IMPROVING STUDENTS’ K-PREP READING SCORES BY INVESTIGATING THE
READING CULTURE AT HARRISON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

by

Rebecca A. Grace
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Susan Quindag, Committee Chair

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Abstract

The purpose of this applied study is to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by exploring the reading culture of Harrison Independent School with the aim of identifying positive practices that can be endorsed as viable solutions to the problem. The researcher reviews the existing research to define the components of a positive reading culture and provide evidence of the link between a school’s reading culture and the reading performance of its students. The ensuing study examines teachers’ perceptions of their roles in promoting independent reading, strategies used by ELA teachers to improve students’ motivations to read, and students’ motivation and reading practice at Harrison Independent School. Four instruments are used to collect data from both students and teachers. Information about students’ attitudes about reading, as well as their reading preferences and independent reading practices, are analyzed using two student surveys: Adolescent Motivations for School Reading (AMSR) and Reading Activity Inventory (RAI), respectively. Additionally, surveys administered to English Language Arts (ELA) and non-ELA teachers assess their perceived roles in promoting students’ independent reading. Interviews with reading teachers present successful strategies for encouraging independent reading among students and promoting a positive reading culture. Finally, a two-part approach to solve the problem of low reading scores among middle schools is presented along with implications for all stakeholders and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: reading culture, motivation, strategies, independent reading, ELA, K-PREP
Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my amazing husband and my four beautiful daughters. I am beyond blessed to have each of you in my corner. To Steven, without your patience and your encouragement, none of this would have been possible. I am thankful to God for bringing us together to lift each other up, to support one another, and to push each other to become the best version of ourselves. You are my hero.

To my girls, Lauren, Savannah, Emily, and Jenna, thank you for your understanding and support. You have helped me to celebrate the small victories along the way and to take the setbacks in stride. Your belief in me and my desire to make you proud have fueled my drive to succeed. It is my prayer for each of you to seek God first, love others, and find your passion. I love you all.
Acknowledgments

Above all, I give God the glory for this achievement for “through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:3 NIV).” Throughout this process, the hardest part was the waiting; but in that waiting I have learned to have patience, to believe His plan for my life, and to be at peace knowing that all things work according to His timing.

I would like to thank both Dr. Susan Quindag and Dr. Jessica Talada for their wisdom, which they freely shared with me, and their encouragement and support when the challenges seemed greater than the reward. I am truly grateful that God put them both in my path.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow educators, my colleagues, my work family, who listened to me go on and on about reading culture, who asked questions I didn’t have the answers to, and who celebrated with me along the way. I cannot adequately express the gratitude I feel for my 7th grade team, who provided more inspiration and motivation than they will know. For those friends who are also undertaking this challenging and rewarding endeavor, I hope that I am able to return the favor, and for the students and educators who so enthusiastically shared your reading culture with me to make this study possible, I offer my utmost gratitude.

Finally, to my family, I say thank you for your love and support. Thank you for believing in me. I could not have done this without you.
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List of Abbreviations

Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs (AITQ)
Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project (ALCP)
Adolescent Motivations for School Reading (AMSR)
American College Testing (ACT)
Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)
Comprehension-Based Silent Reading Rate (CBSRR)
English Language Arts (ELA)
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Extensive Reading (ER)
Individualized Reading Program (IRP)
Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)
Kentucky Educational Television (KET)
Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP)
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD)
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)
Reading Activity Inventory (RAI)
Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR)
Silent Reading Fluency (SRF)
Silent Reading Rate (SRR)
Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study will be to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by exploring the reading culture of Harrison Independent School with the aim of identifying positive practices that can be endorsed as viable solutions to the problem. Since 2018, more than 70% of Harrison Independent School’s middle school students have scored at or above proficiency on their annual summative reading assessment, ranking them in the top quartile of testers in the nation (ACT, Inc.2018). To better understand this achievement, the school’s reading culture will be examined. The researcher will look at both artifactual and behavioral evidence of a positive reading culture and identify practices that can be employed elsewhere for improvement in reading performance.

To identify how the K-PREP reading test scores for Kentucky middle school students can be improved, the researcher developed a central question and three sub-questions. The central question that will guide this research is “How can the reading culture of Kentucky middle schools be amended to improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?” Following the central question, three sub-questions were developed: (1) How would reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in an interview improve students’ K-PREP reading scores? (2) How would information obtained on a teacher survey at Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students? And (3) How would student surveys from Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores?

There are many influences that may impact students’ K-PREP scores that are beyond the school’s control, including socioeconomic status, home environment, community resources, race, and gender (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996). However, there may be some changes that the
school can make within its reading culture to positively impact students’ reading performance. Identifying factors of the reading culture that can have a positive impact on students’ reading performance is important for the students, the school, and the community as a whole (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005; Whitten, Labby, & Sullivan, 2019).

Chapter One provides a background for the current study, including historical, social, and theoretical context. The problem, purpose, and significance of the study are discussed. The questions and sub-questions guiding this research are provided, and key terms are defined.

**Background**

The Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) is a state-mandated assessment that measures students’ proficiency in all academic areas including reading. The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) used the results of the 2019 K-PREP reading assessment to establish a baseline for reading proficiency and set proficiency goals for student subgroups through the year 2030 (see figure 1) (KDE, 2020a). The 2019 K-PREP report indicates that the number of Kentucky middle school students performing at proficiency in reading was 59.6% (KDE, 2020a).

Additionally, the nationally administered measure of reading proficiency, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test, indicated that in 2019 only 34% of Kentucky grade 8 students scored at proficient or higher, compared to 35% of 8th grade students nationally (KDE, 2020a).
The high number of students scoring below proficiency on state and national reading assessments raises concerns for future reading performance as reading comprehension is a fundamental skill for college and career readiness and many colleges and universities are reporting an increasing number of students lacking in this area (Chen & Simone, 2016). To improve reading performance, researchers suggest that it is critical for students to read often and from a variety of sources (Chiang, 2016; Ladbrook, 2014; Twist, Schagen, & Hodgson 2007). The frequency and variety of students’ reading practice work together to improve their silent reading fluency, a reading subskill that receives less instructional focus after elementary school (Ciuffo et al., 2017; Kim, Wagner, & Foster, 2011). Achievement of silent reading fluency is vital since reading performance on the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade versions of K-PREP is measured exclusively through silent reading (KDE, 2019f).

Furthermore, the Kentucky Academic Standards have been amended to hold all content area teachers responsible for promoting literacy (KDE, 2019c). The new standards provide...
guidance on interdisciplinary literacy practices, stating, “The practices should not be confused as additional standards, but they should guide teachers in providing intentional opportunities for students to practice the behaviors of a literate citizen” (KDE, 2019c, p. 384). Among the recommended practices are teaching students to interpret messages communicated through a variety of media, exposing students to multiple texts and disciplinary content, motivating students to pursue new information after engaging them in content-specific texts, providing relevant literacy instruction, promoting independent practice, and helping students to develop a literacy identity that moves them to become lifelong learners (KDE, 2019c).

Unfortunately, some researchers have found that as students progress through elementary school and transition into middle school, their attitudes toward reading become increasingly negative, making it difficult to motivate them (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012; Nootens et al., 2018). Researchers who examined strategies to motivate adolescent readers support the practices of a positive reading culture as a vital component in promoting literacy (Gambrel, 2015; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Louick, Leider, Daley, Proctor, & Gardner, 2016; Ogugua, Emerole, Egwim, Anyanwu, & Haco-Obasi, 2015). Ogugua et al. (2015) defined reading culture as “the habit of reading [that] can only be cultivated through constant or regular and dedicated reading of information resources” (p. 62); and Gbadamosi (2007) asserted, “good reading habit is a product of good reading culture” (p. 42). Dare (2007) found that that a positive reading culture is fully realized when an individual has developed a habit of regularly reading books that are not necessarily required. A recognition of the interdependence of reading motivation, reading habit, and reading culture will serve as a founding principle for this research.

**Historical Context**
For this research, it is important to begin with the historical context behind the study. This includes a history of the practice of silent reading instruction as well as some historical initiatives in education that have impacted reading instruction. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind, and Every Student Succeeds Act will be highlighted.

The earliest reading instruction in American schools occurred in the homes or rented rooms of schoolteachers where students came to learn (Monaghan, 2005) and was limited by social class and available materials (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010). Students were commonly taught to read using as a hornbook—a three inch by four-inch paddle of wood to which was glued a single page of text covered by a thin transparency made of animal horn (Monaghan, 2005). This was followed by a primer—often a prayer book—and later a psalter—a reprinting of the book of Psalms (Monaghan, 2005). Reading education was primarily used to share religious insight, to increase community involvement, and to improve commerce (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010). Books were scarce and read repeatedly, and oral reading was the custom (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010).

With the invention of the printing press in 1638, however, came the introduction of a plethora of new reading materials on a variety of subjects, and by the late 1800s, secular books became the primary source of reading material (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010).

It was not until the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century that oral reading was replaced by silent reading as the classroom norm, and public libraries began designing programs for children’s reading practice outside the classroom (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010). In the 1920s, the individualized reading program (IRP) was introduced. Through IRP, schools dedicated a portion of the day to self-paced independent reading of books students selected for themselves, and teachers conferenced with students about their selections (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010). Building upon this
practice, was a program called sustained silent reading (SSR) by Lyman Hunt in the 1960s (Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010; Ladbrook, 2014). SSR was designed to improve students’ motivation to read and promote reading enjoyment by allowing students to select their own books and by having the teacher model the practice of independent reading for them (Ladbrook, 2014).

Access to reading materials and quality instruction, however, was not equitable in schools across the nation. Consequently, in his “War on Poverty,” President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 (Paul, 2016). The ESEA called for high accountability from schools and equal access to quality education, while providing funding for materials, resources, professional development, and parent involvement programs (Paul, 2016). Accounting for over 80% of ESEA funding is the Title 1 program, which is designed to close the achievement gap between students from low-income families in rural or urban areas and middle-class students from suburban areas by providing funding for schools with a high percentage of students from low-income households. In 1988, the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Act began to tie Title 1 program funding to student achievement and required program improvements when students from schools who were receiving Title 1 funds were not improving (Paul, 2016).

In 2000, the Report of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) was published, and the practice of sustained silent reading came under fire. The authors stated that they found no evidence that using class time for silent reading was effective at improving reading achievement. Opponents argued that the instructional routines during class time allocated for independent reading often did not promote the characteristics of highly engaged readers. Students were limited in selecting texts for themselves. Students did not exhibit reading stamina and sufficient time on task. Furthermore, teachers did
not hold students accountable for their reading or engage with students in a meaningful way about what they read (Reutzel & Juth, 2014).

Following this report, came the 2001 reauthorization of the ESEA known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), enacted by President George W. Bush. NCLB increased accountability for schools by requiring students to take Title I-approved annual standardized assessments (Paul, 2016). It also mandated the annual publication of school report cards which included demographics and student achievement data. Under NCLB, one goal of the Title I amendment was to move students toward 100% proficiency (Gamson, McDermott, & Reed, 2015). Title I eligible schools were required to hire highly qualified teachers, and there were penalties for schools that did not make adequate progress in student achievement (Paul, 2016). NCLB caused tensions between federal and state educational policymakers, and many schools began to alter their reading instruction, including removing Title I-eligible students from general education classrooms and providing instruction that focused on more basic skills (Gamson et al., 2015).

In 2015, President Barack Obama enacted the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which amended the ESEA to offer flexibility to states that had adopted college and career ready standards, implemented evaluation systems for teachers and administrators, and had systems in place to address schools with the highest achievement gaps (Paul, 2016). Consequently, as education trended toward school accountability through high-stakes testing, sustained silent reading time was replaced by mandated curricula, testable objectives, and test preparation (Zoch, 2015). “Given the increased pressure for student performance, teachers and administrators question the use of every instructional minute and wonder if providing students with time to read is a wise investment” (Fisher, 2004, p. 138).
Concurrent with changes in reading instruction and practice, there was a dramatic decline in the scope and frequency of students’ independent reading. A study by Spichtig et al. (2016) reported an alarming decrease in the silent reading fluency rates of a 2011 cohort of students when compared to a 1960 cohort of students. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that there was a stagnation in silent reading fluency rates among middle school students (see Figure 2).

![Comprehension-Based Silent Reading Rate](image)


Reading education has certainly evolved since colonial America as policies and practices have been implemented that hold schools accountable for literacy for all students. It seems counterintuitive that with the increase in accountability and federal mandates for equality, students’ ability to read fluently has declined. With increased expectations from the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) (2019b) and complexity of texts presented in
standardized tests, the rate of decline, particularly among sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, should be a concern for middle grades educators and administrators (Spichtig et al., 2016). This is a phenomenon that beckons further investigation.

**Social Context**

The social context of this study is equally important. Nearly 62.5% of Kentucky’s public schools operate as Title 1 Schools, addressing the educational needs of a high percentage of students from low-income households (KDE, 2020b). An academic performance report published by the state of Kentucky indicated an achievement gap between middle school students with and without economic disadvantages. For the 2019-2020 school year, 34% of non-economically disadvantaged middle school students were proficient readers on the K-PREP reading assessment, while only 24% of middle school students from low-income households achieved proficiency (KDE, 2020b). By law, it is the schools’ responsibility to address this gap in achievement (Paul, 2016).

One social context surrounding the decline in students’ independent reading may be the prolificacy of entertainment options other than reading for middle school students, including access to technology such as streaming video, gaming, and social media. Twenge, Martin, and Spitzberg (2019) found that eighth grade students spend an average of two hours a day watching television, 1.6 hours on the internet, 1.27 hours texting, 1.57 hours playing video games, and another 1.3 hours on social media, leaving little time for recreational reading. Additionally, researchers found that as students advance through school, they have increasingly negative attitudes about reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; McKenna et al., 2012; Nootens et al., 2018). McKenna et al. (2012) found this to be particularly true of middle school students regarding academic reading.
Furthermore, in a study about the busyness of today’s families, Brown, Nobiling, Teufel, & Birch (2011) found that reading was not a priority as an after-school activity. Among their findings was that 75% of 12 and 13-year-olds were involved in after-school activities, and 84% wished for more free time; however only 4% of those said they would use that free time to read.

A final social context to consider is the educational shift under the middle school movement (1963-1979). The establishment of the middle school concept was developed as a transition between primary school and secondary school. It moved students from their elementary school experience toward an educational experience similar to that of high school students (Schaefer, Malu, & Yoon, 2016). Schaefer, et al. (2016) found that the result of this cultural shift was a sustained negative impact on the attitudes and motivations of adolescents toward reading.

There are some social contexts, such as socioeconomic status and family scheduling, which are outside of the school’s range of control. However, there is still much that Kentucky middle schools can and do and should do to improve their students’ performance on the K-PREP reading assessment. Factors within the school’s control include allocation of resources (Bartlett, 2007; Hall, Burns, Edwards, & Carr 2011; Lind, 2008), classroom environment (Lind, 2008: Ogugua et al., 2015), instructional strategies (Ho & Lau, 2018; Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, Peters-Burton, & Burrowbridge, 2018), parent outreach (Mat Roni, 2018b; Merga & Mason, 2019), and professional development (Merga & Gardiner, 2018; Swanson, Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts, & Fall, 2015); and each of these factors work together to make up the school’s overall reading culture.

**Theoretical Context**
Two general educational theories will provide much of the foundation for this research—stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The theory of stage-environment fit (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) asserts that creating educational environments that are developmentally appropriate to the needs of young adolescent students results in positive attitudes and student motivation (Alley, 2019). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is a framework of the roles of motivation on an individual’s choices and performance. It addresses students’ motivations to read outside of the classroom and is often used as foundational research in adolescent education as motivation plays a pivotal role in the performance of middle school students (de Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012).

To emphasize the importance of establishing a reading culture that promotes independent reading, the researcher will also include two reading-specific theories—the theory of verbal efficiency (Perfetti, 1985) and the theory of automaticity in reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). The theory of verbal efficiency dictates that students’ reading comprehension is dependent upon lower reading subskills including word recognition, phenomenological awareness, and silent reading fluency (Kim, Petscher, & Foorman, 2015). The theory of automaticity posits that students who read with speed and accuracy free up cognitive resources to construct meaning from reading and to comprehend what they read with greater speed (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Reading with decreased reading fluency then, by turn, impedes more complex cognitive processes such as reading comprehension (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010).

**Problem Statement**

The problem is that greater than 40% of Kentucky middle school students are consistently performing below proficiency on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h). Table 1 shows the reading proficiency levels of Kentucky middle school students
for the past three years (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h).

Table 1

*Middle School Students Performing at Proficiency on K-PREP Reading Assessment by Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing year</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Equally alarming is the 37.1% of Kentucky middle school students who had a reading growth rate of “less than catch up” as indicated by the 2018 K-PREP assessment. A growth indicator of “less than catch up” indicates both a lack of proficiency and an unlikelihood to reach proficiency in two years, based on trending scores (see Figure 3) (KDE, 2018a).

*Figure 3.* Rating of “less than catch up” as determined by KDE’s growth value table. From KDE, 2018b, *Growth indicator: Training video* [Video]. Retrieved from https://mediaportal.education.ky.gov/featured/2018/07/growth-indicator-training-video/

Screenshots by author.

Low K-PREP reading assessment scores can have long-term detrimental effects on
Kentucky middle school students. If these students do not develop proficient reading skills, they will likely have trouble achieving in other academic areas (Krashen, 2004; Sullivan & Brown, 2013). Because struggling readers often read less than their reading-proficient peers, they can continue to fall farther behind and can be expected to struggle in high school (Moreau, 2014), a factor that increases the risk of dropping out of school (Sorensen, 2019). Consequences for not completing high school include reduced job opportunities and negative psychological impacts (Sorensen, 2019).

Middle school is a pivotal time as students transition from learning to read to reading to learn (Price, Meisinger, Louwerse, & D'Mello, 2016), and researchers found that a strong reading culture promotes independent reading among adolescents (Dare, 2007; Gbadamosi, 2007; Loh, Ellis, Paculdar, & Wan, 2017). The educational standards for the state of Kentucky recommend frequent and varied reading (KDE, 2019c), but the scope and frequency of reading for most middle school students is still falling short (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010).

Kentucky middle school students continue to perform at or below 60% for proficiency on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h) while Harrison Independent School students have performed at 70% or higher on a similar assessment. No previous study has been conducted to examine the reading habits of Harrison Independent School’s middle grade students or the impact of the school’s reading culture on students’ reading performance.

In this multimethod design, the researcher proposes to examine the problem of low K-PREP reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by investigating the reading culture of Harrison Independent School. The researcher will include the students’ reading habits and motivations for reading, teachers’ attitudes about their role in promoting independent reading.
reading among students, and effective practices endorsed by reading teachers to increase students’ reading motivation. Following this investigation, the researcher proposes to present recommendations for other Kentucky middle schools to improve students’ reading achievement.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this applied study will be to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by exploring the reading culture of Harrison Independent School with the aim of identifying positive practices that can be endorsed as viable solutions to the problem. A multimethod design will be used, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For the first approach, the researcher will interview Harrison Independent School reading teachers to investigate their experiences with middle school readers and their strategies to improve student reading motivation. In the second approach, the researcher will administer a survey to all teachers at Harrison Independent School to explore the school’s reading culture. For the third approach, the researcher will administer two surveys to students—one about the scope and frequency of their independent reading, and other about their reading motivations.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies not only in improving K-PREP reading scores but also in advancing the reading culture of Kentucky middle schools. The study will contribute valuable information about Harrison Independent School’s reading culture, including what and how often students read and what motivates them to do so, as well as the practices of classroom teachers that promote independent reading. Using teacher interviews and surveys of teachers and students, the researcher will look for artifactual and behavioral evidence of a positive reading culture and identify practices that can used as recommendations for improvement at other Kentucky schools.
This is important research for recognizing the effectiveness of Harrison Independent School’s reading culture in improving reading performance. Though the culture of every school is unique to its stakeholders (Magara & Batambuze, 2005), the recommendations for improvement may be able to be generalized to other middle schools seeking to improve reading performance. Potential benefits of improved K-PREP reading scores include extrinsic rewards such as improved student performance in other academic areas (Krashen, 2004; Sullivan & Brown, 2013), improved student performance in high school (Moreau, 2014), and increased scholarship opportunities for students (Ellis, 2018). Other benefits for students are more intrinsic, such as increased reading self-efficacy (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015; Retelsdorf, Köller, & Möller, 2011) and pleasure derived from reading (Beers & Samuels, 1998; Wilson & Kelley, 2010).

Improved performance of students on the K-PREP reading assessment may result in higher teacher self-efficacy as well, leading to continued growth and improved instructional practices (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020). Additionally, improved K-PREP reading scores may positively impact the community by improving the ratings of Kentucky schools and making the communities they serve more desirable places to live, work, and shop (Hanushek, Ruhose, & Woessmann, 2016). Furthermore, students who remain in these communities will contribute to the communities’ workforces and spur economic growth (Hanushek, 2016), and those same individuals will be able to perpetuate the positive reading culture they inherited through their own families for generations (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018b).

**Research Questions**

This research will be guided by the following questions:

**Central Question:** How can the reading culture of Kentucky middle schools be amended to improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?
**Sub-question 1:** How would reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in an interview improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?

**Sub-question 2:** How would information obtained on a teacher survey at Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students?

**Sub-question 3:** How would student surveys from Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores?

**Definitions**

1. *Avid Reader:* an individual who enjoys reading, reads often, and makes time to read (Beers & Samuels, 1998).
2. *Aliteracy:* the ability to read without the desire to read (Mikulecky, 1979).
3. *Dormant reader:* an individual who can read but does not engage in reading due to lack of time (Beers & Samuels, 1998).
4. *Reading automaticity:* the lack of conscious awareness of the reader regarding the lower-level reading skills such as phonemic awareness and word recognition as the reader focuses on comprehension of the text (Kuhn et al., 2010).
5. *Reading comprehension:* “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (RAND Reading Study Group & Snow, 2002, p. 11). Comprehension involves the reader, the text, and the activity.
6. *Reading self-efficacy:* one’s belief in his or her own perceived ability to read and comprehend the text (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015).
7. **Reading engagement**: an intentional behavior that entails establishing a purpose for reading, attempting to understand the text, believing in one’s own ability to comprehend the text, and taking personal responsibility for one’s own understanding (Cambourne, 1995).

8. **Reading fluency**: “quick and efficient recognition of words and at least some aspects of syntactic parsing” (RAND Reading Study Group & Snow, 2002, p. 13) which are precursors to comprehension and expressive reading which is a result of comprehension.

9. **Reading literacy**: “understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (OECD, 2009)

10. **Reading motivation**: “the individual’s personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Reading motivation is the catalyst for reading behavior.

11. **Reading stamina**: “the ability to sustain attention and proficiency across a text” (Hiebert, Wilson, & Trainin, 2010, p. 8)

12. **Reading teachers**: individuals who “make a difference in children’s reading achievement and motivation to read” (Santa et al., 2000, p. 193), including classroom teachers (Santa et al., 2000) and librarians (Gruer & Perry, 2020)

13. **Scaffolded Sustained Silent Reading**: the practice of providing class time for independent silent reading with the addition of teacher monitoring, feedback, and accountability (Walker, 2013).

14. **Sustained Silent Reading**: the practice of providing class time for independent silent reading (Walker, 2013).
Summary

Because of the percentage of Kentucky middle school students scoring below proficient on the K-PREP reading assessment, an investigation into the reading culture of middle schools is warranted. This study will explore artifactual and behavioral evidence of a positive reading culture at Harrison Independent School through interviews with reading teachers, a survey of all teachers, and two surveys of students. The researcher will analyze the evidence to identify policies and practices that may serve as viable solutions to the problem.

Chapter One provided the background for this study including a comparison of Harrison Independent School’s reading proficiency scores to the state averages for middle school students. Historical and social context of the problem were discussed. The problem, purpose, and significance of the study were introduced. Finally, the research question and sub-questions were presented along with definitions of key terms relevant to the study. The information presented in this chapter is essential to establish the necessity for further research and the intent of this study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this applied study will be to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by exploring the reading culture of Harrison Independent School with the aim of identifying positive practices that can be endorsed as viable solutions to the problem. The problem is that greater than 40% of Kentucky middle school students are consistently performing below proficiency on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h).

The researcher will conduct a thorough review of the literature to identify studies that have focused on the relationship between reading culture and reading performance among middle school students as well as challenges associated with motivating middle school students to read independently across all content areas. The first section of this chapter will present a discussion of the theoretical framework supporting the research and how the theories relate to the central phenomenon. The second section will present a synthesis of the literature related to the factors that contribute to a positive reading culture. This will be followed by challenges associated with motivating students toward independent reading, the connection between reading culture and reading comprehension, and potential roadblocks to a positive reading culture. The unknown degree to which each of the factors of a positive reading culture are present at Harrison Independent School is an area of need on which to focus this study.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide a foundation for this research. This study will use the theories of verbal efficiency (Perfetti, 1985), automaticity of reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), stage-environment fit (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), and self-
determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as foundations for defining and analyzing the constructs of reading culture and its connection to reading practice and reading performance.

**Cognitive Reading Theories**

The cultural value of independent silent reading begins with an understanding of its pivotal role in reading comprehension. The theory of verbal efficiency (Perfetti, 1985) and the theory of automaticity in reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974) both emphasize the necessity for students to master fundamental reading skills in order to improve reading ability.

**Theory of Verbal Efficiency**

In the theory of verbal efficiency, Perfetti (1985) explained that successful reading comprehension is dependent largely upon students’ achievement of the lower-level fundamental skills of reading, including word recognition, phonological knowledge, and fluency; and readers who lack these fundamental skills will likely present with lower reading comprehension (Kim et al., 2015). However, as students gain experience with a variety of texts, they build upon those fundamental skills, beginning in early elementary school with letter and word identification and later progressing to more complex skills such as semantic-memory access and syntactic analysis (Walczyk, 1994). Essentially, a reader’s ability to master complex text tasks is determined by the efficiency of the reading subskills (Van Dyke & Shankweiler, 2012).

Perfetti (2007) investigated the theory of verbal efficiency and found that efficiency in reading is not the same as reading speed but rather “a ratio of outcome to effort, with time as a proxy for effort” (p. 359). Perfetti (2007) also found that reading practice, through which an individual gains reading experience, and an established knowledge of word forms, gained through fundamental reading skills, results in reading efficiency—he described this result as the ability to rapidly retrieve a word’s identity using few cognitive resources. In this study, the
amount and variety of students’ reading practice will be examined as part of the school’s reading culture.

**Theory of Automaticity in Reading**

Related to verbal efficiency theory is the theory of automaticity in reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). LaBerge and Samuels (1974) described the complexity of reading as a network of component processes—students must master some of these component processes to the point of automaticity in order to free up cognitive processes for other component processes so that the load on attention remains within tolerable limits. Automaticity in reading is the lack of conscious awareness of the reader regarding the lower-level reading skills such as phonemic awareness and word recognition and is the key difference between fluent readers and disfluent readers (Kuhn et al., 2010). Limited mastery of subcomponent skills requires the reader to allocate attention to reading subskills, such as sounding out words or deciphering unknown vocabulary words, and reduces the reader’s ability to focus on comprehension (Walczyk, 1994). “In short, it is assumed that we can only attend to one thing at a time, but we may be able to process many things at a time so long as no more than one requires attention” (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974, p. 295). Therefore, when students are deficient in reading subskills, the result is a lack of fluency that reduces their comprehension.

Walczyk (1994) found that a lack of automaticity in reading can hinder comprehension in two ways. First, readers lacking in automaticity may have slower comprehension when compared to other readers. Secondly, these readers may show impaired comprehension as they focus on resolving fundamental skills such as sounding out a word or determining a word’s meaning in the sentence. Consequently, students who lack automaticity may experience a delay in
transferring information from working memory to integrate it into comprehension of the text (Walczyk, 1994).

**Behavioral Theories**

While cognitive theories surrounding reading and processing skills provide elementary foundations for this study, the behavioral aspect of reading comprehension must also be considered. To address this essential component of reading practice and performance, the researcher will include theories of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and stage-environment fit (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

**Self-Determination Theory**

Reading comprehension is dependent upon the willingness of a student to engage in the behavior of reading (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Schiefele, Stutz, & Schaffner, 2016; Wigfield, Gladstone, & Turci, 2016). Therefore, elements of Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory will be integrated into this theoretical framework. Self-determination theory offers a “broad umbrella” under which to examine students’ reading behavior.

As a macrotheory of human motivation, self-determination theory (SDT) addresses such basic issues as personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, energy and vitality, nonconscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behavior, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 182).

When applying self-determination theory to education, Deci and Ryan (1985) found that students seek experiences through which to fulfill three fundamental needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence, also referred to as self-efficacy, is the students’ need to
believe they are capable of success. Competence can be encouraged by teachers through providing students appropriately challenging reading tasks, positive feedback, and a supportive learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to students’ sense of control or independence over a reading task. Teachers can promote autonomy by offering students choices in reading materials or tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relatedness is the students’ internalization of the reading behavior. Relatedness can be achieved by presenting reading tasks that illicit a sense of belonging to a group, a society, or a culture (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The degree to which the three needs are fulfilled influences the intrinsic motivation of students (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Consequently, researchers found that reading motivation has a significant effect on the amount of leisure time students spend reading as well as on their reading performance (de Naeghel et al., 2012, de Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, Haerens, & Aelterman, 2016).

**Stage-Environment Fit Theory**

The final theory upon which this research will be founded is the theory of stage-environment fit (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). This theory is included because student engagement and subsequent academic behavior is influenced by aspects of the educational environment and instructional practices (Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The theory of stage-environment fit emphasizes the importance of maintaining an appropriate match between the educational environment and the developmental level of the students. Based on this theory, middle school students are motivated to learn when the teacher is able to sufficiently challenge them while recognizing their needs based on their current maturity levels (Eccles et al., 1993).

**Summary**
The researcher will use the theories of verbal efficiency and automaticity in reading to support the need to create a school culture that promotes silent reading as a common daily practice for students. The theory of verbal efficiency will be used in this research as justification for attempting to increase students’ exposure to frequent and varied texts in order to improve their reading fluency. The researcher will use the theory of verbal efficiency to defend the relationship between students’ silent reading fluency and comprehension and to justify the need to increase students’ exposure to frequent and varied reading across content areas. Literature provided about the theory of self-determination will address the critical component of student motivation in promoting independent reading, and the theory of stage-environment fit will be included to examine elements of a positive reading culture that promote reading motivation appropriate for the developmental levels of middle school students. The researcher will focus the theories of verbal efficiency, automaticity of reading, self-determination, and stage-environment fit exclusively on the middle school population to further information in the field using this specific demographic. The researcher intends to use these theories as a foundation upon which to examine the elements of a positive middle school reading culture, determine developmentally appropriate strategies to improve reading motivation among Kentucky middle school students, and to explore ways to promote those strategies across all content areas.

**Related Literature**

To justify the need for further research in the performance impact of a school’s reading culture, the researcher will present a thorough review of the literature. The purpose of providing a literature review is to synthesize existing literature and to apply that information to the current study (Yin, 2014). The review of the literature will analyze existing research related to constituents of a positive reading culture at the middle school level. It will examine the
relationship between a school’s reading culture and the students’ reading performance. To achieve compliance with Kentucky Educational Standards (KDE, 2019c), and to improve reading scores, it is important to understand the connections between a school’s reading culture and the students’ reading performance. It is also essential to recognize what motivates middle school to read independently (Merga & Mason, 2019). The researcher will combine these concepts to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students as viewed through the lens of reading culture.

Reading Culture

The Glossary of Educational Reform broadly defines school culture as “the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, para.1). Lynch (2016) identified the four characteristics of a healthy school culture as physical safety of staff and students; positive interactions among students, teachers, and the community; an emotionally supportive environment where students have a sense of belonging; and academic support that maximizes achievement for all students. The culture of a school is influenced by administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community of which the school is a part (Great Schools Partnership, 2013).

Consequently, school culture, like any culture, is dynamic; it evolves and changes based on the needs and practices of its members (Magara & Batambuze, 2005). This is also true of a school’s reading culture. Because of broad and varied interpretations of the word culture, Trudell (2019, p. 428) acknowledged that the definitions, characteristics, and outcomes of a true reading culture are elusive and “ambiguous,” resulting in inconsistent interpretations among educators and researchers. For the purposes of this research, the term reading culture will be used to
describe both the habitual reading behaviors of students in and out of school, and the policies and practices of others that promote or hinder those behaviors (Magara & Batambuze, 2005). A positive reading culture will be defined as beliefs and behaviors that indicate that reading is highly valued by all stakeholders and wherein the students practice the habit of independently reading daily inside and outside of the school (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005).

**Evidence of a Positive Reading Culture**

Gambrell (2015) indicated that the school has two equally important objectives: “to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read” (p. 260). Evidence of a positive reading culture is found in the teaching of students to “want to read” and is seen as both artifactual and behavioral (Lind, 2008). A positive reading culture may not take the same form from one school to the next, but the policies and practices that make up a positive reading culture essentially fall under the umbrella of two universal practices: First, the readers must be regularly exposed to a variety of text at an appropriately challenging level of text complexity (Gambrell, 2015; Northrop & Kelly, 2019); and secondly, the students must engage in the habit of daily reading (Gambrell, 2015).

Lind (2008) stressed the importance of artifactual evidence of a positive reading culture wherein the educational environment supports and promotes the practice of reading. Artifactual evidence includes the availability of materials (artifacts) that promote reading. This includes the ease of access to the materials and resources needed to promote literacy such as books, magazines, newspapers, documents, libraries, computers, and “the extent to which there is something interesting and/or necessary to read” (Lind, 2008, p. 82). Reading culture artifacts go beyond just having materials students are required to read. Reading culture artifacts serve as
symbols of literacy within a school and can help students to identify themselves as readers as students begin to perceive those materials as their own (Hall et al., 2011). Bartlett (2007) stated that these artifacts do not inherently create better readers, but they have the power to make students “seem and feel more literate” (p. 64).

Behavioral indications of a positive reading culture include the practices of teachers, students, librarians, administrators, and policy-makers as well as parents and community members. Merga and Mason (2019) found that a school with a positive reading culture is likely to have teachers who are avid readers. A school with a positive reading culture is likely to host book fairs and reading nights, classroom teachers often read with and to students, and students regularly converse with one another about what they are reading (Ogugua et al., 2015). Furthermore, in a school with a positive reading culture, students have a positive overall attitude toward reading, view reading as a socially acceptable activity, and read frequently (Merga, 2014; Merga & Mat Roni, 2018a).

**Print Exposure**

Teachers may be able to establish and maintain a positive reading culture by exposing students to a variety of texts and text experiences; this is widely known as “print exposure” (Mano & Guerin, 2018, p. 484). The Kentucky Academic Standards (KDE, 2019c) emphasize the importance of print exposure and direct middle school educators to provide students with a variety of texts from all content areas. They also recommend that students read about their areas of interest so that they can make connections between ELA and other content areas. Thus, in a positive reading culture, students should be given multiple opportunities to analyze the effects of word choice, text structure, and form and determine how those elements contribute to the overall meanings of texts (KDE, 2019c). Because middle school students prefer quickly scanning the
internet over in-depth analytical analysis of rigorous texts, Chiang (2016) recommended extensive reading across content areas as a strategy to close the gap. Extensive reading is the practice of requiring students to read a large quantity and variety of materials on a regular basis (Chiang, 2016). A custom of extensive reading aligns with current literacy standards (KDE, 2019c).

The rigor and complexity of academic reading requirements increase during adolescence (CCSSI, 2019b; Williamson, Fitzgerald, & Stenner, 2014); therefore, it is essential for middle school readers to have achieved fluency in the areas of decoding and word recognition. Students should read from a variety of texts to build background knowledge and to acquire academic and content-specific vocabulary, as these skills are the foundation to silent reading fluency (Sullivan & Brown, 2013; Wigfield et al., 2016). Middle school students are just developing the backgrounds and experiences to personally connect to a variety of texts, and concurrently they are required to increase reading for information, often outside of their own interests (Turner, 2017). By middle school, explicit reading instruction decreases (Williamson et al., 2014). At the same time, reading transitions from primarily oral to primarily silent (Price et al., 2016; Share, 2008; van den Boer, van Bergen, & de Jong, 2014). Because middle school students’ independent reading depends largely on their motivation (de Naeghel et al., 2012; Miyamoto, Pfost, & Artelt, 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018), the need exists to establish a school culture that encourages students to read independently across content areas for a variety of purposes.

**Reading Engagement**

A positive reading culture is evidenced by the habitual choice of students to engage in reading. Wigfield et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between reading engagement and reading performance among elementary students ($r = .57$, $p < .05$); and Taboada, Townsend, and
Boynton (2013) found showed a similar relationship among adolescent English language learners ($r=.67$, $p < .01$). Consequently, Brozo et al. (2014) concluded that “Engagement may be the single criterion that distinguishes nations with the highest and lowest levels of student achievement” (p. 584).

Engagement motivates students, and the classroom teacher plays a pivotal role in student engagement through stimulation, structuring, and scaffolding (Ho & Lau, 2018). You et al. (2016) postulated that students who maintain a positive perception of their teachers’ motivational behaviors show higher self-efficacy and subsequently greater motivation than those who do not, and student motivation is a key predictor of reading performance (Retelsdorf et al., 2011). Afflerbach and Harrison (2017) described the relationship between motivation and engagement this way:

Motivation is somewhat like a reader's potential energy: It is what you have when you are ready to read, when your reading bike is paused, as it were, at the top of a hill.

Engagement is more like a reader with kinetic energy: It is manifest when the reader is zooming down the mountain bike trail of a challenging text, fully absorbed, fully engrossed, totally immersed in the activity of reading (p. 217).

Street (2007), challenged teachers to consider changing the way they defined literacy beyond “cognitive skills and educational measures” (p. vii) to include the social, emotional, and cultural contexts of the literacy engagement of students. This immersive view of literacy requires engaging students through socially-constructed motivational contexts (Davis & Forbes, 2016). In alignment with self-determination theory, students need to experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy to maximize motivation when they read (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, students need to believe in their abilities to complete the task or assignment; they must desire a
connection with the content, the activity, and their classmates; and they need to feel a sense of choice or control over some aspects of their environments (Alley, 2019).

Self-determination theory’s *competence* component (Deci & Ryan, 1985) resembles the term *self-efficacy* used by Bandura (1977). Self-efficacy refers to how individual students feel about themselves and helps to define how they motivates themselves to complete a task (Bandura, 1977). Schiefele et al. (2012) suggested that reading self-efficacy—how students feel about their ability to be successful at a reading task—is derived largely from their past experiences with such tasks and may positively or negatively impact reading motivation. Reading tasks that are excessively challenging can undermine students’ feelings of competence and their perceived ability to be successful, and subsequently reduce their motivation (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). Self-determination theory specifies that a moderate level of challenge, or a challenge that is slightly beyond the students’ skill level, is optimal for motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, teachers who provide students with appropriately challenging reading tasks help them to become improve their reading skills, promote higher reading self-efficacy, and improve reading motivation (Yang, Badri, Al Rashedi, & Almazroui, 2018). Alley (2019) emphasized the importance of providing challenging opportunities, allowing students to participate in decision-making, and developing positive peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships to foster student engagement in reading.

Relatedness emphasizes the need for students to connect to the text and their classmates (Deci & Ryan, 1985). One way teachers can promote students’ engagement through relatedness is by using pre-reading activities (Davis & Forbes, 2016). Bråten, Johansen, and Strømsø (2015) found two prereading strategies that substantially improved text engagement and intrinsic reading motivation among sixth grade students—hands-on activities and prior knowledge
activation. Hands-on activities are designed to provide students with sensory experiences, observations, investigations, and experiments that relate to a particular text in order to create enthusiasm and long-term intrinsic motivation to read a particular text (Bråten et al., 2015). Activating background knowledge is designed to use what students already know to encourage students to delve deeper into a topic (Bråten et al., 2015). Bråten et al. (2015) made a clear distinction, however, between motivating students to read a single, specific text and providing students the intrinsic motivation to become habitual independent readers as emphasized by Schiefele et al. (2012). Consequently, hands-on activities and prior knowledge activation should be viewed as ongoing, situational-based reading engagement strategies rather than as strategies to promote students’ habit of independent reading (Bråten et al., 2015).

Another way to promote student engagement through relatedness is to emphasize student collaboration (Alley, 2019). In a study of middle school students, Parsons et al. (2018) found that students showed increased engagement in tasks that were not only challenging, but also collaborative, authentic, and sustained over time. Such tasks should be both productive and meaningful (Stevenson & Mussalow, 2019). These kinds of tasks fulfill the relatedness need of self-determination theory by allowing students to connect to their peers to achieve a common goal (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Parsons et al., 2018). Because a positive link exists between student engagement and further reading practice, middle school students in a positive reading are culture are encouraged to collaborate, discuss, and debate texts (Kim et al., 2017). Teachers can provide engaging motivational contexts by creating a classroom culture that encourages students to connect with one another, from arranging desks to promote conversations to clearly defining mutual respect for all learners during discussions and debates (Davis & Forbes 2016).
According to self-determination theory, students experience autonomy when they can realize their own personal interests and goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In a study of middle school students, Fulmer and Frijters (2011) concluded that students’ persistence in a reading task was positively related to their interest in the topic of the text, and students were motivated to continue reading a challenging text when it was about a topic that interested them ($r=.61$, $p < .001$). Reading engagement through student autonomy can be achieved by offering students choices about what they read, reducing teacher control, and encouraging students’ independent thinking and personal initiatives (Alley, 2019; Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Stevens, 2016). Furthermore, students who are given autonomy over their reading are more motivated to read and spend more time reading than those who are not (McKenna et al., 2012; Schiefele et al., 2012).

There is a positive relationship between the amount of time students spend engaged in reading and their reading achievement (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Stutz, Schaffner, & Schiefele, 2016; Whitten et al., 2019) Consequently, Reutzel and Juth (2014) proposed that providing time in the classroom to encourage students’ independent reading is still an effective use of class time, provided that silent reading time is actually spent reading. They endorsed two evidence-based strategies to improve students’ independent reading time: Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR) and R5 (Read and Relax, Reflect and Respond, and Rap). With ScSR, the teacher provides students with appropriately challenging and interesting book choices, color coded by level of difficulty. Then the teacher presents a five- to eight-minute mini-lesson, modeling a fluency or comprehension strategy, and students read independently for 20 minutes. As students read, four or five individual students are selected to read aloud to the teacher for one or two minutes each, and the teacher engages each of them in a brief two-minute comprehension-based discussion of
what they are reading. Each student also sets a goal for a date to finish the book. R5 occurs in three phases: Read and Relax, Reflect and Respond, and Rap. The teacher assists students with selecting appropriate books, providing them with autonomy to select books that interest them, thereby increasing motivation (Alley, 2019). Students keep a reading log that includes the books they have read, reading strategies notes, and a goal-setting page; and the teacher holds them accountable in 10-minute individual monthly conferences. Both of these engagement strategies are designed address the skills-based components of reading as well as student autonomy, accountability, and motivation (Alley, 2019; Reutzel & Juth, 2014).

**Beyond English Language Arts**

A school’s positive reading culture extends beyond the ELA classroom. While much literature exists on the importance of engaged sustained silent reading, and though research supports the practice of using a variety of strategies to engage middle school readers, most school policies do little to promote reading engagement strategies as a school-wide endeavor, even where content-specific literacy is a focus (Merga & Gardiner, 2018). Nevertheless, literacy should be a concern for all teachers, regardless of their content areas. “Teachers of secondary students have two related instructional goals: to improve students' content knowledge and to improve their reading comprehension” (Swanson et al., 2015, p. 77). Consequently, College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards are provided for middle and high school teachers in subjects outside of language arts to promote literacy standards in both science and social studies (CCSSI, 2019a). Science and social studies teachers are expected to engage students in rigorous and complex texts through which they can expand vocabulary and participate in effective discussions (CCSSI, 2019a). Middle school students are also expected to engage in complex literary tasks
such as citing text evidence, recognizing text structure, determining the author’s purpose and analyzing content (CCSSI, 2019a).

Beck, Buehl, and Barber (2015) conducted a study on middle school reading in social studies. The researchers found that most middle school students believed reading was important for learning in social studies and actively employed reading strategies they had learned in ELA contexts, but the students also stated that there were challenges with understanding some of the vocabulary in the informational texts they read (Beck et al., 2015). The content of science texts also presents challenges for middle school students with regard to the unique vocabulary, semantics, and syntax used by science curriculum textbooks (Fang, 2007). In science texts, many words are unfamiliar and multisyllabic, requiring students to sound them out; while other more familiar-sounding words are multi-meaning words, used in an entirely new science-specific way that can be confusing and frustrating for middle school students (Fang, 2007). Non-ELA teachers may find the combined tasks of content exposure and literacy development daunting (Swanson et al., 2015), but with effective training and support, the overall impact of this twofold approach will be students’ improvement in all academic areas (Moore et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018).

**Reading Motivation**

A positive reading culture is evidenced by students who are motivated to read. Motivating students to read more from a variety of sources is a necessary step toward improving reading literacy—an essential skill for college and career readiness (Chen & Simone, 2016) as well as economic and civic involvement (Loh et al., 2017; OECD, 2009). Researchers have found that there is a strong relationship between the time students spend engaged in reading and with reading achievement (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019).
Wigfield et al. (2016) suggested that students achieve optimally when they are confident in their ability to be successful in completing a task, when they have control over their learning, and when they find an activity valuable or useful. Middle school students are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors; they have different motivational goals, including increasing their knowledge and out-performing others. Furthermore, middle school students’ motivation may be impacted by social relationships and social contexts (Wigfield et al., 2016).

Classifications of Readers

Beers and Samuels (1998) classified students as either avid readers, or non-readers. Students who are avid readers enjoy reading, read often, and make time to read (Beers & Samuels, 1998; Wilson & Kelley, 2010). In fact, students who consider themselves to be avid readers define reading as a “way of life” (Beers & Samuels, 1998, p. 10) and like being identified as readers (Beers & Samuels, 1998; Wilson & Kelley, 2010). Wilson and Kelley (2010) added that students who are avid readers read for personal reasons rather than just to satisfy a school requirement. Also, they are able to connect emotionally to texts, see reading as entertaining, typically think highly of others who identify themselves as readers, and plan to read in the future (Beers & Samuels, 1998). Avid readers often possess high reading self-efficacy—the student’s belief in his or her own ability to read and comprehend the text—and researchers have found a positive relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading achievement (Lee & Zentall, 2017; Louick et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2018; You, Dang, & Lim, 2016).

Using these defining characteristics for avid readers, Beers and Samuels (1998) categorized non-readers into two distinct categories: students who reported that they enjoyed reading but did not have time to read (dormant readers), and students who did not read because they did not find reading enjoyable. Dormant readers exhibit many of the same reading behaviors
as avid readers; however, they do not read often or make time to read. Beers and Samuels (1998) warned that dormant readers can become non-readers unless their hindering factors are addressed, including creating time for these students to engage in reading.

For readers who did not find reading enjoyable, Beers and Samuels (1998) identified two distinct groups: The first saw reading as a functional skill but not necessarily a rewarding endeavor and therefore lacked the commitment to read. The second had negative attitudes toward reading and toward other students who are readers and therefore lacked motivation to read. The extreme end of latter group found reading boring, did not connect to books aesthetically, and expressed certainty that they would not read in the future (Beers & Samuels, 1998). Mikulecky (1979) used the term aliteracy to define both categories of students who can read but choose not to read.

Understanding what motivates middle school students to read is a crucial component of teaching (Mucherah & Ambrose-Stahl, 2014). Motivation and self-efficacy work together to increase a student’s effort and persistence in reading and to bolster the student’s chances and frequency of success (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015). Unfortunately, researchers have found that students’ attitudes about reading decline through elementary school (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015; McKenna et al., 2012; Wigfield et al., 2016), and the 2015 NAEP report indicated that many middle school students actively avoid reading; This may be especially true for struggling readers (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015).

**Constructs of reading motivation**

De Naeghel et al. (2012) identified four constructs of reading motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, social motivation, and work avoidance. Some researchers caution, however, against viewing reading motivational constructs in isolation, because each construct interacts with
another. For example, although there is a strong positive relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, they have opposite effects on reading comprehension (Schaffner, Schiefele & Ulferts, 2013; Troyer, Kim, Hale, Wantchekon & Armstrong, 2019). The four constructs are included in this research, not in isolation, but together to understand the motivating factors that do and do not improve students’ reading performance.

**Intrinsic Motivation.** Intrinsic motivation, a student’s interest and enjoyment of reading, is important to reading frequency and reading comprehension (Miyamoto et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018). In a study of 1260 fifth grade students, De Naeghel et al. (2012) found that intrinsic motivation was positively related to reading frequency ($r = .60, p <.001$), reading self-efficacy ($r = .37, p <.001$), and reading comprehension ($r = .28, p <.001$). Furthermore, reading comprehension can improve performance in other academic content areas (Ladbrook, 2014; Moore et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2019). Readers who are intrinsically motivated enjoy reading, spend more time reading, and likely develop a wider variety of reading strategies than students who are less motivated to read (Miyamoto et al., 2019). Miyamoto et al. (2019) concluded that intrinsically motivated readers derive pleasure from reading. This pleasure positively reinforces reading behaviors, resulting in increased time spent reading. When students spend more time reading, the result is broadened vocabularies, increased and varied background knowledge, and greater automaticity in lower-level reading processes. Consequently, these factors work together to improve overall reading comprehension (Miyamoto et al., 2019).

To further this construct of intrinsic motivation, Wilhelm (2016) adapted John Dewey’s (1913) types of pleasure—play, work, intellectual, and social—added a fifth construct he termed inner work, and discussed each of these as they relate to independent reading. Wilhelm (2016) described immersive play pleasure as the most critical of all reading pleasures and a necessary
component upon which to develop other reading pleasures. In immersive play pleasure, students are able to become “lost in a book” (Wilhelm, 2016, p.34), identify with the characters, and live through the experiences with them (Wilhelm, 2016). Engaged readers also regularly experience intellectual pleasure when they try to solve a problem or figure out what is going to happen next in a story (Wilhelm, 2016). Social pleasure is derived when students are able to talk with others about what they are reading and to self-identify as readers (Wilhelm, 2016). Dewey’s (1913) fourth pleasure, the pleasure of work, is achieved when an engaged reader is able to use a text to achieve an end goal, such as writing, talking, understanding others and their ideas, and discovering new ways to think and act (Wilhelm, 2016). Wilhelm (2016) identified a new fifth category of reading pleasure he called “inner work” (p. 35), that is “using their reading to help them become the kind of people they want to become” (p. 36). One middle school student in Wilhelm’s (2016) study articulated a distinction between reading for school and “real” reading (p. 36), open-ended reading that prepares one for life and encompasses all five of the reading pleasures.

Schiefele et al. (2012) identified two specific intrinsic motivators for pleasure reading: curiosity—to learn more about topics of personal interest, and involvement—to get lost in a story’s plot or to feel personally attached to a story’s characters. In a longitudinal study of 1051 second and third grade students, Schiefele et al. (2016) found that the intrinsic motivator of involvement—getting lost in a story—remained high between tests over time, while curiosity and competition both declined. The study found that of the two intrinsic motivating factors, involvement showed the most positive relationship with reading comprehension ($r = .29, p < 0.001$). There was no significant relationship between curiosity and reading comprehension ($r =$ -}
and there was a negative relationship between competition, an extrinsic motivating factor, and reading comprehension ($r = -0.26, p < 0.001$) (Schiefele et al., 2016).

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Extrinsic motivation is motivation based upon external factors such as the student’s receipt of recognition and rewards for reading completion and achievement, good grades, pleasing parents or teachers, or reading competition. Students’ extrinsic motivation does not consistently result in increasing reading time or comprehension (de Naeghel et al., 2012; Miyamoto et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018). Furthermore, several researchers have found a negative relationship between extrinsic motivation and reading comprehension (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Schaffner et al., 2013; Stutz, et al., 2016). In study of 168 fifth grade students, Schaffner et al. (2013) found an insignificant relationship between competition as an extrinsic motivator and reading amount ($r = 0.05, p < 0.05$) and a negative relationship between competition and reading comprehension ($r = -0.20, p < 0.05$).

**Social motivation.** Social motivation, which can be defined in the context of this study as sharing books, reading with friends, and talking to others about reading, has shown conflicting results in research among middle school students. Wigfield et al. (2016) found that adolescents who were socially motivated spent more time reading, presented more effort reading, and had higher levels of reading achievement than those who were not socially motivated. Guthrie, Coddington, and Wigfield (2009), however posited that students with lower reading self-efficacy may be less motivated in social contexts and may even avoid social reading activities altogether as a way to prevent other students from seeing them struggle.

**Work avoidance.** Work avoidance was the final construct of reading motivation described by de Naeghel et al. (2012). Work avoidance can be defined as student behavior that avoids reading or involves the least amount of work possible. This behavior is often due to an
aversion toward reading, and may manifest as taking extra time to transition between activities, expressing a sudden desire to take care of a bodily need such as using the restroom or getting a drink of water, looking for or gathering materials, or engaging in off-topic conversations (Stevenson & Mussalow, 2019). In a study of 245 fifth grade students, Guthrie et al. (2009) found a negative relationship between work avoidance and intrinsic motivation ($r = -.70$, $p < .01$), reading self-efficacy ($r = -.27$, $p < .01$), and reading comprehension ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$).

Stevenson and Mussalow (2019) warned that, though some work avoidance may be normal for students, repeated work avoidance over time may widen the achievement gap, lowering a student’s self-efficacy and increasing work avoidance.

**Reading Comprehension**

The ultimate goal of a positive reading culture is to create a passion for reading in an effort to improve overall reading comprehension. There is much evidence to support the influence of a positive reading culture and reading motivation on reading comprehension and performance among students (Brozo et al., 2014; Gambrell, 2015; Retelsdorf et al., 2011). Furthermore, researchers also found that low reading comprehension among students is a concern that needs further investigation.

Reading comprehension is a vital college and career ready skill for students (Chen & Simone, 2016). Although there has been some growth in reading achievement in the United States over the past two decades, the NAEP reported that students are still underperforming. NAEP testing is provided for students in grades 4, 8, and 12 (NAEP, n.d.). The most recent reports show that only 37% of fourth graders, 36% of eighth graders, and 37% of twelfth grade students performed at a level of proficient or above on the 2017 reading assessment (NAEP, n.d.). The NAEP test, as well as nearly all state assessments of reading comprehension, require
students, beginning in the upper elementary grades, to answer comprehension questions after reading passages silently, therein emphasizing the importance of silent reading fluency as it relates to reading comprehension.

One subskill of reading comprehension is reading fluency—the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003) and the ability to decode and comprehend simultaneously (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010). It is a complex process in which the reader is required to use visual cues to automatically decode letters and letter combinations into sounds, translate those sounds into whole words, and process combinations of words into meaningful sentences (Bigozzi, Tarchi, Vagnoli, Valente, & Pinto, 2017). Moreover, the reader must make connections to his or her own background knowledge and fill in the gaps using inferences. To achieve fluency, the reader must combine all of these processes effortlessly and efficiently (Bigozzi et al., 2017).

The foundation of silent reading fluency is word recognition accuracy and automaticity. Word recognition accuracy refers to an individual’s ability to accurately decode written words for meaning (Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014), whereas word recognition automaticity is the speed at which a reader recognizes and processes words. Word recognition automaticity is a complex cognitive skill that evolves through exposure and practice (Roembke, Hazeltine, Reed, & McMurray, 2019). Students who read with high levels of automaticity are able to free up cognitive resources for more complex reading comprehension skills (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). This is especially important by middle school when assessment of basic reading skills is replaced by assessment of higher-level text comprehension (Roembke et al., 2019). At the middle school level, the CCSSI (2019b) provide reading standards that emphasize complex
reading skills such as finding a central theme or idea, interpreting figurative language, and comparing and contrasting multiple texts.

The association between silent reading fluency and reading comprehension is an intricate process, making it difficult to determine which influences which, but there are studies that conclude that strong reading fluency is a strong predictor of strong reading comprehension among students (Bigozzi et al., 2017; Daniel, 2014). Daniel (2014) found that there is a positive relationship between silent reading fluency and reading comprehension among the top 82% students from grades four through eight. Furthermore, Walczyk (1994) concluded that lack of automaticity resulted in decreased comprehension.

The decline in students’ silent reading fluency rates has been the focus of several studies (Carver, 1983; Spichtig et al., 2016; Taylor, 1965). Taylor, Frackenpohl, and Pettee (1960) determined a set of norms for silent reading fluency rates that have been used in several comparative studies over past decades (see Table 2). Carver (1983) used the norms established by Taylor et al. (1960), along with empirical data from his own study, the 1983 Nelson-Denny Reading Test, and 1972 NAEP testing to compare the average silent reading fluency rates of students at the 50th percentile in 1960 to those in 1983, and while growth was noted at each grade level, the decline of rates between the Taylor et al. (1960) study and Carver’s (1983) study were already apparent.
Table 2

*Silent Reading Fluency Norms (Taylor, 1965)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Words per minute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or beyond</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This table provides the silent reading fluency rates, established by Taylor (1965), which have been used as norms for subsequent studies. Rates increased by grade level and were expressed as the number words per minute students should be able to read with at least 70% comprehension.

In a later study modeled after the study of Taylor et al., (1960), Spichtig et al. (2016) reported that about one third of students tested for reading fluency failed to meet the comprehension requirement for each passage. A comparison of silent reading rates of the participants in Taylor’s (1965) and Spichtig et al.’s (2016) studies is presented in Figure 2. While the rates of second grade students remained relatively unchanged between the two studies, an incongruity between rates was noticeable among students in fourth grade, suggesting that in year 2011, students in fourth grade were still developing lower-level skills such as decoding and vocabulary. There was limited growth in silent reading fluency rates for students in grades six through eight in the 2011 cohort (Spichtig et al., 2016). By high school, silent reading rates improved slightly in the 2001 group, but they remained well below the fluency rates of the students of the 1960 study (Spichtig et al., 2016).
Williamson et al. (2014) also found a deceleration of growth occurring just before or during middle school. This evidence coincides with a stagnation of growth in silent reading fluency in middle school in the study of Spichtig et al. (2016) and an interruption of growth in both reading and math noted by Akos, Rose & Orthner (2015) among middle school students.

Moreover, students are not recovering from this trend; an alarming number of students are graduating high school lacking in reading skills that are required for comprehension of academically rigorous texts in college (American College Testing [ACT], 2018; NAEP, n.d). A recent report from ACT (2018) indicated that while 82% of high school graduates planned to pursue postsecondary education, only 47% met the reading benchmark for college readiness (ACT, 2018).

Reversing this trend may be as simple as requiring teachers to increase the volume and variety of students’ reading. There is a significant relationship between the amount of time students spend reading and reading achievement (Ladbrook, 2014; Twist et al., 2007) and motivation (Ladbrook, 2014). There is a theory called the “Matthew Effect” in reading, which suggests that students who read often read more proficiently and have better reading experiences than those who spend little time reading. Reciprocally, those who read less often, do not develop strong reading skills and have less enjoyable reading experiences, leading to even less time spent reading (Stanovich, 1986). Furthermore, Clark and Rumbold (2006) ranked reading for pleasure higher than socioeconomic status in predicting students’ reading comprehension and suggested that the practice of frequent independent reading may be effective in helping to close the performance gap in reading and raise educational standards. Krashen (2004) concluded, “Reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammatical competence, and the only way we become good
spellers” (p. 37). Furthermore, Sullivan and Brown (2013) proposed that reading frequency did not just improve reading comprehension but actually improved overall cognitive processes over time:

Our findings support other work suggesting that children’s leisure reading is important for educational attainment and social mobility, and suggest that the mechanism for this is increased cognitive development. Once we controlled for the child’s test scores at age five and ten, the influence of the child’s own reading remained highly significant, suggesting that the positive link between leisure reading and cognitive outcomes is not purely due to more able children being more likely to read a lot, but that reading is actually linked to increased cognitive progress over time. From a policy perspective, this strongly supports the need to support and encourage children’s reading in their leisure time, especially given that the available evidence on trends over time suggests that children’s reading for pleasure has declined in recent years. In light of the decline in leisure reading between the ages of ten and 16, our findings suggest the particular need to support teenagers’ reading.

**Reading Assessment**

Reading performance for most middle school student in Kentucky is assessed at the end of the academic year using the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP). In accordance with KRS 158.6453, reading comprehension is measured for Kentucky students in grades three through eight, ten, and 11, using the K-PREP reading assessment, a criterion-referenced test used to measure students’ performance levels (novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished) in achievement of Kentucky literacy standards (KDE, 2019e). This assessment is administered within the last 14 days instructional days of each district’s calendar
(KDE, 2019e). Students in grades six, seven, and eight complete the assessment in two timed testing sessions, lasting between 70 and 90 minutes each. The entire assessment consists of six to eight reading passages followed by 42 multiple choice questions, two short answer questions, and one extended response (KDE, 2019b). Reliability for the K-PREP reading assessment for grades six through eight ranges from 0.86 to 0.88 (KDE, 2019d).

Reading proficiency for students at Harrison Independent School is measured by the ACT Aspire. This assessment is administered during the last month of the academic year. Like the K-PREP reading assessment, the ACT Aspire consists of a combination of literary and informational reading passages. These are paired with 19-21 multiple choice questions, 1-3 technology enhanced questions, and two constructed response questions (ACT, Inc, 2020). The ACT Aspire is also the primary reading assessment in Alabama (ACT, Inc., 2020; Alabama State Department of Education, 2018) and Arkansas (ACT, Inc., 2020; Arkansas Department of Education, 2021). Reliability for the ACT Aspire reading assessment for grades six through eight ranges from 0.8 to 0.87 (ACT, Inc., 2020).

Reading Culture Roadblocks

The researcher acknowledges that changing the culture of an entire school is a monumental endeavor. Koşar, Kilinç, Koşar, Er, and Öğdem (2016) proposed that a school does not have a culture, but rather that it is its own culture. This is a fact that can make change challenging. A school’s capacity to change is found in its shared vision, personal mastery, and collaboration. Changes in school culture take time and effort and must start from within the school itself (Eilers & Camacho, 2007). New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc. (NUMMI) organizational leader Edgar Schein suggested that the way to change the culture of an organization is to start by changing its artifacts—the observable measure of what the people of
the culture do and how they behave (Shook, 2010). Once the desired behaviors are defined, then individuals and groups within the organization can work together to design strategies to achieve the desired results (Shook, 2010).

**Students**

Clearly, the desired behavior is for students to read more and to be more engaged in what they read, but Beers and Samuels (1998) suggested that middle school teachers teach aliterate readers more often than avid ones. Some literature suggests that the transition from elementary to middle school may be to blame for the decline in students’ reading efforts (AMLE, 2002; Goldstein, Boxer, & Rudolph, 2015; Williamson et al., 2014) The transition from elementary to middle school marks a significant change in the lives of the approximately 88% of American students who make the adjustment from the expectations and practices of elementary school to those of middle school (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2002) at a time of great developmental growth and change (Williamson et al., 2014). Students often move from smaller neighborhood elementary schools to much larger middle schools, and this transition can raise student anxiety and lower student motivation and achievement (AMLE, 2002; Goldstein et al., 2015). A decline in students’ learning trajectories is observable during the transition year between elementary and middle school. This effect is magnified for vulnerable student populations such as socioeconomically disadvantaged and special education students (Akos et al., 2015). Researchers disagree whether the decrease in learning is primarily an effect of the middle school transition as proposed by Nootens et al. (2018) or of naturally occurring changes in cognitive growth among students in this age group (Williamson et al., 2014).

Whatever the reason, there is undoubtedly a decline in the attitudes of students toward reading, beginning in the upper elementary years and continuing through middle school
(McKenna et al., 2012; Nootens et al., 2018). In a survey of 4,491 sixth- through eighth-grade students, McKenna et al. (2012) found that students’ attitudes toward reading became increasingly more negative as students advanced through each grade. Furthermore, the most negative attitudes were directed toward academic reading (McKenna et al., 2012). This study corroborated earlier findings by Ley, Schaer, and Dismukes (1994) who found a decline in reading attitudes among adolescents and reported that students read primarily to do well in school and not for personal growth or enjoyment. Another study by Anderson, Tollefson, and Gilbert (1985) had similar findings among gifted students, indicating that the decline in students’ attitudes toward reading is not limited to struggling readers.

**Teachers**

The desired behavior for teachers in a positive reading culture is to promote and encourage students to read independently. One of the ways to do this is to model independent reading. Merga (2016) stated that teachers who presented the qualities of an avid reader chose to read at school, talked enthusiastically to students about what they read, and read expressively to the class. Unfortunately, some recent research suggests that middle school students may not perceive their teachers as avid readers (Merga, 2016). Furthermore, a decline in teachers’ own interest in reading may negatively influence their ability to foster a passion for reading among their students (Skaar, Elvebakk, & Nilssen, 2018).

Because of the pressures of high-stakes testing, teachers may struggle to strike a balance between encouraging students to read books for pleasure and requiring students to practice with rigorous and complex texts for testing (Merga & Mason, 2019, Stevens, 2016). Researchers emphasize the importance of self-selected text on reading motivation (McKenna et al., 2012; Schiefele et al., 2012), but middle school students’ reading selections are often undervalued for
two reasons. First, students frequently choose genres not traditionally used for classroom instruction or assessment, including romance, vampire stories, horror, and dystopian fiction (Wilhelm, 2016). Secondly, middle school students’ independent book choices fall short of the rigor of texts students encounter on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019g; Lexile, 2019).

The Lexile® Framework for Reading is a widely used educational tool that measures both students’ reading ability and text complexity (MetaMatrix, n.d.). As a part of the K-PREP reading assessment for elementary and middle school students, one component of the Lexile® Framework for Reading measures and reports students’ ability to read on the Lexile scale, while a second component of the Lexile® Framework for Reading measures the complexity of texts (KDE, 2019g). A combination of these measures can help students and teachers choose appropriately challenging books and predict a student’s success at comprehending a text at a specific Lexile level (KDE, 2019g). The Lexile score for proficient middle school readers ranges from 925-1185 (KDE, 2019g), but many popular middle school books do not fall within this range. In fact, finding high-interest developmentally appropriate books within the middle school proficiency Lexile range can be a challenging task. Table 3 shows the Lexile levels of the top recommended books for middle school readers as published by Goodreads.com (n.d.), WeAreTeachers.com (2019), and Scholastic (n.d.). Of these highly recommended books, the vast majority of the books on all three lists fall below the Lexile range for reading proficiency for middle school students. The Lexile® Framework for Reading cautions that these measures do not account for all factors including student interest and subsequent motivation, maturity level of the reading content, text support features such as illustrations and captions, and the aesthetic appeal of the text (MetaMatrix, n.d.).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goodreads</th>
<th>WeAreTeachers</th>
<th>Scholastic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Harry Potter</em></td>
<td>500-950</td>
<td><em>Ringer</em> 810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(series)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Marvels</em> 770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Giver</em></td>
<td>760</td>
<td><em>George</em> 790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>My Brother Sam is Dead</em> 770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Hunger Games</em></td>
<td>810</td>
<td><em>Counting by Sevens</em> 770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Music of Dolphins</em> 560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Holes</em></td>
<td>660</td>
<td><em>Wonder</em> 790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Maniac Magee</em> 820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Lightning Thief</em></td>
<td>740</td>
<td><em>The Wednesday Wars</em> 990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Julie of the Wolves</em> 860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Outsiders</em></td>
<td>750</td>
<td><em>Ghost</em> 730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Island of the Blue</em> 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Dolphins</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bridge to Terabithia</em></td>
<td>810</td>
<td><em>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</em> 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Hunger Games</em> 810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Hobbit</em></td>
<td>1000</td>
<td><em>Paperboy</em> 940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Holes</em> 660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</em></td>
<td>940</td>
<td><em>The Giver</em> 760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</em> 880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Number the Stars</em></td>
<td>670</td>
<td><em>The Outsiders</em> 750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>American Born Chinese</em> 530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Matilda</em></td>
<td>840</td>
<td><em>Walk Two Moons</em> 770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sounder</em> 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Diary of a Young Girl</em></td>
<td>700</td>
<td><em>Tuck Everlasting</em> 770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Wonder</em> 790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Book Thief</em></td>
<td>730</td>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em> 950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Smile</em> 410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Books recommendations on Table 3 were compiled using different methods. Top books recommended by Goodreads were acquired from votes by members of Goodreads Book Club (Goodreads, n.d.); an editorial team at WeAreTeachers (2019) selected the books on their recommendation list; and Scholastic (n.d.) credited experts for its picks.
While the Lexile Framework may provide one measure of reading ability, Wilhelm (2016) asserted that the impact of students’ freedom to independently choose books based on their own interests goes beyond simply trying to improve reading performance, that it motivates students to continue to read, to engage in what they are reading, and to experience “other emotional, psychological, and cognitive benefits” (p. 30). Unfortunately, the pleasure of reading often gives way to the power of reading in today’s educational system (Wilhelm, 2016). One roadblock to creating a true reading culture may lie in a lack of teachers’ understanding of how to make reading relevant to students. Clark and Rumbold (2006) expounded upon the conclusions of McKenna et al. (2012) and Schiefele et al. (2012) regarding reading for pleasure; their model of independent reading motivation included not only what a student selects independently for his or her own personal enjoyment, but also reading that students continue for their own enjoyment after being introduced to it by someone else. Gambrell (2015) and Daniel (2017) emphasized the need for teachers to create authentic reading opportunities for students, simulate real-life scenarios and experiences, and engage students in meaningful and purposeful literary tasks instead of defaulting to the teacher-directed questions or worksheets. Daniel (2017) proposed that teachers provide a diversity of inclusive and culturally relevant literature to allow all students to recognize themselves in the text and connect with characters, thereby increasing their motivation to read. Deci and Ryan (1985) found that reading tasks that were appropriately challenging to students increased student motivation. Merga (2018) recommended that teachers be consistent in delivery of silent reading opportunities as well as facilitate frequent book discussions of students’ self-selected texts; and Marinak (2014) suggested that teachers could also increase the authenticity of reading tasks by using current technologies and social media such as Twitter to allow students to respond to their reading.
Administration

A positive reading culture requires the involvement of all stakeholders in a school district, including administrators. “To build a reading culture, there needs to be an ecology of reading within the school with the principal leading the way” (Loh et al., 2017, p. 344). Desired behaviors of administrators in a school with a positive reading culture include a professional orientation rather than a bureaucratic one, wherein trust, collaboration, and positive relationships that encourage teacher professionalism, supersede authoritative rules, policies, practices, and procedures (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016). Researchers found the degree of professional orientation of the principal is a positive predictor of teachers’ professional behavior and school academic optimism (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Professionally oriented administrators support their teachers’ instructional practices, and teachers are viewed as professional colleagues who are capable of meeting students’ needs, whereas bureaucratic leaders create hindering organizational structures, thereby presenting a roadblock to improving a school’s reading culture (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016).

According to Mitchell and Tarter (2016), three factors work together to effect change in a school’s culture: collective efficacy, faculty trust in clients, and academic emphasis. Collective efficacy refers to a faculty’s collective belief in its ability to have a positive impact on student outcomes regardless of obstacles (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016). Faculty trust in clients relates to the faculty’s belief that they can trust others—specifically students and parents—to assist in efforts to bring about a positive change for students (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016). Academic emphasis is the school’s collective high expectations for students’ academic success, in which faculty and administration believe in the students’ ability to achieve success, encourage students toward success, aid struggling students, and celebrate achievements.
One exemplar of a positive reading culture can be seen in a case study of an urban school that described itself as a “reading school” (Francois, 2015, p. 69). In this study, the principal’s reading leadership was distinguished as a contributing factor to the school’s reading culture. The principal established an 800-book library in his office and regularly engaged students in conversations about their reading. He stocked high-interest books and hosted book clubs throughout the year, using flyers to advertise available books; and he made sure each student who signed up received a copy of the book, which later became part of their teacher’s classroom library or the school library. Book clubs were mixed-grade social events that included food and insightful discussion of the books (Francois, 2015). While this school is not typical, Ellis (2013) emphasized the importance of viewing an exemplar, not as a standard, but rather as an ideal worth modeling after.

Parents and Social Influences

Another potential hindrance to a positive reading culture occurs outside of the school building. The desired behavior for parents in a positive reading culture is to encourage reading by modeling and providing time and resources for reading. Merga and Mat Roni (2018b) stated that parental reading encouragement can be seen in the form of talking about books with children and focusing on reading for pleasure, having access to books at home, reading aloud with children, demonstrating a personal love for reading, and regularly setting aside time for children to read. Students whose parents value reading and are involved in their educations perform better in reading. Unfortunately, as students acquire basic reading skills, these parents become the exception rather than the rule (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018b). Scholastic (2019) reported that students with parents who believed that reading was important and enjoyable were more likely to have children who were avid readers than those who did not (70% vs. 27%). Although parental
encouragement and has been shown to promote reading engagement, Merga and Mat Roni (2018b) found that over a third of children they surveyed between the ages of eight and 12 stated that no one they know encourages them to read. This number was even greater for boys than girls (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018b). Additionally, parents who model frequent reading are more likely to have children who are frequent readers (39% vs. 16%) (Scholastic, 2019), but many children stated they had parents who encouraged reading but did not read themselves (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018b).

Furthermore, Brown et al. (2011) found that middle school students had little free time after school for independent reading and that reading was not prioritized as an after-school activity. A nationwide survey conducted by Scholastic (2015) corroborated these findings, stating that avid readers reported having more time to read during the school day than at home. Furthermore, of these students, a startling 60% of those who reported that they read for fun mostly at school were from homes with an annual income of less than $35,000 (Scholastic, 2015). Since students from low-income families report reading more at school than at home (Scholastic, 2015), and since reading amount contributes to reading performance (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019), providing time to read at school is an essential part of a positive reading culture.

Merga and Roni (2018b) found that that many children also have negative reading experiences outside of school. Rather than fostering a love for reading, some parents are prone to over-correcting new or struggling readers, focusing on errors, and creating stress for young readers. Additionally, Merga & Roni (2018b) discussed the challenges of a busy schedule as a negating factor in promoting independent reading, wherein parents are too busy to read to their children or engage in dialogue about their reading. A recent report by Scholastic (2019) stated
that parents are less likely to read aloud to children after they have acquired their own basic reading skills. While 52% of parents said they read aloud to children under nine more than five times per week, only 21% reported reading aloud to children 9-11, and only 7% reported reading aloud to children 12-14 (Scholastic, 2019).

**Summary**

It is essential to this research to examine the literature for the purpose of investigating the low K-PREP reading scores of Kentucky middle school students. Harrison Independent School is a private school serving 384 students in grades pre-k through 12, including 103 middle school students. Examining the reading culture of Harrison Independent School will serve to identify positive elements of the school’s reading culture that may be used to make recommendations for other Kentucky middle schools.

Hiebert stated, “The measure of whether we are successful as literacy educators is whether individuals turn to texts for information, restoration, inspiration, and enjoyment” (2009, p. xii). The preponderance of researchers found that there was a strong signification between students’ intrinsic reading motivation and their reading amount (de Naeghel et al., 2012; Miyamoto et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018). Researchers also found that reading amount was a predictor of reading fluency (Ladbrook, 2014; Twist et al., 2007), and that reading fluency improved reading comprehension (Bigozzi et al., 2017; Daniel, 2014; Walczyk, 1994). The literature shows that strategies exist to promote a culture of reading among middle school students that encourages independent reading of self-selected texts (Lind, 2008; Merga & Mason, 2019).

An investigation is warranted to identify components of a positive reading culture and what is being done to promote frequent and varied independent reading across all content areas.
To address this gap in research, the researcher will conduct student surveys, teacher surveys, and reading teacher interviews to look for artifactual and behavioral evidence of a positive reading culture. A positive reading culture was defined as beliefs and behaviors that indicate that reading is highly valued by all stakeholders and wherein the students practice the daily habit of independently reading inside and outside of the school (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005). Based on this definition and the findings in the literature, the researcher will be looking for the following indicators of a positive reading culture:

1. Reading is a social norm wherein students read daily (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005).
2. Students read from a variety of materials (Chiang, 2016; Mano & Guerin, 2018).
3. Students select texts to read based on their own interests or enjoyment (McKenna et al., 2012; Schiefele et al., 2012; Wilhelm, 2016).
4. Class time is set aside for independent reading (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Reutzel & Juth, 2014; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019).
5. Classrooms contain a variety of reading materials available to students (Gambrell, 2015; Lind, 2008, Northrop & Kelly, 2019).
6. Students have regular access to a variety of reading materials in the library (Bartlett, 2007; Hall et al., 2011).
7. Teachers are avid readers (Merga, 2016; Merga & Mason, 2019; Skaar et al., 2018).
8. Teachers and students converse often about what they are reading (Ogugua et al., 2015).
9. Teachers employ active engagement strategies to motivate students to read (Davis & Forbes, 2016; Ho & Lau, 2018).
10. Reading tasks are collaborative, meaningful, and sustained over time (Alley, 2019; Stevenson & Mussalow, 2019; Parsons et al., 2018).

11. Promoting literacy is a school-wide endeavor with administration leading the way (Loh et al., 2017; Merga & Gardiner, 2018; Swanson et al., 2015).

12. Reading extends beyond the school walls to include students’ families and community (Merga and Mat Roni, 2018b; Ogugua et al., 2015).
CHAPTER THREE: PROPOSED METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study will be to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by exploring the reading culture of Harrison Independent School with the aim of identifying positive practices that can be endorsed as viable solutions to the problem. The problem is that greater than 40% of Kentucky middle school students are consistently performing below proficiency on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h). The researcher will conduct a multimethod study to inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores through the lens of Harrison Independent School’s reading culture. The researcher will define the setting and participants of Harrison Independent School and will present the procedures that will be used to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data and the analysis of the data to address the research problem. Finally, the researcher intends to provide recommendations to Kentucky middle schools for advancing a positive reading culture.

Design

Applied research begins with a clear focus on a problem or issue (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The researcher has identified the problem of low K-PREP reading scores (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h) among Kentucky middle school students and will seek strategies to improve the reading culture. The researcher has developed a central research question with three researchable sub-questions that will be used to guide the research; these questions may be refined as the research progresses (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

A multimethod research design will be used for this applied study. This design is appropriate for the current study as the researcher intends to integrate both quantitative and
qualitative measures to inform the study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). In accordance with best practice, the methodology of the study will be guided by the research questions, which will yield both qualitative and quantitative data; and a multimethod design will allow the researcher the flexibility to answer the research questions effectively (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

Furthermore, the data collection will be comprised of quantitative approaches—in the form of surveys of teachers and students—and qualitative data derived from interviews with reading teachers. To address the central question and sub-questions, data will be analyzed by descriptive statistics (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

**Research Questions**

**Central Question:** How can the reading culture of Kentucky middle schools be amended to improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?

**Sub-question 1:** How would reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in an interview improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?

**Sub-question 2:** How would information obtained on a teacher survey at Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students?

**Sub-question 3:** How would student surveys from Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores?

**Setting**

Harrison Independent School is a private Kentucky school that serves 384 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, including 103 middle school students, and employs 29 teachers. Students of Harrison Independent School reside in a small town/rural community in Kentucky where the demographic information is as follows: 71.8% white (non-Hispanic), 22.1%
black, 8.1% Hispanic or Latino, and 3.6% two or more races (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). The median annual household income is $41,235 (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Harrison Independent School students are 82% white (non-Hispanic), 10% black, 6% Asian, 1% Hispanic or Latino, 1% two or more races, and 1% other. 59% of Harrison’s students are female, and 41% are male. The student teacher ratio is 13:1.

This research location was selected as the focus of this study because of its pattern of reading performance above the state average. The number of students scoring at or above proficiency in reading for the 2018-2019 school year was 77% on the ACT Aspire compared to 59.6% for the state on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019h).

Participants

While sampling generally provides the researcher a fair representation of target populations, census-based surveys are preferred whenever they are not restricted by budgetary or logistic means (Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo, & Bastos, 2016). Due to feasibility and ease of access, the researcher has chosen to include all middle school students and teachers at Harrison Independent School during the spring semester of the 2020-2021 school year as participants. This will allow the researcher to survey approximately 103 students and up to 44 teachers. Purposive sampling of teachers will be used to select only reading teachers to be included in the interview portion of the research. Purposive sampling of reading teachers will be used to provide the researcher the greatest amount of information about reading motivation strategies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

Students

One hundred three middle school students were enrolled at Harrison Independent School for the 2020-2021 school year. These students will be asked to complete two student surveys—
the first focuses on students’ reading scope and frequency, and the second focuses on their reading motivation (see Appendices G and H for student surveys).

**Teachers**

The school employs 44 teachers, eight of whom teach middle school. The researcher will gather data from all 44 teachers via the teacher survey (see Appendix G for teacher survey). This will provide an overview of the perceptions and practices of all teachers in promoting students’ independent reading. Five of Harrison Independent School’s reading teachers will be selected to interview and asked questions about their expertise and experience concerning strategies that promote independent reading (see Appendix E for reading teacher interview questions).

**The Researcher’s Role**

To reduce bias in qualitative research, bracketing—a tabling of the researcher’s interests, assumptions, and experiences—should take place, both at the onset of the research and as a continual process throughout the study (Fischer, 2009). The researcher in this study is a doctoral candidate with 16 years of experience as a middle school educator and a desire to see students excel in reading. Though the researcher neither is employed by the state of Kentucky nor works for a Kentucky school, the researcher is a Kentucky resident and the parent of a student enrolled at Harrison Independent School, and may discover, through the course of the research, connections with the research location or its participants or their families. Therefore, the researcher will collect and analyze qualitative data anonymously through surveys that contain limited identifiable information. Additionally, the researcher will rely on journaling throughout the collection and analysis of qualitative data through reading teacher interviews. Journaling will serve to avoid imposing personal biases on collected data and allow the researcher to reexamine the data for other meanings that might appear (Fischer, 2009).
Procedures

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher will seek approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A for IRB approval), whose purpose it is to protect research participants and review the appropriateness of studies involving human subjects (Grady, 2015). Additionally, research permission will be obtained from the administrator of Harrison Independent School to survey students and teachers and to interview reading teachers (see Appendix B for permission request letter and permissions). The researcher will contact teacher participants by phone and email to request their participation in the study. The researcher will explain the details and purpose of the study and the important role teachers will have in informing the research. Teachers will be provided with consent forms which the researcher will collect and keep in confidentiality (see Appendix C for teacher letter and consent form). The researcher will also provide parents and student participants with an overview of the research in advance in the form of a letter, outlining the purpose of the study and the role students will have in informing the research. Parents and students will be informed that all participation will be voluntary. The bottom of the letter will include an opt out form for parents, and the survey will begin with students’ assent to participate (see Appendix E for student/parent permission slip and assent form).

Data Collection and Analysis

This is an applied research study consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Liberty University’s doctoral program requires three data collection sources for a dissertation (Liberty University, 2019). All three sources of data for this study will be primary sources collected by the researcher (Maxwell, 2009). Liberty University also requires one of the three data collection sources to be in the form of participant interviews (Liberty University,
The researcher will conduct face-to-face interviews with five of Harrison Independent School’s reading teachers using a structured interview form (Appendix F). The second approach will be primarily quantitative in the form of an online survey of all of the teachers at Harrison Independent School (Appendix G). This survey will also include two open-ended questions that will be regarded as qualitative data. The final approach will include two quantitative web-based surveys from students (Appendix H & I). Data gathered from each approach will be used to answer one of the three sub-questions guiding this research. Qualitative data will be transcribed, coded, and categorically analyzed, quantitative data will be analyzed with descriptive statistics, and the data will be triangulated to reduce bias and provide a better understanding of the problem of low K-PREP reading assessment scores among Kentucky middle school students (Maxwell, 2009). Common themes among the data will allow the researcher to recommend strategies to improve the school’s reading culture.

**Reading Teacher Interviews (Appendix F)**

The first sub-question for this study explored how reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in an interview would improve students’ K-PREP reading scores. To answer this question, the researcher will conduct a 20-question structured interview with five of Harrison Independent School’s reading teachers. When asking the same interview questions to multiple individuals, Bickman & Rog (2009) advised using a structured interview guide which explains the purpose of the interview and then asks the interviewee questions in a specific order (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Using structured interviews will allow the researcher to use a predetermined number of open-ended questions and also use respondents’ answers to facilitate further questions (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2018). The researcher will plan and schedule times to conduct face-to-face or e-conference
interviews with each of the participating reading teachers and will use the structured interview
guide to ask about their teaching expertise, their experiences with students’ independent reading
and motivation, and strategies they use or have used to encourage students to read. The
structured interviews will consist of the following questions:

1. What grade levels and subjects do you teach? How long have you been in this
   position?

2. What courses have you taught other than ELA? For how long? How was that
   experience?

3. How did you come to be an ELA teacher?

4. What challenges do you face as an ELA teacher? How do you cope with those
   challenges?

5. Please describe a typical day in your class. What do you do? What do students
   do?

6. What kinds of homework do you assign? What is the completion rate?

7. How important is reading as a skill? Why? Consider college, career, and social
   aspects.

8. How would you describe your current students as readers compared to previous
   years or compared to your expectations? What are their strengths/weaknesses as a
   group?

9. What are the major differences you see between “good” readers and “struggling
   readers”? Give some examples.

10. What, in your professional opinion, are the best ways to improve students’
    reading?
11. How much class time is devoted to independent reading and how much are students expected to read outside the classroom?

12. How are books and other reading materials selected? Do you assign specific reading, give students choices, etc.?

13. How are students held accountable for their independent reading?

14. What motivates your students to read?

15. What strategies have you used in your classroom to motivate students to read? To what effect?

16. What role do teachers outside of ELA have in promoting independent reading? What practices have you seen?

17. What experience do you have with other teachers on your team with using interdisciplinary units that require students to read?

18. What could teachers of other content areas do to help you help students to improve in reading?

19. If you could require your team members to implement independent reading as part of their curriculum what strategies would you share with them?

20. Imagine you were given the power to change anything you wanted about the school, its students, or the community, to make reading a bigger priority. What would you change? How would you lead the change?

Questions one through three of the ELA teacher interview are designed to put the participants at ease and establish a conversational tone, allowing the participants to feel free to tell their stories without concerns of contradiction or criticism (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Magnusson and Marecek (2015) recommended beginning interviews with open-ended questions
that are easy to answer, thus assuring the interviewee of his or her ability to fully and confidently provide answers to the interviewer’s questions. Furthermore, these questions will provide a starting point for the participants to understand which aspects of their life experiences the researcher is inquiring about (Josselson, 2013). Combined with question seven, they ask about the participants’ teaching experiences and allow them to describe their paths to ELA while also providing some insight into the value the participants hold for reading.

Although the school where interviews will be conducted is not a struggling school in the area of reading performance (ACT Aspire, 2018), the high expectations middle school reading (CCSSI, 2019b; Williamson et al., 2014) and the challenge to motivate middle school readers (de Naeghel et al., 2012; Miyamoto et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018) are universal. Questions four through six and questions eight through 11 are designed to allow participants to identify specific challenges in teaching reading and what the participants do to address those challenges. These questions are designed to encourage participants to reflect on their own teaching experiences (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

Clustering interview questions into topics helps the researcher to fully explore one topic before moving to another and allows for a more natural, conversational flow (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Since student reading motivation was identified as a key factor in improving reading performance (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015; Mucherah & Ambrose-Stahl, 2014), questions 12 through 15 will all address student reading motivation. To respond, participants will continue to draw from their personal experiences in the classroom. The researcher will be asking about specific strategies of intrinsic, extrinsic, and social motivation that might be used to improve students’ scope and frequency of reading both in ELA and in other content areas.
Questions 16 through 19 are designed to steer the interviewee toward thinking outside the reading classroom to the practices of other content area teachers. They are intended to change the direction of the conversation from talking only about one classroom to discussing collaborative efforts of an overall school culture that could improve students’ reading (Merga & Gardiner, 2018). Because this set of questions has the potential to induce negative, resentful, or judgmental feelings from the participant, these questions will occur near the end of the interview (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

The final question changes the tone of the interview back to a more positive one, closing the interview on a hopeful note (Thompkins, Sheard, & Neale, 2008). The question allows the participant to consider how reading instruction might be improved on a grander scale and empowers the him or her to lead the change.

Optimally, all reading teacher interviews will take place at the beginning of the third quarter of the 2020-2021 school year. This timing will allow teachers to have established classroom expectations and routines with a current group of students while simultaneously reducing the chances of encroaching on the summative testing window. The researcher will interview each of the five selected reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in their respective classrooms or other location in the school as appropriate to ensure privacy and to avoid interruption. All interviews will be audio-taped, including non-verbal activities, pauses, and interruptions (Kuckartz, 2014). The researcher will immediately transcribe verbatim to assure accuracy (McGrath et al., 2018). The researcher will use a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) transcription software for this purpose, and then will compare the final transcript against the audio-recording for accuracy (Kuckartz, 2014). Subsequently, the researcher will schedule a follow-up session with each of the interviewees to share the interview transcripts and ensure that
the responses have been accurately reported (McGrath et al., 2018). Participants who cannot attend a follow-up meeting will be emailed a copy of the transcript for review.

The researcher will use content analysis through the selected QDA software program to code and categorize responses from the transcripts and determine emerging themes (Tesch, 1990). The researcher will attempt to “fracture the data,” a term used by Straus in his discussion of content analysis (as cited by Maxwell, 2009, p. 237), and “unpack” the broad questions, breaking down the whole into identifiable parts that can be categorized and compared (Magnusson and Marecek, 2015, p. 84). Predetermined categories for responses will be as follows:

1. Reading culture in the ELA classroom
2. Reading culture in other content areas
3. Reading culture as a school-wide endeavor
4. Reading culture outside of school

Additional categories may be determined during analyses as similarities among responses are documented, including ways the researcher may not have foreseen (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Following the categorization of ideas and emergence of themes, the researcher will attempt to draw links between the ideas, analyzing areas of strengths and weaknesses in Harrison Independent School’s reading culture (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Tesch, 1990).

**Teacher Survey (Appendix G)**

The second sub-question for this study explored how teacher survey data would inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students. To answer this question, the researcher will conduct a web-based survey among all 44 teacher participants. A web-based survey is feasible since all teacher participants have email and internet access
The researcher will contact the participants via email addresses and telephone numbers provided by the school’s administration. The recruitment email will thoroughly explain the details of the study and will contain a link to the survey questions as well as directions for accessing the link in case the hyperlink does not work. Participants will be directed to the online web survey created by the researcher using the platform SurveyMonkey. Teacher participants will complete a 10-item interactive survey that will present one question at a time. This survey design has the advantages of uniformity, analysis of dropout participant responses, and control of the effects of question order (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The survey will begin with an introduction to the survey, its objectives, and the time participants should expect to spend on the survey. Each question type will include directions for how to answer the question. The survey will include both closed and open response questions. Most closed response questions will be presented with single-response radial button, two closed response question will allow participants to select “all that apply,” and the two open response questions will provide text entry boxes that will allow for lengthy responses. Teacher participants’ answers will be submitted after each question by clicking the “next” button, and responses will be automatically compiled into a database.

Teacher participants’ responses to the online teacher survey will be collected and recorded using the SurveyMonkey platform. The teacher survey created by the researcher includes eight quantitative questions and two qualitative questions which will be analyzed separately. Quantitative data will be entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis, determining reliability through Cronbach’s coefficient alpha and using descriptive statistics. Teacher participants will be responding to eight questions on a Likert scale and responses will be coded with the corresponding Likert scale number (See Appendix F).
Questions 7 and 8 are multiple response questions, and each choice will be coded with a 0 = no, 1 = yes response in SPSS. Descriptive statistics will be used to define the central tendencies of teachers’ responses. Additionally, data will be analyzed by chi-square to compare the responses on survey items one through eight between ELA teachers and non-ELA teachers. Alpha level will be set at .05. Questions 9 and 10 of the teacher web survey are open-ended questions and will be analyzed using the same QDA software program utilized for the reading teacher interviews. The researcher will code the responses for each of these two questions into categories and examine them for emerging themes (Kuckartz, 2014; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Tesch, 1990).

**Student Surveys (Appendices H & I)**

The third sub-question of this study explored how quantitative student survey data from Harrison Independent School would inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores. Two student surveys will be administered in this research: *The Reading Activity Inventory* (RAI) (Guthrie, 1994) (Appendix H) and the *Adolescent Motivations for School Reading* questionnaire (AMSR) (Coddington, 2009) (Appendix I). The RAI is a 26-item questionnaire that asks student participants to respond to questions about the scope and frequency of their reading inside and outside of school. Students will be asked to indicate what kinds of materials they read, such as mystery/adventure books, sports books, science books, magazines, and comic books; as well as how often they read each type of reading material. Students will be asked to provide a book title, author, or topic for any category in which they answered “yes.” RAI has been used in a number of previous studies to analyze the scope and frequency of students’ independent reading (Kirchner & Mostert, 2017; Tercanlioglu, 2001). In a study of 100 fourth and fifth grade students completing the RAI in both the fall and the spring, the findings correlated ($r = .54$, $p < .001$)
(Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). As a measure of internal consistency, Chronbach’s alpha was calculated at 0.782 (Kirchner & Mostert, 2017).

The second survey, AMSR, is a student Likert scale instrument that allows participants to express their attitudes toward reading under six constructs— intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, pro-social interactions, avoidance, perceived difficulty, and antisocial interactions (Coddington, 2009). There are 42 items in the instrument and student participants can respond from “1” to “4” for each item (1 = Not At All Like Me, 2 = Not Like Me, 3 = Somewhat Like Me, 4 = A Lot Like Me). Researchers have analyzed strong validity and reliability with the AMSR as a measure middle school students’ motivation for reading (Ho & Guthrie, 2013; Jones, 2016; Parker, 2017). Using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha, Coddington (2009) reported the following reliability indices for each section of this tool: intrinsic motivation = 0.92, self-efficacy = .89, pro-social interactions = .80, avoidance = .75, perceived difficulty = .92, and antisocial interactions = .84. The researcher will analyze and use data from the RAI and the AMSR to highlight the present reading motivations behaviors of student participants at Harrison Independent School.

The researcher will use the survey platform SurveyMonkey to create a tech-friendly, combined version of the RAI and the AMSR. Optimally, student online surveys will take place in the third quarter of school, so that teachers and students will have already established classroom routines and reading habits. Sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade English Language Arts teachers will be provided with a link to the combined RAI and AMSR survey to disseminate to student participants. Harrison Independent School maintains a 1:1 student-computer ratio, so student participants will each have access to a school-provided device with which to complete the web-based student survey during their regularly scheduled language arts class time.
Before each survey, the teacher will read aloud the survey instructions provided by the researcher (See Appendix J for survey instructions). These instructions will also be provided on the assessment screen so that students can follow along. Student participants will be asked to answer as honestly as they can. The teacher will explain to student participants that there are no right or wrong answers on either survey, that student participants will not be graded on their responses, and that teachers and parents will not read their responses. Administration of the two surveys is expected to take less than 40 minutes (20 minutes each) with time for instructions and practice items.

The survey will begin with the AMSR. The teacher or other designated test administrator will read the instructions to the class and have the class complete the practice questions together before beginning the actual survey individually. Students will be asked to respond to each item on the AMSR by selecting the response that best fits each statement from “Not At All Like Me” to “A Lot Like Me.” Student participants will complete the 42 items on the questionnaire at their own pace. Teachers may assist individual students by pronouncing or defining words on the survey as needed. Each student survey will be automatically finalized when the student clicks the button to submit.

Immediately following the AMSR, students will be asked to respond to each category of reading on the RAI with a yes/no answer. The teacher or test administrator will emphasize to students to pay attention to whether each question refers to reading inside of school or outside of school. For “yes” responses, students will be asked to include a title, author, or topic of the book or magazine that they read. Teachers may assist individual students by pronouncing or defining words in the survey questions as needed but should not provide additional assistance such as offering titles of books.
Students’ responses to the RAI (See Appendix I) and the AMSR (See Appendix I) will be exported to SPSS for analysis. Coding for the RAI will be as follows: 0 = No, 1 = Yes for scope of reading and 1 = Almost never; 2 = About once a month; 3 = About once a week; 4 = Almost every day for frequency of reading. Coding for the AMSR will be defined as the following: 1 = Not At All Like Me, 2 = Not Like Me, 3 = Somewhat Like Me, 4 = A Lot Like Me. To provide the most accurate analysis of data, the researcher will remove any incomplete surveys from the study.

Data from the student participant responses will be analyzed by descriptive statistics including mean, mode, and standard deviation to inspect each of the subsets of student reading motivations described by Guthrie et al. (1994), as indicated by student participant responses on the AMSR, and the scope and frequency of their independent reading, as indicated by their responses to questions on the RAI.

**Ethical Considerations**

It is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data included in this study (Sieber, 2009). Qualitative data from the reading teacher interviews may contain identifying information, and the researcher will need to take the necessary steps to make this information anonymous (Kuckartz, 2014). The researcher will code each response to protect the anonymity of all participants, and only the researcher will have access to the responses. Following the transcription of the interviews, the names of participants, other people, and places will all be replaced by pseudonyms or general references such as “a colleague” or “a small town” (Kuckartz, 2014). Any teacher survey data that might include identifiable information (i.e., if only one teacher participant was a social studies teacher) will not be published as part of this survey. Personally identifiable information will not be collected on
either of the two student surveys. Online survey data will be encrypted by SurveyMonkey where it will be stored in SOC2 accredited data centers and only accessible through password-protected secure connectivity (SurveyMonkey, 2018).

**Summary**

This research will focus on the problem of low proficiency levels on the K-PREP reading assessment by analyzing the reading culture of Harrison Independent School for elements of a positive reading culture. This study will provide strategies that may be used to encourage the promotion and practice of literacy in other Kentucky schools. It will investigate how reading teachers in an interview would improve K-Prep reading scores and how teacher survey data and student survey data would inform the problem of low test scores by revealing information about reading culture.

The researcher will obtain approval from the IRB, permission from the school’s administrator, and informed consent from teachers, parents, and students involved in the study. In this multimethod approach, the researcher will collect both qualitative and quantitative data through interviews with reading teachers, an online survey from teachers of all academic areas, and two student surveys—the RAI and the AMSR. Qualitative and quantitative information gleaned from the study will be analyzed using QDA and SPSS, respectively, and will be protected for confidentiality and participant privacy. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher will recommend strategies for advancing schools’ reading cultures and provide a rationale for their implementation.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of low K-PREP reading performance among Kentucky middle school students by exploring the reading culture of Harrison Independent School with the aim of identifying positive practices that could be endorsed as viable solutions to the problem. A multimethod approach was used to gather input from teachers and students at Harrison Independent School, while simultaneously considering available reading performance data from both the ACT Aspire and K-PREP reading assessments. Chapter Three provided details of the research methodology where the data collection methods were aligned with three research questions. Data collection methods included interviews with reading teachers, teacher surveys, and student surveys. Both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed for emerging themes. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study using illustrative tables and narrative thematic analysis.

This research was guided by the following questions:

Central Question: How can the reading culture of Kentucky middle schools be amended to improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?

Sub-question 1: How would reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in an interview improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?

Sub-question 2: How would information obtained on a teacher survey at Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students?

Sub-question 3: How would student surveys from Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores?
Participants

Teacher Interview Participants

Because Harrison Independent School is a small private school serving students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, its teachers often are assigned to teach a variety of grade levels or content areas. To learn how reading teachers in an interview would solve the problem of low K-PREP reading scores, the researcher used purposeful sampling of participants. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to deliberately select participants for information they can provide that others cannot (Bickman & Rog, 2009). For this research, participants were selected based on their roles as reading teachers, defined as individuals who “make a difference in children’s reading achievement and motivation to read” (Santa et al., 2000, p. 193), including classroom teachers (Santa et al., 2000) and librarians (Gruer & Perry, 2020).

Teacher interview participants were all females between the ages of 30 and 70. They ranged in experience from beginning reading teacher to post-retirement reading teacher. All five participants had experience working with students in grades five and above. To protect confidentiality, these participants will be identified only by pseudonyms:

Reading Teacher 1: Ms. Hemingway
Reading Teacher 2: Ms. Dickens
Reading Teacher 3: Ms. Twain
Reading Teacher 4: Ms. Alcott
Reading Teacher 5: Ms. Woolf

Teacher Survey Participants

Harrison Independent School employs 44 total teachers. Because this research focused on the school’s reading culture, the researcher used purposeful sampling to limit potential
participants to those teachers who teach students in grades where independent reading is expected. Teachers of pre-kindergarten through first grade were not included in the survey. Of the 24 surveys submitted through SurveyMonkey, two were incomplete and were excluded from data analysis. Of the remaining 22 survey participants, eight identified themselves as English or reading teachers and 14 identified themselves as NOT English or reading teachers (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4.* Teacher survey participants classified as ELA (English or reading teacher) and non-ELA (Not English or reading teacher).

**Student Survey Participants**

Purposeful sampling was also used to select participants for the student reading surveys. All survey participants were students at Harrison Independent School in grades six through eight. There were 101 total student participants. Fifty-one were male, and 50 were female. Descriptive statistics for the student sample are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Structured interviews were conducted with reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in order to find themes related to the school’s reading culture. Through qualitative analysis, several themes emerged. The initial pre-planned categories for interview responses—reading culture in the ELA classroom, reading culture in other content areas, reading culture as a school-wide endeavor, and reading culture outside of school—were refined to reflect five emerging themes after qualitative analysis began. These themes included value of reading, reading challenges, reading strategies, role of ELA teachers, and role of others. Second, a multimethod survey was conducted with teachers of all content areas at Harrison Independent School and analyzed to further develop the themes related to the school’s reading culture. Finally, a quantitative two-part survey was administered to middle school students at Harrison Independent School to determine the scope and frequency of their reading as well as their attitudes toward reading, and these findings were used to corroborate the themes.

Sub-question 1

Sub-question one for this study was, “How would reading teachers at Harrison Independent School in an interview improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?” To answer this question, interviews were conducted with five reading teachers from Harrison Independent School. Three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two were conducted virtually. Responses to the interview questions were audio-recorded during each session. Each recording was then transcribed using a QDA transcription software program and checked for accuracy.

This research examined the school’s overall reading culture, which was defined as the reading behaviors of students in and out of school as well as the practices of others that encourage or discourage students’ reading (Magara & Batambuze, 2005). Therefore, a hybrid of
deductive and inductive data analysis was used. Prior to the interviews, a concept-driven coding frame was developed by the researcher to aid in cataloguing responses under different aspects of the school’s reading culture (Schreier, 2012). Bickman and Rog (2009, p. 233) refer to these predetermined categories of data as organizational “bins” that the researcher can use to sort the data for further analysis. These four constructed codes were entered into the NVivo 12 data analysis software program and used for the initial deductive coding of data from the interview responses. Table 5 shows the constructed codes, properties, and examples of participants' responses.

Table 5

*Constructed Codes, Properties, and Examples of Participants’ Interview Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructed Codes</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Examples of Participants’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading culture in the ELA classroom</td>
<td>Value of Reading</td>
<td>Reading is like breathing; it's vital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading challenges</td>
<td>They're strong readers. Do they enjoy reading? No. The majority of them do not enjoy reading unless it's a book that's engaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>Generally, we just do it by bulk. We just read. That's the short answer is just continue to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement/Motivation Strategies</td>
<td>You’ve got to slip some new stuff in almost every day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Constructed Codes**  

**Properties**  

**Examples of Participants’ Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading culture in other content areas</th>
<th>Collaboration with reading teachers</th>
<th>We work together on research projects and other activities where I teach the writing portion. Also, I choose stories that coincide with the curriculum she may be teaching in science or social studies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive observations</td>
<td></td>
<td>All grade levels in our school assign summer reading and the students are assessed on this material when they return the following year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading culture as a school-wide endeavor</th>
<th>Positive observations</th>
<th>Our librarian is great about getting them involved with reading.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Our library is not really equipped for anything over Middle School. That's the one thing that I would really change that would make it better, not only for English classes, but for all of them, is to have our library not just be good for elementary readers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading culture outside of school</th>
<th>Public Library</th>
<th>I'm trying to promote the public library, and some kids do that.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good readers usually have parents that have read. I think they've been read to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td>There's a lot of professionals that will come and talk to kids.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6** shows the coding and the frequency of responses for reading teacher interviews.

Next, the researcher used NVivo 12 to begin an inductive analysis of reading teacher interview responses. As responses were coded, five distinct themes emerged:

1. Value of Reading
2. Reading Challenges,
3. Reading Strategies
4. Role of ELA Teachers
5. Role of Others

Table 6 shows the coding and the frequency of responses for reading teacher interviews.
Table 6

Reading Teacher Interviews Themes and Codes Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of Reading</td>
<td>Personal Value</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value to Students</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Challenges</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure/Experience</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of ELA Teacher</td>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Test-Prep</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation and Engagement</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Others</td>
<td>Content-Specific</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support Reading</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1: Value of Reading

The first theme that became evident from qualitative analysis of reading teacher interviews was value of reading. When they were asked how important reading is as a skill, the participants’ responses paralleled one another’s. Participants used words like, “huge,” “essential,” “the key,” “It’s everything,” and “Reading is like breathing; it's vital.” Ms. Dickens described how growing up in a family of readers led her to become a reading teacher, saying “We went to the library all the time,” and “I love storytelling” Ms. Woolf expressed that reading was how she liked to end the day. She said, “It helps you sleep. It shuts your brain down and
really lets you kind of use your imagination.”

Beyond their personal value of reading, all five teachers discussed the importance of reading for their students. Ms. Hemmingway cited the importance of reading for all of the other subjects. She emphasized how important it is for students to practice their reading so that they can build vocabulary, and though she said she doesn’t believe that non-readers cannot be successful, she stated that more practiced readers may struggle less in other subjects, especially once they get to college.

Ms. Dickens discussed that, not being able to simply read, but being able to read critically is an essential life skill.

We need to be able to understand the speaker and whether or not they're credible. We need to know the message. We need to know who the audience is. We need to be able to break down things and look for bias, so it's not important that you know how to read. It's important that you know how to understand and comprehend and think for yourself and be an individual when you take in information.

**Theme 2: Reading Challenges**

The second theme to emerge was the challenges associated with teaching reading. Participants expressed concerns about some students’ lack of exposure to literary or cultural experiences, not having enough room to create an ideal library space for older students, outdated materials, and students’ extracurricular commitments. However, conversations kept coming back to the challenge of how to motivate students to read. Ms. Hemingway said that her biggest challenge was getting her students interested in reading. She said, “It takes time to find the right genre that they like,” and “There are still some students who don’t enjoy reading.”

Ms. Twain suggested that the problem with motivation may be that her students view
reading as optional. “Reading used to be what you had to do, but once you did it, it was okay. And now it’s more of a choice. Kids have more choices now. I can pick up a video or I can read.”

In discussing what motivates her students to read, Ms. Woolf said, “That's a great question. I'd like to ask myself, ‘how can I get them more motivated?’” She added, “Do they enjoy reading? No. The majority of them do not enjoy reading unless it's a book that's engaging,” and “The struggling readers just give up. They just won't even attempt it or try.” Ms. Alcott also admitted, “I struggle with getting reluctant readers to read. I'm not good at that.”

**Theme 3: Reading Strategies**

Reading teachers also had much to contribute to the theme of reading strategies, particularly in the areas of comprehension, exposure, and motivation and engagement. Participants reported using multiple strategies to increase students’ exposure to a variety of texts. Ms. Dickens said, “Generally, we just do it by bulk. We just read. That's, that's the short answer is just continue to read.” Several of the teachers mentioned that students at all grade levels have required reading over the summer. Ms. Alcott reported that she helps students to find books that interest them, makes recommendations, and encourages students make recommendations to each other. She said, “It's important for them to know where they are, and to challenge them, and help them pick appropriate books,” and “If you’ll read *something*, that’s better than nothing.” Ms. Hemingway said that she makes sure to expose her students to texts they may not have selected for themselves. She explained,

I teach a couple of novels in class each year and these are usually books they wouldn’t pull off the shelf. However, after reading them, they always ask me about the series, or tell me this is one of the most favorite books they have read.
Comprehension strategies was another common code under the theme of reading strategies. Ms. Dickens’ and Ms. Woolf both indicated that their students are challenged by the rigorous reading in their curriculum. These participants discussed strategies such as breaking difficult text down into small chunks for discussion and “taking it slow.” Ms. Twain said that she selects “easier” novels that don’t challenge students’ basic reading skills so that she can teach them more in-depth analysis of narrative elements like foreshadowing and flashback. She said, “They think, ‘Oh, this is a piece of cake.’ And then I tell them to get out my shovel. ‘Go deep. We're going to dig today.’”

The five teachers discussed the topic of reading motivation more than any of the other strategies. They all shared different strategies to motivate students to read. Several teachers indicated that their students were motivated by their grade. Most indicated that when students were assigned to read at home, they often had a worksheet to complete along with the reading, and usually students could expect a discussion or a quiz the following day. Ms. Twain equated the words “accountability” and “motivation,” and Ms. Dickens explained, “We’re a very highly competitive school, and they want to do well.”

Extrinsic rewards were also used as motivators. Ms. Alcott said that she rewards students with stickers and lollipops. Ms. Woolf said that she gives candy and homework passes and creates a game environment where students can compete for these items. However, these were not the primary motivators. All five of the teachers used words like “encourage,” and “praise.” Teachers talked about the importance of helping students find books or genres they might enjoy. They also focused on keeping students engaged in the classroom to continue to motivate them. Ms. Twain said, “You’ve got to slip some new stuff in almost every day.” She enthusiastically described casual independent reading time, art projects, performance art, videomaking, and other
strategies she used to get students excited about what they were reading.

**Theme 4: Role of ELA Teachers**

Although the struggles and strategies of reading teachers were discussed in previous themes, additional codes revealed other roles of ELA teachers which were used to develop this particular theme. These were coded as teacher workload and guiding other teachers to support reading instruction.

All of the participants interviewed reported that they planned for and taught more than one grade level or subject. Additionally, many had other commitments including coaching sports and community involvement. Ms. Alcott said, “I’m just racing.” Ms. Dickens, who has 60 students in her ELA classes, said, “When I assign five-page papers, that's a lot that I have to do.” Ms. Hemingway stated, “A classroom teacher, even with the prenatal support that we have, doesn’t have the time to devote the one-on-one instruction and balance the other students at the same time,” and Ms. Twain stated, “I wish we had more time to do it.”

Additionally, some of the reading teachers saw it as their responsibility to guide other classroom teachers in helping students to become better readers. Ms. Twain stated, “In our history meeting the other day, that was one of the things that I brought up—that kids have stopped reading, so we are just now trying to promote that,” and “I see it part of my job is being able to recommend things.”

**Theme 5: Role of Others**

The final theme that emerged from the reading teacher interviews was the role of others in helping students to become better readers. The bulk of the coding for this theme fell into the subcategory of supporting reading. Reading teachers discussed what others do or could do to support reading instruction. The teachers felt strongly that some teachers of other subjects were
already supporting reading in their respective content areas. History was mentioned by two teachers as an area of strength, and Ms. Twain explained, “We're promoting it [reading] in everything that we're trying to do.”

Furthermore, reading motivation was seen as a school-wide endeavor, especially at the elementary level. Two teachers praised the efforts of the librarian in encouraging students to read. They reported that elementary students were recognized for their reading achievements over the loudspeaker in the mornings by the principal, about whom Ms. Alcott had this to say: “She's like a cheerleader. She goes wild over the intercom.”

A few teachers also talked about the roles of those beyond school. They positively discussed parent support, community reading programs, book donations, and professionals who came to speak to students. They also discussed changes others could make to improve the school’s reading culture. Two teachers said that they would like to expand the library to include reading materials for older students. Due to limited space, it currently only houses books for elementary students. Both of these teachers described their vision of an ideal library as a “hub” where students would enjoy reading, studying, and researching. Other teachers expressed that they would like more open-house events like parent reading nights and poetry slams.

Sub-question 2

Sub-question two for this study was, “How would information obtained on a teacher survey at Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students?” To answer this question, surveys were conducted with teachers from grades two through 12 at Harrison Independent School. The first question on the survey was used to classify respondents into two categories: ELA teachers, and not ELA teachers. Six
participants indicated they were English or reading teachers, and 14 indicated that they were not English or reading teachers.

Questions two through six on the survey were Likert-scale items. For these items, Chronbach’s alpha internal consistency reliability was calculated at .74. Chi-square was computed to determine if there were significant differences between teachers’ role as ELA teachers or non-ELA teachers in their responses to survey questions two through six. No significant differences were found between whether a teacher was teaching ELA or another subject and their responses on questions two through five. However, a significant difference ($p = .03$) was found for the response to question six, “Which of the following best describes your role in getting students to read?” Teachers of courses other than ELA more often labeled themselves as “reminder,” “observer,” or “obstacle” than ELA teachers. Conversely, ELA teachers were more likely to label themselves as “encourager” or “enforcer” than those not teaching ELA. Table 7 shows participants’ responses to the five Likert scale questions.

**Table 7**

*Teacher Survey Likert-Scale Items Frequency Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
<th>ELA teacher</th>
<th>Not ELA teacher</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often is independent reading required in your class?</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once or twice a week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>$p = .661$</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response Options</td>
<td>ELA teacher</td>
<td>Not ELA teacher</td>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often are students given the opportunity to choose reading material in your class?</td>
<td>Daily—Students are expected to bring something to read.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily, but only after they finish their other work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once or twice a week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$p = .269$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the reading abilities of the majority of your students?</td>
<td>Nearly all of my students are strong readers.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of my students can read grade-level appropriate texts.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many of my students struggle with grade-level texts.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have not had enough opportunity to evaluate my students’ reading abilities.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$p = .216$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is reading to your content area?</td>
<td>Reading is the main part of my content area.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading is very important to my content area, but it is not the main focus.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading is somewhat important to my content area, but there are other methods to deliver the content.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading is less important in my content area than it is in other subjects.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$p = .063$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the following best describes your role in getting students to read? (Select one)</td>
<td>Role Model—I talk to students about what I am reading and recommend books.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourager—I talk to students about their reading and praise their efforts.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enforcer—I hold students accountable for their reading.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reminder—I expect students to read and remind them often.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observer—I notice what they are reading and occasionally mention it.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obstacle—Students are not allowed to read their books in my class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$p = .030^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*significant at .05 alpha level.

Questions seven and eight addressed reading strategies and reading materials, respectively, and asked participants to select all items that applied. Table 8 shows the frequency and percentage of each response by ELA teachers and by non-ELA teachers regarding reading strategies they had implemented in the classroom. The comparison indicated that, though fewer ELA teachers participated in the survey, that group selected far more reading strategies than did the non-ELA teacher group. The most popular reading strategies employed by ELA teachers were round robin reading (students take turns reading aloud), independent reading with quiz questions, independent reading with alternate assessment, and free choice reading without assessment. Non-ELA teachers also favored independent reading with quiz questions, but research projects where students found their own resources also made their list.

**Table 8**

*Teacher Survey Reading Strategies Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Strategy</th>
<th>ELA Teachers No.</th>
<th>ELA Teachers %</th>
<th>Non-ELA Teachers No.</th>
<th>Non-ELA Teachers %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEAR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Circles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading with Annotation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading with Graphic Organizers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading with Quiz Questions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading with Alternate Assessment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Choice Reading without Assessment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flipped Classroom Instruction with Online Reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Project (Teacher Provided Resources)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Project (Students Found Resources)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Robin Reading</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Counts Quizzes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Report (Written)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Talks (Small/Large Group Discussion)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 shows the frequency and percentage of each response by ELA teachers and non-ELA teachers regarding reading materials available in their classrooms. Both ELA teachers and non-ELA teachers indicated a keeping variety of reading material in their classrooms. Collectively, their classrooms contained all eight of the reading material options listed. Nineteen (86%) respondents indicated that they had textbooks in the classroom, 16 (73%) had nonfiction books, 15 (68%) had internet or web-based reading materials, 14 (64%) had reference books, 11 (50%) had novels, 9 (41%) had comic books or graphic novels, 6 (27%) had electronic books or article collections, 4 (18%) had magazines, and 2 (9%) had newspapers. Two teachers indicated that they had no reading materials in the classroom. ELA teachers cited textbooks, novels, and nonfiction books most often while non-ELA teachers indicated the presence of textbooks, electronic books, and reference books most.

Table 9

*Teacher Survey Reading Materials*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available Reading Materials</th>
<th>ELA Teachers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-ELA Teachers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Books or Article Collection</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/World Wide Web</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Books</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfiction Books</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Books/Graphic Novels</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher survey also included two open-ended questions: 1) “Explain how you see the roles of different teachers in encouraging reluctant readers. What is the role of the reading/language arts teacher compared to teachers of other subjects?” and 2) “What challenges
have you noticed in your class related to students’ ability to read the content? What strategies have you used to address these challenges?” Responses to these qualitative questions were coded and analyzed for frequency. Analysis of these items further emphasized the developing themes:

Value of Reading, Reading Challenges, Reading Strategies, Role of ELA teachers, and Role of Others. Table 10 shows the coding and the frequency of responses for the two qualitative teacher survey questions.

**Table 10**

*Teacher Survey Themes and Codes Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of Reading</td>
<td>Reading Is Important</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Challenges</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies</td>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation and Engagement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of ELA Teacher</td>
<td>Primarily Responsible</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guide Other Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support Other Content</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Others</td>
<td>Support Reading Instruction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content-Specific Vocabulary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Value of Reading**

Many of the teachers at Harrison Independent School demonstrated the value they place on reading through all three parts of the teacher survey. Eighteen of the 24 participants identified that reading was either the main part of their content area or was very important to their content area. A variety of materials were available for students to read, and teachers used a number of
strategies to promote students’ independent reading. Though neither of the open-ended questions specifically asked about the value of reading, several participants expressed how important this skill was for their students in their responses to these questions. One ELA teacher, stated, “Reading is a necessity in all subjects.” Two teachers of other subjects expressed the same sentiment, writing “I see reading as crucial,” and “Reading is required in all academic subjects and in daily life.” Another ELA teacher also opined, “If we show students how all subjects intertwine, they can see the importance of reading.”

**Theme 2: Reading Challenges**

Teacher survey participants acknowledged that teaching reading and motivating students to read independently could be challenging. In Likert-scale item four, 19 (86%) of teachers surveyed reported that their students were strong readers or able to read grade-level appropriate texts. Three reported that they had not had enough opportunity to evaluate their students’ reading abilities. No participants responded that many of their students struggled with grade-level texts. In the open-ended questions, however, a total of 31 items were coded under the nodes Challenges with Comprehension, Struggles with Vocabulary, and Students Lack Motivation. One teacher remarked, “Challenges are usually poor phonetic skills, low vocabulary, and poor comprehension or retention skills.”

Comprehension was a challenge mentioned by teachers of many different subjects: “Students have a difficult interpreting what they are reading in a math textbook,” “Sometimes students struggle more with nonfiction content like social studies and science,” “Sometimes the rigor of assigned reading is very challenging,” and “Some students don’t seem very practiced at reading.”

Participants also expressed concerns about students’ limited vocabularies. Teachers
explained, “They [students] have a limited vocabulary. Math vocabulary is very precise and demanding,” “In the middle grades, students are caught between the vocab their teacher often uses to explain new subject matter and sometimes more advanced vocab in other materials and texts about their subjects,” “For history, vocabulary knowledge is a challenge,” and “When a textbook or primary source uses terminology from a previous era, students often have no idea what the words mean.”

Survey participants also pointed to students’ lack of motivation as a limiting factor. Fourteen items were coded to reflect students’ lack of motivation to read independently. Teachers wrote, “The most common challenge is interest,” “Students don't want to read directions,” “They don't want to read in a STEM type class,” “They are incensed that they have to read in math class at all,” “They avoid reading whenever possible,” and “There are always students who don’t want to read more than they are assigned. It’s a challenge to motivate them.”

**Theme 3: Reading Strategies**

Strategies to overcome the challenges of poor comprehension, limited vocabularies, and low reading motivation shaped the third theme of this research. Teacher participant survey responses identified many strategies teachers at Harrison Independent School use to help students become successful readers. Response items included in this theme were coded as Exposure, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Motivation and Engagement strategies.

ELA teachers and non-ELA teachers varied in which materials they offered most in their classrooms. This difference may work to provide middle school students a variety of reading materials as they move from class to class throughout the school day. Teachers emphasized the importance of exposure in their open-ended responses, saying, “I do think students should be exposed to many genres,” “They need exposure to the more advanced writing/reading to
understand we're saying the exact same thing,” “Books can and should be used in all subjects and special departments such as art, technology, music, etc.,” and “Finding the material the student loves is the most important step in encouraging the reluctant readers.”

While questions specifically targeting vocabulary did not appear on the survey, the concern about limited vocabulary appeared eight times and strategies to improve vocabulary appeared five times during coding. Both ELA and non-ELA teachers emphasized various strategies to improve students’ vocabularies. Teacher participants described those strategies: “To help students build a larger vocabulary, they complete a weekly vocabulary unit focused on 15 grade level words,” “I translate the textbook for them most of the time and emphasize the importance of vocabulary,” “I also use word roots as a way to help students figure out difficult words,” “I allow students to look up words when they don’t understand the meaning,” and “I also have students write words they see but don't know down in a log so they can look them up or ask at the next class meeting.”

In addition to vocabulary-building strategies, teachers reported using overall reading comprehension strategies. On question seven of the survey, teacher participants reported using 15 of the 17 listed reading strategies, although five teachers indicated they had not used any of the listed strategies and only one participant indicated using a strategy that was not listed. Qualitative responses also added to the theme. Regarding reading strategies, teachers wrote, “We use round robin reading to help, and I partner students up strategically,” “Students are taught how to decode words. When reading, I help students look for these spelling patterns in words they struggle with,” “To build comprehension and retention skills, students are assigned activities to complete, requiring students to first read independently. We then read the stories together. They are then assigned comprehension questions that require them to support answers
with the text,” and “We always take notes or annotate. We learn to break down challenging pieces into chunks and always track the content, so we do not lose sight of themes, purpose or meaning.”

Among the strategies described by teachers on this survey, none were discussed more than how to improve students’ reading motivation. Eleven entries were coded as Motivation and Engagement Strategies. Respondents wrote, “Reluctant readers need lots of encouragement,” “You must find something they are interested in reading,” and “Read it out loud with them.” They also recommended “bringing in those movie images in discussion,” “inserting historical background information,” and “use of book clubs” to capture students’ attention. Other teachers mentioned “encouragement,” “praise,” and “incentives” as motivators.

**Theme 4: Role of ELA Teachers**

Teacher survey participants underscored the value of reading but often deferred to the ELA teachers as the leaders in teaching reading skills and strategies. Within this theme is the perception that ELA teachers are primarily responsible for the teaching of reading standards and skills. ELA teachers reported using many more reading strategies than their non-ELA colleagues. They also provided a greater variety of reading materials and were more likely to indicate that students had choice in their independent reading. Some of the coded responses supported this idea: “Reading teachers have strong content and pedagogical knowledge in the area of reading and reading instruction,” “The reading/language arts teachers have a greater responsibility for teaching skill-specific standards,” “I feel that the majority of reading falls on the English teachers,” and “I do believe the reading/language arts teachers have more of the burden.”

ELA teachers also were given the lead in the role of student motivator. The eight ELA teachers who participated in the survey all described themselves as either encouragers or
enforcers of independent reading. Only four non-ELA teachers selected those roles for themselves. With respect to motivating student readers, participants stated, “The Language Arts teachers are more responsible for instilling a love of reading for life,” “The role of the language arts teacher is to encourage students to read for enjoyment,” and “English teachers should model and encourage outside reading.”

Furthering this theme was the idea that other teachers could support reading under the ELA teachers’ leadership. Two qualitative items were coded as guide other teachers. One ELA teacher stated, “I encourage all teachers to have reading material for the students to do along with the guidance of the teacher.” A non-ELA teacher mirrored this sentiment with “The reading/literature/GVC teachers at my grade levels work closely with us, helping to plan reading and writing activities using the subject matter I am teaching.”

A final role of ELA teachers that emerged under this theme was the responsibility of supporting other content areas in reading. Respondents concluded, “The reading/language arts teacher’s main focus compared to teachers of other subjects should be to equip students with the tools needed to be successful in all other subject areas,” and “Language arts should train them to be able to read anything and understand it.”

**Theme 5: Role of Others**

The role of non-ELA teachers was the final theme of this research. According to both quantitative and qualitative data derived from the teacher survey, teachers of other subjects also have a major role to play in students’ reading performance. Data was coded under three nodes related to this theme: Support Reading Instruction and Content-Specific Vocabulary.

Respondents to the survey indicated that all teachers were responsible for improving reading performance. This was evidenced by the value placed on reading, the prevalence of
reading materials outside of the ELA classroom, and the self-identification of nine the 14 non-
ELA teachers as role models, encouragers, and reminders for student readers. In the open-ended questions, teachers expressed, “All teachers should be reading teachers,” “Each teacher and staff member plays an important role in encouraging readers,” and “Other teachers also play a critical role in offering, encouraging, and building upon reading opportunities/strategies within their subjects.”

While ELA teachers were expected to be the primary source of reading instruction, teachers of other subject areas saw their role in reading instruction as specific to their content area, particularly in the area of vocabulary. Respondents stated, “My role as a math, science, and social studies teacher is to engage the students in reading books based on these subjects,” “Science and math have reading, but it is to reinforce vocabulary needed to interpret questions and graphical data,” and “In my science classes, reading for information and synthesis of information is my focus.”

Sub-question 3

Sub-question three for this study was, “How would student surveys from Harrison Independent School inform the problem of low K-PREP reading scores?” To answer this question, the researcher used non-probability sampling of 101 students in grades six through eight at Harrison Independent School. Data was collected using a two-part online survey, including the Adolescent Motivation for School Reading (AMSR) and the Reading Activity Inventory (RAI). The surveys were administered by the students’ reading or English teachers during their regularly scheduled class time.

The first part of the survey, the AMSR, was designed to provide information about students’ feelings about reading. The survey consisted of 42 items using a Likert scale of 1 to 4
(1 = Not At All Like Me, 2 = Not Like Me, 3 = Somewhat Like Me, 4 = A Lot Like Me). Table 11 shows the frequency and mean for each item on the survey.

**Table 11**

*Frequency and Means of AMSR Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy the challenge of reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I share my opinion about what I read for Language Arts/Reading class with my classmates.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I choose to do other things besides read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I can figure out difficult words in reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I make fun of my classmates’ opinions about what they read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I believe I am a good reader for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I enjoy finding new things to read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I respect my classmates’ opinions about what they read in Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I read as little as possible for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel successful when I read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am good at reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I enjoy it when reading materials for Language Arts/Reading make me think.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I enjoy reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I choose easy books to read for Language Arts/Reading class so I don't have to work hard.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is boring to me.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I try to convince my classmates that the reading for Language Arts/Reading class is a waste of time.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I skip words when reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I respect other students’ comments about what they read in Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I have a hard time recognizing words in books for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I share what I learn from reading for Language Arts/Reading class with my classmates.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Item</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I show interest in what my classmates read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is usually difficult.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is difficult for me.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. It is hard for me to understand reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I keep what I learn from reading for Language Arts/Reading class to myself.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I enjoy reading in my free time for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I think I am a good reader for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I make fun of other students’ comments about what they read in Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I think reading for Language Arts/Reading class is hard.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I offer to help my classmates with reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is a waste of time.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I leave my classmates alone when they have problems reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I am good at remembering words I read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I recognize words easily when I read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I make lots of mistakes reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I keep my opinion about what I read for Language Arts/Reading class to myself.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I am uninterested in what other students read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I avoid reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I try to cheer my classmates up if they have problems with reading in Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I like to read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. I think I can read the books in Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The items on the survey were then organized into the six constructs of reading, following the research of Coddington (2009): *intrinsic motivation, work avoidance, self-efficacy, perceived*...
difficulty, pro-social interactions, and antisocial interactions. Table 12 shows how the items were organized into these constructs.

Table 12

AMSR Items by Construct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Survey Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic Motivation</strong></td>
<td>I enjoy reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy it when reading materials for Language Arts/Reading make me think.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy reading in my free time for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel successful when I read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like to read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy the challenge of reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy finding new things to read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is boring to me. a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is a waste of time. a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
<td>I choose to do other things besides read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I avoid reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I skip words when reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I choose easy books to read for Language Arts/Reading class so I don't have to work hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I read as little as possible for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>I am good at reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am good at remembering words I read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I recognize words easily when I read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think I am a good reader for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I believe I am a good reader for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can figure out difficult words in reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think I can read the books in Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Survey Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Difficulty</td>
<td>Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is difficult for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I make lots of mistakes reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is hard for me to understand reading materials for Language Arts/Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class are difficult to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is usually difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have a hard time recognizing words in books for Language Arts/Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think reading for Language Arts/Reading class is hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Interactions</td>
<td>I share what I learn from reading for Language Arts/Reading class with my classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I try to cheer my classmates up if they have problems with reading in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I share my opinion about what I read for Language Arts/Reading class with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I offer to help my classmates with reading for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I show interest in what my classmates read for Language Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I keep what I learn from reading for Language Arts/Reading class to myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I leave my classmates alone when they have problems reading for Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I keep my opinion about what I read for Language Arts/Reading class to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am uninterested in what other students read for Language Arts/Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Social</td>
<td>I make fun of my classmates’ opinions about what they read for Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I try to convince my classmates that the reading for Language Arts/Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class is a waste of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I make fun of other students’ comments about what they read in Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I respect my classmates’ opinions about what they read in Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I respect other students’ comments about what they read in Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arts/Reading class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aItem was reverse-coded in SPSS to form the construct (Coddington, 2009).
Eight negative items were reverse-coded and Coddington’s (2009) six constructs were created in SPSS: Table 13 provides means and standard deviations for each of the six constructs of reading.

**Table 13**

*Means and Standard Deviations for AMSR Constructs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Difficulty</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Social Interactions</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Interactions</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 101.

Following analysis of the data from the AMSR, the researcher ran descriptive statistics through SPSS for the RAI to calculate the frequency and means of responses. Nine of the survey questions asked students if they read books of specific genres *last week*. These questions included follow-up questions that asked students to name the title, author, or title of a book they had read in those genres *last* week. Since students were just returning from winter break as well as several weeks of remote learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher excluded these questions from the results. The other sixteen items on the RAI asked students how often they engaged in specific reading and non-reading activities, using a Likert scale of 1 to 4 (1 = Almost Never, 2 = About Once a Month, 3 = About Once a Week, 4 = Almost Every Day). Table 14 shows the frequency and mean for each of these items.
Table 14

Frequency and Means of RAI Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How often do you listen to music?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How often do you watch television?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How often do you play outside?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How often do you go to the movies?</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How often do you do chores at home?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How often do you read a science book or science textbook for school?</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How often do you read a book of literature or fiction for school?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How often do you read a book about history or a history textbook for school?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How often do you read a fiction book like a mystery or an adventure for your own interest?</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How often do you read a sports book for your own interest?</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How often do you read a nature book for your own interest?</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How often do you read a romance book for your own interest?</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How often do you read a biography for your own interest?</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How often do you read a comic book or magazine for your own interest?</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How often do you read this kind of book [any other kind of book] for your own interest?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. How often do you read written directions or instructions that tell you how to do something you enjoy, like putting a model airplane together, or baking a cake, or some similar activity?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1: Value of Reading

From the survey results, it is unclear that middle school students value reading in the same way their teachers do. The AMSR results indicate that the mean scores for anti-social interactions are nearly the same as the mean scores for pro-social interactions. Furthermore, students scored higher on the construct of avoidance ($M = 2.45$) than intrinsic reading motivation.
Overall, although many expressed that they were uninterested in what other students read \((M = 2.53)\), a large number of the students indicated that they respected other readers’ opinions \((M = 3.67)\) and other readers’ comments \((M = 3.70)\) about what they were reading. Only four of the students surveyed indicated that it was a lot like them or somewhat like them to make fun of a classmate’s opinions or comments about what they read for reading/language arts class.

**Theme 2: Reading Challenges**

According to Table 13, the highest mean score on the AMSR was in the construct of self-efficacy \((M = 3.12)\). Reading self-efficacy was defined as one’s belief in his or her own perceived ability to read and comprehend the text (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015). This coincides with the low mean score in perceived difficulty \((M = 1.91)\). Thus, the students’ belief in their ability to read does not appear to be as much of a challenge as does their reading motivation. On the AMSR, students scored higher on questions about reading avoidance than they did on questions about intrinsic motivation. More than 50% of students said that it was A Lot Like Me or Somewhat Like Me to read as little as possible, and 68% of students indicated that they choose to do other things besides read for Language Arts/Reading class. Similarly, the mean RAI scores for how often students read books for their own interest ranged from 1.13 to 1.70, with more than half of students indicating they almost never read books in any genre for their own interest. The only exception to this trend was that most students stated that they read written directions or instructions for something they enjoy once a week or more \((M = 2.87)\). Furthermore, 28 respondents on the AMSR indicated that they believed that Language Arts/Reading class was a waste of time.

**Discussion**
An examination of the findings of this study provides evidence that supports the empirical and theoretical literature presented in Chapter Two, reveals elements of a positive reading culture at Harrison Independent School, and establishes a backdrop for making recommendations for other Kentucky middle schools to improve K-PREP reading test scores. In this multimethod design, the researcher used interviews with reading teachers and surveys of both teachers and students to gather the data that supported five emerging themes, each of which supports and adds to the existing literature regarding improving a school’s reading culture to improve students’ reading performance.

**Theoretical Literature**

This research was founded on two cognitive reading theories and two behavioral theories. The theories that served as a foundation for this research were previously identified as the theory of verbal efficiency (Perfetti, 1985), the theory of automaticity in reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Analysis of the data collected in this research aligns with and supports each of these theories.

**Cognitive Reading Theories**

Because of the interrelated nature of these two theories, the theory of verbal efficiency (Perfetti, 1985) and the theory of automaticity in reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974) will be discussed under the umbrella of cognitive reading theories. Together, these theories conveyed that to truly comprehend the text, readers must be able to perform basic reading tasks such as word recognition and phonological awareness efficiently to free up cognitive processes for more complex tasks like comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Perfetti, 1985). Perfetti (2007) found that verbal efficiency was acquired through reading practice; and Walczyk (1994) noted
that readers who were focusing on lower-level processes comprehended less or took longer to comprehend what they read.

Analysis of the teacher surveys shows that 86% of Harrison Independent School teachers believe that their students are strong readers or can read grade-level appropriate texts. Fourteen percent stated that they had not had the opportunity to evaluate their students’ reading, but no teachers indicated that many of their students struggled with grade-level texts. This appears to indicate that the majority of students at Harrison have achieved verbal efficiency and automaticity of reading appropriate to their grade level. However, Williamson et al. (2014) noted that the rigor and complexity of academic reading requirements increase during adolescence. This is supported by teachers’ concerns about students’ limited vocabularies and struggles with comprehension of difficult texts. Statements elicited from the qualitative component of the teacher survey illustrate these concerns. Teachers wrote, “They [students] have a limited vocabulary. Math vocabulary is very precise and demanding,” “In the middle grades, students are caught between the vocab their teacher often uses to explain new subject matter and sometimes more advanced vocab in other materials and texts about their subjects,” and “When a textbook or primary source uses terminology from a previous era, students often have no idea what the words mean.” This further supports the literature, which maintains that when a reader has to stop to decipher unknown vocabulary words, the ability to focus on comprehension is reduced (Walczyk, 1994). In response to the survey, Harrison Independent School teachers offered multiple solutions to combat the problem of limited vocabulary and comprehension including implementing targeted vocabulary instruction, translating the text for students, teaching word roots, and having students keep vocabulary logs.
Behavioral Theories

In addition to cognitive reading theories, two behavioral theories were shown through the literature to play an important role in students’ reading habits and performance: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

Self-Determination Theory. Self-determination theory was presented in the literature as a behavioral theory whose application to reading surmised that students seek experiences through which to fulfill three fundamental needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and the degree to which the three needs are fulfilled influences the intrinsic motivation of students (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

According to both the teacher survey and the student survey, the need for competence appears to be largely met at Harrison Independent School. The majority (86% of teachers) believed that most of their students were strong readers or capable of reading grade-level appropriate texts. This was corroborated by all five reading teacher interviews and the AMSR student surveys on which middle school students scored higher on the construct or self-efficacy ($M = 3.12$) than on any other construct. Furthermore, they scored lowest on perceived difficulty ($M = 1.91$). Students’ reading self-efficacy is also in line with their current level of reading performance on the ACT Aspire (2018).

The question of autonomy was addressed during the reading teacher interviews. In their responses, reading teachers discussed making selections for students based on their own preferences or materials they thought were important for students. In their responses to the RAI, students indicated that they read books for school more often than they read books for their own
interests. Although teachers reported that they encouraged outside reading, the lack of books for middle school students in the school library may limit students’ autonomy in what they read.

For the component of relatedness, reading teachers discussed engagement strategies and using relevant materials. One teacher described using a current events piece to start off the school year. One described how she polls the students each year about the books they read to determine whether to use that book again, and another said that she was looking to add different, “more appealing” books and materials for next school year. As far as the materials that students self-selected to read for their own interests, written directions to do something they enjoy topped the list on the RAI ($M = 2.87$).

**Stage-Environment Fit Theory.** The theory of stage-environment postulates that middle school students are motivated to learn when they are sufficiently challenged while still having their needs based on their current maturity levels (Eccles et al., 1993). In their interviews, reading teachers talked not only about how they break down complex text, but also how they reach students at their levels. One teacher said she starts her class with a wellness check just to see how her students are doing. Another described a grand assortment of fun, engaging activities she uses to keep students interested, including incorporating art, theater, and filmmaking and letting students sit on the floor or use special seating during their free reading time. She explained, “They have to move.”

**Empirical Literature**

Through a thorough review of the existing literature, the researcher identified 12 distinct elements that have been noted as indicators of a positive reading culture. These 12 indicators were used in this study to analyze the reading culture Harrison Independent School.
1. Reading is a social norm wherein students read daily (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005).
2. Students read from a variety of materials (Chiang, 2016; Mano & Guerin, 2018).
3. Students select texts to read based on their own interests or enjoyment (McKenna et al., 2012; Schiefele et al., 2012; Wilhelm, 2016).
4. Class time is set aside for independent reading (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Reutzel & Juth, 2014; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019).
5. Classrooms contain a variety of reading materials available to students (Gambrell, 2015; Lind, 2008, Northrop & Kelly, 2019).
6. Students have regular access to a variety of reading materials in the library (Bartlett, 2007; Hall et al., 2011).
7. Teachers are avid readers (Merga, 2016; Merga & Mason, 2019; Skaar et al., 2018).
8. Teachers and students converse often about what they are reading (Ogugua et al., 2015).
9. Teachers employ active engagement strategies to motivate students to read (Davis & Forbes, 2016; Ho & Lau, 2018).
10. Reading tasks are collaborative, meaningful, and sustained over time (Alley, 2019; Stevenson & Mussalow, 2019; Parsons et al., 2018).
11. Promoting literacy is a school-wide endeavor with administration leading the way (Loh et al., 2017; Merga & Gardiner, 2018; Swanson et al., 2015).
12. Reading extends beyond the school walls to include students’ families and community (Merga and Mat Roni, 2018b; Ogugua et al., 2015).
**Theme 1: Value of Reading**

At the onset of this research, a positive reading culture was defined as one in which beliefs and behaviors that indicate that reading is highly valued by all stakeholders and wherein the students practice the habit of independently reading for pleasure daily inside and outside of the school (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005). Evidence of this aspect of a positive reading culture can be seen at Harrison Independent School as students read from a variety of materials (Chiang, 2016; Mano & Guerin, 2018), class time is set aside for independent reading (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Reutzel & Juth, 2014; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019), and classrooms contain a variety of reading materials available to students (Gambrell, 2015; Lind, 2008, Northrop & Kelly, 2019). All five of the reading teachers interviewed described reading as essential, using words like “the key,” “everything,” and “like breathing.” In the teacher surveys, 75% of participants responded that reading was the main part of or very important to their content areas.

Conversely, students did not appear to share the same value for reading. Though reading teachers in their interviews said that nearly all of their students completed reading that was assigned to them, students on the RAI indicated that reading for school made up the bulk of their reading. More than half of students said they listened to music (89.1%), watched television (69%), or did chores at home (51%) almost every day; however, more than 50% said they almost never read any kind of book for their own interest. This does not support the positive reading culture indicator of students selecting texts to read based on their own interests or enjoyment (McKenna et al., 2012; Schiefele et al., 2012; Wilhelm, 2016).
**Theme 2: Reading Challenges**

There is substantive empirical evidence in the literature of challenges specific to middle school students. Data from this study indicates that the greatest challenge to middle school reading at Harrison Independent School is student motivation. These findings corroborate the findings of Ivey & Broaddus (2001); McKenna et al. (2012); and Nootens et al. (2018), who posited that students’ attitudes toward reading become increasingly negative as they transition into middle school, making it difficult to motivate them to read. They also align with the 2015 NAEP report, which indicated that many middle school students actively avoid reading. These findings were substantiated in this research in both the RAI and the AMSR. On the RAI, students indicated there were many activities they did more often than read for their own interests, and on the RAI, students scored higher on the construct of avoidance ($M = 2.45$) than on intrinsic motivation ($M = 2.39$).

Despite the challenge of reading motivation, students at Harrison Independent School were still described by their teachers as on-target or strong readers. Furthermore, they continue to perform well on the ACT Aspire reading assessment (ACT, Inc, 2018). One conclusion that may be drawn from this information is that, while many students did not report reading for their own interests, the volume and variety of reading required for classwork and homework may be sufficient practice to keep many middle school students reading on grade level. Although reading motivation is certainly a challenge, it may not necessarily be cause for concern. In earlier research, Ley et al. (1994) found that the primary motivation for most middle school readers was to do well in school rather than for personal growth or enjoyment.
Theme 3: Reading Strategies.

In the teacher interviews, many of the conversations about reading strategies flowed freely from exposure to comprehension to motivation, pointing toward the entangled nature of these topics in the complex skill of reading performance (Bigozzi et al., 2017; Mucherah & Ambrose-Stahl, 2014; Roembke et al., 2019). According to survey responses, students have access to a variety of reading materials in in different classes throughout the day, and although there is no space in the building for a middle school library, teachers house grade-level appropriate books in their classrooms for students to read. While this is not a library in the truest sense of the word, it somewhat checks the box for the element of a positive reading culture that students have regular access to a variety of reading materials in the library (Bartlett, 2007; Hall et al., 2011). Additionally, teachers ensure that they are challenging students to read material they may not have selected for themselves. On the teacher survey, participants wrote, “I do think students should be exposed to many genres,” and “They need exposure to the more advanced writing/reading to understand we're saying the exact same thing.”

On the teacher survey, Harrison Independent School teachers reported using a wide range of reading strategies to improve comprehension. Students are expected to answer comprehension questions, cite textual evidence, and annotate. Reading teachers reported that they break down difficult passages into smaller pieces and dig deeply into easier passages for more complex analysis.

In their interviews, Harrison Independent School’s reading teachers discussed several strategies they used to motivate their students to read. One teacher used the words “motivation” and “accountability” interchangeably. These teachers indicated that they often assigned independent reading, both in the classroom at home. Furthermore, they indicated that the
completion rate of the homework was generally very high. Along with reading assignments, reading teachers reported that they used worksheets, quizzes, and follow-up discussions to hold students accountable for the reading. To keep students’ interest and to encourage active engagement, reading teachers said that they strategically selected reading material, read aloud, played games, and had highly interactive classroom lessons and assessments. These strategies align with the findings of Gambrell (2015) and Daniel (2017), who emphasized the need for teachers to create authentic, engaging, and meaningful reading opportunities. They also support two indicators of a positive reading culture: teachers employ active engagement strategies to motivate students to read (Davis & Forbes, 2016; Ho & Lau, 2018); and reading tasks are collaborative, meaningful, and sustained over time (Alley, 2019; Stevenson & Mussalow, 2019; Parsons et al., 2018).

**Theme 4: Role of ELA Teachers**

This study also revealed that, while other teachers found reading to be a valuable skill, the burden of improving students’ reading performance fell mainly to the ELA teachers. Bigozzi et al. (2017) described the complex nature of the process of acquisition. Reading instruction is seen as the ELA teacher’s area of expertise. On the teacher survey, one participant wrote, “Reading teachers have strong content and pedagogical knowledge in the area of reading and reading instruction,” and another wrote, “The reading/language arts teachers have a greater responsibility for teaching skill-specific standards.” ELA teachers were viewed as the authority in reading instruction, though other teachers reported supporting those efforts through collaboration.

Participants on the teacher survey also suggested that the responsibility of motivating students to read fell primarily on the shoulders of ELA teachers, writing “The Language Arts
teachers are more responsible for instilling a love of reading for life,” and “The role of the language arts teacher is to encourage students to read for enjoyment.” However, the literature shows that motivating middle school students to read may be a daunting task as researchers have found that students’ enthusiasm for reading wane after elementary school (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015; McKenna et al., 2012; Wigfield et al., 2016). One reading teacher joked, “My goal is to make sure that they don't hate reading when they leave middle school.”

Additionally, some participants expressed the sentiment that ELA teachers were expected to model reading. One teacher survey participant wrote, “English teachers should model and encourage outside reading.” One point of interest, however, was that on the teacher survey, two non-ELA teachers identified themselves as reading “role models—I talk to students about what I am reading and recommend books,” but no ELA teachers chose that label for themselves. Although none of the interview questions addressed whether teachers were avid readers, three of the five interview participants said that they read aloud to students, “used the accents,” talked to students about what they were reading, or read their own books in class. This supports Merga’s (2016) findings that teachers who were avid readers read at school, talked enthusiastically to students about what they read, and read expressively to the class. It also supports two additional indicators of a positive reading culture: teachers are avid readers (Merga, 2016; Merga & Mason, 2019; Skaar et al., 2018); and teachers and students converse often about what they are reading (Ogugua et al., 2015).

**Theme 5: Role of Others**

Finally, this study complements previous research that asserts that a school’s reading culture extends beyond the ELA classroom (Moore et al., 2019; Soemer & Schiefele, 2018). Although teachers’ survey responses gave the primary role of reading instruction to the ELA
teachers, they showed that teachers of other subjects were active participants in this effort. According to the literature, middle school students are just beginning to build background knowledge and to acquire academic and content-specific vocabulary (Sullivan & Brown, 2013; Wigfield et al., 2016). Beck et al. (2015) found that students struggled to understand some of the vocabulary in the informational texts they read. The teacher survey responses showed that this was also true of students at Harrison Independent School. Swanson et al. (2015) asserted that teachers should be working to increase students' content knowledge and to improve their reading comprehension. Non-ELA teachers at Harrison cited a number of reading strategies they used in their own content areas to improve students’ vocabulary, and on the RAI student survey, 60% of the middle school students at Harrison indicated that they read a textbook for history nearly every day. This corroborates the accounts of reading teachers that history was an area of strength in supporting reading instruction at their school. It also supports the indicator of a positive reading culture that reading is a social norm wherein students read daily (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008; Magara & Batambuze, 2005).

Furthermore, a review of the literature revealed that a positive reading culture included efforts outside of the classroom. In their interviews, reading teachers praised the efforts of the school’s librarian and principal in promoting reading with certificates, announcements, treats, and parties. They also discussed the support of parents, a partnership with the public library, a community reading program, and guest speakers who have come to the school to promote reading. In fact, partnering with the community was something they hoped to do more. One reading teacher said, “I think our community does a pretty decent job,” and other added, “I just think it just needs to be something you do a lot.” These efforts are supportive of two further indicators of a positive reading culture: promoting literacy is a school-wide endeavor with
administration leading the way (Loh et al., 2017; Merga & Gardiner, 2018; Swanson et al., 2015), and reading extends beyond the school walls to include students’ families and community (Merga and Mat Roni, 2018b; Ogugua et al., 2015).

**Summary**

This chapter identified the participants of this study as the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and teachers of Harrison Independent School. The researcher gathered, analyzed and triangulated data from three sources: interviews with five reading teachers, surveys from 22 teachers of various subjects, and surveys from 101 middle school students. Through data analysis, five themes emerged. The five themes were identified as value of reading, reading challenges, reading strategies, role of ELA teachers, and role of others. Within these themes, the researcher was able to support the findings of previous studies and identify a number of indicators of a positive reading culture at Harrison Independent School. Following this chapter will be a proposed solution to the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among Kentucky middle school students along with the necessary resources, funds, roles and responsibilities, timeline, evaluation plan, and implications thereof.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This applied research study sought to examine the problem of low reading performance among Kentucky middle school students on the K-PREP reading assessment. To better understand the problem, the researcher explored the reading culture of Harrison Independent School, a private school in Kentucky whose reading scores exceed the state average. The aim of this investigation was to identify positive practices at Harrison Independent School that could be endorsed as viable solutions to improve reading scores among middle school students at other Kentucky schools.

Restatement of the Problem

This study began with the problem of low K-PREP reading test scores among Kentucky middle school students. Data for the past five years showed that that greater than 40% of Kentucky middle school students were consistently performing below proficiency on the K-PREP reading assessment (KDE, 2019a; KDE, 2019h), and 37.1% of students were not on track to catch up (KDE, 2018a). Poor reading skills puts these students at greater risk for dropping out of high school, reduced job opportunities, and negative long-term psychological impacts (Sorensen, 2009).

Proposed Solution to the Central Question

The central question guiding this research was “How can the reading culture of Kentucky middle schools be amended to improve students’ K-PREP reading scores?” A review of the literature suggested that having a strong reading culture in a school promotes independent reading among its students (Dare, 2007; Gbadamosi, 2007; Loh et al., 2017), and that an increase in scope and frequency of students’ reading has a positive effect on reading achievement.
(Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019). Based on the literature and the findings of this study, the researcher proposes a two-step solution to improving the K-PREP reading scores of Kentucky middle school students. The first is an in-depth analysis of each school’s current reading culture, and the second is targeted professional development for middle school teachers. The purpose of this two-fold approach would be to provide each school with a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of its current reading culture and to provide the training needed to empower teachers in leading the change toward improving reading performance.

**Reading Culture Analysis**

A thorough analysis of each school’s current reading culture is an important first step toward improving reading performance among Kentucky middle school students. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) required schools to use research-based best practices to improve student performance. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) furthered this goal by directing schools to engage in evidenced-based best practice that provides *all* students with college and career-ready skills, but there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Reed and Swaminathan (2014) emphasized that best practices in education must be grounded in the unique needs of each school’s students, staff, and communities. Moreover, research shows that successful schools regularly examine their own practices to explain students’ lack of achievement (Glickman 2002).

Brighouse, Ladd, Loeb, and Swift (2018) emphasized the importance of school improvement informed by data and driven by values. Each school’s reading culture is as unique as its population, and it is only by careful examination that a school can determine its own starting point and direction for improvement. The effectiveness of each reading culture should be informed by artifactual evidence including the availability of a variety of print and nonprint
reading materials as well as behavioral evidence, including the reading practices of students, faculty, and administrators (Lind, 2008). One sound starting point may be to examine schools for the research-based indicators of a positive reading culture that were provided in Chapter Three of this study.

The evidence of each school’s reading culture should be provided by and shared with its stakeholders. Because a school’s culture is comprised of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of its members (Great Schools Partnership, 2013), they are the people best equipped to identify areas of strength upon which to build and areas of weakness upon which to improve. Furthermore, changes in school culture must begin within the school itself (Eilers & Camacho, 2007), which means that the stakeholders must be able to identify the desired reading behaviors and then work together to develop strategies to achieve the desired results (Shook, 2010).

**Targeted Professional Development**

The second recommendation of this research is targeted professional development. Providing professional development all teachers to better understand reading motivation and providing professional development for math, science, and social studies teachers to incorporate literacy strategies into their curriculum are both crucial to improving students’ reading performance. As one teacher surveyed for this study proposed, “All teachers should be reading teachers.” There are several justifications for this targeted professional development:

First, reading motivation was recognized by the literature as a key factor in the amount of time middle school students spent reading (Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Stutz et al., 2016; Whitten et al., 2019). However, it was also a notable area of difficulty consistently reported by researchers and the single most area of reading challenge among students at Harrison Independent School. This research found that teachers generally deferred to ELA teachers to
motivate students to read; however, an indicator of a positive reading culture is that promoting literacy is a school-wide endeavor.

Secondly, teachers of other content areas must be trained to incorporate explicit reading strategies into their curriculums. The Kentucky educational standards have already established this expectation for those teachers (CCSSI, 2019a), and the *Literacy Plans for Kentucky Schools* (KDE, 2018c) calls for middle schools not only to utilize explicit literacy instruction across the curriculum, but also to emphasize fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension in all content areas, and to incorporate content-specific literacy strategies. This study supports prior research indicating that middle school students struggle with the rigor and complexity of content-specific vocabulary in subjects like science, math, and social studies (Beck et al., 2015; Fang, 2007). It also raises concerns that teachers of other content areas may lack the pedagogy and/or reading strategies to help their students to become better readers (Swanson et al., 2015). Therefore, targeted professional development is warranted, both to incorporate literacy into other content areas, and to incorporate other content areas into reading. This idea was highlighted by one teacher survey participant who suggested, “If we show students how all subjects intertwine, they can see the importance of reading.” An added benefit of this practice is that evidence shows that improved reading is associated with improved performance in other academic areas (Krashen, 2004; Sullivan & Brown, 2013), and by intertwining the content matter into different subjects, teachers of those content areas may see gains in student achievement as well.

Targeted professional development is designed to improve educational practices among a specific group, but there must be buy-in from those participants for professional development to be effective. “Teachers yearn for professional development experiences that not only advance their skills and knowledge base but also simultaneously probe their sense of purpose and invite
deliberation about what matters most in good teaching” (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006). To elicit buy-in, Bates and Morgan (2018) recognized seven elements of effective professional development, each of which this researcher considers essential in helping teachers to support literacy instruction:

1. Focus on content—The content of the professional development sessions should be focused on reading motivation and literacy instruction and should enable the teachers to connect theory to practice (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Presenters should make each learning experience relevant to the teachers’ specific content areas. This might mean providing separate small-group professional development opportunities for each department, i.e., grouping math teachers separate from science teachers.

2. Active learning—To make professional development meaningful, presenters should incorporate interactive learning experiences to engage teachers rather than simply providing information. Some suggestions are to roleplay lessons teachers could use with students, examine student artifacts, or provide teachers with materials such as graphic organizers they could use right away in their classrooms. Teachers are motivated to participated in professional development where knowledge is created and shared (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

3. Support for collaboration—Teachers should be given time to discuss what they have learned, and they should be provided with time work together, both within their departments and alongside reading teachers. Setting aside this time and protecting this time for collaboration emphasizes the school’s focus on reading and establishes a positive environment in which the goal of improved reading instruction can be realized.

4. Models of effective practice—Teachers need opportunities to see effective reading
instruction in practice. This may be accomplished through viewing videos, observing other teachers, or working directly with their curricular materials if they include a component of reading instruction. Time should also be set aside to discuss and practice using these models.

5. Coaching and expert support—Literacy coaches or reading experts should be utilized whenever possible to provide small-group professional development as well as on-on-one feedback for teachers. For maximum impact, literacy coaching should be personalized and contextualized based on teachers’ specific needs. Teachers are more likely to change their practices when literacy coaches share research-based reading strategies, provide opportunity for collaboration, and provide ongoing support (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010).

6. Feedback and reflection—Teachers should be provided with ongoing feedback about reading instructional practices and given time to self-reflect. Feedback should be constructive, not critical (Bates & Morgan, 2018), and may be provided by administrators, literacy coaches, reading teachers, or other colleagues.

7. Sustained duration—It is important to note that these changes will not be the result of a one-time event, but rather of ongoing, intentional instruction and support, and that those changes will take time (Kosanovich & Rodriguez, 2021).

**Resources Needed**

Since reading cultures are uniquely specific to each school, the necessary resources may vary greatly from school to school and district to district. As is often the case for changing educational practices, perhaps the resource most needed is time. Schools will need to set aside time to gather and analyze data about their reading cultures. They will need time to share this
information with their stakeholders, time to discuss strategies to improve, and time to implement those strategies. It is noteworthy that in this research, time was identified by interview participants as a limited commodity. It is the recommendation of this researcher that each school designate and protect time specifically devoted to improving its reading culture.

In addition to time, schools will need resources to examine their reading cultures and train their teachers. There are a number of resources available for this purpose, including student surveys such as the AMSR and the RAI that were used for this research, and survey platforms that can be used to create custom surveys for teachers. Additionally, the Kentucky Department of Education provides schools with the *Literacy PERKS Planning Booklet*. This resource includes surveys that schools can use to evaluate their literacy programs. Standard four of the *Literacy PERKS Planning Booklet* focuses specifically on the literacy environment and may shed some light on a school’s reading culture.

To provide ongoing professional development in literacy instruction, schools will need even more time. They will also need a variety of professional development programs and presenters as well as print and digital resources. Some of these materials may be readily available at no cost to schools. For example, the KDE, in conjunction with Kentucky Educational Television (KET), has compiled a series of videos that illustrates successful literacy practices observed in schools across the state. The video series, available online, is titled *The Literacy Leadership: Stories of Schoolwide Success*. Others, like the books *Motivating Readers in the Middle Grades* and *Understanding Texts & Readers: Responsive Comprehension Instruction with Leveled Texts Illustrated Edition* may be purchased for under $30 each per teacher and provide substantial relevant content for professional development.

**Funds Needed**
Since the evaluation of each school’s reading culture is essentially an internal audit, cost is minimal. Schools may choose to invest in an online survey platform like SurveyMonkey that can provide much-needed information for under $400 per year, though additional funds may be needed if it is necessary to hire someone to create the surveys and manage the data. Other input about the school’s reading culture can be procured through faculty focus groups for no added cost to schools.

Additional professional development, on the other hand, can be quite expensive and even cost-prohibitive for many schools. A 2015 survey by The New Teacher Project showed that schools spend as much as $18,000 per teacher per year on professional development, most of which is done whole-group, face-to-face, and without differentiation (Klan, 2017). Because this cost is extensive, schools might alternately consider training a small number of key individuals who would then be tasked with training the rest of the staff in student reading motivation and specific reading strategies. Another suggestion is to utilize the expertise that is already available in the building or elsewhere in the district. Since the discontinuation of Kentucky’s Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project (ALCP), districts are now on their own to determine the feasibility of employing literacy coaches (Porter, Kannapel, Parker, & Moore, 2012). Schools or districts that do employ a literacy coach can certainly use this resource for teacher training, but there are likely others, such as reading teachers and media specialists, with expertise in reading motivation and instruction. By taking advantage of existing personnel resources, a district may be able to provide substantive professional development while staying within budgetary restrictions. Schools or districts that require resources not available to them within their district may consider applying for a grant through the U. S. Department of Education’s Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality (AITQ) Programs, which provides funding a variety of educational purposes
including training for teachers on new approaches for improving educational results as well as improvement of literacy (United States Department of Education, 2014).

**Roles and Responsibilities**

In order to help improve students’ K-PREP reading scores at Kentucky middle schools, it is recommended that each school conduct an internal review of its unique reading culture and provide customized professional development focused on reading motivation and reading strategies across the curriculum. This researcher envisions these changes not as a top-down approach, but as an inside-out approach. Changing a culture is not a bureaucratic process, achieved by mandated trainings and accountability measures. Rather, it is a shift of its members toward a common vision, marked by collaboration, positive relationships, and trusted professionalism (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016).

“To build a reading culture, there needs to be an ecology of reading within the school with the principal leading the way” (Loh et al., 2017, p. 344). There are 455 schools in Kentucky that serve middle school students (KDE, 2020b). That means there are 455 unique cultures to consider. A school’s culture is deeply rooted in its students, teachers, parents, and community (Great Schools Partnership, 2013), but that does not mean that it is outside scope of leadership to mold that culture. It is the responsibility of each building principal to know his or her school and its teachers, students, and community, to understand the culture thereof, and to determine the best method to initiate the changes necessary to improve. In order to build on the strengths of each school’s current experts, it is recommended that building administrators work closely with reading coaches, reading specialists, and media specialists and that all teachers participate in small-group, content-specific, ongoing professional development designed to improve student motivation and implement effective reading strategies. With the support of district
administrators, interschool exchanges may be used to aid struggling schools in the procurement of resources and experts they need to be successful. Teachers also play an active role in improving a school’s reading culture. This happens through active participation in professional development, internalization of the information and strategies learned through professional development, and self-reflection and change in behaviors and practices following professional development.

**Timeline**

The process of cultural change is an ongoing effort which happens over time. The recommendation is to allow for at least one full school year to analyze the current culture of each school and initiate the ongoing professional development necessary to inform the needed changes. Kosanovich and Rodriguez (2021) recommend collecting data beyond the current school year, possibly for even two years, to determine the effectiveness of the changes implemented therein.

While the implementations of specific solutions are highly dependent upon each school’s distinct culture, the sequence of implementation is the same. The first step is a thorough analysis of each school’s current reading culture. This can be done through student and teacher surveys, focus groups, and faculty meetings. Time should be allotted for each school to procure or create its own data collection tools. Data collection and analysis should take no longer than a few weeks. Since reading culture encompasses the beliefs and behaviors of all stakeholders, the timing of data collection is also important. It is recommended that schools are in a regular routine of in-person learning before data collection begins. This excludes the first days or weeks following long periods out of school such as upon returning from summer break or remote learning.
The second component of this solution is ongoing professional development for student motivation and incorporation of specific reading strategies. This researcher recommends beginning professional development on these topics at the beginning of the upcoming school year. The beginning of the school year is often the time teachers use to set the tone and the culture of the classroom. This same concept can easily be applied to overall school culture. Starting the year off with professional development about motivation and reading strategies sets the tone and the expectations for the year. It allows teachers to start the year off with a shared vision and a focus on the value of reading.

Professional development, and time for reflection and reevaluation of the skills and strategies learned therein, should be an ongoing cycle, recurring at regular intervals throughout the school year (Bates & Morgan, 2018). To maintain the central focus of reading culture, the recommendation is to conduct small-group, content-specific professional development, collaboration, and reflection at least once per quarter or as often as is appropriate for the school’s culture. See the bulleted timeline below for a sample model of implementation:

- Pre-school-year Inservice: Whole group professional development with small group breakout sessions.
- Middle of Quarter 1: Small group professional development with collaboration and reflection.
- End of Quarter 1: Small group professional development with collaboration and reflection.
- End of Quarter 1: Reading culture data collection via student and teacher surveys.
- Middle of Quarter 2: Data collected, compiled, analyzed and shared with teachers. Breakout sessions for small group reflection on reading culture data.
• End of Quarter 2: Small group professional development with collaboration and reflection.
• Middle of Quarter 3: Small group professional development with collaboration and reflection.
• End of Quarter 3: Small group professional development with collaboration and reflection.
• Middle of Quarter 4: K-PREP assessment
• End of Quarter 4: Whole group professional development, sharing of personal experiences, struggles, and successes.
• Repeat PD cycle for year 2 with new data collection at the end of Quarter 1 to evaluate effectiveness and establish areas for growth.

**Solution Implications**

The purpose of this solution is to lead to improved performance among middle school students on the K-PREP reading assessment. To do this, schools are tasked with evaluating their reading cultures and providing professional development to improve student reading motivation and advance the use of reading strategies across the curriculum. There are many factors that may influence the outcome, but this study holds a number of positive implications for students, teachers, administrators, and communities.

**Students**

The researcher acknowledges that changing school’s reading cultures needs to be about more than improving test scores. Amending the reading cultures of Kentucky middle schools and providing opportunities for more independent reading during the school day sends the message to students that their reading habits are as important as their reading achievement. Positive
implications of this study include exposing students to a variety of texts upon which to build their vocabulary and background knowledge, improving students’ reading self-efficacy, helping students develop a love for reading, and building a foundation for success in other subjects and in college (Lee & Zentall, 2017; Louick et al., 2016; Sullivan & Brown, 2013; Wigfield et al., 2016).

Improving a school’s reading culture creates more avid readers who are able to connect emotionally with texts as well as with other avid readers (Beers & Samuels, 1998), in turn creating a community environment built around common interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Parsons et al., 2018). Students in a school where there is a positive reading culture talk about what they are reading (Wilhelm, 2016), engage in meaningful, authentic learning activities (Daniel, 2017; Gambrell, 2015), and are provided more opportunity to engage in school-wide reading events (Ogugua et al., 2015).

For students, negative implications of this study may be found in the disparity between how schools or districts choose to implement change within their unique cultures (Magara & Batambuze, 2005). There are a number of factors that would necessarily impact the specific changes made from school to school and district to district, raising questions of equality and concerns about whether some of those changes may have the potential to widen the achievement gap for low-performing schools.

**Teachers**

This study holds positive implications for teachers as well. The proposed solution is centered around collaborative, reflective, and immersive professional development. This kind of professional learning environment, centered around a shared vision, and where teachers’ voices are heard and valued, helps to build positive professional relationships among teachers as well as
between teachers and administrators (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Mitchell & Tarter, 2016).

Furthermore, small-group professional development provides opportunities for effective collaboration and support among job-alike teachers. Teachers who have a voice in the improvement process and whose efforts lead to students’ improved K-PREP reading test scores, may experience higher self-efficacy in their instruction, which in turn may lead to further improved instructional practices (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020).

This study calls for schools to implement ongoing professional development which does take time. In their interview responses, teachers of this study noted that their time was already overextended. For teachers who feel like their time is already in full demand, additional professional development may feel like just one more thing to do, and may impede upon their time to accomplish other necessary tasks or participate in other essential professional development. Teachers who feel overly protective of their time may initially be difficult to convince of the value of the improvement plan and all it entails.

This proposed solution operates under the assumption that the changes that would come from it would be collaborative and of a shared vision (Shook, 2010). This may not be the case in all schools. In schools where professional collaboration and trust are not fully secure, there is the risk of cultural changes being mandated rather than mutually agreed upon, thereby adding to teachers’ workload, increasing tensions, and ultimately hindering the success of the plan (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016).

**Administrators**

Although the overall goal of this solution is to improve reading test scores, the implications of this proposed solution include more than numerical success. The most positive implication of this solution is the evolution of the learning community it creates. As student
learning communities evolve in the classroom, and as professional learning communities evolve in the school, the overall culture of the school, not just its reading culture, begins to change. What this means for administrators is the potential reduction of student disciplinary referrals (Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas, 2016). It may also mean an increase in teacher retention as teachers are more likely to stay in a position where they feel a sense of community and teacher self-efficacy (Hughes, 2012).

This study calls for school administrators to lead the charge in improving reading cultures, but it leaves the details of how to do this up to schools and districts to decide. Although the researcher finds the need to extend this flexibility to schools and defers to the principals in consideration of their understanding of each school’s reading culture, some administrators may see this as ambiguous and may be overwhelmed at the preponderance of data analysis tools and strategies, limiting their ability or motivation to fully follow through with implementation.

Furthermore, the cost of professional development is a factor that cannot be ignored. Depending on the method schools choose, the cost for ongoing professional development could deter some districts from fully supporting schools in this endeavor, and some may not qualify for federal grants from AITQ to fund their efforts. Without sufficient budgetary support, schools may be left on their own to solicit adequate resources and personnel. This puts additional strain on administrators who may already be stretched thin.

**Communities**

Initially, there may be some resistance from parents as school change from the status quo to increased expectations for reading and outreach to parents, but there are far more long-term positive implications for the communities of which the students are a part, and these benefits extend well past the middle school years. Improving Kentucky middle students K-PREP scores
has the potential to improve the ratings of Kentucky schools, both the middle schools where the changes are made and the high schools where the reading culture is carried by those same students. Improvements in school ratings make the communities served by those schools more desirable places to live and work (Hanushek et al., 2016). Students who stay in those communities into adulthood will contribute to the local workforce and spur economic growth (Hanushek, 2016), and when they start families, those same individuals will be able to pass down to their children the reading culture they inherited as adolescents (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018b).

**Evaluation Plan**

Evaluation of this solution includes both goal-based reflective assessment as well as outcomes-based assessment. The two strategies are both informative about improvement efforts toward reading proficiency, but each serves a separate purpose. The purpose of using a goal-based assessment is to show how the school’s reading culture improves over time. This solution begins by establishing a baseline for understanding each school’s current reading culture. This analysis should be conducted a few weeks or more after school begins. It should be led by the principal and shared with the faculty. An initial analysis of the school’s existing culture is an important first step because it gives the school a clear starting point upon which to develop an improvement goal. Schools may use a variety of tools such as student surveys, teacher surveys, and focus groups to conduct this initial analysis. Administrators and teachers may work together to develop a specific goal based on that analysis, and some may establish individual goals as well.

As teachers participate in professional development throughout the school year, they will be asked to reflect upon what they learned and how they are implementing, or plan to implement, what they have learned into their classroom instruction. Teachers’ reflections serve as formative
assessments that move toward the goal of improving the reading culture of the school. This does not have to be as formal as the initial analysis, but it should be used to guide future professional development. Another full analysis of the school’s reading culture should be done the following year in the same manner. Results from this analysis can be compared to results from the previous year to determine overall growth, the degree to which the goals were reached, and future areas of improvement.

The other important baseline to be used when determining the effectiveness of the solution is students’ K-PREP reading test scores from the previous year. Improving K-PREP reading test scores is the outcome schools are aiming to achieve by implementing this solution. Schools will administer the K-PREP reading assessment to students in the spring according to state guidelines. Once the scores are received by the school, they can be shared with the faculty and analyzed collectively to determine the successfulness of the solution as well as next steps for continued improvement.

**Delimitations**

Due to accessibility of participants, this study was conducted at a private pre-K through 12 school rather than a public grade six through eight middle school. The student surveys were limited to middle school students, but the researcher chose to survey teachers of all students above first grade. Additionally, because of a limited number of middle school ELA teachers, teacher interviews were conducted with reading teachers from grades five through twelve. The rationale behind these choices was twofold. First, many teachers at this school taught, or had taught, a variety of grade levels. Secondly, doing so helped the researcher to gain a clear understanding of the reading culture of the school as a whole. It is important to note that students at this school do not take the K-PREP reading assessment, but a comparison was drawn from a
similar assessment, the ACT Inspire, and that data was used for this study.

**Limitations**

A major limitation of this study is its timing. Data for the study was collected between December 2020 and January 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, many schools around the world, including Kentucky schools, were in their second year of non-traditional or remote learning. This unprecedented disruption to the typical school environment varied by location, and its long-term impact has yet to be ascertained. As a result, the reading culture of this school, and likely most schools, has surely been impacted. Students’ surveys reflect their reading motivations and habits ten months into the pandemic. Students were in an in-person learning status at the time of the study. Also due to the pandemic, the study is limited in the unavailability of reading performance scores from 2020. Additionally, since this study was conducted at a small private school, the demographic makeup of its student participants, including race, socioeconomic status, and special education serviced received, may not be reflective of the population as a whole.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research is necessary to solve the problem of low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students. Greenwald et al. (1996) wrote about factors outside of a school’s control such as socioeconomic status, home environment, community resources, race, English language proficiency, and gender. Studies that evaluate each of these variables in conjunction with a school’s reading culture and its reading performance is this researcher’s recommendation for a plethora of further studies. Another recommendation is to compare the reading cultures of different schools within the same district wherein there is a large gap between scores to determine whether reading culture is a significant factor in reading performance. Also, since the
structure of middle schools vary across the state, this researcher recommends a comparison of scores for middle school students attending grade 6-8 Kentucky schools with those attending K-8 schools and those attending 6-12 schools, especially within a single district. Many students at the school used for this study began attending there in elementary school, so their transition to middle school may not have had the impact described by AMLE (2002). Additionally, as this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings may not have been indicative of the pre-pandemic habits and values of students and teachers. As a result of COVID-19, some schools may continue to offer virtual learning to some students as an alternative to in-person learning. Further studies are recommended to determine the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students’ reading behaviors, and the changes in reading strategies needed to motivate online students to read.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to find a solution to low K-PREP reading scores among middle school students by examining the overall reading culture of Harrison Independent School to identify positive practices that could be recommended to other Kentucky schools for improvement. For five consecutive years, Kentucky middle school students have scored at or below 60% proficiency on the K-PREP reading assessment, and many were not on target to catch up. With an increase in the rigor and expectations for reading, it was essential to find a solution.

A multimethod design for this study used a combination of interviews with reading teachers, teacher surveys, and students surveys to gather data to inform the problem. The researcher found that Harrison Independent School exhibited varying degrees of 11 of the 12 indicators of a positive reading culture identified by earlier research. There was little indication of students selecting texts to read based on their own interests or enjoyment; however, this was
also consistent with prior studies that found that middle school students often read to satisfy a requirement more often than for their own interests.

The proposed solution that was shaped by this study was a thorough analysis of the reading cultures of individual middle schools across Kentucky and the implementation of ongoing professional development to improve student motivation and to train teachers to use explicit strategies to improve students’ reading. Analysis and efforts to change a school’s reading culture may be challenging, time-consuming, and potentially costly, but the aim of this study extends much further than increasing the number of students who score proficient on the K-PREP reading assessment. Improving the way schools teach reading and changing the way students approach reading have the potential to have a long-lasting impact on the students, their schools, and the communities in which they live.
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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letters

July 10, 2020

Rebecca Grace

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-105 Improving Students’ K-Prep Reading Scores by Investigating The Reading Culture at Harrison Middle School

Dear Rebecca Grace,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: July 10, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 C.F.R 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study involves surveying or interviewing minors, or it involves observing the public behavior of minors, and you will participate in the activities being observed.

Your stamped consent forms can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. These forms should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
January 14, 2020

Rebecca Grace

Re: Modification - IRB-FY19-20-105 Improving Students' K-Prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at Harrison Independent School

Dear Rebecca Grace,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY19-20-105 Improving Students' K-Prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at Harrison Independent School.

Decision: Approved

Your request to utilize [redacted] as your study site as opposed to using [redacted] has been approved. Thank you for submitting documentation of permission from [redacted] and your revised study documents for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped assent form and consent forms can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. These forms should be copied and used to gain the assent and consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your assent and consent information electronically, the contents of the attached documents should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
December 11, 2020

Rebecca A. Grace
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Dear Rebecca Grace:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Improving Students’ K-prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at Harrison Independent School* (pseudonym for publication), I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at the following location:

Check the following box, as applicable:

[ ]

Check the following box, as applicable:

[ ]

[We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.]

Sincerely,
Appendix C
Teacher Letter and Consent for Survey

Consent

Title of the Project: Improving Students’ K-Prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at [redacted] (pseudonym will be used for publication)

Principal Investigator: Rebecca A. Grace, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a teacher (in any content area) at [redacted]. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to try to improve students’ K-Prep reading scores by examining the overall reading culture of the [redacted] to identify positive reading practices that could be recommended to other schools. It will provide information about what and how often students read as well as the practices of [redacted] that promote students’ reading.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

1. Complete an anonymous survey. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of reading culture, research-based strategies to improve the reading culture, the potential to increase students’ K-Prep reading achievement, and the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of improved reading for Kentucky middle school students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be confidential.
- Data will be encrypted in SurveyMonkey, where it will be stored in SOC2 accredited data centers and only accessible to the researcher through password-protected secure access.
connectivity. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

### Is study participation voluntary?
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or [redacted]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

### What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
The researcher conducting this study is Rebecca Grace. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [redacted], at [redacted].

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

### Your Consent
By selecting the "I agree" button on the survey, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you begin. You may print a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.
Appendix D
Teacher Letter and Consent for Interview

Consent

Title of the Project: Improving Students’ K-Prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at [Redacted] (pseudonym will be used for publication)

Principal Investigator: Rebecca A. Grace, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a teacher at [Redacted], and you must teach at least one section of reading, English, or language arts. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
The purpose of the study is to try to improve students’ K-Prep reading scores by examining the overall reading culture of the [Redacted] to identify positive reading practices that could be recommended to other schools. It will provide information about what and how often students read as well as the practices of [Redacted] that promote students’ reading.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete an anonymous survey. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in a face-to-face or videoconference interview about your experience teaching reading or language arts and the daily reading practices at [Redacted]. Interviews are expected to last an hour or less. Face-to-face interviews will be audio-recorded and videoconference interviews will be video recorded for accuracy and integrity of the research.

How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of reading culture, research-based strategies to improve the reading culture, the potential to increase students’ K-Prep reading achievement, and the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of improved reading for Kentucky middle school students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?
The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.
How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Survey data will be encrypted in SurveyMonkey where it will be stored in SOC2 accredited data centers and only accessible to the researcher through password-protected secure connectivity. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Participants' interview responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Participants' survey responses will remain anonymous. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University [redacted] If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, except anonymous survey data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Rebecca Grace. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at (270) 874-9193 or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor. [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the
study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name  Signature & Date
Appendix E
Student/Parent Permission Slip and Assent Form

Child Assent to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?
The name of the study is Improving Students' K-prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at University Name. A fictional name will be used to keep the information private. The person doing the study is Rebecca Grace.

Why is Rebecca Grace doing this study?
Rebecca Grace wants to know what the reading culture is like at your school to see if learning some things about reading at your school may help other students improve their reading scores.

Why am I being asked to be in this study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a middle school student who will take a reading assessment this year.

If I decide to be in the study, what will happen and how long will it take?
If you decide to be in this study, you will complete an anonymous survey online. The survey will ask about what kinds of reading you do, what you like to read, what you don’t like to read, and what you think about reading. It will take you about forty minutes or less to complete the survey.

Do I have to be in this study?
No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don’t want to, it’s OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It’s up to you.

What if I have a question?
You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can email the researcher, or you may ask your teacher if you have any immediate questions.

You may choose to participate in the survey or not to participate. Clicking on the survey link means that you want to be in the study.

Rebecca A. Grace

Liberty University Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515
irb@liberty.edu

Liberty University
IRB-FY19-20-105
Approved on 12-14-2020
Parental Opt-Out Form

Title of the Project: Improving Students’ K-Prep Reading Scores by Investigating the Reading Culture at [Redacted] (pseudonym will be used for publication)

Principal Investigator: Rebecca A. Grace, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your student is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be 6th, 7th, or 8th grade students at [Redacted]. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your student to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to try to improve Kentucky students’ K-Prep reading scores by examining the overall reading culture of [Redacted], to identify positive practices that could be recommended to other schools. It will provide information about what and how often students read as well as the practices of teachers that promote students’ reading.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your student to be in this study, I would ask him or her to do the following things:

1. Complete an anonymous survey that consists of the Reading Activity Inventory and the Adolescent Motivations for School Reading survey. It should take your student approximately 40 minutes to complete the survey.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of the school’s overall reading culture, research-based strategies to improve the reading culture, the potential to increase students’ K-Prep reading achievement, and the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of improved reading for [Redacted] students.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your student would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be encrypted in SurveyMonkey where it will be stored in SOC2 accredited data centers and only accessible to the researcher through password-protected secure
connectivity. Data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your student to participate will not affect your or his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or [redacted]. If you decide to allow your student to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

**What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw your student from the study or your student chooses to withdraw from the study, your student should exit the survey and close his or her internet browser. Your student’s responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Rebecca Grace. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [redacted], at [redacted].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?**

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Your Consent**

Before agreeing for your child to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the information provided above.

**Opt-Out Signature**

If you do NOT wish to allow your student to participate in the study, please sign and return this opt-out form to your child’s teacher.

Parent’s Signature  Date
Appendix F
Structured ELA Teacher Interview Guide

Researchable Question: How would ELA teachers in an interview solve the problem of the low K-Prep reading scores at Harrison Independent School?

1. What grade levels and subjects do you teach? How long have you been in this position?
2. What courses have you taught other than ELA? For how long? How was that experience?
3. How did you come to be an ELA teacher?
4. What challenges do you face as an ELA teacher? How do you cope with those challenges?
5. Please describe a typical day in your class. What do you do? What do students do?
6. What kinds of homework do you assign? What is the completion rate?
7. How important is reading as a skill? Why? Consider college, career, and social aspects.
8. How would you describe your current students as readers compared to previous years or compared to your expectations? What are their strengths/weaknesses as a group?
9. What are the major differences you see between “good” readers and “struggling readers”? Give some examples.
10. What, in your professional opinion, are the best ways to improve students’ reading?
11. How much class time is devoted to independent reading and how much are students expected to read outside the classroom?
12. How are books and other reading materials selected? Do you assign specific reading, give students choices, etc.?
13. How are students held accountable for their independent reading?
14. What motivates your students to read?
15. What strategies have you used in your classroom to motivate students to read? To what effect?
16. What role do teachers outside of ELA have in promoting independent reading? What practices have you seen?
17. What experience do you have with other teachers on your team with using interdisciplinary units that require students to read?
18. What could teachers of other content areas do to help you help students to improve in reading?
19. If you could require your team members to implement independent reading as part of their curriculum what strategies would you share with them?
20. Imagine you were given the power to change anything you wanted about the school, its students, or the community, to make reading a bigger priority. What would you change? How would you lead the change?
Appendix G
Teacher Web Survey

1. Please select your educator role.
   a. English/reading teacher
   b. Not English/reading teacher

2. How often is independent reading required in your class?
   a. Daily
   b. Once or twice a week
   c. Rarely
   d. Never

3. How often are students given the opportunity to choose reading material in your class?
   a. Daily—Students are expected to bring something to read.
   b. Daily, but only after they finish their other work
   c. Once or twice a week
   d. Rarely
   e. Never

4. How would you describe the reading abilities of the majority of your students?
   a. Nearly all of my students are strong readers.
   b. Most of my students can read grade-level appropriate texts.
   c. Many of my students struggle with grade-level texts.
   d. I have not had enough opportunity to evaluate my students’ reading abilities.

5. How important is reading to your content area?
   a. Reading is the main part of my content area.
   b. Reading is very important to my content area, but it is not the main focus.
   c. Reading is somewhat important to my content area, but there are other methods to deliver the content.
   d. Reading is less important in my content area than it is in other subjects.
   e. I don’t know/I’ve never thought about it.

6. What of the following best describes your role in getting students to read? (Select one)
   a. Role Model—I talk to students about what I am reading and recommend books.
   b. Encourager—I talk to students about their reading and praise their efforts.
   c. Enforcer—I hold students accountable for their reading
   d. Reminder—I expect students to read and remind them often.
   e. Observer—I notice what they are reading and occasionally mention it.
   f. Passerby—I let students read but do not engage them about what they are reading.
   g. Obstacle—Students are not allowed to read their books in my class.

7. Which of the following have you used this year in your classroom? (Select all that apply)
   □ DEAR (Drop Everything and Read)
   □ Literature circles
8. What reading materials are available in your classroom? (Select all that apply)
   - Novels
   - Magazines
   - Newspapers
   - Electronic books or article collection (such as in Schoology)
   - Internet /World Wide Web
   - Textbooks
   - Reference books
   - Nonfiction books
   - Other

9. In the text box below, explain how you see the roles of different teachers in encouraging reluctant readers. What is the role of the ELA teacher compared to teachers of other subjects?

10. In the text box below, provide your thoughts to the following questions: What challenges have you noticed in your class related to students’ ability to read the content? What strategies have you used to address these challenges?


# Appendix H

## Reading Activity Inventory (RAI)

### Measuring Reading Activity: An Inventory

#### READING ACTIVITY INVENTORY

**Directions:** We are interested in knowing about your activities and in finding out how often you do them. Circle the answers to some of the questions, and write the answers to the others.

**Practice Questions**

1. Do you have a first name? (Circle only one.)
   - No........ 1
   - Yes........ 2

   If yes, write your first name.

   **First name:**

2. How often do you tell another person your first name? (Circle only one.)
   - Almost never...... 1
   - About once a month.... 2
   - About once a week...... 3
   - Almost every day...... 4

### QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR ACTIVITIES

1. How often do you listen to music?
   - Almost never........ 1
   - About once a month.... 2
   - About once a week...... 3
   - Almost every day...... 4

2. How often do you watch television?
   - Almost never........ 1
   - About once a month.... 2
   - About once a week...... 3
   - Almost every day...... 4

3. How often do you play outside?
   - Almost never........ 1
   - About once a month.... 2
   - About once a week...... 3
   - Almost every day...... 4

4. How often do you go to the movies?
   - Almost never........ 1
   - About once a month.... 2
   - About once a week...... 3
   - Almost every day...... 4

5. How often do you do chores at home?
   - Almost never........ 1
   - About once a month.... 2
   - About once a week...... 3
   - Almost every day...... 4

---

Instructional Resource No. 4, Spring 1994
QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL READING

Directions: In this section, think about reading you do for school and for homework. Include textbooks and other books in your answers.

6. Did you read a science book or science textbook for school last week? (Circle only one.)
   
   No. .................. 1
   Yes. .................. 2

   If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic that you read about.
   
   Science book title/author/topic:

7. How often do you read a science book or science textbook for school?
   
   Almost never. .......... 1
   About once a month. .......... 2
   About once a week. ............ 3
   Almost every day. ............. 4

8. Did you read a book of literature or fiction last week for school? (Circle only one.)
   
   No. .................. 1
   Yes. .................. 2

9. How often do you read a book of literature or fiction for school?
   
   Almost never. .......... 1
   About once a month. .......... 2
   About once a week. ............ 3
   Almost every day. ............. 4

10. Did you read a book about history or a history textbook last week for school? (Circle only one.)

11. How often do you read a book about history or a history textbook for school?

NRRC National Reading Research Center
QUESTIONS ABOUT READING FOR YOUR OWN ENJOYMENT

Directions: In this section, think about books that you read for your own interest that are not assigned for school or homework.

12. Did you read a fiction book like a mystery or an adventure last week for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

No................... 1
Yes................... 2

If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic you read about.

Book title/author/topic:

13. How often do you read a fiction book like a mystery or an adventure for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

Almost never........... 1
About once a month...... 2
About once a week....... 3
Almost every day......... 4

14. Did you read a sports book last week for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

No................... 1
Yes................... 2

If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic you read about.

Book title/author/topic:

15. How often do you read sports books for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

Almost never........... 1
About once a month...... 2
About once a week....... 3
Almost every day......... 4

16. Did you read a nature book last week for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

No................... 1
Yes................... 2

If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic you read about.

Book title/author/topic:

17. How often do you read a nature book for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

Almost never........... 1
About once a month...... 2
About once a week....... 3
Almost every day......... 4
18. Did you read a romance book last week for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If yes, write title, author, or specific topic you read about.

Book title/author/topic:

---

19. How often do you read a romance book for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

| Almost never | 1 |
| About once a month | 2 |
| About once a week | 3 |
| Almost every day | 4 |

20. Did you read a biography last week for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic you read about.

Book title/author/topic:

---

21. How often do you read biographies for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

| Almost never | 1 |
| About once a month | 2 |
| About once a week | 3 |
| Almost every day | 4 |

22. Did you read a comic book or magazine last week for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic that you read about.

Book title/author/topic:

---

23. How often do you read comic books and magazines for your own interest? (Circle only one.)

| Almost never | 1 |
| About once a month | 2 |
| About once a week | 3 |
| Almost every day | 4 |

24. Did you read any other kind of book last week for your own interest that was not mentioned? (Circle only one.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If yes, write in the title, author, or specific topic that you read about.
Measuring Reading Activity: An Inventory

Book title/author/topic:

25. How often do you read this kind of book? (Circle only one.)
   Almost never........... 1
   About once a month..... 2
   About once a week...... 3
   Almost every day........ 4

26. How often do you read written directions or instructions that tell you how to do something you enjoy, like a putting a model airplane together, or baking a cake, or some similar activity? (Circle only one.)
   Almost never........... 1
   About one a month...... 2
   About once a week...... 3
   Almost never........... 4

Instructional Resource No. 4, Spring 1994
Appendix I
Adolescent Motivations for School Reading (AMSR)

Name: ___________________________ Date: ________________
Teacher: __________________________ Period: ________________

School Reading Questionnaire

Please read the following statements and select the response that best fits how YOU feel about reading for your Language Arts/Reading class this school year.

When answering the questions think about anything you read for Language Arts/Reading class this school year. This could include any of the following materials: fiction books, non-fiction books, textbooks, magazines, newspapers, and Web sites.

For each question think about how similar the statement is to YOU and how YOU feel about reading for your Language Arts/Reading class this school year. Decide whether the statement is: a lot like you, somewhat like you, not like you or not at all like you.

Sample Questions

1. I enjoy playing sports for school.
   - Not At All
   - Not
   - Somewhat
   - A Lot
   Like Me
   Like Me
   Like Me
   Like Me

2. I believe Language Arts/Reading class is important for my future.
   - Not At All
   - Not
   - Somewhat
   - A Lot
   Like Me
   Like Me
   Like Me
   Like Me

Remember to answer the questions honestly based on your own experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. Your teachers, parents and friends will not see your answers.
1. I enjoy the challenge of reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

2. I share my opinion about what I read for Language Arts/Reading class with my classmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

3. I choose to do other things besides read for Language Arts/Reading class.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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4. I can figure out difficult words in reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class.

<table>
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<th>Not At All</th>
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<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

5. I make fun of my classmates’ opinions about what they read for Language Arts/Reading class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

6. I believe I am a good reader for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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7. I enjoy finding new things to read for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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8. I respect my classmates’ opinions about what they read in Language Arts/Reading class.

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<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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9. I read as little as possible for Language Arts/Reading class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>
10. I feel successful when I read for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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11. I am good at reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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12. I enjoy it when reading materials for Language Arts/Reading make me think.

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<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

13. I enjoy reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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14. I choose easy books to read for Language Arts/Reading class so I don't have to work hard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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15. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is boring to me.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

16. I try to convince my classmates that the reading for Language Arts/Reading class is a waste of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

17. I skip words when reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
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<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

18. I respect other students' comments about what they read in Language Arts/Reading class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like Me</td>
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<td>Like Me</td>
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</table>

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19. I have a hard time recognizing words in books for Language Arts/Reading class.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

20. I share what I learn from reading for Language Arts/Reading class with my classmates.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

21. I show interest in what my classmates read for Language Arts/Reading class.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

22. Reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class are difficult to read.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

23. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is usually difficult.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

24. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is difficult for me.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

25. It is hard for me to understand reading materials for Language Arts/Reading class.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

26. I keep what I learn from reading for Language Arts/Reading class to myself.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

27. I enjoy reading in my free time for Language Arts/Reading class.

| Not At All Like Me | Not Like Me | Somewhat Like Me | A Lot Like Me |

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28. I think I am a good reader for Language Arts/Reading class.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

29. I make fun of other students’ comments about what they read in Language Arts/Reading class.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

30. I think reading for Language Arts/Reading class is hard.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

31. I offer to help my classmates with reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

32. Reading for Language Arts/Reading class is a waste of time.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

33. I leave my classmates alone when they have problems reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

34. I am good at remembering words I read for Language Arts/Reading class

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

35. I recognize words easily when I read for Language Arts/Reading class.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me

36. I make lots of mistakes reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

Not At All  Not Somewhat A Lot
Like Me     Like Me Like Me Like Me
37. I keep my opinion about what I read for Language Arts/Reading class to myself.

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>A Lot Like Me</th>
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38. I am uninterested in what other students read for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>A Lot Like Me</th>
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</table>

39. I avoid reading for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>A Lot Like Me</th>
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40. I try to cheer my classmates up if they have problems with reading in Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>A Lot Like Me</th>
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</table>

41. I like to read for Language Arts/Reading class.

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<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>A Lot Like Me</th>
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42. I think I can read the books in Language Arts/Reading class.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Not Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>A Lot Like Me</th>
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Appendix J
Student Surveys Teacher Instructions

RAI (Revised from Guthrie et al., 1994)
The Reading Activity Inventory (RAI) is a quick way to find out how frequently and how widely students read and about some of their other activities as well. It consists of 26 questions and can be administered to a class in 20 minutes or less. Administration: [Before you provide them with the survey link] tell students that you want to find out what they read in school and what they do when they are on their own. Explain that the RAI is not a test and that there are no 'right' answers. Encourage them to be honest. The RAI can be administered in two ways: (a) teachers may read the [survey questions] aloud to the students; or (b) they may permit students to read and answer the questions silently. We recommend that teachers read a few of the questions aloud and allow the students, some of whom may not be sure of the definitions of words like fiction, mystery, and biography, to ask questions if they need to. Teachers can model answering the questions by thinking aloud about what they read in their spare time. This procedure might add a few minutes to the administration time, but would probably improve the accuracy of the students' answers. For those questions that request an author, title, or topic, explain that students only have to give one answer, but encourage them to give all three if they can remember.

AMSR (Revised from Coddington, 2009)
Read aloud: Please read the following statements and select the response that best fits how YOU feel about your Language Arts/Reading class this school year.

When answering the questions think about anything you read for Language Arts/Reading class this school year. This could include any of the following materials: fiction books, nonfiction books, textbooks, magazines, newspapers, and websites.

For each question, think about how similar the statement is to YOU and how YOU feel about reading for your Language Arts/Reading class this school year. Decide whether the statement is: a lot like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you. Let's look at the sample questions. The first statement says “I enjoy playing sports for school.” If you really enjoy playing sports for school, choose “a lot like [me].” If you enjoy playing sports for school a little bit, choose “somewhat like me.” If you don’t enjoy playing sports for school very much choose “not like me,” and if you really don’t enjoy playing sports for school choose “not at all true of me.” (Pause so students can respond to question 1).

The second item says “I believe Language Arts/Reading class is important for my future.” Decide whether this statement is a lot like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you and [click] your answer on the page. (Pause so students can respond to sample question 2.) The rest of this survey should be taken quietly, by yourself. Remember to answer the questions honestly based on your own experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. First, [click the next button] and then begin.

Students should work quietly and independently on the questionnaire. [Have them click the submit button when they are finished.]