

**AN INSTRUMENTAL CASE STUDY OF MICHIGAN'S READ BY GRADE
THREE LAW IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of Michigan - Flint in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Education Department

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University of Michigan – Flint

2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you to Dr. Knezek for her support and encouragement in this dissertation process. Thank you for the sanity checks and for keeping me on track!

To my committee members, Dr. Dorfman and Dr. Vergon- thank you for being on this journey with me.

To Dr. Howard who believed in me enough to hire me as a teacher and be a constant source of support and encouragement and to keep going forward in my teaching and academic endeavors.

Mom and Dad- I am not sure if this would have been possible without your support and constant belief that I could do this. Mom, thank you for reading my papers and being the critical eye, I needed.

To all my students- you inspire me, and I am forever grateful for your endless encouragement and cheers in this process.

To Joshua, thank you for being a great cheerleader and being patient with me when I had to “do school stuff.” I love you more than life itself.

ABSTRACT

Learning to read by the end of third grade is a pathway to a successful life (Keesler, 2019).

Research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation shows that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school and are ineligible for a majority of jobs in the United States (Hernandez, 2012). In 2016, Michigan signed Public Act 306 into law, more commonly known as the Read by Grade Three law, which re-emphasized the importance of literacy in Michigan public schools with a multi-faceted approach. The research in this study used qualitative data from interviews with key stakeholders in a suburban public school district in Michigan, professional development records from the school district, and curricular records and artifacts to explore the impact of this law on literacy instruction in one suburban school district. This instrumental case study investigated how Michigan's Read by Grade Three law is impacting instructional literacy practices in a suburban school district. Further, perceptions and perceived effectiveness of the law on student growth in literacy from teachers and administrators were examined. Implications of this study as well as recommendations for future research are provided.

Keywords: legislation, literacy, mandate, Read by Grade Three

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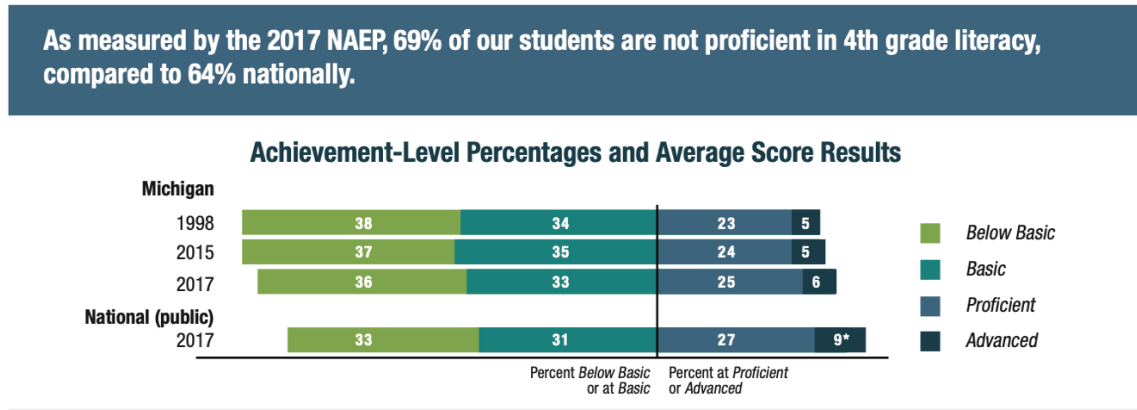
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder signed the Read by Grade Three proposal into law (Keesler, 2019). With this action, Michigan joined a growing number of states enacting such legislation to combat the persistent and growing literacy crisis that pervades the United States. Michigan is a state with a diverse population and fifty-seven intermediate school districts representing 886 public schools over a wide geographic area (State of Michigan Department of Education, 2021). The Read by Grade Three law was a legislated mandate with school districts receiving much of the responsibility for carrying out the provisions of the law. Because school districts received much of the responsibility for the law, it is important to investigate the impact that this law has had on teachers and administrators qualitatively as well as the professional development that was provided to educate staff regarding the implementation. This qualitative case study research examined the teacher and school leader perceptions of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law in one suburban school district. Chapter one provides an overview of this study with sections that include a summary of the problem statement, the research question, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, an overview of the conceptual and theoretical framework guiding the research, and key definitions.

Statement of Problem

Public schools in Michigan have faced an increasing literacy crisis as Michigan's literacy rates have stagnated with students reading at levels of below basic and basic, when compared to national scores. The following figure illustrates Michigan's literacy scores and the national literacy scores and indicates very little change in students scoring in the proficient and advanced categories over twenty years.

Figure 1*Achievement-Level Percentages and Average Score Results*

(General Education Leadership Network, n.d.).

Many attempts have been made to rectify the stagnating scores and improve the percentages of students at proficient levels with previous state and federal legislation; however, there is very little research published regarding how the unique districts of Michigan are working to ensure Michigan is improving these literacy scores, as well as working with the newly implemented Read by Grade Three law in their unique schools. While research has demonstrated the importance of early literacy development and the need for strong early literacy skills (ACLU Michigan, 2015; Cummings & Stanovich, 1997; D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017; Hernandez, 2012; National Institute for Literacy, 2008), few viable solutions have been found. Some published research has investigated the effects from a quantitative perspective statewide (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019; Cummings et al., 2021; General Education Leadership Network, n.d.; Kessler, 2019; Strunk et al., 2022) from various stakeholders and testing metrics. Having numbers and data is helpful from a statistical approach. Still, in a world of many platforms to voice opinions, it is often difficult to determine how the policy change is

being implemented by teachers and administrators in schools and districts on a daily and annual basis.

This study attempted to fill the research gap by providing qualitative research regarding the perceptions of how this law has reshaped education by teachers, administrators, and superintendents of one Michigan suburban school district and the interpretation of and implications for teaching practices that the Read by Grade Three law has had in that district.

Research Questions

The central question that guided this study was: *How has Michigan's Read by Grade Three law impacted instructional literacy practices in a suburban public school district? In addition, the research investigated the perceptions of one suburban Michigan school district's educators and administrators of the Read by Grade Three law and its perceived effectiveness on student growth in literacy.* The researcher chose a qualitative instrumental case study approach to establish and understand the unique experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators and the changes a school district has confronted while working to meet the requirements of this mandate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how literacy instruction in one suburban Michigan school district is being impacted by the changes mandated by Michigan's Read by Grade Three law. This instrumental case study illustrated how one suburban Michigan school district's literacy instruction is being impacted by the changes mandated by that law.

The second purpose of this study was to investigate teacher and administrator perceptions of the Read by Grade Three law and its effectiveness on student growth in literacy in one suburban school district. Through semi-structured interviews and analysis of professional

development records, including artifacts, teacher and administrator perceptions of the law, and the impact the mandate has had on teaching practices were examined. Further analysis of the Read by Grade Three law was researched regarding the preparation school districts used to support the implementation of the law based on professional development offered to staff. The research delved into the perceived effectiveness of student growth in literacy as a result of the Read by Grade Three law changes. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, professional development records, and curricular records and artifacts.

Significance of the Problem/Rationale for the Study

“While efforts were already underway to improve reading outcomes for early learners in Michigan prior to the Read by Grade Three Legislation, the law created an urgency that spurred school districts into action” (Keesler, 2019, p. 11). The U.S. Department of Education describes teachers as the “backbone of our democracy- fostering curiosity and creativity, building skillful individuals and strengthening informed citizens” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) and to achieve this goal, high-quality literacy instruction must be part of the solution. In 2015, new legislation was introduced to the Michigan Legislature. The Annie E. Casey Foundation data analysis, Kid Count, found that 71% of fourth graders in Michigan were *not* proficient in reading (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016), as measured at the beginning of the year. Under Public Act 306, more commonly referred to as the Read by Grade Three law, many changes have been made to Michigan’s education system as a result of these findings. One of the most notable aspects of the act was the retention of third-grade students who did not meet a benchmark score on the State of Michigan standardized test. The retention aspect of the law, especially, has been argued both for and against since the bill was introduced to the Michigan legislature (Michigan Legislature,

2016) and recently was repealed. Although retention was only one aspect of the law, it polarized residents of Michigan.

The Read by Grade Three law also contains other provisions that have changed aspects of Michigan's education delivery, such as the use of early literacy coaches, implementation of diagnostic reading assessments, increased communication with parents, and provision of literacy-intensive professional development for teachers. The Read by Grade Three law is a legislated mandate with school districts receiving much of the responsibility for carrying out the provisions of the law. This study focused on the implementation of the law on teaching practices that Michigan public school teachers and administrators have experienced as a result of the Read by Grade Three law. Their perceptions of the impact the law has had on instructional practices and perceived effectiveness on student literacy growth. The results of this study have the potential to assist lawmakers and other stakeholders in taking the next steps in budget allocations for funding this mandate in public schools and an understanding of the next steps for Michigan public school districts.

Framework

Qualitative research is used to determine a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the qualitative research, an instrumental case study approach will be utilized to look closely at one school district, with potential methodological applications to other similar districts in the State of Michigan. A qualitative instrumental case study allowed the researcher to select one concern, namely, Michigan's Read by Grade Three law, to illustrate various perspectives from one suburban school district on this common issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework that grounds this study is based on Bell and Stevenson's (2015) framework for educational policy implementation.

Education is perceived to be pivotal to economic success in a global economy in which knowledge is considered the key to competitive advantage. It is clear, however, that policy processes and related considerations of the purposes of education inform the contexts within which school leaders and teachers work (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149).

The framework “consists of four main levels: socio-political environment; governance, and strategic direction; organizational principles; and operational procedures and practices” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 147). The authors of this theoretical framework outlined these four levels simply yet acknowledge a greater complexity to educational policy that is “interpreted and translated, reconstructed and remade in different but similar settings” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 148). For this study, the focus was on the organizational principles that “focus on specific ways that policies shape the nature of educational institutions and provide the organizational context within which management and leadership take place” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p.147), namely the Read by Grade Three law in a suburban public school. Additionally, the operational practices and procedures “whereby the governance framework and the strategic direction set within the policy is manifest in the daily activities and experiences of those who work and study in individual institutions” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149), in this study, the teachers and administrators.

Key Terms

Teachers, administrators, legislators, and literacy scholars all may use the same terms when discussing the Read by Grade Three law, but their definitions of those terms may vary. For clarity and consistency, key terms in this study have been defined in the following ways.

Legislation. Legislation refers to laws that are enacted by a legislative body through a lawmaking process (Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, n.d.)

Literacy. The ability to read and write or the ability to use language to read, write, listen, and speak (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Read by Grade Three. Legislation signed into Michigan law in 2016 requires schools to identify struggling learners with reading and writing and provide extra assistance.

Retention. Repeating an academic year (Michigan Alliance for Families, 2023).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an introduction to the research was provided, as well as the research questions and purpose that guided this instrumental case study. A rationale for why this qualitative collective case study research was conducted and a theoretical framework was presented.

In summary, understanding the instructional practice impact and unique perspectives of teachers and administrators of the Read by Grade Three law in a suburban Michigan public school district were researched through this instrumental case study.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Michigan is one of several states that is facing an increasing and ongoing literacy crisis. To combat this literacy crisis in 2016, the state legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, the Read by Grade Three law. This research will examine the implications of this law for a suburban district in the state in real time, as the law is being implemented. Through interviews with teachers and administrators, and utilizing school data, this research will delve deeply into the intricacies of how one school district has changed instructional practices and is working to ensure third-grade students are reading proficiently, as measured by Michigan's standardized tests. This research will also examine the perceptions of educators and administrators about the Read by Grade Three law. The literature review will examine the implications of this law for third-grade students, the legislative history of this law in Michigan and other states with similar laws, and the importance of early literacy development. The qualitative approach used will allow an in-depth look as to how a school district, along with its teachers and administrators, is using the Read by Grade Three law and the mandated literacy changes to increase literacy rates in their unique district as well as their perspectives on the law thereby addressing an identified gap in the research.

Introduction

In 2016, Michigan joined several states, such as Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Indiana (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019), in an attempt to combat declining literacy rates with a reading law that targeted third graders. Substantial amounts of research have been published regarding the statistics and effects of poor literacy skills in the United States (Cummings & Stanovich, 1997; D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017; Fiestler, 2013; National Institute for Literacy, 2008). Furthermore, numerous non-governmental studies have been conducted

using various methods to demonstrate the need for early intervention in literacy to promote lifelong literacy skills (Cummings & Stanovich, 1997; Fiester & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Hernandez, 2012). Government-sponsored reports have been published regarding literacy in the United States to confront this crisis and encourage federal and state lawmakers and other stakeholders to take action and provide best practices and recommendations of action to take in their states and districts (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019; ExcelinEd, 2021; General Education Leadership Network, n.d.; Kennedy, et al., 2015; Lovejoy, 2013; Michigan Department of Education, 2017; National Institute for Literacy, 2008; Weyer, 2019). This literature review will delve into the legislative history of the law, the importance of early literacy development, and finally, a look at the implementation and progress of the law. The review will also include literature that provides a longitudinal look at perceptions, views, and student data of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law.

Legislative History

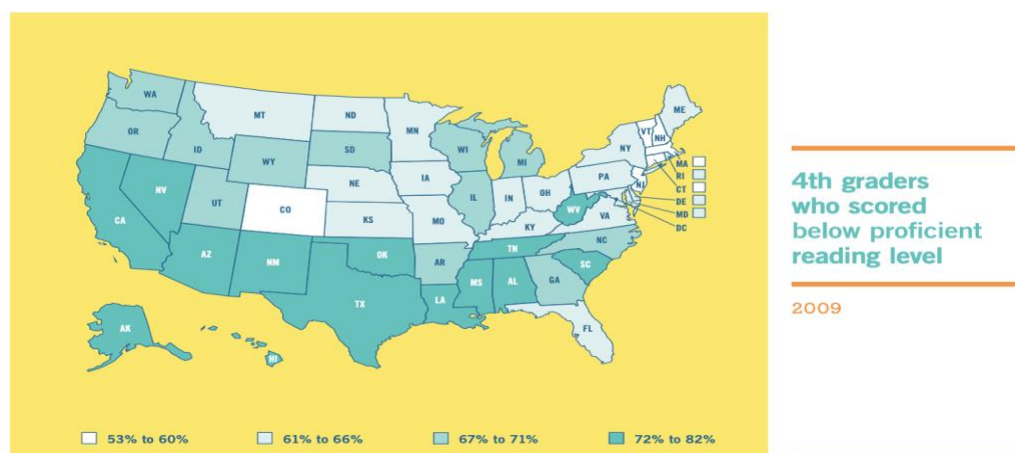
For many years, concern has been expressed about the lack of an educated workforce available in the United States. The Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that “In 2007, nearly 6.2 million young people were high school dropouts” (Fiester & The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). As startling as this fact is, it has been a persistent concern as early as 1965 with the creation of Head Start when it was noted that many young Americans could not pass the military basic skills test (Fiester & The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). This concern grew to national levels of importance as federal lawmakers and state lawmakers worked to create policies to “solve” the crisis. Why? The Annie E. Casey Foundation reported in *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* the following statistics in 2010:

- Every student who does not complete high school costs \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity.
- High school dropouts are more likely to be arrested or have a child while still a teenager, both of which incur additional financial and social costs.
- Of the fourth graders who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2009, 83% of low-income students, who attend high-poverty schools, failed to reach “proficient” levels.
- Three-quarters (75%) of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school.
- A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by the end of third grade is four times more unlikely to graduate from high school.

Figure 2 reflects a national look at students in fourth grade, who scored below proficient in reading on standardized tests in 2009.

Figure 2

Fourth Graders who scored below proficient reading level.



(Annie E. Casey Foundation & Fiester, 2010).

A follow-up report of the Foundation in 2013 stated that “overall, 22 percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013).

Literacy rates have long been a concern of lawmakers and educators in the United States at the federal and state levels. Michigan has also received a strong legislative focus on literacy in recent years. Several attempts by Michigan legislators to move Michigan up in the state rankings of literacy rates were made in 1985 when “collaborative efforts by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and Michigan educators produced Michigan’s Definition of Reading, which became a foundation of expanding our view of literacy and providing instructional resources for educators” (*Michigan's Action Plan for Literacy Excellence*, 2017). While this effort was a first step, Michigan reading test scores showed little improvement.

In 1998, the National Research Council (Pearson, 2020, as cited in Cummings, 2021) published a report concluding that reading ability is determined by multiple factors, including knowledge, language, and other internal processes. That same year, Michigan’s Governor Engler released a new initiative called “the Reading Plan for Michigan” which endeavored to promote early literacy with young children and their parents. The Reading Plan for Michigan included Michigan’s Department of Education’s (MDE) program, entitled the Read, Educate, and Develop Youth (R.E.A.D.Y.), to promote at-home literacy (*Department of Education Read, Educate, and Develop Youth (R.E.A.D.Y.) Program In Michigan and Throughout the Nation*, 2010), as well as the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), a collection of assessments designed to “diagnose, record, and report the literacy progress of PreK through grade 3 students” (*Michigan's Action Plan for Literacy Excellence*, 2017).

A few years later, the National Reading Panel published their extensive report which “assessed the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read” (Langenberg & Dommel, 2000, p. 1-1), while outlining the five main components of effective literacy instruction. These components include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute for Literacy, 2008). In the same time frame, further federal legislation was passed with the Reading Excellence Act in 1998 and the Reading First program started in 2002, as part of the sweeping reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The No Child Left Behind Act provided federal funds annually to help all children achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade from 2001 to 2009 (Herlihy et al., 2009). The Reading First Program was a large part of the No Child Left Behind Act and was promoted to struggling schools to help improve literacy instruction through coaching and professional development for teachers (*Michigan's Action Plan for Literacy Excellence*, 2017). These initiatives were aimed at prompting states to implement their legislation to address literacy problems and concerns. Michigan was one of many states to implement the \$1 billion annually federally funded Reading First program in eligible schools in 2002, receiving \$25 million or more annually from 2003 to 2010 to increase literacy scores in 165 schools (Van Beek, 2013). While a report in 2008 by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) found Reading First did not produce a statistically significant impact on student reading comprehension, it did impact changes in reading instruction. The report did determine that the Reading First program increased time spent on reading instruction in the classroom with professional development in scientifically based reading practices, support from full-time reading coaches, and support for struggling readers (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). Amid allegations of favoritism and unethical conduct of Reading First directors (The Center for

Public Integrity, 2008) funding for Reading First was eliminated in a 2009 federal spending bill. The educational funds were reallocated with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, again opening discussions with federal, state, and local policymakers on how to spend funds for reading instruction and achievement (Herlihy et al., 2009).

Michigan continued to attempt to change literacy rates with legislation requiring teachers to pass a reading diagnostic course in 2006 to obtain teaching certification, as well as an additional three credits in reading education. Additionally, the creation of the MiLit Plan in 2011 served as guidance for the latest research-validated practices for ages birth to adult, aligned with the 2010 Michigan K-12 Standards for English Language Arts (*Michigan's Action Plan for Literacy Excellence*, 2017). While each of these initiatives has attempted to move literacy rates upwards in Michigan, they have lost momentum, attention, and funding without improving literacy significantly as measured by the 2017 NAEP scores (*Michigan's Action Plan for Literacy Excellence*, 2017).

During the era of Reading First initiatives and the No Child Left Behind Act, a third-grade reading policy was passed by Florida in 2002. “By 2021, 19 states had adopted retention-based third-grade literacy policies that contained several elements of Florida’s policy” (Cummings, Strunk, DeVoto, 2021, p. 7). Why? The 2010 Annie E. Casey report stated, “Simply put, without a dramatic reversal of the status quo, we are cementing educational failure and poverty into the next generation” (Fiester & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). In 2009, it was determined that nationwide, 83% of children from low-income families and 85% of low-income students who attended high-poverty schools- failed to reach the ‘proficient’ level (Fiester & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Michigan faced a dismal outlook in literacy as per the National Assessment of Education Progress in 2015, scoring below the national public-school average. Additionally,

72% of grade 4 students scored below basic or at basic proficiency levels with significant racial and socioeconomic disparities (*NAEP*, 2019). Frustrated Michigan state lawmakers had worked with federal lawmakers and literacy experts to try to solve this literacy crisis, including substantial federal grants to improve Michigan literacy scores, only to see scores remain stagnant or dip further (Cummings et al., 2021). Looking at Florida's impressive reading standardized test results from 1998 to 2011 "leaped from 205.7 to 224.5, a 9.1 percent improvement" (Van Beek, 2013), which surpassed the national average of 3.4 percent increase and Michigan's 2.2 percent increase, Michigan was ready for a new initiative to prompt similar results in the state.

Bringing a sense of urgency to correct the poor literacy rates was again focused on Michigan lawmakers when "the ACLU filed a class action suit in 2012 on behalf of the students in the Highland Park Public Schools who are the victims of outrageously poor oversight, management, and teaching controls on both state and local levels" (ACLU Michigan, 2015). This case was brought against the State of Michigan as "less than 10 percent of the district's students in grades 3-8 scored proficient on the state assessments" (Cummings et al., 2021); students in that district were left functionally illiterate and, in some cases, more than five grade levels below their current grade level. The ACLU, in bringing this case to court, brought much-needed attention to the current state of Michigan's education system. Although the court ruled against the students and the ACLU, it did prompt lawmakers to take action. One legislator explained, "That event was a catalyst in the introduction of the original bill" (Cummings et al., 2021, p. 13).

Agenda Setting

With so many failed attempts to make meaningful changes in Michigan's literacy education, lawmakers were faced with an urgency to create and pass legislation to correct this

persistent problem. Representatives Amanda Price and Thomas Stallworth introduced strongly worded legislation to address the literacy crisis in 2013 without success. In the fall of 2015, lawmakers focused their attention on professional development and literacy coaching of teachers and allocated money for Michigan's Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) to hire literacy coaches with the passage of HB4115. The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) met in December 2015 to develop statewide job descriptions for literacy coaches and went on to form the Early Literacy Taskforce (ELTF). The ELTF was a subcommittee of the General Education Leadership Network (GELN) which was composed of representatives from several school districts, intermediate school districts, universities, and educational agencies and associations (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Education Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016) went on to create a resource to support Michigan's teachers, known as the Literacy Essentials (Cummings et al., 2021). The Literacy Essentials became the "foundational documents to support teachers, literacy coaches, and school administrators in building systems to support high-quality literacy instruction" (Go MAISA, n.d.).

The committee While Michigan lawmakers were working to gain traction on introducing legislation that would remedy the literacy crisis, Representative Amanda Price and other lawmakers looked to other states that had passed legislation that set literacy standards. One non-profit education organization, ExcelinEd, was instrumental in collaboration with the Great Lakes Education Project, more commonly referred to as GLEP (Cummings et al., 2021), and is a Michigan-based think tank that promotes school choice and conservative education legislation. ExcelinEd is "focused on educational quality, innovation, and opportunity" (*About ExcelinEd*, 2021) and is chaired by former Florida governor, Jeb Bush. Together, ExcelinEd and GLEP

worked with Michigan's lawmakers to build rapport with several smaller educational issues and then orchestrated bringing a bill, such as the Read by Grade Three law to the legislature. In 2015, Governor Rick Snyder addressed the growing concern of poor literacy skills in this State of the State address. "I am also asking the legislators to work with me to create a commission outside of government, with people from all sectors to say, how do we look at best practices. So, let's work on 3rd-grade reading" (*2015 Michigan State of the State Transcript*, 2015). The Workgroup listened to many stakeholders, such as district administrators, literacy interventionists, and researchers, among others, to address stagnant literacy scores. The result was a recommendation to the Michigan legislature that mirrored Florida's retention-based policy (Cummings et al., 2021).

Policy Formulation

Michigan's Read by Grade Three law was presented at a time when Republicans controlled the state House, Senate, and Governor's mansion (Cummings et al., 2021). However, this did not ensure an easy path for the legislation to be passed. Democrats at the time wanted to emphasize teacher evaluation (Michigan Legislature, 2015; Cummings et al., 2021), as Representative Sam Singh argued that the legislation removed parents and families from the equation of literacy (Higgins, 2015). This topic of educator evaluation passed under separate legislation, Public Act 173 of 2015, that limited the number of years a student could be assigned to an ineffective teacher and increased the percentage of teacher evaluation that was based on student test scores (Michigan Department of Education, 2019). Legislators were faced with literacy scores that continued to move downward in relation to other states and facing this problem was gaining importance, which produced a "policy window" (Kingdon, 1995, p. 171).

Representative Amanda Price and many others worked to establish a compromise that still maintained the high stakes of the legislation, despite several close votes. The comments and emphatic rhetoric arguing against the bill often followed the vote for the records. Appendix 3 provides a detailed explanation of how the bill traveled from introduction in the Michigan legislature to law as per the State of Michigan 98th Legislature in 2015 and 2016 (as published at www.legislature.mi.gov).

“By helping students read proficiently by the third grade, we can make sure that our children have the necessary skills to do well in school and be successful for the rest of their lives,” Snyder said in a statement to the Detroit Free Press (Higgins, 2016).

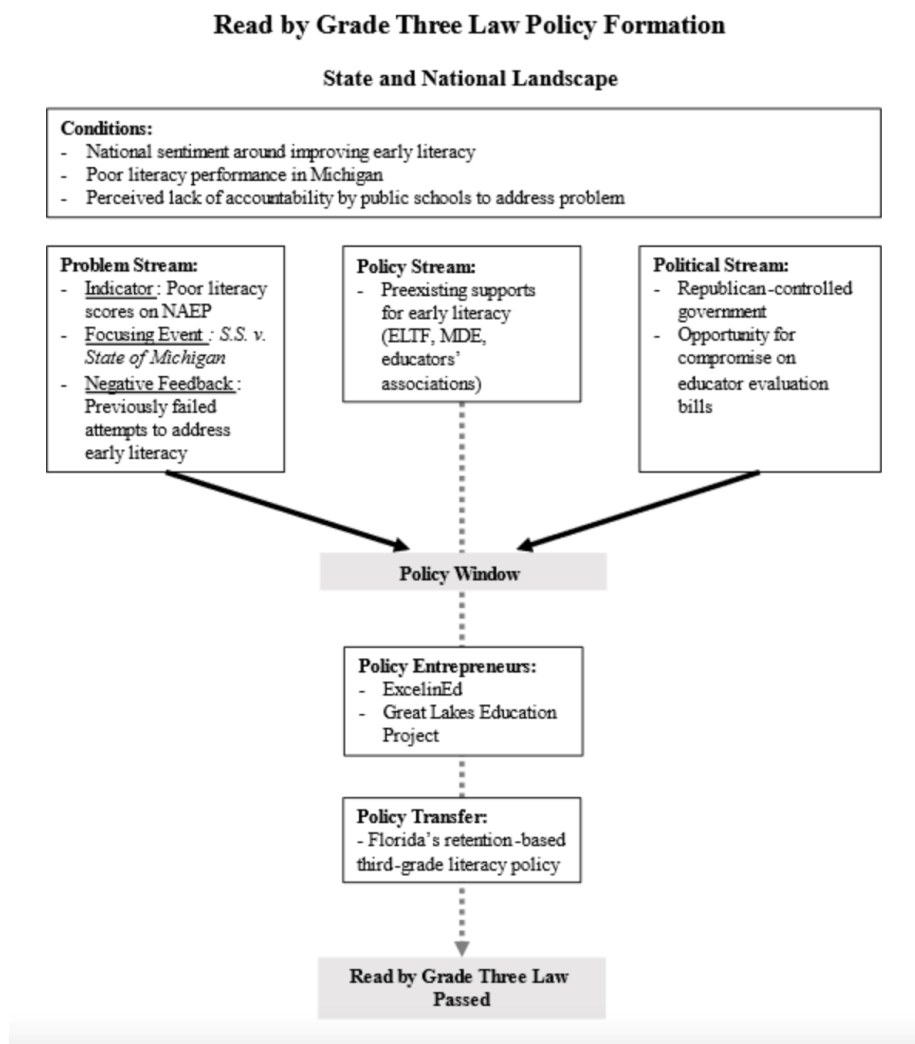
Michigan’s Read by Grade Three bill was passed and signed into law in October 2016 with Democratic insisted compromises such as “good cause exemptions” (Cummings et al., 2021, p. 15) to the retention of third-grade students, such as those with disabilities as identified by an IEP and second language learners. This retention clause required parents or educators to submit a “good cause exemption” to challenge the retention of third-grade students, who did not meet the benchmark on the state standardized reading test (M-STEP) was controversial and received the attention of the media. Some argued that the retention aspect impacted African American students and those from low-income families inequitably and others argued it would limit accountability (Mauriello, 2023). Legislators also vocalized their opinions, and, in March 2023, Michigan Governor Whitmore approved and signed Senate Bill 12, which amended Section 1280f. With the signing of this bill, the retention aspect of the Read by Grade Three law was repealed (Michigan Legislature, 2023).

Another area that was discussed in connection with increasing literacy achievement was literacy coaching and professional development. Although there had been earlier state funding

for literacy coaches, the creation of the General Education Leadership Network's Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) was influential in adding practice guides called the Literacy Essentials. The task force, which represented Michigan's intermediate school districts, created a series of documents to establish the importance of increasing literacy achievement of all Michigan students to teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016). The Literacy Essentials provided a focus for professional development statewide. This teacher professional development foundation was facilitated in the Read by Grade Three law (Cummings et al., 2021).

The graphic "Read by Grade Three Law Policy Formation" (Figure 3) shows how the political, and policy streams joined together to create a policy window and the formation of the Read by Grade Three law, as based on Kingdon's multiple streams policy theory (Kingdon, 1984, as cited by Cummings et al., 2021).

Figure 3



(Cummings et al., 2021)

Policy Content and Adoption

The resulting Read by Grade Three law mandated statewide that schools and districts use a state-approved assessment to identify students with reading difficulties, create support for those students with interventions, require communication with parents, and use the testing data to determine grade promotion. Although support was not unanimous, the bill did become law through bipartisan compromise and became law with immediate effect.

Policy Content

The resulting policy, known as the Read by Grade Three law was enacted into law in October 2016. The major features of the law for Michigan public schools are as follows (Michigan Legislature, 2016):

- Section 1280f. –Develop a reading intervention program with intensive instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Section 1280f. –Create early literacy coaching models with assessment-driven results to guide instruction and teacher training in reading instruction. This was provided for under section 35a (4) of the State School Aid Act.
- Section 1280f.(2a) –Use a reading assessment system to identify students that need additional support with reading and progress monitor those areas, especially in grades K-3.
- Section 1280f.(2c) –Provide written notification and regular communication to families of students, as identified by the reading assessment results that need additional support.
- Section 1280f.(2b) –Create individualized reading plans (IRP) in communication with parents, to identify the student’s instructional needs and supports to be provided.
- Section 1280f. (3) –Provide intensive reading intervention for students, especially in third grade in addition to classroom instruction.
- Section 1280f. (5) –Utilize state testing results to determine promotion starting in the 2019-2020 school year. Students not making the benchmark score of 1252 or below on the ELA M-STEP test are retained in third grade unless a good cause exemption is applied. As of March 2023, this section was repealed (Michigan Legislature, 2023).

- Section 1280f.(5d) ii –Apply good cause exemptions from retention to allow for the special needs of some students, such as those with an individualized education plan (IEP) or English language learners. As of March 2023, this section was repealed (Michigan Legislature, 2023).
- Section 1280f. (7) –Provide specialized and intensified interventions for students retained in third grade by a highly effective reading teacher.

The law prescribes the above changes to literacy instruction and intervention within Michigan schools with responsibilities assigned to teachers, administrators, district superintendents, and Intermediate School Districts (ISD). Teachers are required to utilize state-authorized reading test results to determine student needs and interventions. Furthermore, teachers must create individualized reading plans (IRPs) for students who have scored below the reading test benchmark. Administrators, literacy coaches, and literacy interventionists are required to participate in the IRPs and work with teachers to ensure the intensified reading instruction is in alignment with Ten Essential Reading Practices, which creates a “unified vision and common language for helping students learn to read” (RMS Research Corporation, 2019). Superintendents, administrators, and ISD leadership are encouraged to have teachers participate in professional development that centers around Essential Practices as well as communicate with families of students about home reading plans and ideas (Michigan Legislature, 2021).

Although the legislation did not provide specific incentives or sanctions for schools, it did include a retention clause, which Republican lawmakers insisted on. They felt that “this approach was needed because schools will not do anything unless there’s some punitive measure” (Cummings et al., 2021, p. 17). Retention was heavily argued while the bill was introduced to the Michigan House of Representatives and also in various legislative committees.

Michigan lawmakers understood the importance of collaborating with school officials, the Michigan Department of Education, teachers, and parents to make changes in literacy, especially by third grade, to ensure grade-level benchmarks were achieved.

Policy Adoption

The Read by Grade Three law was adopted by the Michigan legislature and signed into law by Governor Rick Snyder in October 2016. The support for the bill was primarily along party lines, as it passed the House of Representatives with a 60-47 vote and the Senate with a vote of 25-10 (Michigan Legislature, 2016).

This policy was an attempt to address the growing literacy crisis in the State of Michigan. The law used a prescribed method, meaning schools were instructed to act in compliance with this law. This is evident in the verbiage used in Public Act No. 306, which was the signed HB4822 bill, amended 1976 PA 451, Section 1280f. (2) Subject to subsection (14), and states:

“Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, the board of a school district or board of directors of a public-school academy shall do all of the following to ensure that more pupils will achieve a score of at least proficient in English language arts on the grade 3 state assessment” (Michigan Legislature, 2016).

As part of the assurance that more students are proficient, the law requires school districts to utilize a reading intervention system, communicate with parents regarding their children’s progress, and provide summer reading support as a means to ensure reading proficiency. Additionally, the Read by Grade Three law included capacity-building as a policy instrument. “Capacity-building carries with it the expectation of future returns, but these returns are often uncertain, intangible, immeasurable, and distant” (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 21). This aspect of the law included the requirement for school principals to differentiate and target

specific areas of literacy for teacher professional development by providing time for professional development, collaboration time, as well as other engagement opportunities for parents, caregivers, or guardians to assist their children at home. Additionally, criteria for retention and Good Cause Exemptions were outlined in the bill to allow for students who do not meet the benchmark score on the state assessment (Michigan Legislature, 2016).

McDonnell and Elmore (1987) state “the expected effect of mandates is compliance, or behavior consistent with what the rules prescribe” (p. 19). The Read by Grade Three law can be considered a mandate as the law is written because it requires clearly defined compliance from school districts and school administration. The State of Michigan Legislature acknowledged that it could result in “increased costs to the state” (Michigan Legislature, 2016) and local school districts would “incur additional costs associated with additional responsibilities” (Michigan Legislature, 2016). According to McDonnell and Elmore, “in their pure form, mandates entail no transfer of money as inducement” (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987), which the Read by Grade Three law followed as a policy instrument. Although few funds were specifically designated for implementation directly, overall, “the state spent \$132.6 million between 2015-2016 and 2018-2019” (Michigan Department of Education, 2018, as cited by Strunk, et al, 2021, p. 4) as part of additional funds pledged to help districts pay for the required assessments, instructional time, and intervention (School Aid Act, 2018, as cited by Strunk et al., 2021).

Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law was predicated on the assumption that schools will work to comply with all aspects, as outlined in the law, of improving literacy instruction. Additionally, it was also assumed that schools would partner with parents and early literacy coaches to minimize the number of students who are eligible for retention, thereby increasing the number of students who are proficient in reading.

Importance of Early Literacy

“Learning to read is one of the most important skills in modern society” (Lesnick et al., 2010). In 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation published a report on the statistical status of literacy in the United States. This report quantitatively analyzed the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores which are given nationally at the beginning of fourth grade. The data shows the urgency of the national literacy crisis as it focuses on the longer-term societal effects and implications of not being able to read. More than simply stating the problem, the report identified several factors that undermined grade-level proficiency in reading. One of the key takeaways from this report was that “26% of poor readers, who have lived in poverty fail to graduate high school” (Fiester, 2013). The statistics are not limited to poverty. The research further explained that “children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers” (Fiester, 2013, p. 4). This was also found to be true in a longitudinal study of test data of 26,000 Chicago Public Schools students, “fewer than 20 percent of students who were below grade level in third grade enrolled in college” (Lesnick et al., 2010, p. 16). “A strong correlation was found between students at or above grade level in third grade and continued to be at or above grade level in eighth grade” (Lesnick et al., 2010, p. 18).

In a review of elementary research literature, two elementary school indicators were associated with future academic success. These indicators were achieving literacy by third grade (ACT, 2008; Silver & Saunders, 2008, as cited by Hein et al., 2013) and social competence (Hein et al., 2013). Using data from various government sources, such as the U.S. Department of Education, and NAEP Data Explorer, along with other sources, such as KIDS COUNT, this

report provides a comprehensive analysis of the educational data points nationally. As well, these data sources provide a closer look at state and community-level data points of literacy.

The data in a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* (2010) was essential to understanding the larger, national scope of literacy and the importance of proficient reading by grade three and alerted many stakeholders to the continued urgency and implications of illiteracy in the United States. The statistics of those who had not met the benchmark of literacy were plainly explained. For example, “every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity” (Fiester & Annie E Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 5), and “three-quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school” (US Department of Education, 1999, as cited in Fiester & Annie E Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 9).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports entitled *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* (2010) and *Reading on Grade Level in Third Grade* (2010) provide a context of urgency for states to take action and implement changes in educational practices and a “why” for the strong stance on literacy that was included in the Michigan Read by Grade Three law, was clearly described in these reports.

Additionally, authors Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) studied a group of first-grade students using a variety of literacy tasks and then followed up with those same students when they entered eleventh grade. The results of this study determined that there was a strong connection between early literacy in first grade and reading in 11th grade. Students in this study who were exposed to print and reading early on were more likely to develop lifelong reading habits. In this quantitative, longitudinal study of 56 middle-class, first-grade students, the researchers administered a series of literacy tasks to measure reading and cognitive abilities. The

27 students who remained in the district in 11th grade were then given comprehension, vocabulary, print exposure, and general knowledge measure assessments. The researchers examined the correlations between first-grade and eleventh-grade print exposure, which proved a “significant predictor of declarative knowledge and verbal ability” (Cummings & Stanovich, 1997, p. 942). The data points by Cummings and Stanovich (1997) were further analyzed with hierarchical regression analysis with each criterion variable which further solidified that print exposure was a predictor of other abilities, such as verbal and declarative knowledge. The research article by Cummings and Stanovich (1997) was significant because it confirmed the importance of early literacy skills with 10 years of data. The researchers found that early exposure to print and reading success created life-long readers. Emphasizing the importance of societal implications of literacy, especially in the early years of development and the lasting effects of a strong basis of literacy understanding was a clear theme in both Annie E. Casey’s, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* and the Cummings and Stanovich’s, *Early reading acquisition and its relation to reading experience and ability ten years later* studies.

With a strong significance on reading skills in policies and standards at the state and federal levels, greater attention was being focused on early elementary grades. Researchers D’Agostino & Rogers published a study in 2017 in which they looked at literacy trends over time. In this qualitative study of 364,738 students entering first grade in 2,358 different schools across the United States, the researchers investigated literacy achievement over 12 years (D’Agostino & Rodgers, 2017). The literature review provided a historical look at kindergarten trends of expectations and the use of standards to gauge achievement and focused on two research questions. First, what was the overall change in literacy achievement for low-achieving

students and a random sample of first-grade students between 2002 and 2013? Second, what was the trend in the achievement gap between low-achieving students and the random sample from 2002 to 2013, based on six literacy tasks using *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, or OSELA (Clay, 2013)? These tasks include letter identification, word reading, hearing, and recording sounds in words, concepts about print, writing vocabulary, and text reading level at 90% or greater. The identified low-achieving students were selected for Reading Recovery in first grade and two additional first-grade students from each school were selected at random.

Researchers found that each successive cohort of students in first grade had higher scores on all six of the OSELA tasks (D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017). As well, researchers found that the achievement gaps between the low-achieving students and the random sample of students narrowed on basic skills, which they attributed to more focused kindergarten instruction on phonemic awareness and letter identification. The article did point out that the randomly selected students were able to outperform the low-achieving students in word recognition and text reading levels (D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017), which seems to emphasize that low-achieving students continually fall behind their peers, even with instructional intervention. The researchers concluded that the increased emphasis on basic skills of letter knowledge and phonemic awareness was having the desired effect on narrowing the achievement gap, however, “it appears more focus needs to be paid to reading whole texts” (D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017, p. 88) and word reading. It is evident from all three non-governmental sources (Fiester & Annie E Casey Foundation, 2010; D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017; Cummings & Stanovich, 1997) that establishing strong literacy skills early in students' development is important to their literacy development of successful literacy abilities.

Additionally, several studies have been published regarding early literacy with a governmental audience focus. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) developed a comprehensive report regarding identifying interventions and best practices to promote literacy skills in young children. Using a systematic, empirical meta-analysis of more than 500 research studies, the findings “summarized both correlational data and show the relationships between children’s early abilities and skills and later literacy development and experimental data that showed the impact of instructional interventions on children’s learning” (National Institute for Literacy, 2008, p. x). Researchers focused their attention on quantitative data of groups of children that would mirror a normal range of abilities in a typical classroom. The initial research question focused on determining what early literacy skills predicted literacy proficiency later in life. The other research questions investigated the programs, instructional practices, environments, and personal characteristics that are linked to literacy development. To answer these questions, researchers commenced a comprehensive search of various databases of professional journals and then analyzed the published research for relevance. Stringent criteria were applied to ensure the accuracy of the data several times. Using formulas to determine the effect size of the study, a complex coding system was used to list additional variables for homogeneity.

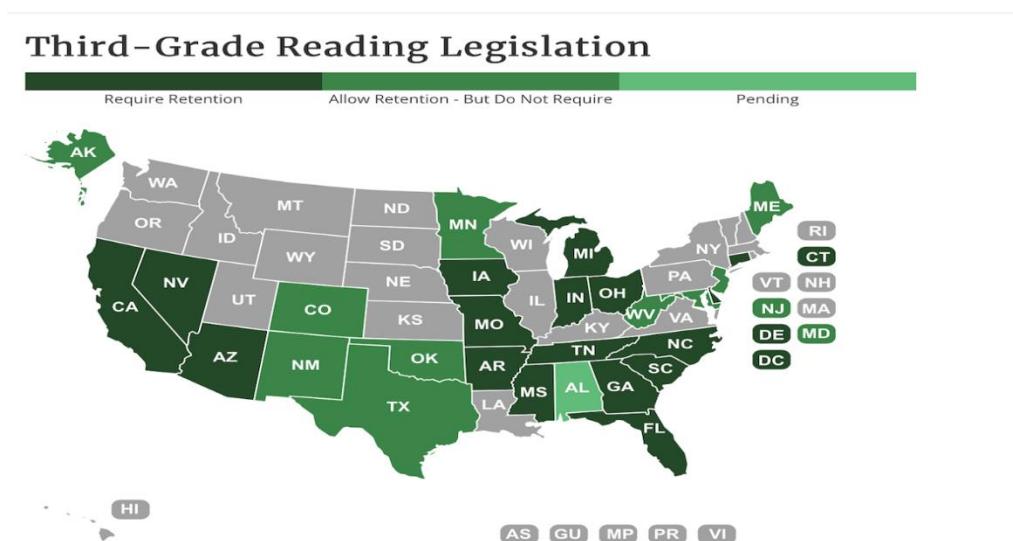
This research by the National Institute for Literacy (2008) was important to further demonstrate the importance of early interventions in literacy development. The statistics on the effectiveness of high-quality early education programs were clearly stated. The study focused attention on best practices to combat the literacy crisis that is being experienced in the United States and addressed the need to educate lawmakers, policymakers, and other stakeholders on the importance of early literacy intervention.

This 2008 research provides a basis for increased importance on early literacy skills and narrowing the achievement gap in literacy as soon as possible, which the Read by Grade Three law attempts to do. However, it did not investigate best instructional practices or specific state mandates for instructional practices. The research will investigate a state-specific mandate, namely Michigan's Read by Grade Three law, and the perceived impact the law is having on Michigan's students and changing instructional practices.

Literacy Policies and Best Practices in the United States

Michigan's Read by Grade Three law is part of an ongoing national effort to confront the growing literacy crisis and to implement change in literacy education in the United States. The map below (Figure 4) illustrates that Michigan is not alone in legislating Read by Grade Three laws.

Figure 4



(Weyer, 2019)

Reading laws like Michigan's are not new. Similar types of reading policies with retention elements were instituted locally in New York Public Schools in the 1980s and in Chicago Public Schools in the late 1990s with dismal results (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). In 1998, California implemented the California Reading Initiative to improve early reading instruction through revised standards, professional development, accountability, and teacher preparation programs (California State Board of Education, 1999, as cited by Coburn, 2006, p. 344). These reforms in education were followed by Florida in 2002 (Modan, 2019). Other states followed with the creation of a variety of reading laws to improve early literacy rates.

Indiana joined the states with third-grade reading laws in 2010. That state took a more localized approach by allowing local districts to utilize funds for early intervention and determine plans for students not meeting the state reading standards, with retention being a last resort (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019). The results of these changes and laws did not statistically impact the NAEP 4th grade reading assessment scores in Indiana, with 33% of students reading at or above basic proficiency level in 2002 and the percentage stagnating in 2022 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Unique to Indiana is the development of a reading assessment called IREAD-3, which measures foundational reading skills from kindergarten through 3rd grade. The IREAD-3 test results show has had an 81% proficiency rate in Indiana (Lawson, 2022).

In 2012, Tennessee launched a "Read to be Ready" campaign along with legislation to increase literacy in the state. While the Tennessee law focused on retention, the state allocated \$18 million over 3 years to fund early literacy, especially in literacy coaching and instructional materials (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019; Education Commission of the States, 2020). These measures impacted NAEP 4th grade reading assessment scores slightly in

Tennessee, with students reading abilities measured at or above the basic level proficiency rising from 27% in 2007 to 38% in 2022 (Hawkins, 2022).

One of the states to pass a comprehensive reading law was Mississippi in 2013 with the passage of the Literacy-Based Promotion Act, which was modeled after Florida's law, as Michigan also did (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019). The Mississippi legislature allocated \$69.5 million over 5 years with specific responsibilities for school districts and the state. A key component of the implementation was placing literacy coaches in the lowest-performing schools with clear protocols of how the coaches should spend their time. Instructional changes were implemented to include measures that would ensure teachers understood the science of reading (Kaufman, 2022), teacher preparation programs, teacher evaluations, and professional development (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019). Additionally, the Mississippi Department of Education has been focusing on partnering with parents in the reading process (Kaufman, 2022). The results have moved Mississippi students from 17% at or above proficiency on the NAEP 4th grade reading assessment in 1998 to 32% at or above proficiency in 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Florida was one of the first states to implement strong literacy legislation that included retention for third graders who did not "meet the state proficiency standards in literacy based on a test" (Winters & Greene, 2012, p. 308). Michigan's Read by Grade Three law is almost identical to Florida's 2002 legislation; using this research to evaluate the impact of Michigan's legislation will help schools and policymakers. Florida's law requires students not meeting a benchmark score on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test to not only be retained but also to attend a summer reading camp and be assigned to a high-quality teacher (Winters & Greene, 2012). Winters & Greene determined that there was a positive effect on student achievement for

several years afterward when remediated. This is very important to lawmakers and other stakeholders because of the extra cost incurred for an extra year of education for each retained student.

Using test scores and demographic data of students in grades three to eight from the Florida Department of Education from 2002-2009, researchers Winters and Greene (2012) analyzed the data with a regression discontinuity identification strategy to estimate the effects of remediation. The students' scores that were analyzed in this study were between 18 points below the cut score and 23 points above that score in third grade. In addition, researchers followed individual students' academic progress over the same period of time. The researchers utilized several calculations to estimate the school's fixed effects with the remediation teacher and treatments that were assigned to those repeating grade three. Although the researcher's calculations could not identify one aspect of the treatment that was most effective, they did show that even though treatment effects diminished over time, they were still significant and produced an overall positive result with standard deviation improvements in both math and reading (Winters & Greene, 2012).

The study by Winters and Greene (2012) is significant because Michigan's Read by Grade Three law closely resembles Florida's law. The research in this study will look at how Michigan's law is meeting the unique student needs and perceptions of how teachers are changing their teaching practices to reflect both stringent testing requirements and the need to plan for retention, as mandated by the Read by Grade Three law.

The National Governors' Association published a guide to early literacy, written in collaboration with the Early Literacy Expert Roundtable, independent consultants, and the National Governors' Association (Lovejoy, 2013). The report, titled, *A Governor's Guide to*

Early Literacy: Getting All Students Reading by Third Grade, NGA Center for Best Practices, compiled best practices from states' practice and legislation as well as a meta-analysis of the literature from published educational research into five recommended actions to improve literacy for new and incumbent governors. The report strongly encouraged governors to take action by working with the many actors in the development of public policy to ensure literacy proficiency is achieved by grade three.

The National Governors Association study, which included the five recommendations, was published in 2013, which was shortly before the Read by Grade Three law was introduced to the Michigan legislature. The recommendations were important to the creation of the Michigan law, as the law encompassed all five of the recommendations and those recommendations also helped to shape the creation of Michigan's Essential Literacy Practices to ensure strong literacy instructional practices were implemented. The recommended actions state that the governors should:

- Adopt comprehensive language and literacy standards and curricula for early care and education programs and kindergarten through third grade;
- expand access to high-quality childcare, pre-kindergarten, and full-day kindergarten;
- engage and support parents as partners in early literacy development;
- equip professionals providing care and education with the skills and knowledge to support early language and literacy development; and
- develop mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and accountability (Lovejoy, 2013).

This study provided important information about best practices for Michigan lawmakers, many of which were included in the Read by Grade Three law.

Read by Grade Three: Implementation and Progress

To implement the Read by Grade Three law, many stakeholders were given responsibilities. Michigan's Department of Education was responsible for "approving three (or more) valid and reliable screening, formative, and diagnostic reading assessment systems for use by school districts and charter schools" and to "recommend or develop a reading/literacy coach model" (Michigan Legislature, 2016, section 380.1280f). Additionally, the Department of Education developed free online modules that focused on essential instructional practices in the area of early literacy for K-3 teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches (Duke, et al., 2020). Early literacy coaches were given eleven teaching tasks ranging from modeling effective reading instruction for teachers, coaches, and mentors of colleagues, to teaching teachers to increase their literacy teaching skills (Michigan Legislature, 2016). School districts were required to: select a Department of Education-approved reading assessment, provide Individual Reading Improvement Plans for students with an identified reading deficiency, provide written notice to parents with tools to help their children, utilize early literacy coaches provided by the intermediate school district, and require school principals to provide time for targeted, differentiated professional development for teachers. The Law also specified the retention of students with a reading score of more than one grade level behind, with notice to parents, unless meeting a set exemption of a good cause and provide a reading intervention program for retained students.

The Read by Grade Three law went into effect immediately after it was signed into law in 2016, with many components going into effect in the 2017-2018 school year. The retention component of the law was intended to take full effect in the 2019-2020 school year (Strunk et al.,

2021). To evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, the State of Michigan allocated \$1 million per year to manage the state-level implementation (Strunk et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unforeseen barrier to effective implementation of the law. The bill originally was to have the retention clause take effect with the 2019-2020 school year (Strunk et al., 2021), but the state waived the retention piece of the policy due to state testing being suspended because of the pandemic. When state testing resumed for the 2020-2021 school year, individual school districts were responsible for determining retention or promoting students to fourth grade under the good cause exemption.

Assigning responsibility is one part of creating policy; however, actual implementation can be more difficult. To truly evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law, several factors must be considered. McLaughlin (1991) notes that implementation is fundamentally determined by local implementers, such as teachers, principals, and students. Their will to implement a policy, as well as their capacity to do so, determines the success of implementation (Loeb & McEwan, 2006). While the retention component has been widely discussed and published in the media, it has not been the only measure of the effectiveness considered in connection with this legislation.

Factors that influence implementation include, those directly influenced by the policy beliefs of fairness and effectiveness of the policy (Spillane, 1996; Spillane, et al., as cited by Strunk et al., 2021), local capacity to implement the policy (Loeb & McEwan, 2006, as cited by Strunk et al., 2021), and an understanding of the policy (Spillane, et al., 2002 as cited by Strunk et al., 2021).

First, implementation is influenced by the perceived fairness and effectiveness of the policy. In 2010, Indiana adopted a third-grade reading law that initially focused on retention, but

then shifted to include educator involvement in implementation (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019). This educator involvement allowed a voice to be given to those who were impacted daily by the policy. One of the key takeaways from this shift is the importance of communication. “Several states wished in retrospect that they had devoted more initial time to proactive communication and stakeholder engagement, especially around the implementation plans and exemptions for retention requirements” (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2019, p. 23).

Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law has faced struggles with implementation due to negative perceptions. A survey of 17,532 K-3 Michigan educators found that only 25% of them believed the law was fair (Strunk et al., 2021). In looking at the perception of the law at a deeper level, a majority of educators found the literacy supports useful (Strunk et al., 2021), but the retention aspect of the law swayed the overall perception to the negative opinion.

The second factor of educational policy that influences implementation is the local capacity to implement it. Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law was folded in with an earlier initiative that provided districts with highly qualified literacy coaches to support educators. While this was a wonderful idea, the implementation reflected a shortage of literacy coaches, literacy specialists, and funding. Only 25% of elementary school principals claimed a sufficient supply of coaches and interventionists (Strunk et al., 2021). Michigan has lacked a “sufficient supply of experienced, high-quality literacy coaches” (Strunk et al., 2021, p. 121).

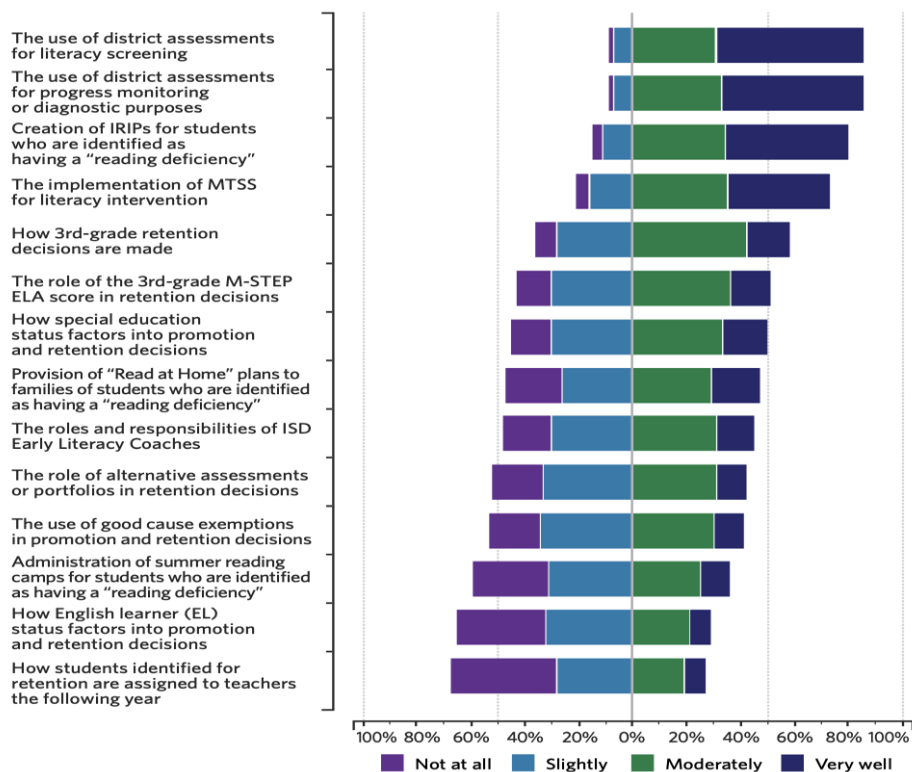
The financial capacity to implement the Read by Grade Three law has been a barrier to implementation. Although districts reported various amounts spent on literacy initiatives, exact numbers were difficult to determine. In Michigan, most educators and other stakeholders believed the law was underfunded, with less than half of elementary principals and

superintendents agreeing they had sufficient funds to implement the Read by Grade Three law. Furthermore, challenges to hiring literacy coaches and teachers were prevalent with 55% of principals stating insufficient funding to hire teachers (Strunk et al., 2021, p. 119). A survey report by ExcelinEd, which was instrumental and influential in creating the Read by Grade Three law in Michigan, recommended that legislators “commit to ongoing funding in order to sustain the legislation and provide direct funding to support successful implementation of the legislation” (RMS Research Corporation, 2019, p. 10). This is a real concern as Michigan’s K-12 education funding has declined by 30% between 2002 and 2015, as reported in a 2019 report (Arsen, et al., 2019).

Finally, an understanding of the policy is important for implementation. In a survey conducted by Educational Policy Innovation Collaboration (EPIC), there was a range of understanding about the Michigan Read by Grade Three law’s components, as indicated by Figure 5: “K-3 Teachers’ Understanding of the Read by Grade Three law.

Figure 5

FIGURE 5.1. K-3 Teachers' Understanding of the Read by Grade Three Law



Note: Six percent did not respond. Teachers were asked, "How well do you understand the following aspects of the Read by Grade Three Law? Please mark one option for each row. If you are not familiar with the Read by Grade Three Law, please select 'not at all' on the items below." Source: EPIC survey of educators about the Read by Grade Three Law.

(Strunk et al., 2021)

While many Michigan K-3 teachers understood parts of the Read by Grade Three law, the survey results indicated teachers did not completely understand the policy. This lack of understanding is problematic for the full implementation of a policy and communication of these components to the community.

Michigan's Read by Grade Three legislation was passed in 2016, with full implementation intended to occur in the 2019-2020 school year. EPIC issued a Year One report to evaluate both the initial implementation and effectiveness of the Read by Grade Three law by using "a multi-stage mixed methods triangulation design that includes multiple types of data and multiple methods of analyses" (Strunk, et al., 2021, p. ii). Several quantitative sources including

voluntary surveys of teachers, principals, superintendents, and Intermediate School District Early Literacy Coaches and student and teacher administrative records were analyzed. The report researched the State of Michigan's schools and investigated educators' perspectives on the law's effectiveness, especially in literacy instruction, and how this law has impacted teachers and students. It also analyzed Michigan educators' concerns as the school year was disrupted by the COVID-19 virus.

This report was comprehensive in a state-wide, multi-level approach to perceptions, implementation, and early effects of the law. This report advanced the research question of how schools are being impacted by this legislation and gave a wider perspective of school district responses.

The Read by Grade Three law took effect for the 2019-2020 school year; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, state testing was waived. Testing resumed in the 2020-2021 school year. Although the Read by Grade Three law does not specify curricula, it does require that literacy curricula be "evidence-based" and include the "five major reading components" (Wright et al., 2022, p. 5), as specified by the National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2000). These five components include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In response to the Law, 55.9% of school leaders reported changing their literacy curriculum (Wright et al., 2022).

The Education Policy Innovation Collaborative led a "four-year evaluation of the Read by Grade Three law" (Strunk et al., 2022), beginning in 2019, to research how the law was being implemented in Michigan and determine its effectiveness in improving literacy achievement for Michigan students. In their February 2022 report, the EPIC researchers used state-wide data and surveys of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders, as well as state-level interviews from

the 2020-2021 school year, to explore how the Read by Grade Three law was being implemented and evaluating the success of the Law (Strunk, et al., 2022). This report acknowledges the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on implementation and the uniqueness of the school year.

Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law: Year Two Report further explores educator perceptions regarding the beliefs about mandated literacy supports and interventions. Throughout the report, financial constraints and a lack of literacy coaching were identified. The unprecedented pandemic-related challenges, such as teaching remotely, were also raised as concerns by teachers (Strunk et al., 2022). As this report outlines, many aspects of the Read by the Grade Three law were challenging to implement, particularly professional development and literacy coaching during the 2020-2021 school year. A few key points from this research include:

- “52% of Michigan students are identified as reading deficient at some point in their K-3 trajectory, with 33% identified each year” (Strunk et al., 2022, p. iv).
- Of the 52% being reading deficient, less than half of them have been caught up to grade level benchmarks.
- “Kindergarten through 3rd-grade teachers reported spending two fewer hours on literacy instruction per week during the 2020-2021 school year than one year prior” (Strunk et al., 2022, p. 39), however, the uniqueness of the school year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic was acknowledged.
- Teachers received less professional development in literacy during the 2020-2021 school year.
- Allocated budget dollars and human capital constraints are barriers to the implementation of the Law.

The EPIC report literature describes a quantitative viewpoint state-wide and does not go deeper into the school district administration and teachers' perceptions and literacy practices that have been impacted by the Law. This *Year Two* report acknowledges the low response rate to the survey, which attempted to reach all Michigan teachers, yet received a response rate of 25%.

The report by EPIC (2022) highlights a gap in the literature from a qualitative research perspective and also highlights that there is a lack of scholarship focusing on what happens in a single suburban district in Michigan. The research in this study will provide an in-depth qualitative analysis of how teachers and administrators in one suburban school district. The research uses a qualitative approach to analyze the Read by Grade Three law's impact on instructional literacy practices within classrooms in a suburban Michigan school district and the teacher and administrator perceptions of the impact of the Law.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, there is substantial evidence to support the importance of literacy in the United States. Schools, state lawmakers, and federal agencies should work together to create a stronger educational system that ensures each student is literate and prepared to meet societal and workforce expectations. The necessity of literacy should spark change and awareness of literacy rates. This literature review has also demonstrated that there have been continued historical attempts to correct literacy disparities within the United States, specifically in Michigan. The Workgroup (2015) report indicated to former Governor Snyder that many components needed to be in place to create the change that needed to happen. The participants of the Workgroup report had the benefit of looking at initiatives, legislation, and data from other states, such as Florida. Utilizing the best practices and learning from others' experiences are useful to schools in Michigan as the Read by Grade Three legislation takes full effect.

The literature examined shows a lack of qualitative research that exists in current studies to show how a qualitative study, such as this one, will contribute to the understanding of the impact of the Read by Grade Three law. Chapter 3 further describes the methodology that was used to gain this understanding from teachers, administrators, and superintendents.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

With the signing of the Read by Grade Three into law, Michigan joined a growing number of states enacting such legislation to combat the persistent and growing literacy crisis that pervades the United States. Michigan is a state with a diverse population and 57 intermediate school districts representing 886 public school districts over a wide geographic area (State of Michigan Department of Education, 2021). The Read by Grade Three law was a legislated mandate with school districts receiving much of the responsibility for carrying out the provisions of the law. This study, qualitative in approach, used an instrumental case study design to explain the perceived impacts of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law on elementary school teaching practices, administration leadership changes, and district adaptations of a suburban public school district in Michigan. Understanding the perceived impacts of this mandate on literacy in this school district will help to articulate issues and concerns for consideration that contribute to the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the mandate for funding and continuance of the law as it stands. This chapter describes the research approach and design used to achieve the purposes of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that was utilized in this study is based on the educational policy implementation analysis developed by Bell and Stevenson (2015). In this framework, "Bell and Stevenson confirm the precedence of the policy decision on the implementation process" (Vinnert & Pont, 2017, p. 24). This framework allowed this study to not only articulate the policy process but allowed "for a combined approach that reflects the importance of central agencies, such as governments, in driving and determining policy agendas" (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 147). Bell and Stevenson's framework also "recognized the potential for policy to be

mediated and contested in different ways and at different levels in different contexts” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 147). This framework identified two main areas: policy development and policy enactment (See Figure 6, below). While it appears simplistic, it should be understood as a web of processes in which educational policies are interpreted, not simply a single direction of execution (Bell & Stevenson).

Within the policy development section of this framework, there are two subgroups: the socio-political environment and governance. It is in the first subgroup of the socio-political environment that broad policy is developed. The second subgroup, entitled governance, focuses on organizational principles and operational practices and procedures.

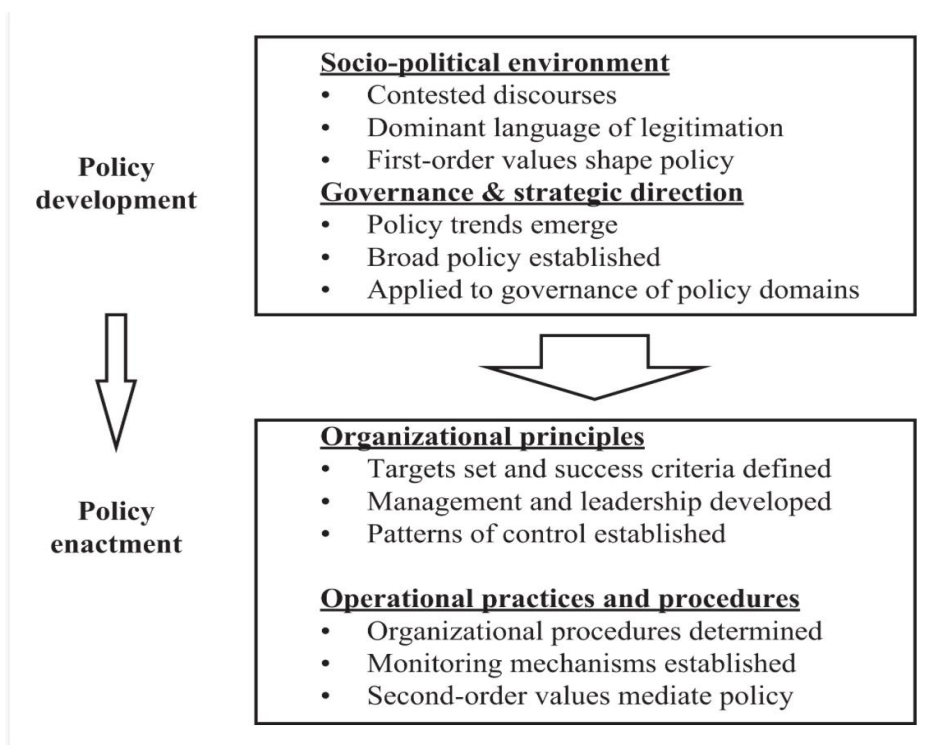
As the policy moves from development into the policy enactment section, success criteria are set with targets, monitoring mechanisms, and patterns of control. It could be described using the idiom “where the rubber meets the road.” This is where school districts, schools, educators, and other stakeholders experience the implications of the educational policy. As the policy is enacted, success criteria will influence the socio-political environment, future governance, and strategic direction.

While the description and accompanying graphic, as shown in Figure 6, indicate a rather simple framework, “it should be noted that the linearity of this model, with its apparent top-down approach, reflects the predominant ways in which policy is perceived and experienced” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 147).

A top-down approach recognizes the “dominant power of the superordinate bodies,” namely governmental entities and legislative members, “in framing policy agendas and asserting decisive influence on the way they are experienced” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 147), which is how educational policy is often perceived and experienced. This is in contrast to a bottom-up

approach in which “policymakers search for information about schools’ goals, strategies, and experiences and use that information to guide their provision of implementation, supports with the specific aim of enabling schools’ decisions” (Honing, 2004, p. 532). Figure 6 indicates a socio-political environment that voices a desired change with governmental bodies responding to the desired change with strategic direction. The model further indicates policy development and big-picture goals established as the model moves into policy enactment. As the broad picture of educational policy is developed, goals and targets to determine effectiveness are established and checks to ensure adherence to the policy are established. Lastly, the second-order values and organizational procedures are established and implemented, typically at the school or district levels. However, this is where the top-down approach cycles back to the constituents, as they shape the socio-political environment. Viennet and Pont (2017) describe educational policy implementation as “a purposeful and multidirectional change process aiming to put a specific policy into practice, and which may affect an education system on several levels” (p. 26).

In this study, the Bell and Stevenson (2015) framework for educational policy implementation helped to identify aspects of the Third Grade Reading law that need to be revisited and what is effective in changing literacy rates in the policy development section of the framework. “By applying this model, it is possible to explore many different issues, some of the most significant of which are the tensions in the discourses that shape education policy” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 150).

Figure 6*Theoretical Framework of Educational Policy*

(Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 147)

Utilizing the theoretical framework of Bell and Stevenson (2015) allowed the researcher to investigate the policy enactment of a section of the framework in the context of a school district case study. It is through Bell and Stevenson's framework that this case study of the Read by Grade Three law is examined. Especially useful as a guiding lens is the framework's policy enactment section: specifically, the operational practices and procedures. From an emphasis on operational practices and procedures, the research focused specifically on teacher and administrator perceptions of their lived experiences with the Law. The research was further triangulated with professional development records and curricular artifacts to note the changes, or lack thereof, that were implemented in the school district as organizational practices and procedures were developed.

The policy of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law was described in the literature review, along with the governance and strategic direction that the Read by Grade Three law originally took. When the Read by Grade Three law was enacted, targets were set and success criteria were defined, as per the framework for educational policy implementation as described by Bell and Stevenson (2015) (see Figure 6, above). As the Michigan legislative and executive branches of government responded to and modified the Read by Grade Three law based on the success criteria defined, the theoretical framework allowed the research to respond to and acknowledge the changes in the law and the influence it has had on teachers' and administrator's perceptions of effectiveness.

The Read by Grade Three law in Michigan provided guidelines to school districts but allowed each school district to establish its own organizational practices and procedures. Using Bell and Stevenson's (2015) framework, especially the organizational practices and procedures aspect, this case study delved into perceptions of the Read by Grade Three law as it has been implemented by one school district. Furthermore, the perceptions of the teachers and administrators who were responsible for implementing the Read by Grade Three law in that district were investigated; they viewed the law as a whole from their perspectives, allowing a brief and limited glance at the socio-political environment that the law was redeveloping. Curricular artifacts were analyzed through the lens of the organizational principles of the theoretical framework. These artifacts were reviewed and analyzed for changes since the enactment of the Read by Grade Three law and they provided a quantitative measure with which to evaluate the impact of the Law in the school district. The professional development records were also analyzed through the lens of the organizational principles for success criteria and the organizational practices and procedures aspects of the theoretical framework. They were

discussed in the teacher and administrator interviews as well as in connection with the records of professional development evaluated for success criteria of the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law.

This research from the policy enactment perspective will help lawmakers and other stakeholders to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the Read by Grade Three law from a small sample of teachers and administrators in one suburban school district in Michigan. From a socio-political viewpoint, with the contested discourse, this research will continue to provide a unique perspective to aid in policy development with governance and strategic direction. For these reasons, Bell & Stevenson's (2015) theoretical framework was used in this research.

Qualitative Instrumental Case Study Approach

A case study is defined by Yin (2009, p. 18) as an “empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context.” Creswell (2014) further describes a case study as

“a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. The case is bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (p. 241).

In this research, a case study approach was selected to investigate the Read by Grade Three law within a single school district with in-depth data collection from multiple data sources.

Within the definition of a case study are various types that are differentiated by the focus or intent of the analysis (Creswell, 2018), including instrumental, intrinsic, and collective case studies. An instrumental case study involves “exploring some general areas to understand rather than a particular case” (Kekeya, 2021, p. 35). In contrast, an intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself as it presents a unique situation (Stake, 1995) for the researcher to uncover. A

combination of both intrinsic and instrumental case studies that involve multiple cases, both “within and across cases” (Punch, 2009, p. 119), is referred to as a collective case study.

An intrinsic case study was not utilized in this research. An intrinsic approach does not allow the viewpoints of the research participants and general areas of the research questions to be researched as an instrumental case study approach would allow. Additionally, while the viewpoints of teachers and administrators were utilized in this study, the participants were bounded by the same school district, not across several school districts, as a collective case study would dictate. For these reasons, an instrumental case study was deemed to be the most appropriate structure for the current study.

An instrumental case study research approach was selected for this study because qualitative methods are more concerned with understanding situations and events from the viewpoint of the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 10). Additionally, they allow the researcher to “draw conclusions that apply beyond a particular case” (p. 390). “In a single instrumental case study, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue” (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98). This research focused on perceptions of the impact of the Read by Grade Three law by teachers and administrators in a particular school district, with a focus on their viewpoints.

Utilization of the case study approach brought several strengths to this inquiry. First, an instrumental case study approach presents an “in-depth understanding of the case” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98) from the viewpoints of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders concerning the impacts of the Read by Grade Three law on such elements as teaching practices, leadership shifts, and student standardized test scores. Second, an instrumental case study uses multiple information streams to collect as much information as possible “to gain valuable

insights” (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 390). Third, an instrumental case study allows the researcher to “draw conclusions that apply beyond a particular case” (p. 390) to the experiences of similar Michigan public school teachers and administrators with the Read by Grade Three law. The qualitative case study research methods that have been employed for this study are described further below and include purposeful sampling, semi-structured interviewing, field notes, and systematic and concurrent data collection of artifacts and analysis procedures. As the study progressed, the researcher utilized a holistic analysis of the entire law and then employed an analysis of themes that are based on specific data obtained from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, the impacts on instructional literacy practices and the perceptions of Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law by teachers and administrators in one suburban Michigan school district were examined. Six teachers and three administrators were interviewed to understand their perceptions about the Read by Grade Three law from the viewpoint of a suburban school district. To triangulate the data, professional development records and curricular artifacts were analyzed. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest “having enough information to present an in-depth picture of the case” (p.102).

The Structure of the Study

This study investigated two research questions: how has Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law impacted literacy instruction and what are the perceptions of the administrators and teachers regarding the Read by Grade Three law? Ragin (1994) defines a research design as:

“... a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. The design of an

investigation touches all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection to the sections of the techniques of data collection” (p. 191)

The setting, participants, role of the researcher, sources of data, data collection techniques, and analysis are described in this section. In addition, measures to ensure the credibility and dependability of the study are explained.

Setting

The school district selected is located just outside one of the most populated cities in Michigan. XYZ (a pseudonym) school district is considered suburban and has an overall population of approximately 3,200 students in three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The elementary schools support students from developmental kindergarten through fourth grade. The research took place with a combination of elementary-level teachers and administrators from the elementary schools and the central office in the school district. The elementary schools have 986 students with the following student demographic composition, as reported by publicschoolreview.com (2023) and Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (2023).

- 72% white
- 10% Hispanic
- 9.3% of two or more races
- 8% African American
- 47% economically disadvantaged.

Across the school district, the following state-mandated standardized third-grade test, M-STEP, reading test proficiency rates have been reported (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, n.d.), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

M-STEP proficiency rates in XYZ school district, as reported by MiSchoolData.

Year Tested	Number of students at or above proficiency	Percentage of students	Number of students assessed
2021-2022	100	49.8%	201
2020-2021	101	50.5%	200
2018-2019	86	41.1%	209

*Note: No testing was reported in 2019-2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants

XYZ Public Schools employ 251 teachers overall, with each elementary school having a developmental kindergarten class and three sections of each grade from kindergarten through fourth grade. Each elementary school employs 16 general education classroom teachers and an administrator, as well as specialists and support staff.

Teacher participants for this research came from a purposive sample from all three elementary schools. The teacher participants had to meet the following criteria:

- Have taught - and currently teach - in an elementary school classroom (grades kindergarten to fifth grade).
- Have taught for at least five years in XYZ School District to provide a before and current view of teaching practices.

From this sample, six elementary teachers, two administrators, and one superintendent - all of whom have been employed in the suburban Michigan public school district for at least five years - were interviewed so that the researcher would be able to compare teaching experiences before the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law and the perceptions of the current measures of the Law that were being implemented at the time data was gathered.

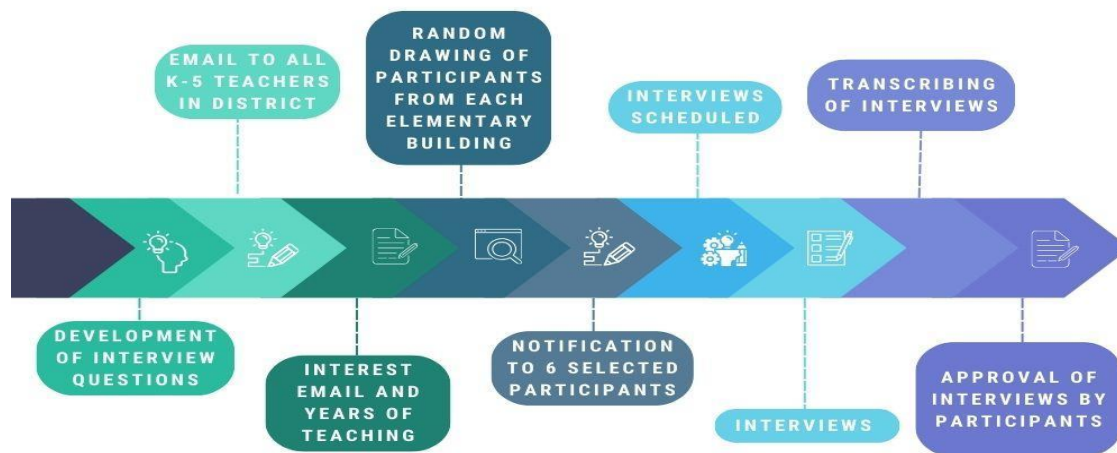
One of the participation criteria for teachers was that they must have worked at the elementary school level, up to and including fifth grade. This grade-level criterion is important as the Read by Grade Three law is largely focused on early literacy acquisition and proficiency. Including teachers that are one to two grade levels above the third-grade level allowed the research to provide a more complete answer to the research questions of how the law has impacted teaching practices, especially with the proficiency benchmarks and teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the Read by Grade Three law for students who have been promoted to grades beyond third grade. Teachers and building administrators at the middle school, specifically above grade five, or the high school level were excluded as the Read by Grade Three law focuses on developing literacy in lower elementary grades and the students affected by the changes in the law were not at those grade levels at the time data was gathered. Paraprofessionals, classroom assistants, and non-teaching staff were excluded as they do not share the same professional development requirements as teaching staff. There were no other exclusion criteria. Participants did not receive any compensation for their involvement and participation in the study.

Administrators were asked directly to participate in the study based on their position in the school district to provide their unique perspectives. All administrators interviewed had at least five years of experience within the school district. The tenure with the district requirement eliminated the other two elementary building principals, resulting in the researcher directly asking just one building principal to participate.

Teachers were solicited to participate in the study via a district email sent by the curriculum director that included an introduction and overview of the study from the researcher. This email sent by the curriculum director was followed by a Google form survey within two

days of the previous email directly from the researcher. After reviewing the interest responses received, the researcher determined if the criteria were met for participation. The final sample was selected by a random drawing of at least one teacher participant from each elementary school, with no more than three teachers selected from a single elementary school building. Once the names were drawn, the participants were notified of their participation via email. The random selection of participants ensured that no bias was given to any particular grade level, building, or person.

Once potential participants had been selected randomly from each elementary school, they were emailed the Informed Consent Form (see APPENDIX 1), which included a description of the research study and a description of the procedures, as approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB). An interview was scheduled, and a copy of the Interview Protocol was provided for the participant's review. Recruitment of participants concluded when six teachers from the identified district (with a minimum of one participant from each elementary school) were selected to be interviewed, as well as the administrators. (See Figure 7, for the interview process).

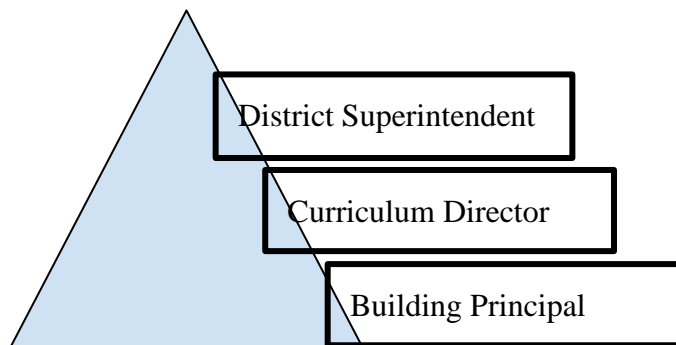
Figure 7*Interview Process*

The teacher participants that were selected included the following individuals:

- Two third-grade teachers with 19 and 29 years of experience
- Two second-grade teachers with seven and 12 years of experience
- One first-grade teacher with five years of experience
- One kindergarten teacher with 19 years of experience

The administrators that were interviewed (as shown in Figure 8) included the following individuals:

- One district superintendent
- One curriculum director
- One elementary building principal

Figure 8*Leadership Pyramid*

The district superintendent has 30 years of experience in education in various teaching and administrative capacities. As district superintendent, he has eight years of experience. The curriculum director has twenty-one years of experience and has been with the district for five years as curriculum director. The principal has been with the district for 15 years, mostly in a teaching capacity and in an administrative position for four years as building principal.

Role of the Researcher

As this study utilized qualitative research methods, the researcher was the primary research instrument for conducting the interviews and analyzing the collected data. Dryden stated that the “researcher’s identity is continuously shifting, affected by an ongoing relationship to the world” (Dryden (2013), as cited by Roger et al., 2018, p. 539). As a qualitative researcher, the study’s author acknowledges that values are “brought to the table, without intruding, and who we are both shapes and contributes to the data that is collected” (Roger et al., 2018, p. 541). Therefore, the researcher’s background and experience frame their perspective and can contribute to bias. Fraenkel and colleagues (2019) acknowledge that no researchers can be completely objective, and each will possess some degree of bias.

The researcher conducting this study is a white woman with 14 years of teaching experience and three years of teaching experience in the XYZ school district. The researcher acknowledges that she is a member of the teaching profession and is currently employed as a literacy interventionist at one of the schools where the data was being collected. This position could bias the interpretation of the data collected, as the researcher is involved in the field and district and is actively responding to the law and its impacts from the perspective of this position. Mitigating this bias is the fact that the researcher was not in an administrative position, nor was the researcher in a position to influence the individual teaching practices of those interviewed. In addition, the researcher did not have any formal authority over the teachers and administrators being interviewed or a voice in their evaluation processes. As participants were from three different elementary schools, most participants were unknown to the researcher on a professional and personal level. Because the researcher was an employee of XYZ school district, the participants may have responded differently in the interview process than with an outside researcher.

To minimize personal bias in this study, several checks were implemented. Before the interview, the participants were made aware that the interviews would be recorded for accuracy, responses would in no way be shared or communicated to administration or peers, and data would be collected for research purposes only. Secondly, the interviewer acknowledged at the start of the interview that the participant may know the interviewer but that the interviewer would still be requesting candid responses from the participants. The researcher asked each question of the participant, then repeated it, if necessary, to ensure understanding. The interviews were digitally recorded because, as noted by Fraenkel, et al. (2019), while the interview is going on, “recording is necessary to capture what the participant says” (p. 412). Once the interview had

been transcribed, the researcher made it available to the participants for their review of accuracy. Finally, the researcher utilized the interviews as one source of data in the research and triangulated the participant responses with other data sources to minimize any potential bias in the responses.

Data Sources

Research is rooted in data which tells a qualitative story. For this research, several sources of data were used to develop the qualitative case study. These data sources helped to answer the research questions addressing how the Read by Grade Three law impacted literacy practices in a school district and the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the Law. Data was collected and analyzed throughout the study. The sources of data were as follows:

- interviews with the participants of the study,
- interview notes,
- professional development records from the school district, and
- curricular records and artifacts obtained from school reporting and the school district central office which included curriculum purchases, policies regarding reading intervention and retention, parent-teacher conference attendance records, retention records, and M-STEP (Michigan's state standardized testing for accountability), results from school years 2016-2022.

Together, the interviews, interview notes, professional development records, and curricular records and artifacts provided a triangulation of data points to offer a clear case study of the perceptions of the Read by Grade Three law. Table 2 describes the methods of data analysis used in this research.

Table 2

Methods of Data Analysis

Research Question	Setting and Participants	Researcher's Role	Data Sources	Methods of Data Analysis	Criteria for Trustworthiness and Control
How has Michigan's Read by Grade Three law impacted instructional literacy practices in a suburban public school district?	Suburban Michigan school district (6) Teachers (3) Administrators	-Researcher -Question Developer -Interviewer -Data Collector -Data Analyzer -Theme Identifier/Analyzer	-Individual Interviews -Artifact Review -Professional Development Records	-Line by Line coding -Holistic coding -Identifying patterns and developing themes -Emotional coding (interviews)	-Triangulation -Participant verification -Data collection protocols
What are the perceptions of one suburban Michigan school district's educators, superintendent, and administrators of the Read by Grade Three law and its perceived effectiveness on student growth in literacy?	Suburban Michigan school district (6) Teachers (3) Administrators	-Researcher -Question Developer -Interviewer -Data Collector -Data Analyzer -Theme Identifier/Analyzer	-Individual Interviews -Artifact Review -Professional Development Records	-Line by Line coding -Holistic coding -Identifying patterns and developing themes -Emotional coding (interviews)	-Triangulation -Participant verification -Data collection protocols

Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to inquire directly about the perceptions and opinions of teachers and administrators about a particular topic (Fraenkel et al., 2019), in this case, the Read by Grade Three law.

According to Fraenkel and colleagues (2019), there are four main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, informal, and retrospective. Structured and semi-structured interview formats are used most frequently to obtain specific information and consist of the interviewer having a list of questions to be asked. Informal interviews “resemble casual conversations, pursuing the interests of both the researcher and the respondent in turn” (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p.

406) and the interviewer does not have a predetermined form of questioning, but rather questions emerge from the immediate context. The fourth type of interview is retrospective, in which the interviewer asks the respondent to recall something that happened in the past, as they recollected the memory (Fraenkel et al., 2019). For this study, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data. The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed for questions to be determined in advance, but also allowed for comments and additional information to be provided, as needed by the interviewer. Additionally, the data gathered from these semi-structured interviews were analyzed continuously to determine if additional questions or information was needed to clarify or deepen the researcher's understanding of the context of the responses. Using the same questions in the interviews allowed the interviews to be structured for comparability of the responses and reduced the researcher's effects and bias (Fraenkel et al., 2019), but also allowed the interviews to be flexible enough to allow the participants to expand and share additional information and personal anecdotes that arose in the interview process. A semi-structured interview format also allowed for greater organization of the data accumulated.

The nine interviews utilized in this research were conducted with current employees (either teachers or administrators) of the school district. Six of the interviews were done with elementary-level teachers who had taught with the school district for five or more years, to allow a comparison of before the Read by Grade Three law was implemented with the perceived changes to practices after the Law was implemented. The interviews with six teachers and three administrators, totaling nine participants, served as one of the primary sources of research data. All interviews took place in person at either a school facility or at a mutually agreed upon location. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to ensure accuracy. The interview

protocol and questions were followed during the research and are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B.

When possible, the interviews were conducted in person at the school of employment to allow the researcher to note and observe the participants where they worked. When interviewing a participant, an essential first step taken was to state the purpose of the interview, the interview protocol, and the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix 1). Emphasis was also placed on maintaining confidentiality before commencing the interview. Fraenkel et al. (2019) suggest developing an appropriate rapport with the participant and demonstrating a high level of respect for the individual being interviewed is essential for a successful interview process. Stating the purpose of the study and the rights of participants helps to establish expectations for the research interview before the questions are presented.

With full disclosure to and approval from, the participants, the interviews were recorded to ensure the accuracy of the record of what the participants said (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Using the same questions for all teachers, as is characteristic of a semi-structured interview, allowed the researcher to compare and contrast information obtained from different interviewees (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The list of questions used for all administrators interviewed was also the same. It was also helpful to have questions prepared in advance to ensure all needed questions would be asked. The complete list of questions asked of the participants is provided in Appendix 2 (see page 169). Teacher questions were focused on classroom-level changes and curriculum, as well as on teacher perceptions of those changes and how they were impacting students and families. This was noted in connection with parent-teacher conferences and experiences with curriculum. For example, teachers were asked about literacy instruction before the Read by Grade Three law and to contrast those practices with the curriculum and current literacy practices in place after the

law was implemented. Teachers were also asked about the impact of the Read by Grade Three law on their teaching style and the kinds of professional development that have been offered in regard to literacy and the Read by Grade Three law. In the teacher interviews, the interviewees were also asked to reflect on the positive and negative impacts they perceived about the Read by Grade Three law and their suggestions for lawmakers going forward. Examples of questions specifically for teachers included:

- Think back to how you taught reading 4 years ago. Describe the curriculum and strategies used.
- What impact has the Read by Grade Three law had on your students? Families?
- How did having the retention requirement change how you taught literacy in your classroom?

Both teachers and administrators were asked to reflect on reading initiatives and programs they had seen implemented throughout their years as professional educators. Teachers and administrators were also asked to reflect on their perceptions of the impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students and to suggest changes that could be made to the Read by Grade Three law to make it more impactful or effective. For example, both teachers and administrators were asked:

- The Michigan legislature recently eliminated the retention aspect of the law. How do you feel about that change and how it will affect literacy instruction?
- What is your perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students? Families?
- What is your perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students? Families?

Additionally, administrator questions focused on changes from a building or district perspective. Administrators were asked about the hurdles and concerns that were expressed and experienced in implementing the Read by Grade Three law and ensuring the district complied with the Law. Family responses to the changes enacted by the Law, from an administrator perspective, were included in the interviews. For example, administrators were asked:

- What were the hurdles to the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law that you experienced at the district level?
- How has the Read by Grade Three law impacted you as an administrator?
- Were there other stakeholders that expressed concerns as this law was being implemented? Families?

Participants were provided with the informed consent letters before the interview, which included an acknowledgment of the participant knowing and/or having knowledge of the researcher and a reminder that the participants' responses with their perspectives were essential to the research. Interview questions were not provided before the interview and a reminder of confidentiality was provided to encourage candid responses by the participants. "Open-ended questions indicate an area to be explored without suggesting to the participant how it should be explored" (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 410). All of the participants were interviewed individually in a quiet environment. Responses and information from other participants were not shared. At the start of each interview, a short briefing of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 128) was given to set up and describe the recording process. This also allowed time for any participant questions or comments. The researcher asked the questions verbatim from the interview questions and allowed participants as much time as needed to formulate their thoughts and responses to the questions.

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to share additional information and the interviewer to ask additional questions as needed. The interview questions were open-ended to guide the discussions and allow for clarifying statements and questions. In this semi-structured interview setting, questions regarding the Read by Grade Three law focused on and allowed for diverse perceptions to be expressed (Kallio, et al., 2016) candidly.

The interviews were transcribed manually by the researcher in their entirety and verbatim for data analysis and review. Once transcribed into a Google Doc, the interview transcripts were made available to the participants for their review. Once approved by the participants, the researcher took the advice of Agar (1980, as quoted by Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 187), which suggested the researchers should “read the transcripts in their entirety several times” before beginning the coding process.

Interview Notes

During the interviews, notes were taken to document clarifying questions of what was stated by the interviewees and emotions that were expressed by the participants during the interview process. Throughout the duration of this study, interview notes were used to provide further information regarding interviews, including, for example, participant behavior, demeanor, and other environmental factors. Fielding and Thomas (2008) note that “important nuances may be lost because we communicate by body language as well as speech” (p. 253) during conversations and interviews. These notes captured the researcher’s reflections, participants’ attitudes, and mannerisms that were observed during the interviews. Noting non-verbal cues during the interviews allowed the researcher to capture important pieces of information as the non-verbal elements that are a major part of live communication (Gillham, 2005, p. 103).

During the interview, the researcher was able to note changes in demeanor or body language that were expressed when each participant responded to questions. These notes were handwritten during the interview when changes were noted and included a notation made near the question that was being asked. The researcher was able to utilize these notes to further illustrate the responses that were being given by each participant. In face-to-face interviews, non-verbal cues play a larger role than we might anticipate in continually shaping and guiding the interview (Stephens, 2007). Saldana (2020) explains further that this “method labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant” (p. 67).

Emotional codes were placed in initial interview notes taken by the researcher in the line-by-line coding. As emotions were noted by the researcher, there was additional focus placed on coding these emotions and non-verbal cues were explored. When the interview participants explicitly stated emotions, such as when one said, “I was mad.” This was coded in quotation marks (Saldana, 2020) and noted as an expressed emotion. These changes in emotions were noted both in body language, such as notes about participants moving closer or further away from the interviewer or participants displaying relaxed postures. Emotions were also noted in expressed sounds, such as sighs and laughter, as well as in extended pauses in the conversations. These emotions were noted in the interview notes to provide a clear picture of the emotions expressed during the interviews.

Interview notes were written during the interview and typed to attach to the interview transcript. To increase the validity and reliability of the study, interview notes offer the ability to triangulate data.

Professional Development Opportunities

The Read by Grade Three law requires that teachers must receive professional development in key areas of literacy instruction and assessment of student progress in literacy (Michigan Public Act 306, 2016). Professional development is often a critical component of understanding new policies and expectations, and, for the purposes of this research, literacy practices. As the research examined the perceptions and implementation of the Read by Grade Three law, it was important to investigate the educational opportunities that were provided to teachers and administrators to help them understand the Law and implement the necessary resulting changes in practice. Professional development artifacts researched included records of the professional development that had been offered at the district to teachers and administrators regarding the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law, as well as professional development opportunities focused on literacy practices. This information was obtained through the school district office records from 2016, when the law was passed, to the end of the 2021-2022 school year. School district professional development records that focused on educating teachers and administrators regarding the implementation and responsibilities required by the Read by Grade Three law, and the changes in curriculum and literacy practices that were a result of the mandate, were examined from the same time frame.

Curricular Records and Artifacts

Curricular records and artifacts were obtained from the district's director of student analytics and state reporting and the curriculum director. In emails and several in-person conversations, the documents were requested and, once prepared and redacted, were sent to the researcher via email. These artifacts had any names and identifiable information redacted before

they were provided to the researcher. State testing data was obtained from the State of Michigan's publicly available online educational data website, MiSchoolData.org.

The curricular items were collected for analysis of past and current practices and policies. Records of literacy instructional policies in the two to three years before the law was enacted, as well as in the subsequent years after the legislation was passed, were obtained for review to help the researcher see if changes that have been implemented as a result of the Read by Grade Three law. These items included the following:

- Curriculum purchased, utilized, and approved for use by the school district for literacy instruction
- District policies regarding retention and intervention
- Parent-teacher conference attendance records
- Personnel records of additional literacy positions, such as literacy coaches, interventionists, and other literacy support personnel
- Retention records of students who did not meet the benchmark for M-STEP testing for the years 2016-2022,
- State-mandated M-STEP test results for school years 2016 to 2022.

These records and artifacts were used to triangulate the responses given in the interviews, the interview notes, and the professional development records to minimize bias and provide evidence of the impact the Read by Grade Three law has had on perceptions of literacy practices.

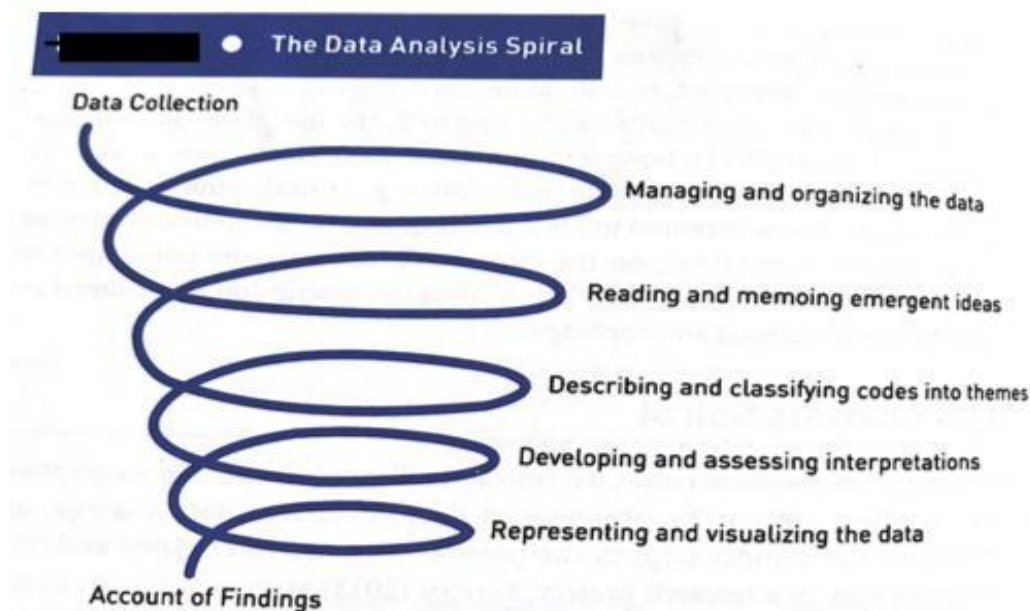
Data Analysis

The data analysis of the research documents followed the Data Analysis Spiral, see Figure 9, below, (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.186) after data collection was completed. "Analyzing

the data in a qualitative study essentially involves analyzing, synthesizing, and reducing the information the researcher obtains” (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 386) into an accurate depiction of the research performed.

Figure 9

The Data Analysis Spiral



(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.186)

The first step after collecting the data was organizing the data to be able to view it as the researcher “moves in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185). This type of approach allowed the researcher to see the interviews, interview notes, and curricular artifacts as a whole “without getting caught up in the details of coding” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188). The goal of the researcher was simply to become familiar with the content and context of the data. Once the data had been initially organized, the researcher worked to become familiar with the research documents and did an initial memoing of the documents. Memos jotted during the readings included positive or negative reactions to the

questions, vague answers, and the researcher's thoughts and reflections based on reading the research. Janesick (2011) emphasizes the importance of memoing to lend credibility to the data analysis and to track the development of themes and ideas which "will lead to a richer and more powerful explanation of the setting, context, and participants in any given study" (p. 148). The memos also helped to start the creation of a "digital audit trail that can be retrieved and examined" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188). As more information and interviews were reviewed, the researcher was able to develop generalizations from the data collected (Frankel et al., 2019, p. 389).

Initial Coding

Once the initial review and memoing of the data were complete and the researcher was familiarized with all the pieces, the researcher commenced coding the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define coding as the "analytic process" (p.3) used to form a theory. The coding process is a "method that enables you to organize a group of similarly coded data into categories or families because they share the same characteristic" (Saldana, 2016, p. 9).

From the initial memos, the data was again analyzed using line-by-line coding, which created many additional codes, to capture the information from the varied data sources (especially the interview responses) more fully. The coding process allows for patterns in the data to emerge from the interviews, interview notes, and curricular artifacts. Line-by-line coding was utilized to break the data into smaller units and to generate as many codes as needed to capture the essence of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190) and to capture the meaning of the transcribed interviews and what was expressed verbally and non-verbally from interview notes. In this phase of the research, it was important for the researcher to keep an open mind, without

preconceived bias or expectations. The line-by-line coding brought new insights and connections between the data points, as shown in Figure 9.

Using the research questions as a guide to establish the objectives of the study, the researcher found that some of the initial codes that emerged from the open coding process were: experience in teaching, attitude towards teaching reading, changes in teaching, experiences in the classroom, and familiarity with the Read by Grade Three laws. These codes were formed based on the word choices of the participants (see Figure 9, below). The line-by-line coding brought new insights and connections between the data points. For example, one teacher expressed a perception of a lack of a specific literacy curriculum. The development of this as a consistent perception was substantiated by several other teacher interviews and a review of the curriculum that was implemented before the Law was implemented. “I remember coming in and we had a basal series with limited questions and very little differentiation and deeper thinking comprehension questions” one teacher stated. This theme was mentioned again in another interview, in which the teacher stated, “Before the reading law came into effect, teachers were often left to use the curriculum as a guide and often found their own resources.”

Figure 10

Examples of open coding

There really wasn't a teaching curriculum. I was handed an odd green binder with copied excerpts from various Lucy Calkins and Teachers College. It was really hard to read, and it made virtually no sense. I just followed what my mentor teacher was doing.	Lack of curriculum, negative
	Initial literacy methods
	Lack of direction, what doesn't work

Holistic Coding

Holistic coding is “applicable when the researcher already has a general idea of what to investigate in the data” (Saldana, 2016, p. 142). In some portions of the data, a single holistic code was applied to a section of data, as seen below in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Example of holistic coding

I have been teaching for 20 years, with 19 of them being at XYZ school district.	}	Tenure
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As the transcripts of the responses were analyzed for patterns of change in literacy practices before the Read by Grade Three law and after it was enacted, the theoretical framework outlined by Bell & Stevenson (2015) was used to compare policy enactment by the teachers and administrators with the policy development. Comparing the interview responses to the curricular records and artifacts of the school district, as well as professional development records from the district, allowed the researcher to develop a clear picture of the impact the Read by Grade Three law has had on the suburban school district. For example, during the interviews, teachers expressed their perception that the literacy curriculum prior to the Read by Grade Three law lacked clear structure and the current curriculum now seems to be much more cohesive in structure. The interview response was compared to the curriculum changes that have been implemented since the enactment of the Law. In the comparison of interview responses and curricular changes, the researcher noted that the changes now have a clear scope and sequence and are implemented district-wide.

Although the interviews were a major component of the data collection, other curricular artifact pieces were also coded line-by-line and holistically to qualitatively triangulate the data. Documents provided by the school were the district records regarding parent-teacher conference attendance, retention and intervention, and personnel records of literacy-focused staff (such as specialists and paraprofessionals who were employed to assist with interventions). These documents helped to provide context to the changes the school district was implementing to comply with the mandate. A review of the M-STEP testing results and numbers of retained students before and after the Read by Grade Three law provided another piece of data to reflect the impact of the Law. Utilizing an analysis of these documents “deliberately triangulates the evidence from multiple sources to confirm or corroborate the findings” (Yin, 2017, p. 270).

The curriculum was evaluated by comparing what was in place in 2016 and what was purchased and approved for use by the school district after 2016, as well as by analyzing the focus of the curriculum (i.e., writing, phonics, etc.) The review of the literacy curriculum approved and utilized by the school district supported noted changes the district made to comply with the Read by Grade Three law.

Parent Teacher Conference Attendance records, literacy positions added, retention records, and third-grade M-STEP test results were quantitative in nature and were coded line-by-line for changes based on the percentage of increase/decrease based on the previous year. M-STEP test results were evaluated based on state-defined categories, below proficient, proficient, and advanced proficient by scores. Parent-teacher conference attendance records were analyzed overall and compared year-to-year for change. Literacy positions and personnel retention records were analyzed for comparisons of those employed from the 2016-2022 school years. These documents were analyzed holistically.

To organize the data and ensure all pieces were analyzed, the researcher transferred codes and notes to an Excel spreadsheet to be able to sort and categorize by source and code. As data were revisited several times, codes were revisited and subject to change. Table 3 shows some of the initial codes that were developed.

Table 3

Data Analysis Initial Codes

Data Source	Initial Codes Developed from Participants' Data
Interview- Teachers	Tenure, Initial literacy methods, Current literacy methods, Understanding of Read by Grade Three, Suggestions, What works, What does not work, Professional development, Rigor, Lack of structure, Retention, Students and families prior, Students and families currently, Accountability, Partnership, Initial impact, Current status, Positive impact, Negative impact, Changes
Interview- Administration	Tenure, Initial literacy methods, Current literacy direction, Compliance with Read by Grade Three, Understanding of Read by Grade Three, Suggestions, What works, What does not work, Professional development, Retention, Policy changes, Accountability, Partnership, Implementation, Current status, Positive impact, Negative impact, Changes in district, Outlook
Interview Notes	Sigh, Laugh, Relaxed, Tensed, Pause, Thoughtful, Emphatic
Professional Development Records	Agenda item, District-wide, Law specific, Literacy support, General literacy (unable to determine)
Artifact 1- Curriculum purchased and approved	Focus, Purchase date
Artifact 2- District Retention Policies and Literacy Intervention	Changes, No-change, Determinate
Artifact 3- Parent-Teacher Conference Attendance Records	% increase, % decrease, No change, No conferences

Artifact 4- Personnel Records of Added Positions	No change, Increase, Decrease
Artifact 5- Retention Records (SY 2016-2022)	retained, # eligible,
Artifact 6- M-STEP Test Results 3rd Grade (SY 2016-2022)	Proficient, Advanced proficient, Below proficient, Eligible for retention

Focused Coding in the Second Round

In the next round of analysis, the researcher reanalyzed the categories to determine emerging trends among the codes to identify and group the codes into themes. It is in the second coding that the “codes are used to create an overview of the data and enable subsequent exploration of patterns” (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 264) and differences across the data. Focused coding is a second-cycle coding method that “searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus” (Saldana, 2016, p. 240). It is from the extensive coding process that a development of themes is established. Saldana (2016) describes second-cycle coding as developing “a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of first-cycle codes” (p. 234). Figure 12, as shown below, provides an example of the focused coding as a second round from the initial line-by-line coding.

Figure 12

Example of focused coding

There really wasn't a teaching curriculum. I was handed an odd green binder with copied excerpts from various Lucy Calkins and Teachers College. It was really hard to read, and it made virtually no sense. I just followed what my mentor teacher was doing.

Lack of curriculum, negative

Initial literacy methods

Lack of direction, what doesn't work

Pre-Read by Grade Three literacy instruction

As the coding process progressed, several themes developed. These themes are described in Table 4, (see below), which contains several categories: Before Read by Grade Three Literacy Instruction, Post Read by Grade Three Instruction, Learning with Professional Development, and Looking Toward the Future. Grouping the coding categories into themes allowed the researcher to present the findings in a logical, organized manner.

Table 4

Data Analysis of Analytic Themes

Themes	Categories Contained in Themes
Before Read by Grade Three Literacy Instruction	Demands to have students proficient, Family involvement, Student observations, Literacy practices, Pre-Read by Grade Three literacy
Post Read by Grade Three Literacy Instruction	Changes to literacy practices, Implementation of the mandate, Impact on students, families, and district
Learning with Professional Development	Directly about Read by Grade Three, Literacy in district
Looking toward the Future	Future development of mandate, Suggestions for lawmakers

Pattern Coding

The interview transcripts and interview notes provided an opportunity to compare the categories and responses of administrators and teachers using Pattern Coding as an additional coding method once themes had been developed from the first two rounds of coding. Pattern coding, as described by Saldana (2020) “helps to look for recurring phrases or common thread in participants’ account or, alternatively, for internal differences that you or participants have noted” (p. 80).

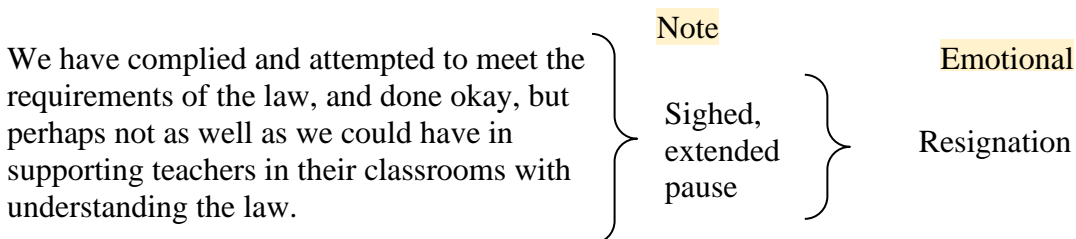
Emotion Coding

Interviews were a large part of the data collected in this research to capture the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the Read by Grade Three law and are commonly used to collect qualitative data. “Qualitative researchers have at their disposal an array of nonverbal behavior that can be collected that would yield thicker descriptions and interpretations compared to the sole use of verbal data” (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013, p.672). During the interviews, the researcher noted emotions and changes in body language that were expressed by the participants. The researcher noted these emotions in the initial coding of the documents but used the interview notes to “broaden the scope of understanding” (Denham and Onwuegbuzie, 2013, p. 674). The emotions and changes in body language are closely intertwined with the verbal discourse of the interviews. The researcher used Emotion Coding as a separate cycle of coding for the interviews and interview notes. Saldana (2020) explains that emotion coding “provides insight into the participants’ perspectives, worldviews, and life conditions” (p. 67). The emotion coding of the interviews and interview notes included sighs, laughter, an increase in vocal volume, and pauses in conversation. These codes offer a deeper insight into the words used in the interviews to express perceptions. For example, when an

administrator was asked about professional development opportunities offered to staff regarding the Read by Grade Three law, there was visible discomfort and shifting, followed by a sigh. This behavior and expressed emotion were noted in the interview notes as resignation. Furthermore, when a teacher was asked about family involvement the researcher noted that there was also a shift in body position, as well as a change in voice tone, which was coded as frustration. The notes were coded using emotional coding, as shown in an example in Figure 13.

Figure 13

Example of emotional coding



Establishing Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is focused on the perspectives, experiences, and thoughts of participants, which require a degree of trustworthiness. “Being humble and developing good relationships with participant communication is essential in this responsibility. It may mean that no one else gains entry to those stories” (Roger et al., 2018, p. 542). As this study was based on interviews with individuals, Fraenkel et al. (2019) suggest credibility and trustworthiness not only encompass the interview validity but also the internal validity (p. 413). Acknowledging that the researcher is an employee of the school system and may have influence on interview responses as a known employee, was clearly stated as well as encouraging candid responses from the participants. Furthermore, “planning and asking good questions, while developing and

maintaining an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect is an art that anyone who wishes to do competent qualitative research must learn” (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 406).

By triangulating the data obtained during the research process between the interview transcripts, professional development offered to teachers, and analysis of curricular records and artifacts, the researcher was able to validate each item against another source. When a conclusion is supported by data collected from several instruments, the validity is increased (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the theoretical framework, methods, and procedures that were used in this research. A theoretical framework, which the research was based on, was presented, and explained. The research used a qualitative instrumental case study approach, utilizing qualitative approaches for data collection and analysis. Justification was provided for the structure of the study and data sources were rationalized. Utilizing the qualitative case study methodology, data analysis and coding methods were articulated. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the procedures that will be used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Chapter 4 of this document will present the findings of this research study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In Chapter Three, the research methodology utilized in this research was described. The findings of the research are described in this chapter.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study research was to examine the impacts of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law, passed in 2016, on literacy instruction and to gain insight into the perceptions of the law as held by teachers and administrators in one Michigan suburban school district. The following research questions framed the study:

- How has Michigan's Read by Grade Three law impacted literacy instruction in a suburban school district?
- What are administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the Read by Grade Three law?

The research findings described in this chapter were obtained during in-depth interviews in 2023, in which participants shared their thoughts and experiences with teaching literacy before the Read by Grade Three law and currently. Sources for the research findings also included a review of professional development records regarding literacy practices, curriculum records, intervention and retention district policies, parent-teacher conferences attendance records, student retention records, and M-STEP standardized test results.

Interview Findings

The interviews were conducted and analyzed first, revealing several themes in the data collected. The participants shared the ways they perceived the impact of the law on instructional practices, students, and families. The themes included pre-Read by Grade Three practices and

perceptions by teachers and administrators, post-Read by Grade Three practices and perceptions, professional development, and thoughts of teachers and administrators on the future of the Law.

Theme 1: Pre-Read by Grade Three

The first theme reflected on pre-Read by Grade Three law practices and perceptions of literacy as described by teachers and administrators. The teacher and administrators' reflections on the demands for students to meet proficiency benchmarks and family involvement are also described in this section.

Literacy Instruction Before the Read By Grade Three Law

When participating teachers and administrators were asked to describe the language arts curriculum in the school district when they first started teaching, some described a variety of literacy curriculums and practices from the traditional basal textbook curriculum. In contrast, others described a binder of "put-together" curriculum with what they described as markedly less rigor when they started their teaching careers. All participants agreed that assessments and meeting literacy benchmarks were emphasized far less prior to the Read by Grade Three law being enacted.

"The curriculum used was very limited; and basically, I found most of the curriculum and center activities," stated one teacher.

Another teacher participant recalled a less formal curriculum, a curriculum that was composed of various pieces. "There really wasn't a teaching curriculum. I was handed an odd green binder with copied excerpts from various sources, including Lucy Calkins. It was really hard to read, and it made virtually no sense. I just followed what my mentor teacher was doing." This was echoed by a different teacher who said, "Small groups were on our own based on guided reading, but we did not have any formal phonics or curriculum to follow with structure."

A kindergarten teacher shared recollections of an extremely limited curriculum. “I basically had a read-aloud story, some phonics, and some centers, which were loosely based on letters and sounds, but it wasn’t anything formal from the district. Me and my grade level teammates found pieces that we wanted to use to teach.”

One participant with almost thirty years of teaching experience in the district recalled that the prior literacy curriculum had a much greater emphasis on writing with many more grades given to students. “Standards were higher, and most students could meet the standards to mastery,” but that teacher also stated that “students fell mainly on the bell curve of academic achievement.” While the demands and rigor felt high for literacy instruction, “it was nothing compared to the past five years.”

“I remember coming in and we had a basal series with limited questions and very little differentiation and deeper thinking comprehension questions,” stated a third-grade teacher.

All the teacher participants in this study had experience with workshop models of instruction and stated the emphasis of instruction was to garner excitement and enjoyment of reading but instruction lacked explicit, systematic structure. “Before the reading law came into effect, teachers were often left to use the curriculum as a guide and often found their own resources.” In other words, while the district purchased some curriculum, it was not necessarily utilized by many teachers across the district, and literacy instruction was more likely to be determined by the individual teacher.

A third-grade teacher stated, “We used the workshop model, but it always seemed too much for the students. It was like teaching fifth-grade lessons and concepts to third-graders.”

Administrators shared similar recollections of the curriculum when they started in education. An administrator with thirty years of experience recalled, “I remember when I started

teaching there were big green bags with big books and small books, and it was based on a theme. We also had some phonics curriculum in the early 1990s, but the focus was really on whole language. Later, I was introduced to the workshop model of reading. I don't recall much phonics instruction being emphasized then. Reading Recovery was used many years ago for a bit, but it utilized the strategies of whole language, with looking at a word, not much sounding out of words. Getting kids interested in books and classroom libraries was also emphasized during my time as a teacher and elementary principal."

Another administrator stated, "There were strengths with each curricular resource. With the workshop model, I was taught to individualize and involve students in their learning goals from first grade on up and have a menu of standards and skills that you, as a teacher, would build your repertoire around meeting the student needs."

Teachers and administrators agreed that, while they taught literacy, it looked quite different when they first entered the education profession in comparison to how literacy has been taught since the Read by Grade Three law. Most felt that before the Read by Grade Three law, they were not focused on teaching students' strategies to decode. One teacher also indicated that "we were living in a world that produced readers and writers that didn't have a strong skill base for the developmental trajectory of learning." When the Essential Literacy Practices (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016) were introduced, they helped focus and start the process of developing reading and writing skills. "Before the Read by Grade Three law came into effect," recalled one administrator, "teachers were often left to use the district curriculum more as a guide." Another teacher echoed this statement: "The literacy curriculum has grown tremendously in the past 15 years from where we started with a mismatch of pieces."

The teachers and administrators who participated in this study had experienced interaction with various curriculum and curricular demands.

Demands to Have Students Meet Proficiency Levels Prior to Read by Grade Three Law

As teachers and administrators recalled, literacy assessment and instructional demands were far fewer before the Read by Grade Three law. One teacher said that “very little actual assessment would indicate areas of need” and those that were given “didn’t give very much usable data.”

A third-grade teacher stated, “We looked at data to create small groups with the reading interventionist if needed, but it was all observational and subjective.”

Most teachers used a workshop model mainly to teach reading. A second-grade teacher shared, “We had to spend about an hour a day doing reading workshops with read-to-self, meeting with small groups, and a read-aloud. It just didn’t seem like there were as many students who struggled with reading.”

A kindergarten teacher thought during an extended pause and said that the required screening demands of standardized tests and expectations for reading were much less exacting on her students in kindergarten before the Read by Grade Three law. “It wasn’t very rigorous, and it was really only letters and sounds. We didn’t have any reading expectations and there weren’t any standardized assessments. We just had to make sure the students knew their letters and sounds and a few sight words. They (the students) didn’t have to be reading by the end of kindergarten.”

Two teachers shared that while the district maintained high expectations, those expectations have shifted. One shared, “The rigor and demands were high, but nothing compared to the past five years.”

The other shared a similar recollection, “I recall all students having reading notebooks where they would be writing several times a day because we had to teach them notetaking skills across all subject areas. I also recall meeting with small groups and having student book clubs. While we didn’t have so many standardized assessments, teachers did much more grading of assignments than I do now.”

A third-grade teacher shared that she also followed the workshop model with a mix of whole-group and small-group lessons. “I ran guided reading groups for a few weeks in a row, then individual conferring sessions in a row. Then all that would stop so I could assess reading levels.” Teacher participants indicated that these demands for proficient reading were much more at a teacher’s discretion and relied more on teacher expertise with grading, conferring sessions, and formative assessments. The reading assessments were not simply based on standardized test results.

Administrators shared reflections similar to the teachers’ thoughts on the demands of education, especially in reading. Echoing the classroom teachers’ response, administrators stated that the district had consistently maintained ambitious standards of literacy for all students. “Getting students reading has always been the district’s focus,” shared one administrator, “but we didn’t always get usable data to see gaps in learning.”

Another administrator shared, “It’s been a huge change in the proficiency levels in what we are expecting the students to be able to do. When I first started in education, there was little actual assessment data that would indicate areas of need. We would listen to students read and there wasn’t much opportunity for feedback. When I was an elementary school principal, there were some assessments that were time intensive and didn’t give much usable data.”

Student Literacy Expectations and Family Involvement Prior to the Read by Grade Three Law

In the interviews, teachers were asked to reflect on student reading expectations and family involvement before the Read by Grade Three law was enacted.

Regarding student expectations for reading proficiency, all six teacher participants agreed there was far less pressure on students to read proficiently and pass standardized assessments prior to the law due to lower expectations of student performance. The actual standardized assessments were not analyzed as part of this research; however, as a historical note, prior to the M-STEP test being adopted in 2014, Michigan had used a pencil/paper, multiple-choice format test that assessed less rigorous literacy standards for 44 years (LaGrou, 2015).

One teacher stated, “Before it seemed that I was the cheerleader and gave ideas and suggestions for reading at home, but I can’t go home and do it for them.” Another teacher agreed and simply said, “There was no pressure and low expectations to read at home.”

With the curricular focus on developing an enjoyment of reading, five of the six teachers shared that any reading at home was encouraged, but not expected. Family involvement was also encouraged, but not expected. One teacher shared, “For many years, I didn’t need to prompt parents to read with their student; most of the time they (families) at least went to the library or did some reading at home with their student.”

Another teacher shared that before the Read by Grade Three law, families were not as connected to what their children were learning or involved in the learning process.

“It seemed like most parents and families didn’t realize what needed to be done or taught at home. They didn’t understand the curriculum. A parent once said, ‘So basically teaching reading is just a kid-level book club?’ It took me by surprise, and I didn’t have a good response,” shared a second-grade teacher.

A kindergarten teacher stated that pre-Read by Grade Three, she simply sent home cards with words and expected students and families to practice reading them. “It is true that parents didn’t do much with their students, but we didn’t show them how to do the activities either. It was basically memorization of words.”

The phrase ‘low expectations’ was often repeated by the teachers interviewed when discussing family involvement. Although families may have read with their children or encouraged their children to read, it did not seem, based on the interview responses, that teachers had high expectations for family involvement. The expectation of reading at home has always been there, several teachers stated, but it was not as emphasized as it is now.

When asked about their observations of students regarding standardized tests and meeting state standards, all teachers responded that the stakes and expectations were much lower before the Read by Grade Three law, as compared to the expectations today. Each participant did share that students themselves seem to have changed from the pre-Read by Grade Three law times, as well.

“Kids are different from when I started teaching and even ten years ago. It seemed like they could focus more and pay attention in class much more than students today,” stated a third-grade teacher.

Another third-grade teacher shared similar thoughts. “The students’ stamina, attention span, motivation, and ability to retain information has decreased while negative behaviors and anxiety have increased. Before the Read by Grade Three law, testing was low-stress and with low stakes. If they passed, great. If they didn’t, they went to intervention, and we did what we could. But really, kids just continued growing at their own pace.”

Theme 2: Post Read by Grade Three Changes

The Read by Grade Three law in Michigan established literacy guidelines for school districts to comply with to ensure reading proficiency. Although the law did not specify exact curricular changes to ensure all students were reading proficiently as measured by the state standardized test, the M-STEP, literacy curriculum was evaluated for effectiveness in the school district by the curriculum director and representatives from each school. During the interviews for this study, the administrators were asked to compare pre-Read by Grade Three law proficiency with student proficiency today. The interview questions also asked them to compare the expectations and perceived impacts of the Law. In addition, administrators were asked to speak about implementing the changes that the Read by Grade Three law brought about within the district. In the interviews for this study, teachers were prompted to reflect on how their literacy instruction has changed, how students have changed, and how family involvement has changed since the Read by Grade Three law went into effect in 2016. Teacher participants were asked to share their perceptions of the Law and the changes that have been made to the law since its enactment.

In this section, the theme of perceived changes in literacy practices, since the Read by Grade Three law was enacted, is analyzed. Further analysis of how the school district featured in this study has implemented and been impacted by the Read by Grade Three law, as perceived by administrators and teachers is included. Changes in family and student impact are also explored through the experiences and perceptions of the teachers and administrators.

Perceived Changes to Literacy Practices

The Read by Grade Three law provided broad language that required districts to “work with teachers to ensure that evidenced-based reading programs, supplemental reading programs,

and comprehensive intervention reading programs are implemented with fidelity” (State of Michigan, 2016, Section 1280f.1.b. ii. E).

Curriculum Changes in the Classroom. One first-grade teacher shared that the strategies used currently are the same as four years ago, but the teacher now uses the curriculum the district has provided. “I teach a short mini-lesson focused on a specific skill to the entire class. Then I meet with small groups of students to practice the skills they need.” Other teachers expressed their appreciation of having a cohesive curriculum and changes in their teaching practices. A second-grade teacher shared, “Now with focused mini-lessons, the curriculum is specific and to the point. It is far less of a waste of time, as compared to the workshop model. The curriculum is specific and targeted to our students and their needs. I feel like a better teacher because of this curriculum. It has come a long way even in the past five years.”

Another third-grade teacher echoed an appreciation of the literacy curriculum changes and the associated ability to make the lessons more challenging or to identify areas of misunderstanding right away and reteach as needed.

“I love the way each day is a bite-sized chunk. It isn’t overwhelming for students, and you can really find where students’ understanding is breaking down. My small group time is much more efficient and I’m able to challenge all my students to grow as readers.”

Having exposure to many genres of books and the knowledge to work on specific skills within the curriculum was also expressed as important by two teachers at different grade levels.

“Using the mentor texts to teach the standards helps students to get exposure to many different genres of texts. Small group work in reading has allowed me to focus on specific skills with students,” stated a third-grade teacher.

Similarly, a kindergarten teacher stated:

“Having a phonics curriculum and an understanding of the science of reading allows me to teach the whole group, without limiting my students. Exposing them to higher-level thinking and skills makes sure that all students are receiving quality instruction and are not tracked to a certain level. I also am able to pull groups of students during the literacy block to focus on skill deficits.”

While teachers expressed a noted change in curriculum, one teacher did not attribute it directly to the Read by Grade Three law, and stated, “It isn’t so much the Read by Grade Three law, but more my individual research and learning of how to teach reading.”

Curriculum Changes in the School District. “We needed to make sure teachers had the tools they needed to effectively teach reading, which we had not really scrutinized before,” stated a district-level administrator. All administrators who participated in this study indicated that the Read by Grade Three law prompted a change in how literacy was being taught throughout the district with a more cohesive approach.

“We are much more focused. The tools we have for adaptive testing allow the teachers to use the data more effectively and can be shared with parents so they can see where their children are growing,” shared a building administrator.

Another administrator noted,

“I respect the Read by Grade Three law for formalizing literacy outcomes to show the students who have a gap area and have schools develop some type of personalized instruction. The Read by Grade Three law has impacted curriculum choices and the rigor of instruction to some degree.”

Both teachers and administrators agreed that having data from the Read by Grade Three-required standardized assessments, which are administered three times per year, has helped promote data-driven instruction and guide student learning. The focused curriculum that has been implemented district-wide seems to have been welcomed by administrators and teacher participants in this study.

Implementation of the Read by Grade Three Mandates

When administrators were asked about hurdles to the implementation of the Law that were experienced at the building level or the district level, each expressed that there had been challenges. The Read by Grade Three law included broad language for school districts to elucidate compliance. This allowed for many ways districts could comply with the mandate, but also caused implementation challenges. As one participant administrator shared:

“One of the biggest challenges was creating the procedures and ensuring that we complied without losing our focus on being good educators and doing what is right for students. The logistics and process of creating procedures just took educator time away from kids getting good instruction, which is most important.”

Another hurdle to implementing the Law was the retention of students who did not meet the proficiency scores on the M-STEP state standardized test at the end of third grade expressed by an administrator:

“The retention piece was very problematic because it takes away the localized voice and relationship to be that first voice. From the beginning of the Law being implemented, I felt I needed to alert parents about a retention letter being sent from the state and to look at the exemptions. Straight assessment data from the M-STEP test is utilized to inform families. Letters are issued from the state without any conversation with the school. So,

schools are then playing catch up. What I believe to be legitimate exemptions make the school look inefficient and result in not many retentions. Those relationships are changed between parents and the school with those letters.”

Administrators also collectively shared that the paperwork that teachers are required to complete, such as Individualized Reading Plans (IRP) and updates to those plans, has been a hurdle to implementing the Law.

“Teachers who create the Individualized Reading Plans and have goal areas for students established are the strongest people to have a leadership role and should be provided support to simplify the reporting process and communication with parents,” stated one administrator.

“Teachers are people who love to do their job, which is to teach students. Although communication with parents is important, the creation and updating of Individualized Reading Plans is another paperwork requirement that is put on their plates and takes them away from time with students,” stated a district administrator.

During the analysis of the interviews, only administrators expressed concern about the extra work requirement of the Individualized Reading Plans. No teachers mentioned this requirement in the interviews.

Perceptions of the Impact of the Read by Grade Three on Families and Students

It is clear teachers and administrators in this study perceived that curriculum and reading instruction methods have changed in the classrooms. Additionally, those same interviewed teachers and administrators were also asked about the perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on the students and families.

Perceived Impact on Students. All participants consistently agreed that the Law did not have a positive or negative impact on students, primarily because the changes have become all they know about school.

“Honestly, I don’t think that the students are aware [of the testing or retention]. I don’t bring it up with them because I don’t think they need the pressure,” a first-grade teacher shared.

“I don’t see much difference in my students. They are oblivious to the changes and it’s all they know. However, they are pushed and challenged more, which can be stressful,” said a kindergarten teacher.

A third-grade teacher shared that testing requirements seem to have lost their impact on students. “Students get stressed out, but we spend so much time testing that it loses any impact on them.”

Although teachers shared seemingly conflicting statements, like those above, of the perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students, the actual measured impact of the Law on students was beyond the scope of this research. However, these statements do indicate that students are impacted when academic demands change and/or curriculum changes.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Initial Impact on Families. The reaction to the impact of the Read by Grade Three law on families was quite different. When the Law was introduced to families, teachers recalled that there was a bit of a panic.

One third-grade teacher stated, “The very first year of the Law being in effect there were a lot of parents that were worried and came to conferences asking what they could do at home.”

“When the Law became official, parents started to feel the pressure to do what they should have been doing all along,” stated one kindergarten teacher.

A second-grade teacher explained her perception, saying:

“When it first was introduced, parents were anxious and uncertain of how their kids were doing in school, as were teachers. Parents were worried about the testing that we administer three times a year in second grade but mostly because it was computerized, and parents were unfamiliar. As a teacher, it was hard to write an individualized reading plan for a student that could read at grade level but tested poorly.”

As part of the Law, teachers and school administrators were tasked with developing Individualized Reading Improvement Plans, created to address the reading concerns of particular children who were not meeting benchmark scores. Families and guardians were also involved in helping their children read with a “Read at Home” plan, which provides resources and activities to support literacy development (Michigan's Action Plan for Literacy Excellence, 2017). However, all teachers in this study agreed that once the Law had been in effect for a few years, the initial anxiety of families dissipated.

“Parents are only concerned about one thing: retention. The minute you tell them their student won’t be retained, they don’t care,” said a third-grade teacher.

Another teacher participant responded, “With the second-grade parents I saw, anxiety on the part of the parents has dramatically increased and some parents have started to read more with their students at home, especially if they are presented with an Individualized Reading Plan (IRP).”

Two teacher participants said they had not seen any impact on families regarding the Law in their communication with families.

Administrators’ Perceptions of Initial Impact on Families. The administrators in this study shared a different view from the teacher participants about how the Law impacted families.

District-level administrators perceived that the Read by Grade Three law seemed to have a more divisive effect than unifying schools and families.

“The Read by Grade Three law creates a lot of pressure for both parents and teachers and becomes an issue. Whenever there is a challenge, people in and around it can start to point fingers. So parents can point fingers at the school and vice versa,” stated a district-level administrator.

An administrator remarked, “The Individualized Reading Plans (IRP) confused parents, especially in kindergarten and first grade. We would have parents stressed and confused when we would present them with an IRP after 3 months of school after the initial testing.”

Current Perceptions of Impact on Families. Teachers shared that they felt there was an initial impact of the Read by Grade Three law on families, but it has eased over time.

One teacher stated, “The very first year of the law being in effect, there was a lot of stress and worry by parents. They were frantic to ensure that their child was reading and came to me with ideas of how to get their child to read more. But after learning of the multitude of loopholes and the initial year of testing, the law seems to have lost steam and then all went back to normal, and old habits of not caring much about reading fell right back into place.”

Another teacher echoed the same perception. “Parents have lost urgency because of the loopholes in the Law and lack of accountability. They still want school to fix their kid and they do nothing academic at home.”

The loopholes that the teachers mentioned, also known as Good Cause Exemptions, are outlined in Figure 14, below. These exemptions can be utilized to promote a third-grade student who did not meet the benchmark M-STEP score to the next grade level.

Figure 14*Allowable reasons for good cause exemptions*

(Freepik et al., 2017)

With families seemingly less concerned, as perceived by most interviewed teachers, and more loopholes identified to avoid retention, one second-grade teacher shared,

“I haven’t heard from a single parent regarding their student’s test results. I haven’t heard any parents’ concerns over the standards that are taught. Parents want their kids to read but most would rather the school pick up the slack rather than working with them at home. Some kids are nearing proficiency and just need more practice. We do have amazing interventionists to help the struggling students, but they can’t meet with every student that just needs a bit more practice.”

All teachers interviewed agreed that family involvement seems to have waned, especially in literacy. One administrator agreed that the retention aspect of the law did not have the desired effect, saying,

“The retention aspect becomes more divisive than bringing people together. It would be better to say this is where the reader is and needs these added supports and to provide additional learning opportunities through after-school tutoring or summer school, rather than punitive. Children figure out if they can or can’t do school at an early age. I feel this law misses the human component of learning.”

Another administrator wondered, “Why are we frightening the students and parents right away? It causes a lot of headaches and gray areas instead of focusing on having really good programming and meeting student instructional needs.”

“One of the hurdles to implementing the Read by Grade Three law has been giving parents a choice in retention, which takes away from the urgency of the student needing to be able to read at grade level. With so many loophole options, the law seems to have little effect on the parents to take school seriously and help their students with reading,” stated an additional administrator.

A first-grade teacher echoed this same idea.

“I don’t think the law had a huge impact on reading because I haven’t heard of anyone being held back. The law has so many loopholes built into it that I don’t see how it can achieve its objective. There are many factors or extenuating circumstances that can affect the student that would negate the law. The parent also has to agree to hold the student back, so I don’t think it’s that effective in and of itself only if it mandates support for struggling students.”

Changes to the Retention Clause in the Read by Grade Three Law. Teachers and administrators were quick to share their opinions regarding eliminating the retention clause of the Law if a student is not meeting a predetermined score on the M-STEP test. The following comments are from two teachers, each with 20 years of experience.

A kindergarten teacher shared:

“I think waiting until students are in third grade is foolish for retention because by then it is too late. There are too many social factors, and the academics are so far behind that we struggle to catch them up to grade level. Kindergarten retention may be too soon, but giving first graders the gift of time would help teachers and reading support actually get kids caught up so third grade isn’t an issue. I base this opinion on my 20 years of teaching experience.”

Another kindergarten teacher stated:

“I would say that it has been difficult for some students because parents have such a strong say and then there are repercussions further down when parents opt out of all sorts of things -- like reading intervention or summer school. It’s frustrating as a teacher because I realize not all students are ready at the same time, but parents who push their students into kindergarten before they are 5 years old or refuse to work with them at home just create more issues as the curriculum gets harder. It is difficult to emphasize the importance of learning early on when parents don’t care and don’t send their children to school regularly. It just puts the student farther behind and the gaps just keep getting wider and harder to catch up and fill.”

In 2023, the Michigan legislature amended the Read by Grade Three law with the elimination of the required retention if benchmark scores were not achieved on the standardized

third-grade reading test, the M-STEP, with Senate Bill 12 (Michigan State Legislature, 2023). This was new information for four of the six teachers, who were genuinely surprised about the change in the Read by Grade Three law when informed by the researcher.

Teachers shared their frustrations about the lack of family involvement in their child's education overall, and all agreed that even with the required communication to families regarding their child's reading proficiency, they did not perceive that family involvement increased because of the Law or its requirements.

Theme 3: Professional Development

The Read by Grade Three law states clearly that teachers must receive professional development “based on the reading development needs data for incoming pupils” and “allow for differentiated professional development as monitored by pupil proficiency rates” (Michigan Public Act 306, 98th Legislative Session, 2016). Additionally, the law stated that school districts must allow time for collaboration between teachers for professional development to improve literacy rates.

When participants were asked about the professional development opportunities specifically focused on the Read by Grade Three law that were provided by the school district and the intermediate school district (ISD), there were extended awkward pauses in all of the conversations according to the interview notes.

One administrator stated, “We have complied and attempted to meet the requirements of the law, and done okay, but perhaps not as well as we could have in supporting teachers in their classrooms with understanding the law.”

Another said,

“We, as administrators, were given one-to-three-point people within the ISD to help understand the structure of the individualized reading plans and timelines for retention letters, but it is a frayed understanding because so much of the mandate was given to the districts to interpret, which has brought about interpretations and those have changed as processes were established.”

Teachers and administrators agreed that the district has consistently provided professional development regarding literacy and best practices but no professional development specifically regarding the Read by Grade Three law has been offered.

“Perhaps at a staff meeting it was mentioned about how to write an individualized reading plan by the literacy specialist, but nothing in actual professional development.” recalled a participant.

Another teacher remembered reading about the Read by Grade Three law for a class that she was taking where she had to research the law generally.

“I recall a few minutes of a professional development session on literacy that we discussed writing individualized reading plans, but nothing specifically about the law and what it entailed.”

When participants were asked if they were encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities regarding the Read by Grade Three law at the intermediate school district level, all teachers said no and that they had not seen anything published that they could have attended. Even after the Law was implemented, none of the six teachers could recall a professional development opportunity offered so that they could learn about it. The three teachers with 20 or more years of experience were asked if they could recall any training or professional development of other reading initiatives and all three said no, they could not recall any.

However, when asked about the district's emphasis on developing teachers' capacity for literacy instruction, the teacher's body language became much more relaxed as they smiled and leaned back in their seats, showing emotions that are associated with happiness. Emotions expressed by participants are addressed later in this chapter.

One participant shared that literacy has always been a focus of the district. "They always emphasized literacy – hiring knowledgeable reading interventionists that we could go to with questions, making literacy a topic of discussion in PLCs (professional learning communities), and having literacy best practices topics at our PD days."

Another shared, "I felt like the district made literacy something teachers could always learn and grow in our teaching practice, especially in our grade level teams. They consistently have encouraged us as teachers to learn and grow with reading."

Other teachers shared that the district emphasized literacy best practices, especially with the General Education Leadership Network (GELN, 2016) Literacy Essentials Instructional Practices as guidelines. The Literacy Essential Instructional Practices were developed by a team of experts to help address the declining literacy rates in Michigan and provide educators with training (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.).

Although teachers collectively stated that more literacy professional development would be helpful, five of the six teachers expressed concern over time commitments to extended professional development. Emphasis on reading practices had often been noted in the professional development in the district but in theory more than practice or application. After the Read by Grade Three law, the practical application of best literacy practices increased. Teachers indicated a desire for more practical approaches in literacy but were reluctant to commit additional time beyond the required professional development hours.

Theme 4: Looking to the Future

Michigan's Read by Grade Three law has experienced some modifications since its inception in 2016. The 2023 removal of mandatory retention of a student if the test score is below a designated benchmark was a notable change made to the Law; however, most aspects of the Law remain the same. Teachers and administrators interviewed have had experience with the mandates of the Law and were asked to share their thoughts on the Law moving forward. The interview participants shared their perceived positive impacts of the Read by Grade Three law in the classroom and provided their thoughts on the Law and future legislation.

Family Involvement and Communication

While Individualized Reading Plans within the Law attempted to encourage family involvement, teachers expressed some frustration that the Law did not go far enough to change family behaviors in the long term. Most teachers shared that communication with families was important for student academic success, but more education of families on how to help their children learn would be needed.

“This Law has brought the importance of literacy to families’ attention for a short time. As teachers, we forget that not all parents are focused and familiar with education and the idea of reading every day. Reading matters and this law brought that to their attention but not how to do it,” stated a first-grade teacher.

“I feel that this change has brought parents a bit more onboard with education and the need to be involved,” shared a second-grade teacher, “but lacked how to really involve families.”

Curricular Changes and Literacy Practices

Curricular changes and changes to teaching practices with the Read by Grade Three law were discussed with teachers in the interviews. Curricular modifications helped to change what

was being taught while teaching practices of how literacy was being taught also needed to be altered. Several teacher participants in this study shared the benefits of reflecting on best teaching practices. As a third-grade teacher explained,

“I think it has brought to light how much students are behind on reading and that students aren’t learning to read. Most students can learn how to read. This Law shows the problem, but it does not answer the question of why not? Change is hard but we as teachers can’t keep using the same tools and methods to teach that aren’t working to get our kids reading.”

A kindergarten teacher stated, “The increased demands of getting all students reading have made me a better teacher of reading. I’ve done so much more research and learning on my own to ensure best practices are being done in my classroom.”

“It has emphasized cross-curricular reading and the importance of a certain level of reading competence to allow students to be successful in life,” stated a second-grade teacher.

Administrators’ Suggestions for Lawmakers and Stakeholders for Future Changes

When asked to consider what changes teachers and administrators would suggest to lawmakers to make the Read by Grade Three law more effective or impactful, interview notes indicated that the administrative participants took a few moments to consider the question. Their suggestions ranged from listening to teachers to theoretical changes, but each administrator also shared viewpoints that were specific to the school district, as well.

Listening to Teachers. One district-level administrator suggested looking at the skills students do have and listening to teachers.

“We are so much better now at identifying where students are at in their progression. If educators were allowed to look at that and have additional resources available and to

provide additional learning opportunities, it would make all the difference within good learning experiences. Provide ways to look at it not from a deficit approach, but look at it from an asset perspective - what are the assets of this student, and how can we document it and approach it so that it is being done but approach it in a way that doesn't point fingers? Politicians should speak with teachers and researchers to see what students really need and from my seat as superintendent, I see the larger picture without the details of reading instruction. We would all benefit from listening to teachers.”

This statement is in line with the educational policy development framework as described by Bell & Stevenson (2015) in Chapter 3. The theoretical developmental framework describes policy enactment of operational practices and procedures, namely second-order values mediating the policy in schools which involve teachers' and administrators' daily work of implementing the Law. Furthermore, as the theoretical framework describes, it is the socio-political environment and contested discourses with teachers and administrators that help shape the future development of changes, such as those made to the Read by Grade Three law.

Along with listening to teachers about the student' needs, the administrators in this study indicated that teachers should provide input on reporting processes as well. For example, an administrator suggested changes to the paperwork that teachers are required to complete.

“I do not think comprehensive Individualized Reading Plans that are so meaty and standardized serve us best. Perhaps the reporting could simply be a spreadsheet of goal areas and initial and final assessments. This would keep teachers doing what they do best, which is teaching and working with students. Having the flexibility of reporting in an updated system would be my suggestion for a change to the Law.”

A district-level administrator further added, “Politicians should speak with teachers and researchers to see what students really need to learn and grow academically. As an administrator, all levels in education would benefit from listening to teachers.”

Communication and Family Involvement. Communicating and partnering with families was a common suggestion for improvement to the Law by all three administrators participating in this study. Those administrators shared that they all thought it is important to increasingly involve families in the education process and teachers in the lawmaking process. A building administrator, for example, suggested closer communication and collaboration between families and teachers would make the Law more effective.

“Teachers can only do so much. Students need the triangulation of strong teachers, good instruction, and home support to substantiate reading progress. Time at school can only do so much. Parents need to do more at home to support learning. I’m not sure how that could be mandated, but those strong home-school partnerships would help students in reading proficiency.”

Providing frequent updates on student progress with specific strategies families could use to help their children was suggested as one way to increase family engagement.

“Work alongside parents with more frequent progress monitoring and parent education of how to help their child at home,” stated a district administrator.

“Involving parents to a much greater extent and taking some of the burden off of teachers – both paperwork and accountability would be amazing” an administrator added.

Administrator suggestions were focused on increasing family involvement with children’s academic development and listening to teachers for information about student needs.

Teachers' Suggestions for Lawmakers and Stakeholders for Future Changes

Teachers also had specific ideas for making the Read by Grade Three law more impactful and were eager to share their thoughts. Their suggestions focused on listening to teachers, adequate funding, and more family involvement.

Listening to Teachers. Two teachers who participated in this study suggested that lawmakers come into the classroom to see what education looks like today. One, a third-grade teacher with 19 years of experience said,

“I wish all lawmakers would make it a point to see what a classroom today looks like and what is actually happening. Before making these big decisions, come and see and talk to teachers to find out what really works.”

A kindergarten teacher shared this same thought as she mused, “I’m not sure how this could change the law but [it would be helpful] to get lawmakers into classrooms and see how teachers teach and how students today learn.”

The perceived disconnection between lawmakers and teachers was emphasized as a needed point of discussion.

Family Involvement. Similar to the administrators’ suggestions, teachers indicated the importance of family involvement in children’s academic progress. A kindergarten teacher stated,

“I would suggest that they find a way to make parents more invested in their student’s education and put some of the responsibility on the parents. Teachers only have so much time with students and parents need to read with their students. The parents keep pushing back that it is so hard but do nothing. Yet, these same parents push their students with extracurricular activities.”

A first-grade teacher shared,

“We need to hold parents more accountable to do the reading with kids and stop putting pressure on teachers. I send home reading materials and create videos on how to work with a beginning reader, yet only about a third of my students actually do the work at home. Lawmakers need to stop putting pressure on curriculum and take something off teachers’ plates.”

While teachers and administrators both “wished” for greater parental involvement, few provided ideas for exactly how that could be accomplished via legislation.

Adequate Funding. Adequate education funding was mentioned by several teachers as a suggestion for lawmakers to ensure student success in literacy. Second and third-grade teachers in this study noted the importance of financial backing, with one stating, “Schools need funding to allow them the resources they need to get kids reading and meeting the standards.”

“Teachers are just asked to continuously do more with fewer resources. If they want to change, the lawmakers will need to ensure schools are funded,” shared a kindergarten teacher.

While the demographics of the school district featured in this study are not indicative of a high percentage of at-risk students, budget constraints are felt in many areas, which prompted the statements included in this section.

Professional Development Findings

The professional development of teachers was a focal point of the Read by Grade Three law. It states that teachers must receive professional development “based on the reading development needs data for incoming pupils” and that allows “for differentiated professional development as monitored by pupil proficiency rates” (Michigan Public Act 306, 98th

Legislative Session, 2016, p. 3). Additionally, school districts are required to allow time for collaboration between teachers focused on professional development to improve literacy rates.

Before the Law, the school district offered professional development on a variety of topics in literacy. Teachers met as building staff and as grade-level teams to discuss curriculum and district-mandated topics. A review of the professional development records available substantiated the teachers' acknowledgment of the continuous offering of literacy-focused professional development by the district. Analysis of district records showed that these offerings were provided on district-mandated professional development days and grade-level-specific literacy conversations were had with grade-level teams consistently on a regular, monthly basis. Before the Read by Grade Three law, these discussions, as documented, were mainly based on the planning and pacing of literacy standards taught within each grade level. These discussions were loosely structured with teachers and were loosely monitored. There were limited records found in the district to review regarding professional development content. The district was not required to maintain records of exact topics or content; instead, they prioritized tracking the number of hours of professional development offered to teaching staff.

After the Read by Grade Three law, the professional development offered by the school district still maintained a literacy focus in the main areas of reading, including phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and phonemic awareness, and also included student data from literacy screeners and other literacy assessments. Teaching staff attended monthly meetings with grade level cohorts to discuss curriculum and further investigate the Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016), along with the added implementation of the school's literacy curriculum and differentiation of instruction to meet all student needs.

Records show that building-level professional development sessions included designated time for student literacy data discussions and administration of literacy assessments. Professional development offered by the school district on designated days, as indicated from professional development records, showed topics such as “Deepening your understanding of Open Court Phonics,” “Extending thinking for talented readers,” and “Understanding Assessment Scores.” These sessions were led by teachers from within the district.

It was clear that, due to the Read by Grade Three law, professional development within the school district changed to have a greater focus on interpreting literacy assessment data.

Interview Notes and Emotion Coding

Anecdotal interview notes were kept during interviews with teacher and administrator participants in the study. Those notes included the researcher’s description of the emotions that the participants displayed during the interviews. Later, those notes were analyzed using emotional coding, as described by Salanda (2020). These notes described any changes in behaviors or emotions that were noticed during the interviews. All participants seemed eager to share their thoughts and appeared to be very relaxed and at ease overall with the questions and process of the interviews. During the interview process, participants were thoughtful and paused to think about the questions. Changes in emotions, body language, and mannerisms were identified in the interview notes throughout the interview process.

In the emotion coding of the interview notes, several of the teachers interviewed exhibited humor (e.g., laughing and smiling) as they recollected past experiences with the curriculum. The administrators who were interviewed appeared to be less amused, instead shaking their heads at past practices, while smiling. Notes on emotions displayed showed that

teachers were amused by their recollections of past teaching practices and curriculum before the Read by Grade Three Law in Theme 1.

It was during the discussion regarding changes in literacy practices after the Law was implemented that all of the teachers seemed to relax, as evidenced by their postures moving to relax back in their seats and smiling. As they talked, they appeared to strongly convey emotions of happiness and satisfaction. Administrators interviewed also exhibited more relaxed postures, sitting back in their seats with smiles on their faces, during those interview questions, as recorded in the interview notes. These emotional changes were noted in discussions of the changes to literacy curriculum and practices after the Read by Grade Three law was implemented, which indicated that teachers and administrators were generally happy about the resulting changes and felt confident in their abilities to provide a better education for their students as a result.

The interviewees seemed to appear less confident and more resigned, as evidenced by their body language, including shoulders drooping when asked about family engagement and involvement. In addition, most teachers who were interviewed sighed visibly before answering and appeared concerned when responding to any question concerning family involvement. These emotions were coded as discouragement and unhappiness. The emotion of frustration was noted in the interview notes as indicated by the raised voices of teachers when discussing family involvement. When responding to the questions on this topic, three of the teachers visibly moved forward in their chairs, displaying emotions of stress and frustration with facial expressions that included furrowed brows and strong hand movements. Upon analysis of these interview notes, it appears that family engagement has been, and continues to be, a source of concern and frustration for teachers, even after the Law went into effect.

When asked to give suggestions to lawmakers regarding the Read by Grade Three Law and future legislation, both teachers and administrators became more animated. Their facial expressions became more intense with their eyebrows pulled together and their upper bodies moved forward in their seats, towards the interviewer. Their eagerness to share suggestions also showed emotions of determination and optimism for future changes, as also reflected in their suggestions for lawmakers in Theme 4.

Teachers did not reveal strong emotions during the discussion of professional development and answered the questions asked quickly and straightforwardly. One of the administrators was slower to respond to the questions regarding professional development and appeared to be self-conscious when responding to professional development opportunities offered by the school district. The administrator exhibited self-consciousness by fidgeting with a coffee cup and not making eye contact. While both teachers and administrators discussed and answered questions regarding professional development, no emotions were noted.

It is noteworthy that participants had very similar responses to sections of the interview. The emotional coding of the interview notes also revealed two patterns across the interview topics. The first was that all six teachers showed emotions that indicated a passion for their profession. This passion was evident in their responses in connection with how long they had been in education as well as the way they expressed their opinions and thoughts during the interview process. Further, their passion for their profession was evident in their responses to the questions asked, as well as their eagerness to participate in the research process. Administrators also shared their passion for their profession with their willingness to participate and answer all questions provided.

The second pattern that emerged from the emotional coding was pride as all participants shared their experiences and enjoyment of the school district overall in discussions about professional development focused on literacy offerings. Most participants wore the school logo on their shirts and sat up straight, ensuring the researcher had the correct information and that they had responded to all of the interview questions.

The changes in their body language conveyed important insights during the interview, including the ways they moved forward in their seats and spoke freely in response to the questions, sometimes providing more than the question required in their response.

Analysis of Artifacts

Curricular artifacts provided by the school district were examined both line-by-line and holistically to establish a triangulation of data points with the interviews, interview notes, and professional development records. These artifacts provided data points to which the perceptions of teachers and administrators could be measured for impacted change due to the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law.

District Policies Regarding Retention and Intervention

Upon review of policies and guidelines, it became clear that the district did not have a policy on retention prior to the Read by Grade Three law, nor do they currently have a policy in place. Discussions with the district superintendent revealed that currently, the building administrators, teachers, and families jointly meet to discuss potential retention on a case-by-case basis after the M-STEP scores are released. Before the Law reading intervention was provided to students who fell below a district benchmark. After the Law was enacted, reading intervention was provided at each elementary school building by a full-time, highly qualified reading teacher for any students that were below the 25th percentile on the district-wide standardized screener,

which was required by the Read by Grade Three law. Summer school has been offered to families of students who are not achieving proficiency in reading as an intervention practice that is recommended by teachers and administrators but is not compulsory.

Parent-Teacher Conference Attendance Records

Parent-teacher conference attendance records were examined for changes in the percentage of families that attended conferences, which are held twice a year, before the Law and after the Law. Although the term parent-teacher conferences are commonly used in the school district, the conferences may include caregivers and other family members. A review of the documents showed that there was a slight increase of 2% in attendance in the Fall of 2017 at one of the three elementary schools when the Read by Grade Three law went into effect. The parent-teacher conference attendance remained the same at the other elementary schools. The parent-teacher conference attendance is typically higher in the fall but drops an average of 2% points in the spring. Although the parent-teacher conference attendance records indicated a slight increase of 1% in attendance at conferences at two of the elementary schools and another saw a 4% attendance increase from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019, the attendance records quickly returned to pre-Read by Grade Three levels after Fall 2019 and have remained consistent since then with two notable exceptions. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted attendance as Spring 2020 conferences were canceled and Fall 2020 conferences were held virtually.

Curriculum Records

The district had adopted a Units of Study curriculum (2015) as an encouraged reading curriculum for teachers to use but did not specify clear goals and curricula to be taught in the classroom, allowing teachers to teach as they preferred or thought needed. As a result, the literacy curriculum varied from building to building and across grade levels. The purchased

curriculum was described by its author in this way: “This series has been designed so that it provides you (the teacher) with a curriculum to lean on and to adapt, as well as professional development that you need to develop a deep knowledge of the reading process, of beginning reading and of teaching methods for teaching reading” (Calkins, 2015, p. 7).

This purchased curriculum was not widely adopted and used district-wide. Teachers interviewed who had experience with it shared various viewpoints about the Units of Study curriculum including that it was “too wordy” and “too much material to cover.” Professional development records were not available to determine if adequate training was provided for the curriculum. While it is unclear why teachers did not use the district-purchased curriculum, a curriculum evolved with pieces collected into a binder of assorted parts of various curriculums that teachers felt comfortable using. These binders were unique to each teacher or grade level in each elementary building. The researcher was unable to determine how the binders were put together or what teachers used to guide their choices as they created them.

The curriculum that is currently being used, Open Court (2015), was not mandated by the Read by Grade Three law, but requires that “the assessment, instruction, curriculum, and resources of a program be evidenced-based, which means based in research and with proven efficacy” (Michigan Public Act 306, 98th Legislative Session, 2016). This phrase of the Law prompted districts to look at what was being used to teach literacy and to ensure students could read proficiently by the end of third grade, as indicated by an administrator. As per the curriculum purchase records, a phonics program, Open Court (2015), was piloted by a committee of teachers, and training was provided by the publisher via video format. The curriculum was purchased in 2019 for grades kindergarten through third grade. Teachers were provided professional development by the teachers who had piloted the program. The phonics curriculum

includes a scripted phonics program that utilizes video components, workbooks, and decodable texts for instruction.

Additionally, a reading curriculum, *The Reading Mini Lessons* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018) was purchased for grades kindergarten through third grade in 2020 to ensure cohesive teaching of literacy skills. This reading curriculum offers whole-group instruction in literary analysis and strategies and skills that students apply and practice during independent learning times.

Personnel Records of Additional Literacy Positions

The district's Human Resources department confirmed that no additional literacy-focused positions were added due to the Read by Grade Three law. Positions were filled as they became vacant but did not correlate with any changes connected to the Read by Grade Three law. The school district has maintained an emphasis on literacy intervention for the past 20 years with the employment of a full-time reading interventionist at each elementary school building, as indicated by employment records.

Retention Records of Students Who Did Not Meet the Benchmark for M-STEP Testing

A review of the district's retention policy did not indicate a change with the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law. The district did not retain any students based on M-STEP test scores for the years 2017-2023.

The artifacts that were analyzed in this research are summarized in Table 5 below, which indicates a before and after comparison. These artifacts are explained in greater detail previously in this chapter.

Table 5*Analysis of Artifacts*

Artifact	Before the Read by Grade Three Law	After the Read by Grade Three Law
District policy regarding intervention	Students selected by teachers for intervention based on district-determined benchmarks. Summer school is offered.	Students scoring below the 25th percentile on the district standardized screener. Summer school is offered.
District policy regarding retention	No students were retained unless the family requested.	No change.
Parent Teacher conference attendance	Attendance was at 90% or above.	Little change: attendance remained the same, with a slight increase of 2% in 2017.
Personnel records	Each elementary school has a reading specialist.	No change to personnel.
Curriculum	Units of Study and teacher-selected curriculum pieces. Variations in how and when lessons were taught in each classroom.	District-mandated, packaged phonics and reading curriculum with grade-level pacing guides and team-level progress checks.
Professional Development	Sessions of best literacy practices were offered. With Essential Literacy Practices (2016), sessions became more focused in professional learning communities (PLC) designated times,	Changed to include analysis of student assessments directed differentiated instruction.

M-STEP Records

M-STEP records of student proficiency were analyzed as per the state-reported data on the State of Michigan's publicly available website Mischooldata.org. These records were

analyzed for third-grade student literacy scores from 2014 when M-STEP testing was initiated to the current reported school year of 2022-23. As per an analysis of the state-reported data, no students were retained in the school district as per the decision of the superintendent, principal, and families of the student. The third-grade students who participated in the M-STEP testing and did not receive a proficient score in the school district as compared to the statewide percentages of students not proficient are described as follows (see Table 6, below):

Table 6

Percentage of Third Grade Not Proficient M-STEP Scores in XYZ School District and Statewide.

SY	2017-18	2018-19	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
District	24.5%	30.1%	22.5%	21.4%	25.8%
Statewide	31.0%	30.4%	32.4%	33.9%	34.6%

(State of Michigan, n.d.)

No data was available in 2019-20 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent cancellation of state-mandated testing. Table 6 compares the percentages of students receiving a score of not proficient on their third-grade M-STEP ELA testing to the statewide percentages of the same. While the school district has had a lower percentage of students not proficient, the percentages do not reflect a dramatic change or consistent downward trend of students receiving not proficient scores with the Read by Grade Three law changes that have been implemented.

Analysis of the M-STEP records also revealed that the school district has an average of 15% of the third-grade students with identified disabilities and an individualized education plan (IEP). Table 7 provides a detailed, historical look at the M-STEP scores of the school district, with percentages in each category. The rows highlighted in yellow represent the years before the Read by Grade Three law was enacted.

Table 7*Third Grade District M-STEP scores*

	Advanced	Proficient	Partially Proficient	Not Proficient	# of retained students
2014-15	13.9%	25.2%	38.1%	22%	0
2015-16	23.8%	24.3%	24.3%	27.7%	1
2016-17	26.8%	21.4%	28.6%	23.2%	2
2017-18	26.6%	21.8%	27.1%	24.5%	0
2018-19	17.2%	23.9%	28.7%	30.1%	0
2019-20	NDA	NDA	NDA	NDA	0
2020-21	27%	23.5%	27%	22.5%	0
2021-22	28.9%	20.9%	28.9%	21.4%	0
2022-23	21.2%	31.3%	21.7%	25.8%	0

The Read by Grade Three law was enacted in 2016, with the retention aspect being implemented in the 2019-2020 school year. The percentage of change from the 2016-17 school year to the 2022-23 school year is an increase of 4.1% of students who scored in the advanced or proficient categories. There has been no increase in retention rates. It is important to note that the 2019-20 school year was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed schools and state testing requirements were canceled for that school year, which may have impacted student learning and growth. The analysis of the data did not determine if the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the testing scores. Therefore, this study cannot conclusively determine that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on test scores.

Relationships

Each of the data sources offered takeaways. In this section, the relationships between the data sources are discussed.

Teacher Perceptions and Parent-Teacher Conference Attendance Records

When teachers and administrators were asked about family involvement, some teachers perceived a rise in concern over retention when the Read by Grade Three law was first implemented. This rise in concern was perceived to have brought added parent-teacher conference attendance. A third-grade teacher shared, “When the Law first came out, parents were very anxious to make sure their child passed and wasn’t retained and moved on to fourth grade. It seemed like not only was there better attendance but also more communication from parents initially.”

A review of the parent-teacher conference records revealed that while the elementary schools have historically had attendance rates of 90% or above, the numbers remained consistent before the Law. After a brief increase in 2017 of 2%, the attendance numbers returned to the same rates as before the Law. The COVID-19 pandemic did impact conferences, which were not held in the Spring of 2020. Fall and spring conferences were held virtually for the 2021-22 school year. The research data did not indicate a relationship between the attendance records and the teachers’ perceptions of family involvement, as measured by parent-teacher conference attendance even with the retention aspect of the Law being repealed.

Teacher Perceptions and Professional Development

When asked about professional development, teachers expressed satisfaction with the literacy professional development that was offered by the school district. The review of

professional development records indicated compliance with the Law and literacy-focused topics. Administrators shared their satisfaction with the professional development offered but did state that specific sessions related to understanding the Read by Grade Three law would have been helpful to ensure all teachers and administrators understood the components of the Law. The perceptions of teachers regarding professional development after the Read by Grade Three law and the records analyzed correlated with providing a variety of literacy-based topics to address student needs and student data.

Teacher Perceptions, Curricular Changes, and M-STEP Scores

Teachers and administrators were not asked directly about M-STEP scores, but they were asked about their perceptions of literacy instruction before the Read by Grade Three law and after its implementation. Teachers all shared how instructional strategies and curriculum changes after the Read by Grade Three law have had a positive impact on M-STEP scores. However, the analysis of the M-STEP scores indicates that the number of students scoring either proficient or advanced proficient was 48.1% before the Read by Grade Three law was implemented, not counting the first year the M-STEP was implemented. The subsequent six years the M-STEP was administered to third-grade students reveals the number of students scoring proficient or advanced proficient to be 48.4%, with the highest scores being 52.5% proficient or above in School Year (SY) 2022-23 and the lowest of 41.1% proficient or above in SY 2018-19. This yields an average change of 0.3% over the past six school years the test was administered. A review of the M-STEP scores does show proficient scores and above increasing from 48.2% in SY 2016-17 to 52.5% in SY 2022-23 for an increase of 4.3 percentage points. The researcher was unable to determine if curriculum changes due to the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law factored into this change.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, research findings were presented. These findings were based on the interviews that were conducted with teachers and administrators and the curricular artifacts and professional development records that were reviewed during the research.

Chapter 5 discusses the themes that emerged from this study and recommends future practices and research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to delve into the perceived impact of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law on literacy instruction in one suburban school district and to examine the perceptions of the Law held by administrators and teachers. In doing so, this study sought to understand the following questions:

1. How has Michigan's Read by Grade Three law impacted literacy instruction?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the Read by Grade Three law?

This last chapter reviews, analyzes, and discusses the study's findings and connections to existing literature. It outlines the suggestions based on the findings for changes to Michigan's education legislation and other similar school districts in Michigan. This chapter also discusses the limitations of this research and closes with suggestions for further research and conclusions.

Discussion of Findings

This study explored how Michigan's Read by Grade Three law has impacted literacy instruction in one suburban Michigan school district and the perceptions of the impact of the Law held by a small sample of a single district's administrators and teachers. In doing so, the researcher found points that both support the existing literature for changes to literacy practices and add to the research base regarding the contemporary perceptions of the Law by some of those who are most highly impacted by it, teachers, and administrators.

Theoretical Framework

The research in this study utilized a theoretical framework for education policy, developed by Bell & Stevenson (2015), as a lens through which the case study was viewed. The framework, as described by Bell & Stevenson (2015), outlines how educational policy is “perceived and experienced” in a linear, top-down approach from development in a socio-political environment and strategic direction to enactment with the development of organizational principles, practices, and procedures. Although this framework is depicted in a straightforward way, with policy development and policy enactment sections, the authors acknowledge the “tensions and discourses” at each level “create contested and challenging environments within which the policies, governance, leadership and management of public education are located” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149). Utilizing the lens as a framework offered an opportunity for analysis of Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law in the context of a school district case study. Described further in Chapter 2, the socio-political environment helped to develop Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law. This was apparent as Michigan followed other states in the creation of literacy policies and, again, as the retention aspect of the Read by Grade Three law was repealed. As the Law was enacted and organizational principles were established, the research indicated that second-order values mediated the policy, with an impact on literacy instruction through curricular changes within the school district. Further, the contested discourses regarding the retention clause on a state-wide level shaped the Law and modified the policy enactment. As the socio-political environment changed with election cycles, this aspect of the Law became a contested point of discussion, which also follows the theoretical framework of policy development as “dominate discourses of the time” are used to “formulate the overarching guiding principles and are reflected in educational policies” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 148).

The review of the curricular records and artifacts from the school district indicated that the second order values and monitoring mechanisms, such as Individual Reading Plans (IRP) and reading interventions which align with the policy enactment section, were implemented in the school district.

This research also found that teachers, with lived experiences of the Read by Grade Three law in the school district, were eager to talk to and share with lawmakers changes that they felt needed to be made in education overall, but especially in literacy. According to the theoretical framework, legislative discussions with teachers, administrators, and families will help shape future educational policy development. The voices of teachers and administrators will, therefore, continue to help shape this policy through direct discussions and through elections, which is also in support of the flow of educational policy as described by Bell & Stevenson (2015).

Impact on Literacy Instruction

One area of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law that was analyzed using the lens of Bell & Stevenson's (2015) theoretical framework was the policy enactment phase. Within the policy enactment, operational practices and procedures, the researcher examined Michigan's Read by Grade Three law regarding the research questions guiding this study, focusing on how the Law has impacted literacy instruction in one suburban school district. This question was researched with interviews with administrators and teachers, a review of curricular artifacts, and professional development records.

“The first set of legislative requirements under the Read by Grade Three Law is aimed at improving literacy instruction and learning statewide for all K-3 students” (Strunk et al., 2021, p. 65). This was identified clearly in Section 1280f of the Read by Grade Three law mandates, which stated, “Develop a reading intervention program with intensive instruction in phonological

awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” (Michigan Legislature, 2016). Bell & Stevenson’s (2015) theoretical framework addresses this under policy development as the governance and strategic direction which, “refers to how policy trends emerge with increasing clarity and policy priorities are established” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 148). The law provided a clear mandate with which school districts worked to comply, namely, to raise literacy rates as measured by the state-mandated M-STEP assessments. As the policy was enacted in the operational practices and procedures, Bell & Stevenson explain that this is where the day-to-day of the policy is carried out. “The curriculum and modes of assessment are revised, and teachers are required to respond to these changes immediately” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p.149). This aspect of the framework is seen with the implementation of the changes in curriculum that have been made within the school district.

Curricular Changes

The analysis of the curriculum purchased by the school district featured in this study found that the changes required by the Read by Grade Three law were perceived by the participants to have a positive impact on literacy instruction, and this resulted in a minimal positive impact on literacy outcomes, especially in kindergarten through 3rd grade. A phonics curriculum for grades kindergarten to third grade was identified by the district’s curriculum director to respond to student needs in the literacy curriculum, as phonics had not been explicitly taught. The district needed to address this curricular need to comply with the Read by Grade Three law. It was implemented in 2020.

In 2021, the district also added a reading curriculum designed to be taught to a whole class, which met the Michigan K-12 Standards for English Language Arts standard of range, quality, and complexity of student reading. This reading program focused on explicitly and

systematically teaching reading comprehension skills, as opposed to the more open-ended framework of the workshop model previously used.

Participants in the interviews reported utilizing the new curriculum with a clear scope and sequence to develop a skill base in literacy with a renewed emphasis on early literacy foundations. This is consistent with the Early Literacy Practices (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016) and the recommendation of the National Governors' Association (2013) in their publication *A Governor's Guide to Early Literacy: Getting All Students Reading by Third Grade*. As described in Chapter 2, these recommendations included schools adopting comprehensive language and literacy standards and curriculum for grades K-3 (2013).

M-STEP Test Results

Although curriculum changes were made, the district's overall M-STEP English Language Arts test scores at the third-grade level reflected minimal and uneven improvement. The test results from two years before the Read by Grade Three law, as well as the 2020-21 School Year (SY), when the new curriculum was introduced, are reflected in Table 8, below as reported to MiSchoolData:

Table 8

Third Grade ELA M-STEP test results for XYZ school district

	% Advanced	% Proficient	Total Advanced or Proficient	% Partially Proficient	% Below Proficient	Total Partially or Below Proficient
2017-18	26.6%	21.8%	48.4%	27.1%	24.5%	51.6%
2018-19	17.2%	23.9%	41.1%	28.7%	30.1%	58.8%
2020-21	27%	23.5	50.5%	27%	22.5%	49.5%

2021-22	28.9%	20.9%	49.8%	28.9%	21.4%	50.3%
2022-23	21.2%	31.3%	52.5%	21.7%	25.8%	47.5%

(State of Michigan, n.d.)

These test scores reflect a slight, though sometimes uneven, increase in the percentage of students scoring in the advanced and proficient categories post-Read by Grade Three Law. Students with proficient test scores show the greatest percentage of increase. It is noteworthy that these test scores may be influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed schools during the 2019-20 SY and impacted student learning. When the school district scores are compared to the State of Michigan scores, the State of Michigan trended towards higher percentages of partially proficient or below proficiency in third-grade ELA M-STEP scores. The school district included in this research trended, with some exceptions, towards higher percentages of advanced or proficient third-grade ELA M-STEP scores as reported to MiSchoolData, indicated in Table 9, below.

Table 9

Comparison of District and State Third Grade ELA M-STEP Scores.

	District	State	District	State
	% Advanced or Proficient	% Advanced or Proficient	% Partially or Below Proficient	% Partially or Below Proficient
2017-18	48.4%	44.4%	51.6%	55.6%
2018-19	41.1%	45.1%	58.8%	54.6%
2020-21	50.5%	42.8%	49.5%	57.2%
2021-22	49.8%	41.6%	50.3%	58.4%
2022-23	52.2%	40.9%	47.5%	59.1%

As shown in Table 9, the school district's third grade M-STEP scores reflected an uneven growth pattern, as compared to the scores across the State of Michigan overall. For example, in the 2017-18 school year, the school district scores were 48.4% of students receiving advanced or proficient scores, as compared to the State scores of 44.4% of students receiving advanced or proficient scores. However, in the next school year, 2018-19 school year, the district dropped to only 41.4% of students receiving advanced or proficient scores. Statewide, 45.1% of students received advanced or proficient scores. For school years 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23, the school district's scores had higher percentages of students in proficient and advanced scores as compared to the overall State of Michigan scores.

This study sought to explore the perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on literacy instruction and, in doing so, the researcher found a minimally positive relationship between the curricular changes and the student outcomes on the M-STEP assessment due to the mandates of the Law for these schools in this district.

Professional Development

The Read by Grade Three law states clearly that teachers must receive professional development “based on the reading development needs data for incoming pupils” and “allow for differentiated professional development as monitored by pupil proficiency rates” (Michigan Public Act 306, 98th Legislative Session, 2016, p. 3). This professional development requirement was based on a recommendation by the National Governors' Association in 2013, described in Chapter 2, which recommended equipping professionals by providing care and education with skills and knowledge to support language and literacy development (Lovejoy, 2013). Additionally, school districts must allow time for collaboration between teachers for professional development to improve literacy rates. A review of the professional development

records from the district featured in this study indicated a clear focus on literacy practices in district-wide professional development. Further review of curricular documents indicated 36 total qualifying professional development hours in Essential Literacy Practices for the school years 2021-22 and 2022-23. The 2020-21 school year did not require formal documentation of professional development hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior records were not available for review, but tenured staff emphasized the school district's long-standing commitment to professional development in literacy practices.

Summary

In response to the research question of “How has the Read by Grade Three law impacted literacy instruction,” findings from this study indicate that the Law has had some positive impacts on literacy instruction in the school district with curricular changes and professional development, yet this finding is particular to one district and cannot be extrapolated to the State of Michigan overall.

The Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators of the Read by Grade Three Law

This research sought to examine the perceptions of the Read by Grade Three law as held by administrators and teachers in one suburban school district. Many of the study participants perceived the Read by Grade Three law to be an overall positive change, especially as the Michigan legislature removed Section 1280f (5), which required students not meeting a benchmark score on the state standardized test, M-STEP, to be retained. Participants' perceptions are grouped into three categories: 1) impact on literacy instruction, 2) impact on students, and 3) impact on families.

Perceived Impact of the Law on Literacy Instruction

Participants interviewed in this research perceived the curricular changes mandated by the Read by Grade Three law as having a positive impact on literacy instruction. Administrators shared that the law has created a greater focus on literacy, a sense of urgency in instructional practices, and developed a capacity for examining where the students are developmentally at having those needs met. Teachers shared that they feel more equipped to teach reading skills and more efficient in their instruction due to curricular changes. Continued research and implementation with professional development sessions of best literacy practices would help teachers improve their practice in literacy education.

Perceived Impact of the Law on Students

Participants in this study also shared their perceptions of the Law's impact on students. Two participants shared that they felt students did not appear to be directly impacted by the Read by Grade Three law. All teachers, however, shared that the increased curricular demands and standardized testing that is required for all students K-3 several times per year have, in their perception, caused additional anxiety and stress in some students. Teachers did report that they wondered if the anxiety was related to the increased academic demands associated with the Read by Grade Three law or overall changes in students in general, including changes in stamina, attention span, and motivation. In a 2023 study reported in the *Journal of Pediatrics*, researchers noted a significant decline in children's mental health with "increased school time and ...fear of academic failure or insufficient achievement" (Gray et al., 2023, p. 5) as contributing factors and affirming teachers' perceptions of the impact on students.

Administrators perceived that the impact on students derives from the teachers' increased ability to identify gap areas in students' learning and intervention to be engaged to support

student success. In future studies, it would be important to consider implementing developmentally appropriate practices (NAEYC, 2021, p. 5) in literacy education and also to consider student mental health with increased academic demands. These developmentally appropriate practices, as defined by NAEYC (2021), are methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning. This is in alignment with research findings by the National Institute for Literacy (2008), which demonstrated correlational data between children's early abilities and skills and later literacy development. Other studies outlined in the literature review's section, including the *Importance of Early Literacy*, also point to the importance of quality interventions and developing early literacy skills prior to grade three to have long-term, positive effects on learners.

Perceived Impact of the Law on Families of Children

The perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on families was reflected by participants. Half of the teachers expressed an initial positive perception when the Law was introduced, indicating that it had prompted families to become involved in their children's education at home. Still, all teachers perceive that family involvement is steadily declining, overall, with academics. One teacher expressed, "I know parents want their children to do well, but really are only concerned with their child being retained." This perception was supported by a review of the parent-teacher conference attendance records, which indicated that, while parent-teacher conference attendance remained relatively steady, there were no extra opportunities for parents to understand the requirements and implications of the Read by Grade Three law had on them and their children. There were no records of parent education opportunities provided by the elementary schools regarding the Read by Grade Three law.

Professional Development Regarding Literacy Best Practices and Read by Grade Three

In the semi-structured interviews conducted for this study, administrators and teachers were asked questions regarding professional development that had been offered to teachers and administrators to build their understanding of the Read by Grade Three law. According to Bell & Stevenson's (2015) theoretical framework of educational policy, as the policy is enacted, organizational principles are developed. The final element of the theoretical framework refers to "operational practices and procedures, whereby the governance framework and the strategic direction set within the policy is manifest in the daily activities and experience of those who work and study in individual institutions" (p. 149).

It is within this policy enactment stage of educational policy that administrators and teachers are required to respond to the policy and other localized factors influence the enactment. This was evident when teachers were asked about professional development that was offered by the district or intermediate school district regarding the Read by Grade Three law. All teacher participants were not aware of any defined opportunities offered by the school district or the intermediate school district. This was further substantiated by a review of curricular artifacts that included a list of professional development offered to teachers in the past five years by the school district. Teachers shared that informally, information about the requirement for writing individual reading plans for students was mentioned briefly at a staff meeting in one elementary school building, but they did not receive any professional development regarding the requirements of the Law.

Administrators shared similar experiences with being referred to point people if they had questions. However, no formal professional development was offered to them to help them understand the Read by Grade Three law and its requirements completely. An administrator

noted that, in retrospect, the district could have done things differently. When asked about the professional development of teachers and administrators regarding the Read by Grade Three law, that administrator said, “We always look back and say I wish I would have done this or that and see areas that are missed.”

However, the review of professional development records did reveal a focused and continued emphasis on literacy with the Essential Literacy Practices (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016) by the district in grade-level team meetings and building-level professional learning communities. This is in agreement with a 2022 state-wide survey of teachers, by the Educational Policy Innovation Collaborative, which asked “To what extent do you agree that these aspects of 1:1 coaching, or professional development received this year affected your literacy instruction” (Strunk, 2023, p. 4)? The teachers interviewed shared many of these same beliefs as indicated in Figure 14, below. A third-grade teacher shared, “The district has always had an emphasis on literacy and provided professional development, especially after the Read by Grade Three law, with a literacy focus on ensuring all students can read.”

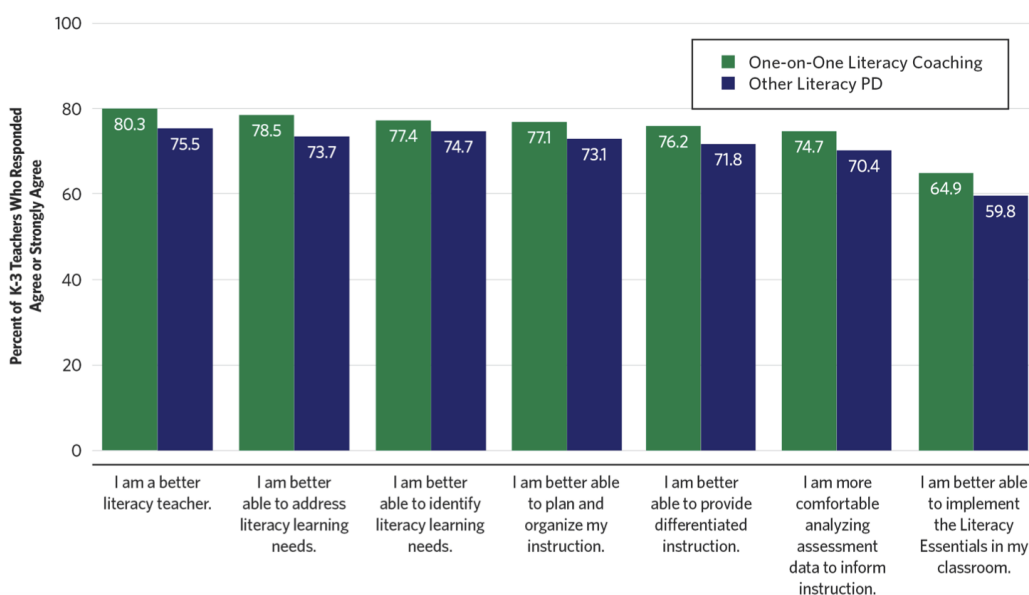
Figure 15, below, echoes this statement with professional development helping teachers become better literacy teachers and identifying student needs as the most effective areas. Although Figure 15 also indicates the effectiveness of one-to-one literacy coaching and professional development, coaching was an aspect that was not evaluated in this research, as the school district did not implement a coaching role until 2022. Figure 15 illustrates teacher perceptions of professional development, as required by the Read by Grade Three Law, as having a positive effect on teachers and teaching practices statewide overall. The professional development records and interview records analyzed do show that the Read by Grade Three Law

professional development requirements have helped educators in the district to develop their skills as literacy teachers and have created positive perceptions of that aspect of the Law.

Figure 15

MOST TEACHERS BELIEVED PD HELPED IMPROVE THEIR PRACTICE

To what extent do you agree that these aspects of 1:1 literacy coaching and/or professional development received this year affected your literacy instruction?



(Strunk, 2023)

Research by the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (2021) explained that successful implementation of an educational policy requires “educators’ and administrators’ understanding of the Law itself and how its specific elements are operationalized at the student level” (Strunk et al., 2021, p 61). Additionally, other literature points to the correlation between professional development and positive student achievement outcomes (Reed, 2009; Correnti, 2007, Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012; as cited by Strunk et al., 2021). For example, in a study of 44 schools focusing on literacy practices, it was determined that “teachers need continued

professional development in instructional planning” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 561), and that providing professional development with a “system-wide focus, the results were exceptionally positive.” Although there has been professional development for several years on Michigan’s Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force, 2016) in the school district, this study acknowledges that professional development specifically regarding the Read by Grade Three law was absent. However, the focus of the law is improving literacy achievement rates, as outlined in Figure 15 above, which the district continues to focus on in its professional development efforts.

While this study does not undertake a quantitative analysis of professional development before and after the Read by Grade Three law, it does suggest the importance of professional development to educate stakeholders regarding the policy, developing a capacity for implementation of the law and the impact of the policy on literacy instruction, as experienced in one suburban school district.

Summary

The results of this study suggest that teachers and administrators in this school district perceive the Read by Grade Three law to have had a positive perceived impact on literacy instruction and their professional development. An examination of test scores indicates a minor improvement in the percentage of students testing proficient for grade level in the third grade. As no statistics were run, there is no indication that this increase is in any way statistically significant. Further, the results show that the teachers and administrators perceive little impact of the Law on students or families, though some teachers spoke of possible impacts of testing and curricular changes on the stress levels of students. This study suggests that Michigan’s Read by

Grade Three law had a perceived positive impact on literacy instruction and the professional development of teachers in this district, although there was a lack of professional development and education about the Law itself provided to stakeholders.

Implications

There are several implications of this research for school districts and legislators in Michigan, and beyond. As the Read by Grade Three law continues to evolve, school districts nationwide search for best practices to help improve literacy achievement, especially in the early grades of K-3. With many states having laws similar to Michigan's Read by Grade Three law (Weyer, 2019), it would benefit educators and legislators within and beyond Michigan to consider the perceptions of teachers and administrators expressed in this research. Bell & Stevenson (2015) share that their theoretical framework analyzing educational policy "provides food for thought and concepts to challenge researchers, together with ideas and possibilities for the further enhancement of the organization of public education" (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149). Considering these implications may provide the possibilities and influence "the organization of public education" as Bell & Stevenson (2015) described and prompt reflective conversations.

School District Implications

Michigan's Read by Grade Three law has sought to impact many areas of literacy instruction as a legislative mandate. This study delved into several of the aspects of the Law and though limited in scope, it provides the following implications for both the school district included in this research and, possibly upon further inquiry, school districts throughout Michigan and nationwide.

The study demonstrates three main implications of this research for school districts.

Namely, it is critical for districts to:

1. provide professional development about the Read by Grade Three law and future education legislation to ensure teachers and administrators have an understanding of the educational legislation;
2. provide professional development and literacy coaching to teachers to ensure best practices are being implemented;
3. streamline the reporting process of literacy areas of concern with clear guidelines and plans to address them to efficiently communicate with families and administrators; and
4. provide family education programs to help families and teachers work together to support children's literacy learning both at home and at school.

The research demonstrates that teacher and administrator perceptions of Michigan's Read by Grade Three law are generally positive concerning its impact on literacy instruction, based on curricular changes combined with a consistent commitment to professional development in Essential Literacy Practices in one Michigan school district.

Professional Development Regarding Educational Legislation

First, the analysis of the research conducted indicates that professional development changes implemented have been perceived overall as helpful in improving literacy practices in the classroom. However, providing informational sessions for teachers specifically about legislation impacting literacy, such as the Read by Grade Three law, would have allowed teachers to understand the purpose and goals of the Law to a greater extent. As Bell & Stevenson (2015) point out, even though their model appears linear, the socio-political environment "is

shaped and re-shaped by the interpretations of the policy” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149). By providing teachers and administrators an opportunity to fully comprehend the legislation, they would likely have been able to communicate their understanding more effectively, thereby eliminating many of the misconceptions and anxiety about the Law that teachers and administrators reported having a perceived impact on families and some students.

This study also indicates that future legislation in education should be more widely addressed in professional development offerings and requirements at the district level to ensure that all teachers and administrators have an established understanding of the legislation and its impact that can be clearly articulated to parents and families. Collectively informing staff will encourage consistency of policy implementation throughout the district and the state overall. While this implication is particularly applicable to the school district utilized in this research, it is not unreasonable to assume that this would apply to school districts throughout the State of Michigan. In even broader terms, ensuring teachers and administrators nationwide understand the educational legislation of their state will help to increase policy implementation.

Professional Development and Literacy Coaching

In this study, it was found that the school district did offer professional development on general literacy topics. It was also noted that a literacy coach was not hired until 2022. Noted in the literature was the impact that literacy coaches had in Mississippi and also in a report to the Michigan legislature (Strunk, 2023) that teachers found the combination of professional development and literacy coaching helped teachers perceive themselves to be better literacy teachers and able to address literacy needs in the classroom. The literature also reflects this need for both coaching and professional development in the report by the National Governors’ Association which recommended that teachers be equipped with skills and knowledge to support

language and literacy development and develop mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and accountability (Lovejoy, 2013). The need for coaching and continuous professional development for teachers to change their practice of teaching is further supported by McLaughlin's research in which it was found that "mere adoption of a 'better' practice did not lead automatically or invariably to 'better' student outcomes" (McLaughlin, 1976, p. 169). To implement effective literacy practices, McLaughlin points to continuous professional development to promote sustained changes that can be fully understood and implemented into classroom practices.

"Change agent policies would be well advised not only to address the user needs that are part of the implementation process per se, but also to consider the developmental needs of local educational personnel that are a prerequisite for the initial interest and support necessary in change agent efforts" (McLaughlin, 1976, p.180).

An area for future research might include revisiting the school district to evaluate the effectiveness and capacity building with teachers that the literacy coach may have on the teaching staff and M-STEP test proficiency levels. This implication may apply to other similar school districts in the State of Michigan, as well.

Reporting Process

A second implication for consideration for the school district studied is the added reporting requirements of teachers to families regarding student progress on the individual reading improvement plans. While it was acknowledged that the reporting systems have improved, it did take time to establish a reporting system with vague guidelines from the Law that impacted teachers and their time with students. These organizational procedures and progress monitoring reports do provide valuable information for parents and administrators but

completing them takes time away from the teachers' actual teaching time with students. A building-level administrator in this study shared that the reporting time required from teachers related to the Read by Grade Three law had a negative effect on student literacy growth. Streamlining the creation of individual reading plans would allow teachers to maximize their time with students, and reduce reporting responsibilities, while still communicating with administrators and families. This implication may apply to other school districts within the State of Michigan and in those states that have similar reporting practices. It would be an area for future research to investigate reporting processes that have been effective in communicating student areas of need while minimizing the impact on teacher instructional time.

Family Education

The teachers interviewed in this study expressed frustration with a perceived lack of involvement from families in the education process. This is a clear deficit area in the Read by Grade Three law requirements, as many of the requirements of reading proficiency fall onto teachers and schools. Having family education programs would help families and teachers to work together as partners to ensure that both parties have a mutual understanding and tools that are needed to effectively help children be successful in literacy. As described further in Chapter 2, when the State of Mississippi included partnering with families as part of their literacy legislation, state testing scores marked an increase in students at or above proficiency in literacy (Kaufman, 2022). This example of partnering with families clearly underscores the importance of providing families with tools to help their child at home as an important piece in student success. Family education sessions could also provide an opportunity for families to understand the curriculum, education legislation, and the importance of their role in supporting their child's education. While not considered in this research, it would be an area of interesting research to

consider family engagement in student success and best practices observed in other school districts. Additional research would also be beneficial to consider the impact of the Individualized Reading Improvement Plans on the families that have received them and their involvement in their child's education process.

Legislative Implications

When teachers in the district studied were asked what changes they would suggest to lawmakers that might help to make the Read by Grade Three law more effective or impactful, all participants responded that legislators need to come into classrooms and witness first-hand the needs of teachers to effectively teach, as well as how students learn today. Each participant echoed the same sentiment: literacy education has changed since the teachers and administrators started in education and differs from what legislators recall of their educational experiences. This disconnect between the reality in the classrooms and what legislators understand to be the classroom requirements is growing. Legislators and most others have had educational experiences in classrooms, yet many have erroneous perceptions or recollections of the actual education process. Creating a further disconnect between legislators and those in the classroom are the rapidly changing educational requirements, student needs, and other aspects of education that are often overlooked. For example, the use of technology in classrooms has changed teacher and student interactions. Additionally, few legislators understand the requirements of being a teacher that regularly exceed the job description, especially in elementary schools. One such example is the additional reporting requirements of teachers for Individualized Reading Plans (IRPs), which take valuable time away from teaching students. Further, the state-issued letters regarding student M-STEP performance, without conversation with those in the school, were cited as creating a disconnect of community between schools and families. These are two

examples, yet the role of the teacher often requires additional student support that is school or classroom-specific, such as ensuring students are ready to learn with providing basic needs.

Besides witnessing what education looks like in classrooms today, having an open dialogue with teachers, students, families, and administrators would mutually benefit both sides as legislators seek to understand education today and those involved in education seek to understand the legislation that is put into place.

Additionally, teachers and administrators are confronted with daily student needs beyond academics that continue to impact the education process. Although not explored in this research, student demographic changes, mental health, and overall well-being are needs that teachers see and need to respond to in their classrooms. Encouraging all legislators to interact in observance of teaching practices and dialogue with today's educators and students would encourage all parties to gain an understanding of the teacher and student perspectives. As a result, educational challenges that are being faced in the classroom might be better understood and addressed in funding and legislation. Further, this understanding might allow legislators to look to the future of literacy education, not to simply focus on fixing the broken pieces from the past education legislation.

Most teachers and administrators in this research study stated that there seems to be a widening gap between what educators face each day in meeting the needs of today's students, and what lawmakers and lobbyists are legislating. Cultivating these conversations and having lawmakers spend time in schools, talking with teachers and administrators, could help to bridge that gap.

Suggestions for Further Research and Limitations to the Study

The motivation for this research was to understand the impact of the Read by Grade Three law from the perspective of teachers and administrators and how the Law has impacted literacy instruction. The research was able to provide insights into the impact on one school district and developed additional questions for future research.

While this study must acknowledge the limited number of artifacts and small number of participants, its findings can still influence the work of school leaders and lawmakers. This is one of several factors the Bell & Stevenson (2015) model describes as “the point in which policy developed ‘up there’ is experienced and enacted ‘down here’ (Seenson & Tooms, 2010, as cited by Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149), however, this does not “minimize the extent to which policy is subject to multiple interpretations based on the specificities of local context and the nature of the work of educators" (Bell & Stevenson, 2015, p. 149).

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provided answers to the research questions, additional questions for future research arose. These questions would yield additional information for school districts to consider.

This study indicated the need for greater involvement of families in their child’s academic process. Additional research is needed to explore what other school districts are doing to involve families. A survey of best practices with family engagement and involvement programs and initiatives would provide valuable information for future research.

While this research briefly examined the perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students and families, future research would benefit from a deeper analysis. Research

involving a large sample size of families, parents, school administrators, and teachers and teachers would yield insights into the impact this Law has had on these participants.

Other school districts within Michigan would benefit from similar studies in their particular district with their teachers and administrators. On a wider scope, other states would benefit from looking at the effects of their similar laws aimed at improving literacy and learning from studies similar to this to evaluate their legislation and the implementation in their unique school districts. While each state has its educational policies and legislation, future research would be beneficial to evaluate best practices and pitfalls of individual state literacy legislation from a national perspective.

Future research should include a deeper analysis of professional development topics, offerings, and content as offered by school districts and the State of Michigan's Department of Education. Ensuring that teachers and administrators have adequate training from qualified instructors along with implementation guidance with literacy coaches will help to evaluate and make recommendations for future training and that best practices are being applied in classrooms. As indicated in Chapter 2, a key component of the success of Mississippi was placing literacy coaches in schools with clear protocols of how the coaches' time should be spent (Kaufman, 2022). This limitation was also cited by Strunk et al (2021) which found Michigan schools were lacking a "sufficient supply of experienced, high-quality literacy coaches" (p. 121).

Future research is needed to assess if additional changes are made to the Read by Grade Three law over time and the impact the Law continues to have on literacy practices and teacher perceptions. A developing line of investigation in research is the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on student learning and the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law mandates. As such, future research on the effectiveness of the Read by Grade Three law would benefit from

an additional three to five-year study of literacy practices for several reasons. First, the students who will be in third grade in the 2024-25 school year will have had a “typical” school experience without the disruptions of COVID-19, as other students have previously experienced. Secondly, with the additional three to five-year study period, researchers would be able to fully evaluate the implementation of the Read by Grade Three mandated changes. Teachers and administrators would have had time to implement the mandates on a building level, allowing evaluation from experience if the changes were effective. It is also noted that with the retention clause of the Law removed, studying the literacy interventions and instructional supports offered to students is needed. Future research is needed to evaluate the equitable access and quality of literacy interventions across school districts and their effectiveness will need to be evaluated.

Developmentally appropriate teaching practices and curriculum requirements of the Read by Grade Three law would also be analyzed with student and family impact in future studies.

While some aspects of the effectiveness of the Read by Grade Three law can be evaluated currently, it is too soon to draw definitive conclusions. However, if literacy scores, as indicated by the M-STEP test do not show an increase in the next three to five years, legislators should re-evaluate the Read by Grade Three law and its funding with a look at other states with equivalent or similar legislation in place who have made gains.

This research study indicates that while the Read by Grade Three has impacted literacy instruction in the studied school district, further studies could provide a statewide perspective of Michigan’s diverse and unique school districts. It is also acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted student learning in ways that are currently being researched. Future research may yield different conclusions about the Read by Grade Three law’s impacts and perceptions of the Law as students progress through the educational system.

This research examined the Read by Grade Three law from the perceptions of teachers and administrators. In discussions with teachers, it was expressed that a gap is seemingly growing between legislators creating the laws and teachers implementing them. Future research regarding legislators' creation of the laws, the motivation behind the laws, and the background experiences of those on the legislative educational committees would be beneficial.

Understanding the sources of information used in the creation of legislation would also provide insights into why the gap seems to be widening between teachers and legislators.

Limitations of the Research

This study has several limitations. First, this study is limited to only nine participants in one school district. The results of this study may have been meaningfully different if more teachers and administrators had been included. Based on this study, it is unknown if this sample of participants differs from other districts, which is a limitation. Second, the participants of this study were restricted to classroom teachers and administrators. Results may have been different if a greater selection of participants had been included. Third, this study takes place in a suburban school district. Districts with larger or smaller populations may not have yielded similar results. Likewise, districts with different demographics of students, teachers, and administrators or in different geographic settings, such as a rural or urban district, may not have had similar results.

Some considerations that need to be included in future research that were not included in this research include the following:

- Expanding the number of teachers and administrators for a more expansive response to the research questions that would be more representative of the general population of the school district or State of Michigan educational staff.

- Including a broader range of perspectives from other school employees, such as social workers and literacy interventionists will allow for a more generalizable study both to the researched school district and other similar school districts in the State of Michigan regarding the implementation and impact of the Read by Grade Three law.
- Including families and students in the research to gain additional perspectives into the impact of the Read by Grade Three law.
- Understanding the district process of selecting curriculum materials. Including questions in the interviews that delved into how the curricular choices were made and what criteria were used in the selection process.

Conclusion

This chapter answered the research questions and the data collected from the interviews in this case study have generated several topics for discussion. The results of this study indicate that the study participants perceive that Michigan's Read by Grade Three law has had an initially positive impact on literacy instruction in their district. As a result, the participants interviewed mainly see the Law as helping to address literacy deficits in Michigan.

Implementation of the research results was outlined as well as suggestions for future research of the Read by Grade Three law and future literacy initiatives. Suggestions for school districts, both the district studied and other Michigan school districts, to make the Law more impactful were outlined. Further, recommendations for lawmakers to regularly conduct an open dialogue with a variety of teachers, administrators, and families to remain current on the state of education from a classroom and school perspective.

Recommendations for continued and future research were outlined and limitations were also explained in this chapter.

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APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Researcher's Name(s): Joan Lamain

Project Number:

Project Title: "The Effects and Implementation of the Read by Grade 3 Law on Urban, Suburban, and Rural School Districts in Michigan"

INTRODUCTION

This consent may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the investigator or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to examine the effects and implementation of the Read by Grade 3 law on a suburban school district in Michigan. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study, and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you should decide to withdraw from the research, please notify Joan Lamain via email at jlmain@umich.edu.

This research is not funded.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to investigate teacher and administrator perceptions of and the implications on teaching practices that the Read by Grade Three law has had on one suburban Michigan school.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THE STUDY?

Nine people will be in the study.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

This study will take approximately 1 year to complete. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN STUDY?

Your participation will benefit state lawmakers, policy writers, and the general public as they become more aware of this law and its implications.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

There are no risks in participating in this study. Pseudonyms will be utilized for both the school district and each participant to ensure confidentiality.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

There is no cost to you.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?

You also have the option of not participating in this study and will not be penalized for your decision.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Please note that all names and school district names used will be pseudonyms. Survey results, interviews and other materials provided will be used for research purposes only and will be kept confidential.

Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's file and identified by a code number only. The code key connecting your name to specific information about you will be kept in a separate, secure location. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

In the case that the IRB will assess the risk level as high, a Certificate of Confidentiality will be obtained.

In addition, if photographs, audiotapes, or videotapes were taken during the study that could identify you, then you must give special written permission for their use. In that case, you will be given the opportunity to view or listen, as applicable, to the photographs, audiotapes, or videotapes before you give your permission for their use if you so request.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

WHAT IF I AM INJURED?

It is not the policy of the University of Michigan to compensate human subjects in the event the research results in injury. The University of Michigan, in fulfilling its public responsibility, has provided medical, professional, and general liability insurance coverage for any injury in the event such injury is caused by the negligence of the University of Michigan, its faculty, and its staff. The University of Michigan also provides, within the limitations of the laws of the State of Michigan, facilities and medical attention to subjects who suffer injuries while participating in the research projects of the University of Michigan. In the event you have suffered injury as the result of participation in this research program, you are to contact the Risk Management Officer, telephone number (734) 936-0933, at the Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences, who can review the matter and provide further information. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Please contact Joan Lamain if you have questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, and voice concerns or complaints to the researcher.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Michigan Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (734) 936-0933 or irbhsbs@umich.edu.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study or a research-related injury, contact Joan Lamain at 202-247-5989.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

Subject	Date
---------	------

Legal Guardian/Advocate/Witness (if required) *	Date
---	------

Additional Signature (if required) (identify the relationship to the subject) *	Date
---	------

**The presence and signature of an impartial witness is required during the entire informed consent discussion if the subject or subject's legally authorized representative is unable to read.*

***The "Additional Signature" line may be used for the second parent's signature if required. This line may also be used for any other signature which is required as per federal, state, local, sponsor and/or any other entity requirements.*

"If required" means that the signature line is signed only if it is required as per federal, state, local, sponsor and/or any other entity requirements.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol:

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for participating in this research regarding the Read by Grade Three law in Michigan. I would like to acknowledge that you may know me or of me and as a result, you may feel like you need to answer and respond to the questions in a particular way, yet your perspective and thoughts are important to this research. While I am an employee of XYZ schools, I am currently not a classroom teacher and value your thoughts and experiences in the classroom. Please be candid with your responses. The interview will be taped to ensure the accuracy of reporting your responses, but they will be kept confidential and not shared with any other staff or administration at XYZ schools. As well, you as a participant will be given a pseudonym and your identity will be kept confidential. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Introductory Questions:

- What is your name?
- How are you doing today? How is your summer so far?

Teacher Questionnaire

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been a teacher at XYZ Public Schools?
3. What grade levels do you have experience teaching?
4. Describe the language arts curriculum when you first started teaching.
5. Describe the rigor or demands to have students meet proficiency levels, especially in reading and writing when you started teaching.
6. What impact has the Read by Grade Three law had on your teaching style?

- a. Think back to how you taught reading four years ago. Describe the curriculum and strategies you used.
 - b. Now reflect on how you teach reading now. Describe the curriculum and strategies you use.
7. What impact has the Read by Grade Three law had on your students? Parents?
 - a. Prior to the Read by Grade Three law, what are your observations about students regarding reading, standardized testing, and meeting state standards?
 - b. Thinking back four years ago, what was your experience with parents regarding involvement in reading, standardized testing, and meeting state standards?
 - c. Now reflect on the current observations of students and parents regarding reading, standardized testing, and state standards.
8. What kinds of professional development opportunities regarding the expectations of the Read by Grade Three law has your district or ISD offered?
9. How were you able to or encouraged to participate in the educational opportunities provided to understand the Read by Grade Three law?
 - a. Were these opportunities for school, district, or ISD offerings?
 - b. Were these opportunities voluntary or were they mandated by the district?
 - c. Were these opportunities before the law was enacted or after?
 - d. What kinds of professional development were you offered on other reading initiatives previously? (pre-Read by Grade Three law) Describe them.
10. If so, what stood out to you in these professional development sessions and how did that impact your teaching practice?
11. What is your perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students?

- a. What do you base this perception on?
 - b. Illustrate this perception with a student you have taught.
 - c. How is this different from before the Read by Grade Three law was enacted?
12. In thinking about the various aspects of the Law, what do you perceive as most important?
13. What changes would you as an educator suggest to lawmakers to make the Read by Grade Three law more effective or impactful?
14. What are the positive impacts of the Read by Grade Three law in the classroom?
15. What are the negative consequences of the Read by Grade Three law in the classroom?
16. How has the media coverage regarding the retention of students and recent decisions by the Michigan legislature and governor regarding the retention aspect of the law influenced your perceptions of the law?
17. The Michigan legislature recently eliminated the retention aspect of the law. How do you feel about that change and how it will affect literacy instruction?
18. How did having the retention requirement change how you taught literacy in your classroom these past few years?

Ending Script:

That concludes the questions that I have prepared for this research. Thank you for your time and your candid responses to the questions. I will be transcribing our conversation and providing that transcript to you for your review, again to ensure accuracy. Do you have any questions? Again, thank you for your time. It is greatly appreciated.

Administrator Questionnaire

Interview Protocol:

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for participating in this research regarding the Read by Grade Three law in Michigan. I would like to acknowledge that you may know me or of me and as a result, you may feel like you need to answer and respond to the questions in a particular way, yet your perspective and thoughts are important to this research. While I am an employee of XYZ schools, I am currently not an administrator and value your thoughts and experiences in an administrative role with XYZ public schools. Please be candid with your responses. The interview will be taped to ensure the accuracy of reporting your responses, but they will be kept confidential and not shared with any other staff or administration at XYZ schools. As well, you as a participant will be given a pseudonym in the research and your identity will be kept confidential. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Administrative Questions:

1. What is your name and title?
2. How long have you been in education? In what capacities?
3. How long have you been with XYZ Public Schools?
4. What grade levels are you currently involved with?
5. Describe previous reading initiatives that you have seen implemented.
6. How have the rigor or demands to have students meet proficiency levels, especially in reading and writing changed from when started in education?
 - a. Describe what the proficiency levels of third-grade students were four years ago.
 - b. Now reflect on what those proficiency levels are today for third-grade students.

- c. How are these expectations similar and different?
7. What impact has the Read by Grade Three law had on the school or the district?
 - a. What changes have you experienced due to the Read by Grade Three law in this district? What was the status of these items previously in the district?
 - b. Do you perceive these changes as positive or negative?
8. How has the Read by Grade Three law impacted you as an administrator?
9. Has the district or ISD offered professional development opportunities regarding the expectations of the Read by Grade Three law or the reporting thereof?
10. What were the hurdles to the implementation of the Read by Grade Three law that you experienced at the school level? District level?
11. Were there other stakeholders that expressed concerns as this law was being implemented?
12. What is your perceived impact of the Read by Grade Three law on students?
 - a. What changes have you experienced *with students* due to the Read by Grade Three law in this district? What was the status of these items previously in the district?
 - b. Do you perceive these changes as positive or negative? Why?
13. What changes would you as an educator suggest to lawmakers to make the Read by Grade Three law more effective or impactful?
14. What is the positive impact of the Read by Grade Three law as a school/district overall?
 - a. How do you see this law impacting classroom practices? Compare this with what classroom practices were prior to the law.

- b. How has this law impacted you in your position with the district? How is this different from prior to the law?
15. Has the negative press regarding the retention of students aspect of the law influenced, in your opinion, your perceptions of the law?
16. In your opinion, how do you see this law impacting literacy in 5 years?
17. The Michigan legislature recently eliminated the retention aspect of the law. How do you feel about that change and how it will affect literacy instruction and the other requirements of the law?
18. How did having the retention requirement change how you worked to implement literacy instructional changes in the school/district?

Ending Script:

That concludes the questions that I have prepared for this research. Thank you for your time and your candid responses to the questions. I will be transcribing our conversation and providing that transcript to you for your review, again to ensure accuracy. Do you have any questions? Again, thank you for your time. It is greatly appreciated.

**APPENDIX 3. THE LEGISLATIVE RECORD OF MICHIGAN’S
READ BY GRADE THREE LAW**

Bill No.	Date	Actors	As described	Vote Count
HB48 22	August 2015	A. Price	<p>Introduced and read for the first time. “A bill to amend 1976 PA451 ‘The revised school code’ to add section 1280f.”</p> <p>Section 1280f states “The department shall do all of the following to help ensure that more pupils will achieve a score of at least proficient in English Language Arts on the Grade 3 State Assessment: (State of Michigan, 2015). The main points to include that school districts must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use diagnostic screening and assessments, ● provide intervention for those that are identified with a reading deficiency based on the assessments, ● provide written notice to parents or legal guardians to help correct reading at home, ● submit literacy data to the Department of Education annually, ● require principals to provide and allow for the professional development of teachers, ● employ reading/literacy coaches, and ● monitor the effectiveness of the reading/literacy coach model. <p>The bill was referred to the Committee on Education for further review.</p>	

Bill No.	Date	Actors	As described	Vote Count
	September 2015		<p>Referred to second reading with H-5 adopted and amended.</p> <p>The revised section to the Revised School Code to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Require third-grade promotion to be based on reading proficiency. ● Require public schools to implement reading assistance programs 	
	October 2015		<p>Read a second time and amended to note changes to the verbiage of the bill, most notably changing the effective date from 2017-2018 to the 2019-2020 school year. The substitute H-5 was adopted and amended.</p> <p>Representative Price moved that the bill be placed on the order of Third Reading Bills, which prevailed.</p> <p>Representative Nesbitt moved that the bill be given immediate effect.</p> <p>Representative Pagan, who voted nay, voiced concern regarding the retention piece of the legislation.</p> <p>Representative Griemel, who voted nay, stated that a recent Michigan Supreme Court decision in <i>SS Next Friend, et al v State of Michigan, et al</i> makes HB4822 unenforceable.</p> <p>Several others voiced concern over legislating the classroom and addressing other concerns.</p> <p>Passed by Michigan House of Representatives.</p> <p>Referred to Senate Committee on Education</p>	<p>Yeas: 57</p> <p>Nays: 48</p>

Bill No.	Date	Actors	As described	Vote Count
	March 2016		Placed on the Senate order of third reading. The Senate Committee on Education amended the bill in several places to change the verbiage to “evidence-based” instead of “research-based” intervention. The Senate agreed and it was placed on the Third Reading of Bills. It was recommended to the Committee of the Whole with substitute S-6.	Yeas: 31 Nays: 6 Excused: 1
	March 2016		The Senate substitute of S-6 was not concurred by the House. The Speaker appointed Representatives Cotter, Price, and Zemke for HB 4822. The Senate named Senators Pavlov, Hansen, and Knezek for HB 4822.	Yeas: 49 Nays: 59
	April 2016		Referred to a conference committee. Under Executive Order 2016-6, the Governor created the 21st Century Education Commission to recommend changes to Michigan’s educational system.	
	September 2016		Committee of Conference report received to resolve differences between the House and Senate. Representative Greimel again voiced concerns regarding the enforceability of the bill based on the Michigan Supreme Court decision on September 20, 2015.	Yeas: 60 Nays: 47
	September 2016		The Senate adopted the Committee of Conference report, and the bill was referred to the Clerk for enrollment printing and presentation to the Governor.	Yeas: 25 Nays: 10 Excused: 2

Bill No.	Date	Actors	As described	Vote Count
	October 2016		Presented to the Governor, approved, and filed with the Secretary of State. Signed with immediate effect.	
SJ2	January 2023	Dayna Polehanki	Introduce to House changes to Section 1280(f) which would repeal the retention aspect	
SJ13	February 2023		Passed Roll Call	Yeas: 22 Nays: 16
HJ13	February 2023		Received and read, referred to Committee on Education	
HJ21	March 2023		Passed; given immediate effect	Yeas: 57 Nays: 51 Not voting 2
SJ32	March 2023	Governor Whitmer	Approved by Governor and filed with Secretary of State	