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The Impact of Using Best Practices to Improve English Language Arts Standardized Test Scores in Rural Central Mississippi Schools

Caroline Greer Ferguson
Mississippi State for Women

The state of Mississippi has always ranked low among other states in the country in terms of literacy. In recent years, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has taken several steps in curriculum, policy, and professional development toward improving their students' literacy rates on standardized test scores. This study is aimed at examining the efforts MDE has made to improve literacy rates for third-grade students, and how these efforts have influenced third-grade teachers to implement best literacy practices in their classrooms. The student researcher chose to focus on literacy best practices in third-grade because of the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) English Language Arts (ELA) standardized test which evaluates third-grade students' reading competency each spring (3rd Grade MAAP ELA Assessment, n.d.). The results of the third-grade MAAP ELA assessment determine if students are promoted to the fourth grade. This assessment is commonly referred to as the "gate test" because it acts as a gate allowing students into fourth grade. If a student does not achieve the academic requirements for this assessment, they will have to repeat the third grade unless they meet the requirements for exemption.

As the state adopted new standardized tests, they created a curriculum that prepares students for these high-stakes assessments. In 2010, the MDE created new mathematics and ELA standards to help students succeed in the university and professional settings (A Path of Progress, 2017). Over the next few years, these new standards were introduced to administrators and teachers and fully implemented into classrooms as part of the teacher's instructional curriculums. In 2016, the Mississippi State Board of Education (SBE) approved the changes to the ELA Mississippi College- and Career- Readiness Standards which are the standards currently being used for literacy instruction across the state (SBE Approves Final Revisions, 2016). The ELA Mississippi College- and Career- Readiness Standards for third grade have six main strands of focus including, "Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, Reading Foundational Skills, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language" (2016, pp. 52-59). Each of these six strands of focus has several sub-foci that aim to strengthen students' ELA skills in areas like vocabulary development and comprehension.

Along with the implementation of new standards, the MDE created the Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan, the Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA), and the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) to provide administrators and teachers with resources to assist in navigating the changes in policies and to further support their students. The Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan outlines the state's guiding principles for improving student literacy including building foundational reading skills. This plan includes foundational skills such as, "oral language, listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, concepts of print, phonics, spelling fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation" (Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan, 2017, p.9). The LBPA focuses specifically on students in grades K-3 reading at their grade-level and showing progress as they move to each grade (Literacy-

Based Promotion Act, 2016). The SSIP is a five-year plan designed to provide the best possible education for students with disabilities. The mission statement of the SSIP reads, “To provide leadership through the development of policy and accountability systems so that all students are prepared to compete in the global community” (2015, p. 2). These state-regulated plans have helped school districts across the state improve their standardized test scores, specifically 3rd grade students on the MAAP ELA assessment.

In addition to their changes in curriculum and policy, MDE has offered more professional development to help educate their administrators and teachers on how to best engage and motivate students. In 2014, the MDE began offering elementary teachers Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling (*LETRS*) training as a way to educate teachers on early literacy skills instruction (Folsom et al., 2017). Dr. Louisa Moats and Dr. Carol Tolman, Developers of *LETRS*, describe the program as, “a flexible literacy professional learning solution for PreK-5 educators” (Life-Changing Literacy Professional Learning, n.d.). *LETRS* offers teachers an intensive look at the best literacy instruction practices and how they can be applied in the classroom (“Teachers Matter,” n.d.). These literacy practices use direct, explicit, and systematic instruction as a way to connect with students and help them understand the information in a more meaningful way.

Literature Review

Effective literacy instruction goes beyond teaching students to read and write; it also provides educators with strategies to teach students how to comprehend information from a variety of text structures (Dell, 2014). It is imperative that third-grade students be able to understand the passages they read because the MAAP for ELA measures a student’s reading comprehension abilities and monitors the degree to which students are reading and comprehending third-grade level passages. Students must read the passages provided and use important reading comprehension skills, such as making inferences, drawing conclusions, and summarizing to answer the questions on the test. To help improve students’ understanding of literacy and improve standardized test scores, teachers are implementing literacy instruction in areas such as vocabulary development and comprehension and are emphasizing student engagement in literacy instruction to keep students motivated and excited about reading.

Vocabulary Development

The ability to understand vocabulary words within the context of reading passages is a challenge for many students. If a student cannot understand the vocabulary terms used in a passage, the likelihood that the student will be able to correctly comprehend the passage is low. In a recent case study, vocabulary instruction was found to be the most important factor in preparing third grade students for reading assessments like the MAAP for ELA (Perkins, 2018). Vocabulary instruction entails students being explicitly taught the meanings of words that are often used in reading passages for their grade level; the more a student is exposed to vocabulary terms, the better chance the student has of being able to understand the words meaning (Apthorp, 2006). Marzano’s six-step process for teaching vocabulary is an example of an effective vocabulary instruction strategy (Marzano, 2004). In this process, teachers use six specific steps to help their students better understand and remember vocabulary terms. Implementing systematic, hands-on vocabulary development strategies helps students recognize and understand vocabulary words’ meanings in multiple contexts.

Comprehension

Comprehension is an integral part of the reading process and without reading comprehension, students are unable to understand and process the information they are reading. Apthorp (2006) attributes reading comprehension as being an integral factor in students' achievement scores. The comprehension process requires students to take information from different parts of the text and put them together to understand the passage as a whole (Kasper et al., 2018). The Simple View of Reading credits decoding and language comprehension as being the two main factors in achieving reading comprehension (Moats, 2020; Gough & Tunmer, 1986). According to this theory by Gough and Tunmer (1986), a student must be able to decode words and comprehend the language the passage uses to accurately comprehend the material they are reading. As students are building their reading comprehension, they are learning to use comprehension strategies such as, activating and using background knowledge, generating and asking questions, making inferences, predicting, summarizing, visualizing, and comprehension monitoring (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). By teaching their students these comprehension strategies, teachers are helping students build their analytical skills in order to better understand the passages on the standardized test and be able to thoroughly comprehend the questions on the assessment.

Motivation

While vocabulary and comprehension are important and necessary aspects of literacy instruction, they cannot be achieved without students being motivated to listen and engage in instruction. Many students do not enjoy reading and feel that reading and learning are not important. Teachers must build students' motivation to learn and read by giving them opportunities to read and learn about topics that interest them (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Students should be given the chance to explore reading independently and discover new information for themselves. Having students feel as though they are contributing to the learning process helps them gain confidence in themselves as learners and make meaningful connections with the information being presented.

Methodology

For this study, the student researcher collected third grade MAAP ELA data from the three elementary schools in the Lowndes County School District (West Lowndes Elementary, New Hope Elementary, and Caledonia Elementary) over three consecutive academic years (2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019). The student researcher administered surveys to Lowndes County School District's third-grade ELA teachers to evaluate their use of vocabulary development and comprehension strategies in their instruction, along with motivational techniques, as they prepare students for the third-grade MAAP ELA assessment. This survey allows the teacher participants to reflect on these instructional practices and their effect on students' standardized test scores. The student researcher compared the teacher's responses concerning best literacy instruction practices they implement in their classrooms to third-grade MAAP ELA test scores from recent years to determine the correlation, if any, exists between best literacy instructional practices and standardized test scores.

MAAP ELA Assessment

The MAAP ELA assessment is administered in two parts on two different days: the reading section, Session 1, and the writing section, Session 2. Session 1 of the third-grade

MAAP ELA assessment has forty operational test items divided into three categories: reading literature, reading informational texts, and language with nine field test items for a total of forty-nine questions ("MAAP English Language Arts Updated Blueprints," 2021-2022). Session 2 assesses students' ability to write an essay based on the given prompt ("MAAP English Language Arts Updated Blueprints," 2021-2022). The time limit for session 1 is one-hundred eighty minutes and session 2 is seventy-five minutes. The MAAP ELA assessment is worth a total of sixty points with forty-eight possible points from Session 1 and twelve points from Session 2 ("MAAP English Language Arts Updated Blueprints," 2021-2022). The Mississippi Department of Education determines a testing window to allow time for the state to score and send back the tests in time for the students to know where they passed or failed. Each school determines their testing dates for Session 1 and 2 within the testing window.

Participants

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, an email was sent to administrators at New Hope Elementary, Caledonia Elementary, and West Lowndes Elementary, detailing the purpose of this research project and asking for permission to survey their third-grade ELA teachers. Please see Appendix A for the consent form that was sent to administrators from the Lowndes County School District via email. Upon obtaining consent from administrators, the student researcher gathered the names and emails of all third-grade teachers and sent an introductory email explaining the project along with the survey link. All participation in the surveys was voluntary.

Materials

The Lowndes County 3rd Grade English Language Arts Teacher Survey consisted of two sections to complete: Section 1: Consent and Section 2: Information on Teaching History and Best Literary Practices Used for Instruction. The teachers could not answer any survey questions until they answered the consent question. Section 1 required teachers to give their consent for their answers to be used as data for the research project. Teacher participants could not continue with the remainder of the survey until they answered the consent question. Section 2 includes two parts: 1. Information on Teaching History 2. Best Literacy Practices Used for Instruction. The first part of Section 2 asked teachers to answer questions about their teaching history including:

- How many years have you worked for the Lowndes County School District?
- Please indicate where you work in the Lowndes County School District
- How many years have you taught 3rd Grade English Language Arts for the elementary school you are currently employed?

The second part of Section 2 asked teachers to reflect on best literacy practices they implement in their classrooms, specifically how they implement vocabulary development and comprehension instruction and use motivation, and how they feel these practices affect standardized test scores. These questions include:

- Do you implement explicit vocabulary development strategies as part of your literacy instruction in your classroom? If so, please describe the strategies you use for instruction.
- Do you implement explicit comprehension instructional strategies as part of your literacy instruction? If so, please describe the strategies you use for instruction.
- How do you use motivation to engage your students in literacy instruction?

- Do you believe motivation directly affects a student's performance on standardized tests/ Why or why not?
- Do you believe implementing best practices for literacy instruction affects your students' standardized test scores? If so, please describe this effect.
- Have you ever taken part in any literacy-based professional development training such as *LETRS*? If so, please describe this training and if you believe it made a difference in the way you implement literacy instruction in your classroom.

Please see Appendix B for the teacher survey used to collect 3rd Grade ELA teachers from the Lowndes County School District's responses. This survey was administered using *Survey Monkey* where all participants' survey results would remain anonymous.

Justification of the Research

The Lowndes County School District is a local school district that has been ranked as an “A” school district for the past two years (Mississippi Succeeds Report Card, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, & 2020-2021). The school district takes pride in the achievements of its students; the vision statement for the school district reads, "Provide a superior educational system that challenges all students to attain their greatest intellectual, social, and personal potential" (“Who We Are,” n.d.). The three elementary schools in Lowndes County School District, West Lowndes Elementary, New Hope Elementary, and Caledonia Elementary, have vastly different demographics, including differences in racial and socioeconomic backgrounds which could potentially provide a variety of data. There is a difference in size with West Lowndes being a smaller elementary school and New Hope and Caledonia being bigger elementary schools.

Data Collection

The design of this study is non-experimental and correlational as it studies the relationship between best practices for literacy instruction and standardized test scores. The main focus of the study is on answering the question:

Is there any correlation between best practices for literacy instruction and ELA standardized test scores?

Data was collected by analyzing standardized test scores from the Lowndes County School District during the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 academic years and surveys from the third-grade ELA teachers from New Hope Elementary, Caledonia Elementary, and West Lowndes Elementary. The teacher surveys were administered using the Survey Monkey software which is an electronic database to protect the teacher participants' identity. Participants' responses were housed in this database and are only accessible to the student researcher and their research advisor. Results from the standardized test scores and surveys were compared to determine the correlation, if any, exists between the two.

Data Analysis

Based on the responses from the administration from New Hope Elementary, Caledonia Elementary, and West Lowndes Elementary, there are nine 3rd grade ELA teachers in the Lowndes County School District. Of these nine teachers, four teachers responded to the teacher survey. In Section 1 of the teacher survey, all four teachers gave consent for their answers to be used in this research project. In Part 1 of Section 2: Information on Teaching History, the teacher survey asks for teachers to discuss how long they have been teaching for the Lowndes County School District, where they teach, and how long they have taught 3rd Grade ELA at their current

place of employment. Of the four teacher participants' two respondents were from New Hope Elementary, one teacher was from Caledonia Elementary, and one was from West Lowndes Elementary. Please see Figure 1 for a graphic of the survey participants' schools. The two teacher participants from New Hope Elementary will be referred to as Respondent 1 and Respondent 2. The teacher participant from Caledonia Elementary will be referred to as Respondent 3, and the teacher participant from West Lowndes Elementary will be referred to as Respondent 4.

Respondent 1 has worked for the Lowndes County School District for three years, and this is her first-year teaching at 3rd grade ELA at New Hope Elementary. Respondent 2 has worked for the Lowndes County School District for eight years and has been teaching 3rd grade ELA the whole time she has been at New Hope Elementary. Respondent 3 has worked in the Lowndes County School District for ten years and has taught 3rd grade ELA at Caledonia Elementary for six years. Respondent 4 has worked in the Lowndes County School District the longest of all of the teacher participants with thirteen years of experience and seven years in 3rd grade ELA at West Lowndes Elementary. The academic years the teacher participants have taught 3rd grade ELA at their current place of employment were not disclosed. Respondent 2 has worked in the Lowndes County School District for the same number of years she has taught 3rd Grade ELA at New Hope Elementary. The student researcher can assume that Respondent 2 taught 3rd Grade ELA at New Hope Elementary during the 2016-2017, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 academic years.

In Part 2 of Section 2: Best Literary Practices Used for Instruction, the teacher survey asks for teachers to discuss the instructional strategies they use for ELA and the professional development they have taken apart in for ELA. On question #5 all respondents answered that they do use explicit vocabulary development strategies for literacy instruction. For vocabulary instruction, Respondent 1 uses the *Wordly Wise* curriculum for vocabulary instruction and focuses on five new vocabulary words for each week. When introducing new vocabulary words, she uses a multi-sensory approach by adding a kinesthetic component to help students remember the words. Respondent 2 implements the four-square model and teaches students how to use context clues and prefixes and suffixes to identify the meaning of an unknown word.

Respondent 3 uses Frayer Models where students will fill out the model by writing the vocabulary word, definition, an example sentence, part of speech, synonym of the word, and an illustration of their sentence. In addition to using the Frayer Model, she also focuses on teaching students how to use context clues to discover the meaning of an unknown word when reading. Respondent 4 uses the four-square model. Through analyzing teacher participants' responses, the student researcher noticed that Respondents 2, 3, and 4 implemented some form of a vocabulary model, such as the Frayer Model or four-square model. However, Respondent #1 from New Hope discusses more of a multi-sensory approach supplemented with activities from the *Wordly Wise* curriculum. This difference could come from a change in vocabulary education over the years since Respondent #1 is teaching 3rd grade ELA for the first time, and the other three teachers have all been teaching 3rd grade ELA for six to ten years.

All of the teacher participants answered that they do implement explicit comprehension strategies as part of their literacy instruction through various strategies and instructional activities. Respondent 1 focuses on one main standard, such as the main idea and supporting details, and teaches students multiple strategies, such as looking back in the story and citing textual evidence, to help them master this comprehension standard. Respondent 2 explicitly teaches and models comprehension skills during whole-group instruction. Then, students break apart into centers to practice mastering these skills using a variety of differentiated instructional

techniques. Respondent 3 explicitly models how to use a variety of strategies that they can use on the 3rd grade ELA MAAP to help them further understand the passage and become a more independent reader. Examples of these comprehension strategies include but are not limited to reading the passage twice before answering questions, identifying the text structure of the passage, and taking notes as they read. To teach explicit comprehension strategies, Respondent 4 uses the WIN strategy which reminds students to closely analyze the text as they are reading. All four of the teacher participants mentioned teaching students comprehension strategies and/or skills.

Questions seven and eight of the teacher survey ask teachers how they use motivation to encourage student engagement in literacy instruction and if they believe motivation directly affects a student's performance on standardized tests. To motivate students, Respondent 1 plans fun and engaging lessons to have students excited about learning. Examples of her engaging lessons include room transformations and having students write about their experience of building and eating yogurt parfaits during their unit on procedural writing and descriptive text. This teacher participant believes that extrinsic motivation can only motivate students to a certain point and on a long and grueling assessment like the 3rd grade ELA MAAP students need to have intrinsic motivation to help boost their performance. Respondent #2 likes to use game-based instruction to enhance instructional activities such as test prep and turning it into a game. Examples of the games she has used with learning materials include test prep Jenga, Connect 4, and board games. She does not believe intrinsic motivation often is enough to convince students to take their time and perform their best on the 3rd Grade ELA MAAP. To help motivate students, she likes to use extrinsic motivation, such as incentives.

To motivate students, Respondent 3 has recently started using Accelerated Reader (AR) to get students excited about reading. She has implemented a coupon system where every time a student reads a chapter book and makes an eighty or above on the AR test, they receive a coupon. This has greatly increased the number of students who want to read chapter books. She believes motivation does affect a students' performance on standardized tests; however, the type of motivation, intrinsic or extrinsic, may vary from student to student. For mature students, intrinsic motivation is enough to persuade them to try their best. However, some students need the extrinsic motivation of working towards a prize to push them to do their best. Respondent 4 implements encouragement into literacy instruction and believes intrinsic motivation directly affects a student's performance on standardized tests. Teacher participants' beliefs on the effects of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation varied from respondent to respondent.

The teacher survey asked the teacher participants if they believe the implementation of best practices for literacy instruction affects students' standardized test scores. All four respondents enthusiastically agreed that using best practices in literacy instruction ensures that the students are well prepared for the third-grade ELA MAAP. In addition to agreeing on the importance of best practices, Respondent 1 mentioned how best practices need to be taught in a specific manner, such as through systematic and explicit instruction.

The last question of the teacher survey asks about teachers' experience with literacy-based professional development training, such as *LETRS*. Respondent 1 has taken part in both *LETRS* 1 and 2 early in her career and discussed how she did not understand these programs at that time. However, she highly recommends the *Phonics First* training offered by the Mississippi Department of education. She also has a master's degree in reading that has helped inform her instruction as well. Respondent 2 has never taken part in *LETRS* training; however, she does have her reading endorsement. Respondent 3 has never taken part in any *LETRS* training.

Respondent 4 took part in *LETRS* training several years ago and still uses the phonics instruction techniques she was taught during this training. While *LETRS* is a prominent literacy program used to educate Mississippi teachers only two of the four teachers have taken part in this training. Only one of these teachers credits *LETRS* with helping inform parts of their instruction.

In the 2016-2017, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 academic years, all three elementary schools had a majority of their third-grade students pass the MAAP ELA assessment. In 2017, the average score of students meeting the LBPA requirements for third grade in Lowndes County School District was 93.8%, with both Caledonia Elementary and New Hope Elementary having over 95% and West Lowndes Elementary having 83.3% (3rd Grade MAAP ELA Assessment Results). In 2018, the average score of students meeting the LBPA requirements for third grade in Lowndes County School District was 94.7%, with both Caledonia Elementary and West Lowndes Elementary having over 95% and New Hope Elementary having 92.5% (3rd Grade MAAP ELA Assessment Results). In 2019, the average score of students meeting the LBPA requirements for third grade in Lowndes County School District was 82.7%, with Caledonia Elementary School having 86.4%, New Hope Elementary School having 79.2%, and West Lowndes Elementary having 78.8% (MAAP 3rd Grade ELA Assessment Results). Please see Figure 2 for a graphic of the standardized test score data compared across the Lowndes County School District.

Through analysis of the teacher survey results, there are several correlations on how all of the teacher participants prepare their students for the third grade ELA MAAP assessments. They all implement explicit vocabulary and comprehension instruction through similar formats and believe motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, affects students' performance on standardized tests.

Implications

Although all of the teachers have various years of experience in teaching 3rd grade ELA and the demographics and population size of their schools vary greatly across the district, each of these teachers discussed how implementing best practices in literary instruction has a positive effect on students' standardized test scores. Because of COVID-19's effect on standardized testing during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, the student researcher had to analyze 3rd grade ELA MAAP data from the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 academic years. Despite this limitation, there is a correlation between the best practices the Lowndes County School District's 3rd grade ELA teachers use and their high standardized test scores. Through this study, third-grade ELA teachers across Mississippi can be informed about the impact of implementing best practices in literary instruction on students' standardized test scores.

A common trend among New Hope Elementary, Caledonia Elementary, and West Lowndes Elementary is their teachers' dedication to preparing students for the third-grade ELA MAAP through engaging research-based best practices which are designed to both intrinsically and extrinsically motivate students. Examples of these research-based best practices include implementing the Frayer or four-square model(s) for vocabulary instruction and teaching students comprehension strategies. All three of these elementary schools are Title I schools which means they receive funds from the Mississippi Department of Education due to having a high percentage of low-income students. In the 2020-2021 academic year, New Hope Elementary School had a low-income percentage of 65.61%, Caledonia Elementary School's was 50.15%, and West Lowndes Elementary School's was 100% (Title I Schools 2020-2021). Please see Figure 3 for a graphic of the low-income percentages for the Lowndes County School district

during the 2020-2021 academic year. Although West Lowndes Elementary has a much higher low-income rate than New Hope Elementary and Caledonia Elementary there is not much difference between the achievement levels of the West Lowndes Elementary students on the third-grade ELA MAAP than the New Hope Elementary and Caledonia Elementary students. Through this study, the conclusion can be drawn that regardless of socioeconomic status teachers can have a positive impact on their students' standardized test scores by implementing best practices in their literary instruction.

Limitations

Due to COVID-19's impact on the education system over the past three years, there are several limitations to this project. First, due to COVID-19, students did not take the 3rd grade ELA MAAP for the 2019-2020 school year. In the 2020-2021 school year, students did take the 3rd grade ELA MAAP; however, these results did not directly impact if a student passed or failed third grade and are not released publicly on the Mississippi Department of Education website. Due to not having test data from the past two years, the student researcher had to compare survey results to test data from 2017 to 2019 which affects the correlation between the survey results and the standardized test data.

To protect their students and staff from COVID-19, the Lowndes County School District is limiting visitors into the building which requires the student researcher to use a digital survey rather than in-person interviews. With limited time in the school day and the added pressure of the pandemic, the student researcher was only able to collect four responses from the nine 3rd grade ELA Teachers in the Lowndes County School District. With the small response size and limited perspective of the bigger elementary schools, New Hope Elementary and Caledonia Elementary, the student researcher's analysis was limited.

Recommendations

If this study was conducted again, the student researcher recommends collecting data from a larger pool of survey candidates and using more recent standardized test scores. Teacher surveys could be sent out to several counties around the Lowndes County School District to determine the correlation in the district's best practices for third-grade ELA. If the survey could be open for a larger amount of time that may help increase the number of respondents. By comparing the teacher surveys with recent standardized test scores, the researcher will be able to make a more direct correlation of the impact of best practices in literary instruction on standardized tests.

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Appendix A
Consent Form to Administrators

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an elementary education honors student from the Mississippi University for Women. For my honors research project I am determining what correlation, if any, between best practices for literacy instruction and standardized test scores. I am conducting a survey that examines best practices third grade English Language Arts (ELA) teachers from the Lowndes County School District implement in their classrooms to improve standardized test scores. I am asking your permission to email surveys out to the third grade ELA teacher(s) from your school.

The survey includes ten questions with two main parts: 1. Information on Teaching History 2. Best Literacy Practices Used for Instruction. The surveys will remain anonymous and confidential and will not affect the teacher(s) or school district in any way. The survey will not ask for any student information or identifiable information. The focus of the project is only on instructional best practices. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. In the introduction of the survey the participant will give their consent for their answers to be used for this research project. I have attached a copy of the survey with this letter for your viewing. Your consent to allow me to send out this survey to your third grade ELA teacher(s) will allow my project to better determine the effect, if any, best practices for literacy instruction has on ELA standardized test scores.

Thank you for your time and consideration in making this decision regarding my research project. Please select the appropriate response below with your printed name and signature. I will gladly accept this form at your earliest convenience. Please email this form to cegreer1@myapps.muw.edu when completed.

Sincerely,
Caroline Greer

_____ Yes, I give permission for the student researcher to conduct the survey.

_____ No, I do not give permission for the student researcher to conduct the survey.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Lowndes County 3rd Grade English Language Arts Teacher Survey

Introduction

Hello, my name is Caroline Greer, and I am an elementary education honors student from the Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, Mississippi. For my honors research project, "The Impact of Using Best Practices to Improve English Language Arts Standardized Test Scores in Rural Central Mississippi Schools," I am determining the correlation, if any, between best practices for literacy instruction and standardized test scores. I am conducting a survey that examines best practices third grade English Language Arts teachers from the Lowndes County School District implement in their classrooms to improve standardized test scores. This survey includes two parts: 1. Information on Teaching History 2. Best Literary Practices Used in the Classroom. All data collected through this survey will remain anonymous and confidential. Answers recorded in this survey will only be used for this specific research project. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Participation or lack thereof will not affect the participants life or work in any way. This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

* 1. I give consent for my answers to be used in this research project. I understand my identity will remain anonymous, and participation in this survey is completely voluntary. (Required)

Answer Choice #1: Yes, I give consent for my answers to be used in this research project. I understand my identity will remain anonymous, and participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

Answer Choice #2: No, I do not give consent for my answers to be used in this research project. I understand my identity will remain anonymous, and participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

Part 1: Information on Teaching History

2. How many years have you worked for the Lowndes County School District?

3. Please indicate where you work in the Lowndes County School District.

Answer Choice #1: New Hope Elementary

Answer Choice #2: West Lowndes Elementary

Answer Choice #3: Caledonia Elementary

4. How many years have you taught 3rd Grade English Language Arts for the elementary school you are currently employed?

Part 2: Best Literacy Practices Used for Instruction

5. Do you implement explicit vocabulary development strategies as part of your literacy instruction? If so, please describe the strategies you use for instruction.

6. Do you implement explicit comprehension strategies as part of your literacy instruction? If so, please describe the strategies you use for instruction.

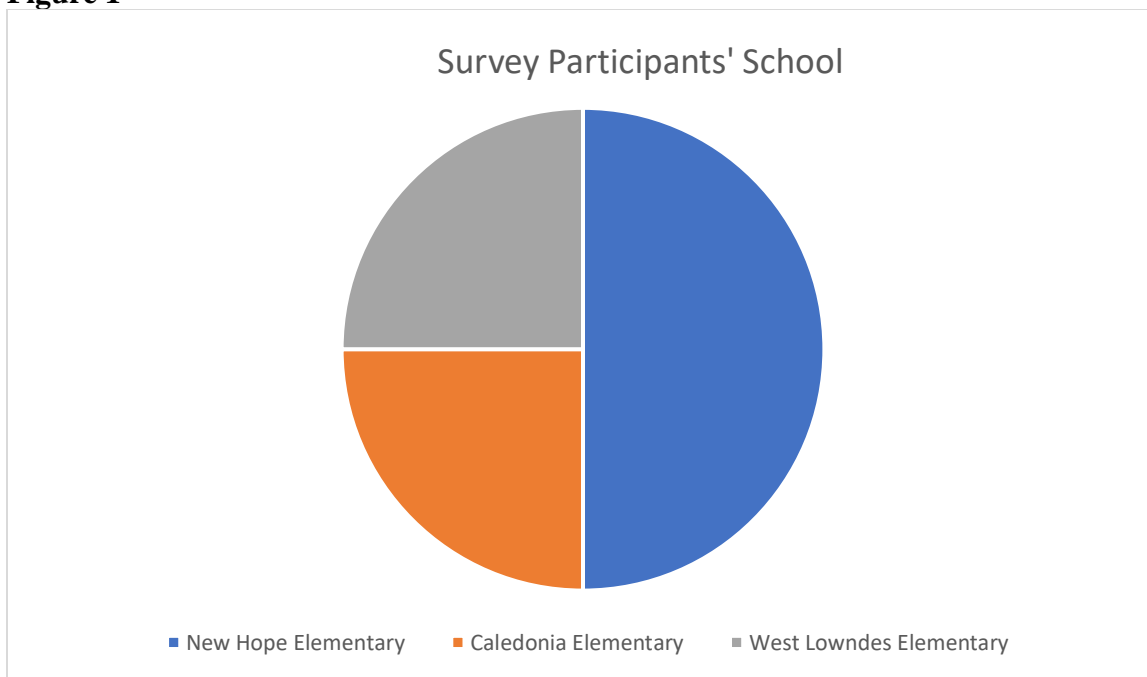
7. How do you use motivation to engage your students in literacy instruction?

8. Do you believe motivation directly affects a student's performance on standardized tests? Why or why not?

9. Do you believe implementing best practices for literacy instruction has an effect on your students standardized test scores? If so, please describe this effect.

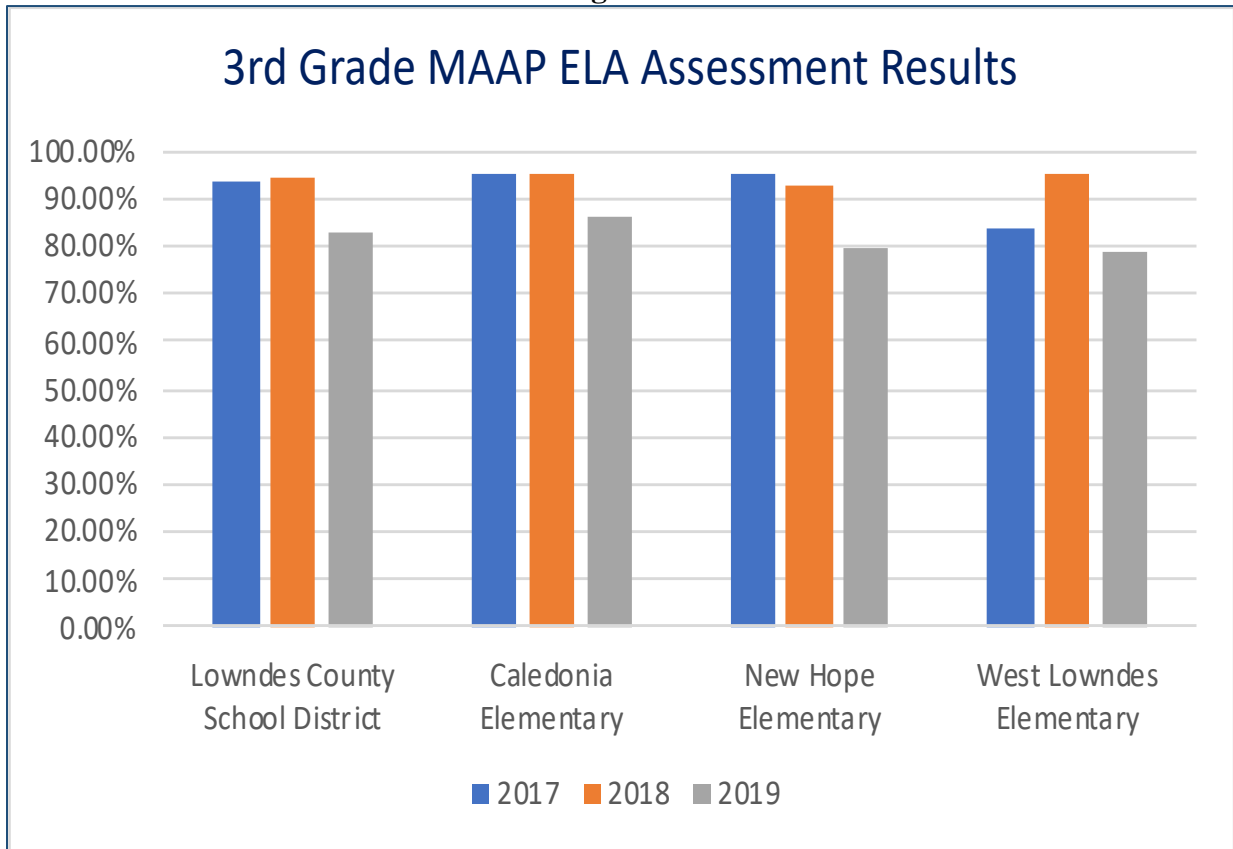
10. Have you ever taken part in any literacy-based professional development training such as *LETRS*? If so, please describe this training and if you believe it made a difference in the way you implement literacy instruction in your classroom.

Figure 1



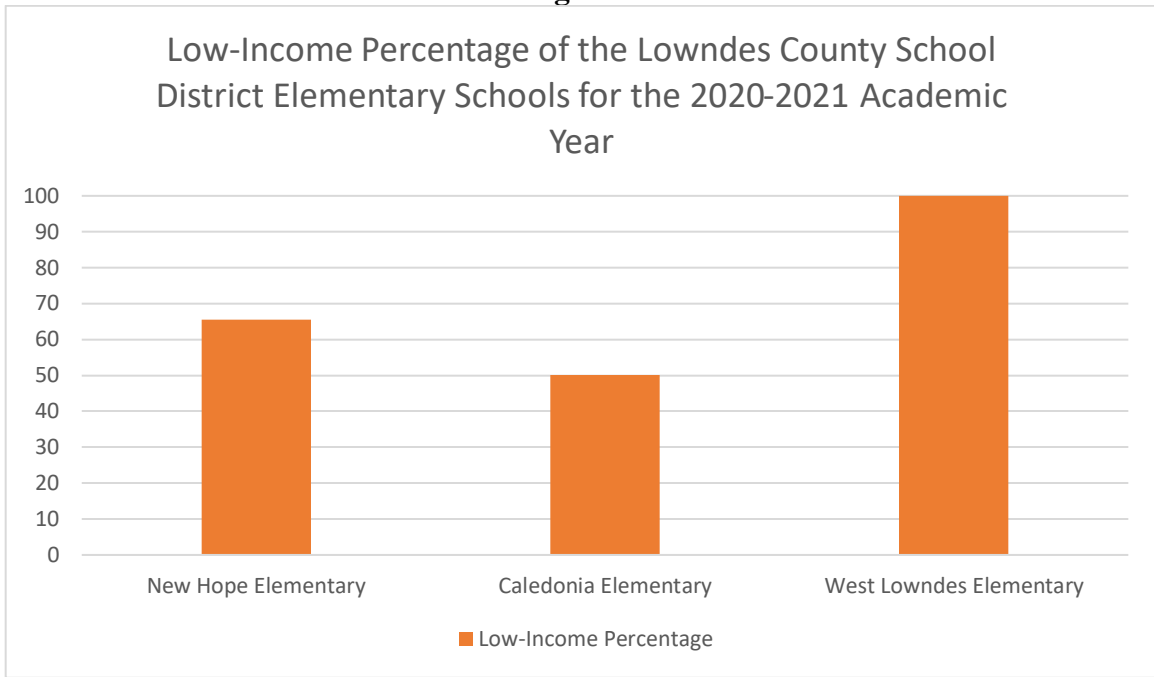
This graphic shows the percentage of teacher participants from New Hope Elementary, Caledonia Elementary, and West Lowndes Elementary for the Lowndes County 3rd Grade English Language Arts Teacher Survey.

Figure 2



Data from the 3rd Grade MAAP ELA Assessment compared across the Lowndes County School District for three consecutive academic years (2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019).

Figure 3



This data table shows the low-income percentage of the Lowndes County School District Elementary Schools for the 2020-2021 Academic Year.