, school leader, or teacher leader. All participants held current administrative or teacher certifications. The researcher focused

on the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student achievement; thus, all participants were leaders in their district or school in some capacity. Participants must have worked in the district or school as a leader, holding a leadership role or title in the district office or worked as a grade-level team leader or as part of a leadership team at school for a minimum of 3 years.

The participating district contains 62 schools and 42,618 students. The demographics of the district includes a minority enrollment of 40%; the breakdown of student population is 61.5% White, 21.6% Hispanic, 8% Black, 2.6% Asian, 6.4% English Language Learners, and 36.2% receiving free or reduced-price lunch. The district's Exceptional Student Education (ESE) population ranges from students who are gifted, English Language Learners, students with specific disabilities, such as Intellectual Disabilities (IND), Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD), or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The select district serves over 8,000 students with disabilities, ages from birth through 21, in 40 schools. The district has eight gifted magnet schools, in addition to other gifted and advanced work programs at many of its other school sites.

Participant Backgrounds

Participant 1 (P1). This participant is a White female who is in her first year working as behavior specialist at an elementary school. In her role as a behavior specialist, she also provides some Tier 3 reading interventions to students. She has taught for 14 years. Prior to becoming a behavior specialist, she taught almost all grade levels, and primarily focused on literacy, reading, and writing. This participant has taught second grade and has been a reading interventionist where she taught literacy at

the kindergarten and first grade levels. This participant has also taught all subjects in third grade, including reading and writing, and fourth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grades teaching reading and writing. There are approximately 500 students enrolled at her kindergarten to Grade 5 elementary school. The demographics of her school are 44% Hispanic, 30 % Black, 20% White, and 2% Asian. The school site is a Title I school with 86% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates; 26% of students are English language learners.

Participant 2 (P2). This participant is a White female who has taught for 20 years. She currently teaches Grade 5 English language arts (reading and writing) and Social Studies but has taught multiple grade levels and has worked previously as an ESE Liaison. This participant works as the team leader for her grade level. In 2022-23 she taught one class of gifted and advanced students and one class of students with disabilities. She also had some students in her classes who were English Language Learners (ELLs). There are approximately 500 students enrolled at her kindergarten to Grade 5 elementary school. The demographics of her school are 44% Hispanic, 30 % Black, 20% White, and 2% Asian. The school site is a Title I school with 86% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates; 26% of students are English language learners.

Participant 3 (P3). Participant 3 is a Hispanic female who has taught for 22 years across multiple grade levels. Participant 3 works as an instructional support teacher for kindergarten to Grade 5 with a focus on English Language Arts, reading, and writing. She works with supporting and coaching both students and teachers across all elementary grade levels. Participant 3 works at a Title I school with 65% of the

students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates. There are approximately 700 students enrolled at her elementary school. The demographics of her school are 62% White, 17% Hispanic, 10% Black, 1% Asian; 7% of students are English language learners.

Participant 4 (P4). Participant 4 is a White female who teaches all fourth grade gifted subjects, including reading and writing. Participant 4 has taught for 25 years across multiple grade levels. The student population of Participant 4's current class includes students that have been coded as gifted based on meeting the state and district criteria for that exceptionality and also includes other higher achieving students that are not coded as gifted but qualify based on their test data and performance to be included in an advanced work class program. Participant 4 has some students with 504 plans to support their disability. Participant 4 is one of the leaders on her school's gifted team and the VEX Robotics Competition and robotics program. Participant 4 works at a Title I school with 53% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates. There are approximately 900 students enrolled at her K-5 elementary school. The demographics of Participant 4's school are 68% White, 17% Hispanic, 7% Black, 1% Asian; 7% of students are English language learners.

Participant 5 (P5). Participant 5 is a White female who teaches fifth grade reading and writing. Participant 5 has taught for 32 years across multiple grade levels. The student population of her classes includes students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). Participant 5 has worked as the team leader of her grade level team in previous years and is involved in her school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee and also has been involved in both

reading and math committees during her span as an educator. There are approximately 500 students enrolled at her elementary school. The demographics of her school are 44% Hispanic, 30 % Black, 20% White, and 2% Asian. The school site is a Title I school with 86% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates; 26% of students are English language learners.

Participant 6 (P6). Participant 6 is a White female who works as a district-level program specialist supporting elementary grade teachers working who have students who are in advanced work as well as gifted programs in the district. Participant 6 has taught all subjects in third, fourth, and fifth grades and has also worked as a coach at a kindergarten to grade 8 charter school. She supports teachers whose students are in gifted or advanced programs. The student population of the schools she works with includes students who are English language learners and students with disabilities, including those who may have multiple exceptionalities. Consequently, she often collaborates with her district's Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program specialist.

Participant 7 (P7). Participant 7 is a White female who works as a district-level program specialist in the selected district supporting elementary school teachers. Her primary focus has been supporting kindergarten through Grade 2 teachers in their small group Tier 1 (core) instruction. In this new role for Participant 7, she facilitates professional learning and coaching opportunities. This school year was Participant 7's 17th year in education. She has worked as a teacher for 16 years across multiple grade levels and has worked with several diverse populations, including a school with an autism and gifted cluster site and a large number of English language learners.

Participant 8 (P8). Participant 8 is a White female who is the principal of her elementary school. Participant 8 has been principal for 1 year. Before becoming principal of her school, she worked for 6 years as an assistant principal. Prior to that she was a classroom teacher for 9 years and has taught multiple grades and content areas, including reading and writing. Her school site is a Title 1 school with 86% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates. There are approximately 500 students enrolled. The student demographics are 44% Hispanic, 30 % Black, 20% White, 2% Asian; 26% of students are English language learners.

Participant 9 (P9). Participant 9 is an African American male who works as the executive director of elementary education in the selected school district. Participant 9 has worked in education for 19 years. He taught fourth grade, ESE, and was an ESE resource teacher. Participant 9 was an assistant principal intern for one year and an assistant principal for 3 years at the elementary level. Participant 9 also worked as a principal for 2 years at the elementary level and 5 years at the high school level. As the executive director of elementary education, he is responsible for the 23 elementary schools in the district. He oversees the curriculum department that consists of 15 program specialists in math, English, writing, science, and social studies. Participant 9 also supports a curriculum director. He supports his team with strategies, trainings, and professional learning opportunities. Participant 9 and his team also write grants to support district initiatives. Additionally, Participant 9 meets with and supports principals at each of his elementary schools, meeting regularly with school administrative teams in data chats to conduct fidelity checks to review and discuss data and to provide support.

Participant 10 (P10) Participant 10 is a White female who teaches Grade 5 students with disabilities. She teaches both reading and math. As a push-in teacher, Participant 10 also works with students in the bottom quarter, some of whom are not classified as students with disabilities. Participant 10 will be the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) team leader in the 2023-24 school year. Participant 10 has worked in education for 27 years. Participant 10 has taught second and third grades and has worked as a middle school special education teacher and dropout prevention specialist. Participant 10 has collaborated to develop a reading resource program for her school which is a Title 1 school with 86% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates. There are approximately 800 students enrolled at her K-5 elementary school. The demographics of her school is 70% White, 15% Hispanic, 4% Black, 2% Asian, and 9% of students are English language learners.

Participant 11 (P11). Participant 11 is a White female who is the principal of her elementary school. Participant 11 has worked in the school system for 29 years. She has taught first, second, and third grades and has also worked as a resource teacher and an assistant principal. Her school is one of the Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) cluster sites in the participating district. Participant 11's school site also has a blended pre-kindergarten program with 13 non-disabled to five disabled students. It is a Title I school with 65% of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch rates. There are approximately 700 students enrolled. The demographics are 62% White, 17% Hispanic, 10% Black, 1% Asian; 7% of students are English language learners.

Participant 12 (P12). Participant 12 is a White male who is the principal of his

school. Participant 12 has worked at his current school as principal for 10 years. Participant 12 taught for 3 years across kindergarten to Grade 12. He worked as a central office assistant superintendent in northern Virginia for 5 years. Participant 12 has worked 23 years in the role of principal. He has worked as a principal of a high school, middle school, and now a gifted magnet school that serves Grades 2 through 12. In his experience as an educator and principal he has worked with many diverse populations, including students with and students with severe and profound disabilities. Participant 12 also works as a university professor at a university in Florida. Participant 12's current school has approximately 1,800 students on a 75-acre campus. The demographics of his school are 67% White, 15% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 1% Black; 11% of students receive free or reduced-price meals. At this gifted magnet student, all who attend the school are gifted; over 30% have additional exceptionalities. Seven to 8% have three exceptionalities or more, including Other Health Impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional Behavioral Disabilities, and/or visually and hearing impairments. Also, this school has the highest percentage of students with 504 plans in the district. Students with 504 plans receive educational accommodations or services. The school offers 34 advanced placement courses and eight dual enrollment courses. All of his faculty are credentialed through one of the local universities, so they have either masters or doctoral degrees in their subject area. This enables students to attend college-level courses on their campus. The school has approximately a 30% minority rate with a 100% graduation rate. Minority students outperform majority students. Additionally, students with multiple exceptionalities outperform majority students. Participant 12 was recognized for his increases in

student achievement in the African American female demographic at his former middle school. The current school has been recognized nationally for its high performance, including 30 national merit scholarships in 2022-23.

Participant 13 (P13). Participant 13 is a White female who is the principal of a high school, serving students in Grades 9 to 12. Participant 13 has been working in education for 35 years. The high school site is a center school for one of the the teen parent programs in the district and is also an Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) cluster site. The school also serves several students with intellectual disabilities and one of the largest and most diverse English language learner populations in the district. Fifty-seven percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch rates. Of the approximately 2,500 students enrolled, 66% are White, 16% are Hispanic, 11% are Black, 1% are Asian, and 3% of students are English language learners.

Participant 14 (P14). Participant 14 is a White female who has been working in education for 12 years. Participant 14 is a district-level program specialist in curriculum. Before joining the district office as a program specialist, Participant 14 taught Grades 3 to 5 and some multi-grade classes. She has also worked as an instructional technology specialist supporting the integration of technology to enhance curriculum.

Participant 15 (P15). Participant 15 is a White female who works as a district-level program specialist. Participant 15 has been working at the district-level for the last 5 years. Before coming to the district, she taught for 20 years at the kindergarten, first, second, and third grade levels. She has served in many capacities at the school level, including instructional technology coach, data literacy coach, media specialist,

interventionist, and teacher of those learning English. Participant 15 currently works in the elementary curriculum department where she supports various curriculum areas across all content areas and domains.

Participant 16 (P16). Participant 16 is a White male principal. Participant 18 has worked in education for 25 years. He has worked as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal and has been in the role of principal for 15 years. The school site includes two magnet programs. One magnet program is for students with intellectual disabilities who are using an ACCESS curriculum. The other magnet school program is for students who are identified as gifted based on qualifying for the program by meeting state and district assessment and academic requirements. Participant 18 has a variety of experiences with special populations, including students with autism and has also worked at a school that was a cluster site for students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

Participant 17 (P17). Participant 17 is a White male principal. He has worked in education for 20 years including 6 years as a teacher and 14 years as a school administrator. The current school is a cluster site for autism and gifted students. Those who receive free or reduced-price lunch rates include 54% of the school population. There are approximately 600 students enrolled including 51% White, 31% Hispanic, 7% Black, 1% Asian students. Seventeen percent of students are learning English.

In summary, the participants belonged to the following groups. District leaders were Participants 6, 7, 9, 14, and 15. School leaders were Participants 8, 11, 12, 3, 16, and 17. School leaders were Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10.

Data Analysis

Data for the generic qualitative study were collected through individual semi-structured interview protocols via Zoom from the voices of participants who work in the selected large high performing suburban-urban Florida school district. Information provided by and collected from the participants during in-depth interviews generated a considerable contextual understanding of experience, including successes, challenges, support, and advice to other district, school, and teacher leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement, resulting in six major themes: (a) systems and structures drive achievement, (b) collective efficacy and collaboration are vital, (c) student and parent engagement are important, (d) focus on the needs of all students (e) differentiate to meet the needs of all students (f) resources are key to success, (g) use resources wisely (h) give teachers time (i) staffing matters, (j) great leadership is required, and (k) set clear expectations.

The researcher sought to answer the following questions that were designed to provide key information about the perceptions and experiences of school, district, and school leaders in the selected district.

1. What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?
2. What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?
3. What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?

4. What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders increase reading and writing achievement?

Sequential Analysis Steps

In order to gain insight into the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement, specifically, since the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, the researcher examined the interview responses of each of the 17 participants and used the generic qualitative approach and followed the below listed data analysis steps (Percy et al., 2015).

1. Each participant was assigned a participant number based on their role in lieu of participant names.
2. Semi-structured interviews were recorded and conducted with each participant via Zoom.
3. After transcribing interviews, individual interview transcripts were provided to each participant for review, feedback, or corrections as a form of member checking.
4. The researcher employed thematic analysis starting with the first participant (P1) and reviewed her transcript for sentences, phrases, and paragraphs that were significant and related to research question.
5. Sentences and phrases that were significant and important to research question were highlighted.
6. Data unrelated to the research questions were stored.
7. The researcher used comments and journaling (memos) to gain a better understanding of the highlighted sentences, phrases, and paragraphs as they related to

research question 1.

8. Bracketing was used by the researcher to ensure separation of the researcher's personal experience from that of the research participants' lived experiences.

9. The highlighted data were reviewed again to determine patterns that related to research question one.

10. This process was completed for participant one. The researcher coded and clustered the data for the first participant and the data for all subsequent participants were analyzed and compared to the previous data.

11. Using constant comparison the researcher reviewed and analyzed each participant's data and compared and contrasted it to what had been previously analyzed in the study.

12. Patterns noted from the data of all participants on all research questions were clustered and checked against previous data from transcribed responses to identify themes.

13. Each pattern aligned to each research question was arranged using a thematic analysis matrix and the emerging themes were identified.

14. The researcher analyzed and described each pattern and theme. The analysis was synthesized and included in a detailed analysis report detailing each.

Presentation of Results

Each participant was assigned a participant number based on his or her role in lieu of participant names. The initial research questions established a platform for interview questions. After transcribing, individual interview transcripts were provided to each participant for review, feedback, or corrections as a form of member checking. Candela

(2019) described member checking as a vital part of upholding validity. She further stated that member checking should be used for more than validity purposes, but that researchers should also review participant experiences and view member checking as a reflective process. After completing the member checking process, interview data were analyzed and reviewed for patterns and themes in the data.

The researcher used bracketing in developing her findings by being deliberate and intentional about including her thoughts and thinking process in comments and memos. For example, "...Participant 1 really described the progression of students growing as readers, also included elements of the Science of Reading and linked to developing speech and being able to put what they understand into writing as key elements of developing readers and writers and increasing reading and writing achievement..." As described by Moustakas (1994) "bracketing" is used to ensure separation of the researcher's personal experience from that of the research participants' lived experiences. This ensures the researcher is truly capturing the experiences of the participant without any bias. By using metacognition and reading the transcript multiple times since the interview was initially conducted and adding to previous thinking and making annotations throughout the process and re-readings the researcher was better able to address bracketing. Additionally, this process allowed the researcher to better capture the experiences of participants.

Thematic analysis was employed using constant comparison. Constant comparison, as detailed by Percy et al. (2015), is a data review process that analyzes the data as they are collected, comparing each interview to previous data collected. In accordance with the constant comparison process, patterns and themes within the data

were highlighted. Patterns and themes were then further reviewed for alignment with the research focus and questions. Unrelated data was removed from the analysis or documented for purposes of future study or analysis. The final remaining patterns and themes from the analysis were synthesized and included in a detailed analysis report detailing each. The analysis below is presented by research question, with patterns supported by the inclusion of some of the exemplary quotes from participants. The researcher was able to collect a wealth of quotes from the 17 participants that supported each pattern. Consequently, the researcher created a detailed thematic analysis matrix (Appendix E) to further illustrate patterns that were supported by direct quotes from participants. The thematic analysis matrix took on a life of its own as it invokes the lived voices of each of the participants and is a powerful read in and of itself into understanding all of the innerworkings and experiences of these participants in their efforts to increase reading and writing achievement, including their successes, challenges, support, and advice to other district, school, and teacher leaders (Percy et al., 2015).

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, "What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?" The primary purpose of this question was to determine what some of the biggest challenges that participants have experienced with increasing reading and writing since students have returned to school after pandemic shutdowns. Questions one through four were asked to collect demographic information about participants. Research Question 1 was addressed by interview questions five through eight. Two primary patterns emerged: (students have weak academic preparation and skills; within this

pattern emerged four descriptors: attendance, lack of parent engagement, learning loss and gaps in learning, and lack of foundational skills. The second pattern that emerged was (b) students have weak academic motivation; within this pattern emerged three descriptors: lack of student engagement, stamina, and motivation; behavior issues; focus on the needs of all students based on the data and the make-up of the school (students approaching proficiency, struggling learners, students with disabilities and gifted students, English Language Learners, and racial groups. One primary theme emerged in answer to Research Question 1 as follows: teachers, families, and students must work together to remediate weak academic preparation and motivation.

Pattern 1: Students Have Weak Academic Preparation and Skills

This pattern was derived from the multiple descriptions from participants of the many challenges that their schools and district were facing in their efforts to increase reading and writing achievement and their goal of working to meet the needs of all students. Exemplar participant quotes for this pattern were depicted in the following ways. “And I think some of those challenges obviously do come from the pandemic and not being in their routines and not, you know, being in school” (P1). “Then there were others who hardly attended at all” (P4).

Participant 9 explained:

...one of the first challenges was we had a lot of absences. Not only a lot of absences, we had a lot of teacher openings and including a lot of teacher absences. So, when you think of when it first evolved like right after when we left in March and it came back that following year in the state of Florida not like every other state did open up schools blended model. We kind of saw right away that we

didn't have as many kids on campus. We didn't have as many teachers, which then turns into the continuity of actually teaching, right?...They were staying at home with their parents or whatever the case may be and so it'll be interesting as time goes on...but to me, really our big challenge was as soon as we got back that blended model I think was much more difficult than any of us would have ever expected and at the time, me being at a high school that I'll add, we had approximately 40% of our high school students who stayed home and so yes, in elementary more kids came we had to take approximately 85% to 90, but as we went up each level it got more and more kids at home by the time we got to high school level I think in our district possibly 40% actually stayed home during that time which within itself the distraction of being at home is still trying to learn within that year, I would tell you was pretty difficult. Hence why mid-year during that time we made them come back. Right? We forced kids to come back, because we could see the challenges and the academic disparities to me those gaps grew a little bit larger during that time. (P9)

Participant 11 lamented about poor attendance:

Lots of attendance issues as far as parents taking their kids out of school more than I had seen prior to COVID, vacations during school. I think we are getting a large onslaught of children from out of state who may not have been in school at all since COVID started... I think to be honest, I think that the reason that they're struggling is they were behind to begin with and that time out of school has caused them to fall farther and farther behind. It was hard during COVID for those kids that were on remote that were ESE to get all of their services as high

quality as you would hope. They weren't getting that small group as much as they should have. (P11)

Participant 13 briefly noted: "So that has affected the attendance of students." (P13)

Exemplar participant quotes for this research question under the idea of lack of parent engagement, for pattern one, was depicted by Participant 4 in the following way: "...depending on what their home atmosphere was, and the level of support that they were able to receive...the homes that had a lot of support and kept them on track made a bigger difference." (P4).

Participant 5 affirmed:

I also find that some students are so involved with extra-curriculars, or parents aren't as involved in prioritizing education, and the need for homework, and you know the need for follow through and the need for studying. Students don't know how to study, and I think that you know those are all challenges and obstacles, because you know, that's what a test is all about is studying and they've never really been taught how to do that. So, I think that that is a big barrier to our students progress. (P5)

Participant 7 noted:

I think possibly from their background from their home life that definitely plays a huge factor. If they are from a language rich environment, they are at an advantage if possibly their families speak another language, not that that's a disadvantage it just makes it a little bit harder, and they have to work a little bit harder to get caught up. (P7)

Participant 13 explained:

It's the same thing that mirrors education at large. Those students who have the greatest deficits in their families and in their community areas and aspects continue to suffer the most. You know, if you don't have the supports out there, anything that hits you is gonna hit in a much larger proportion and have a larger impact. So, anybody who has less money, anybody who has less family, anybody who has less mental health support, anybody who has less support of their personal choices that they have made, it all comes to a screaming head. It just leaves a lack of social support, financial support, food support, and [our county] is a very new community compared to the surrounding communities and so it is not unusual at all for us to have students who may be here with only a single parent, much less have any extended family of you know 47 aunts and full component of grandparents and so we can have a student having you know extreme behavioral or emotional stress and can't get anybody here to come work with us or help them. When they go home there's no one there, because the one person in their lives is working a job often 2 or 3 jobs. I have a high percentage of students who live independently of their parents even at age 17, but particularly at age 18 and that is not students who are necessarily needy. Many of my very advanced students live independently of their parent here and I think that speaks to the home life that they have and that when there is a difficult relationship at home, but there's only one parent so they can't, you know, run to dad when they're having a hard time with mom or run to grandma when they're having a hard time with dad. They leave and they live independently and for some it works out amazingly, but for many of them it does not. (P13)

Participant 5 lamented:

Parents just take their kids on vacation whenever or your kids starting to feel a little sick, so they keep them home...They start their journey into life at a disadvantage. They don't come from homes where parents have the ability to be home with them all the time or to give them that language rich experiences in English. They may have experiences in other languages, but with parents, you know from low-income families having to work multiple jobs to make the same amount of money that another family might or to be able to support their kids and get their kids the same opportunities. They just don't have that same time to spend with their children at home. (P14)

Participant 5 explained:

So after the pandemic shutdown, you know, I think the biggest challenge just came back to re-establishing relationships. No significant learning happens without a significant relationship', you know, as James Comer quoted as saying that years and years ago, and it's so true and so the biggest challenge was re-establishing those relationships not just with our students because our teachers have always done a phenomenal job with that and not just with our families, because the teachers and families have always had great relationships, but collectively as schools getting back into you know a return to some degree of normalcy. (P16)

Exemplar participant quotes for learning loss and gaps in learning for pattern one were depicted in the following way. Participant 1 said, "Yeah, I mean, we are seeing, and I think everybody would agree across the United States we're seeing huge gaps." (P1)

Participant 5 noted:

So, being able to find those gaps and fill in those gaps has been the hardest part.”

I would say, you know, of course, probably our biggest subgroup that we work with trying to close that achievement gap would be our ESE students, but really, you know, even I mean like our ELL students that come in, they do have such a high rate of learning needs. Catching up those gaps, but it is hard when students come in depending on their educational experience from their previous country.

(P8)

Participant 9 expounded in this way:

Like having someone in front of you, which is the most important aspect is that teacher. I would even argue that having to do the blended model online while a teacher was trying to teach and still work with at least on average, a handful of kids that were online was incredibly difficult for them to multitask when to be very fair to them, this is as honest as I can be, they weren't trained for it. Well, because it happened so fast. In March and we went home and then came back. I would honestly say the training wasn't in place to really support teachers the right way of being able to even service that model...The second piece I would say really the curriculum itself, by that time people have to remember that most kids in elementary at least had missed on average about 3 months. Okay, so when we shut down, which means as we rolled into the next great level they didn't have that information and so you were kind of going backwards to be able to go forward, and when you already think of education of trying to squeeze in so much within that time frame before the summer hits you had to add on 3 months of

instruction for that including the loss of summer loss as well, right? So you got 3 months of that, 2 months of summer loss, and teachers trying to catch up within that blended model... We have noticed and this is one of those things for me doing my own researching you know being a student as well and always learning, the gaps became even more apparent for some of our needier students, and so that has also been a challenge for us to see that during that time when students were out and then when we did those pre-assessments, we couldn't believe that students who were already high achieving really didn't lose as much, but our students who were already struggling, the gap became even wider and that's something we continue to try to work with and try to address over the last couple of years

... Well, I mean, unfortunately it's been our title one schools and our students who are, I don't like to use the word the neediest. I know people have different things, low [Socio-Economic Status] (SES) or whatever you would like to call it, and here's how we know. We just got our official data in today from the state with each school and unfortunately, what we tend to see in our county is we rank in the top 5 with student achievement probably in every grade level, in any content area across the state, right? What is the 63 or 65 districts whatever we happen to have, but that's only because our high functioning schools pull our data up to keep that average, whereas you start to look at some of our struggling schools, they're sitting around 40% proficiency for our students in reading and writing, which means they still have not gained over this last couple of years and the gap is growing wider. The last look, one of our highest achieving schools was sitting at like 80% proficiency and one of our lowest was at 32%, in one county, right?

That's a huge disparity and so you're seeing that not only the ones in our title one schools, but our lowest SES in schools still struggling and it's because if you rewind back to kind of what I said in the previous question. They were the ones hit the hardest when we shut down. They are the ones who need us the most, most of the time right when it comes to intervention support towards that end of the year and not to mention in [our county] all of our Title One schools all 10 receive what we call summer learning academies over the summer to hopefully mitigate that summer learning slide. We couldn't do it during that summer, and so not just that they missed 3 months, the normal programs that we normally put in place, we also could not do because of what was going on with COVID-19 and we just are now getting that back clearly right now with the summer learning academies, which are just our 10 title one out of our 23 schools, because we all see it that not only the gaps but even those summer gaps start to grow wider and unfortunately within COVID we've seen it again, and I guess for us, we'll be done this year, within the state of Florida, they get jumpstart funds or [Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) funds, everyone knows all these different names for dollars that we were given for specifically those reasons to hopefully, you know, mitigate that learning loss that students had during COVID and we really have poured our time and energy within those Title One schools to hopefully do that not to mention non-title ones where we still of course have students right that also have those gaps as well, including students who come from poverty that may attend a school that's not Title One. We've seen that across the board no matter if they attend title one or they attend a non-total one school,

our students unfortunately, with the most needs also still continue, we continue to see that gap. Also in addition, African Americans in [school district] and our students with disabilities. Those are the two biggest areas in our county. When we look at our school improvement plans and those [Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) groups under 41%. The reality is those are the 2 glaring needs that we still have across the board in our district when we're looked at as like a [Module 5: Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) schools evaluating state accountability systems under ESEA and those are like support schools in the state of Florida. The reality is the number one group that we see the most gaps is ESE. Number 2 are African American, and I would argue the only reason why you don't see African American more in some of our other schools is because of the percentages. The cell size is not large enough for them to actually have it. We still break it down on our end and look so we can find the data, but the cell size isn't large enough for them to be counted towards that group in some of our schools. (P9)

Participant 10 explained:

Yeah, ESE and I do work sometimes with the bottom quartile, the lowest 25%, but a lot of those are your bottom 25% are a lot of times your ESE students... I would say the ESE population. A lot of them, they need that structure, and they haven't had it for a while... I think it's just, you know, not having that exposure and not having that...consistency. (P10)

Participant 11 also explained:

So we are seeing a lot of kids coming in Grades 3, 4, and 5 who in all fairness

haven't had kindergarten, first, second grade instruction as high quality as it should have been. So, we're seeing a lot of lower-level kids coming in from out of state more than we've seen in the past... I would say our ESE kids notoriously struggle in the area of reading and writing...I think that that subgroup we do struggle with and a lot of our kids are significantly you know below level who are labeled ESE so we're talking you know 2 to 3 years below where they need to be so we're playing a lot of catch up while still trying to give them on grade level instruction so they are still learning and still moving forward, but that is definitely a work in progress here [at our school]...our exceptional student population... (P11)

Participant 15 noted the following about achievement gaps:

So, right now I would say we have definitely our African American students. We have an observable achievement gap there. We have an achievement gap with our English learners. I would say we've had quite an influx of a variety of languages. I think last time I heard we have 42 different languages that we're serving within the district and that is definitely a challenge. (15)

Participant 16 also noted the following about achievement gaps:

So, being able to say, great, we now have kids who are coming back because in all reality, you know, they lost in 2020 they lost a quarter of the school year with instruction at home and it was we're working on packets of work and relying on mom and dad to help support that they check in with teachers here and there, but the instruction in essence came to a halt for the last quarter of the school year in 2020. We saw that new gaps existed, gaps where maybe we didn't have before

now they were there. You know, when we shut down, we had kindergartners who lost an entire quarter of kindergarten. They come back in first grade. We are in concurrent learning. Yeah, so half of our kids are here, half of them are home. We come back the year after. So now they're in second grade, and they're just now getting their first full year of regular school and they've already been in school for 2 years and so the impact I think really was huge on our students. We saw a decline. We saw a dip in student achievement. (P16)

Participant 17 explained:

That was a huge challenge for us as students spent a good portion of time at home and then the year that we came back we kind of had a hybrid model where we had some students at home and the majority of students were at school, which was probably very involved and was very challenging for our teachers to kind of do that and therein lies some gaps that were already there but then widened as far as that goes as well. (P17)

Exemplar participant quotes for lack of foundational skills for pattern one were depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 explained:

I've been in the intervention role where I have been teaching students literacy at the K and one levels like phonics and phonemic awareness...It really runs the gamut from having kids learning decoding skills, building words, you know, understanding the phonics and the phonemic awareness and then obviously getting into all of the comprehension pieces as well. As I ended up moving up the grade levels because as we all know literacy starts at understanding letters and

sounds...I mean, even from, you know, with the younger students just building their ability to develop sentences and paragraphs. (P1)

Participant 2 said: "...but you've got to hit phonics and fluency and reading comprehension, all the different reading strategies and skills within that." (P2)

Participant 3 added:

I see a lot of deficit in a lot of the phonics area. That's probably one of the biggest, especially for those students that were in that K-1 and didn't really get a strong phonological background when they were in those grades when we had the pandemic...I think they need, I feel like they need something more like structured literacy in their instruction I feel that they're missing a lot of the fundamentals and the basics of phonics. So that is very detrimental when it comes to just the reading fluency and also, for the decoding and all that and also for the encoding...really focusing on those small group interventions bringing in that phonics and bringing in fluency and comprehension in those groups...Also the teachers really, you know, using like the phonics we're using, [University of Florida Literacy Institute] (UFLI) with the students now. So that's a really good program for the phonics. A lot of the ESL teachers are using that as well our other teachers, they started to use it. So, I think just going back to that phonics part. It's what I'm really seeing make the difference...I really feel like the answer to that is I see a really big focus now on the science of reading in our district. So, I really see a big a push for that and something that I feel like as a school we're trying to adopt and we're already starting to see differences within the students. (P3)

Participant 6 explained:

So when it comes to the science of reading, I think we are in a place where we're definitely not ahead of everybody. There's a lot who've been jumping into it earlier than we have, but we are navigating the waters and trying our best to help our teachers be informed and not influenced right. So, when we are providing professional development, I'm lucky enough in my role to be able to provide professional development to our teachers and so my team and I try really hard to do the deep work. A lot of the diving into the research and reading things that our teachers just don't have time to dive into and weeding through it and looking for what's most important and how it can be utilized in the classroom, and then providing that professional learning to our teachers and helping them to understand it in that way. (P6)

Participant 5 went on to say:

...supporting the Flamingo small group framework in kindergarten through second grade. So, within that framework, it is a comprehensive framework that includes all the necessary components of high-quality literacy instruction. Which includes fluency, word work, connecting reading and writing, and reading for meaning. So, my role is, to model support and provide continuous learning for teachers that are involved in that work. (P7)

P10 said: "...and definitely reading levels are lower you know they weren't reading and getting you know, I don't think they were getting proper instruction during the pandemic." (P10)

Participant 15 affirmed:

Yes, as we look at data some of the common trends that I see from those two

particular student groups include just their level of readiness as they enter the educational system of course for our ELL students they're coming in many of them they may not be fluent in their native language as well as in English, so they're coming with limited exposure to anchor any learning to with that limited comprehension ability, because they're not fluent in either language. To me that's probably the most challenging ELL student that we deal with that doesn't have an anchor point to be able to extend the new learning on to. When they don't come with that previous knowledge of their home language. Within the African American student group what I'm seeing most often again is related to readiness and that could be early learning opportunities that may not have been available, but it's just the readiness level and that's just compounded moving forward.”

P16: “ So I think the earlier that we can intervene and support our students, the better we're gonna be in the long run. You know when we look historically across our district there has been a disconnect between early learning initiatives, and I mean prior to kindergarten, and the kindergarten experience. I think the more collaborative that we can be and the more that we can start to look at a pre-K support system for our students or early learning opportunities, I think we're gonna be able to address a lot of those concerns. You know, Early intervention is always, always, always a hundred percent of the time more effective than late intervention. (P15)

Pattern 2: Students Have Weak Academic Motivation

This pattern was developed from the descriptions from participants of the challenges that their schools faced in trying to address issues related to motivation.

Exemplar participant quotes for lack of student engagement, stamina, and motivation; for pattern two were depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 explained:

I see a problem with their stamina and their ability to really work through a process...and then all the way to ninth grade where students are actually reading you know, novels and being able to understand what they read, you know, the plot, the summarizing and then taking that and understanding that and putting it into writing and then even the speech piece came into play and when I was teaching ninth grade students, they had to transition from all of that, then being able to present it to an audience...and of course, as I got into the older grades, I was spending a lot of time with students with their writing piece in developing paragraphs and essays, whether it be a narrative, whether it be expository, whether it be, you know, an opinion...in the older grades...So we're seeing that, lack of motivation. (P1)

Participant 2 noted:

I see it as a huge challenge, the students are completely different than they were a handful of years ago. I feel that a lot of them have ADD or something where they are so used to playing games so much that it is hard to keep their attention for any length of time, no matter what level. Whether they are ESE, whether they are gifted or advanced. I feel that it is very challenging. (P2)

Participant 5 opined:

I think one of the biggest challenges is that students are not as driven. They are not self-motivated. They don't, for whatever reason, I don't know if it is because

of Covid, or what, but I find that it can be frustrating when you know they they're just lazy. They don't want to do the things that they need to do, you know, and I'm very much an advocate, for this is your job. This is what you need to do... Well, if it's been a challenge for them, you know it's something that they struggled with. By the time they get to me I was fifth grade. I'll be fourth grade this year, but by the time they would get to me they've struggled for 5 years, so they don't feel like it's worth it. It's too difficult, and you know my whole thing from day one is, what is difficult becomes easier the more you do it. So, you know you have to, even if it's difficult. You have to keep up with it, and not give up because kids are so inclined to just give up. I can't do this video game. I give up, I can't ride this bike, I give up. I don't want to do it anymore and reading is not something that you can just give up. You have to be able to read in every aspect of life. (P5)

Participant 9 elaborated:

...and so starting with that kind of model and then going into being at home and not necessarily being academically focused during that time, being over the summer and not necessarily being in programs that other parents have the opportunity to do that are academically driven is another issue... they have learning gaps, but they also have a need for relationships, and so that need for relationships, being out and coming back and not knowing people. I think also did not help. There's clearly research that you will do and everyone else will do that talks about relationships and how it impacts students. There's enough articles that have been written and when you have kids that are at home and they come back and they have this disconnect with the teacher they have now. It's a barrier and it's

been a barrier within our district. (P9)

Participant 13 addressed challenges this way:

One of the biggest challenges is not specific to schools. It's the mentality of the United States probably the world at large that has changed in many aspects. It has seen how things can work independently and don't necessarily need to be in school in a brick-and-mortar school to gain a diploma, but hasn't seen through the long term effects of maybe how that affects academics and social life and some of the repercussions, and it has impacted the hiring you know with people shifting and moving quite a bit in and out of Florida, in and out of [the county]...in and out of virtual school versus brick-and-mortar schools. Like you know the benefits of it is I think that some students have seen that things that are different and diverse do work for them and so when there's a good process in place in Florida virtual school is a very good program. The GED can work for some technical education is a wonderful thing. Some students have explored those options that didn't have them prior to this and have found that they work really well and they might not have explored those options prior. (P13)

Exemplar participant quotes for behavior issues, for pattern two, were depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 offered the following thoughts:

Whether it be behavior-wise whether it be content... I think society has contributed to that. I think everybody has gotten in this mindset that maybe we don't have to work as hard...So currently some of our teachers struggle with getting that behavior under control. (P1)

Participant 8 added:

...but then also a lot of our students come with a lot of behavioral challenges. I think a lot of trauma that they see at home or in their neighborhoods and so, you know whether it's like hunger or not getting sleep through the night and trying to make sure that their basic needs are met, so that they can actually focus and learn and I don't know that that's necessarily COVID related or just, economic, you know, challenges of families trying to make ends meet and not having the tools always to be parents. (P8)

Participant 10 affirmed:

I would say mostly the biggest thing actually is just how to socialize, you know when we put them into groups to try to read a passage together or answer questions or work in a group, they have a difficult time with that. (P10)

P11 said, "Okay, I think that mindset had sort of changed during the pandemic, that schooling wasn't as important as it might have been prior." P12 added: "We did see a slight uptick in behaviors, misbehaviors, and discipline and so that's something we're addressing through our [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports <https://www.pbis.org/>] (PBIS) school wide, character education program" (P12).

Participant 13 explained:

It has affected most definitely the communications in a very negative way. In the community based off what they've seen whether it is politically or whether it is because things have had to be in writing, not face to face because we're missing all the verbal, you know, all of the body language that goes with things. Our students are struggling with that. It's had a significant impact upon the social

emotional welfare of our students and our staff. (P13)

Exemplar participant quotes for the focus on the needs of all students based on the data and the make-up of the school (students approaching proficiency - ESE (gifted and students with disabilities), struggling learners, ELL, racial groups, for pattern two were depicted in the following ways. Participant 2 said: "...they were like the bubble kids and helping to give them strategies and supports a couple times a week too..."

Participant 3 claimed:

The biggest group that I see is obviously, ESE students struggle a lot with the reading and the writing. That's mostly the biggest subgroup that we have right now in our school. When doing the SIP [School Improvement Plan] and all that that's when looking at that data, they are the ones that are struggling the most.

(P3)

Participant 4 believed: "Well, since the pandemic, it would probably be our lower-level students, because it was just so much harder for them to learn and be focused..." while

Participant 5 countered: "I think the biggest challenges are those students whether they're identified ESE are not identified is that they had just given up, but they don't feel like anything they do matters. (P5)

Participant 6 explained:

I would say, based on the data it is our ESE students, our English language learners, and as well as our Black students and our students from low-income families. I would say those are probably our biggest areas when I'm looking.

When I personally look at data, I see our ESE population probably struggling the most to keep up and close that gap. (P6)

Participant 5 clarified:

It is an autism cluster site and a gifted cluster site. We have a high ESOL population...I think another challenge is just the various levels that students are in and that just makes it hard to look at data group students appropriately, ensuring that you're meeting all of their needs because they're all very different. (P7)

Participant 9 reasoned:

Beyond our normal functioning students and meaning how they're proficient in either reading or writing. We've seen that for over 18 years. I think the difference is when they're at school. We have our hands on and we know who those students are, and I would argue that within those additional resources either it be a paraprofessional that pushes in or an ESE resource teacher and then the general ed teacher think about the amount of supports those students receive when they're in school. When they are not in school and there's gaps, guess what happens? They're no longer receiving that support. We tried online but you're talking about students with attention deficit right, already having a learning disability and I would argue that online or virtual really wasn't a mechanism that was the most comfortable at least for those students with disabilities that I saw. They needed to be in front of someone hands-on working with someone, and so I honestly believe it exacerbated everything because of that. When they didn't have that seat time at a school working with someone that gap widened and so to me, with students with disabilities, it was pretty obvious pretty quickly even the ones who were blended model online virtually we immediately called parents and said we will do anything to get them back. We will sit them by themselves in the corner not to be

disrespectful to them so that they're away with the mask and everything else and I know at the time I was at the high school, that's exactly what we did, because you could see it immediately, just a focus not being there within the first 3 weeks of grades. I would tell you African Americans in [the district] County, unfortunately, disproportionately they represent some of our low [Socio-Economic Status] (SES) students in [the county], that's just the reality. They live usually in a certain area in this county and unfortunately, it's represented within that data also of achievement, unfortunately which is sometimes unfortunately the correlation between low SES and not performing up to where we need to. (P9)

Participant 10 offered:

So I do a lot of push-in. I don't really pull out. Just that works best for our students, especially the older students... they can handle having...another teacher in there. So, I basically support whatever the classroom teacher is doing, and it depends on which group I go into. I'm either in there between 30 to 50 min to help them with their reading and some of the writing. (P10)

Participant 11 described the ELL and ESE populations at school:

We do, we have a large population of ELL students over a hundred out of our 800 are currently in our program... We have a large group of Russian and Ukrainian students and then an ELL population as well. We have a large ESE population as well. We are an EBD cluster for [the county], meaning we have two units of students who are emotionally behaviorally disturbed probably about 12 kids...and we just gained a pre-K that is a blended model, 13 non-disabled to five disabled students. (P11)

Participant 12 added:

...and I think some of my greatest successes or the achievements that our staff were able to make probably was at that middle school and where I am now, because not necessarily achievement. That's sort of a given and expected, but our ability to show growth and learning gains with gifted kids. It's a real challenge that is a huge heavy lift and being able to demonstrate that year after year. I'm pretty proud of that and what our faculty has been able to do... We are 100 ESE, because it's a gifted magnet school. So, everyone here has at least one exceptionality, starting with gifted. Many of our students in fact over 30% have a dual exceptionality which is incredibly high, and we have probably 7 to 8% who have 3 exceptionalities or more. Percentage wise we have I believe the highest percentage of students with a 504 plan in the district. Some of them eventually become [Other Health Issues] (OHI) issues we have special populations students with autism spectrum disorder. We provide services for emotionally disturbed students who are also identified gifted. We have visually impaired and hearing-impaired students who are also identified gifted. (P12)

Participant 13 similarly described the population:

...we are a center school for two programs. We have our teen parent program for south county...the [Emotional Behavioral Disability] (EBD) cluster... We have a significantly large portion of students with intellectual disabilities and...one of the largest and most diverse [English as a Second Language] (ESL) populations within the district. (P13)

Participant 14 noted with apparent frustration:

Definitely our Title I schools are at a greater disadvantage. More now than we had before. We have students coming in from other countries such as Ukraine and we have more language learners and schools that have more language learners with even more gaps when it comes to meeting the reading and writing standards.

(P14)

Participant 16 commiserated:

We are a magnet program for students who are on an ACCESS curriculum and so those are students who may have intellectual disabilities or other disabilities and impairments that don't allow them to work on our regular school curriculum and so they are working on Access Points and we are so proud to have them here and then at the other end of the spectrum, we also are a magnet school for students who are identified as gifted and require a gifted education and so those students are actually working in reading and math a year above their grade level and so for example, our first graders are working on the second grade reading ELA and mathematics standards and so we're just very excited about that. Now historically though in all my experience, I've worked with pretty much the gamut of student groups, including students who kind of qualify again for gifted, you know, they are on access points, students with autism. I have also been at a school where our school was a cluster site for students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

(P16)

Participant 17 agreed:

We have a students with autism cluster and we also have the gifted cluster as well and we have a high number of English Language Learners (ELL) students as

well... and not being here during that time and learning that language it probably was very difficult on them. So, some of them have struggled. I have a cluster of students with autism as well and the socialization aspect of their day is just as important as the academic portion so them not having that and being at home for that time period did set them back. I would probably have to say a lot of it is our lower [Socio-economic] (SES) families, because parents still had to work even during that time and probably not having the time to work with students as much at home has an impact as well, and of course our ESE students who consistently struggle already and staying even further behind their peers would be the core groups that we saw probably took the largest hit during that time... We put so much energy and that's what I was just talking about before as so much energy into that Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction where I think that's where the over burden is because there's so many kids that we talked about looking at that Tier 1 instruction and what that looks like. We put so much energy into supporting them some of our lowest kids have made the gains, but I worry about our kids who are good students, not excellent students, but what that does to them, if we're putting so much energy and we've seen that success with some of our lowest students, but what happens with those students who are kind of on the bubble students. (P17)

Theme for Research Question 1: Teachers, Families, and Students Must Work

Together to Remediate Weak Academic Preparation and Motivation

In reviewing the patterns derived for Research Question 1, the overarching theme that emerged was that teachers, families, and students must work together to remediate weak academic preparation and motivation for participants in this research. All 17

participants believed that a collaborative effort must be made to remediate weak skills and address issues related to both student and parent motivation, as further broken down in the descriptors detailed in the aforementioned pattern analysis of both patterns for research question one.

Participant 14 stated:

One of the biggest concerns I would say is attendance on both sides of the coin whether parents were keeping their kids home because they were sick or they were afraid of getting sick or didn't want their kids to wear masks. Kids have been in and out of school now and it's almost become the norm. So, I think attendance has become a bigger concern. I think it's starting to increase, and that is a major concern. (P14)

Participant 14 further described, “The parental involvement piece is missing, and we've got to get back to parents being involved with their student’s education.” Additionally, Participant 2 affirmed that a major challenge was a “Lack of support at home.”

Participant 14 stated “...and obviously the pandemic led to even more gaps than we already had. So, students are further behind the standards than they were previously...”

Furthermore, Participant 6 acknowledged “Obviously learning losses there...” Participant 8 detailed a lack of foundation skills as a major area of challenge.

Participant 8 gave the following opinion:

I think probably the biggest challenge I mean at my school I'd say the biggest challenge is that background knowledge piece. Our students whether they're ESOL or they're coming from poverty, they don't have necessarily the vocabulary background. They don't have the language as full or like the amount of words that

a student maybe in a different type of family environment or different exposures, like to preschool others might have. So, a lot of our students come in, they don't have that part so we're really building that with our like early learning classrooms...Some of our students come from, you know, impoverished communities and countries that they don't really have basic literacy skills or foundations in their own language. So, you know, they're coming in and not only trying to learn English, they also don't necessarily know letters or sounds. So, it's such basic, basic skills that we're trying to catch them up in and just all around. So that's a big challenge. (P8)

Participant 9 said

...any other professional learning opportunities that we may think is important. Also, grants that we write to actually be able to support those foundational skills, case in point would be UF coming down into our district and providing the science of reading within [Orton-Gillingham Approach] (OG) training. (P9)

Additionally, Participant 4 indicated “Well, since the pandemic, it would probably be our lower-level students, because it was just so much harder for them to learn and be focused.”

Also, participant 10 noted:

I would say it's really hard for the kids first of all to read a passage...so that's just getting them to have that perseverance,...endurance ...and...a lot of them are so good at talking it out...and I do a lot of that with the kids in small group talking about what's the prompt, what do we want to talk about and that kind of stuff, but when they actually have to do that themselves that would be the hardest

thing...for the kids... (P10)

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was, “What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?” The primary purpose of this question was to determine some of the biggest successes that participants have experienced with increasing reading and writing since students have returned to school after pandemic shutdowns. Research question two was addressed by interview questions nine through twelve. Two primary patterns emerged; the first was that strong collaboration at all levels improves instruction. Within this pattern emerged three descriptors: (a) collaboration and training brings it all together (offering a variety of trainings from the district-level specialist teams, train-the-trainer, school level, and outside training), (b) develop professional learning community (PLC) with a sense of community and a growth mindset with all stakeholders (teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members), and (c) sharing students and data works. The second pattern that emerged was that expert and differentiated instruction builds student skills. Within this pattern emerged one descriptor: differentiated instruction based on the needs of your students is helpful. One primary theme emerged in answer to research question two: share and build collective efficacy and vision.

Pattern 1: Strong Collaboration at All Levels Improves Instruction

This pattern was developed from the multiple descriptions from participants of the many successes that their schools and district had in their efforts to increase reading and writing achievement and their goal of working to meet the needs of all students. Exemplar participant quotes for collaboration and training bring it all together (offering a

variety of trainings from the district-level specialist teams, train-the-trainer, school level, and outside training), for pattern one that was depicted in the following ways. Participant 1 said: “I see a lot of training, a lot of PD happening for our teachers. Things that might help them increase that stamina and increase that motivation. Participant 3 added: “I also feel like a lot of the outside PDs that we've done too. I did like the [Orton Gillingham <https://ogreading.com/>] (OG)...I would say lots of collaboration, cohesiveness. Having that end in mind all students succeed mentality.”

Participant 6 detailed:

So my position itself as a district curriculum specialist is considered a leadership role. I am out working with teachers and administrators in support of them. So, coaching both of them as well as we in the last couple of years we've had instructional facilitators at many of our schools. Essentially coaches, if you will, but you've probably heard the buzz we are getting literacy coaches next year at each school, and so that is an area that I get to co-lead with someone else and so sort of get to be the coaches coach, if you will, and so that takes a good chunk of time and leadership effort for sure. (P6)

Participant 6 added:

But I also feel like another area that's been very successful is I don't think it really has to do with the pandemic, but it's since we've been back that there's been just a nationwide really a worldwide push to better understand the reading science...In addition, last year we started a pilot program through a grant working with the University of Florida (UF) Lastinger Center and Flamingo Learning, and piloted a small group framework and saw lots of really good results from that, and we'll be

continuing that next year, and that has also launched us into working with UF in some other ways too. A lot of what we decided this year with the third grade reading camp for third grade summer school that would use the University of Florida's Literacy Institute Foundational program and curriculum...so we're piloting that now, and I know that the teachers that are using it currently are excited and loving it...and all of those things are all based in, you know the research and what we know works for our students who are struggling to learn to read. (P6)

Participant 7 explained:

So currently my role is working with, collaborating with The Lastinger Center from the University of Florida...I think the supports for teachers need to be in place, a place for teachers to be able to, you know, most districts have something in place for new teachers as they're entering in their career, which is fantastic. I think that's so important and I think their wins our district, they're paired with a mentor and then that mentor supports them throughout their first year, but I think that process could be elevated for new teachers, but then continue on for all teachers because everybody needs support. Not, you know, just because I've been an educator for 16 years does not mean that I know it all or I'm great at everything. I have a lot to learn and I choose to surround myself with people who are also very knowledgeable, but I think teachers need continuous support throughout. That's so, important not just at the beginning of their career. You know, like I said, there's so many components of teaching to be strong, to learn and to become good in. (P7)

Participant 8 specified:

So if they're in an LLI group, for example. And there's really like some major phonics pieces so they need an additional group that's more phonics based, really just looking at those students and making sure that our teachers, whether intervention or paraprofessionals have the training as much as the classroom teachers to provide successful interventions, not just you know, read with students but to provide those early interventions intentionally. (P8)

Participant 11 discussed training:

Just making sure training is available when something comes down the chute that teachers need to know how to do. I think that we have been very lucky with our instructional support team. They went to, trainings once a month last year at the district offices and came back with the latest and greatest information before other schools had even gotten it, and I think that was something that we were able to stay a step ahead of a lot of things. (P11)

Participant 16 discussed teamwork in detail:

So I think the better that we are collaborating with our teams, providing them with the leadership that they need so that they can continue to grow in terms of our teachers, that we're connecting with our families so that we are able to help provide supports at home, because most of our parents aren't teachers. You know, most of our parents are just doing a great job of providing a warm and loving environment for their kids. You know, they have other careers. You know, and even those families that, you know, where there is a teacher in the household and I'll use my own kids for example. Yeah, it wasn't always smooth sailing at home

either. Yeah, so I think as we're supporting them with tips and strategies that they can use at home we are focused in on collaborative planning of high impact strategies that address the standards and get our kids to the bar. Then I think when we are doing that collectively across a grade across a school, then I think we'll start to really have a great opportunity to close up those achievement gaps, because ultimately we want all of our kids to be college and career ready when they leave school, right and if we are just saying it's okay that there's a gap that existed in first grade and it existed all the way to twelfth grade then we haven't done our jobs... A lot of it's voluntary, you know, for them to be able to attend, but what I just love is the fact that almost every single one of those is sold out, you know, even though it's voluntary or the teachers in this district are phenomenal when it comes to honestly just pouring their heart and soul into bettering themselves as educators. You know, they do a wonderful job of figuring out where their kids are and what do they need to do to grow professionally and so I think our district, you know, through some of those offerings has done a nice job of trying to support our teachers. I am excited. We have a new position that's kind of bringing our professional learning department back and I'm hopeful that the professional learning that's offered through our district will be a little bit more focused and systematized... If you haven't heard, I've used that term a number of times today. I am a systems guy. I believe that everything builds on everything else and it all needs to fit in the exact right spot to make, just kind of this, synergy come to life where everything is just firing on all on all cylinders, and so I'm excited to have that position and know that once that department is up and

running to be able to kind of really work with our teachers and provide and our principals and provide you know those what are those next learning opportunities that we have. When we talk about the science of reading. Well, not everybody has had the opportunity to engage in some of those multi-sensory types of instructional processes. You know, again, I am not tooting my horn, but I'm tooting the horn of my staff. We had teachers back in 2018 who we sent to OG training back then and so I think as we start to look at the innovative ways that our teachers are trying to address the needs of their kids. It is all really I think being able to do that on a collective system wide basis for our teachers is really just going to help continue to support them and then ultimately it does come down to you know our students reaching mastery and demonstrating mastery or not and I'm just really, I think that's gonna be another great opportunity for our teachers as we head into the upcoming school year. (P16)

Exemplar participant quotes for developing professional learning communities (PLCs) with a sense of community and a growth mindset with all stakeholders (teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members), for Research Question2, pattern one, was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 explained the role:

So my role is to coach them on the strategies and the tools to help those teachers figure out how to get that child engaged...so that coaching piece I feel has really helped. I will go into classrooms and I will talk to the teacher and say, okay, I noticed this. I observed this with this student. Here's what I recommend and giving them some tools, whether it be, you know a behavior chart or maybe It's

hey, I know about this resource.(P1)

Participant 2 gave a parent point of view:

Much of them, many of them are new to the United States and they value education and so they're encouraging their children to do practice at home and even extra practice things that we are not even assigning them to do, because they really value education and want their children to do better than they have done.

(P2)

Participant 3 returned to a coaching point of view:

I did a lot of the coaching cycles with teachers. We do the [Professional Learning Communities] PLC process as well. So really doing the data dates with the teachers trying to find the deficits of the students and working with teachers either grade levels or individually with planning and going into the classrooms, modeling, working with small groups of children. Side by side, co-teaching with them. So, really diving into that coaching cycle with them.(P3)

Participant 4 talked about community:

I think, just building, rebuilding that community and sense of togetherness has been able to get them back on track, and in their learning and their feeling of being accepted, and so they have a little less worry, and they can get back focused on their schoolwork, and consistency is also vital.... Probably just our new focus on our PLC's and backwards planning. I think that's where we're going to start to really see a bigger increase in support of how we can make sure we're hitting everybody, and so they're guiding us through how to meet together as a team and do a better job at finding out what we need, both for the lower-level students and

the higher level, so they're not left behind. (P4)

Participant 5 discussed relationships and connections:

Well, I am very fortunate to have welcomed success or a wealth of experience, that I can fall back on...I've worked with a lot of kids, and I worked there for so many years that you know they knew me or my brother had you or my cousin had you, or this kind of thing. So, you know, being a familiar face being available, I would eat lunch with the kids. I would, you know, invite kids to eat lunch in the classroom, or I would eat in the cafeteria with them, just to have that time outside of the classroom, sit and talk to them at recess, maybe do an activity with them at recess. Those kinds of things play. If it's an inside recess day, play a game with them too, you know, to have that again, build that relationship piece...So I think success in all subgroups happens when you have all of those pieces that fit together. When you have that relationship and you have that and I do. I have a very strong connection with parents, you know. I give them my cell phone number. They know I'll call them, or I'll text them and they can call me or text me, and you know we'll communicate, because we need to work together for the benefit of their child. So, I think that that is something that helps too, because the parents know they feel comfortable, knowing that you know I'm gonna work with you. I'm not gonna exclude you, but you know, doesn't matter how much education you had or what problems you may have had. This is how we're going to work together kind of thing. So, I think once kids know that, too, they are more inclined to do the work and to work harder than those that you don't have that relationship...They don't see what they have the potential to do and it's our job to

teach them and show them that this can happen... (P5)

Participant 6 noted:

...something that if it would be anecdotal that I notice is that teachers that really have a true belief in their students, and they know that they can do well, and they believe it, and they make their kids feel that way and they've built that relationship tend to have better outcomes than those who don't... Yeah, I mean, I would reiterate that again, for sure that not just collaboration, but utilizing their time when they have it to do the deep work right. (P6)

Participant 7 discussed job roles:

So I facilitate some professional learning, some coaching opportunities... I think the biggest challenge is well, one of the challenges is teachers, mindset to being open and being willing to be vulnerable to take on new learning. I think once those walls are broken down and they're able to be vulnerable and open to their learning. Their learning goes deeper and then they want more, and it becomes more successful. (P7)

Participant 8 discussed both evaluating progress and noting barriers:

And then working with our literacy coach, our instructional facilitator to hold weekly PLCs with our intervention and paraprofessionals to look at the student data each week to see if there are students that need to come out of that. Those groups to you know receive more time, you know or not such intensive interventions or there are students that need to be added. Are the lessons that we're doing successful where we're seeing growth? Are there other things that the student might need? I think the greatest successes that I see across campus are

those teachers that have successfully created relationships with students. I think you know, certain teachers have such a way of connecting with students and getting them to feel those pieces of success that it builds on and they want to do more. That's been such a key to success, and I think my school in general has a really powerful support team of services and community services that allow for, families that are in you know, turmoil or, you know, homeless or having, you know, financial issues or domestic violence issues. We have such a wraparound service to provide those supports for our families to make sure that once students go home that they have, you know, their needs met there and that families can make sure the power is on and make sure there's food in their homes and try to you know decrease the amount of trauma that continues in the household. I think that that definitely affects children's ability to come to school and feel like they can learn, and then we also we have such I feel like the staff that are here, they're such proponents of students learning, but also building I mean relationships but it's not just the classroom teacher there's so many people here we have a volunteer center that, has at least 15 volunteers that come regularly and they are like those one on one mentors with students. So, it's just like one more person that they connect with every single week that, they're familiar with. They continue sometimes, you know, all through their education time at Alta vista and they really make that connection and read books and so they see those literacy skills. It's like a positive, it's a positive situation. It's not something to be embarrassed or scared of. It's like something they look forward to. (P8)

Participant 9 touted the importance of teacher training:

So we have, I said all that in the last piece to say, [the district] County Schools ranks like top five in reading and writing proficiencies and the reason for why we've had success to be very fair when we received, that call to receive ESSER funds, we were strategic with them and so I sat down with my curriculum team and they had to send in how they were going to utilize the funds. One big piece was teacher training. I talked about earlier there was a gap between how we support these kids while we were strategic and professional learning within our schools... we're trying to get out of this, it gave me the opportunity to be very fair, to look at everything, to look and see what is it that we're missing. What is it that we have in place that we need to continue with?...and I guess for me, I've always been this kind of leader who are the people in place that I can support and rely on. Like at the end of the day, we can all say we're doing all these great things, but it's a team, we're doing all these great things, but it's a team that does it, and so for me, it was meeting with my curriculum team really sitting down with these brilliant women and I say woman because there are you know men on my curriculum team. They're all women. And maybe that's because elementary education, but brilliant women that really looked at it and we looked at longitudinal data and said what was happening pre-pandemic and what happened right after we came in and did the blended model and what did we see that worked?...so that's when we started making those same adjustments I just described going into it. On top of that, regardless of a school grade that came out for whatever reason doesn't matter for because the pandemic or whatever the excuses were we were extremely strategic with those schools extremely, meaning

they had teams assigned to them on top of everything else within reading programs and intervention, we had that accountability measure, I would argue that was also important, meaning teams going in, supporting teachers there and everything, but at the end of the day, the follow-up is we're going to sit down and review your data, and talk about what's either working or not working. So we, started really a professional learning communities over kind of the last year and with that encompass isn't just the name, the PLC. It really does to hopefully get training about what does collaborative planning time actually look like. And this was district wide, right? Getting in there and when you're meeting with your fellow colleagues and you're reviewing data and what you're going to do next. How do we ensure that you're getting your biggest bang for your buck? And so I would say that that contributed immensely, just thinking through. (P9)

Participant 10 noted the importance of calling (over job):

“...you know, I have to say...I also worked with Gen. Ed. Students, just because I was the ESE teacher didn't mean I didn't work with the Gen. Ed. kids too, you know a lot of those kids...once we broke down the reading, it made the writing so much easier for them and we had a lot of kids get really high scores. You know when I push in...I have my students, but really they're all my students. I mean when I go in there it doesn't matter who I'm there to help. So, you know, I had some kids that I clicked with that were Gen Ed...and would like to do the writing with me in a smaller group and that was fine, and a lot of those kids made great gains from the beginning to the end... I think just having another teacher in there. I mean, you know, two teachers definitely are better than one and I think just the

way that we worked it out in different centers they would have to do, we made them quite independent. I think that was the biggest thing, too. They came in and they kind of had a lot of learned helplessness so we kind of had to break that barrier, but I think once they saw that they could do it. Then just that little push and you know then they were able to do it on their own. (P10)

Participant 11 promoted the team:

I would say, the way that they've come together as a team, you know, we have always been a close-knit building as far as our teams. They work hard together, but I believe in the last 2 years, especially with the bringing on of the PLC model that our teachers have worked more closely together to service their kids not as a classroom, but as a grade level. (P11)

Participant 12 discussed PLCs and personal histories with staff:

Rick DuFour's PLC work. What do I want kids to know? How am I gonna know when they know it? What do I do if they don't learn it? and What I do if they already know it? We spend a lot of time on what do I want my kids to know and what do I do if they already know it? Some of the time it's what do I do if they didn't learn it? and that's those maybe Tier 2 intervention type things, but in this population it's a lot of focus on Tier 1, just making sure we set the stage for teachers to do the magic that they do. One of the lessons that I learned early in my career and it was at that middle school that I talked about wasn't a gifted school just a traditional good old middle school. I think we had 1,200 kids. Our reading scores were and it was sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, were horrible, not for everyone, but for some groups and I had one assistant principal and scores had

come out, a different testing schedule, but scores had come out and he and I always went out in the afternoon and we would do dismissal together and we were really, I used to have hair we were scratching our heads and our hair and I said man Mike, Michael I am really struggling with this eighth grade reading. I just I mean it's I'm at a loss for how and why we're missing all these kids were just not connecting with them. I purposely don't say we have bad teachers, because the teachers come in and they give it their all every day. The parents I can't put it on them they give us the best kid they have at their house to give us. They give us their pride and joy and every parent from every strata of society. Every parent wants the best for their kid. So, it's gotta be, what magic is happening or not happening in that classroom and how can we identify the kids where the magic's not happening for them and what can we do about it and so as we were finishing up dismissal that day, we were talking, and it was like a light bulb came on for both of us at the same time. Every kid we took all of the data and we looked at it student by student. I mean then we dug in, and we wanted to know Mikey, Suzy, you know, every kid we looked at their scores. So, it was very fresh in our minds and we would say goodbye. Have a good evening, see you tomorrow to our kids and so the names were fresh in our minds. Their scores were fresh in our minds and the kids themselves were fresh in our minds, because we were saying, you know, hi and bye to them right there and as the buses pulled away, both of us said, that's the bus. All of the kids who had the low scores got on that same bus, and we looked at each other and we said, that's it, that's the solution, that bus is it and I mean obviously they lived in the same area. So, yeah, immediately we said where

the H do these kids? Where do they live? Because we wanna go there. We did some digging and quickly, very quickly we found out it was Section 8 housing. None of those parents showed up at any parent coffee. I mean the research talks about creating relationships with parents and the community as like a, I mean that's low hanging fruit. How do you help kids? Build a connection with parents and that will help. Hattie even in Hattie's research, his meta-analysis [<https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/>], that's, you know, that's one of the things, strategies approaches to help student achievement, but those parents weren't coming to us, and it wasn't because I hadn't showered, or I was mean and nasty. It was because the parents were working two and three jobs and the parents maybe didn't have good experiences themselves or in the past with that place called school. So, we brought a coalition together. I remember it was our guiding coalition before we really had guiding coalitions and we started brainstorming. What could we do? We reached out and made contact with the property manager at that Section 8 housing and we raised some money and we started doing cookouts. We started doing movie nights at that Section 8 complex. Me, the assistant principal, some teachers, we got our School Resource Officer (SRO) that I went to high school with, he and I grew up together. We started in kindergarten went all the way through high school he went in the military I went to college, but then we ended up back together. I was the principal and he was my SRO. We had a really good relationship. [This] Black guy my age had two kids. At the time I had two kids. We saw things through similar yet different life experiences. I said I want you

there with me and he said, are you sure about that and I said, absolutely. We're in this all together and so our teachers put together like test prep packets that parents could do with their kids at home. It had some games, but it also had a lot of just material in real simple language. These are activities to do with your child to get them ready to show us they know what they know and we did that for the entire year and that year our Black female students outperformed every other group of students on campus, White boys, White girls, Hispanic boys, Hispanic girls, Asian didn't matter. Black females outperformed every other group by a lot. Our Black male population they also demonstrated incredible gains. They still had a ways to go and as I was leaving that was the group we were gonna even drill down further on, because we hadn't cracked how to make those connections and there's a whole body of research on young Black males. How do you connect? How do you help support them with all sorts of strategies and that was what we were getting ready to do when I came here 10 years ago, but the achievement level of that process and that plan that we had was so effective that we got an award and was recognized for our school significantly decreasing the achievement gap at our school in reading and writing and it wasn't a packaged program. It wasn't like we bought you know X program from a vendor and put kids in front of a computer for hours and hours a day. We do that, it was about relationships. It was about high expectations. It was about community. That third grade, I mean, I'm sure you've heard and read lots about third grade reading level, on grade level reading by third grade that's the goal and for the vast majority of schools and communities that's the key. Our kids come to school already reading like I mentioned you know

at a higher level so what I would say is that I am an avid consumer of research. I am constantly trying to learn something I don't know, which is a lot. And I always wanna learn from people and places where it has worked, and I'll give you two examples or three examples. One a professor I had at Harvard. His name is Dr. Ferguson at Harvard. He's actually an economics professor, but he was collateral teaching in the department, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and he shared with us a program that he started with a whole team called Boston Basics and Boston Basics has now, it's so successful, there's Cleveland Basics, there's Philadelphia Basics, there's Houston Basics and the whole the whole crux of the program is that you can't wait until school to start teaching all of these things. They reached out to pediatricians they reached out to obstetricians, because that's when you need to plant the seeds for the moms and their partners about how to set the stage for a successful reader when they come into school. Reached out to places of faith, communities of faith, grocery stores, police fire rescue. It really is a literal community supporting readiness for school and then of course head start and those programs, but it's very simple. I encourage you to look up Boston Basics. Dr. Ronald Ferguson is the researcher. That's huge and I would love to see that here in [our district] where we are...Oh, the research from, John Hattie, his meta-analysis. Every class I teach and the work I do with our faculty on collaborative planning teams and professional learning communities with our guiding coalition, we go back to what works. You don't have to reinvent the wheel and find out what works and then modify it, adapt it to what you need, what your kids need most importantly, but what does your school need? Find out the

research. I love this quote. 'God gives every bird a worm, but he doesn't throw it in the nest.' So, you really need to be a voracious consumer of research. Get out there and find out what's working and go for it. Your kids deserve nothing less.

That's what I demand of myself and expect of everyone on my team. (P12)

Participant 13 said, "We run a lot of mentoring on this campus, not nearly as much as we could use and as much as I would like to have, but it's something that we're very aware of and look at a lot."

Participant 14 discussed the power of relationships:

I think one of the biggest positives that I see is that relationship between the teacher and the student. I think that is a really important thing, because not every child has those relationships outside of the school. As a teacher works to build and maintain relationships, it leads to things like better attendance, better, you know, home school communication and those are all factors on a student's success... I think that as we have opportunities to collaborate, one of my rules is to support teachers as we get together, and we collaborate, and we plan together, and I think that is a very impactful strategy. I think that's what moves the needle is everyone coming to the table, everyone, you know, talking about our students and how we can meet the needs of our students and the successes that we're having and challenges that we're having. So, I think that that as a support is one of the most helpful things. (P14)

Participant 15 affirmed the importance of data:

I think when it comes to data and evidence-based decision making, when we have clear data coming back to us to indicate the results of our teaching or our efforts

in a particular area, once we can balance the data that we're seeing with the work that we're doing and we put those two factors together that's when we really see powerful change and that's what's going to lead to teacher collective efficacy is when they're matching that data with the results that they're seeing. (P15)

Participant 16 discussed multiple topics that had to do with collaboration and PLCs:

You know, we're able to engage in that small group work with our students. We're able to engage in ongoing professional learning with our colleagues.

We're able to engage in the professional learning community framework so that we are able to really look at our student data and make instant adjustments to our instruction. You know, during the pandemic, you weren't really able to do that as well. You got a child at home It's really hard to make instantaneous adjustments to instruction when you're talking to and trying to teach somebody online versus when they're right there with you and so I think we became much more intentional in our use of data when we came back ...and so really the principal's role there is to establish those systems that are gonna support the opportunity for our teachers to continue to grow together. Being able to provide the support and that guidance and that leadership, you know then you're able to help our teachers grow and that's where the kind of the rubber meets the road is as our teachers are growing in their craft our students are then are able to increase in terms of their proficiency levels. It's a lot of removing barriers for our teachers and students, really establishing connections with our curriculum department, so that our teachers are really learning the best way that they can to impact the children in their classrooms... we also saw a tenacity with our teachers that we hadn't seen

before, because they recognized how specific and intentional and just honed in on what our students need and the work that needed to be done with them and so I think we came out of that tired for sure, you know, stressed, but with a renewed sense of our kids need me. You know, there is that power in education comes from the people in education and that is the key to having our students grow. It's the collaboration, the collegiality, the building of that collective efficacy amongst our staff and I think we brought a renewed focus to that coming out of the pandemic...and so I think that's probably been the biggest piece coupled with the PLC work, because none of the exceptional gains that we're seeing with our kids and I don't mean me in our school I mean across our schools within our district none of that's going to happen without the opportunity to engage in highly effective collaborative work where we are building that collective efficacy among our teachers...All of us have strengths and when we are able to harness the power of that collectiveness and the power of that. collaboration, then yeah, that's gonna make an impact on our kids and because when I learn from you how to be a better reading teacher. Well then I'm gonna use that on my kids, because it the old saying we do the best that we can with what we know until we know more and then we need to do better, right, and so it's that whole kind of concept if I know if I'm learning something from you, then I'm gonna be able to better impact my kiddos and because I'm doing the best I can already. So that's where I think that's why I think that it is so important for us to have the time and that it is given the level of importance that it should be and when we are, because again, you know, I have the best Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. What is that? Let's say maybe an hour

a day. I still have six and a half other hours of poor instruction. It'll never overcome that poor instruction at the Tier 1 level. So it is, I think if anyone ever wanted a silver bullet when it comes to education, I think that collective efficacy that we build through our PLC framework. It involves ensuring our families are part of that conversation. You know, I've been a principal in two different types of schools. I've been a principal at a Title I school. You know where we had just a lot of different needs for our students and our families and then I've kind of been in a school where we weren't Title I, but still somewhere around 45% of our families came from poverty, these students were receiving free or reduced meals and so there are different needs based on different schools and when you're tuning into kind of the specific needs of our families, It's really important that we are intentional in how we support them. So some of our families, you know, are kids are coming from 2 parent households and they've been read to since they were born and they've gotten that that just overwhelming amount of literacy and that opportunity to write you know they had the whiteboard easel set up in their homes and they had the chalkboard paint on their walls and you know they had a chance to engage in all of those activities from an early age. So our support for those families is going to look a little bit different than it is for families where when the kids are coming to school it's their first school experience and parents you know not at not because they haven't wanted to, but because of you know other impacts and influences within their lives. They have been working multiple jobs to make ends meet. You know, they didn't have a great school experience themselves and so they don't know how to help build that love of literacy within our students, and

the way that we approach and help support our families is gonna look different at different schools. We may be doing some ongoing family nights. You know, or opportunities at parent conferences where we are sharing little tidbits, little instructional strategies that are easy to use at home. Like maybe we are giving our families those magnetic letters, so they can start spelling words at home or we're giving them, you know, letter tiles so that even if they aren't able to use the magnets they're able to manipulate it that we're giving them the level of readers at their children's independent level, so that they can engage in that reading together. Yeah, so it's really the systems component from the principal's role, because the reality is I don't deliver the instruction. I'm not in the classroom every day working with our families and working with our parents and our students, but what I am able to do is set the expectations of what our instruction needs to look like. Provide the time and systems and support to make sure that instruction is taking place and to make sure that I've removed any barriers to our students and our teachers being able and our families being able to feel successful when we're talking about early literacy and really mastering our reading and writing standards and expectations... (P16)

Participant 17 affirmed teachers' hard work to educate students:

Well, I mean, teachers, there's nobody works harder than a teacher. So, like I said, you give them a problem they will find it. The great thing about it and I'm glad our district is kind of going to it, more now as a total district is really the collaboration and working together. I've never seen it as much as it's at an all-time high than has been over the past years and sharing some of that of those

ideas and successes. I think that's kind of, you know, where we saw our greatest success as really sharing those ideas in a PLC kind of format... You know just identifying those kids and letting parents know who those kids are. We've always done that, but there is that monitoring checkpoint along the way and we've always done that with data, however it does bring to light every month when you have to write something to a parent of where their child is and what they're going from. I think it what it does is it builds better communication between home and school. So, I think that's what it does there again. My teachers have always done a good job with that, but I think on the other side, parents are more tuned to that as well because they are getting that letter and that monthly update as far as that goes. So, I do think that that's kind of helped. (P17)

Exemplar participant quotes for sharing students and data for pattern one was depicted in the following ways. P1 recommended: “And I think we could share data and we could talk about with our students... They know they're going to be pulled for small group.”

P2: agreed: “They want you to really hone in on the data that you're collecting so that you can meet everyone's individual needs.” P3 noted the importance of sharing interventions for shared students : “ I think you know them sharing kids and really focusing on those small group interventions...”

Participant 4 affirmed the notes of P1, 2, and 3 and added:

Because we're very specific on the data that we're using to drive our instruction, and we have the ability to borrow all of our brains to share information, and you're so you're not on your own, or just you and a partner nearby, especially for, like our team teachers. So, we have a lot more people there to share, plus we

usually have somebody from the administrative team that joins us. So, then we have a more schoolwide perspective of who's heard from other grades and ideas that can be shared that happened before or after us in PLC and then also just the chance to brainstorm when it comes to planning. (P4)

Participant 6 explained:

One school in particular, that I think I do see making a lot of improvements and rising above the challenge, and having that accomplishment would be Emma, because I think that having the Bureau of School Improvement there for a few years, has really made a difference. The teachers have learned now that BSI is no longer there, the teachers are still doing the hard work. They're still collaborating and really diving into the tasks that students are supposed to be doing and thinking through. If this is the task we want them to do what does that look like in the lesson?... how do I make sure that that happens?...they are continuing to do that work, and they have shown a lot of growth and so I would say that's a big accomplishment. They're scoring better than a lot of our schools that didn't have that, that weren't in the situation they were in, they've really turned around a lot of things. So, I think that's something definitely to be celebrated. (P6)

Participant 6 noted:

...I began co-teaching with a teacher next door to me. Our rooms were adjoined...we really, really looked at data all the time and would group and regroup students our students were they worked in a small group with Teacher-led instruction twice a day in reading and math. We really utilized every moment of every day to the greatest that we could, and we really were able to constantly talk

about students, constantly talk about data, what students need. We would pass notes back and forth to really be able to respond immediately. (P6)

Participant 9 considered his multiple schools:

Within that includes data chats, progress monitoring, fidelity checks, and what fidelity checks are is that I go attend schools and actually meet with a team of not only teachers and leaders but the principal to go over all their diagnostic and their data within every student group and also how their teachers are doing overall. I guess in addition to that, cause it could keep going... The reality is when you when I visit 23 schools the positive I can see the difference from school to school and the impact that teachers are having, the work they're doing, the planning that goes into it, collaborative planning time where they're talking about students and really digging deep into what they need, but still having that focus on Tier 1, understanding they're not going to intervene their way out of it. (P9)

Participant 10 explained:

We took turns a lot of the times I was the one that whole group would do the reading just because the makeup of the class we had. I was the one that would do the whole group reading. Just because the makeup of the class we had, it was, pretty much half and half, half ESE and half Gen Ed. So, I was the one that usually did a lot of the reading and breaking it apart for the vocabulary, and it was great seeing them use their strategies, you know, just to be able to decipher what the text was and then the Gen Ed teacher did a lot of the writing I would just support you know with the students talking it out, correcting their papers. You know, a lot of those kids have difficulty remembering the steps and with their

spelling and their grammar. So, a lot of that I did a lot of editing with the kids.

(P10)

Participant 17 affirmed the benefit of open doors among colleagues:

You know, It's always, you know, education it's always been you work together, whatever, but sometimes, you know, when the doors close that's the teachers domain, but a lot of times that door is staying a lot more open now, where teachers are sharing kids and sharing what best practices are and things like that and I would say my teachers are on board with that. I mean, we did it a lot this year as part of the district-wide initiative and I think it's been a hugely successful as far as that goes. (P17)

Pattern 2: Expert and Differentiated Instruction Builds Student Skills

This pattern evolved from references to the positive effects of differentiating instruction and practices to the individual needs of students including the many references to interventions and knowledgeable trained staff dedicated to supporting the needs of their diverse population of students. Exemplar participant quotes for differentiating instruction based on the needs of students for Pattern 2 was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 noted the importance of knowing the children's needs:

...a lot of differentiation tools... so that piece that you're seeing that child act out, well maybe that's gonna minimize itself because we're utilizing some of these other things that are more you know, suited for that child's learning ability. (P1)

Participant 3 did as well:

I think a lot of teachers are really using a lot of like small groups like doing a lot

of small groups and interventions. In the school I think that's one of the things that we've really worked on after we came back from the pandemic, because there was so much so much deficit. (P3)

Participant 4 noted the importance of using data to best differentiate:

...because we're very specific on the data that we're using to drive our instruction, and we have the ability to borrow all of our brains to share information, and you're so you're not on your own, or just you and a partner nearby, especially for, like our team teachers. So, we have a lot more people there to share, plus we usually have somebody from the admin team that joins us. So, then we have a more schoolwide perspective of who's heard from other grades and ideas that can be shared that happened before or after us in PLC and then also just the chance to brainstorm when it comes to planning. (P4)

Participant 6 added the importance of the emotional component as children returned to school:

...but not only learning loss, but I think there's a large emotional component that has surfaced for a lot of trauma that our students are coming back to school with not just because they weren't in school, but because of having families disrupted both by either having lack of work or just being home in a different environment. You know, just a lot of change that adults were navigating, and maybe not so well, since it was all so new to us. So, I think our children are coming back with a different level of emotional need and support. I would say, that's a big challenge for us. As well as I think a lot of people decided to move at the end of COVID-19. Florida in general, I'm sure you know, has some open, a little more freedom than

some other States didn't. I think a lot of people moved here for that and so we had a lot of increase in students coming from different areas with all different backgrounds and different educational experiences, as well as other languages, speak other languages coming from other countries and so there's quite an uptick in that, as well...so I think on the teacher end being much more comfortable there, and utilizing different ways of teaching. (P6)

Participant 7 affirmed the unique role of small group work as opposed to whole group instruction:

I think small group instruction is, crucial, but I think what the teacher is focusing on during that small group time is even more important because again, it goes back to looking at that data and whatever you're working with the student in that small group is what they need, not what you've already done in your whole group. It's what they are specifically needing. (P7)

Participant 8 discussed the making of and use of small groups:

Whether it's LLI groups, phonics skill bag groups. Really any kind of reading intervention lesson for students where teachers can also pull students at that time...and then we also, I also work with that team to schedule, pulling student data to form those groups to make sure that we're kind of being intentional about what students receive and what interventions are taking place. (P8)

Participant 9 discussed the importance of using monetary resources well post pandemic for student benefit:

...and so when you when you kind of add all those together, you have things like a school that was a C the prior year. That data wise, even though it may not be

school grade, jumps all the way up to an A because of reading proficiency and writing everything else, because of those supports. We continue with that model of intervention support in addition to supporting teachers because of Benchmark advance with Tier 1 instruction. I believe it's been a huge impact and then the last piece really has been we have done written grants and everything else. We really have focused on, I guess, kind of two-fold reading recovery and OG and Wilson and these things that support reading. However, lane you're in when it comes to reading doesn't matter to me. It just matters what does a child need and doesn't matter to me. It just matters what does a child need, and we've been strategic enough and we have the resources to do this. We've identified what that need was in that kid, and we put that particular resource towards it no matter what it has to be. We brought in UF to do dyslexia training with our staff as well. So that we can go in and hopefully meet the needs of kids as well. So, I think to answer that it's kind of been a strategic look over all of it, we knew there were going to be gaps going into it. So why wouldn't we sit down as a team and strategically think about everything we have in place? We have all this different money to support it. Let's make sure we're utilizing it the right way and the payoff for us has been the data that just came in to say, you know what? In most grade levels, it's working. It's working. Is there still a gap between some of our highest achieving students and some our students that we're still pushing up between some of our highest achieving students and some of our students that we're still pushing up. Yes, but I would argue they're all moving forward and that's what we've been trying to get back to where we were before the pandemic. So we always say this at our district

level, we're trying to get back to pre-pandemic scores and we're still not there. We're moving in the right direction, but we're still not to where pre-pandemic scores were in [our county]. I will tell you, I, it was interesting, some of our Spanish students have made really, really good growth in in [the district]. I've been incredibly impressed. Our percentage has grown a lot even in the amount of students that we have. I think the last I look we sit at almost 25% either 20 to 25% which is pretty strong if you think about it. They have grown immensely over time and coming from different areas of the country, which has also been the most interesting part. We've seen growth in that area. And I think that's more or less just being very strategic about just kind of the native language that they speak. ESOL support that we provided, para of support we provided and to be very fair programs that we now have in place. I would argue over time we've started to understand more, and this is sad as silly as it seems just because you come from somewhere where you don't where you speak a different language and you don't speak English doesn't mean that you weren't successful in your home country, right? That you didn't know these academics and everything else. You just don't understand our language, which prohibits you from normally reading and writing, and once we break through that, we've seen an increase within those students when it comes to that. Success in our district as well. I will say we're predominantly a White district and we have predominantly been extremely successful within that student group as much as people don't always call this student group it really is right you go to a different district, and they don't always call this student group. It really is, right? You go to a different district and they're

predominantly only African American White would be there another student group and so we have seen success in that aspect as well, to me those are really the main two. Because of how I kind of explain what we have in our district already. We don't have a really strong population of Asian Pacific Islander. And outside of students with disabilities, I would tell you that we're still working through that with all our students, it doesn't matter where they fall in. Those are probably the two student groups that I've seen kind of grow the most and have been incredibly impressed with. Anyone could argue that our gifted students as well. We are, have one of the leading, gifted, separate day schools in the nation in Pine View school and clearly I think they're still ranked number one in Florida or something top 10 in the United States and those students have shown tremendous growth over really pre-pandemic and even post pandemic it's been unbelievable to be fair to them. So, I want to make sure I do say that that they've done a remarkable job. Regardless of those students identified, just looking at their data those students still moved from the right direction going from 95 to 96, 98 sometimes 99 or 100% in areas and I'm not just talking proficiency bringing above I'm talking level 5s...to me that's pretty impressive. I'm going to attribute it to the schools and the teachers. I want to be fair to them. (P9)

P10 said: "...teaching things by writing in chunks for the kids has helped them so much and we've seen a lot of success with that."

Participant 11 affirmed the value of strong teamwork in raising achievement:

So, I feel like our ESE babies are the students that needed to be in school the most, so that they could get that differentiated instruction from their teachers and

from their outside providers as well as their classroom teachers, so I would say that is probably why they fell behind a bit was more due to the time out and not getting all the services that we normally provide on a daily basis... You know, it's interesting, our ELL population has I think really taken off. We have a great team that works with our kids. You know we're seeing a lot of kids come in who don't know much English but are very smart children and they've caught on really quickly. You know so when you're going through your test scores, your writing samples...It's always interesting when you come across your kids that you know are new to this country and how far they've come in a short amount of time. I think that we do very well working with our ELL students and we have the supports in place and I think our classroom teachers have been very well trained in what they need to do to support our ELL kids as well. We've seen great strides with our ELL population, still definitely a long way to go, but they seem to be making I think bigger strides than our ESE population. (P11)

Participant 12 noted the strong skills of the gifted population:

We actually don't teach explicit phonemic awareness and the basics of reading our kids typically come to us bragging, even in second grade that they've read every Harry Potter book...The typical profile of a gifted student. Even in those early years is that they have extremely high scores in reading and so when they come to us, we were able to take them where they are and continue them even farther. Obviously, they also have high scores in math and that helps provide that full scale IQ of at least 130 to qualify to come here. (P12)

Participant 13 affirmed the value of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program:

It is always a very successful test component when the students are coming through a CTE program, a career and technical education program, because they already have the adult expectations in the job world and they very quickly perceive that there are people out here who are paying me money and I would like more of it and so there's a financial reason for them to find a way whether it is simply improving their attendance and showing up for things that they didn't or whether it is, you know, really buckling down because they need to know something that they like in the job world and the adult world... the students who have a reason for a job like [Career and Technical Education] CTE or [On the Job Training] OJT, they may have very low scores, but they become successful because of a motivation that they have there...I think the teenagers at large right now, many of them are very disengaged with the type of education that we're still using, the sitting and the being lectured to and the program that is being used on the computer, but it's not interactive with the way that they take in life. So, the success is very much tied to an understanding of I don't need to teach reading as reading. I just need to deal with it every single day in everything that I do. In those classes I find it very successful, and in the classes where it's tied to a career and technical or a job component those students tend to be pretty successful.

(P13)

Participant 16 noted with pride the performance of students from many subgroups:

So, Yeah, so, you know, for us, historically we have seen our students with disabilities have experienced great success. Our students, who their heritage language is Spanish are having some really wonderful success as well. Both again

both kind of qualitative and quantitative. Is there still a gap there when we look at, you know their peer groups? Yes, there is, but you know, we're really very proud of the fact that we do not have any student groups at our school that fall below the federal index and so all of our student groups are performing above what kind of the federal indexes, all of our student groups are performing above the state average. So you know, we do feel really good about the work we've been doing there. That being said, we still have work to do. You know, we absolutely still have work to do. Until those numbers for any student group. Whether it's you know, males, females, White, African American doesn't matter until that number is a hundred. We have work to do like, you know, our, fourth grade. I'll take our fourth-grade math. Proficiency you know we were at 90% score to 3 or higher this year and the very first thing that we all did. Myself, my teachers, my entire team as we looked at those 10 kids that didn't score 3 or higher. You know, it wasn't about the 90 that did. It was about the 10 that didn't and then we started talking. Okay, gosh, so what are we gonna do as they move into fifth grade with these kiddos, and so it's those types of conversations that are just gonna kind of continue to happen because until I guess till we're at 100% for everybody we definitely still have work to do. (P16)

Theme for Research Question 2: Share and Build Collective Efficacy and Vision

In reviewing the patterns derived for Research Question 2, the dominant theme that emerged from the many participant responses was regarding the importance of sharing and building collective efficacy. Additionally, a clear vision in order to build relationships and establish a professional learning community. All 17 participants

believed that sharing and building collective efficacy and vision through the PLC framework and collaborative practices was important to increasing reading and writing achievement, thus creating the theme for Research Question 2 that collective efficacy and vision are crucial.

Participant 9 noted:

In addition, I also support a curriculum director. Within that role, the responsibility really is to support them with any strategies and trainings that we can provide and any other professional learning opportunities that we may think is important. Also, grants that we write to actually be able to support those. (P9)

Participant 17 detailed that:

We have built-in planning days and PD types of things where we can work with it as far as that goes and kinda working alongside of them on some of those things. Myself, my assistant principal, are really trying to be active as part of that and again included in the PLC model to be as a big part of that as we can. (P17)

Furthermore, Participant 4 described that:

Because we're very specific on the data that we're using to drive our instruction, and we have the ability to borrow all of our brains to share information, and you're so you're not on your own, or just you and a partner nearby, especially for, like our team teachers. So, we have a lot more people there to share, plus we usually have somebody from the administrative team that joins us. So, then we have a more schoolwide perspective of who's heard from other grades and ideas that can be shared that happened before or after us in PLC and then also just the chance to brainstorm when it comes to planning. (P4)

Participant 5 affirmed the importance of collaboration with students and families:

So, I think success in all subgroups happens when you have all of those pieces that fit together. When you have that relationship and you have that and I do. I have a very strong connection with parents, you know. I give them my cell phone number. They know I'll call them, or I'll text them and they can call me or text me, and you know we'll communicate, because we need to work together for the benefit of their child. So I think that that is something that helps too, because the parents know they feel comfortable, knowing that you know I'm gonna work with you. I'm not gonna exclude you, but you know, doesn't matter how much education you had or what problems you may have had. This is how we're going to work together kind of thing. So I think once kids know that, too, they are more inclined to do the work and to work harder than those that you don't have that relationship. (P5)

Participant 9 described:

We couldn't wrap our arms around, how are we going to get to the level of when teachers are really discussing and talking and last but not least where all these kids are struggling? How are we going to meet the needs of all them?...and so not that every school is at this place yet where I would argue that it's phenomenal and rolling through efficiently, but it's something that I believe at least attributed to our success, including some schools actually sharing kids. (P9)

Moreover, Participant 11 expressed:

So I think that their successes have been really getting that data, understanding where kids are and what gaps they have in their learning and figuring out how to

fill those gaps while continuing to move them on in their grade level curriculum... with our ELL team I think they are a great team. They work together. You know, they share a room. They talk about kids. They split up the work... (P11)

Additionally Participant 2 elaborated:

Specifically for reading, and...for exactly what they needed, not just like, you know, the reading program or something like that, but it was exactly what they needed...meetings in small groups and basing it on data. As individual needs of students and not just having small groups based on their level but digging in more specifically...They want you to really hone in on the data that you're collecting so that you can meet everyone's individual needs. (P2)

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, “What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?” The primary purpose of this question was to determine some of the supports, guidance, or mandates reported by participants to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23. Research Question 3 was addressed by interview questions 13 through 16. Two primary patterns emerged. The first was there is an abundance of resources. Within this pattern emerged three descriptors: (a) the right resources based on the needs of the school, (b) staffing matters (use finances/funding wisely to appropriate enough staff and the right staff in the right places), and (c) time is your most valuable resource so teachers should be given more time to plan and teach and with the materials provided so they need so they do not

have to create them and can focus on teaching (e.g., instructional focus and pacing guides, essential standards, research-based core and intervention curriculum). The second pattern that emerged was about the abundance of data. Within this pattern emerged one descriptor: (a) use data as a resource to inform practice, instruction, finances, and operations. One primary theme emerged in answer to Research Question 3: use resources wisely.

Pattern 1: The District has an Abundance of Resources

This pattern was developed based on the frequent references to using resources appropriately and to the many descriptions of how resources are used to support district, school, and teacher leaders in their efforts to increase reading and writing achievement. Exemplar participant quotes for using the right resources based on the needs of the school (provide research and standards-based vetted curriculum and guidance based on best practice), for pattern one was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 affirmed:

We have a lot of materials that we have access to which we didn't have years ago...I feel like we are making progress in terms of being able to find the right curriculum for our students...We have a lot of tutoring programs after school and summer learning academies....We have cluster sites in our district where students have the ability to go to certain schools that address their issue. (P1)

Participant 3 reiterated:

and really having them use research-based materials...with writing as well. We've adopted extra resources as well and the county's actually gonna use the same resource that we're using, which is Write Score. We've also seen we've been using

that program for 2 years now. And we've seen, I've seen a difference within the students writing in, you know, third, fourth and fifth grade. (P3)

Participant 5 explained:

I definitely like the growth mindset piece. I definitely like some of the SEL social-emotional learning aspects of you know them actually thinking about their thinking and thinking about themselves, and how they feel. And then being able to put that into words. So I think you know, there's so much more to teaching reading, you know. We're teaching children and we're teaching children how to read and write and be successful. The skills that will help them to be successful later in life. So you know there are a lot of pieces to it. I think that the district has done a good job putting those supports together and putting them in place for our schools. (P5)

Additionally, Participant 5 questioned a resource but added:

When I look at reading, you know I'm not sure about the Benchmark Advance. If that's the best program, but I think with being able to bring in other resources, I think that helps to fill in and helps to get more buy-in for the program. (P5)

Participant 6 praised teacher learning and using technology wisely:

I've seen a lot of just the use of technology in general...and I think our teachers are doing a lot of self-study and learning more and more, and realizing that there are things that they knew even 10 and 20 years ago that are important to stay with and other things that they've realized that aren't really servicing their students and helping them and starting to drop some of those kind of things, really narrowing the focus and doing and spending our time on the things that matter and are

working for our students. I think there's been a lot of conversation with our educators around that and wanting to make sure that we are really driving home what needs to be done with our students. (P6)

Additionally, Participant 6 added a comment about reading:

...but when it comes to reading, I think that it again comes back to relying on the research and evidence-based practices that have shown over, you know not just the last few years, but over like the last 40 years, that they work and then getting rid of the things that aren't working. (P6)

Participant 8 also discussed reading saying: “Whether it's LLI groups, phonics skill bag groups. Really any kind of reading intervention lesson for students where teachers can also pull students at that time.” (P8)

Participant 8 added comments about literacy coaches:

I do like and this is new district mandate...having literacy coaches, I think can be really powerful, because it allows for somebody with expertise to receive high-level professional development and bring it back to our teachers and have that expert on campus to be able to be in the classroom and not just me giving my, you know, experience and my, you know, coaching suggestions, but to have somebody that really is getting the most up-to-date research-based information and being a collaborator and a partner with the teachers to ensure that those pieces are being implemented and they're supported as they're being implemented. So I think that'll be a great mandate that could really be valuable. (P8)

Participant 9 discussed wise use of funds:

ESSER funds, we were strategic with them and so I sat down with my curriculum

team, and they had to send in how they were going to utilize the funds...How are you going to move the needle? Second thing were programs themselves as much as we don't believe in programs, it was adopting an actual curriculum Benchmark Advance right actually adopting something that teachers could put their hands on and really utilize with students... I would tell you the second mandate would be when we adopted our new curriculum in reading. The mandate was that we use it. And we will check and monitor by doing interim assessments to ensure that you're utilizing our new curriculum. That to me was another big mandate if you really look at that from the perspective of we didn't have anything in place as we were trying to adopt. Getting something and making sure that people are using it and are aligned with standards was 100% a mandate from not only our you know the district but also from my curriculum team. (P9)

Participant 10 discussed writing instruction:

A lot of working with a lot of visuals and the teacher that I co-teach with, she's magnificent...fourth grade uses the Top Score Writing and so we saw that when they were using that, they came in with a nice basis. For us to work with, you know what I mean? They had that base of what they needed and the lingo was the same. So I think that definitely helped, you know, because there's that consistency. So it would be nice if there was like a school-wide writing program. We had that a while ago with Mary Lewis writing. We don't do that kind anymore, but you know, we saw then how it was nice because it went from year to year to year and they heard the same vocabulary in the same format. So we saw fourth grade had started using it and that I think that really made a difference. You

know for them to have that and then coming in to fifth grade they're like, oh we've done this before and it's like yeah you have good, I'm so glad you remembered so then it was easier to go forward with you know what else they needed...and I think the Benchmark Reading does this too it's very challenging with the reading, but it's like if we can get through the reading, you know, it does have good topics for the kids to write about.

Participant 12 discussed results of using research-based approaches depending on student populations:

...have the resources they need to create those conditions in their classrooms for success...that we rely on research-based approaches to teach our gifted population... [for the general education population at the middle school I taught at] some of it was about explicit vocabulary instruction and at the time we really were struggling because we weren't seeing the gains in explicit vocabulary instruction that we were hoping to and it's a really neat contrast that I can draw between then and now, because the research that we found said don't explicitly teach vocabulary words in isolation. You need to embed them in social studies, math, and embed them in the instruction and that will make them relevant. It'll make them real and it gives context. When we made that switch, that worked. That was the secret to unlocking vocabulary mastery and it included, you know, Latin and Greek stems and prefixes and suffixes and all that sort of thing. Coming to [my current magnet school for the gifted it was] very different and the exact opposite was what happened here. Our key to success here is explicit vocabulary instruction. So, we actually do what the research says don't do, but it's because of

the population we work with and there their level of readiness to accept explicit, isolated vocabulary instruction. We actually do drill the heck out of just lists of vocabulary words.

Participant 12 added teacher reactions and advice to recent political situations around books:

I think the biggest challenge or opportunity our teachers are facing. It really is a political one, because teachers are scared. They're scared about what to put in front of children, novels that they have used, books that they have used all the way down to second grade, books they have used for their whole career that have been great that are stimulating, that are teaching empathy and kindness. Now they're scared if I use that am I gonna get convicted of a felony and lose my license and some of that I think is unfounded, but it's not an illegitimate concern. It is in state statute, it is in the Florida administrative code and it is part of the professional standards for educators so my advice to our teachers is always look at grade. Look at what is developmentally appropriate reading material for your students. Tie it, make sure you are able to tie it to the standards and is it developmentally appropriate for their chronological age, as well as their intellectual age and sometimes there is a huge disparity. So what we have seen is that our students are able to handle from a Lexile perspective reading material that is much more mature than their grade level would suggest. So it creates a challenge in our media center, our library, because it's one library that serves Grades 2 through 12. So you could have, I mean, theoretically a second grader has access to a twelfth grade, a 12th grader type book and that can't happen under the

new rules. So, our elementary teachers take their students to the media center, because we want to instill a joy and a love and a passion for reading. We just want to make sure they're doing it correctly and they're not, you know, jumping over into the young adult section. We're doing some education with our parents reminding them that they can go into Follet Destiny and say what books they don't want their child to read. Even if they're a middle school. You know, young adult, they can click the button that says, I don't want my child to read X, Y, and Z. Teachers are creating the lists through the the app called Libbib [<https://www.libib.com>]. I don't know if you're familiar with that but they're scanning all those books and making sure parents know, hey, these books are in my room. I have looked at them. I've done my weeding and vetting them. They are age-appropriate, they're developmentally appropriate. They are connected to standards and if you don't want them to read it, you need to let me know and, so that's on their syllabus or course expectations for the upper grade levels. Where they actually especially in English class assign you know texts novels, like *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Catcher In the Rye*, I could go on and on whatever the novel is that you are reading, there are no standards that say you must teach this novel. There are suggested novels and recommended ones, but the standard talks about, you know, teaching authors voice and plot and setting and all those things. So if a parent objects to a specific novel, then just come up with a different one. The standards are the standards and we can teach them through lots of vehicles. So what we do is support our teachers, make sure they feel comfortable and know that they're gonna be supported. There is a lot of anxiety

from grade 2 through 12. Beginning readers all the way through you know AP English literature, British literature, you know, I don't know how long ago it was if you ever read *The Miller's Tail* or Chaucer, some of the stuff out of Shakespeare. I mean, that stuff is some pretty bawdy. William Shakespeare, I've heard him call lots of names like Dirty Birdie. I mean, he wrote some pretty randy stuff and it was on purpose because his audience even at the Penny Theater, the Globe Theater in England, London in his time, that audience, that's what they wanted. They didn't have YouTube and you know anything we do. They didn't even have magazines, but they had these plays that were incredibly entertaining, and he was a master at weaving in what is obviously said, but then there were multiple levels of other meanings that were, you know, you could take it any way you wanted it. Some had sexual innuendos, lots of violence, but there were very layered plays and things that he had written, but again it needs to be age appropriate, developmentally appropriate, and tied to standards. So that's how we help support them and keep them focused. (P12)

Participant 12 added:

We did notice specific deficiencies within reading, and we did find a program - it wasn't i-Ready... It was a program called Fast Forward...it was an explicit, intervention program. We trained our teachers. We spent a lot of money on the program. We put kids in in front of computers. It was about 35 minutes required every other day and it would generate a report about their strong in this area, they're still lagging in this area, and then the teacher could provide an intervention and support and we did it with fidelity. We were very unimpressed with the

growth that was generated by that program - it just didn't deliver on the promise that the company made. So that was a 1-year program. (P12)

Participant 14 discussed state support:

The level of support being offered from the state has increased dramatically since the pandemic. We used to talk about unpacking the standards. We don't do that anymore, because I think that there are more clear, you know, examples and clarifications built in that help us understand what we need to, what we need to be able to, what the goal is, what we're gonna try to achieve. (P14)

Participant 16 discussed intentional use of resources:

I think what the pandemic allowed us to do was really evaluate and re-evaluate. How were, how intentional were we and were we using our resources in the most productive manner? You know when we talk about the science of reading, we want to make sure that we are supporting our teachers in that it's not just about yes, we're using the Haggerty phonics program but if that's not giving us the results does there need to be an additional phonics lesson? Do we need to start looking at our kids who aren't grasping that and looking for some of those [Orton Gillingham] (OG) strategies that we can incorporate into our instruction? We start with those standards and let's use the resources that we have. You know, these are our particular resources have been vetted by our school district and by the state and there's nothing that says they aren't good resources, but they are a resource. They are not the end all be all. If they were everything would be fixed, right? So, we use them as a resource. We look at how are they aligned to the standards?" (P16)

Participant 17 briefly discussed some ideas about the pandemic:

I've also thought that teachers are, you know, not all things were bad during that pandemic timeframe. We did learn that there's other opportunities and things that we can use to kind of assess kids whether it is outside the duty day whether we are using some kind of learning management system or some kind of platform to get them something that they can practice at home and effectively practice. We learned that not everything though we want from the teacher, because the teacher is hands down one-on-one is our best, but there are other opportunities, so I think there's some good that came out of that as well and some things that we could learn during that time to say, okay, this is a way that we can do it effectively as well. (P17)

Participant 17 added:

There is a lot, especially in the area of literacy with teachers and so sometimes it becomes I wouldn't say unclear, because teachers are very clear, but a little gray on exactly what are best practices and what they need to teach and what they don't need to teach, in identifying that and help supporting that is crucial. I think the big charge coming into the next year, from the district, through the PLC process too is identifying guaranteed and viable curriculum across all subject areas, but you know, it will help in the area of literacy, because then teachers will really understand these are the standards that we're guaranteeing and we know that they're viable moving forward, because there's a lot and teachers will really understand these are the standards that we're guaranteeing and we know that they're viable moving forward because there's a lot in curriculum that you have to

get through as a teacher so identifying what are those the most important ones, where do we need to hit on, and then making those adjustments as a result of that, I think it's crucial. (P17)

Exemplar participant quotes for the descriptor, staffing matters (use finances/funding wisely to appropriate enough staff and the right staff in the right places), for pattern one was depicted in the following ways. Participant 1 (P1) said: “We have a lot of people in place to support children who might have autism, or we have children that might have some behavior challenges or whatever the problem may be.” Participant 2 (P2) said: “I also had an interventionist who were helping where the kiddos didn't have an IEP.”

Participant 5 spoke about herself as a resource to a specific student:

This year I worked with a young lady who was actually in the AWC class. She was in there. She was misidentified, I mean, you know, she really didn't was not on that level as far as the work goes, but she had been in that AWC class for many years, so they thought it would be a detriment to take her out of there, but in talking with her, and working with her, she actually did a speech at the end of the year. You know what she'll miss most about the school, and she identified that I was one of the teachers that it didn't make sense before until I explain things to her and really worked with her in small groups and taught her so that instilled in me that you know I am making a difference... (P5)

Participant 5 also spoke about small group instruction:

...last year is they did have all the Title support, and that was they could pull small groups that they targeted, you know, groups for LLI instruction... I think when I think about the supports having small group and having someone either push in or

pull, you know, pull aside a small group and so that it's not so overwhelming for the classroom teacher to try to adjust to try to have so many small groups that she's working with at the same time, I think that that is beneficial. (P5)

Participant 6 spoke about instructional coaches:

They also have had coaches for the last few years in place. I think that it's supported them, not just BSI being there, but their own. They have, ELA. They have a math, and they have a science coach, and they help facilitate those conversations and make sure that they are happening, and that they are effective. Right? So that those meetings don't turn into a waste of anyone's time. So I think that's definitely playing a role in it. (P6)

Participant 7 spoke about explicit instruction:

I don't know that I can pinpoint just one particular group. I think it just goes back to the level of instruction that all students are receiving, from their teachers...I think explicit instruction has the greatest impact because you could have all these great things in place, looking at data, grouping students, intervening but if the teacher is not equipped with the tools needed to provide clear, explicit instruction and understanding their benchmarks and where they're headed none of it really will make a difference. So, I think it really just stems back to the teacher. (P7)

Participant 8 spoke about intervention teachers, para-professionals, and literacy coaches:

We have a lot of intervention teachers here and para-professionals, ESOL paraprofessionals, ESE paraprofessionals and just contracted former teachers and so we create a schedule for them so that during that one block hour, they're rotating with those classroom teachers to do interventions.... I do like and this is

new district mandate...having literacy coaches, I think can be really powerful, because it allows for somebody with expertise to receive high-level professional development and bring it back to our teachers and have that expert on campus to be able to be in the classroom and not just me giving my you know experience and my you know coaching suggestions, but to have somebody that really is getting the most up-to-date research- based information and being a collaborator and a partner with the teachers to ensure that those pieces are being implemented and they're supported as they're being implemented. So I think that'll be a great mandate that could really be valuable. (P8)

Participant 9 spoke about diversity:

...and then us getting back to school and realizing that we need to have the manpower to address the biggest issue... We do not have a lot of representation when it comes to African-American educators, we just don't... and so because of that, I truly "do believe sometimes they don't necessarily see themselves in some of the people who are educating them. That is not to say on camera that I don't believe anyone could teach any kid, I truly do, but I also believe that it would be nice at times to see someone that also represents you and that can give you some knowledge and feedback and have that connection even if it's not your teacher, just someone that you feel like you can go to, I think also plays a role in why we have those gaps. (P9)

Participant 9 also spoke about using ESSER funds to hire people:

The last piece was because of ESSER funds, we could actually hire more people. So, we were able to hire more support staff, literacy coaches, instructional

facilitators that were specific just for to be fair reading and writing. Their job was to go in build capacity with teachers and then the other side of that equation of their job was to go in and actually support students while they're actually supporting teachers as well... but here's the big piece, we actually in this county have the resources to do something about it, meaning the human capital. We have people that we can employ and put in place to actually not only support teachers and students to actually support schools... and then I guess the last piece was actually mandated were literacy coaches. Instructional facilitators and literacy coaches not that they had to be one at every school, which is what we winded up doing. First, we started with nine at Title I schools because, our neediest Title I schools..., it already had three, so we didn't have to add one to them. We started with that as a focus and then this upcoming year we actually added what 23 literacy coaches to all elementary schools and so those are mandates that we use just to kind of also based on funding that we had to follow through with. (P9)

Participant 11 spoke about Title I funds:

I think as a Title I school we're very blessed to have extra money to buy extra people. We spend the majority of our title budget on people rather than things. In the last 2 years we've had the jump start money from the pandemic that is allowed us to spend that money on things so we can focus on having extra supports. We have a large support team due to be in Title I and spending our money in that manner. So we have extra folks in ESE, we have extra folks in our support roles who are there to support, you know, new teachers, new curriculum, new families to our school. (P11)

Participant 12 spoke about having qualified and endorsed faculty members:

...I make sure we have qualified and endorsed faculty to teach those courses and that everyone has a thorough understanding of the needs of gifted students... Our faculty are credentialed through the university of south Florida, so they have either masters or doctorates in their subject area. So our kids after they take that course on our campus, they have the transcript from [our school] and they have the transcript from the University of South Florida. (P12)

Participant 13 also spoke about hiring and staffing:

It is the hiring and the support in all of the classes... the other piece is looking at the staffing that we have on campus and finding ways that will be of interest to the students in being successful in supporting the careers that they want and being able to hire and move in that area that means two specific things are enlarging again the career and technical options and offerings that we have on our campus and in supporting our ESOL students we've been trying very hard to find a Russian teacher we are not successful yet, but I want to add that because we teach Spanish we teach French. We have a large Russian Ukrainian population. They can be successful in their own language and then they can pull students of American heritage who are friends who want to learn it into that and so you have somebody who was unsuccessful because they didn't speak English, who is now the leader in the class and it sets them up for more of a self-esteem boost in their other classes...I think also it's just, it's a lot of staff who know their job very well and do above and beyond, you know, with what they need to be doing... Now the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief] ESSER dollars which

have come in which allowed our district to have instructional coaches have been very helpful and that is a... state and district because our district made the decision to use it in the coaches. (P13)

Participant 15 spoke about ESSER funding:

I would say the ESSER funding has been probably one of the largest factors following the pandemic is providing that flexibility to both districts and school sites to determine what their specific needs are in relation to their students' achievement. So schools have used that for extra tutoring time, either bringing in outside tutors or providing extra compensation for teachers to work during planning or after school to service students. So that flexibility with the funding there has been pretty impactful. (P15)

Participant 17 spoke about likely gains with the lowest students:

We're putting so much energy and we've seen that success with some of our lowest students, so I think the gains are probably bigger as far as those goes. They also have the largest way to go as well. So I do think that has to play a part in it as well, like I stated earlier in the interview, I think they lost the most during that time frame so they're probably the same type of students who had the most to gain as well, given that they were given that instruction that was started again and not only that, but that we're putting that human capital and everything else into them to kind of accelerate, to bring them up. I think that's probably a good reason why we're seeing that in those areas for those kids. (P17)

Participant 17 added

Well, what I'll say is we've had people come in from the district that help support

our teachers. So they've been very good from the students' services and professional development, curriculum department. So that's been very helpful as far as that goes. This year we're getting a literacy coach. You know, a literacy coach as well. I think that will be impactful as far as that goes, we had an instructional facilitator last year and really that was her role, it was a hybrid role. A lot of it was doing what the literacy coach is going to do this year as a matter of fact in my school personally I moved that person over into the literacy role, because that's how I saw the role anyways it's really supporting teachers and supporting students with those teachers really in the area of literacy and then we're gonna change up the role of the instructional facilitator. So those are two, you know, recent ones that I would say from the district that we've gotten that has been very helpful as far as that goes, anytime using best practices and finding out what's really working and that's what like I said when the district staff came out, they're really trying to work and center around what those best practices are.

(P17)

Exemplar participant quotes for the Research Question 3, Pattern 1 descriptor “time is your most valuable resource” was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 noted:

We have the supports in place at the district level and at the school level to address it. I really believe we do... I think one of the other things is that teachers need and it's a real basic thing and that is time. Time is needed to get all of the reading and the writing in sometimes can be challenging and I just think if we support our teachers, you know, with collaboration and time to really analyze the

data and share their struggles and challenges and to get in it deep and say, okay, this is what we're gonna do to address this student. (P1)

Participant 2 claimed:

I think that with reading there's so many different components to it. It's important to try to hit as many components as you can and to keep that flow going and that they need 90 minutes a day of that instruction and practice. (P2)

Participant 2 added

I think our district has done a wonderful job implementing the whole ELA district specialists I think that really has helped. That's helped me so I can bring it into the school as well so having that team of them there for us and having the resources, having our monthly meeting has really helped and shaped what I bring back to the school for the teachers. Having them available for PDs, bringing in professional development for the teachers in our school. So that support has really benefited and helped us grow. (P3)

Participant 3 added about the value of common intervention time: “We really focused on that intervention piece and having that common intervention time for teachers.” (P3)

Participant 4 explained:

The time and support, and then the resources weren't necessarily going to be there and teaching with them on a computer. It's just not going to be the same. You can't sit next to them to help them...Probably the biggest thing is with our district they do so much planning for us and giving us our instructional focus guides and they do all that work ahead of us, so that we can just take that plan with it for what our students need and we don't have to worry about a scope and sequence

and they provide activities and a lot of information that we need, what to do and troubleshoot when we have an issue, arise. So, they do a lot of work for us, and I think that's probably been the biggest thing that makes a difference. (P4)

Participant 5 added:

I love the instructional focus guide that the district has. You know that the ELA Department at the Landings. They are always putting together and sharing different things on their website. You know and on Blackboard. So you know, I think that again there are so many resources. It's just bringing them all together that is the difficulty. (P5)

Participant 6 discussed pacing calendars, standards, supports, and intervention resources so teachers use their time to their best benefit:

So my current role is as a curriculum program specialist, and I work with kindergarten through fifth grade teachers and administrators, and I would say, in all aspects of reading and writing, because I am specifically a specialist in ELA, and so within that my role is to provide curriculum and instructional support to teams of teachers, individual teachers, to administrators, and in doing so I am able to coach and support teachers in all of the aspects, all the components of reading and writing...So, for one is I work on the pacing calendars for both reading and writing, helping our teachers to be able to manage both our standards and their curriculum, and be able to cover everything over the course of the year, and so laying all of that out for them as well as the assessment, calendars that we use creating those and making sure that you know we don't have too much assessment at one time, but there were covering everything we need. In addition to that,

something I do is help to create resources that our English language learners or teachers can use. For instance, last year specifically created the exit tickets that went along with the comprehension lessons for all of our units throughout the year, and so just making sure that we're giving that additional support that our teachers don't have time to be doing but need and then another place that takes up, I would say a big portion of my job is making sure that there are intervention resources ready, and that our teachers understand how to follow a process of using a decision tree to determine the deficit areas that our students may have and then what interventions to use and how to progress monitor them... Yeah, I mean, I would reiterate that again, for sure that not just collaboration, but utilizing their time when they have it to do the deep work right... But when it comes to reading, I think that it again comes back to relying on the research and evidence-based practices that have shown over, you know not just the last few years, but over like the last 40 years, that they work and then getting rid of the things that aren't working... realigning our values on certain things, how much time and effort we spend on them! (P6)

Participant 7 advocated explicit and systematic instruction:

...in the district level... I think just the support for teachers to really ensure that they are able to be explicit with their students in systematic instruction is really what all students need. So I think being able to support teachers on that end was very beneficial. (P7)

Participant 8 discussed the 90-minute reading block:

So my role, for reading and writing really, I mean, I set the master schedule. So

ensuring that, we have a solid 90 minute and uninterrupted reading block and for a lot of grades that's beyond 90 minute. We also ensure that there is a like we call it the WIN block but like this coming year we're scheduling in like our special, you know, back-to-back intervention time with our computer time and it's an hour long. (P8)

Participant 9 discussed time for intervention groups:

...Like really sitting down and discussing and going if we have this many kids with different deficiencies in certain areas in reading. The only way to meet the needs of all of them would be if we do have a discussion about at least for a 30 minute intervention time of grouping them into smaller groups to actually support them and then our students who are proficient in moving, we group them so that we can work on something to move them forward so that they're also not being held back. I truly believe that's probably been our biggest calling card at [the district] over the last really, it's been a year, but I would argue it started even a year before then just the planning purposes. (P9)

Participant 11 discussed strategic scheduling:

So just getting teachers what they need in order to make those PLCs work. I think I've worked hard on making sure that funds were available for them to have time outside of their classroom in order to get together as a team in order to analyze data...I think the counties focus on making sure that you have adequate time and a schedule. So really scheduling out strategically and with intent of how you want kids to be serviced has been something that we've worked very hard on, making sure that the schedule works so you can get your ESE resource teachers in there as

much as possible. Scheduling outside contract people as much possible, making sure our instructional support teachers are able to work the schedules. So I think scheduling is very important. (P11)

Participant 12 discussed being strategic with the master schedule:

We're very strategic in creating a master schedule. This is kind of on a different tangent, but it is related. We're very strategic in how we create a master schedule to ensure that there's ample time for kids in reading and math blocks and that they have time to go outside and be kids and ensure that free time, every class periods 52 min. including lunch min they get to eat and then another almost 30 min go play. Some kids choose to go to the media center and read and that's awesome. I love reading. Some wanna play chess and we provide an area for them for an elementary chess club, for example, but we also encourage them to go outside. Every student at our school has to start learning another language at second grade. So every child at our school is either learning Spanish, French or Chinese starting in second grade and there's no better way to learn English then to also have to learn another language. I can tell you I'm not the smartest guy on Earth, but I mean, I'm not stupid, I'm fairly intelligent, but I didn't really understand English parts of speech when I was a child. I didn't really grasp indirect object pronouns and, you know, direct object pronouns and tenses and moods. In Spanish, there's a mood there's a thing called the subjunctive tense. I didn't really understand tenses until I had to learn Spanish. So, it's through the other language that you can actually become more proficient in your own language and we do that starting in second grade. (P12)

Participant 15 discussed limited time as a challenge:

I would say probably the biggest challenge would be the amount of time that we have to work with teachers to support instruction and how expectations may have changed from pre-pandemic, before the pandemic to where we're at now. Often once we get comfortable teaching a certain way or using particular strategies, it's hard to make that shift without a lot of support and the time that we have with teachers, I see as one of the greatest challenges. We're very limited with how often we can support teachers equitably, meaning that all teachers would receive that information in the same way and the same level of support. We're often invited out individually by principals to support at a school level, but when we're looking across district wide it provides challenges for everyone to get that same information... again, I would probably go back to just the clarity of expectations. When the school has provided very clear expectations on resources or time allotments or expectations for how to utilize the data is when we've seen probably the largest gains... I think teams working in that collaborative planning time to develop common goals, having assessments that are aligned to those common goals that really meet the desired level of proficiency that they are trying to attain and then measuring their impact of the student learning following that instruction. Did we hit our target? Did we have our students reach that level of proficiency that we defined? If we are below our expectations, what could we do differently? So keeping teachers and school teams involved in that problem solving evidence-based data-decision making cycle. (P15)

Participant 16 discussed planning time, release time, priorities, and funding:

You know, we have a kind of a qualitative success and then we have quantitative success, right and so when we look qualitatively at our success, one of the things that our teachers have done really well and have grown leaps and bounds with since we came back is just engaging in that teach assess cycle that we just talked about. You know, so we provide regular planning days for our teachers so that they have the time and we are there to support them so that we can guide them down the path that we wanna go down and we know that is collectively as a school, because we've engaged in these conversations, right and then we're there to remove any barriers for them and so we provide that regular planning time and this is in addition to their weekly CPT where it's all about what standards are we gonna be teaching our kids. How are we gonna teach them? That becomes the critical component. It's not just the what cause I can talk about the what all day long and if I don't have a clear idea of how we're gonna do this collectively across our team, then I'm the weakest link on my team in essence and I don't know about you, but I don't ever want to be the weakest link, right, and so it's about building that shared learning within our teams and I think by following this cycle, our teams have become and we started this as soon as we came back from the pandemic. So even before our district brought this kind of district-wide we were doing this here at my school a year or 2 prior to that and so what we got from that was a deep understanding of what our standards are. Really, how are we gonna assess this, and then what we are continuing to grow in is, okay, what are we gonna do about it and how are we gonna move those kids who already know it and accelerate them... so when we initially started this back, yeah a couple of

years, a few years ago. We talked with our teachers, basically about, hey, here's where we are as a school. Here's where I think we can be. What do you need from us in order to get there, and so we started those conversations kind of my first year here? So, I just finished my fifth year at this school. So it is a process. This is not an overnight kind of thing that happened. We started this, these conversations 5 years ago. Cause we were doing a good job. You know, we weren't doing a great job. We were doing a good job and yeah, we are an "A," but we were barely an "A" when I got here and so those are some tough conversations to have and in this I only credit our staff. They were so open. They have done all of the heavy work. They've done the growing, the learning they've put in their time and sweat and effort and just poured their hearts into these kids and into our school, because we had this kind of shared goal, and so as we started talking about that our first year that we did this, I wrote a grant and received some grant funds to be able to provide release time. I think the first time we did this, I think it was a half a day, once a quarter. You know where we brought in some subs to be able to provide release time my assistant principal and or I we help kind of set the stage and led the professional learning at that point because we were all still kind of new in this and wanted to go at it together and we did not have any coaches, facilitators at my school, you know, we're not a title school. So, the extra staff we just we didn't have to be able to engage that with our teachers. So, you know what, hey, that's great for me. It keeps me in the mix and keeps me growing and learning. So we are able to lead our teachers in that process. The following year we received some additional funds again and we're able to I think increase that to a full day once a

quarter, and then I think the year after that, is when all of the ESSER funding started rolling out and so we went back to our teachers and said we have this much money. I mean, we just laid it out there, like I'm very transparent with my staff. I want to know exactly what we have. How do we want to spend this money? What are our priorities and every single one of them said no matter what we do in terms of like tutoring, or you know family engagement, or you know buying extra supplies or instructional materials, the number one priority was the opportunity to plan together and so what we did is we gave each team 10 planning days a year now to where we get subs for them. So we actually, again, it's all about the systems as an instructional leader that you put in place. So in March of this past year, I asked our teams, we knew we were getting the funding for this upcoming school year and said, hey, do we wanna keep doing this? or do we not? What do we want this to look like? Again, overwhelming, you know, we've got some other kind of little projects that we're doing, but the vast majority of the money that we are spending from our ESSER allocations, they want it so that they can engage in that PLC process and really in that framework and engage in that collective planning. So, starting in March the teams are picking all of their days for the following year. We are lining up all of our subs for the following year, because if you want that to be the priority. Then you have to make it the priority and so that If I want my teachers engaged in collaborative planning and I want them engaged in building this collective efficacy across the entire team, I have to say no matter what happens, you are going to attend that training session, that planning, that professional learning. So right now we have for all of our teachers

for the entire year. We have all of our subs and all of our days already lined up. Now sometimes the subs will call out sick and things like that, but we are intentional about making that happen and we do it months before all of the planning days are gonna happen. We also are looking at and working, you know, we did get a literacy coach for this year, so you know this year we're looking at having our literacy coach there to help facilitate as we talk about writing, because that's an area that we still need to grow in as a school. You know, we are working on our vertical continuum of writing, and so, you know, the pieces that we've been doing on the reading side of the house where we are getting great results. Be honest, we it's time for us to start picking the pace back up on the writing side and bringing that up to where it needs to be. So there's still even when you're having, you know, schools with success, you know, there's always areas for us to continue to grow, but so I'm using, you know, ESSER dollars to fund that. It's a priority for us. So our teachers get up to one day a month to engage in that professional learning. Some of our teams, will do that early in the school year and some of them wait. You know, until they have some student data. Some of them will say, okay, today is a math day. So instead of needing 6 subs for that team. I only need 3, right? And then later in the week might be an ELA day. The other piece that we did this year, again, kind of because we had new information honestly with our FAST data what we did is we also provided every single team paid planning days over the summer. Myself and my assistant principal, we are leading those planning days in the sense that, you know, we kind of have an agenda that we're going through, but the very first thing that we are doing in those planning days is

we are looking at our AP 3 data from last year. We have already developed our class lists for next year. So our teachers when they come to the planning day, they know exactly who's coming to their classroom. They already have their student data from last year on who's gonna be in their class this year. So that the work they're doing isn't hypothetical. It's not, okay, so I guess if I get some kids who need this I'll be able to do that. So we met with our first team the first week in June. They were given their draft class lists for this upcoming school year in June so that they could look exactly at what are the incoming kids going to need. (P16)

Participant 17 discussed limited time to meet children's needs as a challenge:

As far as current challenges we have as a result of that time is always a challenge. There's never enough time. It seems like there's never enough time to meet the needs of all students. We try to do our best to limit, like I said, limit those outside distractions and things, but there is a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it and it's crucial, especially in terms of reading and writing because it is a skill that as you know, is critical to, to the learning throughout their history. So, you know, that's been the biggest the biggest challenges and just the sheer number of students who are now identified at the low reading level has increased because of that, so teachers feel that time load has increased, as well as trying to catch them up. (P17)

Participant 17 continued to lament lack of time:

If we could spend 12 hours with kids every day, the kids would make huge gains, but we don't have that time with kids, and I think identifying those best practices to be efficient and effective with our kids is great and then understanding that

these are really the essential standards that we need to hit because they hit other standards and we really need to dig in deep here and maybe not so deep here. It allows for that, you know, it's just it's being more efficient with your time, and I think that's probably the biggest reason to me why I'm excited about seeing that come play through a little bit. (P17)

Pattern 2: The District has an Abundance of Data

This pattern was developed based on the multiple references by participants to the importance of using data effectively to drive and inform instruction, by making evidence-based and data-driven decisions to support district, school, and teacher leaders in their efforts to increase reading and writing achievement. Exemplar participant quotes for the descriptor, use your data as a resource to drive and inform practice, instruction, finances, and operations, for pattern two was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 discussed progress monitoring data:

They're being progress monitored. They know that when they do not do well that that teacher has used the tools and the materials and all the things they need to do to get that child to where they need to be and they've communicated it. They've said, hey, you didn't do so well on this part of this test. Let's take a look at that and see what we can do. What can we do differently? So next time when that question comes up. (P1)

Participant 2 talked about small group data:

meetings in small groups and basing it on data. As individual needs of students and not just having small groups based on their level, but digging in more specifically...I would say you definitely have to keep focused on the data for

individual students and not just what you know the reading series is telling you to do. (P2)

Participant 3 discussed comparing student data form one time point to another:

I think, well, because of the way we have the progress monitoring now too from progress monitoring one to 3, I think they usually grow the most because now you're comparing them within that same year versus the year before and like you know just having like FSA and then FSA again at the end of each grade level. So, I think really seeing their growth throughout that school year, their language acquisition through that year really has helped. (P3)

Participant 3 also discussed learning what students need from data:

really looking at the data, really knowing how to dissect that data and seeing what it is exactly what the students need. I think that's always the hardest part. With the new FAST test that we've had, the data wasn't very teacher friendly. It didn't give them a lot of information. So really knowing how to use that data looking at it and not really like dwelling exactly on what standard but mostly like what does the students need as a whole. You know, what is it that they're lacking and why is it that they're not doing well in comprehension. What parts are missing that you need to address before they can even comprehend what they're reading on their own. So going back to that, you know, what are the foundations that the students are lacking? And sometimes it's not only one test that tells you that. It's you have to really look at that progress monitoring that the district has implemented which I think it's a great tool for us to see because yes, they might have fluency, but they might not have comprehension so knowing why is it that they have the fluency

down pack, but what is it that they need to get that comprehension part of the assessments? So having all those multiple data points, just all that data is I think something that we really need to learn how to dig into and not look at one item at a time but looking as a whole. (P3)

Participant 5 also discussed comparing student results from one point in time to another:

Well, it's important as the classroom teacher to have an understanding or identify what level the students are performing. So I would look at the data from the previous year. Look at the FAST data that is now available, and how they progress through the three. The three assessments or benchmark testing periods, and then I would do some background to find out what the children are interested in. Listen to their reading levels assessed fluency. You know, and then try to build things that interest and involved all of their, you know, the things that they're interested in to tackle some of those deficit areas, or to increase their interest in a certain topics. I think it's really important to know how to look at the data and to target interventions based on the data. So the first FAST assessment will be early on in the school year. So then I can compare that to the third one from last year to see if there's been any decline in progress and then to develop my small groups and my planning around that...I definitely like the fact that we moved from the FSA. The end of the year, one time test the high stakes and stress test to that Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) testing progress, monitoring. I like that aspect of it, because then you can really look at the data and say, Okay, this is where this child is, and this is where what I need to work with him or her on. (P5)

Participant 6 mentioned interventions, decision trees, as well as progress monitoring:

Sure I think that at the district level in the last few years we put a lot of time and effort into our decision trees for reading, you know any deficiencies in reading and helping our teachers to understand how to use those decision trees and also we have a guidance document that helps teachers figure out the interventions. I think that's played a big role in understanding what to do when to do it. You know the difference between a screener and a diagnostic? When do we dive in deeper as well as how do we progress monitor? How often do we do it? A lot of those things we've tried to put a big emphasis on the structure of that and not the paperwork side of that right. Doing what's best for students, and I do think that that's been very supportive. (P6)

Participant 8 discussed using student data to schedule interventions:

...and then we also, I also work with that team to schedule, pulling student data to form those groups to make sure that we're kind of being intentional about what students receive and what interventions are taking place. (P8)

Participant 8 also discussed using data to determine the progress of subgroups:

I think looking at our data our ELL population definitely has a high percentage of proficiency and growth. That's definitely an area our Hispanic, you know, students are definitely a subgroup that definitely a higher proficiency. They definitely have high growth percentages. So that's probably one of our, and it's our biggest part of our population at our school. So it's definitely something to be proud of to know that the majority of our students are really moving in the right direction. (P8)

Participant 8 added information about closing achievement gaps:

I would say because I would say it's that opportunity to close that gap. It's that extra it's that year before, you know, those basic literacy skills that students are learning how to be in school, how to listen to a story, how to start to understand what a story is to start seeing letters, to be able to start...using materials like sand and different things to create letters and understand how writing and sounds connect to, connect to letters and all those very foundational you know rhymes and just things that our students may not get to experience in their home situation. They're getting a whole year of here at school that really sets the foundation and then having that summertime where our students are getting, you know, 6 solid weeks of quality instruction beyond the school year. That's significant. (P8)

Participant 8 then discussed funding:

If you have the ability to be intentional about your use of money, funding for contracted or high-quality para paraprofessionals being very intentional about the role they play in working with students, and their you know what their interventions are but also making sure that there's that fidelity and like in their everyday time with students and that we are looking at the data and looking at that time with all of our students to make that a fluid model. I think that that's big. (P8)

Participant 9 discussed data in terms of informing parent of student reading deficiencies:

When you combine all of those and you're strategic about it in addition to a progress monitoring tool with the [the district] County, we created ourselves after the pandemic, so we could track fluency, phonics, reading levels, writing levels, assessments. We did all that to track so as we went along with all those other

resources we also knew where to intervene and so in our county, I think being able to track all that data, and use it... Unfortunately, if you like it or not and so you're not being asked to have a team assigned. I am doing that as a leader and my role is to make sure that to be very fair that we have no C schools in this district, and so if that is the case. We're gonna be very strategic with it. I would tell you that it wasn't accepted by everyone, no, not at all. Principals were not happy overall with someone that's new in the role basically dictating what's about to happen to their school, but what I explained to them was I looked at longitudinal data and said you've been the principal for 5 years, pre pandemic and post pandemic. Your data still kind of looks the same. It gives me that opportunity to make some adjustments on your part. To get us where we need to. And that's including everything I just said kind of the last question. Those are those other pieces that we really just looked at and my team would go in, I would go in got fidelity checks and what fidelity checks are again are kind of just that monitoring system that I go in where there really are questions and data and we dig deep with the principal and their leaders to really have that discussion about what's working and not working and then make adjustments to the year as a direct result of that... We had the progress monitoring. We had to update not only parents. We also had to update the state. So we actually had a system in place for reading for really reading deficiencies that we had to track right after the pandemic. So to me, that probably was as much as sometimes we maybe didn't like it was probably the number one reason why everyone knew who they were. So when you think about anyone that had a deficiency and it was spelled out in the legislative, you know, in

the bill itself, but it was one of those first things that we had to do when schools got back. They had to send letters to every single family of a student who had a reading deficiency. So you couple that with the work of actually now if I do that. I don't have a choice but to intervene. I'm being held responsible, meaning teachers and districts are being held responsible, that probably was that to me that number one piece right away...and then I would say the other mandates that actually did help as much as people don't like assessments, the testing aspect. The reality is progress monitoring has a place in education to where we can track and check on how students are doing, and so mandates for us, we instituted i-Ready mandated. Interim assessments from benchmark mandated, progress monitoring along the way. All mandated. Meaning that when I say mandate, meaning that they have to submit that data that we can see. Right, so we are tracking it and when you say mandate it means that the accountability measure on that is I can also follow up if you're not doing it, and so those particular pieces I believe played a role. In you know, reading proficiency only because then that also means we can get down to the to the level of what does it actually look like? Like what are you doing in the classroom to ensure that you're moving students? So, those are huge mandates.

(P9)

Participant 11 applauded progress monitoring data:

I think the progress monitoring has been huge for us. I mean we've been doing it since I've been here, but it's become more intentional. You know, knowing where gaps are, doing the [Quick Phonological Awareness Screening] (QPAs) with kids, doing the math glossing with the kids, those different strategies that we have that

help us know exactly and pinpoint where kids are and give us resources to move them from where they are and give us resources to move them from where they are. I think that's been huge for us... If you're looking at the progress monitoring sheets and you notice that one classroom is really knocking it out of the park in certain areas during those PLC times finding out what's going on in those classrooms, but it also helps us monitor which kids are struggling and get them, you know, on the ground support as fast as we can, and I think that the user friendliness of it allowed teachers to see and administrators to see and us all to be on the same page to be able to use that data to make those decisions. (P11)

Participant 12 discussed “relentlessly” using that data:

...and that we relentlessly go back to the data. What do the data tell us we need to do? Where are we experiencing successes with our students? Where are we experiencing challenges and how can we continue to help them grow?... We have a hundred percent graduation rate and just before I jumped on this zoom with you. I was looking at we have 19 tested areas from the state of Florida and then we also have the 34 tested areas through the college board. So, that's a lot of data we have to go through, look at, not only comparing us to us, but comparing us to, the state of Florida and to the world when it comes to the AP tests, because that's a world-wide test. So, did I answer the question?... I don't look at pass rates and proficiency levels because if it's less than 98 or 99 or a hundred percent we're gonna have a conversation. What I look at and what we look at as a community of learners and educators is growth... and learning gains of the first quartile and again, I purposefully don't use the phrase lowest quartile, because when you label

somebody the lowest that brings with it all the baggage that calling somebody low brings. If you say it's the first quartile. It's still just a word, but it brings a whole different set of expectations and I'm all about setting incredibly high expectations, not only for myself, our faculty, our kids. (P12)

Participant 12 added discussed shielding teachers and students from public mandates and initiatives.

We're successful in spite of district mandates and initiatives. Part of my job is to shield my amazing faculty and these magnificently brilliant children from some of what goes on in public. That's part of what I see my job is and the minute, this is what I say to my executive director, the minute we don't or can't demonstrate success, I am happy to do whatever it is the way you tell me I need to do it, but if I'm doing it differently and I'm experiencing success then leave me alone, leave my teachers alone, and let us continue to do what we're doing and refine it and get even better and being, I mean, we're the number one school in the state of Florida. We're actually the number one elementary school in the United States. We're the number three middle school in the United States. We're the number 17 high school in the United States. We have 30 national merit finalists in the graduating class of 2023. I think we're doing pretty well. There are a lot of districts that the entire district doesn't have but 2 or 3 national merit finalists and we're one school and had 30. So, what we're doing, we do really well, the way we do it. We are always open to doing it better. (P12)

Participant 12 also emphasized learning gains over proficiency:

.... and I mentioned growth and learning gains. I am much more proud of learning

gains in ELA and math with the first quartile students than I ever am of a proficiency score, you know, how many kids pass the test or what was our mean SAT score or mean ACT score? Those I do monitor, and we hope that they are on and expect them to be on an upward trajectory, but the learning gain piece is what we're all about. For example, on an AP test we don't necessarily just look at the how many score a 3, 4, or 5, but from year to year we look at how many score to 4 and then moved the next year to a 5, because we want to see that growth. When we did have the [Florida State Assessment] (FSA) tests we looked at interventions specific to learning gains and first quartile learning gains. Statistically it is much more difficult to take students who are achieving at 95, 96% proficiency getting them to 98% proficiency that's only three percentage points, but that is significantly more difficult than going from 30 to 50%. 30 to 50% there are I mean, Hattie's research, there are some low hanging fruit strategies that you can implement tomorrow that will generate gains for those students. Going from 95 to 98 or 97 to 99 that's a heavy lift, because we're already doing those low hanging fruit strategies. They are already coming to us with lots of capacity and information. We're having to stretch and extend and push them and support them even farther. So, you know, what state strategies, actually for us that's why we're an outlier. You know, programs like Penda. Penda is a great program and we do use it because we're required to use it, but we use it minimally and we use it to give us a baseline. The i-Ready assessments. We use it because we have to, it's a mandate and we use it minimally. It gives us a baseline. Now if you dig into some of those programs. There is a way that the teacher can adjust the level of the

question, the level set that you can go into in i-Ready and the other programs. Like Dreambox is another one. So we have to help support our teachers being more sophisticated with how they use those programs that are state mandated or locally mandated. (P12)

Participant 13 discussed viewing data from different vantage points:

An interesting correlation with data is when we look at our school grade and we look at our [Every Student Succeeds Act] (ESSA) data,... the ESSA reports. Although [our] school has one of the lower school grades of high schools in [the district], we have some of the better ESSA data and that is specifically in the areas where the Department of Education tracks, which are African American students and our students with IEPs. Our success rates in those two areas are much higher, our discipline rates are often lower and I think there's a reason that the two of them are together like that. We do have units that support those students on campus, but we run a very restorative in-house practices. The difficulty is often coming from the home or the lack of support because it's a new community. They don't have supports there, so we keep them here you know at all cost in many cases, and so while they struggle most of those students do come successfully through their education at a higher rate than many other high schools in the district... and it's a very targeted approach to looking at data and trying to move students forward, but not seeing the student just as data, you know, working with them individually. (P13)

Participant 15 discussed using evidence-based decisions based on data:

I think we're doing a much better job at beginning to really make evidence-based

decisions based on the data that we're seeing in front of us. That has definitely been a goal as to kind of take out the human element of it and really focus on actual results of what we're seeing in that capacity. So when we are looking at hard evidence of how students are responding were able to make more targeted or strategic decisions to support both students and teachers... I would say probably most of the mandates that principals are putting forth start with support from the district level. I know our executive director at the elementary level has a process what he calls fidelity checks, that once there's been an expectation placed by the district, the executive director will meet with that school level leader to hear how that school leader is implementing that particular initiative at the school site and what results that they're seeing. So again, accountability and clarity, I would say across all levels. (P15)

Participant 16 discussed intentionally working with individual students and student subgroups to build the overall school's data.

...and now have an opportunity to continue that work, you know, with our new progress monitoring tool that we have with three FAST assessment periods and then we also have our district wide progress monitoring. We've got an opportunity to continue to build on that work and to continue to hone our craft because we can't just be satisfied with saying, well, you know, we beat the state average when it came to a score or we beat the district average when it came to a score, even if we beat the state average when it comes to let's say third grade reading, right, That still means half of our kids weren't on grade level and that's a tough pill to swallow as a principal to ever say, gosh, well, I feel good because we're above the

state average but 49% of my kids didn't make the cut. Yeah, you're not gonna find a principal who's gonna be okay with that. You're not gonna find a teacher who's gonna be okay with that and so I think it's helped renewed that intensity, that focus as we look to move forward with the work that needs to be done and we understand the importance of the work that needs to be done...I think we also have some areas that we can tap into each other. We're seeing success in certain schools with certain student groups. It's not by happenstance, I promise you. We aren't just crossing our fingers and saying, oh, I hope our students with disabilities do really well this year and we wish them all the best and you know. It is all about the intentional and data driven decisions that we are making, not just in terms of our instructional practices, but in terms of our staffing allocations and our staffing supports as well. If supporting our English language learners is a priority, we're gonna make sure that our students are assigned to the student to the teachers who have the most impact in those areas. You know, if, making sure that our African American students are continuing to reach the bar and continuing to grow. Well, we want to make sure that we are looking specifically at who those students are. What kind of progress are they making? What do they need? What do the teachers need? What do the students need and that this isn't just about a number, these are about kids. You know, we need to drill this down to each individual child so that we know by name who the kids are and that we can then talk about them, because we're not gonna say it's easy to say, oh well, you know, our percentage is here, but when we start saying, you know student A is making the grade, but student B isn't. It makes it much more real and I think it makes it much more urgent in terms

of the work that we're gonna do. So while, you know, certainly across the board there are successes, and every school is gonna have a success that they can hang their hat on. We definitely still have work to do, especially as a district, because until everyone is achieving at that bar and hitting that bar and achieving at a high level. You know, we can't rest on our laurels just yet...Quantitatively, what we've seen is because of that process that our proficiency scores and our progress monitoring scores are continuing to improve. So when we look back actually at the end of last school year when we look at our end of year testing, it was the highest proficiency rate that my school has ever had and that's coming off of the pandemic. You know, our scores just continue to grow and grow and grow and progress and it's all because of the planning and the collaboration that's taken place. (P16)

Participant 17 simply said, "Looking at the data and breaking it down and seeing what we can do and seeing what makes sense" (P17).

Theme for Research Question 3: Use Resources Wisely

In analyzing the patterns developed for Research Question 3, the overarching theme that emerged from the many participant responses was regarding the importance of using resources wisely to strategically focus on the goals and initiatives that will support positive student outcomes in reading and writing achievement. All 17 participants believed that using resources wisely was important to increasing reading and writing achievement, as further broken down in the descriptors detailed in the aforementioned pattern analysis of both patterns for research question two.

Participant 3 stated:

We adopted Benchmark Advance for our reading curriculum and lots of teachers are using that in their classroom and I feel like we've seen a lot of growth, especially with those benchmark tests that they take. When you compare that to like the FAST, the students are performing, it's very similar to each other and the students at the beginning when we first started that curriculum a few years ago, students were like lower performing and now that they've had like 2 years of it you can see their scores are getting way better and you see it reflected as well in the fast exam. (P3)

Participant 5 explained:

I like the fact that we've been able to have classroom libraries that we've been able to do book studies in addition to using the curriculum and using as long as you know, incorporating all of the standards, and addressing the standards through a variety of methods. I like the resources like I said. You know the district had. What was that purposeful people? And then they got rid of it. I think they're looking at something else for an SEL program, but I think it all has to tie together. I love the use of technology, and you know, having the kids there with you, not on the computer, seeing you, you know, or hearing you that, but actually being there and being able to interact, I think that that is a valuable piece of it to, since the pandemic. (P5)

Additionally, Participant 9 expressed:

It would be also that my support goes into my curriculum team in general. So, we actually sit down and review the data as a team to talk about specific supports that we can provide to specific schools. An example of that this year would be when

school great data came out last year, we reviewed and saw we had 6 schools who earned a letter grade C and within that, I assigned teams reading specialists and writing specialists as well as math specialists to strategically go in there and work with those teachers and teams to increase student achievement. (P9)

Participant 16 described:

The most valuable resource that we have is our people. There isn't a program. There isn't a curriculum, there isn't a textbook company, or resource out there that is more valuable than our teachers. It is all about the intentional and data driven decisions that we are making, not just in terms of our instructional practices, but in terms of our staffing allocations and our staffing supports as well...If supporting our English language learners is a priority, we're gonna make sure that our students are assigned to the student to the teachers who have the most impact in those areas. (P16)

Participant 1 articulated:

I just think if we support our teachers, you know, with collaboration and time to really analyze the data and share their struggles and challenges and to get in it deep and say, okay, this is what we're gonna do to address this student. (P1)

Moreover, Participant 6 affirmed the need for using the resource of time wisely:

I think that it's very hard as an as an educator to find the balance of teaching our students to a high bar and hitting those grade level expectations that continue to increase all the time while also meeting the needs of deficit areas and trying to find the time to do all of that simultaneously. (P6)

Additionally, Participant 4 detailed the importance of using data as a resource to drive

and inform instruction and practice as being a key part to increased reading and writing achievement.

...because we're very specific on the data that we're using to drive our instruction, and we have the ability to borrow all of our brains to share information, and you're so you're not on your own, or just you and a partner nearby, especially for, like our team teachers. So, we have a lot more people there to share, plus we usually have somebody from the admin team that joins us. So, then we have a more schoolwide perspective of who's heard from other grades and ideas that can be shared that happened before or after us in PLC and then also just the chance to brainstorm when it comes to planning. (P4)

Participant 7 also identified the importance of using data to progress monitor and drive instruction and meet the needs of students.

...district...progress monitoring. I mean, that really allows teachers to track the story of the student and be able to respond appropriately...it's kind of like playing detective work, you know, what's working, what's not working, if it's not working, what can I do to shift my thinking, my instruction to better meet their needs. (P7)

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was, "What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders increase reading and writing achievement?" The primary purpose of this question was to gain guidance from participants to support other district, school, and teacher leaders in similar roles trying to increase reading and writing achievement. Research question four was addressed by interview question 17. Three primary patterns emerged: (a) develop great leaders and

structures. Within this pattern emerged two descriptors or subpatterns: (a) leadership starts from the top and (b) shared vision and clear expectations are necessary. The second pattern that emerged was to teach requisite skills. Within this pattern emerged one descriptor: or subpattern: use targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to close gaps. The third pattern that emerged was to have high expectations for all. Within this pattern emerged one descriptor or subpattern: to high levels of learning, ensure strong Tier 1 instruction. One primary theme emerged in answer to research question four: keep excellence at the forefront.

Pattern 1: Develop Great Leaders and Structures

This pattern was developed from the extensive number of references from participants to the importance of great leadership and key systems and structures being established to achieving successes in reading and writing achievement. It also was based on the key pieces that participants described as being the primary role of great leaders. Exemplar participant quotes for the descriptor, develop great leaders and structures, for pattern one was depicted in the following way.

Participant 6 discussed the importance of student outcomes as the focus:

Make sure that the work that is happening with your coaches and your teachers is focused on student outcomes and not teacher practice. Specifically...that we're moving the needle with students and that's where our focus is. (P6)

Participant 8 noted the importance of supporting and allowing good staff to do the work:

I guess as a school leader is just ensuring that those things continue. So, you know, I've met with several churches to encourage volunteers to come to our campus. One of my staff members that is a contract you know Title I position she

runs a volunteer center, so she ensures that you know lessons materials books resources everything is set and ready for those students, those schedules are set so that she matches the student with the volunteers, then it's a good fit and that every time they meet that everything is ready for them. She's tracking data. She's really one person that has the benefit of 50 people because she's able to ensure all of that is happening every single week, and so I guess my role is really just supporting that continuing and providing those people and those resources and those schedules to allow that to be successful. (P8)

Participant 9, as the Executive Director of Elementary Education, noted the importance being the instructional leader and of supporting principals:

Yes, so, my role for supporting reading and writing for the district, really starts with, I guess, really my job, which is the executive director of elementary education [in the district]...In addition to that, it is my responsibility to not only visit and support principals who at the end of the day are the leaders of those schools that actually hopefully help move academics by supporting their teachers...So I guess being Executive Director of Elementary Education just like the title says, it really does involve kind of that focus on curriculum and me being the instructional leader of my complete team of curriculum team all the way down to those 23 elementary schools. (P9)

Participant 9 also advised that it is important to be strategic, put the right leader in place, and recruit the best teachers:

The reality of all this and all the discussion we have about reading and I love the research that's being done it's still at the teacher level, right. Any researcher will

tell you that the biggest impact on the students is at that teacher level, and so from our lenses, then how do we build that capacity knowing the high turnover in teachers, staffing issues that we're having, the people that we have in place, how do we build them up?...I think the leadership at the principal level and their focus on how they staff their school. How they deal with support staff and whatever initiative they believe to be important also plays a vital role in how reading and writing and proficiency are moving at their school, and I say that because I've seen both sides. I've seen where you have a focused leader who knows the direction they're going and how they're supporting their teachers with the same pieces I just explained to you, moving in the right direction and I've seen the other way where unfortunately they're not going and doing what they need to and it causes chaos and unfortunately what it leads to is students not performing well and I know this is going into the challenge, but I wanna say not going well. Staff turnover starts to become an issue and then that's where you see the impact in reading proficiency and writing, because they don't have the people they need in place anymore... The advice I would give would be to be strategic. Is one, what I mean by being strategic is actually looking at your data and determining what are the actual needs. That's, first and foremost, you can buy a bunch of products and do different things, but if you don't actually know what the issues are, you're gonna just be running in circles. Second is you have to have the right leader in place at your schools. They play a vital role in stabilizing that particular school and having the staff that can actually meet the needs of students, and then for me, the third thing is the most obvious, you just gotta have the right teachers. Like the

reality is this, the recruiting and retention piece in education is incredibly important. Nowadays, we are we are basically for lack of a better word, battling against other surrounding districts for the most talented people in education. We already know that some educational programs are almost shutting down...and some of these colleges and things of that nature and so that particular part is getting smaller and smaller you have got to have the right people in place, and someone may say well how do you do that? Well, you have to go outside of your comfort zone of just your surrounding area. And recruiting where you need to go outside of just traditional educators and look at people who maybe are in mathematics and engineering and everything else and be able to bring them in, because at least if you do those three things. Then you can start to determine if I have the right person in place leading, right teachers in place and I actually have examined my data, I can now make thoughtful decisions on what we need to do to move reading proficiency forward and not just grasping at programs hoping that they work. You will know that they work and when you do all of that and they don't work, you can then make decisions on what else you need to use, because the biggest piece out of all this the one thing that won't change are your babies. Your kids aren't changing. Who comes in and doesn't come you don't control in public education and so the reality is they're going to be coming no matter what from all walks of life and backgrounds, and so you have to be clear about the things that you can control and make sure that you're putting those things in place to meet the needs of students. (P9)

Participant 11 advised listening to and understanding the teachers in classes with the kids:

I think to be up-to-date as to what's going on and what's out there, to rely on teachers as being the expert to bring in things that we need. They're in the classroom 184 days with those kids and you know the amount of time that I'm afforded to be in classrooms is not as much with so many classrooms, but really listening to what teachers are saying and figuring out how we can make things work, how we can get our hands on different things that other schools are using. You know, I think that's huge. You know, just sitting and listening. I think listening and understanding and supporting the experts in the school, which are our teachers, which is important. (P11)

Participant 12 advised keeping an eye on student needs:

Overall, I mean, I'm responsible. It begins and ends with me. My role is to support teachers who do the day-to-day work with students. Whether it's a second-grade teacher or teaching reading writing and mathematics. All the way to a high school teacher teaching seniors AP English literature and composition English literature or a dual enrollment course which we also offer so the entire spectrum... and create the expectation, which is part of that climate and culture piece on this campus that every student deserves the opportunity to learn and grow...I think for whether you're a teacher or a principal or an assistant superintendent or the superintendent it's always important to remember it's not about you, it's about the students, it's about the kids and I mean, [my school] has some great successes. It's not because of me, it's because I helped set the foundation. I help create the conditions for success, but the teacher in the classroom is the one that actually makes that happen, and I'm not a micro manager. I'm not looking over their

shoulder and putting their data in a faculty meeting up on a big board or a PowerPoint and shaming Mrs. Johnson because Mrs. Smith, her kids had, you know, 20% growth and Mrs. Johnson's kids only had 1% growth. If you do that kind of thing as a principal, I mean, you're just an idiot. That's a good way to kill morale. Shaming is never the way to help kids get what they need... it would be better if principals didn't just say this is what we're doing because we have to or we were told to do it. It would be better if they said this is what we're doing and this is what the research says is why we need to do it and when your students do really well, here's what you can do next, to help them get even better or if your students are struggling and maybe they're not demonstrating growth from PM 1 to PM 2, here's what you can do differently. Give them strategies. Give them a way to be a more sophisticated users of whatever that program is. That's what we try to do for our teachers. (P12)

Participant 13 noted the importance of working with reading:

Part of it would be at large would be the professional expectations for the staff in continually stating to them, I expect everyone to be working with reading. No, I do not expect you to teach reading. I don't want to give you a reading course code. I don't want you to give a vocabulary lesson like your English teacher would do. These are all the ways that you can do it and getting in a professional learning support or instructional facilitators or coaches that can help them with that and find a way to do it. (P13)

Participant 14 advised being with the teachers to ensure expectations and goals are clear:

My current position...a leadership role...as a curriculum specialist, I support

teachers and students to implement curriculum and really achieve the standards. I think accountability is a huge indicator of success as well and that spans between you know teachers and their students' accountability between principals and teachers and even teacher to teacher holding each other accountable. I think that one of my roles is to support accountability, accountability for making sure we know what the standards are and meeting the standards, making sure that everything, you know, the curriculum we use and the instructional methods that we use are supporting our students every day and so I think that my role is kind of working side by side with teachers and even at times with students to make sure that we're all working towards the right goal and making sure we have high expectations and clear goals. I think just being present, being out in our schools is really important. We can't just sit in an office and send out documentation and hope that the messaging is clear. We have to be at the table with teachers. We have to be a part of the problem-solving team. (P14)

Participant 15 similarly noted the importance of clear vision and expectations:

I support various curriculum areas across all domains. I support teachers across the district as well as administrators with making instructional decisions, in regard to, data implications from how they're seeing both student results and progress monitoring data that's collected to make those decisions moving forward... I led the team in the development of a progress monitoring tool, as well as the problem-solving sessions with our district administrators... I think leadership within that capacity is really important. If you don't have a leader that's clear with the vision and the expectations, it's very hard to move that initiative forward. You

know, it's the participants or your stakeholders that require that clarity to be able to grasp the idea and have the understanding as to how it's going to impact them personally, how it's going to benefit their students, ensuring that their teachers or stakeholders have the skill sets that they need in order to be successful to reach that targeted goal all ultimately come back on the leadership. (P15)

Participant 16 highlighted the importance of purposeful and intentional work:

So I really think the role of the principal, or really any school-based administrator when you're looking at increasing, you know, the achievement of our students when it comes to reading and writing really comes down to a couple of integral components. So, the first of which is really what systems do we have in place in our school so that everything that we're doing is purposeful. It's intentional and it is towards achieving our goal of student success and student mastery of what our grade level curriculum are...and as a leader, what my role there was to again establish those systems, those procedures, the expectations that go along with it. Get rid of the barriers that might be in their way and then get out of their way and let them do the work. You know, our teachers are so committed and you know this with the folks you work with. They are incredibly committed to seeing their kids succeed and to be able to be to have the time to do that and to engage in that collaborative work and that PLC work, that's what's made a big difference for us... When I started as a classroom teacher, I was the general Ed inclusion classroom and so from my perspective, to me, there is no reason that our students with disabilities shouldn't be reaching what our expectations are. It's a different way to get them there. It might take them a little bit longer. You know, but we

have to set a high standard and a high bar for them and so it comes back to kind of me walking the talk if you are walking the walk whatever that saying is you know and so when I staff our school. If I'm making waivers to our staffing allocations, it's to support our students with disabilities. So we don't have a PE aid. We waved that position so that it becomes a priority. You know, when you look at the leader, the staff is gonna follow your lead. You know, when like I don't I change the language. I don't refer to our access classroom as a cluster classroom anymore. It is now a magnet classroom. You know and so when you change the dialogue and you lead through example with that, then folks who, 90% of your people are one gonna get on board. You know, and so just through your actions and through our actions as a staff collectively, we've been intentional with the way that we allocate our ESE staff. Where the biggest needs are is where we put the most support. At the same time, we are providing intensive support when it comes to literacy development and in our early grades. As much as I can I try to hire, staff members who bring something additional to the table. You know like I hired an ESE teacher last year who also speaks Spanish. I have a kindergarten teacher who is bilingual and speaks Spanish and I have 0 problem and I encourage that because if our teachers need to use children's heritage language to help them, build relationships, acclimate to the school, start to understand what the purpose of their learning is, I'm all for it. I 100% support that and then they'll start to transition to learning English and starting to learn our alphabet and learn our rules, cause this is the most confusing, you know, language that exists in the world, and so it just has become, it's a priority for me, which then makes it a priority for my staff, and

it involves, you know, us talking through the decisions that we're making. You know, when we decided to get rid of our PE para, it wasn't me making that decision. It was us talking about what are the needs of our school. Where do we have some flexibility and collectively as a team we made that decision. We made the decision collectively as a team to allocate additional staff, when we had the ability to have additional staff, we add them to our ESE department so it's intentional in the work that we're doing, and I try also to narrow down the amount of students on our caseloads. You know, and so that is just comes from me kind of maneuvering and looking at the financial impacts of that, but again, you can only have one thing that is at the top of your priority list. That's just, you know, the way of the world works, right, and so it's just us being really intentional about identifying because those are the 2 student groups that are the largest in our school, and so we wanna make sure that we're having the biggest impact on those students as well and so it just has become a way of work that we do, but it started with identifying that and working with our teams to figure out the best way to approach that need. (P16)

Participant 16 added

So, I think, over the last few years under the leadership of our Executive Director of Elementary Education we've had a couple of great leaders in there. They both have made it a priority to increase the capacity of our teachers, the professional capacity. In the sense that you they have bolstered the curriculum department. They have done a great job through our curriculum department of tasking them with developing pacing guides that are meeting the, you know, kind of the

standard expectations. Our curriculum departments working really hard to make sure that the materials we have align to our standards, but also meet the rigorous expectations of those end of your grade level standards, and so I think in terms of what the work we've done at the district level, engaging our teachers in the curriculum materials. You know, that's been huge, because we need the input from our teachers to say, hey, we love this resource. We don't love this resource so much, because it doesn't do us any good to spend because every time we adopt a new textbook series it's over a million dollars right and so what a waste if every single teacher is like well this is terrible, I'm not using this. I'm gonna go back to teacher pay teacher. You know, and so it's about keeping, so I think our instructional leaders at the district level have done a great job on the curriculum side. For the last year where our district has given us the opportunity to really engage in this. Professional learning community's framework. I think that's been a huge part. Again, you know, we were doing some of that work at my school just because we were, but now to have that across the entire district. I think that's gonna make a great impact on our teachers ability to really grow professionally to engage in some professional learning, and we have a new superintendent as you know who just on day 4 I think you know already he's put forth a couple of considerations for again enhancing the capacity of our teachers and really providing that support to our teachers, and so I think as we look at the systems that are in place and the processes that are in place at the district level, have especially been hugely helpful. Yeah, with the state, the farther as we all know, the farther you go away from the child, the less impact you really have and I say

that in all honestly that our classroom teachers have much more impact on what's happening with our students than I do or that my assistant principal does or than our district does, but I think from the state what they've done a nice job of, especially is one I think trying to provide some consistency in terms of understanding the new BEST standards for our districts. I know our teachers to some degree, but I think our teachers are getting much more from our district than they do from our state, but I think they're rolling out of the BEST standards and trying to provide those documents that help to clarify the standards and help to set what are the content limits that go along with it. I think those couple of documents have been helpful for our teachers as well. (P16)

Participant 17 noted the importance of teacher support:

I think, as a leader you have to start at the top. So, my role is really just being as much as a support to our teachers as I can and kind of honestly getting them what they need and allowing the time for them to do what they do and supporting them along the way. It's more of a supportive type of role. It doesn't mean that I don't play a role. I need to be in there and monitoring and kind of side by side, but really where the rubber meets the road is where those teachers are. So, I would say it is more supporting and kind of understanding what they're doing and kind of supporting what they're doing, but also trying to get as many of the roadblocks out of the way as I can so they can do the very important job. (P17)

Exemplar participant quotes for the descriptor, shared vision and clear expectations, for pattern one was depicted in the following ways:

Participant 1 questioned rules, expectations, and intentions:

You know, there's not downtime, we're structured, we have routines, we know what's expected of us. In the classroom environment, are their expectations, are there rules?... Do students know what they are learning? What is expected of them? Are their learning intentions?" (P1)

Participant 2 spoke about phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension:

...but you've got to hit phonics and fluency and reading comprehension, all the different reading strategies and skills within that...It really runs the gamut from having kids learning decoding skills, building words, you know, understanding the phonics and the phonemic awareness... (P2)

Participant 7 claimed teachers need to invest in their knowledge:

I think teachers, when they're very clear in their language that they're using to their students and very clear in the modeling that they're providing to the students, that really supports the students in whatever it is they're learning, connecting it to something that they're familiar with and shifting them to something new. It all just stems back from the clarity of the teacher...Well, I think there's just so many different components within teaching to be strong in and they all fit together and if one piece is maybe not as strong, it definitely affects the overall outcome. So it's hard, teaching is hard. So I think there's just a lot to learn and a lot to be strong in and I think teachers just need to invest in their knowledge and understand that it takes time to be effective, highly effective and that's obviously the ultimate goal to do the best for your students. (P7)

Participant 7 added:

I think that collaborative conversation with you know, a specific goal in mind is

so important. I always tell new teachers. You know when you're you kind of have to pick goals for yourself like mini goals to focus on and you know maybe one year or the first part of the year you're really going to focus on writing instruction and you want to dive into everything that you can to learn more to try with your students, new strategies, analyze student work with colleagues and maybe the second part of the year you shift your goal, but it's just overwhelming if you think about it. As a whole, so breaking it into small parts and pairing yourself with like-minded, knowledgeable people within that goal is very helpful and I think the district could provide...a continuous support for teachers not just new teachers entering in the field. (P7)

Participant 9 advised knowing your students and building trust:

When you think about our school district, it does lend itself, that if you're moving in the right direction, right?, if you're top five in the state of Florida, you should be seeing movement within those particular students and I truly believe that's why. I think there is definitely a focus on making sure in [our county] if the students are level 3 how do we get them to a 4 and a 5 because even though I work in elementary education I also have been a high school principal as well for 5 years and I see the trajectory that we have to get them to if they're going to not only be proficient in high school, if they're going to go above and beyond a college and career and so I think in our district we've done a nice job of understanding that looking at it vertically from Pre-K now all the way through high school and understanding if these kids aren't moving, not just a level 3 in reading and writing if they're not above and beyond that as they go higher and

higher in education, you know this the work becomes more and more difficult, and so we've had that kind of I would say laser focus at least on that of making sure students who are doing well. Then we are also starting to push them above and beyond because prior to that I would argue that was one of our deficiencies. We have students who are really strong academically and all we ever did was focus on our students who struggle the most. We've learned, I think, through the pandemic, because we watch even high achievement students struggle at first when they got back, we learned that listen you can't take your eye off any student. You have to be strategic...and even...the PLC. This is something that we invested in, money. I would tell you collaborative planning time is in addition to that of hoping to build capacity with the teachers in the work they're doing... at the end of the day for me, there's something to be said about continuity, right? I mean that starting at the top level of having the same principal for multiple years. Okay, having a teacher who has been invested in that school for multiple years, right? Knowing the community, the families, to me, that's that first piece of it. Well, what does that do? That means everyone buys into whatever it is in direction we're going. That means the community buys into it. Parents believe in the school because it's something that they see and know every day, which then contributes to what? The biggest piece, caring actually caring about what you're doing with those kids. Yes, the intervention, the support. reading programs, everything you're doing. There's something to be said about I'm invested in those kids in this community in the school. So when you couple that with all the other resources we can provide that to me is when you start to see that proficiency and everything

move and why people have been successful. Especially at some of our schools where we have that in place, but we have that leader and teachers who have been in place so long that they know what hasn't been working and what is working, and they focus on what has been working and here's the best part about it. They stop doing what's not been working. They actually have a conversation as a team and say, we have tried this program for 3 years. It is not working. Why are we doing it? But you only get that when you build that trust within that school, and so that's why to me that continuity is, it seems so simple but it's incredibly important to move the student achievement, especially in reading where we know there's little nuances in helping kids read and what they need to be able to do. Well, part of that comes from knowing the kid. It's hard to do that if you're constantly having turnover or they're not there and things of that nature. Well, kids come to school and show up to places where they feel like they belong. (P9)

Participant 10 advised being positive and consulting knowledgeable colleagues:

I think just, you know, obviously attitude for sure going in there and trying to be as positive as you can...and I know that we have a lot of our standards that we have to go through. So, I think being able to follow those standards, then you know. You have it laid out for you and our county does a good job of you know listing the standards that we need to follow...I would definitely say try to find another teacher...I mean a lot of people don't have the inclusion classroom like I do, but you know we still would brainstorm with the other ELA teachers on our team and just to talk to. Use your colleagues they're the best source of information. It was nice because we all taught the same, so we could be like, 'hey,

I have this kid and this is what I'm seeing, what do I need to do? and oh, well, they're not really getting the elaboration portion'...so sometimes having someone to bounce ideas off I think is really the best thing to do. Your colleagues have so much information and a lot of times, I think it is really the best thing to do and we forget that we should go to them first. (P10)

Participant 11 promoted strong teamwork:

I think every school leader is charged with bringing teams together and setting high expectations for the way we work as a team... So just getting teachers what they need in order to make those PLCs work. I think I've worked hard on making sure that funds were available for them to have time outside of their classroom in order to get together as a team in order to analyze data, and of course, you know, being a cheerleader when it's working well. I think we saw a lot of that last year that the cheerleading and letting people know which grade levels are really moving forward and getting you know the guiding coalition together so that they can talk about their successes and I think once you know we started doing that, that spread and then you started seeing some of those high functioning teamwork type activities on other grade levels, because they were sharing ideas and activities with each other. So I think as a leader just being there, facilitating some of that and having high expectations and making sure people understand why the work is important. (P11)

Participant 12 advocated goals setting and high expectations:

I'm all about setting incredibly high expectations, not only for myself, our faculty, our kids and that's how we operate... one of the courses that I teach at USF is

administrative analysis and change and it really is just a class about data coming up with an improvement plan. How do you organize a professional learning community and a network improvement community? How do you identify, analyze the data, analyze to discover what the challenge or opportunity is and then how do you go to the research to find out what already exists that can inform our improvement process and then building a coalition around that to make it happen, how to measure it, you know, come up with smart goals, etc. (P12)

Participant 12 also advised assuming that every student can do the work:

I would refer you back to the anecdote about the middle school in Virginia and how we were able to show success with that that population of eighth grade young Black females and get them so excited about reading, get them excited about being able to show us that they really did know what they knew. They never knew that they were under performing. They just knew they were coming to school when you know they went from sixth to seventh and seventh to eighth. When we published our scores and then the state began publishing scores. Obviously, that brought it to the public attention, but we set high expectations and we went into it with the expectation and assumption that every student could do the work that needed to be done that every student could engage with novels with the standards, different standards in Virginia than in Florida, but we just went into it with a different mindset, and this was before Carol Dweck came out with her book mindset. It was the mindset we were using and adopted, creating the conditions or the climate and culture for success I think is huge...At [my former middle] school it was our young Black females...At [my current school] it's students with

disabilities and minority students as a whole, all groups of minority students, Asian, Black, Hispanic all outperform majority students and that doesn't happen anywhere statistically. So talk about outliers. Every place I've been has been an outlier. So that's students with multiple exceptionalities. They also outperform majority students. (P12)

Participant 12 further advised using data and going to the research and learning:

So, if you wanna impact what happens in the classroom, you can increase the knowledge base and engagement with parents. Increase the knowledge base and support and engagement with teachers. Focus on relationships and your climate and culture and realize again it's not about you, but dig into the data together... Always look at data as an opportunity to learn something new, to do something differently, not necessarily more, because it may not be more it may actually be stop doing something that's not working, but look at it as an opportunity and always, always, always go to the research. Don't reinvent the wheel. If something's not working, you know, let's say early grades, it's phonemic awareness, that's the thing as a as a community if you're at an elementary level in ELA, we're just really struggling. You're not on an island to figure this out on your own. Reach out to the district. Do your own research. There's a great website called the What Works Clearing House [<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>] that the United States government puts out for anyone who wants to write a grant, and part of writing a grant for the federal government is you have to show a research-based evidence-based proven program to qualify for, you know, for writing a grant, and you can search by what are primary grade literacy programs and it will

spit out for you everything that we know. Be willing to learn and reach out to colleagues. Be that voracious consumer of research and roll up your sleeves and get your hands and feet and maybe even ears dirty and do the work with your teachers. This is not about managing or supervising or any of that, that's all important stuff, but this is about you sitting at a table in your media center with your teachers with data and talking about what really worked well and then kid by kid what really didn't work well not to identify an excuse and heaven forbid I ever hear a teacher say little Johnny is a this and comes from that home. They will get a very unpleasant reaction from me. All of that stuff doesn't have anything to do with what that child does. (P12)

Participant 13 went beyond school grades and asked if students had the personalities, social skills, work ethic, and upper level reading skills to reach their goals:

As the principal, I oversee the entire piece. As a beginning it's the vision for the school and the vision for the staff at large it's also pushing out that vision through my assistant principal of curriculum (APC) who handles the more direct day-to-day needs. However, I also directly oversee the English department. This year I did split off this past year the reading department to my APC. So she has directly the reading, but the two do work hand in hand and I oversee the part at large. So it is the initial staff understanding of the importance of reading and how it meets the needs you know of every classroom. It is the hiring and the support in all of the classes, it is the organization within the community and within the district speaking to the needs of our school trying to gain support out with you know with the parents, with community, with the district and all of the other areas... but you

can't forget the fact that the community perceives a school, particularly the community that doesn't know the school. They perceive the school by a school grade and that your data is out there, and we want all students to be successful on these tests, you know, and graduation rates. So going forward and in working with people, it is that you have to ride those boundaries and you have to be very, very positive in getting them to see what is wonderful and beneficial and that if you have a school and a community that is not as strong in some of their reading abilities, are you working to support all of the surrounding strengths? Do they really have the personality skills? Do they have the social skills? Do they have the work ethic skills that will support a lack of upper level reading ability? Do you have all of the pieces that are in place for students to move forward at every level? So do you support your really upper-level students who are going into a humanities degree or are gonna be a college professor in literature, and do you support those that are going to be a STEM computer programmer and are probably never gonna speak to anybody outside of their cubicle, but have to read science technology, and do you support those that really don't want a job beyond something that's not gonna have benefits and be outdoors, but they really are gonna need those people skills there and in the midst of those keep moving forward and always know what your data is. So then when someone says, well, this group has lower scores and you can say yes, but they have this, and they have this, and they have this, and these are all positive aspects and they do balance each other out and you need to know where all of your successes are and really get them out there and have people see them. (P13)

Participant 15 noted the importance of school level leadership:

I would say it's not one particular group, it's more dependent on where we are seeing the most alignment to those strategic goals. So when I have an administrator that is in high support of utilizing those problem-solving strategies that then promotes that message to the staff is where I've seen the greatest impact. We've seen large gains and big movements across student groups, but I think it ultimately comes down to the school level leadership. It has to be in support of that work and make that clear as an expectation across the school culture. (P15)

Participant 16 advised thinking of student groups instead of student subgroups as used by the state:

So when it comes down to you know, kind of, making sure that when we talk about our literacy leadership teams, you know, that we are helping to guide those conversations, because you know, I guess the positive really one of the main positives that comes from the leadership position is that you do have kind of a pre-K through 5 perspective or a school wide perspective if you're at a middle school or a high school and you're able to understand, you know, the continuum of what our students need to be able to do from the time they enter your school until the time they leave your school and so as a principal or school base leader you're able to help support our teachers through the systems that you put in place to be able to deliver that high quality instruction and so that might mean you know you're planning based on student need and teacher need professional development opportunities in this professional learning experiences for our teachers to be able to continue to grow in their craft... just for kind of a nuance

piece, I think one of the ways we can change our outlook is when we don't use the term subgroup and we use the term student group. I think as we start to use the term subgroup it brings and I know that that's what the state uses and I know that's what our school, your program probably uses and it's certainly not a reflection on you at all. Lots of folks use that term, but it by default lessens the importance of that group and so when we keep our focus on student groups, we are finding that our students are more successful. (P16)

Participant 17 advised listening and supporting:

Well, honestly, as a leader, best device I'd give is to listen, listen to what your teachers are telling you and what staff are telling you and kinda, and I hate to allude back to something I did before, but it's really, I think my role, biggest part of our role in any leader is really to support those, you've got to believe in our teachers and support them and kind of be a person who's pushing those roadblocks out of the way so they can do their job. I can't be in every classroom in every single day and identifying those, but those teachers are. So it's really the best of advice I can is listen to what teachers are saying, support them in any manner you can, and work side by side is with them as much as you can. If we all did that and if we all have that again, time and I don't wanna keep harping on that to do that I think that we would be in a better place educationally throughout. (P17)

Pattern 2: Teach Requisite Skills

This pattern was derived from the multiple descriptions from participants of the importance of helping all students reach high levels of learning by closing achievement

gaps and using the intervention process to remediate learning challenges. Participants indicated that systems of support, such as the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework were key to all students being able to access grade-level standards and high-level reading and writing instruction. Exemplar participant quotes for the descriptor targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to close gaps for pattern two was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 claimed Tier 2 and 3 supports work:

You know, and I think those teachers that are really doing that, Tier 2 and Tier 3, I do think that's helping them, because if we just always teach to the middle, yeah, it's not gonna work. You gotta reach every student's need. (P1)

Participant 2 noted, “On those particular successes that I was just talking about, I was ESE resource teacher and so I was able to provide interventions daily.” Participant 3 explained, “We really focused on that intervention piece and having that common intervention time for teachers.”

Participant 5 noted extra support for small group work is helpful:

...last year is they did have all the Title support, and that was they could pull small groups that they targeted you know, groups for LLI instruction... I think when I think about the supports having small group and having someone either push in or pull, you know, pull aside a small group and so that it's not so overwhelming for the classroom teacher to try to adjust to try to have so many small groups that she's working with at the same time, I think that that is beneficial. (P5)

Participant 6 noted that the reading endorsement training is not only required, but helpful, for those providing Tier 3 interventions:

The state put in place a while back that our teacher, anyone providing Tier 3 interventions needed to be reading endorsed, or certified in reading, and while that it still continues to be a heavy lift, and we have a lot of teachers that still need to do that, and we have not put any parameters in place like we have with ESOL about, you know, losing your position, or anything. I do think that a lot of teachers have done that on their own and taken the initiative and the most feedback I've gotten is, you know I know a lot of this stuff, but it was a really good refresher. Also, that they learned some new things as well, and we're able to put those into place right away. So I do think that that initiative at the state level was an important thing. I'm glad to find out that it's going to be added to pre-service, so that our teachers aren't having to do it on the backside, that they're learning it when they should be learning it. So, even adding that to university pre-service, I think, is a great thing as well. (P6)

Participant 11 applauded ESE teachers moving to better levels of service for students:

I would say our ESE kids notoriously struggle in the area of reading and writing. I think that as an ESE team we have made great growth as far as how we service our kids, what curriculum we use with our children, and when we are offering those services, we've moved away from the ESE resource coming in as just sort of an aid in the classroom to them being responsible for that Tier one, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction for those kids. (P11)

Participant 12 advised knowing approaches individual students need and checking in with them regularly:

It really came down to the teacher and the student in the classroom and going

from the general instruction for everyone to targeted Tier 2 interventions with students, taking them and switching them with a different teacher for that instructional period, because some teachers just really had a better a better connection or grasp of teaching author's voice or you know the mechanical elements of writing a paragraph. There are a thousand ways to go about teaching that. I mean, you can talk about the hamburger model when it comes to writing, but you don't have to, you can be very explicit and teach it in a less metaphorical way. You need to know your students to know which approach is going to connect with them. It doesn't matter if it's my favorite approach or what I'm comfortable with. It matters what the student is comfortable with and what's going to resonate with them. So, relationships between our teachers and students became incredibly important and we actually created a program where every teacher had a group of kids, didn't matter about grade level, but they were responsible for checking in with those students and finding out how are you doing this week? Tell me your assignments, things that we would assume parents would do and some parents do and that's great, but we're not gonna leave it up to chance. As a school we came up with that is one of our steps to ensure that every student had the same entry access point and then we supported them as we moved forward. (P12)

Participant 16 claimed the MTSS framework works:

Looking at increasing the effectiveness of our Tier 1 instruction and then also being able to develop the skills and provide the resources for our teachers on what happens when they don't get it. So, when we give our initial lesson, and I don't get

it as a learner. What are we gonna do to help me? Because if we don't intervene immediately then I'm never gonna get it, and I was the learner personally that you know, if you're not gonna call on me, I didn't disrupt in class, but I certainly didn't pay attention in class. So if you're not gonna call on me, I'm hunky dory. I'm gonna sit there and I'm gonna be quiet. I'm gonna be a good little boy and I'm just gonna sit. You know, I'm not gonna upset the apple cart. Okay, but I don't know what you're talking about. I was just watching that squirrel or that bird on the fence for the last 15 minutes and so being able to provide our teachers MTSS... it's really just the MTSS frame of work that we're doing. Where we are identifying almost immediately. What does each learner need and how can we intervene, you know, kind of triage those situations, because the only way we're gonna be able to do that successfully is because collectively as a team we have talked about that instruction before we've delivered that instruction. So we already know what we did and if we already know what we did, and it didn't work, and we've already thought about what are we gonna do if we don't get it? We're not stuck in this no man's land where Okay, we didn't get it. Hmm. What could I do next? We've already talked about what we're going to do next, because we've already built it into our instructional practices, our instructional routine. We know that on Wednesday this is when we're going to reteach that skill that you know, Junior didn't get and we're gonna go ahead and do it. And so I think just the whole framework of looking at our instruction and supports through the MTSS lens. I think that's had a tremendous impact because it's more than our [Response to Intervention] (RtI). If we go back, you remember the old triangle. This is so much

more than that and it's so much more responsive to our students' needs. (P16)

Pattern 3: Keep High Expectations for All

This pattern evolved from the many references from participants of the importance of helping all students reach high levels of learning by strengthening Tier 1 instruction, which directly impacts all students. Participants indicated that systems of support, such as the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework were key to all students being able to access grade-level standards and high levels of reading and writing instruction. Exemplar participant quotes for the descriptor, high levels of learning and strong Tier 1 instruction, for pattern three was depicted in the following ways.

Participant 1 noted, I think any kind of programs like [Multi-tiered System of Supports] (MTSS).

Participant 4 advised reading aloud and integrating subjects:

Probably my two biggest things is read aloud to your children, and I don't mean the picture books for instructions. I mean chapter books and be inquisitive and curious and make them wonder and get them to love reading by reading aloud.

Not enough classrooms are read aloud to anymore, and the other one is using the integration of subjects. So, during reading, it's also science and social studies, materials and everything is just brought together and so it's less separate. (P4)

Participant 5 noted the importance of focusing on writing:

I think honestly, we need to look at the writing piece of it. I think that that's one of the things that is really lacking. I know that when I look at Benchmark Reading, they do have a grammar component to it, and I think that needs to be to be a focus from early on not just the year or the first year that the writing test takes place. I

remember being in elementary school many, many years ago, and you know we had we had grammar instruction. We had spelling instruction, you know, and I learned to write complete sentences...So I think that when I look back on that, I think that part of that is missing that...kids have been allowed to slush that off because you know in a lot of grades it's not tested. (P5)

Participant 7 noted, “this year I am a program specialist, supporting teachers kindergarten through second grade in their small group Tier 1 instruction.”

Participant 9 noted that success requires strong Tiers 1, 2, and 3 instruction:

You kind of fast forward to this particular year and what you saw a lot of was a lot of interventions put in place to try to catch students up, and I've said this time and time again and I'm not the one who made it up. It was one of my curriculum program specialists who said we can't intervene our way out of this, and so we were trying to do that because we saw such huge gaps. We tried to intervene our way out of COVID-19 and we realized that it wasn't going to be possible, and so we turned our attention to Tier 1. But with all that being said, that, challenge to be very fair still remains. You think about the kids who are coming in now that we're starting to deal with pre-K, which we have, three-K. Our babies who were born during COVID-19 and so as we talk about challenges, I would argue that they have not gone away. We have done our best to not let that be an excuse for not making sure kids get what they need, but also in the back of our mind knowing the next kids who are coming up were actually kids born during COVID-19, right?... Another piece would be really those interventionists, and so interventionists in our district really, their main job is pretty simple. Teachers

work through Tier 1, teachers also we know do that Tier 2 sometimes... but when it starts to get to the point where it needs to be very specific and focused, we have interventionists as well... (P9)

Participant 11 agreed:

I would say our ESE kids notoriously struggle in the area of reading and writing. I think that as an ESE team we have made great growth as far as how we service our kids, what curriculum we use with our children, and when we are offering those services we've moved away from the ESE resource coming in as just sort of an aid in the classroom to them being responsible for that Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction for those kids. (P11)

Participant 12 advocated depth, breadth, and building in skills from the next grade level standards as students increase in grade level:

We do whole grade acceleration. So, everyone at [our school] is at least one grade level accelerated. Sometimes it's two grades. By the time they get to middle school the grade is really irrelevant, it's subject matter, but I say that to say a second grader is still a second grader chronologically. So, they're with their chronologically similar peers and we do teach second grade standards and we also teach third grade standards. So, in third grade they're in third grade and they are taught third grade standards and fourth grade standards and the test they take is the FAST. Third grade FAST test and that happens throughout. So, it's not only depth, but it's also breadth and I would say the speed is really not an issue. It's not how fast you get through the material, it's the depth and the mastery and then you know once they get into, to high school, the rigor simply continues, and it looks

more like a geometric curve. (P12)

Participant 13 advocated focusing on reading, “I think that those who embrace the idea that reading can and should be taught everywhere because it's a pervasive part of life have been the most successful.”

Participant 15 noted examining data both vertically and horizontally across grade levels and skills, respectively:

One of the primary roles that I have is the support of our progress monitoring system and that was designed specifically it begin with for ELA and writing to coincide with how our teachers’ Tier 1 instruction and the data is indicating the student response to that Tier 1 instruction. So we have multiple domains across the progress monitoring tool from K to 5 that closely align with each grade level’s targeted Tier 1 goals. So for instance in kindergarten, you would find goals for letter identification, letter sounds going from basic reading comprehension to phonemic awareness and fluent and then building up to also some of the basic fundamentals of early literacy instruction. So we look, we are able to align those indicators with the scope and sequence that’s suggested in our pacing guides to help provide a common data point across the district. So, it was designed to be able to be used in multiple tiers. So for instance, a teacher can utilize that data to look at how students are responding within his or her classroom, a grade level team can then combine that grade level data to look at it as a grade level team where are our strengths, where are our weaknesses for our particular grade level in regard to these goals that will hopefully lead to problem solving for those particular areas and then a school administrator can look vertically from K to 5 for

how students are performing and then at the district level it allows us to look globally to help inform both our professional learning and problem solving moving forward. (P15)

Participant 16 required the mindset of working until all students are successful:

We want them to get the school experience, no matter whether a child goes into your classroom or my classroom, we want to ensure that they are getting a high-quality education and that comes from building collective efficacy within our teachers, within our staff, within our principals. At my school in particular, you know, what we are finding is that our students are coming from a heritage language and their home that is different from English. Yeah, those are our students that we continue to want to see close that achievement gap. Our students with disabilities are students that we want to continue to see closing achievement gap. When there's an intentional focus on our work with those kiddos and then what we do see and when we set those expectations high because we can't just say, oh well you know, they're 2 years below grade level, but they grew one grade level this year. Well, that's great. Well, they're still 2 years below grade level. I mean, we have to get our kids up to the bar and in the bar can't be anything less than mastery of our grade level standards. Yeah, I'm really proud of our school in the last time where they reported by student group what our results were, our school led our district in seven of the nine reporting categories when it came for students with disabilities and that's when you include elementary, middle, and high school. We had in seven of those nine our students with disabilities had the highest mastery performances of the entire school district and so you know I think

we need to celebrate those pieces, but even though our scores were the highest in the district, they still were lower than their non-disabled peers, and until we all are at that bar and until we all have the ability to say, great, there is no achievement gap, then I think we need to continue to work at that. You know, I know through our district especially, you know, we're looking at students with disabilities, African American students our Hispanics learners, our ELL learners, you know, when we look at those groups. Yes, as a district, we still have a lot of work to do, but I guarantee you that we have pockets of success within our schools, you know, when I was in another school, we were recognized for the learning gains and the growth of our African American students that we had and so you can focus in on I think, you know, that the negative pieces there than we still absolutely we have a ton of work to do. You know, we can't sleep well at night until we know that all of our students are reaching the bar... You will never be successful and this is so it is all about what can we do. We have to listen to the needs of our teachers. We need to learn as much as we can as you come into a new role in a new school, you know, because everybody there wants their kids to do well. This is never a situation where I'm like, God, I really hope he fails. You know, we want them to do well. We get frustrated when they don't and I think if we look internally at that frustration and say, is it something that I as the teacher can improve upon? Or is it truly he just got up and walked out of the classroom? You know, I mean, there's always this kind of dichotomy that we wanna work through, right, but I think if I'm talking to a group and saying, I'm saying it's not about you, you got talk to your teachers, you got to talk to your team, believe in

them they are going to have the answers. They may not know what to do next, but I guarantee you they can tell you what's keeping them from moving forward.

Yeah, they're gonna be able to put their nail on the head, because they're gonna say well I really think it's this and then your job as the leader is to figure out how to address and support those needs. You can't come in and say this is what you're gonna do, because the reality of it is I can come in and say this is what you're gonna do every single day and then they go in their classrooms and close the door. I am not in that classroom delivering that instruction, but if we come together with a collective focus and we've come together with this is where we need to be and this is how we're gonna get there and we start laying out incremental steps on how we're gonna make it...we set some clear expectations and we really have the systems in place to support where it is we think we're going again collectively.

(P16)

Participant 17 claimed that every single teacher in every single class should meet grade level expectations:

I mean, just like anybody, you need that daily practice and instruction...and if you're not getting that then you're just falling that much further behind... A lot of times what we're seeing is we need to look at our Tier 1 instruction versus Tier 2 and Tier 3 and that's just on in numbers and those discussions are ongoing as far as that goes as well and what can we do to help support that... but I think the important part is that when we are purposeful about our early literacy instruction and our early mathematics instruction, I know we're not talking about math in your study, but you know when we are looking at our earliest supports for kids or

a few things that kind of pop into my mind. One is we need to make sure that the volume of reading that our kids are engaged in is much more than it is now. You know, our students when they get to, you know, you think of a kindergartener comes in, you know, he doesn't yet know his letters and sounds and that's fine because that's what kindergarten is about. We're gonna learn our letters. We're gonna learn our sounds. We're gonna learn how they blend together and how we segment, you know, we're gonna talk about how we've been putting words together and we make sentences and then we're writing some sentences after we've written some words and we get to the end of kindergarten right now we're reading a level D. So we've gone from a prereader AA to a level D that's five different levels that our kindergartener is gonna work through, right? So then we get to first grade. Now the expectation is that in first grade we go from a D to an I or a J level. So we're now going 10 levels of text complexity, the rigor that's needed to do that, the stamina that's needed to do that and I think we need to come back and really focus in on what type of volume of reading are we giving our kids? Do they have the opportunity to engage in daily independent reading where they are just getting volumes of words that they are able to absorb and come into them? Yeah, a print rich environment is critical for our students to be able to learn and to grow and to thrive and when it comes to the reading, the writing component also, we need to have the same type of purpose with that. The more that we write, the better our kids are going to be as writers and we also know that the better writers they are, the better readers they will be and so I do believe that as we start to look at the ability to have these supports on our campus for our

teachers, cause again, it all comes down from the principal's perspective the systems that we put in place to support our teachers, because again, I'm not delivering that instruction to our kids. You know, that's what our teachers are doing, but if we know that we have a roadmap of where we're going. Not just where we're going, how we're gonna get there and that comes through the PLC framework through that collaboration with each other, because I guarantee you that if I'm teaching on a team, someone's got a better idea than I do on how am I gonna get my kids to learn this concept and so it really comes down to, I think, implementing, you know, when we look at the PLC framework, what we call the teach assess cycle and it's, you know, we need to know exactly what is it we're going to teach and that comes from looking at our standards and I think the more that we can build capacity within our teachers to be able to say hey here are the standards here are the critical learning areas that we need. We start with those standards and let's use the resources that we have. You know, these are our particular resources have been vetted by our school district and by the state and there's nothing that says they aren't good resources, but they are a resource. They are not the end all be all. If they were everything would be fixed, right? So, we use them as a resource. We look at how are they aligned to the standards? What instructional moves am I going to make to ensure that my students are getting this and then we talk about assessment how am I gonna make sure that they've gotten that and when I say I mean collectively as a team, so this is all about the building that shared experience for our students. That every single kid in every single class and every single school across our district should know that when I leave this

classroom I'm hitting that bar. It shouldn't be well, I hope I got that teacher who's gonna help me get there and so, we start with those standards. You look at the assessments you're gonna use. You need to figure out at that point how did we do and when our kids didn't get it what are we gonna do about it and those that did, how are we gonna help challenge them? Because I promise you this and I've said this for years and years and years and no one has yet changed my mind because I've never seen any proof to change my mind. The very best Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention will never ever replace poor Tier 1 instruction and if we don't have just the most effective Tier 1 instruction taking place in our classrooms, we won't close that gap cause that gap is gonna continue to exist. (P16)

Theme for Research Question 4: Keep Excellence at the Forefront

In analyzing the patterns developed for Research Question 4, the overarching theme that emerged from the many participant responses was regarding the importance of strong leadership at the top to establish a shared vision and collective efficacy and develop key systems and structures that will support high levels of instruction and learning for all students at all ability levels, from all backgrounds, including students from diverse and special populations. Seventeen of the seventeen participants deemed that strong leadership at the top, a shared vision and collective efficacy, along with the and developing key systems and structures that will support high levels of instruction and learning for all students at all levels was essential to increasing reading and writing achievement, as further broken down in the descriptors detailed in the aforementioned pattern analysis of the three patterns for Research Question 4.

Participant 11 expressed:

I view my role as a leader at [my school], is to be present, to have a listening ear to what's going on and to research alongside my teachers to find out what is the best way to help our kids be successful...I think that I'm more of a coach when it comes to reading... I find myself as a coach, but I do rely heavily on the experts in my school who are out there receiving professional development, who are doing research, who are the ones on the ground seeing what our kids need...I think that allowing teachers to come in and say, you know, this is what I'm seeing in my classroom. This is what I found and I'm gonna try this and giving them that freedom to try things in order to make sure kids are successful. (P11)

Participant 12 described:

Number one, breathe. Take a breath, take a minute, and breathe. Number 2, remember it's not about you. Number 3, remember every teacher, hmm, almost every teacher is coming to school doing the best they can with what they know. Number 4, every parent is sending you the absolute best kid they have to send you. They're giving you their best and they want the best for their child, and they're doing the best that they know. (P12)

Additionally, Participant 8 stated:

I think it's the people, the intention on how we service those students and making sure that we have good schedules and if there's nobody that is here wasting time. Everybody has a part to play, and everybody here is very focused on our students and having close relationships and ensuring that what they do with those student students is focused on what that student needs. (P8)

Participant 14 reiterated the importance of shared responsibility and establishing a culture

of collective efficacy and accountability:

When we all share the load, right? It's not only accountability that we are all on the same page, we all understand what the expectations are, but we at the end of the day, we're going to hold ourselves accountable and we're going to come back to the table, and you know problem solve if things are not going the way we want them to go. I think that you know I talked about the high expectations. I think that that's huge. I talked about accountability and relationships, and I think all those things tie into that when we are more collaborating together that we are really meeting the needs of our students. (P14)

Participant 7 affirmed the importance of establishing systems and structures, such as the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to ensuring high levels of instruction and closing achievement gaps, “The response to their intervention, the MTSS System. I think all of that is always successful...if the process and the procedures are in place to be able to respond to their students’ needs.”

Participant 9 advocated for establishing the supports, systems, and staff to properly implement and support teachers in the MTSS process:

Teachers work through Tier 1, teachers also we know do that Tier 2 sometimes during that same time, but when it starts to get to the point where it needs to be very specific and focused, we have interventionists as well in our district that can hopefully pinpoint what the issue is and dig into those Tier 3 issues, right? That’s what is it that's going to get that kid back to where they need to be. If I was talking to an administrator, those would be the pieces. (P9)

Participant 6 also explained the importance of ensuring high levels of instruction for all

students at all grade levels, and not just focusing on the “tested grades:”

We talk about the reciprocal nature of reading and writing, but I think that writing is an area where we need to put more emphasis...It's definitely happening at both the state and the district levels, but putting an emphasis on primary, putting an emphasis on that kindergarten through third grade instruction, and not putting the emphasis on just our tested grades, or even only our tested grades, right. Too often we act like, you know, there's grade levels like you can just coast by in... Second grade used to be the oh, it'll be fine just let them coast by in second grade... I'm glad to see that there is a stronger emphasis on primary, and I think that's what I would tell other leaders. Is that, you know, put your efforts in primary, put your coaches in primary. (P6)

Chapter 5: Discussion

Study Overview

This study was designed to gain insight and add to the current body of knowledge of what district, school, and teacher leaders in a large southern district are doing to make improvements that have yielded a gradual increase in student reading and writing achievement and recovery after the decline following the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher was interested in learning the perceptions, experiences, and advice of district, school, and teacher leaders with increasing reading and writing achievement in hopes of gaining insight into what this district did and can do to continue to increase student achievement in reading and writing following the instructional loss from the COVID-19 shutdowns. The study was designed to keep a focus on the perceptions of district, school, and teacher leaders as they recounted their experiences with increasing reading and writing achievement, successes, and challenges, as well as supports for students in the selected district.

Research Background

The generic qualitative research study was conducted using semi-structured interviews from five district leaders, six school leaders, and six teacher leaders. Participants in the study are bounded by location; they lived in Florida and worked in the participating school district. The 17 participants were purposefully selected for the study based on their work at the district, school, and teacher levels in the participating school district in making decisions about reading and writing instruction and programs designed to increase student achievement in the areas of reading and writing. Teacher leaders from the target district were selected based on their participation in leadership activities at their

school site. All participants held administrative or teacher certifications. Participants worked in the district or school as a leader, holding a leadership role or title in the district office or worked as a grade-level team leader or as part of a leadership team at a school for a minimum of 3 years.

Research Questions and Findings

Research Question 1

The focus of the first research question was to ascertain the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement. Four interview questions were asked to address research question one. Two primary patterns emerged: (a) students had weak academic preparation and skills and (b) students had weak academic motivation. Within each pattern were smaller subpatterns that emerged that were included in this study as descriptors. Four descriptors emerged for pattern one: (a) attendance, (b) lack of parent engagement, (c) learning loss and gaps in learning, and (d) lack of foundational skills. Three descriptors or subpatterns emerged from pattern two: (a) lack of student engagement, stamina, and motivation; (b) behavior issues; and (c) focus on the needs of all students based on the data and the student composition of the school. From the patterns that evolved, one overarching theme emerged in the responses to Research Question 1. The theme perceived by all participants was that teachers, families, and students must work together to remediate weak academic preparation and motivation.

Research Question 2

The focus of the second research question was to determine the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and

writing performance for all students. Four interview questions were asked to address Research Question 2. Two primary patterns emerged: (a) strong collaboration at all levels improves instruction and (b) expert and differentiated instruction builds student skills. Within each pattern were smaller patterns that emerged that were included in this study as descriptors or subpatterns. Three descriptors emerged for pattern one: (a) collaboration and a variety of training models are required, (b) develop a professional learning community (PLC) with a sense of community and a growth mindset with all stakeholders (teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members), and (c) sharing students and data works. One descriptor emerged from pattern two: differentiate instruction based on the needs of students. From the patterns that evolved, one central theme emerged in the responses to Research Question 2 from participants. The theme generated was that for positive student outcomes in reading and writing achievement to occur, district, school, and teacher leaders must share and build collective efficacy and vision.

Research Question 3

The focus of Research Question 3 was to determine the specific supports, guidance, or mandates reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23. Four interview questions were asked of individual members of each group of leaders to address Research Question 3. Two primary patterns emerged: (a) there is an abundance of resources and (b) there is an abundance of data. Within each pattern were smaller patterns that emerged that were included in this study as descriptors or subpatterns. Three descriptors emerged for pattern one: (a) the right resources are needed based on the needs of each school (provide research and standards-based vetted curriculum and guidance based on best

practice), (b) staffing matters (use finances/funding wisely to appropriate enough staff and the right staff in the right places), and (c) time is the most valuable resource (give teachers time to plan and teach; provide needed materials (e.g., instructional focus and pacing guides, essential standards, research-based core and intervention curriculum) so teachers can focus on teaching. One descriptor or subpattern emerged from pattern two: use your data as a resource to guide and inform practice, instruction, finances, and operations. From the patterns that evolved, one central theme emerged in the responses to Research Question 3 from participants. The theme derived was that it is critical for district, school, and teacher leaders to use resources wisely when working to increase reading and writing achievement.

Research Question 4

The focus of Research Question 4 was to extrapolate the advice or suggestions from the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders that they believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders increase reading and writing achievement. One interview question was asked of members of each leader group to address Research Question 4. Three primary patterns emerged: (a) develop great leaders and structures, (b) teach requisite skills, and (c) aim high for all students. Within each pattern were smaller patterns that emerged that were included in this study as descriptors or subpatterns. Two descriptors emerged for pattern one: (a) leadership starts from the top and (b) shared vision and clear expectations are required, One descriptor emerged from pattern two: targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are required to raise achievement. One descriptor or subpattern emerged from pattern three: high levels of learning and strong Tier 1 instruction are required. From the patterns that evolved, one predominant theme emerged

for Research Question 4. The theme derived was to keep excellence at the forefront. This will allow all students to learn and achieve at high levels by establishing key systems and a shared vision from great leaders to ensure no child is left behind. A summary of research questions, patterns, subpatterns, and themes is listed in Appendix E.

Limitations

The research was conducted in a single school district site involving 17 leaders including district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders. The opinions, views, and feelings expressed by these leaders may be unique to the setting of the research and may not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of all district, school, and teacher leaders. Other limitations may include how forthcoming participants were in their interviews as well as small sample sizes for each participant group as is common in qualitative research.

Conclusions

The focus of this research study was to conduct a generic qualitative research to learn from the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in a high performing Florida school district their insights into increasing reading and writing achievement, particularly since schools across the country have reopened since the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. The researcher asked questions to gather information and insight into participants' successes and challenges and also the advice and most effective supports they would share with other districts leaders working to increase reading and writing achievement. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted via Zoom with each participant. There was consensus among research participants that it starts from the top with strong leadership at all levels. From there it is about developing a shared vision with clear expectations and systems put in place that work to establish professional

learning communities that invoke collective efficacy, in which everyone, all stakeholders (teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members), are working towards the same goals. Young et al. (2017), in their study, also affirmed the critical role school leaders play in achieving the goals set forth in districts and schools. All participants were also clear that in order to increase reading and writing achievement, district, school, and teacher leaders must make all students a priority and strategically utilize their resources to support this collaborative effort. It was also made loud and clear by each respondent that leaders must listen to their teachers and stay knowledgeable of research and evidenced-based practices and stay focused on the individual needs of their students and community. As affirmed through Yuan and Zhang's (2016), it is important for administrators to encourage collaboration, so that teachers can have the time to do the work required and use the resources needed to support positive student outcomes in increasing reading and writing achievement. Furthermore, meeting the needs of all students using strategies and resources to differentiate instruction and target individual needs to close achievement gaps and achieve high levels of learning for all students was overwhelmingly supported by all participants and has also been confirmed by Bondie and Zusho (2018) and other researchers across the country. Furthermore, as all participants asserted, data should be used to inform instruction, practice, and decision-making. Anderson et al. (2010) also emphasized the importance of data informing the improvement process.

Recommendations for Future Research

The author of this generic qualitative study investigated the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing reading and writing achievement, as

measured by the state tested grade levels (Grades 3 to 10) in the state of Florida for accountability. The focus of this study was to investigate the experiences of the participating leaders in increasing reading and writing achievement at all grade levels.

An area for further research would be to conduct a quantitative study to identify areas districts need to improve to increase reading and writing achievement. Additionally, future quantitative research about trends in the reading skills is recommended. Another area of further research would be to conduct this same study, but with a broader population, to include multiple high performing districts rather than just one to check for similar findings. Finally, it would be useful to study districts that are finding overall successes in the student groups that are typically identified as struggling to close achievement gaps at many schools such as students with disabilities and African American students.

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Appendix A

District Leader Interview Protocol

District Leader Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Script

My name is Jennifer Fowler. I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University conducting a research study to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student reading and writing achievement.

I am interested in your insights into how you support reading and writing, including successes, challenges, support, and advice you would give to others in your role.

The interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes and it will be recorded so I can send you a transcript to review. This will allow me to ensure I accurately represent your responses. It is essential that you respond fully and honestly to the open-ended questions posed.

Prior to our interview, I emailed you a list of “Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today’s Schools” you may consult if you wish during the interview as you consider challenges, successes, supports, and advice to educators about increasing reading and writing achievement.

I will send you your interview transcript to review and amend if you like within a week from our interview.

Do you have any questions before we begin?
(If so, answer the participant’s questions)

Demographic Questions.

1. What education degrees/certificates do you hold?
2. What special populations of students do you have in your district?
3. Please describe your gender, age, and years of teaching experience.
4. What leadership role(s) do you hold in your district now?

Research Question 1

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants’ answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?

Interview questions.

5. Please describe your role(s) in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement for your district.
6. What are the biggest challenges you see for yourself and your schools as students have returned to school after pandemic shutdowns?

7. Which schools, students, or subgroups of students do you see exhibiting the greatest weaknesses or challenges in reading and writing? **Probe if needed without leading to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.**
8. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 2

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?

Interview Questions.

9. Please describe your schools' greatest successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement since students returned to school after pandemic shutdowns.
10. What role(s) did you play as a district leader in these successes (ESE, ELL, etc.) if any?
11. Which schools, students, or subgroups of students do you see exhibiting the greatest successes in reading and writing? **Probe if needed without leading to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.**
12. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 3

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?

Interview Questions.

13. Please describe any *district or state mandates* that contributed to your teachers' successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement gains since students returned to school after pandemic shutdowns.
14. Please describe any *district or school supports or guidance* that contributed to your teachers' successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement or gains
15. Which supports, guidance, or mandates do you see as generating the greatest successes or gains in reading and writing? **Probe if needed without leading to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.**
16. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 4

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement?

Interview Question.

17. What advice or suggestions would you give to other district leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement?

Post-Interview Follow-up:

Thank you again for sharing your time and expertise. I will send you the transcript of our interview. You may make any changes if desired. Your identity will be kept confidential. Please ensure I have the correct contact number and email address to send you your transcript. I need any revisions within a week of the time I send your transcript.

Name: _____

Phone contact: _____

Email address: _____

Appendix B

School Leader Interview Protocol

School Leader Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Script

My name is Jennifer Fowler. I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University conducting a research study to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student reading and writing achievement.

I am interested in your insights into how you support reading and writing, including successes, challenges, support, and advice you would give to others in your role.

The interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes and it will be recorded so I can send you a transcript to review. This will allow me to ensure I accurately represent your responses. It is essential that you respond fully and honestly to the open-ended questions posed.

Prior to our interview, I emailed you a list of “Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today’s Schools” you may consult if you wish during the interview as you consider challenges, successes, supports, and advice to educators about increasing reading and writing achievement.

I will send you your interview transcript to review and amend if you like within a week from our interview.

Do you have any questions before we begin?
(If so, answer the participant’s questions)

Demographic Questions.

1. What education degrees/certificates do you hold?
2. Please describe your gender, age, and years of teaching experience.
3. What leadership role(s) do you hold in your school now?
4. What special populations of students do you have at your school (ESE, ELL, etc.) if any?

Research Question 1

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants’ answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?

Interview questions.

5. Please describe your role(s) in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement for your students.
6. What are the biggest challenges you see for yourself and your teachers as students have returned to school after pandemic shutdowns?

7. Which students or subgroups of students do you see exhibiting the greatest weaknesses or challenges in reading and writing? **Probe if needed *without leading to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.***
8. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 2

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?

Interview Questions.

9. Please describe your teachers' greatest successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement since students returned to school after pandemic shutdowns.
10. What role(s) did you play as a school leader in these successes?
11. Which students or subgroups of students do you see exhibiting the greatest successes in reading and writing? **Probe if needed *without leading to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.***
12. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 3

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?

Interview Questions.

13. Please describe any *district or state mandates* that contributed to your teachers' successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement gains since students returned to school after pandemic shutdowns.
14. Please describe any *district or school supports or guidance* that contributed to your teachers' successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement or gains
15. Which supports, guidance, or mandates do you see as generating the greatest successes or gains in reading and writing? **Probe if needed *without leading to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.***
16. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 4

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement?

Interview Question.

17. What advice or suggestions would you give to other school leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement?

Post-Interview Follow-up:

Thank you again for sharing your time and expertise. I will send you the transcript of our interview. You may make any changes if desired. Your identity will be kept confidential. Please ensure I have the correct contact number and email address to send you your transcript. I need any revisions within a week of the time I send your transcript.

Name: _____

Phone contact: _____

Email address: _____

Appendix C

Teacher Leader Interview Protocol

Teacher Leader Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Script

My name is Jennifer Fowler. I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University conducting a research study to investigate the experiences of district, school, and teacher leaders in increasing student reading and writing achievement.

I am interested in your insights into how you support reading and writing, including successes, challenges, support, and advice you would give to others in your role.

The interview should take approximately 45 to 60 minutes and it will be recorded so I can send you a transcript to review. This will allow me to ensure I accurately represent your responses. It is essential that you respond fully and honestly to the open-ended questions posed.

Prior to our interview, I emailed you a list of “Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today’s Schools” you may consult if you wish during the interview as you consider challenges, successes, supports, and advice to educators about increasing reading and writing achievement.

I will send you your interview transcript to review and amend if you like within a week from our interview.

Do you have any questions before we begin?
(If so, answer the participant’s questions)

Demographic Questions.

1. What grades and subjects are you teaching now?
2. What special populations of students do you now teach (ESE, ELL, etc.) if any?
3. What leadership role(s) do you hold at your school now?
4. What education degrees/certificates do you hold?
5. Please describe your gender, age, and years of teaching experience.

Research Question 1

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants’ answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?

Interview questions.

6. Please describe your role(s) in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement for your students.

7. What are the biggest challenges you see for yourself and your teachers as students have returned to school after pandemic shutdowns?
8. Which students or subgroups of students do you see exhibiting the greatest weaknesses or challenges in reading and writing? **Probe if needed *without leading* to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.**
9. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 2

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?

Interview Questions.

10. Please describe your teachers' greatest successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement since students returned to school after pandemic shutdowns.
11. What role(s) did you play as a teacher leader in these successes?
12. Which students or subgroups of students do you see exhibiting the greatest successes in reading and writing? **Probe if needed *without leading* to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.**
13. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 3

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?

Interview Questions.

14. Please describe any *district or state mandates* that contributed to your teachers' successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement gains since students returned to school after pandemic shutdowns.
15. Please describe any *district or school supports or guidance* that contributed to your teachers' successes in supporting and increasing reading and writing achievement or gains
16. Which supports, guidance, or mandates do you see as generating the greatest successes or gains in reading and writing? **Probe if needed *without leading* to determine if there are specific groups of students who are experiencing the greatest learning challenges in reading or writing.**

17. In your opinion, why?

Research Question 4

(Do not read research questions to participants. Keep them in mind as you read the interview questions and listen to participants' answers. Read only the interview questions aloud.)

What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement?

Interview Question.

18. What advice or suggestions would you give to other teacher leaders trying to increase reading and writing achievement?

Post-Interview Follow-up:

Thank you again for sharing your time and expertise. I will send you the transcript of our interview. You may make any changes if desired. Your identity will be kept confidential. Please ensure I have the correct contact number and email address to send you your transcript. I need any revisions within a week of the time I send your transcript.

Name: _____

Phone contact: _____

Email address: _____

Appendix D

Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today's Schools

Issues/Needs/Supports Commonly Encountered in Today's Schools

Achievement

Assessment

- Screening (vision, hearing, learning)
- Progress monitoring
- Diagnostic assessment
- High stakes assessments (retention, promotion)

Attendance

Home involvement

Prior learning

School/student grading

Subgroups (economic, ELL, ESE, race/ethnic)

Time for learning (summer slide, pandemic slide, learning rate, date of birth)

School/Environmental Characteristics

Books/reading materials at home

District grade

Income

School choice

School grade

School staffing

School structure/organization

Self-contained classes

Departmentalized classes

Pacing guides

Lesson plans

Siblings

School philosophy

Continuous improvement

Detention

Homework

Punishment

Retention

Student Characteristics/Needs

Age

Effort/perseverance

Experience

Gender

Illness

Income

Primary language

Race/Ethnicity

Special needs/gifts/talents

Student Behavior/Engagement

Bullying

Mental health

Resilience

Restorative justice

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Student violence

Functional behavioral Analysis (FBA)

Parental Characteristics/Needs

Parental/family education

Parental/family education values

Student Supports

Curriculum supports

 Below/remedial materials

 On grade level materials

 Above grade level/enrichment materials

Differentiated instruction

MTSS

Tutoring

504 plans

ESE supports

Progress Monitoring Plans

Online supports (i.e., iReady, Kahn Academy, myON)

Universal design for learning

Other

Appendix E

Summary of Research Questions, Patterns, Subpatterns, and Themes

Summary of Research Questions, Patterns, Subpatterns, and Themes

Research Question 1: What are the biggest challenges reported by district, school, and teacher leaders when attempting to increase reading and writing achievement?

Pattern 1: Students had weak academic preparation and skills.

- A: poor attendance
- B: lack of parent engagement
- C: learning loss and gaps in learning
- D: lack of foundational skills

Pattern 2: Students had weak academic motivation.

- A: lack of student engagement, stamina, and motivation
- B: behavior issues
- C: Focus on the needs of all students based on the data and the student composition of the school.

Theme: Teachers, families, and students must work together to remediate weak academic preparation and motivation.

Research Question 2: What are the biggest successes reported by district, school, and teacher leaders in supporting and increasing reading and writing performance for all students?

Pattern 1: Strong collaboration at all levels improves instruction.

- A: Collaboration and training bring it all together.
- B: Develop professional learning communities (PLCs).
- C: Sharing students and data works.

Pattern 2: Expert and differentiated instruction builds student skills.

A: Differentiated instruction based on the needs of students is helpful.

Theme: Share and build collective efficacy and vision.

Research Question 3: What specific supports, guidance, or mandates are reported by district, school, and teacher leaders to help schools monitor and raise reading and writing achievement in 2022-23?

Pattern 1: The district has an abundance of resources.

A: Use the right resources based on the needs of the school.

B: Staffing matters; use finances/funding wisely to appropriate enough staff and the right staff in the right places.

C: Time is your most valuable resource; give teachers time to plan and teach and with the materials provided.

Pattern 2: The district has an abundance of data.

A: Use data as a resource to inform practice, instruction, finances, and operations.

Theme: Use resources wisely.

Research Question 4: What advice or suggestions do district, school, and teacher leaders believe will help district, school, and teacher leaders increase reading and writing achievement?

Pattern 1: Develop great leaders and structures.

A. Leadership starts from the top.

B. Shared vision and clear expectations are necessary.

Pattern 2: Teach requisite skills.

A. Use targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to close gaps.

Pattern 3: Keep high expectations for all.

A. To have high levels of learning, ensure strong Tier 1 instruction.

Theme: Keep excellence at the forefront.