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Aligning Secondary Benchmarks in High School Curriculums Across Content Areas

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Aligning Secondary Benchmarks in High School Curriculums
Across Content Areas

by
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An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Michael G. Forrest under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

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Michael G. Forrest
Name

July 20, 2015
Date

Acknowledgments

"Education has its place, but if it is not transformational, it does not make sense."
~Bob Andy, Jamaican Reggae Entertainer

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Abstract

Aligning Secondary Benchmarks in High School Curriculums Across Content Areas. Michael G. Forrest, 2017: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: Secondary Benchmark System, Primary Benchmark, Alignment, Across Content Area, Reading Literacy Standards.

This applied dissertation was designed to provide insight into aligning secondary benchmarks in a high school curriculum across content areas to prevent students from failing reading in a South Florida high school. Few studies have investigated the effects of the alignment of secondary benchmarks across content areas. The study focuses on a case study design for data collection to reveal its analysis. The researcher utilizes content analyses and a panel of experts in the field of education to review the protocol and review the assessments, using open-ended interview protocol procedures on more than 13 teachers. The teachers' positions can be found within the administration, reading department, and content areas teachers of instruction in mathematics, science, English/language arts, physical education, and business education to investigate changes in instructional alignment with secondary standards. The data analysis revealed nine themes that enhanced the researcher's understanding of specific details that will ensure methods to improve students' needs.

This qualitative research study provided an awareness to adequately support useful provision to educate students on different levels of reading. This increases their knowledge acquisition, which brings awareness to their utilization of secondary benchmark standards. The research concluded that teacher training included, professional development day among participants that were congruent with the themes revealed within the data analysis. The instructional alignment between reading teachers and content area teachers indicates that alignment in Grades 9 to 12 will increase if the alignment of standards is supported and if the implications for developing a better curriculum design is discussed.

Table of Contents

Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

The current school system across the United States is governed by benchmark standards as part of the curriculum. Benchmark standards are designed to solidify accountability and knowledge and to contribute related information (Horn, 2004). The purpose of this study was to examine the alignment of secondary benchmark standards in high school curriculums across content areas. Examining the relationship between various subject areas can enhance student performances on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) test.

The State of Florida requires the implementation of benchmark standards for planned lessons; therefore, teachers are under intense pressure to teach these benchmark standards (Hurt, 2003). The state's benchmark standards assist administrators and teachers by providing information about students who fail to achieve pre-established criteria for particular subject areas (Linn, 2014). In addition, benchmark standards are a part of state-mandated educational standards. Standards are administered as part of the written curriculum for the K-12 educational system (Herman, 2009). Benchmark standards are used for various content areas, such as (a) reading, (b) language arts, (c) math, (d) social science, and (d) world history. Benchmark standards are designed to provide coherent and comprehensive data to the state and school district (Herman, 2009). The initial purpose of these benchmark standards was to ensure localized accountability data for (a) administrators, (b) teachers, and (c) the district level coordinators (Horn, 2004).

The standards are reviewed by coordinators at the district level within an

instructional marking period. These marking periods provide records that hold

instructors accountable (Horn, 2004). As this data is collected, the process provides

teachers with assessments of their students. The data is then used to create new teaching

strategies before an annual state assessment. Herman (2009) explained that these

mandated benchmark standards are appropriate when the data collected serve to monitor

the progress of students to their advanced placement.

State benchmark standards now drive the public education system in America.

Most administrators of public schools and the public understand that, and these

benchmark standards seem to be uncontroversial. Horn (2004) promoted standards as

essential, and Polikoff (2014) further indicated that the state and districts should use a

timeline for implementing these benchmark standards, as well as utilize state assessments

to make decisions about teachers' effectiveness for the next several years. Applebee

(2013) explicated that

> As new assessments are implemented and revised over the next several years, it
>
> will be important to examine them against the broader goals of the CCSS,
>
> partially the vision of a college and career-ready graduate, and to insist that such
>
> goals be included in one way or another in the high stakes evaluation system. (p.
>
> 30)

However, some teachers have expressed that the benchmark standards are

becoming overwhelming and ineffective, as students are required to learn the entire new

system of standards before they can achieve success within the academic program. Due

to this, teachers are resisting efforts by school administrators to apply benchmark

standards for more subjects. In addition, students are also exposed to a plethora of different teaching strategies, which can make it difficult for teachers to make long-term progress in any particular area (Alivernini, 2013; Burke, 2010; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). Research by Alivernini (2013) and other researchers, including Zimmerman and Smit (2014) and Burke (2010), suggested that this problem could be addressed with new teacher training, to enhance teacher skills. The report also suggested increasing teachers' salaries to give teachers future incentives (Alivernini, 2013). Portela, Camanho, and Borges (2012) agreed with Alivernini that teachers should be offered an increased salary as an incentive to encourage them to learn new teaching skills and bridge the gap in their teaching methods.

This research study indicated that there was a problem in the South Florida high school, which became the main focus of this study. The school needed to implement the state's secondary benchmarks. Secondary benchmarks are subcategories of standards that are taken from the primary benchmark standards set by the state. The students were given pre-tests at the beginning of the year and mid-tests in the middle of the year. The test results indicated that students did not comprehend the subjects they had been studying. The evidence from both pre-tests and mid-year tests illustrated that the students' performances were weak in math, world history, and physical education, among other subjects.

The test results from this researchers study site revealed that reading teachers were not using the secondary benchmarks. This became a concern with the school's principal and with administrators who spearheaded the implementation of secondary

benchmarks. The evidence from the tests indicated teachers should use the secondary benchmarks, as this practice could be beneficial to the students across multiple content areas.

Background and Justification

The relevance of this study is evident in the literature review, as Polikoff and Porter (2014) explained the non-usage of secondary benchmark standards by faculty and teachers within different subjects' content area and it was illustrated that teachers had not utilized these benchmark standards to their students. Diagnostic tests exposed a number of students' weaknesses and their inability to perform on state tests (South Florida School District [SFSD], 2015a). Students are required to master standardized tests by the state's educational department. School districts and administrators demand that teachers follow the educational department platforms so that the students will be able to compete globally.

The Research Problem

To attain information, the researcher gathered data from a set of winter and fall diagnostic tests; this information was gathered from a South Florida public high school utilized for this study. In regards to the winter diagnostic test, students earned 1,395 points out of a possible total of 3,450. In regards to the fall diagnostic test, students earned 1,107 points out of a possible total of 2,714. This study was intended to assist in ameliorating the school's low test scores (SFSD, 2015a).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

There are some deficiencies in the evidence, and the results revealed that there is

a need for improvement (Hurt, 2003). The students' lack of proficiency in certain content areas was exposed and confirmed by the tests, which demonstrated that both the fall and winter diagnostic tests indicated that students were inadequately prepared for their future (Hurt, 2003).

The level of difficulty from the state's diagnostic tests ranged from easy, to average, to challenging. For the fall diagnostic test, the students' scored 8% (2/24) on the easy level tests and scored 58% (14/24) on the average level tests. In addition, students scored 29% (7/24) for the challenging level tests and earned 1,107 points out of a possible total of 2,714, or 41%. It is important to note that there were 118 students per teacher. In regards to the winter diagnostic test, the students scored 13% (4/30) on the easy tests, 63% (19/30) on the average tests, and 23% (7/30) on the challenging tests. Therefore, the students earned 1,395 points out of a possible total of 3,450 or 40%. It is pertinent to illustrate that there were 115 students per teacher (SFSD, 2015a). These results have been replicated in several categories, particularly word recognition and comprehension.

An in-depth review was conducted based on the diagnostic test results. As these areas of weakness were exposed in both tests, it is evident that the school and those involved, including the students are facing a massive problem. After further analysis, the researcher was able to determine that although these instructors have been working and interacting with students, the test results are the same, due to the lack of proficiency with the secondary benchmarks.

Audience

The target audience of this study comprises of teachers, administrators, parents, and other researchers. These stakeholders will be able to gain more information on the standards as the curriculum broadens and the secondary benchmarks from the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) are implemented. The target audience can utilize the results of this study in their own schools to improve student proficiency in reading comprehension on the state's standardized tests. This research will provide useful information for teachers, administrators, state lawmakers, and parents of high school students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the alignment of secondary benchmarks, in high school curriculum, across content areas. The point is to create a package of standard initiatives that will help align school-wide secondary benchmarks with literacy standards, to improve reading comprehension, and to address the students' needs. The study also illustrates where the lack of implementing benchmarks has created learning deficiencies for students. However, the learning deficiencies for these students reveal a decline in their literacy skills, while their reading comprehension skills have increased.

The secondary benchmark system has exposed ineffective teaching practices. This has been displayed as some teachers ignored the secondary benchmark standards, which caused problems for students and administrators. This study demonstrates that both administrators and faculty members need to re-examine their utilization of standards for

teaching. The approach used by teachers left out parts out of the curriculum and resulted in students failing literacy and comprehension. The winter and fall diagnostic tests illustrated that a large percentage of students lacked the skills to compete globally (SFSD, 2015a).

Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to understand the secondary benchmarks system, as seen through the experiences of reading teachers, content area teachers, and administrators of a public high school.

Central Research Question. To what extent does aligning teachers' use of secondary benchmarks within other content areas improve student achievement?

The following sub questions helped the researcher understand how both reading teachers and content area teachers implement reading benchmarks across the curriculum:

Research Question 1. What are the teachers' experiences with the secondary benchmarks system?

Research Question 2. What are the administrators' experiences with the secondary benchmarks system?

Research Question 3. What are the challenges or successes of the implementing the secondary benchmark system?

Research Question 4. What impact will implementing the secondary benchmark system have on student achievement across all curriculums?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are provided.

General education teachers in this study will be interchangeable with content area teachers. These teachers are participants at the research site who teach all general courses except reading.

Implementation of policy is defined by Hemmer, Madsen, and Torres (2013) as "the impact of laws and mandates the compliance or behavior, consistent with what the rules prescribe" (p. 659). This means that policy should be adhered to as it affects the well-being of students.

Reading literacy is defined by Alivernini (2013) as "variables that affect children's reading performance" (p. 401). This relates to the teaching of standards by educators within the classroom.

Secondary benchmark standards are subcategories of standards that are derived from the primary benchmarks set by the state (Hurt, 2003). When appropriate information is used by teachers, students' abilities are enhanced, and they can achieve mastery (SFSD, 2015a).

Student achievement is defined by growth, knowledge, mastery, and gains (SFSD, 2015a).

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the topic and research problem, research setting, background and justification, deficiencies in the evidence, audience, definition of terms, purpose of study, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature as it relates to the theoretical framework, constructivist model/theory, implementation of benchmarks, teachers' attitudes toward using secondary

benchmarks, comparison of studies, bridging gaps using secondary benchmarks, possible

improvement, personal insights showing effectiveness of secondary benchmark studies,

the need for further study, and the research questions. Chapter 3 illustrates the

description of the methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 discusses the analysis of the

data, results, and findings of the research conducted. Chapter 5 discusses anticipated

outcomes, limitations, delimitations, implications, conclusions, and recommendations for

suggested future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The indirect consequences of accountability measures when teachers' performances are lacking the basic skills or knowledge, which is needed to impart ideas, theories, and or the methodology to their students so that learning acquisition can be achieved. Olivant (2015) explained that a curriculum is most effective in improving student achievement when it is designed and developed by those who use and implement changes, including the alignment of secondary benchmark standards in other content areas. This literature review illustrates teachers' perceptions of the secondary benchmark standards, in addition to teachers who are inadequately teaching their students these benchmark standards by leaving out sections of the curriculum. Furthermore, this literature examines essential information, which relates to the exclusion of these benchmark standards and the alignment across other content areas. Virtue (2015) suggested that these practices or decision making are becoming more eminent with the increase in accountability policies targeting students' reading performances.

Theoretical Perspective and Reading Literacy

Teachers in various content areas, including math, history, physical education, and other subject areas, believe these secondary benchmarks are unrelated to their students' achievement. This theoretical framework covers methods in which teachers can implement the secondary benchmark standards. The Florida high school utilized in this study had a great deal of difficulty with their faculty; however, the administrators wished to address the subject to increase student achievement. The theoretical framework for

this research examined the approach and the perspective of reading literacy standards as these benchmarks correspond to helping students in other content areas.

The study conducted by Polikoff and Porter (2014) illustrated their knowledge, ideas, and thoughts on the subject of benchmarks and standards. Polikoff and Porter agreed that there is a commonality in how teachers are teaching benchmarks to students. This 2014 study indicated that teachers are not utilizing the secondary benchmarks, which are mandated by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) (2015). The literature review indicated that the problem was common with teachers who taught in the South Florida high school that was studied. However, these behaviors and practices also occur in different states and different school districts; for example, New York City, Dallas, Denver, Charlotte- Mecklenburg County, Memphis, and Hillsborough County in the State of Florida (Polikoff & Porter, 2014).

The literature review further illustrated the need for quality teaching strategies by comparing and contrasting results of different studies (Alivernini, 2013; Burke, 2010; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). This study site examined that the exclusion of these secondary benchmarks from the classroom. Secondary benchmarks could be used to identify the students who are failing, based on the results of the fall and winter diagnostic tests. A sample was drawn from the six districts mentioned earlier—New York City, Dallas, Denver, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Memphis, and Hillsborough County in the State of Florida (Polikoff & Porter, 2014). There were over 701 teachers who taught at the targeted grade level and subject areas. Out of that number, 388 (55%) signed up for the study. Of that number, 278 (72%) completed the teacher survey. Many

participants were interested in using the secondary benchmarks (Polikoff & Porter, 2014).

The related statistics mentioned earlier in this segment of the research were taken from both winter and fall diagnostic tests. For the winter diagnostic, students earned 1,395 points out of a possible 3,450. For the fall diagnostic, the students earned 1,107 points out of a possible 2,714. This study can help improve the schools' low comprehension attributes of student performance (SFSD, 2015a). The researchers created a quantitative report to show a problem with non-compliance of benchmark standards (SFSD, 2015a, 2015b). There was a correlation between the number of students that failed the winter diagnostic (60%) and the number who failed fall diagnostic (59%) (SFSD, 2015a). The evidence indicated that the students were inadequately prepared, in regards to the state's mandated benchmark standards. However, the implementation of various teaching strategies relies on the information given from teachers within the curriculum. The information from the test exposed the student's inability to make gains. The teachers, the principal, administrators, and other instructional faculties, along with school board members from the district all need to work together to conduct further study.

Constructivist Model/Theory

Theorists Good and Brophy (1995) explained that the *Constructivist Theory* deals with the way in which knowledge or new information is processed. Good and Brophy indicated that this theory traces its roots back to John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and as far back as Socrates. The term *constructivist* is quite new, but other researchers (Good & Brophy, 1995) are using the theory's implications. Good and Brophy stated that if students retain

some personal interest in what they study, then they are more likely to retain the

knowledge long term. Uredi (2013) illustrated that a constructivist approach establishes

an efficient learning environment by using student-centered learning and improving

student motivation. Moallem (2001) extended that the theory of constructivists

demonstrates references to systematic development by using learning and instructional

theory to ensure the quality of instruction. To further acquire learning theory, the entire

process of students' learning needs, goals, and development should be evaluated before

any trial is utilized within an instructional system. In addition, instructional design

models are guidelines or moreover a set of strategies, which are based on theories that

suggest best practices (Moallem, 2001).
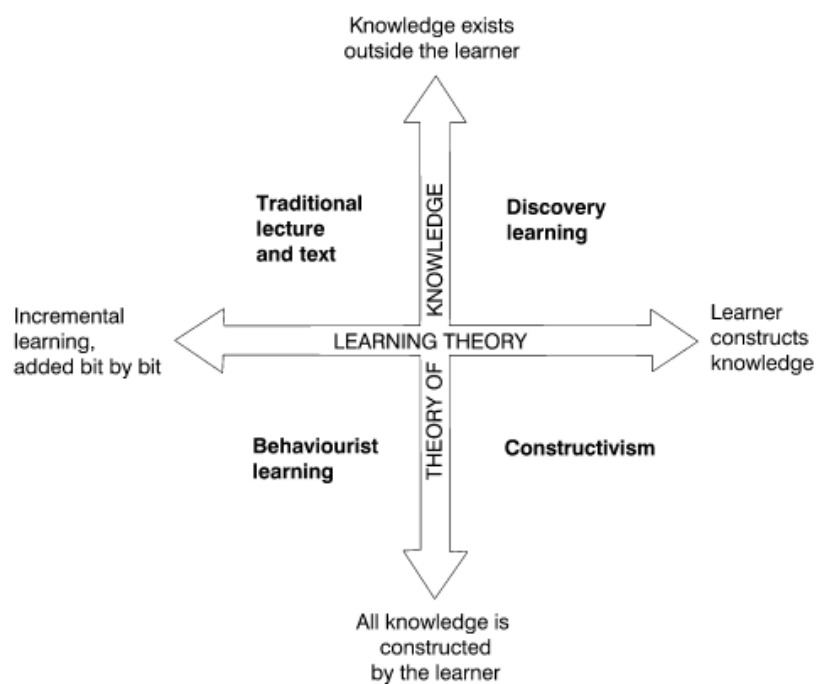
Figure 1. Four Possible Combinations of Learning Theory and Epistemology.

    Learning theory not only provides a description that correlates with learning

conditions of various learning outcomes. However, it also involves cognitive science that

contributes and emphasizes with a learning schema that organizes the structure of

knowledge. Cognitive science and constructivism are equally rooted in social

psychology and social learning paradigms (see Figure 1).

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher's focus is providing an environment

where students can interact with each other, in ways that relate to their lessons (Uredi

2013). Students are more likely to remember things that they attach meaning to. The

interactions in constructivist-style classrooms help students acquire knowledge in a

deeper and more meaningful way (Uredi 2013). Uredi (2013) and Jonassen, McAleese,

and Duffy (1993) agreed that teachers who are taught this approach would be able to help

their students learn more efficiently, and retain more of what they learn. This is

illustrated based on The Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model by Jonassen et al.

(see Figure 2).
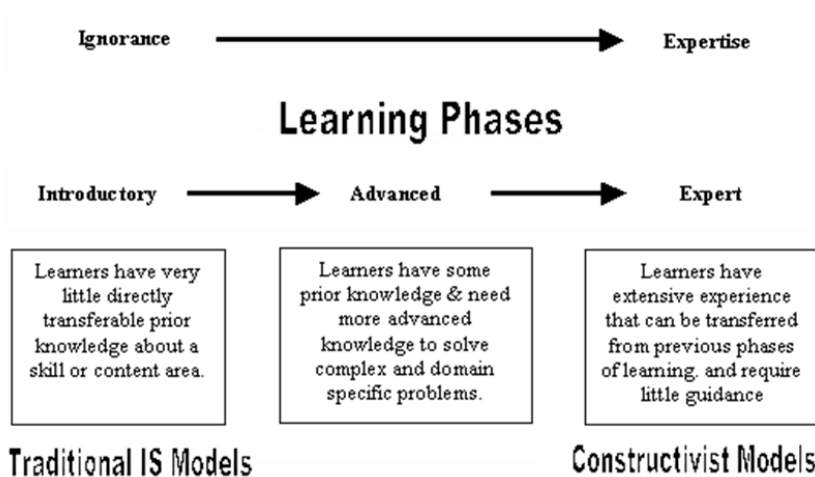
Figure 2. The Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (Jonassen, McAleese, & Duffy, 1993).

Research on education tends to focus more on students than on teachers.

According to Yager (1991), learning should be viewed as an active process that occurs within the students themselves. The learning process is also influenced by the teachers and the schools (Yager, 1991). Therefore, reforms should be implemented to encourage teachers to think more about the learning processes. Moallem (2001) further explained that teachers believe that knowledge acquisition is better served when instructional techniques are in alignment with instructional design models and that constructivist learning environment has been promoted as most effective, as this would lead to the advancement of the learning stage of knowledge acquisition.

Benchmark Standards

According to Reed (2015), the term *benchmark* encompasses various short-term assessments that may be administered at specified intervals to compare students' current performances to an expected level of achievement, or to track students' success on summative or formative assessments. Benchmark standards are used by various organizations to measure progress against similar objectives as these benchmark standards that have been used by educators to assess students, are no different then from those utilized in various other organizations (Applebee, 2013). Teachers are asked to review the benchmark standards every day in their curriculum, and it is their responsibility to determine whether the benchmark standards are being utilized appropriately and what they are intended to measure (Burke, 2013).

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, benchmark standards were created to illustrate teacher accountability (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2011). In accordance with the state's educational

system, benchmarks are further utilized to establish baseline proficiency and to identify the level or types of instructional support that students require (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012). Salmon and Ettrich (2012) and Burke (2004) explicated that educational benchmarks systems are used to monitor growth in students learning and language acquisition, as well as for teachers. In addition, the benchmarks are used as transitional points between grades, schools, and programs to inform stakeholders and administrators of instructional decisions (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012).

Benchmarks are designed to be utilized as a tracking and monitoring system to report proficiency and deficiency of students in various subject areas includes reading, English-language, and math (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012). According to Reed (2015), there are two different types of benchmark standards commonly utilized in the United States: (a) those that are created independently by various commercial companies, and (b) those that are created at the local level, using either original items or released versions of previously administered state tests.

Primary Benchmarks

The primary benchmarks used by the State of Florida, work as our governing benchmarks system. They were adopted from Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the National Governors Association (NGA) (Linn, 2014). These benchmark standards are the guidelines to create the curriculum utilized by school districts and individual schools. This standards-based curriculum is used by the schools' literacy departments to teach students under the guidance of the FLDOE (Linn, 2014). A state's primary benchmark system is valuable to school districts because it is the official reading

assessment tool (Reed, 2015). The state accountability standards continue to reveal the

teaching aspect of teachers, as the primary benchmarks consist of 28 rows of information,

it allows teachers to create and provide a higher-level overview of information. The

benchmarks contained various stands from the 28 rows of information, as it is broken

down as an introduction to the benchmarks when it is introduced to students by their

teachers (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012).

Reed (2015) explained that benchmarks suggest both what to teach, and how to

teach it, and this is useful for schools when they are creating annual priorities. Reed

further clarified that the content and the method utilized in classrooms should be changed

to align with state accountability standards. Lampert (2001) further felt that "the

establishment of a classroom culture that can support studying is a fundamental element

of teaching practice" (p. 53). Although Lampert was involved with the standards

movement, she also had an interest in studying professional teaching standards as well.

Having a better understanding of how to create a learning environment, while teaching

standards will be beneficial for student success (Lampert, 2001; Reed, 2015).

Secondary Benchmarks

The FLDOE utilizes secondary benchmark standards to determine what educators

should teach each day. Students who are not taught using the secondary benchmark

standards are unlikely to succeed in the diagnostic tests. A large number of students at

this researchers study site failed reading literacy in the winter diagnostic test (SFSD,

2015a). The research from the study site shows that students at this south Florida high

school lacked literacy skills across different content areas including math, world history,

science, physical education, and music (SFSD, 2015a). Students lacked the comprehension skills needed to understand various subjects (SFSD, 2015a). Virtue (2012) stated that numerous research studies found that a moderate to strong correlation between fluency and standardized measure focus on their concerns regarding the utilization of benchmarks which assessed comprehension in consideration to the states reading assessment. Reardon, Valention, and Shores (2012) also indicated that the students' performances that are relative to the benchmark standards and proficiency going back to the reading skills of students during elementary and middle school years.

Reed (2015) demonstrated that teachers were not interested and students were disconnected from the teacher. Furthermore, the students did not understand the secondary benchmarks, which resulted in them failing. Reed further explained that this may have developed despite the fact that teachers reportedly examined the official state assessment. Based on the diagnostic test in this study, the reliability and the predictive validity of secondary benchmarks were not called into question (Reed, 2015). An agreement with FLDOE, Reed, and the Michigan Department of Education Board members stated that secondary benchmarks standards are critical in helping students become college and career ready.

Salmon and Ettrich (2012) argued that the use of secondary benchmark standards and the proficiency of using the standards can and will identify the levels or types of students based on the standardized assessment. It establishes a baseline that is currently used to support the learning acquisition of students at the English-language proficiency level. The ongoing report stated that the use of benchmark standards is used at a

transitional point between grades, schools, and programs to inform administrators to make instructional decisions (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012). Secondary benchmark standards were designed to be used by teachers of English language learning as well as K-12 teachers who do not see themselves as English as a second language (ESL) teachers. The benchmark standards are used to support assessing, monitoring, tracking, and reforming language proficiency (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012). In addition, secondary benchmark standards also are utilized in lesson planning for explicit instruction. However, the benchmark is organized and is utilized around four specific strands, (a) listening, (b) speaking, (c) reading, and (d) writing, which are based on the students' age and the appropriateness of language development. The main purpose of this study was the reading aspect, which involved decoding and the recognition of vocabulary sentence structure and words that form and represents ideas. The key aspect of comprehension suggests word recognition and the constructing of meaning from words in a varied context (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012). The competences of benchmark standards indicate that fluency in reading is effective to speaking as well as pronunciation. As students understand the benchmark standards, they are being taught they are expected and encouraged to develop word count to measure language proficiency (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012).

Secondary benchmark standards are reflected on the development using academic language which is expected to increase from one grade level or division to the next. This means that the reading proficiency assessment is required to have students read passages of text, retell it, and answer questions informally with their teacher. Their teacher can

then assess their reading proficiency using the secondary benchmark standards with the understanding of formal reading, decoding, and comprehension assessment (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012).

Secondary Benchmark Standards in Various States

The researcher reviewed other states' secondary benchmark data systems including California, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, and Texas, along with Florida's database. The representatives of these states' systems demonstrated a great deal of similarity in following the CCSS, except Texas. In addition, these states are considered leaders in education, and their students' demographic population is similar to the school district used in this study. These findings give the researcher a reason to include these states and use their information in this study (McShane, 2014).

California. California is another leading state in education, especially on issues that deal with cultural diversity. The students of California; are taught by teachers, who utilize various benchmark standards, and the education curriculum and educational structure are similar to many other states that use the CCSS. California, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York utilize the same benchmark standards. The structure and patterns in each state follow these key benchmark standards and their subcategories: (a) key ideas and details, (b) craft and structure, (c) integration of knowledge and ideas, and (d) range of reading and level of text complexity (California State Board of Education, 2013). The following standards offer the focus for basic instruction.

Key ideas and details. This set of standards requires students to read texts closely

and determine what evidence is used to support an author's main ideas and therefore, students draw logical inferences as they study the texts. Students are also taught to draw conclusions about what is true or false, as they analyze central ideas and themes. In addition, students should be able to analyze the author's unstated point of view from the text, while making logical connections and determining the meaning (California State Board of Education, 2013). Students are also taught to determine two or more ideas and provide an objective summary of the text.

Craft and structure. In this set of standards, students are taught to utilize the meaning of words to create an understanding of key terms, for an example, which includes analysis of the Federalist No.10 by James Madison (Kernell, 2003). Students are required to view the document in their junior and senior years of high school. In addition, the California State Board of Education (2013) explained that using this standard allows students to develop their ideas when analyzing the author's claim and point of view. Viewing the author's rhetoric gives students an understanding of the author's persuasiveness. Students are taught to analyze the use of text features including graphics, headers, captions, and functional work place documents.

Integration of knowledge and ideas. This set of standards requires students to evaluate texts from diverse media formats. Therefore, students are required to assess reasoning related to constitutional principles and legal documents, including the U.S. Supreme Court, the Declaration of Independence, The Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln's inaugural address. Students also view texts such as Martin Luther King's letter from Birmingham Jail and Lincoln's Gettysburg's address.

Range of reading and level of text complexity. The final set of standards requires students to read and comprehend more complex texts, as students are expected to be college and career ready. The CCSS state that by the end of 12th grade, students should be able to read and comprehend complex literature within a specific range. Alternatively, teachers can use scaffolding, as needed, at the high-end range (California State Board of Education, 2013).

Florida. There are 15 different types of benchmarks that are related to the literacy reading standards. These benchmarks are divided into five reporting categories: (a) key idea and details literature instructional, (b) craft and structure literature instructional, (c) integration of knowledge and idea literature instructional, (d) language and editing literature informational, and (e) report based writing.

The key idea and details literature instructional. This first set of reading standards emphasizes students' ability to identify key ideas and themes in a text, whether literary, informational, primary, or foundational. The focus of this first set of standards is on *reading to understand*, during which students focus on *what* the text says (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). The premise is that students cannot delve into the deeper (implicit) meaning of any text if they cannot first grasp the surface (explicit) meaning of that text. Beyond merely identifying these ideas, readers must learn to see how these ideas and themes develop and evolve over the course of the text. Such reading demands that students know how to identify, evaluate, assess, and analyze the elements of the text for their importance, function, and meaning within the text (Burke, 2013).

Craft and structural literature instructional. The second set of standards builds

on the first, focusing not on *what* the text says but *how* it says it. The emphasis here is on the text analysis; therefore, it is how texts are made to serve and function to achieve their purposes. These standards ask readers to examine the choices the authors of the texts made regarding words and sentence and paragraph structure, and how these choices contribute to the meaning of the text and the author's larger purpose. Inherent in the study of craft and structure is how these elements interact with the ideas outlined in the first three standards (Burke, 2013).

   Integration of knowledge and idea literature instructional. This third set of standards might be summed up as: *reading to extend or deepen one's knowledge.* In this set of standards, students are taught to compare what a range of sources have said about a subject over time and across different media. In addition, these standards emphasize the importance of being able to read the arguments. Students are taught to identify the claims that texts have made and to evaluate the evidence used to support those claims, regardless of the media. Finally, these standards require students to analyze the choice of medium that the author selected, and to consider the effect that those choices have on ideas and details. Thus, if a writer integrates words, images, and video in a mixed media text, readers should be able to examine how and why the author did that, for stylistic and rhetorical purposes (Burke, 2013).

   Range of reading and level of text complexity. To become college and career ready, students must grapple with exceptional works whose range extends across genres, cultures, and centuries. Such works offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students' thinking and writing. Along with high-quality

contemporary works, these texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. documents, the classics of American literature, and dramas of Shakespeare, to show the range and text complexity. Through the wide and deep reading of literature and literary nonfiction, students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, as well as the ability to evaluate intricate argument; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts (Burke, 2013).

Massachusetts. The State of Massachusetts' secondary benchmark standards have many similarities to Florida's benchmark standards. The State of Massachusetts mentioned that College and Career Readiness expectations (CCR) also involve reading standards of informational text for upper-level students. This involves the same four reporting categories used by the State of Florida, which include (a) key ideas and details; (b) craft and structure; (c) integration of, knowledge and ideas; and (d) range of reading level of text complexity.

Key idea and details. This first standard requires students to be able to cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support the analysis drawn from the text. Students are also taught to identify central ideas that develop over the course of the text, including how to analyze the author's ideas and how to draw connections between them (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2011).

Craft and structure. The second set of standards requires students to determine the meaning of words and phrases, as they are used in the text. This includes figurative, connotative, and technical meanings. Students are taught how to analyze the impact of specific word choices, which may include the author's tone, ideas, the point of view, or

purpose in a text. In addition, students are taught to analyze the author's use of rhetoric to advance their point of view (Burke, 2013).

Integration of knowledge and ideas. The third set of standards requires students to analyze various pieces of writing that discuss the same subjects, but in different mediums. For example, students could study a person's life story in both print and multimedia and explain how the accounts differed. Students are taught to evaluate specific claims in the text and to assess whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is sufficient. Students should be able to identify false statements and fallacious reasoning, as well as be able to analyze seminal historical documents and significant literary documents. Some examples of these important documents include Washington's Farewell Address, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms Speech, and Martin Luther King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail (Burke, 2013).

Range of reading level of text complexity. The fourth and final set of standards state that by the end of every grade level, students should be able to comprehend literary nonfiction at specific ranges of complexity. This should occur in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, with complexity increasing at each grade level, which can be achieved with scaffolding, as needed, at the high end of the range (Burke, 2013).

Michigan. Michigan's Benchmark Standards are also very similar to the benchmark standards of Florida. However, Michigan's standards serve as an outline that deals with learning expectations for Michigan students. Michigan has stated that the local districts should have access to a broad set of resources to develop their local curriculum and assessments. Michigan's standards are based on a platform that measures

how well schools provide opportunities for their students to be college and career ready.

Local districts in Michigan use various measures to assess how well students learn

required content. The four reporting categories for Michigan's Secondary Benchmark

Standards are: (a) key ideas and details, (b) craft and structure, (c) integration of

knowledge and ideas, and (d) range of reading and level of text complexity (Michigan

Department of Education, 2010).

      Key ideas and details. The first set of standards pertains to how students utilize

their understanding to cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support and analyze

texts. Furthermore, students are taught to draw inferences from the texts, in addition, to

being required to determine the central idea of text development over the course of the

text. Moreover, students must be able to analyze how the authors unfold their ideas,

including the order in which the points are introduced, and finally, have the ability to

explain the connections that they have drawn between texts (Michigan Department of

Education, 2010).

      Craft and structure. The second set of standards relates to how students

determine the meaning of words and phrases, which includes figurative language,

connotative, and technical terms. Furthermore, students are required to analyze the

cumulative impact of specific word choices on their meaning and tone. In addition,

students are to taught to (a) analyze the difference between the language of court opinions

and that of a newspaper, (b) make references that relate to the author's ideas and how

those ideas were developed and refined by a particular sentence, paragraph, or larger

portion of the text, (c) determine an author's point of view and their use of rhetoric to

advance that point of view (Michigan Department of Education, 2010).

   Integration of knowledge and ideas. The third set of standards requires students

to read various pieces of writing on the same subject that were written in different

mediums. Students are then asked to determine which details were emphasized in each

account, such as a person's life story in both print and multimedia. Furthermore, students

are taught to evaluate arguments and assess whether the reasoning is valid and the

evidence is relevant and sufficient (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007). Some

examples of this include significant historical documents, such as Washington's Farewell

Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, Martin Luther

King Jr.'s Letter from a Birmingham Jail (Burke, 2013).

   The range of reading levels of text complexity. The fourth set of standards

requires students to be able to read texts of varying complexity, based on their grade

level. Students in grades nine and ten should be able to read and comprehend complex

nonfiction texts, with scaffolding utilized as needed at the high end of the range, whereas

students in 11th or 12th grade should be able to analyze text and cite strong and thorough

textual evidence to support their analysis. Students should be able to draw inferences

from the text, which includes, determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Moreover, students should be capable of understanding an author's point of view or

purpose and have the ability to point out rhetoric that is particularly effective.

Furthermore, students should be taught to evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts,

such as the application of the U.S. Constitution and principles of legal reasoning

(National Assessment Governing Board, 2008). Some examples of this include the U.S.

Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents. In addition, students are required to

analyze documents of historical and literary significance; including the Declaration of

Independence, the preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln's second

Inaugural Address. By the end of 11th grade, students should demonstrate the ability to

read and comprehend literary nonfiction in their college career readiness text. In 12th

grade, scaffolding should be used, as needed, at the high end of the range (Michigan

Department of Education, 2010).

New York. New York State's Secondary Benchmarks are similar to those in

Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, and California. Each of those states have four

reporting categories that are similarly worded. These reporting categories are

standardized within the CCSS and within the states that has been previously mentioned in

this research. The reporting categories are: (a) key ideas and details; (b) craft and

structure; (c) integration of knowledge and ideas; and (d) range of reading and level of

text complexity. New York State's Benchmark Standards emphasize specific content

within the first and third reporting category of their benchmark standards and the

emphasized phrases are italicized (New York State P-12 Common Core Standards, 2011).

Key ideas and details. The first set of standards for New York State requires

students to *develop factual, interpretive, and evaluate questions for further exploration of*

the topic(s). Students should also be able to (a) cite strong and thorough textual evidence

to support what the text has stated explicitly, as well as draw inferences from the text, (b)

determine the central ideas of the text and analyze that idea's development over the

course of the text, (c) shape and refine specific details and provide an objective summary

of the text. This can be accomplished by drawing connections between ideas as they are introduced and developed (New York State P-12 Common Core Standards, 2011).

Craft and structure. The second set of standards requires students to be able to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, as figurative, connotative, and technical meanings can affect specific word choice. Students should also be able to (a) analyze ideas or claims that are developed and refined by a particular sentence, paragraph, or larger portion of the text, (b) determine an author's point of view, and (c) to consider the author's use of rhetoric to advance that point of view (New York State P-12 Common Core Standards, 2011).

Integration of knowledge and ideas. The third set of standards requires students to read various pieces of writing on the same subject that were written in different mediums. Students are then asked to determine which details were emphasized in each account, such as a person's life story in both print and multimedia. In addition, students are taught to evaluate arguments made in a text and assess whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient. *Students should be able to read, annotate, and analyze informational texts on topics related to diverse and non-traditional cultures and viewpoints. Students are taught to develop factual, interpretive questions for further exploration of the topic.* Students in the eleventh and twelfth grade are also taught to analyze complex documents from U.S. history such as Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, and Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech (New York State P-12 Common Core Standards, 2011).

Range of reading level of text complexity. The fourth set of standards state that

students should demonstrate the ability to comprehend complex material and should be able to read at specific levels for specific grade ranges. Therefore, students that are between 9th and 10th grade should be able to read and comprehend literary nonfiction texts that have great complexity and scaffolding should be used as needed at the high end of the range. The same procedure is used for 11th and 12th graders, except having their CCR expectations (New York State P-12 Common Core Standards, 2011).

The states that have been discussed utilize the same CCSS to teach students. In these states, students are taught using multiple reporting categories in similar or the same language (New York State P-12 Common Core Standards, 2011).

Texas. The State of Texas does not follow the same CCSS within their educational system as those states that have been previously mentioned in the researcher's literature, as Texas still utilizes an older format to educate their students. Rather Texas utilizes the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Part 11 and Chapter 110. Furthermore, it is important to note that Texas was the first state to implement the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in the early 2000s. Information needed for this study was gathered from a subchapter of the Texas Education Agency regarding this state's benchmark system (TEA, 2011).

Texas utilizes the following reporting categories: §110.31. English Language Arts and Reading, English 1(1 credit). §110.32: English Language Arts and Reading, English 11(1 credit), §110.33: English Language Arts Reading, English 111(1 credit), §110.34. English Language Arts and Reading, English 1V (1 credit), and §110.47. Reading 1, 11, and 111 (.5 to 3 credits). The key sets of standards in these categories are: Knowledge

and Skills, Reading/Comprehension of Literary Devices, Theme and Genre, Poetry, Drama, and Fiction (TEA, 2011).

110.31. English Language Arts Reading, English 1. The first set of standards is defined as the English Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), where students are taught to read and understand an array of texts. The Public Education Goal One of the Texas Education Code §4.002 indicates that children who are in the public educational school system should demonstrate exemplary performance in writing the English language. This mixture of both reading and English is meant to help students, who are English Language Learners (ELLs), make sense of unfamiliar words. The idea is that developing spelling and grammatical conventions of academic language produce better readers. In addition, scaffolding can be used as a support mechanism to promote understanding (TEA, 2011).

Knowledge and skills. Texas Education Code §28.022(h) explicates that each school district in Texas should foster the continuation of the tradition of teaching. The State of Texas has a history of using the free enterprise system in regular subject matters and in reading courses, as well as in the adoption of textbooks (TEA, 2011). This set of standards also requires students to be able to read and understand technical and academic English words. For example science, mathematics, social studies, and arts, all use the same core words, derived from Latin, Greek, and other linguistic roots. That stated, students should be able to distinguish between the denotative and connotative meaning of words. Furthermore, students should illustrate the ability to describe the origins and meaning of foreign words or phrases that are frequently written in English (i.e., *caveat,*

emptor, carte blanche, tete a tete, pas de deux, bon appetit, quid pro quo). This mostly applies to second language students so they have a better understanding of vocabulary.

Genre. Students are required to understand ideas such as (a) text, (b) theme, and (c) genre. Therefore, students are taught ways to analyze mythic, classical, and traditional literature from the 20th and 21st centuries. The Texas reporting categories reveal that ELLs should have the same approach to learning figurative expressions that are associated with plot development. In addition, ELLs should be familiar with various authors in the non-English speaking literary traditions (TEA, 2011). Moreover, students should understand the term *nonfiction* and be able to make inferences from diverse structural patterns, and be able to provide evidence from the text. In addition, they should be able to identify factual information. Students should also be able to explain rhetorical texts and analyze warranties and consumer publications.

§110.32. English Language Arts Reading, English 11. The second written standards are very similar to the first ones, as their outlines utilize the same governing codes: Public Education Goal One of the Texas Education Code §4.002, and Texas Education Code, §28.002(h). English Language Arts and Reading, English 11, is formatted with the understanding that students are taught using the same framework and methodology as in English Language Arts and Reading, English One §110.31. Students are taught to determine the meaning of grade-level-appropriate technical English words in multiple content areas, for example, science, mathematics, social studies, and the arts. The core of these words is often derived from Latin, Greek, and other linguistic roots. Students are taught to understand the relationship between word's and origins and its

meaning. This includes foreign words and phrases that are frequently used in English and historical events, such as *glasnost, avant-garde*, and *coup d'état*. Students are expected to evaluate syntax, diction, and the effect of voice, tone, speech, and imagery on literary nonfiction, which includes evaluating ways in which messages are displayed in social media (TEA, 2011).

§110.33. English Language Arts Reading, English 111. The third set of standards is similar to the first two sets; however, the third set conveys information not mentioned within those previous strands. In the third set of standards, students are asked to distinguish between the main ideas and the author's viewpoint without taking a position themselves. Students should demonstrate the ability to analyze inductive and deductive reasoning and explain different ways that a conclusion can be supported. This helps students make logical connections through thematic links. Students should be capable of (a) demonstrating evidence from the text to support their analysis; (b) explaining historical, contemporary, and even political debates; and (c) understand logical fallacies such as non-sequiturs, circular logic, and hasty generalization.

Students are also required to translate from text to graphics and graphics to text, so that they can read and understand information presented in maps, charts, illustrations, graphs, timelines, tables, and diagrams. Students are also taught to use comprehension skills to analyze media, including layout, pictures; typeface in print media, images, text-sound in electronic journalism (TEA, 2011).

§110.34. English Language Arts Reading, English 1V. The fourth set of standards also uses the same procedures and formats laid out in the Texas educational

code §4.002 and §28.002(h). The Texas educational code explains that students in the public education system must demonstrate exemplary performances in reading, writing, and the English language. Students are required to draw conclusions about patterns of organization and hierarchical structures. Students should illustrate their ability to write by using a process that includes planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. In addition, students are taught to plan a first draft by selecting the genre that best conveys their meaning to their audience. Lastly, students should demonstrate their ability to analyze discussion; background reading, personal interests, and interviews to develop a thesis (TEA, 2011).

Students should be capable of writing an engaging story with a well-developed conflict and resolution and one that also contains (a) a theme, (b) non-stereotypical characters with dialogue and suspense that enhances the plot, and (c) sensory details that define the tone or mood. Students are taught to (a) write their story with explicit or implicit themes using literary techniques; (b) produce multimedia presentations that include documentaries, class newspapers, docudramas, textual parodies, and theatrical productions; (c) write an argumentative essay, and a proposal; and (d) oral and written conventions and how they are used in academic language when speaking and writing (TEA, 2011).

§110.47. Reading 1, 11, 111. Reading 1, 11, and 111 are linked to those previously mentioned sections of the Texas educational platform, but without the actual educational code §4.002 and §28.002(h) themselves. These sections of reading deal with students' ability to read instructions while they navigate their academic demands (TEA,

2011).

Knowledge and skills. Students are taught vocabulary and comprehension

strategies that provides them with the opportunity to read with confidence (TEA, 2011).

High school students whose first language is not English are taught to use their native

language as a foundation for English language learning. Students acquire extensive

vocabulary through reading and systematic word study; they use dictionaries, glossaries,

thesauruses, and available technological tools to determine pronunciation of unfamiliar

words. In addition, students expand their vocabulary by reading, viewing, listening, and

discussing synonyms, antonyms, and analogies. Students are also taught test-taking skills

and study skills, such as highlighting, annotation, previewing questions, noticing key

words to employ the process of elimination, and allocating time to follow directions.

Moreover, students are required to use prior knowledge and experiences to generate

relevant and interesting questions. Students are then taught to analyze the process of

cause/effect, compare/contrast, and problem/solution. Lastly, students are encouraged to

read, to increase their knowledge of their own culture, the culture of others, and the

common elements of cultures (TEA, 2011).

Implementation of Benchmark Standards

The implementation of benchmarks is becoming a larger part of the teachers'

curriculum planning, but most teachers are reluctant to implement them. Most

researchers have found that teachers say that secondary benchmarks do not increase their

students' abilities when it comes to reading and writing (Montgomery, 2012; Polikoff &

Porter, 2014). Teachers claim that they are overwhelmed and ignore these benchmarks

when they are planning various subject areas. Montgomery (2012) stated that teachers opt out of implementing secondary benchmarks, and they forget the educational policy set forth by the NCLB. Researchers have indicated that teachers need to implement benchmark standards for both instructional alignment and the pedagogical quality (Polikoff & Porter, 2014). Researchers have also indicated that school districts must do a better job providing teachers with training and incentives to implement the benchmark standards, such as higher salaries (Alivernini, 2012).

Salmon and Ettrich (2012) continued to explain that benchmark standards can be utilized at every grade level. While teachers are reluctant to use benchmarks in their classroom, the interaction with student one-on-one is needed to create partner and trust. Consistently utilizing the benchmark standards work as a governing point with small groups, or the whole class, as it demonstrates competences with students reading proficiency with the state's implementation of NCLB (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012).

Attitudes Toward Using Secondary Benchmarks

Teachers, administrations, and parents should examine their attitudes towards secondary benchmark standards. In addition, the stakeholders closest to the students' learning process should review the standards and the assessment strategies (Horn, 2004). Moreover, schools should form a panel of teachers, administrators, parents, and curriculum specialists that can construct standards and assessments (Horn, 2004). Burke (2004) commented that both parents and teachers should assist students to have a better understanding of the school system as it is designed for not only attending school, but the information that a student can obtain.

Given the circumstances of teacher's attitudes that surround secondary benchmark standards, the deprofessionalizing effect of teachers teaching more standards may further exacerbate their willingness to work, given the fact that NCLB called for accountability on teachers (Olivant, 2015). Halverson (2004) suggested that often one considers the results of various interventions, which provides valuable feedback on what did and did not work, but knowledge received are critical conditions to improve learning for students. However, practical knowledge is vital for school leaders when these teachers do not put forth the effort. Halverson continued to explain that the attitudes of teachers' towards using secondary benchmark standards would influence their teaching practice, while the knowledge used by teachers illustrate that they often lack a principled method for conversion into a trustworthy knowledge base. For example, content area teachers lack the nuances and the skill levels that is needed to apply within the curriculum. Halverson stated that "Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, provides a framework for accessing and communicating" (2004, p. 3). Teachers need to keep into consideration that they are ethically and morally responsible for providing their students with an exceptional education.

Administrators. Administrators are more inclined than teachers to use literacy benchmark standards. Reed (2015) explained that 80% of superintendents and 80% of principals spoke about the usefulness of benchmark assessment, as they were more practical than state tests. In addition, he explained that those secondary benchmarks were relatively useful as classroom-based tests (Reed, 2015). Although most teachers complain that it is overwhelming to teach these literacy standards combined with other

subject areas, the administrators often insist that students should be career and college ready when they leave school (Applebee, 2013; Montgomery, 2012). Reed (2015) elaborated on Montgomery's 2012 statement by saying that teachers were frustrated with having benchmark tests every six weeks in addition to teaching the standards. Montgomery noted that teachers preferred classroom-based tests in which there may be deeper issues involving teacher's perceptions of the benchmark assessments.

Teachers. Teachers' attitudes towards using secondary benchmarks have been overwhelmingly negative. The administrators of the researcher's study site are researching the teachers' judgment. There are some perceived notions that relate to the value of what teachers think students can achieve (Connolly, Klenowski, & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). Other experts, for example, Connolly et al. (2012) agreed that these teaching practices should not have taken precedence in the 21st century, but it is the reality in which students are learning in the classroom. Connolly et al. (2012) mentioned that in recent years there were no checks and balances in place to regulate the system, which demonstrates the validity and reliability of those teachers' judgments.

Fan and Hansmann (2015) argued that the generalizability theory shows that errors occur when students are not being taught these standards. In addition, some teachers may be simply resisting change (Hemmer et al., 2012). Reed (2015) explained the resistance that teachers displayed resulted in them not having to teach additional benchmarks standards. In addition, the teachers had fewer resources available than the teachers who taught literacy standards. This study demonstrated that teachers did not examine the secondary benchmarks.

Comparison of Studies

A comparison of studies showed that benchmark non-usage occurs not only in the south Florida area, but also within other parts of the United States (Fan & Hansmann, 2015; Hemmer et al., 2012). It was important to look at different studies and their methods to determine how other administrators deal with the effective implementation of benchmark standards (Hemmer et al., 2012). The principles of benchmark standards should be taught as one entity, across all content areas in all subjects, and not just a few. Hemmer et al. (2012) illustrated that there was a qualitative study taken from the TEA, and they acknowledged that it was predominantly at-risk students who failed. However, the results exhibited by the students indicated that they did not fail because of the design of the curriculum (Hemmer et al., 2012). Fan and Hansmann (2015) claimed that there is no consensus when it comes to how a teacher should use their curriculum for instruction. They suggested that a teacher can use their curriculum to impart knowledge regardless of how they feel, or what they think is in the best interest of their students. Information within both studies revealed that students are failing, regardless of where they are located in the United States. However, other commonalities in the studies demonstrated that teachers are disengaging from the benchmarks, which leads to students not being prepared for the future.

The data analysis allowed the researcher to make references to the fall and winter diagnostic tests, where the students are failing (SFSD, 2015a). By using different data analyses, the similarities can be viewed in how students reacted to secondary benchmark standards in various settings. One study that was conducted in a South African school

illustrated patterns of teachers not using reading literacy benchmark standards. The study revealed that students lacked distinct learning skills as well as thinking and reasoning ability (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). It was noted by Zimmerman and Smit (2014) that the "optimal achievement within the benchmarks was lower on other achievements within other learning areas" (p. 1).

The findings showed that 13% of students in Grade 4 of the South African school were able to reach the *Low International Benchmark of 400*, which deals with the basic comprehension skills (Zimmerman& Smit, 2014). During the South African school's analysis of benchmarks the school received a score of 175 on a 225-point scale, from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The South African School scored 325 points, 75 points below the Lower International Benchmark of 400 (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014).

The results illustrate that attention is needed to align the curriculum policy and teachers' implementation. Although these students were of elementary level, the concepts were the same in regards to students and their ability to achieve. These researchers explained that the challenges that students face come from the teachers' of instructional practices (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). Zimmerman and Smit (2014) found the same results for low-level students in their study. According to Wendt (2013), teachers should set higher standards so that their students are able to compete globally. The benchmarks that are set forth by the FLDOE would allow students to compete at a global level.

Bridge Gaps Using Secondary Benchmarks

Alivernini (2013) attempted to use secondary benchmarks to bridge the gaps between students' achievement and their teachers' teaching methods. The researcher sees this as an ongoing problem in education based on many years in the profession and having dialogue with colleagues. Alivernini and other researchers, including Zimmerman and Smit (2014), agreed that the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study students performed below international standards. However, the report mentioned that this problem could be addressed with new teacher training to enhance teacher skills. In addition, the report suggested that a method of giving teachers incentives is to increase their salaries. (Alivernini, 2013). Portela et al. (2012) agreed with Alivernini that teachers should be offered an increased salary as an incentive to encourage them to learn new teaching skills and bridge the gap in their teaching methods. Administrators should also be given a chance to develop reading literacy questionnaires data. This independent variable could be another means to bridge the gap, by using the questionnaires to see what works (Alivernini, 2013).

The continual effort to bind the curriculum with benchmark standards is another factor where reading teachers' most often teach with restriction, as they use the specific test like techniques. This is also trivializing the reading process of students or the loss of creativity, imagination, and the result of critical thinking which indirect undermines the curriculum (Olivant, 2015). Using the benchmark standards as it relates to curriculum development will impact what is known to be the implementation or evaluation of great lesson, with series that also stimulate and improved teaching and learning (Willemse,

Dam, Geijsel, Van Wessum, & Volman, 2015).

Possible Improvement

The possibility of improving the current situation within the education system begins with the administrators, followed by the teachers. Therefore, it is crucial that all educators embrace the curriculum and teach all standards to provide their students' academic success. Polikoff and Porter (2014) emphasized that in order to have effective teaching, schools must make reform as one of their central goals. This means that the schools must align with the federal standards and hold teachers accountable. Connolly et al. (2012) stated that the government is still deciding on the curriculum structure. The FLDOE acknowledged that part of their expectation is holding teachers accountable for students' performance, which in turn, demonstrates that improvement is possible, for both teachers and administrators, and therefore work together to agree.

Duplass (2007) suggested that changes in technology will transform American society, and the central goal of education reform should be to find ways of effectively teaching students to deal with those transformations. Educators are considering how to structure a new curriculum that will offer meaningful literacy skills to students (Duplass, 2007).

Duplass (2007) stated that literacy standards should be incorporated across all subjects, as low literacy levels are a common problem. Curriculums should be designed to give students a wide range of useful knowledge, because students in our society tend to be isolated, and have only a small amount of world knowledge, especially students who live in low-income homes and metropolitan communities (Duplass, 2007). Hammond

(2007) suggested that if teachers comply with literacy standards in secondary benchmarks, it would result in an increase in average test scores and a decrease in the student dropout rate

Personal Insights Show Effectiveness on Secondary Benchmark Studies

Hemmer et al. (2013) explained that performance-based standards provide results, if teachers are in line with the teaching curriculum. Teachers should teach students in a more defined manner, while students should become more proactive and motivated within their learning environment (Hemmer et al., 2013; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) stated that students want to be satisfied with the learning process and

> without good feelings about oneself, and without curiosity or motivation, there is little chance for continual cognitive (or even psychomotor) learning. Learners must feel confident about performing the skill or task required, be eager to learn, and feel that what they are being asked to perform is psychologically satisfying. (pp. 141-142)

It is easy to see how teachers are being overwhelmed, and their workload, meetings, and lack of sufficient workshop training should be taken into consideration (Duplass, 2007). Duplass (2007) stated that when teachers are only given direction from the principal, it limits the chance that students will master their curriculum.

Montgomery (2012) suggested that administration should check teachers' curriculums daily and relate it to their standards and further suggested that this should be done randomly while asking questions. The researcher's study illustrated that students

were not adequately instructed in regards to primary or secondary benchmark standards, and the students failed overwhelmingly. Montgomery predicted that more students would fail unless all teachers are brought into alignment with the benchmark standards. This also affects students' grade point averages, their graduation rates, reading, writing, thinking, and their quality of life as they embark in the real world (Burke, 2010; Montgomery, 2012).

Olivant (2015) suggested the in a matter-of-fact theory, which includes the explanation that creates emphasis on *drill-and-kill* skills, which limits teachers' flexibility, as this inhibits the creativity of teachers to improve their students' needs. This is a continuum of detracting students from the opportunities to explore, discover, and develop critical thinking to further develop any personal growth (Olivant, 2015). Focusing on raising test scores as to acquire knowledge is more critical, but the overwhelming emphasis on reading and mathematics are suppressed by teachers who lack creativity, and students who need creativity to think critically, will experience difficulty, and hence a decline is inevitable to at least one subject area (Olivant, 2015).

Need for Further Study

There was a dire need for further study on this topic as it can assist other institutions in the United States, as well as benefit other international platforms. Teachers report that they are overworked and overwhelmed, which are acknowledged by research (Olivant, 2015). In addition, Connolly et al. (2012) revealed that teachers and students have different interpretations of standards. Research data should be used to encourage teachers to teach more efficiently (Olivant, 2015). Salmon and Ettrich (2012)

explicated that benchmark standards can be utilized as a tool to assist classroom teachers in several categories, including (a) illustrative examples, (b) writing samples, (c) speaking videos, (d) tracking sheets, and (e) division level summaries. They further suggested that benchmark standards assist classroom teachers to establish baseline proficiency while focusing on literacy (Salmon & Ettrich, 2012).

In addition, the current dichotomy that has developed between our society and the need for education should be evaluated, as opposed to what the education system has provided to our students (Olivant, 2015). The continuation for future studies should address the current climate, which involves teachers that are reluctant to teach outside of the box. The changes should address the unprecedented, potentially overwhelming teachers that presently teach, because they may lack the training needed to aspire our students day-to-day. Knowledge and skills are diminishing based on the perspectives of the teachers and the students' attitude, as it is also illustrated that an immediate action is needed based on their performances. In addition, more research is needed and should be conducted to increase the knowledge base of our students. Unfortunately, the knowledge and skills, which are required for students to advance, may not be recognized in time to prepare most students who are in high school and set to go to college (Olivant, 2015).

Chapter Summary

The literature review supported aligning teachers' use of secondary benchmarks within content areas. The research revealed that having students prepared adequately with the skills from these secondary benchmarks makes a difference and adds value to the students' achievement (Montgomery, 2012). However, the teachers in the school that

was studied, and in other areas, should consider the needs of students, and how the

students are being taught the benchmark standards. The literature review also referred to

the secondary benchmarks as they appear in the actual classroom practices.

Results will be evident in the classroom if the secondary benchmarks are taught by

teachers who understand the importance of the secondary benchmarks, and how it is

associated with a students' success. In addition, it is imperative that teachers and

administrators remain proactive by observing the effects of educators who adequately

teach their students. As when teachers teach inadequately, students become unmotivated

(Connolly et al., 2012).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

This chapter illustrates the methodology utilized for the case study. Yazan (2015) opined that when conducting a case study, the researchers should have at least 3 cases or groups. There were three targeted groups of educators in this study (a) reading teachers, (b) content area teachers, and (c) administrators. These three groups are experts in their respective field(s): in addition, many teachers have one or more certifications or endorsements in different content/discipline areas. These educators offered their experiences in the secondary benchmark system associated with reading in the public high school system. The focus of this chapter was to describe the (a) setting of the study, (b) participants, (c) instrument, (d) design, (e) procedures, (f) data analysis, (g) ethical considerations, and (h) chapter summary. The methods and procedures utilized to answer the research questions are included. The instrument used in this study was created and reviewed by a panel of experts in reading benchmarks; this supported the validity of the interview protocol questions, which consisted of six open-ended questions. These questions were designed to obtain information from three groups (i.e., case studies) of educators regarding the success of the reading secondary benchmark system in a targeted high school. This benchmark is also known as reading literacy standards.

Setting of the Study

This study was conducted in a high school located in a suburban part of southeastern Florida. The high school predominately consisted of students from the African American community. However, the level of diversity of students was a two-

thirds ratio among other ethnic races, which includes Hispanic, Caucasian, and Asian. The high school was part of a larger school district that housed over 155 schools including 92 elementary, 37 middle, and 26 high schools (see Table 1). However, this study only took place at one high school.

The school utilized in this study was in a school district that was rated "A" by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE). The district recently had an increased student graduation rate of 88.3%, and they also improved their accountability among schools, administrators, and their faculty of teachers. The district built a unique curriculum to suit the advanced literacy needs of students and to minimize reading disabilities among students (SFSD, 2015a, 2015b).

Table 1

Distribution of Public Schools by Level and Use the Secondary Benchmark System

School levels	# of schools	% of schools
Elementary	92	55.8
Middle	37	22.4
High School	29	17.6
Alternative/Special	7	4.2

Participants

The participants in this study included the high school's administrators and

faculty members, therefore, the participants included the principal, assistant principals,

reading teachers, and content area teachers. The demographic characteristics of these

participants are discussed in this chapter. Table 2 illustrates the number of administrators

and teachers who are employed at the study site. In Chapter 4, the total amount of study

participants are displayed in Table 4. Table 3 shows the breakdown of teachers at the

study site and how they compare to the state and district averages with college degree

status.

Table 2

Percent of Teachers Who are Employed at the Study Site by Discipline

Teaching discipline	Sample number	%
Reading teachers	10	6.7
Content area teachers	52	34.9
Administration	6	4.0
Language Arts	18	12.1
Math	20	13.4
Science	15	10.1
Social Studies	17	11.4
Vocational	11	7.4

Table 3

Percent of Teachers Holding Degrees in the Study School Compared to State and District

Degree level	State %	District %	Secondary teacher %	Study site %
Bachelor's	60.71	63.00	59.60	59.6
Master's	35.33	34.50	37.40	31.8
Specialist	2.79	1.22	<1.00	4.6
Doctorate	1.16	1.04	<1.00	4.0

Inclusion criteria. The targeted population or samples were obtained from the database of the National Center for Education Statistic (NCES). The research provided applicable data, which was consistent with the statement of the problem and the research questions mentioned in Chapter 2. The population that the sample was drawn from included demographic information such as age, gender, and ethnicity. The NCES data demonstrates that of the targeted population of 143 teachers, 43 were male, and 100 were female. In addition, 6 administrators were also part of the targeted populace. However, NCES did not reveal or mention these teacher's ethnicities. However, a qualitative approach gave a clear view of the school's data bank as it revealed that the teachers' age ranged from 22 years to 67 years. Their racial ethnicity was also included in the qualitative approach, illustrating one third Black, one third Hispanic, and one-third Caucasian.

Exclusion criteria. This study excluded school employees who do not have

any teaching experience, such as the school's secretary, guidance counselors, cafeteria workers, and maintenance personnel. The study also excluded faculty members who were non-instructional, did not hold a valid teaching certificate, and could not speak about their experiences. Furthermore, this study excluded participants who were not proficient in English or was unable to meet during one-on-one interviews or over the telephone. This study additionally excluded faculty members who did not live within the geographical location of the study and teach in the virtual platform.

Case Study 1: Reading Teachers

The study included ten literacy-reading teachers who belonged to different grade levels and worked under different assistant principals/administrators. The job description of these reading teachers included helping students to develop reading comprehension skills, background skills, and vocabulary skills. The reading teachers also work to foster enthusiasm in their students for learning, in addition to assisting students with disabilities and identifying any disorder related to reading. The responsibilities of the reading teachers include, but are not limited to, common planning as it relates to the benchmark standards and implementing lessons. The reading teachers who participated in this study indicated that they welcomed administrators' support. The ninth grade reading teachers used in this study also shared their perspectives on classroom management, on introducing students to the basics of reading, and on encouraging students to read more advanced work.

The tenth, eleventh, and twelve-grade reading teachers' profiles were similar to those of the ninth grade teachers, in that they are taught to recognize, students with

deficiency in reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. Teachers are expected to recognize and account for students with disabilities, while also teaching the rest of the students, at the same time. Their responsibilities varied and often included a number of tasks, including differentiation of instruction and small group learning (Florida Department of Education, 2015).

Case Study 2: General Education Teachers

The general education teacher sample was a mixture of mathematics, English, history, science, music, and physical education; they also fell in a range of different respective grade level administrations. The teachers' job profile included lesson planning based on their field. These lesson plans varied depending on the subject area, so standards in the study sometimes also varied across different subject areas. Within the content area, teachers were given the "highly qualified" status by having completed their degree programs and having been certified or licensed by the state (Florida Department of Education, 2015).

Case Study 3: Administrators

The target population included the principal of the school, the vice-principal, and five other assistant principals who were overseen by the area superintendent of the schools. The area superintendent's job is to oversee the school's governing body. The administrator's purpose is to fulfill the needs of students and to assist the teachers on the campus. The age of the administrators in this study ranged from 34 to 56 years, of which three were female administrators, and four were male administrators. The study included teachers who were African American, Caucasian American, and teachers

from the Caribbean, all with different cultural ethnicities. The researcher selected

these participants, not just for the research regarding the benchmark system, but for

their cultural and pedagogical differences.

      The principal of the school site is responsible for promoting safety and

providing equity and access to the curriculum. In addition, he/she allocates and

manages the resources that support instruction (Florida Department of Education,

2015). The assistant principals' responsibilities vary because there are two or more

assistant principals in the high school. Their duties include, (a) supporting the

principal in all aspects of administrative duties, (b) promoting safety, (c) providing

equity, (d) access to the curriculum, and (e) allocating and managing the resources that

support instruction (Florida Department of Education, 2015). The principal and

assistant principal have a "highly qualifying" status as they both completed a master's

degree program and also attained additional certification, as required by the State

Board of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2015).

Instrument

      Data was gathered from three case studies, using a set of six open-ended protocol

questions developed by the researcher and the dissertation chair. Data was recorded by

utilizing an audio tape recorder, which was then transcribed. Interviews were held for

case study A, B and C, which comprised of reading teachers, content area teachers, and

administrators. All participants were presented with the same interview protocol

questions.

      Content validity. This study was piloted before it was introduced to actual

participants, to rectify any unclear propositions and the case study was piloted at another high school in the south Florida area. After the questionnaire was piloted, the questions were corrected for ambiguous statements, which was then followed by the actual study that was conducted.

Formative committee. This study was designed to measure secondary benchmark standards across content area. A formative committee was formed, where members were chosen based on their expertise and their experiences in the field of education. There were five members that comprised the formative committee, including two principals, one assistant principal, and two general education teachers.

The first member of the formative committee was a principal/administrator of a predominately African American high school in a rural area. The administrator had 25 years of teaching experience and was responsible for graduating seniors at that high school. For 10 consecutive years, students have graduated at a rate of 87-92%. The second member of the formative committee was a principal at another rural area high school. This principal has retained 95% of teachers' positions at the high school and is an expert in the math field. These teachers are responsible for their student's achievement. Of the graduating seniors, 85% have gone to college.

The third member of the formative committee was an assistant principal, who oversaw ninth-grade students and was also in charge of the curriculum. The assistant principal focused on literacy and reading, and for more than 3 years, fewer students moved into remedial reading courses in the 10th grade. The fourth member of the formative committee was a general education teacher who was a reading teacher for more

than 15 years and had a 75%-88% success rate with students passing the state-mandated standardize test. The fifth and final member of the formative committee was a general literature teacher with certification from The Advanced International Certificate of Education who has been teaching literature for more than 30 years. Based on her certification as it pertains to helping high school students be challenged for college readiness, 90% of her students from overseas passed her class.

Formative committees' feedback. The formative committee reviewed the protocol questions that were given to them and made their recommendations. They identified the validity and reliability of questions, as answers needed to be quantifiable for the study. The committee members suggested that the word "system" in the benchmark system should be changed and to not utilize the word "please" from the suggested questions. Questions three and four were misleading and could have been misinterpreted, and Question 6 was ambiguous and not clear.

The following six open-ended interview protocol questions were finalized after based on feedback from the committee and dissertation chair and committee member:

1. Please take some time to share personal thoughts on the secondary benchmarks system.

2. Can you talk about your experiences with the successes you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

3. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

4. Please explain your understanding of how the implementation of the secondary benchmark system will increase student achievement within your class.

5. Based on your personal experiences, please share your recommendations regarding teaching methods of your curriculum while using the secondary benchmark system.

6. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

Design

This research was designed to be a qualitative study that viewed evidence with routine procedures and utilized data analysis (Yin, 2012). The structure of the research was outlined by the research questions. The study examined secondary benchmark standards between reading teachers and content area teachers, in relation to students' performances. The research was designed so that the similarities between cases could be studied or examined. Yin (2012) suggested that a case study research method is designed to discuss the principles and procedures of that study. The interests of the researcher in this case study is to discover an explanation to align various content area and literacy standards.

Procedures

Data collection procedures. The researcher interviewed 25 teachers, and 6 administrators for this study, who were chosen due to their availability and the unwillingness of other teachers to participate. The researcher requested consent from the district's school board to conduct the research within the region. The anonymity of participants was ensured during the Institutional Review Board process (IRB) by

withholding all the names and descriptors that would have identified the school. IRB

permission was also obtained from the researcher's university. Prior to the study,

approval was granted by the IRB, the institution of the intended site, and the researcher's

university. The school's administrators were contacted prior to the teachers'

participation.

Upon conducting the interview, teachers were notified of the benefits of using

secondary benchmark standards across different content areas. The interviews took place

over a 4-day period. The answers to most of the questions were recorded using a tape

recorder. However, ten teachers preferred to put their answers on paper. This took place

over an additional 3 weeks after the data was initially collected. Each participant was

given an interview protocol question sheet (see Appendix A), and a written form to fill

out that included their demographic information (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis. Participants' responses were analyzed based on the

research protocol questions of the study. Qualitative data was collected and analyzed.

The researcher determined the frequency and response of the participants and searched

for responses that can be used as coded themes as part of the data analysis. Yin (2012)

suggested that the data analysis could begin by systematically organizing the data by

using relationships while conducting the findings. Stake (1995) and Yin (2012) further

stated that several different methods could be utilized including pattern matching,

explanation building, and time series analysis (see Figure 3).
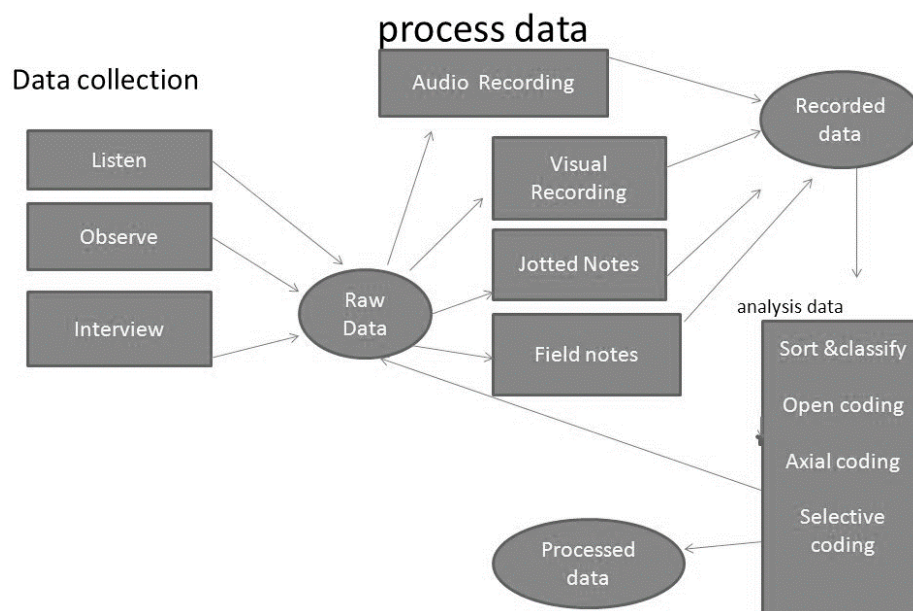
Figure 3. Qualitative Data Process.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher understands that the ethical considerations of the analysis should be considered in the presentation of findings. According to Merriam (1998) and Merriam and Simpson (1995), ethical consideration should be acknowledged in order to safeguard and to protect the rights of participants in regards to the collection of data. The respondent may feel that their privacy has been invaded and may be embarrassed if questions reveal something that they did not want to reveal. To ensure ethical research, the participants must enjoy sharing their knowledge, opinions, or experiences, without being judged or looked upon with bias concerning the topic (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the researcher received the necessary permission prior to researching to ensure authenticity. All participants signed a consent document and all transcripts consent forms, and recordings are stored in a secure vault.

Trustworthiness

One of the researchers' major roles was to focus on trustworthiness to ensure data

was collected as accurately as possible (Merriam, 1998). The researcher presented data

to a panel to validate the findings of the study. The protocol questions were then

reviewed by a panel of experts; was asked to read the transcripts as well as verify the

questions. Moreover, they were asked to select question(s) that were biased and to add or

omit comments. The validity of the data was also checked, based on the review of the

experts' analysis. In qualitative research, the maintenance of true value must be assured.

Trustworthiness shares the same importance as validity in qualitative inquiry (Merriam,

1998). It was important to maintain trustworthiness at the study site while interviews

were being conducted.

Limitations of the Study

Part of the limitations of this study was that participants were teachers who

already may have had knowledge about the secondary benchmark system. Therefore, the

status of these participants was taken into consideration. The surveys were based on the

assumption that the respondents read and understood the questions or items that were

presented to them (Yin, 2012). However, the candidates were selected based on the

condition that they would remain neutral. The school's administrator gave permission to

conduct the survey with the hopes that participants would not try to influence the other

participants in the study. The principal of this South Florida high school did not

participate in this study, due to untimely approval from the school district to conduct the

study, where time was constrained, the interviews were scheduled on the last day of the

school year. In addition, other time constraints included job-related duties and

performances such as school board meetings at the district office, as well as teachers'

requirement of signing documents before leaving for their summer vacation. In addition,

checking teachers' records on the last day of school made it impossible to confirm her

agreement to interview with the researcher.

The participants may have had biased views because of their previous experience

with secondary benchmarks standards. Lastly, the researcher selected participants who

volunteered to be a part of the study and the collection of the data was limited to teachers

who hoped to incorporate secondary benchmark standards into their curriculum.

Delimitations of the Study

The delimitation of the study was the analysis of the data from six open-ended

protocol questions related to secondary benchmark standards. The data was collected for

the research using tape recorders, transcripts, and questionnaires that were presented to

the participants. The study focused on using secondary benchmark standards across other

content areas of study. In addition, this study was solely qualitative in the description

and assumed that teachers would consider the benefit of the benchmark standards, as it

strengthened student performance.

The focus of the study was that students should benefit from the research.

Students' data from the winter and fall diagnostic assessment did not relate to the

research questions regarding the teachers' perception of the effectiveness of the

secondary benchmark system.   Further research, such as a study on benchmark standards

as they relate to students' achievement in the classroom, should follow based on new

benchmark standards.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative methodology for this chapter sought to answer the primary question of this research, and answer the research questions about the use of secondary benchmark standards that are aligned across different content areas of study (Yazan, 2015). A number of protocol questions were utilized to conduct the study. In addition, participants who were teaching experts were used to create a panel, which consisted of three types of educators. As previously stated, the participants in this study were educators who agreed to take part in the research. There was a great amount of attention that was paid towards trustworthiness, identifying potential biases and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4, the findings are presented to answer the research questions of this study, and Chapter 5 includes a conclusion, discussion of the implications of the study and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

This chapter describes the findings of the research and gives an overview of the results from the interviews of all participants who contributed to this study. Due to the constraint of time as the school year come to close, the researcher was still able to obtain enough participants for this study. The participants in the study elected to participate, as they were to utilize their professional experiences to reply to the questions posed by the researcher. The participants were willing to explain their beliefs and philosophies about the Secondary Benchmark Systems. These educators hold multiple degrees including; double masters or higher and view themselves as experts in their field. The study consists of teachers of different concentrated areas of studies, so a divided structure was put in place to verify the validity and reliability while discussing the analytic procedures in the different case study (Yanzan, 2015). The researcher's exploration of this study is derived from Case Study 1, which comprised of the reading teachers, Case Study 2 which consisted of the general education teachers, and Case Study 3, which comprised of the administrators. The results should impact every phase of the research process to demonstrate validity. This chapter will illustrate the different experiences of each participant with the Secondary Benchmark System as it affects a South Florida's public high school.

The purpose of this research study was to understand and interpret how to align Secondary Benchmarks in the high school curriculum across content areas of studies. Three focus groups representing the different educational departments within the school

(i.e., reading, general education, administration) were formed to conduct an in-depth survey of the experiences of the participants and capture the interpretation of their experiences, as well as their expectations while using the benchmark system. Participants were recruited through outreach efforts using a listserv of the school's email system, which contained an invitation letter. This invitation letter had explained to the participants who volunteered for this research study what the expectations of the study are, in addition to stating the purpose, as well as suggesting a focus group format. A focus group setting was essential; however, there were time constraints as it was the end of the school year and more specifically, the last day of the school year. It is pertinent to note that the open-ended nature of the questions did not give the opportunity for more discussion during the interviews, such as probing. The researcher was cognizant of the effort demonstrated by the participants and appreciated the sacrifices the participants made to participate in the study. The sacrifices that these participants made included time taken away to meet with colleagues, cleaning their classrooms, having their checklist signed off by various departments including administrators, leaving forward addresses, and returning classroom keys.

The researcher conducted three focus groups with the attempt to interview 16 participants representing three areas of the school's departments: reading teachers, general education, and administration. The goal of utilizing focus groups was to encourage participants to discuss their experiences of implementing the Secondary Benchmark system. Therefore teachers from the same department and other departments with similar experiences comprised the focus groups. The researcher initiated

recruitment by utilizing a listserv provided by the school's directory. At the initiation of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and the criteria required of the participants who chose to be part of the study's focus groups. The researcher revealed the confidentially and anonymity protocol to each participant within the high school and gave each participant the option to withdraw at any time. The researcher utilized a recording device, however, the researcher was aware that this was not a substitute for listening and transcribing. Yin (2012) suggested that we should listen to our participants closely throughout the interview. The researcher read the protocol questions out loud and explained to the participants that no harm will result from their participation or if they chose to withdraw from the study.

The focus groups were guided by six interview protocol questions:

1. Please take some time to share personal thoughts on the secondary benchmarks system.

2. Can you talk about your experiences with the successes you have had with the secondary benchmarks system?

3. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you have had with the secondary benchmarks system?

4. Please explain your understanding of how the implementation of the secondary benchmark system will increase student achievement within your class.

5. Based on your personal experiences, please share your recommendations regarding teaching method of your curriculum while using the secondary benchmark system.

6. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

The participants of each focus group were invited to participate via email as well as through other outreach sources. An invitational letter was sent to 120 teachers who worked at the school within the 2016-2017 school year (see Appendix C), and 15 participants agreed to participate, therefore, a total of two males and thirteen female teachers participated in the groups. Participants ranged from 30 to 59 years of age. Each focus group was in their respective classroom or office, and each participant within their group was interviewed via a face-to-face format. The researcher transcribed each focus group's responses after all of the interview sessions were completed between June and July of 2017.

Background of Participants

The participants in the focus groups comprised of teachers and administrators from a diverse background who varied in (a) age groups, (b) gender, and (c) teaching interests, but shared common experiences in teaching background, regardless of their job title. Yin (2012) explicated that participants are selected in case studies because they all have certain characteristics in common related to the topic discussed. The participants included a sample of (a) three reading teachers who were part of the reading department, (b) three participants that comprised the English department, (c) two participants that were part of the administrative department, (d) one participant that was part of the mathematic department, (e) two participants that were part of the science department, (f) one participant that was part of the Physical Education department, (g) one participant that was part of the JROTC department, and (h) two participants that were part of the

business education department. See Figure 4 for gender participation, Figure 5 for different case studies (i.e., content areas/departments), and Tables 4, 5, and 6 for the demographics of all 14 case study participants.
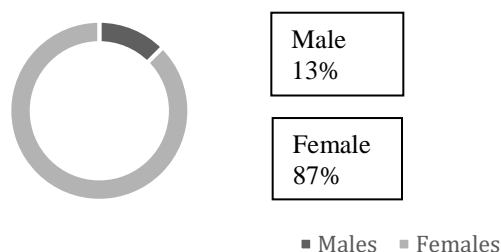
Figure 4. Study Participants by Gender.
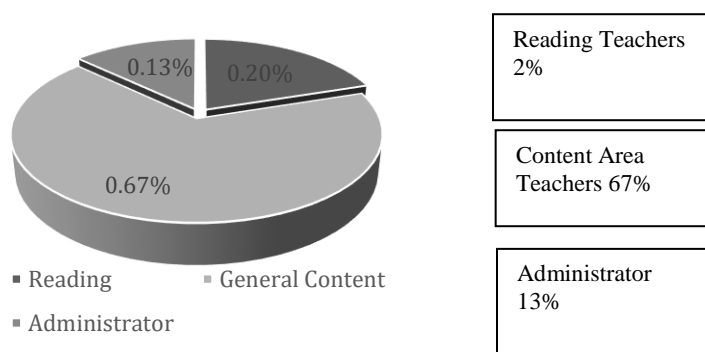
Figure 5. Study Participants by Case Study.

Table 4

Study Participants' Demographics for Reading Teachers

Pseudonym	Department	Years of service	Teacher	Age	Race	Gender	College major
RT1	Reading	11	RT	32	Black	Female	Masters
RT2	Reading	17	ESE/RT	39	Black	Female	Bachelor of Arts
RT3	Reading	17	RT	39	Black	Female	Masters

Note. RT=Reading Teacher; ESE/RT=Exceptional Student Education Reading Teacher.

Table 5

Study Participants' Demographics for Administrators

Pseudonym	Department	Years of service	Teacher	Age	Race	Gender	College major
ADM1	AP	10	ESE/SD	42	W/Hisp	Male	Master EDL
ADM2	AP	20	B Ed	23	Black	Female	Master EDL

Note. AP= Assistant Principal; ESE/SDHS=Exceptional Students Education/Special Diploma High School; B Ed=Bachelor of Education; Master EDL=Master of Educational Leadership.

Table 6

Study Participants' Demographics for Content Area Teachers

Pseudonym	Department	Years of service	Teacher	Age	Race	Gender	College major
T1	English	22	ET	50	White	Female	BS
T2	Science	5	CHEMT	30	W/Hisp	Female	Masters
T3	Business	33	CD	56	White	Female	Masters
T4	Science	24	I B	47	White	Male	ABD
T5	Physical ed	11	PET	39	Black	Female	HPER
T6	Mathematics	12	MT	34	Black	Female	Master curr/ins
T7	English	21	ET	45	White	Female	BS NBC
T8	Business ed	16	BDD	50	Black	Female	Masters
T9	English	17	ET	51	White	Female	BA

Note. ET=English Teacher; CHEM=Chemistry; CD=Career Development; IB=Inclusion Biology; PET=Physical Education Teacher; MT=Mathematic Teacher; BDD=Business Digital Design; JROTC=Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps; BA=Bachelor of Art; BS=Bachelor of Science; ABD=All But Dissertation Education Doctor; HPER=Health Physical Education Recreation; BS NBC=Bachelor of Science/National Board Certified.

The participants expressed positive attitudes while they shared information during their interview. All participants read the consent form and signed it as per protocol procedures of the Institutional Review Board of the host and sponsored institution (see Appendix D). In addition, the participants received a letter requesting permission to conduct the interviews (see Appendix E). The focus groups were actively engaged and expressed their concerns, about the secondary benchmark systems, as they felt comfortable conveying their thoughts, interests, and feelings during the interview. Many participants within the different content areas shared comparisons with their beliefs and experiences. Few veteran teachers suggested that it was not ideal for them to teach, as it was hard work, and would consume a vast amount of their time. The reform or the design to modify existing structures across all content areas with reading literacy benchmark standards will create massive changes in what are thought to be effective practices (Bean, Dole, Nelson, Belcastro, & Zigmond, 2015). These changes are what teachers are currently concerned about; however, welcome the idea and believe that it may work if they are aligned.

Once the researcher went through the collection process and attained all the required data from the participants, the results were gathered, and themes were identified and created based on each focus group. The same six protocol questions were asked to each participant in each group, in which the answers were collected using a digital device and were transcribed after each participant was interviewed. The data collected from those participants within their respective groups were placed in different categories, based on their content areas of study: reading, general education, and administration.

Participants were excited to share their experiences that were similar to those of different focus groups, as some participants have varied experiences based on the content that they teach within the school.

Preliminary Analysis

Case Study 1: Reading teachers. The researcher included three participants in this focus group. To protect the confidentiality of the teachers who participated, they were given a code RT1 to RT3. RT1 pertains to a 32-year-old Black female who has been teaching reading for 11-years and has a master's degree in reading within her field. RT2 refers to a 39-year-old Black female, who has been teaching reading for 17-years and has a Bachelor's of Art in education. RT3 is a 39-year-old Black female, who has been teaching reading for 17-years and has a master's in curriculum and instruction in the field of education.

Question 1. Please take some time to share personal thoughts on the secondary benchmarks system.

Most of the participants in this focus group expressed that the benchmarks were too vague, broad, and should be aligned and constructed more to benefit students. The participants further expressed that the standards should support teachers' as it is an inconvenience for teachers to teach students at various academic levels. For this question, 2 out of 3 confirmed the vagueness and the broad approach of the benchmark standards. Three out of 3 participants shared that the benchmark system should support students learning acquisition, and 2 out of 3 stated that the benchmark standards should curve towards the support of teachers (see Table 7).

Table 7

Identified Themes Regarding Reading Teachers Interview Protocol Question 1

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Benchmarks	Vagueness/ Broadness	"They are too vague, teachers have to create lessons and get resources so that they can try to narrow it down."
Students	Support learning	"It must be aligned to fit the students need."
Teachers	Academic level	"Provide frame work for instruction, guidance for lesson design and a target for instructing students."

RT1 stated, "Right now they are vague teachers have to create lesson and get resources that can try to narrow it down."

RT2 explained, "It must be aligned to fit the students need."

RT3 stated, "Provide frame work for instruction guidance for lesson design and a target for instructing students."

Question 2. Can you talk about your experiences with the successes you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

The participants in this focus group revealed what they perceived to be successful, in regards to their experiences with implementing the secondary benchmark system. For this question, 1 out of 3 shared that they had less success with the FAS test compared to the FCAT test. In addition, when comparing the item utilized in both tests, 2 out of 3 stated that they have had great success with the benchmark system using the instructional focus calendar and implementing coursework and test designs (see Table 8).

Table 8

Identified Themes Regarding Reading Teachers Interview Protocol Question 2

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Instructional design	FSA	"What might have been on the secondary benchmark for FCAT number one, number two, now they have combined it to FSA number one and claim it common core."
Instructional design	Focus calendar	"The focus calendar, implementation of course work using test design."

RT1 revealed, "What might have on the secondary benchmark for FCAT number one, number two now they have combined it to FSA number one and claim it is common core."

RT2 indicated, "That my students test scores have increased due to implementing day-to-day learning course work."

RT3 illustrated "That using an instructional focus calendar, identifying the benchmark most necessary for student's performance, looking at test design, and designing a lesson that would impact the students."

Question 3. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

Participants in this focus group shared that they are chasing a moving target, as they move from the Florida standards to Common Core and then to Language Arts Florida standards, where there is no guidance from the State of Florida or district on how to meet those standards. Individuals do not know or comprehend what is meant exactly,

as there is no support to help the teachers. In addition, other participants share their concerns with struggling students, as they focus on mastering complex skills that the benchmark requires teachers to implement. For question 3, 2 out of 3 illustrated that there is more time spent collecting resources when instead they could invest their time in teaching. Additionally, 1 out of 3 indicated that the State could not determine what the learning gains for students were after they had administered the states assessment (see Table 9).

Table 9

Identified Themes Regarding Reading Teachers Interview Protocol Question 3

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Florida standards	Challenges	"The secondary benchmark is too broad, too vague, it needs to be more detailed so that the teacher can definitely understand exactly what is needed to be pin-pointed for our students."
District	Changes	"We have gone from Florida benchmark, to common core standards, to language art standards and there is not a lot of guidance from your state, from district in term of how to meet those standards."
Limited support	Experiences	"I am trying to teach, how do I facilitate moving in terms of instruction and how to make sure as a teacher that I am using the best possible resources for my students."

RT1 stated, "It needs to be more detailed so that the teachers can definitely understand exactly what is needed to be pin-pointed for our students."

RT2 explicated, "We have gone from Florida benchmark, to common core

standards, to language art standards and there is not a lot of guidance from your state, from your district in terms of how to meet those standards."

RT3 revealed, "I am trying to teach; how do I facilitate moving interim of instruction and how do I make sure as a teacher that I am using the best possible resources for my students."

Question 4. Please explain your understanding of how the implementation of the secondary benchmark system will increase student's achievement within your class.

Participants explicated their understandings, which the end in mind replicates the States standardized test as the mark of the students' achievements. In addition, the secondary benchmark system helps assess the teachers regarding reading materials for what is needed for their students' success. For this question, 2 out of 3 indicated that

Table 10

Identified Themes Regarding Reading Teachers Interview Protocol Question 4

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Benchmark standards	Assessment	"The students will need to learn in order to make vast achievements on the FSA."
Implementation	Resources	"It will involve classwork, class observation, students learning assessment, and feedback from learning at school and at home, technology, and online education."
Increase Skill	Experience	"Share their knowledge on lesson design"

implementing the benchmark system will increase the ability for students' to achieve,

however, it will involve (a) classwork, (b) class observation, (c) student learning, (d) assessment, and (e) feedback from learning at school and at home using technology online education. Two out of 3 shared their knowledge on lesson design (see Table 10).

RT1 stated, "Students will need to learn in order to make vast achievement on the FSA."

RT2 opined, "It will involve classwork, class observation, students learning, assessments, and feedback from learning at school and at home, technology, and online education."

RT3 explicated, "Share their knowledge on lesson design."

Question 5. Based on your personal experiences, please share your recommendations regarding teaching methods of your curriculum while using the secondary benchmark system.

Few participants recommended the use of technology. However, they are encouraging the use of more frequent use of technology, not just regular PowerPoint presentations or visual applications, but with the use of a smart-board and flip class. Other participants shared their frustrations in regards to students who are reading at a lower grade level, and who are in the last upper-grade before graduating from high school. For this question, 1 out of 3 recommended the importance of having teachers involved in more workshops. One out of 3 suggested that implementing scaffolding 100% of the time, and that it is to be utilized with the curriculum as well as the secondary benchmark system vagueness are narrowed down to serve both teacher and student understanding better. One out of 3 explained that students should have more

accountability in equality to their teachers (see Table 11).

Table 11

Identified Themes Regarding Reading Teachers Interview Protocol Question 5

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Teaching	Frustration	"Students reading on lower grade level who are in their last year of high school."
Instructional design	Vagueness	"Having more teachers involved in more workshops."
Technology	Method	"Not just power point, but the use of smart boards, and flip classroom."

RT1 stated "Students reading on lower grade level who are in their last year in high school."

RT2 revealed, "Having more teachers involved in more workshops."

RT3 indicated, "Not just PowerPoint, but the use of smart boards, and flip classroom."

Question 6. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

The participants explicated that the questions that the researcher asked, were more than enough and that it covered all of the bases. That stated, in regards to this question, participants revealed that they did not have any other information to add to the prior questions asked gave them the opportunity to share all their knowledge and experiences that pertained to the topic. Therefore, no additional information was acquired (see Table 12).

Table 12

Identified Themes Regarding Reading Teachers Interview Protocol Question 6

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Question	Agreement	"None, you have asked some really good questions, I think it was pretty targeted."

RT1 explained, "None, you have asked some really good question."

RT2 opined, "None."

RT3 stated, "I think it was pretty targeted."

Case Study 2: General education content area teachers. The researcher included ten participants in this focus group. To protect the confidentiality of the teachers who participated, a code of T1 to T10 was given. T1 is a 50-year-old White female, who has been teaching English for 22-years and has a Bachelor of Science in English education. T2 is a 30-year-old White Hispanic female who has been teaching Chemistry for 5-years. She currently has a master's degree in the field of science, in education. T3 is a 56-year-old White female, who has been teaching Personal Career Development for 33-years and has a master's degree in the field of education. T4 is a 47-year-old White male, who has been teaching Inclusion Biology, Earth Space Science and Environmental Science for 24-years. He has a master's degree while seeking a doctoral degree in education. T5 is a 39-year-old Black female, who has been teaching Physical Education for 16-years. She has a degree in health, physical education and recreation. T6 is a 34-year-old Black female, who has been teaching Mathematics for 12-years and

has a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction in Education. T7 is a 45-year-old White

female, who has been teaching English for 21-years and has a Bachelor of Science degree

and is also National Board Certified in the field of education. T8 is a 50-year-old Black

female, who has been teaching Business Education and Digital Design for 16-years and

has a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, in addition to a Master of Science in

education. T9 is a 51-year-old White female, who has been teaching English for 17-years

and has a Bachelor of Arts in education. T10 is a 59-year-old Black male, who has been

teaching JROTC for 4 years and has a master's degree in education.

Question 1. Please take some time to share personal thoughts on the secondary

benchmarks system.

Most of the participants in this focus group expressed the importance of having

the secondary benchmark system and that it should be taught throughout high school.

For this question, 7 out of 10 participants stated that the secondary benchmark system is

important and beneficial. Additionally, 4 out of 10 shared that there is a problem with the

alignment, while they are not aligned, the prior benchmark standards included: FCAT,

NGSS, and the new LAFS reading benchmark standards should be more flexible with the

framework of digital design which opposes the rigid scope and sequence. Three out of 10

participants shared that the benchmarks are somewhat disjointed, especially within the

academic classes that are not English, or related specifically to the benchmarks that have

been taught, especially if one teaches Science or Mathematics. Two out of 10

participants expressed that the secondary benchmark system is a broad method of

encompassing the different content areas, where there is no uniformity throughout the

different content areas itself. Two out of 10 participants suggested that it is not useful for all children, unfortunately, because it does not account for growth if a child does not meet the benchmark standards and subject area taught in school. Lastly, 2 out of 10 participants suggested that it holds teachers accountable (see Table 13).

Table 13

Identified Themes Regarding General Education Teachers Interview Protocol Question 1

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Important	Benefits	"Secondary benchmark systems should be taught throughout high school."
Instructional design	Alignment	"FCAT. NGSS, and the new LAFS reading benchmarks should be more flexible with the framework of digital design."
Content area	Uniformity	"No uniformity throughout the different individual content areas. They are not beneficial for subjects taught and children growth."

T1 stated "I think the secondary benchmark system is important because as a teacher who teaches tenth grade and tested areas, I want to make sure my students are coming with certain benchmarks that I know that should have been taught to them."

T2 indicated, "I think that the secondary benchmark system is a broad way to encompass the different content areas and pretty much what people perceive to be important within these different content areas."

T3 opined, "I feel the benchmark system is a valuable guide it holds teachers' accountable for planning and instruction as well as students when they are assessed."

T4 explicated, "My personal feeling is sometimes they are sort of disjointed, especially in the academic classes that are not English or not related to specifically the benchmarks that have been taught for example; in a science class, you may have a reading or language secondary benchmark."

T5 illustrated, "Well I find them not to be so beneficial for me, because of the subject that I teach."

T6 revealed, "I actually like them to an extent, as certain things aren't explained in the text book for us to explain it to the students, so we actually have to supplement."

T7 explained, "I am supposed to be teaching in the classroom, they help me to explain to the students what our focus is."

T8 stated, "We have a framework and in the past, when we have FCAT standards or the NGSS standards I have a framework." "We are not really aligned to the new LAFS or the new reading standards. So, I think having that alignment will help us as vocational teachers, because we have more frameworks, more flexibility with our framework as opposed to be on a rigid kinda scope and sequence."

T9 illustrated, "I don't think that it is useful for all children unfortunately because it doesn't account for growth if a child does not meet the benchmark."

T10 stated, "I think everybody should be teaching on the same standards with secondary benchmarks."

Question 2. Can you talk about your experiences with the successes you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

The participants in this focus group expressed that they have had limited success

with the secondary benchmark system within their classroom. Few participants revealed that their subject matter did not align with the benchmark system, as they also teach various demographics of kids yearly, therefore, they must be creative with their teaching style. For this question, 3 out of 10 shared that they never had any experience with the benchmark system. Six out of 10 suggested that using the benchmark system as a framework for lesson planning, as well as a guided road map that gives a pathway to implement whatever they are teaching and to use supplementary materials. One out of 10 stated that the benchmark system has been more of a complication then what is needed into a one size fit all because the students are at different reading and skill levels (see Table 14).

Table 14

Identified Themes Regarding General Education Teachers Interview Protocol Question 2

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Teaching	Experiences	"Having much teaching experiences with benchmarks system however, not having to utilize it because they are not aligned."
Courses teach	General education	"I am a special ed teacher, but I have also, taught English and reading and social studies, all subjects that use secondary benchmarks."
Framework	Lesson	"I really haven't used them because every year I have different kids, different demographics. I guess you could say a different creative way to teach the kids."

T1 stated, "I guess the success would be having students either gain points on the test, now FSA used to be FCAT. They made gains or moved up a level or they have to pass the test."

T2 explicated, "When I initially started teaching the benchmark system, it was kinda the guideline of what I followed, how long I should be taken on everything."

T3 revealed, "Secondary benchmark system has totally help me guide my planning it is the framework for all of my planning."

T4 opined, "I think I have personally have been ok. I am a special ed teacher, but I have also taught English and reading and social studies and all those subjects that use secondary benchmarks."

T5 illustrated, "Well, I haven't really used them because every year I have different kids, different demographics, I guess you could say I use a different creative way to teach the kids."

T6 expressed, "Using the benchmark helps only because it gives us an entry to whatever we are teaching and whatever supplementary material we use."

T7 stated, "The secondary benchmark system kind of gives me a road map on explaining the what I am doing so, it gives them a chance to know why I am here, when the benchmarks were pretty ambiguous."

T8 explained, "It is having that alignment because we are a technical course and student that struggles with reading tends to have a hard time reading our text."

T9 stated "I am not a fan of the benchmark system and they have made things much more complicated then they need to be and I think it's a one size fits all. Although

it's getting better cause now they are benchmarks for access mark for ESE and ESOL."

T10 opined, "I have not had any experiences with benchmark system. However, I haven't utilized it because they are not aligned."

Question 3. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

The participants in this focus group shared the academic challenges of students not passing the State of Florida benchmark assessment test, and also mentioned the fact that the benchmark system is not aligned with the curriculum. For this question, 4 out of 10 participants revealed that the benchmark system is not aligned. Five out of 10 participants expressed the challenges that they have encountered in regards to the mixture of grade levels, as grades 9 – 12 all share the same classroom. Three out of 10 participants discussed the reading difficulties of students, as they are reading two, three, and five grades below their average reading levels. One out of 10 shared that the benchmark system can be redundant, as this can be kept on the teachers' board for months, as it is so broad and vague (see Table 15).

T1 stated, "The challenges with secondary benchmark systems is that for many years I have taught students' who have passed the states test whether they are in the 3rd or the 6th grade." "The 8th graders come to me in the 10th grade reading sometimes three to five levels below their grade level."

T2 explicated, "Topics mentioned earlier are very vague, I started teaching different courses and that course had a very genetic syllabus and didn't have tons of benchmarks associated with it. So, I have to create my own even though I have a test at

the end of the year which makes things difficult."

Table 15

Identified Themes Regarding General Education Teachers Interview Protocol Question 3

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Academic	Challenges	"For many years I have taught students have not pass the states test whether its 3-6 grade, 8 graders come to me in the 10 grade reading sometimes 3 to 5 level below grade level."
Teaching	Experience	"This is the second year I have taught this course and some of the benchmarks do not line up with the course at all."
Curriculum	Mixture	"I think the secondary benchmark system put everyone in one box." "We have different demographics of kids and different physical abilities."

T3 revealed, "This is the second year I have taught this course and some of the benchmark standards do not line up with the course code at all. They are physical education benchmarks in here and it's not pertinent to the course so I have to re-work some of them."

T4 illustrated, "I would say we haven't had enough time getting through our own benchmark standards as far as getting from point A to B. Especially in biology we take our exam, 2 to 3 weeks before the end of the school year, so we are already trying to get our benchmark in, that we have to actually cover for the exam itself."

T5 opined, "I think the secondary benchmark system put everyone in one box, so like I said before when you we have a different demographic of kids and different

physical abilities I have to kinda do my subject around those students that I have.”

T6 explained, “If it includes a Marzano or anything like that or new curriculum with FSA it's just too much testing for the kids, it drains them it's not like it used to be back in the day. Where you teach now is like we are teaching to the test.”

T7 stated, “The challenges are having all grades in one class. If it a reading class, you have 9th grade reading or you have 10th grade reading. When you are in vocational class you have 9th through 12th. So, trying to maybe have some differentiated instruction is kinda challenging.”

T8 revealed, “Not all children are at the same level. Your brain develops at different times and until your brain does a major pruning there is not going to be some connection made on a critical skill level, so some of these kids are not meeting the benchmark.”

T10 stated, “Not any, because it's not aligned.”

Question 4. Please explain your understanding of how the implementation of the secondary benchmark system will increase students' achievement within your class.

The participants in this focus group shared that implementing the benchmark system would increase students' success when students pass the FSA, which is the state assessment test. In addition, the participants mentioned that the benchmarks are taught as planned lessons and as part of their curriculum, as well as teachers being properly trained by implementing the benchmark system. For this question, 4 out of 10 participants expressed that students' achievement will be met when lessons are planned by implementing the secondary benchmark system. Four out of 10 participants concur that

students learn better when they are able to see the information multiple times. Three out of 10 participants shared that they felt teachers required more training in how to implement the benchmarks so they can be comfortable with it (see Table 16).

Table 16

Identified Themes Regarding General Education Teachers Interview Protocol Question 4

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Important	Benefits	"Student's achievement on the FSA and that will be the success of the district."
Implementation	Increase Knowledge	"When I plan the lesson according to the benchmarks. I want to make sure that my students have learn them."

T1 stated, "I think implementing the secondary benchmark system well increase student's achievement on the FSA and that will be the success of the district, because I had students that have now passed that FSA and it will be a success for my school."

T2 explained, "Students learn better when they have seen the information multiple times. So been able to see everything cross curriculum wise would allow for more success with the benchmark system and I have tried to do that in my own classroom."

T3 revealed, "Student achievement will be met when I plan the lesson according to the benchmark. When I plan well, I hit those benchmarks, I want to make sure that my students have learn them."

T4 illustrated, "I just feel that my major concern, have it implemented by people who may not be comfortable with it. We have training where you go in and you trained with a group of science teachers, and history teachers on secondary benchmarks. Spend

the whole day learning about it then they leave to go back to implement this one benchmark and then focus on it."

T5 stated, "I always have to go back to what I am dealing with the type of students that I have, If I am telling kids that they must run, it is because that is what the benchmarks are telling me that this is what they have to do, and they aren't able to do that, then I have to change what I am doing so I kinda go off what I am dealing with."

T6 explicated, "The class I teach, it actually helps them because I actually have the students read the objective and then towards the end of the lesson, ask them what was the learning goal for today. So, I actually have them doing like a review of the work they know and I implement the benchmark doing that."

T7 expressed, "I think anything that explains to students in their language why. Why are you in my classroom, what are you supposed to be learning in my classroom. So, this is my focus so a lot of time kids would sit there and say. This class is ridiculous. I am not learning anything or what is the purpose of this school, what is the purpose of this class. By explaining and understanding the secondary benchmark system to kids at least maybe they will understand ok! Alright, I don't like this lesson, but I kinda get to understand why I have to do this lesson."

T8 opined, "I think if we all work together which we all try to, which is when they always ask the vocational teacher to really kind of focus on the reading standards. That will help those students who are struggling, and because we are such a technical area, that if they can kind of master some of the technical terminology and are able to practice those strategies a little bit more outside of reading. Then it increases their

reading comprehension and their test score."

T9 revealed, "I don't think it will, because I like to push my kids beyond necessarily what this benchmark system does. I also like to find out where they are and move them up to where they can be and that might be beyond that benchmark. It might be maybe they are below the grade level, but they are not moving up again. I am not a fan of the state benchmark system. It's better than a lot of states, but ideally there is no room for growth."

T10 stated, "My understanding is that if ever teacher is teaching the same thing it will increase the students reading. It depends on the schedule we have, we have the schedule that let us see them every day that may work, but with block schedule, I might not see my students for couple days. If it was aligned and I see my students daily it would be a lot better."

Question 5. Based on your personal experiences, please share your recommendations regarding teaching methods of your curriculum while using the secondary benchmark system.

The participants in this focus group were satisfied, but expressed that teachers need to incorporate the secondary benchmark system to meet the various standards, which will give students access to pertinent literature, rather than overwhelm students with literature that they have no interest in. Other participants shared, that multiple approaches, or teaching styles should be considered when determining teacher accountability, as well as discuss the benchmark system during teacher training as a component of their general professional development. For this question, 5 out of 10

participants concurred that teachers pay close attention to the benchmark while creating their lesson plans. Two out of 10 participants expressed that they have not utilized the benchmark system. Additionally, 3 out of 10 shared that they have used the benchmark system as a structure to guide their lesson within the classroom (see Table 17).

Table 17

Identified Themes Regarding General Education Teachers Interview Protocol Question 5

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Teaching	Recommendation	"Teachers find novel to teach students interest that will incorporate the secondary benchmark system."
Important	Benefits	"Teaching methods are totally guided by benchmarks. Multiple approaches different teaching style. Need to hold teachers accountable and responsible."

T1 stated, "Recommend that teachers find novel to teach students interest that will incorporate the secondary benchmark system that meets those standards, meet those benchmarks and stop inundate those kids with just passages that they have no interest in."

T2 expressed, "Multiple approaches different teaching styles like being hands-on, visual, auditory." "All those things using technology approaching different types of tasks."

T3 opined, "Teaching method is totally guided by benchmarks." "My planning must line up exactly with the benchmark that is my job, that is my requirement as a teacher, to hit those benchmarks across the board throughout the state." "It also helps to drive my assessment with my students to also make sure they hit the benchmark."

T4 illustrated, "What we really needed to do is start looking at educators, not only as curriculum specific they need to be held accountable and responsible in some ways for knowing those expectations that would be coming forward." "I think the system needs to teach teachers specifically while they are in college of education how to implement it."

T5 revealed, "I haven't been using the secondary benchmark system, things have been working fine with me."

T6 explicated, "When going over the objective, don't just write it on the board, actually go over it with your students and have them understand what they are going to learn." "Always reiterate what they are learning for that day, so they understand it so they are not lost in instruction and then always review what you just went over with them."

T7 stated, "I use the secondary benchmark system as a guide, not as law, so I try my best to make my lesson come alive, and I think if you use your benchmark to the end, all be all today's overall objective I suppose the lesson would be flat." "Kids are not going to learn it's not going be as exciting." "I am trying to think of a benchmark words." "The word is context, this our goal we are going to do words and context." "I am able to choose whatever lesson I want to use to make the lesson come alive, so that kids can learn words and context."

T8 indicated "I think more training more teacher training just because we always, it's kinda hard like I said, we don't implement all of the benchmarks." "We usually ask as part of the bigger picture to focus on like one thing or one strategy that the reading teacher is working on at a certain grade level." "So how do we do all of that us to get

some kinda training, but training with the reading teachers, usually cause kinda like a general professional development day."

T9 revealed, "I think if you take the benchmark method of trying to teach them individually and teach units and then make sure you are hitting all the areas in the benchmark." "I think that is a better deal for the kids and better for you because it makes things tie in and they could build on, build their knowledge so they can have prior knowledge to fall back on." "If the information is covered in the first lesson, second lesson, and third lesson and carried over then built in an upward motion."

T10 stated, "That if I had the secondary benchmark system in my curriculum manager, it would be a lot easier to implement."

Question 6. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

The participants in this focus group shared that they would like to see teachers help with developing the benchmark as their interpretation of the benchmark is not clearly stated for lack of alignment. For question six, 4 out of 10 participants shared that the students' needs have not been kept in mind when the benchmark developer developed the benchmark. Additionally, 6 out of 10 expressed that they did not have anything to add, as the researcher has already asked prior pertinent questions about the topic (see Table 18).

T1 stated, "Because the people that are making these standards they are so far removed from the classroom. I understand that we do need to set standards and we want children to achieve them, but you know teacher have so much that they must deal with students with all their baggage's that they come with, their home life. You have 130 kids

and just providing us with the benchmarks standards is not enough, or some standards. We need an article; we need novels, we need the materials that are going to interest those kids to get them reading. Once we get them reading they are going to meet those benchmarks. They are not going to meet those benchmarks if they are not reading and they are not going to read those articles that are just so boring."

Table 18

Identified Themes Regarding General Education Teachers Interview Protocol Question 6

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Developer	Recommendation	"I think it helps to have people creating benchmarks on a theoretical bases. The benchmarks are up for interpretation. Providing us with benchmarks are not enough"

T2 indicated "No! I don't think so."

T3 revealed "No."

T4 explicated "No."

T5 illustrated "No."

T6 explained "No! You have asked pretty much everything."

T7 stated "I love teaching I have been teaching a long time that's what make me come alive, and sometimes I feel bad for new teacher that think they have no creative license to curriculum that's what bothers me the most about the idea of benchmarks, but they are up for interpretation.   I think you can still make lesson come alive if you use the benchmark as a guide."

T8 stated "No! I think that for me the reading standards are obviously easier in a

sense to implement into help make gains or students comprehension or students improvement. So, from that stand point I think that I am happy that we can help in our area."

T9 illustrated "No! I would like to see people who are developing these benchmarks. I would like to see it be people who have been in the classroom recently. I think it's helpful to have people creating benchmark on a theoretical basis as what does and doesn't work base on theory. Which I know of theories, but you need to know what in practicality and that is not the case with a lot of this, so until you can do that and have been in the classroom recently, I don't think you are going to have effective benchmarks."

T10 stated "No" in response to the question that way asks.

Case Study 3: **Administrators.** The researcher included 3 participants in this focus group. To protect the confidentially of the teachers who participated, a code of ADM 1 and ADM 2 were given.

ADM 1 refers to a 42-year-old White Hispanic male who has been teaching ESE special Diploma High school for 10-years, including all content areas, and currently is an administrator and has been for 8-years. He currently has a Masters in Educational Leadership. ADM 2 refers to a 44-year-old Black female who has been teaching Business Education for 20–years and has a Masters of Education degree. She is currently an administrator and has been in this position for 10 years.

Question 1. Please take some time to share personal thoughts on the secondary benchmarks system.

The participants in this focus group shared that the secondary benchmark system is an important structure within schools and the development of cross-curriculum. The participants shared that it would benefit not only the teachers, but also the students, as they implement the reading benchmarks. The participants further expressed that the reading strategies, when reviewed are used with fidelity, will help students as they achieve their educational goal. For this question, 1 out of 2 participants revealed that teachers implement certain standards, in addition to certain standards being reinforced in all subject areas. One out of 2 participants suggested that secondary benchmark calendars are given, so that teachers who could implement reading strategies and math strategies across the school and the curriculum are successful at scheduling their lesson plans (see Table 19).

Table 19

Identified Themes Regarding Administrators Interview Protocol Question 1

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Curriculum	Strategy	"Secondary benchmarks are very important part in making sure that cross curriculum that certain standards are addressed."
Implement	Success	"Teachers who could implement reading strategies or some school do math strategies across the school, across the curriculum."

ADM 1 stated, "I think the secondary benchmark is a very important part of making sure that cross curriculum that certain standards are addressed, and certain

standards are reinforced in all subject areas."

ADM 2 indicated "Secondary benchmark calendars given, so that teachers who could implement reading strategies or some schools do math strategies across the school, across the curriculum."

Question 2. Can you talk about your experiences with the successes you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

The participants in this focus group expressed that in the past years, some of the success was attributed to the elective teachers or elective team based upon their ability to help with student mastery of the subject matter. The participants shared, additionally, that it was a vital part of moving students in reading level and moving the lowest 25% to make gains. For this question, 1 out of 2 participants shared that elective teachers were able to use the benchmark or literacy benchmarks in other core classes, such as reading and English. One out of 2 participants expressed that cross curriculum in other subject areas needs to be reinforced in a different method, in order to have the ability to implement the standards (see Table 20).

ADM 1 stated "It's a vital part of moving students and moving the lowest 25% when it comes to reinforcing maybe standards that haven't gotten too accustomed to or didn't understand. It would help them cross curriculum in other subject areas."

ADM2 indicated "Teachers who are considered as an elective team or elective teacher or literacy benchmark or math we are utilizing in other core classes such as reading and English."

Table 20

Identified Themes Regarding Administrators Interview Protocol Question 2

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Development	Structure	"It's a vital part in moving students and moving the lowest 25% when it comes to reinforcing maybe standards."
Knowledge	Success	"Elective team teachers or elective teachers were able to see which benchmark or literacy benchmark or math benchmark we are utilizing."

Question 3. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

The participants in this focus group shared that the greatest challenge, is that the benchmarks are not aligned with all of the content areas as well as the plethora of assignments or other activities that teachers must teach. For this question, 1 out of 2 participants expressed that the biggest obstacle, is ensuring that there is an alignment, and a focus calendar. One out of 2 illustrated that due to the State of Florida strongly believing in their benchmarks, it has become a challenge to implement a primary benchmark system and secondary benchmark system (see Table 21).

ADM 1 stated "The biggest challenges are that it's not aligned with all content areas in which they are doing and with what the standards for reading are geared towards. Making sure that there is alignment and a focus calendar kind of lens to that keeps it on track with a focus on what the students need."

Table 21

Identified Themes Regarding Administrators Interview Protocol Question 3

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Structural	Challenges	"It has become a challenge to implement a primary benchmark system also a and secondary benchmark system."
Obstacle	Alignment	"The biggest challenges is that it's not aligned with all content areas."

ADM2 indicated "It has become a challenge to implement a primary benchmark system and secondary benchmark system, because of the volume of assignments or the volume of things that teachers have to do currently. Because our State of Florida loves benchmarks."

Question 4. Please explain your understanding of how the implementation of the secondary benchmark system will increase students' achievement within your class. The participants in this focus group shared their thoughts on exposure with opportunities with the secondary benchmark system. For question four, 2 out of 2 participants indicated that student's in different classroom settings, and at the high school level, will be given more opportunities and exposure to the benchmark system. Additionally, 2 out of 2 participants expressed that the literacy or reading benchmarks could identify the central idea that could be discussed in the social studies classes, and perhaps also in an elective class (see Table 22).

Table 22

Identified Themes Regarding Administrators Interview Protocol Question 4

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Structural	Exposure	"The literacy or reading benchmark could be identifying the central idea and that could go over to social studies classes."
Classroom	Achievement	"Students in different classroom settings and at the high level will be given more opportunities and more exposure."

ADM 1 illustrated, "Students in different classroom settings and at the high school level will get more opportunities and more exposure to those benchmarks and more time for students to concentrate on the benchmark."

ADM 2 revealed, "The literacy or reading benchmark could be identifying the central idea and that could go over to the social studies classes and then perhaps also an elective class, maybe culinary."

Question 5. Based on your personal experiences, please share your recommendations regarding teaching methods of your curriculum while using the secondary benchmark system.

The participants in this focus group expressed that the Sunshine State or the Next Generation Standards, which includes the reading and literacy benchmark system are not needed. Although, other participants did suggest that using the secondary benchmark system can greatly enhance the students understanding in various settings. For this

question, 1 out of 2 participants shared that there are too many reading benchmark

standards. One out of 2 participants explained that students are receiving insufficient

exposure to the standards (see Table 23).

Table 23

Identified Themes Regarding Administrators Interview Protocol Question 5

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Method	Exposure	"You may realize that they understand the standards a little bit better or that they are lacking some exposure to that standards."
Standards	Enhance	"The secondary benchmark system could enhance their understanding in other classroom settings as well."

ADM 1 illustrated, "Using the secondary benchmark system can greatly enhance

the understanding of student's primary role with the standards, in other classroom

settings, as well as in the actual classroom, and in teaching methods in your curriculum."

ADM 2 revealed, "Because of the number of benchmarks that are in reading, I

would just share the tested benchmark or benchmark covering either English or reading

with another teacher in other areas."

Question 6. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

The participants in this focus group shared that having the secondary benchmark

aligned across other curriculum is intimidating and that it should become one benchmark.

Moreover, participants expressed that students are able to tell the difference when a

teacher no longer implements the standards. For this question, 1 out of 2 participants

revealed that the implementing the standards are crucial, and it would benefit all students

if it were a cross-curriculum. One out of 2 expressed that rolling the secondary and

primary benchmark into one subject matter would work better (see Table 24).

Table 24

Identified Themes Regarding Administrators Interview Protocol Question 6

Event	Theme identified	Participants' quotes
Method	Benefit	"The Standards are very important at the same time it would benefit, in all standards if it was cross curricula."
Intimidating	Benchmark	"If we could roll them into a catch all Phrase, then it wouldn't seem as intimidating."

ADM 1 stated, "Yes! I would like to share that when you make the switch, from

using the standards to basic learning, students understand the standards, very important at

the same time it would benefit all standards if it was cross-curricula." "Hence like the

International Baccalaureate (IB) world studies, where you are learning different content

area cross curricula, and everything is aligned." "I think it's a great asset to have

secondary benchmarks cross curriculum cross all content area."

ADM 2 revealed, "I think the secondary benchmark needs to be rolled into the

primary benchmark." "So, that teachers don't feel like, here is my primary benchmark I

need to cover, and here is an additional benchmark." "That if we could roll them into a

catch all phrase that it wouldn't seem as intimidating."

The documentation of each focus group from the interview was transcribed, filed,

and placed in their folder to prevent any mishandling of the records. The information explicated by each focus group accurately correlated with all of the participants from the different case studies, demonstrating that there is a need to improve the curriculum and that an alignment is required. The members of Case Study 1, which comprised of reading teachers' shared similar responses to the Case Study 2, which comprised of general content area teachers. In regards to Case Study 3, administrators have expressed the same sentiments on the subject of aligning the benchmark system to the different content area.

Themes of the Study

Themes of the case study participants' experiences. Eighteen themes were found based on the focus group sessions (see Table 25). The themes were gathered from the experiences revealed by the teachers and administrators who participated. The top three themes from all focus groups were: (a) teachers find benchmarks challenging to apply, (b) beneficial if standards were cross curricula, and (c) benchmarks will enhance students learning acquisition.

Teachers find benchmarks challenging to apply. All of the focus groups expressed that they find the secondary benchmark standards as a challenge to teach within other content areas of the curricula. The conversations had contained words such as *overwhelming, stressful, and hard work*. "It is too much to teach both standards." These thoughts are taken into consideration, but the faculty of professionals, forget their reason for teaching. Student knowledge acquisition and the mastering of the state's assessment is a requirement of all students from their various content areas of study in

order to graduate from high school. In addition, more teachers shared that they need

better training and workshop experiences to carry out these performances. However, not

Table 25

Thematic Results of Participants' Experiences

Themes	RT	GT	ADM
1. Teachers find that the benchmark is more challenging to be applied	X	X	X
2. It is beneficial if the standards were cross curricula	X	X	X
3. The understanding of the benchmark can enhance students in other classes	X	X	X
4. There are no uniformity with in other content areas		X	
5. The more exposure the students have with the benchmark better they will understand	X	X	X
6. The curriculum designer can make the lesson more informal	X	X	X
7. The vagueness of the benchmarks are problematic for teachers		X	X
8. The secondary benchmarks need to be more aligned within the different content area	X	X	X
9. Technology should be a useful as part of the curriculum	X		

Note. RT=Reading Teachers; GT=General Teachers; ADM=Administrators.

applying these challenging benchmarks will not only cost this high school funding but also will have a major impact on their graduation rate, as these students will remain within their communities and not be able to compete in the global job market.

Benefit if the standards were cross curricula. Participants in this focus group described the benefit or the accomplishment of having the standards cross curricula. Not only would student's achievement improve, but; the teacher's job would become easier. The teachers throughout this high school would be on the same leveled playing field, as students are leaving from one classroom to another. For example, leaving their intensive reading classes or literacy reading classes to attend their math classes, having a reinforced lesson of standards that they had just learned in their language arts, reading, and science classes, but in a different format, such as using different structured materials and study areas. Teachers shared the importance of having this kind of format within the school, as the community would embrace the quality of education that their students will be embarking. Knowledge is not only being shared by one teacher but by all teachers within the school, as they all actively participated in their students' education. The administrators' also shared their enthusiastic approach to the idea of having the standards cross curricula. As one of the participants opined, "This would be a major breakthrough if this happened" to know, that all teachers are giving students the best education, toward their ability to learn.

Benchmark enhance students. All members of this focus group collectively expressed the need to teach students. However, there is a handicap, and that is the need of how to utilize the secondary benchmark system to enhance student's performances', as

one participant illustrated, "we need some training to support our teaching skills."
Regardless of the hard work, it is the teachers' job and duty to educate young minds. The
participants argued that without professional development day and being able to learn
new strategies; the benchmark would not be effective for the students. Participants
suggested that the school should provide time off from work to attend workshops or
coordinate time with the school hours. These benchmark standards will work under the
condition if the teachers are properly trained, as teachers would apply what they have
learned. As a result, students will express their knowledge acquisition and experiences to
master the skill taught by the teachers who are trained to teach the benchmark standards.
Both the teachers and the students acknowledged that over time, the presence of growth
was revealed via the scores of the tests. Participants were enthusiastic to know that if
they are trained on how to implement benchmarks, students' ability to pass the state's
assessment test will soar, as they will go from the lowest 25% to the top.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented evidence from three types of case studies, where the data
was collected in an interview during June of 2017, from each focus group, within a high
school in the South Florida area. Due to the data collected, themes were discovered
based on the participants' experiences with the secondary benchmark system, where an
alignment is needed across other content areas in the curriculum. Each focus group
participated in a one-on-one interview setting sharing their experiences for both positive
and negative attributes during the interview. Participants expressed that their
involvement in the case study would be beneficial for studies, as they are helping both

teachers and students, as they strive to succeed on the state assessment. In addition, the

results will be beneficial for administration, at all levels within the school district, to

determine the impact of the reading benchmarks as well as proposing new or revised

policies and procedures.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the study as well as to outline the anticipated outcome. In addition, the chapter is divided into six sections, which include: implication of the findings, limitation of the study, delimitation of the study, recommendation for future studies, and a conclusion. The issue of aligning the secondary benchmark system across content areas, has resulted in students failing reading, states assessments, and other subject areas.

There is a need to incorporate the alignment of the secondary benchmarks standards in this high school in the South Florida region. Many teachers within their different content areas of study find the secondary benchmarks system overwhelmingly hard, vague, and broad, while other teachers shared, that they have not used the benchmarks system with their curriculum. Most general education teachers are not adequately trained in utilizing the secondary benchmarks or prepared to provide students with the services necessary to improve the students' chances of passing the state's standardized assessments' including, the Florida Standardize Assessment (FSA). Virtue (2015) shared that using the benchmark assessment at specified intervals for comparing students' current performance is important, but to an expected level of achievement, or determining whether students are on track to succeed on various summative or formative assessments. The teachers within the South Florida high school shared their thoughts and experiences and despite these concerns, different varieties of benchmarks seem to have strong face validity among educational administrators.

However, teachers in the study preferred classrooms made simple, with less stress, and implementing benchmark standards. The researcher has noted that there may be greater issues involving teachers' perceptions of the benchmarks system. The number of teachers who declared that the benchmark system is challenging comprised of those from the reading department to the administrative level as illustrated in Table 25 of Chapter 4. Recently, since the State of Florida has adopted new benchmark standards, the increase of teachers concern about the students' education has declared more sophisticated than in the past decade (Virtue, 2015).

Anticipated Outcomes

It was anticipated that this study would help gain insight of the perspectives and experiences of high school teachers, with their ability to align the secondary benchmark system with reading literacy, and to different content areas across the curriculum, which would meet the needs of their students. During the last 10 years of working in this disciplinary area, the researcher had anticipated the possible outcome that would emerge from this study. The researcher anticipated that the participants would not be involved directly with reading literacy or the secondary benchmark standards. The researcher further anticipated that the participants might have had very little training or background knowledge of the standards. Furthermore, the researcher anticipated that the participants might have perceived the importance of implementing the secondary benchmark standards to their students. In addition, the researcher observed that there was a possible disconnect between content area teachers and the reading teachers as the content area teachers suggested that they do not teach reading nor are they reading teachers. Although

there is an importance of addressing these standards and the needs of their students, content area teachers see teaching the secondary benchmarks standards as a difficult and an overwhelming task, based on their rigorous academic curriculum and time constraints.

The themes attained from the study proved to support that students would benefit from having additional benchmark standards implemented to different content areas of studies. Although three focus groups were held, the data collected illustrated that all of the participated teachers and administrators' opinion, were that students would collectively benefit from having the secondary benchmark standards aligned in different content areas. After the data analysis process, the earnestness theme was to identify a middle ground and meet with the teachers on school grounds to network, share experiences, and feel a sense of camaraderie among teachers. Several participants shared that they if the secondary benchmark standards were aligned, then they would be less reluctant to implement the standards. Furthermore, participants shared that they never heard of the secondary benchmark standards, so it would benefit all stakeholders at the district level, to ensure teachers, faculty, staff, and administration are aware and are educated to implement the standards adequately.

Implications of the Findings

The implications suggested in this chapter are based on the constructed results that were derived from the case study analyses and the four central research questions in this study. The following research questions will be addressed.

Research Question 1. What are the teachers' experiences with the secondary benchmarks system?

Research Question 2. What are the administrators' experiences with the secondary benchmarks system?

Research Question 3. What are the challenges or successes of the implementing the secondary benchmark system?

Research Question 4. What impact will be implementing the secondary benchmark system have on student achievement across all curriculums?

The researcher utilized four predominant questions to investigate the understanding and the experiences of the teachers at the South Florida public high school where the study was conducted, in which a total of 15 participants attended three focus groups. The 15 participants had participated in a two-part interview session, which were designed as a one-on-one faced approach, but with one interviewer and several interviewees. The answers given varied among the different participants, due to their experiences. Teachers with limited experiences included those who did not have any experience with secondary benchmark experiences, as they expressed their concern with the benchmark alignment. In addition, most general education teachers who participated did not have adequate training with the benchmark system. However, teachers with experience suggested that the benchmark system is a de-facto, as most participants could not explain anything that refers to or resembles the benchmarks system. Whereas other participants suggested that they did not know enough about it, or did not have any recollection of what they had in their classroom or resources that supported the benchmark standards. However, teachers explained that not enough was done to improve their skills, and also stated that the school did not provide them with sufficient training to

implement the standards, in addition to feeling overwhelmed with the idea to teach other standards. Teachers held a more favorable opinion of retelling their experiences, but also admitted that improvising and using the benchmark system might have worked for those participants that are in the reading department, and those that have acquired some knowledge and experiences related to the benchmarks system. Zeichner (2003) stated that teachers could develop skills in regards to self-analysis that can be applied to other aspects of their teaching as they communicated with other teachers, leading to more collegial interaction.

In addition to the limitations that were out of the control of this researcher, teachers with that experience shared their knowledge during the professional development day and added more opportunities towards the learning acquisition of teachers teaching experiences and towards the benchmark system.

However, the administrators discovered that to provide teachers with explicit guidance with the distinct processes in using the secondary benchmarks system, they would have to take some measures to make the benchmark system a part of the instructional tool. Unfortunately, this was one of the teacher's concerns, as this may encompass and ensure the decision-making that would result in a greater effect for students to achieve. Therefore, teachers would not have to make their own decisions about additional benchmarks, in which most teachers classified and detailed as hard work, vague, broad, and overwhelming. The administrators have experienced that improving teacher's skill could be fortified. The administrative team observed that the teachers did not have adequate training with the skills required to help their students succeed.

The experiences of the teachers' challenges; or success were a factor when implementing the secondary benchmark system. This may have some related issue to the elaboration of those individual teachers and their personal experience. Using different instructional design models within their classrooms, as well as their inadequate knowledge, reflected how these teachers did not properly use the secondary benchmark system, which in turn, prevented the students from striving to their academic potential. Moallem (2001) explained that the instructional learning designs should be implemented after educators have learned them. This will then provide an association between learning theories and practice to help teachers develop methods to teach. It would benefit the students more if the teachers were trained adequately to teach students who consistently failed due to teachers lacking the knowledge of the benchmarks system.

After viewing the students' test results, it was evident that the teachers lacked knowledge in implementing the benchmark standards. The information gathered from the data illustrates that by teachers not implementing the secondary benchmark system, that the students were negatively impacted. In regards to the students' diagnostic tests, it was revealed that the students scored 58% (14/24) on the average level tests, and scored 29% (7/24) for the challenging level tests. The comparison of the students had no correlation regarding the students' ethnicity when compared within the percentages. Based on the interviews held for the study, there were significant statements that demonstrated that teachers deem creativity as a critical tool to access autonomy and professionalism. This would positively impact students and teachers would be able to implement the material using information that is readily accessible on their computers, by

utilizing various instructional modules to teach while using the benchmark system in all content areas and of the curriculum (Olivant, 2015). Misco (2013) stated that teachers need to be trained to be successful and, this training should also improve their ability to teach their students the curriculum.

Limitations of the Study

"Limitations are potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control" (Simon, 2011, para. 4). In the case of this study, the research was limited to high school teachers and their administrators; therefore, students, clerical staff, nor custodians were part of this study. The protocol questions were open-ended questions selected by a group of professionals from a formative and summative committee before the research study was approved. The researcher was limited to six protocol questions approved by the Institutional Review Board and validated by the committees for reviewing the questions. The three focus groups were conducted on the school site; this actual study took place at the high school in a convenient office adjoining to the production room. The researcher was limited to asking additional questions during the interview from the focus groups and within a 60-minute time frame. Limitations occurred due to utilizing focus groups. Participants were required to meet at a convenient and specific location, and at a particular time; however, they experienced difficulty in locating the room and therefore the researcher kept in constant communication until the participants arrived. Due to the room setting, a major limitation was the inability to interview teachers within a ten-minute window. The researcher was limited to a number of participants who accepted to partake in the study, as there were only a total of 15 participants in the study.

The researcher would have preferred to have more participants, but due to the time constraint barriers, and the teachers' reasons for not participating, hindered many participants to partake in this study. "Response rates indicate the number of subjects, out of the total sample, who actually participated in the full study. The higher the response rate, the better the study will be perceived" (Lanier & Briggs, 2014, p. 40). In addition to the limited participants, the duration of the time that it took for the study to be approved, delayed the ability to contact potential participants at the end of the semester. The outcome of this study was based on the responses of the interviews and only the knowledge base of the participants.

A significant limitation and concern was the time it took for the study to be approved. By the time that the study was approved, it only gave the researcher time to conduct the interviews a day before the school year ended; therefore this prevented more teachers from participating. Due to these time constraints and the time it took to attain approval from the school board, the ADM3 principal was not able to participate. ADM3 was in meetings most of the day, which was hosted by the school board, and the superintendent. In addition, ADM3 had other job duties on the school's site, which pertained to other office duties. Time constraints were also the reason that participants declined to participate in the study, as it was the last day of the school year and teachers were cleaning their classrooms, returning keys, getting signatures for their check out sheet, which is scheduled at the end of the school year. Although many expressed their interest in participating, their job duties and schedules prevented them from taking part in the study.

The researcher initially had difficulty in determining which room the interview would be conducted in, which was frustrating for both the researcher and the teachers who were willing to participate in the study. Moreover, the researcher prepared to meet with different participants, from various focus groups, where the researcher wished to interview more teachers to acquire more information, in particular, those who were in distress about the secondary benchmark system. Additionally, the researcher would have liked to interview more teachers and administrators, to obtain different views on the strength and weaknesses or the benefits of the secondary benchmarks.

Delimitations of the Study

Simon (2011) stated that "the delimitations are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study" (para. 5). The delimitations for this study was in the control of the researcher. These factors as described by the researcher were the research questions, the theoretical model by theorists Good and Brophy who explained the *Constructivist Theory* adopted for the study as different to other theories/models that could have been adopted, and to include the participant population selected to interview (Simon, 2011). Two other delimitations were the geographical region of Southeast Florida, and the profession of education in the K-12 system, specifically a high school.

The researcher chose not to conduct the study at other schools within the district because the focus was more about this specific school site. At the beginning of the study, the researcher and communicated with the school principal who at the time was very interested in the results for the school. In addition to not conducting the study at other

locations was because of teacher access and administration cooperation. The researcher

has a better rapport with the teachers and administrators at the specific school site

because of the length of employment, trustworthiness, and sharing best practices as well

as everyone's dedication for their students' success.

Suggestions for Future Research

The researcher recommends a more in-depth research and analysis on a proposed

initiative based on the idea of "Aligning Secondary Benchmarks in High School

Curriculum Across Content Areas" that would benefit the learning experience for both

the teachers and the students. Teachers have expressed that they do not have any training

and some have further revealed their concern of not hearing or seeing the secondary

benchmarks within their school. Teachers explicated that they would have preferred to

be trained and also have the benchmarks aligned to the curriculum as part of their

workload. This would eliminate the teachers from feeling overwhelmed by teaching

various benchmarks within a particular subject area. A proposed initiative has been

created in having the standards aligned with one another. Polikoff, Porter, and Smithson

(2017) shared that to align different subjects; policy makers must understand what is

meant by alignment. Polikoff et al. (2017) suggested that the curriculum should be

reformed based on the school and their utilization of the inferior quality of teacher

preparation and professional development. Using the incoherent curriculum with

teachers on this site, policy makers and administrators should use or look at the tested

outcome regarding the core knowledge of the curriculum. The first step in making this

change is to establish an instructional coherence by viewing teaching and learning within

the school. In addition, it will be imperative to utilize the curriculum framework as a binding tool by using the core of the school's work to develop a solid curriculum in the core content areas, therefore aligning the rigorous curriculum materials to the framework to support teachers. This will be followed by placing the newly constructed framework built with the benchmarks from the literacy standards used as a guide by performance assessments developed by teachers to ensure quality and to create high-quality students assessment. This will encourage content pedagogy of the newly aligned curriculum.

Polikoff et al. (2017) explained that using students' assessments that are aligned with various achievement goals would provide information on a school's progress, in which policymakers can use as part of their designed accountability measures for both the school and students, and to create incentives for improvement. This would be a better method of evaluating the data gathered by the teacher over time to make a comparison of data collected previously (Polikoff, 2012). Teachers can help self-report by creating a comparison of data with the content standards and assessments by developing a survey for a quick response measure. In order to compare the workload of teachers' instructional goals from the past to the present, the following statement can be addressed in the future. When the curriculum is aligned to the standards, the learning outcomes will justify the assessment of the students in English/language arts, mathematics, and science.

Conclusion

A student's high school years are critical years for a student to develop. If the goal is to administer various assessments to young adolescents, then the decision is to appropriately challenge these students from different levels of ability (Virtue, 2015).

Teachers must provide meaningful techniques and strategies to enhance students gaining

knowledge. The researcher's goal of this study was to explain and demonstrate through

data that the district's secondary benchmarks, was not utilized by the focus group within

this study. The teachers did not believe in the benchmark system, and a majority of them

did not know how to implement it, while others never heard of the system. While others

claim that they have heard of the system, they still had an issue with the alignment, as

they believed that it might have been more beneficial for the teachers and students if they

were aligned. However, the focus group did not think that it would reflect students

reading comprehension from other content areas of the study. In contrast, the findings of

the study provided data throughout chapter four, which demonstrated that students were

not appropriately taught using secondary benchmark standards. Therefore, this gives a

reason as to why the students failed their reading courses and their states tests,

summative, and formative assessments. One teacher indicated that they needed teacher

training to properly administer lessons to students that demonstrated how to implement

the system adequately within lessons taught. Nevertheless, the benchmark system is

inconsistently utilized due to the school's administration team, as classroom instruction

was not enforced to implement the secondary benchmark standards. Virtue (2015)

explained that concerning to the assessment policy, the tests that are mandated should be

considered well taught with the factor of teachers using the district's secondary

benchmark standards with students.

Even though the study intended to provide actionable information, the results

demonstrate how inadequate the students of this high school were in reading

comprehension. Reading, which is a required skill to compete globally, can be improved

by mandating the alignment of secondary benchmark standards across all content areas to

be taught by teachers within high school from 9th through 12th grade. It is critical to

remember that participants reported that using the secondary benchmark was arduous

work, and even overwhelming to teach while having to teach their benchmarks from their

own content areas. The implementation of successfully using secondary benchmark

standards could only be improved if both the school board and the district high schools

along with their faculty would buy-into that learning system of pedagogy (Schildkamp &

Kuiper, 2010). However, the result of the study also coordinated facts that the school

staff mostly did not use the secondary benchmarks except for the reading teacher. The

administrative team and the school should take significant action with training teachers

that are already in the system and who have the required years of experience, and those

who are new to the teaching profession. Virtue (2015) suggested that professional

development in the long term with the conjunction of order instructional elements may

help teachers to understand how they can effectively complement their professional

judgment and give students applicable mean to succeed.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

Interview Protocol Question

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today to talk about your experiences as a teacher and administrator regarding the reading benchmark system. The purpose of this interview is to understand your experiences addressing the secondary reading benchmark system. I am not evaluating you or your school district. Everything we talk about today is confidential. I will be developing a report to document what you share with me, but no names or school districts will be identified. Our 2 interviews should take no more than 1 hour each. I would like to digitally record the interview with Dragon Speak dictation, and audio to text format, but your name and your school district's name will not be included on the transcripts, and the recordings will be kept in a secure location in my office. Please let me know if there's any point at which you would like me to turn off the recording device. Additionally, when I come for the secondary interview, I will be showing you a copy of this interview for your review. You can read your responses and make any additions or deletions at this point. Do you have any questions? You did receive a copy of this document 48 hours prior to this interview in the event you decided not to participate. [Hand out and collect signed consent form]

1. Please take some time to share personal thoughts on the secondary benchmarks system.

2. Can you talk about your experiences with the successes you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

3. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you have had with the secondary benchmark system?

4. Please explain your understanding of how the implementation of the secondary benchmark system will increase student achievement within your class.

5. Based on your personal experiences, please share your recommendations regarding teaching methods of your curriculum while using the secondary benchmark system.

6. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Demographic Data Form of Participants

Demographic Data Form of Participants

Date:

Name: NOT ACTUAL NAME . . . Please give the pseudonym for each participant.

T1, T2 . . . Tn for general education teachers

RT1, RT2 . . . RTn for reading teachers

ADM1, ADM2 . . . for administration

Gender: Male or Female

Race/ethnicity:

Age:

How many years of teaching experiences?

What subject do you teach?

Type of degree held?

 If you are an administrator, how many years in this position?

Administrators only: What subject did you teach while you were in the classroom?

Appendix C

Invitational Letter

Invitational Letter

Dear Participant:

As a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University, I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that delves into the phenomenon of the school district secondary benchmark system in reading. I believe this study will add to the body of knowledge regarding the implementation of the reading benchmark system within your school.

I would like to invite you to participate in two face-to-face interviews (i.e., focus group format), each lasting no more than 60 minutes. The sample for this study consists of participants who are part of three separate focus groups: administrators, reading teachers, and general education teachers.

As a participant, you will receive a packet containing an invitational letter that outlines the procedures, directions, and ethical requirements for the study. Your contribution is very valuable. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time. All records and documents with your name will be confidential and will not be identified in any publication of this dissertation. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Interviews will be digitally recorded by Dragon Speak dictation and audio to text dictation, for transcription purposes only. Solely the researcher will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be held in a secure area with a password protection. At the conclusion of the study, the recordings will be destroyed.

There will be no direct benefits to your participation in the study. However, your participation will involve reflecting on your experiences, which may provide other administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders' information useful for several purposes. The other schools within the district will become better informed about the secondary benchmark system of reading.

If you have questions, please contact me through e-mail at mf1321@nova.edu. Please accept my sincere thanks for your support and participation.

Sincerely,

Michael Forrest, M.S., Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
Aligning Secondary Benchmarks in High School Curriculums Across Content Areas

Funding Source: None

IRB protocol #:

Principal investigator   Co-investigator
Michael Forrest, M.Ed   David B. Ross, Ed.D
                                                           c/o Ashley Russom, Ed.D
                                                           Fischler College of Education
                                                           3301 College Avenue
                                                           Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314
                                                           800-986-3223, Ext. 27838

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information:

What is the study about?
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to
understand your experiences in working with the alignment of secondary benchmarks, in
high school curriculum, across content areas. The point is to create a package of standard
initiative that will help align school-wide secondary benchmarks with literacy standards,
to improve reading comprehension, and address students needs.

Why are you asking me?
I am inviting you to participate in this study because you currently have or will
potentially have students in your classroom setting. There will be approximately 16
participants in this research study.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?
You will participate in a research that will benefit students with the awareness of
benchmarks standards that are being used within the states assessment at your school site.
The interview will be held after school on Thursday which will not affect your duty
hours. Prior to the starts of the interview you will be giving a packet in that contain 6
protocol questions pertaining to secondary benchmarks standards. This will take
approximately 60 minutes and will take place after your duty day has ended. You will
also participate in other session where you will review your transcript of your interview
where you will sign and date.

Is there any audio or video recording?
There will be audio, but no video recording.

What are the dangers to me?
Risks to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risks you experience every day. If you have any concerns about the risks/benefits of participating in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at the numbers listed above.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?
There are no benefits for you taking part in this research study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?
The focus group interview protocol questions will not ask you for any information that could be linked to you. All files contained in this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet. No one will have access to the file cabinet except the researcher. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, or Dr. Ross may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?
You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:
If the researchers learn anything, which might change your mind about being involved, you will be told of this information.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing below, you indicate that
- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled Aligning Secondary Benchmarks in High School Curriculums Across Content Areas

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date _____

Appendix E

Requesting Permission to Conduct the Interviews

Community High School
Reading Department
Math Department
History Department
Science Department
Physical Education Department
Music Department
Administration

Aligning literacy Secondary Benchmarks Standards to other content area will produce learning acquisition for students who are not in a reading classroom. Teaching these standards will increase gains in these areas of studies including:math, history, science, physical education, and music. These standards are not taught in these above-mentioned areas within the school. In addition, teaching these standards will give students from other content area the opportunity to be successful on the states mandated assessment. The School Board will benefit from the research study after its personnel have carefully reviewed the evidence shown from the study as they mandated the curriculum.

The research interviews will be conducted in May of 2017. The process will take approximately two weeks in which the researcher will need 12 hours to conduct the interviews. Each teacher and administrator will be interviewed for one hour. The study will be conducted after their duty hours. All participants are 18 years or older as there are no students involved in this study; no testing room is required for this study. Requesting permission to use the school's library will be required to conduct the research interviews. I will provide a copy of the research document to the school board professional standards to ensure that required guidelines are correct and complete.

The participants will receive a copy of the invitation letter, consent form in which they will sign and date, and also the interview protocol questions. To ensure and safeguard all of the participants' identity and their ethnicity the researcher will exempt all of the participant's names and identity from the study. Only the information received and collected from the interviewee will be transmitted into the research. The information collected from the participants will be placed in a secure vault in the researcher's office to ensure privacy for all of the participants; this includes a password protected laptop for any digitally recorded interviews and typed documents.