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# Third- Through Fifth-Grade Males and the Reading Gap: Factors That Aid in the Reading Gap in Relation to Their Female Counterparts

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THIRD- THROUGH FIFTH-GRADE MALES AND THE READING GAP: FACTORS  
THAT AID IN THE READING GAP IN RELATION TO THEIR FEMALE  
COUNTERPARTS

By  
Tina Alexander

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2022

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Tina Alexander under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Acknowledgments**

God has been my anchor throughout this entire process. When I started this journey in 2019, I did not know how much I would change or all the sacrifices I would make along the way to get where I am today. I have gained a new set of life goals, matured in so many ways, and strengthened my love for education. I have had different job titles throughout this process from a fifth-grade teacher, fourth- and fifth-grade virtual teacher to MTL (master teacher leader). COVID-19 changed the course of everyone's lives in and outside of school. When I began this journey, I never imagined I would endure this process as a mom, educator, and student through a pandemic. I learned to buckle down and face obstacles straight on throughout this process. This was a very challenging but rewarding program, and I know with prayer, that all things are possible.

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side. My three children, Khali, Ashtyn, and Eli have been so resilient throughout this process. They let mommy study, stay up late, and miss out on some fun family activities so I could buckle down and get my work done. My significant other KP was always my biggest cheerleader and helped motivate me when I felt overwhelmed.

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## **Abstract**

THIRD- THROUGH FIFTH-GRADE MALES AND THE READING GAP: FACTORS THAT AID IN THE READING GAP IN RELATION TO THEIR FEMALE COUNTERPARTS. Alexander, Tina, 2022: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The study was designed to provide key factors that impact male reading gaps in relation to females using a quantitative approach. K-5 teachers and reading specialists were given a survey on reading and how it pertains to males and reading. The surveys consisted of the importance of reading, reading efficacy, reading avoidance, reading challenges, recognition for reading, social reasons for reading, reading curiosity, reading for grades, compliance, and competition in reading. I analyzed the perceptions of K-5 teachers and reading specialists as they relate to males and their reading gaps in relation to female students in a small school district. Some of the contributing factors were environmental, physical activity, motivation, reading selections, and behavioral engagement. The analysis collected from the surveys revealed that some of the contributing factors were motivation, reading selections, classroom behavior, and parent involvement. After analyzing all the data and gaining perspectives from the K-5 teacher survey and the reading specialist survey, I was able to compile a list of recommendations that can help improve the reading gaps between male and female students.

*Keywords:* male, reading, gaps, perspectives

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Reading is fundamental, and it is important that male and female students are given the best strategies and opportunities to perform at their best. It is imperative that both male and female students have favorable attitudes toward reading to ensure they become successful readers, thus helping them to become academically successful. Male students tend to lack the basic reading proficiency that is needed for today's knowledge in society (OECD 2021). I take pride in being a great reading teacher, but even the best reading teachers can find areas in which to improve. I noticed that in the schools in our district and even in my classroom and personal life as a mother of two boys, male students were not as engaged or reading to the capacity of female students in the schools. I wanted to discover (1) why, and (2) the best practices that can be implemented to improve this gap.

As a researcher, I conducted my research with an open mind and kept my personal beliefs and biases out of this process in order to have a clear and unbiased dissertation topic with appropriate, fact-driven, and meaningful research. I did this by surveying all volunteer K-5 teachers and reading specialists in the subject school district. The volunteers were from the subject school district's four elementary schools. I spoke to potential participants at a staff meeting that was set up by each principal at the schools allowing me to explain the research procedures and how their experience, expertise, and recommendations would help aid in determining strategies that can be used to help close the reading gaps between male and female students. I also surveyed reading specialists within the subject district to aid in obtaining a clear understanding of reading gaps and

behaviors as they pertained to male students within the district. In writing an exploration dissertation paper using research, I researched a variety of reasons for males demonstrating such a significant reading gap and effective ways stakeholders can help improve these gaps.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As a previous fifth-grade reading teacher, and having taught males in Grades K, 1, 4, and 5, I often wondered what caused these gaps and what could be done to improve them. According to Reilly (2018), male gaps in reading in relation to female students are very apparent in fourth grade, which is an early age for reading gaps, and only widens as they get older; fourth-grade females tend to read and write better than males. Reilly went on to state that after studying 3.4 million fourth-grade students over a span of 27 years, it was revealed that males did not only perform lower in reading but there was an even more significant gap in their writing skills. Scholes (2019) conducted a survey of 296 eight- to 10-year-olds to see what their attitudes were towards reading and other school activities. This survey revealed that girls showed a higher percentage than boys when it came to reading during their social time. One of the most significant findings from this study revealed that the boys expressed that they have a positive enjoyment of reading. This is huge because most findings have revealed that this is typically not the case.

Pinsker (2019) stated that Americans read less due to the advancement in technology. Research has shown that urban people read more than rural people. Race also plays a big role in reference to reading. Data indicates that 60% of White Americans report reading at least one book in the last year outside of the required text. This is higher than 47% of African Americans, 47% of Asians, and 32% of Hispanics. Wong (2018)

emphasized the fact that the United States has made tremendous growth in academics for girls in the last century. There is history that highlights girls and women being discriminated against in colleges and schools, and now women and girls are academically leading the way. In the subject school district, female students are outperforming the male students in various categories.

**Table 1**

*Student Enrollment in Advanced Classes*

Subgroup	Advanced Placement (AP)
All	100.00%
Female	70.34%
Male	29.34%
American Indian	0.85%
Asian	7.63%
African American	17.80%
Hispanic	40.68%
Pacific Islander	1.69%
Two or More Ethnicities	8.47%
Caucasian	22.88%
Students With Disabilities	0.00%

Male students in the subject school district make up 29.43% of the students in Advanced Placement classes and female students represent 70.34%. This is a significant difference compared to the percentage of male students within the district.

In my experience within the classroom, I have noticed that my male students tend to gravitate towards books that are fiction, and schools and teachers within the district tend to focus more on books that are aligned with the expectations of standardized tests. These books do not lend themselves to fictional books. This was one of several varying reasons this study was able to uncover.

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate current research; conduct surveys of local teachers in two areas, K-2 and 3-5, to gain their unique perspectives; and survey reading specialists for their perspectives. Finally, I was able to compile some useful suggestions to address the gap with practitioners in the classroom and district.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework I utilized in my dissertation included the critical theory approach. I decided I would use this framework due to my topic of males and reading and the contributing gaps. This theoretical framework is where truth is linked to the key question of who benefits, insight, and the impetus for change.

To produce a theory to identify possibilities and conditions from liberation and social systems while being able to disassociate itself with a given political system, Marxist thought used insight from existentialism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critical theory emerged. It combined the Marxist Hegelian inspiration thought. Through observation of society through a critical methodology, critical theory shares the Marxist idea of reification and alienation. Critical theory states that there is always a contradiction between the oppressed and the oppressor. Normative explanatory and practical critique are the methodologies of critical theory. Critical theory explores what should and could be by not restricting itself to what is. In principle, critical theory identifies key factors that provide concise attainable practical goals for the emancipation of society, while stating things that are wrong with the current oppressive social reality (Govender, 2020).

## **Research Questions**

There are significant amounts of research that have been conducted that stresses the importance of reading. This research study focused on three questions to help determine some of the key factors that impede male students from reading at the same level as female students. The following questions that helped guide this research study were:

1. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by classroom teachers?
2. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by reading specialists?
3. What strategies do classroom teachers and reading specialists have to address the reading gap between male and female students?

## **Significance of the Study**

Being a reading teacher and having taught for 17 years, I have seen firsthand the struggles males have in reading. The purpose of this quantitative study was to analyze why the observed struggles facing male students are happening and provide best practices that can be implemented to improve their reading gaps. This study addressed low reading levels of male and female students, how stakeholders can help to ensure male students become stronger readers, and the best practices for helping male students improve their reading.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study focused on reading specialists and teachers who teach grades K-5. The subject district was chosen for the study because it was a convenient location and

provided access to the necessary stakeholders to conduct the research. There were various limitations that affected this study. The study consisted of surveys that were given to K-5 teachers and reading specialists. For this study, I needed participation from as many stakeholders as possible to obtain clear and adequate data. I had to consider beginning teachers who may not have the necessary experience to answer the questions on the provided surveys, response rate, timing at the beginning of the survey, honesty of respondents, and the role of the researcher in the district. All these limitations were addressed to determine this study's validity.

### **Setting**

The subject district is in North Carolina. The subject school district city has a population of approximately 19,787 people and ranks in the upper quartile in comparison to other cities and towns. The median household income for a resident living in this district is \$30,173 a year. The school district demographics consist of five Indian male students and one female Indian student. This is a total of six Indian students. There are 47 Asian male students and 53 female Asian students, totaling 100. The subject school district has a very high percentage of Hispanic students with 507 males and 518 female students and a total of 1,025 altogether. There are a total of 936 African American students with 448 being males and 488 being female students. In the district, there are 300 Caucasian male students and 262 Caucasian female students totaling 562 students altogether. There are only seven Pacific-Islander students in the district. There is one male and six female Pacific-Islander students. One hundred and forty-eight males and 144 female students represent two or more ethnicities in the district and altogether totaling 292.

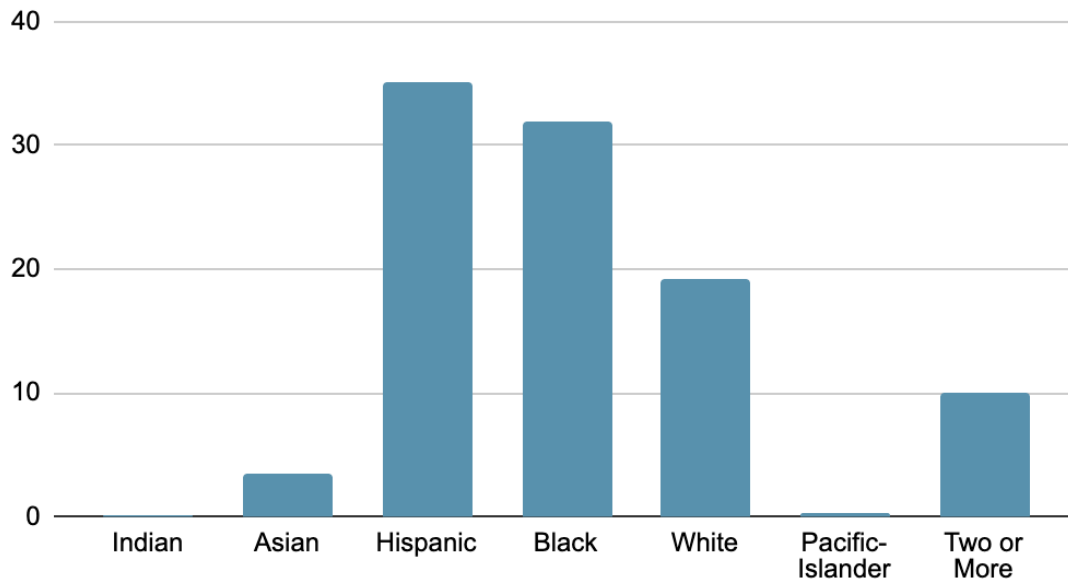
**Table 2***Subject School District's Student Demographics*

Subject school district	Male	Female	Total Together
Indian	5	1	6
Asian	47	53	100
Hispanic	507	518	1025
African American	448	488	936
Pacific-Island	1	6	7
Two or More	148	144	292

*Note.* Total number of students: 2,928.

The percentage totals of the students in the subject school district vary. Indian students represent 0.2049% of students in the district. Asian students represent 3.4153% of the student body. Hispanic students make up the highest percentage of students in this school district with a percentage of 35.9672%. The Pacific-Islander students have a very small margin of students in the district with only 0.2391%. African American students make up 31.9672% of the students in the district. Students with two or more ethnicities make up 9.9727% of students in the subject school district. The subject school district is very small but has a vast variety of different ethnic groups that are represented in the student body.



**Figure 1***Percentage Total of Students***Percentage Total Of Students**

The subject school district consists of three elementary schools (Grades 1-5), one prekindergarten/kindergarten center, one high school, and one middle school. Of six schools, five receive Title I funding and are above 90% free and reduced lunch. Title I funds are used to enhance instruction. The five schools average 58-68% of low-income students who benefit from Title I funds. The subject school district received a total of \$1,515,888.28 in Title I funds for the 2021-2022 school year.

Title I funds will be used to enhance instruction by

- Providing reading tutors at the schools in the district
- Providing Master Classroom Leaders, Master Teacher Leaders, Extended Impact Teachers, and Reach Associates to enhance instruction at the schools in the subject school district.
- Providing quality professional development

- Supporting the Apple initiative
- Supporting Leader in Me Initiative
- Purchasing materials and supplies to enhance instruction
- Purchasing media center books

The subject school district states that the curriculum for elementary school consists of PreK through fifth grade in the district. Using a variety of activities and lessons allows for teachers to be able to provide a variety of instruction on academic platforms by utilizing grouping strategies. The various needs of the subject school district's young learners are addressed with the focus being on the individual needs of the child while ensuring they are met with the differentiated and explicit instruction that is geared towards the North Carolina Standards. The subject school district has four major academic subjects that are taught daily at each school. Those academic areas include Mathematics, English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies, and Science. A 90-minute math block and a 3-hour ELA block that encompasses social studies and science are taught each day. The district has several non-negotiables that everyone must adhere to such as small group reading, math instruction, guided cognitive instruction, formative assessments, teacher-directed reading, as well as instruction on vocabulary. To ensure that all students are successful in this ever-changing world, academic risk-taking, and providing fun educational challenges must happen.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Dedicated, committed, and driven are three words I use to describe my work ethic! I pride myself on being a very hard worker. I am currently an MTL (Master Teacher Leader) with the subject school district and, I teach virtually 2 hours a day

Monday through Thursday to four kindergarten students. I have been employed with this school district for 17 years. In my current position, I work directly with teachers to enhance their teaching, model lessons, co-teach, conduct professional development, and provide support for struggling students. This has led me to create a positive learning environment that motivates students and teachers. The Superintendent of North Carolina Schools has initiated a new reading program titled Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and I am the point of contact (POC) for our district. I have scheduled all of our district's LETRS training for all stakeholders involved, drafted email reminders of upcoming LETRS events, and monitored teacher completion of required LETRS material.

I have been trained in guided reading groups where I pull up to six students at a time to practice letters, sounds, sight words, and practice reading skills with my guidance on content that is on their reading level. I have been trained on the reading monitoring program that the state of North Carolina uses for reading, with mClass. I currently test students of various levels on letter sounds, decoding, phonological awareness, oral language, vocabulary, and reading levels. I monitor mClass data and provide data breakdowns to improve instruction. I created the data wall that consists of all kindergarten students' individual reading levels throughout the year at the prekindergarten/kindergarten center in the district along with its functionality of it.

My credentials include a B.S. in History, K-6 licensure, Master's in Educational Leadership, EdS, and EdD in Educational Leadership (currently in progress). I was named Teacher of the Year at one of the district's elementary schools for the 2020-2021 school year. I have been a first, fourth-, and fifth-grade teacher, and now this year a

virtual kindergarten teacher. I have also been an instructional coach, digital facilitator, virtual teacher for fourth and fifth grade, and a K-2 virtual coordinator for the district. I aspire to be an assistant principal next year in the subject school district.

When addressing the reading research that focused on the gaps with male readers within the subject district, I sent an informed consent form to all potential participants (Appendix A), and I used an anonymous survey that was given to K-5 teacher volunteers and reading specialists to ensure all results were unbiased. With the completion of my dissertation, I hope the research will help to develop reading strategies, programs, and recommendations that will help male readers within the subject school district and beyond.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### ***Advanced Reader***

Students who read and comprehend the text that is beyond their age and grade.

#### ***End of Grade Test (EOG)***

A test that is used to measure student academic performance for a school year on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

#### ***Evaluation***

When the value of something is determined through some form of assessment.

#### ***Fluency***

When someone speaks quickly and the syllables, phrases, and words are smooth and flow together.

#### ***Intervention***

The act to prevent harm or enhance functioning through interfering with the

outcome or process.

### ***Late Reader***

Someone who learns to read slower than their peers.

### ***Reading Gap***

A phrase that is given by the government and school districts when a child at a particular age struggles to convert letters on a page into a meaning thus causing a problem or deficit in relation to reading. Subjects in school as well as most life skills relate back to reading by being able to take a variety of texts and determine their meaning. When this becomes a struggle, reading gaps manifest into achievement gaps.

### ***Standardized Tests***

A test that is given to students and is used to make comparisons among schools, achievement, and aid in acquiring accountability for teachers so improvement in instruction can take place.

### ***mClass***

A science of reading literacy-based system that offers gold standard assessment and intervention strategies used by teachers for Grades K-6.

### ***Reading Specialists***

- Teachers who have been trained specifically to teach reading.
- Teachers who work with struggling readers one on one or in small group settings.
- Teachers who identify which children require more help with reading.

### ***Student Readiness***

A student's current level of knowledge.

## **Summary**

Males demonstrate a significant gap in relation to females in reading comprehension, book selection, time spent reading for leisure, and a variety of other impacting variables. Therefore, stakeholders must research proven research strategies teaching strategies to lessen the reading gaps between males and females.

This research study analyzed influential key factors to help close the gaps between male and female students. There is a growing body of meaningful research regarding males and their reading gaps. Therefore, this work is necessary to strengthen the gap between males and their reading through a thorough examination of critical contributors and best reading practices.

Chapter 2 illustrates the conceptual framework that consists of what the study is based on; environmental factors that aid in the reading gap for males; what can motivate males to increase their reading activity in and out of the classroom; and book selection is pivotal in the choices that males make in reading.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design, participants, instrumentation, threats of vitality, procedures, ethical concerns, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 consists of the data collected and how it helps determine the answers to the research questions presented in the study. The analyzed data from my research study is made available.

Chapter 5 summarizes the work that was acquired during the research study. After the study was conducted, recommendations and suggestions from the research findings were used to identify future research that is needed. The future research is related to

males and their reading gap, in relation to female students. This can be used in or outside of the district and offer future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to analyze the reading gaps between kindergarten through fifth-grade male students and female students while examining the key factors that contribute to the gaps. The research study examined results from teacher and reading specialist surveys on males and reading and what causes male students to overwhelmingly continue to perform lower in reading when compared to female students. Kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers as well as reading specialists were surveyed to gain a better perspective on what motivates male students to read or not read as much as female students and the causes for their lack of reading performance.

According to Reilly (2018), male gaps in reading in relation to female students are very apparent as early as fourth grade and only widen as they get older. Research data have shown that in the fourth grade, girls tend to read and write better than boys. After studying fourth-grade students over a span of 27 years, it was revealed that boys did not only perform lower in reading but there was an even more significant gap in writing. Reilly surveyed over 3.4 million 12<sup>th</sup>-, eighth-, and fourth-grade students. The results revealed that in the 12<sup>th</sup>, eighth, and fourth grades, female students outperformed male students in both writing and reading. The reading gap only widens further in upper grades.

Now, growing research has proven that gender-based stereotyping in male and female students can restrict their potential and learning. There are several strategies that educators and parents can use to aid in gender-based stereotyping as it pertains to male students:



1. Encourage male students to focus more on learning and put less focus on grades,
2. Focus more on homework, and
3. Abandon all stereotypes.

Stereotypes have limited our thinking, and adults have placed limits on male and female students due to the preconceived notion of what male and female students are capable of doing. Regardless of the student's gender, if we abandon our stereotypes, all children will benefit (Adem, 2016).

A variety of research has been conducted that stresses the importance of reading as it relates to male students in particular. The literature from this research study that was conducted focused on three research questions that are aimed to help provide meaningful research to address the significant reading gaps that plague male students.

The following questions helped to guide this literature:

1. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by classroom teachers?
2. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by reading specialists?
3. What strategies do classroom teachers and reading specialists have to address the reading gap between male and female students?

This literature review is structured in the format of scholarly research and how it pertains to males and their reading gaps related to female students. The study will focus on (a) historical gaps in education, (b) race, (c) gender, (d) wealth, (e) the reading gap: factors that aid in the reading gap of males in relation to their female counterparts, (f)

environmental factors, (g) physical activity, (h) motivation, (i) behavioral engagement, and (j) reading attitudes. Following the scholarly research, the end of chapter 2 summarizes critical points. Finally, it leads to chapter 3 and the methodology related to the quantitative method I used in my research study.

### **Historical Gaps in Education**

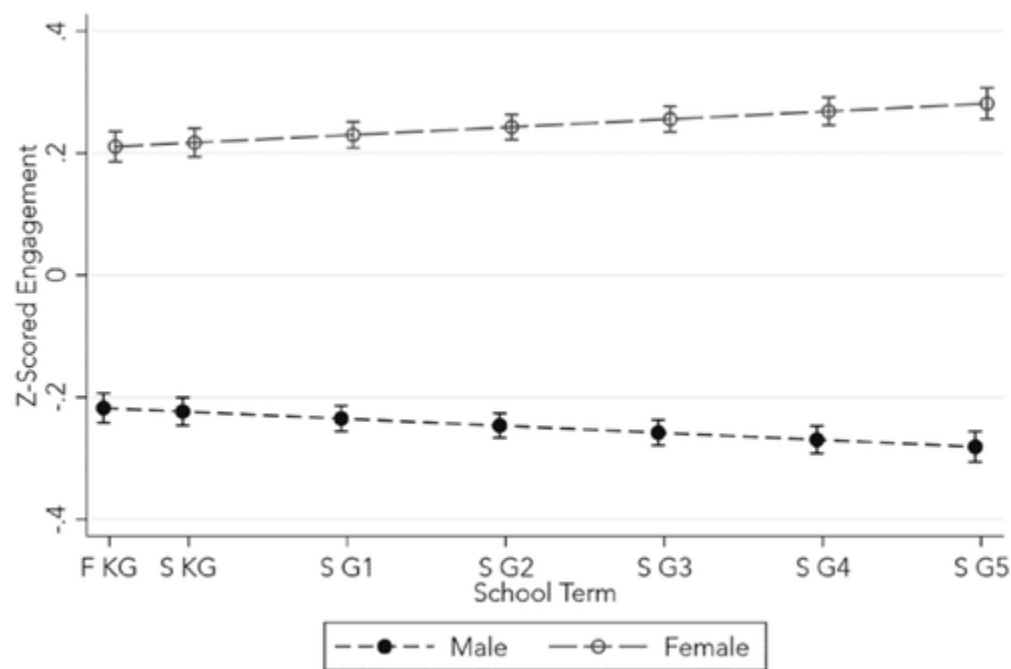
Males struggling with reading in comparison to female students is not new. One of the most famous gender studies in reading was conducted in 1970 using 15 countries focusing on reading comprehension. The study revealed that male students continuously performed lower than female students on reading comprehension. According to Meinck and Brese (2019), over the last 20 years, evidence underpinning the gender inequality debate in education has been analyzed and explored. Stereotypes directly affect the professional actions of teachers' expectations and influences. These stereotypes in turn cause students to struggle with actions, achievement, decisions, and most importantly self-concept.

According to Quigley (2020), in 2019, 10% fewer 11-year-old boys than girls of the same age achieved the combined expected standards in math, writing, and reading in their key Stage 2 Standard Attainment Tests. Figure 2 displays unconditional estimates of behavioral engagement report trajectories for average boys and girls from kindergarten through fifth grade (Pyne, 2020). At school entry, the gender gap in teacher reports of behavioral engagement is roughly 40% of a standard deviation and increases to about half of a standard deviation by fifth grade. The slopes are statistically significant for both boys ( $b = -0.006$ ,  $SE = 0.001$ ,  $z = -4.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and girls ( $b = 0.006$ ,  $SE = 0.001$ ,  $z = 4.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The difference in slopes between girls and boys is statistically significant ( $b =$

0.012,  $SE = 0.002$ ,  $z = 6.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These patterns suggest large and growing gaps in behavioral engagement trends favoring girls at kindergarten entry and over the elementary school years, as girls appear to become more engaged than boys through elementary school.

**Figure 2**

*Behavioral Engagement Trajectories in Elementary School by Gender*



As presented from the research, male struggles in reading has been an ongoing endeavor. Therefore, this research study analyzed vital factors contributing to these reading gaps and how best to close these gaps.

## Race

There is research related to race that looks at the gaps in reading between male and female students.

Lynch (2016) stated that the foundation that is found in all endeavors is literacy. There is a startling difference between Black male students and White male students as it relates to reading. In the United States, only 10% of eighth-grade African American males are proficient in reading. Urban areas such as Detroit and Chicago are experiencing even lower numbers. The National Assembly of Education in 2015 found that only 17% of African American students are adequate readers in comparison to 46% of Caucasian students (Lynch, 2016).

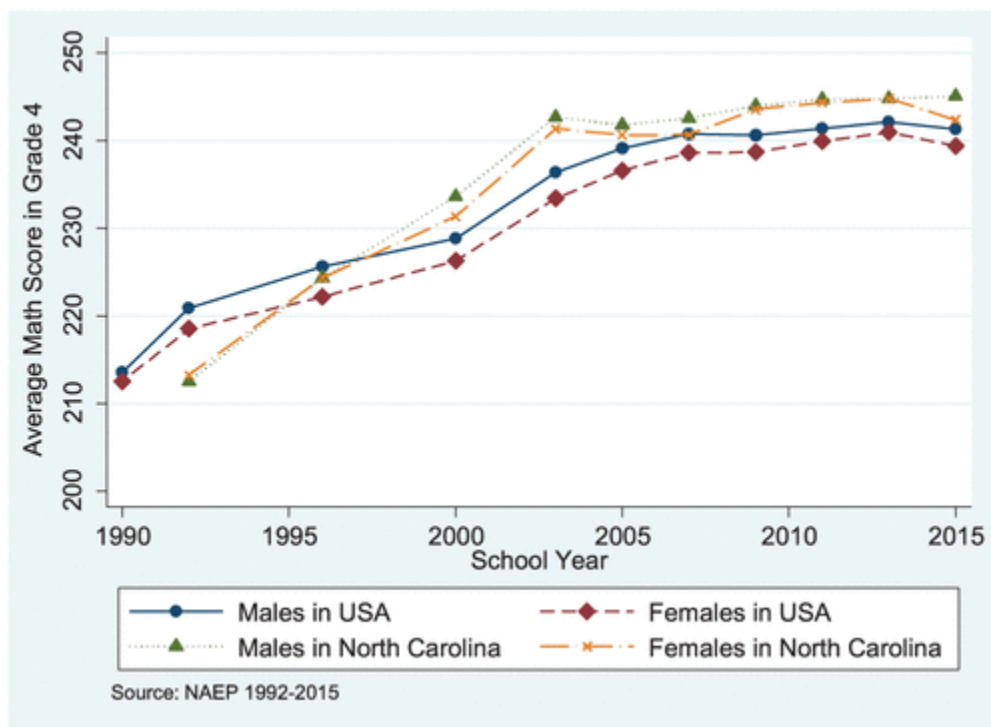
### **Gender**

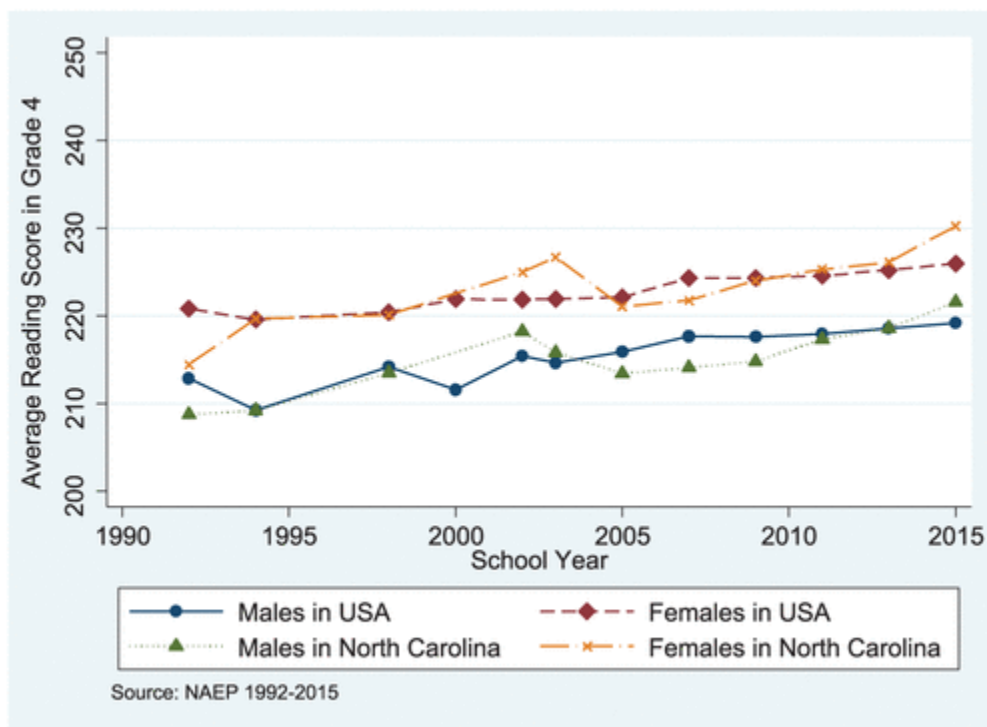
Gender has been at the forefront of this research study. It is pivotal to understand current research as improvements towards males in reading strive to advance over time. Male students and their reading gaps, compared to female students, are prevalent in the present and past research. This research helps to shine a light on this issue while explaining how it has affected male students academically and best practices to aid in improving these gaps among our male students.

Research has shown that gender plays a vital role in the reading gap between male and female students. North Carolina conducted a study looking at reading trends using the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). The reading scores of fourth-grade students were compared over the years and revealed, that in comparison to math scores, there was no gender difference. In reading over the years, there were gender differences where there is a continued display of a difference between male and female students (Muschkin et al., 2020).

**Figure 3**

*Trends in Math Scores, Fourth Grade NAEP*



**Figure 4***Trends in Reading Scores, Fourth Grade NAEP*

According to Cobb-Clark and Moschion (2017), achievement in education is often related to gender. Policymakers, educators, and legislators for more than a generation worked to encode a principle of equal opportunity in education. Girl and boy students generally attend the same schools alongside one another in classrooms and are taught the same lessons. The question becomes why, then, are there disparities in gender achievement that persist? The question becomes more perplexing when we consider that this issue is not a simple matter of an overall edge in the achievement of one gender despite the frequent rhetoric that is around the issue. Cobb-Clark and Moschion further stated that when the focus is on science and math achievement, girls tend to lag behind; this is especially present at the top end of the distribution of upper grades. When the focus is on reading in particular, language skills, grades, and classroom behavior, boys in

relation to girls will underperform. This is more about the system not producing achievement in gender equality than the educational system failing one over the other in reference to gender.

### **Wealth**

For decades, the educational system in America has made great efforts to close the achievement gaps. Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind were major initiatives in 2000 and the focus of the legislation was to spend federal resources on low-achieving students. With these two initiatives and various other local and state efforts, gaps between lower and higher-income students continue to remain. The achievement is apparent to some extent between ethnic minority students and White students (Reardon & Portilla, 2016). Beginning with kindergarten, recent evidence suggest that household income presents achievement gaps and changes little over time (Reardon & Portilla, 2016).

According to Scammacca (2020), reaching far beyond the classroom door are factors that initiate and maintain multifaceted and systematic achievement gaps; however, differentiated student achievement and a better understanding of the patterns of growth help education researchers identify responsive malleable factors in an effort to reduce achievement gaps while revealing critical periods when the interventions that are aimed at narrowing achievement gaps are more likely to be successful.

Achievement gaps are more likely to narrow or widen with typical instruction. This then can shed light on closing the achievement gaps and the extent to which progress are being made. In the absence of researcher-introduced interventions, documenting growth trajectories increases our knowledge and patterns of the effect of instruction that is typical on student achievement. Policy discussions around achievement

gaps of struggling students can raise when insight from new research is spurred (Scammacca 2020).

### **The Reading Gap: Factors That Aid in the Reading Gap of Males in Relation to Their Female Counterparts**

This quantitative research study examines reading gaps between male and female students. To gain a clear picture of possible factors that aid in reading gaps between male and female students, we must explore current research on these gaps.

The gap between girl and boy reading scores is largely exerted by school influence. High-quality teachers along with a well-motivated and talented student body will help establish a successful learning environment for boys with school resources (van Hek et al., 2018). The National Literacy Trust's 2019 Annual Survey revealed that boys indicated that they enjoy reading at 46.5% with "quite a lot" (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). This was compared to girls at 60.3%. Possible solutions such as reading practice during the day, better book access, and well-supported homework were identified solutions for boys (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020).

### **Environmental Factors**

Environmental factors contribute a significant amount to the reading achievement of boys. In children's lives schools are key in socializing contexts. Drawing out the full potential of children is the influence of policymakers and scientists as they are keenly interested in the learning environments in schools. A relatively large portion of the influence between the gap between boy and girl reading scores is exerted by schools (van Hek et al., 2018). Pegram (2016) looked at third-grade boys and surveyed 10 third-grade teachers to gain a better understanding of the reading gap between boys and girls. After



several surveys, the study concluded that motivation played a small role between boys and girls in reference to reading. From the teacher survey, the main reasons boys are lower in reading are they lack male role models and have classroom behavioral issues. It could make a big difference if they could see their hero reading a good book.

Overall, most scholars agree that high-quality schools improve the achievement level of all students but particularly elevate the performance of disadvantaged students (Nye et al., 2004; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). A high-quality school is typically defined as one with highly qualified teachers and optimal organizational conditions, but some previous studies have proposed that a large proportion of students from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds is another indicator of school quality (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Greenwald et al., 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Louis et al., 2010; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). (van Hek et al., 2018, p. 5)

Girls are better and more frequent readers; they enjoy reading more, have more positive attitudes towards reading, and are motivated intrinsically to perform well in school (Buchmann et al., 2008; Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2015).

Jacobson (2016) suggested the impact may be cultural and less to do with lack of male role models who read, and support for struggling boys in reading may cause boys to be discouraged from picking up books for enjoyment.

### **Physical Activity**

According to Donnelly et al. (2016), fitness through physical activity, academic achievement, and cognition suggests a positive association. Pansu et al. (2016) stated reading comprehension in Grades 1-3 is related to better reading fluency in boys in first

grade when they had vigorous or moderate physical activity. Watson et al. (2017) stated an opportunity to increase physical activity based in schools may provide an opportunity for classroom-based physical activity while improving academic-related outcomes. Golsteyn et al. (2020) suggested that there are important implications for policymakers, researchers, and educators as they aim to increase physical activity among students. These implications include (a) assuring intervention implementations where all the benefits and potentials are being monitored for the assured while ensuring that the policy remains alert; as well as (b) weighing the well-being and health benefits against the increased potential inequality in school performance, and having policymakers consult research evidence; and (c) schools may potentially need targeted interventions to increase low-performing students' physical activity without decreasing their educational performance any further.

Research has shown that there is a positive correlation between physical activity and closing male reading gaps. Therefore, the study analyzed current research in physical activity to gain insight into the factors that contribute to males and their reading gaps as it pertains to female students who are not struggling to the degrees of male students.

## **Motivation**

Finding what motivates male students to read is essential in understanding and analyzing the reading gaps between male and female students.

Given that the reading motivation of many students declines, and their comprehension relates to their reading motivation, it is critical to enhancing student reading. Educators must work with other teachers. To foster reading engagement and motivation in students, researchers have identified a set of instructional practices

(Wigfield et al., 2016).

These practices include:

- helping students build their self-efficacy
- facilitating the relevance and importance of what they are learning
- giving them some autonomy over their learning
- allowing many social interactions around reading

Females both in the U.S. and in the PISA international comparison study have outperformed male students in elementary and secondary in a variety of reading achievement measures (Wigfield et al., 2016). It is also reported that boys do not have as high of a reading motivation as girls do. Interestingly, it was found in the first 2 years of elementary school, male students had a very similar competency belief in reference to reading as female students, but there is a decline that is subsequently more rapid in the values and beliefs than female students (Wigfield et al., 2016).

The capacity for a child to understand his/her own performance throughout the school years increases. Children are able to understand their performance with more clarity from the feedback they receive while in school. A child's intrinsic motivation to learn can drop when they evaluate their report cards as well as receive feedback on their performance on tests and academic projects thus causing the child to realize that when compared to their peers, they are not as capable.

Why should we be concerned about these declines? Use of effective strategies, reading comprehension, and grades are strongly associated with reading motivation and reading outcomes.

The early reading gap among diverse subgroups of students in schools has made

teachers conscious of how students' culture affects their perceptions of reading and the literacy materials now being used in classrooms. The reported racial and gender gap among elementary literacy readers leaves African American boys on the fringes of literacy growth and development. Therefore, teachers are responsible for implementing strategies to build an emergent and early literacy classroom that motivates all boys of color to enjoy reading at an early age while shining a positive spotlight on all student backgrounds. Adopting a culturally responsive approach to literacy, increasing student responsibility in the literacy selection process, and supplying culturally relevant texts that positively influence student self-perception will foster motivation for male students of color who are marginalized during the literacy-learning process. (Thomas, 2019, p. 761)

According to Nicola (2017), as parents, we also hold the key to helping boys be successful at reading and thereby improve their chances of success later in life. Nicola suggested the following 12 tips to help motivate boys to read:

1. Having expectations that are high: Research has shown that the reason boys are not good at language naturally is only partly connected to societal reasons. A self-fulfilling prophecy is a risk for our sons if we start with the belief they will not be interested or good at reading. We need to banish the thoughts that are negative about boys not being interested or naturally good at reading.
2. Get involved: The key to your child's literacy is your involvement through reading aloud to them at infancy and encouraging a love of stories.
3. Your definition of reading needs to be redefined: A range of topics and formats, researchers say, have shown boys tend to like a variety of genres. It is

important to expand your son's reading as he gets older from storybooks to newspapers, graphic novels, and magazines.

4. Encourage dad to read: Male role models are key, and research has shown that a way to motivate boys to read is if they have a positive attitude developed towards reading for pleasure.
5. Strive to become role models who demonstrate good reading: It is good for sons to see their mom and dad reading books for pleasure rather than parents reading when they go to bed. This will show your son how powerful reading is.
6. Reading can be fun if you make it: Dressing up like book characters or reenacting stories can help to keep reading for pleasure key and not seeing it as a developed skill.
7. Reading should become a habit: tremendous benefits come from reading aloud to your son daily; as they become older, you could have an evening where everyone reads a book at home.
8. Pick positive role models who are males when choosing text: On a consistent basis, your son should be exposed to new books. For birthday presents and other special events, buy him books along with take him to the library.
9. Make sure to have a library: It is important for your son to see books in the home and not only on the shelves; books need to be seen around the house in various places. This will create value for reading.

10. Expose your son to book signings: Going to local bookstores where there are male authors present who could possibly talk to your son about being an author or talk to him about his book helps to promote reading.
11. Book discussions are important: When reading with your son, encourage dialogue about the characters' relationships present in the book and discuss the theme of the story.
12. Gather information from your son's school: It is important to ask your son's school about reading literacy for boys and the best practices they use to meet the needs of boys and reading.

### **Reading Text Selection**

Book preference between male and female students varies. However, research has shown that reading text selection is a factor that contributes to males having reading gaps as they relate to female students.

. Lipsyte (2011) suggested that one of the reasons boys might perform lower in reading than girls is due to the fact that girls enjoy reading more. It is vital that stakeholders provide reading material that boys enjoy. Research has implied that boys tend to gravitate towards books that are nonfiction, and schools and teachers tend to focus more on books that are aligned with the expectations of standardized tests. That does not lend itself to the use of fictional books. This is one issue that pushes males away from reading. The article examined the books that are being published; at this time, most of the books being published are being published by female writers who are writing about topics that are geared towards girls. The topics are not something that necessarily interests boys. Males prefer informational text, humorous text, graphic novels, stories

about athletes, and comic books.

Yakovleva (2019) conducted a survey with teachers, and the teacher survey implied the main reasons boys are lower in reading are due to the fact that boys lack male role models and have classroom behavioral issues. The benefits of reading include

- Reading is fundamental and dares people to grow: You must learn how to read before you actually begin reading.
- Reading allows you to experience multiple realities: Reading can take you places outside of your normal life. Imagination is able to take shape.
- Reading challenges your perspective: Talented authors allow the reader a chance to experience life through the eyes of others.
- Reading helps you remember: You are able to use some books for reflection.
- Reading helps you forget: Reading can be a way to escape negative thinking.
- Readers don't have to feel alone: Life can be stressful, and a book can become a comfort.
- Reading brings life: If you are an individual who enjoys reading, it can give you energy and elevate your mood.

Stakeholders need to instill in males from an early age the importance of reading.

According to Fletcher (2020), a teacher and mother to a son expressed the need for boys to have books that reflect their interests and reflect them as a whole when she referenced the article titled Boys and Books by McFann (2004). Fletcher developed a 30-item list of chapter books to foster the relationship between boys and reading. According to Fletcher, the boys in her classes prefer to read nonfiction texts, which usually are not chapter books or in series format, as well as graphic novels. Fletcher went on to state she

was hoping that by bringing in some books with strong male main characters, boys would get more excited about digging into a chapter book series.



**Table 3***Chapter Book Series for Boys*

Chapter book	Description
Henry and Mudge by Cynthia Ryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Join Henry and his 182-pound English Mastiff, Mudge, through all of the trials and tribulations of life! This series not only beautifully illustrates the bond between a child and their pet but also shows readers that there are many different types of friendships in the world. This is a great starting chapter book series for younger readers.</li> </ul>
Magic Tree House by Mary Pope Osborne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Of course, who doesn't love the Magic Tree House series! Join siblings, Jack and Annie, as they venture to different historical places and periods in time with a magical treehouse that they find near their home. These chapter books are not only highly entertaining for early readers but the offer a fun spin on history that will have your kids learning how to read while learning about history!</li> </ul>
Nate the Great by Majorie Weinman Sharmat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These are wonderful chapter books for emerging readers. The text features simple vocabulary and the various plots revolve around everyday things that kids can relate to such as a missing picture or a lost cat. Students will love trying to solve each mystery with Nate, his dog, Sludge, and all of the other humorous characters that join in on their adventures.</li> </ul>
Alien in my Pocket by Nate Bull	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The series begins when a four-inch-tall alien crashes through Zack McGee's bedroom window. The story follows Zack and his new alien friend, Amp, through all kinds of crazy adventures that they face together. Your students will love the illustrations on every page, interesting science facts, and unexpected plot twists as they make their way through each book in this fun series!</li> </ul>
Jaden Toussaint by Marti Dumas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a series of chapter books following a (super smart) 5-year-old African American boy bursting with confidence and some ninja dance moves. All kids will love watching him solve real kid problems, like convincing his parents he needs more TV time and less time reading.</li> </ul>
Eerie Elementary by Jack Chabert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This series is part of Scholastic's early chapter book line, which is aimed at new and emerging readers! Especially if they love a bit of mystery and spookiness in their stories! The Eerie Elementary series features fun illustrations and fast-paced plots. It will keep your readers building their reading confidence as they learn all about the school that comes alive and all the spooky adventures that occur as a result!</li> </ul>
Jigsaw Jones by James Preller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jigsaw Jones is a campy series of Scooby Doo like mystery chapter books that your kids won't be able to put down as they try to crack the codes and figure out the puzzles along with the private detective, Jigsaw Jones. With relatable characters and funny scenarios, it's no wonder that this series has over 33-chapter books and remains a favorite among new readers.</li> </ul>

(continued)

Chapter book	Description
Stink by Megan McDonald	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will love the hilarious antics of Stink Moody and his friends. Not to mention all of the random facts and cool science adventures that are packed into each book! These are especially appealing for young boys and may just turn a reluctant reader into an avid one!</li> </ul>
I survived... by Lauren Tarshis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will love the hilarious antics of Stink Moody and his friends. Not to mention all of the random facts and cool science adventures that are packed into each book! These are especially appealing for young boys and may just turn a reluctant reader into an avid one!</li> </ul>
The STAT: Standing Tall and Talented series by Amar'e Stoudemire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eleven-year-old Amar'e Stoudemire has a lot going on. He loves to go skateboarding in the park, takes his schoolwork very seriously, and helps out with his dad's landscaping company. And he likes to play basketball with his best friends—but just for fun.</li> </ul>
Dragon Masters by Tracy West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This 14-book set of the "Dragon Masters" series is perfect for newly independent readers. Easy-to-read text, purposeful illustrations, and captivating yet simple plotlines will help your child soar to new heights as a reader.</li> </ul>
Clubhouse Mysteries by Sharon Draper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ziggy and his friends Rico, Rashawn, and Jerome call themselves The Black Dinosaurs and share exciting adventures. In <i>The Buried Bones Mystery</i>, the boys build a clubhouse in Ziggy's backyard, where they uncover a box of bones while digging to bury their secret treasures. But when the boys try to hide their treasures, they're swept up in a mystery more intriguing—and scary—than anything they could have imagined. Who could have buried a box of bones behind their clubhouse?</li> </ul>
The Bad Guy by Aaron Blabey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They may look like Bad Guys, but these wannabe heroes are doing good deeds...whether you like it or not! This <i>New York Times</i> bestselling illustrated series is perfect for fans of Dog Man and Captain Underpants. Get ready to laugh up your lunch with the baddest bunch of do-gooders in town! Watch the fur fly in the first five hilarious installments in this bestselling series.</li> </ul>
A to Z Mysteries by Ron Roy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A is for Author . . . A famous writer is coming to Green Lawn! Dink rushes to the bookstore to meet his favorite author, Wallis Wallace, and get all his books signed. But the author never shows up! Where is Wallis Wallace? It's up to Dink and his friends Josh and Ruth Rose to track him down.</li> </ul>
Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accidentally built sideways and standing thirty stories high (the builder said he was very sorry for the mistake), Wayside School has some of the wackiest classes in town, especially on the thirtieth floor. That's where you'll meet Bebe, the fastest draw in art class; John, who only reads upside down; Myron, the best class president ever; and Sammy, the new kid—he's a real rat.</li> </ul>

(continued)

Chapter book	Description
Who Was...? Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This series follows the lives of famous people throughout history. There are so many to choose from, both men and women and give your students a glimpse into their lives.</li> </ul>
Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective by Donald J. Sobel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leroy Brown, aka Encyclopedia Brown, is Idaville neighborhood's ten-year-old star detective. With an uncanny knack for trivia, he solves mysteries for the neighborhood kids through his own detective agency. But his dad also happens to be the chief of the Idaville police department, and every night around the dinner table, Encyclopedia helps him solve his most baffling crimes.</li> </ul>
Captain Underpants by Dav Pilkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Captain Underpants</i> is an illustrated children's novel series by American author and illustrator Dav Pilkey. The series revolves around two fourth-graders, George Beard and Harold Hutchins, living in Piqua, Ohio, and Captain Underpants, an aptly named superhero from one of the boys' homemade comic books, who accidentally ("kinda on purpose") becomes real when George and Harold hypnotize their cruel, bossy, and ill-tempered principal, Mr. Krupp. Soon after, Mr. Krupp gains superpowers by drinking alien juices in the third book.</li> </ul>
Press Start! By Thomas Flintham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uh-oh, Animal Town is in trouble! Meanie King Viking has created a dreaded robot army to spread No Fun across the land. On top of that, he has stolen the happiest and most fun animal ever, Singing Dog. There is only one person who can save the day — Super Rabbit Boy! Super Rabbit Boy is super fast and super brave, but he's also a video game character living in a video game world. What will happen when Sunny, the boy playing the game, loses each level? Will it be game over for Super Rabbit Boy and all his friends?</li> </ul>
Mac Undercover by Mac Barnett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>James Bond meets <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> with this groundbreaking fully-illustrated chapter book series Mac B., Kid Spy. The precious Crown Jewels have been stolen, and there's only one person who can help the Queen of England: her newest secret agent, Mac B. Mac travels around the globe in search of the stolen treasure...but will he find it in time?</li> </ul>
Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's a new school year, and Greg Heffley finds himself thrust into middle school, where undersized weaklings share the hallways with kids who are taller, meaner, and already shaving. The hazards of growing up before you're ready are uniquely revealed through words and drawings as Greg records them in his diary.</li> </ul>
Dog Man by Dav Pilkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>George and Harold have created a new breed of justice. With the head of a dog and the body of a human, this heroic hound digs into deception, claws after crooks, rolls over robbers, and scampers after squirrels. Will he be able to resist the call of the wild to answer the call of duty?</li> </ul>
The Woodsworth Chronicles by Nick Eliopoulos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Five young Minecraft players in the real world find themselves transported inside the game they love. But now it's not a game—and they will have to use everything they know to explore, build, and survive! This illustrated hardcover series will thrill and engage fans of Minecraft and action-packed fantasy stories alike.</li> </ul>

(continued)

Chapter book	Description
Ready Freddy by Abby Klein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's Freddy Thresher, a first grader who knows it's a jungle out there. A new chapter book series written by an elementary teacher who's seen it all!</li> </ul>
Andrew Lost by J.C. Greenburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When Andrew's latest invention, the Atom Sucker, goes haywire, Andrew and Judy are shrunk down to microscopic level! Andrew and Judy find themselves lost on their neighbor's dog, where they encounter everything from colossal fleas to crab-like eyelash mites. Now they have to find their way back to the Atom Sucker and get unshrunk before it's too late.</li> </ul>
Flat Stanley by Jeff Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When Stanley Lambchop wakes up one morning, his brother, Arthur, is yelling. A bulletin board fell on Stanley during the night, and now he is only half an inch thick! Amazing things begin happening to him. Stanley gets rolled up, mailed, and flown like a kite. He even gets to help catch two dangerous art thieves. He may be flat, but he's a hero.</li> </ul>
Black Lagoon Series by Mike Thaler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oh, no! It's the class trip from the Black Lagoon. The kids have no idea where they're going but they imagine a day full of ferocious animals, maniacal monsters, and scary aerial acrobatics. And their teacher, mean Mrs. Green, is going to quiz them on everything! When the kids stop letting their imaginations run wild they soon realize that they're going to a very cool zoo. But that won't change the fact that there's never a dull moment in the Black Lagoon!</li> </ul>
Fly Guy by Ted Arnold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boy and fly meet and so begins a beautiful friendship. Er, and so begins a very funny friendship. Using hyperbole, puns, slapstick, and silly drawings, bestselling author/illustrator Tedd Arnold creates an easy reader that is full of fun.</li> </ul>
American Chillers by Johnathan Rand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow this series as it takes us through monsters and scary animals of each state. Every book has a different character from a different state that is tasked with saving everyone from some type of scary creature or animal. The chapters each end with some kind of suspense, but are an easy read for all students.</li> </ul>
Weird School Daze by Dan Gutman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Things have gotten weirder! From a zany graduation ceremony to the off-the-wall antics of their new third-grade teacher, A.J. and the gang from Ella Mentry School have had some weird and wacky adventures.</li> </ul>

## Behavioral Engagement

Research has shown that females tend to do better than males academically, in some respect because they are more engaged in school. Behavioral engagement accounts for a sizable portion of the fifth-grade reading test gaps that favor girls (Cimpian, 2016, as cited in Pyne, 2020).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2019) stated that children are less likely to be able to read at a third-grade level if they are absent chronically in kindergarten and first grade. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggested these 10 tips to help with absenteeism:

1. Use a calendar to set goals for attendance with your child as a means of keeping track of their attendance. Offering some type of incentive as a reward to your child for not missing school.
2. Help establish good sleeping habits to promote a good night's sleep. Young children need approximately 10-12 hours of sleep per night and 8-10 hours of sleep is needed for 13- to 18-year-olds. Sleep is important because a lack of sleep can result in low achievement in middle schoolers and lead to higher numbers of tardies and missed school.
3. Preparation is key to streamlining your mornings. It is important to prepare for the upcoming day. This can be accomplished by getting your child's clothes out and packing lunches and book bags the night before. It is important to always have a backup plan in case there is a conflict in your schedule. Making these plans with family members, a trusted adult, or a neighbor will be beneficial so they can help when needed.
4. Schedule medical and dental appointments not during the school day but before or after school. If scheduling your child's appointment must take place during the school day, it is important that they return to school immediately following the appointment so they will not miss the whole day.
5. Trips should be planned during school breaks. Even in elementary schools, if

a child misses a week of class, it impedes their learning and can cause the child to be behind in their learning. Planning trips outside of school hours acts as an example to the child about the expectations for them to attend school the entire year.

6. If your child is not truly sick, they should not stay at home. Indications that your child should stay home include vomiting, a temperature greater than 101, diarrhea, or a toothache. It is important to note that when your child is complaining of headaches or stomachaches, this could be a sign of anxiety and not sickness, thus causing no reason to stay at home from school.
7. It is vital to talk to your child to get an understanding of why they do not wish to go to school. If you have any concerns about your child's mental health, talk to their school counselor, teacher, or pediatrician for help. It is important to talk to your child concerning any symptoms or emotional struggles they may exhibit with fear of failure, bullying, or physical harm because school avoidance can be caused by school anxiety.
8. Develop a plan with your child's school using your healthcare provider if your child has a chronic issue that affects their health such as allergies, seizures, or asthma. Become familiar with your child's school nurse and use your pediatrician to obtain services at their schools, such as 504 Plans and Individual Education Plans.
9. Be a rule follower. Parents need to cross their t's and dot their i's when it comes to their child's school requirements concerning being late or absent. It is important to know if you need to email, provide a doctor's note, or call

when your child has been out a certain number of days. Parents must be an example for their children.

10. When your child's absences do not add up, you need to investigate to find the reasons and keep track of your child's attendance records. Parents, you know your child. Look into your child's absences to see if they have been themselves lately, or if their mood has changed, or if their chronic illness has become a problem.

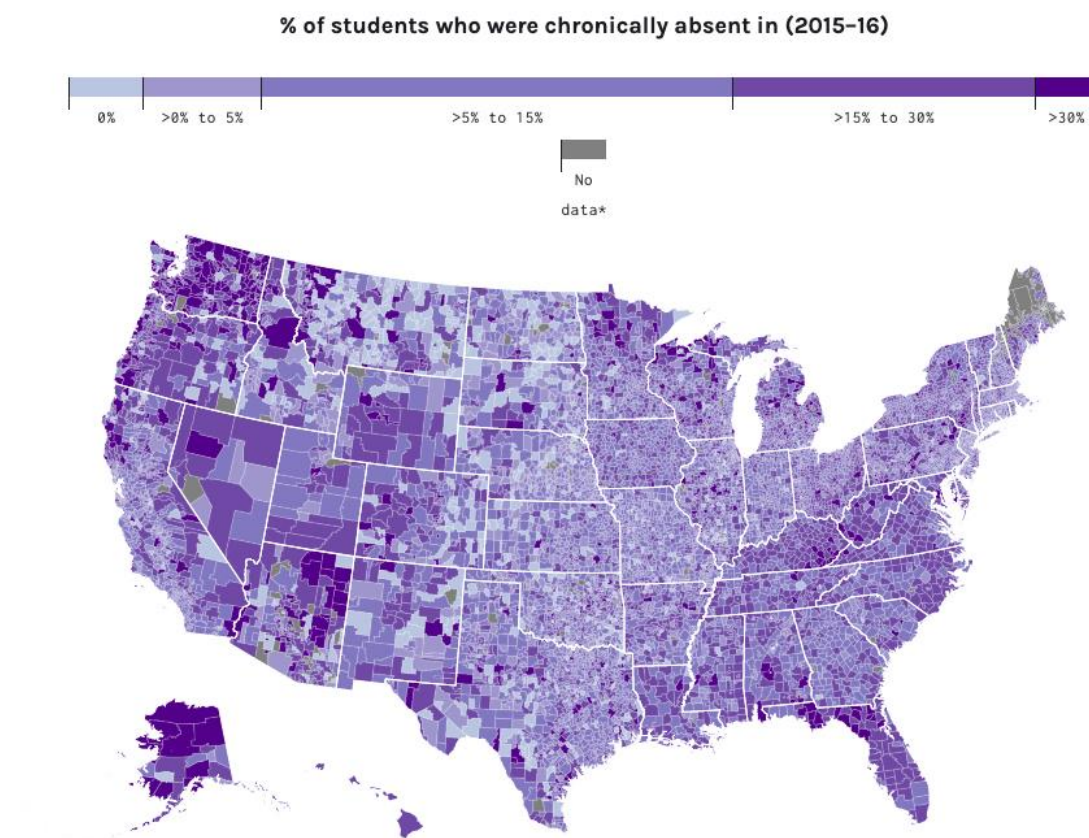
Newman (2019) stated that chronic absenteeism can negatively affect the following:

- emotional and social development
- reading proficiency
- test scores
- confidence in academics

The U.S. Department of Education (2022) stated that from coast-to-coast, chronic absenteeism is being experienced by students. At a disturbing rate, 30% of students in the 2015-2016 school year missed at least 3 weeks of school as reported by 800 school districts.

**Figure 5**

*Percentage of Students Absent in the United States in 2015-2016*



Current research on behavior in males shines a light on various ways that behavior engagement of males directly plays a role in male reading gaps.

### **Reading Attitudes**

Research is ongoing in regard to reading attitudes of male students, and the research that has been done shows that reading attitudes of males impact their success in reading.

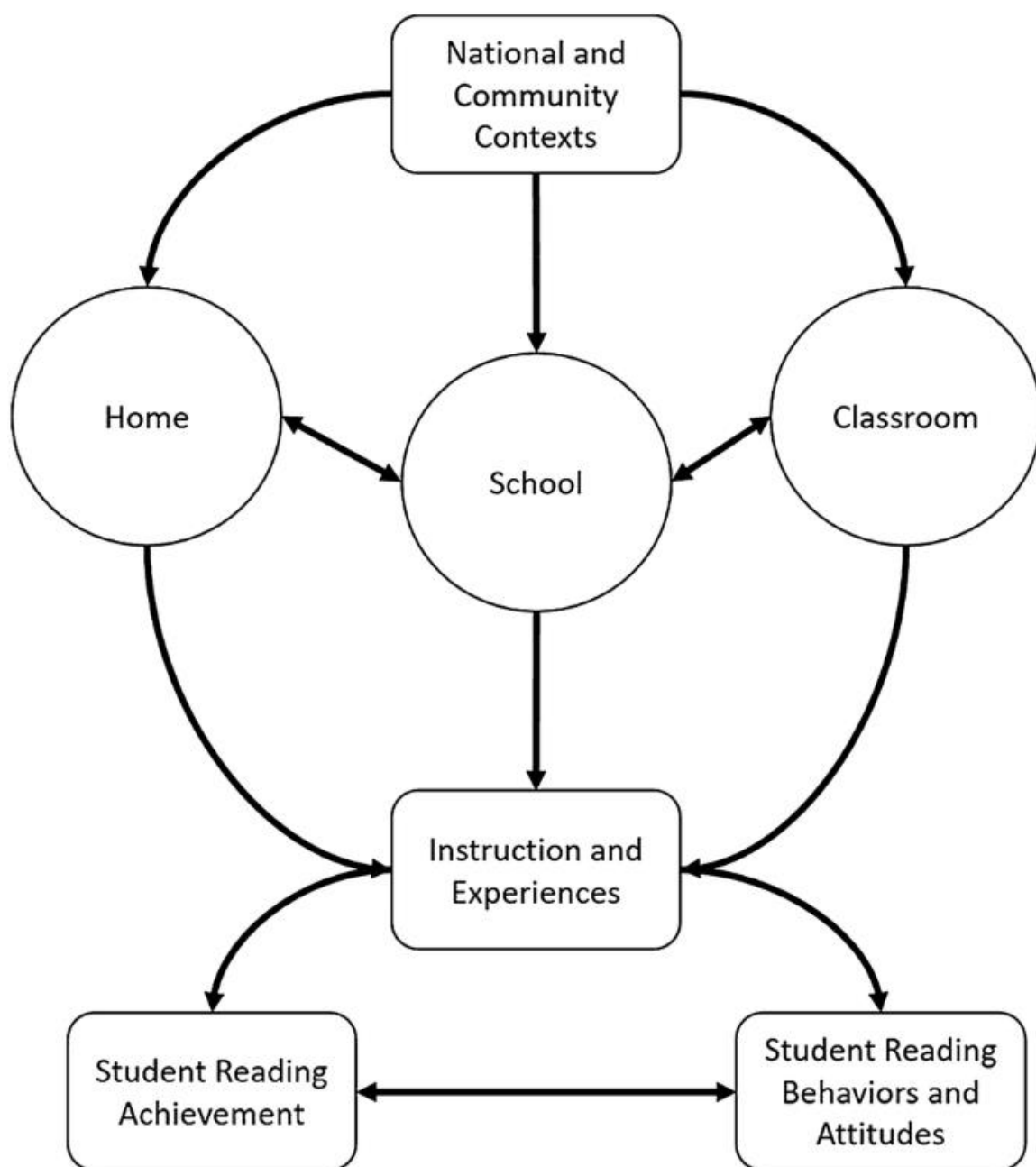
In a cross-country comparison using the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study framework, the results revealed that individual students and their home characteristics are of importance when promoting student attitudes towards reading, as



well as the number of books they have at home and the amount of time spent reading outside of school (Nonte et al., 2018).

**Figure 6**

*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study Framework*



According to Nonte et al. (2018), the major aim of the framework was to analyze the extent to which contextual factors are related to the reading attitudes of young readers.

None et al. (2018) went on to state that the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study was developed to survey boys and girls to identify similarities and differences in their attitudes towards reading. The study revealed that the attitude of boys has an interrelated attitude toward reading with the social aspects of reading as well as other school-related activities such as competitive sports.

### **Summary**

It is necessary to address the reading gaps that male students face because this has been an ongoing issue spanning the world. Reading problems in male students have been prevalent for a long time and continue to be present at this current time. The reading needs of male students range in degree. The importance of that comes from males reaching their highest potential in reading so that the gaps become less apparent than their female counterparts. This quantitative study aimed to analyze why the observed struggles male students have, are happening and identify best practices that can be implemented to improve their reading gaps. This is a crucial part of achieving academic success for all students. It is a journey that must be embarked upon by all stakeholders.

Research has shown that an overwhelming number of male students struggle with reading due to many reasons. These reasons concluded from current research suggest issues with race, gender, wealth, physical activity, motivation, behaviors, environmental factors, and personal attitudes towards reading affect their overall reading ability.

This research study is viewed through the lens of Critical Theory. This theory focuses who benefits from the situation and the insight from the change as it is linked to truth. This is key when looking at the research that has proven through various ways that for these reasons, male students have in the past and continue into the present to struggle with reading at an ever-alarming rate than female students. Critical Theory aids in helping to explain how historical gaps in reading for male students have been at the forefront for a very long time.

Keeping within the lens of Critical Theory helps explain environmental factors and how these factors contribute to reading gaps in males as part of one's environment and all that is offered in how it shapes the people, we become one day. As research has shown, Critical Theory references who benefit from truth and wealth constitute a difference in reading gaps between males of lower socioeconomic status and males who hold a higher economic level. We want to think that race does not play a part in education, but as research has shown, it unfortunately does, and minority male students struggle with reading more than Caucasian males.

This chapter helped identify current literature that has identified the need for males to be engaged in reading through high-interest text and nonfiction text while building off their natural curiosities. Making reading fun is essential while tracking reading progress and setting attainable reading goals. In addition, the representation of strong academic men in text and male role models demonstrating great reading habits through guest speaking can be beneficial.

This quantitative research study aimed to analyze the reading gaps between kindergarten through fifth-grade male students and female students. The research

examined in this chapter, while reviewing the key factors that contribute to the cracks, sheds light on the overwhelming aspects that support why males continue to perform lower in reading when compared to female students.

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## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 introduced the research survey and methods that were used in this study. This quantitative method study identified some key causes for reading gaps among K-5 male students in comparison to female students. This study was conducted by surveying the subject school district's K-5 teachers and reading specialists. In collegial relationships, the focus is on best practices and analyzing student data. It is also important to remember that this type of relationship is not possible without first developing a sense of trust. I analyzed the survey results to see if there were any correlations between the K-5 teachers and reading specialists in reference to possible factors that are directly related to male reading gaps. The survey questions were developed based on the research questions below.

### **Research Questions**

1. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by classroom teachers?
2. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by reading specialists?
3. What strategies do classroom teachers and reading specialists have to address the reading gap between male and female students?

### **Research Design**

The quantitative research design was used to evaluate the varying contributions that aid in the reading gap with male students. The research questions for the study were used to guide the survey questions that all K-5 teachers and reading specialists

participating used to identify key factors in relation to the reading gaps between males and females and to make recommendations along with possible solutions to help to close these gaps. The study was conducted using a quantitative method to analyze and collect research information and data in order to determine the variables that cause reading gaps with male students.

Quantitative research is often subjected to statistical analysis because it involves the use of numerical data that is gathered. The use of quantitative research is underpinned by the epistemological position that it is more useful to study large-scale samples and gather broad information than to gain more individual and in-depth data from smaller groups (as would be the case with qualitative research methods). Quantitative research uses research methods such as experiments and questioning that will provide numerical data and then it will be applied to large sample sets or else it will rely on the analysis of secondary sources as official statistics (Crawford, 2009).

### **Participants**

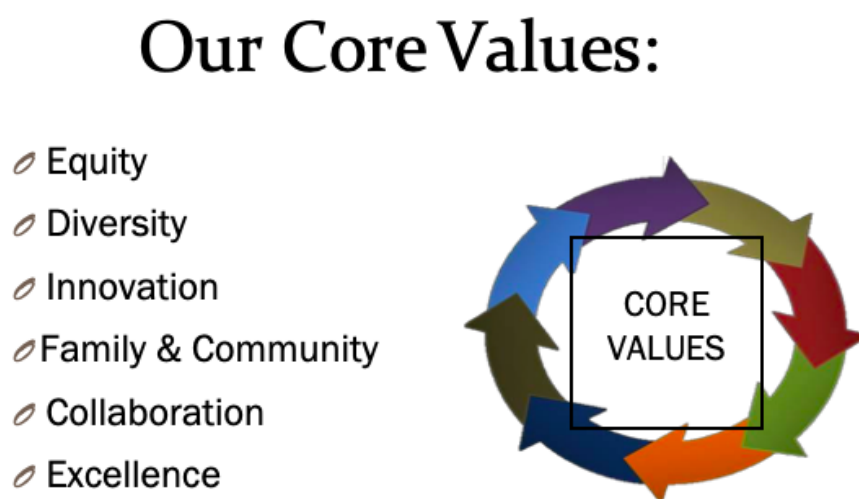
The subject school district believes that all children can learn, and it takes a village to ensure that students are given the best education possible. The district believes that each student can be successful if everyone believes and works together to accomplish what is stated in the mission (see Appendix B) and vision statements (see Appendix C). The motto for the subject school district is “Be Somebody,” and this is accomplished with the mission and vision statements that all stakeholders uphold and will adhere to in order to ensure the educational advancements of all K-12 students.

The subject school district has a new superintendent and with that comes new ideas and a new focus. The new superintendent has begun to implement her R.I.S.E.

(Rigorous, Innovative Schools for Everyone) initiative. The superintendent of the subject school district believes that they must “rally the village” as they aim to design a path to excellence. This is evident in the core values of this district.

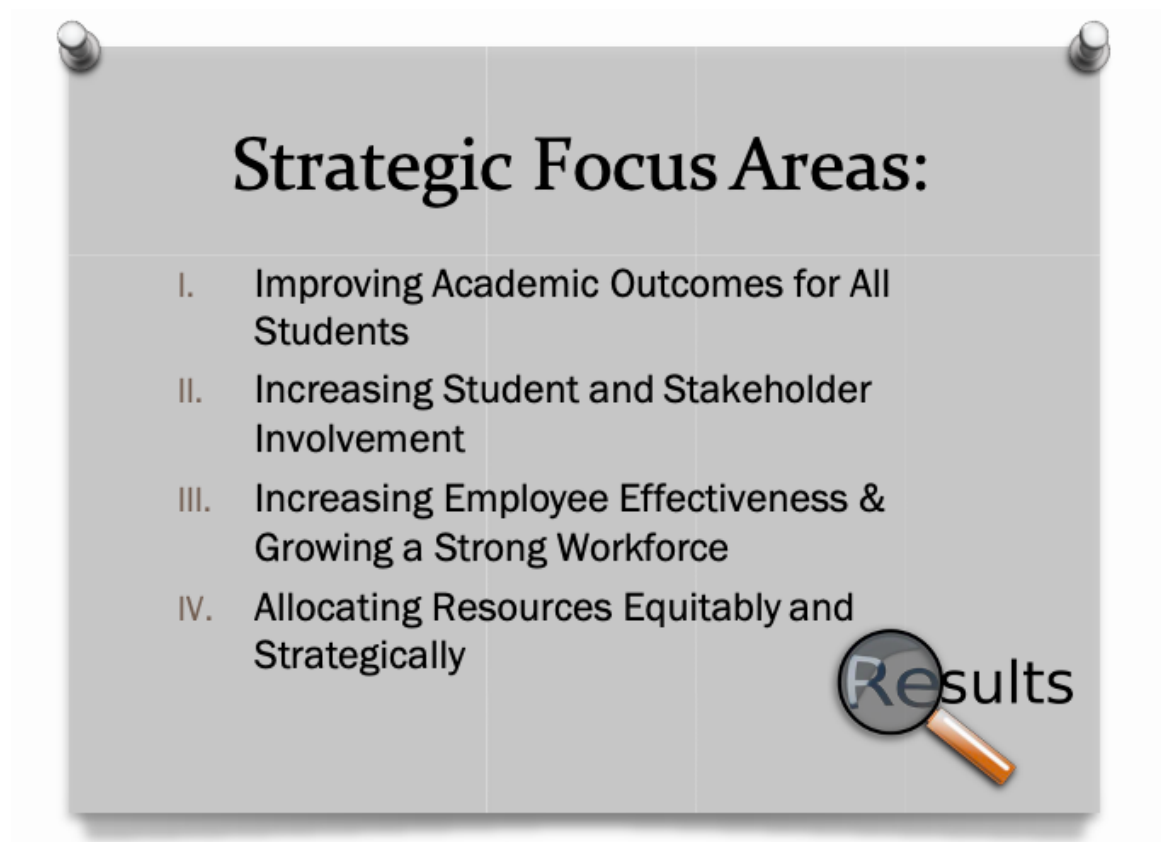
**Figure 7**

*Subject School District’s Core Values*

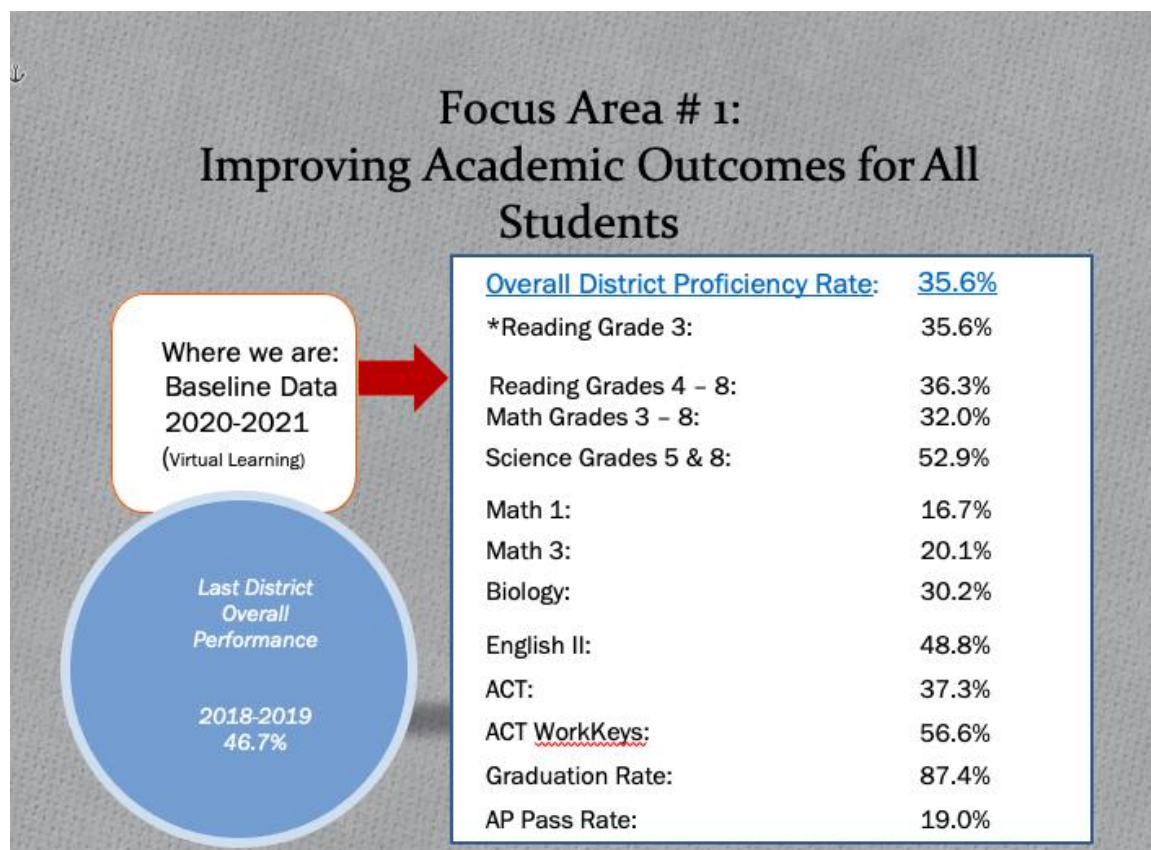


This has thus shaped the system's new strategic plan. The subject district will focus on four areas from 2019 to 2024.

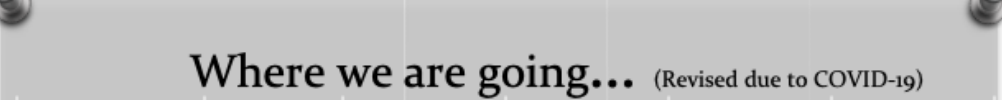


**Figure 8***Strategic Plan Focus Areas*

The first focus is improving academic outcomes for all students.

**Figure 9***Strategic Plan Focus Area 1*

The goal to achieve this is through preparing students to be prepared to enter the world after they leave high school through student goal setting, multiple pathways to ensure that all students are career and college ready, collaboration opportunities, and teacher support by making sure they have a clear understanding of the standards and are able to display this in their classrooms with engaging lessons and activities. The expected results are found in Figures 10 and 11.

**Figure 10***Strategic Plan Expectations*


**Where we are going...** (Revised due to COVID-19)

Assessment /Grade	2018-2019	COVID-19 2019-2020 (No End of Year Tests)	2020-2021 (New Baseline Yr)	2021-2022 TARGET	2022-2023 TARGET	2023-2024 TARGET
Overall Goal	50.1% (46.7%)	—	35.6%	45.6%	53.6%	61.6%
*Reading Grade 3	—	—	35.6%	43.6%	49.6%	55.6%
*Reading Grades 4 - 8	48.9 (43.2%)	—	36.3%	44.3%	48.0%	56.0%
Science Grades 5 & 8	61.0 (69.7%)	—	52.9%	60.0%	65.0%	70.4%
Math 1 (Goal is 10% increase each year)	(15.5%)	—	16.7%	26.7%	36.7%	46.7%
Math 3 (Goal is 10% increase each year)	(29.7%)	—	20.1%	30.1%	40.1%	50.1%

**Figure 11***Strategic Plan Expectations*

Assessment /Grade	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
English II	44.6% (44.2%)	–	48.8%	54.4%	60.0%	66.0%
ACT	46.0% (45.6%)	–	37.3%	45.3%	53.3%	61.3%
WorkKeys	38.3% (63.4%)	–	56.6%	61.6%	66.6%	73.6%
Graduation Rate (Goal is 5% increase each year)	90.0% (89.6%)		87.4%	90.0%	92.0%	94.0%
AP Pass Rate	39.0% (32%)	–	19.0%	29.0%	39.0%	50.0%

Numbers in ( ) denote actual EOC/EOG performance for that year.

\*Represents new method of reporting due to re-norming of test.

2018-2019 -- Improved EVAAS growth status from 20% to 80%|

Performance goals revised to reflect impact of COVID-19 on school closures and 2020-2021 academic calendar and adjusted model of instruction.

The second focus area is to increase student and stakeholder engagement by reducing disciplinary issues within schools, implementing the “Leader in Me” initiative at one the elementary schools, and implementing three superintendent boards: the first being the Superintendent’s Teacher Advisory Board, the second being the Student Advisory Board, and the third being Parent/Community/Business Advisory Board. The boards will enhance partnerships with the schools and the community throughout the year by conducting student and stakeholder surveys.

**Figure 12***Strategic Plan Focus Area 2*

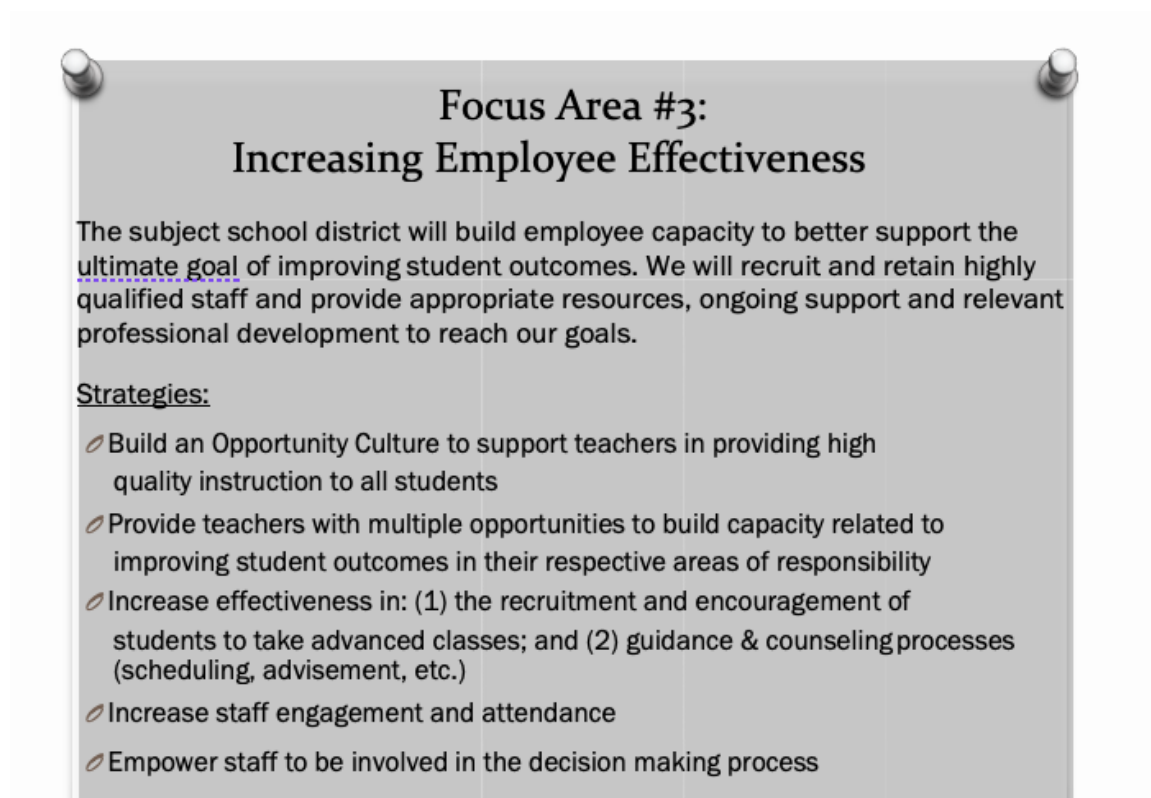
## Focus Area #2: Increasing Student and Stakeholder Engagement

We understand that it takes a village to make our school system a success. We have initiated opportunities to "Rally the Village" in support of our system as we prepare responsible citizens who will eventually become leaders in our community.

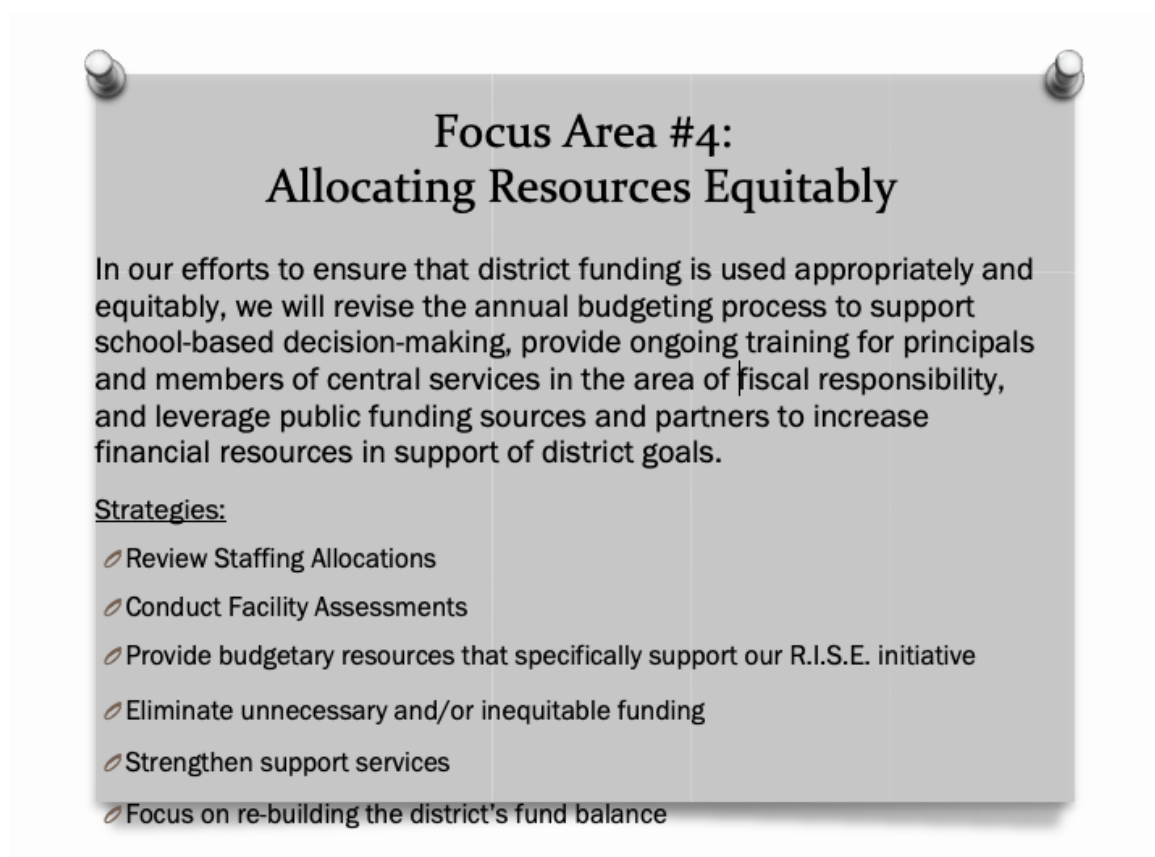
Strategies:

- ✍ Reduce disciplinary infractions and the resulting loss of instructional time through the development of a system-wide Code of Conduct that ensures student and parent awareness.
- ✍ Implementation of three Superintendent Advisory Boards: Student, Teacher, and Parent/Community/Business
- ✍ Leader in Me Initiative
- ✍ Conduct yearly student and stakeholder surveys
- ✍ Conduct yearly Community Fair
- ✍ Conduct Student-Led conferences at all levels
- ✍ Build school and community partnerships
- ✍ Support safe, secured, and discipline learning environments

The third focus area is to increase employee effectiveness through staff engagement, attendance, and providing staff feedback and opportunities in decision-making for the subject school district in order to build an opportunity culture to support teachers so they are able to provide high-quality instruction to all students (Appendix D).

**Figure 13***Strategic Plan Focus Area 3*

The last focus area is allocating resources effectively. This will be accomplished by conducting facility assessments, reviewing staffing allocations, providing budgetary resources to support the Rise Initiative, and most importantly focusing on rebuilding the district's fund balance which took a huge hit a few years ago.

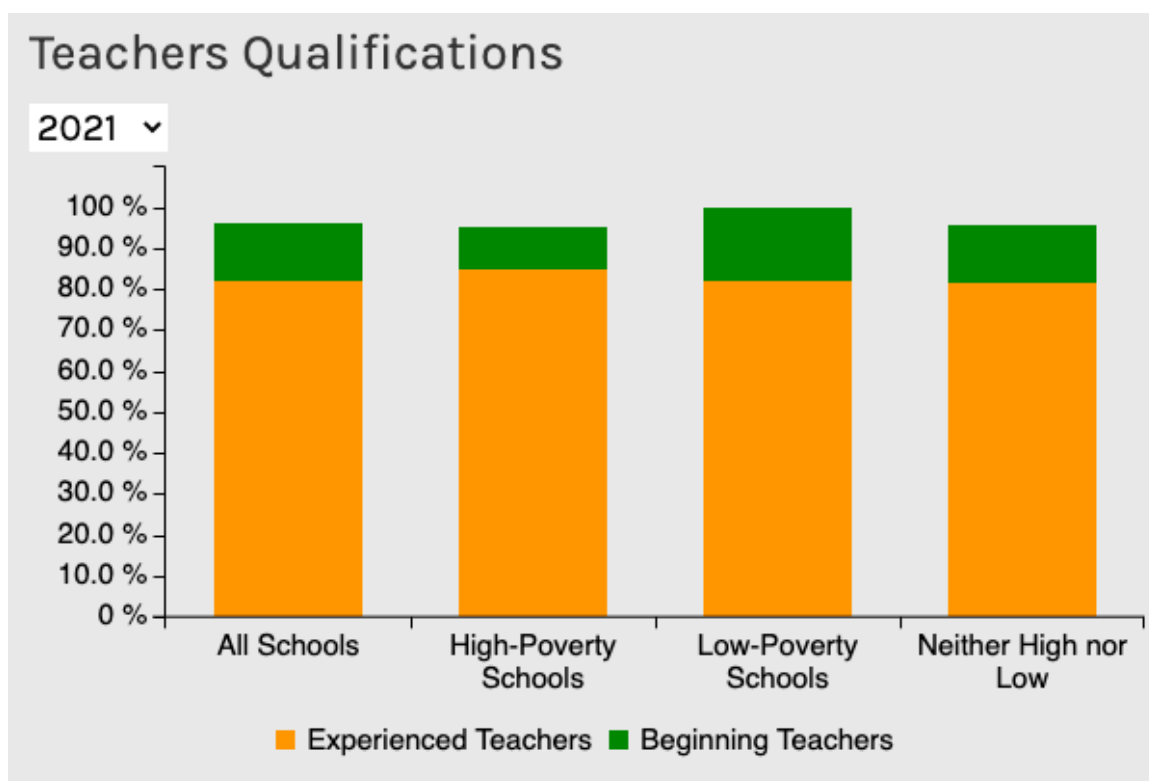
**Figure 14***Strategic Plan Focus Area 4*

The subject school district prides itself on improving academics. The strategic plan for the district displays clear expectations of all stakeholders in order to achieve reading success for ALL students. For this study, the participants included K-5 elementary teachers, reading specialists, and all stakeholders who were directly involved in the educational realm of teaching students.

The K-5 teachers and reading specialists who participated in the study are from the subject school district: 81.9% of the teachers are considered experienced teachers, and 14.3% of the teachers are considered beginning teachers.

**Figure 15**

*Subject School District Teacher Qualifications*

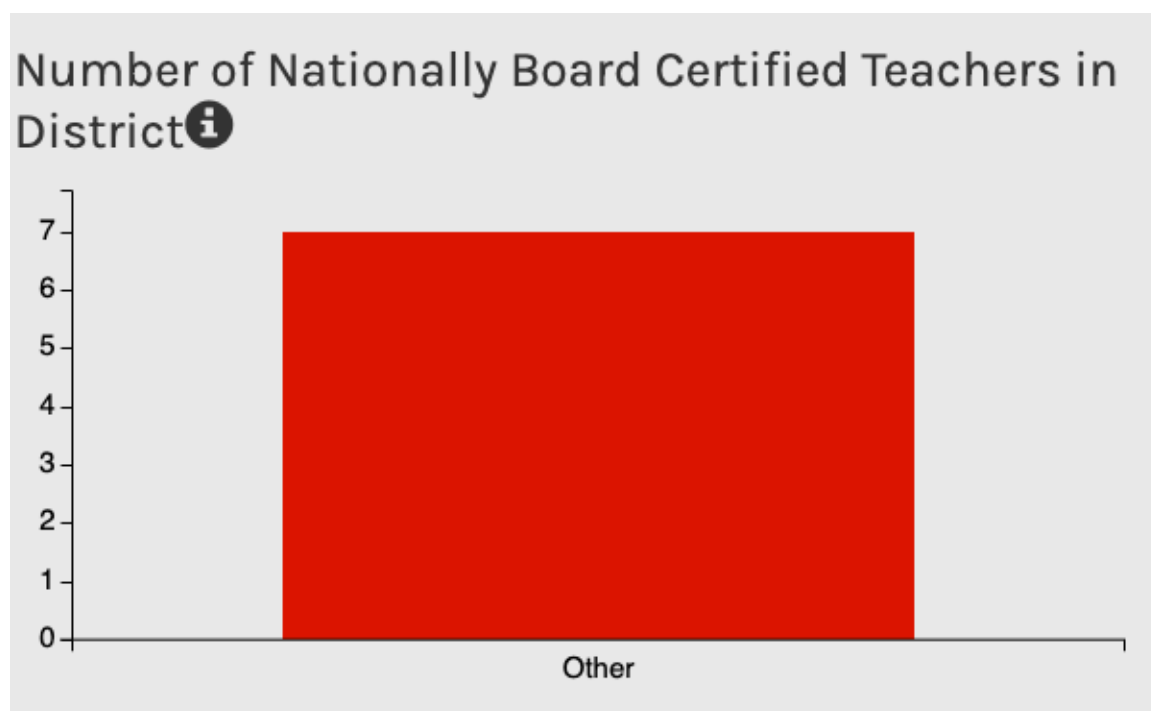


The subject school district has seven teachers who are Nationally Board certified.



**Figure 16**

*Subject School District Certified Teachers*



### **Instrumentation**

There should be three educational research objectives: to find the answers to questions while exploring issues (for academics), to share policies (e.g., relationships between policy makers/training/education/work), and to aim to improve practice for practitioners (Lopez-Alvarado, 2016). There were two surveys used during this study. The K-5 teacher survey consisted of 12 questions that were designed based on questions that pertain to the reasons that aid in the reading gap between male and female students. The survey given to the reading specialists contained nine questions in reference to what they experienced with male readers and their gap in reading as it relates to female students. After receiving permission from the superintendent of the subject school district to conduct this study, I met with all elementary principals before presenting the survey to

teachers and reading specialists to ensure that everyone was on the same page. Surveys were completely voluntary, and all data collected from the surveys were used to analyze cause and effect relationships in male reading gaps.

### **Validity**

The Lawshe method was used to validate the instrument and the validity of the survey and its content. I used certified K-5 teachers and reading specialists at the three elementary schools (Grades 1-5) and the prekindergarten/kindergarten center in the subject district to complete the survey instruments. All certified K-5 staff were prompted to complete the survey consisting of 12 questions in order to gain perspective on the research questions. Reading specialists completed a 9-question survey regarding male students and reading as it pertains to the research questions. Validity is the measurement that is central to social science; regardless of the diagnostic test, or survey questions, the adequacy of interpretations of the measurement outcomes is of concern (Menold et al., 2018). Both the K-5 teacher survey and the reading specialist survey questions were given to a content evaluation group made of educational stakeholders within the subject school to determine validity, and they provided feedback and/or suggestions as they pertained to the survey questions.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Ethics derive from the notion of what morals are considered right for society and individuals within it (Gray & Boling, 2016). Drachsler and Greller (2016) defined ethics as the moral code of external conventions in society, with privacy being an intrinsic part of a human's identity. Data protection issues as well as privacy issues include how different stakeholders process data that are collected (Ifenthaler & Schumacher, 2016).

Instruments that are used to collect data for research are widely used in surveys, even with the survey appearing to be unlinked easily to participants and benign. The conducting of research surveys includes important ethical concerns that should be considered (Hammer, 2017). The following were some of the most prevalent ethical concerns for this study:

- permission from the school district to conduct the study
- teacher participation
- reading specialist participation
- teacher's honesty to the questions being asked
- reading specialist honesty to the questions being asked
- meeting the timeline for survey and interview completion

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The way data are collected is essential, regardless of if they are quantitative or qualitative to maintain the integrity of the field of study research. To help reduce errors during the data collection process, such instruments (modified, existing, or something newly developed) must provide clear delineated instructions. The following consequences can arise from data being collected improperly:

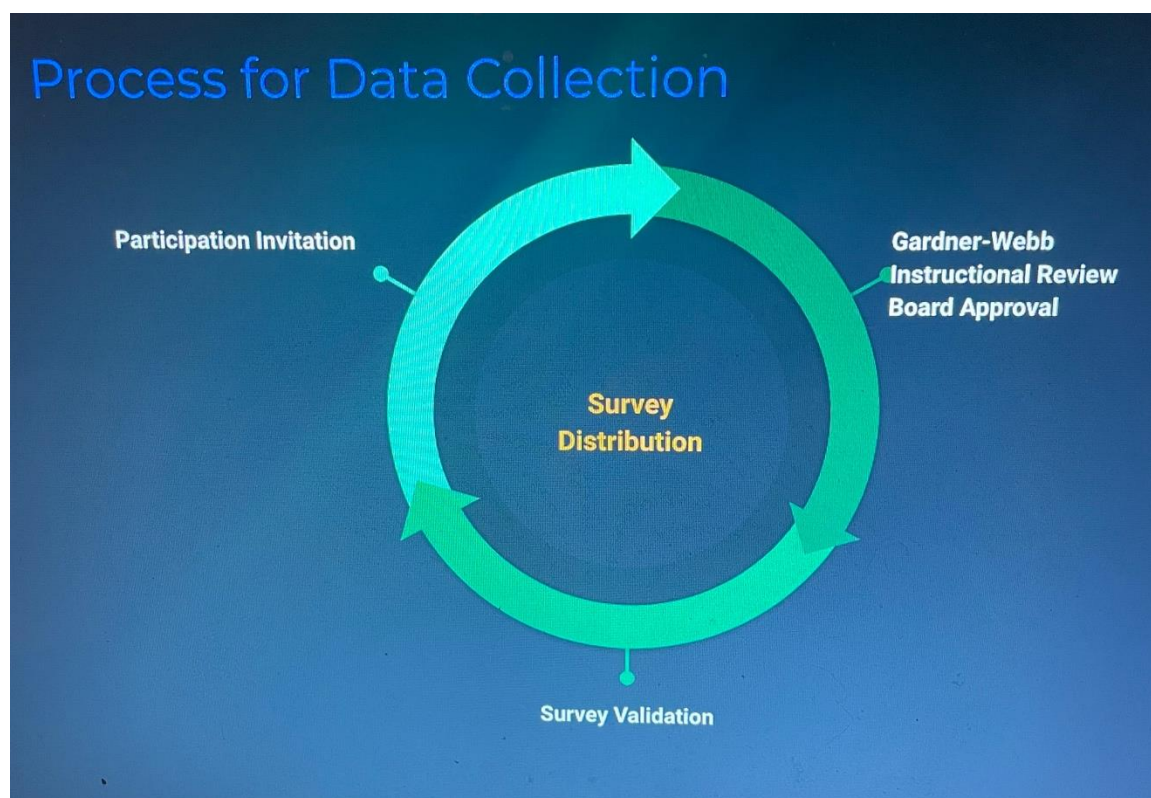
- not having the ability to accurately answer research questions
- inability to validate and being able to repeat the study
- wasted resources because of findings that are distorted
- pursuing avenues of investigation that are fruitless and misleading to other researchers
- public policy decisions being compromised

- human participants and animals being harmed

A quantitative research study was used to analyze various data collected. I obtained district/school report cards, EOG scores, data on male and female reading trends, and data on male and female graduation rates for the subject school district. Surveys with teachers and other supporting staff such as reading specialists were conducted.

All survey questions consisted of questions to help determine the best practices and suggested problems for reading gaps in male students. The survey questions were accessed by a panel of stakeholders who did not participate in the study in order to help determine if the survey questions were valid and ethical. The panel had to consider the following as they evaluated the validity of the survey questions:

1. When presenting a survey, it is important to include the course evaluation and purpose at the top.
2. The survey questions should be focused on purpose and provide clear understanding.
3. The questions should not be leading.
  - Yes and no questions qualify as the leading questions in a survey.
4. The survey questions that allow both open and closed questions are ideal.
  - Open-ended questions can help to gain further understanding while providing significant insight that may not be received through closed-ended questions alone.
5. Consider not asking demographic questions.

**Figure 17***Process for Data Collection*

To distribute the survey questions, I first prepared a draft script to read at each school during their staff meetings to obtain K-5 teachers and reading specialist volunteers so they could provide their insight for the study.

### **Pre-Draft Script for Faculty Meeting**

Good afternoon, my name is Tina Alexander, and I am an MTL (Master Teacher Leader) at one of the elementary schools in the subject school district and a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University. I am here to ask for your participation in my dissertation research study. I will be conducting research in the area of 3rd-5th grade male students and the reading gaps that exist in relation to female students. I would like to get your feedback on possible reasons for

males experiencing such a large reading gap in comparison to female students by completing a 12-question survey for teachers and a 9-question survey for reading specialists that will be sent via email and will only take 15 minutes to complete.

The surveys are anonymous, and no one has access to individual responses.

Permission to conduct this research study was granted by the superintendent of the subject school district. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Gardner-Webb University will monitor the research process to ensure that all information being collected is handled properly. All teacher/reading specialist information collected will not be used at any point to identify you nor will it affect your job performance. Instruments and results will be kept confidential and destroyed when the research is completed. If you choose not to participate in the survey, there will be no penalty.

The survey questions were conducted online. I took all the information that was collected from the two surveys and analyzed the data and made recommendations that will help bridge the reading gap between female and male students.

### **K-5 Teacher Survey**

1. How many years have you been teaching? 0-5 6-10 11-15 15 or more
2. How often do you think the average boy in your class reads outside of school?  
Everyday Three times a week Once a week Less than once a week
3. Do you think boys in your classroom struggle more with reading than girls?  
Always Most of the time Seldom Never
4. Do you think the parents of the boys in your class read to them at home?  
Always Most of the time Seldom Never

5. Do you think boys' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?  
Always Most of the time Seldom Never
6. Do you read aloud to your class on a regular basis (at least 3 times per week)?  
Always Most of the time Seldom Never
7. Do reading grades influence your male students to do better when they receive good grades or to give up when they receive poor grades? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
8. Do you think the boys in your class put forth enough effort in reading?  
Always Most of the time Seldom Never
9. Do you select different reading materials based on the interest of the boys in your classroom? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
10. Do you think boys in your class are motivated or have a good attitude about reading? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
11. Do you feel that the boys in your classroom are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
12. Which factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement? Parent involvement motivation reading material classroom behavior other

### **Reading Specialists Survey**

1. How many years have you been a reading specialist? 0-5 6-10 11-15 15 or more
2. How often do you think the average boy reads outside of school? Everyday  
Three times a week Once a week Less than once a week
3. Do you think boys struggle more with reading than girls? Always Most of the

time Seldom Never

4. Do you think the parents of the boys read to them at home? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
5. Do you think boys' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
6. Do you think the boys put forth enough effort in reading? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
7. Do you think boys are motivated or have a good attitude about reading? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
8. Do you feel that the boys are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher? Always Most of the time Seldom Never
9. Which factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement? Parent involvement motivation reading material classroom behavior other

### **Summary**

Being a former reading teacher and having taught for 17 years, I have seen firsthand the struggles males have in reading. It was important to find out why these observed struggles were happening. The research was able to identify some practices that could be implemented to improve male reading performance to reduce and/or eliminate the gaps. Males and females demonstrate a significant gap in relation to reading comprehension, book selection, time spent in reading for leisure, and a variety of other impacting variables. It was important for stakeholders to research effective teaching strategies that aided in implementing research-proven strategies to lessen the reading gaps between males and females.



## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative method study was to examine key factors that contribute to reading gaps between male and female students by analyzing quantitative trends between K-5 teachers and reading specialists in the subject district and how they pertain to male students to reduce some of the reading gaps between males and females in reading.

Staggering reading gaps between male and female students continue to be present in the classroom. Important information pertaining to the research design, as well as the research questions from the research study, are revisited prior to presenting the findings. This study was designed to investigate current research, conduct surveys of local K-5 teachers to gain their unique perspectives, and survey reading specialists for their perspectives. This study was used to help to compile useful suggestions to address the gap between practitioners in the classroom and district.

This chapter contains a summary of the results and findings gathered from the research study. The quantitative data analysis is discussed in conjunction with the conceptual framework of the research questions that were used to guide this research study.

### **Demographics**

The subject school district that was used for this study is comprised of four elementary schools. Three of those schools have students in third through fifth grades that take the EOG reading test each year. Table 4 has the overall school data for Schools A, B, and C and their EOG reading tests as compared to the state percentage for students who

are proficient and not proficient.

**Table 4**

*EOG Comparisons Between Three of the Four Elementary Schools in the Subject District Compared to the State of North Carolina Scores*

Schools 2020-2021	Grade level proficient (Levels 3-5)	Career and college ready (Levels 4-5)
School A	36.9%	27.9%
School B	23.9%	8.5%
School C	30.2%	17.5%
Subject district	36.3%	19.2%
State of North Carolina	45.6%	28.9%

EOG scores for three of the subject schools reveal that grade-level proficient skills for reading for male and female students are below the state level. School A demonstrated career and college ready Levels 4-5 in reading that are 1% lower than the state average. Reading is a focus area for the subject school district.

**Table 5**

*Ranking of Subject District EOG Scores for Male and Female Students in Grades 3-5*

School EOG scores	1 Not Proficient	2 Not Proficient	3	4	5
Third-grade male EOG scores	37.6%	19.2%	10.95%	24.5%	7.8%
Third-grade female EOG scores	33.2%	19.5%	11.7%	27.5%	8.1%

### **Description of Participants**

The participants in this quantitative study consisted of K-5 teachers and reading specialists from a small rural school district in North Carolina. The survey was sent out to

80 potential volunteers for the research study. I did not have participation from all potential participants; the 34 K-5 teachers and the five reading specialists who did participate in the study are very much appreciated. Tables 6 and 7 display specific details as they pertain to the demographics of the volunteers for this study. Participant data are presented according to the percentage of respondents' years of teaching (0-5, 6-10, 11-15, and 15 or more) experience for both K-5 teacher participants and reading specialists. The surveys were created to obtain data on K-5 teachers' and reading specialists' perceptions of factors that contribute to the reading gaps of male students in comparison to female students.

**Table 6**

*Demographic Data K-5 Teachers*

Demographic	Percentage
K-5 Teachers	87.2%
Years as teacher 0-5	20.6%
Years as teacher 6-10	14.7%
Years as teachers 11-15	23.5%

**Table 7**

*Demographic Data Reading Specialist*

Demographic	Percentage
Reading specialist	12.8%
Years as a reading specialist 0-5	0%
Years as teacher 6-10	60%
Years as teachers 11-15	20%

## **Correlation and Research**

The three research questions were the driving force for this research study. There are apparent correlations between the survey questions and the research questions for the K-5 teachers and the reading specialists who participated in this study. Research question 1 asked about the key factors that contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as they are perceived by teachers. K-5 teacher survey questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12 aided in answering this question. There were no survey questions from the reading specialists survey to help answer this question.

Research question 2 was geared towards the key factors contributing to the reading gap between males and females from the perception of the reading specialists. Reading specialist survey questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 were vital in answering this question. There were no K-5 teacher survey questions that helped to answer this question.

The third research question focused on the strategies that both K-5 teachers and reading specialists felt are necessary and useful when bridging the reading gap between males and females. The survey questions from the K-5 teachers that helped to answer this question were questions 6 and 9. Reading specialist survey question 9 helped to answer this question.

**Table 8***Correlation of Research Questions and Survey Questions*

Research questions	K-5 Teachers	Reading specialists
Research Question 1: What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by classroom teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Survey Question 2: How often do you think the average male in your class reads outside of school?</li> <li>● Survey Question 3: Do you think males in your classroom struggle more with reading than females?</li> <li>● Survey Question 4: Do you think the parents of the males in your classroom read to them at home?</li> <li>● Survey Question 5: Do you think males' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?</li> <li>● Survey Question 7: Do reading grades influence your male students to do better when they receive good grades or to give up when they receive poor grades?</li> <li>● Survey Question 8: Do you think the males in your class put forth enough effort in reading?</li> <li>● Survey Question 10: Do you think males in your class are motivated or have a good attitude about reading?</li> <li>● Survey Question 11: Do you feel that males in your classroom are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher?</li> <li>● Survey Question 12: What factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● None</li> </ul>

(continued)

Research questions	K-5 Teachers	Reading specialists
<p>Research Question 2: What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by reading specialists?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey Question 2: How often do you think the average male in your class reads outside of school?</li> <li>• Survey Question 3: Do you think males struggle more with reading than females?</li> <li>• Survey Question 4: Do you think parents of males read to them at home?</li> <li>• Survey Question 5: Do you think males' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?</li> <li>• Survey Question 6: Do you think males put forth enough effort in reading?</li> <li>• Survey Question 7: Do you think males are motivated or have a good attitude about reading?</li> <li>• Survey Question 8: Do you feel that the males are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher?</li> <li>• Survey Question 9: Which factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement?</li> </ul>
<p>Research Question 3: What strategies do classroom teachers and reading specialists have to address the reading gap between male and female students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey Question 6: Do you read aloud to your class on a regular basis?</li> <li>• Survey Question 9: Do you select different reading materials based on the interest of the males in your classroom?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey Question 9: Which factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement?</li> </ul>

## **Findings by Research Questions**

The instrument used for the study included Google Forms. The survey was emailed to K-5 teachers and reading specialists. To get to the appropriate survey, participants were asked to identify as a K-5 teacher or reading specialist. Then they were presented with the 12-question K-5 teacher survey for K-5 teachers and the 9-question reading specialist survey if they identified as a reading specialist. Both surveys were designed to obtain data to analyze male gaps in reading and possible contributing factors. The number of years as a K-5 teacher was broken into categories of 0-5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and 15 or more years of experience. The number of years as a reading specialist was also broken into categories of 0-5 years of experience, 6-10 years of experience, and 11-15 years of experience.

## **Research Questions**

This study was explored by K-5 teachers and reading specialists who work with children daily on reading. Three research questions helped to guide this research study.

1. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by classroom teachers?
2. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by reading specialists?
3. What strategies do classroom teachers and reading specialists have to address the reading gap between male and female students?

### ***Research Question 1: What Key Factors Contribute to the Reading Gap Between Male and Female Students as Perceived by Classroom Teachers?***

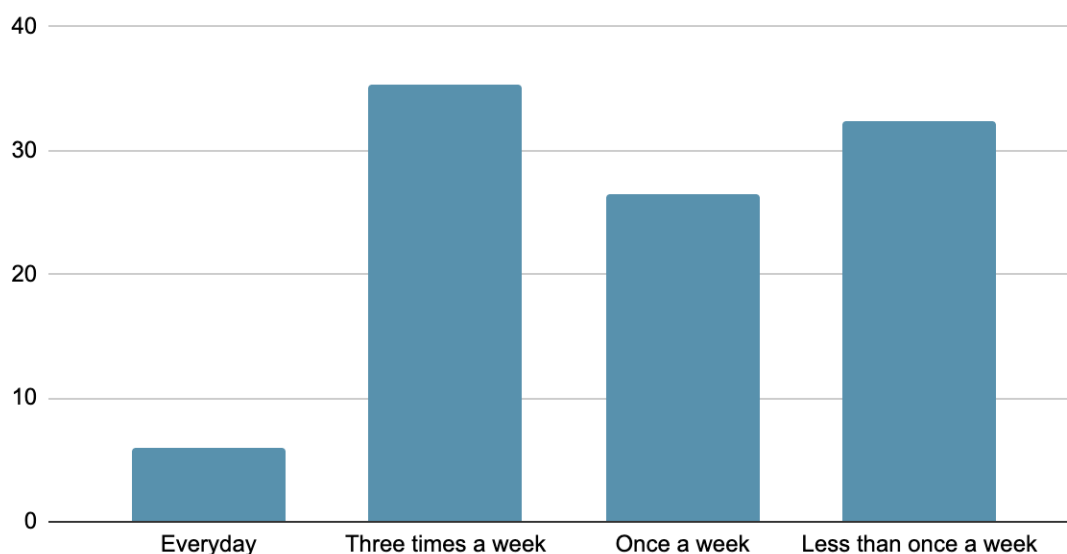
To address this question, K-5 teacher participants completed a 12-question

survey, responding to most of the questions with always, most of the time, seldom, or never to reading questions pertaining to teaching reading to male students. K-5 teacher survey question 2 was, “How often do you think the average male in your class reads outside of school?” The K-5 teacher participants responded with 35.3% three times a week, 32.4% less than once a week, 26.5% once a week, and only 5.9% every day. This survey question reveals that most of the K-5 teachers surveyed believe that male students are not putting forth much effort to read outside of the school environment.

**Figure 18**

*K-5 Teacher Survey Question 2*

Survey Question #2 How often do you think the average male in your class reads outside of school?



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 3 was, “Do you think males in your classroom struggle more with reading than females?” It was revealed that 55.9% of the K-5 teachers surveyed believe that most of the time males tend to struggle with reading more than female students in their classrooms; 41.2% of the K-5 teachers surveyed believe that male

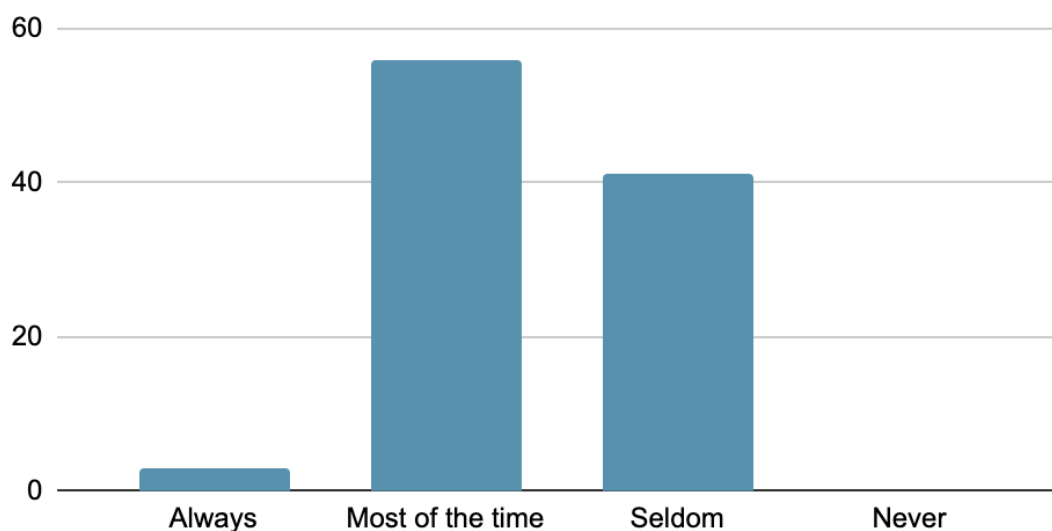


students seldomly struggle more with reading than their female students, and 2.9% of the K-5 teachers surveyed believe that male students always struggle more than female students. Of the K-5 teachers surveyed, none believed that male students never struggle more reading than female students in their classroom.

**Figure 19**

*K-5 Teacher Survey Question 3*

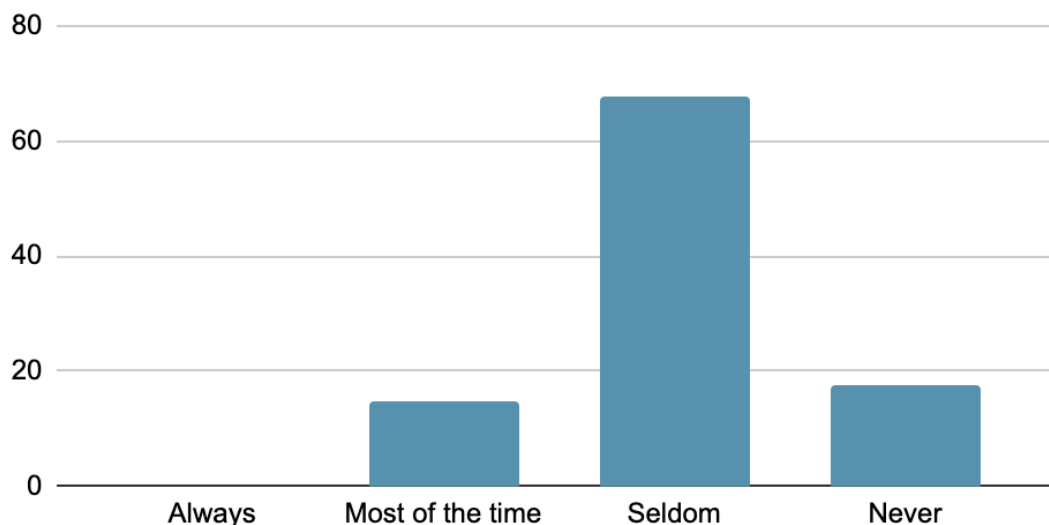
### Survey Question #3 Do you think males in your classroom struggle more with reading than femal...



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 4 was, “Do you think the parents of the males in your classroom read to them at home?” This survey question revealed that most of the K-5 teachers surveyed (67.6%) believed that parents of male students seldom read to them at home. There were 17.6% of the K-5 teachers who believed that parents never read to their male children at home, and 14.7% believed that most of the time male students are being read to at home by their parents. This survey question went on to reveal that none of the K-5 teachers believed that parents always read to their male children at home.

**Figure 20***K-5 Teacher Survey Question 4*

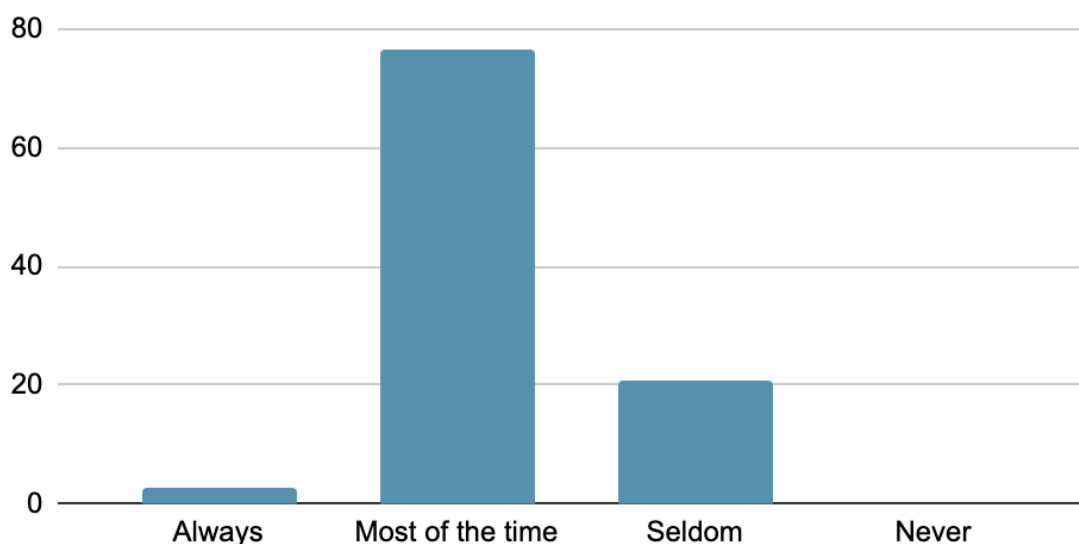
### Survey Question #4 Do you think the parents of the males in your class read to them at home?



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 5 was, “Do you think males’ classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?” This question revealed that an overwhelming majority of K-5 teachers surveyed (76.5%) believed that male student classroom behaviors impact their reading performance. There were 20.6% of the K-5 teachers surveyed who believed that male student classroom behaviors seldom impact their reading performance. There were 2.9% of the K-5 teachers who believed that male classroom behaviors always impact their reading performance, and none of the K-5 teachers surveyed believed that male classroom behaviors never impact their reading performance.

**Figure 21***K-5 Teacher Survey Question 5*

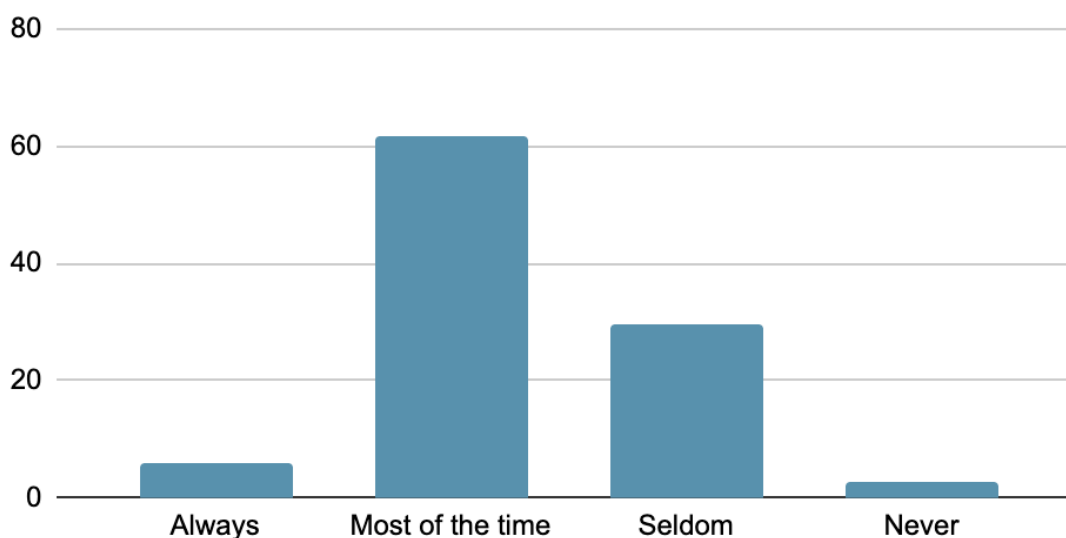
### Survey Question #5 Do you think males' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 7 was, “Do reading grades influence your male students to do better when they receive good grades or to give up when they receive poor grades?” This question revealed that 61.8% of K-5 teachers believed that grades influence male students to do better when they receive good grades or that they give up when they receive poor grades; 29.4% of K-5 teachers believed that seldom does receiving good grades influence male students or that they give up when they receive poor grades. There were 5.9% of the K-5 teachers who believed that grades never impact male students to do better regardless of if the grades are good or poor. Of the K-5 teachers surveyed, only 2.9% believed that grades always influence male students to do better when they receive good grades or that they give up when they receive poor grades.

**Figure 22***K-5 Teacher Survey Question 7*

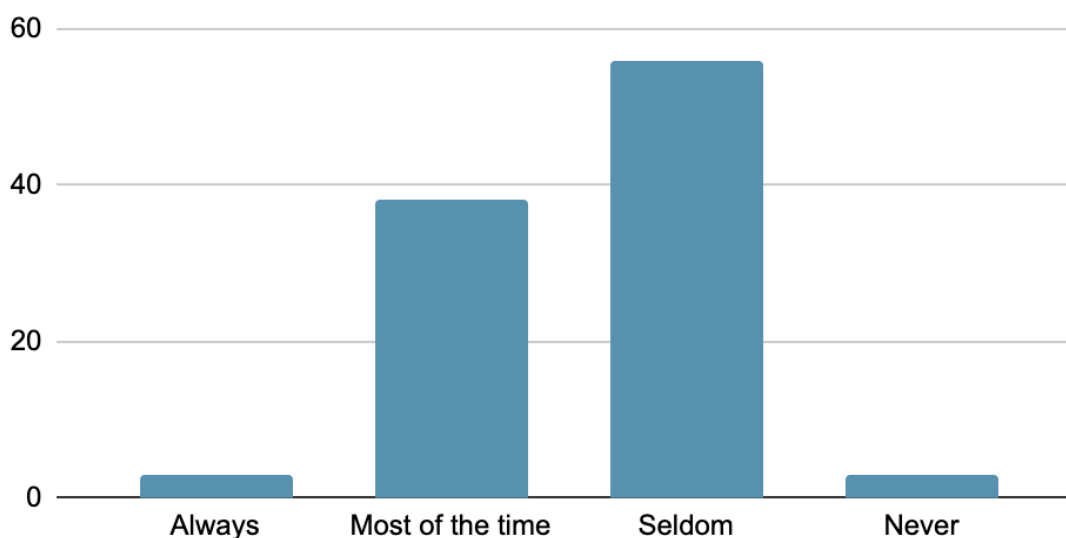
### Survey Question #7 Do reading grades influence your male students to do better when they receiv...



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 8 was, “Do you think the males in your class put forth enough effort in reading?” This question revealed that 55.9% of K-5 teachers believed that males in their classroom put forth enough effort in reading; 38.2% of K-5 teachers believed that most of the time male students put forth enough effort in their class when it comes to reading. There were 2.9% of K-5 teachers surveyed who believed that male students always put forth enough effort in their classrooms when it comes to reading, and 2.9% of the K-5 teachers believed that male students never put forth enough effort in reading in their classrooms.

**Figure 23***K-5 Teacher Survey Question 8*

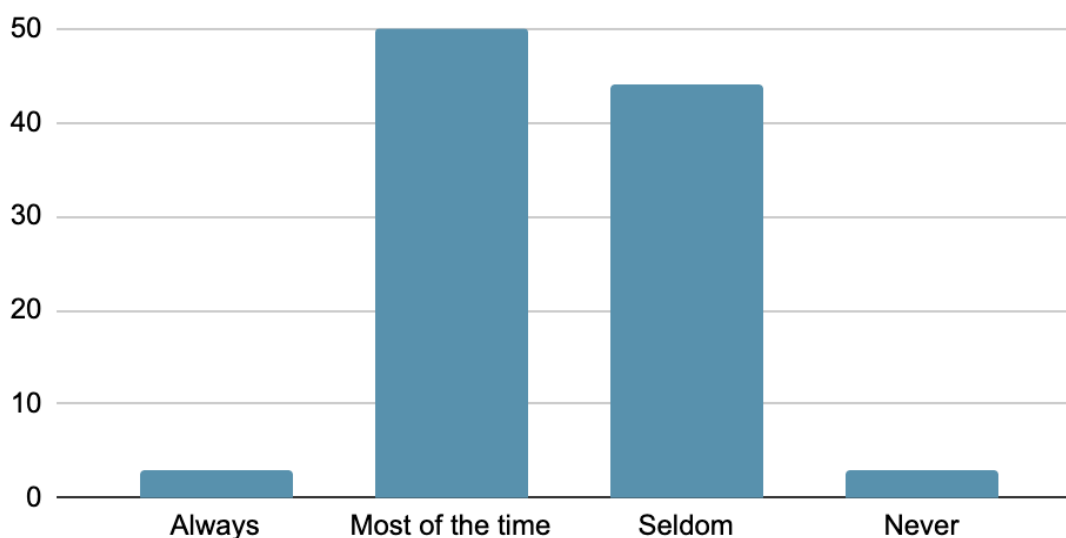
### Survey Question #8 Do you think the males in your class put forth enough effort in reading?



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 10 was, “Do you think males in your class are motivated or have a good attitude about reading?” This question revealed that 50% of the K-5 teachers surveyed believed that male students in their classrooms are motivated or have a good attitude about reading most of the time. 44.1% of K-5 teachers believed that male students are seldom motivated or have a good attitude about reading; 2.9% of K-5 teachers believed that male students in their classrooms are always motivated or have a good attitude about reading. 2.9% of K-5 teachers believed that males are never motivated or have a good attitude about reading.

**Figure 24***K-5 Teacher Survey Question 10*

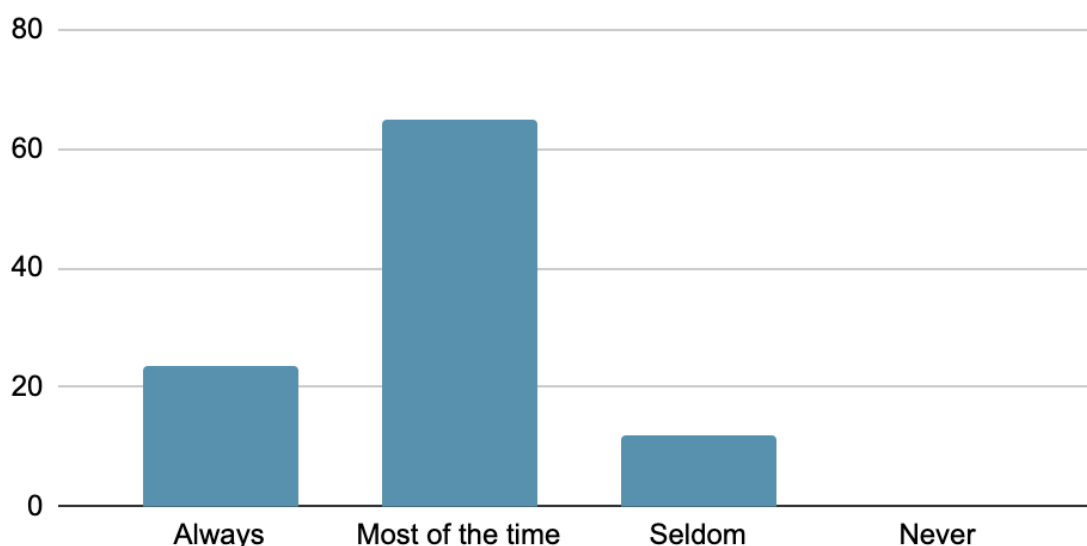
### Survey Question #10 Do you think males in your class are motivated or have a good attitude about...



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 11 was, “Do you feel that males in your classroom are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher?” This K-5 teacher survey question revealed that 64.7% of the teachers surveyed believed that most of the time males in their classrooms are encouraged to read when they receive praise from their teachers. There were 23.5% of the K-5 teachers who believed that male students are always encouraged to read when they receive praise from the teacher; 11% of the K-5 teachers surveyed believed that male students in their classroom seldom are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher.

**Figure 25***K-5 Teacher Survey Question 11*

### Survey Question #11 Do you feel that the males in your classroom are encouraged to read by praise...



K-5 Teacher Survey Question 12 was, “What factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement?” This survey question revealed that 47.1% of K-5 reading teachers believed that motivation is one of the key factors that play one of the largest roles in male reading achievement. The next highest percentage was 41.2% of K-5 teachers believed that male reading achievement has to do with parent involvement. Only 2.9% of the K-5 teachers surveyed believed that classroom behavior, a combination of parent involvement and motivation, having a book they can read that is not too hard for them, and parental and teacher involvement are large factors that play a role in male reading achievement. There were no K-5 teachers who believed that reading material played the largest role in male reading achievement.

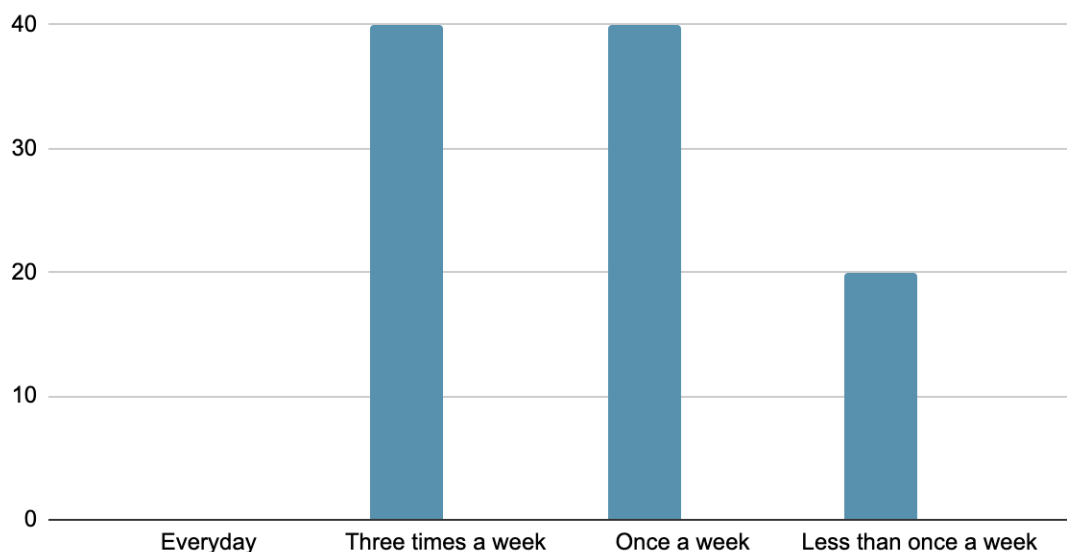
***Research Question 2: What Key Factors Contribute to the Reading Gap Between Male and Female Students as Perceived by Reading Specialists?***

To address this question, reading specialists completed a 9-question survey. Reading specialist Survey Question 2 was, “How often do you think the average male in your class reads outside of school?” This question revealed that 40% of reading specialists believed that males read outside of school three times a week and 40% believed males read outside of school once a week. They also believed that 20% of males read less than once a week outside of school. No reading specialists believed that male students read outside of school every day.

**Figure 26**

*Reading Specialist Survey Question 2*

Survey Question #2 How often do you think the average male reads outside of school?



Reading Specialist Survey Question 3 was, “Do you think males struggle more with reading than girls?” This question revealed that 80% of reading specialists believed

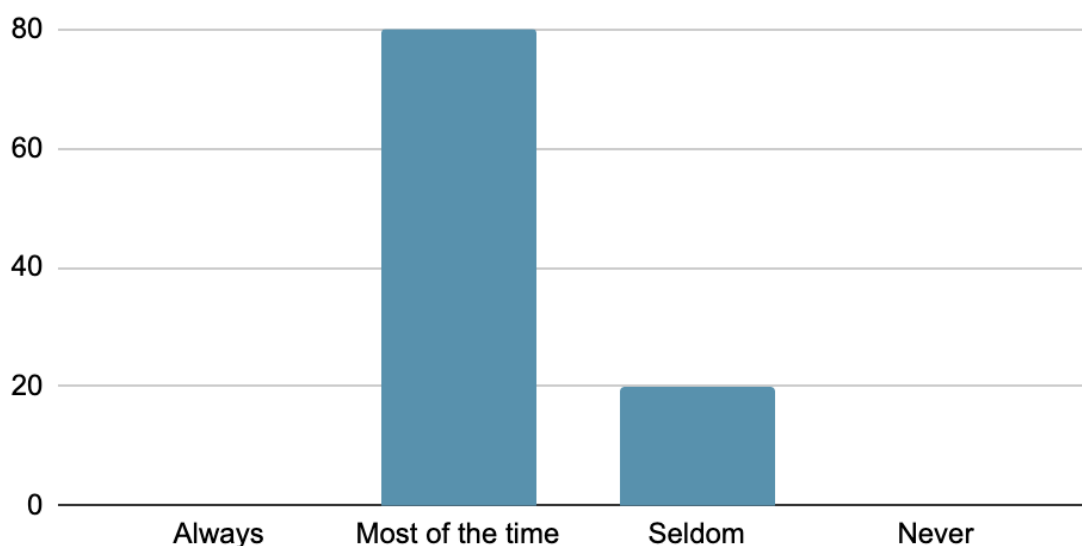


that most of the time males struggle with reading more than females, and 20% of the reading specialists believed that males seldom struggle more with reading than females. There were no reading specialists who believed that males never or always struggled with reading more than females.

**Figure 27**

*Reading Specialist Survey Question 3*

### Survey Question #3 Do you think males struggle more with reading than females?

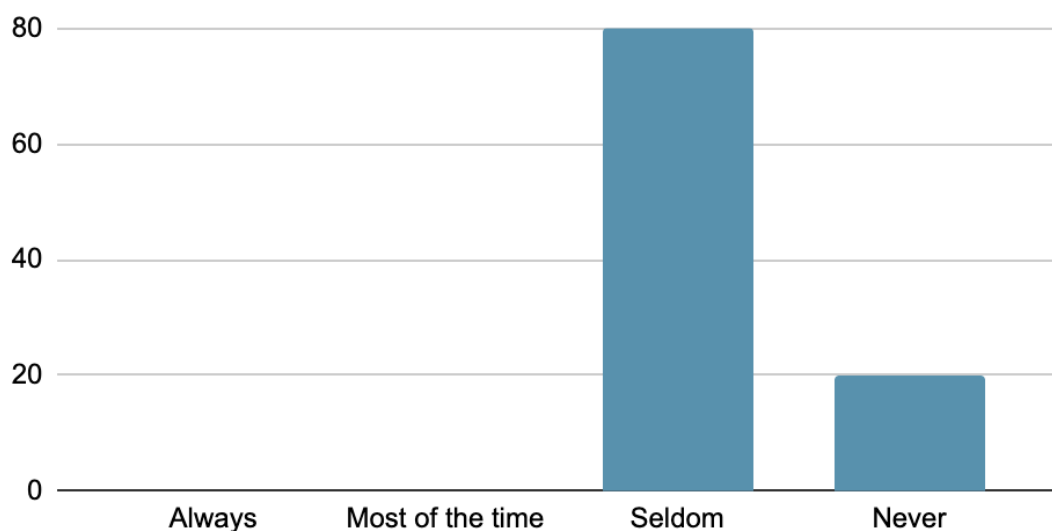


Reading Specialist Survey Question 4 was, “Do you think parents of males read to them at home?” This question revealed that an overwhelming majority of reading specialists (80%) believed that parents seldom read to their male children at home. There were 20% of reading specialists who believed that parents never read to their male children at home. There were no reading specialists who believed that parents always or most of the time read to their male children at home.

**Figure 28**

*Reading Specialist Survey Question 4*

### Survey Question #4 Do you think parents of males read to them at home?

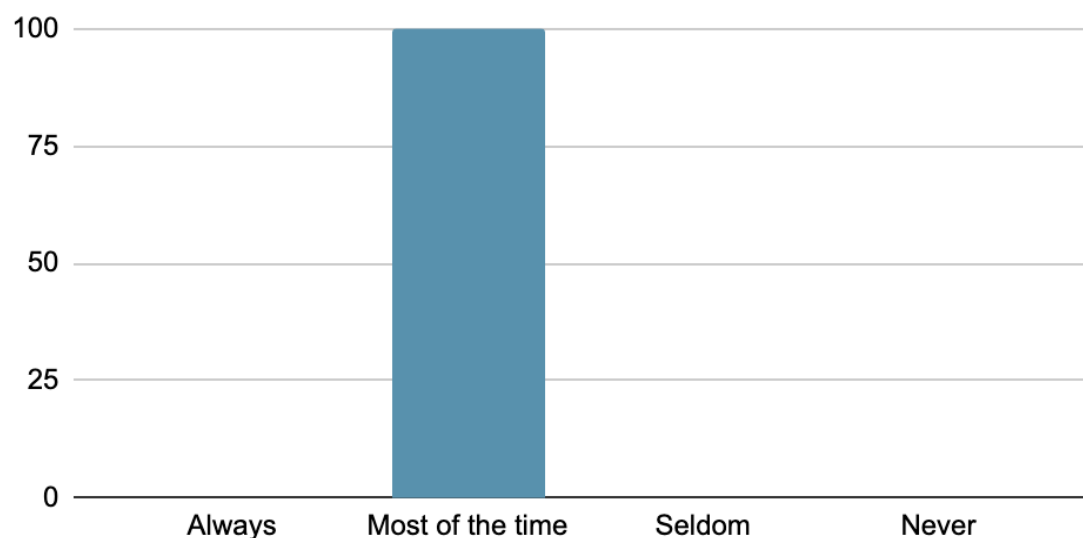


Reading Specialist Survey Question 5 was, “Do you think males’ classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?” This question revealed that 100% of the reading specialists believed that most of the time male classroom behaviors impact their reading performance.

**Figure 29**

*Reading Specialist Survey Question 5*

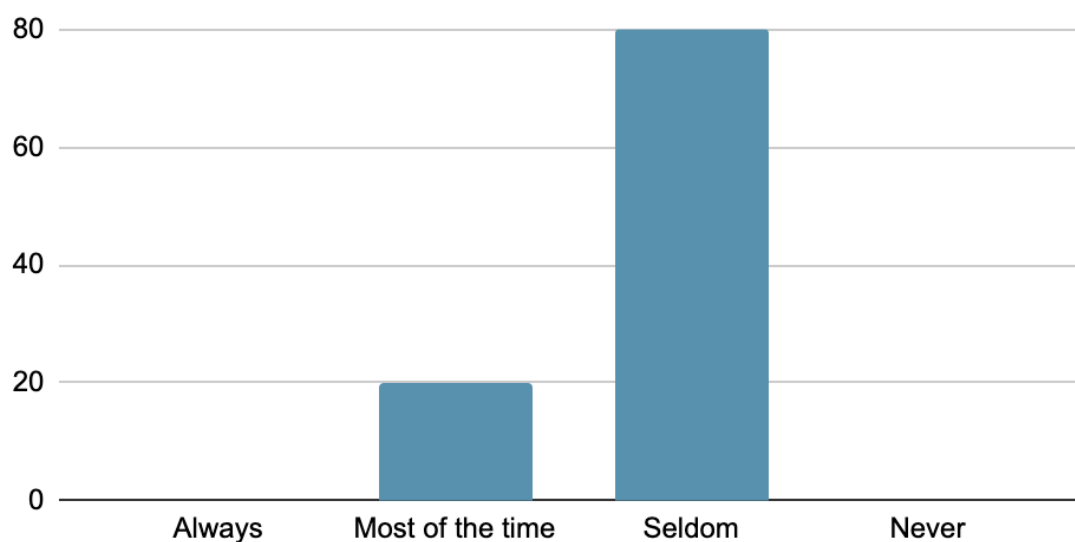
**Survey Question #5 Do you think males' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?**



Reading Specialist Survey Question 6 was, “Do you think males put forth enough effort in reading?” Eighty percent of reading specialists believed that male students seldom put forth enough effort in reading; 20% of the reading specialists surveyed believed that most of the time male students put forth enough effort in reading.

**Figure 30***Reading Specialist Survey Question 6*

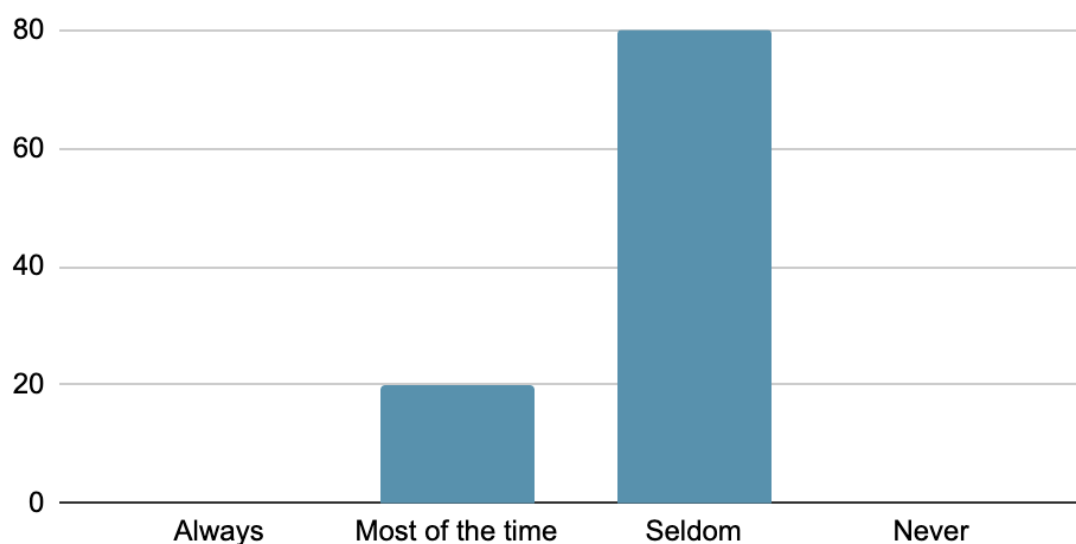
### Survey Question #6 Do you think males put forth enough effort in reading?



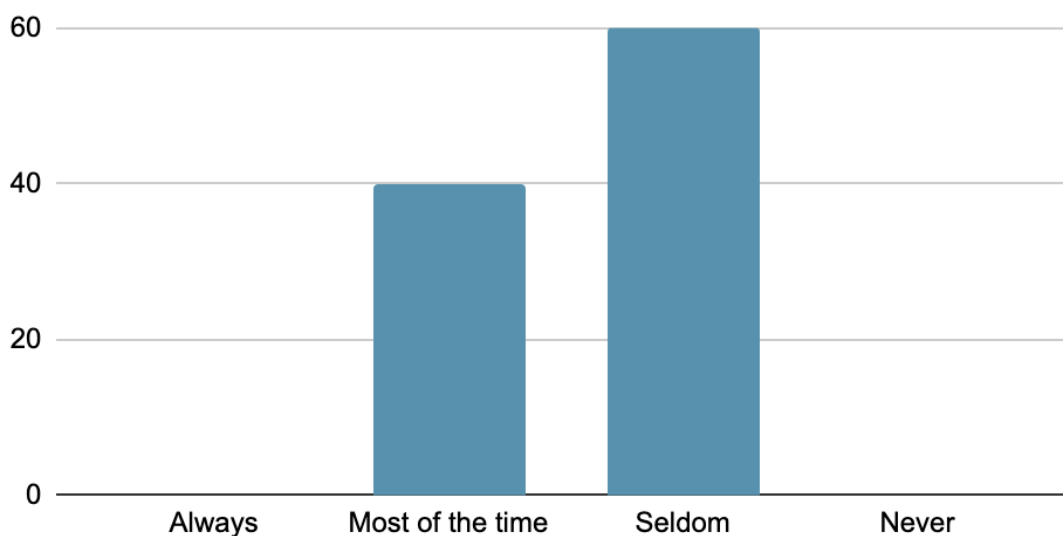
Reading Specialist Survey Question 7 was, “Do you think males are motivated or have a good attitude about reading?” This question revealed that 80% of reading specialists believed that males are seldom motivated or have a good attitude about reading; 20% of reading specialists believed that most of the time male students are motivated or have a good attitude about reading.

**Figure 31***Reading Specialist Survey Question 7*

### Survey Question #7 Do you think males are motivated or have a good attitude about reading?



Reading Specialist Survey Question 8 was, “Do you feel that the males are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher?” Sixty percent of reading specialists believed that male students are seldom encouraged to read by praise from the teacher; 40% of the reading specialists believed that most of the time male students are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher.

**Figure 32***Reading Specialist Survey Question 8***Survey Question #8 Do you feel that males are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher?**

Reading Specialist Survey Question 9 was, “Which factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement?” It was found that 40% of reading specialists believed that reading material plays a large role in male reading achievement; 20% of the reading specialists believed that motivation, parent involvement, and behavior are imperative to males and their reading achievement. None of the reading specialists believed that classroom behavior plays a large role in male reading achievement.

***Research Question 3: What Strategies Do Classroom Teachers and Reading Specialists Have to Address the Reading Gap Between Male and Female Students?***

To answer this question, K-5 teachers completed a 12-question survey and reading specialists completed a 9-question survey. Two K-5 teacher survey questions helped to answer this question and one question from the reading specialists survey. K-5

Teacher Survey Question 6 was, “Do you read aloud to your class on a regular basis?”

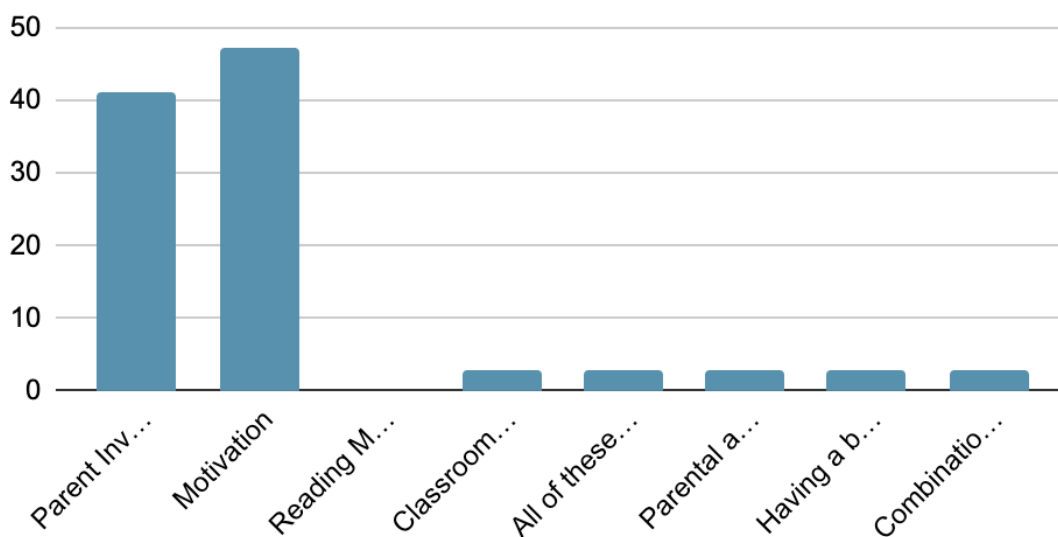
There were 82.4% of the K-5 teachers who stated that they always read aloud to their class regularly; 14.7% of the K-5 teachers said they conduct read aloud to their class most of the time. Only 2.9% of the K-5 teachers said they seldom conduct read aloud to their students on a regular basis. There were no teachers who stated that they did not read to their students regularly.

Both K-5 Teacher Survey Question 12 and Reading Specialist Survey Question 9 aid in addressing strategies that help to address the reading gap between male and female students.

**Figure 33**

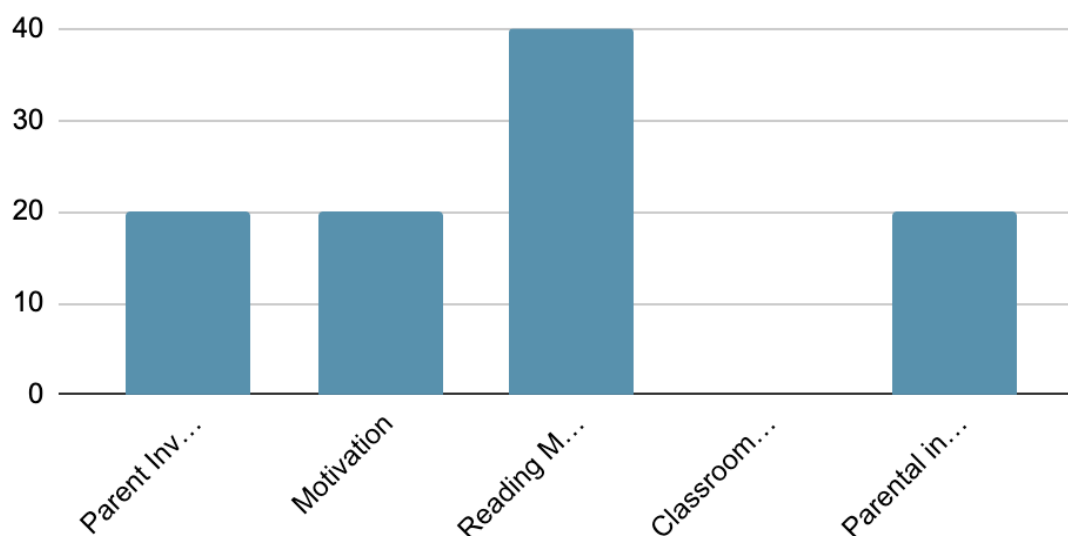
*K-5 Teacher Survey Question 12*

### Survey Question #12 Which factor play the lagest role in male reading achievement?



**Figure 34***Reading Specialist Survey Question 9*

### Survey Question #9 Which factor play the lagest role in male reading achievement?



Both K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that parent involvement and motivation play a large role in male reading achievement: 41.2% of K-5 teachers and 20% of reading specialists believed that parent involvement plays a large role in male reading achievement, and 47.1% of K-5 teachers and 20% of reading specialists believed that motivation plays a large role in male reading achievement. One significant takeaway from both K-5 Teacher Survey Question 12 and Reading Specialist Survey Question 9 is that K-5 teachers believed that motivation plays the biggest role in male reading achievement while reading specialists (40%) believed that reading material plays the biggest role with males and their reading achievement. K-5 teachers did not believe that reading material played a significant role in male reading achievement.



## **Emerging Trends**

There were several emerging trends from the research questions, K-5 teacher survey questions, and the reading specialist survey.

There were emerging trends present with Research Questions 1 and 2 on key factors that contribute to the reading gap between males and females. Both surveys contained the question, “How often do you think males read outside of school?” This question was answered by both K-5 teachers and reading specialists, and both believed that male students read outside of school at most three times a week. Both K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that most of the time males struggle with reading more than female students as relayed in the survey question that asked both K-5 teachers and reading specialists if they believed males struggle more than females in reading. K-5 teachers and reading specialists were asked if parents read to their male children at home and both agreed that parents seldom read to their male children at home. Classroom behavior was seen by the K-5 teachers and reading specialists to have an impact on male students most of the time. Effort in reading is very important, and both K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that males seldomly put forth enough effort in reading.

Emerging trends for Research Question 3 focused on the biggest factor that impedes males and their reading in comparison to female students. K-5 teachers and reading specialists both believed that motivation and parent involvement play a major role in the significant reading gap between males and females.

**Table 9***Correlation of Survey Questions From K-5 Teachers and Reading Specialists*

Survey questions	Emerging trends
Survey Question: How often do you think males read outside of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that male students read outside the school three times a week.</li> </ul>
Survey Question: Do you think males struggle more with reading than females?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that most of the time males struggle more than females do with reading.</li> </ul>
Survey Question: Do you think parents of males read to them at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that parents seldomly read to their male children at home.</li> </ul>
Survey Question: Do you think males' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that most of the time male classroom behaviors impact their reading performance.</li> </ul>
Survey Question: Do you think males put forth enough effort in reading?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that males seldom put forth enough effort in reading.</li> </ul>
Survey Question: Which factor plays the largest role in male reading achievement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers and reading specialists believed that motivation and parent involvement play a large role in male reading achievement.</li> </ul>

**Summary of Findings**

This chapter supplies detailed information related to the findings of this qualitative research study. K-5 teachers and reading specialists who work with male students in the subject school district were surveyed, and quantitative information data from the 12-question K-5 teacher survey and the 9-question reading specialist survey provided the necessary information to answer the three research questions for this

research study.

Chapter 5 focuses on providing more data and analysis of the research that was collected for this study. In Chapter 5, I provide recommendations and a conclusion with aid from the information that has been obtained from this study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to examine key factors that contribute to the reading gap between boys and girls and best practices to help reduce these gaps. This research study surveyed K-5 reading teachers as well as reading specialists in the subject school district. The study revealed key factors that contribute to male reading gaps and best practices to help improve these gaps as provided from the data collected from the participants. This research and information that was obtained will help in establishing best practices to ensure that reading in relation to male students improves.

This research study was conducted with three research questions used to guide the survey questions completed by the K-5 teachers and reading specialists participants. The research study questions for this study were

1. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by classroom teachers?
2. What key factors contribute to the reading gap between male and female students as perceived by reading specialists?
3. What strategies do classroom teachers and reading specialists have to address the reading gap between male and female students?

This research study aimed at shining light on the gaps that exist between male and female students and ways to improve these reading gaps. Research Questions 1 and 2 emphasized important key factors that contribute to males having reading gaps and the perceptions from the lens of K-5 teachers and reading specialists. These two questions go

hand in hand as K-5 teachers and reading specialists were able to provide some key factors that impede males in reading such as parent involvement, the effort by male students, time spent reading outside of school, grades, and motivation.

Research Question 3 focused on strategies that K-5 teachers and reading specialists use to help close the gaps between males and females in reading. This question was able to be answered while providing great recommendations that can be used to foster more beneficial relationships between male students and reading as it aims to increase their love of reading.

### **Summary and Supporting Theory**

Male students and their reading gaps and best practices to help eliminate these gaps were at the forefront of this research study. The theoretical framework I used to utilize emerging trends includes the critical theory approach. This theory aligns directly with the research questions from this research study. I decided that I would use this framework due to my topic of males and reading and the gaps that are contributing. This theoretical framework is where truth is linked to the key question of who benefits, insight, and impetus for change. This is a very important part of seeing the overall big picture of key factors that impede the reading of male students. Critical theory explores what should and could be by not restricting itself to what is analysis. In principle, critical theory identifies key actors that provide concise attainable practical goals for the emancipation of society while stating things that are wrong with the current oppressive social reality (Govender, 2020).

The study revealed that motivation and parent involvement are two key factors that must be considered when determining why male students have such a significant gap

in reading when it comes to female students. Through the critical theory approach, male students will benefit from a change in old strategies and incorporating best practices, new strategies, and diving deeper into the fundamentals of what male students require in order to be successful in reading. Critical theory is embedded within the assumptions of the results of this study. Males have gaps in reading due to reading outside of school not being an important practice and parents being less likely to read to them. Males receiving good grades to help to increase their reading motivation, putting forth effort in reading, and having positive behavior all factor into becoming good readers that will follow the male students throughout their lives.

This research study was able to add to the critical theory approach as it aligned directly with the question of who benefits and what changes are necessary to meet the needs of the beneficiary. Male students are struggling more with reading than female students. Using the critical theory approach helped to identify the key factors that are contributing to male gaps in reading. The use of the K-5 teacher survey along with the reading specialist survey identified key causes as well as recommendations that need to be put into place to help improve these gaps with male students. Insight from both K-5 teachers and reading specialists will help male students read at a higher level while promoting change in teaching strategies, programs, and work from all stakeholders involved to ensure that male students are successful in reading.

### **Correlation Between Current Research and the Findings of This Study**

Connecting the literature from Chapter 2 and the findings from Chapter 4 helps to identify the relationship between what the current research has suggested concerning the reading gaps male students demonstrate when compared to female students and how this

research study supported some of the causes that have made the gaps evident with male students. The gender of a student, as revealed in current research, does play a role in the reading gap between male and female students. In the study, K-5 teachers and reading specialists believe that male students struggle more with reading than female students. Motivation in current research and in the findings of this study indicate that males are less motivated to read than females students. Several key factors contribute to males and their motivation to read. The academic environment helps to foster positive relationships between males in reading, and teachers can help male students learn to find pleasure in reading and make reading a fun experience.

Current research paired with the findings of this study went on to suggest that the academic success that a male feels in the school environment plays a role in the male gaps in reading. Fostering positive feedback and grades will aid in improving reading among male students. Reading text selection is a key component that has been revealed by current research and from the findings in this research study as an area that must allow rich reading materials that capture the attention of male students and will then capture their minds to the joys of reading. Positive behavior will reveal positive results as negative results will reveal negative results in reading more with male students, as has been identified by both current research and this study's findings. Reading attitudes are fostered from the male student's relationship with reading with their parents at home and the time and effort that they put into reading outside of the realm of school. Positive attitudes towards reading are developed when males experience positive reading relationships with their parents reading to them and themselves reading for pleasure is carried over from the school environment to outside arenas.

**Table 10**

*Correlation of Current Research from Literature in Chapter 2 and the Finding in Chapter 4*

Current research	Research study findings
Gender- Current research has revealed that gender plays a vital role in the reading gap between male and female students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject district believe that most of the time male students struggle more with reading than female students.</li> <li>• Reading specialists in the subject school district believe most of the time male students struggle more with reading than their female students.</li> </ul>
Motivation- Current research has revealed that boys do not have a high reading motivation as girls do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject school district were found to believe that motivation does play a significant part in the reading gap between male and female students.</li> <li>• Reading specialists in the subject school district found that motivation does play a part in the reading gap between male and female students.</li> </ul>
School Performance- Current research has revealed that a child's intrinsic motivation to learn can drop when they evaluate their report cards as well as receive feedback on their performance on test and academic projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject school district revealed that most of the time reading grades influences their male students to do better when they receive good grades or to give up when they receive poor grades.</li> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject school district also believe that most of the time male students in their classroom are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher.</li> </ul>

(continued)



Current research	Research study findings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Specialists in the subject school district revealed that most of the time male students are encouraged to read by praise from the teacher.</li> </ul>
<p>Reading Text Selection- Current research has revealed that book preference between male and female students varies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject school district revealed that most of the time they select different reading material based on the interest of the males in their classroom.</li> </ul>
<p>Behavior Engagement- Current research has revealed that behavior accounts for a sizable portion of fifth-grade reading gaps that favor girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject school district believe most of the time male classroom behavior impacts their reading performance.</li> <li>• Reading specialists in the current school district believe that most of the time male students' classroom behavior impacts their reading performance.</li> </ul>
<p>Reading Attitudes- current research has revealed that individual students and their home characteristics are of importance when promoting students' attitudes towards reading, and the number of books that they have at home and the amount of time spent reading outside of school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-5 teachers in the subject school district revealed that they believe the average male in their class reads outside of school three times a week and that their parents seldom read to them at home.</li> <li>• Reading specialists revealed that they believe the average male reads outside of school once to three times a week and that parents seldom read to them at home.</li> </ul>

## Implications

This quantitative study informs all stakeholders of the necessity to contribute to

research, develop, and model reading practices that will meet the needs of all students in reading, in particular male students who are struggling. In schools, motivating students to read is a challenge; but as research has shown, male students have more of a decrease in reading motivation than their female counterparts. Providing reading material that focuses on topics that interest male students will help to increase their motivation to read and increase their love of reading.

Parent involvement is a key component in any child's education, and being that male students are having bigger gaps in reading than female students, there needs to be more communication between parents and educators on ways they can help their male children at home so they can be more successful in reading; one of the key components being that male students need to be read to at home by their parents.

According to Merga (2017), research has found a highly beneficial activity for young children is shared reading experiences. The benefits of shared reading skills consist of vocabulary, spelling, listening skills, establishing essential literacy skills, and reading comprehension. Merga (2017) went on to state that for the benefit of a child's cognitive development, we should read books aloud to them. Mental imagery and narrative comprehension activate brain areas with parent-child reading.

According to Ezell (2016), research indicates that to improve reading comprehension and encourage students, classroom libraries are necessary. The enjoyment of reading comes when children spend more time choosing and exploring books related to their personal interests. To become lifelong readers, students need the support of classroom libraries that are well stocked. Ezell went on to state profound influencers who shape the lives of children are the teachers who teach them. There are no definitive

answers for teachers as to what makes a classroom library perfect, but they need to create classroom libraries that are diverse in genres, reading levels, and content areas across balanced book collections that are well-rounded.

Classrooms and media centers need to provide reading material that is appropriate and worthwhile for both male and female students. Classrooms and media centers should contain rich meaningful context that fosters the curiosity and excitement of male and female students. The right reading material is key to the success of reading in both male and female students. When this material is not provided for both male and female students and only caters to one specific group of students, a variety of perspectives, knowledge, or meaningful material is not fostering the education of all students in reading.

According to Merga (2018), there are six strategies that can be used to help connect boys to reading:

1. Boys' views are not identical to all those of the same gender and age just as your views and interest are not. Boys are diverse in their tastes and interests. They are not necessarily static over time. To keep boys' interest in reading pleasure, they must be matched with the material in reading that they are interested in and initiate discussions on a regular basis.
2. Throughout the school years, schools must provide access to libraries. Girl students may be more inclined to visit libraries when they have free time more than boy students, and boys may need class time to access libraries. To promote reading having access to books is essential.
3. Boys find it beneficial and enjoyable beyond the early years, so it is key to

continue to read to boys as well as with them.

4. Silent reading at school and home provides expectations and opportunities despite the competing demands on time.
5. Paperback books should be readily available. Boys are even less likely to read on screens than girls, even when they are daily readers. Research does not support the theory that boys prefer to read on screens.
6. Promote reading as a role model to your students or children as something to be acceptable and enjoyed during pastime.

Teacher pedagogy for differences is key. Preparing teachers to teach a wide variety of students is essential in education. Teacher preparation programs need to change so they increase the focus on teaching educators how to teach reading across the board. The importance of knowing that not all children learn the same and there must be strategies put into place to help struggling readers, in particular male students who have proven to have bigger reading gaps in comparison to female students, is important.

Male teachers can serve as role models for reading for males. Special programs that are centered around getting males into schools for reading buddies through shared experiences are so beneficial when aiding males and their gaps in reading.

There needs to be more use of comics and graphic novels as teaching tools in the classrooms. These are some of the reading materials that male students enjoy and will provide a chance for male students to love what they are reading while they are gaining knowledge and best reading practices.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

There were limitations derived from this research study that included the

following:

- The participants for this study were all from one school district and may have common reading strategies and approaches to reading.
- This study only had participation from five reading specialists. More participation from reading specialists could have increased reading recommendations and strategies.
- Interpretation of the survey questions may have been interpreted differently among the participants because the K-5 teachers and reading specialists had varying levels of educational experience and background in teaching reading.
- More K-5 teacher participants had 0-5 years of experience than K-5 teachers with 6-10 years of experience, which could be subjective.

Despite the limitations of this study, the research that was collected and analyzed yields a great understanding of some of the key factors that play a role in male reading gaps while providing meaningful recommendations that can be taken into consideration to improve these gaps.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study examined male student reading gaps compared to female students and best practices to meet these gaps. Several recommendations can be derived from this study:

- Survey male teachers to see what strategies they use to teach male students.  
This is needed to gain insight to see if there is a significant difference in males when it comes to reading if they have a male teacher. This can also provide more reading strategies to help aid males in reading.

- Conducting further research using other school districts in North Carolina could help to gain a wider perspective on key factors that contribute to males and reading.
- Surveying media specialists to gain their perspectives on male reading gaps would help to gain a wider view of reading material and strategies that can be used to help males in reading. Media specialists specialize in books, and this can be a great aid for teachers when they are pulling reading material for their class or individual students.
- Researching different reading programs can help to gain insight into proven successful programs that can help males with reading. These programs can be beneficial to all stakeholders involved.
- Examining different teaching strategies and perspectives from teachers in other grades and comparing the similarities and differences from their perspectives and strategies can add more insightful information to help male students with reading.
- Conducting interviews using the following questions to gain more information from teachers and reading specialists would gather more strategies that can be used to help male students in reading:
  1. Do you feel that boys in your class struggle more with reading/literacy activities than the girls? If so, what are some of the reasons you feel boys tend to struggle more than girls?
  2. When you plan your lessons, do you utilize differentiated activities and materials with the boys, or do you plan the same activities for both the

boys and girls in your class?

3. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to motivate and effectively engage the boys in literacy activities/reading?
  4. Given boys and girls are different and that have different learning styles, do you feel that segregating the boys and girls into single-sex classrooms for academics could prove to be an effective strategy to utilize in curbing the gaps and lack of motivation between genders in the classroom? If so, why do you feel this strategy could be effective? If not, what are some of the challenges you see with implementing the single-sex classroom strategy?
  5. If given a choice to have a single-sex class, would you choose to teach the boys girls, and why?
- Conduct a survey of K-5 parents in the subject school district to gain their perspective on male students and reading using the following questions:
    1. Do you have a son in school? Yes or No
    2. Do you feel that your son struggles with reading? Always, Most of the time, Seldom, Never
    3. Do you feel that your son struggles more than female students? Always, Most of the time, Seldom, Never
    4. Do you feel that your son is receiving adequate education in reading? Always, Most of the time, Seldom, Never
    5. Why do you think your son or males in general struggle in reading?
  - Districts can adopt recommendations to grow programs, and existing

successful male reading programs should be researched and replicated.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Several recommendations were developed from this research study. A general start is to teach all students how to choose the right book. This can be accomplished by teaching them the 5-finger rule. This is something that can be taught at an early age and can become a best practice for students to use in any grade. The 5-finger rule consists of

1 Finger: If the book is too easy, the student needs to find another book.

Students need to choose books that interest them.

2 Fingers: Students need to read a page in the center of the book and if they can read this page with ease, this is called a just right book.

3 Fingers: While reading a page of the book, the student should note the words they do not know and put a finger up for each unknown word. This indicates that the book is a little hard but could be fun to try.

4 Fingers: If a student gets to the end of the page of a book and they have four fingers up, the book is difficult to read, or they may need help.

5 Fingers: If the student has all five fingers up, the book is too difficult, and they need to find another book.

This rule of thumb will help students be accountable for their reading choices as they choose reading material that is on their reading level.

Through this study, K-5 teachers were asked if they select different reading materials that interest their male students and to provide some of that reading material. Most of the time, K-5 teachers choose books and other vital reading materials that include topics on male interests to capture their male students' attention to reading.



During this research, K-5 teachers provided some great recommendations for reading material that can be used to help engage male readers while keeping the focus on reducing the reading gap between male and female students.

**Table 11***What K-5 Teachers Use to Teach Reading to Their Male Students*

K-5 Teacher Survey Question 9	Reading material
Survey Question 9: Provide reading material used in classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Books about nature</li> <li>● Books on transportation</li> <li>● Pete The Cat books</li> <li>● Books on bugs</li> <li>● Books on dinosaurs</li> <li>● Graphic novels</li> <li>● Sport text</li> <li>● Biographies</li> <li>● Books with boy characters</li> <li>● Books on reptiles</li> <li>● The One and Only Ivan</li> <li>● My Brother Martin</li> <li>● The Best Christmas Pageant Ever</li> <li>● Flamin' Hot</li> <li>● Comic books</li> <li>● Books on superheroes</li> <li>● Books on animals</li> <li>● Fiction and nonfiction books</li> <li>● Weekly Readers</li> <li>● Reading A to Z</li> <li>● Leveled Readers</li> <li>● Pattern books</li> <li>● Lego books</li> <li>● Adventure books</li> <li>● Magazines</li> <li>● Scholastic News</li> <li>● Books on sport figures</li> </ul>

- 
- Space books
  - Books based on sight words
  - Books on seasons
  - Books on holidays
  - Books on music
  - Books and articles on video games
  - Short stories
  - Periodicals
  - Science-based passages
  - Books/articles on world events
  - Digital books
- 

## **Conclusion**

This quantitative research study provided findings and recommendations using best practices to help towards reducing male reading gaps in relation to female students. While this is an ongoing endeavor, increasing male students' love for reading and finding encouraging ways to help improve these reading gaps were fundamental during this study. The K-5 teachers and reading specialist participants provided great insight on key factors that capture the significance of the reading gap between male and female students through their lack of motivation, parental support, effort in school, grades, and behavior in the school environment. Some limitations exist; however, efforts should be made to reduce those gaps, and K-5 teachers and reading specialists provided an array of reading material suggestions and ideas that will aid in reducing the reading gaps that are present between male and female students. With the participation of K-5 teachers and reading specialists, great insight was provided, and new strategies were obtained that look promising for male students and their reading.



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**Appendix A**  
**Informed Consent Form**

Gardner-Webb University IRB  
Informed Consent Form for Online Survey  
*THIRD-FIFTH GRADE MALES AND THE READING GAP: FACTORS THAT AID IN  
THE READING GAP IN RELATION TO THEIR FEMALE COUNTERPARTS.*

The purpose of this research is to gain insight on factors that contribute to the reading gaps with male students. As a participant in the study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous 12- item survey. It is anticipated that the study will require about 15 minutes of your time. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. Data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**

Researcher's name

Researcher telephone number:XXX

Researcher email addressXXX

Faculty Advisor name-

Faculty Advisor telephone number- XXXX

Faculty Advisor email address XXX

Dr. Sydney K. Brown

IRB Institutional Administrator

Telephone: 704-406-3019

Email: [skbrown@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:skbrown@gardner-webb.edu)

Clicking the link below to continue on to the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study:

If you are not 18 years of age or older or you do not consent to participate, please close this window.

**Appendix B**

**Subject School District Mission Statement**

# MISSION STATEMENT

The subject school district will meet the educational needs of all students through its programs, services, and facilities within a safe environment.

- We will provide resources to stimulate intellectual curiosity, promote achievement, and develop personal growth.
- We will prepare students to function as lifelong learners in an ever- changing society.
- We will encourage the involvement of all educators, families, and community members in the on- going process of school improvement. |



## **Appendix C**

### **Subject School District's Vision Statement**

## VISION STATEMENT

The subject school district will provide a rigorous, innovative, learning experience for every student, every day, in every classroom in an effort to allow students the opportunity to maximize their individual potential in preparation for college and career readiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Appendix D**

### **Focus Area 3: Innovative Mindset**

