

“I failed 3rd Grade.”

Improving the self-esteem of retained students by giving them a leadership role.



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School Context:

The school is located in an urban city in a predominately African-American community. This community is plagued by drugs and violence. In the summer of 2014 one of our students was murdered during a sleep over at a friend's house. A stray bullet entered a window and struck the student in the head. She was 11 years old. Between August 23 and September 22, 2014 there were 56 reports of violent crimes (robbery, battery, assault, homicide, sexual assault) 84 reports of property crimes, and 172 quality of life crimes (criminal damage, narcotics, prostitution).

<http://crime.chicagotribune.com/chicago/community/west-garfield-park>

Currently there are 606 students enrolled at my school. We are a Level 3 school which means that we are on probation. The school population is 98.2% African-American, 1.5% Hispanic, and 0.3% classified as "other". There are very few jobs within this community and 92.6% of the families are low income. All students in the school receive free breakfast and lunch, and an afternoon snack (fruit or vegetable) as part of our healthy initiatives program. There are concerns related to attendance and mobility at this school. During the 2013-2014 school year it was reported that 58.8% of our students are chronically truant, and there is a 19.4% mobility rate among our families within the school community. There are very few jobs within this community and 92.8% of the families are low income.

Teaching Context:

I am a 19 year veteran with the Chicago Public Schools. Throughout the first 18 years of my teaching career I was a classroom teacher in an early childhood setting. My position this school year has changed. I am now the Head Teacher at the Child Parent Center at my school. In this capacity I do not have a classroom with students that I directly teach and supervise. My position

as Head Teacher involves a balance between being a teacher mentor and coach, and I also go into classrooms and model instruction and Best Practices for early childhood education. I work with teachers in an effort to improve their practice which will ultimately impact learning outcomes for students. There are 5 preschool classrooms within the Child Parent Center and all are full day programs where children attend school from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. In my capacity as Head Teacher I supervise 5 teachers and 5 teacher assistants, and I oversee the daily operations within the Child Parent Center. The Child Parent Center is separate from the main building and there are 98 students enrolled in the preschool program

I feel that we have an excellent administrative team at this school, and I feel completely supported by them in the work that I do throughout the day. Our administrative leaders demonstrate compassion for students and staff, and they are constantly striving to improve academic outcomes for our students. They work diligently to improve the overall climate within the school which can be a daily challenge. We have partnered with several companies to ensure the academic success of our students, and have implemented many mentoring programs for the academic and social welfare of students.

Literature Review:

Due to increased teacher and school accountability throughout the country, retaining children has become a common practice in an effort to answer questions related to instructional standards.

The definition of retention means being held back in a previous grade. Although this practice is highly controversial, “over the past 25 years, grade retention has been revived [as] a method of remediating poor academic performance.” (Jimerson, 2001, pp. 420). I feel that in the past, teacher judgment and putting the needs of the student first played a larger role in the decision

about whether a student should be retained. Unfortunately, it appears that high-stakes testing has become the major requirement for promotion, thus devaluing a teacher's input and expertise, and the academic needs of individual students seems to be far less important than the score achieved on a standardized test.

Recent estimates indicate that over 3 million children have been retained (Hauser, 1999; Merrick, McCreery, & Brown, 1988) since the passing of NCLB. Although some believe, and may argue, that the current policies of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) were developed with the best intentions, I find that the practice of grade retention is leaving many children behind without offering the needed academic and emotional supports. I am not suggesting a return to a policy of social promotion. Rather, I recommend an implementation of Best Practices and providing instruction that is scaffolded to support the educational, social, and emotional needs of the child. Shepard & Smith (1990) concluded that although retention is commonly and widely practiced, it is ineffective unless targeted interventions that address the needs of low-achieving students are implemented. One study reported that 78% of students that had been retained in elementary school at least once ended up dropping out of high school (Tuck, 1989). The state in which my school is located has a history of high dropout rates, with around half of the students failing to graduate over the past 30 years. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Public_Schools) This staggering statistic demonstrates that grade retention does not address the challenges that a child may face and may even prove to exacerbate them. I worry about my former students that have been retained at 3rd grade this year because they did not meet the required score on the NWEA.

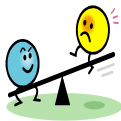
“These students are functioning below grade level and placed back in a 3rd grade classroom with no additional support. I'm afraid for them because the student to teacher ratio in the classroom is 30+:1. How can ONE teacher be expected to support the needs of so many learners, differentiate instruction, and ensure that ALL students are ready for the mandated assessment?” (Teacher Journal dated 10-29-14)

Data that I obtained from my school district shows that 92.8% of students in this community are from low income homes. Research demonstrates that low reading abilities and increased rates of retention can be attributed to poverty. “Students from economically disadvantaged communities are at a greater risk of academic failure... stemming from the lack of academic preparedness, [and] young children living in poverty [are] at special risk of school failure.” (Schweinhart, 1994, pp. 237) Children that are retained become disengaged and view themselves as a failure. Holmes (1989) concluded that retained students had a more negative attitude toward school and are frequently absent from school. 58.8% of the students at my school are considered chronically truant and have a 19.4% mobility rate. Students that are not in school cannot learn and I wonder how many of these students have been or will be retained at some point. Our school data shows that only 39.9% of the students in grades 3-8 are on track for high school. This frightening data indicates that more than 60% of the students at my school might not even graduate from high school

“The issue [of early grade retention] has entered public debate as accountability policies pressure schools to ensure that kindergarteners acquire readiness skills...” (Shepard & Smith, 1988; Smith & Shepherd, 1988). I was called into a meeting this school year that was led by the network supervisors. The focus of this meeting was kindergarten data. I was questioned about many things, one of which is “what are you and your teachers doing over there to get the students ready for kindergarten and the DIBELS assessments (mandated kindergarten reading proficiency assessment)?” I understand that there are some prerequisite skills that all preschoolers need in order to be prepared for the beginning of kindergarten. However, should I be preparing students

for kindergarten and making sure that they are ready socially, academically, and emotionally OR am I preparing them for the DIBELS assessments?

“I’m the kid on the end of the see-saw with my legs dangling in the air that cannot push down because there is someone on the other end that is bigger, heavier, stronger, and has more power. I try to push back and fight for what I know is best and academically appropriate for my students. I feel resistance and the weight of the test scores on my shoulders. Again, how can I achieve balance, and is a balance really possible? “



(Teacher Journal Entry dated 10-15-2014)

Research has shown that grade retention negatively impacts a student and “by adolescence grade retention is predictive [of] emotional distress, [and] low self-esteem.” (Jimerson, 2001, pp. 420-437). Through my research I wanted to determine whether my 3rd grade Scholars would demonstrate academic improvements as well as develop improved self-esteem through a leadership role. Tanaka and Reid (1997) reported that with cross-grade mentoring programs, like the one I designed for this research, students developed a relationship of “security, respect and affection with a sense of responsibility.” Instead of highlighting the fact that my Scholars were retained, I wanted to provide expectations for them as a leader and allow an opportunity for the Scholars to share their knowledge and expertise with their preschool partner in the hopes of improving academics and self-esteem. Heiden (1987) reported that “the experience of being needed, valued, and respected by another person produced a new view of self as a worthwhile human being” and it was my hope that my Scholars could view themselves and their school

experience positively by providing a leadership role where they could be able to view themselves as leaders in their community.

Rationale:

Student attainment data indicates that many students at my school are functioning at a below average level when compared to students nationally, and students at my school in grade 2-8 are ranked at the 14th percentile in reading and in the 15th percentile in math. During the 2013-2014 school year 39% of our students met or exceeded national norms in reading and 38.6% of our students met or exceeded national norms in math. There were a significant number of students that were retained at my school last year based on the 2013-2014 NWEA assessments that were administered. In my new capacity this year as Head Teacher for the Child Parent Center I have interacted with many parents during Preschool registration.

“I was frightened to learn that many parents were unable to read the application that needed to be completed to register their child for preschool. They asked for reading assistance and wanted to know if they were completing the forms/application correctly. My thoughts immediately went back to the retained 3rd grade students. I did not consider that some students may live in a home where with an illiterate parent, guardian, or caregiver. Again, this is another instance where there is little or no support for these struggling students, and more motivation for me.” (Teacher journal: 10-29-2014)

I'm sure that having to ask for assistance to read the preschool application was humiliating for parents. I question why nothing is being done to support the children **and** their families. How can we ask parents to help their child at home when they may be unable to do so? Admitting to their child that they cannot help must be devastating. I find myself wondering why are the scores from NWEA assessment the only vehicle to determine whether students are ready for the next grade. My experiences at the beginning of this school year have shown me that there truly needs to be more done to support these struggling students in order to improve the academic outcomes

for students and address a factor that that can potentially cripple their future. Another factor that could be contributing to low academic achievement is attendance and student mobility. During the 2013-2014 school year it was reported that 58.8% of our students are chronically truant, and there is a 19.4% mobility rate among our families within the school community. Attendance and truancy could drastically impact academic achievement, and the current growth levels/trends within our school are depressing.

“Many students in our school have been retained in grades 3, 6, and 8 this year because they did not meet the required score on NWEA. I see many of my former students daily on the playground. Some seem happy and others just have a look in their eyes that should not be the face of a child before the school day begins. They look depressed and defeated. Is this because they are struggling in school or could it be something else?”

(Teacher Journal: 10-29-2014)

The decision to hold a child back implies that the child has not achieved expected goals in a particular grade. Unfortunately, this decision to retain a student and the student’s perceived failure is more of a public humiliation. In October, 2014 I had a conversation with Mrs. P. Her daughter, Maya, was in my class when I taught 2nd grade. Maya has been retained this year in 3rd grade. We discussed Maya and her progress, and Mrs. P expressed her concerns about her daughter’s attitude toward school.

“At the beginning of the school year Maya did not even want to come to school and it was an effort to get her out of bed and out of the house on time.” (Teacher Journal dated 10-09-14)”

Maya had to watch as the other kids came to school on the first day excited to meet their new teacher and begin a new school year. Other classmates were promoted to the next grade and she must, in a humiliating fashion, start the same grade over with children that are younger, smaller,

and may even be more academically prepared. Mrs. P also stated that during the first week of school Maya went home and cried each day. I can only imagine how humiliating this experience must have been for her, and, as her father told me, “she must relive the fact that she has failed each day. This is her private hell.” (Teacher Journal dated 10-31-2014) “Although it has been argued by some that students [must] first do well in school in order to have a positive self-image” (Hamachek, 2001) related to academics and their academic abilities, it has been argued that a positive self-image is a prerequisite for doing well in school. This suggests that both are dependent on the other, and that the connection between the pair affects self-esteem. I feel that this the connection between academic and self-esteem are often ignored and, if properly addressed, could significantly impact the achievement of many students.

In November, 2014 I spoke with a few parents at dismissal and reminded them of one upcoming parent workshop at the school related to literacy. “I won’t be here” replied one parent. I told the parent that the workshop begins at 9:15 AM. I reminded her that she will be bringing her daughter to school at this time so why not join us to learn ways to assist her child. She replied “When it gets cold and it snows me and my baby won’t be here.” I wasn’t sure how to respond to this statement. If this is the attitude of a parent for a preschool age student, I can only imagine how this could impact the amount of assistance her daughter may be receiving at home. I wondered if the only time this parent will care is when the student is at a benchmark grade and the stakes are greater because this is when her daughter could potentially be retained based on the standardized assessment. Unfortunately, expressing concern at this point will be too late. This conversation has led me to believe that I need to have a workshop about the importance of early childhood education and explain to parents that what we do now in preschool sets the stage for future learning. Considering this parent’s comments, I better check the weather forecast and

schedule the workshop on a day when the weather is warmer or no chance of precipitation.

“Children that are retained are more likely to have mothers with lower IQ scores, poorer attitudes toward their child’s education, and lower parental involvement in school.” (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Sandoval, 1984)

“My parent resource teacher and I held a workshop titled: *The Importance of Sight Words*. This workshop was designed specifically for the parents of preschool students in our Child Parent Center because this is the first year that the preschool students were given sight words to memorize and they were going to be assessed on them weekly. We thought it would be particularly important for our parents to be aware of the reasons for this instruction and how these sight words are relevant to literacy development in young children. My parent resource teacher and I co-planned this meeting for 2 weeks. Sadly, only ONE parent (out of 100 preschool students) came to the meeting. I feel defeated.” (Teacher Journal dated 12-3-14)

When compared to other schools nationally, my school was listed as having “below average” growth based on the NWEA scores. This means that overall many students in our school are not making academic gains when compared to their peers nationally. The data from the NWEA assessments should be used as a formative assessment to guide instructional decisions and improve learning outcomes. However, I question whether this is actually being done. Is the data gathered from these assessments used to inform instructional decisions at the school in each classroom and/or to determine the academic needs of each student, or are the scores from these assessments used to determine the academic rating/performance of the school? I ask this because the NWEA scores were used as one gauge when the Mayor selected 50 schools to close and/or merge during the 2012-2013 school year. If this data is meant to be formative and used to guide instructional decisions, and only one piece of evidence to determine whether the instruction being provided is effective, why was it used in such a punitive manner? The students at my school were mandated to take the PARCC assessment in March, 2015. It is unclear how

the data from these assessments will be used and when this assessment data will become available.

Many of my Scholars did not view themselves as leaders or “smart” during interviews conducted at the beginning of my research. Amarianna stated “I’m smart sometimes and with some things... but not reading.” (October, 2014) Maya stated “I’m kind of smart but I failed.” (October, 2014) I asked Kya “Do you think you are smart?” Kya replied by shrugging his shoulders which I interpreted to mean “I don’t know.” (October, 2014) All Scholars replied “no” during a whole group discussion in November, 2014 when asked “Do you think that you are a leader?” Trenton stated “I’m not a leader, I’m a student.” Designing a program for the Scholars where they had a leadership role to improve self-esteem was important to me. I hoped that the interaction between the Scholar and their preschool partner would assist the Scholar in recognizing their academic abilities, provide additional practice on academics and build self-esteem while in a leadership role.

Question:

What happens when students who have been retained at third grade are given leadership roles?

Sub-questions:

- Is the retained student’s academic performance impacted?
- What happens to a student’s self-image? Specifically, how does being a student leader affect self-image, and does the student’s self-image change throughout the process?
- What happens to a student’s perspective of school?
- What happens to a student’s perspective of learning?

Data Tools:

- **Weekly reflection Journal: My own personal reflection journal** (ongoing).

I used my journal as a way to reflect on my own thoughts and feelings throughout the process. I saw this as a way to think about my next steps as it related to student involvement, data collection, and my own feeling(s) about what I was seeing and hearing. These data points helped me throughout my writing to put events in perspective and give a larger context and frame of reference to what I was doing at the time. My reflection journal was an integral part of my writing, and helped to capture events, thoughts, and feelings that may have otherwise been lost or forgotten. I also made video recordings as needed with individuals and small groups (randomly) based on meetings with students and students engaged in mentoring activities.

- **Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)**

I administered the 20 question Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (A.K.A The Garfield Survey) at the beginning of the research process. I analyzed the data to determine students' perceptions of recreational and academic reading, and I used the reading inventory surveys during 1:1 interviews as some of my guiding questions.

- **Interviews:**

I conducted 1:1 and small group interviews with students that were videotaped or audio recorded. This was important to my data collection as it was evidence that I was allowed to review at a later time and provided an opportunity to capture student interactions, thoughts, and feelings that may have otherwise been lost or forgotten over time. I also conducted interviews with the 3rd grade teacher of the Scholars in my group to gather both formative and summative data about the students.

- **Observations and Anecdotal Notes**

I conducted observations of students engaged in activities with and without their preschool partner on a weekly basis. I also took notes during our weekly meetings or wrote information from conversations that I may have had with students during the week.

- **NWEA**

Assessment data from fall 2014 and spring 2015 assessments was gathered to determine student academic progress in reading and math.

RESEARCH PROCESS/IMPLEMENTATION (WEEKLY MEETINGS):

I decided to form a group where select retained 3rd grade students would be considered “Scholars” and academic leaders as they worked with preschool students in both reading and math on a weekly basis. By working with these students I would have an opportunity to study, up close and in depth, the effects that having a leadership role might have on their academic progress and self-esteem, and determine whether this role may have had an impact.

I began my research by meeting with one of our 3rd grade teachers in October, 2014 to explain my action research and share my rationale with her. Four from a total of 13 students that had been retained were randomly selected. I specifically chose one student who had been retained (Maya) because I have known her since she was in kindergarten and she was a student that I had in 2nd grade. Two non-retained students were also randomly selected (5 retainees and 2 non-retained students). Also in October, 2014 I met with the selected students to explain my research, and asked them if they would be interested in participating. Upon receiving their permission in the form of a Student Participation Contract I informed the students that they

would also need to obtain permission from their parent (signed permission form). Six of the seven students returned a signed permission form from their parent and/or guardian. One parent contacted me and indicated that she did not want her son to participate in the research. I decided that my research and data collection would only focus on four of the students that had been retained and for whom I had permission forms (Maya, Amarianna, Trenton, and Kya). I did not include one of the retained students because she was frequently absent and subsequently transferred during the course of my research. For purposes of writing this paper I concluded my data collection at the end of March, 2015. My weekly meetings with the Scholars will, however, continue until the end of the school year in June, 2015. I felt that it was important for my students to be able to continue their interactions and engagement with the preschool students, as a teacher/leader would, from the beginning of the program until the end. At the end I wanted them to be able, as a leader to share what growth they may/may not have experienced with their partner.

Every Friday my group of Scholars would meet from 12:30 until 1:45. I met with the Scholars from 12:30 until 12:45 and we discussed our plan for the day. This day/time was chosen by the 3rd grade teacher because it would not interfere with her instructional time. This scheduled time was a second weekly physical education period for the students, and the physical education teacher allowed these students to miss this time without penalty. From 12:45 until 1:00 we would set up the games, learning materials, and/or select the stories that we would work on with the preschool students. Then the Scholars would go and get their preschool partner from their individual classroom. From 1:15-1:45 the students would read books and/or play games. Each scholar was partnered with a 3 or 4 year old preschool student that was randomly selected. I did not collect data on the preschool students during this time because my research only focused on

the Scholars. From 1:45-2:00 Scholars and I would debrief and discuss how we felt after each session and how the activity planned for the day progressed. The Scholars would write, draw, or reflect about their experience for the day with their partner. I would use these conversations as data collection points throughout my research to determine whether there were any changes relating to a student's perspective of self and their thoughts and feelings pertaining to school and learning. During these weekly sessions I would take anecdotal notes and I would also complete audio/video recordings of the students engaged in learning activities and these data points would then be used in my writing and when conducting additional 1:1 sessions with the Scholars on an as needed basis.

Our meetings were held for a total of 15 weeks. Select students were chosen from one preschool classroom within my center. These students were randomly selected and not part of the data that I was collecting. There were 4 Scholars and 4 preschool students that were paired together and we all met in one room. After 3 weeks it became apparent that this arrangement was not working as well as I had hoped. First, I noticed that there always seemed to be 1-2 preschool students that were absent regularly from this group. I checked individual classroom attendance and noticed that there were students that had perfect attendance for the months of August, September, and October. This data led me to select this different group of students instead based on their regular attendance in school. I did this because I felt that their consistent attendance would provide fidelity to my data collection and might allow the Scholar to form a bond with one student. I felt that this relationship may impact self-esteem and affect the Scholar's view of himself as a leader. Additionally, the noise level from 8 students reading books and/or playing games in one room was not conducive to a good learning environment and some students were off-task. Therefore, I decided that we would split the groups into two groups

(fours per group) and utilize two separate spaces to cut down on the noise level. This was effective and I noticed that it allowed the students to focus more on the activity and I was able to freely travel back and forth between both rooms and monitor student activities.

Many factors became problematic when trying to stick of to our scheduled Friday meetings. In my position as Head Teacher I was frequently out of the office at meetings and professional development trainings, and if one of the teachers in my center was absent, and we were unable to obtain a substitute teacher, I had to provide coverage for that class. Meetings also had to be cancelled due to mandated assessments. There were also field trips and special events that interrupted our meeting schedule.

Date Interpretations:

ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS:

I administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) In September, 2014 during one of our weekly sessions. The reading abilities within this group vary so I read each question to the students in order to ensure understanding and the collection of accurate data. Students had to respond to 20 questions and circle one response (from the 4 choices below) for each question to demonstrate their feeling about recreational and academic reading.



Very Happy



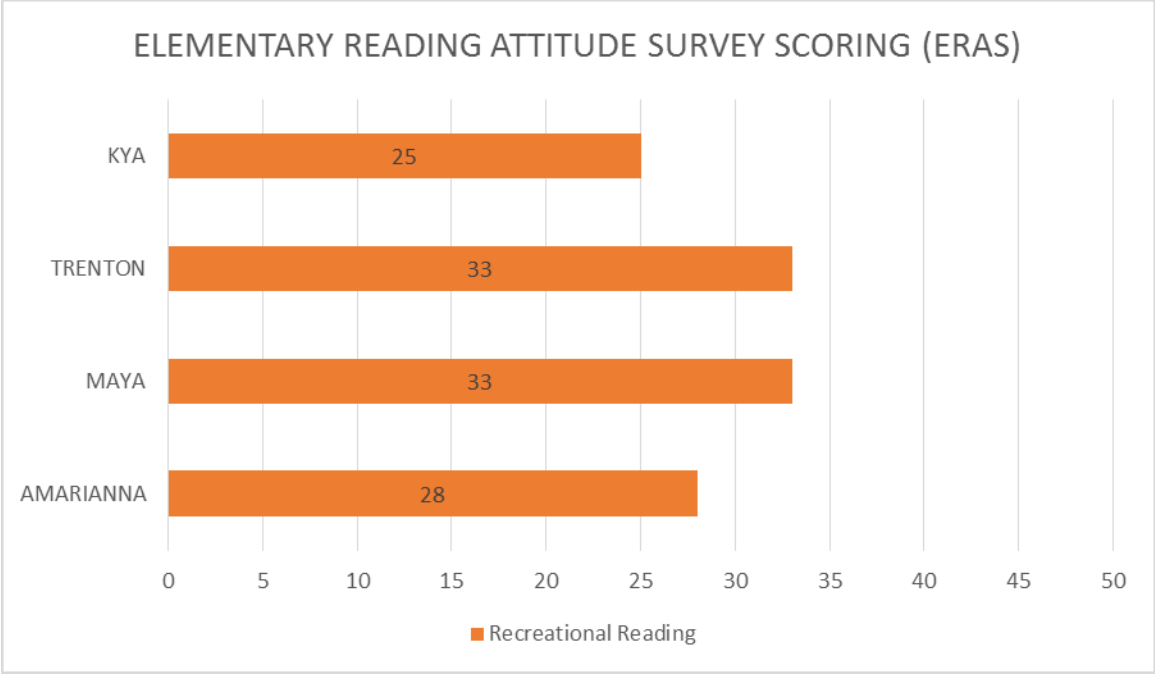
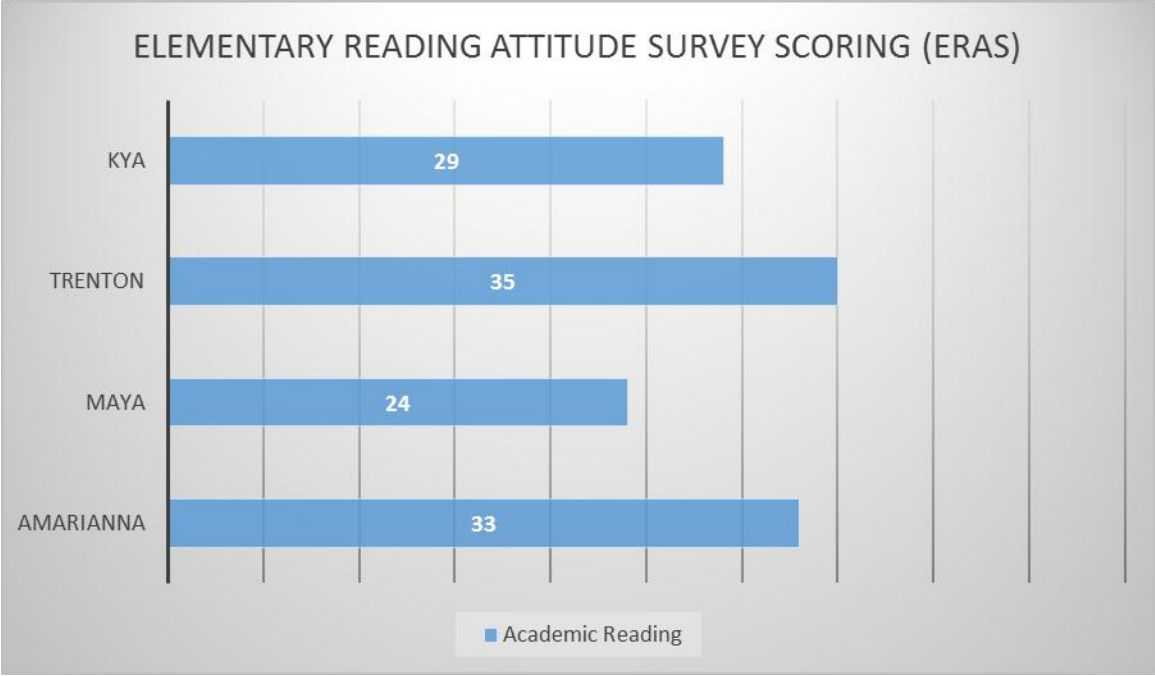
A Little Happy



A Little Upset



Very Upset



From the data collected on these surveys I learned that 3 of my 4 “Scholars” (students participating in the study) scored higher on academic reading which indicates that they find reading in school to be more pleasurable than recreational reading. This data left me

wondering...IF the students find more pleasure in reading in school, what could be the cause for them being retained? IF students are enjoying the reading material in class, did the instructional practices, methods, interventions, and strategies effect their academic achievement?

Furthermore, are the students reading at home at all as a recreational activity? When surveyed, 3 of the 4 students indicated that they do not have a “library” at home and that they have very few, if any, books at home to read. Trenton stated “Ms. P. (classroom teacher) lets us take books home to read from our classroom library but I don’t have any books to keep at home.”

“Many students in our school have been retained at 3rd grade this year because they did not meet the required score on the NWEA, and are functioning below grade level. They have been placed back in a 3rd grade classroom where there are 30+ students with very little support or resources to meet their needs. (Teacher Journal: 10-29-14)

On the ERAS Maya scored 9 points higher on recreational reading than on academic reading.

Maya told me that she likes when “the teacher reads to us” and stated that currently her teacher is reading the Wayside School series. When asked if she has read any of these books

independently she replied “No, they are chapter books and it takes too long to read them.” I

asked Maya to explain what she dislikes about reading in school during an interview on 4-21-

2015 and she replied “the passages in school are too long and boring.” This statement makes me

question whether the material that is provided to students in school might impact her attitude

toward reading and academic performance. I wonder if the teacher has thought to use the

Wayside School series as reading material for instruction. I asked Maya during an interview on

4-27-2015 if she enjoyed our reading group and she replied “yes, because I like to read with my

partner and I can help someone else learn.” But when I asked her if her opinion about reading

has changed because of our group (she previously stated that she dislikes reading) she replied

“No, I still don’t like it.” I’m confused by this response. I interpret her statement to mean that

she enjoys helping someone learn which is in line with her earlier statement that she wants to become a teacher, and enjoys her role as a leader; however, reading is still not an activity she would independently complete.

On 4-19-2015 I sat with my Scholars as their classroom teacher read a chapter aloud from their current book in the Wayside School series, Wayside School is Falling Down, and I noticed several teaching points, specifically making inferences, main idea, and character analysis, which could be used as instructional points. Kya even commented previously that he needed help in identifying the main idea and his classroom teacher confirmed that this as an academic area where all students are struggling. When I asked the 3rd grade teacher about using this reading series for classroom instruction she stated “they don’t have multiple copies of the book for students to read.” Most students are not on the same reading level within this class, so obtaining a few copies should not be problematic and this could be a point where this teacher can differentiate her reading instruction.

Amarianna also scored higher on academic reading on the ERAS. I met with Amarianna to discuss some of her responses on this survey. She selected the “A little upset” Garfield when answering the question “How do you feel for reading for fun at home?” When asked to discuss this response Amarianna stated that “I might read a little bit more if I had books at home to read.” She chose the “A little Happy” Garfield” when answering the question “How do you feel about getting a book for a present?” which suggests to me that this student does have a positive opinion about reading and, if given an opportunity, may invest more time into reading which support her literacy development. Amarianna’s statement that she “might read a little bit more if I had books at home” makes me wonder what I could do to get more books to students so that they can build a home library. Amarianna’s reading ability is equivalent to a 1st grade student.

In my child parent center we have an abundance of books at varying levels. I asked Amarianna if she would like books to take home. She quickly replied “that I can keep?” When I told her she could keep them she said “good, then I can read to my sister and we can play school.” This statement suggests to me that she has a positive attitude about school and reading. Perhaps having more books in the home might be beneficial to both Amarianna and her sister. When she stated that she could read to her sister I interpret this as evidence that she is continuing to embrace the leadership role which is evidence of improved self-image.

Trenton’s scores on the ERAS reflected a neutral opinion toward reading. Trenton scored 35 on academic reading and 33 on recreational reading. I interpret these scores to mean that he has a relatively indifferent attitude toward reading. Trenton admits that he “likes reading” and that there are many different types of books that he enjoys. “I mostly enjoy comics and superhero books.” He informed me that he reads books at home and at school. Trenton is repeating 3rd grade based on his NWEA math scores. He is not a struggling reader which also would support his ERAS scores being similar in academic and recreational reading.

Kya, who is reading below his academic level, scored slightly higher on academic reading. Essentially his scores fell midway on the scale and these scores could be interpreted as not having a clear opinion about reading overall. Kya admits that he enjoys reading but that it is a struggle for him. Kya has stated that he enjoys reading but that “it is a little hard sometimes...sometimes I don’t know the vocabulary words.” I interpret Kya’s survey responses as evidence that Kya, despite his academic struggles, enjoys reading both in and out of school.

Student Profiles:

- Scholar Profile: Trenton

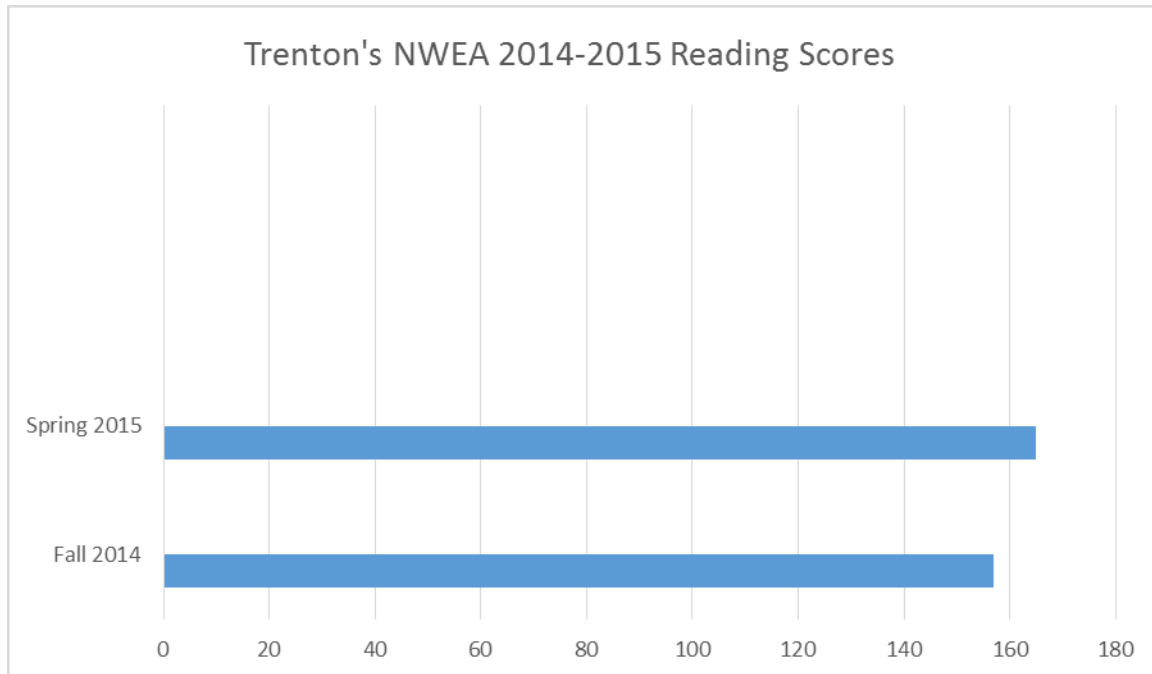


(TRENTON 01-2015)

Trenton is a 10 year old student who is repeating 3rd Grade and was randomly selected by his 3rd grade teacher. Trenton had to repeat 3rd grade based on his lack of achievement in math. Trenton lives with mom, grandpa (whom he calls “Pa-Pa”), his grandmother, and his great-grandmother. He stated that “things happened between my mom and dad and they are not together anymore.” Trenton explained that he does, however, spend time with his father every weekend. Trenton stated that he has a lot of help at home with homework and that he will “do homework before I watch TV, and Pa-Pa helps.” This family involvement suggests that education is important in this home. I am left wondering, however, why did Trenton fail 3rd grade when he appears to have a support system at home? Trenton’s teacher reported that he has regular and consistent attendance in school so I am led to believe that there was a level of instructional support not being provided to this student to meet his academic needs and that the data being collected from the mandated assessments was not being used in a manner that was effective to improve instruction.

Trenton stated that his current teacher allows students to practice math and reading skills on tablets and utilizes technology which is a method of differentiation for students. He also mentioned that there are specific web sites the students are able to access (www.lexiacore5.com and www.striveacademy.com) and he stated “you get into trouble if you are on something else.” Whereas last year, Trenton recalls that students were allowed to “play games and download

games” that were, as Trenton calls them, “just games, not learning.” Trenton also stated that his teacher rewards students for “doing good stuff like listening and following directions which is important for your education.” When asked to compare this reward system to what was happening in his classroom last year, Trenton stated “there was no reward.” During a conversation with Trenton I asked him “What is different about this school year when compared to last year?” Trenton stated “it is different learning things.” When asked to explain he stated “new things this year that I did not learn last year.” This statement suggests that Trenton is aware that he may have missed out on some valuable learning during his previous 3rd grade experience. During one of my 1:1 interviews, I asked Trenton “Do you think the math games we use during our mentoring time help you?” He responded “Yes...by showing your partner what to do...it’s not just like practicing someone else, it’s like practicing you.” This statement is significant because it demonstrates that Trenton realizes that he is also practicing, and potentially refining, his own skills while working with his preschool partner. Trenton is functioning far below his academic grade level. Trenton’s 2014-2015 NWEA reading scores (fall-spring) improved slightly from 157 to 165. This minimal growth indicates that Trenton went from having an end of year kindergarten reading proficiency in the fall 2014 to a middle of the year 1st grade reading proficiency 4 months later in 2015.



During many of our mentoring sessions Trenton has been observed giving his partner praise and encouragement during activities. During one of our videotaped conversations (2-27-15) I stated to Trenton that “I noticed when you work with your preschool partner you use words like good job and I know you can do it...why do you say stuff like that?” Trenton responded “because I want to help them out...because the more you learn the better you get...and when you encourage them...sometimes they feel happy.” I asked Trenton “how do you feel when you get kind words or someone encourages you?” He replied “I feel so happy...when a teacher or someone tells you that you can do it you feel better and the kind words help you.” Trenton’s statements suggest to me that he knows that self-image is important during the learning process. Trenton realizes that words are important to improving self-esteem and that they are powerful, and understands how they impact learning. In my opinion his statements show that he understands that receiving and/or giving praise affects an individual’s perspective of school, which could potentially impact learning.

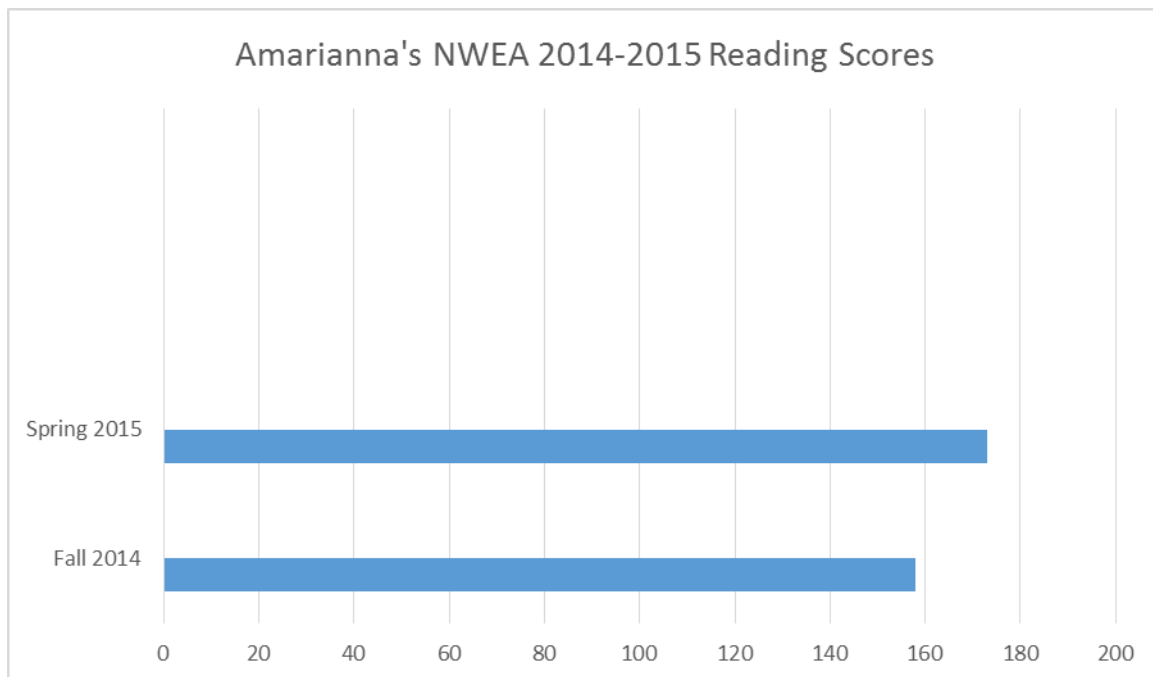
Trenton told me that he wants to be a police officer when he grows up. “All I see is too much blood and stuff. I can’t stand it.” Trenton even mentioned that Pa-Pa tried to “help his cousin who gets drunk and acts crazy all of the time.” Even within his own home he is faced with violence and challenges that could affect his way of life, perspective, and self-image. He continued “look on the news. All I see is people getting hurt. Every time I hear the police sirens I think Oh, no!” These statements are illustrative of what happens in our school community on a regular basis. Our students are surrounded by violence, poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse which are all symptoms of a community in crisis and detrimental to one’s self-image. Trenton continued “I made up my mind that I’m going to change it.” His optimism and plans for the future are refreshing. Students at my school are in a community where many have difficulty thinking about making it to the next day let alone having plans for a future. Despite what he may have witnessed in his own home, he maintains a positive attitude about himself, school, and ultimately his future. This positivity will impact Trenton’s academic success. Through his interactions and kind words of encouragement with the preschool students I believe that Trenton is trying, in his own way, to affect their self-image and attitude.

- Scholar Profile: Amarianna



(AMARIANNA 03-2015)

Amarianna is a 9 year old student that has been retained in 3rd grade and was randomly selected. Amarianna began the school year with a kindergarten reading proficiency level. When asked “What makes Amarianna special?” She quickly replied “I like to solve problems, I was never suspended, and I have lots of friends.” She lives with her mother and younger sister. Amarianna considers herself to be the middle child. When I asked her how old the oldest sibling was she replied “I don’t know. She died before I was born.” Amarianna’s mother works in the community in a hair salon as a beautician. Amarianna’s teacher reported that Amarianna has made improvements in reading and math but “she would do much better if she came to school every day.” To date, (4-17-2015) Amarianna has missed **20** days of school out of a total of 120. This is significant because our school has an issue with attendance and truancy. I wonder if non-attendance during the 2013-2014 school year may be one reason to explain why Amarianna is repeating 3rd grade.



Martina's NWEA score in reading went from a 158 to a 173 which is a 25 point gain. Her score in the fall 2014 indicates a reading proficiency equivalent to EOY kindergarten and has improved to a BOY 1st grade proficiency level. This score, although showing academic improvement, is tragic. On 2-13-2015 Amarianna stated "Mrs. Stewin did you see I made progress in my reading?" I replied "No, I had not seen that." She stated "Let me show you." From her book bag she retrieved our school newsletter that listed the names of the students that had made double digit gains in reading and/or math. She quickly scanned the list for her name and said "see...there it is...my name." I quickly congratulated her, gave her a hug, and told her that I was proud of her. She replied "I'm proud of me too." I interpret this statement as evidence to show that the work we are doing in our group to improve self-image and confidence in my retained students is possible. During a 1:1 session (video recording) with Amarianna she stated "I like school...my teacher is nice..." which suggests that she has a positive attitude about school. When I asked Amarianna about a reading survey where she indicated that she liked reading but was not a good reader she explained "I can only read...like a little." When I asked her to explain what was difficult about reading she stated "some of the words a little bit." Despite her admitted struggle with reading she still maintains that she "likes" to read. I am left wondering... **IF** reading is an enjoyable activity for this child... then how/why did the educational system fail Amarianna and not address her academic needs. Sadly, I doubt Amarianna's situation is unique and there are probably many children that academic have needs that are left unaddressed. Amarianna and I discussed one of her favorite books, Go Dog, Go! The story Go, Dog, Go!, written by Dr. Seuss, introduces concepts such as color and relative position, has easy to read repetitive language, and has many picture clues that support beginning readers. ("The blue dog is in. The red dog is out.") Although this is a beginning reader book with

a readability level of 1.4 (year /months) Amarianna chose to read it during one of our Scholar sessions to her Pre-k student. Her success with reading this predictable and repetitive pattern within the text allows her to feel a level of success that she may not have regularly within the school day. Providing her an opportunity to develop her fluency, competency, and word recognition may assist her in achieving improved fluency and reading comprehension and may also improve her self-image. She has the opportunity to see herself as a reader and participate in an activity that she says she enjoys, and feel a level of success in doing so. Amarianna also indicated that she enjoys reading books about people who “are detectives and solve crimes.” When asked if she has any of these types of books at home she replied “we don’t have books at home...well, only school books.” I was very sad when I heard this. I cannot imagine that there is a home without books for students to read.

In a conversation with Amarianna on 3-25-14 I asked her to compare last school year and this year, and explain how these experiences maybe the same or different. She stated “I’m happier this year. Ms. P. (her current teacher) teaches us more stuff, like reading and math. She is more fun.” When I asked what makes this year “more fun” she replied “we get to get on I-pads and do reading and math and we are learning like that. She makes it more fun and it’s different.” These statements suggest that, despite being a retained student this year, she has a positive outlook on school and learning, and the method of delivering instruction is important. She continued “it’s like when you come get us (referring to our weekly meetings), we have fun playing our math and reading games... and learn at the same time. It don’t feel like school.” This statement suggests that Amarianna views our weekly meetings with a positive attitude and reflects her attitude toward school and learning has been affected. Having the opportunity to explore learning and have multiple learning opportunities has impacted this student’s outlook and attitude despite the

fact that she is struggling academically. When I asked her current teacher how she is providing instruction and additional support to the students that are being retained she replied “It’s been a lot of work... but some of these kids need just the basics. Like with Amarianna, I work with her on letter sounds and blends and give her kindergarten packets to take home and practice. That’s the only way she is going to ever get it.” This teacher recognizes that differentiation is important and that the only way students are going to be able to progress academically is to give them practice with the fundamentals that they missed.

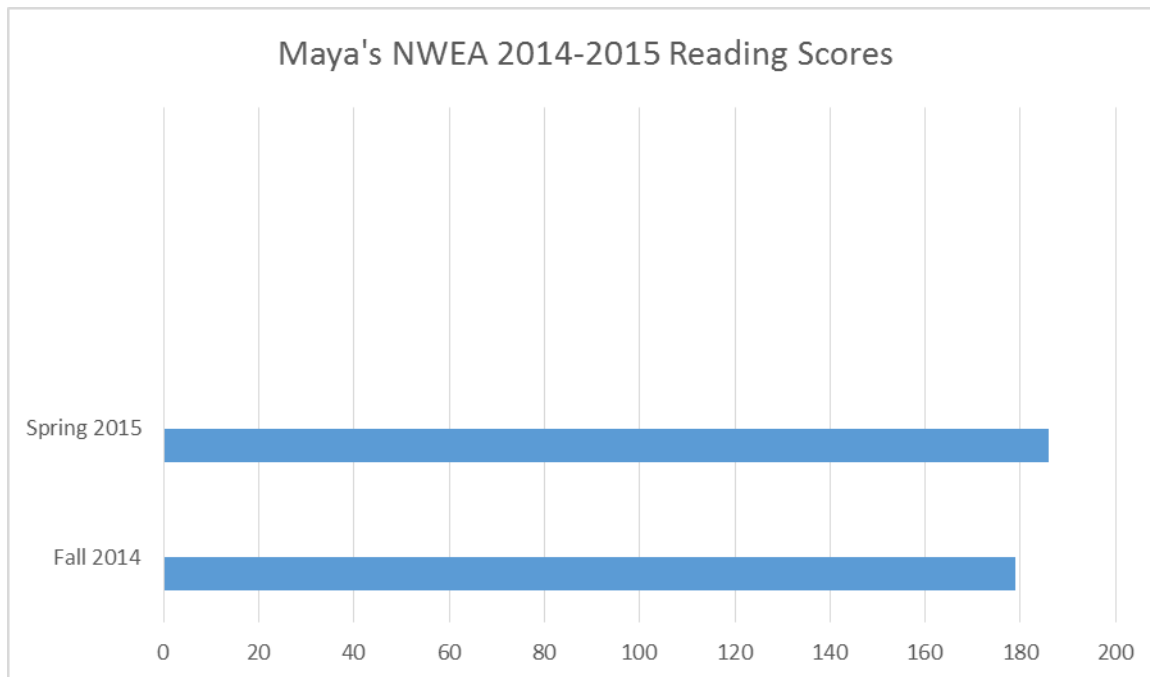
Scholar Profile: Maya



(MAYA 10-2014)

Maya is a 10 year old student who is repeating 3rd grade. At the beginning of the school year I noticed that Maya looked sad. In September, 2014 Maya looked down at the floor and told me “I failed 3rd grade.” The idea that she had that tremendous amount of shame that she could not even look at me was heart-breaking. I replied “Okay...so you have to repeat a grade. This just gives you extra time for learning, and a chance to get even smarter.” Maya is the older of 2 children. Maya’s brother, Maren, teased her at the beginning of the year when he first learned that she failed. When asked about the teasing Maya stated “that used to make me feel sad.” Maya enjoys playing school at home where she is the teacher and her brother and two cousins are her students. Maya told me that she “wants to be a teacher when she grows up.” This

dramatic play at home and expressed desire to be a teacher suggests that she has a positive outlook on school and education despite her academic struggles and retention in 3rd grade this school year.



During an interview with Maya in March, 2015 she stated “I hate reading...but I love to do math. Reading is too hard and takes too long.” Maya made minimal improvements in reading on her spring NWEA scores. She went from a 179 (BOY 2nd grade reading proficiency) to a 186 (MOY 2nd grade proficiency). This 7 point growth is below the expected 10 point growth target for this assessment cycle that was provided by NWEA. Her inability to achieve the target scores is a cause for concern. Maya was one of my students when I taught 2nd grade and I specifically selected her to participate in my research. At the beginning of 2nd grade she was reading at a kindergarten proficiency level (Level B Fountas & Pinnell). By the end of 2nd grade Maya was reading at a Level K which is equivalent to a middle of the year 2nd grade proficiency. Maya made significant progress during 2nd grade and was on target to continue that growth in 3rd grade.

However, according to her BOY NWEA scores during her first year in 3rd grade, however, it appears that Maya's reading proficiency level decreased in the fall of 2013. So I wonder..."what happened?" How could a student who was on target to continue growth in reading fall so far behind in one year? Was the instruction being provided not meeting this student's needs? Was the teacher differentiating instruction, or was the instruction being provided whole group? I question whether Maya's feelings and attitude toward reading hindering her academic progress.

During a conversation with Maya's mother in February, 2015 I was told the following:

"At the beginning of the school year Maya did not even want to come to school and it was an effort to get her out of bed and out of the house on time. Today she was up before me and telling me to hurry up because she needed to get to school and see you because she had some questions to ask you about the mentoring group. She is so anxious for it to start." (Teacher Journal dated 2-26-15)

I was happy to hear this and glad to learn that the idea of being a Scholar and participating with the pre-school students has already improved Maya's attitude about school. In February, 2015 Mrs. P., Maya's mother stated "Did you see Maya's name in the hall? She made double digit gains in math!" Mrs. P is referring to the posters that the principal has placed in the hall celebrating student progress on the NWEA 2014 fall assessment. She continued "I guess she is just learning this year what she **should have** learned last year." Maya had to repeat 3rd grade based on her reading score and not her math. Her double digit gain in math, albeit a point for celebration, is not the area of concern for Maya. In conversing with Mrs. P. she admitted that she is aware that her daughter struggles with reading but that it "is a challenge and a fight at home to get her to read or do her reading homework." When I asked Maya's mother about the

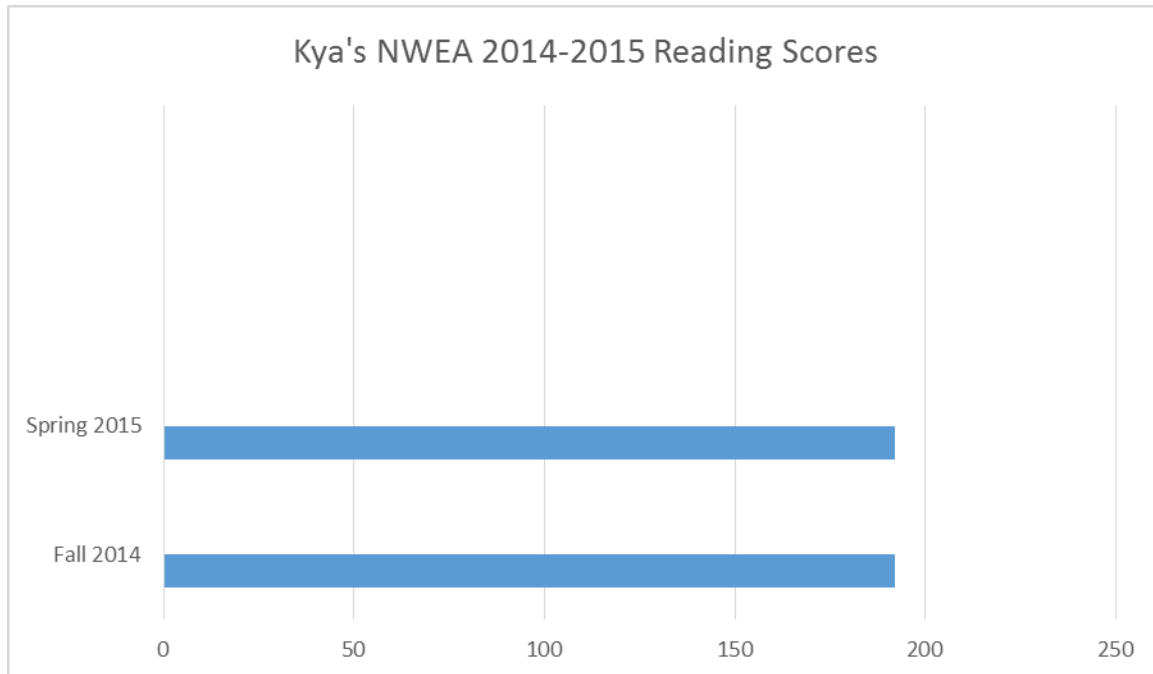
types of books she likes to read she stated “picture books...which are really for younger kids.” When I reminded her that Maya’s reading ability would be best supported, and perhaps improved, by reading a books that were at her readability level she replied “I never thought of it that way.”

Scholar Profile: Kya



(KYA 4-2015)

Kya is a 9 year old student who is repeating 3rd grade and was randomly selected to participate in my research by his current 3rd grade teacher. It was reported that Kya regularly attends school and does not have behavior concerns. His fall 2014 NWEA reading score was 192. His reading score did not improve when he was again tested in January, 2015. His score is equivalent to a beginning of the year 3rd grade student. Kya’s reading ability was on point for the fall 2014 assessment but the fact that he made no academic improvements 6 months later is alarming. I question what supports and interventions were put into place for this student to ensure his continued growth after the fall assessment. Kya’s spring 2014 reading score was 184 which is equivalent to a middle of the year 2nd grade student. Although Kya made academic gains from the spring to the fall in 2014 I’m still concerned about his lack of progress during the fall to spring assessment cycle.



During a video interview in February, 2015 with Kya he stated “I’m not happy with the [reading] score that I got on the NWEA.” When asked to explain why he was unhappy he replied “because I need to practice some more.” He said this as tears welled up in his eyes. When I asked him to explain what was challenging for him in reading he stated “the main idea.” I asked Kya if he thought working on main idea with our preschool partners would help him he stated “yes.” This awareness of his academic needs surprised me. Kya’s teacher agreed that Kya does need to practice with identifying the main idea and said that this is an area that they work on regularly in the classroom because many students are struggling with this same concept. After this interview I wondered if teachers are having 1:1 conversations with their students about their test scores and doing any sort of goal setting. The idea that Kya understands where his challenges lie, and has the ability to articulate this, is something that should be communicated with his teacher. Did Kya share this specific information with his teacher? Was he given an opportunity to share this information with his teacher? When I spoke with Kya’s teacher she

indicated that she holds individual goal setting conferences with her students about their NWEA scores after each assessment cycle. She also indicated that it is difficult to track data with 30+ students in the classroom that are functioning on so many different levels. The classroom teacher explained “I have a data binder for this...I have a data binder for that...but at the end of the day with all the testing we do... it’s hard to keep track.”

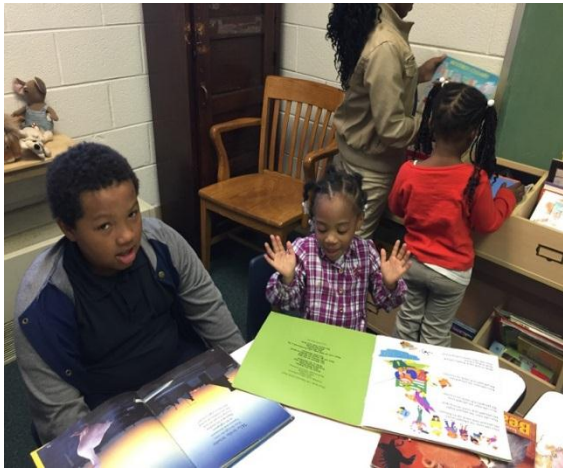
Kya stated that “he enjoys our group” and asks me every Friday morning when he drops his cousin off at preschool “you coming to pick us up today?” This statement suggests that he looks forward to the time spent working with the preschool school students and has a positive attitude about the work that we are doing together. When asked how he feels about working with a partner he stated “I like her...she is nice...I just want her to read better and be smarter.”

Although his partner is a preschool student and Kya’s idea of “reading” may not be developmentally appropriate for this child, his statement demonstrates that he knows that reading is important and has positive goals for her. He maintains a positive outlook when discussing his own progress as well. “I know I am getting better because I read better now.” When asked to explain this statement he replied “I read better because I understand more. I know more of the words now and we work a lot on vocabulary so I know what more words mean.”

Weekly Meetings: Session Observations:

Our weekly meetings were not as consistent as I would have liked and my Scholars were unhappy when I was unable to keep the scheduled Friday meetings. For example, on May 1, 2015 I told my Scholars that the meetings for the next 2 weeks would be cancelled they resoundingly replied with a series of “aww, no!” and “oh man!” I explained that I will be out a meeting for one of the days and the other was a field trip day. When I asked the group “how

does it make you feel when we cannot meet?” Amarianna replied “I get mad...because I like to come over here (referring to the Child Parent Center) and reading with my partner.” Kya stated “I like reading with my partner and teaching her stuff and when we don’t get to meet I be feeling sad and stuff.” When asked why he feels sad he replied “because we don’t teach the kids nothing.” This statement suggests that he has knowledge as a scholar to share with his partner and understands his role as a Scholar (leader) is important to him and his self-esteem. Trenton stated “I get made when you can’t pick us up because I like reading with my partner and it’s important that I teach him stuff.” The statements from Kya and Trenton suggest that sharing their knowledge with their partner is important and that they value their role. The reactions and statements from my Scholars led me to believe that the Scholars enjoy the time as leaders with their partners, they embrace their leadership role, and our reading group is an activity that builds confidence and self-esteem. The Scholars see themselves as the teacher (leader) and they value the role that they play.



This photo shows Kya and his partner Allelah (May, 2015). On this particular day Allelah decided that she would read to the Scholar. She stated “I want to read to you.” It was a sing along book (“This Old Man He Played ...). Kya obliged as his student sang to him. Kya was able to take a risk and felt confident enough to allow Allelah to

read to him. I observed that Kya would say hello to Allelah every morning when he brought his cousin to preschool. In April, 2014 I went to pick up the Scholars for our Friday meeting and I brought Allelah with me. When we entered the room Kya shouted “hey, that’s my partner.” He got out of his seat and hugged her. Later, as we walked down the hall, he took her hand as she struggled to walk safely down the stairs. Kya would generally preselect math games and books for his session with Allelah and each time when she entered he would wave to her and pull out her seat so she could sit down, and he would end each session with “Bye Allelah, I’ll see you next week.” The relationship is important in the development of self-esteem. The Scholar’s interactions with Allelah showed that he valued this relationship, viewed himself as a leader, and wanted to help her. Kya would ask me every Friday “You coming to get us today?” This questioning demonstrated his commitment to Allelah and his role as a leader and I interpret his actions as an improvement to his self-esteem.



Scholar Amarianna reading with her preschool student (April, 2015)

Amarianna has a reading proficiency level of a 1st grade student. She selects books that are beginning readers with decodable words and pictures to support the text. At the beginning of our program Amarianna needed several reminders regarding expectations and behaviors. At the

beginning of the research we were in one room and due to the noise level we split into two different rooms. Amarianna was frequently acting silly, laughing, and off-task. It was difficult for me to leave one room and collect data when I had to frequently manage Amarianna's misbehavior which would lead to others getting off task as well. I had to have many discussions with Amarianna at the beginning of the research (Scholar sessions) and remind her that I expected her to be a leader and that the preschool students will react depending on how she behaves. As the sessions continued I noticed that I needed to speak with her less frequently and by December, I noticed that she was giving the preschool students reminders about their behavior if she saw them getting off task. This change in behavior was important and I interpret this change in behavior as impacting her self-image. She saw herself as a leader. When I asked Amarianna's teacher about her behavior and whether she noticed any change she replied. "No. She is not here enough for me to notice." Amarianna's teacher reported that Amarianna has attendance issues. However, when I checked Amarianna's attendance pattern she was only absent on 2 of the Friday meeting days. I met with Amarianna in May, 2015 and discussed her attendance with her. I stated "Ms. P told me that you are absent a lot...but I noticed that you are rarely absent on Friday. Why is that?" Amarianna replied "cause you come get us on Friday and I want to be here for that." This statement suggests to me that Amarianna is embracing her role within this group and it is important to her to participate. Our reading sessions has impacted her self-esteem and her role as a Scholar is important to her. I view Amarianna's change in behavior as important, and I wonder how a leadership role for students with behavior problems might be impacted positively in the future.

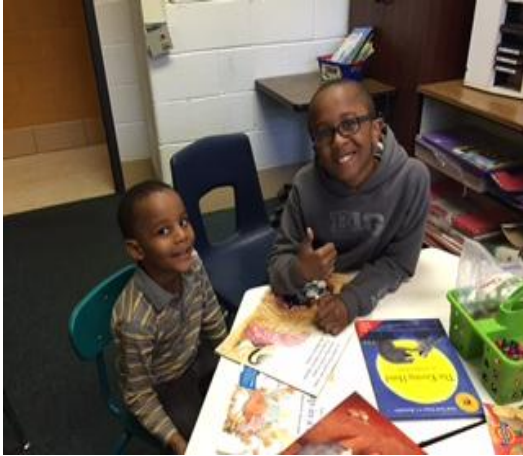


(Scholar Maya 4-2014 selecting books

with her Preschool partner)

Maya stated that she “likes reading with a partner...but that she still does not enjoy reading.” I am disappointed when Maya tells me that she does not like reading. Despite stating many times that she enjoys our reading group Maya is still a reluctant reader and according to her mother “it is so hard to get Maya to read...even though I bought her books with pictures...because these are the kinds of books she says she likes.” The parent continued “I don’t know what else to do with her.” At the beginning of the Scholar meetings (October through December) Maya would always preselect books that she and her partner would read before the sessions began. During observations in January, 2015 and again in April, 2015 Maya has been allowing her partner to select the books once the sessions begin. Perhaps offering her partner this choice is part of the self-esteem building. She is comfortable giving her partner the opportunity to select any book and Maya has confidence in herself and believes that she will be able to read it with accuracy. I believe that providing the opportunity for her partner to choose a book demonstrates an improvement in self-esteem and confidence, and despite Maya’s admission that she does not like reading, is slowly coming to enjoy the activity. I wonder... IF the research continued for a

second cycle or was continued for another school year would Maya's opinion about reading change or, because of her experiences with retention and not being a successful reader in school, impact her outlook for years to come?



(March, 2014) Trenton and his partner Reg

Trenton has had a difficult time with his partner. This preschool student was selected because he is “high energy” and I chose him because I wanted to give his teacher a “time-out.” Reg is 3 year old who is participating in preschool for the first time. He is often off-task and Trenton has been observed telling Reg “Come on...look over here...you need to pay attention.” When conferencing with Trenton about his partner he stated “He is bad a little...he doesn't always pay attention and listen...and I just want him to be successful.” This positive attitude, despite what could be considered difficult circumstances, demonstrates that Trenton has embraced his role as a leader. He does not give up on his active partner and has high expectations for him. Trenton is demonstrating that he understands that paying attention and listening are an integral part to achieving academic success. He has embraced the role as a Scholar and leader. Trenton has stated that it is “hard to work with him” (referring to his partner). I have observed Trenton stating “come one...pay attention...let's count...I know you can do it.” This encouragement is important to self-esteem building and I interpret his actions as recognizing the importance of

positive praise. I think in the future I would consider more pairings like the one with Trenton and Reg. I think that both students benefitted from the relationship and the additional attention that the preschool student received might be something that could potentially help him learn to manage his own behavior in the future. This was not a consideration during the research but could potentially be an important factor to consider for future research.

Findings/Conclusion:

I have found that overall the students have come to embrace their role as Scholars. This name was a purposeful choice on my part and I wanted students to view themselves as the scholar and expert when working with the preschool students. It was my hope that having a name that suggests that they were learners and leaders would make the students embrace this role and take on the qualities of these roles. All students, in some regard, demonstrated a change that improved their self-esteem. When some of the weekly sessions needed to be cancelled the group of Scholars were disappointed and verbally expressed this to me. I interpret this stated disappointment as evidence to suggest that the Scholars embraced their role as a leader and the fact that they wanted to participate in these sessions suggests improved self-esteem as a leader. Not all NWEA and PARCC data was available at this time and, in the future, I would like to analyze NWEA and PARCC data to determine whether academic improvements were made in reading and determine whether these gain were significant. Not all NWEA assessment data from May, 2015 was available at the time that I completed this research.

Maya went from controlling the book choice to allowing her partner to make the choice which demonstrates confidence as a reader. She knows that she will be able to read any book her partner chooses, and relinquishing control to her partner demonstrated that improved confidence

and self-image. Despite her opinion that she does not like reading, her actions suggest that perhaps reading is something that she enjoys more on a recreational level rather than academically. She did score higher on her ERAS for academic reading so perhaps her opinion has changed. If I conducted similar research in the future I would definitely give the ERAS at the beginning and the end of the research study and use this data to determine if there were any changes. Although Maya describes reading as a process that is too time consuming and “boring” she seemed to embrace her ability as a reader and regularly engaged with her partner where she asked her partner questions about the reading as a teacher would. This behavior is evidence that she saw herself as a leader and a teacher and this interaction and questioning of her preschool partner could translate into improvements in academics for both tutor and tutee. Maya did not show much improvement on her reading score from the January to May 2015 NWEA testing. Her reading score only improved two points. On the day of the NWEA test (5-1-15) I spoke to Maya about her reading test. I tried to offer her words of encouragement prior to the test and build up her self-esteem. She rolled her eyes, uttered “ugh” and then smiled. Her attitude going in to the test was less than positive and I could tell this by the expressions and body language that she displayed during the conversation that she was not looking forward to this day. I feel that she definitely needs to have more support on building self-esteem and that perhaps her negative attitude toward reading in school could be impacting her academic progress.

Amarianna went from needing behavior management to being the one to manage student behavior in the group which I interpret as improved self-image and acceptance of her role as a leader. I found this to be refreshing and her change in behavior allowed me the confidence to travel back and forth freely within the two rooms without being concerned about the off task behaviors that occurred at the beginning of the research study. Also, her attendance in 13 of the

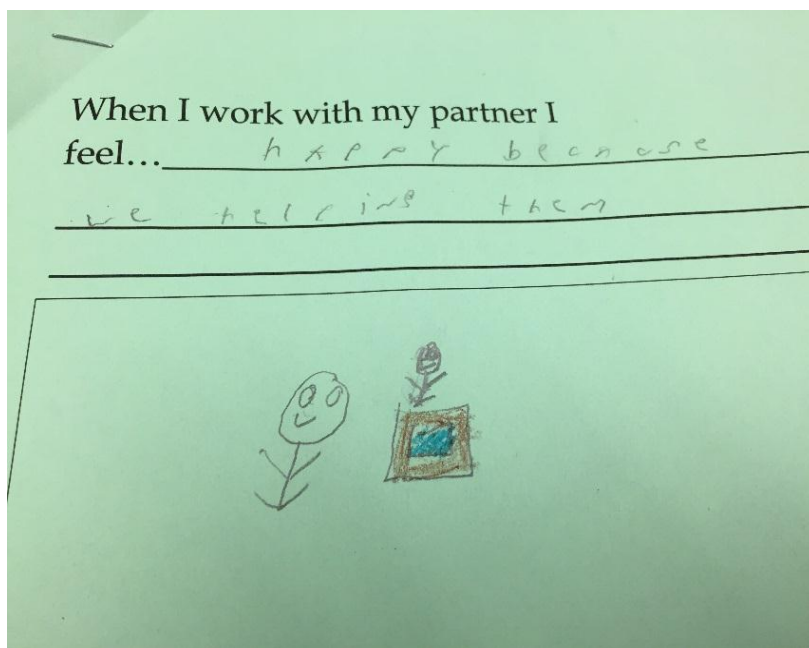
15 meetings was significant because she is a student that has a poor attendance pattern. This improved attendance demonstrates her improved self-esteem and commitment to the Scholar reading sessions. From her data I would conclude that giving a student a leadership role would impact student attendance and could potentially affect academic outcomes on the mandated assessments. When Amarianna stated that her attendance improved “cause you come get us on Friday and I want to be here for that” (referring to our sessions). Her role as a leader was important to her and for her to make the effort to get to school on the day of our Scholar meetings was a significant choice for her to make. Amarianna lives in the community and walks to school so this decision to attend school regularly on Fridays was purposeful. Additionally, this regular attendance in school could lead to improved academics.

At the beginning of the study Kya admitted that he was a struggling reader and did not view himself as a leader. Despite his lack of progress on the spring, 2015 NWEA assessment he now admits “I can read a little better now” (interview on 5-2-2015). When Kya was asked “Do you feel more confident as a reader?” He replied “Yes...because I can read books that I have never read before.” Kya stated that he believes our Scholar reading group has helped him “because I can read much more every time I read.” I have observed that Kya embraced his role as the Scholar when working with his partner. During an interview on 5-5-2015 Kya stated:

“When I read with my partner I read so that she can learn how to read books and read hard words...I feel great when I read with her...because I can tell her the words that are hard for her read.”

I interpret this statement to mean that he views himself as the expert when helping Allelah read. As a scholar he wants to share his knowledge with her which suggests an improved self-image as

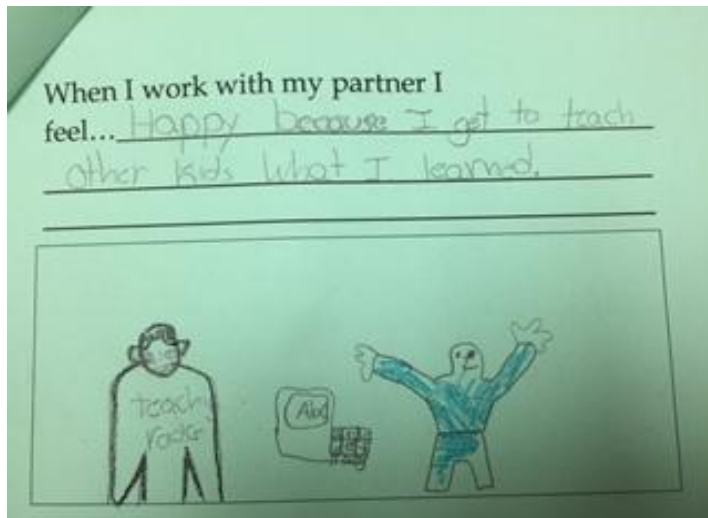
a reader. Kya admits that “school is still hard a little bit” but he likes the time he spends as a Scholar so that he can “teach the kids new things.” Kya also developed a relationship with his partner Allelah that I did not see with the other students. He was careful and patient with her (especially when she decided that she was going to read and sing to him) and when he saw her when we were not in our Scholar meetings he called her “my student.” This word choice suggests that his view of himself as the teacher and leader changed and he developed improved self-image as a result. Kya’s illustration below shows that both people are smiling and Kya wrote that when he works with his partner he feels “happy because we helping them.” This statement suggests that Kya enjoys the work that he did with his partner and the illustration demonstrates a positive outlook on his participation in the Scholar meetings.



(Kya: May, 2015)

Trenton admits that he enjoyed working with his partner “even though he doesn’t listen all the time” (Scholar interview 5-4-2015) and when looking at the image that he has drawn below he has a positive image about the work that he is doing which is evident by what is printed on the

shirt he has drawn: "Teaching Rocks." (Illustration created 3-27-15) He said that he likes the math games best and that the Scholar meetings "helps them and helps me learn... and helps us both go to the next level" (Scholar interview 5-1-2015). This statement demonstrates that Trenton is aware that participating as a Scholar is a learning experience for both parties. When I asked Trenton if he sees himself as a leader he replied "no." When asked to explain why he did not view himself as a leader he stated "well, it's not like that, it's just that you are teaching them and practicing reading. All I try to think about is helping them read so that they don't have to think about failing or something." I was in awe when he made this statement. Trenton is repeating 3rd grade this year and obviously this has impacted his self-image. Trenton worked with one of our most energetic preschool students and never once was observed getting angry or raising his voice when Reg was off task and not paying attention. He clearly demonstrated leadership skills and the fact that he was concerned about Reg not failing academically later demonstrated that he was committed to the process. At the beginning the research Trenton stated "I'm not a leader, I'm a student." When asked again at the conclusion of the research whether he viewed himself as a leader he replied "No, I'm not a leader really. I'm still a kid. But I do teach my partner things so I'm kind of like a teacher." I interpret this state to mean that he views himself differently, and in a more positive way, and believes that he is a teacher rather than a leader. I think that if I were to conduct this research in the future I would ask the Scholars to explain what a leader is and does. Clearly Trenton was a leader when trying to work with Reg and keep him focused; however, perhaps his idea of what a leader does is different and requires clarification. Trenton's reading score for the May, 2015 NWEA assessment improved from a 179-187. This 8 point gain means that Trenton is now reading at a middle of the year 2nd grade proficiency level.



(Trenton: May, 2015)

Policy Recommendations:

Based upon my research I am making the following recommendations:

National:

- The elimination of test-based promotions.

District:

- Districts need to provide professional development for Pre-K through 2nd grade teachers that will allow teachers to improve the quality of instruction being provided to at-risk learners
- Districts need to develop a regular schedule for the collection of data that is evidence based that has been collected at specific checkpoints throughout the school year (maturity, academic, social/emotional, and standardized assessment data)

Local/School-Level:

- Schools need to develop early identification systems (Pre-K through grade 2) for at risk students.
- Classroom teachers need to develop a cross-grade mentoring program for retained students in grades 3, 6, and 8 where they are giving a leadership role as a mentor to improve academics and self-esteem.

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Consideration of ethics and permissions needed:

I will need permission from the family members of the students that were selected (based on teacher recommendation) in the 3rd grade and preschool classes. Once a student has been recommended I will call each parent individually. During this conversation I will introduce myself and explain the focus of my work. If they agree to allow their child to participate I will then provide the student with a permission slip to take home for the parent to sign. I will conduct a 2nd phone call for those parents that did not respond to my initial request for permission after 1 week. Once parental permission is received I will also have the 3rd grade student participating in the research study sign a contract that outlines my expectations of them and details their responsibilities as a Scholar.