NASET
Special Educator e-Journal

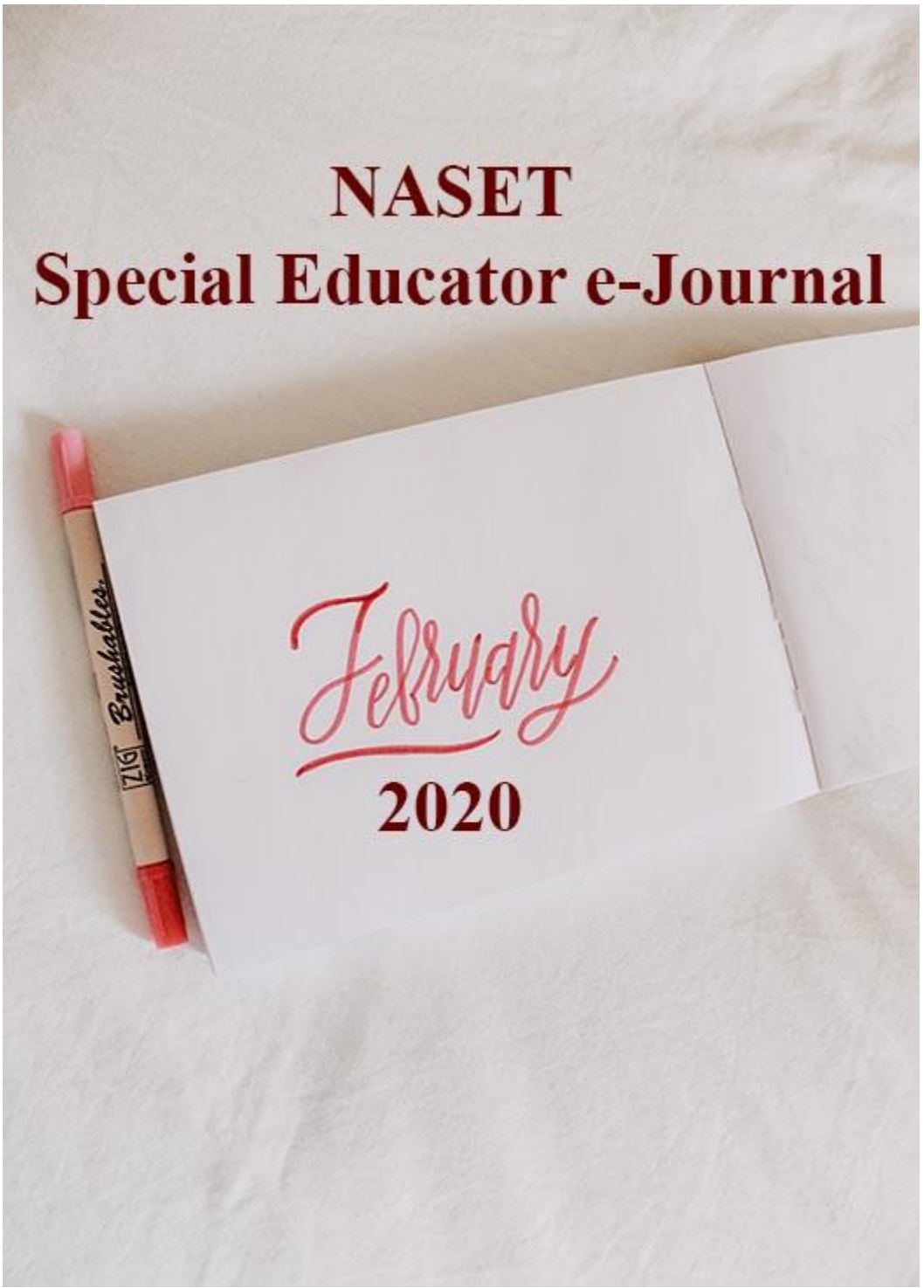


Table of Contents

Special Education Legal Alert

By Perry A. Zirkel

This month's update concerns issues that were subject to recent, unpublished federal court decisions of general significance: (a) liability for money damages under the IDEA, and (b) the reverse effect of general education interventions on IDEA child find and eligibility. For further examination of both of these issues, see Publications section at **perryzirkel.com**.

In *Doe v. Bedford Central School District* (2019), a federal district court in New York addressed a federal civil rights liability suit against a district and its officials under the IDEA in the wake of a suicide of an eighth grader with an IEP for ADHD, which included a provision requiring "teachers and counselor/psychologist [to] call or email [his] parents, as needed, to notify [them] of any changes in [his] behavior." On the day of the student's suicide, the counselor partially informed the parents of his break-up with his girlfriend but without the specifics, including alarming emails that the girl friend's mother had forwarded to the counselor. The parents filed suit under Section 1983, alternatively connecting it to 14th Amendment substantive due process and the IDEA. The defendants moved for dismissal of the suit.

The court dismissed the Section 1983 substantive due process claim against the counselor and three other named defendants (the superintendent, principal, and school psychologist) due to failure to show required elements of a state-created danger theory—(a) affirmative acts that were (b) conscience-shocking.	This ruling fits with the vast majority of substantive due process claims in the K–12 context, including for most student suicide cases in light of the indirect role of school officials and the high standard for constitutionalizing the regular operations of governmental agencies, including schools.
The court denied the motion to dismiss the Section 1983 IDEA claim, concluding that "[a]lthough monetary damages generally are not available under the IDEA itself, a plaintiff may recover for a violation of the	This ruling is highly unusual on a national basis. Almost all jurisdictions have concluded the connecting Section 1983 to the IDEA does not change the unavailability of money damages under this

IDEA pursuant to § 1983." The court also characterized the parents' failure-to-implement claim as atypical and for which "a traditional remedy under the IDEA is unavailable, especially given [student's] untimely death." Finally, the court rejected the defendants' qualified immunity defense.	legislation. Moreover, contrary to the court's characterization, failure-to-implement an IEP is not an atypical claim under the IDEA. Finally, qualified immunity applies unless the law is clearly established, which is not even the case for the Second Circuit. The future proceedings in this case bear watching, unless the parties decide to settle.

The unusual fact pattern of this case consists of student suicide in combination with an IEP provision that fits with a duty to warn theory. Will these allegations make a difference for the general unavailability of money damages under the IDEA?

In *J.N. v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (2019), a federal district court in Alabama addressed the child find claim of an eighth grader with ADHD. In grade 7, her parents informed the school of her diagnosis in connection with her persistent behavioral problems, and she started to have academic difficulties in a few subjects, especially math, whereupon his math teacher provided 1:1 help. In the first half of grade 8, the math teacher referred her to the school's problem-solving team, which provided interventions, but her academic problems continued. In the second half of grade 8, the district conducted a special education evaluation that determined that she was eligible under the IDEA, leading promptly to an IEP. Her parents filed for a due process hearing, which ruled in their favor but declined to award the requested compensatory education relief.

The court affirmed the child-find ruling in favor of the parents, concluding that the district had reason to conduct the evaluation earlier that the second half of grade 8.	This ruling was not unusual, except that some courts would have concluded instead that the district did not reasonable suspicion until the increasing level of interventions proved ineffective.

The court also affirmed the hearing officer's withholding of compensatory education relief. Pointing out that the burden of persuasion was on the parents, the court concluded that the parents failed to show that the increasing interventions that the school provided were substantively different from the services to which she was entitled as FAPE.	This ruling, like the aforementioned exceptions, shows the other side of the coin of the various forms of general education interventions that are increasingly part of prevailing practice. This ruling would seem to suggest that RTI and MTSS, as extensions of the less systematic interventions of this case, can be double-edged swords. They may not only increase the exposure to child find but also decrease the exposure to compensatory education.
Finally, the court ruled that the parents had not achieved prevailing party status and, thus, were not entitled to attorneys' fees.	As a result, the parents' victory in this case was only in principle, not in principal. They not only failed to obtain relief but also were left with the considerable cost of legal representation to obtain this "win."
Stay tuned for future child find/eligibility cases in terms of the potentially direct effects of general education interventions, particularly RTI and MTSS, and their reverse effects on compensatory education relief. Overall, this decision is the latest in the lengthening line of case law that show the blurry boundaries between general and special education.	

To top

Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following links:

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-nov2019-issue1/

Active Listening and Effective Questioning

When a family or professional first contacts your Center, you have to gather information about *why*. What issue or concern brings them to you? What type of help are they looking for? While many newcomers can answer insightfully, many others are not sure *what* to ask or what kind of assistance is needed. Often, you have to tease this information out of them, which is where skillful listening and questioning come in. This 8-page PDF provides lots of information about both, as well as useful examples.

Become a Better Listener: Active Listening

This article includes a lot of information immediately useful to Parent Center staff working directly with families. Individual sections focus on 13 steps to better active listening skills, 7 communication blockers, 5 simple conversation courtesies, and the art of questioning.

Interpersonal Skills

This article gives an overview of interpersonal skills and discusses how you can strengthen yours. The article explores listening and speaking skills in particular and looks at barriers to effective interpersonal communication. There's a free self-assessment tool that can give you valuable feedback on the quality of your own listening skills, verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and ability to work in groups.

School-Age Family Engagement | Online Module

This online, 5-part module is all about how family-centered practice, strong family engagement, and effective communication contribute to high-quality school-age programs. The module includes sections that focus on strategies for working with and strengthening families of children with special needs, military families, and families facing challenges.

We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations

This article gives a brief synopsis of best practice strategies: a checklist of action items to think about before going into a difficult conversation; some useful concepts to practice during the conversation; and some tips and suggestions to help you stay focused and flowing in general, including possible conversation openings

To top

Have You Ever Flown?—A Personal Essay

By Charlie Strecker

Have you ever flown? I have, but I don't remember it. It's funny: I remember the sensation of the handlebars, riding the brakes, and barreling down the hill, but I can't seem to recall the important part. You would think that I would remember a thing like that but no. I have no recollection because after I flew, I fell hard. That's what they told me. They say I fell so hard that I don't remember flying. Everything must have went dark after that because I don't remember much directly after the fall either. I'm sure it felt like I was asleep-- except, not in a relaxing sort of way. Probably in more of a "dreamless void" sort of way, one that you just exist in for a while. Yes, that sounds right.

"I don't have a passion!" is something I would say to myself time and time again during ninth grade. In retrospect, it was a little silly to expect a boy that age to have such a thing in his life, yet that doesn't change the fact that at the time, I wanted one. High school was by far the biggest transition I had ever experienced, and crossing that threshold into maturity really got me thinking, "What do I want to dedicate my life to?" The simple truth was I didn't know.

This realization caused me to fall into despair. I wanted to have something to identify with, something to cling to, something that would describe me, Charlie Strecker, as a person, but nothing came to mind. Eventually, I gave up, and that's when I fell.

The one good thing about sustaining a traumatic brain injury is this: it clears your mind. I awoke in a hospital room in mid June, 2017, and it took me a little while to get back down to Earth. Learning about the chunk of YOUR life that YOU of all people missed out on is a surreal experience, one I'll never forget. It was nice though. I had the sympathy of everyone I knew and no knowledge whatsoever of the frightening experience of sustaining my injury, and best of all, I had forgotten about the thing that had been plaguing my mind for the past year: my lack of passion.

Soon after I had a visitor: my best friend Derek. Derek was sporting a Beatles t-shirt when he visited me, and upon seeing it I commented on how I thought they were "for old people." Derek convinced me to listen to them though, and while I was reluctant, I agreed. I had received an iTunes gift card as a get-well gift and decided to use it to purchase the album "Please Please Me": the Beatles' first album. I listened to it, half expecting to put it out of my brain the second I finished, but that didn't happen. Instead I listened again and again, eventually learning every word to every track. I was becoming a full blown Beatlmaniac.

In only about a month after leaving the hospital, I had listened to each of their albums at least twice. I was becoming a huge fan, and with that, my musical interests spread elsewhere. I picked up the guitar and ukulele, dipped my toes into other musical artists and genres, and I was even part of a

band. Music has also allowed me to grow as a person, and I've decided to dedicate my life to it. Also because of music, my entire worldview has changed. At a time where I should've become a total cynic, music instead brought me inner peace and allowed me to see the world as a place for creativity and beauty. It continues to be a huge part of my life, so I guess you could say I've finally found a passi

To top

Graduation Rates Are Increasing, but Students with Special Education Needs Are Still in Peril

By Christine Powell

At face value, the state of American education is on an upswing; 2014 was a landmark year, with the highest graduation rate on record in American high schools. An increase in the number of students that earn a diploma has been a reliable indicator of the preparedness of our youth to pursue college and career opportunities. The upward trend in graduation rates has some scratching their heads about the trustworthiness of these numbers. The argument made, is that the uptick has been realized by a lowering of the standards, making the value of a diploma seemingly less than it once was. But until there is another way to benchmark student achievement, the diploma is the standard, and it is better to have one than not.

Absent from this conversation is an acknowledgment that graduation numbers for students receiving special education services continue to be appalling, despite alleged cutting of the criteria. Many high schoolers receiving special education services never make it to graduation, as evidenced by graduation data. In 2016, 61 percent of students with disabilities graduated from high school; a glaring 20 percentage points lower than the national average of 82 percent for students without disabilities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 2013-2014 data indicates that in 20 states, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is lower than the national average by an additional 3 percent, meaning that these students often lack the fundamental skills to move into the workforce. These same students who leave their education early are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, less inclined to go back to school, and less likely to live on their own (Newman et al., 2001).

The silver lining is that federal initiative, to include the Civic Marshall Plan, require schools to address the achievement gaps of subgroups to include students with special education needs. The aim is to raise graduation rates to 90 percent, and have students complete at least a full year of postsecondary education or training by the year 2020. With every passing year, schools and educators are learning more about how to help students with disabilities as research continues to explore available evidence and expertise for ways to assist with the systemic challenges in working with diverse populations.

Accordingly, there are recommendations to support students with special education needs. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) recommends several practices to prevent students from dropping out of school. Included are targeted and schoolwide interventions such as assigning adult advocates to students, providing increased academic support and enrichment, and adopting

personalized learning and strength-based teaching schoolwide. Research supports inclusive education practices, finding that across all disability classifications, students with special education needs who were in inclusion settings for the majority of the school day, graduated at a higher rate than students in disability-specific programs. Additionally, a peer reviewed study showed that effective practices to include increased collaboration between special education and general education teachers, access to core curriculum, and targeted professional development for behavior management lead to improved student achievement for students in special education. And perhaps most promising are the positive effects of student engagement in career technical education (CTE) as a remedy to the alternative to dropping out. When students with special education needs successfully participate in a CTE course, they are less likely to drop out, more apt to compete for competitive wages post-graduation, and develop the skills and attributes required for future education and training.

These recommendations, although significant and revealing, will likely not be enough to substantially close the current 20 percent graduation gap between students with special education needs and their peers in general education. Keeping students engaged and in school requires acting on the above research-based recommendations, as well as continued investment in creating an eco-system of support. Most importantly, there needs to be transparency in graduation rates, and a targeted pledge to close the gap and ensure all students graduate ready for what lies ahead.

To top

Leading School Change: How to Overcome Resistance, Increase Buy-In, and Accomplish Your Goals

By Marisol Lorenzo

Whitaker, Todd. (2018). *Leading School Change: How to Overcome Resistance, Increase Buy-In, and Accomplish Your Goals* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. 155 p. $27.61

Author and Context

"Change seems to be the operative word in education (and the world) today" (1). With these words Todd Whitaker, author of over 50 books related with the field of education – which is his passion more than his career – develops the thesis of his book. The content of this book is based on the challenges faced by leaders to foster change in the school culture today, and also about the strategies they can implement to "move our entire organization and all of its members forward with a myriad of required and desired changes" (1). The author enhances the need of change and of inclusion of all leaders in this era of school change.

Todd is a professor of educational leadership at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. He is also a professor emeritus at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. One of his books, *What Great Teachers Do Differently,* is considered a national bestseller. Todd Whitaker has been recognized as a leading presenter in the field of education, and as a thorough researcher of effective strategies to create great teachers and principals.

Purpose and Thesis

The author's purpose when writing this book was to offer some guidance and entry points to educational leaders to have the most influence and best results when promoting change at the school or district level. Another purpose of this book is to deviate from the typical theoretical, historical, or hypothetical approach from the literature review and focus on change that is happening today in real schools. Accordingly, all the strategies and practices provided by Todd are based on his experience working with schools, districts, and their leaders as they worked to implement changes in their organizations. This book also aims at helping educational leaders understand how to work effectively with the people around them, including those who support change, those who resist any kind of change, and everyone in between.

The author uses the example of chess players to represent the concept that when school leaders begin the process of change in a school or school district, they are surrounded by people who have their own fossilized habits and mindsets. Therefore, the first step is to get the team to work in unison for a

common purpose, "chess players also start each game with a specific set of pieces in specific positions, but each piece moves differently, and the number of possible combinations is so vast that every game can turn into a contest much different from the one before" (2).

The thesis of this book is based on the view that change should be understood as a complex process involving different characters, mindsets, and interests, not as a straightforward, lineal process, "The process of change is multi-faceted and far from linear" (101). In order for educational leaders to achieve valuable change at the school or school district level, "each person on the school improvement team, each member of the curriculum committee, and every teacher working to improve classroom instruction" (1) must be involved in the process. Also, in order to achieve change in an affective way, all professionals involved must have a deep understanding of the dynamics of change process, which will also prevent the resilient members of the team from refraining change, "By everyone knowing the 'inside skinny' it also weakens those who attempt to thwart growth" (1). Finally, change will be affectively managed when educational leaders learn how to set realistic goals, plan their approach, track their progress, and implement sound strategies and best practices based on evidence obtained from real life problems that are present in schools today.

Main Themes

This book describes nine practices aimed at implementing changes effectively at the school setting by educational leaders. These strategies are presented in order from chapter two to chapter ten. This edition includes an Implementation Guide with the purpose of helping leaders understand the change process and apply it to their specific setting. This plan is also aimed at allowing communication among the team members. It serves as a guide to lead others in a study group on the book as well. Appendix B contains a Quick Start Step-by-Step Action Plan intended to be implemented after leaders have fully understood the nine strategies and are ready to start the change process.

The first strategy, Identify the Change, focuses on identifying the changes that need to be implemented at a specific school setting. The second strategy Make Sure the First Exposure Is Great! gives guidelines on how to have a strong start, which will lay the essential foundation for growth. Determine Who Matters Most is the third strategy. It aims at improving the dynamics in the organization and getting to know the makeup of each team member. Find the Entry Points is the next practice, which focuses more on what team member to start with, rather than where to start. Strategy number five is called Reduce the Resistance. It refers to how leaders can proceed toward the members of the team who resist change and bring negativity to school on a daily basis. Harness the Power of Emotion is the following approach, and it is related to the tools used to bring on board those people with strong feelings against the change that hold them back. As emphasized by the author, "the main reason teachers resist having a colleague observe their classroom activities is the fear of being judged" (67). Look Past Buy-In to Action; Reinforce Changed Behaviors and New

Efforts; and Fit It All Together are the last three strategies suggested by Todd. In general terms, those strategies comprise three main tenets. First, leaders should not expect to wait for a 100 percent agreement to introduce a change, or they might end up not achieving any change at all. Next, effective leading change requires the prompt support and reinforcement of any attempts to move toward the desired change. Finally, these nine strategies can be implemented in any setting, in any order, or prioritizing those who are more important according to each specific situation.

Weak and Strong Points

One strong key point presented in this book is how Todd seeks for intrinsic value in every change, "People become more cynical and negative when something new happens, not because they are inherently resistant, but because the last alteration provided little or no value" (3). Changes that did not bring meaningful results and improvement will create more resistance to future possible growth. Therefore, leaders need to create change that will "lead to better schools rather than just different schools" (3).

Another key point of this book is how all strategies presented by Todd include a critical factor for leaders to implement sound practices and achieve a real cultural change, and it is including the students in that process. As stated by the author, "be sure the changes we are making have actual value to improve our schools for the students" (5). The student achievement must be the ultimate goal of every school leader.

Many other key points lay precisely on the different strategies presented by the author. One important strategy is making sure the first exposure to the change process among the school staff causes great impact. First and foremost, when leaders ensure full commitment from their followers, they guarantee success. However, commitment must come together with the intension to generate innovative ideas for change, not already drafted goals. According to Todd, "Just as great teachers are intentional about how their room is arranged, how they greet students, and even how children use the pencil sharpener, effective leaders of school change practice intentionality every step of the way" (22).

Under the last strategy, the author advices to involve every staff member in the process of change, "Even the most effective leader would have difficulty imposing change from above" (110). It is crucial to try to bring every faculty member on board before starting the journey to school improvement and growth. Thus, collaboration is a critical factor when implementing change in schools. Instead of projecting an authoritative position over their employees, leaders should present themselves as members of the team who help lead and organize the complex process of change.

Despite the strengths, there are also some weaknesses regarding some of the strategies presented on this book. One weak point might be the way each individual is separated into categories, "Superstars / Irreplaceables—good communicator, initiator, visionary, risk-taker…Backbones / Solids—hard worker; dedicated, loyal, productive, knowledgeable, consistent…Mediocres / Replacement Level—

slacker, cynic; negative, incompetent, sarcastic; resists change; knows the contract word for word" (31). Regardless this classification, and the roles given to each type of teacher, even those individuals who do not complaint or that are less active could have a meaningful impact on the process of change, and their opinion should also be taking into consideration. Leaders might be advised to see all team members with the same importance to ensure collaboration and homogeneity.

Compare and Contrast to Other Books on Educational Leadership

Under the strategy Determine Who Matters More, Todd places the success of the change process on "key players to screen your plans and proposals right from the start" (37). For this author, the key players are the superstars, and improvement depends only on them. The leader might as well listen only to the ideas given by those superstars, as manifested on the following citation, "If the superstars do not think something is a good idea, what are the odds that it is going to fly with the rest of the faculty? Even more important: what are the chances that it actually is a good idea?" (37).

On the other hand, Fullan (2001) enforces building up relationships on his framework for leadership, "leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups—especially with people different than themselves" (p.75). Further on, this researcher explains that effective leaders foster interaction and problem. Instead of classifying types of employees, and determining who matters more, Fullan (2001) declares that "All successful organizations in a culture of change have been found to a certain extent to seek diversity of employees, ideas, and experiences while simultaneously establishing mechanisms for sorting out, reconciling, and acting on new patterns" (p.75). This author adds that "the development of relationships among diverse elements in the organization, including those who raise objections, is essential" (Fullan, 2001, p.75). Conversely Todd would only see the importance of this when talking about the superstars, "You can just ask them, because these irreplaceable teachers have another gift: the ability to look you in the eye and tell you the truth" (37).

Under Redefine Resistance, in chapter three of his book, Fullan (2001) clarifies that "We are more likely to learn something from people who disagree with us…But we tend to hang around with and overlisten to people who agree with us, and we prefer to avoid and underlisten to those who don't" (p.41). This author considers that authoritative leaders are not good at listening either; on the contrary, leaders should have good ideas and present them in an appropriate manner, while seeking and listening to resisters at the same time. This is a way to build good relationships even with the distrustful members of the team.

Todd refers to the same topic in a similar way when pointing out that "Though there are many people that may resist simply out of fear, they can continue to learn and grow with the help of knowledge, experience, and reassurance" (53). However, Todd sees a threat on those teachers who always oppose, "What can be a real limitation is people who tend to resist almost anything and/or bring a great deal of negativity to school on a regular basis" (53). This author's approach when working with

those opposers is to implement the change and ignore them "Once we recognize the pattern for what it is, we can treat the whining like background noise" (54). Nevertheless, with respect to ignoring, Fullan highlights that those resisters are crucial when implementing the change, "In all organizations, respecting resistance is essential, because if you ignore it, it is only a matter of time before it takes its toll, perhaps during implementation if not earlier" (Fullan, 2001, p.42).

Despite the differences, both authors discuss similar approaches when referring to how to manage the emotions of those who follow the leaders. "To maximize the odds of a positive initial response, you must channel the emotions triggered by the first exposure to an impending change. One way is to highlight the good outcomes that will result from this change" (Todd, 2018, p.66). Similarly, Fullan (2001) assures that "In a culture of change, emotions frequently run high. And when they do, they often represent differences of opinion" (p.74). Fullan (2001) also points out that "dissent is seen as a potential source of new ideas and breakthroughs" (p.74).

Furthermore, both authors propose similar approaches to build knowledge among the school staff through intervisitations (Fullan, 2001), and to promote appropriate behaviors and ongoing staff development through the strategy of Out from Behind the Desk (Todd, 2018). "District 2 [has] a heavy reliance on peer networks and visits to other sites, inside and outside the district, designed to bring teachers and principals into contact with exemplary practices… Teachers often visit other classrooms in conjunction with consultants' visits, either to observe one of their peers teaching a lesson or a consultant teaching a demonstration lesson" (Fullan, 2001, p.93). Todd suggests similar practices to improve teachers' professional development, "one change the school leadership team would like to bring about is to have teachers spend less time sitting behind their desks and more time up and about, interacting with students… One possibility is to have a guest speaker address effective instructional practices in a dynamic and memorable presentation" (92). This author also advices to send teachers to professional development sessions and provide an interactive approach to teaching.

Conclusion

The author's purpose when writing this book was to offer some guidance to educational leaders on how to impact school culture and promote change at the school or district level. Since all the strategies provided by Todd are based on his experience working with schools, districts, and their leaders as they worked to implement changes in their organizations, they can be considered sound evidence-based practices. Despite separating team members into classifications and highlighting the importance of the superstars above the other categories, the guidelines provided by Todd could help educational leaders understand how to work effectively with the people around them, including those who support change, those who resist any kind of change, and everyone in between. The thesis of this book based on the view that change should be understood as a complex process involving different characters, mindsets, and interests, not as a straightforward, lineal process, could be used as the hypothetical question for research studies conducted by principals and other school leaders. If adapted for each specific setting in schools and school districts, the strategies presented by the

author regarding the setting of realistic goals, approach plan, progress tracking, and implementation of evidence-based practices could indeed affect in positive ways the implementation and management of school change.

References

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. Retrieved from search.ebscohost.com. ezproxy.fiu.edu/login.aspx?direct= true &db=eric&AN=ED467449&site=eds-live

Whitaker, Todd. (2018). *Leading School Change: How to Overcome Resistance, Increase Buy-In, and Accomplish Your Goals* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

To top

If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students

By Samantha Groover

Teacher attrition is a becoming a big problem all over the county. Teachers are leaving the profession due to a variety of issues; low income, dissatisfaction with the profession, challenges within the school, culture, climate, leadership, etc. In schools, leaders play a big role. They are the visionaries that can help build up students, teachers, and the school culture. Neila A. Connors, the author of *If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students*, shares this belief. She states that successful administrators feed their teacher continuously to make sure the students are not eaten. Great administrators provide a positive school climate where teachers are encouraged to take risk and guide students to success.

Connors believe that one common characteristic of outstanding teachers is the importance of having empowering administrators or leaders. Her goal is that this book is to be used by administrators and stakeholders as an insight on how they can become better leaders. The ability for administrators to encourage and lead teachers and help them feel supported, trusted, and as a significant member of the school. "Administrators who make it a priority to treat teachers with respect, recognize invaluable contributions, and realize teachers are their best allies, see great things happen" (p.21). Throughout the book, Conner provides administrators and stakeholders with a variety of assessments that can be completed to identify areas of weakness and strength for themselves or their schools. Each assessment is followed by the significance of the assessment for the administrator. She also states that administrators should continuously reflect on their practice and continue to learn. Change can be scary for some and it is something that administrators need to implement through the school to help build up the school's climate and overall moral of all stakeholders. Conner states that 5% of the people will accept it immediately, 25% will slowly adapt and accept, 60% will take a "let's wait and see" approach and will eventually accept the new idea if it works to their advantage, and 10% will never accept any change" (p. 47). Administrators need to recognize that change needs to be implemented and the change may take a while to make a positive change in the school and the school climate. According to Michael Fullan (2001) developing leaders in a culture of change are more tortoise-like than hare-like because they involve slow learning in context over time.

Conner outlined a variety of strategies at she has detected over years of observations, surveys, school visitations, and conversations with the best and brightest. The aim of these strategies is for administrators to use to improve the overall experience for teachers and students in their schools. Some of these strategies are provided as R.E.C.I.P.ES. (Recognizing Everyone Contributes in Providing Educational Success). They are derived from recipes designed from an administrator in Baldwin County, Milledgeville, Georgia. Each recipe has a variety of ingredients that can be

implemented by administrators and a set of directions. Conner states that schools who use these strategies are well fed. Well-fed schools exhibit high attendance, positive attitudes, communication is effortless and on-going, a sense of ownership is widespread, and community pride is present (p. 91).

While this book is practical, it does not address the importance of the effectiveness of the strategies that are presented by the author. She provides observable examples of great leadership and how to implement them in an interesting way. She does excellent job at explain characteristics of effective leaders and how to become a better leader. She also points out how positive leadership can influence the staff, students, parents, and community. Administrators face a plethora of problems daily and have many responsibilities that must be address daily, and these issues were not addressed. Administrators are given tasks from district personnel, region superintendents, and other stakeholders that must be implemented in schools that they might necessarily know how to implement while trying to also implement the strategies in this book, it can also be overwhelming for administrators as well. In a perfect school, a leader would be able to devote all of their time perfecting their craft to help their teachers and staff feel empowered, heard, and valued. The author is quick to propose a variety of strategies that might not work for everyone. Each leader needs to examine and tailor the strategies to meet their needs.

Michael Fullan the author of, *Leading In a Culture of Change*, also discuss strategies for leaders to implement to help them improve their practice. Unlike Connors, Fullan uses strategies that have been implemented at the district level by stakeholders to help administrators deal with the ever-changing field of education. Both authors provide strategies to help administrators communicate with the teachers and staff. They stress on the importance of keeping communication open and continuous throughout the year with all stakeholders. If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students: Guide to Success for Administrators and Teachers set out to provide educators and educational leaders strategies and ideas to help change the mindset of the school or themselves. It is very informative and presented in an engaging way. It leaves the readers with a variety of tools to use to enhance their leadership practice.

References

Conners, N. A. (2014). *If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students: Guide to Success for Adminstrators and Teachers*. Chicago, IL Incentive Publicaions by World Book .

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading In a Culture of Change*. San Fransico, CA: Jossey-Bass.

To top

Urban School Discipline: Comparing the Impact of Punitive and Restorative Discipline for Minority Students

By Sharde Z.I. Theodore

Introduction

Public schools are responsible for building childrens' academic competence, as well as, developing their social and independent skills needed to become productive members of society, yet the history of intense disciplinary policies have disrupted the success of many minority students in urban settings. School disciplinary procedures are essential in maintaining a productive and safe school environment that is conducive for learning and such procedures involve methods aimed to promote students' prosocial behaviors and eliminate problematic behaviors that impede learning. Contradictorily, the relationship between zero tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline procedures have resulted in adverse consequences for students of color (Okilwa & Robert, 2017; Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014; Payne & Welch, 2010). School disciplinary policies that involve aggressive and prison-like practices have historically resulted in disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates based on students' race, gender, and disability (Okilwa & Robert, 2017).

This report serves to address the history of public school disciplinary policies and the connection to the discriminatory processes involved in intensive disciplinary methods against minority students in the urban public school setting. Throughout the discussion related studies will be evaluated in efforts to discuss the types of disciplinary actions that affect students of color in the urban school setting based on the following themes: 1) discipline disparities in urban schools, 2) criminalization of Black and Latinx students, 3) perceptions of urban school teachers and students, 4) disciplinary practices and academic performance, 5) empowering minority students through discipline, and 6) school discipline reform in urban schools.

Discipline Disparities in Urban Schools

There has long been a disparity between the ways in which schools discipline students based on the location and demographics of these schools. Harsh school disciplinary procedures can be traced back to the 1950s, in which corporal punishment and public embassement were legally acceptable means to use reasonable force against students (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). School disciplinary policies then transitioned to using in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions during the 1960s and 1970s as a more humane alternative to the previous harsh policies (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). In the 1980s zero tolerance policies emerged, which were derived from the federal drug and weapon initiatives during President Clinton's administrative term and resulted in 94% of American public schools implementing zero tolerance policies for firearms, 91% for other weapons (i.e., knives), 88% for drugs, 87% for alcohol, 79% for tobacco, and 79% for violence by the end of the

1990s (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014; Okilwa & Robert, 2017). High minority schools disproportionately apply zero tolerance policies and punitive discipline controls.

Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014) conducted a study to examine how the impact of widely-publicized school shootings displayed by White suburban youth in suburban areas provided a justifiable means to implement strict zero tolerance procedures that disproportionately discriminated against students of color nation-wide. The findings from this study, which evaluated the demographics and characteristics of school shootings between 1990-2011, found that in the 116 reported incidences during these years there was a significantly greater likelihood for school shootings to take place in suburban or rural settings (72 incidents) than in urban settings (44 incidents) (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Findings also revealed that the massacre shootings that were widely publicized and contributed to the push for zero tolerance policies (i.e, Columbine High School Massacre of 1999) were all perpetrated by White suburban/rural male students. School shootings over the last three decades were committed predominantly in suburban/rural schools by White male gunmen (62%) and only 13 incidents of the 116 reported shootings included in the study were considered to be gang-related, yet the rise in gang-related activity in the 1990s was often blamed for the need to implement zero tolerance policies (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

Many schools expand the mandate of zero tolerance to cover a range of subjectively defined behaviors that have little impact on school safety. Schools with a large percentage of minority students have been found to be more likely to use punitive disciplinary responses in dealing with misbehavior. Minority students are often referred to the office for subjective offenses, proven by the study conducted by Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014), which revealed that during the 1994-1995 school year minority students were referred more often for subjective offenses (i.e., excessive noise) while White students were referred more frequently for objective offenses (i.e., possession of drugs on school grounds). The same study also indicated that in 2003 almost 1 in 5 Black students were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White and Asian/Pacific Islander students (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Under zero tolerance, racial disparities and punitive discipline has seen almost three decades of persistent growth, yet students of color in urban settings who are being negatively impacted by these practices are not contributing to the factors that have led up to creating safer school environments through these procedures.

Payne and Welch (2010) conducted a similar study which found that, although Black students make up only approximately 17 percent of students enrolled in American public schools nation-wide, they account for 40 percent of all reports of misconduct and 32 percent of all out-of-school suspensions. Minority students as a whole are suspended three times more frequently than White students, especially when socioeconomic status is considered. Based on the findings of the study students who come from backgrounds of poverty were more likely to be targeted by harsh school practices and, coincidentally, schools with a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged students tend to have a greater proportion of minority students as a result of systematic and oppressive means that

have created barriers for minority groups throughout history, such as redlining and gentrification (Payne & Welch, 2010). Schools are yet another means to control groups of power and school discipline is a means that directly impacts the ways in which dominant groups and races can sustain their power.

Lastly, Okilwa and Robert (2017) found that Black male students, specifically, often face major consequences for minor infractions, such as dress code violations. The study examined the patterns of discipline disproportionality which hold true for both Black male and female students, but it became evident that Black males are the most overrepresented group of students for school discipline referrals overall, which are used as a gateway for in-and out-of-school-suspension (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). The study stated that while Black students only represented 15-17 percent of the school population between 2000 and 2012, they were the largest group to be targeted for intense disciplinary consequences overall (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). In public schools, specifically, Black students only represented 16 percent of the population but made up 36 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 37 percent of expulsions (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). This exposes the reality that schools have created a significant inequity in school discipline that has created and sustained the school-to-prison pipeline.

Criminalization of Black and Latinx Students

It is no coincidence that many school disciplinary policies are rooted and derived from criminal justice issues and initiatives, such as the War on Drugs and Gun Control (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). These widely publicized and media-led federal policies filtered into public school policy making decisions in efforts to eradicate the presence of violence in schools. This created protocols for how teachers and school personnel would handle students demonstrating behaviors that were subjectively and objectively considered criminal. It was at these times that federal policies created intensive methods to attempt to eliminate school violence, which also was linked to many of the policies related to the criminal justice system. It also caused a rise in the prevalence of suspensions and expulsions in the urban school setting, particularly for students of color (Okilwa & Robert, 2017; Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014; Payne & Welch, 2010).

The discipline procedures adopted by many schools have been found to have a direct impact on the school to prison pipeline (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). These policies are already associated, embedded, and birthed from the realm of crime and imprisonment. School policies are being formed based on criminal procedures that continue to punish minority students more harshly and more frequently than their White counterparts. Our educational system has built an alarming and problematic relationship with schools and criminal justice that already reveals the systematic powers at play against minority students who are overrepresented in disciplinary referrals and criminal acts as adults. Regardless of all other factors studied by Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014) it was proven that schools are more punitive and less restrictive when there are more minority students enrolled in them.

Another factor that has been linked to the racial disparity that exists in school discipline is the perceived threat that minorities pose against dominant political and social groups and by imposing punitive social controls these groups will maintain dominance. Payne and Welch (2010) considered this theory in their study that explored the association between the percentage of Black students in schools and the use of punitive disciplinary responses (referrals, suspension, expulsions) through the lens of the racial threat theory. The racial threat theory is defined as the fear that exists in dominating the economic and political power by racial minorities that is historically sustained by the White majority (Payne & Welch, 2010). The perceived racial competition that exists with the limited financial and political capital has been linked as a possible cause for the increase in systematic controlling factors through the education and justice systems. The study assessed the specific dynamics among race threat and used a sample of 1, 279 public schools to examine the types of punishment used based on the location and demographics across school settings. Findings consistently revealed that one of the strongest predictors of punitive school discipline was socioeconomic status. This means that socioeconomic status is a strong indicator of punitive measures in schools. This also poses a correlation between the prevalence of Black students consistently being disciplined more frequently and more severely than their peers for the same behaviors, similarly to how Black criminal suspects are subjected to harsher criminal punishments than other offenders (Payne & Welch, 2010).

Research has also proven that the apparent "crime-control model" implemented in schools creates a school environment that is mimicking prisons (Payne & Welch, 2010). Urban schools have criminalized students and use crime-control measures to enforce strict regulations and police bodies. For instance, many public schools, especially at the high school level, require students to have visible identification badges, implement uniforms or dress codes, monitor hallways using surveillance cameras and hallways monitors, have uniformed security guards, and conduct locker and backpack searches using drug-sniffing dogs (Payne & Welch, 2010). All of these prison-like practices have become a normalized safety measure in many school campuses and are potentially creating an internalized condition of students being institutionalized.

Furthermore, the racial disparity that has been demonstrated through research and urban school environments also holds a significant difference in the groups being targeted. In a study conducted by Okilwa and Robert (2017) the researchers found that Black students are overrepresented in disciplinary actions in both elementary and middle school levels, while Hispanic students are overrepresented only at the middle school level. Black middle school students have the highest suspension rates compared to White and Hispanc students. The relevance of school discipline has been mentioned throughout this section and in many studies to be linked to incarceration rates that disproportionately impact men of color. It has been found that 1 in every 15 African American men are incarcerated and 1 in every 136 Hispanic men are incarcerated, while 1 in every 106 White men are incarcerated (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). These statistics are maintained through conditioning factors imposed by society that is maintained through schooling.

Furthermore, Rueda (2015) examined the disproportionality with school discipline that lies within minority groups, specifically Black and Latinx students. Through consistent observations of a fifth grade class, the study found that when Latinx students misbehaved, teachers were less inclined to interpret their behavior as problematic and less inclined to discipline them than their African American peers. These trends have stayed persistent since the 1970s and studies show that Latinx students do not have disproportionately high rates of office referrals until they reached middle school (Rueda, 2015). Research shows that Latinx students were underrepresented in office referrals relative to their White peers at the K-6 grade levels, but in grades 6-9 they are overrepresented compared to their White peers (Rueda, 2015). There seems to be a shift in perception of Latinx students as they grow older and the evidence represents systematic bias that persists against Black and Latinx students.

Perceptions of Urban School Teachers and Students

The focus of zero tolerance has been used to punish what is perceived as dangerous behaviors of urban minorities based on biases of teachers and administrators, rather than addressing the cross-cultural competence needed to be considered in creating subjective disciplinary protocols (Payne & Welch, 2010). Using the platform of strict disciplinary procedures schools are able to apply socially constructed definitions of minority students as violent or defiant in order to justify harsh punishment and exclusionary tactics (Payne & Welch, 2010). In other terms, schools are able to justifiably label cultural norms as criminal acts.

Teachers play a significant role in shaping the experience of students in their classroom (Rueda, 2015). Teachers likely hold the most potential in influencing students discipline outcomes because most interactions with students and disciplinary procedures are handled inside the classroom and is based on the perception and decision of the teacher. Data indicates that teachers at the elementary level perceive Latinx students as well behaved and were less inclined to discipline them, even when they engaged in the same kind of behaviors that they penalized Black students for (Rueda, 2015). This discrepancy can be largely traced to their frame of reference and misconceptions, or biases that are shaped from media. White teachers and administrators in predominantly minority populated school settings are more likely to implement zero tolerance policies based on the perceived threat posed by minority students based on cultural differences, misunderstanding, and filling gaps in their cross-cultural incompetence with biases and stereotypes (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). It has also been proven that Black students are selected more often for punishment and are disciplined more harshly than their peers, which may be due to the fact that teachers and administrators are more familiar with the behaviors of students sharing their identity.

Minority students who are perceived as not fitting into social or behavior norms are often labeled as dangerous and troublemakers. Labeling these minority students often fuels teacher's negative academic and behavioral expectations, often shaped by media-constructed stereotypes (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Fears of teachers and administrators are paired with misunderstanding of

cultural norms of social interactions and result in harsher consequences for minor or trivial infractions (Payne & Welch, 2010). This demonizing of Black children played a significant role in framing actions and events in the justice system in a way that is similar to how these images are used in schools to interpret the behavior of individuals. Teachers should be trained to address implicit bias, institutional racism, and cultural mismatch in order to have a critical reflection about one's own ethnic identify and deficit theories of minority students. Once a general awareness is attained, professional development could focus on disciplinary events that arise from the differing styles of communication and punitive offenses that are based on subjective offenses (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

An additional factor that is important for the misunderstanding and bias toward students of color is the "adultification" of Black youth. Black boys, specifically, are not viewed as children in many forms of implicate racism fed through the media (i.e., referring to young Black boys as men in the news) and therefore are punished for displaying juvenile masculinity that would typically be deemed as harmless or immature behavior for other groups. Instead, schools interpret the expression and display of masculine disobedience of Black boys as an indicator of an inherent violent or criminal nature that poses a threat (Payne & Welch, 2010). The potentially racist biases held by teachers in urban settings who do not connect with urban, minority students could be responsible for the systematic and prevalent bias in the practice of school discipline.

Schools reinforce misconceptions of racism, oppression, and stereotypes against minority students through disciplinary methods. Leadership demonstrated by administration is also essential to the overall framing and shaping of the school culture. Strong administrative leadership can result in effective discipline policies, while weak school leadership is associated with a greater use of punitive discipline (Payne & Welch, 2010). Additionally, teachers need formal pre-service and in-service training to explicitly implement effective school discipline procedures that are helpful for students.

There is limited, if any, formal pre-service training on evidence based practices that build positive relationships with students. School climate also must entail meeting the needs of the teachers, especially in urban schools that experience high turnover rates for novice teachers with less than five years experience in the field (Wilkins, 2014). High turnover rates in urban settings directly correlate to punitive measures and less tolerance for misbehaviors because when teachers are no longer invested in the school setting and plan to leave they are less likely to tolerate or find solutions for misconduct. Wilkins (2014) conducted a qualitative study to address the needs of teachers in eight large public urban high schools and identify their expectations of students. Of the interviews conducted some common trends revealed that these teachers mostly expected students to view them as individuals, accept their teaching style, and also show adequate effort in the content even if the student is struggling to understand it. The teachers did mention that if students were not showing adequate efforts then the teachers were not willing to meet the students' needs, but instead accept their lack of effort as defeat and potential failure in the course. Many of the key factors that these

teachers addressed were rooted in the submission of students and teachers expressed a need for students to be responsive to their teaching, but there was no discussion to be responsive to students' individual needs in the building of relationships.

Johnson, Burke, and Gielen (2012) conducted a similar qualitative study to examine the factors that contribute to school climate from the perspective of high school students. The researchers emphasized that any traumatic experiences faced by students outside of the school impacts students' behaviors in school and may cause students to generalize and mimic the violence they are exposed to, but instead of schools providing a safe and restorative environment for students teachers and administrators often respond to these behaviors with more violence and aggression toward students who are at-risk. The study used 27 student participants each representing a school population that was 90 percent African American, with 60 percent of the student body eligible for free or reduced lunch. The study evaluated students' feeling of belonging, teacher support, belief in the fairness of rules, and involvement in school activities and linked these factors to the prevalence of school violence. Among the groups of student participants the six common themes they identified that builds a safe school environment are student behaviors, norms of behaviors, relationship with all school staff, learning environment, school safety, and neighborhood environment. Students mentioned how school police are used as scare tactics to enforce tolerance, which results in a lack of trust among students of color, especially, who are often victims of punitive disciplinary measures. This signifies that students must have a respectful and safe interaction with school police in order to trust school staff and eliminate internalized fear of school police officials in and outside of school (Johnson, Burke, & Gielen, 2012). This may entail training conducted with school officials that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a safe environment for all students and restorative measures, rather than creating a direct hyper-criminalized interaction that adds to the construction of prison-like school environments.

Disciplinary Practices and Academic Performance

School discipline is essential for academic success and connected to all other school factors impacting achievement. Okilwa and Robert (2017) noted in their study that school discipline procedures cannot be separated from instructional methods and, in fact, they should drive the targeted outcomes of academic performance because exclusionary discipline has the potential to create alienation and disengagement among students, which results in a negative impact on academic achievement and behaviors. Expectations are based on social constructs and not necessarily needed for academic success. Lack of cultural competence among teachers, coupled with racial stereotypes in part can explain racial discipline disproportionality in schools.

Research shows that in 2010, Black male students were suspended for a total of 3,714 school days during the course of one academic school year, which resulted in lower proficiency on standardized test scores in reading, writing, math, and science (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). High suspension rates and punitive discipline have also been linked to a greater frequency of dropping out. It has been

proven that a student being suspended even once in high school can double their likelihood of dropping out from 16% to 32% (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Harsh punitive consequences have also resulted in a rise in suspensions since the 1970s. In 1972-1973, 6% of Black students were suspended one or more days compared to 3% of White students, but by 2006-2007, 15% of Black students were suspended compared to 5% of White students (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). Continued absences from school manifest into problems with academics and life outcomes for students. Intense disciplinary environments also deteriorate the critical development of teacher-student relationships that are linked to school success.

Empowering Minority Students through Discipline

By the exclusionary nature that suspension and expulsion has, they pose a particularly damaging effect in the lives of the poor, minority students that are most often targeted in this style of exclusionary punishment (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). It potentially increases the amount of time that they spend unsupervised. Suspension strongly correlates with future delinquency and substance use. These harsh disciplinary procedures do not aid in finding solutions to eliminate and replace problematic behaviors, but instead perpetuates the behaviors and leads to more problems for the students and a tendency for them to be repeat offenders. Out of school suspension does not work as a deterrent of misbehavior. Instead, the punishment may actually serve to increase the frequency of the very behaviors that they are intended to eliminate. Discipline disproportionality, academic problems, social/emotional injury, and diminished life chances for urban, minority students.

As more data has revealed the discrimination that exits from these harsh zero tolerance policies many schools have moved away from using suspensions and expulsions as a first resort to punish students for major and minor offenses. The challenge now arises for many urban public schools to identify a more effective means to create a safe learning environment for all students. One common and popular method that has been adopted by many school districts is Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a widely-used alternative method that has a strong research base because it has been used since the 1990s. This behavior management framework was adopted from the Response to Intervention tiered support framework and lies in the idea of teaching students the intended behaviors first, monitoring and tracking student behaviors, and providing leveled supports for students who are not responding (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). It is also driven in data and progress monitoring in efforts to continuously support students who demonstrate adverse behaviors that impede learning. At the first tier of PBIS intended prosocial behaviors needed to succeed in school are taught to all students and monitored for success. Students who need more intensive supports for behavior move into the second and third tiers, which provide more intensive and individualized supports, such as wraparound services or counseling. A five year longitudinal study examined 37 elementary schools who implemented PBIS with high fidelity and found a reduction of disciplinary referral from .201 per 100 students to .159. PBIS is also widely used because it includes the needs and input of the teacher (Okilwa & Robert, 2017).

Comparatively, Restorative Justice (RJ) is a newer alternative approach that is grounded in the idea of conflict resolution and teaching students how to address and mediate conflict on their own. Restorative Justice has been highlighted specifically for its effectiveness with minority students in the urban school setting because it is there where we find more punitive measures and a history of school adding fuel to the fires that these students face. RJ places an emphasis on holding students accountable for their actions and teaching them how to address their feelings, show empathy toward each other, and resolve conflict in a safe and effective manner. Although RJ is a newer approach that began in 2013, it promotes good behavior and minimizes loss of learning time. The alternative is rooted on an emphasis of community and social-emotional learning. It works to help the offending student recognize the sequence of events and emotions leading up to the incident. The offender is not removed from the situation, but rather is taught mediating skills and prompted to use conflict-resolution to solve issues. Although the method is still growing in use, recent reports revealed that it can lead to an 84% reduction in the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion for some schools (Okilwa & Robert, 2017). Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Restorative Justice provide promising alternatives to harsh and ineffective zero tolerance procedures. These approaches are best if used school-wide and focuses on teaching and maintaining prosocial behaviors to students.

Ogilvie and Fuller (2017) provided the benefits of restorative discipline practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students. School discipline reform is centered around a reconceptualized process done with students and not to them. Students are the stakeholders and restorative measures, such as PBIS and RJ are intended to teach and maintain prosocial and healthy characteristics needed to succeed in and beyond school, such as accountability, problem solving, and respect for oneself and others. When students are involved in finding ways to rectify a situation they have a better understanding of how their behaviors affect others. This is an essential skill to develop empathy of students and build communication and collaborative skills. The sense of community that is built through these restorative methods is also essential in providing a culturally responsive learning environment and meeting the prosocial needs of English Language Learners and students with a disability. It provides students an avenue to build their authentic communication skills and a supportive community of learners who are conditioned to have a caring perspective for one another, in which they value the needs of their peers instead of relying solely on the teacher or school staff to meet those needs.

School Discipline Reform in Urban Schools

Restorative disciplinary procedures, such as PBIS and RJ, have shown promising effects on behavior and a reduction in school violence, but many urban schools in particular still find challenges with implementing the system with fidelity. Okilwa and Robert (2017) examined the recent transition in disciplinary actions of schools during the Obama administration. During his presidential term, President Barack Obama addressed the significant school discipline disparities that still persist today

and its negative effects on students of color. President Obama administrative team created efforts and initiatives that pushed for school discipline reform. In 2011 the Obama administration introduced the Supportive School Discipline Initiative to coordinate federal actions to provide schools with effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices. This was aimed to reduce the disproportionality for students of color and students with disabilities. Obama administration's efforts to disrupt the pervasive racial discipline disproportionality. Reform has begun and shows a promising future in closing achievement gaps for minority students and students with disabilities, especially students who identify with both groups, but the disparity still remains. This could play in part due to less resources and demands for better school climate. Many public urban schools continue to suffer due to the time constraints and collaborative efforts needed to implement alternative practices with fidelity. Issues of treatment fidelity in settings where teachers have other demands and pressures. Also, much of the disciplinary training is left up to the teachers on expected behaviors and there may be a significant variability in perceptions of behaviors to implement. PBIS and RJ requires a lot of time on consistently teaching and modeling behaviors and mediation.

Although disciplinary reform has begun, many urban schools still face obstacles when considering vast changes to their disciplinary policies and procedures. Successful school-wide implementation of PBIS and RJ requires the collaboration and full support of school professionals with expert consultants and with the limited resources and the pressures to meet standardized test requirements often leave little room in ensuring the treatment fidelity of alternative disciplinary practices (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

Conclusion

Zero tolerance procedures were implemented as a response to the heightened fear of widely publicized school shooting (i.e, Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting of 2012), yet these procedures disproportionately target students of color in urban settings (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014). Schools are mirroring the criminal justice system by becoming harsher toward student misbehavior despite the decreases in delinquency and research that proves the ineffectiveness of these policies (Payne & Welch, 2010; Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014).

With the recent school discipline reform we have moved away from using suspension and expulsion as an immediate response to discipline, but many urban schools are still struggling with handling student misconduct. Management skills of teachers and staff are a significant contributor to discipline outcomes. How teachers and administrators perceive and respond to student behavior contribute to an over-selections of minority students of disciplinary consequences. Alternative practices, including PBIS and RJ, may be of optimal use for urban schools who have traditionally relied on more extreme and aggressive disciplinary measures.

References

Johnson, S. L., Burke, J. G., & Gielen, A. C. (2012). Urban students' perceptions of the school environment's influence on school violence. *Children & Schools*, 34(2), 92–102. Retrieved from doi-org.ezproxy.fiu.edu/cs/cds016

Ogilvie, G., & Fuller, D. (2017). Restorative justice pedagogy in the ESL classroom: Creating a caring environment to support refugee students. *TESL Canada Journal*, 34, 86–96. Retrieved from search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/login.aspx

Okilwa, N. S., & Robert, C. (2017). School discipline disparity: Converging efforts for better student outcomes. *The Urban Review*, (2), 239. Retrieved from doi-org.ezproxy.fiu.edu/10.1007/s11256-017-0399-8

Payne, A. A., & Welch, K. (2010). Modeling the effects of racial threat on punitive and restorative school discipline practices. *Criminology*, 48(4), 1019–1062. Retrieved from doi-org.ezproxy.fiu.edu/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2010.00211.x

Rueda, E. (2015). The benefits of being Latino: Differential interpretations of student behavior and the social construction of being well behaved. *Journal of Latinos & Education*, 14(4), 275–290. Retrieved from doi-org.ezproxy.fiu.edu/10.1080/15348431.2015.1025955

Triplett, N. P., Allen, A., & Lewis, C. W. (2014). Zero tolerance, school shootings, and the post- brown quest for equity in discipline policy: An examination of how urban minorities are punished for white suburban violence. The Journal of Negro Education, 83(3), 352. Retrieved from doi-org.ezproxy.fiu.edu/10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.3.0352

Wilkins, J. (2014). Good teacher-student relationships: Perspectives of teachers in urban high schools. *American Secondary Education*, 43(1), 52–68. Retrieved from search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/login.aspx

To top

Leading in a Culture of Change: A Review of Literature

By Marissa Desiree Pardo

Abstract

In the book, "Leading in a Culture of Change" author Michael Fullan describes how anyone can lead in a societal culture that is forever changing in many ways by exhibiting enthusiasm, energy, and hope, among other positive personal traits. He describes administrative change as being difficult to accomplish in a manner in which its impact is long lasting and positive. Using a framework of leadership, Fullan describes five essential leadership qualities including moral purpose, an understanding of change, coherence-making, relationship building skills, and knowledge creation and sharing. By applying these ethical qualities and personality traits, members under a leader's guidance are motivated to commit to the changes a leader is implementing in the hopes that more positive results, or less negative outcomes, manifest under that leadership. The overarching theme of the book is that good leadership can create the conditions in which the opinions and contributions of the individual are just as valued as those of the collective groups, and that isolation is an enemy to improvement.

Purpose of Book

Michael Fullan wrote the book "Leading in a Culture of Change" with the intention of examining how anyone can improve their leadership skills by focusing on a small number of core values and aspects of leadership. By extension, this requires an individual or group to develop a mindset in which the leader is responsible not only to themselves, but also to those who work under them. He mentions that leadership exists to solve the problem for which there are no simple answers, leading him to discuss leadership qualities that motivate members of a collective to be flexible to the changes a leader may implement. While this may seem simple enough without context, Fullan moves on to describe leadership as very complex, inflexible, and difficult to manage without member buy-in. He cites that problems that may arise in any setting are very complex and lack one-size-fits-all solutions. While many members look to leaders for solutions to many complex and interconnected problems, this may result in leaders using very simplified or one-sided solutions as a result of the difficulty of tackling issues that can easily evolve into crises without warning. As a result of this need for effective leadership within any business or system, Fullan describes a framework in which he describes how leaders can change their mindset to more efficiently solve problems that they may have never successfully confronted.

Within the text Daniel Goleman (2017) identified six leadership styles, including:

1. Coercive: A leader that demands compliance
2. Authoritative: A leader that mobilizes people toward a common goal
3. Affiliative: A leader who believes people come first and try to build emotional bonds with staff
4. Democratic: A leader that encourages staff participation to forge a consensus
5. Pacesetting: A leader that sets high standards for staff performance
6. Coaching: A leader that develops people for the future
7.

Five Components of Effective Leadership

In Fullan's framework of leadership, he describes five qualities that can result in effective leadership: Moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creating and sharing, and coherence making. Embodying those five ethical traits are three more personal characteristics that an effective leader must adhere to in order to promote positive change. These characteristics are called the *energy-enthusiasm-hopefulness* constellation. A leader must be fully immersed in the five ethical leadership traits in their daily lives while also being energetic to promote change, enthusiastic in a manner that can be infectious towards members under their leadership, and hopeful for achieving desired results towards the pursuit of their goals.

Fullan begins by describing moral purpose as a quality some leaders may have too much of or are severely lacking in. This of course can be detrimental to leadership as an effective leader must embody each of the five qualities within the framework of leadership to some extent and continue to improve upon them. Moral purpose must contend with the interests and goals of diverse groups (racial groups, interest groups, and power bases) in order to forge interaction among the collective whole. When a leader fails to acknowledge that not all people are equal, or equally vested into their leader's singular moral purpose, mutual purpose cannot be created reducing the impact of change the leader is trying to implement. While moral purpose can attracts most people to do things that are good for others, simply acting on moral purpose can be problematic at best when leaders are not actively aware of the pluralistic motives behind their moral decision-making. A leader simply cannot lead or consult with oneself, as this may leave a team vulnerable to negative results. When guiding through moral purpose a leader should acknowledge that their decision-making is guided by three forces: doing good for others, worrying about their environment, and even making a profit for the betterment of the collective, all while never compromising the core ideals of the company If well cultivated by leaders, moral purpose can flourish and become stronger despite the ever-changing environment.

When adapting to a culture of change, a leader must take into consideration that change is nonlinear and it moves at a rapid pace. Effective leaders must understand how change will always be a factor in their decision-making and that they must understand change in order to become more efficient. Fullan describes six methods that provide leaders with an easier understanding of the change process and how to develop a mind-set open to refining their own personal practices. (1)He states that no goal should ever involve simply providing the most innovative solutions. This kind of

leadership, known as pacesetting, involves a leader taking on and implementing one innovative idea after another. This kind of leadership highlights a leader's obsession with accomplishing tasks better and faster than before, while pinpointing shortcomings of the team member's in the process. The pacesetter often expects others to meet unrealistic demands for excellence without consideration for the drop in morale or input of diverse team members. (2) It is also not enough to have the best ideas when leading in a culture of change. The challenges arise when a leader must find ways in which to get other team members to buy in to their ideas. This is called social engineering, which in itself is also problematic. In order for a leader to create ripples of change, they need to foster an internal commitment to their ideas among other important staff members. (3) A leader must also appreciate the implementation dip, meaning a dip in performance and confidence is to be expected when change is being implemented, as it takes time for everyone to learn any new required skills and concepts. Proficiency takes practice and with every new change, unforeseen challenges may arise that can result in the implementation dip. (4) Redefining resistance follows this concept, as resistance can be beneficial in teaching leaders something new when interacting with people who do not agree with them. While leaders may have good ideas, they must also have good listening skills in order to build good relationships with team members who have not bought into the new practices. Resisters might provide leaders with ideas they may have missed while also assisting them in the manner in which change is being implemented. (5) Restructuring and transforming the culture is a crucial step in achieving success. Through mutual moral purpose, collaborative work cultures, and a respect for differences immeasurable and positive change can be achieved. (6) Finally, change must never be viewed as a checklist, but a complexity. Change is never a step-by-step process, but a series of complexities that are rarely controlled. Therefore the relationship between leaders and followers must be cohesive and flexible.

Relationship building is imperative to strengthening the quality of a collective team. There are five components that can lead to successful relationship building: (1) a leader's knowledge, skills, and dispositions, (2) the professional community, (3) coherence of an implemented program, (4) resources, and (5) principal leadership. While individual skills and dispositions are valuable within any system, it is not enough to make a difference that can impact the entire team. It is important that all team members create communities in which to effectively knowledge share. A leader must also be aware of the coherence of a program, meaning to what extent are the participants within a system coordinated and aware of the goals implemented in order to sustain long-lasting change. This also places emphasis on the idea that quality leadership is the main source in asserting that all other components are functioning properly. When teams collaborate and create strong communities of shared knowledge and expertise, they can make breakthroughs in learning. The leader must delegate and enrich a culture of change, seeking diversity in employees through their unique ideas and experiences.

Knowledge building is the creation, testing, and improvement of conceptual artifacts. Through the building of collective knowledge a team can participate in knowledge sharing, through which

knowledge (namely, information, skills, or expertise) is exchanged among people, friends, families, communities. Knowledge creation is the formation of new ideas through interactions between explicit and tacit knowledge in individual human minds. Knowledge management is the process of creating, sharing, using and managing the knowledge and information of an organization. It refers to a multidisciplinary approach to achieving organizational objectives by making the best use of knowledge. When thinking of knowledge sharing and exchange, complex and turbulent environments constantly generate messiness and reams of ideas from all stakeholders. Interacting with individuals is the key to accessing and sorting new ideas, but team members will not engage in sharing unless they find it motivating to do so (be it intrinsic or extrinsic motivation). Leaders need to be context-setters of the learning experience, in that they acknowledge that they don't have all the answers. They must allow personnel closest to the action to discover the problems in a system and create their own solutions because they typically are aware of all the goings on. Leaders must work very closely with all levels of staff allowing them to assess and evaluate them as a leader directly by becoming accessible and welcoming feedback and ideas from others.

According to Pascale et al. (2000), the world and a culture of change are both very complex ideals, and that must be treated as if they are a "living system". There are four principles a "living system" that best describe schools and businesses:

1. *Equilibrium* is a predecessor to *death*. A living system is at maximum risk when it is less responsive to change (a state of equilibrium).
2. Living things move towards the *edge of chaos* through compelling opportunities or threats, which allows for more experimentation that can garner fresh solutions.
3. Living systems then *self-organize* and new forms and repertoires *emerge*.
4. Living systems cannot be *directed* down a linear path as consequences are inevitable. Living systems must be *disturbed* in a way that promotes a desired outcomes.

Two concepts in the coherence-making role include self-organizing which consists of new patterns of relationship and action that emerge when you set up innovative conditions and processes and strange attractors, which involve experiences or forces that attract the energies and commitment of employees. When engaging in the coherence making process, leaders must design (not dictate) the means of pursuing any new goal through intervisitation, peer networking, and instructional consulting services. This can produce "attractors" (experiences and forces that attract the commitment of employees) and new solutions that can be utilized, reinforced by personnel, and built upon. Leaders and staff must be able to assess performance data, develop action plans based on the data analysis, and contribute to reducing misuse of achievement data in the high-stakes accountability era. Lateral accountability (contributing to solutions and avoiding inaction), knowledge-sharing, and a shared commitment to selected ideas and paths of action allow for cohesive systems to be fostered.

Review of the Text

Fullan's five components of leadership, while imperative to good leadership, seem slightly oversimplified in terms of the reality of the ever-changing nature of the world. These five components moral purpose, understanding change, coherence making, knowledge creation and sharing, and relationship building are imperative to creating great leaders who can foster commitment from their team, but also seem to be the bare minimum of requirements when thinking in terms of good leadership. This is not a negative characteristic on Fullan's book, but a positive aspect of his writing about leadership. He cites throughout the book that leaders are expected to have solutions to very complex and crises-related issues that are constant and difficult to manage for any one person alone. This is unrealistic as many problems cannot be resolved by one leader alone, nor is it encouraged that a leader resolve problems by their own singular plans and ideas. A highlight about Fullan's book is that change does not have to be innovative, extreme, or a regular occurrence. Change can be small or seamless or even radical, as long as the diverse needs and ideas of team members are taken into consideration. Fullan discusses each of the characteristics in the leadership framework in a manner that places responsibility primarily on a good leader, while also teaching the leader to effectively include the team to promote long term success. By taking part in each characteristic, a leader is inadvertently working with their team by creating and sharing knowledge, participating in the coherence-making process together, and building accessible relationship where the leader is open to feedback and resistance in order to promote growth internally and externally. The end result of a unified collective under good leadership is that members commit to new ideas and more positive or less negative results can be garnered.

Conclusion

There are several characteristics that make up a good and healthy working relationships between leaders and staff that have been found within the text including mutual respect, valuing the input and ideas of the staff, by working together and developing solutions based on collective insight, welcoming diversity, taking the time to consider what others have to say, and factoring their insights into a leader's decision-making, and open communication (Midgie, Dahawkk, & Yolande).

When considering the ever-changing nature of school systems, a good leader must manage the perception of the staff in order to promote buy in. When change occurs, those involved may feel as if change is something that is "done *to* them" rather than something that was planned out to improve the school system. While in some cases certain changes may lead to a teacher fostering a negative perception, many teachers and administrators have some level of autonomy to control how these changes are implemented and affected. A good administrators encourages and offers opportunities for teachers to provide some input and feedback, giving them some semblance of control over these changes, while also ensuring the "buy in" occurs with the school staff. Teachthought.com states that "a greater sense of ownership is more likely to lead to successful change implementation within an organization."

It is also important to consider making change a part of the school culture. By developing a culture of change is an integral and often necessary part of working within education. When a change needs to be implemented, a good administrator does not create an atmosphere where expectations are meant to impose on to teachers, but rather implemented through small and visible changes. Staff members will feel as if change is incentivized through the small successes, that they will be more open to them as smaller changes arise. This also makes it easier to tackle any setbacks or barriers that may arise, as addressing these issues is critical to the success of the school community. Teachers and staff members must be celebrated when efforts are made to adapt to change, especially when breaking paradigms in pursuit of the school's mission and goals.

A good leader must also seek to remove the barriers to change**.** A good leader seeks a team of problem-solvers and committed members. When a significant change occurs, it can be easy to find the cracks within the foundation before fully accepting to commit to it. While change may create problems at the initiation phase a good leader will willingly listen to those trying to implement change and take note of the challenges and problems that may arise, identifying patterns or repeat obstacles that may prevent success. A culture of change can only be fostered when problem-solving is encouraged, while complaints regarding barriers to changes are being examined carefully and addressed fairly. Not every criticism regarding change as an excuse to avoid it. Resisters an important part of the change process as they will inevitably implement the change leaders are trying to implement. Certain obstacles require resources and support to be able to implement change.

References

Midgie, Dahawkk, Yolande, Mind Tools Content Team, Mind Tools Content Team, & Mind Tools Content Team. (n.d.). Building Great Work Relationships: Making Work Enjoyable and Productive. Retrieved October 2, 2019, from www.mindtools.com/pages/article/good-relationships.htm.

Fullan, M. (2007). *Leading in a culture of change: personal action guide and workbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Goleman, D. (2017). Leadership that gets Results. *Leadership Perspectives*, 85–96. doi: 10.4324/9781315250601-9

Pascale, R. T. (2000). Surfing the Edge of Chaos. *Creative Management and Development Creative Management and Development*, 235–250. doi: 10.4135/9781446213704.n18

To top

Action Research Report: Effects of ClassWide Peer Tutoring on Phonics and Decoding Skills among Mixed-Age Students with Disabilities

By Sharde Z. I. Theodore

Abstract

Mixed age multigrade classrooms have boomed throughout the nation for many reasons including logistical and pedagogical practices. In order to maximize learning opportunities for students learning at different levels and on different standards, educators must implement strategies that yield collaboration. The hardest challenge is to find strategies that align to both curriculums within the given timeframe. To solve this problem, Andrew Gillum (1954) proposed the strategy of classwide peer tutoring, a form of peer assisted instruction that allows students to collaborate on learning in a meaningful way. In peer assisted learning strategies, students work in pairs or small groups with one student acting as a tutor. In this way, students are teaching each other and providing immediate feedback on skills learned. This is especially useful in a multigrade setting, in which older students can be beneficial as tutors for younger students.

Keywords: multigrade, classwide peer tutoring, peer-mediated instruction, resource classroom

All individuals interact with text on a consistent basis and must master the ability to read fluently in order to access one's needs, including buying food, driving, and communicating with others. Reading is a fundamental skill that is essential to life, yet culturally, linguistically, and cognitively diverse students experience many challenges with mastering basic reading skills. Students who struggle with learning to read are at a significantly elevated risk for a number of negative outcomes later in school and life. Learning to read is most critical at the early elementary level because young children acquire the basic formal reading skills that are built upon as they matriculate through their educational careers.

The primary level of reading development involves the ability to use phonics skills and decode new words being read. Phonics is the capability to represent spoken letters and sounds as printed letters and words, while decoding involves the use of letter-sound relationships to break words into smaller parts in order to be able to read them fluently. Students with disabilities (SWD) often struggle with phonics and decoding skills due to deficits in cognitive abilities and executive functioning skills that make learning to read more challenging. This challenge often leads to students with disabilities making fewer learning gains compared to their nondisabled peers (Maheady, & Gard, 2010). Further, the difficulties students with disabilities face with reading is only intensified for those who have a combination of additional factors that affect their academic achievement, such as low socioeconomic status and language barriers.

According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the U.S. Department of Education created a program that aimed to alleviate these barriers by financially supporting schools that serve at least 40% of students who come from low-income households. This program, called Title I, allocates schoolwide funding to supplement resources designed to meet the intense needs of children in disadvantaged groups, particularly those performing at the lowest academic levels (NCLB, 2001). Many school districts use the provided Title I federal funding to implement schoolwide instructional programs, yet students with disabilities still fall short of making gains in reading compared to their nondisabled counterparts. In order to meet the unique needs of these students, special education teachers must access supplemental practices that can be individualized and can easily be added to the already prescribed curricula (Maheady, & Gard, 2010).

Moreover, multigrade teaching adds yet another factor on the achievement of struggling readers, especially those identified with a disability. Multigrade classrooms have been a growing trend in schools throughout the country for many decades (Miller et al., 1991). In this configuration, students are grouped in classes of mixed grade levels, such as third and fourth grade, with one primary teacher. There are many reasons schools decide to use this model of teaching, but teachers may find that their role becomes more strenuous when planning for the effective instruction of two grade levels simultaneously. For example, in a mixed-grade special education class teachers must concurrently instruct mixed-aged students at their appropriate grade-level, while instilling adequate time to accommodate instruction in order to meet the needs of each student.

In order to maximize learning opportunities for students learning at different levels and on different standards, educators must implement practices that supplement both curriculums within the given instructional time. One such practice is the integration of peer-mediated instruction. Peer-mediated instruction is an instructional model that encompasses a myriad of strategies and allows students to collaborate on learning in a meaningful way. In the early 1980s, Juniper Gardens Children's Project at the University of Kansas developed a highly effective peer-mediated instructional model called ClassWide Peer Tutoring (CWPT), which is a peer-assisted instructional strategy that provides students with increased opportunities to practice reading skills (WWC, 2007). The CWPT strategy involves pairs of students taking turns tutoring each other for 30 minutes total to reinforce previously taught concepts and provide immediate, corrective feedback. This strategy is especially impactful for Title I special education programs because it was specifically designed to meet the needs of struggling learners in inner-city schools and has been found to be highly effective for students with disabilities and English language learners (WWC, 2007).

In order for students to make considerable gains in their respective grade-level content, it is imperative that the special education teacher can integrate an instructional strategy that maximizes instructional time and provides ample opportunity to practice reading skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of ClassWide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) on the phonics and

decoding skills of first and second grade students with disabilities in a multigrade resource classroom.

Context

This action research took place in a mixed-aged, first and second-grade special education resource classroom with four student participants. The participants included four male students encompassing diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Specific Learning Disability, and Speech Impairment. Some students were also identified with a comorbidity of the previously stated exceptionalities. All students were performing one to two grade levels below in at least one major academic area and presented additional academic and behavioral challenges, including speech deficits, attention deficits, and patterns of disruptive behaviors. The school setting was a Title I inner-city school located in Miami-Dade County's public school system. According to the School Improvement Plan, the population of the school was 92% African American and 8% Hispanic. Additionally, 98% of students received free or reduced lunch during the 2017-2018 school year and only 28% of the student population spent 0-5 school days absent.

The materials for this study included standards-based workbooks, timers, data posters to track progress, pencils, pens, and rewards. Students were trained to act as tutors and tutees. Students were responsible for prompting peers during instructional tasks, timing peers during instructional tasks, providing corrective feedback, and scoring responses. The special education teacher was responsible for monitoring peer-tutoring groups, checking scores, supplying rewards, and analyzing data. Consent was provided by the legal guardians of the participants, as well as school administration.

A Review of the Literature

The acquisition of reading is one of the most critical skills early elementary-age students need to master in order to be successful in future academics (Van Keer & Vanderlinde, 2010). In order to support students with disabilities who struggle with reading many schools rely on the resource classroom model, in which students are removed from the general education setting to receive targeted instruction aided with accommodations based on their specific needs identified in the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Resource room models vary between districts, and even schools, based on the availability of resources and special education teachers, but a popular set-up in this model is the multigrade classroom.

Mixed-age classrooms have been a practical model that schools throughout the United States and have been utilizing for numerous years (Ansari, 2017). In this set-up, students of two or more grade levels are grouped in the same class, such and third and fourth grade, with one primary teacher. To support the constraints of teaching and learning in a mixed-grade classroom Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) provides a practical method to enhance instruction by maximizing on peer collaboration. Students are trained to work in teams and coach each other, both playing the role as a tutor and tutee. In this way, students are teaching each other and providing immediate feedback on

skills already taught. CWPT has shown to be effective for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. The practice is most used for reading instruction, but it can easily be integrated in any pre-existing curriculum for all subject areas. This is especially useful in a mixed-age classroom, in which teachers can easily implement supplemental support to students who are struggling.

Because single-grade classrooms still rank in dominance compared to the mixed-grade model, with 200 primary students enrolled in multigrade classrooms versus 2.76 million in single-grade classrooms during the 2010-2011 school year (Ansari, 2017), limited research has been conducted on the impact of multigrade teaching on academic performance for early elementary age SWD. Even smaller pools of research have studied the impact of mixed-grade teaching on the targeted population of SWD learning in classrooms of various grade levels in the urban school setting. In reviewing the existing literature, the following factors were considered in determining the effectiveness of CWPT to aid reading instruction in the mixed-grade resource classroom: multigrade teaching, teaching in an urban setting, impact on socioemotional development, impact on academic performance, and treatment fidelity.

Multigrade Teaching

The bulk of existing research addressing multigrade teaching focuses on the impact of academic and behavioral performance of older students in upper elementary grades and higher. In order to address this lack of empirical support for mixed-age teaching in the primary grades, Ansari (2017) conducted a study to identify the impact on academic achievement, executive functioning skills, and socioemotional development of early elementary age children across the United States. Ansari (2017) sampled approximately 18,760 kindergarten students learning in mixed-grade classrooms with pre-kindergarten peers. The study targeted a wide range of schools, 80% being public schools who adhere to state and district mandated curriculum decisions. This research aimed to identify how the kindergarteners, being the older students in the classroom, benefitted or were hindered from being in a learning environment with students learning lower-level curricula.

The study also aimed to identify the characteristics of the primary multigrade classroom and how teaching in this setting differs from the traditional instructional framework single-grade classroom teachers follow. Based on academic achievement, findings revealed that fewer gains were made in both math and reading domains throughout the school year, with a reported standard deviation of 15% and 19%, respectively. In math, the study assessed students' problem solving, geometry, spatial reasoning, and measurement skills. Furthermore, reading was assessed based on students' print knowledge, letter recognition, decoding skills, and vocabulary knowledge. In order to fully understand this disparity, it is imperative to identify the pedagogical techniques used in this setting compared to the traditional classroom setting.

Analyses of instructional delivery in this setting reported that teachers often strayed away from the typical instructional framework followed by single-grade teachers and allocated majority of time providing students with individualized activities to meet the students' unique needs. Overall, it was found that less time is spent in whole group and small group instruction because teachers often dedicate more time addressing behavior concerns and must create a unique instructional framework that targets goals based on a variety of academic standards. Additionally, it should be noted that there is no existing evidence-based instructional framework developed to teach in the multigrade classroom, so teachers in this setting often rely on research-based interventions and strategies geared toward peer learning and self-directed learning.

Furthermore, Ansari (2017) addressed the executive functioning and socioemotional development of kindergarten students learning with their prekindergarten peers. Executive functioning (EF) was broken down into two areas: cognitive flexibility and working memory. Based on these two major areas of EF the results indicated that kindergarten students learning with lower grade peers demonstrated fewer gains in cognitive flexibility and working memory compared to same-age peers learning in single-grade classrooms. The standard deviation of both areas were reported as 18% and 10%, respectively. Additionally, four dimensions of socioemotional development were identified for this study: attentional control, internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, and social skills. Results indicated that no significant differences were found in students' social skills and ability to internalize problems, but students did exhibit less optimal abilities in externalizing behaviors, specified by a 12% standard deviation.

Based on these findings this study shows that there is a critical need for school districts to develop an evidence-based instructional framework along with effective strategies to support learning in the primary multigrade classroom setting. Although past research both supports and negates the rationale for mixed-age classrooms there appears to be limitations in the research that directly addressed the effectiveness of this teaching model in primary grades, which build the foundation of academic skills students will need to be successful throughout their academic experience.

Urban Schools

Although mixed-grade classrooms encompass only a small percentage of classroom models across the nation, research confirms that students living in an urban setting and/or living in the southern region of the United States are more likely to be enrolled in these classrooms (Ansari, 2017). Students in this population often struggle in school due to extraneous factors, such as low-income households, systematic disparities, and lack of exposure to academic practices prior to schooling. Volpe, Young, Piana, and Zaslofsky (2012) aimed to address the disadvantages students in urban school settings face by investigating a promising intervention that relies on peer-mediated instruction to support primary grade students with literacy skills.

Volpe et al. (2012) argues that Kindergarten Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (KPALS) and direct behavior training enhance early literacy skills and on-task behavior for struggling readers. This study included 10 kindergarten children from an urban elementary school in northeastern United States. Students were between ages 4 and 6 and divided into two groups, one group including students who performed below the 25th percentile in letter-sound fluency. All students were either African American or Hispanic and the class was led by one teacher and a teacher aide that was present twice a week. Results of the KPALS intervention revealed an effect size of 5.3 for active engaged time, 0.08 for passive engaged time, and 3.8 for teacher-directed instruction. Overall, effect sizes were large for both the tutees (0.84) and tutors (2.7), revealing favorable outcomes for KPALS on early literacy intervention, especially for schools serving students of underprivileged backgrounds.

Urban schools serve high concentrations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and have greater demand to close achievement gaps. Moreover, children from economically disadvantaged families too often perform significantly lower in reading and are more likely to exhibit delays in the development of reading skills than students coming from more affluent households. Peer tutoring models can be used to target basic phonics skills, as well as prosocial behaviors to minimize disruptive behaviors and maximize academic engagement.

Jones, Ostojic, Menard, Picard, and Miller (2017) conducted a similar study that addressed students in urban settings. In their study, Jones et al. (2017) investigated the effects of a universal intervention that aims to prevent reading difficulty for kindergarten through third grade students in Canada. Peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) was chosen because it allows for the engaged participation of learners at diverse levels of reading achievement. The participants of the tutoring model are afforded opportunities to gain greater ownership in their learning process. The intention of PALS was to integrate phonetic knowledge with reading fluency and comprehension within classroom-based peer tutoring. This study included 1,429 third grade students across 38 schools in a racially diverse population. Curriculum-based measures (CBM) were used to track progress.

Results indicated medium to large effect sizes across all domains. All schools in this study showed significant improvement based on CBM scores over time. Additionally, all children participating in this study experienced gains over time, but the groups living in high poverty areas did not catch up with students in other schools. This suggests that in order to close achievement gaps, disadvantaged schools still needed additional supports to make parallel gains compared to affluent schools. Students who came from backgrounds of poverty or with less exposure to literacy-rich environments continue to face challenges in the educational environment and benefit from continued supplemental practice with instruction.

Impact on Socioemotional Development

Research heavily supports the theory that social skills affect a student's access and experience with learning. Students with cognitive disabilities often struggle with managing and regulating

socioemotional skills due to deficits in executive functioning. Hart and Banda (2018) aimed to strengthen these social skills in their study that compared the effects of peer-mediated social skills training for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to their neurotypical peers. Students who struggle with social skills may be seriously impacted in their success in the learning environment. Students with ASD can particularly be affected by deficits in social skills, including challenges with making eye contact, initiating or sustaining conversations, and recognizing nonverbal cues. Hart and Banda (2018) examined the levels of which peer mediation increased, maintained, and generalized social initiations and responses between students and their peers within the school setting.

The experiment utilized a multiple baseline design to determine the impact of interventions. The study also examined the rate and quality of initiations and responses during peer interactions and peer coaching. The focus was to measure the transfer of learning that occurs through peer-mediated social skills training. Four participants with ASD were included in this study and paired with three neurotypical peers, ranging from pre-kindergarten to first grade. Peers participated in coaching cycles during center-time activities for 15 minutes daily. Results indicated that as initiations decreased, responses increased throughout the study for participants and peer groups. By the end of the study entire 10-minute sessions were sustained by one or two initiations. These results suggest that meaningful conversations took place at longer rates, with numerous responses being recorded. Peers were able to respond to each other in a natural way, including verbal and nonverbal responses. Outcomes of this study indicated that peer mediation increased, maintained, and generalized responses for all participants, but did not significantly impact initiations.

Findings such as these support the use of peer-mediated coaching models to support students who demonstrate deficits in social skills. Peer coaching provides a valuable opportunity to model prosocial behavior for students with cognitive disabilities, while allowing opportunities to practice these skills in the natural environment. Moreover, this type of intervention also fosters a community of peers who understand and accept each other based on their diverse differences and needs.

Impact on Academic Performance

Peer tutoring models reveal promising evidence for the increase in reading performance across all reading domains. In a particular study conducted by Hayes (2012), the effect of cross-age peer tutoring on the rate of words correct per minute based on reading probes was examined using fifth and sixth grade students. In this examination of peer tutoring, tutors and tutees used a repeated reading strategy to coach each other and build reading fluency. Findings showed that the intervention permitted primary students who show low reading performance additional opportunities to practice reading at their instructional level, with the support of peers who provided corrective feedback. This resulted in positive outcomes on struggling readers' reading accuracy and fluency. Comparatively, older struggling students increased their volume of easy reading and were able to apply strategies to their reading and comprehension skills.

In just three months of the investigation the findings for some students were remarkable, showing over one year to even three-year gains in reading age. The total comprehension raw scores of tutors as a group increased from 100 to 132 and the total raw comprehension scores for the group of tutees increased from 70 to 96. It was also noted that struggling readers learned to apply comprehension strategies effectively when engaged in higher order comprehension tasks. This study reveals the strong impact that peer-mediated instruction has on struggling readers. Peer tutoring provides students, both acting as tutors and tutees, with additional opportunities to practice and strengthen reading skills. It also allows students to receive immediate feedback and opportunities to correct errors while still shaping their reading skills.

Grünke, Janning, and Sperling (2016) studied the effectiveness of peer collaboration in writing interventions for third grade students with severe learning and speech difficulties. The study highlighted story mapping as an effective strategy to enhance writing production of elementary age students and explored if the integration of peer tutoring can aid in the production of quality narratives. Writing was deemed as the pivotal focus of this study due to the vast percentage of elementary students that are still unable to compose texts of acceptable quality. The writing process examined in this study entailed three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Within this model students with learning and communication deficits often find the first stage, prewriting, the most challenging.

As stated previously, many students with cognitive disabilities lack executive functioning skills, which include one's ability to self-regulate and organize tasks. Compared to neurotypical peers, these students spend very little time thinking about the content of the text that they are about to compose and struggle when tasked to organize ideas in order to develop a writing piece. This is a critical issue, especially for elementary age students who are expected to acquire basic composition skills by grade 3. Grünke et al. (2016) chose six third-grade students to pair in mixed ability groups. Students who produced texts with the fewest number of words based on a sub-test of the General German Language Test were paired with same age and same gender third graders who wrote the highest number of words. This study revealed that on average, the performance of the three tutees increased by 382.68%. This examination reveals strong support for the use of peer tutoring in writing instruction. Too often teachers allocate small windows of time to provide writing instruction but developing writing skills is a complex task that encompasses a variety of reading skills, as well as executive functioning skills. Students with learning and communication challenges need additional support and guidance throughout the writing process and peer tutoring has shown to be an effective supplemental strategy to support writing instruction.

Grünke, Wilbert, Tsiriotakis, and Agirregoikoa (2017) conducted another study that highlights how students with learning disabilities have difficulties planning for writing. Writing skills are often found to be the most difficult for students to acquire and even challenging for educators to teach because it involves the process of organizing one's thought and transferring those thoughts into print

that conveys a specific message to the reader. Due to the complex cognitive demands and need of executive functioning skills, students with learning disabilities struggle to meet basic writing standards. Grünke et al. (2017) investigated the use of peer tutoring on writing acquisition with six fourth-graders who were paired in tutoring groups of mixed ability same-aged peers. All tutees participating in this study had been diagnosed with having a Specific Learning Disability and produced the shortest text in the spelling subtest of the Standardized Reading Fluency Test. Findings on this study reported that all three tutees were able to compose remarkably longer and higher quality narratives after the intervention ceased, revealing evidence of transfer of learning. Although only small conclusions can be drawn from this study due to the limited sample size this investigation supports the evidence that peer tutoring can enhance literacy interventions for students with cognitive disabilities who lack executive functioning skills.

In another study Van Keer and Vanderlinde (2010) examined the effects of CWPT with mixed-grade levels. In this study researchers focused on the effects of explicit reading instruction and cross-age peer tutoring on third and sixth graders' reading strategy usage. Samples were used across 762 elementary schools throughout Belgium schools for an entire school year in order to measure students' reading comprehension. This study also addressed the cognitive demands of reading on students. The research noted that reading, specifically comprehension, entails many metacognitive strategies, including self-monitoring and self-regulation. Because reading to comprehend is a complex skill for students to develop, teachers often rely on various strategies to teach reading comprehension, but it is crucial for students to understand how to use these strategies effectively in order to for skills to be maintained and built upon as students participate in more complex comprehension tasks.

Van Keer and Vanderlinde (2010) relied on the use of peer-led learning interactions to promote the use of effective comprehension strategies and foster opportunities for students to become independent learners. The intervention used included peer tutoring, in which sixth grade students provided tutoring for reading comprehension to third grade peers. These tutors provided additional practice in comprehension strategies previously taught by the teacher. The impact of this multigrade intervention resulted in positive outcomes on third graders' overall usage of reading strategies and self-regulation during reading. Additionally, the overall use of reading and meta-cognitive strategies increased for both groups. Based on this study evidence reveals strong support for peer collaboration during the learning process. Although the goal of this study was to promote comprehensions skills for the younger group of students, results reported that both groups made gains overall due to additional practice with reading concepts and opportunities to reflect and refine skills already mastered.

Treatment Fidelity

Reading fluency is an essential component of reading development, as fluency skills can predict mastery of reading comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading at the end of elementary

school. Dufrene, Reisener, Olmi, Zoder-Martell, McNutt, and Horn (2010) looked at how the integration of peer tutoring can enhance a fluency-based intervention for students in middle schools across the rural southeastern United States. Their goal was to identify a more individualized format to address the needs of students struggling with oral reading fluency. Specifically, the study examined the treatment fidelity and level of scaffolding that is provided during peer coaching.

Eight students participated in this study, with four students being tutored using Tier II intervention supports. A multiple baseline design was selected for this study based on the limited number of participants. In addition, the design method was determined to be appropriate based on the intervention used in the study, which posed a potential opportunity for learning to be maintained following the withdrawal trial. Although results showed that seven of the ten steps in the tutoring procedures were followed by peer tutors with at least 90% fidelity, tutors exhibited an overall lack of fidelity when requiring tutees to read the given passages three total times as directed by the treatment measures. Additionally, results revealed that peer tutors failed to correct their peer tutees at least 80% within the overall tutoring sessions. In general, peer tutors demonstrated eight out of ten steps during the reading fluency intervention. This brings promising results for teachers looking to implement interventions that are feasible and affordable in a RtI framework. In order to conduct this research Dufrene, et al. (2010) placed the middle school participants in homogeneous groupings in order to evaluate their peers' reading fluency based on curriculum-based measures. This added responsibility given to students provided much more than improvements in reading fluency, but also increased levels of engagement and student responsibility.

In this next investigation Gnadinger (2008) aimed to examine the type of scaffolding that occurs between peers in the peer tutoring model. This study highlighted the significance of the Vygotskian perspective of the zone of proximal development, which targets the current abilities of the student in order to bring them to new heights in learning. Scaffolding offers the necessary support for all students and gradually releases the levels of support as the learner gains greater levels of understanding. Gnadinger (2008) examined the delivery of instructional peer-coaching in a multi-age primary classroom in the southeastern region of the United States to identify how students provided scaffolding when supporting their peers.

During this investigation peer interactions were observed across a variety of settings throughout the school day. Scaffolding occurred in the areas of on task behavior, task analysis, and academic content. Evidence showed that 33.83% of scaffolding opportunities were in the forms of questions posed to one another. Results indicated that peer coaching provided the most scaffolding by allowing opportunities for feedback. This occurred 25.37% of the time, with instruction taking place 20.89% of the time. Although this study cannot be used for generalization purposes due to the limited sample size, it suggests that scaffolding occurs in a variety of different styles and interactions during peer tutoring. Students are able to assist their peers in engaging with content in multiple formats that provide individualized means to mastering skills.

In conclusion, each of these studies discussed throughout this literature review reveal strong support for this action research experiment aimed to investigate the effectiveness of ClassWide Peer Tutoring on the phonics and decoding abilities of primary students with varying exceptionalities learning in a multigrade resource class. In the mixed-aged classroom teachers are tasked to provide direct instruction to mixed-grade level students at their specific content areas in the same time frames allotted to single-grade classroom teachers. This requires strategic planning and time management that teachers often find as added strains to their already demanding practice. Moreover, students with disabilities require additional accommodations in the classroom to meet learning targets. In the special education resource setting teachers must not solely focus instruction on the general curriculum but must also provide specialized instruction that is stated in each child's Individualized Education Plan.

In addition, socioeconomic challenges that the participants in the research study exhibited added to the barriers of success these students faced. Each of these factors resulted in a critical need for a supplemental intervention that alleviated the demands of the teacher and was flexible enough to meet the unique needs of each student. ClassWide Peer Tutoring served as a feasible means to individualize instruction in a setting that gave limited time to instruct students with varying capabilities and learning on different curriculum. CWPT has also shown positive effects on reading acquisition in multiple areas of the domain, as well as, positive impacts on the participants' social skills. It allows students to take charge of their learning and collaborate with peers in order to solve problems in academic content. CWPT serves as a beneficial strategy to improve all students' learning and behavioral performance and allows teachers in high-demand settings to meet the individual needs of students.

Action Plan/Methods:

Name: Sharde Theodore **School:** A.S.P./Olinda Elementary School

Research Question:

What is the effect of ClassWide Peer Tutoring on phonics and decoding skills among first and second grade students in a multigrade resource classroom?

Intervention:

ClassWide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) is a peer-assisted instructional strategy that provides students with increased opportunities to practice reading skills (WWC, 2007). This strategy was especially impactful in this research context because it was designed to be integrated in various classroom settings, specifically to meet the unique needs of learners who struggle due

to cognitive and linguistic factors (WWC, 2007). The CWPT strategy involved pairs of students taking turns tutoring each other for 30 minutes total to reinforce previously taught concepts and provide immediate, corrective feedback. Students were grouped with tutoring buddies and given 10 minutes for preparation and 10 minutes in each coaching cycle. The tutors assisted their partners with completing phonics tasks. During the coaching cycle the student completed phonics materials while tutors monitored and provided feedback as needed. Tutors also graded their partners work and administered points based on the number of items correct. Two points were given for each correct response and one point was given for errors that were corrected. At the end of the first ten-minute session the partners switched roles and completed the same process. Once both partners tutored one another the teacher evaluated responses to ensure accuracy. Then, individual points were merged into team points, which were tracked on a team scoreboard.

Data Collection:

Data Source 1: McGraw-Hill Wonders Placement and Diagnostic Assessment

Data: Initial and post data were collected using a curriculum-based diagnostic assessment on phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, letter naming fluency, and phonics. Based on this data participants were grouped in heterogeneous pairs for tutoring. In order to measure the impact of CWPT on students' phonics and decoding performance the test-retest method was utilized at the conclusion of the eight-week trial in order to measure the effectiveness of the intervention.

Data Source 2: McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonemic Awareness: Progress Monitoring Assessments

Data: Students' phonological awareness skills were monitored through a curriculum-based interim assessment containing nine progress monitoring assessments. This assessment tool was supplied through the school district's prescribed reading program and included curriculum-based measures for phonemic awareness and beginning decoding skills. Data was collected based on the student's ability to identify and manipulate sounds.

Data Source 3: McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonics/Word Study: Progress Monitoring Assessments

Data: Students' phonics and decoding skills were monitored through curriculum-based interim assessments. The instrument included nine progress monitoring assessments that measured students' decoding skills at levels that gradually increase by the complexity of the skill. This assessment tool was supplied through the school district's prescribed reading program and included curriculum-based measures for phonics and beginning reading skills. Data was collected based on the student's ability to read words at various skill levels.

Action Plan/Methods: Timeline

Tasks	Timeline	Resources
Received Consent from School Principal and Parents	January 11th, 2019	Consent Letter
Administered Baseline Assessments	January 14th, 2019 - January 18th, 2019	McGraw-Hill Wonders Placement and Diagnostic Assessment subtests: 1. Phonological Awareness Subtests 2. Phonemic Awareness Subtests 3. Letter Naming Fluency Assessment 4. Phonics Survey
Students Were Grouped	January 21st, 2019	Baseline data and Grouping Chart
CWPT Strategy: Peer Coaching Modeling and Practice	January 21st- 25th,2019	Practice pages Answer Sheets Pencils Blue pens (students) Red pens (teacher) Data tracker Stickers Team Tracking Board Timer

CWPT Strategy: Students conducted pair coaching cycles Students provided feedback and grading of class assignments	January 28th, 2019 - March 22nd, 2019	Practice pages Answer Sheets Pencils Blue pens (students) Red pens (teacher) Data tracker Stickers Team Tracking Board Timer
Administered Interim Assessments	February 8th, 2019 February 22nd, 2019 March 8th, 2019 March 20th, 2019	McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonemic Awareness: Progress Monitoring Assessments McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonics/Word Study: Progress Monitoring Assessments
Administered Post-Assessment	April 2nd, 2019	McGraw-Hill Wonders Placement and Diagnostic Assessment Subtests: 1. Phonological Awareness Subtests 2. Phonemic Awareness Subtests

		3. Letter Naming Fluency Assessment 4. Phonics Survey

Findings, Limitations, and Implications

Data Analysis

Data was collected using three instruments which were all provided through the Miami-Dade Public School prescribed curriculum, McGraw-Hill Wonders reading program. The experiment utilized the test-retest design to determine the impact of CWPT. Baseline performance was measured using the McGraw-Hill Wonders Placement and Diagnostic Assessment, which is a curriculum-based assessment tool for identifying the instructional placement of students in all reading areas. This tool included four testing instruments used for this experiment: phonological awareness subtests, phonemic awareness subtests, letter naming fluency assessment, and a phonics survey.

The phonological awareness subtests assessed participants' ability to recognize rhyming words, produce rhymes, count syllables, blend syllables to form compound and multi-syllabic words, and combine onsets and rimes to form a word. The phonemic awareness subtests assessed participants' ability to segment and blend sounds, manipulate phonemes, and count phonemes. It also measured students' ability to distinguish long vowels from short vowels and represent phonemes with letters. Moreover, the letter naming fluency assessment tested students' ability to name the letters of the alphabet. Lastly, the diagnostic assessment included a phonics survey containing phonics tasks that measured students' ability to read letters, words, and sentences. Progress in all areas was measured by comparing the initial and summative results of the placement and diagnostic assessment at the conclusion of the experiment.

Interim data were collected throughout the treatment phase to track the effects of the intervention using two testing instruments, McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonemic Awareness: Progress Monitoring Assessments and McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonics/Word Study: Progress Monitoring Assessments. The phonemic awareness assessment was used to measure students' foundational reading skills. Phonics acquisition is developed through mastery of the prerequisite phonemic awareness skills that help learners understand how words work. Most struggling readers who lack phonics skills also demonstrate deficits in phonemic awareness. Students' knowledge of phonemic awareness was monitored through progress monitoring assessments divided into nine section. The first subtest of the test measured participant's sound awareness and rhyming skills. The second section assessed students' ability to generate rhyme, alliteration skills, and recognition of beginning sounds. Thirdly participants were assessed on their ability to segment syllables and identify ending sounds. In subtest four students were tested on their

ability to blend syllables and segment onset and rime. Subtest five included tasks to identify medial sounds and short and long vowels. Section six and seven evaluated student's ability to segment and blend phonemes. The eighth test assessed students' ability to substitute initial, medial, and final sounds. It also assessed participants' ability to delete initial sounds and syllables. Finally, the ninth section measured participants' ability to delete final sounds, add initial and final sounds, and delete initial and final phonemes in a blend.

In addition, students' progress with phonics and decoding was monitored using the McGraw-Hill Wonders Tier 2 Intervention Phonics/Word Study: Progress Monitoring Assessments. This instrument was also divided into nine sections, which measured various components of phonics. The first section assessed students' ability to name the letters of the alphabet and decode basic two to three-letter real and nonsense words. Section two measured participants' ability to decode more advanced two to three-letter real and nonsense words. The third test assessed students' ability to decode real and nonsense words with final /ck/. Subtest four measured the participants' letter-sound recognition. The fifth measure assessed students' ability to decode real and nonsense words with short vowels, initial and final blends, plurals, and digraphs. Next, section six evaluated students' ability to decode real and nonsense words with final e, inflectional endings, possessive nouns, contractions, and three-letter blends. Section seven measured the participant's ability to decode real and nonsense words with long vowels, inflections endings, irregular plurals, compound words, and abbreviations. The eighth test monitored students' ability to decode real and nonsense words with r-controlled vowels, diphthongs, variant vowels, prefixes/suffixes, irregularly-spelled words, and two to three syllable words. Finally, section nine assessed the students' ability to decode real and nonsense words with open and closed syllables, final e syllables, r-controlled vowel syllables, and word families.

In each subtest of both progress monitoring instruments percentage scores were derived based on the total number of items answered or read correctly. Students who met at least 80 percent of items correct demonstrated mastery of the skill and were not re-assessed during the next progress monitoring session. However, scores below 80 percent revealed deficits in the specific skill and remediation in that skill was provided during the peer tutoring sessions, with priority instruction allotted to the lowest scored skills. Students were then re-assessed on the skill and progress was monitored by comparing the results of the progress monitoring assessments over time. Interim data was recorded using a response sheet that documented the percentage scores of each section based on the total number of correct responses. Further, interim data was tracked and analyzed using an excel spreadsheet.

Findings

The results of this study were consistent with the findings from the studies conducted by Volpe et al. (2012) and Hayes (2012) on the effectiveness of peer-assisted academic strategies. Based on the comparable results from the initial and summative assessments all four participants showed

improvements in phonics after partaking in the intervention. Findings from the initial assessment showed that participants earned an overall average of 72.32% proficiency in phonics and decoding before the intervention. Results revealed the main areas of concern for all four participants were recognizing rhyming words, manipulating phonemes to make new words, words with consonant digraphs, words with final e, words with r-controlled vowels, words with advanced consonants, words with vowel teams, multi-syllable words, and words with affixes. As indicated in Figure 1, students received an overall average score of 50% in recognizing rhyming words (Subtest 1), 51.25% for matching phonemes (Subtest 8), and 57.5% proficiency in segmenting words (Subtest 10). Additionally, all four participants demonstrated 47.5% mastery level in deleting phonemes (Subtest 11) and 46.25% average proficiency in substituting phonemes (Subtest 13). Results also indicated a 57.5% mastery of reading words with consonant digraphs (Subtest 22) and final e (Subtest 24), 38.75% proficiency in words with r-controlled vowels (Subtest 25), 27.5% mastery of words with advanced consonants (Subtest 26), and 56.67% proficiency with words containing vowels teams (Subtest 27). Lastly, the average percentages of multisyllabic words (Subtest 28) and words with affixes (Subtest 29) were 55% and 40% respectively.

Results from this action research show that the intervention had a positive impact on the reading skills for all participants. Progress in all areas of concern were assessed four times throughout the treatment phase of the intervention. This data allowed the teacher to pinpoint specific areas where each participant was lacking and tailor instruction to meet the needs of the learners. Areas in which students scored the lowest were considered high priority for instruction and remediation of the skills were provided within the intervention. Trends in data were recorded and tracked using the progress monitoring assessments, which revealed increases in all areas of concern over time.

Figure 3 shows the trends for all participants across all four data points for phonemic awareness skills. Student averages were also calculated, and results exhibited that on average the participants mastered 71.26% of phonemic awareness skills in the first progress monitoring session. The fourth data point for student averages showed 90.15% proficiency, revealing that overall the participants gained an 18.89% increase in phonemic awareness skills. In phonics and word study Figure 4 shows the results of the progress monitoring tools for phonics skills. Overall, participants demonstrated a mastery of only 69.44% proficiency in the phonics skills tested in the first data point. In the final progress monitoring session, the students earned an overall 82.09% level of proficiency, demonstrating a 12.65% increase in phonics knowledge. These findings showed favorable outcomes of the impact that CWPT had on the foundational phonics skills of each participant.

Data was analyzed based on summative results, which revealed strong evidence that the intervention was successful in closing gaps in the foundational areas of phonics. Figure 2 displays that all four participants increased their overall average scores on the post-test, gaining a score of 90.64%. This 18.32% increase revealed strong indications that the intervention was successful in improving phonics skills for students.

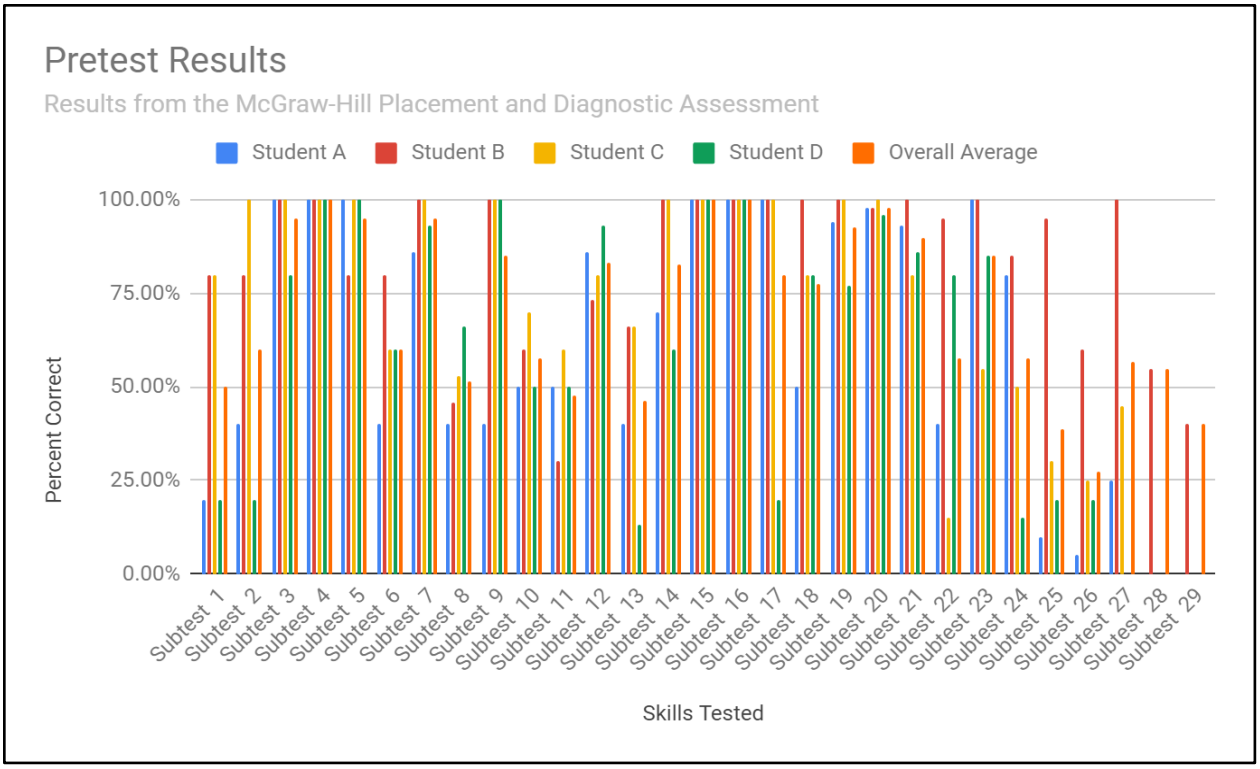


Figure 1. Pretest results from the McGraw-Hill Placement and Diagnostic Assessments.

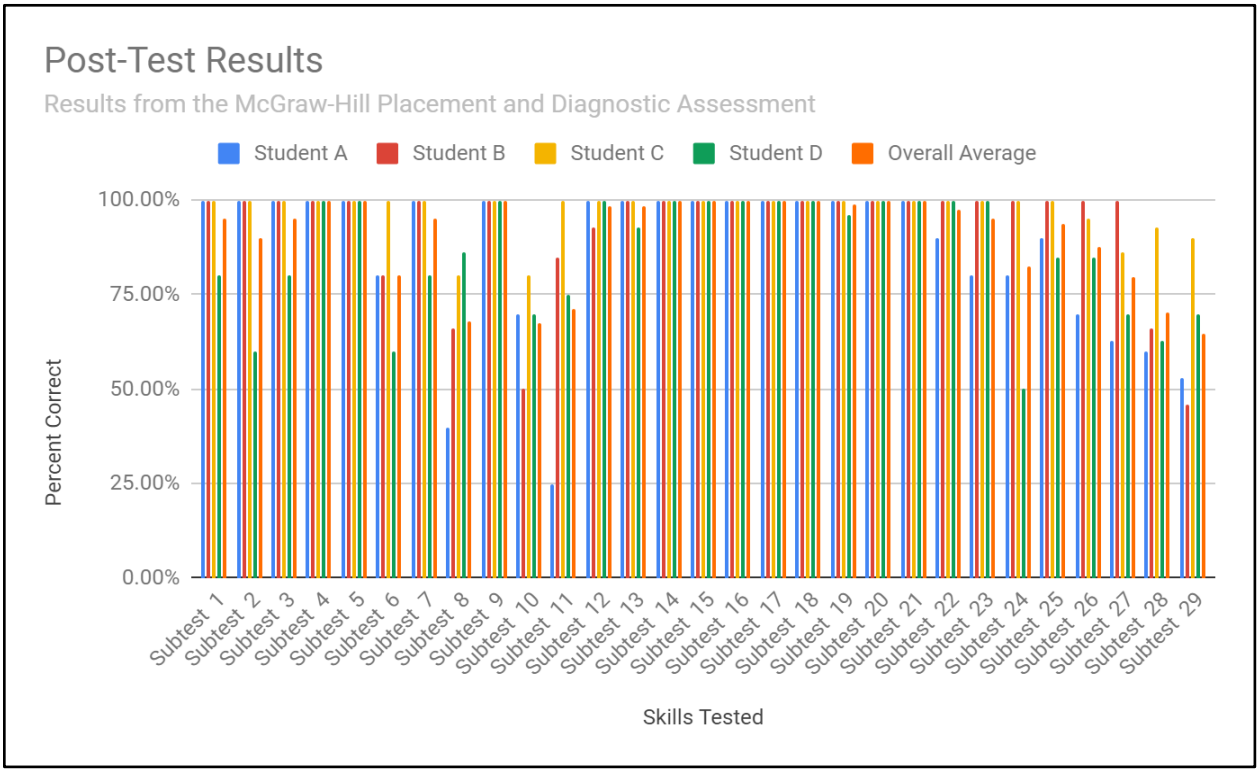


Figure 2. Post-test results from the McGraw-Hill Placement and Diagnostic Assessments.

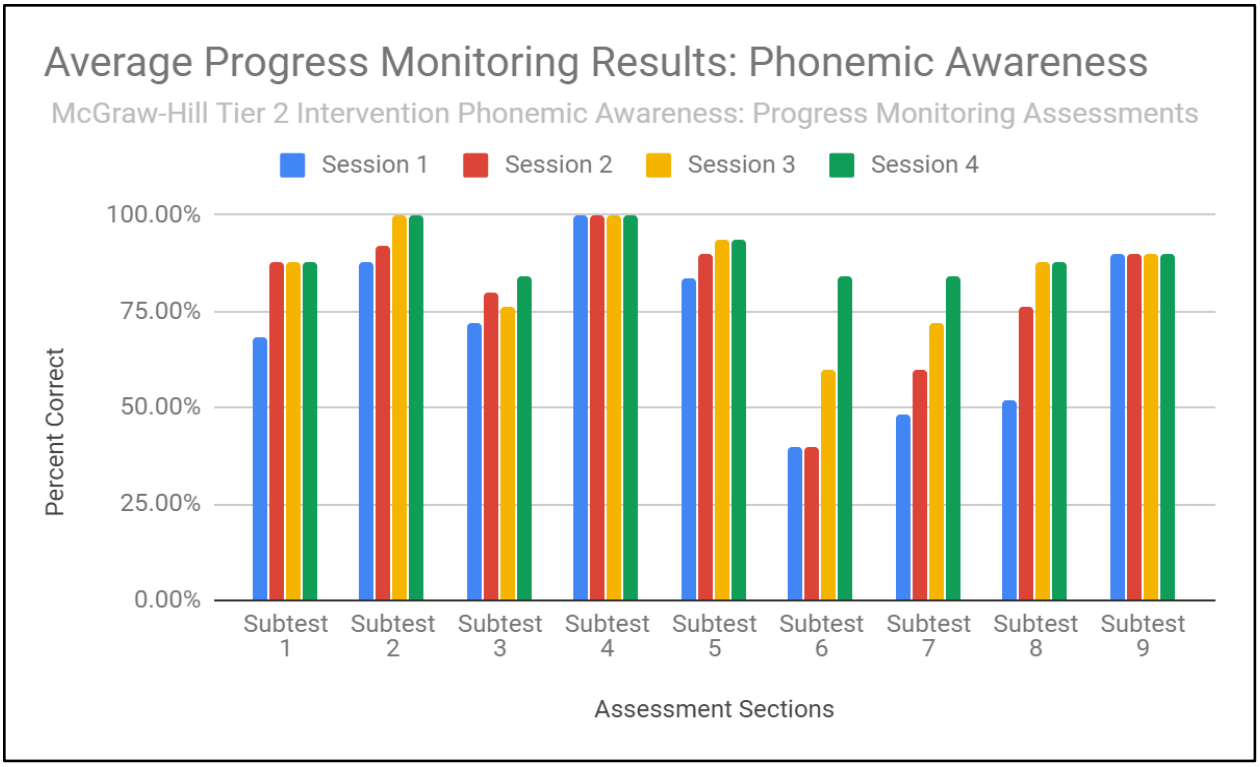


Figure 3. Progress monitoring results for phonemic awareness.

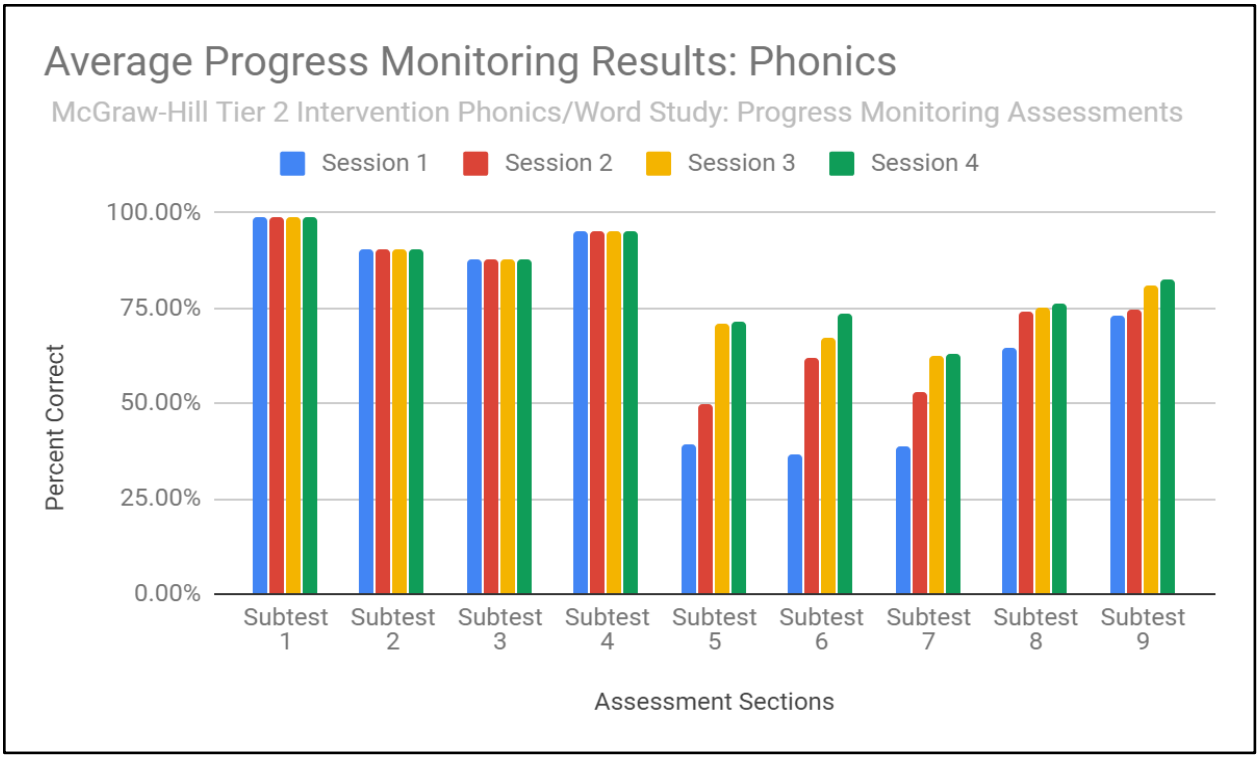


Figure 4. Progress monitoring results for phonics.

Student A Results

Student A was a second-grade student who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Other Health Impairments, and Speech Impairments. This student struggled with pronouncing final consonants and producing intelligible speech. Based on the data from the pretest Student A earned a 65.07% proficiency level across phonics skills as seen in Figure 5. He demonstrated the highest deficits in the areas of rhyme, manipulating phonemes, recognizing letters, and decoding grade level words. During progress monitoring assessments it was also found that Student A struggled most with pronouncing the short /u/ sound, three-letter blends, soft c and g, and reading words with silent letters. Instruction in all high priority areas were provided for this student during small group instruction, with direct instruction from the teacher. The student then received additional materials in the CWPT sessions to practice each skill.

The pretest data revealed that Student A presented deficits in the foundational skills of phonics. Figure 7 exhibits the results of the phonemic awareness progress monitoring assessment for Student A. The first data collection revealed priority areas in rhyming (Subtest 1), segmenting and blending sounds (Subtests 6 and 7), and manipulating sounds (Subtest 8). He was able to increase his initial score of 40% in rhyming to 80% mastery, revealing a 40% increase in this domain. In the sections assessing sound segmentation and blending Student A improved from a 60% and 40% score in the first session to 80% and 100% on the final session, respectively. Lastly, Student A increased his initial score of 60% to 80% when assessed on his ability to manipulate sounds.

Based on the overall interim data Student A moved from 73.33% to 88.89% proficiency from the first progress monitoring session to the last. This 15.56% increase showed a positive impact on his overall phonemic awareness skills with the support given during the CWPT sessions. Moreover, his phonics skills were also tracked, showing an average increase from 66.22% to 79.11% proficiency level as seen in Figure 8. This 12.89% percent increase also confirmed a positive effect on phonics skills for the student.

Based on the summative data, Student A struggled most in areas that involved medial and final sounds, such as matching phonemes and phoneme manipulation. He received his lowest score of 25% on the phoneme deletion subtest (Subtest 11). It is significant to note that Student A also demonstrated deficits in speech, which interfered with his ability to articulate final sounds and blends. He was, however, able to improve in all other tested areas, increasing his overall average score to 86.24% as seen in Figure 6. This 21.17% increase demonstrated the effectiveness of the intervention for the participant. In addition to the findings, the student demonstrated a higher level of confidence with reading aloud and was more eager to help peers in all academic settings after the intervention was withdrawn.

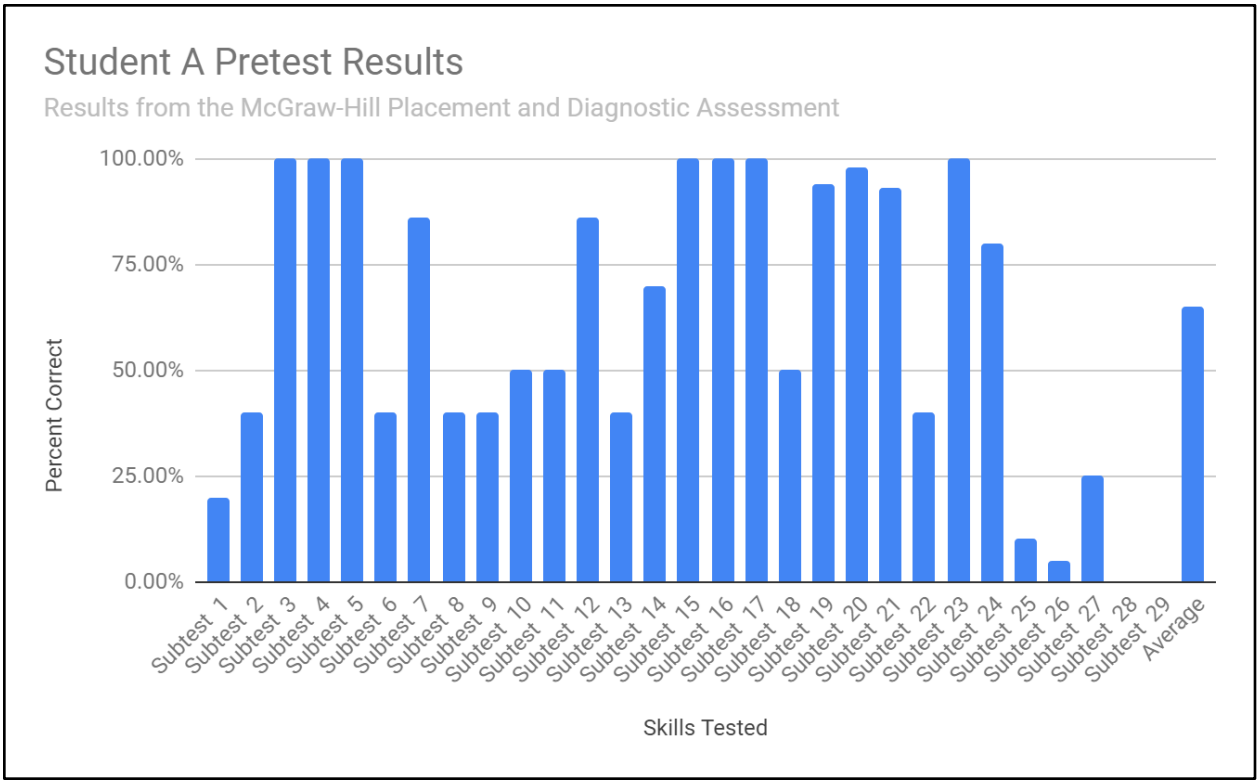


Figure 5. Pretest results for Student A.

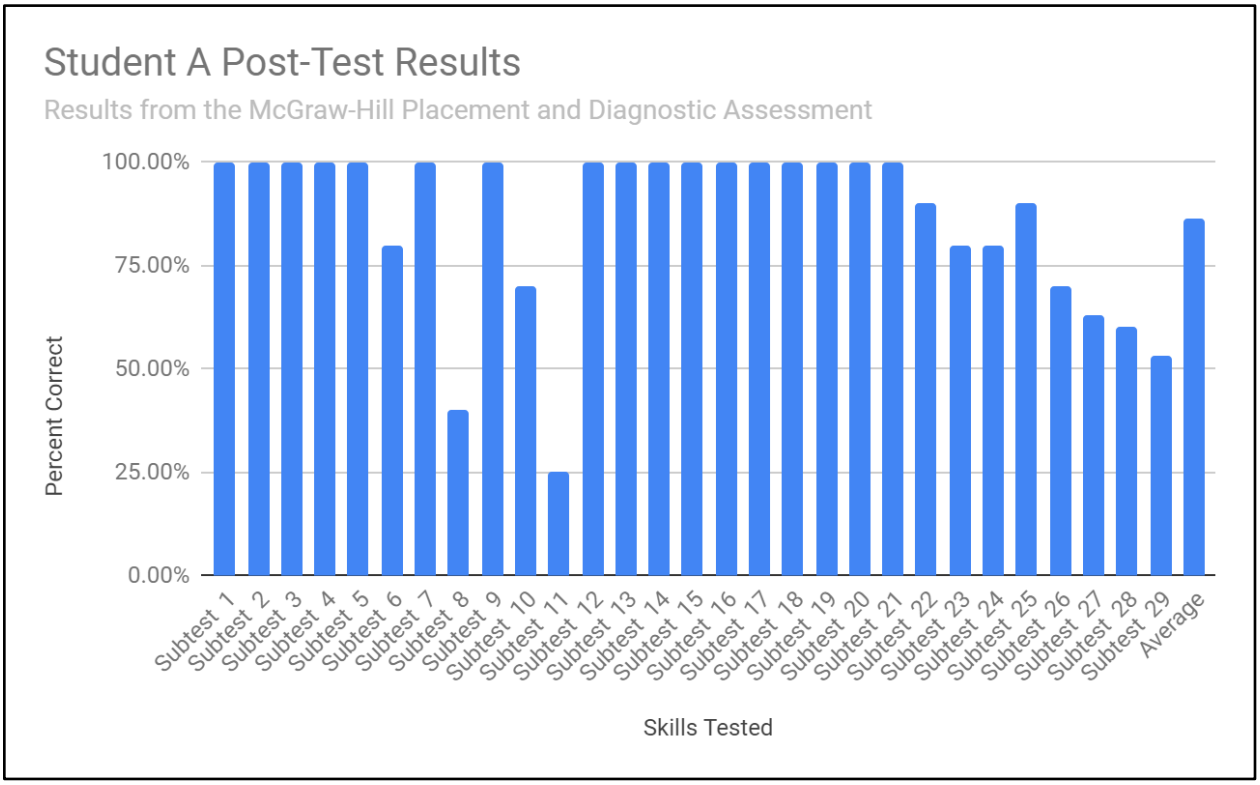


Figure 6. Post-test results for Student A.

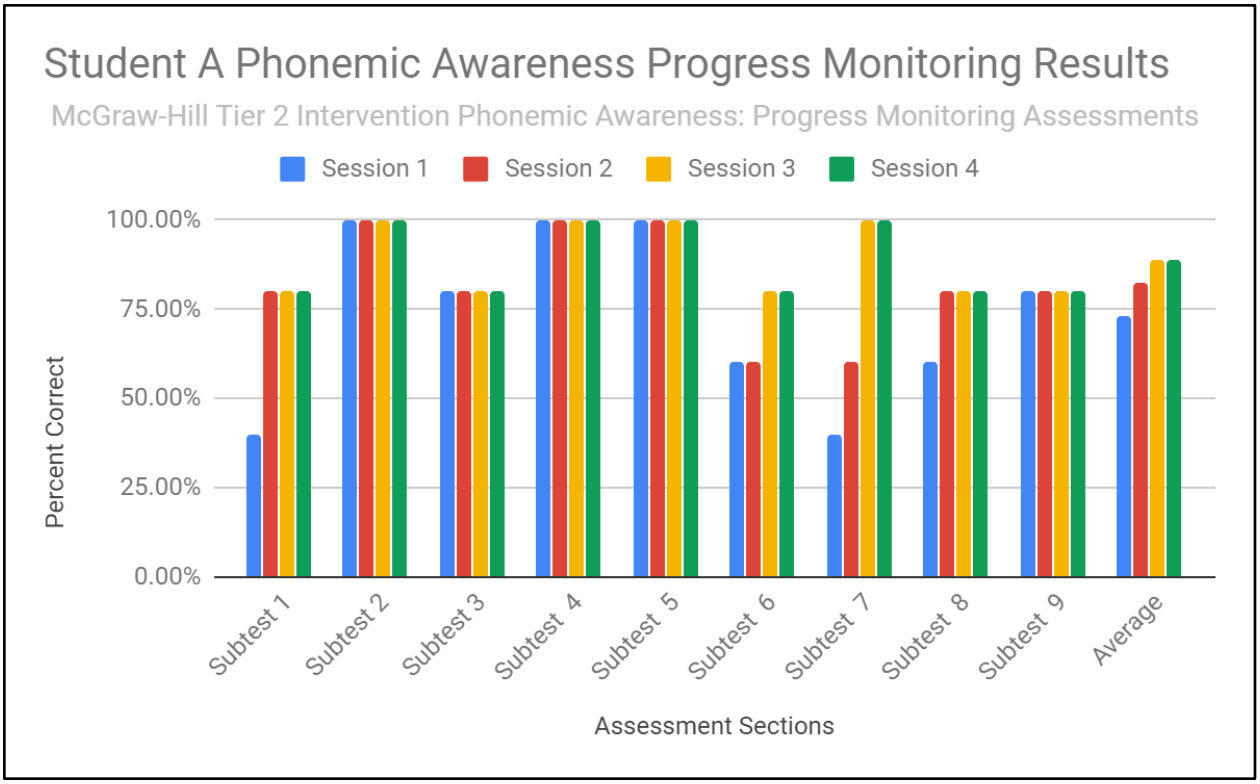


Figure 7. Progress monitoring results on phonemic awareness for Student A.

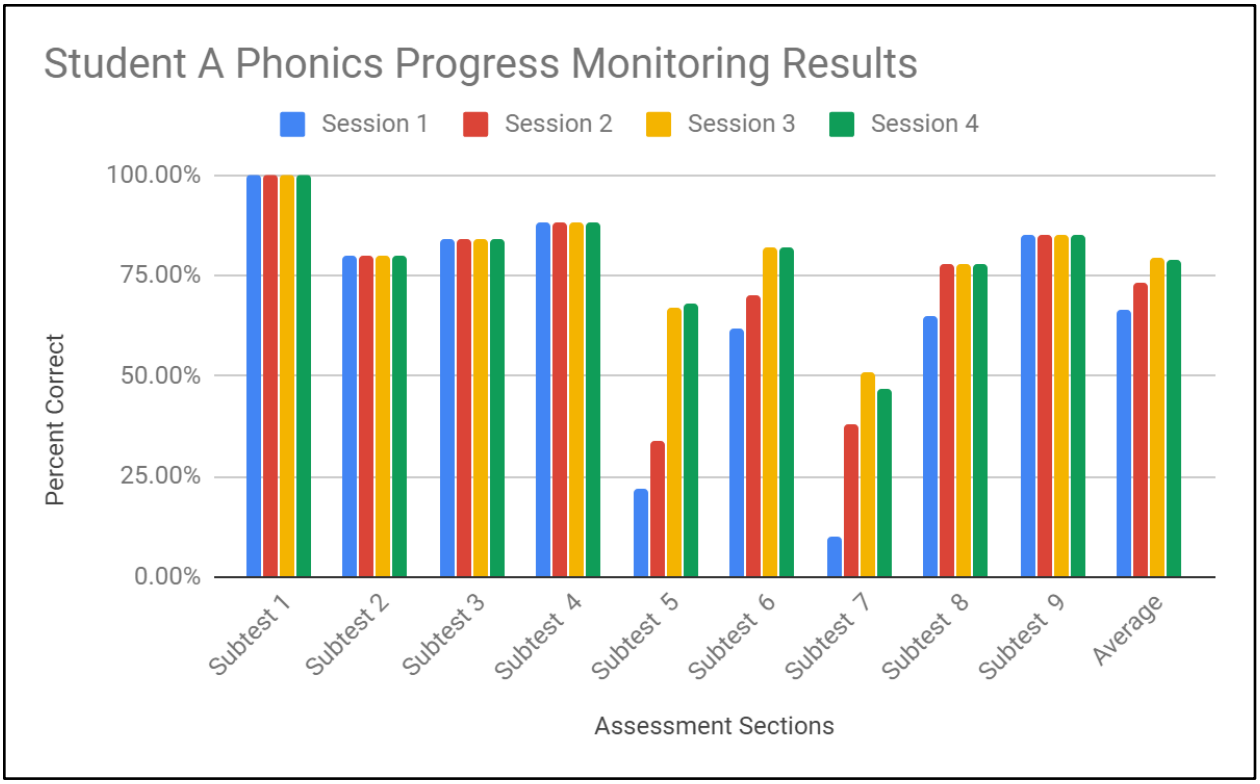


Figure 8. Progress monitoring results on phonics and word study for Student A.

Student B Results

Student B was a second-grade student identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This disability affected his academic and social skills. This student showed the highest proficiency in phonics compared to the other three participants, confirmed by his 83.55% average score on the baseline assessment as seen in Figure 9. Although he demonstrated mastery level performance in phonics, data results indicated that he lacked some foundational reading skills in the areas of rhyme, manipulating phonemes, and decoding grade level words. Like Student A, instruction in all high priority areas were provided for Student B during small group instruction, with direct instruction from the teacher. The student then received additional materials in the CWPT sessions to practice each skill.

Figure 11 displays the progress monitoring results in phonemic awareness, which revealed that overall Student B did master phonemic awareness skills, but gaps were shown in the areas of syllables (Subtest 3), medial sounds (Subtest 5), and manipulating phonemes (Subtest 8). Throughout the experiment he was able to increase his score on syllabication from 60% to 100% proficiency from the first progress monitoring session to the last. In medial sounds, Student B went from 60% proficiency to 80% mastery. Lastly, in phoneme manipulation Student B scored 40% on the first progress monitoring instrument and gained 100% on the final monitoring assessment. Overall, Student B progressed from an average percentage of 80% to 93.33% mastery in all phonemic awareness skills. Additionally, Figure 12 shows the phonics skills that were tracked, showing that Student B earned an overall increase from 91.33% to 92.44% proficiency level in phonics. Student B performed well on the phonics interim assessments but showed the greatest challenges with short vowels (Subtest 5) and complex vowels (Subtest 8). With short vowels, Student B increased his 68% score to 78% over time and his score of 77% in complex vowels stayed the same over time.

On the post-test Student B improved in most areas of phonics, but still managed to maintain the 50% score in segmenting words into phonemes (Subtest 10). He struggled most with segmenting words containing silent letters and long vowels. Contrastingly, he was successful in segmenting words with blends, and gained an overall average score to 92.62% as shown in Figure 10. This 9.07% increase exhibited a positive outcome for the intervention.

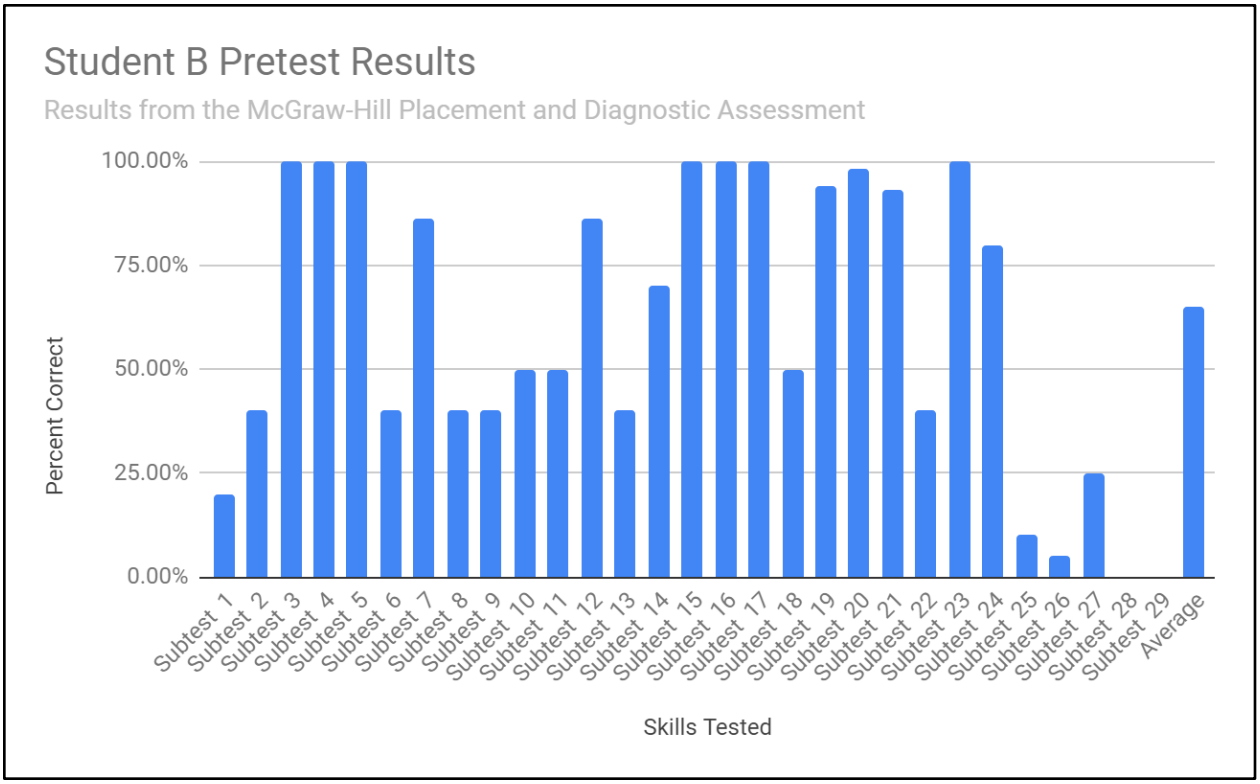


Figure 9. Pretest results for Student B.

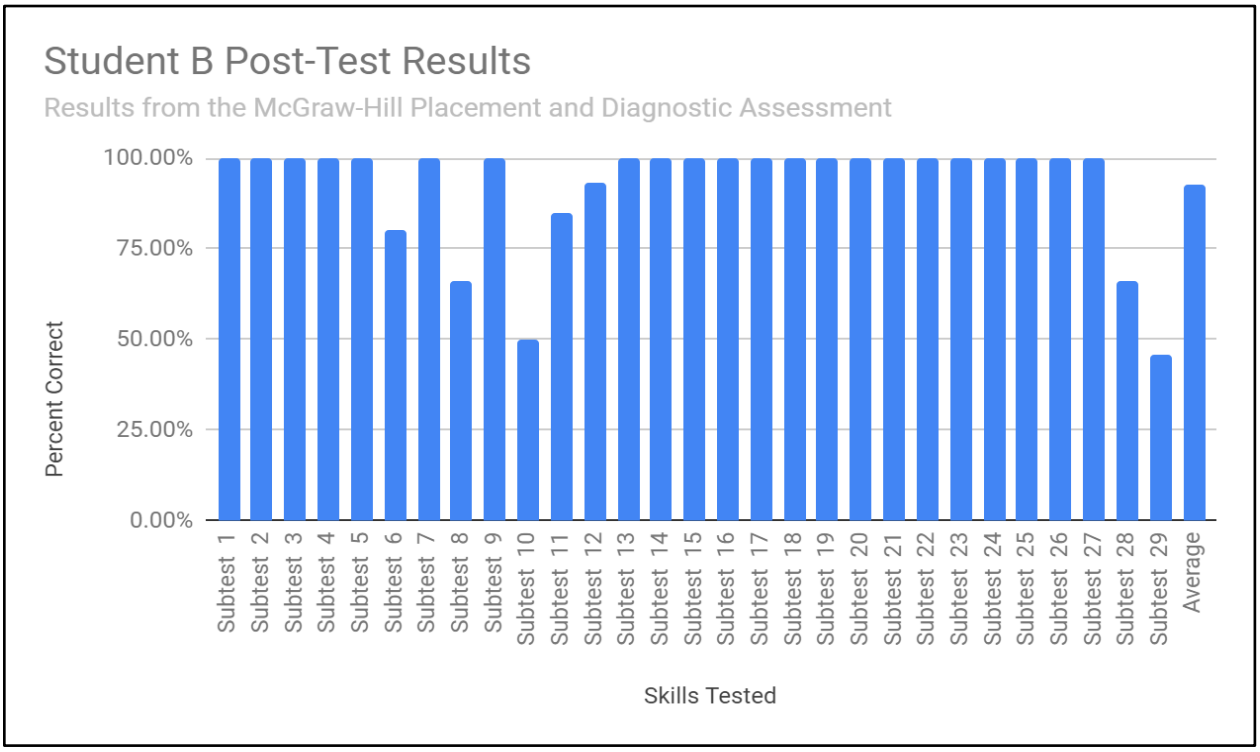


Figure 10. Post-test results for Student B.

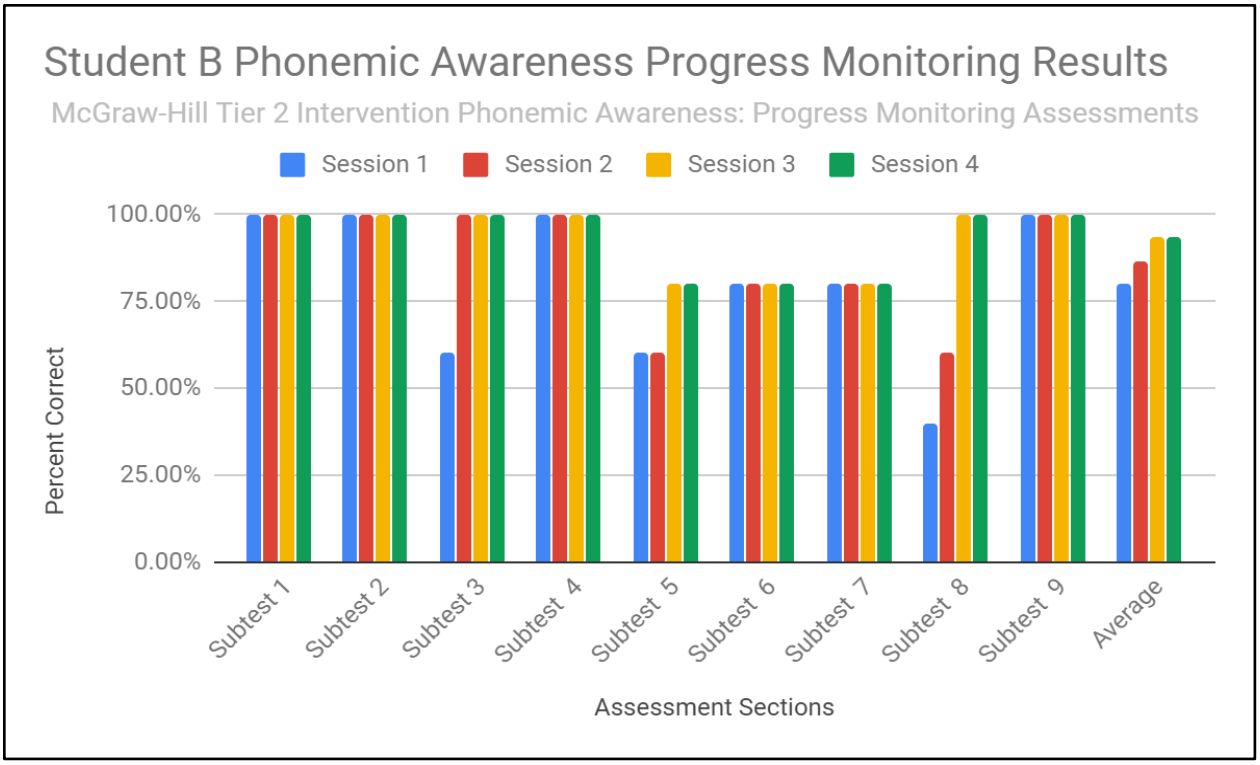


Figure 11. Progress monitoring data on phonemic awareness for Student B.

.

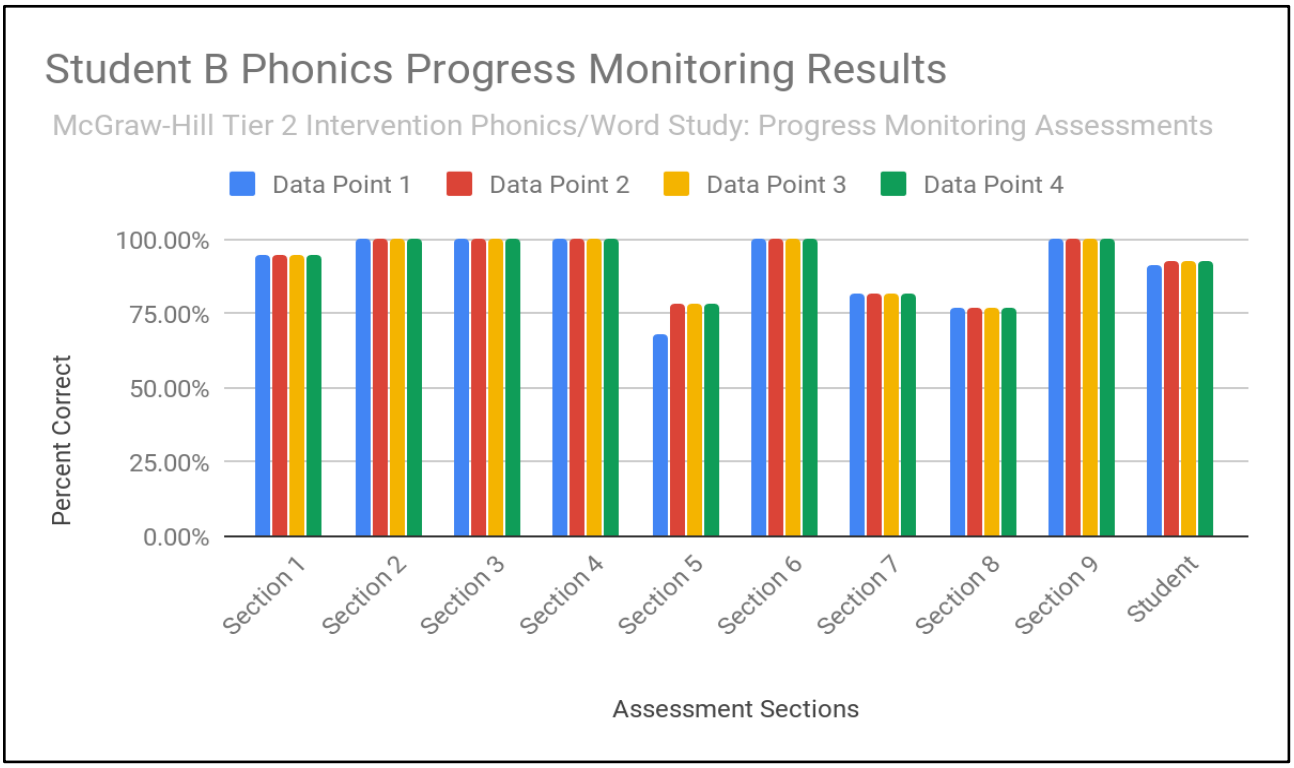


Figure 12. Progress monitoring data on phonics and word study for Student B.

Student C Results

Student C was a first-grade student diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Figure 13 shows the initial performance of Student C in all phonics domains. Overall, Student C demonstrated 75.89% proficiency, with the lowest scores being in the areas of matching phonemes (53%), consonant digraphs (15%), words with blends (55%), and grade level words. These areas were addressed through direct instruction and additional practice gained in CWPT sessions.

Throughout the intervention progress was monitored based on phonemic awareness skills and phonics skills. As shown in Figure 15, Student C showed gaps in medial sound knowledge (Subtest 5), segmenting and blending words (Subtest 7), and phoneme manipulation (Subtest 8) based on the first data collection. After remediated instruction was provided to strengthen these skills Student C was able to gain a 40% increase in all three areas, gaining scores from 40% to 80% across data points.

Progress in phonics skills were also tracked throughout the intervention phase. Figure 16 shows the progress monitoring results in phonics for Student C. Overall, the student gained a 71% average score, with the lowest scores on tests that measured short vowels (Subtest 5), long vowels (Subtest 7), complex vowels (Subtest 8), and syllabication (Subtest 9). After receiving CWPT instruction in short vowels Student C earned a 34% increase on the final data point, moving from a score of 41% to 75%. With long vowels Student C gained a 20% increase on the final data point and a 16% increase in complex vowels. He moved from a 54% proficiency level to 74% in long vowels. Also, with complex vowels Student C went from a score of 57% to 73%. Finally, findings revealed that the student scored an average of 13% higher on the syllabication assessment, scoring 56% on the first data point to 69% on the final data point. The results show an overall increase of all skill areas across domains. Figure 14 identifies the final outcomes for Student C based on the post assessment. Overall, he was able to increase his final results by 21.49%. He achieved a 97.38% score on the post assessment, demonstrating the considerable growth as a response to the intervention.

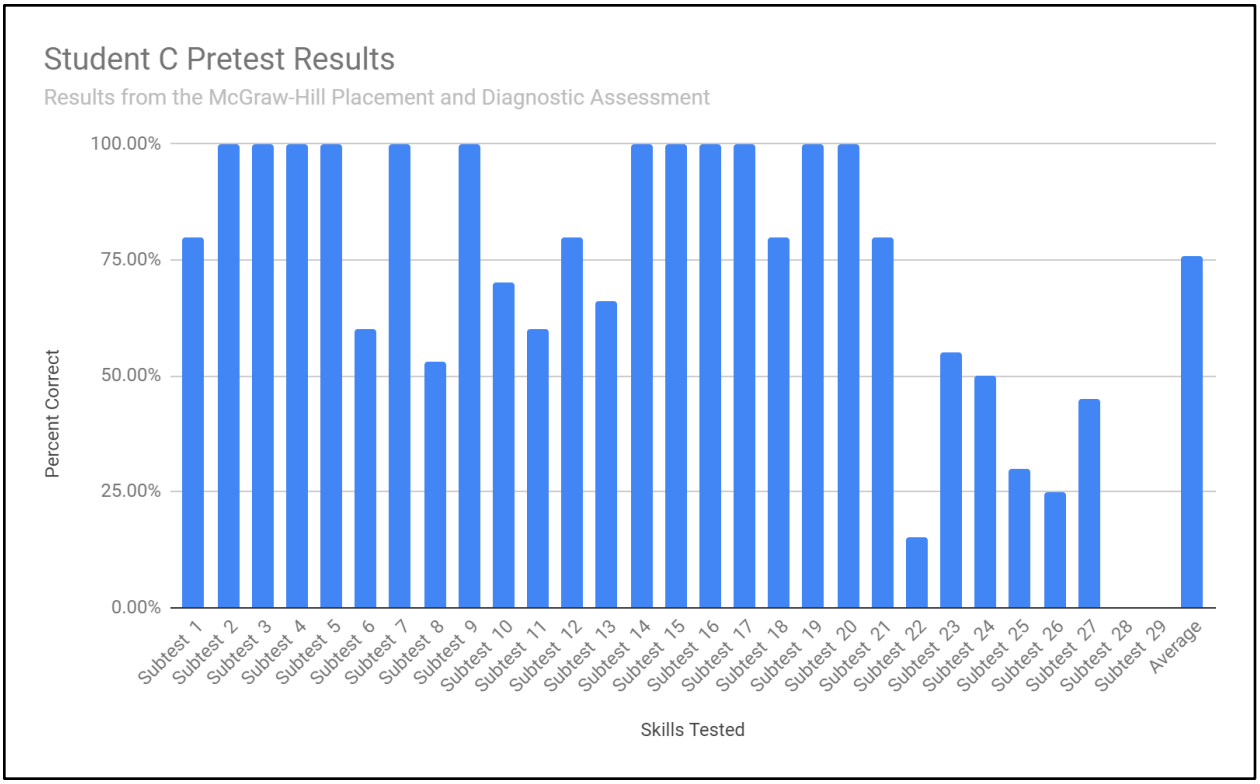


Figure 13. Pretest results for Student C.

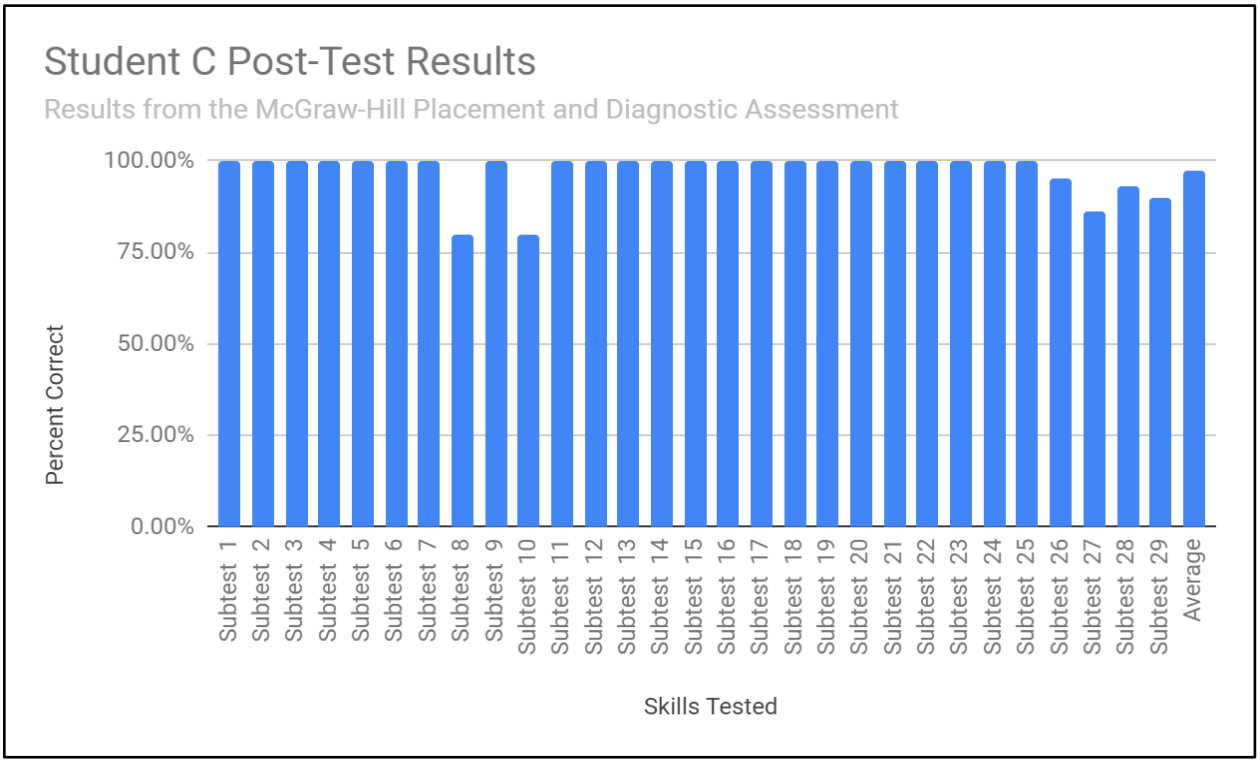


Figure 14. Post-test results for Student C.

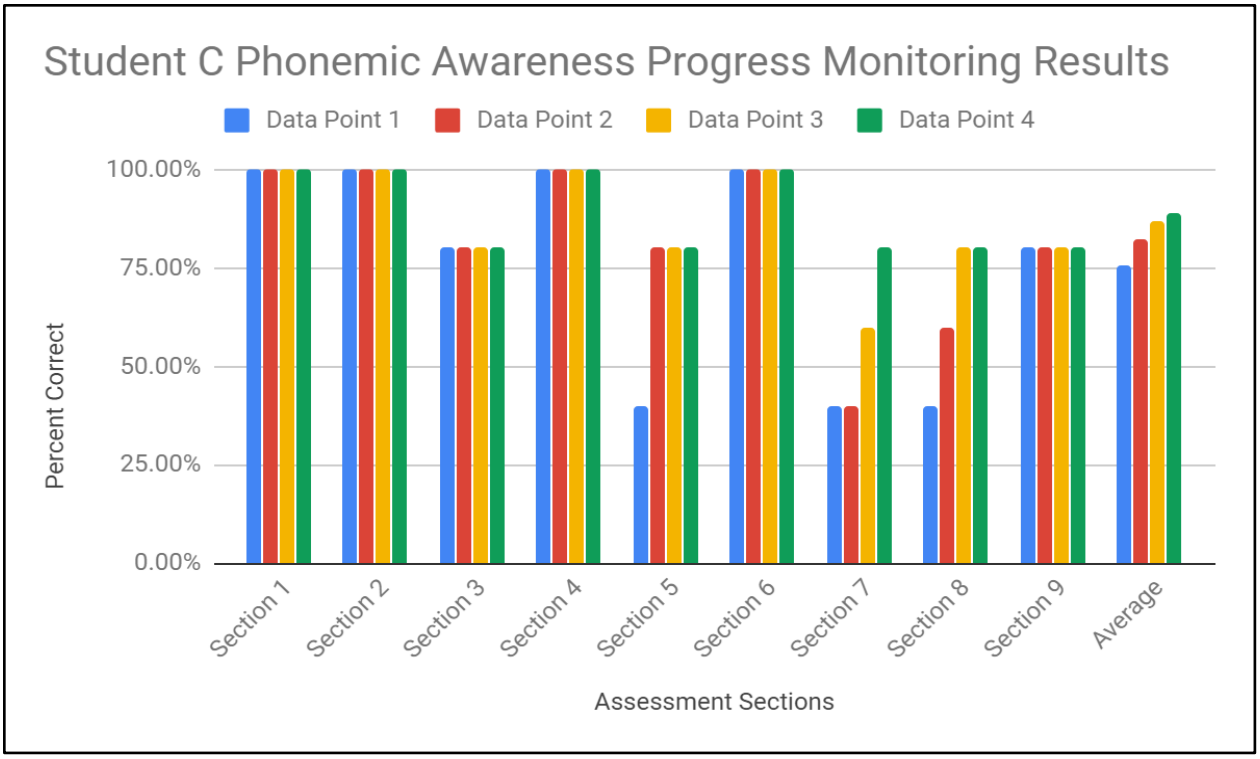


Figure 15. Progress monitoring data on phonemic awareness for Student C.

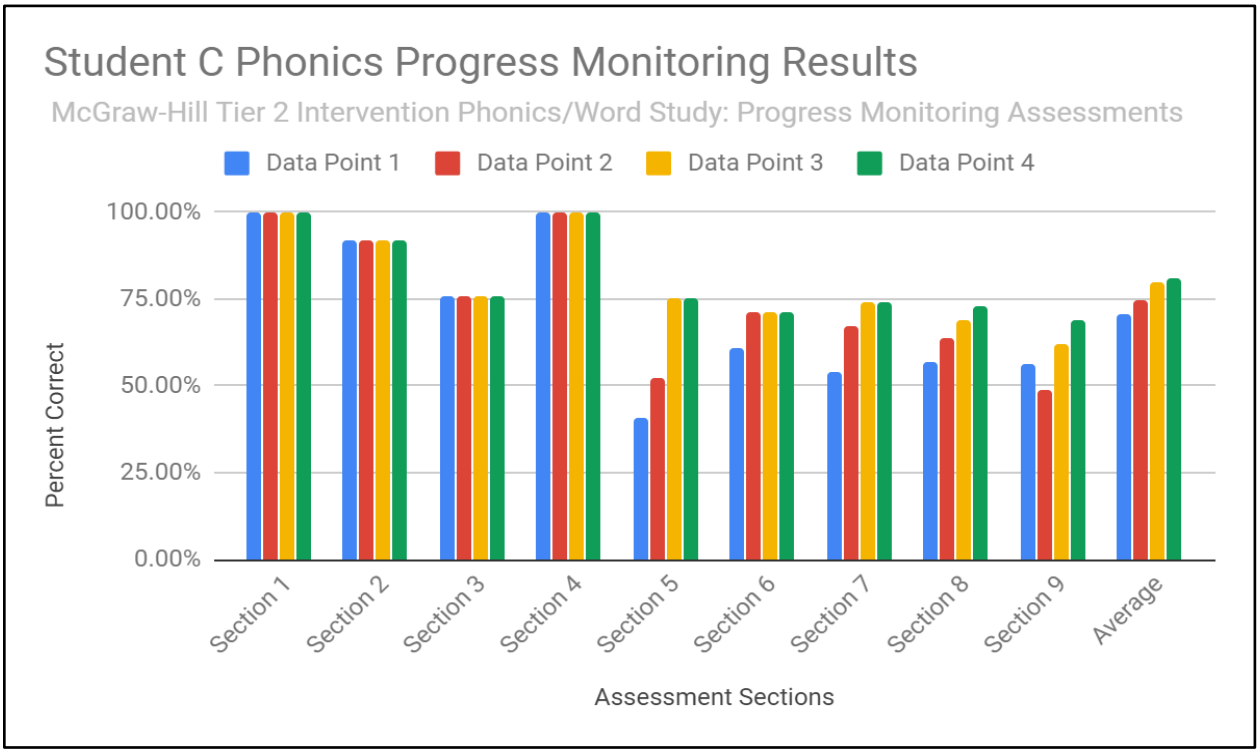


Figure 16. Progress monitoring data on phonics and word study for Student C.

Student D Results

Student D was a first-grade student identified with Specific Learning Disabilities. Based on the baseline data shown in Figure 17 Student D needed additional supports in the areas of rhyme, segmenting phonemes, manipulating phonemes, distinguishing long and short vowels, and decoding grade level words. Overall, Student D demonstrated 64.77% proficiency in all phonics areas. The results of the initial assessment were used to assign instruction for this student in CWPT sessions. Throughout the intervention progress in the areas of phonemic awareness and phonics were assessed to track gaps in specific skill areas. Figure 19 displays the results of the phonemic awareness monitoring assessments, which revealed deficits in the areas of rhyming (Subtest 1), initial and final sounds (Subtests 2 and 3), segmenting and blending (Subtests 6 and 7), and phoneme manipulation (Subtest 8). With the provided CWPT support Student D received a 20% increase in rhyming, 40% increase in initial sounds, 20% increase in final sounds, 60% increase in segmenting and blending one-syllable words, 40% increase in segmenting and blending multisyllabic words, and a 40% increase in phoneme manipulation.

When tested on phonics skills Student D exhibited deficits in short and long vowels (Subtests 5 and 7), words with final e (Subtest 6), complex vowels (Subtest 8), and syllabication (Subtest 9) as displayed in Figure 20. CWPT instructional materials were tailored to focus on these skills and Student D was able to show improvements in all areas over time. An 8% increase was made in the area of short vowels along with a 26% increase for long vowels. The student also showed improvements with decoding words with final e, demonstrated by a 54% increased score on the final data point. When tested on complex vowels the student went from 60% proficient to 74%, earning a 14% increase. Finally, on syllabication tasks the student went from 50% to 77% proficiency, producing a 27% increase.

The final results, presented in Figure 18, showed that Student D improved in all tested areas, similarly to Student C. Student D obtained a final average of 86.31%, a 21.54% increase compared to his initial results. He obtained the largest increase of overall growth out of all the participants in this study. The intervention proved to be successful in improving phonics skills for this student.

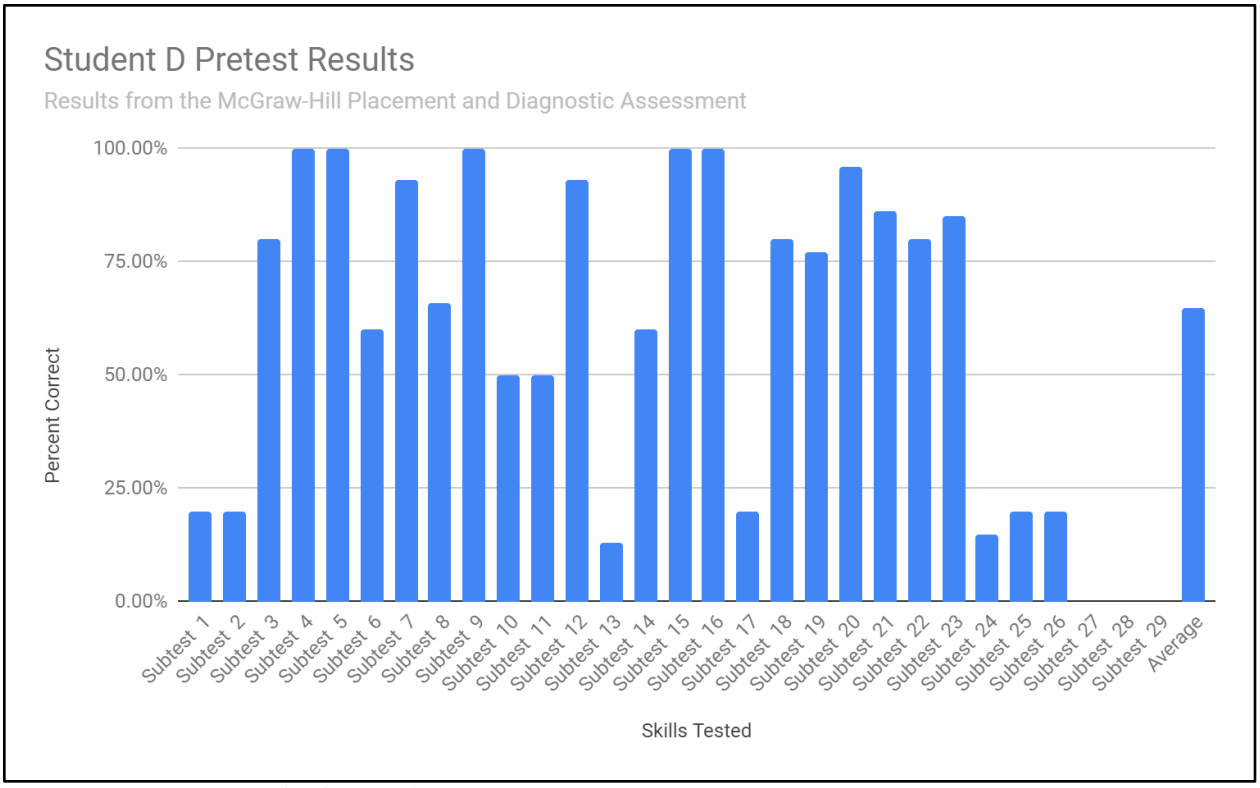


Figure 17. Pretest results for Student D.

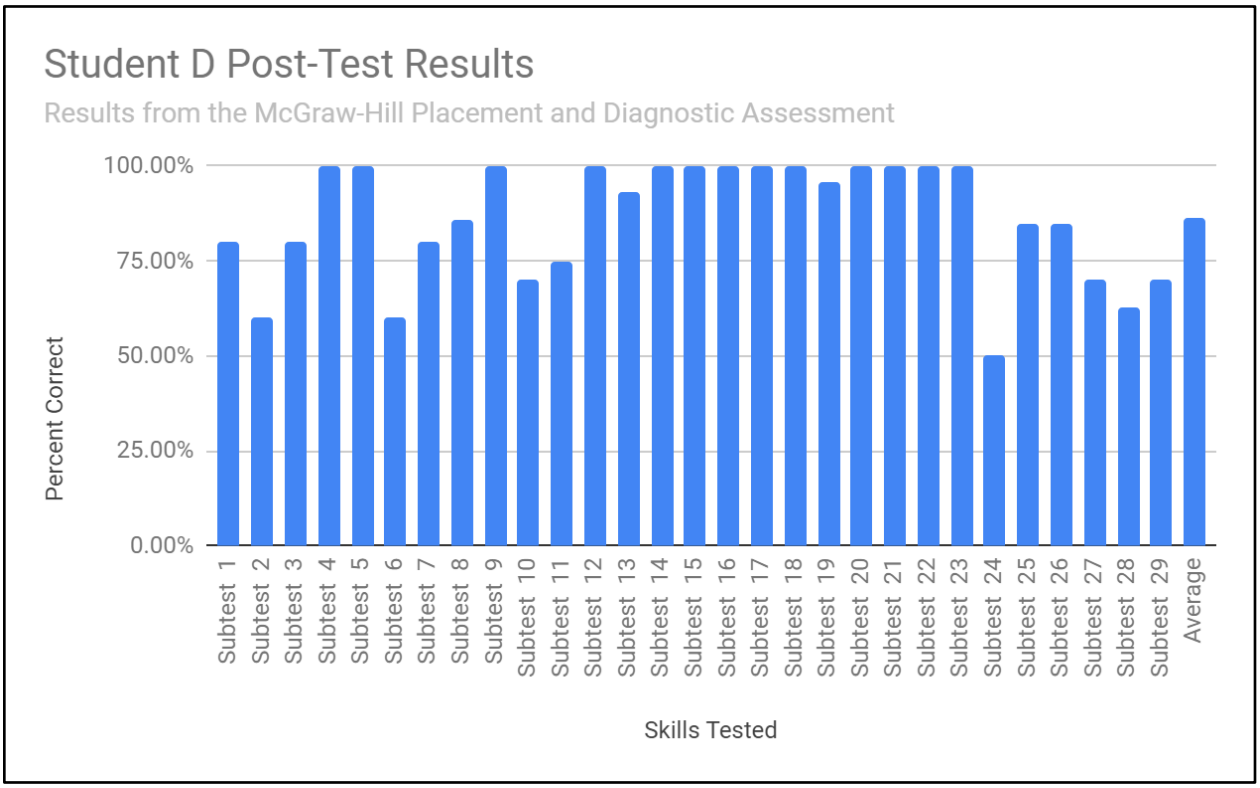


Figure 18. Post-test results for Student D.

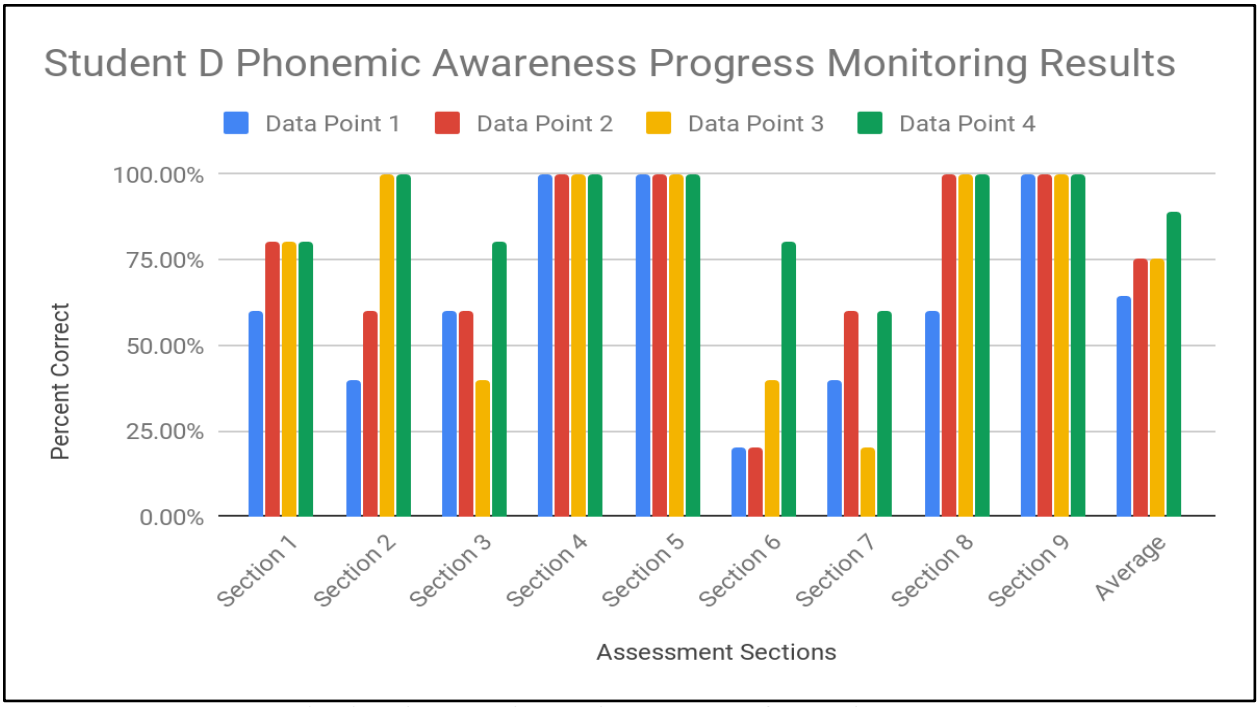


Figure 19. Progress monitoring data on phonemic awareness for Student D.

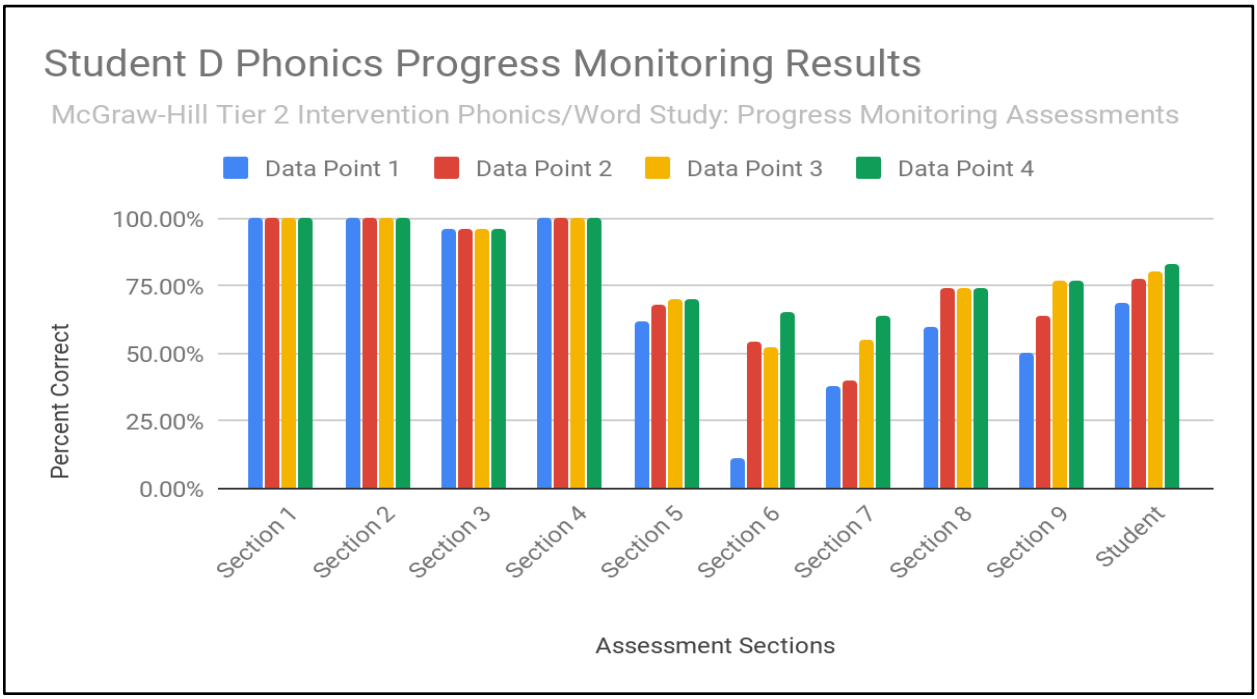


Figure 20. Progress monitoring data on phonics and word study for Student D.

Limitations

Similarly to the challenges addressed in the study conducted by Jones et al. (2017) there were several limitations to the study that require discussion. At the conclusion of the intervention, it was found that support was needed with administering assessments. In order to collect data, the special education teacher met one-on-one with each participant to assess progress. Although the data was able to show increases in all areas of phonics for the four participants, additional interim data is

needed to draw reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of the ClassWide Peer Tutoring intervention. Additionally, students did make improvements in all high-priority areas but were not able to meet proficiency level of each tested skill within the allotted eight-week period of this experiment. Students needed more time completing CWPT in order to continue to strengthen the results and master foundational reading skills.

Implications

Based on the results from the data ClassWide Peer Tutoring was able to bridge gaps in the participants' foundational reading skills needed to master grade level reading instruction. In this action research project, the intervention proved to be useful in facilitating the development of phonics skills while also encouraging collaboration and teamwork amongst students. Along with reinforcing academic skills CWPT has been shown to be useful with providing ample opportunities for students to strengthen social skills and self-management skills. Additionally, ClassWide Peer Tutoring can be integrated in any pre-existing instructional routine. Along with this research project the CWPT strategy was utilized during whole group reading and math instruction, in which peer groups assisted each other with class assignments and delivered grades.

Dissemination

Findings from the study were shared with school administrators and instructional coaches. The results were also shared with parents and families during IEP meetings. Moreover, findings were shared with Florida International University graduate students and professors during a poster presentation.

References

Ansari, A. (2017). Multigrade kindergarten classrooms and children's academic achievement, executive function, and socioemotional development. *Infant and Child Development,* 26(6), 1-19.

Dufrenfe, B., Reisener, C., Olmi, D. J., Zoder-Martell, K., McNutt, M. R., & Horn, D. (2010). Peer tutoring for reading fluency as a feasible and effective alternative in response to intervention systems. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, *19*(3), 239–256.

Gnadinger, C. M. (2008). Peer-mediated instruction: assisted performance in the primary classroom. Teachers and Teaching: *Theory and Practice*, 14(2), 129–142.

Grünke, M., Janning, A. M., & Sperling, M. (2016). The effects of a peer-tutoring intervention on the text production of students with learning and speech problems: a case report. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 14(2), 225–235.

Grünke, M., Wilbert, J., Tsiriotakis, I. K., & Agirregoikoa, A. L. (2017). Improving the length and quality of texts written by fourth graders with learning disabilities through a peer-tutoring graphic organizing strategy. *Insights into Learning Disabilities*, 14(2), 167–188.

Hart, S. L., & Banda, D. R. (2018). Examining the effects of peer mediation on the social skills of students with autism spectrum disorder as compared to their peers. *Education & Training in Autism & Developmental Disabilities*, 53(2), 160–175.

Hayes, A. (2012). What are the effects of a cross-age tutoring intervention on the reading attainment of struggling readers in a primary school? *REACH Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, 26(1), 30–44.

Jones, G., Ostojic, D., Menard, J., Picard, E., & Miller, C. J. (2017). Primary prevention of reading failure: effect of universal peer tutoring in the early grades. *Journal of Educational Research*, 110(2), 171–176.

Maheady, L., & Gard, J. (2010). Classwide Peer Tutoring: Practice, Theory, Research, and Personal Narrative. Intervention in School and Clinic, 46(2), 71–78.

Miller, B., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, C. W. (1991). Teaching and Learning in the Multigrade Classroom: Student Performance and Instructional Routines. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved from http://www.ericdigests.org

No Child Left Behind Act. (2001). [Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O: Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., distributor, 2002]. Retrieved from http:// https://www.ed.gov/

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse. (2007, July). *Beginning Reading intervention report*: *ClassWide Peer Tutoring*. Retrieved from http://whatworks.ed.gov

Van Keer, H., & Vanderlinde, R. (2010). The impact of cross-age peer tutoring on third and sixth graders' reading strategy awareness, reading strategy use, and reading comprehension. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 5(1), 33–45.

Volpe, R. J., Young, G. I., Piana, M. G., & Zaslofsky, A. F. (2012). Integrating classwide early literacy intervention and behavioral supports: a pilot investigation. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 14(1), 56–64.

Appendix A

Administrative Consent for Action Research

RE: Classroom Research Project

Scott, Cisely J.

Fri 1/11/2019 3:43 PM

To:THEODORE, SHARDE <stheodore25@dadeschools.net>;

Cc:Hallman, Anjanette <ahallman@dadeschools.net>;

Good Afternoon Ms. Theodore,

That is fine with me. I give my consent. Thank you.

Cisely Scott, Principal
Agenoria S. Paschal/ Olinda Elementary School
5536 N.W. 21st Avenue
Miami, FL 33142
(305) 633-0308/(305) 635-8919 (fax)
Home of the Dolphins

From: THEODORE, SHARDE
Sent: Monday, January 7, 2019 2:51 PM
To: Scott, Cisely J. <msscott@dadeschools.net>
Cc: Hallman, Anjanette <ahallman@dadeschools.net>
Subject: Classroom Research Project

Hello Ms. Scott,

I am currently completing my Master's degree at FIU and as part of the requirements I will be implementing an action research project in my classroom this semester. I spoke to you briefly before the winter recess to gain your approval of this action research project and this email serves as additional information for you and evidence of consent that will be sent to my professor overseeing my research. I plan to implement the ClassWide peer tutoring intervention, in which students will learn to work with a partner to gain more opportunities to practice and enhance their reading skills. The intervention is set to begin in January and conclude in March before spring break. Students' personal information will be left confidential and my professors at FIU will only have access to the academic progress related to the specific intervention. Please respond to this email at your earliest convenience if you approve of the action research.

https://portal-mail.dadeschools.net/owa/#path=/mail/search 1/2

Appendix B

Letter of Action Research for Parents and Guardians

December 20th, 2018

Greetings Parents and Guardians,

My name is Ms. Theodore and I'm your child's ESE Resource Teacher. I am currently completing my Master's degree at FIU and as part of the requirements I will be using activities in my classroom to help your child improve his/her reading skills. These activities include peer tutoring, in which your child will learn to work with a partner to gain more opportunities to practice, and enhance his/her reading skills. I will be collecting data based on your child's specific reading needs in order to track the improvements made with the peer tutoring intervention. I hope to share the success of these activities with the administration at A.S.P./ Olinda Elementary school, as well my professors at FIU. You can rest assured that your child's personal information will be left confidential and my professors at FIU will only have access to your child's academic progress for the specific intervention. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me via ClassDojo, stheodore25@dadeschools.net, or (305) 633-0308. Have a wonderful holiday and I am excited to support your child in new ways after the winter break!

Ms. Sharde Theodore,
School of Education and Human Development
Florida International University

Appendix C

Sample of Baseline Assessment and Recording Sheet

Phonics and Decoding Grades K–6

Phonics Survey—Standard Version

Task 1(a)	m	t	a	s	i	r	d	f	o
	g	l	h	u	c	n	b	j	k
Task 1(b)	y	e	w	p	v	qu	x	z	

Task 2(a)	wat	fod	leb	tum	pon
	sib	cug	raf	mip	hev

Task 2(b)

Sam and Ben hid the gum.
Pat had a nap in bed.
Mom had a top on a big pot.
Tim can sit in a tub.

Task 3(a)	shap	ming	gack	whum	pith
	chan	thog	kosh	mich	whaf

Task 3(b)

That duck had a wet wing. Dad hit a log with a whip.
When can Chip pack? A fish is in that tub.

Task 4(a)	clab	trin	snaf	greb	slad
	fosp	lonk	mant	jast	sund

Task 4(b)

Glen will swim past the raft in the pond.
The frog must flip and spin and jump.

Task 5(a)	sice	nole	fune	moze	vate
	rine	lade	sile	gane	fote

Task 5(b)

Mike and Jane use a rope to ride the mule.
Pete had five tapes at home.

Phonics and Decoding Grades K–6

Grades K–1

1. Letters		Score			Score
(a) Names	m t a s i r d f o g l h u c n b j k y e w p v qu x z	/26	(b) Sounds	/m/ /t/ /**a**/ /s/ /**i**/ /r/ /d/ /f/ /**o**/ /g/ /l/ /h/ /**u**/ /k/ /n/ /b/ /j/ /k/ /y/ /**e**/ /w/ /p/ /v/ /kw/ /ks/ /z/	Consonants: /21 Vowels: /5

Grade 1

2. VC and CVC		Comments	Score
(a) In List	wat fod leb tum pon sib cug raf mip hev		/10
(b) In Text	*Sam* and *Ben hid* the *gum*. *Pat had* a *nap in bed*. *Mom had* a *top on* a *big pot*. *Tim can sit in* a *tub*.		/20

Grade 1

3. Consonant Digraphs		Comments	Score
(a) In List	shap ming gack whum pith chan thog kosh mich whaf		/10
(b) In Text	*That duck* had a wet *wing*. Dad hit a log *with* a *whip*. *When* can *Chip pack*? A *fish* is in *that* tub.		/10

Grade 1

4. CVCC and CCVC		Comments	Score
(a) In List	clab trin snaf greb slad fosp lonk mant jast sund		/10
(b) In Text	*Glen* will *swim past* the *raft* in the *pond*. The *frog must flip* and *spin* and *jump*.		/10

Grades 1–2

5. Silent e		Comments	Score
(a) In List	sice nole fune moze vate rine lade sile gane fote		/10
(b) In Text	*Mike* and *Jane use* a *rope* to *ride* the *mule*. *Pete* had *five tapes* at *home*.		/10

Placement and Diagnostic Assessment · Phonics Survey **83**

Appendix D

Sample of Progress Monitoring Assessment

Name _____ Date _____

Practice Reproducible PH33

Decoding Review

Real Words

dip

rap

Ed

red fed pet met

Ben

lit

kick

up

pup cup luck tuck

gum

Nonsense Words

dat nid dop

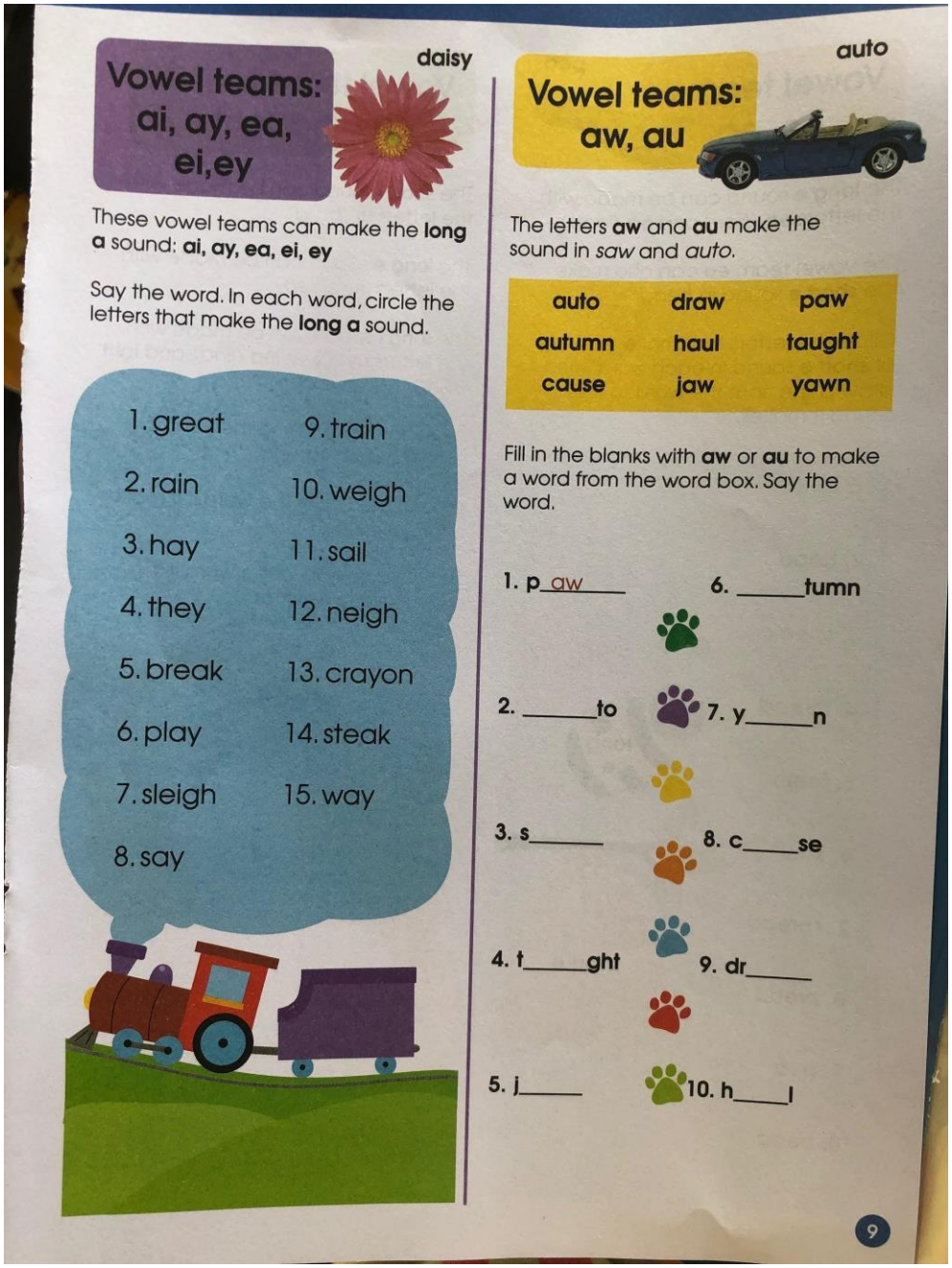
ras rit mef

pem lup nuck

Practice Reproducible 67

Appendix E

Sample of Intervention Materials



Vowel teams: ai, ay, ea, ei,ey

daisy

These vowel teams can make the **long a** sound: **ai, ay, ea, ei, ey**

Say the word. In each word, circle the letters that make the **long a** sound.

1. great
2. rain
3. hay
4. they
5. break
6. play
7. sleigh
8. say
9. train
10. weigh
11. sail
12. neigh
13. crayon
14. steak
15. way

Vowel teams: aw, au

auto

The letters **aw** and **au** make the sound in *saw* and *auto*.

auto	draw	paw
autumn	haul	taught
cause	jaw	yawn

Fill in the blanks with **aw** or **au** to make a word from the word box. Say the word.

1. p_aw_
2. _____to
3. s_____
4. t_____ght
5. j_____
6. _____tumn
7. y_____n
8. c_____se
9. dr_____
10. h_____l

9

To top

Disproportionality and Minorities

By Buruuj I. Tunsill

Abstract

The literature review explores the reason as to why there is a disproportionate representation of minorities in special education. The findings reveal that across the nation there is a high rate of minorities who are diagnosed with learning disabilities and emotional behavioral disabilities, but a low rate of minorities who are placed in special education under the umbrella of autism spectrum disorder. The studies indicate that socioeconomic status plays a major role in the type of resources that are allocated for CLD and/or minority students and suggest that lack of resources contributes to the regression of minority students. Hence, disproportionality is linked to widening the achievement gap and the pipeline that leads students of color from school to prison due to inequitable education and labeling. Disproportionate representation of minorities in special education results from subjective assessments and a cultural mismatch between teachers and students.

Topic: Why is there a disproportionate representation of minorities in special education?

1. The Problem of Disproportional Representation of Students from Minority Races in Special Education-International Journal of Education (Eric)
2. Disproportionality and Acting-Out Behaviors Among African American Children in Special Education-Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal (Springer Science + Business Media)
3. Suspensions and Special Education: An Examination of Disproportionate Practices-National Teacher Education Journal (Supplemental Database)
4. Special Education Policy Change: Addressing the Disproportionality of English Language Learners in Special Education Programs in Rural Communities-Rural Special Education Quarterly (Eric)
5. Disproportionality Fills in the Gaps: Connections Between Achievement, Discipline, and Special Education in the School-to-Prison Pipeline-Berkeley Review of Education (Eric)
6. Ethnic Difference in Autism Eligibility in the United States Public Schools-Hammil Institute on Disabilities (Sage)

Introduction

From learning disabilities to behavioral disorders, there is often an overrepresentation in exceptionalities among minorities in special education. However, there are some exceptions; while they are overrepresented in most high incidence disabilities, they are underrepresented in the area of

Autism Spectrum Disorder. There is a disproportionate amount of minority students in special programs, and it raises the question if they are being properly diagnosed. Disproportionality exists in special education when there are too many or too few of a certain population being referred to a specialized program. Unfortunately, due to obsessive referrals or the lack thereof, students are not receiving the education they need in order to be successful in life. Even with federal laws in place to enforce equal educational opportunity, disparity in educational success continued to occur (Hardin & Richard, 2018). The alarming rate of marginalized students being referred to special programs is resulting in these particular students digressing instead of progressing, so why is there a disproportionate representation of minorities in special education?

Overrepresentation in Special Education

African American children are frequently being diagnosed with externalizing behaviors, such as aggression, hyperactivity, and oppositional defiance, and as a result, they are being placed in specialized programs (Bean, 2013). One study suggests that disproportionality is due to a cultural mismatch between primarily white, middle-class teachers and African American students (Bean, 2013). Subsequently, clusters—classes with a small number of students with similar disabilities—are being overflowed with students from minority groups. They are stationed in programs that are in rural areas, which means they only have access to a limited amount of resources, ultimately contributing to future dropout rates as well as suspension and incarceration rates. Furthermore, according to the American Council on Rural Special Education, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (i.e. minorities) were most likely to be placed in special education (Barrio, 2017). There are interventions in place such as RTI (response to intervention), but frequently it is improperly used. A study revealed that if evidence-based practices are correctly administered, there can be a reduction of CLD students in special programs (Barrio, 2017). Also, a study discovered that there are some factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural differences that contribute to the disproportionality in school systems as well as special education. However, to combat the uncontrollable factors, research suggests that teachers should focus on controllable factors, such as the way they teach and deliver lessons; thus educators should deliver more culturally responsive lessons (Othman, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching is a way of teaching where educators connect students' home life and/or background to school and the lessons they are teaching so that it is more relatable and congruent. Essentially, the lack of culturally responsive lessons being taught to CLD students can contribute to the influx of minority or CLD students in special education because they are not given an accurate opportunity to display their knowledge and skillset. There are various arguments that have surfaced as to why a plethora of minorities are being placed in special education. Research claims that poverty is a reasonable explanation for why children of color are in special education. The claim is based off the fact that poverty causes health problems, which, in turn, cause physiological shortcomings, which produce higher rates of disabilities (Annamma, Jackson, &

Morrison, 2014). Overall, there are multiple reasons for a disproportionate amount of minority students in specialized programs, and it is hindering their academic success.

Underrepresentation in Special Education

Minority students are overrepresented in special education with the exception of autism. In special education, disproportionality also occurs when there are too few of a specified group represented in special education. Marginalized students are underrepresented in special education under the autism spectrum disorder category. A study determined that Hispanic and African American children are identified as having autism spectrum disorder at a significantly lower rate than their Caucasian counterparts: "Hispanic students were 99.995 times less likely to be served under an autism eligibility than other groups were" (Hess & Morrier, 2012, p. 50). There are various tools to use to diagnose children with autism spectrum disorder. Some students are identified with the use of the DSM-V, which is a medical diagnosis, and other students are identified by professionals in a school system where they identify children using Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement (IDEA) criteria. The discrepancy in finding children eligible for autism spectrum disorder can be due to the specific testing tools that are being utilized. Likewise, personnel who work in rural areas tend to lack resources and knowledge concerning the best practices for diagnosing autism. Therefore, it is highly likely for students in low socioeconomic communities to be easily misdiagnosed.

Moreover, a study on ethnic differences in autism eligibility revealed that only 5% of states enroll Hispanic students in special education under autism eligibility. Hence, there is a great chance that there can be systematic problems with classifying groups of children on the autism spectrum (Hess & Morrier, 2012). Due to the variations in testing, a child who qualifies for autism spectrum disorder in one state may not qualify in another state. As a result, they may fall behind their peers.

Implications for Disproportionate Representation

Disproportionate Representation of minorities in special education means that they are not receiving an adequate education. Therefore, they will continue to push through the system and, in some cases, are eventually pipelined. Pipeline is the theory that students who are overrepresented in special education under emotional behavioral disorders will be pushed through the juvenile justice system (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2014). Also, the achievement gap between minority students and mainstream society will continue to grow because personnel are misdiagnosing minority children, thus leading to a lack of proper resources needed for their success. When students of color are continuously placed in restricted settings throughout school age years, they are then suspected to dropout. This ultimately leads to the everlasting cycle of poverty due to the fact that they will go into society only being able to work low wage jobs.

Additionally, across the nation, CLD and/or minority students are slipping through the cracks. Underrepresentation and overrepresentation have a detrimental impact on this particular group of students—it stunts their growth. In the case of underrepresentation, marginalized students are being labelled DD (Developmental Delayed) up to nine years old instead of being properly tested for disorders such as autism spectrum disorder (Hess & Morrier, 2012). Hence, the educational system is contributing to the perpetual regression of minorities and widening the achievement gap between them and their white counterparts.

Conclusion

The achievement gap and the mislabeling of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can be combatted if educators teach culturally responsive lessons. They should also provide an interdisciplinary approach instead of disproportionate discipline practices and referrals to special education, which will allow more progression for students of color (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2014). The summation of the research conducted on disproportionality and minorities revealed a disquieting rate of students being referred to special programs from their culturally mismatched educators and in rural areas. Personnel lack viable resources and training to appropriately identify children who should fall under autism spectrum disorder. Consequently, this subjects students of color to an inequitable education.

References

Annamma, S., Jackson, D., Morrison, D. (2014). Disproportionality Fills in the Gaps: Connections Between Achievement, Discipline, and Special Education in the School-to-Prison Pipeline. *Berkeley Review of Education 5(2), 53-87.* Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1169721.pdf.

Barrio, B. (2017). Special Education Policy Change: Addressing the Disproportionality of English Language Learners in Special Education Programs in Rural Communities. *Rural Special Education Quarterly 36(2), 64-72.* Retrieved from https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/8756870517707217.

Bean, K. (2013). Disproportionality and Acting-Out Behaviors Among African American

Children in Special Education. *Child Adolescences Social Work Journal 30, 487-504.* Retrieved from http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=92042019&S=R&D=eue&EbscoContent=dGJyMMTo50SeprQ4wtvhOLCmr1Gep7FSsK64SbKWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGutk6wp7BNuePfgeyx43zx.

Hardin, L., Richard, L. (2018). Suspensions and Special Education: An Examination of Disproportionate Practices. *National Teacher Education Journal 11(2), 67-74.* Retrieved from http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=134572121&S=R&D=eue&EbscoContent=dGJyMMTo50SeprQ4wtvhOLCmr1Gep7FSsay4SraWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGutk6wp7BNuePfgeyx43zx

Hess, K., Morrier, M. (2012). Ethnic Differences in Autism Eligibility in the United States Public Schools. *Hammil Institute on Disabilities 46(1), 49-63*. Retrieved from https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022466910372137

Othman, L. (2018). The Problem of Disproportional Representation of Students from Minority Races in Special Education. *International Journal of Special Education 33(1), 171-183*. Retrieved from http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=133903242&S=R&D=eue&EbscoContent=dGJyMMTo50SeprQ4wtvhOLCmr1Gep7FSsqi4SrWWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGutk6wp7BNuePfgeyx43zx

To top

Latest Employment Opportunities Posted on NASET

*** Teacher (10-month) SY 2020-21** - As part of a comprehensive reform e?ort to become the preeminent urban school system in America, DCPS intends to have the highest-performing, best paid, most satis?ed, and most honored educator force in the nation and a distinctive central o?ce sta? whose work supports and drives instructional excellence and signi?cant achievement gains for DCPS students. To learn more - Click here

*** Special Education Teacher** - Stars is seeking Special Education Teachers in Arizona (Phoenix and surrounding cities). With a proven track record, STARS is able to offer you an unbeatable support system and resources. We are hiring for the 2020-2021 school year. STARS places Special Education Teachers throughout the Phoenix, Tucson and the surrounding area public schools. to learn more - Click here

*** Teacher - Special Education Coordinator** - Maintains a safe and healthy learning environment. Provides developmentally appropriate curriculum to promote the physical and intellectual growth of the student's/patient's. Provides positive guidance to support the social and emotional development of the student/patient. To learn more - Click here

*** 2020 Arizona Education Job Fairs** - The Arizona Department of Education will be hosting the 2020 Arizona Education Job Fairs. Arizona public schools will be looking for administrators, teachers, related service providers, and support staff. To learn more - Click here

*** The Newark Board of Education is Hiring Now!** - Newark Board of Education (NBOE) is now accepting applications for Special Education Teachers for the 2020-21 school year and still has openings for the 2019-20 school year. Certified teachers, career changers, and recent graduates should apply by January 31 for early priority for the 2020-21 school year, and as soon as possible for consideration for the 2019-20 school year. To learn more - Click here

*** Head of School** - The Westview School seeks a dynamic, enthusiastic and engaging leader who is excited by the school's distinctive mission, history, culture, and values. The appointee will have strong leadership skills and a genuine knowledge and love for children on the autistic spectrum. To learn more - Click here

*** Principal - Julie Billiart Schools** - ("JB Schools") is a network of Catholic, non-public schools serving children in grades K-8 with special learning challenges. Currently operating on two campuses in Lyndhurst and Akron with plans to expand to a third campus in Greater Cleveland in August 2021, JB Schools creates unique learning environments for students with autism, ADD/ADHD, dyslexia and social learning challenges. To learn more - Click here

*** Classroom Special Educators Needed** - Fulltime NYS Certified Special Education Teacher needed in Manhattan, Brooklyn or Bronx private schools for children with developmental and behavioral delays. The position offers a competitive salary and benefits. The ideal candidate is a school-based professional with a friendly and team player demeanor. To learn more - Click here

To top

Acknowledgements

Portions of this or previous month's ***NASET's Special Educator e-Journal*** were excerpted from:

- Center for Parent Information and Resources
- Committee on Education and the Workforce
- FirstGov.gov-The Official U.S. Government Web Portal
- Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (JAASEP)
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- National Institute of Health
- National Organization on Disability
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Education-The Achiever
- U.S. Department of Education-The Education Innovator
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. Office of Special Education

The **National Association of Special Education Teachers** (NASET) thanks all of the above for the information provided for this or prior editions of the Special Educator e-Journal