

A UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION OF THE  
PATHWAYS TO READING PROGRAM

---

A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
University of Missouri

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

---

By  
SUSAN POWERS

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Supervisor

December 2013

Copyright by Susan Powers 2013

All Rights Reserved

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

A UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION OF THE  
PATHWAYS TO READING PROGRAM

Presented by Susan Powers

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

---

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Supervisor

---

Dr. Doug Thomas

---

Dr. Barbara Martin

---

Dr. Jim Bowman

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Phyllis. She raised me to think this was possible, supported me through the process, and kept pushing for results even when I lost focus.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the insight and support provided by the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dr. Doug Thomas, Dr. Barbara Martin, and Dr. Jim Bowman. I appreciated the different perspectives on the subject of literacy education that led me to expand my thinking and learning on the subject. A special acknowledgement goes to Dr. Hutchinson for her insistence on my completing this journey. Her belief in me far surpassed my own!

I also want to give a nod to Professors Maxcy and Nguyen who began the journey with me and challenged me more intellectually in that first summer session than I had ever been challenged. Their passion for research and knowledge compelled me to reach further.

Big thanks go to Dr. Dudley who taught me that all things are possible when you have very insistent friends!

Finally, I want to acknowledge my very supportive family, my boys, and Fred.

I love you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....ii

LIST OF TABLES.....viii

ABSTRACT.....ix

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION.....1

    Conceptual Framework.....4

    Statement of the Problem.....7

    Purpose of the Study.....7

    Research Questions.....8

    Research Model.....8

    Limitations and Bias.....11

    Vocabulary Pertinent to this Study.....12

    Summary.....14

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH.....16

    Reading Instruction Theories.....16

    Reading Policy Development.....19

    Reading Instruction Concepts.....21

    Teaching and Intervention Methods.....24

    Professional Development Models.....27

    Implementation Methods.....32

    Summary.....34

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....36

Purpose of the Study.....	37
Research Questions.....	38
Rationale for Utilization-Focused Evaluation Design.....	38
Population and Sample.....	41
Validity and Reliability.....	42
Participants.....	43
Role of the Researcher.....	44
Data Collection and Analysis.....	44
Summary.....	45
4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	46
Research Questions.....	46
Review of Methodology and Research Design.....	46
Participants.....	46
Demographics.....	47
Results of Perception Survey.....	49
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #1.....	49
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #2.....	49
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #3.....	50
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #4.....	51
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #5.....	51
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #6.....	51
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #7.....	54
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #8.....	55

Teacher Perception Survey-Question #9.....	56
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #10.....	56
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #11.....	57
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #12.....	57
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #13.....	58
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #14.....	58
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #15.....	59
Teacher Perception Survey-Question #16.....	59
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #1.....	59
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #2.....	60
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #3.....	60
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #4.....	61
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #5.....	61
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #6.....	61
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #7.....	61
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #8.....	62
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #9.....	62
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #10.....	62
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #11.....	63
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #12.....	64
Administrator Perception Survey-Question #13.....	65
Results of Focus Group Protocols.....	65
Focus Group Question #1.....	65

Focus Group Question #2.....	66
Focus Group Question #3.....	66
Focus Group Question #4.....	67
Focus Group Question #5.....	68
Focus Group Question #6.....	68
Focus Group Question #7.....	69
Focus Group Question #8.....	69
Focus Group Question #9.....	70
Focus Group Question #10.....	70
Summary.....	71
<b>5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>73</b>
Participant Perceptions of Pathways to Reading Professional Development.....	73
Participant Perception of Pathways to Reading Implementation.....	76
Participant Perception of Pathways to Reading Impact on Student Learning.....	78
Recommendations for Practice.....	79
Recommendations for Future Research.....	83
Summary.....	84
<b>APPENDIX</b>	
A. PARTICIPANT PERCEPTION SURVEY.....	86
B. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL.....	95
C. FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES BY THEME.....	96

REFERENCES.....	99
VITA.....	114

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Participant Background Demographics.....	48
2. Participant Experience with Pathways to Reading.....	48
3. Other Curriculum Used Alongside Pathways to Reading.....	50
4. Level of Teacher Knowledge Change from PTR Professional Development.....	52
5. Perceptions of Cost Effectiveness of PTR Professional Development.....	54
6. Teacher Perception of Implementation of PTR By Grade Level.....	54
7. Effectiveness of PTR Professional Development.....	60
8. Level of Administrator Knowledge Change from PTR Professional Development.....	63
9. Administrator Perception of Implementation by Grade Level.....	64

A UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION OF THE  
PATHWAYS TO READING PROGRAM

Susan Powers

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Recognizing that reading is a gateway skill for further learning many districts are seeking programs that address early reading intervention and remediation of reading. Reading instruction must address student literacy in a deliberate manner, address professional development needs in a comprehensive, continuing way, and bring measurable improvement in reading achievement.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a Utilization-Focused Evaluation of the Pathways to Reading program. Utilization-Focused Evaluations provide program stakeholders a process in which to select the model, methods and uses for the evaluation. The study sought to evaluate perceptions of participants implementing the Pathways to Reading program in their districts. Further, the study sought to gain insights from teachers and administrators on how to improve the reading instruction model of professional development, implementation, and student learning.

Data show the program to be a very specific, complete program to address the teaching of foundational skills in grades K-2 with excellent support for teachers via on-site visits and access to knowledgeable trainers. Further findings identified ways program authors could expand the program content to include lessons for higher students, and reading comprehension component.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

According to the latest study of literacy in America, low reading ability adversely affects many aspects of life. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) reports just 45% of *below basic* level readers have full time jobs, 56% of the prison population read at or *below basic* level, and a third of *below basic* readers drop out of high school. These data point to different uses of literacy: civic, political, or personal. Whatever its use, literacy in America has been a source of concern since the Puritans landed on the rocky shores of Massachusetts. The Puritans valued literacy so their children could read the Bible. By the late 1700s literacy was further valued for its ability to inform a free society. In a letter to Colonel Charles Yancey, Thomas Jefferson pointed out, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be” (Jefferson, 1816, p. 227). During this period in American history most literacy education took place in the home and in private school settings. In the early 1800s the Common School Movement, led by Horace Mann, called for common teaching of American values and the American political system through property tax funding of education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This movement brought literacy into the public setting.

With the dawning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century every state had laws requiring children to attend school and all states offered free public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) bolstered by mandatory school attendance. The educational focus changed as the nation experienced wars, the race for space, the civil rights movement, and a more global view of educational achievement (Mraz, 2004). The definition of literacy has changed

with the times, from simply having the ability to read one's Bible, to having the skills to be a lifelong learner, and to read, write, analyze, and understand information (Brandt, 2005). "Now more than ever for our young people to realize their potential and excel as students and working citizens, they must be taught to read and write effectively"(College Board, 2004, p. 221). An additional use for literacy in America has been added as outlined in the *National Endowment for the Arts Research Report #47* (2007). In this report, literacy is framed as an economic production imperative. "Literacy is now what iron ore or oil once was: a raw material to engine the GNP" (Brandt, 2005, p.306).

The United States Department of Education stated the mission of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is to, "...promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (2010, para. 19). The foundation upon which education rests is reading, with 20% of this nation's students having significant problems learning to read (NCES, 2006). To this end, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 brought together Title I reading instruction and Comprehensive School Reform, calling for scientifically based efforts to reform low-performing, high-poverty schools across the nation.

After a decade of NCLB-driven instruction and the onus of high-stakes testing, reading achievement has failed to improve. According to the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, reading achievement in America has remained flat with a third of all students performing at the *basic* and *below basic* level (NCES, 2011). This assessment measures students' abilities to both decode and comprehend print, a very simplified view of reading.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data from 2012 show 45% of grade 3-8 students scoring below *proficient* in communication arts. Longitudinal data show small gains in scores as students progress to graduation (Ehlert, Podgursky, Koedel, & Kim, 2009). Nearly half of all Missouri students arrive at grade three unable to perform literacy skills at a *proficient* level and persist at that level through graduation (National Reading Panel, 2000). Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, described the flaws in NCLB:

It created an artificial goal of proficiency that encouraged states to set low standards to make it easier for students to meet the goal. The act's emphasis on test scores as the primary measure of school performance has narrowed the curriculum, and the one-size-fits-all accountability system has mislabeled schools as failures even if their students are demonstrating real academic growth. The law is overly prescriptive and doesn't allow districts to create improvement plans based on their unique needs. It also has not supported states as they create teacher evaluation systems that use multiple measures to identify highly effective teachers and support the instructional improvement of all teachers. (Duncan, 2012, para. 3)

Secretary Duncan called for reforms to NCLB to give states more flexibility to determine how to meet achievement goals. In 2012 the U.S. Department of Education invited states to apply for Flexibility Waivers. These waivers offered some choices in how states would raise educational standards, improve accountability, and support reforms to improve teacher effectiveness.

In February 2012, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education submitted a request for a flexibility waiver to the U.S. Department of Education, enabling Missouri public schools to redefine and align federal accountability requirements to the state's updated Missouri School Improvement Program. The waiver included a move toward a teacher evaluation process with measures of student performance in determining teacher effectiveness and curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS are based on rigorous curriculum informed by

other top performing countries designed to prepare students for college and work, as well as to succeed in a global economy and society. The learner as an important resource in creating a national product of knowledge, or “knowledge capital” (Morrell, 2012) couples literacy with success in civic, political, personal, and economic arenas (Brandt, 2005; United States Department of Education, 2010).

A need for critical evaluation of programs designed to address the new challenges faced by districts established a basis for exploration of one such reading program. The Pathways to Reading Program was designed to address such challenges.

### Conceptual Framework

This research study is based on the epistemology of constructionism, in which knowing is a process of actively interpreting and constructing knowledge in a social setting. Knowledge is then adapted to meet the purposeful needs of human activity (Crotty, 1998; Scribner, et al.,1999). The learner is a central figure in this view of knowledge, alluding to an interconnectedness between the learner and the environment. This view of the learner in the organization is based on several theories of organization, management, and change.

Deming’s (1993) work on industrial performance focused on management of systems. Deming encouraged a common system of education to inform a common system of management. In this model, managers were called upon to recognize the individual workers as important components of a successful system. Among Deming’s 14-point plan for achieving the highest level of industrial performance, eight of the points addressed management of staff. Deming stressed education of all workers, a supportive management model to build team, and encouragement toward self-improvement. This

model, which became known as “Total Quality Management” or TQM, was, in Deming’s words, about management, not quality. He believed management must look toward the future with innovative plans and a long-term commitment to new learning and new philosophy (Deming, 1982). Only then would a quality product emerge. The worker as learner was viewed in this model as something to be managed by managers who were firmly in charge (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995).

In Lewin’s (1999) classic work on group decision and social change, Deming’s view of the worker as learner was expanded. In this model, staff acts in the role of reflective, rational learners in an organization. Change is brought about when thinking individuals take in knowledge, respond to it rationally, and make changes according to what is most effective for the organization as a whole (Lewin). While this model placed much more autonomy on the learner, one weakness of the model was its leap from individual to organizational thinking.

In Senge’s (1996) *Systems Thinking*, the organization also acts as a learner. In the systems thinking model the interdependence of worker and organization are in play concurrently with constant friction between the needs of each (Gary, 2005). The processes of change, the feedback loops, and delays require nonlinear patterns of interaction.

Thus, if there is constant friction between the manufacturing and sales divisions, systems thinking encourages us to focus not on the personalities of the respective vice presidents of each division, but on the underlying patterns of interaction between the two units. In so doing, we move beyond simply reacting to the symptoms of the problem to achieving a measure of understanding of its root causes. (Gary, p.46)

Systems thinking looks at wholes rather than individual parts, where people are able to act on the system and, in doing so, change the system. Senge states:

A systemic view of personal power entails empowering the individual to manifest his or her own personal power simultaneously with empowering the organization to manifest its purpose. The distinction between individual and group blurs in this process, just as happens in the exceptional jazz ensemble or championship sports team. In this context, system dynamics becomes a way for the organization to know itself better and evolve its design to more effectively accomplish its purpose. (1996, p.15)

Senge distinguished between a problem-solving approach and a learning approach:

managers traditionally problem solve, explaining the phenomena in many organizations of the same problems getting fixed repeatedly. In a learning approach, decisions are based on reflective thinking, with self-discovery the catalyst making deep changes possible (Gary).

In this way, people become agents of organizational learning. Senge et al. (2012) wrote,

...our organizations work the way they work, ultimately, because of how we think and how we interact. Only by changing how we think can we change deeply embedded policies and practices. Only by changing how we interact can shared visions, shared understandings and new capacities for coordinated action be established. (p.315)

In a learning organization leaders share the tools and models needed to achieve objectives, with staff empowered at all levels to find better solutions to challenges (Yukl, 2006). With this empowerment, Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, and Valentine(1999) also called for critical evaluation of the values and assumptions that guide behavior to bring about change.

A need for critical evaluation of programs designed to address the new challenges faced by districts established a basis for exploration of one such reading program. The Pathways to Reading Program was designed to address such challenges.

## Statement of the Problem

With new curriculum, achievement, and teacher effectiveness accountability standards comes greater need at the district level for programs to address these challenges. In 2000, the Pathways to Reading (PTR) program was designed by Terry Clinefelter. Based on the National Reading Panel's findings (2000), PTR was created to address districts' needs for reading intervention, instruction and professional development. Clinefelter developed the program based on her background in reading instruction and her knowledge of testing and diagnosis of reading problems. The PTR program includes on-site professional development, teacher manuals for instruction, and instructional support. Recognizing that reading is a gateway skill for further learning (Ehlert, Podgursky, Koedel, & Kim, 2009; Moats, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2010), many districts are seeking programs that address early reading intervention and remediation of reading. There is a need for reading instruction to address student literacy in a deliberate manner, address professional development needs in a comprehensive, continuing way, and bring measurable improvement in reading achievement (NCLB, 2001). District personnel want evidence that a method generates results before allocating funds in ever-tightening budgets.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) of the Pathways to Reading (PTR) program (Patton, 2008). Utilization-Focused Evaluations provide program stakeholders a process in which to select the model, methods and uses for the evaluation (Patton). The Pathways to Reading program has been

implemented in school districts throughout Missouri and Kansas. The study reviewed and evaluated teacher and administrator perceptions of the professional development component, the implementation of the program, and the perceived program impact on student learning to provide information for ongoing program development.

This qualitative study focused on three Missouri school districts currently utilizing the PTR program. Answers to a survey led to the gathering of perceptions from three focus groups of teachers and administrators in these districts. The surveys and focus groups provided data to the identified primary users, whose values framed the analysis of data by their ability to apply findings and implement recommendations via the Utilization-Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2008).

#### Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are participants' perceptions of the professional development provided in the Pathways to Reading program?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the implementation of the PTR program?
3. What are participants' perceptions of PTR's impact on student learning?

#### Research Model

A methodological perspective was applied to the study, with research questions driving the data collection and analysis. The research study had value in that it informed and improved practice (Creswell, 2003). The Utilization Focused Evaluation (U-FE) model (Patton, 2008) was chosen based on its focus on utility and actual use of study findings. The goal of U-FE is to increase the likelihood that an evaluation will be used, and subsequently, have an impact, by identifying a small group of stakeholders, often

referred to as primary intended users, who are in a position to use the evaluation findings (Patton). Primary intended users are identified from the larger pool of potential stakeholders, and are involved in the study design (Patton). Primary intended users are the stakeholders who have a principal role in decision-making and in turn are in the position to utilize results. Since no evaluation is values free, U-FE identifies whose values will frame the evaluation by working with clearly defined primary users who have responsibility to apply findings and implement recommendations. The evaluator develops a working relationship with the primary users, negotiating the content, model, method, theory, and uses for the evaluation (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Patton calls this the Personal Factor, the presence of an identifiable group of people who care about the evaluation and the findings it generates. The Personal Factor increases the probability that the findings will be utilized, thus heightening the impact from the evaluation (Patton).

The American Evaluation Association [AEA] set forth five guiding principles for evaluators:

1. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.
2. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
3. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
4. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.

5. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.

(online:<http://www.eval.org/publications/guidingprinciples.asp>)

These standards are recognized as the benchmark by which all evaluations are judged (Patton, 2008; Preskill & Donaldson, 2008; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). One issue in evaluation has “persistently plagued evaluation researchers and practitioners...the use of evaluation findings” (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008, p.113). U-FE subsumes other evaluation approaches in an effort to address the needs of the stakeholders and often includes several methods. The use of qualitative data in this study stems from the identified needs of the intended users. Every step of the way, the U-FE method is designed to provide meaningful information for the program or organization that will be used for its betterment (Patton).

In collaborative evaluation, stakeholder involvement is a central part of the most exemplary evaluations. U-FE’s purpose is to bring about effective change with change more likely to occur if those involved are involved all along the way as members of a team within a learning organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Lencioni, 2002; Patton, 2008; Yukl, 2006). In his work based on 22 years in education, Boloz (2008) suggested that one cannot effect change within a school setting without authentic stakeholder involvement. In Scribner et al. (1999), in the context of organizational learning, evaluation is part of a continual process of examining values that guide actions to detect errors, generate new insights, use feedback in decision making, and ultimately address the core problem and not just the symptoms. Each stakeholder must play an active role in

this process. The choice of U-FE for this study presented unique limitations and biases the researcher had to address, as well as unique strengths in qualitative study.

### Limitations and Bias

Limitations provide an identification of any potential weaknesses a study may encounter (Creswell, 2003). This qualitative study was limited in setting to three public schools in Missouri using the Pathways to Reading program. There was no provision for comparison of data from other schools utilizing other programs.

This study enabled the primary users of the PTR program to apply findings and implement recommendations, but may not necessarily be generalized to all program settings. Additionally, the research was limited by examining administrators' and teachers' perspectives of the program as implemented only in certain districts. Further, survey data were coded to address the three research questions, disregarding other issues.

Assumptions held by the constructivism epistemology include a reliance on participants' perceptions of an experience through broad and general questions (Creswell, 2003) and that this reality is socially constructed (Crotty, 1998; Fosnot, 1996; Scribner, et al., 1999). This study assumed the trustworthiness of participants' perceptions as they answered questions and participated in focus groups. In order to ensure the participant's voice was not lost by the researcher's bias of having worked closely with the primary users, the participants' original voices were maintained through the use of extensive participant quotes and precise language (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, the audio recording of focus groups, member checking, and peer debriefing supported the study's credibility.

The participatory nature of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation presented

opportunities for bias into the study. In emphasizing a close collaboration with the primary users and a study design intended to be responsive to their needs, the researcher and primary users both took part in the process of needs assessment and survey question development. All researchers bring their own perspective and understanding to any research study (Herr & Anderson, 2005, Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2008; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). This researcher also felt an innate desire to please the primary users of the study findings, having worked so closely with them. A neutral party review of interview transcripts provided a critical reflexivity activity. The survey instrument was also piloted in a non-participating school to ensure its reliability and validity (Fink, 2006).

#### Vocabulary Pertinent to this Study

The purpose of this section is to define and explain the following terms used in the study.

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*. Part of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the measure of a school's progress from year to year.

*Comprehension*. Intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed.

*Fluency*. The ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression.

*Job-Embedded Professional Development (JEPD)*. Professional development situated in schools and concerned with the current work of schools.

*Missouri Assessment Program (MAP)*. A statewide assessment for the four core subjects of Math, Communication Arts, Social Studies, and Science. It is developed, administered, and scored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

*National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*. A nationwide assessment of various subjects administered by the National Center for Education Statistics through the U.S. Department of Education.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. Legislation intended to help states utilize scientifically-based research to improve student achievement.

*Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)*. The measure of a student's accuracy of words read in a reading passage during a one minute time segment.

*Pathways to Reading (PTR)*. A multi-level program created to address districts' needs for reading intervention, instruction and professional development.

*Phonemes*. Individual sounds of spoken language.

*Phonemic Awareness*. The ability to identify and use phonemes to make spoken words.

*Phonics*. The study of relationships between the letters and sounds of spoken language.

*Primary Users*. In a Utilization-Focused Evaluation, Primary Users are identified from the larger pool of potential stakeholders, which can be vast, and so the primary user group can be understood to be a small sub-set of the larger stakeholder group. Thus, we differentiate between stakeholders, who have a stake—a vested interest—in the evaluation, and primary users (Patton, 2008).

*Professional Learning Community (PLC)*. An organizational change process of professional development coupled with ongoing data driven decision making.

*Reading Level*. A tested level of reading ability scrutinizing fluency, decoding ability, and comprehension. There are four levels in Missouri as well as National testing:

*Below basic-* indicates no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.

*Basic-* students performing at the *Basic* level should be able to locate relevant information, make simple inferences, and use their understanding of the text to identify details that support a given interpretation or conclusion. Students should be able to interpret the meaning of a word as it is used in the text.

*Proficient-* students performing at the *Proficient* level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations.

*Advanced-* students performing at the *Advanced* level should be able to make complex inferences and construct and support their inferential understanding of the text. Students should be able to apply their understanding of a text to make and support a judgment (NCES, 2006).

*Vocabulary.* The collective of understood words and their meanings.

### Summary

This study evaluated the Pathways to Reading program as implemented in three Missouri public schools. The survey and focus group data gathered described teacher and administrator perceptions of the professional development, implementation, and impact of the program. The paradigm of social constructionism was utilized as data were collected through a qualitative design intended to address the research questions and enable study findings to be used by the primary users. The conceptual framework of organizational learning provided the theoretical lens through which participant

perceptions were reviewed. The research provided information to the primary users for ongoing program development.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Pathways to Reading (PTR) is a teacher professional development training program and curriculum that addresses beginning reading instruction for teachers of grades K-2 and for teachers of struggling older readers (Clinefelter, T., 2008). The program focuses on developing teacher understanding of the five components of the reading process: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Clinefelter). The literature and research review examines the reading instruction theories, reading policy, reading intervention methods and delivery models, professional development models, implementation research, and measures of reading achievement on which Pathways to Reading is based.

#### Reading Instruction Theories

Historically, reading instruction has followed two main theories of learning: objectivism and constructionism. Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy and Perry (1991) state the philosophy of objectivism as follows:

Objectivism is a view of the nature of knowledge and what it means to know something. In this view, the mind is an instantiation of a computer, manipulating symbols in the same way....These symbols acquire meaning when an external and independent reality is "mapped" onto them in our interactions in the world. Knowledge, therefore is some entity existing independent of the mind of individuals, and is transferred "inside". Cognition is the rule-based manipulation of these symbols...this school of thought believes that the external world is mind independent (i.e., the same for everyone) and we can say things about it that are objectively, absolutely and unconditionally true or false....Consistent with this view of knowledge, the goal of instruction, from both the behavioral and cognitive information processing perspectives, is to communicate or transfer knowledge to learners in the most efficient, effective manner possible. Knowledge can be completely characterized using the techniques of semantic analysis (or its second cousin, task analysis). One key to efficiency and effectiveness is

simplification and regularization: thought is atomistic in that it can be completely broken down into simple building blocks, which form the basis of instruction. (p.91)

In reading, objectivism is implemented as “Bottom-Up” instruction where sub-skills are acquired in a linear fashion and build toward comprehension ability. Students are first taught letter sounds and letter names, progressing to pronouncing whole words, then connecting words to texts (Goouch & Lambirth, 2011). This approach studies the relationship between letters and sounds of spoken language, or phonics.

Contrasting with objectivism, constructionism views knowledge as a social construction, depending on the learner’s actions directed toward making meaning of information (Goodman, 1989). Constructionist theorist Dewey placed the learner at the center of the process of learning, where students construct, create, and actively inquire about the world around them. Piaget’s stages of cognitive development and the constructivist theory of Bruner (Grossen, 1997) built upon Dewey’s social learning model. Piaget studied knowledge development in humans through which one exerts constant effort to adapt to the environment. Patterns of mental action, or cognitive structures correspond to stages of development and build upon one another. The teacher’s role is to provide new input at the correct developmental stage (Piaget, 1950). Bruner’s work theorized that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas on existing cognitive structures, or schema. In this theory, the teacher’s role is to structure lessons with effective pacing, sequencing, rewards, and punishments so the learner can do the work of constructing new knowledge (Bruner, 1960).

These constructionist theories are implemented in reading as “Top-Down” instruction. This view is based on the work of German researcher James Cattell who

published a paper in the mid-1880s titled, *The Time Taken Up in Cerebral Operations*. Cattell's study of adult readers found they could identify whole words as quickly as individual letters (Reutzel & Cooter, 2010). By the 1930s a new approach to reading was developed based on Cattell's findings. Children were taught whole words without analysis of letters and sounds. Frequently used words were taught through books such as the *Dick and Jane* readers which debuted in 1930 in Scott-Foresman's Elson-Gray Basic Readers (Shermer, 2003). The Readers were accompanied by a guide explaining the whole word (or *look-say*) method, emphasizing the meaning of words, rather than using rote phonics drills. The primers constantly repeated the few words in their texts as a replacement for phonics exercises.

Millions of American schoolchildren learned to read with *Dick and Jane*. However, in post World War II America, civil issues entered into the instructional realm. Rudolf Flesch (1955) spoke out against *Dick and Jane* in his bestseller, *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Flesch argued that the whole word method did not properly teach children how to read or to appreciate literature, because of its limited vocabulary and overly simplistic stories depicting only middle-class life (Flesch). Other phonics advocates in the 1960s echoed Flesch's arguments, calling for new primers that focused on phonics and introduced students to real literature. In the mid-1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson called for better primary education especially for underprivileged students. The resulting Elementary and Secondary Education Act included money to help poor school districts buy supplemental materials for their students but with the restriction that these materials had to have subject matter depicting urban life and relating to urban schoolchildren (Shermer, 2003).

The more recent adaptation of constructionism in reading education is the whole language movement. The whole language instructional model involves immersing students in print-rich classrooms in which teachers read aloud whole works of literature while showing the text on large charts or Big Books. Students are to first understand the whole, then come to an understanding of the parts of that whole (Reutzel & Cooter, 2010).

### Reading Policy Development

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a pendulum-like swing from one reading theory to another with little evidence of progress. The Nation's Report Card showed statistics that remained flat, with an average of 33% of fourth graders scoring at *below basic* levels of achievement in reading (NCES, 2011). The National Research Council determined that the academic success of a student, as measured by high school graduation, can be predicted by the student's third grade reading skill level. Early reading failure was shown to have a negative impact on general cognitive development (Grossen, 1997; NCES, 2011; Torgeson, 2000), as well as academic achievement and earning ability. Children with low levels of literacy are at an increasing disadvantage in our technological society (Brandt, 2005; Torgeson, 2000). With these findings in mind, key policy informants at the national level were calling for sweeping educational reforms of reading curriculum and teacher preparation by the mid 1980s. Government sponsored reports followed, including *Thirty years of research: What we now know about how children learn to read: A synthesis of research on reading from the National Institute of Child Health and Development* (Grossen, 1997), and *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature of reading and its*

*implications for reading instruction* (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000).

Louisa Moats, in her work titled, *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science* (1999), highlighted the need for research-based methods of reading instruction. Moats made the case that,

Reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Research now shows that a child who doesn't learn the reading basics early is unlikely to learn them at all. Any child who doesn't learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge, and is unlikely to ever flourish in school or in life. (p.2)

The recommendations in the reports were used to define policy decisions, leading to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was intended, "...to help states and local educational agencies utilize scientifically-based reading research to implement comprehensive reading instruction for children in kindergarten through third grade" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.10). School funding was based on significantly increasing student scores on state administered tests. The legislation also required use of funds to identify students at risk of reading failure and to provide professional development in reading instruction for teachers of Kindergarten through third grade and teachers of special education in grades K-12. The legislation set benchmarks for proficiency in literacy and set out requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward the benchmarks (Borman, et al., 2003). Reading instruction in schools today has been influenced greatly by the need to meet NCLB standards and AYP. Teaching to the standardized test and fidelity to the adopted reading program design have become synonymous with the teaching of reading (Cassidy, Valdez, & Garrett, 2010).

Current research in reading instruction calls for a more holistic, or balanced, approach to the teaching of reading. Kersten and Pardo (2007) describe this as "hybrid

pedagogy” (p.153), blending elements from a core reading program such as a basal series with more authentic learning activities such as literacy stations. A balanced literacy program includes instruction of reading sub-skills using a variety of instructional methods (Stevens, et al., 2008). Schools are searching for scientific, evidence-based reading programs to help them meet NCLB standards that include this balanced instructional approach based on the findings of the National Reading Panel report.

### Reading Instruction Concepts

Five main concepts in reading instruction were studied in the National Reading Panel (2000) report: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These five concepts, through meta-analysis of the research literature, were found to have a statistically positive effect on reading skills and came to be known as the “Five Pillars” of reading instruction (Cassidy, Valdez, & Garrett, 2010).

One of the five pillars, direct instruction of phonemic awareness, was found to have a large effect size in assisting early elementary children in learning to read. Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and use phonemes to make spoken words. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that make up language. Children who are phonemically aware have the ability to substitute and rearrange those sound units to create different words (Armbruster, et al., 2009; Ehri, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Children exhibit phonemic awareness in their ability to play rhyming games. In order to rhyme, the child uses his or her knowledge of grapheme-phoneme relations, distinguishing the separate phonemes in the pronunciation of words. This awareness and the subsequent segmenting, blending, and manipulation of sounds in words is the foundation for the ability to establish sound-letter correspondences, leading

to decoding of words in print and the ability to spell (Nicholson, 2006; Torgeson, 2001; Walsh, 2009).

Phonics is the study of the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language (Armbruster, et al., 2009). Phonics instruction helps children use the alphabetic principle. This principle states that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds (National Reading Panel, 2000). It focuses on letters (Clinefelter, T., 2008) and builds upon the phonemic knowledge base. There are different methods of teaching phonics: synthetic, analytic, analogy, spelling based, and embedded approaches. All different methods were found to have positive effects on word reading skills in grades Kindergarten through second, and had remedial effects in upper elementary age students (Cheesman, et al., 2009; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Loeb, et al., 2009; Pokorni, Worthington, & Jamison, 2004; Torgeson, 1999). Torgeson's (1999) study of synthetic versus embedded phonics instruction found that synthetic instruction had greater achievement effect in the Kindergarten setting. Synthetic instruction involves explicit instruction in phonological awareness with extensive practice of phonetic decoding without contextual application. Embedded instruction involves specific instruction in phonics practiced with application to reading and writing. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction provides practice with letter-sound relationships in a predetermined sequence. Children learn to use these relationships to decode words. Phonics instruction is not a stand-alone reading instruction method. It should be used with other reading instruction to create a balanced program and is best delivered in Kindergarten and first grade (Torgeson).

Fluency is the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression (National Reading Panel, 2000). Fluency has been described as the ability to read without word identification problems that hinder comprehension (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Fluency is the shift from dealing with words on a word-by-word basis to a rapid, accurate, and expressive rendering of the text (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Fluency is not comprehension, but is a predictor of comprehension. Fluency has two main parts: automaticity and prosody. Automaticity occurs when a reader can instantaneously recognize words in text. This allows the reader's attention to focus more fully on understanding what is being read, instead of tying up cognitive ability on decoding. Prosody involves pitch, loudness, timing, and phrasing of what is read. It is the expression in reading. Fluency has been described as the bridge between word reading and comprehension, and involves accurate and automatic word recognition, as well as reading with expression (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski, 2004).

Vocabulary instruction bridges the oral vocabulary knowledge one has with reading vocabulary encountered in texts (National Reading Panel, 2000). Decoding a word, or applying letter-sound correspondences to printed material, is effective in reading only when the word is understood by the reader. Some meaning must be attached. Semantics, the meaning of words, are learned in relation to other word meanings (Moats, 1999). Through explicit instruction students are given definitions of words to learn. Pre-teaching of the vocabulary before reading of a text and analyzing word roots gives students the base knowledge needed to understand the words in the text. Indirect instruction, where students are exposed to vocabulary in reading, requires the reader to decode words and infer definitions in context. Best practice calls for vocabulary

instruction that is a mix of explicit and indirect instruction.

Comprehension is the intentional thinking during reading where meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader. Problem solving, understanding the narrative structure, and thinking about the meaning of events by the reader create an interchange with the message presented in text (National Reading Panel, 2000; Stevens, et al., 2008). Direct instruction of strategies to help with the cognitive process guide students to think about their reading, to check whether it makes sense or not, to ask questions while reading, and to check their own understanding of the text. The goal is to become independent from the teacher through an ability to check for understanding or for ways to use information in text.

#### Teaching and Intervention Methods

Teaching reading and intervention methods in reading instruction follow the two main theories of learning: objectivism and constructionism. The Lindamood-Bell Learning Process is an example of objectivist theory, while Fountas and Pinnell's Guided Reading is an example of constructionist theory. Response to Intervention brings together these two theories in an intervention model.

Pat Lindamood and Nanci Bell (1998) pioneered work in the clinical setting measuring and developing phonemic awareness. This work was expanded to the larger school setting in 1993. The program is based on the concept that the ability to decode, the ability to comprehend written language, the ability to comprehend oral language, the ability to spell, and the ability to think critically are necessary for success in content areas (Lindamood & Bell, 1998). The Lindamood-Bell Learning Process includes extensive professional development in student need identification, phoneme sequencing, and on-

site support of professionals in implementation of interventions (Owen, 2004).

The amplification of any initial advantage (cognitive ability, health status) that leads to cumulative differences that widen preexisting gaps is called a “Matthew Effect” (Carreker, et al., 2007). Initially rich readers become richer readers over time, and early poor readers fail to progress at the same rate as the rich readers. Effective literacy instruction builds comprehension by focusing on sub-skills such as phonemic awareness, decoding skills, vocabulary, fluency practice, and construction of meaning.

In the early elementary stage encompassing preschool through the first grade, direct instruction in both decoding skills and comprehension strategies combine to influence the future success of students and their ability to become *proficient* readers (Moats, 1999; Grossen, 1997). Children who have phonemic awareness skills can bring together the two pieces of reading, decoding and comprehension, and are likely to be better readers (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Cheesman, et al, 2009; Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004). If readers do not attain phonemic awareness by the end of first grade, future reading ability will be affected. Remediation is then needed. Phonologically based intervention is critical to successful outcomes in children with reading disabilities. Early direct instruction improves reading fluency and develops the neural systems that underlie skilled reading (Shaywitz, et al, 2004).

Fountas and Pinnell’s (2001) guided reading structure combines language and word study, reading workshop, and writing workshop in a three-block framework. Direct instruction of reading sub-skills and comprehension strategies are presented in “Mini-lessons”. These strategies include:

1. Using prior knowledge, making connections with the text

2. Asking questions
3. Determining important ideas
4. Synthesizing
5. Visualizing, using sensory images
6. Monitoring comprehension
7. Predicting
8. Summarizing (p. 42-44)

In the language and word study arena, Fountas and Pinnell use “word work” to build vocabulary and meaning. This work depends on a phonemic awareness base that is already in place. If phonemic awareness is missing, none of the language and word study will make sense to the student. Many schools are now searching for ways to incorporate phonemic awareness instruction in their existing reading programs to ensure an effective base upon which to build (Enz, 2006).

Given that there are differences in students’ ability to learn, there must be differences in how they are taught. Some intervention is done through separated instruction. In this model, those who need remediation are regrouped and served in a separate classroom, usually with a reading specialist. Other interventions are done in classroom support models (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009) where students remain in the regular classroom and remediation benefits them all. In a properly differentiated classroom all students are challenged to think at high levels and have consistent opportunities to be active learners working on interesting tasks.

These tasks may take different forms as is seen in the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. This model, part of the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) reauthorization, is a two-pronged approach to remediation. First, RTI is a strategy for preventing learning disabilities by encouraging responsive teaching, assessment, and teacher improvement. Secondly, RTI is used to identify students with learning disabilities before a prolonged period of failure occurs (Johnston, 2010; Koutsoftus, Harmon, & Gray, 2009). RTI gives increasingly intense, targeted intervention to students who struggle. Students are identified through ongoing assessment data gathering to determine what intervention is needed for whom. Differentiation also takes into consideration differences in learning styles. Some learners need to deal with subject matter in a concrete way, others at a greater level of abstractness (VanSciver, 2005). RTI breaks interventions down into three tiers. Tier I consists of whole class instruction of specific skills that are then measured. Students who do not progress on grade level are then moved to Tier II interventions. In Tier II students are typically served in small groups to address the specific skills the students struggled with in the classroom. Progress is monitored and when the skills are acquired, the student returns to the regular classroom. If the skills are not acquired with this level of intervention, the student is referred for Tier III intervention. This highest level of intervention is highly individualized and may result in the student being referred for special education evaluation (Koutsoftas, Harmon, & Gray, 2009).

### Professional Development Models

To address the on-going need for training, NCLB also requires high quality professional development that expands and deepens knowledge, creates favorable conditions for learning, and builds relationships. Researchers call for highly effective teachers, with a focus on results (Borman, et al., 2003; Foote, Falk-Ross, Szabo, &

Sampson, 2008). District personnel look for professional development that supports the comprehensive school improvement plan in place in the district. This plan identifies the overall vision and goals of the district, with professional development used to support continuous improvement. Professional development that is goal focused and expands teacher expertise is critical (Johnston, 2010). There are four design principles supported by research in professional development. These principles state that professional development should (a) be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; (b) focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific content; (c) align with school improvement priorities and goals; and (d) build strong working relationships among teachers (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, para. 9).

The common link among teaching and intervention methods is the classroom teacher. NCLB has requirements for highly qualified teachers. This designation involves degree level and years of experience as criteria. Teacher preparation and expertise is a stronger correlate of student achievement than class size, overall spending, or teacher salaries (Cheesman, et al., 2009; Villaume & Brabham, 2003), and, more than any other factor, is crucial in preventing reading problems (Moats, 1999). A teaching degree alone does not ensure teacher readiness, however. Studies show that many graduates of teacher preparation programs do not have the skills needed to teach reading subskills such as phonemic awareness (Cheesman, et al., 2009; Rosemary, Roskos, & Landreth, 2007; Walsh, 2009).

Early delivery of instruction is vital and the teacher matters. “When a student has experienced an ineffective teacher or series of ineffective teachers, there is little evidence of a compensatory effect provided by experiencing more effective ones in later years”

(Rivers & Sanders, 2002, p.17). In high performing schools, external research on what works in schools and the internal practices happening within the walls of the school setting are highly linked (Rosemary, Roskos, & Landreth, 2007; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005). In these schools, a more robust curricula and willingness of teachers to make informed decisions to benefit their students is the norm (Bolz, 2009). This requires teachers who are literacy leaders. These teachers have the ability to use data to make adaptations to programs that are responsive to student needs, drawing on a wide spectrum of instructional tools best suited to individual needs (Applegate, Applegate, & Turner, 2010).

There are several delivery models for professional development including workshop-based, web-based, and job-embedded models. Historically, administrators have favored the workshop approach, in which a district or school brings in an outside consultant or curriculum expert or travels to a conference to give teachers a one-time training seminar on a common pedagogic or subject-area topic. The nature of this delivery method requires sessions to appeal to the masses and lacks follow-up capability. NCLB (2001) defines all professional development funded through the law to include activities that “are not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences.” Even so, many teachers still appear to receive much of their professional development through some form of the one-shot workshop. National Center for Education Statistics survey data show that in the 1999-2000 school year, 95 percent of teachers took part in workshops or training in the previous 12 months, compared with 74 percent who reported working in an instructional group and 42 percent who participated in peer observation (Broughman, 2006).

Web-based professional development is increasingly used as technology capabilities improve in schools. Teachers are assigned topics, or self-select topics to learn about online via webinars or self-paced tutorials. This delivery method is highly cost effective, but is limited by teacher anxiety about using technology and by district limitations on technology capability (Blank, & de la Alas, 2009).

Literature on qualitative studies from the 1990s began to support more sustained, on-site models of professional development. This approach holds that for teacher learning to be deemed effective, it needs to take place in a more active and coherent intellectual environment in which ideas can be exchanged and an explicit connection to school improvement is made. This vision holds that professional development should be sustained, coherent, take place during the school day and become part of a teacher's professional responsibilities, and focus on student results (Wei, et al., 2009).

Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices during day-to-day teaching with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). It is professional development situated in schools and concerned with the current work of schools (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kennedy, 2011). JEPD is a shared, ongoing process that makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice, requiring active teacher involvement in cooperative, inquiry-based work (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Hawley & Valli, 1999). High-quality JEPD also is aligned with state standards for student academic achievement and district and building improvement goals (Hirsh, 2009).

Although JEPD can be undertaken by a teacher alone, a view of professional

knowledge as social, situated, and distributed among colleagues undergirds JEPD (Putnam & Borko, 2000). If implemented and supported effectively, JEPD has the potential to contribute to the development of all teachers within a team or school by generating conversations among teachers about concrete acts of teaching and student learning (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

JEPD may consist of departmental, cross-departmental, grade-level, or “vertical” (across grade levels) teams of teachers engaging in “interactive, integrative, practical, and results-oriented” work (Fogarty & Pete, 2009, p.32). Activities include designs such as mentoring, coaching, lesson study, action research, peer observation, examining student work, and professional learning communities.

On-going professional development not only builds expertise in a subject area, but also supports teachers’ capacity to work together to solve local problems and to recruit and retain capable staff (Bryk, 2010). This collaborative model is the focus of DuFour and Eaker’s Professional Learning Community (PLC) work based on the concept of organizational learning. Organizations are made up of individuals. As these individuals coalesce toward a shared vision they become a team. The team has the capacity to self-diagnose and self-manage changes needed to react and adapt to environmental changes that affect the organization. As teams become more aware and able to acquire, analyze, comprehend, and plan around data, the organization becomes able to learn (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Morgan, 2006; Schein, 1992; Senge, 2006; Yukl, 2006). Professional learning communities require a shift in the thinking that has prevailed in schools. Instead of teaching as the primary focus, a shift to learning leads teachers to consider specific actions to which they can commit to make

desired results happen.

Creating teams is the centerpiece in the PLC model. DuFour and Eaker state, "...schools are effective because of their teachers, not in spite of them" (1998, p.206). When the organization gives authority for decision making to those doing the work and empowers them to act upon ideas, the organization will be increasingly effective in reaching its goals. In the PLC model four prerequisites must be met to enable this work: time for collaboration built into the work day, explicit purpose for all collaborative time, training provided for all, and teachers willing to accept responsibility for this time and the work expected. In this model, teachers in either grade-level or content-area teams meet regularly to collaborate on teaching strategies and solve problems. In the most sophisticated examples, teachers set common instructional goals, teach lessons in their individual classrooms, administer informal assessments to determine levels of student mastery, and then regroup as a team to analyze the data together. This analysis identifies areas of success, areas for improvement, and leads to goal setting for future teaching (Honawar, 2008).

### Implementation Methods

Implementation of new program initiatives in schools impacts the effectiveness of the program. Implementation is the practical application of policy. Researchers Majone and Wildavsky (1978) stress that, "policy ideas...are subject to an infinite variety of contingencies, and they contain worlds of possible practical applications. What is in them depends on what is in us, and vice-versa"(p.113). Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) develop a framework for understanding the implementation process as one of cognitive interpretation.

First, individual cognition, or how individuals bring prior knowledge and experience into interpreting policy affects how it is used. Next, situated cognition, the context of where a policy is being used, comes into play. Thirdly, the role of policy signals, how ideas are represented in the policy, enables implementers to accept or reject them. This research sheds light on the importance of human resources in the implementation of policy. Fowler (2009) states that, "...the key to surviving implementation with both the policy change and the implementers intact is a judicious combination of pressure and support"(p.295). This pressure and support comes from within the local organization, including both district administration and building level leadership. Many excellent programs fail due to implementation failures having nothing to do with the program itself. Successful implementation of a new program involves changing adult behavior in the educational setting. Schools are active behavioral cultures with established patterns of function and physical features. Over time, equilibrium is found and sustained because it is functional for teachers, administrators, and students (Juel, C., 2010). Intervention that changes this equilibrium will have profound behavioral implications. To bring about systemic change, the behavior of a critical mass must be changed, and then the change must be sustained. Supports for sustaining change include ongoing training, instructional coaching, performance feedback, and resources dedicated to overcoming difficulties encountered with the program implementation. But perhaps the most important process in bringing about full implementation is moving beyond talking about a program to actually assessing implementation and discussing the data (Noell & Gansle, 2009). Approaching implementation from multi-levels has been found to have great impact on program success. In Bronfenbrenner's work (2005), effective

implementation was found to be unique to the specific context. Finding the balance between fidelity to a program's principles and processes, and the need to fit into a unique culture and climate in a building was the key to implementation success.

### Measures of Reading Achievement

When implementing a reading program, achievement measures that guide instruction are needed to provide teachers useful information for making instructional decisions in the classroom. The end-of-year high stakes tests provide a measure of reading achievement over a year, but prove useless in the daily decision-making that must occur to provide timely intervention for problems with students' progress. Various formative measures of reading achievement have been found to be predictive of end-of-year reading achievement and include phoneme segmentation fluency, nonsense word fluency, letter naming fluency, and oral reading fluency (ORF) (Schilling, Carlisle, Scott & Zeng, 2007). One measure of reading achievement, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), has become widely used in U.S. elementary schools since the Reading First initiative was put into place in 2001 as part of NCLB (Shelton, Altwerger, Jordan, 2009). DIBELS includes subtests of letter naming fluency, phoneme segmentations fluency, nonsense word fluency, and oral reading fluency. If problems are found in any of the subtest areas, intervention is indicated in the classroom, or in pull-out groups. While DIBELS is an effective indicator of achievement, it is not an intervention curriculum.

### Summary

The three research questions were used to identify the topics for the review of literature and research. First, the theoretical and conceptual bases of the Pathways to

Reading program were reviewed. Next, various methods of program implementation were examined along with related professional development implications. Finally, reading achievement measures were reviewed.

Regardless of what reading program, curriculum, intervention methods, or professional development model is utilized in the educational setting, this literature review points to the need for all of these aspects to be present in order for the most effective learning to occur. As Moats (1999) so aptly observed, reading instruction IS rocket science in that it brings together so many aspects of education and is the foundation for all that comes after. Reading cannot solely rely on pre-service teacher education, but on the daily interventions needed to remediate problems as they occur. Reading instruction does involve base knowledge, ability to assess, ability to remediate, and the culture of on-going PD that makes all that possible. Bringing all those aspects together is a daunting task for any setting. This literature and research review turns attention toward the need for a program that can and does deliver knowledge, ability to assess, remediate, and includes on-going professional development.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

With increased accountability standards on the state and federal level school districts are seeking programs proven to help meet these standards. Reading is the foundational skill upon which academic achievement builds. However, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report of March, 2010, reading achievement in America has remained flat since 1998 with one third of all students performing at the *basic* and *below basic* level (NCES, 2011). Nearly half of all Missouri students arrive at grade three unable to perform literacy skills at a *proficient* level and persist at that level through graduation (National Reading Panel, 2000). The data suggest there are a significant number of K-2 students who struggle to read or fail to demonstrate *basic* reading skills necessary for continued success in reading. Reading programs that can deliver reading instruction, intervention, and professional development are highly sought after.

Research indicates a need for early and focused reading intervention (Cheesman, et al, 2009; Moats, 1999; Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004; Shaywitz, et al, 2003). The Pathways to Reading (PTR) program, implemented in 22 districts across Missouri and Kansas, is a multi-leveled program designed to provide whole-group and small-group assessment and instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, and decoding in the primary grades, as well as professional development for district personnel. PTR is authored by Terry Clinefelter, who has a master's degree in reading with an emphasis on testing and diagnosis of reading problems. She has public teaching experience and ten

years of clinical teaching experience. Clinefelter leads a team of trainers helping teachers better understand the reading process and successful instructional techniques. In the PTR program teachers are trained in the reading process and empowered in their ability to teach a broader range of students to read at grade level through on-site trainings, scaffolded classroom instruction, and practice exercises. Training includes methods to incorporate PTR lessons into other reading programs already in place in the school district, such as Reader's Workshop, Guided Reading, and basal programs.

The PTR program consists of weekly and daily lessons for the systematic and explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics for whole class, as well as spelling and decoding lessons for small group delivery. The program also provides six informal tests to help the teacher measure level and growth in phonemic awareness, phonics, word attack, and sight word recognition. These lessons and assessments are provided in grade leveled manuals designed to give the teacher a continuum of reading instruction that progresses from early decoding skills to grade level reading. The manuals aid the teacher in differentiating instruction to fit student needs. Upper elementary grades can also use these lessons to remediate reading problems (Clinefelter, T., 2008).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a Utilization-Focused Evaluation of the Pathways to Reading (PTR) program. The study provided specific information on participant perceptions of the professional development component, the implementation of the program, and the perceived program impact on student learning to present identified primary intended users with accurate program benefit information. For the researcher, the focus of this study was to evaluate the PTR program in a manner that

would be utilized by the primary intended users. The ultimate concern was to develop an evaluative method that enabled the PTR primary intended users to address the needs of their clients as they move forward. The primary intended users of the information gathered in this study are the program authors, district administrators, and classroom teachers.

### Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are participants' perceptions of the professional development provided in the Pathways to Reading program?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the implementation of the PTR program?
3. What are participants' perceptions of PTR's impact on student learning?

### Rationale for Utilization-Focused Evaluation Design

The Pathways to Reading program is founded upon using data to direct and differentiate instruction based on student need. Terry and her husband, Dennis Clinefelter, approached the researcher about conducting a research evaluation of their program. They were interested in gaining perspective on the usefulness of their program, how it is implemented and replicated, and the evidence of effects on student learning. They did not want to solely base their efforts on general research, but on evidence-based outcomes. The researcher's extensive background in reading instruction and intervention fit well with the Clinefelters' need for a researcher with literacy knowledge. After meeting with the Clinefelters, the researcher identified their first desire for any research outcome was its usefulness in their practice. This led to the research model of Utilization-Focused Evaluation.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), along with the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP), calls for program evaluations to determine effect and compliance. This is a limited view of how evaluation can be used. In his work on Utilization Focused Evaluation (U-FE), Michael Quinn Patton (2008) states that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use. The focus of the U-FE is on the intended use by intended users. Patton has stated that in order to get findings that will be used, any legitimate approach to evaluation can be used, making U-FE highly “pragmatic and ubiquitous” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007, p. 44). Since no evaluation is values free, U-FE identifies whose values will frame the evaluation by working with clearly defined users who have responsibility to apply findings and implement recommendations. The evaluator develops a working relationship with the intended users, negotiating the content, model, method, theory, and uses for the evaluation. Patton calls this the Personal Factor, the presence of an identifiable group of people who care about the evaluation and the findings it generates. If this group is present, then the findings are more likely to be used. Without the group, there is a correspondingly lower probability that the findings will be utilized, thus lowering the impact from the evaluation. Covey and Colosimo (2004) state, “Most failure in organizations today are not the result of a lack of smarts, they are caused by a lack of execution-things just don’t get done. Execution means getting critical things accomplished” (audio recording).

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) set forth five guiding principles for evaluators:

1. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.

2. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
3. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
4. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.
5. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare. (<http://www.eval.org/publications/guidingprinciples.asp>)

These standards are recognized as the benchmark by which all evaluations are judged (Patton, 2008; Preskill & Donaldson, 2008; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). One issue in evaluation has “persistently plagued evaluation researchers and practitioners...the use of evaluation findings” (Preskill & Donaldson, 2008, p.113). Patton’s focus on utilization in evaluation separates his method from traditional forms of research and most other forms of evaluation. U-FE subsumes other evaluation approaches in an effort to address the needs of the stakeholders and often includes several methods. The use of qualitative data in this study stems from the identified needs of the intended users. Every step of the way, the U-FE method is designed to provide meaningful information for the program or organization that will be used for its betterment.

The first step in developing a U-FE is to identify primary intended users. In collaborative evaluation, stakeholder involvement is a central part of the most exemplary evaluations. U-FE’s purpose is to bring about effective change with change more likely to

occur if those involved are involved all along the way as members of a team within a learning organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Lencioni, 2002; Patton, 2008; Yukl, 2006). In his work based on twenty-two years in education, Boloz (2008) suggested that one cannot effect change within a school setting without the stakeholder involvement in real ways. In Scribner, et al. (1999), in the context of organizational learning, evaluation is part of a continual process of examining values that guide actions to detect errors, generate new insights, use feedback in decision making, and ultimately address the core problem and not just the symptoms. Each stakeholder must play an active role in this process.

The focus of the U-FE is on the intended use by intended users. Patton (2008) states that in order to get findings that will be used, any legitimate approach to evaluation can be used, making U-FE highly “pragmatic and ubiquitous” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Since no evaluation is values free, U-FE identifies whose values will frame the evaluation by working with clearly defined users who have responsibility to apply findings and implement recommendations. The identified primary users of the evaluation findings were PTR stakeholders including program authors, trainers, district administrators, and teachers. The evaluation is designed to be formative, with program improvement the primary intended use of the findings. The intended users were actively involved in the evaluation process. The first stage of the study involved the researcher meeting with program authors to identify the key questions and methods for data collection and analyzing.

### Population and Sample

The sample of schools was chosen by the researcher from the Pathways To Reading

participating school list of twenty-two districts. One district was chosen randomly from those implementing the PTR program for more than eight years. This criterion was set to examine perceptions among long-term program participants. One district was chosen randomly from those implementing PTR for less than five years to provide perceptions from novice participants. The sample was completed with a district chosen randomly that was in the first year of implementing the PTR program. In spring 2013, participants were surveyed about their perceptions of the professional development, implementation, and effectiveness of the program. The sample consisted of 184 teachers and 13 administrators invited to participate through personal contact from the program authors and the researcher. Three focus groups of teachers and administrators were formed from the study sample, representing each district to further clarify findings from the survey.

The nature of qualitative data collection in the U-FE tends to be more open-ended. Both positive and negative perceptions of the PTR program were expected. As Patton (2008) stated, this data then leads the researcher and stakeholders to ask, “What are the program’s strengths and weaknesses?”, “To what extent are participants progressing toward the desired outcomes?”, “Which types of participants are making good progress and which are not doing so well?”, “What kinds of implementation problems have emerged?”, and “How are these problems being addressed?”. It is a process focus involving the primary intended users in thematic content analysis and inductive analysis of the data and uses of the findings (Patton).

#### Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity in qualitative research take the forms of trustworthiness, rigor and quality. To achieve validity and reliability of the qualitative research, the

researcher's biases must be identified and triangulation used to increase the researcher's trustworthiness in testing a proposition about some social phenomenon (Denzin, 1978). Triangulation is defined to be "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.126). The U-FE study design involves the researcher and participants both taking part in the process of needs assessment and question development. This involvement leads to a high degree of internal validity as, "...the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest (best able) to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (Merriam, p.203). To insure rigor, interview transcripts were reviewed by a neutral party (Creswell, 2003), as well as member-checked for congruency between the respondents' intended meaning and the researcher's reporting. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. For quality assurance the survey was reviewed using SurveyMonkey's pre-testing service called [SurveyQA](#), which provides customers with the opportunity to test their survey on an unbiased respondent. The survey is sent to a respondent who interprets the questions in their own words, explains what they are thinking as they answer each question, and rates the clarity of each question. Any survey questions found to be misleading or difficult to understand were then reworded or removed.

### Participants

The participants in this study were 184 teachers and literacy coaches and 13 administrators from three districts in the state of Missouri. All participants were actively utilizing the Pathways to Reading program in grades K-2. The teachers, literacy coaches,

and administrators participated in the study through completion of an online survey. Participants were randomly selected to participate in focus groups to share their perceptions of the program.

#### Role of the Researcher

The researcher in the qualitative study was a doctoral student with a background in Literacy education at the elementary level. The researcher had five years' experience serving struggling readers in the Title I classroom, as well as leading staff literacy development in the role of Literacy coach. As the primary collector and analyst of data, the researcher was able to "respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information" (Merriam, p.20).

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Surveys were sent to identified teachers and administrators in the participating districts. Survey results were compiled using a computer program. Analysis of the open-ended survey questions was in the form of open and axial coding. The researcher reviewed the coded data to determine emergent themes (Mertens, 2005). Three focus groups of participants were randomly selected from among the study sample, one group from each participating district. Focus group questions were constructed in preparation for the first meeting. Many reasons exist for conducting focus groups including evaluation research (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups should be used when the researcher desires a range of ideas or feelings, to bring insight into complicated topics, and when the researcher wants ideas to emerge from the group (Krueger & Casey). The focus groups were audio recorded. Transcripts of the recordings were made. Data were open-coded looking for general themes. Next, data were axial coded, forming

relationships among data points (Mertens, 2005). To insure validity, member checking of the transcripts was utilized (Creswell, 2003).

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of participants using the Pathways to Reading program in three different school districts. The central focus of the study was the perceptions of participants about PTR's professional development, program content, and its effect on student learning. The methodology used to conduct the study was based on qualitative descriptive case study principles and procedures guided by the intended use by primary users. The study design was outlined and a variety of data gathering methods were discussed. The process for data analysis and evaluation was identified.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to conduct a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) of the Pathways to Reading (PTR) program. Data were collected regarding teacher and administrator perceptions of the professional development component, the implementation of the program, and the perceived program impact on student learning to provide information for ongoing program development.

#### Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are participants' perceptions of the professional development provided in the Pathways to Reading program?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the implementation of the PTR program?
3. What are participants' perceptions of PTR's impact on student learning?

#### Review of Methodology and Research Design

The researcher used a variety of means to identify and evaluate participants' perceptions of the Pathways to Reading program. Participants responded to a survey constructed with input from the primary user to solicit perceptions regarding Pathways to Reading training, implementation, and efficacy. Perceptions were also evaluated from an analysis of recorded focus group conversations with teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators who were implementing the program. Focus group protocols were determined based on survey data.

#### Participants

The sample of schools was chosen by the researcher from the Pathways to Reading

participating school list. Twenty-two school districts participate in the Pathways to Reading program. Three districts were chosen to participate in this study. One district was chosen randomly from those implementing the PTR program for more than eight years. This criterion was set to examine perceptions among long-term program participants. One district was chosen randomly from those implementing PTR for less than five years to provide perceptions from novice participants. The sample was completed with a district chosen randomly that was in the first year of implementing the PTR program. In spring 2013, participants were surveyed about their perceptions of the professional development, implementation, and effectiveness of the program. The sample consisted of 184 teachers and thirteen administrators from the three districts in the state of Missouri. There were 94 teachers/literacy coaches and seven administrators who completed the survey, a 51% overall response rate. One focus group of teachers and administrators was held in each district to further clarify findings from the survey.

### Demographics

The first five questions in the survey collected demographic data from respondents, including the number of years teaching, highest degree achieved, and number of years involved with Pathways to Reading. The mean average years experience in education was 7 years. Twenty-five percent of participants held Bachelor's degrees, while 71% held Master's degrees. The remaining 4% held Education Specialist degrees (see Table 1).

The mean average years of experience with the Pathways to Reading program was 3.4 years. Fifty-two percent of respondents had less than three years' experience with the Pathways to Reading program, with 12 respondents in their first year, 19 respondents in

their second year, and ten respondents in the third year of PTR implementation. In the range of more than three years' experience with PTR, 21 respondents had less than five years' experience, 13 had less than ten years' experience, and four respondents had more than 10 years' experience with Pathways to Reading (see Table 2).

Table 1  
*Participant Background Demographics (n=84)*

	Teacher	Literacy Coach	Administrator
1-2 yrs experience in education	9	1	
3-5 yrs experience	12		
6-10 yrs experience	21		5
More than 10 yrs experience	34		2
Bachelor's degree	21		
Master's Degree	55	1	4
Specialist Degree			3

Table 2  
*Participant Experience with Pathways to Reading (n=79)*

Years in PTR	Number of Participants
1 <sup>st</sup> year	12
1-2 years	19
2-3 years	10
3-5 years	21
5-10 years	13
More than 10 years	4

### Analysis of Data

Two primary methods of collecting data were used in this study of the Pathways to Reading program. The first method used a survey sent to teachers and administrators in the participating districts who were actively implementing Pathways to Reading in their classrooms. The survey included closed and open-ended response items. The second method was discussions with three focus groups of participants randomly selected from among the study sample, with one focus group from each participating district.

## Results of Perception Survey

The Perception Survey was given in the spring of 2013, at the end of the 2012-2013 school year. Ninety-four teachers and seven administrators completed the online survey, for a total population size of 101 respondents. The survey was designed to separate teacher and administrator responses after four demographics questions answered by both teachers and administrators. There were 16 teacher questions, and 13 administrator questions that followed the demographic section.

### *Teacher Perception Survey- Question #1-Other Curriculum*

The first question asked teachers to share any other reading curriculum besides Pathways to Reading currently used in their classrooms. Of 94 teacher respondents, 58 teachers reported 17 other reading curriculum items being used alongside the Pathways to Reading program (see Table 3). Sixteen teachers indicated the use of the Houghton Mifflin Basal Series. Reader's Workshop was listed 13 times.

### *Teacher Perception Survey Question #2-Prior Reading Curriculum*

The second question asked teachers to list reading curriculum used prior to implementing Pathways to Reading in their classroom. A total of 63 teachers responded to this question with 14 teachers indicating they had never used any other reading curriculum other than Pathways to Reading. The 49 remaining respondents listed 10 prior reading curriculum items used. The Houghton Mifflin basal series was the most often used item, with 34 teachers listing it. As seen in Question #1, 16 teachers were still utilizing the Houghton Mifflin series alongside PTR. Other curriculum used prior to implementing PTR were: Fountas and Pinnell's Guided Reading, Four-Block, Saxon

Phonics, McGraw-Hill Treasures Basal Series, Scott Foresman Basal Series, Linda Mood, Letter People, Literature Sets, and the Rigby Series.

Table 3  
*Other Curriculum used alongside Pathways to Reading*

<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Number of Teachers Using item</b>
Houghton Mifflin Basal Series	16
Reader’s Workshop	13
Daily 5 Comprehension Tool Kit	11
Reading A to Z Books	11
Balanced Literacy	11
Hubbard’s Cupboard Books	2
Scholastic News	2
Tim Rasinski Fluency	1
Frog Street Letter Books	1
Reading Eggs	1
Accelerated Readers	1
Debbie Diller Literacy Work Stations	1
Scott Foresman Basal Series	2
Literature Sets	2
McGraw-Hill Basal Series	1
PALS	1

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #3-Desired Companion Curriculum*

The third question on the survey asked teachers what, if any, other curriculum items they would like to use alongside Pathways to Reading. Forty teachers responded to this question, with 19 answering no, they would not like to use curriculum from other reading programs. The remaining 21 respondents listed specific items, as well as some “wishes”, such as lessons aligned to the new common core standards, something to augment comprehension skills, and curriculum to increase work on sight words. Other curriculum listed were: Fountas and Pinnell’s Guided Reading, Saxon Phonics, McGraw-

Hill Treasures Basal Series, CAFÉ, Daily 5, Jolly Phonics, and Lucy Calkins Reading Program.

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #4-Level of Knowledge Change*

The fourth question on the teacher survey asked teachers to select the level of knowledge change they experienced for each segment of the Pathways to Reading training. Teachers selected “Did not add to my knowledge”, “Somewhat added to my knowledge”, “Greatly added to my knowledge”, or “Not applicable” for each segment of the PTR training (see Table 4).

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #5-Cost Effectiveness*

Question #5 asked teachers to rate the cost effectiveness of the Pathways to Reading Professional Development as “Highly Cost Effective”, “Somewhat Cost Effective”, or “Not Cost Effective”. The ratings are shown in Table 5. Over 97% believed PTR to be Highly or Somewhat cost effective. The remaining 1.45% believed PTR to be Not cost effective. In the comments section of this question teachers indicated they had no idea how much the training cost the district, but that they had gained knowledge and skills from the training. The “Not Cost Effective respondent did not comment further on their belief.

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #6-Professional Development, Other*

Question #6 was an open-ended question asking teachers to share any other things about PTR professional development. Twenty-four teachers responded with answers falling into three main areas: Initial Training, On-Going Training, and Teacher Resources. Comments made about the Initial Training were mixed. Two teachers had negative perceptions, while 11 teachers shared positive perceptions.

Table 4  
*Level of Teacher Knowledge Change from PTR Professional Development*

<b>Differentiate Phonemic Awareness and Phonics</b>	<b>3.95%</b> 3	<b>27.63%</b> 21	<b>65.79%</b> 50	<b>2.63%</b> 2	76
<b>Small Group Instruction</b>	<b>7.89%</b> 6	<b>31.58%</b> 24	<b>57.89%</b> 44	<b>2.63%</b> 2	76
<b>Large Group Instruction</b>	<b>13.16%</b> 10	<b>42.11%</b> 32	<b>42.11%</b> 32	<b>2.63%</b> 2	76
<b>Quarterly Grade Level Assessments</b>	<b>13.16%</b> 10	<b>31.58%</b> 24	<b>51.32%</b> 39	<b>3.95%</b> 3	76
<b>Old Word/New Word</b>	<b>6.67%</b> 5	<b>26.67%</b> 20	<b>65.33%</b> 49	<b>1.33%</b> 1	75
<b>Segment and Write</b>	<b>2.67%</b> 2	<b>17.33%</b> 13	<b>78.67%</b> 59	<b>1.33%</b> 1	75
<b>Vowel Hill or Town</b>	<b>2.67%</b> 2	<b>9.33%</b> 7	<b>86.67%</b> 65	<b>1.33%</b> 1	75
<b>Pronouncing Vowel and Consonant Sounds</b>	<b>9.46%</b> 7	<b>36.49%</b> 27	<b>52.70%</b> 39	<b>1.35%</b> 1	74
<b>Multisyllable Strategies</b>	<b>6.67%</b> 5	<b>29.33%</b> 22	<b>58.67%</b> 44	<b>5.33%</b> 4	75
<b>Responding to Student Errors</b>	<b>2.70%</b> 2	<b>36.49%</b> 27	<b>59.46%</b> 44	<b>1.35%</b> 1	74
<b>Read Single Words</b>	<b>13.33%</b> 10	<b>38.67%</b> 29	<b>45.33%</b> 34	<b>2.67%</b> 2	75
<b>Read in Context</b>	<b>18.67%</b> 14	<b>38.67%</b> 29	<b>40%</b> 30	<b>2.67%</b> 2	75
<b>Assigning Decodable vs. Leveled Books</b>	<b>16%</b> 12	<b>42.67%</b> 32	<b>37.33%</b> 28	<b>4%</b> 3	75
<b>First Grade Spelling</b>	<b>9.86%</b> 7	<b>19.72%</b> 14	<b>26.76%</b> 19	<b>43.66%</b> 31	71
<b>Second Grade Spelling</b>	<b>5.56%</b> 4	<b>13.89%</b> 10	<b>22.22%</b> 16	<b>58.33%</b> 42	72

Two teachers indicated it was too intense with so much information being delivered in a short time frame. One teacher commented, “ My three-day training was too much in too short a time. There wasn't enough time to let it settle and mesh.” Another comment pointed to the intensity of the initial trainings creating stress for the teacher. “The training was very intense and I was extremely overwhelmed by it, it takes a lot of prep work and creates a great deal of stress on behalf of the teacher, but a good program for the students.” Eleven teachers made positive comments about the Initial Training and its effectiveness. One teacher commented, “I learned an abundance of information during training that I use daily. I think it's a great program and I can truly see a difference in the 1st graders this year. My small group is fantastic!”

Teacher comments about the On-Going training were positive. One teacher wrote, “I feel like it has been helpful. The most helpful part is the question and answer. Once you teach with it for a while, questions come up as to what to do in certain situations.” Other comments indicated teachers had received support for implementing Reader’s Workshop alongside PTR, and received guidance to implement the program with fidelity.

Teacher comments on Teacher Resources were in two categories: the written manuals and the web-based resources available for teachers. Three teachers commented on the written manuals, all negatively. “Teachers' resources are difficult to understand until you have used them for a couple years.” “It is not helpful that everything is in pieces and we have to have all of the pieces in front of us to make sense of it all. If everything had been downloaded and printed ahead of time and we had it all with us, it could have made more sense. The more pieces, the more confusing it is. It needs to be more

streamlined instead of everything being linked. Keeping all of that straight is too much.”

“The number of typos, errors, and reprints of the manuals is disappointing.”

Table 5  
*Perceptions of Cost Effectiveness of PTR Professional Development*

	Highly Cost Effective	Somewhat Cost Effective	Not Cost Effective	Total
–	–	–	–	–
<b>Respondents</b>	50.72% 35	47.83% 33	1.45% 1	69

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #7-Extent of Implementation*

The next seven teacher questions focused on the Implementation of the Pathways to Reading program. Question #7 asked teachers to rate the extent PTR was implemented in their building. Implementation was indicated to be greatest in First Grade, followed closely by Kindergarten, then Second Grade. Full implementation in remedial settings was indicated to be very low (see Table 6).

Table 6  
*Teacher Perception of Implementation of PTR by Grade Level*

<b>In RTI Model</b>	11.67% 7	10% 6	6.67% 4	10% 6	38.33% 23	23.33% 14
<b>In Kindergarten Classrooms</b>	86.96% 60	1.45% 1	0% 0	0% 0	8.70% 6	2.90% 2
<b>In First Grade Classrooms</b>	91.18% 62	1.47% 1	1.47% 1	0% 0	1.47% 1	4.41% 3
<b>In Second Grade Classrooms</b>	72.06% 49	10.29% 7	0% 0	0% 0	14.71% 10	2.94% 2
<b>In Title I Classrooms</b>	21.67% 13	11.67% 7	6.67% 4	13.33% 8	31.67% 19	15% 9
<b>In Reading Remediation Classrooms</b>	18.33% 11	13.33% 8	5% 3	18.33% 11	31.67% 19	13.33% 8
<b>In RTI Model</b>	11.67% 7	10% 6	6.67% 4	10% 6	38.33% 23	23.33% 14

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #8-Concerns with Implementation*

In response to Question #8, teachers shared concerns that they saw in the implementation of the PTR program. Forty-five responses included nine who had no concerns with the program implementation. The shared concerns fell into the areas of Program, Materials, and Fidelity.

Concerns with the PTR program included:

Alignment with the Common Core Standards

Lack of sight word activities

Lack of time in texts

Time intensiveness of program

Time spent documenting student levels

Preparation for lessons is very time consuming

Pacing is difficult with some long lessons and some shorter lessons

Concerns with PTR materials included:

Teacher manuals are difficult to use

Manuals are difficult for substitute teachers to use

There are too many materials to navigate for each lesson

Concerns with Implementing PTR with fidelity included:

All teachers implementing PTR consistently

Inability to implement program without all the training

Teacher commitment to the PTR program

Support teachers (SpEd and Title I) not trained in PTR, creating inconsistency for lowest students.

Training new teachers

Re-training teachers who move to new grade

Training new students who move in during year

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #9-Trainer Support*

In response to Question #9, 50 teachers shared ways in which PTR trainers helped in implementing the program in their classrooms. While the question did not ask teachers to rank the helpfulness, the most often mentioned way in which PTR trainers helped in implementation of the program was with the follow up visits after the initial trainings. Twenty-nine teachers listed these follow up visits as helpful. Other helps were access to trainers via email for advice, answers to questions and resources, Modeling lessons on site, observing teacher lessons and giving feedback, and mini-refresher courses to address needs.

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #10-Administrator Support*

Question #10 regarding ways administrators have helped teachers implement the PTR program elicited responses from 43 teachers. Three comments indicated a lack of support from administrators due to lack of training, "...they are not very familiar with the program." The most frequent response, with twenty teachers listing it, focused on administrator monitoring, evaluating, and providing feedback to teachers as being helpful. Eight responses focused on administrators providing needed materials in a timely manner. Eight teachers believed that the time and funding to send them to training helped them implement the program. With two responses each, answering questions and providing cumulative data and spreadsheets were the remaining ways in which administrators helped teachers implement PTR.

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #11-Accountability*

Question #11 asked in what ways were teachers held accountable for the implementation of the Pathways to Reading program. Out of 60 responses, 51 indicated submitting test data to the district and/or building level administrators held them accountable. Of those indicating a time frame for data submission, 16 turned in data quarterly, three turned in data weekly, two turned in data three times per year, and two turned in data once per school year. Other ways teachers were held accountable were observations by administrators and literacy coaches (14 responses), being required to turn in lesson plans and notes (six responses), and meeting with coaches (six responses).

*Teacher Perception Survey Question #12-Obstacles to Implementation*

Teachers' perceptions of obstacles to implementation of the Pathways to Reading program were the subject of Question #12. One perceived obstacle to implementation far outweighed any other in responses, with 21 teachers naming lack of time as the main obstacle with which they grappled. "Time. There's never enough time to accomplish what I want to accomplish to do pull outs, special activities, etc." Time for preparation was also mentioned as an obstacle, "Preparation time needed but have NONE." Ten teachers listed the teacher's manuals and resources as being an obstacle for them. "Not the most user friendly teacher's guide--took awhile to locate everything." Inexperience with the program was listed by eight teachers, lack of needed resources was listed by three teachers, and three listed lack of training, or not being fully trained yet as being an obstacle to implementation. "I started (teaching) after the trainings in the summer, so I am trying to use the manuals and get help from other teachers. I'm looking forward to getting the training."

### *Teacher Perception Survey Question #13-Implementation, Other*

In the last question about implementation, teachers were asked to share any other comments about the implementation of PTR in their setting. Fifteen comments were on the program overall, with seven calling PTR a “great” program, six calling PTR an “overall good” program, and one commenting that it was an “effective” program. Eight comments were about a need for training to address the needs of higher students, to learn about other levels in the program, and to clear up confusion about different aspects of the program. “I would like to be trained in the grade level ahead of me so I know where the kids are headed with expectations and I know how to move ahead my kids that are ready the right way.” One comment was made about the Teacher manuals having spelling errors in them and needing updating.

### *Teacher Perception Survey Question #14-Effect on Student Learning*

The next two questions on the survey asked teachers’ perceptions of the effect on student learning. Question #14 asked in what ways has Pathways to Reading been helpful to students and of the 57 responses, 52 centered on the overall program layout and content. “Pathways has given students a repetitive and continual opportunity to learn letter sounds and spellings. This is helpful in building foundational spelling, writing, and reading skills. They can take what they started learning in Kindergarten all the way to Second grade. It is especially helpful in their first years of learning how to read and building decoding skills.” Other comments addressed PTR as being multi-sensory, reaching more students in more ways, being organized, novel, helping students remember, and as increasing reading scores.

### *Teacher Perception Survey Question #15- Student Learning Areas of Need*

Question #15 asked in what ways could Pathways to Reading be more helpful to students. The highest response was about needing more ways to address the needs of higher students who master the vowel sounds and blends earlier than their peers, with six responses. “Better comprehension components”, “more PowerPoints to go along with PTR lessons”, and “more user-friendly teacher manuals” had an equal number of responses (three). “I would love to see some Powerpoints to go with the whole group lessons. It is very confusing going from one manual to the next.” One response addressed needing more in the program for struggling learners and one response was on building in more work on blends.

### *Teacher Perception Survey Question #16-Effectiveness-Other*

In this open-ended question, eighteen teachers shared any other comments they had about the Pathways to Reading program in their district with 16 positive comments and two negative comments. With seven comments, the increase in reading ability shown in the PTR data was the most common response, with three responses about increased spelling ability, and one comment each on increased writing ability and support for lower ability learners. The remaining four positive comments were about the overall likability of the program, “I am glad that our district has invested the time and money to this program. I love it!!”

### *Administrator Perception Survey Question #1*

The first Administrator Survey question asked what brought the administrator to the decision to go with the Pathways to Reading program. In all the responses (7) the administrators indicated that they did not make the decision, rather it was one already

made by district-level administrators. “It was a top down decision but PTR is an excellent program that is structured and wonderful results have been seen with the implementation.”

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #2*

Question #2 asked how effective the Professional Development portion in Pathways to Reading was in helping the staff. The program was thought to be effective, with most administrators finding it “Highly effective” (see Table 7).

Table 7  
*Effectiveness of PTR Professional Development*

	<b>Not Effective</b>	<b>Somewhat Effective</b>	<b>Highly Effective</b>	<b>I do not know</b>
<b>Administrators</b>	<b>0%</b> 0	<b>14.29%</b> 1	<b>71.43%</b> 5	<b>14.29%</b> 1

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #3*

The third administrator question was on the cost effectiveness of the Pathways to Reading program. Five administrators responded to the question. Two comments identified student learning to be worth the cost, stating, “Overall student achievement has increased which makes this program cost effective”, and “I think with the follow up training and professional development it has shown that students are learning at a higher level.” One comment pointed to the online resources available to teachers as adding to the value of Pathways to Reading. “They (teachers) can go to the Pathways to Reading website for forms they need, and to blog with other teachers.” One respondent felt that it was a waste of time and money for higher achieving students, and one wrote that the added cost for substitute teachers to cover classrooms during the first two years of training was a drawback.

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #4*

Question #4 asked in what ways the Pathways to Reading professional development fits with other professional development already being provided to staff. Two administrators commented that PTR aligned with district-wide initiatives to increase reading scores. Other ways indicated the program fit was with vertical teaming done district-wide, balanced literacy done district-wide, and with collaborative teaming.

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #5*

The fifth question on the administrator survey asked administrators to select the level of knowledge change they experienced for each segment of the Pathways to Reading training. Administrators selected “Did not add to my knowledge”, “Somewhat added to my knowledge”, “Greatly added to my knowledge”, or “Not applicable” for each segment of the PTR training (see Table 8). The training areas that most greatly added to administrator knowledge were Vowel Town, Old Word/New Word, Pronouncing Vowel and Consonant sounds, and Responding to Student Errors.

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #6*

The next five administrator questions were on the Implementation of the Pathways to Reading program. Question #6 asked administrators to rate the extent PTR was implemented in their building. Implementation was indicated to be 100% implemented in both Kindergarten and First Grade, followed by Second Grade. Full implementation in remedial settings was indicated to be low (see Table 9).

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #7*

In response to Question #7, five administrators shared ways in which PTR trainers helped in implementing the program in their buildings. Modeling lessons on site,

observing teacher lessons and giving feedback were listed as being helpful in implementing PTR.

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #8*

Question #8 asked in what ways administrators held teachers accountable for the implementation of the Pathways to Reading program. Out of five responses, four indicated submission of testing data as an accountability measure used in their building. Teachers were also held accountable by observations by administrators (three responses), and discussions after observations (two responses).

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #9*

Administrators' perceptions of obstacles to implementation of the PTR program were the subject of Question #9. Obstacles to implementation listed were: difficulty to train new staff and substitutes (three responses), length of training time (two responses), and implementing the program with fidelity, complicated manuals, and increasing class sizes (one response each).

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #10*

In Question #10 administrators were asked to share any other comments about the implementation of Pathways to Reading. Two administrators commented: "I struggle with new teachers hired in. I have a Kindergarten teacher that is just getting trained in the middle of October. First quarter is over.", and "Put together in an easy to follow method. Make simple. Forms are hard to follow and how to fill them out."

Table 8  
*Level of Administrator Knowledge Change from PTR Professional Development*

	Did not add to my knowledge	Somewhat added to my knowledge	Greatly added to my knowledge	N/A
	0%	57.14%	42.86%	0%
<b>Differentiate Phonemic Awareness and Phonics</b>	0	4	3	0
<b>Small Group Instruction</b>	0%	42.86%	57.14%	0%
	0	3	4	0
<b>Large Group Instruction</b>	14.29%	57.14%	28.57%	0%
	1	4	2	0
<b>Quarterly Grade Level Assessments</b>	14.29%	57.14%	28.57%	0%
	1	4	2	0
<b>Old Word/New Word</b>	0%	28.57%	71.43%	0%
	0	2	5	0
<b>Segment and Write</b>	0%	33.33%	66.67%	0%
	0	2	4	0
<b>Vowel Hill or Town</b>	0%	28.57%	71.43%	0%
	0	2	5	0
<b>Pronouncing Vowel and Consonant Sounds</b>	14.29%	14.29%	71.43%	0%
	1	1	5	0
<b>Multisyllable Strategies</b>	14.29%	42.86%	42.86%	0%
	1	3	3	0
<b>Responding to Student Errors</b>	0%	28.57%	71.43%	0%
	0	2	5	0
<b>Read Single Words</b>	14.29%	28.57%	57.14%	0%
	1	2	4	0
<b>Read in Context</b>	14.29%	57.14%	28.57%	0%
	1	4	2	0
<b>Assigning Decodable vs. Leveled Books</b>	0%	57.14%	42.86%	0%
	0	4	3	0
<b>First Grade Spelling</b>	0%	42.86%	28.57%	28.57%
	0	3	2	2
<b>Second Grade Spelling</b>	14.29%	57.14%	14.29%	14.29%
	1	4	1	1

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #11*

The next two questions on the survey asked administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of the PTR program. Question #11 asked in what ways has Pathways to

Reading been helpful to students. Three of five respondents commented on the reading achievement levels improving each year the program has been implemented, with great gains seen in the lowest achieving students. Two respondents commented on the specificity of the instruction being helpful. “I love that we teach the children what our mouth should look like when we say the sounds.”

Table 9

*Administrator Perception of Implementation by Grade Level*

	Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	Minimally Implemented	Not Implemented
<b>In Kindergarten Classrooms</b>	100% 7	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0
<b>In First Grade Classrooms</b>	100% 7	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0
<b>In Second Grade Classrooms</b>	71.43% 5	28.57% 2	0% 0	0% 0
<b>In Title I Classrooms</b>	40% 2	20% 1	40% 2	0% 0
<b>In Reading Remediation Classrooms</b>	40% 2	20% 1	40% 2	0% 0
<b>In RTI Model</b>	20% 1	0% 0	20% 1	40% 2

*Administrator Perception Survey Question #12*

Question #12 asked in what ways could Pathways to Reading be more helpful to students. The three responses were as follows: “Possibly a school to home connection for parents.” “I find it hindering that you are suppose to teach one letter a week. The Common Core is way too rigorous to go that slow.” “The Program does what it is intended to do.”

### *Administrator Perception Survey Question #13*

The last question asked for any other things administrators would like to share about PTR in their building. The two comments were that PTR is a wonderful program with great results, and the PTR program was not for every school.

### Results of Focus Group Protocols

Focus group questions were constructed after review of teacher and administrator survey results. Many reasons exist for conducting focus groups including evaluation research (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The researcher desired a range of ideas or feelings to bring insight into complicated topics and developed questions designed to allow ideas to emerge from the group (Krueger & Casey). The focus groups were audio recorded. Transcripts of the recordings were made and member checked for validity.

Three focus groups of participants were randomly selected from among the study sample, one group from each participating district. The focus groups included 14 teachers and one administrator from the district implementing Pathways to Reading for more than eight years, seven teachers and one administrator from the district implementing PTR for less than five years, and 11 teachers from the district in the first year of implementation of the PTR program. The researcher met with the Focus Groups in the fall of 2013, at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

### *Focus Group Question #1*

The first Focus Group question asked participants to give their perceptions of what was most helpful in the initial trainings with Pathways to Reading. Three themes emerged during the group discussions: the structure of the trainings, On-site visits by trainers, and trainer availability. Participants believed the training days were broken down into well-

planned presentations that allowed for practice of new strategies being taught. The structure also allowed for collaboration with other teachers and good discussions enabling teachers processing time. The on-site visits by trainers were perceived to be very helpful, allowing for modeling, observations by the trainers, feedback on lessons, and question/answer time. Participants all commented on the availability of the PTR trainers via email and phone calls being helpful in clarifying program components and answering questions that come up in the day-to-day implementation of the program.

### *Focus Group Question #2*

The second Focus Group question asked participants to give their perceptions of what was least helpful in the initial trainings. Comments centered around feeling overwhelmed with so much information being presented in a short amount of time. “I think it was such a different thing than what we were doing, than how we taught before...it was foreign to us at that time so...it was harder to take it back and do it with your students because it was so foreign to us.” Several participants commented on training sessions being held at the end of the school year, prohibiting application of the new information until the fall. Augmenting this sense of frustration was teacher manuals that were difficult to navigate. Problems navigating the teacher manuals led to lengthy discussions in two focus groups. “I would love to take both my books apart and just put them the way I want them.” “Especially when you’re new there is a lot of flipping pages back and forth, and you have to get the other book. If there were some distinction between them, that would be helpful.”

### *Focus Group Question #3*

The third question for the Focus Group participants was on the ease of use of

support materials, including the teacher manuals. This question was a follow up to Focus Group Question #2, as difficulties with the materials emerged as a theme. During this discussion teachers highlighted some strengths in the materials. The use of the Flip and Assist helped teachers find things in the manuals. The overview was also mentioned as helpful and that it was used in developing pacing guides and curriculum maps for the year. One participant commented, “It’s good to have a lot of resources, for sure. And it’s all there, it’s just hard to find.” But some weaknesses were also shared. “There’s just a lot. I feel like I take home three or four books every night and go through them for the next day’s groups.” “I’ll still find something new, after four years, that I’m like, Oh my Gosh! I didn’t see that until just now!”

During this discussion teachers indicated they had turned to the PTR website and found the resources there to be up-to-date, highly useful, and that it relieved some use of the manuals. The PTR web-based blogs were also mentioned as a great source of support for teachers.

#### *Focus Group Question #4*

Question #4 asked what could make the initial trainings more helpful. Participants discussed the first three days of training as being too packed with new information, while the last two training days seemed slower, and more repetitive. There was frustration over the lack of training on reading comprehension, and with the feeling of being rushed into implementation of everything at once. “Maybe allowing time to set up folders so the trainer could then tell you, you need this, you need that. I wasn’t sure I had set it up right.”

*Focus Group Question #5*

The fifth question asked participants to discuss their perceptions of the on-going training and support they receive from Pathways to Reading trainers. The on-site supports through observations, modeling of lessons, discussion and feedback with the PTR trainer were perceived as highly useful and supportive. The PTR website was also highlighted as being a positive source of on-going support.

*Focus Group Question #6*

In response to Question #6 regarding the length of time required to feel successful implementing PTR, comments varied by years of teacher experience with Pathways to Reading. Teachers with three or more years' experience described year one as a blur, year two as much better, and year three as being the year they felt comfortable with the full program. One veteran teacher described her first experience with small groups, "It was so new. We were all scared to make the jump from level 1 to level 2 to level 3...we would get stuck on the fact that they didn't know the -ng sound, so we can't move them on. We were stuck on level one forever! But now we move them on up and work with those slower ones in small group."

Newer teachers broke the first year down into quarters, with the first quarter being very difficult to plan and carry out daily lessons, to the second quarter difficulties with adding on small groups, to the third quarter struggles trying to keep up small group and whole group lesson planning, to fourth quarter challenges with testing and expanding past PTR to serve the higher students.

### *Focus Group Question #7*

Question #7 asked if participants believed they had enough time to implement PTR effectively. When the researcher asked this question at each of the sites, there was a chorus of “No’s!”, then laughter. All sites had schedules built around implementation of the Pathways to Reading program. One respondent described the schedule as, “It’s (PTR) a way of life around here, half our day is spent in it.” Even with blocks of time set aside for the program, teachers still believed there was not enough time for the whole group lessons, small groups, and remediation of objectives with slower students. Comments were made that with practice, more is fit into the time frame. “In the beginning I would be like, Well, I’ll have to pick up that high group tomorrow. There was just no time. By the end of the year we could finally do it. Now we have all new students again and we’re starting from scratch.”

### *Focus Group Question #8*

In response to Question #8 regarding alignment with new Common Core Standards, teachers pointed to the PTR website as specifying ways in which the program aligns. A teacher involved with district curriculum development stated, “I’ve been helping with pacing guides for the District and I’m constantly thinking about PTR...that fits there for first quarter, that fits there for second quarter.” Pathways to Reading was seen as one piece that fits into the bigger picture of the Common Core standards. “It’s been a great resource when we are doing our curriculum mapping with the new Common Core. We are like, Oh, that’s in PTR, that’s in PTR.”

### *Focus Group Question #9*

In Question #9 participants were asked if they believe PTR has an effect on student learning. The small group setting emerged as the perceived strength of the program. In this setting high students can go ahead, slower students can get extra help, and new students are taught the basics to allow them to understand the program. “We can see our students having those ‘Ah-ha’ moments, when they see the new blend in a book and can read it on their own.” “The upper grade teachers have had to change how they teach reading since we have started using Pathways. The kids are ready for more.” Many comments reflected the perception that PTR was not useful, however, when students were already fluent readers. “I don’t feel like there’s enough material in PTR for those higher students.”

### *Focus Group Question #10*

The last Focus Group question asked participants to share their wishes for the program. Comments fell under two areas: training, and materials. Participants wished more administrators were trained in PTR and better able to understand what they did in the classroom. Training of support teachers in Special Education and Title I so they were able to use the same vocabulary and lesson structure with the students they serve was also on the wish list. Teachers also wanted the ability to re-visit training sessions once the participant had experience implementing PTR. Teachers also wished for more materials to serve bigger class sizes (segment and write boards, letter tiles), better decodable books that were more colorful and interesting, comprehension lesson support materials, and teacher manuals on the website.

## Summary

Data from a survey and three focus groups were presented in this chapter. The survey was entitled *Pathways to Reading Perception Survey*. This survey was given to teachers and administrators actively implementing the Pathways to Reading program in their districts. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions. The responses of the participants were evaluated and data were presented. The Pathways to Reading Perception Survey was given in the spring of 2013, at the end of the 2012-2013 school year. Ninety-four teachers and seven administrators completed the online survey, for a total population size of 101 participants. The survey was designed to separate teacher and administrator responses after four demographics questions answered by both teachers and administrators. There were 16 teacher questions, and 13 administrator questions that followed the demographic section of four questions.

Three focus groups of participants were randomly selected from among the study sample, one group from each participating district. The focus groups included 14 teachers and one administrator from the district implementing Pathways to Reading for more than eight years, seven teachers and one administrator from the district implementing PTR for less than five years, and 11 teachers from the district in the first year of implementation of the PTR program. The researcher met with the Focus Groups in the fall of 2013, at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. The Focus Group protocol included ten questions designed to allow ideas to emerge from the group to clarify perceptions identified in the survey.

Data were collected regarding teacher and administrator perceptions of the professional development component, the implementation of the program, and the

perceived program impact on student learning to provide information for ongoing program development. The survey responses and the focus group discussions were evaluated in relation to the three research questions to determine perceptions of participants.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to conduct a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) of the Pathways to Reading (PTR) program. Data were collected regarding teacher and administrator perceptions of the professional development component, the implementation of the program, and the perceived program impact on student learning to provide information for ongoing program development.

The findings of this study, based on the perceptions of the users of the Pathways to Reading program, provided accurate program benefit information to the primary intended users. The findings were presented based on the analysis of the teacher and administrator perception responses to the survey questions and the focus group discussions. The presentation of the findings included a discussion of related information from the review of literature and implications for the primary intended users.

The findings are directly related to the three research questions.

1. What are participants' perceptions of the professional development provided in the Pathways to Reading program?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the implementation of the PTR program?
3. What are participants' perceptions of PTR's impact on student learning?

#### Participant Perceptions of Pathways to Reading Professional Development

The findings related to the first research question regarding the participant perception of Pathways to Reading professional development will be presented. These findings include the perception of how PTR training changed understanding of literacy instruction, perceptions of PTR initial training, on-going training, and how cost effective

the professional development provided in PTR training was perceived.

#### *Perceptions of Change in Understanding Literacy Instruction*

One finding of the study was that the highest perceived change in knowledge of literacy instruction was from the Vowel Hill and Vowel Town training. Eighty-seven percent of teachers and 71% of administrators ranked it first, for an average of 79% of teachers and administrators indicating this piece of the PTR training most changed their literacy instruction. Vowel Hill and Vowel Town are unique to the program and serve as the application piece in the classroom. The training is highly specific and detailed. This perception was uniform, with both teacher and administrators rating it highest.

Teachers next rated the Segment and Write training second in level of change in their literacy instruction understanding, and Differentiating Phonemic Awareness and Phonics third. This differed from the Administrator rankings. Administrators ranked Pronouncing Vowel and Consonant Sounds, Old Word/New Word, and Responding to Student Errors all at the same level as the Vowel Hill and Vowel Town training for most greatly changing their understanding of literacy instruction. This indicated that administrators perceived a higher level of knowledge change from the PTR training than teachers perceived.

The training segments rated lowest in terms of knowledge change were in teaching spelling in First and Second grades. These training segments received the lowest ratings by both administrators and teachers. This finding could guide the Pathways to Reading trainers in making changes to time allotted to the different training segments.

#### *Perceptions of Pathways to Reading Initial Training*

The data evaluated from the survey found a distinct difference between teacher

and administrator perceptions of the initial PTR training. Over half (55%) of teachers identified the initial training as too intense and stressful. Data from the Administrator portion of the survey found 71% of administrators perceived the initial training to be highly effective. Administrator comments tied their perceptions of effectiveness of the training to the effectiveness of the program, pointing to reading achievement data as a measure of training success. This more global view of the training was not reflected in the teacher comments. Teachers perceived a high level of stress from the training, pointing to having to immediately implement the new strategies in their classrooms and being held accountable for doing so.

#### *Perceptions of Pathways to Reading On-Going Training*

Results from the survey and focus groups revealed the largest discrepancy between administrator and teacher perceptions in the area of on-going training. A full 100% of teachers perceived the on-going training as supportive and positive, while 100% of administrators perceived difficulties with the on-going training process. Teachers identified the site visits by PTR trainers as where their questions were answered, were supported in their implementation of the program, and where they learned additional skills needed to fully implement the program. Administrators pointed to struggles keeping new employees trained, the time involved in training all staff, and the difficulty training all staff to fully implement the program with fidelity.

#### *Perceptions of Cost-Effectiveness of Pathways to Reading Training*

In this Utilization-Focused evaluation the program authors wanted a question in the survey pertaining to perceived value of the Pathways to Reading program. The findings show cost is not part of teacher perceptions, and a very small factor in

administrator perception, placing value in the program on its ability to generate desired improvement in reading achievement. Findings show that the end users of the Pathways to Reading program feel very removed from the cost factor. Does cost create value, or does it not matter in the educational setting where everything costs, but budgets are taken care of at different levels?

### Participant Perceptions of Pathways to Reading Implementation

The findings related to the second research question regarding participants' perceptions of the implementation of the Pathways to Reading program were presented based on data from the survey and the focus groups. These findings include the extent of implementation, concerns with implementation, perceptions of how trainers helped implementation, and how teachers are held accountable for PTR implementation.

#### *Perceptions of Extent of PTR Implementation*

Findings from the survey show a big difference in administrator perception of the extent of implementation by grade level in their buildings, and their teachers' perceptions of the extent of implementation. Administrators perceive 100% implementation in both Kindergarten and First Grade classrooms, while teachers perceive implementation to be 87% in Kindergarten, and 91% in First Grade classrooms.

This discrepancy was clarified in focus group discussions. Teachers perceived full implementation as fully incorporating all pieces of the program: whole group lessons, small groups, Vowel Town, spelling, as well as adding in comprehension components. Administrators perceived full implementation as any use of the program generating data.

#### *Concerns with PTR Implementation*

Findings on the concerns with Pathways to Reading implementation fell into three

categories: the program contents, program materials, and fidelity concerns. The main concern about the program content centered on the intensiveness of the program and time to implement it fully. Participants perceived a lack of time to plan daily lessons, teach all the lessons, document the learning, and incorporate rich texts into the small group lessons for higher learners.

Another area of concern was with the program materials. While the materials were perceived to be complete, they were also perceived to be difficult to navigate and use for day-to-day lesson planning. Teachers also identified the level of difficulty of the manuals as a problem when planning for a substitute in the classroom.

The previous areas of concern contribute to the concern with program fidelity. The intensiveness of the program, time constraints, and complicated program materials all create opportunities for problems in implementing the program fully, consistently, and correctly in every classroom. Newer teachers especially shared concerns with their ability to fully implement the program correctly.

#### *Perceptions of how PTR Trainers Helped Implementation*

Both teachers and administrators identified the on-site visits by PTR trainers to be most helpful in implementing the Pathways to Reading program. While the initial training was perceived to be too intense and confusing by teachers, the on-site follow up with PTR trainers was perceived to be very helpful. Trainers on-site model lessons for teachers, observe teachers in their own classrooms, discuss the lessons, and provide guidance and advice tailored for the specific classroom settings. Teachers also perceived the on-site trainers to be knowledgeable, positive, and supportive of their efforts.

Data indicate the on-site training to be the determinant of whether or not the

program succeeds in the classroom. Initial PTR training serves as an introduction. Specific learning takes place while implementing the program in classrooms, with the alongside guidance of highly trained, knowledgeable trainers. The ongoing on-site training is also the place where classroom teacher needs are assessed and addressed by program authors.

#### *Teacher Accountability for Implementation*

Both teachers and administrators identified data reporting and observations as methods used to ensure accountability. There was a wide span of frequency of required data reporting, from once per school year, to once per week. Most respondents indicated data were required once per quarter. Survey answers and focus group discussions both found most administrators relied on these data as they were not fully trained in the program. During walk-throughs administrators see only portions of the program in action, relying on reading data to hold teachers accountable for implementing the program. Data due each week was perceived as a stressor for teachers, while data due once per year also created stress from not knowing if the program was implemented correctly until the after-the-fact data at the end.

#### *Participant Perceptions of Pathways to Reading Impact on Student Learning*

The program authors had previous study data that showed a positive impact on student achievement. Research Question #3 focused on the Pathways to Reading impact on student learning and were presented based on data from both the survey and from focus groups. Included were perceptions of how PTR was helpful to student learning, and how PTR could be more helpful in student learning.

### *How Pathways to Reading is Helpful to Student Learning*

The PTR program was perceived to be organized, multi-sensory, comprehensive, and novel enough to stick in students' minds. Data from this question focused on the structure of the lessons, finding the program to be a complete and effective method of teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, letter sounds and blends, and spelling.

### *How Pathways to Reading Could be More Helpful to Student Learning*

This study found that users had a mindset to the future and the inclusion of the new Common Core standards. The new common core is insisting on more being taught in earlier grades, with an emphasis on deep reading comprehension of both fiction and non-fiction texts. Data revealed a desire for more lessons designed for higher students, specifically aligned to the new Common Core standards. Both teachers and administrators also wished for materials that were easier to use, citing ease of use as a way to increase fidelity of implementation of the PTR program. Administrators suggested that a home-to-school connection to inform parents about the PTR program could be helpful to student learning, creating a way for parents to be involved in PTR learning in the home setting.

### Recommendations for Practice

Findings from this study have identified program aspects that are highly effective, as well as generated several recommendations for practice for the Pathways to Reading primary users. The nature of the Utilization-Focused evaluation was for any findings to drive decisions about the program. Recommendations based on these findings focus on the three areas studied: Professional Development, Implementation, and Effectiveness.

Several program aspects were found to be highly effective. Data show PTR to be perceived as a very specific, complete program to address the teaching of foundational skills in grades K-2. It was also found to include excellent support for teachers via on-site visits and access to knowledgeable trainers. The teacher resources were also identified as being comprehensive and useful to participants.

Data suggested several areas of the program in which practice could be improved.

1. To further enhance the professional development aspect of Pathways to Reading, the authors need to add an administrator-specific initial training segment. Teachers have a pragmatic view of the training, while administrator comments unveil a more theoretic view. Teachers place importance on gaining specific program knowledge and rate the initial training high in terms of effectiveness in preparing them to teach the program with fidelity. Teachers also commented on being held accountable for the program contents via walk-throughs and more formal classroom observations. In this way, Pathways to Reading is used as Job-Embedded Professional Development, situated in schools and concerned with the current work of schools (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kennedy, 2011). JEPD is a shared, ongoing process that makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice, requiring active teacher involvement in cooperative, inquiry-based work (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Hawley & Valli, 1999). With JEPD, the onus is on In-District personnel to either bring in experts, or become experts in delivering needed professional development and evaluate daily practice. Fowler (2009) stated that, "...the key to surviving implementation with both the policy change and the implementers intact

is a judicious combination of pressure and support”(p.295). This pressure and support comes from within the local organization, including both district administration and building level leadership.

Administrators in charge of JEPD need specific support in initial program understanding and on-going data collection to direct further professional development. A separate administrator training could include a program overview of the scope and sequence of PTR in grades K-2, the basic structure of whole group and small group lessons, and the structure of the spelling lessons in First and Second Grades. Administrators could also be given more detailed information on data collection, and how to analyze data to ensure student growth. The teacher observation tool could be explained as an accountability piece, and the role of the administrator as support for teachers implementing the program could be discussed.

2. The Pathways to Reading website should be further developed to allow for on-demand professional development via training videos. An on-demand video library could help address the need for training of new staff, training new administrators, and training of substitutes. The constant need for this training in different districts at different times creates logistical problems for the program authors, as well as issues with program fidelity at end-user sites. An on-demand video library that included the initial training sessions in full could address the needs of teachers hired after the district trainings take place, training of long-term substitutes, and also serve as refresher training for teachers moving grades. Once the initial trainings are teacher and administrator specific, program authors

should customize the initial training sessions based on the level of prior knowledge of the teachers in training. Time allotted to the different areas of literacy education during the initial sessions could be determined by a pre-test on the different literacy education areas. This customization of the initial trainings could allow for more time to be spent on areas of literacy education that are less familiar to the trainees, addressing the teacher perception of the trainings as being overwhelming.

3. Develop a consistent web-based data collection system for ease of data collection and monitoring of program fidelity. The most important process in bringing about full implementation of a program is assessing implementation and discussing the data (Noell & Gansle, 2009). In Bronfenbrenner's work (2005), effective implementation was found to be unique to the specific context. Finding the balance between fidelity to a program's principles and processes, and the need to fit into a unique culture and climate in a building is the key to implementation success. With web based data collection at all sites, program authors could address unique site needs while monitoring program fidelity.

4. Program authors should reorganize teacher manuals to be more user-friendly, and add program manuals to the website with a search engine to enable users to quickly and easily find needed information. This portion of the website could be password protected for use by subscribing members only. Manuals should also be carefully edited for spelling and grammatical errors.

5. Along with web-based manuals, literacy coach manuals should be developed and available online as well. Implementation in many districts is supported by in-

district literacy coaches. These coaches need more specific information on program development and teacher guidance.

6. Resources should be added to address the needs of higher students, and to address reading comprehension. Both of these additions are beyond the current scope of the Pathways to Reading program. However, with the advent of the new Common Core standards, educators desire incorporation of more early reading instruction designed for Kindergarten, First, and Second grades. The program authors could design additional lessons to address these needs, offering them at an additional cost to districts as extensions to the existing program.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The current study was a case study of the perceptions of participants using one reading intervention/instruction program. Additional studies could provide further information on reading instruction methods.

A quantitative experimental study could be conducted to compare different reading instruction methods and their effectiveness in the classroom setting using standardized tests, teacher evaluations, and student performance. This type of study could compare Pathways to Reading to other K-2 reading programs.

A longitudinal study could be conducted to determine change in reading achievement after varying years in the Pathways to Reading program. Student achievement could be measured after one, two, and three years in the program. This type of study could determine cumulative effects of years in the program.

An evaluative case study could be designed to determine user perceptions of different delivery methods for professional development. Web-based, online delivery of

professional development via videos and blogs versus in-person training and onsite visits could be studied.

A correlational study could be conducted on different district models of professional development and the effects on student achievement. This study could look at delivery methods utilizing of literacy coaches and district-based PD as opposed to a workshop-based PD model and how each model correlates with achievement on standardized reading tests.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to conduct a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) of the Pathways to Reading (PTR) program. Data were collected regarding teacher and administrator perceptions of the professional development component, the implementation of the program, and the perceived program impact on student learning to provide information for ongoing program development.

Two primary methods of collecting data were used in this study of the Pathways to Reading program. The first method used a survey sent to teachers and administrators in the participating districts who were actively implementing Pathways to Reading in their classrooms. The second method was discussions with three focus groups of participants randomly selected from among the study sample, one group from each participating district. The findings were evaluated in relation to the three research questions to determine perceptions of participants.

Findings related to the first research question included perceptions of professional development of the Pathways to Reading program including how PTR training changed understanding of literacy instruction, perceptions of PTR initial training, on-going

training, and how cost effective the professional development provided in PTR training was perceived. The findings of this study were based on the perceptions of participants and provided ideas for program development of the professional development aspect of PTR.

The findings related to the second research question included the extent of implementation, concerns with implementation, perceptions of how trainers helped implementation, and how teachers are held accountable for PTR implementation. Findings related to the third research question included perceptions of how PTR was helpful to student learning, and how PTR could be more helpful in student learning.

In recommendations for further practice, several topics were discussed relating to the Pathways to Reading program. The topics included customization of initial trainings based on teacher prior knowledge, expansion of web-based professional development offerings, additions to the website of teacher manuals and support materials, and a more uniform data collection system housed online.

Recommendations were made for future research studies. The studies could focus on comparison of different reading strategies, longitudinal study of PTR participant reading achievement, a case study of perceptions of professional development delivery methods, and models of professional development delivery and its effect on student learning. With new curriculum, achievement, and teacher effectiveness accountability standards comes greater need at the district level for programs to address these challenges. The response to these challenges is to continue to find ways to deliver professional development and reading instruction programming that greatly affects student reading achievement.

# APPENDIX A

## SURVEY

### Demographics

**\*1. Are you an Administrator on staff?**

Yes

No

**\*2. What is your position on Staff and your years in the profession?**

	1-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years	more than 10 years
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Literacy Coach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate grade level in which you teach

**\*3. What is the highest degree you have achieved?**

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Specialist
- Doctorate

**\*4. How many years have you been involved with Pathways to Reading?**

- In First Year
- 1-2 Years
- 2-3 Years
- 3-5 Years
- 5-10 Years
- More than 10 Years

**5. Please share any other reading curriculum currently used in your classroom/reading program.**

**6. Prior to Pathways to Reading, what reading curriculum did you use in your classroom?**

**7. Would you like to use curriculum from other reading programs? If so, what?**

## Professional Development

### 8. In what ways did the Pathways To Reading Professional Development change your understanding of literacy instruction?

Select the level of knowledge change you experienced for each segment of Pathways to Reading training.

	Did not add to my knowledge	Somewhat added to my knowledge	Greatly added to my knowledge	N/A
Differentiate Phonemic Awareness and Phonics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small Group Instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Large Group Instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quarterly Grade Level Assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Old Word/New Word	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Segment and Write	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vowel Hill or Town	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pronouncing Vowel and Consonant Sounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multisyllable Strategies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responding to Student Errors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read Single Words	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read in Context	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assigning Decodable vs. Leveled Books	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
First Grade Spelling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Second Grade Spelling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 9. How cost effective is the Pathways to Reading Professional Development in your opinion?

Highly Cost Effective	Somewhat Cost Effective	Not Cost Effective
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

### 10. What other things would you like to share about the Pathways to Reading professional development?

## Implementation

### 11. To what extent is Pathways to Reading implemented in your building?

	Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	Minimally Implemented	Not Implemented	I do not know	N/A
In Kindergarten Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In First Grade Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In Second Grade Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In Title I Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In Reading Remediation Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In RTI Model	<input type="radio"/>					

### 12. What concerns do you see in the implementation of the program?

### 13. In what ways have the trainers helped in implementing Pathways to Reading in your classroom?

### 14. In what ways have your administrators been helpful in implementing Pathways to Reading in your classroom?

### 15. In what ways are you held accountable for the implementation of Pathways to Reading?

### 16. What do/did you perceive to be obstacles to implementation?

### 17. What other things would you like to share about the implementation of Pathways to Reading?

**Effectiveness**

**18. In what ways has Pathways to Reading been helpful to your students?**

**19. In what ways could Pathways to Reading be more helpful to your students?**

**20. What other things would you like to share about Pathways to Reading in your building/district?**

**\*21. Please share any other comments about the Pathways to Reading program.**

I have no other comments.

Other (please specify)

## Administrator-Professional Development

**22. As an Administrator, what brought you to the decision to go with Pathways to Reading Professional Development?**

**23. How effective do you think the Professional Development portion in Pathways to Reading was in helping your staff?**

Not Effective                      Somewhat Effective                      Highly Effective                      I do not know

**24. Share your thoughts on the Cost effectiveness of Pathways to Reading, to what extent are you getting your money's worth?**

**25. In what ways does the Pathways to Reading Professional Development fit with other professional development you are providing for your staff?**

**26. In what ways did the Pathways To Reading Professional Development change your understanding of literacy instruction?**

**Select the level of knowledge change you experienced for each segment of Pathways to Reading training.**

	Did not add to my knowledge	Somewhat added to my knowledge	Greatly added to my knowledge	N/A
Differentiate Phonemic Awareness and Phonics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small Group Instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Large Group Instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quarterly Grade Level Assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Old Word/New Word	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Segment and Write	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vowel Hill or Town	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pronouncing Vowel and Consonant Sounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multisyllable Strategies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responding to Student Errors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read Single Words	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read in Context	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assigning Decodable vs. Leveled Books	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
First Grade Spelling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Second Grade Spelling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**27. To what extent is Pathways to Reading implemented in your building?**

	Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	Minimally Implemented	Not Implemented	I do not know	N/A
In Kindergarten Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In First Grade Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In Second Grade Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In Title I Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In Reading Remediation Classrooms	<input type="radio"/>					
In RTI Model	<input type="radio"/>					

**28. In what ways have the trainers helped in implementing Pathways to Reading in your building/s?**

**29. In what ways do you hold your staff accountable for the implementation of Pathways to Reading?**

**30. What do/did you perceive to be obstacles to implementation?**

**31. What other things would you like to share about the implementation of Pathways to Reading?**

**32. In what ways has Pathways to Reading been helpful to your students?**

**33. In what ways could Pathways to Reading be more helpful to your students?**

**34. What other things would you like to share about Pathways to Reading in your building/district?**

## Thank You!

Thank you for participating in this survey.

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

#### Professional Development

1. When you were first trained in PTR, what was most helpful in the training?

Least helpful?

2. What could make the training more helpful?

3. In ongoing training, do you feel supported?

4. Are new staff trained effectively?

5. Are substitutes, SpEd, Title I instructors trained/using the program?

#### Program Implementation

1. How long does it take to feel successful at implementing PTR?

2. Do you feel you have enough time to effectively implement the program?

3. Are the teacher materials easy to use?

#### Program Effectiveness

1. Is PTR aligned with the new Common Core?

2. Does program address needs of new students, advanced students, very low students?

3. Wishes?

APPENDIX C  
FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES BY THEME

Professional Development

1. Program

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Organized-five initial sessions	Too much information
Informative	Program is complicated
“Thick”- detailed, specific information	Overwhelming amount of information New terms, skills taught quickly Stressful
Classroom/lesson specific	
K-2 teachers trained in whole program Get good overview of different levels	Need more specialized training in specific grade Difficult keeping new staff trained Not all staff trained (SpEd, Title I, Subs)
Use of Best Practice in adult learning as well as Literacy instruction	

2. Support

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Trainers are: Expert Knowledgeable in literacy instruction Knowledgeable in formative data use Knowledgeable in vertical teaming/alignment Positive Supportive Available	No negative comments were made about the Pathways to Reading trainers
Website gives easy access to program Materials Videos Blogs Emails of trainers	No videos of initial training sessions on website, would be nice to review once implementing the program  Manuals not on website
PTR trainer on site visits	Driven by District decision
In-district Literacy Coaches	Literacy Coaches are provided by districts, not PTR. Support varies.

### 3. Materials

Teacher Manuals give comprehensive program information	Manuals difficult to navigate Different books are confusing
--	--

### Implementation

#### 1. Program

Provides scope and sequence	Teachers find the scope overwhelming, sequence confusing at first
Pacing fits school year	Never enough time in the schedule
Provides consistency across grades/classrooms	
Replaced less effective models of literacy education	No room for other programs that work
Small groups facilitate differentiation	Teachers unsure about groups...when to move students along, when to reteach?
Grouping structures fluid, providing enrichment and remediation as needed	Not enough in program to meet higher students' needs
Common Core Standards aligned	No reading comprehension piece

#### 2. Support

PTR trainer on-site Teachers love what they get	District budget driven Teachers wished for more
District Literacy Coaches	District budget driven

### 3. Materials

Teacher Manuals give comprehensive program information	Manuals difficult to navigate Different books are confusing
Two main manuals	Heavy, need both to plan lessons
Many Forms on website	Not all available on site

### Effectiveness

#### 1. Program

Reading Achievement improves	
Prescribed Method creates consistency among classrooms	Complexity of program creates inconsistency in implementation
Prepares students for next grade level in program	Does not serve higher students
	Comprehension piece lacking
	Limited scope

## 2. Support

Meets teachers' needs at point of need with In-classroom observations/modeling	Inconsistent delivery
--	-----------------------

## 3. Materials

Pathways to Reading is always updating/improving materials	Not everyone has same materials/forms
--	---------------------------------------

## References

- American Evaluation Association (n.d.). *Guiding principles for evaluators*. [Online]  
<http://www.eval.org/publications/guidingprinciples.asp>
- Applegate, A.J., Applegate, M.D., & Turner, J.D. (2010). Learning disabilities or teaching disabilities? Rethinking literacy failure. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(3), 211-213.
- Armbruster, B.B., Lehr, F., Osborn, J., & Adler, C.R. (2009). The research building blocks for teaching children to read: Put reading first. Kindergarten through grade 3. *National Institute for Literacy: The Partnership for Reading*. [Online]  
<http://www.nifl.gov/publications/pdf/PRFbooklet.pdf>
- Bednar, A.K., Cunningham, D., Duffy, T.M., and Perry, J.D. (1991). Theory into practice: How do we link? In G. Anglin (Ed.), *Instructional Technology: Past, Present and Future*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Biggam, S. & Itterly, K. (2009). *Literacy profiles: A framework to guide assessment, instructional strategies, and intervention, K-4*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Blair, T.R., Rupley, W.H., & Nichols, W.D. (2007). The effective teacher of reading: Considering the “what” and “how” of instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 60, 432-439.
- Blank, R. K., & de las Alas, N. (2009). Effects of teacher professional development on gains in student achievement: How meta analysis provides scientific evidence useful to education leaders. *Council of Chief State School Officers: Washington, DC*. [Online]  
<http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs>

- Bolman, L.G., & Deal, T.E. (2003). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and Leadership* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Boloz, S.A. (2008). *A principal's autoethnography: Literacy development and school-reform efforts across 22 years*. [Doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University].
- Borman, G.D., Hewes, G.M., Overman, L.T., & Brown, S. (2003). Comprehensive school reform and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 73*, 125-230.
- Brandt, D. (2005). At last: Losing literacy. *Research in the Teaching of English, 39*(3), 305-310.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Broughman, S.P.(2006). Teacher professional development in 1999–2000. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Bruner, J. (1960). *The process of education: A landmark in educational theory*. The President and Fellows of Harvard College.
- Bryk, A.S. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(7), 23-30.
- Carreker, S.H., Neuhaus, G.F., & Swank, P.R. (2007). Teachers with linguistically informed knowledge of reading subskills are associated with a Matthew Effect in reading comprehension for monolingual and bilingual students. *Reading Psychology, 28*, 187-212.
- Cassidy, J., Valadez, C.M., & Garrett, S.D. (2010). Literacy trends and issues: A look at

- the five pillars and the cement that supports them. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(8), 644-655.
- Cheesman, E.A., McGuire, J.M., Shankweiler, D., & Coyne, M. (2009). First year teacher knowledge of phonemic awareness and its instruction. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, 32, 270-289.
- Clinefelter, D. (2008). *A case study of teachers engaged in teaching reading to adolescent students in middle school*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri).
- Clinefelter, T. (2008). *Pathways to Reading: Instructor Manual*. Independence, MO: Author.
- College Board. (2004). *Senator Robert Byrd receives the National Commission on Writing Award*. [Online] <http://www.writingcommission.org>
- Covey, S.R., & Colosimo, J. (2004). *The four disciplines of execution* [Audiotape]. West Valley City, UT: FranklinCovey.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-131.
- Croft, A., Cogshall, J., Dolan, M., Powers, E., Killion, J. (2010). *Job-embedded professional development: What it is, who is responsible, and how to get it done well*. Issue brief. National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *Introduction: The research process*. In *The foundations of social*

- research: Meaning and perspective in the research process* (pp. 1-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Darling-Hammond, L. and McLaughlin, M.W. (1995, April). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(8).
- Darling-Hammond L., Wei R. C., Andree A., Richardson N., Orphanos S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council.
- Deming, W.E. (1982). *Out of the crisis*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Deming, W.E. (1993). *The new economics for industry, government, education*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Duncan, A. (2012). *Escaping the constraints of "No Child Left Behind"*. Washington Post 1/6/12. [Online] <http://articles.WashingtonPost.com/2012-01-06>
- Ehlert, M., Podgursky, M., Koedel, C., & Kim, E.Y. (2009). *Longitudinal analysis of MAP achievement growth: Initial findings*. P-20 Educational Research and Data Center: University of Missouri-Columbia.
- Ehri, L.C. (2005). Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 9(2), 167-188.

- Enz, B.J. (2006). Phonemic awareness: Activities that make sounds come alive. In Cummins, C. (Ed.). *Understanding and Implementing Reading First Initiatives* (pp. 18-30). Newark: International Reading Association.
- Epstein, J.L. (2005). A case study of the Partnership Schools Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2).
- Fink, A. (2006). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Flesch, R.F. (1955). *Why Johnny can't read*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Fogarty, R., & Pete, B. (2009). Professional learning 101: A syllabus of seven protocols. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(4), p. 32-34.
- Foote, M, Falk-Ross, F, Szabo, S, & Sampson, M. B. (2008). Charting the literacy waters: Research, praxis, & advocacy. *College Reading Association*.
- Fosnot, C.T. (1996). *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- Fowler, F.C. (2009). *Policy studies for educational leaders: An introduction (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gary, L. (2005). *Peter Senge: The dynamics of change and sustainability*. New Zealand Management, 46(46). [Online]  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/201647198?accountid=14576>
- Goouch, K. & Lambirth, A. (2011). *Teaching Early Reading and Phonics: Creative Approaches to Early Literacy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Ltd.

- Grossen, B. (1997). *30 years of research: What we now know about how children learn to read*. Center for the future of teaching and learning: Santa Cruz, CA
- Harris, T.L., & Hodges, R.E. (1995). *The literacy dictionary*. Newark: DE: International Reading Association.
- Hawley, W. & Valli, L. (1999). The essentials of effective professional development. In Darling-Hammond, L. & Sykes, G. (eds.). *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Herr, K. and Anderson, G.L.(2005). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pub.
- Hirsh, S. (2009). A new definition. *National Staff Development Council* 30(4),10-16.
- Honowar, V. (2008). Unified teacher-college accrediting system urged. *Education Week*, 27(42), 9.
- Implementation of reading programs and strategies: Hearing before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, United States Senate, 107<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2 (2002).*
- Jefferson. T. (1816). Letter, to Colonel Charles Yancey, January 6, 1816. In Ford, P.L. (Ed.), *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Federal Edition*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons 1904-5. Vol. 11.
- Johnston, P. (2010). Response to Intervention (RTI) in reading: An instructional frame for RTI. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(7), 602-604.
- Juel, C. (2010). Taking a long view of reading development. In McKeown, M.G., &

- Kucan, L. (Eds.), *Bringing reading research to life*, pp. 11-32. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kemp, K.A. & Eaton, M.A. (2008). *RTI: The classroom connection for literacy: Reading intervention and measurement*. New York: Dude Publishing.
- Kennedy, J. (2011). Use collaborative inquiry and multiple data sources to improve practice. *The Leading Teacher*, 10(11), 7.
- Kersten, J., & Pardo, L. (2007). Finessing and hybridizing: Innovative literacy practices in Reading First classrooms. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(2), 146-154.
- Koutsoftas, A.D., Harmon, M.T., & Gray, S. (2009). The effect of tier 2 intervention for phonemic awareness in a Response-to-Intervention model in low-income preschool classrooms. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 40, 116-130.
- Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M.A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Kuhn, M.R., & Stahl, S.A. (2003). Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(1), 3-21.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lewin, K. (1999). Group decision and social change. In Lewin, K. & Gold, M. (Eds), *The complete social scientist: A Kurt Lewin reader*. American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, pp. 265-84.
- Lindamood, P.C. (1998). The need for phonemic awareness. *ASHA*, 40(2), 44-49.
- Loeb, D.F., Gillam, R.B., Hoffman, L., Brandel, J., & Marquis, J. (2009). The effects of

- Fast ForWord language on the phonemic awareness and reading skills of school-age children with language impairments and poor reading skills. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 18, 376-387.
- Louis, K.S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K.L., & Anderson, S.E. (2010). Investigating the links to improved student learning. *Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement*. University of Minnesota.
- Majone, G., & Wildavsky, A. (1978). Implementation as evolution. In H. Freeman (Ed.), *Policy Studies Annual Review* (Vol. 2). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Manzo, K.K. (2008). Reading First doesn't help pupils 'Get it'. *Education Week*, 27(36), 1-14.
- McBride, N. (2005). *The effectiveness of second shot and/or Lindamood-Bell on reading achievement of elementary students*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nevada, Reno).
- Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Moats, L. (1999). *Teaching reading is rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.
- Morrell, E. (2012). 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacies: Critical media pedagogies and Language Arts. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(4), 300-312.

- Mraz, M.E. (2004). Factors that influence policy decisions in literacy: Perspectives of key policy informants. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 43(3), 20-36.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2006). *A first look at the literacy of America's adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. U.S. Department of Education. (NCES) Publication No. 2006-470. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2011). *The Nation's Report Card*. U.S. Department of Education. (NCES) Publication No. 2012-457. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Endowment for the Arts. (2007). *To read or not to read: A question of National consequence*. Research Report #47. Washington DC: Office of Research and Analysis.
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. (NIH Publication No. 00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Nelson, L. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation of the program evaluation process of a Missouri school district*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Missouri).
- Nichols, W.D., Rickelman, R.J., Young, CA., & Rupley, W.H. (2008). Understanding and applying reading instructional strategies: Implications for professional development in the middle schools. In M. Foote, Falk-Ross, F., Szabo, S. & Sampson, M.B. (Eds.), *Navigating the literacy waters: Research, praxis, & advocacy*, pp. 220-246. Texas A&M University: College Reading Association.

- Nicholson, T. (2006). How to avoid reading failure: Teach phonemic awareness. In McKeough, A., Phillips, L.M., Timmons, V., & Lupart, J.L. (Eds.), *Understanding literacy development: A global view*, pp. 31-48. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, PL 107-110, (2001).
- Noell, G. H., & Gansle, K. A. (2009). Moving from good ideas in educational systems change to sustainable program implementation: Coming to terms with some of the realities. *Psychology in the Schools, 46*, 79-89.
- Ogawa, R. T., & Bossert, S. T. (1995). Leadership as an organizational quality. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 31*(2), 224-243.
- Owen, K.E. (2004). *Effects of Lindamood-Bell on third and fourth grade reading achievement in Pueblo School District No. 60*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Denver).
- Patton, M.P. (2008). *Utilization focused evaluation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pokorni, J.L., Worthington, C.K., & Jamison, P.J. (2004). Phonological awareness intervention: Comparison of Fast ForWord, Earobics, and LiPS. *Journal of Educational Research, 97*(3), 147-158.
- Piaget, J. (1950). *The psychology of intelligence*. London: Routledge & Paul.
- Preskill, H., & Donaldson, S.I. (2008). Improving the evidence base for career

- development programs: Making use of the evaluation profession and positive psychology movement. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 10(1), 104-121.
- Putnam, R. T., & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4-15.
- Rasinski, T.V. (2004). *Assessing reading fluency*. Honolulu: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.
- Reutzel, D.R., & Cooter, R.B. (2010). *The relationship of top-down reading theories to whole-word reading instruction* [On-Line]  
<http://www.education.com/print/top-down-reading-whole-word-reading>
- Rivers, J.C., & Sanders, W.L. (2002). Teacher quality and equity in educational opportunity: Findings and policy implications. In L.T. Izumi & W.M. Evers (Eds.), *Teacher quality* (pp. 13-23). Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.
- Rosemary, C.A., Roskos, K.A., & Landreth, L.K. (2007). *Designing professional development in literacy: A framework for effective instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Rossi, P.H., Lipsey, M.W., & Freeman, H.E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schein, E. (1992). Uncovering the levels of culture. In *Organizational culture and leadership* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 16-27. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schilling, S.G., Carlisle, J.F., Scott, S. E., & Zeng, J. (2007). Are fluency measures accurate predictors of reading achievement? *The Elementary School Journal*, 107(5), 429-448.

- Schoen, L. & Fusarelli, L.D. (2008). Innovation, NCLB, and the fear factor: The challenge of leading 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools in an era of accountability. *Educational Policy*, 22(1), 181-203.
- Scribner, J. P., Cockrell, K. S., Cockrell, D. H., & Valentine, J. W. (1999). Creating professional communities in schools through organizational learning: An evaluation of a school improvement process. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(1), 130-157.
- Senge, P. (1996). Systems thinking. *Executive Excellence*, 13(1), 15-15. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/204644691?accountid=14576>
- Senge, P.M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner, A. (2012). *Schools that learn: A Fifth Discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. New York: Crown Business.
- Shankweiler, D., & Fowler, A.E. (2004). Questions people ask about the role of phonological processes in learning to read. *Reading and Writing*, 18, 483-515.
- Shaywitz, B.A., Shaywitz, S.E., Blachman, B.A., Pugh, K.R., Fulbright, R.K., Skudlarski, P., et al. (2004). Development of left occipitotemporal systems for skilled reading in children after a phonologically-based intervention. *Biologic Psychiatry*, 55, 926-933.
- Shelton, N.R., Altwerger, B., & Jordan, N. (2009). Does DIBELS put reading first? *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 48(2), 137-148.
- Shermer, E.T. (2003). *Reading with and without Dick and Jane*. University of Virginia

Press.

- Smith, M. (2009). Learning how to teach reading: A tale of two beginners and the factors that contributed to their vastly different teaching perspectives. *Reading Improvement, 46*(4), 247-262.
- Spillane, J.P., Reiser, B.J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research, 72*(3), 387-431.
- Stevens, R.J., Van Meter, P.N., Garner, J., Warcholak, N., Bochna, C., & Hall, T. (2008). Reading and integrated literacy strategies (RAILS): An integrated approach to early reading. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 13*, 357-380.
- Stufflebeam, D.L., & Shinkfield, A.J. (2007). *Evaluation theory, models, and applications*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Peterson, D.S., & Rodriguez, M.C. (2005). The CIERA school change framework: An evidence-based approach to professional development and school reading improvement. *Reading Research Quarterly, 40*(1), 40-69.
- Torgeson, J., Wagner, R., & Rashotte, C. (1999). Prevention and remediation of severe reading disabilities: Keeping the end in mind. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 1*(3), 217-234.
- Torgeson, J.K. (2000). Individual differences in response to early interventions in Reading: The lingering problem of treatment resisters. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 15*(1), 55-64.
- Torgeson, J.K., & Mathes, P.G.(2001). *What every teacher should know about*

- phonological awareness*. Florida Department of Education.
- U.S. Department of Education (2002). *Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program guidance* [On-Line]  
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/compreform/guidance/appendc.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education (2007). *Beginning Reading* [On-Line]  
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>
- U.S. Department of Education (2010). *120 years of literacy* [On-Line]  
[http://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit\\_history.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit_history.asp)
- VanSciver, J.H. (2005). NCLB fitfully fits differentiated instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86, 534-535.
- Villaume, S.K., & Brabham, E.G. (2003). Phonics instruction: Beyond the debate. *The Reading Teacher*, 56(5), 478-482.
- Walsh, R. (2009). Word games: The importance of defining phonemic awareness for professional discourse. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 32(3), 211-225.
- Wei, R.C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). The status of professional development in the United States. *National Staff Development Council and the School Redesign Network*: Stanford University.
- Wilderman, S.G.(2007). *Data driven decisions in K-12 education: A comparative case study about data driven decisions in curriculum and instruction in two rural K-12 school districts*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri].
- Woodward, M.M., Talbert-Johnson, C. (2009). Reading intervention models:

Challenges of classroom support and separated instruction. *The Reading Teacher*,  
63(3), 190-200.

Yukl, G. (2006). *Leadership in organizations*. (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ:  
Pearson Prentice Hall.

## VITA

Susan Powers is a Middle School administrator in the Lexington, Missouri school district. She served for eight years in the elementary school setting as a teacher and literacy coach. She earned Master's degrees in Literacy Education and Elementary Administration.

Susan was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She attended public schools in Illinois, Ohio, and Missouri and graduated from the Hazelwood School district in St. Louis, Missouri. She completed higher education degrees from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg.

Susan has three children. She is engaged to be married to her fiancé Fred, who is a farmer in Kingdom City, Missouri.