UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE GRADING AND STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHER INSTRUCTION AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

by

Ann Ashley Mathena

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to understand the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards on elementary teacher instruction at a suburban school system. This research study examined teacher instruction and assessment, sharing obstacles, and resources necessary for the effective use of standards-based instruction and grading. The population for the study included 74 teacher participants from elementary schools. Data included information obtained from interviews, focus groups, and document collection. Data analysis included analyzing transcripts and coding information based on identified themes. Formal data analysis completed through using Moustakas' seven steps, analyzed the experiences, identified significant statements from participants, clustered the statements into themes, synthesized the themes into a description of the experiences, and constructed a description of the essence of the experience. Results from the study included the need for consistency in grading through the use of rubrics, use of Understanding by Design (UbD) for teacher planning of instructional, use of formative assessment with teacher feedback for student learning, and articulating student learning goals to students through success criteria and learning progressions created through Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME). Teachers use Google Educators for collaboration, eliminate percentages in grading, and strive for consistency through grade level/departmentalized teaming. Recommendations for further research include analyzing the development of FAME learning progressions, and implementing a Digital Learning Plan.

Key words: standards-based grading, standards-based report cards, formative assessment, Measures of Academic Progress, Understanding by Design (UbD), digital learning, growth mindset, Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME).

Dedication

Raised with an appreciation for higher education, my parents and grandmother were each public school teachers with undergraduate degrees, and my father completed a Master of Education degree in Music Education. My father encouraged me to take classes and pursue additional degrees and certifications. When he became confined to a nursing home in 2009, I began to focus on pursuing a Doctorate of Education degree as much for myself as for a goal to share with him. My father passed away in June 2012, and I promised him at the end of his life that I would complete this degree, and he became my motivation to complete my research study focused on instructional changes with standards-based grading. As I near the end of this program my mother, a former English teacher, has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and understands that the completion of this dissertation represents a huge accomplishment. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents who taught me that goals can be accomplished through hard work, perseverance, and determination.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. David C. Nelson, for his guidance and support throughout the research and writing process, guiding my revisions to improve the quality of my work. Thank you to committee members Dr. Jared T. Bigham and Dr. Michael David Patrick, for your diligent input throughout the process. Much gratitude is given to research consultant Dr. Gail Collins for sharing expertise to steer me toward completion of the dissertation defense. Thank you to Christine Chichester for the completion of an English review with professional edits to guide this dissertation toward publication. Goals are able to be achieved through hard work, dedication, and perseverance, striving to perfect a research document worthy of sharing and defending.

I appreciate the support from my colleagues with Potomac River County Schools, a pseudonym for our school system, who shared time, expertise, and their thoughts on standards-based grading throughout this research project. Much appreciation remains for those who participated in the data collection process through interviews, focus groups, and document collection. My research supported the instructional changes and lived experiences of elementary level classroom teachers with the implementation of standards-based grading. My professional growth during this process included many ideas that benefited my students with library media instruction.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

American Education with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Classroom Focused Formative and Improvement Process (CFFIP)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)

Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)

Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME)

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

National Commission on Excellence (NCEE)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)

Potomac River County Schools (PRCS)

Primary Acceleration Academic Camp (PAAC)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Rasch Unit (RIT)

Research Question (RQ)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition Model (SAMR)

Understanding by Design (UbD)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

School systems throughout the United States implementing standards-based grading forecast significant changes with teacher instructional and assessment practices. Educators strive to determine student growth as achieved on classroom assessments and computer-based assessments, while documenting mastery of grade level standards. Proponents of grading reform including Marzano and Heflebower (2011) recommended changes in formative assessment practices to include multiple opportunities with a variety of formative assessments, allowing opportunities for student growth and mastery of standards-based curriculum. Wiliam (2011) recommended sharing success criteria with students, providing feedback, and encouraging self-regulation of learning. With the implementation of a standards-based report card, professionals seek to document whether a student is exceeding, meeting, approaching, or not meeting grade level standards. Teachers analyze student growth, setting learning goals for students to accomplish. Dweck (2015) advocated developing a growth mindset, with students focusing on learning processes, dedication, hard work, and perseverance to achieve learning regardless of their intelligence level.

Students in elementary schools within public education complete rigorous instruction focusing on meeting grade level standards in each academic subject. The term instructional rigor is defined as creating an environment where students demonstrate learning at high levels with teacher support for high achievement (Blackburn, 2012). Accomplishing rigorous learning experiences requires teachers to design lessons that meet the needs of all students, allowing students to understand complex skills and strategies for learning. Lessons that provide rigorous instruction allow students to think deeply and use critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and

communication. To accomplish the high expectations for student learning, teachers are advised to provide learning experiences that are challenging, engaging, and not deemed too difficult for students. Guskey and Jung (2012) advised the implementation of grading policies and practices that use multiple grades and provide an accurate assessment of student learning. Within standards-based instruction students begin to take ownership of their learning, guided through teacher feedback, with strategies for learning implemented, and self-assessment and peer assessment opportunities provided. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) advised the use of student-generated assessments and rubrics.

With the use of close reading strategies and text complexity, students focus on meeting grade level standards and making a minimum of one year's growth in reading and math (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In Potomac River County Schools (PRCS), a pseudonym for a public school system in Maryland, elementary school teachers integrated reading into content areas and provided guided reading experiences that incorporate other subjects, including science and social studies. A debate exists among educators on quality assessment of learning and how to provide informative report card and assessment data to parents (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). With the current educational focus on Common Core State Standards, a discussion exists among educators on how to identify students exceeding, meeting, or failing to meet grade level standards. Teacher assessment changed dramatically throughout the last decade, with teachers using daily, formative assessment tools to guide instruction.

Many instructional strategies are considered by teachers when planning lessons and teaching methods to best instruct students. Teachers in PRCS focus on integrating reading in all subjects and integrating science and social studies standards within guided reading groups. A variety of assessment tools such as exit slips, classwork, projects, quizzes, and tests provide

teachers with detailed information to determine if students have mastered a standard. Group work provides opportunities for students to work together and assist each other with learning experiences. Formative assessments allow teachers the opportunity to assess which students need further instruction in order to master a skill. Teachers input grades into Edupoint's Synergy online grading program as a rubric or point scores for exit slips, classwork, projects, group work, quizzes, and tests. These rubric or point scores align with a selected grade level standard and provide several factors toward determining mastery of a learning standard.

Portfolio assessments can be used by teachers to enable students to show mastery of standards. A portfolio assessment requires a collection of student work, and that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements (Venn, 2000). This type of assessment allows students to reflect on assignments and self-evaluation to show mastery of the content. Portfolio assessment can be a collection of documents in a notebook or through the use of technology and online presentation tools. Portfolio assessments are most often used by students in student-led conferences where the learner shares information with parents and teachers to show growth and achievement with learning standards. This type of assessment provides data over an extended period of time to show student mastery and growth on grade level standards. Students in PRCS begin to create portfolios of student work through shared documents within Google Drive, Google Classroom, and recently the iPad app, Seesaw.

The use of online grading programs established parent communication of grades to students in secondary schools. PRCS adopted the Synergy program in all K-12 schools at the start of the 2013-2014 school year. The elementary schools within the district also implemented the use of standards-based grading with a new elementary standards-based report card. Students work towards meeting grade level standards, striving to make a minimum of one year's growth

on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) computerized assessment. This MAP data, linked to Common Core State Standards, gives teachers a Rasch Unit (RIT) score which correlates to the student's grade level achievement with Common Core State Standards (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2013).

MAP data also provides recommendations for further teacher instruction and remediation with specific skills. Teachers in PRCS used the DeCartes ladders based on MAP scores to identify skills in which students need further assistance with re-teaching or intervention strategies. Teachers planned intervention lessons with small groups or individual students based on specific standards and areas of need. The goal remained for all students to meet grade level expectations on each of the standards for each subject area. This focus on standards-based grading sought to close the achievement gap between low performing students and high achievers. PRCS used computerized intervention and skills programs to help meet the needs of all students with standards-based instruction, often providing extra intervention programs for low achievers. These programs included: i-Ready, Stride Academy, Fastt Math, Raz Kids, Wilson Reading, and Fundations.

During the summer of 2014, PRCS offered a Primary Academic Acceleration Camp (PAAC) for selected students in kindergarten through second grade at six elementary schools. Instructors with PAAC strived to reinforce literacy skills, with additional work on math, so the students could gain an edge on academic performance for the next school year. PRCS, one of five school systems nationwide, implemented use of a new version of MAP testing during PAAC. Students who completed the five-week camp participated in the assessment of reading and math skills, using the MAP test. Approximately 75% of students accelerated in achievement or remained at the same level of instruction in reading and math through this summer literacy

and math camp.

PRCS provided professional development training to school personnel from all 26 elementary schools on the recent changes with the MAP testing software program. Teachers created and managed test sessions while administering the MAP with their students. The MAP testing continued to be administered three times throughout the school year to assess the students in reading, math, and language arts, providing detailed assessment data to plan for teachers to use in planning instruction. Ongoing training through professional development sessions and professional learning communities in team meetings and with staff provided teachers with knowledge to create learning experiences, shared assessments, intervention plans, and flexible groupings.

The following research study served to establish how teacher instruction, assessment practices and student learning have changed with implementation of standards-based grading at the elementary level. PRCS implemented a standards-based report card, the Synergy online grading program, and instructional changes through Understanding by Design (UbD). This research study concerning online grading and standards-based report cards represented necessary qualitative research needed to identify resources required for effective implementation of standards-based report card grading. The lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based grading uncovered any obstacles to effective implementation of standards-based instruction with online report cards. By examining the use of the online grading program, with MAP data, instruction and assessment practices, the researcher explored implications for grading policies and the use of standards-based grading at the elementary level.

Background

The standards-based education movement, first initiated in 1983 with the publication of

A Nation at Risk, focused attention on test scores and dropout rates in public education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Concern existed over the ability of students to graduate from high school and successfully enter the workforce. In the 1990s, the American Education with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protected students against discrimination and ensured special education services were provided for identified students (Federation for Children with Special Needs, 2008). The standards-based reform movement introduced educators to outcome-based education by Marzano in the 1990's. No Child Left Behind in 2001 provided accountability for schools and teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Schools were evaluated for student achievement based on standardized test scores and required to show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of students throughout the student population and subgroups.

In 2009 the Common Core State Standards Initiative prompted the use of national and common standards for all public schools throughout the United States. Originally these standards were designed to provide common instruction for students moving to other public school systems throughout the United States. The implementation of these standards now known as the College and Career Readiness Standards resulted in a focus on what information students are required to know by the time of high school graduation and a common set of expectations for K-12 education (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Common Core State Standards, originally adopted by 48 public school systems in the United States, found 47 school systems following through with the completion and implementation of the standards (CCSSI, 2014).

The Common Core State Standards Initiative provided accountability with instructional learning standards for all teachers and students. Currently 43 states, the District of Columbia,

four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) adopted and continue to utilize the Common Core (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) implemented Common Core State Standards during the 2012-2013 school year throughout Maryland Public Schools. In 2013-2014, MSDE renamed the standards The Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards which incorporated the Common Core Standards and implement standards to prepare students for future careers.

The Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards established goals and expectations for what students should be able to accomplish in grades K-12. These common standards are designed to set the foundation for education, preparing students for success in college and in the workplace. Teachers in PRCS strived to develop learning experiences and common assessments based on rigorous instruction with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. The PRCS Elementary Standards-based Report Card reflected The College and Career Readiness Standards identified in each grade level by subject area aligned with the Maryland State Standards. During the summer of 2014 the PRCS Report Card Committee at the Center for Education Services redesigned the standards-based report card to reflect improved wording, font size, and clarity for teachers and parents. Letter grades, seen as a traditional grading scale, were omitted from the PRCS Standards-based Report Card at the start of the 2014-2015 school year.

Traditional grading systems gave an average grade of a student's performance on work throughout the marking period. Often this average grade represented a comparison with other students in the class (Guskey, 2011). Traditional grading leads to grading through a subjective lens by the teacher, rather than grading based on student mastery of skills (Guskey, 2011). With

traditional grading attendance, effort, and participation often factor into a student's grade. Summative assessments, such as end of unit tests, provided assessment data detailing student performance on numerous skills assessed simultaneously. With standards-based grading, teachers strive to grade students objectively, assessing each individual skill in all academic areas to determine student mastery of learning standards. Subjective grading occurs in determining the degree to which a student has met or exceeded the grade level standard.

Standards-based grading provided an alternative to traditional grading and strives to identify which grade level standards students are exceeding, meeting, or failing to meet (Guskey, 2011). The focus of student assessment relied on "what students know and are able to do at a particular point in time" (Guskey, 2011, p.16). Traditional grading identified a grade based on effort, behavior, and attendance, while standards-based grading "summed up achievement on standards, with often several grades per subject" (Brookhart, 2011, p. 11). A variety of assessment options should be available to enable teachers to evaluate the students' knowledge of the content (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). Teachers used formative assessments with exit slips, quizzes, and student work to determine instructional needs. End of the unit instructional assessments, known as summative assessments, provided a test or project determining the students' knowledge and current mastery of the standards.

The traditional grading system of A-F lacked the ability to accurately assess a student's progress in each of the individual, grade level standards (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). Standards-based report cards identified learning standards that students are able to complete at their individual grade levels. Parents of students receiving standards-based instruction shared concerns about how to interpret a report card that does not consist of traditional letter grades. Students performing at 75% or above on standards received a numeric 3, while a numeric 4 is

reserved only for students instructed on above grade level standards with 96% or above accuracy. PRCS provided several report card video presentations for parents to further explain the numeric grading system for standards-based report cards (PRCS, 2014). Teachers conferred with parents during parent conferences to further explain grading procedures resulting from the shift to standards-based report cards.

In October 2014, the PRCS Report Card Committee identified concerns about the use of the numeric 4 for students exceeding grade level standards. Teachers were advised to use the numeric 4 only for students exceeding some grade level standards and receiving instruction on above grade level standards (PRCS, 2014). Originally students receiving 96-100% on grade level standards earned a numeric 4. Instructors changed their numeric 4 to a 3 if the students were not receiving specific instruction on above grade level standards. Elementary students documented as working below grade level received a numeric 2 for not meeting grade level standards regardless of their performance within the classroom. The Synergy computer system, used by educators to enter grades, calculated the numeric scores for each standard. Teachers had the ability to override the numeric score, changing the score for the report cards.

This research study analyzed the extent of any existing changes with teacher instruction, assessment practices and student learning with online grading and a standards-based report card using the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. The theoretical framework guiding standards-based grading remained identified as Bloom's taxonomy, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Bloom's taxonomy (1956) set forth a process where student education revolved around higher-order thinking, which remained a premise for achieving a rigorous education with standards-based instruction using the Common Core State Standards. Bandura's social cognitive theory encouraged the use of self-regulation of learning,

collaboration, and communication with peers (Bandura, 1986). Vygotky's sociocultural theory promoted social interactions giving implications for the collaborative and transformative process of goal setting and self-regulation of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Dweck's growth mindset (2015) stressed the importance of academic performance being attainable through hard work and perseverance. As students move through a standards-based instructional process can their learning goals be attainable through higher-order thinking, collaboration and feedback with peers, and self-regulation of learning?

The following study provided insight on the living experiences of teachers implementing standards-based instruction as promoted by Marzano and Heflebower (2011) and Guskey (2011), guided by the learning theories attributed to Bloom's taxonomy, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Individual interviews, focus group sessions, and document collection uncovered specific procedures and programs teachers used to provide instruction and assessment evaluating student performance. The implementation of Common Core State Standards resulted in a shift to standards-based grading at the elementary school level in PRCS. Secondary schools in PRCS continued to use a traditional letter grade report card for all subjects. The research concerning online grading and standards-based report cards at the elementary level provides implications for other public school systems adopting a standards-based report card based on instruction with Common Core State Standards.

Situation to Self

PRCS adopted a standards-based report card for all elementary schools in August of 2013. Grade level standards were listed for all academic subjects and woven into Edupoint's Synergy online grading program. Each elementary school designed a cohort team of five teachers to serve as trainers for their school faculty. I served as the leader of the training

committee, providing training and answering questions on an ongoing basis. Professional development, held weekly with teachers, provided training on how to set up online grade books, create assignments, enter grades, and align the standards to each assignment. Teachers received instruction on how to weigh assignments to give low weighting of points with formative assessments and high weighting of points to summative, end of unit assessments.

The Synergy program assigned end of marking period numeric grades for each standard taught and assessed. Teachers used professional judgment when determining if the grade assigned in Synergy provided an accurate representation of a student's knowledge for each standard. Work day time allotted gave teachers the opportunity to enter grades, transfer grades, and complete edits of the student report card. If questions or concerns arose during the report card timeline, the principal or teachers contact a member of the Synergy grading school committee, to provide answers to technical issues with computerized grading.

The PRCS standards-based report card provided an average percentage score for each standard addressed and evaluated through instruction. Students also received numeric scores from 1-4 to identify student performance as failing to meet, meeting, or exceeding grade level standards. The online report card provided increased communication to parents of the mastery of standards in all subjects at each grade level. A PRCS second grade classroom piloted the online grading program and standards checklist during the 2012-2013 school year. The Synergy program and use of the online standards-based report card were implemented with minimal training provided to teachers. The report card committee at the PRCS Center for Educational Services worked to develop policies that provide clarity on developing assignments, grading, and input of grades into the Synergy program.

Teachers collaborated in grade level teams to create learning experiences using

consistency in grading common assessments for specific standard areas on the report card. Quality learning experiences and assessments created in grade level planning meetings ensured students were instructed on mastery of grade level standards, with small group instruction or interventions provided to ensure student success. Teachers conferenced with parents to provide clarity on the report card changes and identify the progress of students on each of the standards addressed on the standards-based report card. Feedback from teachers and parents provided evidence for reflection to the school Synergy grading team, enabling this team to plan for further professional development and policies to improve the use of standards-based grading. Numerous professional development sessions provided training on the use of the Synergy program and addressed the standards through creating rubric-scored assignments. Professional development sessions were provided in school-based sessions after school and during the school day based on the needs of collaborating, grade level teams. Support continued to be provided to all teachers as needed throughout the school year.

As a researcher, I adhered to my biblical worldview as the foundation, working toward the goal of interpreting knowledge of truth through the observation process. Philosophical assumptions for my research included my thoughts and beliefs from my background as a member of the Synergy committee, trainer for professional development, and library media teacher assigning and updating grades. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described the research process as occurring in phases, with philosophy and theory considered throughout the research process. During the first phase of the research philosophical assumptions shape how the researcher approaches formulating the questions. While formulating the questions, I adhered to the belief that instructional and assessment changes were brought about through the use of a standards-

based report card. I aimed to identify significant changes with instruction and learning in the elementary school classroom, determining how teachers use data to drive instruction.

With epistemological assumptions in a research study, the researcher strives to get as close as possible to the participants to determine their individual view (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). My goal remained to determine the lived experiences of classroom teachers through data obtained through interviews, focus group discussions, and document collection. I visited classrooms, maintained a journal, and minimized "objective separateness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) through conducting all research within the school settings. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) described several paradigms of inquiry in guiding the research process. As the researcher, I subscribed to the participatory paradigm guiding this research, striving to identify changes within the instructional and assessment process through the collaborative, participatory efforts of teachers submitting data through interviews, focus groups, and document collection. With communication from a variety of participants, insight was gained on the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards on teacher instruction and student achievement.

My experience includes a thorough background in online grading, technology use, and vast experience as a classroom teacher and library media specialist using the Common Core State Standards. Motivation for completing the research study included wanting to identify procedures and policies that contribute to the successful implementation and use of standards-based grading. Philosophical assumptions included the belief that standards-based grading correlates with teacher instruction and student assessment performance. With participatory experience as a library media specialist assigning grades based on student performance on instructional standards, I relied on the lived experiences of teachers in this qualitative research study to guide the use and improvement of standards-based grading within our school system.

Problem Statement

Implementation of Common Core State Standards with standards-based grading presented concerns for educators, students and parents on how to incorporate grading procedures and interpret student performance with a standards-based report card. Nationally, negative publicity in social media surrounded the adoption of Common Core State Standards and the complexity of instruction (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Research existed on the use of online grading and standards-based report cards at the secondary level (Craig, 2011). The use of online and standards-based grading relayed a new phenomenon at the elementary level. PRCS secondary schools provided online grading for students and parents since 2010. Implementation of Synergy online grading and a new report card coincided at the same time, resulting in a technology learning curve for PRCS elementary school teachers.

Elementary schools focused on the use of quizzes and projects, while grading at the secondary level addressed student performance on summative tests. An abundance of research existed giving suggestions and possible obstacles to implementing grading reform at the elementary level (Guskey, 2011; Guskey & Jung, 2012; Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; Reeves, 2013). Such obstacles included grading based on student behavior, awarding zeros to incomplete work, and using multiple standards within classroom assignments for multiple grades. Adoption of the Common Core State Standards represented a new initiative with changes in teacher instruction, assessment practices, and student achievement.

A gap in the literature existed with standards-based grading at the elementary level, while a lack of research exists showing the impact of standards-based grading on teacher instruction. Paeplow (2011) suggested ways to implement a standards-based report card at the elementary level. Craig (2011) studied the effects of standard-based grading on student learning. Proponents

of grading reform advocated for changes with report card grading but little research existed showing the effects on standards-based instruction and assessment with the implementation of Common Core State Standards at the elementary level. Use of online grading with a standards-based elementary report card presented a mind shift transformation to a focus on learning outcomes, student evidence of learning, and providing a wealth of activities to support student learning.

This research focused on implementation of standards-based grading with changes with instructional practices using the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. I conducted interviews, observed focus group discussions, and collected documents to uncover the policies, procedures, and resources needed for successful implementation of standards-based grading. The population of the study consisted of teacher participants throughout elementary schools within the school system who implemented changes with instruction and assessment practices. The problem identified by teacher participants articulated how to implement and effectively use online grading and standards-based report cards using the Common Core College State Standards, referred to in Maryland as the College and Career Readiness Standards.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to understand the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards with teacher instructional practices for elementary school teachers within PRCS. Standards-based online grading remained generally defined as student and parent access to grades determined through instruction using grade level standards, and shared using the Synergy program. The Measures of Academic Progress, given three times per year to students, correlated with the Common Core State Standards (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2012). PRCS elementary teachers used MAP data to plan instruction,

grouping of students, interventions, and to measure academic growth of the students in reading, math, and writing. Marzano Research (2016) advocated teacher instruction with formative assessment tools through a variety of measures, allowing teachers to use feedback and progress to plan future lessons.

The research study related to Bloom's taxonomy (1956) for higher order thinking, with higher level thinking skills addressed through teacher planning and use of essential questions to guide teacher instruction. Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001) advocated for students learning in a social and collaborative format. This occurred within PRCS as part of project-based learning, and use of Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME). Vygotsky's social cultural theory (1978) stressed the importance of progressing through instruction at the correct level of performance. Standards-based grading advocated for students to make grade-level progress through the learning standards guiding teacher instruction. Dweck's growth mindset (2006) proposed creating a focus on developing growth in all students through hard work, perseverance, and focusing on developing intelligence with self-directed learners seeking academic progress that she called a growth mindset. Standards-based grading adhered to students working through the standards, while teachers documented growth through mastery of standards, summative assessments, and reading levels.

Proponents of grading reform, Guskey and Marzano (2011), stressed the importance of changes within formative assessment practices, to modify instruction. McTighe and Wiggins (2012) advocated the importance of purposeful unit planning and higher order thinking, beginning with the end of the unit in mind through the Understanding by Design (UbD) Framework. UbD offered a planning structure to guide curriculum, assessment, and teacher instruction (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). With UbD teachers focused on instruction and

assessment for the purpose of student understanding and transfer of knowledge. The phenomenon of standards-based instruction remained a new experience guided by the theories of Bloom, Bandura, Vygotsky, and Dweck. Bandura defined self-efficacy as one's belief in their ability to succeed or accomplish a skill (Bandura, 1993). As students worked toward mastery of standards, self-efficacy and belief in a growth mindset remained necessary components of standards-based instruction. School systems moved from traditional grading systems to standards-based grading, where research determined changes needed in instructional and assessment practices related to the Common Core State Standards, to ensure successful implementation of standards-based grading.

Significance of the Study

The standards-based movement encouraged provided students with a similar education throughout public schools in the United States (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Online grading represented a new initiative at the elementary level. With the use of Common Core State Standards, the Synergy online grading program and report card gave parents feedback on what skills students mastered (Edupoint, 2016). Through the Synergy online grading program school systems can effectively manage all aspects of documentation of student performance and achievement data (Edupoint, 2016). Students working above grade level were listed as exceeding grade level standards, while those students working below grade level were deemed as not meeting grade level standards. Limited research existed with the use of online grading and full implementation of standards-based report cards with the Common Core Standards at the elementary level.

This study proposed to determine the level of understanding, policies, and procedures in place among teachers for the successful implementation of standards-based instruction with the

use of online grading and standards-based report cards. Scriffiny (2008) suggested multiple reasons for standards-based grading including the need for meaningful grades, the adjustment of instruction, and a focus on quality work. Marzano Research (2016) advocated for grading reform, including more opportunities for formative assessment to guide instruction. Guskey and Jung (2012) stressed the need for a more effective way of communicating student learning. With standards-based instruction in place and accountability assessment programs to measure student progress, the next logical step included the implementation of a standards-based report to document the mastery of grade-level standards for each student. The following study identified procedures, performance indicators, and rubrics necessary with standards-based instruction.

Craig (2011) and Paeplow (2011) indicated how to implement a standards-based report card, but failed to analyze the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based instruction with the Common Core State Standards. Paeplow (2011) shared the early implementation of standards-based grading at the elementary level. Craig (2011) researched the effects of standards-based grading on student learning in 4th grade math. Prior research does not analyze the lived experiences of teachers instructing with a standards-based report card, while using UbD rubrics, performance assessments, Cornerstone Tasks, and increased measures of formative assessment as documented through FAME. This study addressed the literature gap with the implementation of standards-based grading with Common Core State Standards and backward mapping for planning and assessment through UbD.

Focus on the use of formative assessment measures, as well as summative assessments with the Measures of Academic Progress RIT scores identified how these scores provided further implications for instruction of students. Did the Measures of Academic Progress provide information on how to best instruct students with the standards-based report card? Teachers

analyzed MAP data to evaluate the progress of students from fall to winter and from winter to spring. New instructional programs with UbD and FAME were implemented throughout schools within the county. Feedback from teachers through interviews, focus groups, and document collection provided valuable information for other public school systems wanting to pursue implementation of a standards-based report card.

This research remained guided in the theoretical works of Bloom, Bandura, Vygotsky, and Dweck. Prior research did not analyze the use of higher-level thinking as deemed necessary through Bloom's taxonomy (1956), and now use of the UbD Framework with essential questions. Bandura's social cognitive theory called for self-regulation of learning, collaboration with peers, and self-efficacy, believing in one's ability to learn (Bandura, 1993). This study identified procedures in place as teachers provided opportunities for students to self-assess, peer assess, and collaborate with other learners. Vygotsky's social cultural theory regarded learning as outcome-based with students working within their ideal level of performance (Vygotsky, 1986). Research identified procedures and resources needed for successful implementation of outcome-based mastery of grade level standards. This study remained ideal for analyzing the best approach for grading special education, and gifted students, along with students working toward current grade level mastery of standards. Dweck's growth mindset (2006) provided the impetus for achieving further growth through hard work and perseverance, regardless of one's level of intelligence. This qualitative study provided further significance in the further research of the next steps needed after implementation of standards-based grading.

Research Questions

The use of online grading and standards-based report cards presented a huge technology and instructional learning curve to the elementary teachers. Teachers continued to acquire

knowledge regarding implementation of the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards within instruction. Online grading required teachers to set up a grade book, add grading policies, create assignments, and enter grades for students. In determining the research questions for this study, focus was given to how an online grading and reporting system impacted teachers. Research questions addressed how teacher instruction, student learning and assessment practices have changed through use of standards-based grading. Teachers learned to implement data from the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) Assessment, given to the students three times per year, when planning instruction. The MAP Assessment correlated with instruction using the Common Core State Standards. One research question analyzed how use of MAP data impacted teacher instruction.

As the educators became more accustomed to teaching Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards and using a standards-based report card, research determined what obstacles still existed and what instructional resources were necessary to help overcome these obstacles. Throughout professional development and common plans times, teachers reflected on successes and failures of the standards-based grading program. Research included interviews, focus groups, and data collection to identify which barriers for success with standards-based grading still existed and how school systems set policies and procedures in place to ensure student and instructor success with standards-based learning.

In considering research questions, reflection on the major points in literature regarding standards-based grading informed the direction of the current study. Guskey (2011) stated that a standards-based grading scale was designed to describe a student's level of mastery with a set of course objectives. O'Connor (2007) found that standards-based grading led to student mastery of skills and more objective grading. Teachers using standards-based instruction relied on

formative assessment to guide instruction and may see an impact in student effort and goal-setting (Marzano Research, 2016). Haptonstall (2010) identified a greater correlation between standards-based report card grades and achievement on the Colorado Student Assessment Program. Prior research was considered and the lack of availability of data on standards-based instructional practices with the Common Core State Standards as research questions were designed to explore the impact of standards-based instruction and online grading on teachers. The following Research Questions (RQ) guided this study.

RQ1: How has standards-based grading impacted and changed teacher instruction and student learning in the classroom?

With the implementation of standards-based report cards in 2013, teacher planning and instruction began to change with a focus on backward mapping through Understanding by Design (UbD). Teachers planned the assessment first, then backward mapped to plan instruction (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Marzano and Heflebower (2011) advocated for increased opportunities for formative assessment, with the use of student-created performance assessments and rubrics. Teachers within PRCS began using Cornerstone Tasks, rubrics, and FAME. Research analyzed the use of FAME learning progressions, and success criteria, with students having opportunities for self-evaluation, teacher feedback, and peer assessment.

RQ 2: How does teacher use of online grading and a standards-based report card change instructional and assessment practices in the classroom?

McTighe and Wiggins (2012) advocated for use of higher-order Essential Questions, Cornerstone Tasks, and Transfer Goals within teacher instruction. Essential questions are open-ended questions guiding a unit of study, designed to spark additional thought and inquiry with the students. Cornerstone tasks provided formative assessments designed to address a

combination of skills and transfer goals that show the depth of student knowledge with standards. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) promoted the use of grades that identify what students know, with increased opportunities for expanded assessment options. With the use of a variety of formative assessment options, MAP testing, and cornerstone tasks, research identified the changes within instructional and assessment practices in the classroom. Increased opportunities for authentic learning occurred when students are given real-world assignments. This research identified the changes within instruction that allow students to hopefully transfer their knowledge to other disciplines.

RQ 3: How does data from the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) and other assessments help teachers plan standards-based instruction?

Measures of Academic testing occurred three times per school year, designed to document mastery levels and levels of growth occurring between assessments. Teachers used the assessment data to teach skills within guided reading, guided math, and groupings for intervention or enrichment. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) stressed the need for increased opportunities for allowing students to continually update their scores on previous assessment standards. Research identified the increased formative assessment options occurring with the use of performance assessments, Cornerstone Tasks, rubrics, learning progressions, and success criteria. Teachers lived experiences using these types of assessments created procedures to help teachers plan further standards-based instruction.

RQ 4: What do teachers perceive as obstacles to effective use and documentation of mastery of standards with standards-based report cards?

Guskey and Jung (2012), proponents of grading reform, advocated for the necessity for specific procedures in place to provide objective grading of the grade level standards.

Consistency remained needed as teachers move forward with specific programs and procedures for planning and assessment. Research in the following study uncovered perceived obstacles to effective use and documentation of the mastery of grade-level standards. Data collection through interviews, focus groups, and document collection strived to uncover necessary procedures for successful implementation of standards-based instruction and online standards-based report cards.

RQ 5: What additional resources do teachers believe are necessary for continuous improvement of instruction and assessment methods?

Many PRCS elementary teachers began working on the Essential Curriculum Task Force, receiving further training from consultant Dr. Jay McTighe. Training provided to the task force, and ultimately to all elementary teachers included work with essential questions, cornerstone tasks, and transfer goals. Several schools implemented FAME for increased formative assessment opportunities with learning progressions and success criteria. Qualitative research in this study strived to uncover resources needed for all teachers to successfully improve teacher instruction and assessment methods. A thorough understanding of the programs, resources, and procedures in place provided significant implications for the adoption and implementation of standards-based instruction and a standards-based report card within other school systems throughout the United States.

Research Plan

Creswell (2013) defined a phenomenological study as describing the meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept. In phenomenology, the researcher collects data through interviews, observations, conversations, and/or written responses. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as cited by Moustaskas (1994) stated that

the researcher eliminates all prejudgments to describe the meaning and essence of lived experiences through the use of intuition and self-reflection rather than deduction. Participants reflected on broad questions in addition to other open-ended questions. Moustakas (1994) described horizonalization as the researcher highlighting significant statements. In phenomenology, the researcher then develops clusters of meaning by identifying significant statements in themes (Creswell, 2013). These themes are used to write a descriptive analysis of what the participants experienced (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) stated that the researcher develops a textural description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how they experienced it.

In analyzing the current research plan, a transcendental, phenomenological study provided appropriate research methodology since the phenomenon under study is the use of online grading and standards-based report cards at the elementary level. This research plan focused on questions that relayed an intense interest in the topic. Moustakas (1994) defined *epoche*, or bracketing, as the researcher taking a fresh look at the phenomenon under examination. The phenomenon, online grading and standards-based report cards, introduced a new grading procedure with all teachers in 2013. The researcher put aside all thoughts about the phenomenon to take a fresh look at the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards on student achievement. Participants included five teachers with interviews, 18 teachers with focus groups, and document collection from 51 teachers. Data analysis provided teacher perceptions of the essence of online grading, the implementation of standards-based report cards, and how perceptions and implementation impacts instruction.

Participants for the interviews included elementary school teachers selected through random, purposeful sampling from elementary schools within PRCS. Purposeful sampling

required participants who have experienced the same phenomenon from elementary schools implementing standards-based report cards in PRCS. Creswell (2013) stated that random purposeful sampling gives credibility to the sample participants when the purposeful sample remains too large. Random purposeful sampling ensured a variety of teacher participants can be chosen without regard for years of teaching experience, demographics of the school, and predetermined thoughts on standards-based grading. Through random purposeful sampling a variety of teacher perspectives were shared that provided implications for other school systems wanting to implement standards-based grading.

The Director of Testing established a list of several elementary schools showing student growth with MAP RIT scores in third, fourth, and fifth grades, with performance on MAP testing from September 2014 to May 2015. Principals and teachers of each school were contacted after IRB Approval, through email and phone, to encourage teacher participation in interviews at the schools. Through random purposeful sampling, teachers from a variety of experience levels and diversity participated in the study. Purposeful sampling included teachers from elementary schools who used the Synergy online grading program and PRCS Standards-based Report Card for at least one year. This population included random sampling since participants were based on willingness to participate in the interview process.

All elementary school teachers were emailed in November 2015 to encourage participation with interviews. Five participants were selected from a variety of schools based on demographics of rural and urban populations. All individual interviews completed during December 2015 were recorded, transcribed, and secured in a locked, off-site school location. The interviews were analyzed for clusters of meaning. One concern about selection of participants included teachers wanting to participate to earn favor from their principals. To

mitigate this concern, participating teachers registered by email and remained anonymous from the principals. To encourage participation, participating teachers were entered into a drawing for a $10 restaurant gift card.

Focus groups sessions with teacher participants were held in December 2015 in three elementary school locations throughout the county. I contacted the Director of Testing to obtain a list of schools showing the most growth on MAP data from September 2014 to May 2015 for third, fourth, and fifth grade students. Selection of schools for focus group participants were determined based on schools showing the growth from the September 2014 MAP RIT scores to the May 2015 MAP RIT scores. Principals were contacted in November 2015 to obtain permission for focus groups to be held within their school. While the goal was to obtain up to 10 participants per session, a minimum of six participants agreed to participate for two focus group sessions and one session had seven participants. Food was provided to adhere to the comfort level and time given by each participant. Focus group sessions were conducted for approximately 45 minutes with a thorough dialogue response given to each discussion question.

Document collection established the third method of data collection. Creswell (2013) recommended with document collection that the researcher keep a journal or collect personal letters. Other examples of document collection included lesson plans, exit slips, assessments, and other artifacts used by teachers for the Charlotte Danielson Framework of Teaching, observation documents currently collected by teachers. Participants can also keep a journal or diary during the research timeline. Upon obtaining IRB approval, documents were collected through a Google Drive shared folder or in person with teacher identifying information eliminated from the document. All recordings, transcriptions, and documents remain stored in a locked, secure school location, with names of participants not divulged. By delving into the

shared experiences of teachers, information was clustered and coded for common themes. The use of interviews, focus groups, and document collection provided a wealth of information to analyze for common themes.

Delimitations

PRCS provided adequate professional development sessions, and training videos for the implementation of Synergy online grading and the standards-based report card. Classroom teachers in grade level teams received professional development on unit planning with Understanding by Design, the use of rubrics, performance tasks, and creating common assessments. Further training provided with Cornerstone Tasks allowed these tasks to be used as formative assessment real-world assessments. Grade level and departmentalized teams worked collaboratively to plan assessments, units, and rubrics to determine what students can achieve related to grade-level standards. Teachers communicated through the CFFIP collaborative process to share concerns and ideas related to standards-based instruction with an online, standards-based report card.

Definitions

The following educational terms provide definitions and a common language for all of the stakeholders within PRCS.

1. *AMT:* Three interrelated goals leading to student understanding of instructional material.

   Acquisition: Learners know factual information and are able to complete basic skills.

   Meaning: Students arrive to an understanding of important ideas and processes.

   Transfer: The learner has an ability to apply, and use their learning autonomously and effectively in new situations (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

2. *Authentic Learning:* Real world, natural connections occur within or between subject disciplines; Students apply their knowledge and skills to perform authentic tasks. (Wiggins, 2014).
3. *Comprehensive Arrangement of Standards:* Includes priority standards, which are fixed, and supporting standards, which are flexible, based upon evidence of mastery (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).
4. *Cornerstone Tasks:* Formative assessments/performance tasks that are intended to engage students in applying their knowledge and skills in an authentic and relevant context. Like a cornerstone anchors a building, these tasks are meant to anchor the curriculum around the most important understandings that learners need to apply independently. They are common performance assessments that are foundational to the implementation of the Essential Curriculum (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).
5. *Enduring Understanding (EU):* Statements summarizing important generalizations or ideas which are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom. They synthesize what students should understand—not just know or do—as a result of studying a particular content area (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).
6. *Essential Curriculum:* An understanding-focused curriculum, designed around complex transfer goals that require understanding- students know how and when to use and adapt content to meet performance demands. It includes priority standards, cornerstone tasks, and comprehensive arrangement of supporting standards (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).
7. *Essential Questions:* Open-ended; intellectually engaging; intended to spark interest, inquiry, higher-order thinking, discussion, and debate; raise new questions and spark further inquiry; require support and justification; reoccur periodically over time; and

should be visited again and again throughout a unit and across a year (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

8. *Formative Assessment:* A process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011).
9. *Learning Progressions:* Provide a description of student learning in proficiency levels to support students to take the next step in their learning (MSDE, 2016).
10. *Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards:* Maryland's framework for teaching the Common Core State Standards
11. *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP):* Summative, computer-based assessments given three times per year to document student mastery and growth in Reading and Math (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2013).
12. *Performance Assessments:* Integrated tasks that require learners to transfer their learning to authentic situations. The results provide evidence of students' understanding and ability to apply their learning in a meaningful way (McTighe & Wiggins, 2016).
13. *Professional Learning Community (PLC):* Professional Learning Communities adhere to the concept of improved learning for students being obtained through continuous job-embedded learning for educators. Eight roles of a member include: information specialist, staff developer, teacher and collaborator, critical friend, leader, researcher, learner, and student advocate. The time remains dedicated to enhancing the quality of teacher planning, examine achievement data, collaboratively plan for school improvement, and continuously learning about learning strategies and resources (Hughes-Hassell, Brasfield, & Dupree, 2016).

14. *Response to Instruction/Intervention (RTI):* The practice of providing high quality instruction while monitoring progress frequently to make changes in instruction or learning goals, using the data to match enrichment and interventions to student needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016).
15. *Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR):* A model of infusing technology tools with personalized, mobile device learning to impact teaching and instruction, progressing in complexity from Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, to Redefinition (Romrell, Kidder, & Wood, 2016).
16. *Success Criteria:* Describes all specific components that are necessary to successfully reach the learning goal (MSDE, 2016).
17. *Transfer Goals*: Identify what we want students to be able to do when they confront new challenges – both in and outside of school, beyond the current lessons and unit to achieve the autonomous transfer of learning (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).
18. *Understanding by Design (UbD):* UbD: Stage 1- Desired Results, Stage 2- Evidence, Stage 3- Learning Plan. The process of then planning backward, identifying the assessment first, and then the learning experiences and instruction that will be needed to achieve the desired outcomes (McTighe & Wiggins, 2016).
19. *Universal Design for Learning (UDL):* A scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice for differentiating by content, process, and product that: (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with

disabilities and students who are limited English proficient (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014).

Summary

Public school education changed dramatically since the report of a Nation at Risk and implementation of No Child Left Behind, and the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Proponents of grading reform recommended changes in grading and assessment practices to include the use of a numeric grading scale to identify students exceeding, meeting, approaching and not meeting grade level standards. PRCS focused on teachers providing an engaging classroom environment to make meaningful connections of knowledge. The use of the Synergy Online grading system included implementation within all Pre-K – 12 schools, along with the adoption of an Elementary Standards-based Report Card. Increased parent communication included a report card that documented mastery of standards, narrative comments, and parent/teacher conferences to share student mastery of the grade level standards. Teachers provided ongoing feedback for student learning, ensuring opportunities for multiple grades in each standard to document the accuracy of assessments for student learning. Assessments consisted of increased formative assessments with the use of MAP Data to assist teachers in planning instruction.

PRCS teachers began to collaborate, share resources, analyze student work, focusing on learning outcomes to increase mastery of grade level standards. This research study provided an in depth analysis of the lived experiences of elementary school teachers within PRCS who implemented online grading, UbD, principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Cornerstone Tasks, Transfer Goals, and ongoing methods of formative assessment. Qualitative research was conducted using interview, focus groups, and document collection. Moustakas'

Seven Steps for data analysis allowed the research to identify and code the information by themes, providing the basis for data analysis. Research identified the existing connections between the theoretical framework of Bloom's taxonomy, Bandura's social cognitive theory, Vygotsky's social cultural theory, and Dweck's growth mindset.

This study identified how standards-based grading impacted and changed teacher instruction, allowing significant personalized learning to support individuals. Changes with instructional and assessment practices were discussed, identifying how assessment data helps teachers plan learning experiences. Obstacles to effective use and documentation of the mastery of standards, and additional resources necessary for continuous improvement of instructional and assessment methods were identified. The following chapters provide a thorough analysis of the literature review, complete description of the research methodology, analysis of the research findings, and a discussion with conclusions, providing recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Educators throughout the United States are shifting toward a standards-based grading system in an effort to improve the quality of teacher instruction and assessment methods. The literature review provides a thorough review of the standards-based reform movement introduced by Marzano as outcome-based education in the 1990's and advocated by Guskey and Jung with current educational practices. The theoretical framework guiding standards-based grading remains identified as Bloom's taxonomy (1956), Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), Vygotsky's social cultural theory (1978), and Dweck's growth mindset (2006). The review of the literature shared background information on the standards-based grading report cards, various rationales for grading, differences between traditional grading and standards-based instruction, and explores the gap in the literature with the use of standards-based instruction and online grading at the elementary school level. The following review provided an in-depth summary of current literature in standards-based reform, showing the need for further research to understand the effectiveness of standards-based instruction with Common Core State Standards and the use of an assessment tool such as the Measures of Academic Progress.

Standards-based education reform began in response to the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983. The report from President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence (NCEE) in Education started a wave of concerns throughout the United States about the quality of public education and the preparation of students for career readiness (NCEE, 1983). The commission generating the report consisted of 18 members, selected from the private sector, government, and education. Concerns emerged from the NCEE report about quality teaching and learning in public education and the lack of academic progress of students. The NCEE advised that the

public school education system fails to meet the requirement of a competitive workforce (NCEE, 1983). Standards-based reform called for measuring students' academic progress against curriculum standards.

The NCEE commission found low Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, difficulty with writing and math, to be among the concerns (NCEE, 1983). The NCEE made 38 recommendations in several categories: 1. Content, 2. Standards and Expectations, 3. Time, 4. Teaching, 5. Leadership, and 6. Fiscal Support (NCEE, 1983). Additional course work in English, math, science, social studies, computer science, and foreign language was recommended as the NCEE advised against grade inflation and recommended for colleges to raise admission standards (NCEE, 1983). The NCEE questioned the quality of instruction in elementary and secondary public schools, labeling instruction as mediocre (NCEE, 1983). Recommendations included rigorous standards of student learning, quality instruction, and higher fiscal support (NCEE, 1983).

The publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983 prompted educators to begin reform efforts at the local and state level with results stymied due to the lack of national leadership in education to prompt change (NCEE, 1983). Marzano (1988), a leading researcher in education, began calling for a shift in education, referring to student learning as outcomes-based education. Traditional education focused on the resources provided to students and finding materials to provide differentiated instruction to students. Schools focused on instruction and the outcomes or objectives that students were expected to complete. Educators implemented student-centered classrooms where education and instruction focused on the students as learners and leaders. Teachers required students to work in cooperative groups and share information learned from collaboration to the students in the class. The goal of educators in outcome-based instruction

adhered to preparing students to be members of a competitive workforce.

Shifts in education included project-based learning and block schedules of classes in longer time periods. Project-based learning consists of projects requiring research, writing, interviewing, collaborating, or speaking. Through project-based learning, projects assigned required a longer amount of time to complete and involved writing or multimedia presentations. Project-based learning adhered to the concept of authentic learning that requires students to investigate real-world issues and problems. Authentic learning required students to transfer knowledge to real world tasks (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Block scheduling increased class time for instruction and learning and allowed the students time to complete projects on real-world issues.

Teachers concentrated on the skills and course content the students were expected to master. Outcomes-based education, referred to as mastery education and performance-based education, required teachers to pre-assess all skills prior to providing instruction based on student needs. Students completed summative assessments, with skills identified that were not mastered. Teachers provided re-teaching of skills not mastered through small group instruction. Peer tutoring allowed time for students who mastered a skill to partner with a student who needed additional help. The goal for mastery education remained for all students to completely master grade-level curriculum. Traditional grading focused on percentage scores and letter grades, earned to show student mastery of the course or subject content.

With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, school systems began to concentrate on standards-based education, and school accountability. NCLB (2001) was an Act of the United States Congress that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Educators implemented new testing procedures designed to identify student growth and

achievement on standards of learning. NCLB supported the standards-based education reform movement, designed to set high standards and establish measurable goals. Educators believed that standards-based education and school accountability improved individual outcomes in education. Marzano (2006) and Guskey (2011), two main proponents of the standards-based education reform movement, conducted research and provided literature on formative assessment and standards-based reform, beginning to recommend a standards-based report card.

Teachers implemented further assessment practices through formative assessment used to identify further instructional needs. Marzano (2006), best known for his work with best practices in classroom instruction, provided research for formative assessment. Marzano's research advocated expanding assessment options and allowing students to gradually update scores on previous assessments (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). Teachers began to focus on a variety of grading options, rubrics, and retesting to show mastery of skills. Formative assessment through daily observation and testing provided data for further instruction. Teachers began to plan instruction groupings, re-teaching, interventions, and enrichment as needed.

Guskey (2011) stated that educators needed a comprehensive standards-based grading system that shows how students measure with grade level standards. Standards-based grading was designed to report what students know with each of the grade level standards and ensure that students are making academic progress with grade level learning objectives. Online grading provided detailed communication with parents on student mastery of learning objectives. With the Common Core State Standards shift in 2009, and the need for documenting student growth and achievement, many school systems in the United States switched from the traditional A-F report card to a standards-based numeric report card. Students with standards-based grading were provided a report card similar to a checklist showing mastery of skills.

Race to the Top, introduced by President Obama in 2009, designed an initiative to target educational reform and compliance with the implementation of Common Core State Standards. The United States Department of Education (USDE) Race to the Top Fund awarded grant money to school systems showing reform in four areas: adopting standards and assessments, building data systems to measure student growth, developing and retaining effective teachers, and rebuilding low achieving schools (USDE, 2014). States that adopted Common Core State Standards applied for Race to the Top grants to supplement school system funding and provide innovative programs for students. The Race to the Top $4.35 billion contest was designed to spur innovation in education at the state and local level (USDE, 2014).

The Common Core was initially implemented by 47 states and the District of Columbia with Indiana and South Carolina dropping the Common Core (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Alaska, Texas and Virginia chose not to adopt the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI, 2014). With No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and Common Core State Standards, school systems in the United States strived to be accountable for the learning and success of all students. Schools provided standardized assessment data to all stakeholders to document that students are meeting grade level standards. Assessment played a major factor in instruction with formative assessment and a variety of assessment options being a key factor in determining student progress (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). Teachers assessed student work through projects, quizzes, tests, and exit slips. With standards-based grading and a variety of assessment options, parents were provided documentation of the student mastery of grade level, student learning, and education standards.

Common Core State Standards, introduced in 2009, designed standards for public school systems, to ensure all participating states had a common curriculum and standards for learning.

Common Core was launched by governors and state commissioners on education in 48 states. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) provided "consistent, real-world learning goals ensuring all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life" (CCSSI, 2014). The Common Core introduced college and career readiness standards that students were expected to know upon graduation from high school. These Common Core College and Career Readiness and K-12 Standards ensured that students moving from one state to another received a similar education, preparing them for the future workforce.

With the shift to Common Core Standards many school systems migrated to a standards-based report card to show student mastery of skills. Montgomery County Public Schools and PRCS in Maryland implemented standards-based report cards at the elementary level. Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, switched to an online standards-based report card, providing detailed and specific information on performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning, since the state of Virginia is not participating in the Common Core Standards Initiative. Montgomery County and Fairfax County spent several years piloting report card changes, prior to mandating the changes for all elementary school within the school system. PRCS implemented standards-based grading while continuing to give letter grades to students in first through fifth grades during 2013-2014.

Online grading was implemented with many secondary schools for several years, while online standards-based grading and online grading programs are new initiatives for elementary schools throughout the United States. Within PRCS online grading provided detailed information to parents of students at all levels, with the standards-based report card and traditional letter grades given to elementary students during the 2013-2014 school year. Parents

received a report card that provided numeric marks for each of the academic standards, as well as narrative comments from teachers on student achievement. The use of online grading and standards-based report cards substantiated the need for technology training with staff and parents. Training was needed with navigating the Synergy program, identifying information and codes, and interpreting the data provided. While traditional letter grades were provided during the first year of implementation of a standards-based report card, the traditional grades were removed from the report card at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year.

Researchers such as Marzano and Guskey remained proponents of grading reform (Erickson, 2011; O'Pry & Schumacher, 2012). Grading required focus on the learner and what the learner is able to accomplish (Campbell, 2012). The use of rubrics for assessing classroom work and projects provided teachers insight documenting how to grade mastery of a skill (Chapman & Inman, 2009; Edwards et al., 2012; Livingston, 2012; Young, 2009). Schools and grade level teams require in-depth conversations centering on grading, to discuss how standards mastery should be assessed (Dobertin, 2012). Differences exist between the grading practices in place at the elementary and secondary levels (Randall & Engelhard, 2009; Tierney et. al, 2011).

Shifts in education during the last decade required students to be prepared for and use 21st century skills. To be ready for college and the workforce, students are required to have a broad set of knowledge, skills and character traits needed for successful employment. Common Core addressed this need by providing standards that require the students to use critical thinking, oral communication, written communication, research and creativity. School systems identified skills that students need for college and career readiness. With a focus on 21st Century skills students learned the knowledge and strategies needed to be successful in a competitive, information-rich, technology-driven global society.

Theoretical Framework

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's taxonomy, created by Benjamin Bloom in 1956, created a way for teachers to promote higher order, critical thinking skills, such as analyzing, evaluating or creating (Bloom, 1956). Bloom's taxonomy addressed educational objectives according to three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Bloom, 1956). The original Bloom's taxonomy included a triangle showing cognitive domain skills progressing from the bottom to the top in difficulty: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). In the 1990's revisions in Bloom's taxonomy showed the nouns becoming verbs and the focus shifted to getting students to use higher order thinking skills and higher levels of learning: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

With the Common Core State Standards, Bloom's taxonomy remained in use, requiring students to focus on the use of higher order thinking skills to show a complete understanding and mastery of the learning material. Project-based learning adhered to Bloom's taxonomy requiring students to use analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and creation. Teachers in PRCS used higher level thinking questions noted in each lesson, listing the questions within the teacher's lesson plans. These higher order questions were posed as how or why questions requiring students to reflect and analyze prior to responding. Higher order questioning enabled the student to think critically and provide the teacher with a complete picture of student understanding of the learning standard. Through standards-based instruction, students were given instruction on grade-level standards and provided with opportunities to enhance the cognitive domain. Students use higher order thinking skills when they are asked to reflect and analyze work.

With Common Core State Standards, students further their knowledge by using complex

text, reflecting on information, and collaborating with classmates to discuss, analyze, and synthesize material. Higher order thinking skills focus on all subject areas, and requiring the students to practice metacognition, which represents thinking about thinking. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) suggested the use of student generated assessments and rubrics, requiring students to analyze and evaluate work. The use of Bloom's taxonomy promoted having students think beyond simple recall questions and communicating with peers for deep, meaningful conversations about course material. Wiliam (2011) proposed that self-regulated learning along with the role of peer feedback remained a key component of teachers' use of productive formative assessment with students.

Haystead and Marzano (2009) found that using higher-order thinking strategies resulted in students making a 16 percentile-point gain over students not exposed to instructional strategies. Risko and Walker-Dalhouse (2010) advised teachers to tailor instruction, promoting higher level thinking skills needed to meet the educational challenges confronting students. Use of higher order thinking provided the foundation for the use of standards-based learning. Report card standards note whether a student has exceeded, mastered, or not mastered grade level standards. Students who are meeting individual grade level standards are communicating knowledge through analyzing, and evaluating material. Through peer communication students can share thoughts and ideas while demonstrating mastery of the standards.

Students in elementary school complete numerous projects or assignments where students are asked to use Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking skills to analyze information. Such projects include the use of technology showcasing student work that includes summarizing material learned, comparing and contrasting concepts, and using information from the text. PRCS students have used higher order thinking skills when creating technology projects such as

Google Drive and Google Classroom assignments, iMovie, and PowerPoint. The use of Bloom's taxonomy required students to appraise, compare and contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, or test a concept (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2008). Students evaluate text and work by appraising, defending, judging, or supporting using information from the text (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2008). The highest skill in Bloom's taxonomy asked students to create a project or presentation, through the use of writing or technology. Students used higher order thinking skills in technology projects to assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, or write (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2008).

Students able to use higher order thinking skills, as substantiated through Bloom's taxonomy, learned to think critically and to use problem solving skills when collaborating with classroom peers, as noted by teacher observation. Higher order thinking enabled students to be problem solvers when entering and working in the competitive job market. Creating, critiquing, and supporting are among the skills needed for college and career readiness. Through Common Core State Standards student address higher order thinking in reading through literal comprehension, and grade level reading focusing on text complexity (Calkins et. al., 2012, p. 32). Higher level thinking remains addressed through writing when students compose narrative, informational, and argument or opinion writing (Calkins et. al., 2012, p. 127). Standards-based instruction promotes higher level thinking and prepares students to be successful members of the workforce.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Theoretical work conducted by Bandura (1986) provided the background for the current movement in public education on empowering students to self-monitor academic progress. Bandura's social cognitive theory focused on human influence with observing and modeling the

behavior, attitude, and the emotions of others. Bandura's theory held to the premise that learning occurs in a social context and most of what is learned is gained through observation (Bandura, 1986). Student learning remained affected by students' thoughts, self-beliefs, and interpretation of the learning experiences. Five of the core concepts of social cognitive theory focused on observational learning/modeling, outcome-based expectations, perceived self-efficacy, goal setting, and self-regulation of learning (Bandura, 1986).

The work of Bandura since 1993 focused on self-efficacy. Bandura defined self-efficacy as a belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy played a role in how students approach specific goals and tasks. Students with high self-efficacy were confident and approached a task believing in success. Self-efficacy remained a product of prior academic performance, the interaction with other classmates, and the student's motivation to succeed. With the implementation of outcome-based instruction and standards-based learning teachers focused on motivating and encouraging students, including activities that promoted self-esteem and self-efficacy.

With standards-based instruction, students know the standards and skills they are mastering and can seek out ways to learn and be successful. Students learn through social interaction, communicating, and collaborating with other students. Through the use of online grading students can monitor their progress and grades, striving to improve their scores. Social cognitive theory makes use of metacognition, asking students to think about thinking. Educators implemented goal setting and conferencing as strategies for promoting student achievement. Student and teacher interaction through instructional feedback to students on assignments and assessments becomes crucial in promoting students to achieve and update their progress with learning standards.

Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory

Russian psychologist Vygotsky adhered to the belief that student learning occurred as a social process with the origination of intelligence within society or culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's social cultural theory attributed learning to two levels: interaction with peers, and integration into the student's mental capacity (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers provide reinforcement through assistance, noted as scaffolding, to give the student help needed to achieve the task and be successful. Vygotsky shared in the social cultural theory that child development and learning was the result of the student interacting with peers and adults in the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Interaction of students provided opportunities for the learner to be an active participant working in small groups or pairs. One aspect of Vygotsky's work included the practice that students work best when instructed in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). He defined the zone of proximal development as the distance between the actual development level and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance from the teacher or in collaboration with more peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

American public education swayed from differentiation since No Child Left Behind, to a focus on ensuring that each student works on grade level. The focus on modifying assignments provided enrichment or re-teaching as necessary for each student. All students remain instructed with the same grade level standards. Students are deemed as meeting, exceeding, or not meeting standards. If differentiated instruction were provided, students would be instructed with Common Core State Standards that are in the student's zone of proximal development, not necessarily at the current academic grade level. Instruction at the zone of proximal development provides instruction that is not too difficult, not too easy, but occurring at the correct instructional level where students can complete the activity with guidance and support. The use

of the zone of proximal development remained highlighted through reading and language arts instruction provided in a balanced literacy program.

The balanced literacy framework defines components that allowed the teachers to focus on reading and writing instruction tailored to the specific needs of the students in the classroom: word work, reading workshop, and writing workshop (Carnahan, Williamson, Hollingshead & Israel, 2012). Balanced literacy followed the Vygotsky theory that students learn best through scaffolding and collaboration, working toward the goal of becoming an independent learner. Carnahan et. al. (2012) promoted the use of before, during, and after reading technology tools to promote student comprehension. The PRCS literacy program supports the use of the zone of proximal development through guided reading instruction with literature and informational text, and training on strategies to improve student comprehension. Opportunities to receive feedback, buddy read, and conference with peers provide the scaffolding, collaboration, and interaction supported through Vygotsky's social cultural theory.

Dweck's Growth Mindset

Student mindset and how each learner perceives their intelligence has a profound effect on the growth and achievement of learners. Dweck (2006), a Stanford University psychologist, promoted the concept of creating a growth mindset with students based on hard work, learning strategies and perseverance. Basic abilities can be developed through a growth mindset, by establishing challenges or failures as the opportunity to learn and grow. Students with poor self-esteem or poor performance in a subject may learn at a slower pace, or refrain from challenges. Dweck (2015) found that students who believe their intelligence can be developed outperformed students who believe their intelligence remains fixed. With teachers focusing on the process of

learning, and sharing strategies, a growth mindset could lead to positive success with instruction and assessment, and academic growth for students.

Fostering growth mindset within educational classrooms takes more than valuing student effort. In a standards-based grading system, Marzano Research (2016) advocated for opportunities with formative assessment without penalty for failure. This process allows for students to determine the extent of their growth and needs for improvement. With growth mindset, students grow their understanding with a concept, gaining feedback from the teacher and peers. Mistakes in student work can be viewed as helpful in determining re-teaching, or areas for increased practice of a concept. This mindset fosters resilience in students, collaboration among teachers, and persistence in learning. Growth mindset adheres to Bandura's social cognitive theory belief that students learn through modeling, outcome-based expectations, goal-setting, and self-regulation of learning.

Theoretical Framework Summary

The theoretical framework of Bloom, Bandura, Vygotsky, and Dweck provided implications for this research study, since students with standards-based instruction are working through standards-based grading as a continuum of learning. Instruction may not be challenging enough or may prove to be too challenging for some students. Students may need enrichment activities or re-teaching of information that they have not mastered. Students in special education would have specific goals noted on Individual Education Plans, with specific accommodations or modifications listed, designed to ensure the student's success with learning standards. The use of standards-based grading reflected implementation of Bloom's higher order thinking, with essential questions from UbD, and Bandura's self-efficacy, through self-monitoring of learning. Implications exist for instructing students at the student's instructional level with Common Core

State Standards, resulting in students learning best through their Zone of Proximal Development. Further research potentially advances the research of Marzano and Heflebower (2011) and Guskey (2011). The following study extends the theories of Bloom, Bandura, Vygotsky, and Dweck providing implications for grading reform through standards-based instruction.

Related Literature

Instructional Feedback

One goal of standards-based grading included providing instructional feedback to students, and communication to parents regarding student understanding of the subject matter. Grading through standards-based instruction provides feedback on what students know and what they do not know (Guskey, 2011). Reeves (2013) stated that "one of the most important things that teachers do is to provide feedback to students" (p. 28). Standards-based grading relayed detailed information on the objectives a student remains expected to master at his or her current grade level. Feedback to students and parents on student achievement allowed teachers to plan further instruction. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) considered appropriate feedback to be one of the biggest motivators for getting students to improve in student growth and achievement.

Teachers provided instructional feedback to students through conferencing, grading of student work, use of rubrics to assess work, and through tutoring. Teachable moments occur throughout a school day where teachers work with individual students and small groups. Instructional feedback provided re-teaching and ensured that students understand mistakes, designing ways for students to improve in academic performance. The lack of feedback provided missed opportunities to ensure instructional growth. Reeves (2013) advised that feedback that is "mysterious, inconsistent, inaccurate, and unfair will never lead to better performance" (p. 28). When students don't understand feedback, a missed opportunity occurs to improve academic

performance. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2004) stressed the importance of questioning while providing feedback that contains positive comments along with guidance on how to make improvements.

The use of standards-based report cards represented feedback on each of the grade level standards, identifying standards that students are meeting, not meeting or exceeding. Standards-based grading feedback in the form of a numeric scale represents a shift from traditional report cards where most students and parents strived to see A's and B's. With the numeric report card, the goal for students includes mastering the material, earning a minimum of a 3 on each of the grade level standards. Appropriate instructional feedback provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to raise the mark of not meeting grade level standards to meeting grade level standards. Students using instructional feedback set goals to make significant gains on retesting, further instruction and summative assessments, and project-based assignments.

Standards-based Grading

Many factors go into determining an overall grade in a subject or a specific grade with a performance standard. Guskey (2011) identified the importance of including multiple sources of information to identify a grade. Standards-based grading allowed teachers to use exit slips, classwork, quizzes, projects, and tests to determine a student's overall grade within a standard. Standards-based report cards provided comprehensive feedback to parents on the progress of students. Online grading gives students feedback on which skills they have mastered, and which have not yet been mastered. Students are measured according to each of the performance standards, not against the performance of other classmates (Guskey, 2011). Standards-based grading allowed teachers to grade through an objective lens rather than a subjective lens. This objective grading resulted in a more accurate reflection of the mastery of skills.

With standards-based grading, student performance with report card grading adhered to criterion referenced grading. Students are evaluated according to set criterion, student learning objectives. Achievement remains based on academic mastery of skills, not on work habits or behavior. Students should be assessed and provided with grades that are a reflection of mastery of learning and not behavior or deadlines for completing work (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). Mastery of skills shows students fully understand the material, and mastery of standards communicates student achievement (Marzano, 2006). Mastery or non-mastery of skills guides instructional practices of teachers (O'Connor, 2007). Educators used information to plan further learning experiences that meet the needs of students.

Student achievement evaluates student growth and mastery using similar criteria or assessments (O'Connor, 2007). Teachers collaborated in grade level teams to develop common learning experiences and quality formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments defined as informal assessments used by teachers during the learning process, are used to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student learning (Marzano, 2007). Summative assessments provide documentation of the learning and knowledge of students after instruction. Use of common assessments allow for reliability, showing consistency in methods of determining grades across the classrooms.

Scherer (2011) promoted assigning of grades that are meaningful, accurate, and fair. Standards-based grading provides feedback on standards in a detailed format and often beyond the understanding of parents. Guskey (2011) warned that standards-based grading provides challenges in effective communication of the mastery of skills with parents. Grading reform may also result in obstacles to success: 1. using grades to differentiate students 2. Teachers seeking a bell-shaped curve 3. Grades based on students' standing with classmates 4. Poor grades

prompting students to try harder 5. Students receiving an overall grade for each subject (Guskey, 2011). Brookhart (2011) stated that for successful standards-based grading reform, schools must reach a "consensus on the purpose of grades" (p. 10). Educators often want to give grades based on work ethic, effort, motivation, and attendance. Brookhart (2011) advised to focus on the message of the grades and the intended audience. Grades reflect the achievement of learning standards and supply feedback to students and parents. Conversations about grading in schools allow educators to focus on the purpose of standards-based grading, and providing grades that reflect student learning and mastery of skills.

Formative Assessments

Marzano (2006) defined formative assessment as a teacher assessment of skills to determine if students understand material that was taught. Marzano Research (2016) advocated assessment as the force guiding instruction for the last decade. Stiggens and DuFour (2009) stated that teachers using formative assessments clarified what skills students are learning, improved the instructional practices of teachers, and allowed for re-teaching of standards to reach struggling students. Formative assessment, often referred to as assessment for learning, remains designed in the form of an informal exit ticket or a quiz, allowing students to show what skills they have mastered.

Formative assessment allows for instruction to be provided through flexible groupings based on the skills and needs of the students. Formative assessments remain ongoing, given throughout instruction while students are learning the material. Marzano (1996) defined standards-based teaching as instruction that provides for a mastery of skills. Formative assessment opportunities help the teacher and student guide further instruction. Black and Wiliam (2011) found that formative assessment provides evidence that teachers and students can

use to make decisions about the next steps in instruction. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) promoted the use of a variety formative assessments options in analyzing student progress, and designing instruction to meet student needs.

Through ongoing informal and formal assessments, teachers plan instruction with standards-based activities that meet the needs of individual students. Teachers give formative assessments to determine the skills students have mastered or to assess the skills in which students need further instruction. Marzano (2007) stated that formative assessment is designed to give teachers information to plan further instruction with individual students. Formative assessments tend to be low scoring assignments that are not heavily weighted towards the student's overall grades in a subject. Students learn at different rates, with many students needing additional time to master the material. The goal of standards-based learning required students to master the standards, requiring a student not be penalized because longer time was required to comprehend the material.

Objective Grading Practices

Mastery of the content material allowed for grading that requires more objective feedback and showed the advanced learning of the stated objectives (Guskey, 2001; O'Connor, 2007). The traditional grading scale provides subjective grading that includes grades based on student work habits or behavior. Students achieve a higher or lower grade based on factors such as participation, enthusiasm, and attendance. The traditional grade remains not always a reflection of student understanding of the course learning. With standards-based grading aligned to Common Core State Standards, the report card provided an objective measure that should reflect mastery of skills. Standards-based grading allows for a more equitable grading policy for students.

Rubrics give one example of setting criteria that allowed for objective grading practices from teachers. Often student writing or projects were measured using teacher created rubrics. Rubrics provided teachers with a consistent way to measure the students' work against specific criteria and learning objectives (Chapman & Inman, 2009). Extensive research exists on how rubrics should be implemented in the classroom, specifically with writing, science, and social studies (Gullen et al., 2012; Livingston, 2012). Students use rubrics to judge or evaluate their work, using higher order thinking skills, prior to turning in the assignment or project for grading. Student reflection and time spent analyzing student work provides students with the opportunity to evaluate, reflect, critique, and implement changes to work prior to objective grading by the teacher.

Traditional grading presented a subjective view, often based on teacher perception and offered students grades based on the traditional A-F grading scale. While traditional letter grades of A's and B's remained familiar to parents, these traditional grades do not document what skills a student has mastered and areas where the student needs to improve in achievement. Marzano (2006) stated that traditional letter grades do not offer detailed feedback that students need for effective learning. Traditional grades often included averages, zeros for late or missing work or penalized work for behavior problems (Guskey, 2011). Traditional grading resulted in an inaccurate picture of what a student knows and is able to complete. O'Connor (2007) stated that when zeros are included, the grades do not reflect student achievement. Students may have difficulty in improving their grades or may feel defeated when zeros are included in student work. Traditional grading with zeros posed detrimental to student motivation to succeed in course work.

Student Mastery of Skills

Grades often motivated students to work harder or set goals to complete work. Traditional grading did not examine a student's progress toward mastery of all skills in a grade level (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). Grades require a valid representation of what a student knows and has achieved with the curriculum. Assessments show precisely what skills students have academically mastered. Grades provide a reflection of each separate skill and are not used to determine an average grade for a student's work. O'Connor (2007) stated that when multiple grades are combined together, the cumulative, percentage grade did not communicate a student's knowledge of an individual standard. A standards-based report card reflects individual skills that students have mastered, and those skills in which students need additional teacher instruction.

With the implementation of Common Core State Standards, teachers strive to communicate to parents the skills that students are exceeding, meeting, or not meeting. Some school systems continued to use traditional grades of A-F, along with the numeric grades for each of the grade level standards. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) advocated the use of standards-based grading and rubrics, without the traditional letter grades. Standards-based grading resulted in a shift in thinking among teachers, parents, and students. These report cards provided significant data to parents on what each child is able to complete at grade level. Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina implemented standards-based grading at the elementary school level without the use of traditional grades (Paeplow, 2011.)

Proponents of grading reform recommended standards-based grading as the way to accurately assess and monitor student growth and achievement (Erickson, 2011; O'Pry & Schumacher, 2012). Through No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, teachers and schools are accountable for student growth and achievement. Marzano Research (2016) advocated

assessment as the force guiding instruction for the last decade. The significance of standards-based grading revolved around formative assessment, with teachers using formative assessment to guide instruction (Marzano & Helfebower, 2011). Teachers track a student's progress and provide appropriate feedback, interventions, and classroom instruction as necessary. Summative based assessments include projects and tests weighted for a larger part of the student's grades in a subject.

Portfolio assessments remain one example of how students complete a summative assessment showing the skills students have mastered. A study in Canada revolved around the use of electronic portfolios in 16 elementary school classrooms and found that teachers with high implementation of electronic portfolios in classrooms experienced growth with instructional practices (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2011). The study supported the use of portfolio assessments as a tool for encouraging student use of self-monitoring of learning. Portfolio assessments provided detailed information about the mastery of standards and gave teachers opportunities for scaffolding of instruction and re-teaching needed skills to students.

Marzano and Heflebower (2011) encouraged the use of formative assessments with a variety of types of summative assessments. Assessments given should provide student understanding of a single standard of learning, not multiple standards. Grades determine a reflection of what the student is able to do and are not designed to show a comparison with the performance of other students in the class. Feedback with standards-based grading provides the teacher with a snapshot of the skills the student has mastered and the skills in which the student needs more instruction. By using a variety of assessment methods, teachers provide grades that are reliable and not based on teacher subjectivity.

Obstacles to Grading Reform

Often educators shared a common vision that grades must provide a bell-shaped curve of assessment results and a means for differentiating the performance of students within the classroom. Guskey (2011) viewed the beliefs as "obstacles to grading reform" (p. 16). Grades should be based on the mastery of skills, not based on the differing performance of students within the classroom. A bell-shaped curve of assessment data can result without teacher intervention such as strong instructional support. Guskey (2011) promoted high instructional quality matched to student learning needs. Student mastery of skills documents individual achievement by each student, not a comparison to the performance results of other students in the classroom.

Guskey (2011) shared that research does not support the belief that poor academic grades will make students work harder. Often students with poor academic performance have less motivation to succeed. Guskey (2011) advised that giving poor grades or one grade for a course are additional obstacles to grading reform. Often teachers and parents do not support the concept of re-teaching and reassessment, worried that children are not being prepared for the real world. This process of re-teaching and reassessment created increased additional work for teachers. Standards-based reform requires multiple grades for student achievement, showing separate grades for the mastery of individual standards. School Improvement Teams need to have meaningful conversations about grading, setting policies that provide grades and promote achievement based on individual student performance.

Product, Process and Progress Criteria

Guskey and Bailey (2010) advocated for educators to distinguish between grades based on product, process, and progress learning criteria. Product criteria based grades primarily on the final product or assessment, showing mastery of the skills. Product criteria grades show achievement on summative assessments or projects. Process criteria grading takes into account other aspects of the student learner. With process criteria grading, teachers include grades for quizzes, formative assessments, homework, work ethic, class participation, or attendance (Guskey, 2011). Progress learning grading shares grades based on how much students gain from their learning experiences (Guskey, 2011).

Standards-based grading takes into account all of the components of product, process, and progress learning. Summative assessments provide heavier weighting of grades, while process grading includes grades based on formative assessments and class participation. Progress learning, primarily used in special education, tracked the performance of students over time to show growth and achievement. By weighting of grades, teachers assign grades that provide an accurate reflection of the student as the learner. Guskey (2011) recommended developing grading policies that provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of what students accomplish with learning standards.

Use of Standards-Based Grading at the Elementary Level

Research articles exist promoting standards-based grading and describe the use of standards-based grading at the secondary level. The use of online grading and standards-based report cards represent a new phenomenon to elementary schools. Paeplow (2011) offered perceptions on how a standards-based report card was implemented at the elementary level through a mixed methods study in Wake County, NC. Craig (2011) studied the effects of

standard-based grading on student learning, prior to the implementation of Common Core State Standards in Massachusetts. Research by Craig showed a causal-comparative study, examining the effects of standards-based grading on the growth and performance of elementary students on the Massachusetts state assessment.

Craig (2011) studied the effects of standard-based report cards relative to the growth and performance on a Massachusetts mathematics test. Research by Craig was limited to fourth grade students in elementary schools in southeastern Massachusetts. Since this study was completed prior to the implementation of Common Core State Standards, further research is needed to determine the strength and nature of the relationship between report card standards and a standardized assessment such as the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Assessment for determining growth and student achievement with Common Core State Standards. MAP Assessments are given three times per year, designed to measure student growth and achievement with reading, language, and math standards.

This study sought to analyze the strength and nature of the relationship between MAP data and report cards for fourth and fifth grade students. Intermediate students in elementary school have a better understanding of how to take computerized assessments, seem to be more serious and focused with completing the assessment. Primary students tend to click ahead or select the wrong answer, realizing after it is too late to return to the previous problem. With MAP Assessment data correlating with the Common Core State Standards, further research requires analyzing student growth and achievement. Research with MAP data provides further implications for instruction with Common Core College and Career Readiness and K-12 State Standards.

The use of standards-based grading was analyzed at the elementary level at a school in

South Dakota, one school system in North Carolina, and at a public school system in Massachusetts. Prior research focused on implementation of standards-based grading, discussing policies for effective implementation. In PRCS standards-based checklists have been used in conjunction with traditional grades. A gap existed in the research with the effects on standards-based instruction with Common Core State Standards at the elementary level and the nature of the relationship between standards-based grading and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Research deemed it necessary to determine if using standards-based grading in conjunction with the Common Core State Standards, will provide more equitable and less subjective grading.

Instruction with Common Core State Standards

With the switch to Common Core State Standards school systems used the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to assess whether students are meeting grade level standards. PARCC (2014) represented a set of assessments in reading and math starting in 2014-2015 that correlate with grade level standards to determine student readiness for college and careers. Research does not currently assess the strength and nature of the relationship between MAP RIT scores and performance on Reading and Math standards on standards-based report cards. The Common Core State Standards supplied the big picture of curriculum, while the MAP requires students to focus on smaller, individual skills. Teachers in Washington County use the RIT scores and information gleaned from the reports to plan lessons to meet the needs of individual students. Research does not address student achievement on the Measures of Academic Progress as an appropriate predictor for performance and achievement of Common Core State Standards with standards-based report cards.

Standards-based grading and Common Core State Standards are each a new phenomenon shaping American Education reform within the last three years. With the implementation of Common Core, standards-based grading and report cards are needed to document the numerous skills learned by students on each grade level continuum. Online grading, used at the secondary level, now appears at the elementary level. Linking the online grading with a standards-based report card shared a new phenomenon. PRCS implemented standards-based grading with a new report card during the 2013-2014 school year. The PRCS report card committee worked in 2013-2014 to make adjustments and recommendations to the process of online grading, and addressed standards to provide consistency when grading. A new policy for weighting grades existed to give exit slips (formative assessment) the weight of one point, classwork and quizzes are five points, while tests and projects are worth 10 points or more. The weighting policy existed to ensure that grades are heavily weighted with summative assessments, rather than heavily weighting with formative assessment grades, obtained while students are learning the material.

Standards-based report cards provided feedback to all stakeholders on student and school progress. Students remain accountable for their learning of grade level standards in each of the academic subjects. Progress and mastery of standards required reporting to parents, school administration, and School Board office leaders. Marzano (2007) stated that standards-based instruction provides a more consistent measure of instruction from school to school and state to state. Standards-based report cards took a positive approach in measuring what the students are capable of doing and addressing standards as they are taught. However, how do standards-based report cards meet the needs of special education students who are not yet able to master grade level standards? Guskey and Jung (2012) advocated reporting special education students'

achievement on the level of work that the students are able to complete. Teachers should instruct with the skills that special education students are capable of mastering, providing accommodations and modifications for other grade-level standards that won't be mastered.

Schools began to prepare students for college and career readiness at the elementary level. The state of Maryland referred to the K-12 Common Core Standards as the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. Through Common Core State Standards curriculum, teachers focused on providing students with opportunities to use creativity, problem solving, collaboration, and communication with peers. Standards-based grading gave students opportunities to set goals, meet standards, and work toward future progress. These college and career readiness standards helped students address the skills needed, as educators prepared students for employment and college courses for the future.

The current gap in research addressed the phenomenon of online grading, with Common Core State Standards and standards-based report cards implemented at the elementary level. A gap in the literature existed with the use of the MAP as a way to assess student growth and achievement with Common Core State Standards. Teachers used the RIT scores obtained on the MAP to determine instructional groups and activities within the classroom. Instructors look for growth in the RIT data from the beginning of the school year MAP assessment to the mid-year assessment and with the mid-year assessment to the final MAP assessment.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative began as a way to establish a common curriculum throughout the United States. Common Core resulted in a new movement similar to No Left Child Left Behind, focused on the best practices with instruction to use with students. Teachers spent time learning the curriculum frameworks for each grade level. Instructors used data on formal and informal assessments to plan instruction and identify progress on grade level

standards. Literature and research existed on how to implement Common Core State Standards and standards-based grading. Allocation of time and resources are needed to determine the effects of standards-based grading on teacher instruction and student achievement to improve student learning.

Linking Standards-Based Instruction with National Assessments

More than $175 million was required to design, develop, and pilot test a new generation of assessments in education (Doorey, 2013). The new assessments replaced current assessments for Reading/Language Arts, and Math, providing assessment data for grades three through eight, and high school. Implementation of standards-based grading reform required linking instruction with Common Core State Standards to the new, national assessments provided through PARCC or Smarter Balanced (SB) prepared the Fall of 2014. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) developed assessments that accurately measured student progress toward college- and career-readiness goals.

Doorey (2013) stated that new assessments measure individual student growth toward college and career readiness, providing data that informs decisions regarding instruction, student learning, program improvement, and teacher effectiveness. The PARCC and SB assessments required students to use technology skills in navigating through the assessments. Doughterty and Sweid (2013) shared that the new assessments provided students opportunities to "comprehend and respond to complex texts using text evidence and high levels of thinking" (p. 121). Extensive professional development training provided teachers with skills to develop learning experiences for students that promote critical thinking and deeper understanding of material.

Instructors focused on integrating reading comprehension strategies into all subject areas including science and social studies. Standards-based instruction prepared students for the new

PARCC assessments by focusing on complex tasks instead of individual skills. Doughtery and Sweid (2013) recommended five practices to be implemented to ensure successful student preparation for the PARCC assessment: "teaching integrated content units, teaching comprehension strategies, providing opportunities for high levels of speaking, listening, and thinking about texts, using official writing rubrics, and providing diagnostic interventions for at-risk readers" (p. 125). By linking Standards-based instruction with preparation for the PARCC or SB assessments, educators addressed the goal of college and career readiness, preparing students to be critical thinkers and successful members of the workforce.

Teachers focused on providing high quality instruction that promoted success on the trial versions of the new national assessments. Larson and Leinwand (2013) advised educators to prepare for reductions in the percentage of students deemed proficient on the PARCC assessments to allow for a new baseline of achievement to better support standards-based instruction. Research is needed to evaluate the implementation of standards-based instruction with Common Core State Standards and assessment provided through MAP and PARCC. Assessment data of student growth and achievement through PARCC and SB will determine student achievement with standards-based grading and set recommendations that will impact teacher instruction.

Summary

In summary, changes in education began with concerns over the quality of public education with the publication of A Nation at Risk (NCEE, 1983). Significant changes occurred with the rigor of public education with the adoption of No Child Left Behind in 2001 and Race to the Top in 2009. Bloom's taxonomy (1956) resurfaced with increased instructional use of higher order questioning. A shift to Common Core State Standards in 2009 paved the way for

instruction based on grade level standards. Bandura's social cognitive theory encouraged self-monitoring of learning, which occurred in standards-based grading with regards to self-assessment and peer assessment (Bandura, 1986). Vygotsky's social cultural theory adhered to the belief that students learned best through collaboration in a social environment, particularly through a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Prior research substantiated the use of standards-based grading and how to implement an elementary school level standards-based report card. The purposes of standards-based instruction are to provide clear communication on student progress and mastery of skills; provide standardized benchmarks for grading, and provide the use of assessment for feedback and documentation of student progress. Standards-based grading requires meaningful feedback and requires use for the intended purpose (Brookhart, 2011). A variety of assessment methods must be used to provide parents with evidence of student growth and achievement (Stiggins, 2005). Guskey and Jung (2012) advocated four steps in implementing grading reform: understanding the purpose of grades, using multiple grades for each subject, eliminating class rank, and giving meaningful grades. School Improvement Teams required open discussions to determine shared beliefs among teachers and common practices related to grading policies. This research study provided an in-depth study of the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based grading with changes within instructional practices.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study entailed the exploration of the lived experiences of elementary level teachers and the impact on teacher instruction and assessment with online grading, and standards-based report cards. Phenomenology represents the study of the meaning of individuals lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Van Manen (2014) described phenomenology as observing, recording, and interpreting the experiences through in depth descriptions. In phenomenology, the researcher reflects on essential themes emerging from the engagement with the descriptions. This research addressed online grading through the Synergy program, implementation of a standards-based report card, with instructional changes brought forth through the implementation of UbD, Cornerstone Tasks, FAME, rubrics, and digital learning.

Numerous research articles existed at the secondary level with the use of online grading to share student performance data. Prior research in North Carolina relayed strategies for implementing an online grading and standards-based report card system at the elementary school level (Paeplow, 2011). Further research allowed me to share the lived experiences of teachers using standards-based grading with Maryland's Common Core State Standards and the MAP Assessment. With this qualitative research study, I investigated the procedures, policies and the teacher's role with implementing standards-based grading at the elementary level.

Through a transcendental phenomenological approach I identified the lived experiences of teachers by sharing data obtained from interviews, focus groups and document collection. During the data analysis phase, I identified common themes shared from teachers regarding the

use of online grading and selecting instructional standards for the report card. *Epoche* is setting aside personal beliefs and opinions about a topic (Moustakas, 1994). I applied the *epoche* principle, setting aside my personal views about the implementation and policies regarding standards-based report cards to ensure an accurate description of the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based instruction. A discussion included the research design, research questions, participants, the setting, procedures, and the researcher's role in the process. The data collection materials and instruments, data analysis procedures, and methods for promoting trustworthiness and ethical considerations are shared. This qualitative study shared a new perspective on the experiences of teachers implementing standards-based grading with Common Core State Standards.

Design

The following transcendental, phenomenological study took a fresh look at the implementation of the standards-based report card at elementary schools in PRCS, describing the instructional changes occurring throughout this shift to online standards-based grading. Phenomenology entails a research design where the researcher seeks to identify the essence of the human experiences about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) described transcendental phenomenology as setting aside prior experiences by bracketing, and using specific procedures for coding and analyzing data. A qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study remained appropriate for this research as I analyzed the lived experiences of the teachers with the implementation and use of the phenomenon of online grading and standards-based report cards. Moustakas (1994) described a phenomenological study as transcendental when the data analysis remains descriptive rather than interpretive. I

strived to uncover the procedures, pitfalls, and resources necessary for school systems to successfully implement standards-based grading.

Teachers shared changes in instruction and assessment practices through a variety of data collection methods including interviews, focus group dialogue, and document collection. Creswell (2013) identified qualitative research as collection of data in a natural setting for the participants, using analysis of data that establishes themes. Phenomenology remained the only research methodology that allowed for the collection of data through lived experiences of teachers implementing instructional and assessment changes with online grading and standards-based report cards. The focus of the study uncovered the extent to which standards-based instruction and grading contributed to changes in instruction, assessment, and daily student learning. Understanding the implementation of standards-based instruction required feedback and examples from teachers, who were best able to share feedback in the form of dialogue in focus groups and interviews. I examined how online grading and standards-based report cards changed teacher planning, daily instruction, and formative assessment practices. This research design strived to give an overall picture of how standards-based reform has impacted instruction in the classroom with student performance on standards-based report cards.

Research Questions

In identifying the research questions, I reflected on the major points in literature regarding standards-based grading.

RQ1: How has standards-based grading impacted and changed teacher instruction and student learning in the classroom?

RQ2: How does teacher use of online grading and a standards-based report cards change instructional and assessment practices in the classroom?

RQ3: How does data from the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) help teachers plan standards-based instruction?

RQ4: What do teachers perceive as obstacles to effective use of standards-based report cards?

RQ5: What additional resources do teachers believe are necessary for more effective use of standards-based report cards?

Setting

The chosen, purposeful setting was selected given the recent implementation of online grading and standards-based report cards at the elementary level in PRCS. This setting provided research participants who have lived experiences with the phenomenon of online grading and standards-based report cards. In PRCS, 10 schools are considered Title I schools, with populations of 70% or more of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (PRCS, 2014). There are 26 elementary schools within PRCS, that were included as part of the study. I ensured that participants were included from a variety of schools with teacher participants including tenured teachers, having three or more years of teaching in PRCS, including prior experience using traditional grading and the implementation of standards-based grading. The demographics of the participants included predominately Caucasian, female elementary school teachers with a variety of teaching experience. Efforts were made to ensure that male and minority teachers were included within the participants in focus groups and document collection. Participants were included from rural, suburban, and urban areas within the county's 26 elementary schools.

Each setting within the selected schools for focus groups took place at locations chosen for comfort and focus without distractions. Food provided to participants ensures the comfort and relaxed atmosphere for teachers. Schwandt (2007) recommended that teachers suggest the location of the focus groups and interviews, within a school building, which will give them a

more comfortable, natural setting. The goal remained for all participants to share beliefs about online grading and standards-based report cards in a dialogue format. The interview and focus group questions are provided in Appendix B and Appendix C, and during the focus groups sessions I ensured that all focus group participants had the opportunity to respond to each question.

Leadership within PRCS consists of the Superintendent of Schools, Assistant Superintendents, the Director of Elementary Education and site-based management of schools by principals and assistant principals. The Report Card committee at the Center for Educational Services gathered information from research, all stakeholders, and began suggesting policies for using the Synergy online grading program. Training committees have been established in each school to provide thorough professional development and support as needed. Research conducted through these school settings will provide implications for standards-based reform at the state and national level.

Participants

The participants of this study met the criterion of tenured teaching in PRCS, and use Synergy and standards-based report cards to qualify for the study. Teachers receiving the status of tenured teaching completed contractual teaching of three school years, returning to begin a fourth year of teaching within PRCS. Creswell (2013) defined purposeful sampling as selecting individuals and sites for the study as they can inform an understanding of the problem and central phenomenon. Random purposeful sampling employed with interviews and focus groups, selects teachers who met the criteria of using standards-based grading for at least one year. Focus groups held at three geographic locations within PRCS, consisted of teachers using UbD, FAME, and Cornerstone Tasks as part of their instructional process. Interview participants

included elementary teachers from various geographic and demographic areas of the county. Documents collected from 51 teacher participants from elementary schools throughout the county, show changes with instructional planning, formative assessments, rubrics, and performance assessments. Creswell (2013) stated that research using a diverse population sample will give richer descriptions.

The research population included a random purposeful sample of elementary school teachers from several of the 26 elementary schools. Creswell (2013) stated that random purposeful sampling adds credibility to the sample, when a purposeful sample group would be too large. Random purposeful sampling provided participants from various locations for focus groups and participants since participants from all 26 elementary schools would be too large for focus groups. All elementary school teachers who have used the Synergy online grading program and instructors who give grades using standards-based report cards had the opportunity to participate with submitting documents as part of the data collection process.

Maximum variation remains applied to identify participants for individual interviews. Creswell (2013) defined maximum variation as determining criteria that differentiates the participants, and selecting random participants different from the criteria. Maximum variation provided the best sampling strategy for the participants of the interviews, since the findings unique differences or individual perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Student poverty rate for schools will be one criteria used to provide participants from a variety of schools with differing economic status. Other criteria included school size and identifying whether the school has a rural or urban location. Maximum variation ensured the research provided a variety of teacher perspectives through the interview process.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval secured through Liberty University remained

in place, with the researcher after approval contacting the Superintendent of Potomac River County Schools to obtain formal, written permission to use human participants and student data from students' MAP scores. The IRB Approval for research is included in Appendix A. MAP scores from September 2014 and May 2015 evaluated by the Director of Testing with the top schools showing overall growth with MAP RIT scores identified in random order. These schools were selected as possible locations for the interview and focus group process. Emails and phone calls contacting principals of each of the elementary schools, established the method for selection of participants for focus groups and interviews.

Principals who gave approval for a focus group session to be held in their school promoted participation within their schools. Teachers were encouraged to participate if the principal felt they felt would benefit from participating in the study, however selection of participants was based on teachers who showed documented growth of students with MAP RIT scores, and participation with UbD, Cornerstone Tasks, and FAME. Creswell (2013) identified participants who have a wealth of knowledge that may be pertinent to a study as being information rich. Consent forms and confidentiality forms were given to all participants. All information remained stored in a locked, secure, off-site location.

The sample size of this study included five teacher participants with individual interviews, and 19 total teacher participants within three separate focus groups. Creswell (2008) recommended long interviews with up to 10 people for a phenomenological study. Polkinghorne (1989) suggested interviews with five to 25 participants. For focus groups Creswell (2013) recommended six to 10 participants per group, to ensure rich dialogue among the participants. Focus groups allowed participants to answer questions and encouraged participants to share information. Principals were contacted through email to encourage staff members to submit

documents as part of data collection. Documents submitted by teachers included lesson plans, assessments, journal entries, letters, and photographs. All documents were submitted directly to me in person or to my Google Drive account to ensure that information from all participants remained confidential and anonymous. Table 1 represents the demographics, including the years of teaching experience, of the interview and focus group participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Pseudonym	Age	Experience	Ethnicity	Gender
Interview 1	Mrs. Green	53	24	Caucasian	Female
Interview 2	Mrs. Smith	62	36	Caucasian	Female
Interview 3	Mrs. Miller	59	32	Caucasian	Female
Interview 4	Mrs. Kelley	29	6	Caucasian	Female
Interview 5	Mr. Palmer	61	35	Caucasian	Male
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Schultz	49	26	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Howe	39	16	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Cooper	41	19	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Thompson	26	4	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Denis	26	4	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Michaels	31	9	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 1	Sparks – Mrs. Davis	43	20	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 2	Gilbert – Mr. Randall	41	19	Caucasian	Male
Focus Group 2	Gilbert – Mrs. Walter	32	10	Caucasian	Female

Focus Group 2	Gilbert – Mrs. Snyder	37	15	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 2	Gilbert – Mr. Williams	38	16	Caucasian	Male
Focus Group 2	Gilbert – Mrs. Fletcher	43	21	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 2	Gilbert – Mrs. Andrews	51	28	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 3	Campbell – Mrs. Wood	30	8	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 3	Campbell – Mrs. Callahan	41	19	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 3	Campbell – Mrs. Roberts	43	21	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 3	Campbell – Mrs. Stotler	32	9	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 3	Campbell – Mrs. Harris	36	14	Caucasian	Female
Focus Group 3	Campbell – Mrs. Hudson	52	29	Caucasian	Female

All teacher participants with interviews and focus groups were assigned pseudonyms for to ensure confidentiality. These included realistic, last names or school names reflective of the culture of our participants. Teacher participation in the focus group discussion remained voluntary, with the members able to end their participation at any time without harm or risk. I audio-recorded and transcribed all interview and focus group discussions. Participants of document collection included male and female teachers, as well as Caucasian and African-American participants. All data required storage in an offsite location, secured by the researcher. All information shared remained confidential to ensure that participants do not have any repercussions from honest responses during the interviews and focus group process. Purposeful sampling gave appropriate research participants, since information required from teachers allows participation from those who have lived and experienced the implementation and use of standards-based report cards and online grading with PRCS.

Procedures

IRB approval, obtained from Liberty University prior to collecting any research, allowed me to gain written permission from PRCS to use human participants and collection of MAP data within the study. All teacher and student identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality of the data. Questions for interviews and focus groups were sent to three lead teachers in PRCS, considered experts in standards-based grading, use of UBD, and implementing changes with instructional practices. This expert review was completed to ensure face and content validity of the questions. I piloted the interview and focus group questions with several teachers at my home school in October 2015, allowing me to determine the accuracy of wording and if the responses would give an essence of the lived experiences of teachers immersed in online grading and standards-based instruction (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2003, as cited by Creswell, 2013) "recommended a pilot testing to refine data collection and revise questions. The individual, semi-structured interviews, consisted of specific questions to guide the interview process. Each interview required audiotaping, transcribing, and securing all of the data in an off-site locked location.

Teachers participating in the individual interview process in December 2015 signed informed consent forms. Member checks were completed in January 2016 as I gave the teacher participants a transcription of their own interview and asked each participant to verify the accuracy of the transcription. Creswell (2013) defined member checking as asking participants to verify transcriptions to provide findings in research that are authentic and original. All transcriptions of interviews collected through research were kept in a secure, locked, offsite location. Upon the completion of the individual interviews and transcription process the researcher looked for common themes within the teacher interviews.

In September 2014, January 2015, May 2015, and September 2015 all elementary school students took the Measures of Academic Progress. After obtaining IRB approval the researcher used the information from the Director of Testing showing schools obtaining high student growth with MAP RIT scores. Schools showing highest growth between assessments were identified and the principals contacted for possible teacher participation in focus groups. Principals of those schools were contacted to obtain permission for having a focus group session. The principal forwarded an email of information to help to elicit up to 10 teacher participants for each session. Each participant signed a consent form, and a confidentiality form. Focus group sessions took place within three County Schools during December 2015.

All schools and teacher participants of the focus group sessions were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Each focus group session included an audio recording with a pocket, digital recorder, with notes taken by me, while I served as the moderator for each school, but was not be part of the focus group dialogue. I ensured that each teacher participated, sharing their thoughts in regards to each open-ended discussion question. Each focus group session consisted of food supplied by the researcher, with the opportunity to have open dialogue for 30-45 minutes sharing how standards-based report cards are impacting teacher instruction. My role ensured that all participants had the opportunity to speak regarding each open-ended question. Popsicle sticks were coded with numbers corresponding to each participant, who were seated in a circle. I pulled each participant's number from a cup as they shared during the dialogue. Participants with little dialogue had the open-ended question directed to them again, to allow the opportunity for additional dialogue.

All recordings were transcribed by me for accuracy with documents, recordings, and transcriptions kept off-site in a secured, locked location. Teacher pseudonyms adhered to

confidentiality and willingness of participants to share information honestly. Focus group participants engaged in member checking as they were provided with a transcription of their dialogue for verification of accuracy. Document collection occurred with submissions of UbD units, lesson plans, teacher notes and journal entries, and formative and performance assessments from October 2015 through May 2016. I worked with principals, assistant principals, and the lead teacher in each school to encourage teachers to submit journals, notes, photographs, and other artifacts as part of the document collection process. A journal and portfolio of all items submitted remained stored by the researcher with items secured in a locked off-site location. Through this process the researcher observed and visited classrooms to photograph artifacts, bulletin boards, exit slips, and other documents. An extensive journal written by the researcher included notes on changes with instruction and assessment, along with entries regarding the implementation of new instructional initiatives. The extensive document collection, with examples included in Appendix H, gave an overall view of how instructional practices have changed with the implementation of Common Core State Standards and standards-based report cards.

The Researcher's Role

As a researcher for this study and member of a standards-based grading training committee for an elementary school in PRCS, I strived to remain impartial. Considered an expert in technology, others would view me as a proponent of online grading and standards-based report cards. My role required taking a fresh look at the data provided in interviews, focus groups, and document collection, transcribing all conversations through the interview and focus group process. I ensured that all participants completed member checks in January 2016 by asking for transcribed conversations to be validated as they were checked for authenticity and

accuracy of transcripts. As a former special education teacher, I remained passionate about the topic of teacher instruction and providing opportunities for all students to learn at their academic level.

A Christian worldview guided me in the research and allowed me to believe that all students deserve fairness within the grading process. As the daughter of two educators I believe in developing life-long learners and providing positive school experiences for students. I advocate allowing teachers the opportunity to learn new initiatives, collaborate with each other, communicating positive and negative experiences to improve instruction. Through identifying of common themes, I identified obstacles and resources needed to improve the process of using online grading and standards-based reporting.

Data Collection

A variety of data collection methods take place with transcendental, phenomenological research. Creswell (2013) stated that interviews should be the primary method for collecting data in phenomenology. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviews with five to 25 participants. This research used interviews, through one-to-one interviews, as well as focus groups and document collection as part of this qualitative study. Focus groups are considered advantageous since participants will have dialogue and discuss ideas about standards-based grading. Through the following study, triangulation of data obtained will include the use of three different types of data in the research. Creswell (2013) stated that triangulation provides validity for a qualitative study.

Interviews remain the primary method of data collection and were completed prior to focus groups, with document collection occurring throughout six months in the research process. By choosing the data collection method of interviewing first, I delved into the lived experiences

of elementary teachers, providing a wealth of information prior to implementing and managing focus group discussions. Document collection occurred over time and through using as many tenured teacher participants as possible. The data analyzed synthesized the findings, providing implications for how instructional practices best meet the needs of students with standards-based instruction.

Interviews

One method of data collection required interviewing multiple people who have experienced the same phenomenon. Creswell (2013) shared that data collection in phenomenology primarily relies upon interviews with participants. By using this research design I provided an understanding of the themes determined to be portrayed by the participants of the study. Van Manen (2014) proposed that the researcher be attentive to subtle voices and significant statements in the interview process. The words used by participants guide the researcher within the interview and written process. Interview participants asked specific questions helped to determine the impact of online grading and standards-based grading on their instruction.

These interviews include one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Creswell (2013) defined one-on-one interviews as the researcher interviewing one participant who provides willingness to speak and share ideas. The interview process of a semi-structured interview included several questions prepared and presented to the participant ahead of time. Creswell (2013) defined semi-structured interviews as the use of five, open-ended questions with space between the questions to write responses to the participant's comments. This type of interview allowed the interviewee to share information freely on the topic and add additional thoughts and ideas through conversation.

With confidentiality in place teachers freely discussed their responses to the following individual Interview Questions (IQ):

IQ1: What changes in instructional practices in your classroom have you noticed with the implementation of standards-based grading?

IQ2: What difference have you noticed with assessment practices and student learning in your classroom?

IQ3: How have you used data from the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) to help you plan instruction with whole group, guided reading, or intervention or enrichment activities?

IQ4: What do you think is necessary for the effective use of standards-based grading?

IQ5: What would you like to share about data-driven instruction, MAP assessments, or standards-based report cards?

The overall purpose of the interview sessions was to glean a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based instruction with online report cards. Question one was designed to establish instructional practices that are required for the successful implementation of standards-based grading. Campbell (2012) stated that standards-based instruction and grading requires focus on the learner. My goal was to identify instructional programs, procedures, and practices teachers use to ensure the daily success and progress of their students. Carnahan, Williamson, Hollingshead & Israel (2012) advised for teachers to focus on reading and writing instruction through scaffolding and collaboration. Reeves (2013) and Marzano & Heflebower (2011) advocated for increased feedback to students on the quality and clarity of their work. With question one teachers shared necessary procedures and strategies needed to implement standards-based report cards.

Question two addressed changes with assessment practices to effectively identify the mastery of grade level standards. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) advocated for an increased variety of assessment options including formative assessment to guide teacher instruction. Chapman and Inman (2009) proposed the use of rubrics to document student mastery of skills. Question two sought to determine the changes in assessment practices necessary to determine the level of mastery of grade level standards. With the Measures of Academic Progress given as an assessment three times per year to document student growth, question three was asked to determine the impact of MAP assessment data on planning whole group, guided reading, intervention, and enrichment lessons. Guskey (2011) advised for school districts to implement grading policies that provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of student achievement. Question four allowed teachers to share their thoughts on what is necessary for school systems to effectively implement standards-based instruction.

The implementation of standards-based report card represented new challenges with instruction, assessment, and reporting to parents. Guskey (2011) found a challenge in providing effective communication to parents of student mastery of skills. Question five allowed interview participants the opportunity to share any other thoughts regarding instruction, assessment, and the PRCS standards-based report card. The interview location allowed a quiet location without distractions in each school. The questions used during the interview process generate responses from participants about standards-based instruction. Each participant received a transcription of their interview to verify for authenticity. The researcher supplied the interview participant with any other questions that are needed to provide clarity in the participant's responses to the interview questions.

Each interview consisted of approximately 30 minutes in a setting within the school

selected by the participant. The interviews conducted at each teacher's home school were audiotaped and transcribed by me for authenticity. All transcriptions required multiple readings by the researcher to ensure clarity and authenticity of responses. Through interview questions I gathered information from the teacher participants about their experiences with instruction and assessment after the implementation of online grading and standards-based report cards. With standards-based instruction an emphasis remains placed on mastery of skills and formative assessment to guide instruction. O'Connor (2007) recommended that the purpose of grading refers to guiding teacher's instructional practices. I adhered to the goal of determining how instructional and assessment practices have changed with the implementation of Common Core State Standards and standards-based report cards.

Marzano and Heflebower (2011) recommended the increased use of formative assessments and including a variety of types of summative assessments. Through the interviews, the researcher strived to determine how teachers are using formative assessments and data from the Measures of Academic Progress to guide instruction. Finally, I wanted to determine what obstacles still exist and what resources are necessary to improve the use of standards-based instruction and online standards-based report cards. Moustakas (1994) advised for a researcher in transcendental phenomenology to develop descriptions of the essence of lived experiences, rather than explanations or an analysis. The information obtained through interviews in the study has implications for further use of standards-based grading at the secondary level.

Focus Groups

Focus group participants were provided with open ended questions designed to elicit responses and promote dialogue among all members of the focus group. Van Manen (2014) recommended constructing a questioning inquiry that instills a sense of wonder. Focus groups

included discussions as a data collection tool to elicit teachers' response and feedback about the implementation of online grading and standards-based report cards. Creswell (2013) defined focus groups as a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader, using a semi-structured interview process. Focus Group Questions (FGQ) designed to elicit teacher dialogue included:

FGQ1: What changes can you share in regards to your instructional and assessment practices?

FGQ2: What types of assessment tools and strategies would you recommend to other teachers and why?

FGQ3: How does your MAP data help you plan instruction?

FGQ4: What recommendations would you give to other teachers who are struggling with the use of standards-based grading or instruction?

FGQ5: What protocols can be put in place to best meet the needs of all students in a standards-based grading classroom?

Focus group questions were designed to prompt a discussion on all aspects of instruction, assessment, and use of standards-based report cards. Risko and Walker-Dalhouse (2010) advised for teachers to tailor their instruction to meet the needs of all levels of learners. Teachers implemented higher order questioning and thinking skills with many instructional strategies. Questions one through three spoke to the need for determining the instructional practices, assessment tools, and data needed to guide teacher instruction. Haystead and Marzano (2009) shared the need for higher-order thinking strategies to improve student learning. Question four allowed teachers the opportunity to share successes and struggles to help other instructors implement successful protocols with standards-based grading. Guskey (2011) proposed using multiple sources of information to identify a student's level of mastery of a standard. Stiggens and DuFour (2009) promoted the use of formative assessments to allow for re-teaching and

mastery of standards. Question five related to research questions four and five, allowing teachers to share obstacles to effective use and resources necessary for the continuous improvement of standards-based instruction.

Focus groups were conducted at three schools with two focus groups consisting of six teacher participants, while one group included seven participants. The group discussion was designed with discussion questions in which participants discuss their opinions. Focus group discussions were conducted in a comfortable environment with all discussion responses kept confidential. Schools for focus groups were selected based on data of schools showing growth on the Measures of Academic Progress RIT scores from September 2014 to May 2015. I was provided with a list of schools where students who have shown the most instructional growth between the two MAP assessments. The goal remained the desire a having open dialogue among the participants about what instructional strategies and assessment tools have worked within the classroom.

As the researcher, I emailed principals and followed up with additional emails to gain approval for focus groups to be held in the principal's schools. With principal assistance I solicited participants for each focus group. No compensation was provided and teachers were able to opt out of the focus group at any time. All conversations were transcribed with pseudonyms and coded for common themes. Informed consent forms and confidentiality forms were completed by each participant. Teacher participants answered five open-ended questions in a 45-minute session. A researcher provides participants with "a set of questions to guide the interview process" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103). All conversations were transcribed by me with pseudonyms and coded for common themes.

Creswell (2013) described phenomenology as finding individuals who have experienced

the same phenomenon. The criterion sample included tenured teachers who have used the Synergy program and standards-based instruction since the implementation in 2013. Creswell (2013) described criterion sampling as useful for quality assurance. Focus group questions were used to help guide the dialogue and discussion process. These discussions included open dialogue regarding instruction, formative assessment, and use of MAP data to improve instructional practices. Through analyzing recordings and transcriptions the researcher gives special attention to the anecdotal narrative collected in the research process.

A wealth of information exists in the literature, giving suggestions and possible obstacles to implementing grading reform (Guskey, 2011; Guskey & Jung, 2012; Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; Reeves, 2013). Through the focus groups dialogue, a discussion focused on what instructional practices have changed, what practices are successful, and how these practices can help a teacher who struggles with implementing standards-based instruction. Teachers gave specific examples of how MAP data is helping them plan instructional strategies, groupings, or lessons to meet the needs of the students.

Marzano and Heflebower (2011) recommended that a variety of assessment options should be available to enable teachers to evaluate the students' knowledge of the content. Open discussion through focus groups will uncover what assessment options are being used and how these assessment options are guiding teacher instruction. Focus group discussion strived to answer the research question of how instructional and assessment practices have changed with the implementation of standards-based grading. Through focus group discussion teachers shared how MAP data guides teacher instruction for small groups of students.

Document Collection

Through document collection I included the collection of journals, letters, and photographs. Fifty-one participants were secured through emails to each elementary school and additional emails to principals. Selected teacher participants provided anonymous responses, and teachers were provided with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Information in document collection submitted through Google Drive, allowed for printing, and storage in a secure, locked, off-site location. The use of this qualitative research method correlated with the purpose of understanding the impact of standards-based report cards and online grading on student achievement. Creswell (2013) described document collection as the researcher keeping a journal during the research, having participants keep journals, collecting letters, and having participants take photographs.

Teachers within PRCS collect documents as artifacts to submit to the administration as part of the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching Observation and Evaluation process. Charlotte Danielson, an evaluation tool used with school administration, provides a research-based set of components of instruction, divided into four domains of teaching responsibility. These domains include planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2011). In order to delve into the lived experiences of the teachers with standards-based instruction, it would be important to collect types of lessons plans, formative assessments, common assessments, notes, and journals. Working with lead teachers in the county, I encouraged submission of anonymous artifacts. Data remained collected and analyzed to capture the essence of the experience of online grading and standards-based instruction. Several examples that are a good collection of artifacts gathered during document collection are included in Appendix H.

Additional documents needed to clarify further understanding of information emerging from statements during the interviews. I contacted the English/Language Arts Content Specialists and Supervisor to secure a list of the approximately eight schools currently participating in Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators. These schools included teachers who have adopted the FAME model as a school or grade level, while some teachers within the County have completed the FAME County level course to learn more about how to implement formative assessments and success criteria with their students. Additional documents collected from participants furthered my knowledge of Understanding by Design (UbD), scrolling, essential questions, transfer goals, cornerstone tasks, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), literacy, the newly implemented Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME), and digital learning.

Marzano (2007) and Guskey (2011) advocated changing instructional and assessment practices to improve standards-based instruction. The use of document collection allowed a variety of visual sources that will help explain the changes in instructional and assessment options. This type of data collection gathered further information that would not be shared in an interview or focus group process. Since the goal is to determine the impact of standards-based reform on instructional practices, I needed concrete evidence in the form of artifacts to help paint a complete picture. Creswell (2013) recommended analyzing public documents such as official memos, archived materials, minutes and newspaper articles.

Data Analysis

Formal data analysis was completed using Moustakas' (1994) seven steps for coding data. The statements from interviews and focus groups, along with documents, journals, and

researcher notes were coded based on common ideas or themes. This process of coding the research data for this study included:

1. Identifying statements from participants and identifying characteristics from the documents collected; horizonalization,
2. Reduction and elimination of outlying data,
3. Identifying and clustering the statements into significant statements,
4. Determining the identified coded themes,
5. Constructing a textural description of the experience,
6. Constructing a structural description of the experience,
7. Constructing a composite description of the essence of the experience.

Through the data analysis process, I strived to discover significant characteristics, patterns or themes to get a better understanding of the lived experiences of participants with the phenomenon of standards-based grading. Moustakas (1994) shared the importance of understanding the essence of the phenomenon under research. Moustakas (1994) stated that transcendental phenomenology describes research as it is, to understand the meaning and essence of the topic. Research remains coded and described in descriptive terms, rather than through interpretive analysis. Moustakas (1994) described intuition as a necessary component with transcendental phenomenology with describing the phenomenon. Through this study, I strived to understand how the phenomenon of online grading and standards-based report cards has impacted daily instructional practices of teachers. The interviews and focus group discussion addressed the changes that have taken place in the classroom with instruction, assessment, and student learning. Teachers described the tools and resources necessary to make standards-based instruction successful in their classrooms. The interviews and focus group discussions

uncovered some pitfalls necessary for teachers to avoid when implementing standards-based instruction and assessment.

Epoche

Moustakas (1994) recommended that a researcher use *epoche*, bracketing out his or her experiences to focus on the experiences from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. First I analyzed my role with the Synergy online grading program and use of standards-based report cards, both as an instructor and as a trainer for the school report card committee. Through the process of describing personal experiences I set aside personal beliefs related to the Synergy program, standards-based report cards, and classroom instruction. Setting aside beliefs on instructional and assessment practices allowed me to focus time and thoughts to the participants in the study. *Epoche* for this study remains noted within a journal of thoughts kept by me throughout the research process to avoid researcher bias.

Examples of journal entries are included within Appendix I.

Horizonalization

Moustakas (1994) suggested that the researcher provide horizonalization, assigning equal value to each statement, by listing statements from participants and identifying characteristics from all of the documents collected. I analyzed transcripts of interviews and dialogue from focus groups, finding statements about how the participants experienced the phenomenon of online grading and standards-based report cards. I strived to develop lists of each statement, not overlapping the statements with other statements. I applied reduction and elimination of outlying data. Next I identified and clustered the statements into significant statements, coding the appearance of the significant statement across the data sets.

Coded Themes

Through the next part of data analysis, I analyzed the significant statements and grouped them into coded themes. This process required multiple readings of my notes and transcriptions, to investigate whether themes readily appear within the research. The grouping into themes involved synthesizing the findings across all three sets of data collection. I synthesized the significant statements from the interviews, focus groups, and documents and grouped them into clusters of information. The phrasing from the transcriptions that relates to separate themes included color-coding by using different colored highlighters. The clusters of themes painted the overall picture of the essence of the lived experiences of the teachers and how the phenomenon of online grading and standards-based report cards changed the teacher's instructional practices. Clusters of themes assist the researcher make sense of a total picture of how online grading and standards-based report cards have impacted teacher instruction and assessment.

Textural Description

The next step in data analysis included writing a thorough description of what happened with teachers during their experiences with online grading and standards-based report cards. Moustakas (1994) described a textural description as a description of the meaning of what individuals have experienced. The description involved examples from the interview transcripts, dialogue from the transcripts from the focus groups, and quotes from the journals and letters in document collection. Samples of descriptions of pictures and artifacts may be included. The section allows a textural description of the lived experiences of the teachers.

Structural Description

In the next part of the data analysis process, I wrote a thorough description of the setting and how this experience with the phenomenon took place. Moustakas (1994) indicated that this

relays "how" the phenomenon was experienced by the participants in the study. This focus included writing about the elementary school settings, detailing classrooms and how the experience with standards-based instruction took place. The structural description shared information on where access to online grading and standards-based report cards occurred, including information about how teachers accessed the Synergy online grading program and report card standards. The structural experience detailed how the teachers experienced standards-based instruction within their classrooms.

Composite Description

The final step within data analysis involved writing a complete description of the phenomenon including the textural and structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) referred to this as a composite description, providing reduction to the essence of the phenomenon. The detailed explanation includes all aspects of the themes, stating the essence of what the teachers experienced with online grading and standards-based report cards. The composite description provided the reader with the complete picture of what I found to be the essence of online grading and standards-based report cards through the three, qualitative measures of data collection.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness to determine validity of a research study is determined by analyzing four aspects: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). The trustworthiness of the study remained established by using triangulation, three different research methods for collecting sources: Interviews, focus groups, and document collection. Creswell (2013) stated that triangulation provides validity to a study by gathering information from different individuals, types of data and methods of data collection. Through triangulation I strived to gather detailed information that answered the research questions, drawing on multiple

viewpoints from teachers who have experience standards-based instruction.

Credibility

To establish credibility in this study, I collected data through triangulation of multiple data sources from interviews, focus groups, and document collection. Creswell (2013) stated that triangulation using multiple sources of data increases the validity and reliability of a study. Credibility remains established through the rich, textural, structural descriptions, and composite descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. Member checks were incorporated to check the validity of the participant's statements. Creswell (2013) identified member checks as a process in which a researcher seeks to provide findings that are authentic and original. I provided transcripts of the interviews and the focus group discussion to each teacher participant to check for accuracy. Member checks allowed participants the opportunity to review transcripts to decide whether descriptions are accurate descriptions of their interpretations about standards-based instruction. Member checks provided confirmability, which is defined as including real information with direct quotes from participants (Schwandt, 2007).

Along with member checks and expert review was completed by a Lead Teacher, who provided a peer review of all documents to check for accuracy. A peer review included a review of all documents providing an external check of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The Lead Teacher viewed pseudonyms for all participants to ensure that confidentiality remains in place. Through the peer review, the Lead Teacher, an expert on standards-based instruction, checked for accuracy, themes, and interpretations. According to Schwandt (2007), member checking and peer review help establish the credibility of a study. Throughout the study, the researcher kept an audit trail of all written data included as part of the research in a secure, locked location. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify an audit trail as a description of all of the

steps taken throughout the research process. A dated audit trail of all activities related to the research study is included in Appendix G.

Dependability

Schwandt, (2007) referred to dependable findings as results that promote reliability and validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define dependability as showing that the research findings are consistent and could be duplicated. Dependability in this research study occurs through the many thorough steps and methods provided to interpret the data. Overlapping methods such as interviews, focus group dialogue, and journal entry submissions provide dependability for the data collected. Through the peer review, audit trail, and secure location of data, the research remains confirmed as having dependable findings. Further research completed by other researchers will be able to be compared to my research methods and interpretations of the data analysis.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described transferability as showing that the research findings are applicable in other similar contexts. The research study provided transferability to further research settings and findings, through a rich, detailed description of the data. Detailed descriptions of the research process and data analysis allow other school systems to compare the standards-based grading phenomenon to their school settings. My hope remains that the research results will be applicable to our school system expanding standards-based grading to the middle school level, as well as other public school systems wishing to implement standards-based report cards along with changes in assessment and instructional practices.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that confirmability provides the extent to which the findings in the study are shaped by the participants and not the researcher's bias or interest. My role with standards-based grading included providing training with the online Synergy grading program. As a library media specialist, my experience was limited or non-existent on classroom instructional programs and changes, use of Understanding by Design (UbD), performance assessments, classroom formative assessments, and Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME.) My home school began using UbD at the start of my research, and did not adopt the FAME model until the 2016-2017 school year, after my research was completed. As a former special education teacher, I am an advocate for students being taught at their instructional level regardless of their grade level placement. I worked to remain neutral throughout this study, as my research findings report the results found through multiple sources of data obtained from elementary schools throughout PRCS.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher and employee of PRCS, I had an obligation to provide accurate, authentic data in my research. As a technology expert and member of the Synergy training staff, I remain viewed as a leader within the topic under consideration. All data collected remained confidential and only used within this research study. Teachers were given a pseudonym to ensure that no repercussions from the county will occur based on the honest answers provided through the interview, focus group, and document collection process. School administration teams did not provide any type of influence over teachers in the sharing of information.

Informed consent given to each participant documented the purpose of the study, time commitments, risks and benefits, and confidentiality of the responses. Each participant of the

interviews and focus group sessions signed the informed consent form prior to the interview or focus group participation to ensure confidentiality of the information. All documents, including audio recordings, transcripts, and signed informed consent remain stored in a secure, locked location. Storage of data in a locked location included all written data: all journals, notes, transcriptions, emails, and copies of handwritten notes to participants. Electronic data of emails or communication was kept in the locked location stored on a flash drive and as a printed paper copy. In accordance with IRB procedures, I will keep all date in a locked, stored location for five years prior to shredding all documents and erasing all recordings.

Creswell (2013) recommended looking at ethical issues at all phases of the research process. The research provided multiple perspectives of the research phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The study shared a detailed perspective on the implementation and effectiveness of standards-based report cards as a way to document student growth and achievement. All data collected provided further implications for training, policies, and implementation of online grading and standards-based grading at elementary schools at the state and national level.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to understand the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards on elementary teacher instruction. This research examined teacher instruction and assessment models, sharing obstacles, and resources necessary for the effective use of standards-based instruction and grading. The population for the study included 74 teacher participants from elementary schools within PRCS. Data included information obtained from interviews, focus groups, and document collection. Data analysis included analyzing transcripts, and coding information based on identified themes. Formal data analysis completed through using Moustakas' seven steps, analyzed the experiences, identified

significant statements from participants, clustered the statements into themes, synthesized the themes into a description of the experiences, and constructed a description of the essence of the experience. This research study provided the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based grading, sharing all of the procedures and tools necessary to promote student growth and mastery of grade level standards.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Standards-based grading, implemented within elementary schools in PRCS in 2013, offered a new online grading program in conjunction with an elementary level standards-based grading report card. This electronic report card was designed to give teachers an objective measurement of student performance, and to focus on the student mastery of grade level standards. Changes in teacher instruction include the use of Common Core State Standards for each grade level, and the use of different assessment practices designed to document student growth, driving instructional practices. Online grading through the Synergy program uses the Common Core State Standards, now referred to as the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards, linked to each subject area assignment, project, and assessment. This chapter provides an overview of the research questions, my researcher's role, and the participants included within the interviews, focus groups, and document collection.

Results from the analysis of data are shared with a composition description of the themes that emerged from the research. The goal remained to dig deeper with recent changes to instructional practices, uncovering an understanding of how this phenomenon of online grading, and standards-based report cards with the use of the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards impacted teachers' daily instructional practices. Prior to the start of the 2015-2016 school year, PRCS Instructional Division established the following desired results, focused on collaboratively, and intentionally planning for all learners by:

- Establishing and using a common language for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional learning

- Maximizing integrated organizational structures, professional learning communities, and an understanding-focused curriculum
- Creating cohesiveness through the alignment of system and school improvement planning and resources

Changes with instructional and assessment practices included the use of UbD, teacher collaboration using a wealth of resources and strategies, and the use of performance assessments and rubrics. The following work described the focus of teachers on analyzing student work and outcomes. Use of the Synergy Online grading program and a standards-based report card allowed teachers to strategically design learning experiences to meet the needs of students. Teacher recommendations for educators seeking to effectively implement standards-based instruction included the resources and procedures necessary for creating a positive culture of learning.

This research study addressed the use of the Synergy online grading program, the PRCS elementary standards-based report card, Measures of Academic Progress assessments, as well as instructional, and assessment changes, with practices of elementary teachers. Understanding by Design (UbD), planning with the end in mind, allows teachers to plan instruction and assessments around big ideas and essential questions. This adheres to the work of Bloom's taxonomy with the use of developing higher order thinking, and critical thinking with students. Learning activities provide students with opportunities to reflect and revise their work, giving adherence to Bandura's social cognitive theory, empowering students to monitor their academic practice. Practices of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Response to Instruction (RTI) focused on students setting learning goals and using feedback from teachers and other students to collaborate with others in the learning process.

Schools focused on teacher implementation of transfer goals and cornerstone tasks during the 2015-2016 school year, designed to focus on the transfer of knowledge regarding standards to real world events, showing true mastery of the content standards when students can apply knowledge to new situations. A committee task force of elementary teachers with ELA Content Specialists wrote 27 cornerstone tasks to be administered multiple times throughout the school year to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. These real-world cornerstone tasks focus on multiple standards with transfer goals, designed to be a formative assessment for teachers to use to inform further instruction. A Digital Learning Plan adopted by the PRCS Schools Board of Education in December 2015, with iPad implementation in February 2016, strategically placed the purposeful use of technology resources and digital tools with students in grades 2 through twelfth grade with the goal of maximizing student learning.

With standards-based instruction, teachers document student grades and mastery of standards through the Synergy program, giving low weighting of points to formative assessments and classwork, and higher weighting of points to projects, and summative assessments. Changes in the structure of teachers planning small learning experiences impacted teacher instruction and assessment methods. To uncover the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based grading, I analyzed three sets of data collection including data from individual interviews, focus group sessions, and document collection from elementary teachers.

Participants

Responses from teacher participants and documents analyzed inform this section, giving a complete picture of instructional and assessment changes with standards-based grading practices of teachers implementing standards-based instruction. The following provides a rich description of all participants informing the research for the interviews and focus groups process.

Five teacher participants completed the interview process and 19 teachers participating in one of the three focus group sessions. All quotes from the participants are presented in verbatim, which included verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to accurately portray all participants' voices.

Interviews – Mrs. Green

Mrs. Green described changes with UbD and planning with the end in mind as having a profound effect on her instruction. This instructor from a rural school provided a wealth of experience with teaching, with strengths in finding multiple resources in all academic areas to support student achievement. She valued her time spent analyzing data, planning learning experiences and guided reading lessons, and using performance assessments with rubrics to document mastery of the transfer of knowledge. Mrs. Green stated, "I need more time to plan. When do you get back and retest the student" (Interview, Mrs. Green, December 7, 2015)? Her classroom provided a welcoming atmosphere, with a large classroom library and a wealth of resources to support student learning. With over twenty years of experience in teaching students in city and rural settings, she relies on developing relationships with students and has a clear picture of student growth through the assessment process. Mrs. Green relayed, "With the make-up tests, couldn't we share? Where's the uniformity if we are all doing something different? We really need somebody making up the tests" (Interview, Mrs. Green, December 7, 2015).

Interviews – Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith retained over thirty years of experience working as a library media specialist in a rural setting. She found that posting I Can statements of an objective written in student language of what the student can accomplish provided a focus for her learners. Mrs. Smith valued time spent planning and gathering resources sharing, "I put time into planning and writing

the assessment first, designing essential questions" (Interview, Mrs. Smith, December 9, 2015). With extensive experience building a library collection, she valued the teachers and students needing leveled text, with Fountas and Pinnell reading levels. Mrs. Smith used student artifacts and assessments, entering grades that provide an accurate reflection of her student's abilities. She shared, "I need time to get documents together. With grades needing to be input at least every two weeks, I need time for reflection" (Interview, Mrs. Smith, December 9, 2015). As a technology and literature expert, she strived for Encore teachers to be included in conversations regarding changes with instructional and assessment practices.

Interviews - Mrs. Miller

Mrs. Miller shared her background of teaching students and working with gifted students as well as struggling learners in an urban setting. She valued the role of relationships and providing students in her Title 1 school with the use of opportunities with technology using MacBook laptops and iPads. With thirty years or more experience of teaching in a Hagerstown city school Mrs. Miller shared, "There is often no time for assessment. I rely on teacher observation and computer-based assessments" (Interview, Mrs. Miller, December 9, 2015). Mrs. Miller strived to meet the needs of all of her students stating, "How do you find time to teach all of the different levels and skills?" (Interview, Mrs. Miller, December 9, 2015). She espoused support for standards-based grading and the 1-4 report card, while she remained realistic that parents still wish to view letter grades. Mrs. Miller collaborated with other educators in her school and the county to gather print and non-print resources to meet the needs of learners. She views student engagement and desire to learn as necessary tools for student success.

Interviews – Mrs. Kelly

Mrs. Kelly worked as a teacher in a suburban school, prior to moving to a role of an Encore teacher within the same school. With less than ten years of teaching experience, she valued the role of technology in providing increased learning opportunities for students. Mrs. Kelly shared the use of rubrics and assessments stating, "I like to use rubrics and it is nice if the students are developing the rubric with me" (Interview, Mrs. Kelly, December 16, 2015). She stated her perception that teachers are divided on how to grade sharing, "Without a rubric, how do you grade?" (Interview, Mrs. Kelly, December 16, 2015). Mrs. Kelly addressed the need for each teacher to have a clear understanding of the standards. Throughout the interview process she remained positive, enthusiastic, and adhered to the belief that excellent planning and instruction leads to student learning for all.

Interviews – Mr. Palmer

Mr. Palmer shared his background as a veteran teacher working in several schools at the middle school and elementary school level throughout his career. He described his projects as very detailed works created by his students. He adhered to the belief that strengths can be found in each artifact sharing, "Not everything can be graded. With grading precision we are taking the human or emotional element out of the grading process" (Interview, Mr. Palmer, December 18, 2015). Mr. Palmer shared concerns for the use of rubrics identifying a concern of rubrics equating student grades to a large percentage range with most students earning a 3 for meeting grade level standards. He adhered to the belief that the vision of standards-based grading should share what students have mastered, concurring with the need for the removal of percentage scores that lead to comparing student grades. Mr. Palmer valued the need for teachers to focus on student creativity and risk taking for learners to provide their best work. As a teacher with

thirty or more years of experience, Mr. Palmer hoped that policies would be put in place to ensure the accurate assessment and grading of all students. He stated, "Students who used to be at a C level are getting the same grade as A and B students" (Interview, Mr. Palmer, December 18, 2015).

Focus Group 1, Sparks Elementary

Sparks Elementary is a pseudonym for a rural school within PRCS. Participants of Focus Group 1 consisted of seven teachers from a wealth of backgrounds regarding years of experience and grade levels taught. Two teachers taught for four years, while the other participants ranged from 11-21 years of experience. All teacher participants were women, six of the teachers working as classroom educators and one teacher instructing gifted students. Three teachers provided answers equating to their roles and beliefs as primary teachers, while four educators worked as teachers of intermediate students. Teachers at Sparks Elementary completed training with UbD and writing performance assessments and rubrics, but had yet to participate in trainings with the FAME model for formative assessments. Participants shared information and provided opportunities for dialogue in a relaxed, enthusiastic environment.

Focus Group 2, Gilbert Elementary

Gilbert Elementary is a pseudonym for suburban school within PRCS. Participants of Focus Group 2 consisted of seven teachers from a wealth of backgrounds regarding years of experience and grade levels taught. Two teachers taught for four to six years, while the other participants ranged from 10-28 years of experience. Five teacher participants were women, while two male teachers participated in the focus group discussion. Five of the teachers worked as classroom educators, while one teacher instructed gifted students and one worked as an instructional support teacher. Two teachers provided answers equating to their roles and beliefs

as primary teachers, while five educators worked as teachers of intermediate students. Teachers at Gilbert Elementary completed training with UbD and writing performance assessments and rubrics, and recently began to participate in trainings with the FAME model for formative assessments. Participants shared information and provided opportunities for dialogue in a comfortable, informative environment.

Focus Group 3 – Campbell Elementary

Campbell Elementary is a pseudonym for suburban school at a small town within PRCS. Participants of Focus Group 3 consisted of seven teachers from a wealth of backgrounds regarding years of teaching experience and grade levels taught. One teacher taught for five years, while the other participants ranged from eight to 29 years of experience. All teacher participants were women in the focus group discussion. Six of the teachers worked as classroom educators, while one teacher instructed students with physical education. Three teachers provided answers equating to their roles and beliefs as primary teachers, while four educators worked as teachers of intermediate students. Teachers at Campbell Elementary completed training with UbD and writing performance assessments and rubrics, and recently began to participate in trainings with the FAME model for formative assessments. Participants shared information and provided dialogue in an open-ended, supportive environment.

Results

Teachers within PRCS used A Framework for Teaching by Charlotte Danielson as the evaluation tool for teacher performance and striving for professional growth. This tool focuses on four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2013). Standards-based grading requires teachers to analyze their instructional and assessment methods, providing higher-order questioning and

engaging lessons for students. During the teacher observation and evaluation process, numerous artifacts are needed to support teacher performance with Charlotte Danielson and support student mastery of skills with standards-based grading. Through teacher reflection on quality teaching and student mastery of skills, teachers are consistently modifying their daily instructional and assessment practices.

The individual interview process in December 2015 and January 2016 allowed for five teacher participants to reflect on their daily instruction, assessment practices, use of achievement data, and their thoughts on how to successfully implement standards-based instruction. Teacher interviews yielded a wealth of data related to instructional practices, student assessment, and student growth and performance. Teachers shared their perspectives in honest, open-ended responses to the interview questions. Participants reflected on their planning, instruction, assessment, and use of achievement data from formative assessments, Cornerstone Tasks, and MAP testing to inform their thinking with standards-based grading. Significant statements from teachers in the interview process included the need for increased planning time, use of common assessments and rubrics, and the need for having a thorough understanding of the standards and grading practices.

Focus group sessions conducted in December 2015 yielded significant data, due to the teacher discussion format, eagerness of participants to share a wealth of information, and allowing the opportunity for teachers to respond to participant statements with further information. Focus group discussions yielded significant data on teacher planning, instruction, and use of formative assessments, stemming from the participation in a discussion format. Teachers shared their use of teacher and student-created rubrics and formative assessments designed to drive their teacher instructional practices. Two focus groups discussed the

implementation of FAME, designed around building success criteria, showing learning progressions, and using teacher feedback self-evaluation and peer evaluation.

The third method for data collection involved the collection of documents, teacher artifacts, including WCPS initiatives, and new policies from October 2015 through May 2016. Teachers at all elementary schools within the school system were emailed in separate emails for each school to encourage their participation with document collection. Documents collected included examples of learning experiences (lesson plans), rubrics, learning progressions and success criteria, formative assessments, summative assessments, and yearly scrolls showing the outline of standards to be taught. Encore (art, music, physical education, and library/media) teachers and special education teachers were encouraged to participate to yield a total picture of changes within instructional practices of all teachers, not just the classroom teacher perspective.

Additional documents included a PowerPoint presentation, and artifacts sharing the work of educators towards literacy, with professional development, and school visits to observe Lucy Calkin's Reader's Workshop. Further documentation showcasing the work of the Essential Curriculum Task Force's Curriculum Renewal Process included providing support to teachers with a YouTube video. This video created for all elementary level teachers for the March 22, 2016 Professional Development Day, highlighted the changes within teacher instruction designed to impact student performance and assessment. Throughout the document collection process several teachers submitted journal entries in a journal or letter format, detailing their thoughts on the implementation of standards-based grading within their teaching domain.

The following information, gathered from all three data collection methods, provides the results of this research study as addressed by each research question. Significant statements

through the use of Moustakas steps of data analysis painted an overall, composite description of the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards on teacher instruction.

RQ1: How has standards-based grading impacted and changed teacher instruction and student learning in the classroom?

Teacher participants shared the need for a complete understanding of the grade level standards including standards one grade level above and one grade level below. "With standards-based grading we look at what's happening in the grade above and the grade below" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Andrews; December 16, 2015). Teachers shared included how to correctly report the learning of students working below grade level. "I find that with my students working below grade level, I give a separate report" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Andrews; December 16, 2015). Several teachers benefited from having the perspective of multiple grades, through recent changes in the grade level taught. "I have more evidence to prove my report card in 2nd grade than I did in kindergarten" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Recent changes to condense standards together resulted in the grouping of grades within the Synergy program. "The report cards have been condensed with standards grouped together. I don't always know what grade they might get for a group of standards until it is calculated" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015).

Knowledge of the standards resulted in a need for teachers to share information with parents through conferences, work sent home, and grades imported correctly within Synergy. With the addition of Parent Vue for the communication of grades one teacher found it "helpful for parents to look in Parent Vue and look at grades for individual standards" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). Teachers reported that his resulted in a mind shift for all stakeholders in realizing the depth of work for all students including kindergarten. "Teaching

kindergarten I realize the standards-based report cards have included a lot more paper pencil work for 5 year olds" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Thompson; December 10, 2015).

Many teachers reached a consensus on how to take grades, with a teacher checklist recommended by focus group participants within primary grades to document mastery, approaching, or not mastering each skill. One teacher shared, "In kindergarten, we changed. It's more of a checklist with a weekly grade based on classwork and observation, not just tests" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). An intermediate teacher shared, "I use rubrics for everything. In the gradebook I use the format of 1-4 (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). In the intermediate grades the same assignment could count for a content grade, as well as a writing grade. One teacher stated, "I'm pulling a writing grade and a science grade at the same time" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Many teachers take less grades and one shared, "I'm picky about what I choose to put in front of them for an assessment. Does it show true depth of knowledge of the standard?" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015). Another replied, "I don't record everything. I wait until there is one focused on the standard" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). Learning styles factored into the dialogue with a teacher stating, "It's a huge move away from rote instruction. We're using what you're teaching and applying it to new situations to see if there was authentic learning" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015). Teachers found themselves more conscientious of making sure that things graded and recorded are standards-based. "It's not so subjective. It's cut and dry. They either met the standard or not" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Stotler; December 17, 2015).

RQ2: How does teacher use of online grading and a standards-based report card change instructional and assessment practices?

Significant statements in response to focus group questions regarding teacher assessment and grading included the shift to most assignments, projects, and tests being scored by a rubric. One teacher shared, "Everything we are assessing and instructing should be scored by a rubric. In the PARCC testing we looked at yesterday, that rubric goes up to a 5, where the rubrics we are using go up to a 4. There's no standard for a rubric it seems" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Cooper; December 10, 2015). Teacher subjectivity came into play with one teacher stating, "I have no idea how that compares to other schools with the rubrics. Maybe I'm scoring someone a 3 and they might be giving them a 4 or a 2. We really have no consistency. There is not a group of rubrics we should choose from" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Michaels; December 10, 2015).

Changes with the implementation of standards-based grading results in rubric scores being entered in place of points within the Synergy system. "In the gradebook we have to give students a 3 out of 4, even if they got a 4 out of 4, because it shows up as exceeding the standard with a 4 out of 4" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Howe; December 10, 2015). Standards were graded separately with one teacher advising, "If I am giving an assessment with three different standards, I need enter it in the gradebook three separate times for three different standards" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Thompson; December 10, 2015). Teachers shared a greater need for reflection take a deeper look making sure all activities are aligned with my assessment. "I include more formative assessments to guide my instruction" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015).

Several second grade teachers advocated for teachers to take assessments themselves prior to sharing a performance assessment for students to complete. "How would we answer

that? Does the assessment ask a fair question and is the rubric answering what we want to ask? We do it ourselves before we ask the students to complete it" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). The types of assessments vary to assist with addressing the needs of all types of learners. "I look at types of assessments and vary the style. I use a variety like exit tickets, clickers, performance assessments. I look at learning styles and keep it varied. You need to see if they are approaching, meeting or exceeding the standard" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015).

Changes with instructional and assessments practices involved the implementation of increased formative assessment opportunities within classrooms. "We're learning FAME for formative assessment, how to take the big idea and learning roles and create success criteria. It's a way to give feedback" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Increased formative assessment allowed more time for students to master the content of grade level standards. "We're looking at data to support if they have met the standard, yes or no. It's a mind shift. We're going to provide lots of opportunities assess and provide feedback. It's not cumulative scores. By the end of the time period we will see if they got it" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). "We are looking at end of year mastery. It's going to look different one marking period to the other. You need to keep open communication with parents" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015).

Additional focus group dialogue centered on the use of the FAME model to support classroom success. Teachers offered suggestions for seeking assistance from other professionals with suggestions on how to support the use of scheduling with teacher planning tools of UbD. "With the FAME model we develop success criteria and set learning goals, getting the kids interested in what they're learning. It's all about taking the standards and teaching richly, deeply,

and well" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Andrews; December 16, 2015). Standards need to be matched as priority standards and supporting standards. One participant shared, "Don't isolate standards" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). "The Lead Teacher has resources that break the standards down" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015).

Teachers noted that instruction and assessment practices changed with increased collaboration and support among teachers. One teacher advised, "Seek help. Find someone who knows what they are doing" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Randall; December 16, 2015). "We have on the spot PD in the hallway or around the mailboxes" (Focus Group Two; Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). One participant shared, "It can be overwhelming how many standards there are. That's why we have a scroll and map out standards. It's a tentative plan, and it groups standards. We have an idea of where we are going and rearrange it if we need to" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015).

Instructors reported that standards-based instruction and grading required a depth of knowledge with regard to grade level standards. "You need to understand the content very well. That's where UbD comes in, looking deeply at the content" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). "Start small. Do one to two things well, and build" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Randall; December 16, 2015). Flexible grouping of students ensured success of students at their level of mastery of skills. "Regrouping within grades levels has helped us. We can focus on what standards those kids need" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015).

One teacher shared, "Has my student met the expectations? Yes or no? I have to give a shout out to FAME and success criteria showing what it looks like to be successful" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). At Gilbert Elementary, "in K-5 you're either a STEM teacher or an ELA teacher, so you become content experts. You get to delve into your

curriculum, but you still communicate with the other teachers to integrate topics" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). This school found success with the implementation of FAME and students actively participating in self-assessment. "Right now we have a FAME cohort that allows kids to create learning progressions" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). "When I don't create a rubric with kids, I get halfway through the project and I think if I had just created the rubric with students. They would know what everything should look like. I like how FAME uses self-assessment and peer evaluation" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015).

The ability to use rubrics often resulted in teachers creating checklists that correspond to a rubric score of 4, 3, 2, or 1. Two teachers shared their thoughts on checklists and the use of rubrics: "I have used checklists of what needs to be included in a technology assignment, that will then show the students in a rubric what they need to do to get a 4 or a 3" (Journal Four; December 18, 2015). "Sometimes I give these checklists to the students ahead of time as they are creating their projects. Sometimes they get the checklist after that have had a chance to use their creativity. Either way, they always have a chance to go back and edit their project, adding to it" (Journal Four; December 18, 2015). Teachers reported that checklists enabled students to check all components of their work to "ensure that they earned a 3 for meeting grade level standards" (Journal Four; December 18, 2015).

The opportunity for students to earn a 4 as exceeding a grade level standard remained a topic through interviews, focus groups, and document collection. One teacher offered, "I want students to have a chance to earn a 4, if they are truly exceeding grade-level standards with their performance" (Journal Four; December 18, 2015). Another teacher added, "I began to use student-created checklists and rubrics with my students as a way for students to know all of the

components of a project and know what they need to do in order to achieve a 3, meeting grade level standards" (Journal Five; January 8, 2016). Teacher concerns over consistency in grading throughout the county with regards to a level 4 included a teacher sharing, "If some teachers allow 4's on rubrics, and some do not, how do we truly know who is exceeding grade level standards?" (Journal Five; January 8, 2016).

In December 2015, the Digital Learning Plan was adopted by Potomac River County Schools for the implementation of digital devices of iPads with students in second through twelfth grade. The Digital Learning Plan focused on a one-to-one initiative for third through twelfth grades, and a one iPad for every two students within second grade classrooms. A goal of personalized learning, combined with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards prepared students to look toward high school graduation and contributions to the global workforce. The iPad initiative reached implementation in elementary classrooms in February 2016, with immediate changes noted by teachers in student engagement and the empowerment of students in their learning. Students assigned with iPads began to carry their device from class to class, using their iPad for instruction, assessments, and digital learning when all of their work was completed. The iPad initiative allowed teachers to further explore apps and multimedia programs to integrate with standards-based instruction. One teacher explained, "A one-to-one iPad initiative will really impact instruction allowing students to complete exit slips, student work, and projects on a digital device" (Journal Four; February 25, 2016).

Documents collected included UbD units, performance assessments, journal entries, and artifacts pertaining to changes in English Language Arts, sharing a focus on literacy, writing, and use of graphic organizers to organize thoughts in the mind of the reader. Teachers submitting UbD templates shared the lengthy collaboration process required with grade level teammates in

order to complete the assessment first, and then backward mapping all instructional activities. Teachers shared specific graphic organizers created for students to use with writing, and to improve comprehension of literary and informational text in reading. Formative assessment and performance assessment artifacts were submitted, with teachers stating that increased assessment opportunities for students provided a clear picture of the level of mastery of a standard, and paved the way for further instruction to increase a student's level of mastery. A special education teacher stated, "Teachers differentiate their lessons and scaffold their instruction, but in the end these students are assessed on grade-level standards, which for some students is still out of reach even with support" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015).

Numerous artifacts collected for document collection were analyzed for related categories, coded into possible themes for instructional planning, essential questions, rubrics, formative assessments, and summative assessments. Upon the completion of the interview and focus group sessions further knowledge was needed by the researcher to understand the impact of the use of Understanding by Design, and FAME (Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators). The researcher requested further documents to be submitted for document collection showcasing the use of FAME, learning progressions, and success criteria created for students to show how to meet grade-level standards.

Permission obtained through the Elementary ELA Content Specialist allowed the researcher to review, and include the Cornerstone Tasks, written and administered to grades Kindergarten through fifth several times per year, as part of this document collection. Further knowledge and inquiry revolved around Transfer Goals, with the researcher attending a professional development sessions regarding Transfer Goals and Cornerstone Tasks. Additional documents included from the Essential Curriculum Task Force helped further explain the focus

on essential questions, backward mapping, and formative assessment. Several research articles were recommended by the ELA Elementary Content Specialist, stemming from Washington's County's collaborative work with Jay McTighe through the Essential Curriculum Task Force.

RQ3: How does data from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and other assessments help teachers plan standards-based instruction?

Teachers discussed the use of MAP to document the mastery of growth throughout the year, including MAP data assisting teachers in planning additional instruction. Many teachers compared the significance of the MAP data as to how it compares with the mastery of grade level standards in the classroom. A teacher shared, "Where is the teacher judgment? What am I seeing in the classroom?" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Randall; December 16, 2015). One participant offered, "MAP data is not always reliable. How is their performance in class? Did they take it serious? In K, 1, and 2 it's read to them and in 3-5 they read independently" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015). Most teachers focused on student growth with one participant sharing, "For MAPS we get to look at the growth kids are making in the content areas. Who is making growth? Who is not?" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015).

Teachers addressed their thoughts on MAP assessments regarding the accuracy of assessing kindergarten and first grade students with minimal experience using technology. A teacher concluded, "Sometimes MAP data was a test of using the computer. By the end of the school year it was helpful" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). Teachers used the information gleaned from MAP testing in a timely manner. One participant offered, "In 3-4 weeks MAP data become irrelevant quickly. You must use MAP data in a timely fashion" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). "With MAPS you need to take the time

to teach deficits. I do need to sit the kid down to teach skills. It gives me a list. For the enrichment group, what is a skill we could work on in a natural progression?" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Intermediate teachers found an opportunity for student self-directed learning, with a participant sharing, "I can do goal setting and strategies with MAPS. Kids can show excitement over a score and take ownership" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015).

RQ4: What do teachers perceive as obstacles to effective use and documentation of mastery of standards with standards-based report cards?

Participants reported concerns over how to instruct and evaluate special education students with one special education teacher sharing, "Students with disabilities are being assessed on grade-level standards, standards in which they are clearly not able to meet" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015). This teacher offered an example in which "a 4th grade student who is reading on a 1st grade level is still given grades for 4th grade standards on the standards-based report card" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015). The teacher stated concerns over parent perception of student progress. "Student's grades can look like they are failing the majority or all of the standards when in reality they could have made much progress in their reading ability" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015). "When these report cards go home all parents see is that their child is failing" (Journal Two, November 17, 2015). Without a separate report for special education students, "standards-based grading has eliminated the ability to factor in progress made toward the standards or effort the student has put forth" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015).

A teacher shared concerns in a document submission over how to accurately and fairly grade special education students. She stated, "There has been little direction or guidance given

to teachers as how to fairly assess the SWD population within our general education classrooms" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015). This teacher shared her desire for special education students to be evaluated with standards at their performance level. She stated, "The I.E.P. team does their best to align these goals and objectives with grade-level standards; however, grade-level standards are not attainable for students who are performing two or more grade levels below" (Journal Two; November 17, 2015). "Standards-based grading has shifted instructional practices from tailoring instruction for students to best meet their needs and meet them at their instructional level to instructing and assessing all students on grade-level standards whether they are appropriate or not." (Journal Two; November 17, 2015).

Another teacher expressed concerns with a journal entry submitted regarding the evaluation of students in the visual arts using rubric scores, sharing that rubrics remove the teacher ability to subjectively measure student creativity. He shared, "I know what I am looking for in a piece of art and my eyes tell me whether the piece was successful, or whether there is room for growth. I have never needed a rubric to measure this process" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). This teacher believes "you cannot accurately and precisely measure an assignment when there is almost always more than one correct answer to the problem" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). "What is the value of taking a subject that is different and making it like every other class the student has during the day?" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). He vowed, "Art is a human and emotional experience, why remove that from the evaluation process?" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). "How do you determine if a 3rd grader is cutting and gluing at a 3rd grade level?" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). "How do we determine how a particular student should interpret a particular image at a certain age?" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015).

The art teacher sharing his concerns stated that "grading art in itself is a creativity killer, because it does not promote risk taking, an essential part of the creative process" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). He stated his concern over a variety of students performing at various levels receiving the same grade as other students. He shared, "Students who used to be at a C level are lumped into the same grade as the former B and A students" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). His beliefs included, "Why even have grades if everyone is getting the same grade?" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015). "Even the absence of failure from the grading process suggests that it is something to be avoided" (Journal Three; November 23, 2015).

RQ5: What additional resources do teachers believe are necessary for continuous improvement of instruction and assessment methods?

Many comments addressed the need for clear communication to parents about the mastery of standards during the report card and parent conference process. A classroom teacher stated in a journal submission, "You should see my parent conferences. It takes so long to explain each report card, making sure each parent understands their child's progress on the standards" (Journal One; November 9, 2015). A kindergarten teacher shared, "Before I used to give comments for parents. Now I need to give a 4, 3, 2, or 1 on how you are doing on speaking and listening that day" (Focus Group One; Mrs. Michaels; December 10, 2015). Parent access to Parent Vue reminded a teacher to share, "I'm better at making sure grades are recorded since parents are checking in Parent Vue" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Stotler; December 17, 2015). Teachers found that parents need training on the understanding of the report cards and content of grade level standards. "You're either basic in it, working toward it, met it, or exceeded it" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). "Show the parents the individual standards. Let's look at growth." (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). A

teacher concluded, “The parents are questioning. They don’t understand. Parents want to know quality. If they see a 2 they think my child isn’t doing his best when they haven’t been given all of the instruction yet on that standard to get to a 3” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015).

Math and percentage scores remained a topic of conversation among intermediate and Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) teachers. “Parents want to know how they are doing in Math. There’s not an overall grade. I can show parents standards, but they want to know how they are doing overall. In middle school they will be an overall grade” (Focus Group One, Mrs. Schultz; December 10, 2015). A GATE teacher shared, “Isn’t a 75 or higher a 3? Kids are getting 75’s and thinking I’m on track, but when they go over to the middle school a 75 is a C. My kid was doing great in elementary school. Now look at them” (Focus Group One, Mrs. Howe; December 10, 2015). Teachers concerns included the comparison of students with various percentage scores. “We have kids getting 98’s and 99’s and they’re getting a 3” (Focus Group One, Mrs. Howe; December 10, 2015).

“I’ve had parents say, “If you gave my kid a grade, what would you give them?” (Focus Group One, Mrs. Michaels; December 10, 2015). Teachers stated that parents need a clear understanding of rubric scores. “A 4, 3, 2, 1 rubric score does not translate into a percentage or a grade” (Focus Group One, Mrs. Davis; December 10, 2015). “You have to get rid of the percentages and discuss language with parents for exceeding, meeting, approaching” (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). Other suggestions from participants included a teacher stating, “Send home instructions. Don’t call a 4 an A, a 3 a B. If assessed in the beginning, keep assessing and don’t forget about it” (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015).

Teacher dialogue occurred on the wording or suggestions related to improving standards-based report cards to assist parents in reaching a clear understanding. One teacher offered, "Too bad we can't replace the numbers with Behind, Most of the Way There, Met, or Exceeding" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). "I'd like a check box that says Everything's Fine, I'm a Little Concerned, or Wow" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). One teacher shared that standards-based grades and FAME success criteria can be used to "drive an assignment. It gives them choices. Why didn't I get a 3? You can go back to see what they need to do" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015).

Gilbert Elementary and Campbell Elementary focus groups stated that the implementation of FAME remains a necessary component for the continuous improvement of standards-based instruction. "One participant shared, "I like the success criteria. What makes a 3? This is everything that I need to do to show my work. It's great for me to do a quick formative assessment" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Stotler; December 17, 2015). One teacher found, "It gets students to use your evidence from the story. What makes a 3?" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). With success criteria students "care about their grades. This is how I get to a 3. I'm seeing them care about working to a 3" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). "Goal setting with rubrics makes it very clear for students. It's really mapping out for students small steps. That's what I need to do to get to the 3" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). One teacher shared the use of self-reflection by students. She stated, "I ask them when I hand their work back, if you could do this over what else would you do? Reflect on what else you could have done. You're giving them an action plan" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015). Self-monitoring of learning was

suggested through a teacher sharing, “I’ve told students as soon as you get two wrong, stop. That’s what you need to work on” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015).

Teachers shared the need of collaboration with teammates for the continuous improvement of instruction. One participant offered, “If you are struggling as a teacher, rely on your coworkers. Use your resources. Everyone struggles. If you are planning well, it will all come naturally” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015). One teacher identified, “I’m not giving so many little grades. I’m building the concept” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). Another participant added, “Know your standards. Try not to go too far. Work with teammates” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). Another suggestion included the use of flexible grouping to allow students to move back and forth. A teacher stated, “It makes it very clear to students, where are you? How can you get there?” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015). Continuous improvement of standards-based instruction occurs through “knowing the standards deeply and well” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015).

Themes

Throughout this research study a wealth of information showing changes in instructional and assessment practices began to paint an overall picture of the lived experiences of elementary teachers implementing standards-based grading. I identified specific statements, concepts, and recurring categories as emerging from the three methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups, and document collection. Codes were created from the data and grouped together by themes to create the enumeration chart listed in Table 2. The enumeration chart lists the significant statements (open codes), the quantity of times appearing across the data set, and the applied themes. Several open codes overlapped or broadened to apply to a larger theme.

Table 2

Enumeration Table

Significant Statements (0pen codes)	Enumeration of open code appearance across data sets	Themes
Planning the assessment first	3	Understanding by Design (UbD)
UbD template	22	
Focus on standards	19	
Posted expectations for students	1	
Encore classes included	8	
Leveled text	3	Literacy
Use of graphic organizers	18	
Use of iPads for instruction	5	Digital Learning
Digital instruction and apps	15	
Apps for differentiated instruction, student empowerment in learning	2	
Student-created rubrics	4	Student Empowerment
Success criteria and learning progressions	20	
Synergy recommendations	3	Use of Synergy
How to input grades	5	
Reporting Multiple grades for content and writing	4	
Standards grouped	5	
Synergy instructions	10	
Formative assessment	18	Assessment
Evidence of mastery	5	
FAME	13	
Cornerstone Tasks	24	
Teacher Checklists	3	
Self-Assessments	6	
Rubrics	11	
MAP testing	6	
Lack of planning time	6	Time and
Time needed for assessments	1	

Uniformity and consistency in grading	8	Consistency
Focus on learning standards	12	Professional Learning
Authentic learning	1	
Collaboration with grade level or content team	8	
Vertical teaming	3	
FAME professional development needed	13	
Parent training needed	9	Parent Training
Parent Vue recommendations	3	
Parent understanding of report card	3	

Statements were coded into significant statements, grouped, and then identified by me as relating into overall themes that related to the research questions that guided this study. The identified themes included: UbD, literacy, digital learning, student empowerment of learning, use of the Synergy program, assessment, parent training, digital learning, and time and consistency. Each of the statements were color coded by specific themes using the highlighted colors of royal blue, purple, yellow, green, brown, orange, light blue, red, and pink. Significant statements by themes were calculated with additional documents collected and grouped within each of the theme areas. The themes remain addressed by each research question guiding the study, to provide a composite description of the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards on teacher instruction

RQ1: How has standards-based grading impacted and changed teacher instruction and student learning in the classroom?

Planning with Understanding by Design (UbD)

The use of UbD was identified as a theme with 53 total open codes of significant statements referencing UbD and UbD learning plan documents collected containing learning

experiences with teachers using the UbD template. An interview participant stated, "UbD and planning with the end in mind has certainly changed my instruction" (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015). Teachers focused on writing the assessment first, backward mapping the lessons, and including higher-order questioning. A teacher shared, "I put a lot of time into planning with the assessment first, and designing essential questions" (Interview, Mrs. Smith; December 9, 2015). With the implementation of the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards, teachers began learning the standards and unpacking theme standards with the Rio Method to identify the big ideas as nouns with the stated performances as verbs (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). The modifiers of the standards identified the expected proficiency of how the student was to meet the standard.

Teachers engaged in purposeful planning, focusing on deepening the understanding of students and seeking to transfer knowledge (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Discussions during CFFIP involved teachers discussing whether tasks required students to acquire knowledge or transfer knowledge into real-world tasks. Curriculum planning, backward mapped from the assessment, focused on identifying the desired results, determining the assessment, creating rubrics, and planning the learning experience (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). One teacher stated, "We're trying to make our rubrics before we are assessing, and before we are teaching. So we are starting with the end in mind. Before we did standards-based report cards, I don't think we were making our rubrics before we taught" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Denis; December 10, 2015).

PRCS teachers found that the standards needed to be read and reread, to "know the standards deeply and well" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). The standards were designed to produce long-term outcomes that focus on the completion of all standards through grade 12, to ensure that students are college and career ready. PRCS

classroom teachers articulated that it remained important to understand the standards one grade level above and one grade level below their grade of instruction. "With standards-based grading we look at what's happening in the grade above and the grade below" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Andrews; December 16, 2015).

During the 2015-2016 school year elementary teachers within PRCS received professional development on transfer goals and cornerstone Tasks. Teachers identified transfer goals identified what they wanted students to be able to accomplish, transferring their knowledge to new situations both within their classroom and outside of school (Focus Groups Two and Three; December 2015). The overarching understandings identified what skills they wanted students to achieve, while the essential questions turned those understandings into a question format to have students make meaning and deepen their understanding of a topic. Teachers created performance assessments and formative assessments, often using Google Forms as a way to create a user-friendly assessment with graphics and opportunities for open-ended responses (Interview, Mrs. Smith; December 9, 2015). Teachers in all three focus groups and during interviews stated that they use the UbD process to ensure that students will make meaning of the big ideas and hopefully transfer their learning into new situations.

PRCS teachers focused on developing open-ended essential questions, paving the way for students digging deeper with their learning. Essential questions, designed to be thought-provoking and engaging, sparked class discussions on the topic. These higher-order questions allowed the students to use skills such as prediction, analysis, evaluation, and inference. Through essential questions students strived to transfer their ideas into other content areas. Student use of these higher-order thinking questions requires support and justification for the

answer. Teachers revisited these essential questions throughout the unit to spark student understanding and the quest for further inquiry by students.

Understanding by Design required teachers to start small, with planning a learning experience or two each marking period. A teacher described UbD as "looking deeply at the content" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). Teachers worked collaboratively with their grade level teams or partners to create unit plans together or to divide the planning work among their teammates (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015). As teachers planned engaging lessons and formative assessments educators must analyze student achievement, providing feedback and adjustments to instruction as needed for each student. Self-assessments with peer assessments became a focus with teachers providing the students with tools they need to reflect and gather feedback to improve their work. Through the design of authentic learning and real-world performance assessments, PRCS teachers identified evidence to show students are achieving the desired results.

Elementary level teachers in PRCS focused on developing learning experiences that led to acquisition, meaning making transfer of skills. One Focus Group participant shared her thoughts as the huge shift away from rote learning, to applying student learning to new situations to see if learning was authentic (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015). Through differentiation teachers adjust instruction to meet the needs of groups of learners, identifying activities and lessons needed in their learning experience. Differentiation took place through grade level teaming, small group instruction, or further instruction to an individual student as necessary. A teacher advised for everyone to "use your coworker and resources, because if you are planning well, it will come naturally" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). A teacher implementing digital learning differentiated levels of instruction

through the use of videos within Khan Academy (Journal One; March 9, 2016). This approach created a personalized learning environment for students, leading students to focus on growth within subjects and grade-level standards.

Changes in instructional practices included classroom teachers creating yearly scrolls, mapping out grade level standards into a tentative plan for each subject throughout the school year. A teacher shared, "It can be overwhelming how many standards there are. That's why we have a scroll and map out standards. It's a tentative plan, and it groups standards" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Performance assessments became real world, asking students to transfer their knowledge into new situations that will allow them to practice the skills that they have learned. Cornerstone Tasks were developed by a committee of teachers with the County English Language Arts Content Specialists. These real-world assessments, implemented this school year and given by classroom teachers to assess student learning several times throughout the school year, allowed teachers to focus on using the information from the Cornerstone Task to plan further instruction, with grouping students for specific skills.

Teachers perused the PRCS Essential Curriculum to create essential questions for units, to guide students to deeper meaning within the learning experiences. Essential Questions ask open-ended thought-provoking questions, typically without one single, correct answer. One teacher shared, "I put a lot of time into planning with writing the assessment first, and designing essential questions" (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015). By posting these essential questions for students, instructors could revisit these higher-order questions throughout the unit to check for understanding, serving as an opportunity for students to continue their learning, extending beyond their current knowledge on a topic. One teacher proclaimed, "Don't isolate the standards" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). With standards grouped

and not isolated, teachers engaged in opportunities to integrate the content areas, allowing students to use these essential questions to transfer their knowledge from one content area to another area, with a new situation.

PRCS District Mission Statement aspired for all stakeholders to work together, "Building a community that inspires curiosity, creativity, and achievement" (PRCS, 2016). Discipline Transfer Goals became aligned to unit planning and Cornerstone Tasks, stated as "Students will be able to independently use their learning to ____" (PRCS, 2016). Transfers Goals identified what teachers wanted students to be able to achieve when confronted with new challenges within discipline areas and outside of school. McTighe and Wiggins (2012) identified Transfer Goals as having the following characteristics:

- Long-term, developing and deepening over time
- Performance-based, not based on recall
- Application in new situations
- Requiring thoughtful assessment of prior learning
- Learners apply learning autonomously on their own
- Uses the habits of mind, i.e., judgment, self-regulation, persistence, academic understanding, knowledge, and skill

Long Term Transfer Goals required students to use their learning to perform specific skills within academic disciplines, research, health and physical education, and visual arts. This will require students to analyze, evaluate, draw conclusions, make meaning, and apply knowledge. During this school year Long Term Transfer Goals were developed and shared with teachers identifying specific Transfer Goals for Career and Technical Education, English and Language Arts, Fine Arts, Library/Media, Math, Physical Education and Health, Science, Social

Studies, and World Languages (PRCS, 2016). Teachers collaborated and communicated on learning experiences that use these transfer goals, setting the stage for student learning to be transferred across the content areas, subject disciplines (Focus Groups One, Two and Three; December 2015).

Grant Wiggins (2012) stated that the point of education is not to just get good at school, but to effectively transfer what we learned to other academic areas and throughout life. Student transfer of knowledge in the form of Transfer Goals were aligned with unit planning and Cornerstone Tasks this school year. Printed copies and online documents through the PRCS Faculty and Staff portal, showcased 27 new diagnostic Cornerstone Tasks that included teacher directions, student directions, texts, and rubrics for assessment use. Teachers were encouraged to give the Cornerstone Tasks, making observation and notations of the strategies students used to complete the assessments. The purpose of the challenging assessments allowed teachers to use these formative assessments to make further instructional decisions on the learning needs of the students.

Cornerstone Tasks required students to complete challenging tasks that were not used for grades in Synergy grading, and the assessment was not sent home to parents. Teachers communicated with parents the strengths, and areas of need they observed through these tasks. Cornerstone assessments remained challenging for students, giving teachers artifacts and data to inform instruction. These tasks given to kindergarten through fifth grade students several times throughout the school year, allowed data for discussion during the CFFIP meetings and common planning times. Grade level teams used the data to identify strengths, areas of need, implications for instruction, and necessary resources needed for students. Students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) reading accommodation receive the accommodation on the assessment.

Teachers at their discretion could read the text to students who were not able to read words, allowing for the teacher to note on the assessment the inability of the student to complete the reading of the assessment independently.

PRCS elementary level teachers in the primary grades of kindergarten through third grade implemented a new Science curriculum, Next Generation Science Standards. Twenty-six states with teams, worked with a 40 member writing team and partners to create the Next Gen Science Standards (NGSS Lead States, 2013). These standards adhered to three dimensional learning of practices, crosscutting concepts, and disciplinary core ideas. The Disciplinary ideas, grouped into the domains of physical sciences, life sciences, earth and space, and engineering, technology, and applications of science, provided the framework for the major advances taking place in the world of science (NGSS Lead States, 2013).

Literacy

As the researcher, I identified literacy as a significant theme with 21 total instances of coded significant statements through the interviews and focus groups, along with documents submitted to support the changes with the reading and language arts program. One teacher stated, "I find that we really need leveled text, with Fountas and Pinnell reading levels" (Interview, Mrs. Smith; December 9, 2015). Teachers found success with grouping students into levels of performance for reading and English/Language Arts and STEM. A teacher shared, "Regrouping within grades has helped us. We can focus on what standards those kids need" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Becoming a content expert remains advantageous for the students as one teacher proclaimed, "In K-5 you're either a STEM teacher or an ELA teacher, so you become content experts. You get to delve into your curriculum" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015).

MAP Assessments remained an integral part with identifying student growth in literacy. A teacher shared, “In K, 1, and 2, the test is read to them and in grades 3-5 they read independently” (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015). MAP data allowed teachers to “focus on guided reading lessons” (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015). With MAPS “you need to take the time to teach the deficits. It gave me a list” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Most teachers relied on student progress in the classroom with guided reading groups. A teacher stated, “Where is the teacher judgment? What am I seeing in the classroom?” (Focus Group Two, Mr. Randall; December 16, 2015). A teacher found that she integrated reading and writing into other content areas by “pulling a writing grade and a science grade at the same time” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Students improved in “using evidence from a story. They learned what makes a 3” (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015).

A teacher submitting documents for examples of learning progressions shared the PRCS developed and proposed during the 2015-2016 school year a Literacy Philosophy focusing on belief and action statements designed to support student success with Reading and Writing. She was part of a task force developing and implementing these statements, along with the Cornerstone Tasks:

- “Good readers use strategic behaviors.
- Identifying text structure prepares a reader to determine the organization of nonfiction and fiction texts in order to understand and analyze a text.
- Reading/listening and writing/speaking are critical interrelated components of literacy.
- Phonics and vocabulary can become roadblocks to independent comprehension.

- An essential component to reading instruction is providing the opportunity to read daily with a variety of texts in an environment conducive to literacy.
- Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do as an outcome of grade level literacy instruction.
- A coherent curriculum is mapped backwards from desired performance outcomes, which require the application and integration of multiple standards within a disciplinary literacy approach.
- Students truly understand when they can transfer knowledge and skills to new and novel situations.
- Assessment of disciplinary literacy should be ongoing, align with instruction, and inform instruction" (PRCS, 2016).

Classroom teachers in all three focus groups shared their focus on building libraries of leveled text, often grouped by genres (Focus Groups One, Two, and Three; December 2015). One teacher shared, "I find that we really need leveled text, with Fountas and Pinnell reading levels" (Interview, Mrs. Smith; December 9, 2015). MAP data included documentation of student's Lexile levels for reading, while student classroom libraries include text leveled and labeled by Fountas and Pinnell levels used for guided reading. Furthering teacher understanding of the comparison of these levels of reading ability included profession development on converting Lexile levels to grade level equivalents, as well as to Fountas and Pinnell levels. Teachers shared that reading instruction focused on teaching students the strategies that readers use prior to reading, during reading, and after reading to promote deeper understanding, and student comprehension. These strategies included:

- Prior to reading: The student will set a purpose, preview the title and pictures, determine their interest or needs, and determine the genre of the text.
- During reading: The student will question for meaning, making connections, and asking if the text makes sense. Students may make visualizations using text features and work attack strategies. Graphic organizers serve as note catchers, allowing students to identify important information. By the end of the reading the student can reevaluate the purpose, making meaning through questioning, inferring, making connections, and visualizing.
- After reading: The reader reevaluates the purpose of reading, using strategies of sequencing, drawing conclusions, summarizing, or identifying the main idea with key details (PRCS, 2016).

During the completion of this research study teachers implemented these strategies showcasing what good readers do during reading instruction, getting students to focus on specific use of strategies, with literary and information graphic organizers to use with specific genres of text (Journal One; November 9, 2015). A teacher submitted through document collection a set of adopted structures of text organizers, instructing students on how to apply before reading strategies to identify whether a text includes literary or informational elements. McLaughlin and Overturf (2013) recommended specific graphic organizers for use by students to meet the comprehension needs of complex literary and informational text. The goal remained for students to identify the specific type of complex text, literary or informational, and select the note catcher best suited to increase their level of reading comprehension (Journal One; November 9, 2015). A significant change with instruction occurred with students identifying the type of literature, and choosing the note catcher that best supports their reading. Consistency of using the same graphic organizers began to occur throughout schools as a process of training students on how to

use note catchers to improve comprehension skills (Journal One; November 9, 2015).

Teachers shared that they trained students to visually scan new text to immediately determine whether it included literary or informational text elements, replacing the terminology of fiction or nonfiction text. During the 2015-2016 school year the students received additional instruction on how to identify structure of informational text to determine the meaning and organization of nonfiction text (Journal One; November 9, 2015). Work included examining the author's intended purpose for writing as determined by the text structure that included: description, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, cause and effect, or problem and solution. Specific graphic organizers identified for each of these skills allowed students to prepare and comprehend the text structure through a specific note catcher designed to improve student comprehension. Changes in teacher instructional challenges included finding print and non-print resources to support these specific literary and informational text structures, with teachers instructing students on how to choose the best note catcher to support their reading and comprehension.

English Language Arts instruction through standards-based grading allowed teachers to focus on the use of rubrics, specifically through the Lucy Calkins method, to promote significant improvement of writing skills. Lucy Calkins, the author of professional books including the Art of Teaching Writing, and Units of Study in Opinion/Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing K-8 series, recommends the workshop approach, with the teacher conferencing with students to improve student writing (Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, 2014). Extensive use of the Lucy Calkins rubrics occur during student writing and also have been used when grading Science assessments for a Science grade as well as a writing grade. This approach to writing centers on a whole language approach of improving reading and writing without

phonics instruction.

Classroom teachers in kindergarten through second grade recently implemented the use of Fundations program through Wilson Language to address students' needs for phonics and word attack skills. Wilson Fundations provides systematic lessons emphasizing: phonemic awareness, phonics, high frequency words, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, handwriting, and spelling (Wilson Language, 2016). Newly implemented within second grade during the 2015-2016 school year, Fundations combines phonics strategies to assist readers within 30 minute classroom lessons. This program adheres to helping struggling or at risk readers and provides phonics and vocabulary lessons in conjunction with English Language Arts lessons taught in the Reader's and Writer's Workshop format. Teachers noted that students memorized letters and letter sounds, matching the letter sound to a picture, and applying these word attack strategies when seeing a word they could not identify. Participants shared that Fundations instruction with a solid English Language Arts program provided the students access to all of the skills they need to work toward mastery of grade level standards.

Teachers through document collection shared artifacts from Reading professional development sessions, while other teachers relayed their thoughts regarding visits to see Lucy Calkins Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop in action in other elementary schools within the county. Many PRCS elementary schools implemented Reader's Workshop with an hour block of solid reading instruction without any pull-out programs and push-in interventions occurring during that block. Components of Reader's Workshop included students making connections with prior knowledge, teacher instruction with workshop teaching and conferencing, and student active engagement of reading with students making authentic connections. Small

group instruction included shared reading, guided reading, and strategy lessons allowing teachers to use sticky notes, setting the strategy for students to practice.

Digital Learning

With the adoption of the PRCS Digital Learning Plan, classrooms in grades 2-12 began to see the implementation of iPads in February and March 2016 for personalized student learning. The digital devices were implemented to enhance great instruction. I identified 22 total, coded, significant statements and the inclusion of documents regarding the digital learning instructional implementation. The Digital Learning Plan required for the following components to maximize student learning in an effort to support: self-evaluation and reflection, photo and video annotation, comparing and contrasting, word processing with multimedia, real-time collaboration, mass communication and feedback, personalized learning, project-based learning, formative or summative assessments, user-friendly, and cost effective platforms (PRCS, 2016). Rubrics were developed to assess each digital application, with teachers provided feedback for the digital resources to be deployed to students (PRCS, 2016).

All iPads, controlled by the JAMF Software Management System, arrived with 45 preselected apps for student use and teacher implementation with standards-based grading. iPads deployed to schools for student use included all Google Apps for Education (Docs, Drive, Sheets, Slides, Classroom, Chrome, Maps and Google Earth). Additional apps and iPad functions included iBooks, Notes, a Camera, Safari, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. The following applications were recommended for installation at the elementary school level: Adobe Spark Video, Aurasma, Book Creator, Brytewave for Follett Shelf, Class Dojo, EdPuzzle, Educreations, Evernote, Front Row, Garage Band, Hopscotch coding, iNigma QR scanner, Khan Academy, Lino, Nearpod, Parent Vue, Schoology, Seesaw, Shadow Puppet, Showbie, Side by

Side, Simplemind, Sketchbook, Skitch, Socrative, StudentVue, and Voice Recorder Pro. Stride Academy, adopted during the 2014-2015 school year, remained a focus for personalized learning at school and home, through the use of lessons in Reading and Math.

Changes noted by teachers included increased student engagement and teacher implementation with integration of the iPads for assignments in Google Classroom and exit tickets using Google Forms (Journal One; March 9, 2016). Khan Academy provided lessons particularly in Math, focused on video modules for personalized learning. Students with assigned iPads are able to take their iPads to other classes throughout the school day, including their Encore classes. Stride Academy, purchased by the school system for use on other devices, also was included as a bookmarked app on the home screen of each iPad. Training was provided to each library media specialist, lead teacher, and two other teachers within each school. These four professionals serve with school administration on an iTeam making decisions for ongoing implementation with professional development for the use of digital devices.

The recommendations of teachers from focus group two and three discussions called for increased student empowerment in learning, collaboration, self-assessments, and peer-assessments, all of which are now available on a digital platform, with a device available for each student in third through fifth grades, and one device for every two students in second grade (Focus Groups Two and Three, December 2015). In the future, a Digital Learning Plan will impact teacher instruction and assessment practices, through the use of digital, personalized assignments with less paper/pencil work. Feedback will be quicker to give to students in writing, with the impact of quick accessibility of students and parents to immediately look for grades. Digital devices appeared to result in higher student engagement, possible increased student attendance rates, and higher levels of student performance. With students as proficient users of

digital devices for writing, collaboration, and multimedia presentations, we are preparing students for successful entrance into college and/or the workforce. A teacher shared, "I map out the standards, having a tentative plan of where we are going, and I can rearrange it if I need to (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Scrolls shared with teachers throughout a school in Google Drive gave opportunities for specialists and encore teachers to integrate their instruction with the learning occurring within the classrooms.

Through iPad training, provided to library media specialists, lead teachers, and two other teachers at each school, school-based technology teams provided ongoing support to other staff members. Teachers implemented personalized lessons through Khan Academy training modules, Educreations, i-nigma QR code reader, and many other applications. Exit tickets of formative assessments, and performance-based assessments created through Google Classroom, allowed for responses to be digitally typed, and submitted for electronic feedback. Students completed responses through Google Classroom, with opportunities to edit their responses and then read and respond to their classmate's answers (Journal One; March 9, 2016).

Further training for classroom teachers included professional development sessions on using a MacBook computer and using Air Server to mirror the iPad on the screen of the MacBook. As teachers implemented new apps with the digital devices, one remained hopeful that technology integration will move beyond substitution on the SAMR Model (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition), as teachers seek new strategies for the creation of new tasks. The Digital Learning Plan created a method for personalized learning, designed to maximize student potential of achieving, and to work at and beyond grade level standards. As additional teachers experienced success with the iPad implementation, new applications were vetted by the school technology team for additional use with the student iPads.

RQ2: How does teacher use of online grading and a standards-based report card change instructional and assessment practices in the classroom?

Student Empowerment in Learning

Participants in focus groups shared the need of collaborating with students in the learning process through creating student-created rubrics, learning progressions, and success criteria. One teacher shared, "With the FAME Model we develop success criteria and set learning goals, getting the kids interested in what they're learning" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Andrews; December 16, 2015). With the FAME cohort "kids create learning progressions" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Teachers reported success with student created rubrics. One teacher stated, "When I don't create a rubric with kids, I get halfway through the project and I think if I had just created the rubric with the students, they would know what everything should look like" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015). Students have more control and power over the success of their work. One teacher relayed, "Students can go back and see what they need to do to improve their grade" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). One participant stated, "I ask them to reflect on what else they could have done. You're giving them an action plan" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015). With student empowerment in learning, "flexible grouping allows students to move back and forth" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Harris; December 17, 2015).

In coding the data I found 24 instances of student empowerment in learning within the interview, focus group, and document collection process. Documents submitted included artifacts for student-created rubrics and success criteria learning progressions. FAME strived for students to practice metacognition by reflecting on their thinking, providing self-assessments and peer assessments. One teacher gave a shout out to FAME, sharing that success criteria showed

the student what it looks like to be successful (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015).

One Focus Group participant found that with success criteria, students cared about their grades (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). Another teacher participant stated that he/she gives students the chance to edit their work, stating if you could do this assignment again identify what would you change (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015). These strategies create the mindset of achieving more, and creating growth and knowledge. Teachers noted that when feedback and dialogue exists between teachers and students, the students can set learning goals, taking ownership of their work. A focus group participant stated that students will be told to stop if they have two answers wrong in math, as that tells the student what skill they need to work on (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Roberts; December 17, 2015). Students retained ownership of grades, skills they need to practice, and evaluate their work to the success criteria and learning progressions in place. Through the Digital Learning Plan, iPads assigned to students provide for personalized learning through apps such as Khan Academy.

Teachers implement self-assessments and peer assessments as an opportunity for students to reflect on their work, and make changes or improvements to their assignments. One teacher stated that asking students what else they could have done gave them an action plan to improve their student work (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015). This process of metacognition, thinking about thinking, gave students time to reflect on their progress, checking over their work to seek improvements. She stated to students, "If you could do this over, what else would you include?" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015). When students were asked to critique other student's work, many would give two compliments, and one

suggestion with their feedback (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). Students identified through the use of essential questions that there were often multiple ways to share information or solve real-world problems.

Digital learning through the iPad initiative supported personalized and project-based learning, providing opportunities for self-evaluation and reflection. The Digital Learning Plan, designed to produce high levels of student achievement, empowered students in their learning. Multimedia applications, eBooks, note-taking apps, and Google apps aligned instruction with high quality learning tools. In the digital age, we align our students with assessment rubrics, success criteria, and digital devices to impact their learning. Using iMovie and iBooks allowed students to produce their personalized, documented works. As we prepare students for college and careers, empowerment in their learning allows them to work toward their goals to graduate from high school, becoming productive citizens in the workforce. The PRCS Future Ready commitment provides students with "the education they need to thrive in a globally connected world, finding ways to design, fund, acquire, and maintain the infrastructure that will make connectivity a reality for every teacher and student in the classroom" (PRCS, 2016).

Use of Synergy for Standards-based Report Cards

Teachers implemented the Synergy gradebook to update grades for each subject, linking grades to the standards for their grade level or subject area. I identified 27 coded, significant statements, and documents collected regarding the use of Synergy and policies related to the elementary standards-based report card. Teachers found that assessments could count for multiple grades based on the content, and often writing. One teacher shared, "If I am giving an assessment with three different standards, I need to enter it in the gradebook three separate times for three different standards" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Thompson; December 10, 2015). Focus

group participants advocated for the use of rubric scores in the Synergy gradebook, with one participant sharing, “I use rubrics for everything. In the gradebook I use the format of 1-4” (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher, December 16, 2015). One teacher stated, “A 4, 3, 2, 1 rubric score does not translate into a percentage or grade” (Focus Group One, Mrs. Davis; December 10, 2015). Another teacher offered, “You have to get rid of the percentages and discuss language with parents for exceeding, meeting, approaching” (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015).

Teacher gradebook assignments, projects, and assessments include assignment types, points possible, and maximum points. Weighting of assignments remained advocated with points that remain possible, a maximum score. When first implementing standards-based grading recommendations included weighting an exit ticket for one point, classwork and group work for five points, quizzes and projects for 10 points, and a summative assessment for 25 points (PRCS, 2016). Parents accessed the student gradebook through activation of a ParentVue account. Use of ParentVue remains helpful in having parents monitor classroom grades on a daily, weekly or marking period basis. Students have the ability to monitor their grades through the StudentVue account, which was uploaded to the student iPads with the inclusion of a StudentVue app. Encore teachers of art, music, physical education, and Media give a combination of grades for the first and second marking periods at the end of the second grading period, and a combination of grades during the third and fourth marking period, at the end of the fourth grading period. Through the focus groups teachers shared the importance of keeping the grades updated every two weeks as dictated through the teacher contract, since “the gradebook remains live and parents are watching for new data to determine their child’s performance in school” (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015).

Many teacher participants stated the need to stay away from percentage scores and base grades on a rubric score that corresponds with the grading system of 4 for exceeding grade level standards, 3 for meeting, 2 for approaching, and 1 for not meeting grade level standards (Focus Group One, Mrs. Howe; December 10, 2015). The percentage scores seems to reaffirm the fact that students scoring between a 75 – 100% could achieve the same grade of a 3 for meeting grade level standards. Focus group participants recommended the removal of percentage scores for teachers and parents with one teacher participant reminded teachers that "a student's grade should be the result of whether they have achieved the standard by the end of the marking period, not the culmination of a marking period's grades" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). Many teachers advocated for the removal of the scores of 4, 3, 2 or 1 with the inclusion of words to state that a student knows some, is almost there, has achieved the standard, or is proficient beyond the grade level standard (Focus Groups Two and Three; December 2015).

For students exceeding grade level standards there seemed to be a discrepancy between schools as to whether a 4 could be given on the report card. "Many teachers do not give a 4, as it implies that students must be instructed on above grade level standards" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Michaels; December 10, 2015). With the rigorous standards, teachers have time to teach their own standards, but often do not take the time to go to the next grade level above to teach those standards. With departmentalization of reading and math within a school, it seems to be easier to determine which students are working above grade level. More opportunities exist to earn a 4 if high achieving students are given opportunities to work beyond their grade level standards. The goal is for most students to be meeting grade level standards, and progressing through the rigorous standards each school year. More work remains to be done to learn how to address the

needs of students not meeting grade level expectations, and those students capable of working on the next grade level's standards.

The PRCS Elementary Report Card included academic areas that have been condensed, with many standards grouped together in each subject area. Teachers within Focus Group Two found a condensed report card necessary to avoid having the report card that was the length of a book. One teacher found it beneficial to give a separate report to the parents of students working below grade level (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Andrews; December 16, 2015). With the combination of standards for the Synergy program and PRCS Report Card, many teachers were unsure of what the final grades would look like when calculated. Instead they preferred to focus on what their students have met and ensured that their final grades were an accurate representation of whether they have met the standard. Conversations with parents were requested to ensure that parents understood the language of exceeding, meeting, and approaching (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). Teachers found it important for parents to understand that a grade of a 2 does not mean that a child is not doing his/her best. It is possible that the student has not had all of the instruction needed, or is simply not at the point of mastering the standard.

Many PRCS teachers envisioned a different system in place instead of numeric scores of 4, 3, 2, or 1. One teacher suggested the terminology of behind/below, most of the way there, met, and exceeding (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Recent learning progressions created for literacy use the terms beginning to excel, working toward excellence, achieving excellence, and surpassing excellence. A focus group participant stated that it would be welcoming to have checkboxes to share everything's fine, a little concerned, or wow, things are great (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Stotler; December 17, 2015). Most importantly parents need

to have a clear understanding of the standards and how their child is able to perform. Many parents still wish for the letter grade system, due to the familiarity of how parents received grades. Using the Synergy Online Grading program and the Standards-based Report Card required the buy-in of teachers and parents, and the need still exists for ongoing professional development in these areas.

Positive classroom culture encouraged teachers and students to be partners in the learning process. With standards-based instruction many opportunities with hands-on instruction, technology, and writing allows students opportunities to use creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. Teachers used laptops with document cameras and projectors to display information. With the shift to iPads and other devices for student learning, a more personalized learning process takes place. A focus on questioning and discussion allows students to make connections, arriving at a new meaning of complex text. Teachers focused instructional time daily using appropriate instructional strategies that assisted students in acquiring knowledge, making meaning, and transferring their knowledge to new situations.

All grades provided within the Synergy program were linked to grade level or subject area report card standards. At the end of the marking period, teachers evaluated the students' calculated rubric grades for each standard to determine if the Synergy grade was an accurate representation of the student exceeding, meeting, approaching, or not meeting the standard. Teachers attained the opportunity to change the grades, if needed, to accurately represent whether the students were mastering, approaching, or not meeting grade level standards. Exceeding the standard, at a level 4, was given rarely as most students needed significant time to master the rigorous standards of the current grade level.

Teachers collaborated with administrators, other teachers, and students through Google Drive, with the use of shared documents created through Google Docs, Google Slides, and Google Forms (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). Use of the email collaborators feature, allowed teachers to share learning experiences, assessments, and agendas for meetings or professional development sessions. Teachers created Google Classroom pages for students to be able to complete assignments, collaborating and critiquing with classmates. Through Google Classroom instructors posed a question to students, shared an assignment, or assigned a performance assessment. Feedback was provided quickly and directly to students through comments, and numeric grades.

Changes in classroom instructional practices often required students to: design something from the information learned, illustrate what you have learned, justify your answer, compose an argument supporting your view, evaluate work against a rubric, and test what you learned in a new situation. Students explored strategies for learning and different methods of obtaining the same answer, or conclusion. Through critiquing student work through self-assessment, learners find ways to improve their work or deepen their understanding of the topic. As teachers began to teach the art of peer assessments, students look for positive examples within the work of other students, and offered meaningful suggestions for other students to consider when seeking feedback for their performance.

RQ3: How does data from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and other assessments help teachers plan standards-based instruction?

Assessment

As the researcher I identified the topic of assessment as coded 86 times during the significant statements and categories identified by me through interviews, focus groups, and

document collection journals. As part of the document collection process teachers submitted examples of formative assessments, performance assessments, rubrics, and the new Cornerstone Task assessments given in grades K-5. One teacher stated, "Everything we are assessing and instructing should be scored by a rubric" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Miller; December 10, 2015). Teachers found importance in taking a "deeper look making sure all activities are aligned with the assessment" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015). The importance of including more formative assessments, with multiple activities aligned with assessment was a topic among the focus group discussions (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams; December 16, 2015). Changes in instructional and assessment practices included a shift from the focus on summative assessment scores to the need for formative assessment to impact and guide instruction.

One teacher shared that her team evaluates whether each assessment asks a fair question and if the rubric answers what they want to ask. "We complete it ourselves before we ask the students to complete it" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). While kindergarten and first grade teachers use checklists to evaluate level of mastery, one second grade teacher found that she needed more assessment evidence to prove her report card (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Teachers used multiple sources of data to support whether a student has met the standard (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). A teacher shared, "There is often no time for assessment. I rely on teacher observation and computer-based assessments" (Interview, Mrs. Miller; December 9, 2015). "We're looking at end of year mastery. It's going to look different one marking period to the other" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Teachers found standards-based grading to be objective. "It's not so subjective. It's cut and dry. Either the student met the standard or not" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Randall; December 16, 2015).

Students in fifth grade completed the Maryland School Assessment for Science, while other subjects will be assessed in 2016 using PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). The PARCC Assessment included practice tests for teachers to use as instructional tools throughout the school year. Formative tasks were available for grades kindergarten through second grade, third through eighth grade, and high school (PARCC, 2016). The annual assessments included tests for English Language Arts, literacy, and math for students in third grade through twelfth grade.

Elementary students in PRCS continued to the take the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing, three times per year, in first through fifth grades. This summative measure documents student growth, while teachers use the information on MAP to identify specific skills for small group instruction, particularly within guided reading. Teachers found it necessary to use MAP data in a timely fashion (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). One teacher stated to "compare their MAP results with their performance in class" (Focus Group Two, Mr. Williams, December 16, 2015). MAP testing in kindergarten, no longer conducted during this school year, often found that student difficulty included navigating the computer, making it difficult to determine the accuracy of a score until the end of the kindergarten school year. MAP assessment results include a RIT score for Reading and Math, with focus given on student growth from one assessment to the next. Teachers strive for students to obtain the RIT score needed for students to be considered performing on grade level by the end of each school year.

Formative assessments consisted of teacher observations, checklists, and exit slips designed to measure student understanding. Through Charlotte Danielson, PRCS teachers have learned to identify artifacts to document teacher instruction and student growth. Kindergarten

and first grade teachers relied heavily on teacher observation checklists, while teachers beyond kindergarten begin to look for actual student artifacts in the form of student responses, exit tickets, or written classwork to document student understanding. Through the Synergy program, scores entered for formative assessments received a low weight. Summative assessments and projects included a higher weight in the Synergy program, since the teacher expectation at that point strives for student mastery of the standards.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) developed a Formative Assessment Team, designed to share best practices with formative assessment across the state of Maryland. Information provided through MSDE Webinars, Online Modules, and county classes trained teachers in the Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME) process. Participants in focus groups two and three highly recommended the use of FAME for furthering student growth and achievement. FAME requires a yearlong commitment to professional development, consisting of five training modules, activities to implement with students, building a community of practice, guided by leadership support (MSDE, 2016). The FAME program allows teachers to refine their formative assessment practices to create student success with standards-based instruction. Approximately eight schools collaboratively adopted FAME for their school during the 2015-2016 school year, while some teachers completed the professional development process to implement FAME only in their classroom.

Teachers at eight elementary schools, as well as other teachers throughout the county who completed the MSDE course implemented FAME as a method for providing feedback, success criteria, and learning progressions with formative assessments. Increased time was spent establishing and communicating to students learning goals, criteria for success, and rubrics designed to clearly identify all aspects to be included within student assignments. Teachers

began creating performance assessments that required students to transfer knowledge to real world situations. Preparing students for real world assessments, and completing Cornerstone Tasks became a focus during each marking period. Teachers found that most of what was assessed was being scored by a rubric on a 1-4 scale, while PARCC Assessments are measured on a 1-5 scale. Much time spent giving rubric grades, serves as a better correlation towards the standards-based report card than grades with percentages or points.

MSDE (2016) used the FAST SCASS/CCSSO definition (2006) to define Formative Assessment as a process used by educators during student instruction, providing feedback to adjust instruction designed to improve student achievement. Participants in Focus Groups two and three at Gilbert and Campbell Elementary Schools advocated for further professional development assisting teachers to implement aspects of the formative assessment process through FAME. This FAME process involves having teachers dialogue with students, use feedback to guide instruction, and to promote student reflection of their work. Scaffolding of instruction by teachers, interaction with peers for feedback, and self-monitoring prepared students to be independent learners, empowers students to monitor their own academic progress. Teachers provided formative assessment through questioning and observing along with requiring students to write reflections or summaries, and answering questions in writing, with feedback to promote further learning (Focus Groups Two and Three; December 2015). The summative assessment process remained necessary to measure the quantity of learning on a particular set of topic. Through quizzes, tests, and state assessments teachers determine the quality of learning for a unit, or school year (MSDE, 2016).

The role of formative assessments required teachers to assess “different sized chunks of learning, providing information on the degree to which students have progressed toward meeting

specific instructional learning targets, and ultimately to the mastery of the content standard" (Heritage 2010, through MSDE, 2016). Through establishing learning goals, success criteria, and learning progressions the learner identifies where they are going (MSDE, 2016). Teachers noted that feedback with self and peer assessment identified what the learner needs to accomplish to meet the standard. This process allowed students to work toward self-regulation, deciding on learning goals, identifying how to reach these goals, and producing authentic, quality work (Butler and Winne 1995, through MSDE, 2016). Setting learning goals remained a strategy for getting students invested in what standards they are learning, achieving the mastery of grade level standards.

Providing assessment opportunities through formative and summative assessments provides teachers with significant data to inform instruction. Students require feedback to produce greater learning, furthering their growth toward the standards. Focus group discussions centered on providing many opportunities to formatively assess, providing feedback to students, to ensure their growth on standards (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Recommendations included using varied formative assessments designed to meet different learning styles and suggestions of not using formative assessments for student grades, with the goal in mind of seeing whether the student is exceeding, meeting, approaching, or not meeting the standard (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015).

MAPS and use of student data became an opportunity to assess student growth and evaluate the skills that students could master next. "We look at the growth kids are making in the content areas. Who is making growth? Who is not? (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Fletcher; December 16, 2015). All elementary classroom teachers in the County use MAPS to assess students in first through fifth grade as an objective assessment. When school MAP data was

used by teachers for comparison with other County schools, student growth was compared in schools with similar demographic populations. One teacher advised for instructors to use MAP data to "take the time to teach the deficits" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). This educator stated that for her high ability students, MAP data provided a list of skills that she could instruct within a natural progression of the curriculum (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). Teachers identified MAP data as one part of the puzzle to use in conjunction with student performance within the classroom.

One teacher shared the need to "look at types of assessment and vary the style, using exit tickets, clickers, and performance assessments" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). Focus shifted to providing many opportunities for students to learn, assess, provide feedback, and then determine if the student has mastered the material, rather than seeking a grade based on cumulative scores (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). With standards-based grading evaluation became objective, based on individual performance, with teachers determining who continues to make growth with student learning. Many assignments, such as science, were graded for a content grade and also used for a writing grade. With standards-based instruction teachers spend time looking for students showing a true depth of knowledge with mastery of the standards (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Wood; December 17, 2015).

Teachers shared that instructors strategically aligned all instructional activities with the performance assessment, giving increased formative assessments, designed to guide further instruction. Instructors looked for additional ways to increase effective feedback to impact student learning. Establishing learning roles, developing success criteria, and providing student with feedback encouraged learners to strive for end of year mastery of the learning standards.

Student-created rubrics and use of the FAME models of self-assessment and peer assessment provided students with tools to reflect and improve their work.

Teachers within Focus Groups at Gilbert and Campbell Elementary Schools exemplified enthusiasm over the implementation of FAME. Use of FAME included use of feedback from teachers with peers, aligned with the purpose of learners self-reflecting upon student work to make changes and improvements. Teachers implementing FAME diligently provide students opportunities to compare their work, or the work of peers with a rubric with the goal of providing positive, useful feedback. Effective use of self-assessment, with feedback from teachers and other students guided students to show persistence towards the mastery of grade level standards, and learning goals.

During the research study rubrics remained a significant component of the assessment process, with rubrics designed this school year to correlate with the 4, 3, 2, and 1 mastery levels given within the Synergy gradebook. Teachers suggested that rubrics should correlate with the Synergy grade book and Elementary Report Card; however the rubric for PARCC includes levels 1-5 (Focus Group One, Mrs. Cooper; December 10, 2015). Many teachers expressed concerns of how rubrics compare to rubrics completed by other teachers in different schools. Teachers recommended a bank of rubrics with assessments within a computer database as a way to help with the lack of planning time, and the desire for consistency with rubrics, and assessments (Focus Groups One and Two; December 2015)..

RQ4: What do teachers perceive as obstacles to effective use and documentation of mastery of standards with standards-based report cards?

Time and Consistency

A recurring theme throughout the Interview, and Focus Group discussions included the lack of available time to complete all of the tasks required for standards-based instruction. The researcher noted 15 coded, significant statements and documents regarding time and consistency. Teachers relayed their concerns over the lack of planning time to focus on planning instruction with finding all of the resources that are needed (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015, and Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). A teacher shared, "I have no idea how my grading compares to other schools with the rubrics. Maybe I'm scoring someone a 3 and they might give them a 4 or a 2" (Focus Group 1, Mrs. Michaels; December 10, 2015).

Many teachers wished for someone else to be available to write the curriculum and establish the performance assessments (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015, and Focus Group One, December 10, 2015). Several teachers suggested looking to other school systems through the Internet to find units, while some teachers found resources through Pinterest, or Teachers Pay Teachers (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). Time remained needed to gather documents for units as well as reflecting on what strategies and lessons were successful with learners (Interview, Mrs. Smith; December 9, 2015).

Time occurred as a concern for re-teaching and retesting of students with standards-based instruction (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015). One teacher shared, "How do you teach students in 50 minutes, with different levels of ability, and different skills needed?" (Interview, Mrs. Miller; December 9, 2015). When teachers focus on grade level standards, many teachable moments can be lost, and sometimes difficulty exists in meeting the needs of all students within a variety of academic levels within the classroom. Teachers provided recommendations to have an online database of County learning experiences, rubrics, and assessments for teachers to draw

upon (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). Another suggestion included having curriculum specialists available to create meaningful learning experiences, similar to the groups of instructors who have authored Cornerstone Tasks for the county. One teacher shared, "Where's the uniformity if we are all doing something different" (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015). With the implementation of the PRCS Essential Curriculum Blueprint in May 2016, consistency may occur through the use of a framework with enduring understandings, essential questions, a cornerstone task map, and grade level modules to provide resources and support student learning.

An additional topic arose over the possible lack of consistency in units, assessments and rubrics (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). Teachers expressed concerns as to how their units and assessments compare to other schools (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). While consistency in using rubrics occurred, teachers expressed concerns that rubrics do not look the same and may assess student performance differently. Some instructors used percentages to assess student mastery, and percentages still are visible within the Synergy grading program, regardless of whether the teacher uses rubrics. While students receive standards-based grades in elementary school, a student earning 75% will head to middle school feeling successful, and learn in middle school that a 75% equates to a C letter grade. Consistency within teacher instruction and grading may lead to increased parent understanding of the process of standards-based grading.

Teachers recommended the use of rubrics to use with every assessment, most teachers express the desire to eliminate percentage scores from student work, and eliminate these percentages from showing in the Synergy Online grading system (Focus Groups One and Three; December 2015). Teachers stressed that percentages focus the instructor on the learning of

students within a ranked system of ability, with teachers comparing the performance of a student with that of their classmates. A student earning a 75% could achieve the same mastery score of a 3, along with a student achieving a 98% (Focus Group One; Mrs. Howe; December 10, 2015). With standards-based instruction, teachers evaluate data to support whether a student has met the standard. Many teachers viewed this mastery as a yes or no and considered the student as mastering the standard, approaching the standard, or not yet meeting the standard. Students working above grade level on the next grade level standards would have the opportunity to achieve a 4, exceeding a grade level standard.

Teachers within encore areas, such as art, music, physical education, and library/media expressed concerns over equating every student grade to a rubric scores. In those areas, teachers prefer to use class points, often relying on teacher judgment of a student's performance. Special education teachers expressed concerns over students with IEP's mastering grade level material that they are not able to master (Journal Two; November 17, 2015). Teachers implemented extra written reports for parents, documenting the mastery of skills below grade level, or showing the approaching of grade level standards, and the student's performance with on grade level material. The use of percentages within the Synergy grading program, through students earning points, did visually show teachers a comparison of how students were performing against other students within the class.

Educators shared a concern over the lack of time to adequately plan units and assessments, learning experiences, with consistent formative assessments to guide instruction. Many professionals advised to have a computerized database of assessments, rubrics, and learning units for teachers to use. Teachers agreed to share information with colleagues, seeking ways to find new ideas, including using Teachers Pay Teachers and Pinterest to find engaging

activities and lessons for students (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). Many school systems and teachers using Common Core State Standards, or the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards have available resources online that teachers have used for instruction. Teachers shared the desire to have other curriculum specialists creating assessments and learning experiences to be shared throughout the County school system, allowing teachers to focus on the academic performance of students (Interview, Mrs. Green; December 7, 2015).

RQ5: What additional resources do teachers believe are necessary for continuous improvement of instruction and assessment methods?

Professional Learning

Within the research study I noted 37 total codes, instances of significant statements and documents submitted addressing the topic of teacher professional learning to further knowledge and expertise on standards-based instruction. Many documents submitted included artifacts to further professional learning with FAME, Cornerstone Tasks, and Transfer Goals. Teacher planning and focused, personalized, professional learning occurred within grade level teams, CFFIP meetings, and during after school teacher planning. A teacher stated that collaboration is highly evident in her school with "on the spot PD in the hallway or around the mailboxes" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder; December 16, 2015). The 2015-2016 school year saw the implementation of three school-wide Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) for teachers in all elementary schools. This job-embedded professional learning remained designed around enhancing teacher planning, examining student achievement data, planning collaboratively for school improvement, and focusing on continuous learning designed to improve teacher instruction. The PLC's adhered to the PRCS Aspirational Goals of:

1. All students will read at or above grade level by 3rd grade and continue to read at or above grade level thereafter.
2. All students will meet grade-level and course-specific curriculum standards each year and complete an established educational and/or career pathway by graduation.
3. All students will be provided quality instruction using appropriate technology.
4. All students will be healthy, informed, and productive citizens.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) met after school once a month, with each teacher devoting time to one or more PLC's within their school building. Each PLC identified a facilitator and addressed goals for their learning community that is supported by the School Improvement Plan. Most schools identified a Technology Committee, Wellness Committee, and a curriculum-based reading or math PLC, designed to improve student performance. Each PLC identified resources and topics for professional learning. The goal of the PLC strives to enhance teacher planning, leading to increased student performance and continuous improvement with identified school goals.

Additional professional learning for teachers occurred during CFFIP meetings conducted by the Lead Teacher in each school. The teachers examined achievement results, spent time planning summative assessments, and used Understanding by Design to backward map, planning two week learning experiences. unpacking the Standards, identifying standards that work together, identifying major and minor standards, now referred to as priority standards and supporting standards, and creating summative assessments prior to planning daily instruction. A teacher shared in the Interview process that "teachers need to have a clear understanding of the

standards" (Interview, Mrs. Kelley; December 16, 2015). This understanding remains needed for teachers to use shared information learned through intensive book studies that furthered their professional growth and learning.

Through further professional learning with UbD, teachers focused on the desired results for all students, identifying their lessons around big ideas and essential questions. Assessments were used to check for prior knowledge, and evaluate a student's performance based upon certain criteria or rubrics. Through the CFFIP and teacher planning process, grade level teams planned learning activities that engaged students, requiring students to reflect on their work. UbD templates for lesson planning through learning experiences show established goals and desired results through acquisition of skills, making meaning, and transfer of knowledge. Stage two of the UbD plan included the performance task, with any other resources needed by the instructor, while stage three documents the key learning events, and instruction to take place throughout the learning experience. Data analyzed during the CFFIP process, allowed teachers to reflect on student work, providing feedback to students and planning for further instruction.

Parent Training

With the Synergy Online grading program, parents and students have immediate access to student grades. I noted 15 total coded statements and documents supporting the need for parent training. Teacher requirements for importing grades stipulate by contract that grades are updated every two weeks. One participant stressed the need to "keep open communication with parents" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Walter; December 16, 2015). Immediate access to student grades provided parents immediate communication on how their child performs with standards-based instruction. A teacher found it "helpful for parents to look in Parent Vue and look at grades for individual standards prior to the report card or conference" (Focus Group Two, Mrs. Snyder;

December 16, 2015). Parents remain familiar with letter grades and express difficulty understanding the standards-based grading system. A teacher shared that parents say, "If you gave my kid a letter grade, what would you give them?" (Focus Group One, Mrs. Michaels; December 10, 2015).

With the consolidation of the standards-based report cards into clusters of standards grouped together, teachers worked with parents, communicating the mastery or non-mastery of grade level standards. A teacher found she was "better at making sure grades are recorded since parents are checking ParentVue" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Stotler; December 17, 2015). Consistency remained needed for teachers and parents throughout the county, as to whether the format of the gradebook uses points with percentages, or rubrics scores. Providing differences within the grading system can result in confusion or questioning by parents with multiple students within the elementary grades.

Parents questioned teachers through parent conference sessions regarding changes in the student report card (Focus Group One; December 10, 2015). Additional time allotted at parent conferences allowed teachers to explain the standards that students were meeting, approaching, or not meeting on the grade level report card. With the report card being live, teachers focus on updating grades within the two week guidelines established by the Central Office, or more often if needed. One teacher found that she was "not giving so many little grades, but rather building the concept" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015). Grades imported through the Synergy program were accessible through the Internet with TeacherVue. Training was provided to parents on using ParentVue, and with the implementation of iPads students learned how to access StudentVue. "Parents are questioning. They don't understand. Parents want to know quality. If they see a 2 they think their child isn't doing their best, when they haven't been

given all of the instruction yet on that standard to get to a 3" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Callahan; December 17, 2015). One teacher wished there were check boxes that said, "Everything's fine, I'm a little concerned, or wow" (Focus Group Three, Mrs. Hudson; December 17, 2015).

Summary

This qualitative research study provided an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of elementary level teachers with the instructional and assessment changes implemented with standards-based instruction. Teacher participants included a total of 74 teachers with participation within interviews, focus groups, and document collection. Teachers were listed by pseudonyms with significant statements identified throughout the results and themes sections of this chapter. Through the steps of the data analysis and coding the data, I identified significant changes with the implementation of online grading and a standards-based report card through the following themes: UbD, student empowerment of learning, literacy, digital learning, use of the Synergy online grading program, assessment, time and consistency, professional learning, and parent training.

Teachers shared that students needed to be provided with multiple opportunities to document mastery of a standard. Educators implementing FAME worked to create rubrics, success criteria, and learning progressions for each assignment and/or performance assessment. Instructional changes occurred with use of UbD, designing essential questions, developing real-world assessments, and using formative assessments to guide instruction. With the implementation of the Digital Learning Plan personalized learning through digital devices prepared students to use critical thinking and creativity, while collaborating and communicating with their peers. Many instructors recommended removing percentages from the online grade

book, as percentages allowed for teachers to compare each student's ability within the class to that of their classmates.

Teachers noted the need for consistency in grading to document mastery of the standard, approaching the standard, and not meeting grade level standards. Clear and consistent grading policies need to be implemented to address the numeric 4 for exceeding grade level standards, and the report card numeric grades given to special education students who are working below grade level standards. Implementation of online grading and a standards-based report card requires increased time for educators to plan, provide assessments, evaluate the data, and provide further instructional opportunities based on students' needs. Teachers offered suggestions on creating a computerized database of instructional units, student-created rubrics, and performance assessments, allowing teachers to have more time to focus on student mastery of the standards. The recommendations reported included the need for common assessments, rubrics, and units that would allow for more consistency when grading student performance.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

PRCS elementary teachers implementing standards-based grading, strategically provided teacher instruction using the premise of UbD, with teachers planning with the ending assessment in mind. The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of elementary teachers shifting to the use of the Synergy Online Grading Program, with the PRCS Standards-based Elementary Report Card. Research questions provided the basis for the study seeking to identify instructional and assessment changes, use of data to drive instruction, obstacles to effective use of standards-based grading, and resources necessary for the successful implementation. Data collection through interviews, focus groups, and document collection painted a synopsis of the lived experiences of teachers implementing standards-based grading.

Focus with instruction shifted during the 2015-2016 school year, with teachers implementing long-term transfer goals, asking students to analyze, showing their results using information in a real world context. This chapter concludes the study with a summary of the findings, and a discussion of the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards related to instructional practices and prior literature. Implications for effective use of a standards-based report card show the tools necessary for the development of instructional and assessment changes. Limitations of the study were addressed and recommendations for further research describe the future research needed as a result of these findings.

Summary of Findings

This transcendental, phenomenological study addressed the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing a standards-based report card. Numerous changes

within instruction were documented through the data collection methods of interviews, focus groups, and document collection. This qualitative study strived to address these research questions, finding the following results:

RQ1: How has standards-based grading impacted and changed teacher instruction and student learning in the classroom?

Standards-based grading impacted teacher instruction through the use of UbD, with teachers planning an assessment first, backward mapping to plan smaller units of study. Grade levels teams collaborated to plan a yearly scroll of learning standards, which will give way to the PRCS essential curriculum blueprint of linked priority standards with supporting standards. A common language paved the way for current practices in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional learning. Student learning focused on the posting of essential questions, goal setting, student empowerment in learning with self-assessment and peer assessment, use of rubrics, and the implementation of cornerstone tasks and transfer goals. These instructional and learning changes for students support the work of Bloom (1956) for higher-level thinking, and Bandura (2001) for empowering students to self-regulate, monitoring their own academic progress. Teachers used a variety of formative assessments to guide teacher instruction. Use of increased assessments supported prior recommendations by Marzano Research (2016), Guskey and Jung (2012), and Wiliam (2011) calling for grading reform and increased formative assessments to guide student learning.

RQ2: How does teacher use of online grading and a standards-based report cards change instruction and assessment practices in the classroom?

Teacher instructional and assessment practices for online grading shifted to increased use of formative assessments, with a teacher focus on end of year student mastery of the standards.

Grades entered on a timely basis became visible for parents in ParentVue and students within StudentVue. Separate grades for content and writing were often given for the same assignment. Increased use of Google Classroom provided opportunities for collaboration, increased teacher feedback, and documentation of the mastery of standards through project-based learning. Teachers of kindergarten and first grade concurred on the use of checklists to analyze the mastery of skills, while teachers used a variety of assessment opportunities to document the mastery of grade level standards. Increased opportunities for formative assessment and mastery of content existed to promote further student learning.

RQ3: How does data from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and other assessments help teachers plan standards-based instruction?

Teachers analyzed data from the MAP Assessment to provide mastery of skills, document student growth since the previous assessment, and plan for guided reading instruction or timely re-teaching with enrichment activities. With a Synergy gradebook set up for rubrics instead of points, teachers input grades that document the extent of mastery of each standard. Increased opportunities for formative assessment, with feedback and re-teaching provided, paved the way for a higher level of performance on real-world assessments. Educators perused data from MAPS and other assessments with the goal of student learning experiences becoming authentic learning, which transfers student knowledge into other situations and disciplines.

RQ4: What do teachers perceive as obstacles to effective use and documentation of mastery of standards with standards-based report cards?

Teachers advocated for the use of rubric scores as opposed to percentage scores to document the extent of knowledge on a standard. Percentage scores led to comparing students within the class and questioning a grade of a 3 having a wide range of scores, from 75%-96%.

Effective use of standards-based report cards requires time for planning, analyzing data, re-teaching, and providing opportunities for gifted as well as special education students to receive instruction at their academic level of performance. Consistency of grading practices ensured accurate grades for students specifically for the use of 4's and 2's, and use of rubrics and their interpretations to identify the extent of mastery toward a standard. A numeric system of grading was suggested to employ words that will focus the teachers on student mastery of standards and not comparison of levels of students receiving a 3 on the report card. Lack of parent understanding of a standards-based report card required parent training and additional conversations with parents through the parent/teacher conference process.

RQ5: What additional resources do teachers believe are necessary for continuous improvement of instructional and assessment methods?

Teachers subscribed to the belief that additional formative assessment training remained a necessary component of professional development through Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME). Training provided professional learning with developing learning progressions and success criteria for students. Continued personalized professional development training remained needed through Professional Learning Communities to offer opportunities for teachers to grow with reading strategies, a focus on writing across the content areas, and infusing digital resources within standards-based instruction. Teachers required leveled text on students' guided reading levels, in print format and as eBooks, to use throughout instruction. School Improvement Teams continued to identify resources for planning and instruction, including providing leveled text and use of specific graphic organizers to support comprehension of text. The PRCS Essential Curriculum Blueprint provides an alignment of standards, resources, and

Cornerstone Tasks. Grade level teams revisited this document to realign their learning experiences to best meet the needs of their students.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to understand of the impact of online grading and standards-based report cards with teacher instructional practices for elementary school teachers within PRCS. Data collection included information obtained through interviews, focus groups, and document collection. This study examined the use of UbD for teacher planning and assessment methods, use of rubrics with performance assessments, and the implementation of cornerstone tasks. Increased opportunities existed to provide formative assessment for students, with the goal of using the data to change and plan teacher instruction.

Schools began implementing Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators (FAME) as a way to provide increased formative assessments, and learning progressions with success criteria for individual standards. PRCS teachers implement increased formative assessments, with assessments of instruction becoming an assessment for instruction to guide student learning. This supported the recommendations of Marzano Research (2016), Guskey (2011), Guskey & Jung (2012), Wiliam (2011), proponents of formative assessments calling for an increased opportunity and variety of formative assessments, to guide teacher instruction. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) supported the use of increased formative assessment opportunities, without the risk of a grade or penalty for incorrect answers.

Through the use of rubrics with the success criteria and learning progressions offered with the FAME program, students become empowered, taking ownership of their learning and identifying the skills needed to master grade level standards. This study confirmed the recommendations of grading reform proponents Marzano and Heflebower (2011), as well as

Guskey and Jung (2012), extending previous research with the implementation of learning progressions. Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001) supported the work of empowering students to monitor their academic progress, self-regulating their learning. Vygotsky's socio cultural theory and zone of proximal development supported the process of scaffolding instruction, peer collaboration, interaction with peers, and creating an independent learner (Vygotsky, 1986). With increased use of formative assessments, teachers planned assessments before instructional units, seeking to guide further daily instruction to meet the needs of learners. FAME adhered to the use of teacher feedback, self-assessments, and peer assessments, allowing the students to reflect on their learning for improvement of their work.

Schools selecting to implement standards-based grading with an online grading program needed to develop and implement an essential curriculum prepared to meet the needs of all learners. With UbD, teachers focused on planning with the end in mind, identifying priority and supporting standards and then planning the assessment with a rubric. Use of essential questions concurred with Bloom's taxonomy with providing opportunities for higher order thinking and critical thinking. With the focus on transfer goals, teachers shifted toward guiding students to a deeper understanding of the material to allow the students to transfer their knowledge to other subject areas and real world events. Through the use of cornerstone tasks for multiple grade levels, teachers assessed the transfer of knowledge by students, using the assessment as a formative tool to guide further instruction or re-teaching.

Education shifted from multiple choice memorization, and student learning without a real world context. Teachers instruct with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards, providing engaging lessons with content and encouraging use of literacy skills. Feedback through formative assessment remained relevant and responsive to student needs, with teacher

feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment guiding students to improve their work. Math standards equated to a focused and coherent math curriculum, with the selection and use of mathematical strategies and specific practices as a focus. Standards-based instruction transferred from a covered-based curriculum to an understanding focused curriculum.

PRCS teachers engaged in collaboration working through professional learning communities designed to engage in the successful sharing of strategies and resources. Multiple opportunities for professional learning allowed teachers to grow with curriculum and technology. Educators worked in grade level teams through the CFFIP process, or common planning, to collaboratively and intentionally plan for learners of all levels. Vertical teaming allowed teachers to collaborate with the grade level above and grade level below the instructor's standards.

With the shift from the Maryland School Assessment to the standards-aligned PARCC Assessment, teachers strived to provide clear information and data to parents on each child's progress toward the mastery of grade level standards. Multiple opportunities to learn, guided by formative assessments, geared students toward the learning progressions needed to master grade level standards. Increased formative assessments allowed for ongoing teacher and student dialogue, descriptive feedback, and student reflection throughout the instructional process.

PRCS reported success with students involved with the creation of rubrics, success criteria, and learning progressions. Marzano and Heflebower (2011) through their research supported and advocated for the increased use of student generated assessments and rubrics. Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001) promoted the use of outcomes-based expectations, goal setting, and self-regulation of learning. Teachers reported increased work ethic with students striving to achieve the components of an assignment to show mastery of the standard. Bandura

(2001) promoted the concept of self-efficacy, with students believing in their ability to succeed in specific situations. Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001) supported empowering students to self-regulate their learning with gaining knowledge through observations and interactions. This research remained supported in the work of Wiliam (2011) who advocated for sharing criteria for success and including learners as instructional resources to self-regulate and support one another.

The digital learning plan supported the work of theorists Bloom, Bandura, Vygotsky, and Dweck with creating a learning environment supporting higher level thinking, self-regulation, collaboration with peers, and developing a model of achieving student, personalized growth. Carol Dweck (2015) advocated for a growth mindset where intelligence remained not fixed, with achievement possible through perseverance and hard work. iPad applications such as Khan Academy allowed students to work at their pace supporting the use of differentiated instruction to meet various instructional levels. Teachers worked at their own pace learning to use digital technology, implementing applications to improve student engagement with their learners. Allowing educators to visit other classrooms and schools to explore other options for teaching, assessing, student grouping, and scheduling may bring about consistency through the county as to the most successful methods to use with standards-based instruction.

Implications

PRCS elementary teachers report success with the use of specific curriculum programs integrated with the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards: Lucy Calkins Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop, Fundations, and Next Gen Science. The arts, technology, science, and social studies became integrated throughout standards-based instruction. Teachers shared success with the implementation of rubrics and removal of percentages from the online

grading, as much as possible. Educators considered the proper use of points or percentages to assess curriculum areas of math and the visual arts. The PRCS essential curriculum blueprint shared in May 2016 offered a collaborative effort of priority and supporting standards, with grade level resources. During the 2016-2017 school year recommendations of a computer database of rubrics, instructional units, and assessments through a curriculum blueprint improved consistency in standards-based instruction. By sharing successful strategies and resources throughout the county, teachers focused on the formative assessment process and the tools needed to guide daily instruction.

At the start of implementation of a standards-based grading, the focus for all stakeholders applied to use of the Synergy Online Grading system and learning to computerized system for selecting and reviewing grades for classwork, group work, formative assessments, projects, and summative tests. The true work began when teachers began to strategically design a PRCS essential curriculum blueprint using the Common Core State Standards, now identified as the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. The goal remained for students to achieve mastery of the grade level standards. Are the needs of the gifted learners who are capable of working beyond the rigorous standards met? Students identified through an IEP received special education services, and yet must meet the requirements of grade-level standards, when ideally the students may need to work a year or two below grade level. Further work with learning progressions resulted in a shift towards differentiated instruction and students working at their academic level of performance, not necessarily their current grade level. Use of differentiation would support the work of UDL by providing appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, while maintaining high expectations of achievement for all students.

Online grading remained an excellent strategy for providing immediate feedback to parents and students on the mastery of grade level standards. Further work with parent training would provide an understanding of students approaching a standard, receiving a 2 on the report card, with students mastering a standard, receiving a score of a 3. Opportunities need to be put in place for students to exceed grade level standards, receiving a score of a 4, along with students working below grade level receiving a separate report documenting progress towards the mastery of standards. A standards-based report card should provide clear information on the mastery of grade level standards, with supplemental narrative information provided to parents as needed. Webb's Depth of Knowledge relayed the complexity or depth of understanding required to explain an answer (Hernan & Linn, 2014). Consideration may need to be given to changing the numeric report card system of mastery to words that could include the depth of the student's understanding of each standard.

Educators may need to consider removing the formative assessment process from the cumulative scores of a student's overall grade. Instructional feedback could be provided in the form of words, not the documentation of a mastery grade for all formative assessments. Student percentage scores may lead to a comparison of students, while comments are seen as teacher feedback to help students improve. The mastery of a standard required documentation with artifacts; however, mastery does not mean the ongoing performance throughout the marking period. Is the student mastering the standard, approaching mastery, or not meeting the standard at the end of the marking period?

The Synergy program determined an average of student grades and rubric scores for specific standards. Daily grades require noting for instructional planning purposes, and students' feedback should be evaluated as mastering the standard if they complete all criteria for mastery

by the end of the marking period. Guskey and Jung (2016) recommended trusting teacher judgment with grading, using the evidence to determine the fair and accurate grade to assign for each report card standard. Teacher goals remained for students to transfer their knowledge on specific standards to real-world situations and other curriculum areas. Through transfer goals and applying curriculum to real-world situations, students can begin to transfer their knowledge to achieve authentic learning, achieving a deeper understanding with retaining skills for life.

As teachers continue to develop a dynamic and continuous revision progress for the essential curriculum, increased focus identified measured success with teachers becoming content specialists with departmentalized teaching. English language arts teachers can delve into the content areas of reading, writing, and social studies, while STEM teachers can focus on teaching science, technology, engineering, and math. Grouping students into flexible groups for similar skills can allow teachers to focus on guided instruction, with increased feedback to students provided. Looping of students, who continue with the same instructor during the following school year, can provide a benefit for students continuing their learning with a teacher who has already developed a relationship, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the student.

Limitations

With standards-based grading and use of rubrics, there remained an element of teacher subjectivity, as to the extent that the student has mastered or exceeded the standard. Teachers continued to receive training with instruction changes, and variance among teacher knowledge existed within schools and throughout the school system. Some schools choose to focus on moving ahead with further training with formative assessments through Maryland's FAME (Formative Assessment for Maryland Educators) Model. Other schools remained focused on

continued professional development work with teacher planning through Understanding by Design, and grade level team creation of rubrics and performance assessments.

Limitations of the study included the use of one school system, located in a suburban and rural environment. The information obtained through focus group conversations may be specific to each school and not generalized to all areas of the county, state, or national level. The immediate and swift change to a standards-based report card without feedback from stakeholders represented a dramatic change in the type of report card (Marzano & Kendall, 1996). One limitation remains the amount of feedback during the 2013-2014 school from teachers, regarding the full implementation of the online grading and standards-based report cards at the same time. To mitigate this concern, research was conducted after teachers spent at least one year working with online grading and standards-based report cards. Prior experience will allow time for the teachers to learn the grading program and receive professional development, prior to acknowledging thoughts and perspectives regarding the use of standards-based grading.

Another limitation stemmed from current changes made with the procedures for determining numeric grades for students exceeding grade level expectations. To mitigate this concern research was completed after teachers have implemented changes during the first and second marking periods of the school. This allowed instructors and schools to focus on clear and consistent policies for determining numeric report card grades. Teachers provided feedback on the use of rubrics, performance tasks, common assessments, and subjectivity in determining student mastery or exceeding of grade level standards. Research reflected the lived experiences of teachers, sharing changes in instruction and assessment to promote student learning, with standards-based grading.

Recommendations for Future Research

A standards-based instructional grading program required an essential curriculum, with the teacher backward mapping, planning the assessment prior to the instructional learning experience. Standards were grouped and taught together, not taught separately in isolation. An online grading program served as a strategy for documenting student mastery of the standards, and providing timely feedback to parents and students on daily or weekly academic performance. For true transfer of knowledge, students required engaging and rigorous lessons, providing multiples opportunities of formative assessment with teacher feedback. 21st century learning requires students to become experts with digital devices, encouraging the use of personalized learning tools that seek to develop and extend creativity and critical thinking skills.

Additional research could address the use of common assessments and common rubrics, analyzing how schools compare with educational settings without uniform assessments and rubrics. With online grading and standards-based report cards, teacher instruction continued to have an impact through implementing a coherent essential curriculum, while providing a thorough instruction and assessment plan with ongoing student feedback. Wiggins (2012) shared that decades of education research suggested, and supported the idea that teaching less and providing more feedback can produce greater student learning. With clear information provided to students and parents on the student mastery of grade level standards, teachers provide the pathway to instructional practices, preparing students for the transfer of 21st century skills and knowledge needed for success with college, careers, and life-long skills.

Further research could potentially analyze the effects of standards-based grading when taught in a digital learning format. With the shift to a digital learning plan and personalized student learning, further work remains needed to analyze the use of standards-based instruction

and grading with digital learning. Teachers implemented the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) Model designed to analyze how teachers are using technology into learning experiences for students (Schrock, 2013). As educators strive to create learning environments where all students learn at a higher level, personalized differentiation occurs throughout instruction. Webb's Depth of Knowledge categorized student learning tasks according to the complexity of thinking: recall and reproduction, skills and concepts, strategic thinking, and extended thinking (Hernan & Linn, 2014). PARCC Assessments use complex thinking skills, falling into the higher levels of three and four on Webb's Depth of Knowledge (Herman & Linn, 2014). As students prepare for these rigorous PARCC Assessments, further research could address the rigor of standards-based instruction and the ability of students to transfer knowledge to real word situations.

Summary

As school systems begin to shift to standards-based report cards, with changes in instructional practices many initiatives must be firmly in place. An online program that focuses on rubric scores linked to standards must be available. Educators need an essential curriculum blueprint of priority standards with linked standards, resources, and cornerstone tasks that are used to plan backward mapped learning experiences. Increased levels of formative assessment with a variety of assessments options should provide the use of learning progressions and success criteria. Involving students within the creation of rubrics, learning progressions, and success criteria appears to result in higher levels of student understanding, with the ability for collaboration with peers and peer feedback in place.

Use of standards-based instruction with essential questions supported the work of Bloom's taxonomy (1956) advocating for higher order thinking. Bandura's social cognitive

theory (2001) addressed self-efficacy and the need for student collaboration, and self-monitoring of student learning. Vygotsky's socio cultural theory and zone of proximal development (1987) provided credence to the support of students learning standards through learning progressions, with each student at their academic level of performance. With increased focus on student growth, depth of knowledge, and personalized learning, real world experiences with learning provides students with authentic learning, preparing young learners for success throughout life.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 14, 2015

Ann Mathena
IRB Approval 2272.091415: Understanding the Impact of Online Grading and Standards-Based Report Cards: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Instruction at the Elementary Level

Dear Ann,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix B: Informed Consent – Interviews

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/14/15 to 9/13/16
Protocol # 2272.091415

Informed Consent – Interviews

Understanding the Impact of Online Grading and Standards-Based Report Cards:
A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Instruction at the Elementary Level

Ann Mathena, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to join a research study to explore the use of online Synergy grading and the implementation of standards-based report cards. You were selected as a possible teacher participant because of your prior use of standards-based grading report cards. I ask that you read this form and ask questions prior to agreeing to be in the following study.

Background Information:
In this research study, I am investigating the use of online grading and standards-based report cards for elementary students. This research study will uncover the procedures, pitfalls, and resources necessary for successful implementation of standards-based grading. Through the use of interviews, focus groups, and document collection, I will determine the lived experiences of teachers with standards-based instruction, assessments, and online report card grading. I am looking for up to 10 teachers from elementary schools in Washington County Public Schools, who have used standards-based report cards and Synergy online grading for at least one previous school year, to participate in an interview.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate in the interview process in this qualitative research study, you will be asked to meet with me at a location chosen by you to respond to five open-ended questions regarding standards-based grading. Your responses and all statements will be audio recorded.There will also be the opportunity to share any feedback that you think would be beneficial for other school systems to consider when implementating standards-based grading. It is anticipated that the interview process will take 30 minutes of your time. You may stop participating in the interview process at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
This study has risks that are no more than a participant would encounter in everyday life. This study does not involve any benefits to you. However, through your reflection, you may gain a deeper understanding of the needs of school systems for successful implementation of standards-based instruction and online grading.

Compensation:
Your name will go in a drawing to win a $10 gift certificate to a local restaurant.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. I will take the following

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/14/15 to 9/13/16
Protocol # 2272.091415

steps to keep information about you confidential, and to protect your rights as a research participant. Your interview will be audio recorded and all responses transcribed in writing. I will remove identifying information such as your name and school to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. All audio recordings and printed transcriptions will be kept in a locked, secure location and stored for three years. You will have the opportunity to verify the written transcription of your interview responses to vouch for authenticity. The lead teacher at my home school will peer review all documents that are included within the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Washington County Public Schools. You have the right to leave the study at any time. If you choose to leave the study, any responses to the interview questions will be erased, printed transcriptions shredded, and not longer be included within the qualitative research study.

Contact Information
If you have questions or concerns about the focus group process of this study, please call or email me at any time. Contact Ann Mathena at [redacted] on my cell at 410-253-0726, or by email at amathena@liberty.edu. My faculty advisor, Dr. David Nelson, can be contacted by email at dcnelson3@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134 , Lynchburg, Va 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

☐ This study involves audio recording of the interview. I give consent for my responses in this interview to be audio-recorded.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Informed Consent – Focus Groups

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/14/15 to 9/13/16
Protocol # 2272.091415

Informed Consent – Focus Groups
Understanding the Impact of Online Grading and Standards-Based Report Cards:
A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Instruction at the Elementary Level
Ann Mathena, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to join a research study to explore the use of online Synergy grading and the implementation of standards-based report cards. You were selected as a possible teacher participant because of your prior use of standards-based grading report cards. I ask that you read this form and ask questions prior to agreeing to be in the following study.

Background Information:
In this research study, I am investigating the use of online grading and the standards-based report card for elementary students. This research study will uncover the procedures, pitfalls, and resources necessary for successful implementation of standards-based grading. Through the use of interviews, focus groups, and document collection, I will determine the lived experiences of teachers with standards-based instruction, assessments, and online report card grading. I am looking for 6-10 teachers from your school, who have used standards-based report cards and Synergy online grading for at least one previous school year, to participate in a focus group.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate in the focus group process in this qualitative research study, you will be asked to meet with me in a quiet, closed-room location in your school chosen by me. Your responses tofive open-ended questions regarding standards-based grading will be audio recorded and transcribed by me at a later time. There will also be the opportunity to share any feedback that you think would be beneficial for other school systems to consider when implementating standards-based grading. It is anticipated that the focus group process will take 45 minutes of your time. You may stop participating in the focus group process at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
This study has risks that are no more than a participant would encounter in everyday life. This study does not involve any benefits to you. However, through your reflection, you may gain a deeper understanding of the needs of school systems for the successful implementation of standards-based instruction and online grading.

Compensation:
610 teachers at your school will be selected to participate in a focus group in this studyrticipate in the focus group discussion your name will go in a drawing to win a $10 gift certificate to a local restaurant.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
9/14/15 to 9/13/16
Protocol # 2272.091415

stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. I will take the following steps to keep information about you confidential and to protect your rights as a research participant. Your focus group discussion will be audio recorded, and all responses transcribed in writing. I will remove identifying information such as your name and school to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. All participants of the focus group discussion will be reminded to maintain confidentiality and privacy regarding discussion responses. All audio recordings and printed transcriptions will be kept in a locked, secure location and stored for three years. You will have the opportunity to verify the written transcription of your focus group discussion responses to vouch for authenticity. The lead teacher at my home school will peer review all documents that are included within the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Washington County Public Schools. You have the right to leave the study at any time. If you choose to leave the study, any responses to the interview questions will no longer be included within the qualitative research study. Any responses that you gave will be erased, transcriptions shredded, and the data will not be included as part of the research study.

Contact Information:
If you have questions or concerns about the focus group process of this study, please call or email me at any time. Contact Ann Mathena at [redacted], on my cell at 410-253-0726, or by email at amathena@liberty.edu. My faculty advisor, Dr. David Nelson, can be contacted by email at dcnelson3@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134 , Lynchburg, Va 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

☐ This study involves audio rcording of the focus group discussion. I give consent for my responses in this discussion to be audio-recorded.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: Informed Consent – Document Collection

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 9/14/15 to 9/13/16
Protocol # 2272.091415

Informed Consent – Document Collection
Understanding the Impact of Online Grading and Standards-Based Report Cards:
A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Instruction at the Elementary Level
Ann Mathena, Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to join a research study to explore the use of online Synergy grading and the implementation of standards-based report cards. You were selected as a possible teacher participant because of your prior use of standards-based grading report cards. I ask that you read this form and ask questions prior to agreeing to be in the following study.

Background Information:
In this research study, I am investigating the use of online grading and standards-based report cards for elementary students. This research study will uncover the procedures, pitfalls, and resources necessary for successful implementation of standards-based grading. Through the use of interviews, focus groups, and document collection, I will determine the lived experiences of teachers with standards-based instruction, assessments, and online report card grading. I am looking for at least 100 teachers throughout the County, who have used standards-based report cards and Synergy online grading for at least one previous school year, to participate in the document collection process.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate in the document collection process in this qualitative research study, you will be asked to upload documents into a shared Google Drive folder. These artifacts can include lesson plans, assessments, exit slips, rubrics, or journal entries regarding your feedback on standards-based grading. Documents can be uploaded at any time throughout the research process from September - December 2015. It is anticipated that this may take 5 minutes or more of your time to upload documents. You may stop participating in the research process at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
This study has risks that are no more than a participant would encounter in everyday life. This study does not involve any benefits to you. However, through your reflection, you may gain a deeper understanding of the needs of school systems for the successful implementation of standards-based instruction and online grading.

Compensation:
If you participate in the document collection your name will go in a drawing to win a $10 gift certificate to a local restaurant, one certificate given away each month in September, October and November 2015.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
9/14/15 to 9/13/16
Protocol # 2272.091415

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. I will take the following steps to keep information about you confidential and to protect your rights as a research participant. I will print each document and remove identifying information such as your name and school to ensure the confidentiality of your submitted documents. All documents will be kept in a locked, secure location and stored for three years. The lead teacher at my home school will peer review all documents that are included within the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Washington County Public Schools. You have the right to leave the study at any time. If you choose to leave the study, any responses to the document collectionwill be erased, print copies shredded, and not included as part of the qualitative study.

Contact Information
If you have questions or concerns about the document collection process of this study, please call or email me at any time. Contact Ann Mathena at [redacted] on my cell at 410-253-0726, or by email at amathena@liberty.edu. My faculty advisor, Dr. David Nelson, can be contacted by email at dcnelson3@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134 , Lynchburg, Va 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: *Open-Ended Interview Questions*

Online Grading and Standards-based Report Cards

1. What changes in instructional practices in your classroom have you noticed with the implementation of standards-based grading?
2. What differences have you noticed with assessment practices and student learning in your classroom?
3. How have you used data from the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) to help you plan instruction with whole group, guided reading, or intervention/enrichment activities?
4. What do you think is necessary for the effective use of standards-based grading?
5. What would you like to share about data-driven instruction, MAP assessments or standards-based report cards?

Appendix F: *Open-Ended Focus Group Questions*

Online Grading and Standards–based Report Cards

1. What changes can you share in regards to your instructional and assessment practices?
2. What types of assessment tools and strategies would you recommend to other teachers and why?
3. How does your MAP data help you plan instruction?
4. What recommendations would you give to other teachers who are struggling with the use of standards-based grading or instruction?
5. What protocols can be put in place to best meet the needs of all students in a standards-based grading classroom?

Appendix G: Audit Trail

9/11/2015	Approval from Potomac River County Schools to complete research pending IRB Approval from Liberty University
9/14/2015	IRB Approval from Liberty University to conduct research
9/21/2015	Emailed PRCS Director of Testing to request a list of elementary schools showing the most growth on MAP Assessments
9/25/2015	Applied Epoche, setting aside all prior judgments and opinions on standards-based grading to take a fresh look at the phenomenon for research
9/28/2015	Interview and focus group questions piloted at home school
10/05/2015	Requested for three PRCS lead teachers to provide an expert review of the interview and focus group questions to check for clarity
10/12/2015	Emailed elementary teachers to request documents for document collection
11/09/2015	Sent a second email to elementary teachers requesting documents for document collection
11/16/2015	Emailed elementary teachers requesting participants for individual interviews
11/23/2015	Emailed elementary principals from three schools showing growth on MAP Assessments, to request focus group sessions within their school
12/1/2015	Sent a second email to three elementary principals to secure a date for focus group sessions
12/07/2015	Interview 1 held, 30 minutes (after school)
12/09/2015	Interviews 2 and 3 held, 30 minutes each (personal day)
12/10/2015	Focus Group 1 held, 45 minutes (after school)
12/12/2015	Transcribed Interview 1

12/13/2015	Transcribed Interview 2
12/14/2015	Emailed reminders for Focus Group sessions 2 and 3
12/16/2015	Interview 4 held, 30 minutes (personal day)
12/16/2015	Focus Group 2 held, 45 minutes (personal day)
12/17/2015	Focus Group 3 held, 45 minutes (after school)
12/18/2015	Interview 5 held, 30 minutes (after school)
12/19/2015	Transcribed Interview 3
12/20/2015	Transcribed Interview 4
12/30/2015	Transcribed Interview 5
1/2/2016	Transcribed Focus Group 1
1/9/2016	Transcribed Focus Group 2
1/11/2016	Member Checks provided for Interview Participants
1/16/2016	Transcribed Focus Group 3
1/19/2016	Email sent to teachers from eight elementary schools participating in FAME to request additional documents related to learning progressions and success criteria
1/25/2016	Member Checks provided for Focus Group Participants
2/2/2016	Additional Lead Teacher peer reviews all documents to check for accuracy
2/13/2016	Significant statements are identified from transcriptions, began to write textural description
2/20/2016	Significant statements, categories, and ideas from documents are coded into themes.
2/29/2016	Email sent to request additional documents related to the Digital Learning Plan
3/7/2016	Email sent to request use of the PRCS Cornerstone Tasks for document collection

3/12/2016	Began to write structural and composite descriptions
3/22/2016	Curriculum Renewal Professional Development sessions
4/25/2016	Lead Teacher peer reviews documents to check for accuracy on themes
5/26/2016	Reviewed New PRCS Blueprint of Standards, final review of significant statements and ideas coded into themes

Appendix H: Examples from Document Collection

Teacher-Created Questions and Rubric

A Bouquet of Wild Flowers by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Journal Questions

Literary Response and Interpretation Questions

1. What does each species of flower symbolize for the author? Are there any flowers that have special meanings for you? Why?
2. How do the author's memories, brought forth by the flowers, compare with the memories of characters in the novel you read?
3. Explain the meaning of the statement that "we take an old thought and dress it out in so many words that the thought itself is lost in its clothing like a slim woman in a barrel skirt." Why do you think the author used this image?
4. Why does the author prefer wildflowers to "hothouse blossoms"? What might each type of flower represent?
5. Is there a protagonist or an antagonist in the essay? Is it possible for a nonfiction essay to have these elements?
6. How is the process of analyzing an essay like this different from analyzing a fictional story? How is it different from analyzing a poem? What aspects of the structure are similar and different?

Reasoning Questions

1. What is the author's purpose in sharing her memories with her readers?
2. What issue(s) does the essay address? What is the author's position on the issues? What evidence did you use to make this deduction?
3. What inferences can you make about the differences between the world of the author's childhood and the world she lived in when this essay was written?
4. What would be the consequences if people lived simply, as the author wishes us to do?

Cycles Questions

1. Why does the gift of flowers cause Laura to "cycle back" in her memory?
2. How does Laura use the term "revolution"? What kind of cycle is she talking about in the final paragraph?
3. What generalizations about cyclic patterns of change does this essay illustrate?

Discussion Questions Rubric

4	3	2	1
The response meets the demand of the question/prompt: • All parts of the question are answered • The response includes sufficient text based evidence to support the answer. • Student thoughts are included and supported in the response. The response also includes connections to literature or other texts that are above what is expected in Grade 5.	The response meets the demand of the question/prompt: • All parts of the question are answered • The response includes sufficient text based evidence to support the answer. • Student thoughts are included and supported in the response.	The response somewhat meets the demand of the question/prompt: • All parts of the question are answered • Text based evidence and student thoughts are included, but neither fully supports the answer. OR The response has sufficient text based evidence; however, the student thoughts are missing. OR The response has sufficient student thoughts, but the text based evidence is missing.	There is an attempt to answer the question. However, there is no text based evidence nor student thoughts to support the answer.

UbD Template – Grade 1

Economics Unit

Stage 1 Desired Results		
ESTABLISHED GOALS RL.13 RL.12. W.12. L.1.6 RL.1.0 W.1.5	*Transfer* *Students will be able to independently use their learning to understand that* Authors use details to help readers understand the story	
	Meaning	
	UNDERSTANDINGS *Students will understand that...* Authors use details to help readers understand the story	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS How to writers use details to make their writing easy to understand?
	Acquisition	
	Students will know... -more about economics -what details are the most important within a text	*Students will be skilled at...* writing to inform (summaries, how-to) reading grade level text identifying and describing characters, setting, and events adding details to their writing
Stage 2 - Evidence		
Evaluative Criteria	**Assessment Evidence**	
- graphic organizers - Lucy Calkins Rubric (section on Elaboration and Craft) - Peer Review/Feedback Checklists - Conferencing notes - Story Maps	PERFORMANCE TASK(S): After reading a new book, students will identify the characters, setting, and MAJOR events using details from the story to support their choice of events Students will answer a set of MC questions testing them on their basic understanding of our economic system	
	OTHER EVIDENCE: Graphic Organizers used throughout the unit	
Stage 3 - Learning Plan		
SEE DAY PLAN BELOW		

Day 1: Wants & Needs	Day 2:	Day 3:	Day 4:	Day 5:
<u>The Bag I'm Taking To Grandma's</u> Story Map Together to refresh memory of story parts and begin discussion about what the most important events in the story are Define terms: **wants vs. needs** Wants & Needs Sort w/ journaling of what each word means	<u>Lily Learns Wants and Needs</u> Make a list of wants versus needs and discuss how theses are different (possible idea- using a word sort) Students fill out story map - semi independently	<u>Those Shoes</u> Character discussion during & after reading - identify words and phrases from the text to characterize discuss the choices the boy makes when buying small shoes- is this a good choice? why or why not? Character Study Organizer + Pg 11 from my Economics make it out of 10 cents (4AiB - Scarcity and economic decision making)	<u>Alexander Who Used to be Rich Last Sunday</u> Character discussion during & after reading - identify words and phrases from the text to characterize discuss the choices that he makes- are they good choices, why or why not? Character Study Organizer + opinion writing- Did Alexander make smart choices with his money? Yes/No- list 2 reasons why (4AiB - Scarcity and economic decision making)	<u>Just a Piggy Bank</u> Setting discussion during & after reading- what jobs does he do in what locations? describe the settings within in his house. Discuss the choices that he makes- are they good choices, why or why not? how was he able to earn money?

Day 6:	Day 7:	Day 8:	Day 9:	Day 10
<u>The Big Buck Adventure</u> Setting discussion during & after reading- what goods are for sale in each place? describe the settings within the market Shopping Activity- pass out cards with various products/prices- students will find their team and together decide where to shop and why (4.a.3.b)	<u>A Chair For My Mother</u> Talk about how to write a summary and create shared/model summary Story Map independently (students will use summary for information) On back of story map: Describe how people earn money while working at a job (4.a.3.a) & Modify Character Study to be a career person - drawing of students dressed up to be a job and label picture	<u>Mel's Diner</u> Talk about how to write a summary and create shared/model summary Story Map independently (students will use summary for information) Define goods vs services. Complete a job sort as a class (teachers, doctors, etc.. provide services- salesmen/women sell goods)- students will complete sort independently (4.a.1.a)	<u>A New Coat for Anna</u> Create a process chart- discuss ordinal words (first, next, then, etc...). While reading chart the steps taken in making Anna's new coat. Ask students to write a summary of their own using the first, next, then, after, finally words as sentence starters- this will explain how Anna's new coat was made (4.a.2- describe the production process).	<u>Pancakes! Pancakes!</u> While reading chart the steps taken in making the pancakes. After reading Create a process chart- discuss ordinal numbers (first, second, third etc...). (4.a.2- describe the production process) Use Pancakes Pancakes organizer for students to tell the beginning middle and end of the story
Day 8: <u>Chicken Sunday</u>				

Economics Assessment

Name _____

RL.1.3, VSC: 4.a, 4.b

On the line next to the pictures write if they are a want or a need.



_____ _____ _____

CANDY SHOES SHELTER


_____ _____ _____

VIDEO GAMES FOOD GAMES

Wal-Mart **Target**


$4.50 $5.27

Which store would you shop at? _____

Why would you shop there? _____

Match the words to their definitions.

Goods ◯ ◯ something you can purchase, an object

Service ◯ ◯ something someone does for you

Want ◯ ◯ something you can live without

Journal Two Entry

November 17, 2015

Impact of Standards-Based Grading within Special Education

The majority of students with disabilities are mainstreamed into the general education classroom. These students are provided interventions and/or services as specified on their IEP either within the general education classroom or pulled out for a specific researched-based intervention. These students qualify for an IEP due to the fact that they have a disability that inhibits them from performing at grade-level. Despite the fact that these students are performing below grade level, they are still moved from grade to grade at the end of each school year. With the recent change to standards-based grading, these students with disabilities are being assessed on grade-level standards; standards in which they are clearly not able to meet. For example, a 4th grade student who is reading on a 1st grade reading level is still given grades for 4th grade standards on the standards-based report card. Obviously, this students' grades are going to look as if the student is failing the majority or all of the standards when in reality they could have made much progress in their reading ability. When these report cards go home, all parents see is that their child is failing.

There has been very little direction or guidance given to teachers as to how to fairly assess the SWD population within our general education classrooms. Teachers differentiate their lessons and scaffold their instruction but in the end these students are assessed on grade level standards, which for some students is still out-of-reach even with support. Standards-based grading has eliminated the ability to factor in progress made towards the standards or effort the student has put forth. IEPs contain individualized goals and objectives that the IEP team feels that the students will be able to meet within one year. The team does their best to align these goals and objectives with grade level standards; however, grade-level standards are not attainable for students who are performing 2 or more grade levels below. Standards-based grading has shifted instructional practices from tailoring instruction for students to best meet their needs and meet them at their instructional level to instructing and assessing all students on grade-level standards whether they are appropriate or not.

Student-Created Rubric – Grade 4

Substance	4	3	2	1
What I show matches the research in the text (accuracy)	• Gives very specific detail in information • Using specific vocabulary and all used very correctly • Might include labels, very detailed, clearly put a lot of effort	• Correct information about the topic • Specific vocabulary • Close in look to the real thing	• Most facts are correct, maybe 1 or 2 errors • Some specific vocabulary, but some general words • Getting there, but not quite a match	• Off-topic information OR made-up or incorrect facts • No specific vocabulary OR it is used incorrectly • Includes extras that shouldn't' be there OR very inaccurate
Adding details from the text (support)	• All vocabulary (content and not content) is advanced • Quote or paraphrase with page numbers • Details all match the topic	• Use vocabulary in details • Paraphrase or quote from the text • Details all match the topic	• Mostly using correct vocabulary, maybe one or two mistakes • Not paraphrase correctly • Most details match the topic	• Not using vocabulary OR using most of it incorrectly • Doesn't quote or paraphrase at all • Very few details match the topic
Teach how the interaction with environment has changed (address the prompt)	• Giving deep detail about both Native Americans and our modern day interaction with environment • Giving a deep comparison with many examples.	• Gives details about Native Americans and their interactions • Gives details about us and our interactions • Explain how they are the same and different	• Gives some detail about Native Americans and their interactions • Gives some details about us and our interactions • Gives some similarities and differences	• Gives very few details about either topic • Barely explains how they are the same or different

First Grade Math Learning Progression

Math 1.NBT.C.4,5,6 Learning Progression

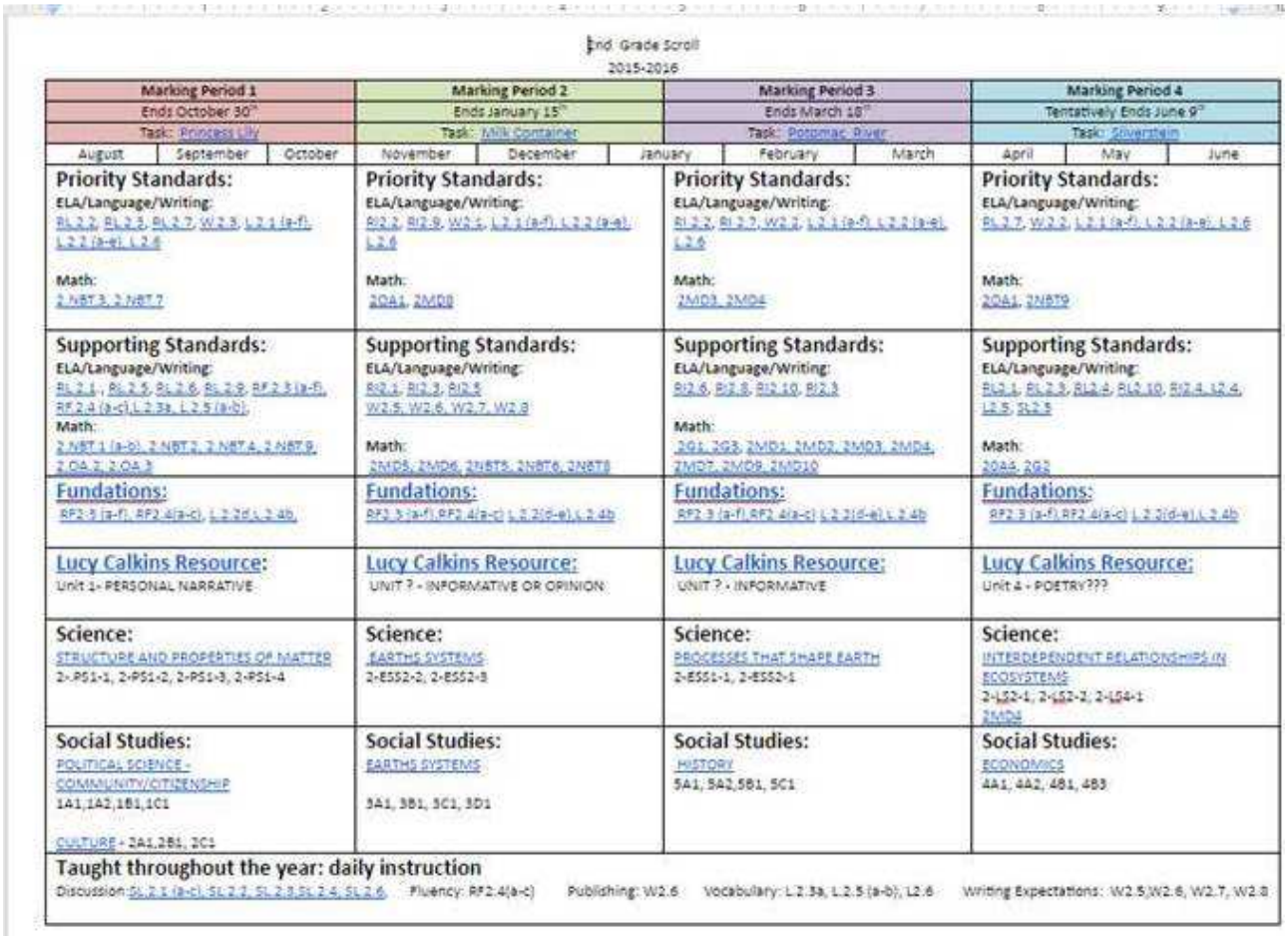
	Before the Unit	During Unit	After the Unit	After the Unit	Notes and Evidence
I can...	Student Self-Assessment	Peer Assessment	Student Self Assessment	Teacher Assessment	
I can use manipulatives to show a number from 1-20					
If you can meet all of the criteria above, you have scored a 1 within the standard.					
I can identify the digit in the tens place and the digit in the ones place in a two digit number.					
If you can meet all of the criteria above, you have scored a 2 within the standard.					
I can add and subtract 10 from a two digit number in my brain. (25+ 10, 25-10)					
I can add ones to a two digit number. (45+3)					
I can add multiples of ten to a two digit number. (20+40)					
If you can meet all of the criteria above, you have scored a 3 within the standard.					
I can add or subtract 100 from a three digit number in my brain. (356+ 100, 356-100)					
defend my thinking					
If you can meet all of the criteria above, you have scored a 4 and exceeded the standard.					

First Grade Scroll

1st Grade Scroll
2015-2016

Marking Period 1			Marking Period 2			Marking Period 3			Marking Period 4		
Ends October 30th			Ends January 15th			Ends March 18th			Tentatively Ends June 9th		
Task: Book Cover			Task: Playground			Task: Garden			Task: Pets		
August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March		April	May	June
Priority Standards: **ELA/Language/Writing:** RL.1.2, RL.1.3, RL.1.7, W.1.2, L.1.1 (a-j), L.1.2 (a-e), L.1.6 **Math:** 1.OA.8, 1.OA.1			**Priority Standards:** **ELA/Language/Writing:** RI.1.7, W.1.3 **Math:** 1.OA.2			**Priority Standards:** **ELA/Language/Writing:** RI.1.2, W.1.2 **Math:** 1.NBT.2, 1.MD.2, 1.OA.2			**Priority Standards:** **ELA/Language/Writing:** RI.1.3, RI.1.9, RI.1.2, W.1.1, L.1.6, L.1.1, L.1.2 **Math:** 1.NBT.4, 1.NBT.6		
Supporting Standards: **ELA/Language/Writing:** RI1.1., RL.1.10, RF.1.4, SL.1.4, SL.1.5, L.1.2.b, L.1.2.e, L.1.2.d, L.1.2.a, L.1.1.j, L.1.1.g, W.1.5, W.1.8 **Math:** 1.NBT.1, 1.OA.6, 1.OA.5, 1.OA.2, 1.OA.7, 1.OA.4, 1.OA.3			**Supporting Standards:** **ELA/Language/Writing:** RI.1.5, RI.1.6, RI.1.10, W.1.5, L.1.1.j, L.1.2.c **Math:** 1.OA.1, 1.OA.6, 1.OA.3, 1.MD.4, 1.NBT.2-b, 1.G.1, 1.G.2, 1.G.3, 1.MD.3			**Supporting Standards:** **ELA/Language/Writing:** RI.1.1, RI.1.7, RI.1.8, W.1.5, W.1.7, W.1.8, SL.1.2, SL.1.3, L.1.5.a (teach in science) **Math:** 1.NBT.2.a, 1.NBT.2.b, 1.NBT.2.c, 1.NBT.3, 1.MD.1, 1.OA.6, 1.OA.3			**Supporting Standards:** **ELA/Language/Writing:** RL.1.5, RL.1.4, RI.1.1, RL.1.9, RL.1.6 (teach with persuasive writing), W.1.5, W.1.8, L.1.1.f, L.1.5.d, L.1.5.b **Math:** 1.NBT.5, 1.MD.4		
Fundations: L.1.1.a, L.1.4, RF.1.2.a, RF.1.2.b, RF.1.2.c, RF.1.2.d, RF.1.3.a, RF.1.3.b, RF.1.3.g			**Fundations:** L.1.1.c, L.1.4.b, L.1.4.c, L.1.2.a,b,d,e, RF.1.1.a, RF.1.2b,c,d, RF.1.4a,b,c, RF.1.3.b,f,g			**Fundations:** L.1.2.a,b,d,e, L.1.4, RF.1.2.b,c,d, RF.1.1, RF.1.4.a, RF.1.3.a,b,c,d,f,g			**Fundations:** L.1.2.a,b,d,e, L.1.1.c, L.1.4.b,c, RF.1.1.a, RF.1.2.a,b,c,d, RF.1.3.b,c,d,e,f,g		
Lucy Calkins Resource: Unit 1- Personal Narrative			**Lucy Calkins Resource:** Unit 4- Fictional Stories			**Lucy Calkins Resource:** Unit 2- Informational Writing			**Lucy Calkins Resource:** Unit 3- Opinion Writing		
Science: Space Systems, Patterns, and Cycles 1.ESS1.1, 1.ESS1.2			**Science:** Engineering Design K-2-ETS1-1, K-2-ETS1-2, K-2-ETS1-3			**Science:** Structure, Function, and Information Processing (Life Science) 1-LS1-1, 1-LS1-2, 1-LS3-1			**Science:** Waves: Light & Sound 1-PS4-1, 1-PS4-2, 1-PS4-3, 1-PS4-4		
Social Studies: Standard One- Political Science- Rules Standard Four- Economics			**Social Studies:** Standard Five- History			**Social Studies:** Standard Three- Geography Standard Two- Culture			**Social Studies:** Standard One- Political Science- American Symbols		
Taught throughout the year: daily instruction DISCUSSION: SL.1.1.a,b,c SL.1.6 Fluency: RF.1.4.b, c Publishing: W.1.6 Vocabulary: RI.1.4, RL.1.4, L.1.4.a, L.1.5 Writing Expectations: L.1.1.a-j, L.1.2.a-e											

Second Grade Scroll



2nd Grade Scroll
2015-2016

Marking Period 1			Marking Period 2			Marking Period 3			Marking Period 4		
Ends October 30th			Ends January 15th			Ends March 18th			Tentatively Ends June 9th		
Task: Princess Lily			Task: Milk Container			Task: Potomac River			Task: Silverstein		
August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March		April	May	June
Priority Standards: ELA/Language/Writing: RL 2.2, RL 2.3, RL 2.7, W 2.3, L 2.1 (a-f), L 2.2 (a-e), L 2.6 Math: 2.NBT.3, 2.NBT.7			**Priority Standards:** ELA/Language/Writing: RI 2.2, RI 2.9, W2.1, L 2.1 (a-f), L 2.2 (a-e), L 2.6 Math: 2OA1, 2MD8			**Priority Standards:** ELA/Language/Writing: RI 2.7, RI 2.7, W2.2, L 2.1 (a-f), L 2.2 (a-e), L 2.6 Math: 2MD3, 2MD4			**Priority Standards:** ELA/Language/Writing: RL 2.7, W 2.3, L 2.1 (a-f), L 2.2 (a-e), L 2.6 Math: 2OA1, 2NBT9		
Supporting Standards: ELA/Language/Writing: RL 2.1 , RL 2.5, RL 2.6, RL 2.9, RF 2.3 (a-f), RF 2.4 (a-c) L 2.3a, L 2.5 (a-b), Math: 2.NBT.1 (a-b), 2.NBT.2, 2.NBT.4, 2.NBT.9, 2.OA.2, 2.OA.3			**Supporting Standards:** ELA/Language/Writing: RI2.1, RI2.3, RI2.5 W2.5, W2.6, W2.7, W2.8 Math: 2MD5, 2MD6, 2NBT5, 2NBT6, 2NBT8			**Supporting Standards:** ELA/Language/Writing: RI2.6, RI2.8, RI2.10, RI2.3 Math: 2G1, 2G3, 2MD1, 2MD2, 2MD3, 2MD4, 2MD7, 2MD8, 2MD10			**Supporting Standards:** ELA/Language/Writing: RL2.1, RL 2.3, RL2.4, RL2.10, RI2.4, L2.4, L2.5, SL2.5 Math: 2OA3, 2G2		
Fundations: RF2.3 (a-f), RF2.4(a-c), L 2.2d, L 2.4b			**Fundations:** RF2.3 (a-f) RF2.4(a-c) L 2.2(d-e) L 2.4b			**Fundations:** RF2.3 (a-f) RF2.4(a-c) L 2.2(d-e) L 2.4b			**Fundations:** RF2.3 (a-f) RF2.4(a-c) L 2.2(d-e) L 2.4b		
Lucy Calkins Resource: Unit 1- PERSONAL NARRATIVE			**Lucy Calkins Resource:** UNIT ? - INFORMATIVE OR OPINION			**Lucy Calkins Resource:** UNIT ? - INFORMATIVE			**Lucy Calkins Resource:** Unit 4 - POETRY???		
Science: STRUCTURE AND PROPERTIES OF MATTER 2-PS1-1, 2-PS1-2, 2-PS1-3, 2-PS1-4			**Science:** EARTHS SYSTEMS 2-ESS2-2, 2-ESS2-3			**Science:** PROCESSES THAT SHAPE EARTH 2-ESS1-1, 2-ESS2-1			**Science:** INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN ECOSYSTEMS 2-LS2-1, 2-LS2-2, 2-LS4-1 2MD8		
Social Studies: POLITICAL SCIENCE - COMMUNITY/CITIZENSHIP 1A1,1A2,1B1,1C1 CULTURE - 2A1,2B1, 2C1			**Social Studies:** EARTHS SYSTEMS 3A1, 3B1, 3C1, 3D1			**Social Studies:** HISTORY 5A1, 5A2,5B1, 5C1			**Social Studies:** ECONOMICS 4A1, 4A2, 4B1, 4B3		
Taught throughout the year: daily instruction Discussion: SL 2.1 (a-c), SL 2.2, SL 2.3,SL 2.4, SL 2.6 Fluency: RF2.4(a-c) Publishing: W2.6 Vocabulary: L 2.3a, L 2.5 (a-b), L2.6 Writing Expectations: W2.5,W2.6, W2.7, W2.8											

Appendix I – *Epoche*

From Researcher Notes

9/25/2015 Applied *Epoche*, setting aside all prior judgments and opinions on standards-based grading to take a fresh look at the phenomenon for research. I disregarded my expertise as the leader of the Synergy Online Gradebook Committee for my home school. My prior experience with the Synergy Online grading program and standards-based report card included instruction with Library Media standards for grades K-5. I wished that some high performing students were able to earn 4's of their report card, as most schools did not give 4's until the end of the school year. I set aside all thoughts about standards-based instruction to take a fresh look at classroom changes impacted by standards-based grading.

11/17/2015 Set aside thoughts of how to instruct special needs students with standards-based grading, as I previously taught special education students at the start of my career. Previously I worried that students were instructed on grade-level standards much too difficult and would have a hard time achieving approaching or mastery of a standard. A teacher of special education students submitted a journal entry expressing her concerns over standards-based grading.

12/7/2015 I've had limited experience with the use of UbD. Our encore team created one UbD unit plan, but we did not begin with the assessment to design the unit. I took a fresh look at UbD, and instructional changes shared by teachers as I began the interview process.

12/10/2015 As a teacher of Library Media, I've used assessments and rubrics for project-based

learning. I still have my Synergy gradebook set up with points. I set aside prior opinions, as I listened to focus group members share the use of rubrics, advocate for checklists and the elimination of points and percentages from the Synergy gradebook.

12/16/2015 I did not have any prior knowledge of FAME, learning progressions, success criteria, and use of student-created rubrics. I put aside instructional opinions to reflect on focus group members explaining the implementation of FAME, and the need for departmentalization of ELA and STEM.