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Addressing the Achievement Gap in Pinellas County Schools: School Improvement Plan Compliance of Listing and Implementing Interventions

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ADDRESSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN PINELLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS:

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN COMPLIANCE OF LISTING AND

IMPLEMENTING INTERVENTIONS

A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Melissa Porter

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research revolved around the achievement gap which exists among

Blacks and non-Blacks in Pinellas County Schools. The problem that I addressed was

whether or not the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan were actually being

implemented within the classrooms and whether or not those strategies were

academically effective to assist Black students. The method I used to determine

implementation and effectiveness was through the use of surveys distributed to parents,

students, teachers, and administrators. The results of the surveys revealed which

strategies were being used and were the most effective within the classrooms. In

conclusion, this study proved detrimental to making strides in closing the achievement

gap.

PREFACE

Addressing the Achievement Gap in Pinellas County Schools: School

Improvement Plan Compliance of Listing and Implementing Interventions was a study I

conducted to determine whether or not strategies listed in the School Improvement Plans

of various schools were actually being used within the classrooms. This project

specifically addressed the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding, which was a

document that resulted after a lawsuit was filed against Pinellas County Schools

regarding the achievement gap between Black and non-Black students. The role I played

in initiating this project was applying to conduct research within the district, reviewing

the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of the three schools, and surveying various

stakeholders to determine whether or not the strategies were implemented and effective

with Black students in order to decrease the achievement gap. This project was important

to me because I wanted to find out whether or not we were merely complying with the

legal agreement by listing the strategies in the SIPs, or if we were actually implementing

them within the classrooms. As an assistant principal, it was important to know what

teachers were doing in the classrooms with the students, and whether or not their teaching

was effective in student learning. This project was important to other stakeholders

because if the achievement gap is decreased and more Blacks obtain a high school

diploma, the community and workforce would benefit from them being productive

members of society.

  The significant leadership lessons I learned as a result of planning and completing

this project were to always be flexible when things do not work out as planned, be willing

to coach or provide professional development to teachers about how to use the strategies,

and to use the data appropriately. This meant to continue or discontinue the strategies

based upon what the data was demonstrating as far as how effective they were with students. This project influenced my preparation and growth in leadership by providing a different perspective to view various issues. It taught me how to refer to others for assistance in their areas of expertise, how to apply the learning to the situation, and how to seek professional development to meet the needs of the school and everyone involved.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I have worked in the education field for 12 years (as a paraprofessional in an elementary school for two years, a high school science teacher for seven years, and now as an administrator). I conducted this study in the Pinellas County School District (PCS) on the west coast of Florida, within the Tampa Bay Area. I am a Black, middle-aged, female assistant principal who encourages the academic achievement of all students.

However, for the purposes of this study, I focused on Black students since the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which is explained in the next section, addressed how the Pinellas County School system educates Black students as compared to non-Black students. Since the Bradley MOU (*Bradley v. Pinellas*, 2002) referred to this group of students as Black and everyone else as non-Black, I used the term *Black* in my paper, rather than the term *African American* in order to be consistent with this court document. I explained this reasoning to avoid offending anyone and to provide the rationale for not being politically correct. The term *Black* is one that I feel comfortable with and prefer using, because I perceive the term *African American* implying that I recently arrived from Africa and newly became a citizen. I was born and raised in America, as many of my family generations before me. Again, this is my personal view of the term, and nothing more.

Purpose

In 1964, a federal court case against Pinellas County Schools, unique only to this district, resulted in a legal decision calling for desegregation of the district's schools: *Leon W. Bradley, et al., v. The Pinellas County School Board, et al.,*

(1964/1999/2000/2006). In 2005, an amendment, named the "Bradley Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)" (*Leon W. Bradley, et al., v. The Pinellas County School Board, et al.,* 2006) was made to address additional interventions for Black students in regards to academics, discipline, and student assignments. The amendment was implemented to ensure that all students learn, and to address the graduation rate of Black students, which was low compared to White students. I selected to address the student achievement portion of the MOU. It specifically states, "Evidence of School Improvement Plans including data on Black student achievement relative to White and other students in general, strategies and interventions to improve Black student achievement, and school-based individuals responsible for implementation." (*Leon W. Bradley, et al., v. The Pinellas County School Board, et al.,* 2011). The interpretation of this statement led our district to require all schools to include a statement specifically to address how they would address closing the achievement gap between Blacks and non-Blacks. Schools had to set goals specifically for Black students and list strategies they would use to assist Black students in achieving those goals.

Upon reviewing the state's website for FCAT results (Florida Department of Education, 2012b, www.fldoe.org), it was evident that there was an achievement gap between Blacks and non-Blacks. What was meant by achievement gap was the difference in the test scores and achievement levels between Backs and Whites. The website categorizes the data into ethnic subgroups, which points out this gap.

The purpose of this evaluation was to identify the strategies listed in the school improvement plans (SIPs) of various schools and to evaluate whether the strategies were implemented in the classrooms; to determine current gaps between the Bradley

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) standards and present outcomes and practices; and to identify and build on existing, isolated instructional strengths to enhance the learning experiences and outcomes for all students. School Improvement Plans (SIP) were documents in which schools state their goals and project outcomes for students in reading, math, science, discipline, and attendance. There were specific sections in each SIP that requested information regarding the Bradley MOU. Schools had to list how they would specifically address the needs of Black students within their goals and projected outcomes. In order to address the goals, schools had to list strategies they would use with both Black and non-Black students in two different sections. Therefore, the focus of this paper was to determine whether or not those strategies listed were beneficial to Black students to impact student achievement. The Bradley MOU is comprised of the following standards: student achievement, student discipline, retention of minority teachers, and student assignment to programs and classes (Bradley MOU Progress Report, 2011, p. 1).

To investigate the fulfillment of this mandate, I met with principals and some teachers of other schools to inquire about the strategies they were using and the effectiveness of those strategies with this target group. This was similar to the "We Just Can't Meet NCLB" (Terry, 2010) article in which district employees worked to find solutions in closing the achievement gap among minorities and Whites. I wanted to research and determine if what we were doing was working. I delivered surveys to the schools for administrators, teachers, students, and parents to complete to determine what they felt students needed to be successful in school. This affected student achievement because it had to do with helping Black students learn and thus graduate from high school. This study was important to me not only because it was crucial to comply with

the law, but also that Black students might be successful. I wanted them to know that they can make it if they put their minds to it, regardless of the stumbling blocks that may be in their way. I am a living example of one who succeeded despite the obstacles.

Rationale

The rationale for conducting this research as to which strategies were effective for Black students was to ensure high student achievement for all Black students in all academic courses. The fact that an achievement gap exists between Whites and minority students throughout our country is an important reason to evaluate the strategies used in Pinellas County to address this gap. More importantly, the rationale for evaluating this gap in Pinellas County was to ensure implementation of strategies to satisfy the Bradley MOU. Upon review of the data for the various school districts in Florida, the percentage of Black students who scored at Level 1 on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is higher than the percentage of White students. In 2012, 29% of Florida's Black students in third grade performed at Level 1 on the FCAT as compared to 10% of Florida's White students; the data was the same for 2013 for the same grade level (Florida Department of Education, 2014). Upon comparing Pinellas County's FCAT Level 1 Black and White third grade students to other districts for 2012, Pinellas had 33% Level 1 Black students and 11% White students; while Hillsborough County had 30% Level 1 Black students and 9% Level 1 White students; and Dade County had 32% Level 1 Black students and 9% Level 1 White third grade students. This data supported the fact that an achievement gap was present throughout Florida and Pinellas County.

One of the standards of the Bradley MOU includes student achievement. Because we have to list strategies in the SIP that would satisfy the MOU, this was a relevant

aspect to research to determine the effectiveness of the strategies and to determine whether or not schools were merely listing strategies to be in compliance. The other standards of the MOU are student discipline and assignment to programs and classes. The standards for student achievement are as follows:

- Evidence of School Improvement Plans including data on Black student achievement relative to White and other students in general, strategies and interventions to improve Black student achievement, and school-based individuals responsible for implementation.

- Equitable allocation of resources.

- Data to support the above using district data systems such as EDS/Portal/Reporting Services.

The standards for student discipline (behavior) are as follows:

- Evidence of School Improvement Plans including data relative to Black student discipline relative to White and other students in general, behavioral strategies and interventions to improve student behavior, and school-based individuals responsible for implementation.

- Evidence of school-wide behavior Plans to include positive behavioral supports and professional development in the implementation of the plan through the use of data for identifying the underlying causes of negative behavior through problem solving (PS/RtI:B).

- Data to support the above using district data systems such as EDS/Portal/Reporting Services.

The standards for assignment to programs and classes are as follows:

- ▪Evidence of school improvement plans including data relative to assignment of students by race to exceptional education programs, accelerated classes, countywide programs, AVID, and/or gifted programs, means, and methods to achieve continuous improvement, and school-based staff responsible for implementation.

- Data related to Black student participation in exceptional education programs, accelerated classes, magnet/application programs, AVID, and gifted services. (Bradley MOU Progress Report, 2011, p. 1)

If the district did not meet the Bradley MOU standards, this would mean that there was a high probability of increasing the achievement gap between Blacks and non-Black students. The purpose of the Bradley MOU in the first place was to decrease the achievement gap. Secondly, if the gap was decreased, more students would make learning gains, thus increasing Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which satisfies the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate. Most importantly, when students accomplish the learning that is expected of them in school, this may increase their self-esteem in order to become successful members of society. I did not want the district to simply comply with the mandate, but I wanted the compliance to make a difference in the students' education and lives. The objective of this project was to determine whether or not the district was out of compliance and, if so, to work with others to offer solutions, interventions, and resources to assist our students.

I selected this particular program because, being Black myself, I wanted to see all Black students successfully complete high school. I wanted them to receive a more effective education so they may have positive options for their future. Many of them did

not realize that an education could lead them out of poverty, but only if they invested time into their education. They needed to reprioritize their lives and make education top priority over video games, hanging out with friends, and wearing name brand attire. I was not saying "do not engage in such non-academic activities." I was saying that these activities should be done in moderation and should not take precedence over education. Homework should be completed prior to going outside to play, playing video games, or hanging out with friends. They should not be so concerned with the clothes they wear that they miss class just because of a small spot or stain on the shirt. I was not saying that they should not be concerned with what they wear or how they look because appearance was important. I was saying that a student should not be so concerned with a small spot that was hardly visible that he stayed in the office waiting on someone from home to bring him a change of clothes even though he was offered another shirt. However, his complaint was the "offered shirt" did not match his outfit. I was saying that education was more important than any material thing because no one can take your education away from you. My interest in the Bradley MOU standards originated in my commitment to Black students receiving the focused attention needed to close academic achievement and graduation gaps so that their education works as effectively for them as a public school education works for other students.

This was important to me because I grew up on free-lunch all 13 years of my public education. Often we had to do without some of the things we wanted, but we always had the basic necessities in some shape or form. My parents did not have health or dental insurance. This meant we did not go for regular check-ups. We went to the doctor when it was required for sports or shots and to the dentist when we had a toothache. If we

were sick, home remedies were the method of choice for treatment. Having such a childhood, I knew that I did not want to have the same kind of adulthood. I wanted to be able to go to the doctor when I was sick, if necessary. I wanted to be able to access healthcare without standing in long lines waiting to apply for approval of welfare benefits. With all that I have learned from my experiences, I wanted to use them to help others succeed.

Another reason this was important to me was my grandmother told me when I was a little girl to get an education. She explained how family members lost their land because they did not know how to read. Some people had these family members sign over their property to them but told them the paperwork was for something else. As a result of my grandmother sharing this story with me, I made sure I completed high school. I thought that would be the end of my education because achieving that was something big for my family. However, I went further than that after my ninth grade English teacher asked me if I was going to college. I told her "no" because my family did not have the money. She told me that I could get the money. So, I started looking into scholarships and grants. As a result, I went to college on financial aid and graduated with my Bachelor's degree in Medical Technology in 1993.

This program evaluation was important to the district and the educational community because it attempted to assist in decreasing the achievement gap between Black and non-Black students. It is anticipated that test scores for this subgroup would increase, which would cause an increase in the overall district test scores. Also, the district could avoid another lawsuit if we were in compliance with stipulations of this one. Additionally, our employer stakeholders would benefit by obtaining better educated

employees, and universities would receive more college-prepared students. Subsequently, closing achievement gaps through application of the Bradley MOU standards could, in the long run, result in fewer Blacks being incarcerated and more Blacks being productive members of society. This would cause communities to improve and, more importantly, the individuals will feel better about themselves.

Goals

The goal of my project was to ensure that the Bradley Memorandum was fulfilled academically in schools in Pinellas County. Often we put achievement improvement strategies in place, but wondered if they were actually working for the intended audience. I chose this topic for investigation because it was easy for schools to list strategies and best practices presented by others, but I questioned whether we were really implementing them and whether they were working. This goal was directly related to student achievement because using differentiated strategies in the classroom may determine how successful a student will be academically when he or she has not been successful otherwise. Utilizing strategies that were individualized for student learning was a better mode of transmission of content knowledge rather than a one-size-fits-all type of instruction. This study applied program evaluation methodologies to assess the nature of a possible "implementation gap" between schools listing intended strategies in school improvement plans (SIPs) and schools actually implementing effective research-based strategies to close the achievement gap.

I reviewed the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plans (SIP) for three schools in our district. I contacted administrators to discuss and to obtain permission to conduct the research on their campuses. We discussed the strategies and two of the three

principals stated they used the strategies with all students but focused on individual student needs. My goal was not to just see if these things were being done, but if they were not being used, to facilitate the implementation of them with our Black students.

Research Questions

The primary question which drove my evaluation research asked, Which academic strategies were most effective to assist in decreasing the achievement gap among Blacks and non-Blacks? The related questions I had for my program evaluation included the following:

1. Were the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of the three schools implemented to attain the goal of increasing student achievement among Black students?

2. What level of progress did the teachers observe in the Black students by using these strategies?

3. If the Black students were not progressing, what could we do to make it happen?

4. If they were implemented, which strategies were most effective so they may be implemented in other schools?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to use program evaluation methods to assess whether the appropriate and most effective achievement improvement strategies were implemented with fidelity. My plan to conduct home visits with students and families in the target population to collect data and build closer relationships with the community affected by the Bradley MOU was not permissible as a researcher. Therefore, I was reliant on teachers to disseminate the Informed Consent Forms and surveys. I

intended for this project to benefit our district not only by assisting with compliance, but also, more importantly, by helping students achieve and by decreasing the achievement gap. I was excited about conducting this project and hoped for positive results in the end.

SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

There were numerous studies addressing the achievement gap between minorities and Whites (Childress, Grossman, & King, 2007; Mapp, Thomas, & Clayton, 2007; Terry, 2010). However, my study was somewhat different in that I conducted this research to determine whether the schools in our district were in compliance with the Bradley MOU in order to assist Black students become academically successful. Therefore, I focused on which strategies were effective in promoting academic success and thus decreasing the achievement gap. With this focus, I evaluated what other researchers deemed effective, and if those strategies could be implemented in our schools.

I found one article on DreamBox Learning which deemed small group instruction as an effective strategy to use with students to decrease the achievement gap (DreamBox_Learn, 2012). Finding this article was an important correlation to my study because small group instruction was a strategy listed in the SIPs. This correlation was an important discovery because it revealed that some of the strategies listed in the SIPs were research-based and were used in places other than Pinellas County Schools. The strategies most of the other literature listed were more social-emotional strategies to implement with students. Small group instruction is a physical strategy that teachers may easily incorporate within the classroom by grouping students by various abilities to address their specific needs. This strategy employs focusing on distinct areas within the content during direct instruction with the teacher while other groups work independently.

The two articles, one by Mapp et al. (2007) and the other by Childress et al. (2007), talked about the achievement gaps between minorities and Whites. These articles discussed a brief history of the school district, the situation, the problem, and the solution to decrease the achievement gap. In "Race, Accountability, and the Achievement Gap" (Mapp et al., 2007), it was noted that the achievement gap had existed for years, as far back as the days of slavery; that Black students needed to be challenged; and it promoted diversity training for school faculty and staff. In "Meeting New Challenges at the Aldine Independent School District" (Childress et al., 2007), the achievement gap increased due to a change in the format of the state assessment that was administered to the students. Professional development for faculty and staff was also listed in this article as being a key component to student success.

In the articles "Closing the Black Achievement Gap in Higher Education," by Petchauer (2007) and "Diversity and Learning on College Campuses," by Haysbert and Williams (2007), the authors believed teachers needed to take into consideration the culture and the learning styles of Blacks, and incorporate strategies addressing these items into their lessons daily. Thus incorporating such strategies into the lessons, teachers would meet the students where they were in order to assist them in learning. "Teachers should obtain the skills needed to translate knowledge into effective instruction and enriched curriculum" (Haysbert & Williams, p. 57). These students learned best by making the material relevant to their own lives. These authors illustrated the fact that after the achievement gap had occurred in primary grade levels, it often followed students to the college level.

In *Motivating Black Males to Achieve In School and In Life,* the author discusses relationship strategies teachers could use to assist in the academic achievement of Black males (Kafele, 2009). This is a different approach than merely focusing on the curriculum, which requires building positive relationships to earn the trust of Black males, thus inspiring and motivating them to succeed. Kafele (2009) stated that teachers need to take the following into consideration when interacting with Black males: the "need for inspiration; learning styles; goals and aspirations; experiences and realities; needs and interests; challenges, obstacles, and distractions; peers, parents, and neighborhoods; and history and culture" (p. 8). Kafele believed teachers should teach the students, not the content; that they can more effectively teach the students if they invest time in getting to know more about the students, especially how they learn. Although my research did not address these types of strategies, they yielded a different perspective to consider.

Dorothy Garrison-Wade and Chance W. Lewis expressed viewpoints that align with Baruti Kafele's views on developing relationships discussed above. In "Tips for School Principals and Teachers: Helping Black Students Achieve," Garrison-Wade and Lewis "addressed five major areas for promoting achievement for Black students." Those five areas were "respect, stereotype, connection, cultural understandings, and high standards." They went further to "provide five tips to assist educators in working with Black students:

1. Show students respect and it will be reciprocated.
2. Consider your first impression of a student. Avoid judging the student based on stereotypes.

3. Take the time to learn about our students' backgrounds and interests. This will help you develop a connection with them that may create an environment conducive to learning.

4. Recognize cultural differences and develop a multicultural curriculum. Establish high expectations and standards for all students and they will meet the challenge." (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2011, pp. 146-147)

Garrison-Wade and Lewis gathered this information by forming student focus groups who answered questions related to students' perceptions of the role White teachers play in Black students' academic success. As in Kafele's book, Garrison-Wade and Lewis do not focus on any particular classroom strategies for teachers to use. They focused on building relationships and understanding the students to promote academic achievement.

In "Young, Gifted, and Black," the author described highly engaging techniques (or strategies as the term used in the SIPs) used in a classroom of "low-income, cultural minority children" at "Berkeley High School in California" (Hilliard, 2003, p. 149). The techniques the teacher used included physical movement by utilizing hand signals and having the students to take a stand with their answers.

The idea here was to build students' confidence and willingness to take a position, even if it was not the popular one. By treating every answer as worthy of examination, most students did indeed take positions, challenge them, and listen carefully to others. (Hilliard, 2003, p. 150).

This type of classroom had a lot of energy, thus was not boring to the students. Students were learning high-level material and were performing well. In addition, there were no discipline problems among the students. This study showed that despite the low

socio-economic status of the students, they were challenged and therefore succeeded. Hilliard told of another classroom located in West Oakland, California where the teacher used culturally-sensitive materials, small groups, and physically engaging activities such as "sing(ing) and danc(ing) to serious themes, (doing) art, writ(ing) stories and essays, and play(ing) games for a purpose" (Hilliard, 2003, p. 153). In such classrooms observed by Hilliard, the typical lecture-style presentations of the content did not occur. Students were as much involved in their education as their teachers and the teachers built solid, positive relationships with students.

This literature helped me to evaluate what had already been implemented and what was successful for others. With this information, I was better able to determine what may work with our students in Pinellas County so they may become successful. I collected, "analyz(ed), and organiz(ed) the data" as suggested by Patton's four-part framework (Patton, 2008, p. 500). This assisted with "facilitating interpretation and judgment" of the data to determine whether or not the strategies were effective with Black students (Patton, 2008, p. 500). I was then able to generate recommendations to enhance student learning in an effort to decrease the achievement gap (Patton, 2008, p. 500).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there have been a number of studies regarding the achievement gap among Black and White students. My study was slightly different, in that my goal was to evaluate whether or not the strategies listed in the school improvement plans were utilized in the classroom and if so, if they were working. Analyzing, interpreting, judging, and making recommendations from the data were essential to this study to determine if

we were in compliance with the Bradley MOU. My data collection began with reviewing

SIPs to determine which strategies were being used at each school selected for research.

Then survey results indicated if the needs of the students within the classroom were being

met.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

This was a mixed-methods qualitative and quantitative study that utilized surveys and SIP documents to gather data to answer the study's research questions. The first portion of data I collected was the School Improvement Plans' purposive sampling of one elementary, one middle, and one high school in Pinellas County who had an enrollment of at least 40% Blacks. The original plan was to select one high performing and one low performing school at each level; thus two schools each. However, obstacles warranted adjustments to my selections. The obstacles I encountered with trying to select one low and one high performing school at each level included schools that were under the State's Differentiated Accountability program. The low performing schools were receiving interventions by the State of Florida and the district did not want any research conducted at those sites. As a result, I focused on one school from each level and all of these schools were rated a Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test letter grade of A, B, or C for that school year.

Then I surveyed administrators, teachers, students, and parents at the selected schools. I believed this methodology helped me answer my research questions because I received the input of most stakeholders who were directly affected by this MOU from the selected schools. By surveying those involved, I became aware of what administrators and teachers thought was helping the Black students, while getting feedback from that subgroup of students and their parents. I felt that student and parent input was valuable because they were the best people to tell me whether the SIP strategies were actually being taught to them and whether they were learning the material.

Participants

The key participants from whom I gathered data were students, parents, teachers, and administrators. They were chosen because they were directly involved in knowing whether or not various strategies were being implemented in the schools and if those strategies were beneficial to the Black students. I selected a purposive set of participants in each category. After I selected the SIPs from the three schools, I also selected teachers and/or administrators at those same schools. I surveyed the teachers because they were the ones in the classrooms who were able to tell me whether or not they were using the strategies listed in the SIP. The administrators were required to do walk-throughs, by which they should be able to tell me if they saw these strategies being used in the classroom.

I selected the students according to their FCAT achievement levels from the same schools of the predetermined SIPs and identified their parents as appropriate survey subjects. My selection of students included all students in Read 180 or Intensive Reading classes. These students usually were those who either scored a Level 1 or a Level 2 on the FCAT reading and who appeared, according to the teachers, to struggle (have difficulty comprehending and completing assignments), or have demonstrated academic improvement in the classroom. I selected these groups of students because they were in the best position to validate the presence or absence of the use of effective instructional strategies that were most beneficial to their learning.

Data Gathering Techniques

I gathered surveys (Appendices A, B, C, and D) and School Improvement Plans as my sources of data for this study. The reason for using surveys was to find out whether

the participants believed that the strategies were effective in increasing student achievement, and to obtain feedback for areas of instructional improvement. I used the SIPs to determine which strategies were identified for use by the teachers and administrators.

In order to conduct the surveys with students and parents, I requested the remedial reading teachers to distribute the consent forms (Appendices E, F, G, and H) to all of their students to obtain permission from the parents. Once the consent forms were returned, I asked the teachers to distribute the student and parent surveys only to those who had consented to participate. These surveys were precise in providing the answers I was seeking in order to avoid occupying too much of the parents' and students' time. To collect the surveys from teachers and administrators, I left a copy of the survey for them to complete. However, this occurred only after I had a conversation with the administrators and some of the teachers to inform them of and to obtain their cooperation with my study. Although I was able to meet with all three principals, I only met with a group of fourth and fifth grade teachers at the elementary school. I obtained SIPs from the Florida Department of Education website (Florida Department of Education, 2012c, http://www.flbsi.org/SIP/Login.aspx). This type of data collection required time on my part, but it did not cause any undue inconvenience to the participants. The administrators were able to complete the surveys by what they observed during school hours while conducting walk-throughs. The strategies were prepopulated on the surveys for their convenience.

Data Analysis Techniques

I analyzed the data by interpreting the returned surveys and by conveying the results in simple terms in order for all stakeholders to understand them. I utilized tables to show patterns in the findings that were significant for my study. The tables contain the survey questions and present the findings in a simple format that aids in the ease of reading the data. The tables include a summary of the findings above each table to describe any outlaying results.

Ethical Considerations

Participants had the right to exercise autonomy of whether or not to participate in this research study. I designed informed consent forms (Appendices E-H) that were used to document their consent. Parents received consent forms for their children (Appendices F-H) and themselves (Appendix E) to sign to participate in this study. Students delivered these forms to their parents and returned the signed forms to their schools. Teachers then distributed the surveys to the students for them to complete during class. Parents received the parent surveys at the same time they received the consent forms. Parents then returned the signed consent forms and the surveys to the schools. The data I used in this project came only from surveys accompanied by signed consent forms. Teachers and principals received the consent form in Appendix E to complete for this project. I obtained permission to conduct research t from National Louis University IRRB Committee and Pinellas County Schools Research and Accountability Department. Both institutions required the completion of an application and I had to wait on their approval before proceeding with this project.

Each participant's privacy and confidentiality was respected and upheld throughout and following this study. I affirm that no harm (neither physically nor emotionally) came upon any participant as a result of their participation in this study. I upheld the research ethical rules as expressed by National Louis University (National Louis University Institutional Research Review Board, 2001) and the Florida Code of Ethics (Florida Department of Education, 2012a).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of collecting data was to evaluate whether or not the strategies were being used and whether or not they were effective with Black students. I included the SIP data into the surveys, thus changing the methodology to that of a quantitative study only, not a mixed methods study. Thus, I obtained the necessary information with the selected quantitative method.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Findings

I collected the following data results via surveys to address the research questions. The number of participants was low; however, it reveals the perceptions of those who completed the surveys. I delivered the surveys to the three selected research schools and the teachers distributed them to all students in Intensive Reading classes. The Intensive Reading classes were selected to distribute the surveys to place them in the hands of the FCAT Level 1 students. I incorporated this piece into my research as a response to the district's request in its application process to narrow down which groups of students would receive the surveys. There was an item on the surveys for parents and students to indicate their ethnicity. I disaggregated the data into two major categories: results from all surveys collected from the various participants and results from only the Black participants. I also segregated the data according to the participants' responses. As an example, I created separate data tables for each group of participants from the surveys I received.

Learning Surveys: Elementary School Students

I distributed 197 surveys to the Intensive Reading students (Appendix A) at China Elementary School (pseudonym). Of these, 16 student surveys were returned, for a response rate of 8%. The data in Table 1 demonstrates that 100% of the students responded they knew how to learn; most (88%) of them believed their teacher knew how they learned. The majority (81%) of the students indicated they used small groups in the class room in addition to lessons driven by their interests, which were strategies that worked best to help them learn.

Table 1

Survey Responses of Students at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I know how I learn.	56%	44%	0%	0%
2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.	19%	69%	6%	6%
3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.	25%	50%	19%	6%
4. The strategies we use in the classroom include the following (circle the ones that apply to your class or write in your own). Strategies are the classroom activities that you do with your teacher in order to learn. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	81% small groups 44% lessons driven by my interests 38% positive behavior incentives 25% culturally sensitive lessons 12% lessons at my skill level			
5. Of those strategies, which ones work best for you? (You may list more than one.)	38% small groups 13% lessons at my skill level 38% lessons driven by my interests 6% positive behavior incentives 6% culturally sensitive lessons 6% one-on-one			

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	63%	19%	6%	12%

Note. 16 student participants out of 197 distributed survey

Table 2 includes the data collected from the Black students who completed the survey. All (100%) of them indicated that they knew how they learned, while 80% believed the teacher knew how they learned. Eighty percent of the Black students also indicated that the teacher uses how they learn to teach them. All (100%) of the Black

students indicated that small groups were used in the classroom. Forty percent of the

Black students indicated that small groups and lessons driven by their interests worked

best to help them learn.

Table 2

Learning Survey for Students at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I know how I learn.	40%	60%	0%	0%
2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.	20%	60%	20%	0%
3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.	20%	60%	20%	6%
4. The strategies we use in the classroom include the following (circle the ones that apply to your class or write in your own). Strategies are the classroom activities that you do with your teacher in order to learn. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	100% small groups 40% lessons driven by my interests 20% positive behavior incentives 20% lessons at my skill level 20% culturally sensitive lessons			
5. Of those strategies, which ones work best for you? (You may list more than one.)	40% small groups 40% lessons driven by my interests 20% one-on-one			

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Five Black student participants out of 197 distributed surveys

I distributed a learning survey to parents (Appendix B) at China Elementary

School. Out of 197 surveys distributed, six were returned, for a response rate of 3%.

Table 3 reveals the perceptions of the parents who completed the survey. One hundred

percent of the parents indicated that their child was learning in each subject area, they know how their child learned, and believed the teacher was teaching according to how their child learned. Fifty percent of the parents were familiar with the Bradley MOU while 50% were not. Eighty-three percent believed the strategies were working and indicated that small groups worked best to help their child learn.

Table 3

Learning Survey for Parents at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My child is learning in each subject area.	33%	67%	0%	0%
2. I know my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing and/or by repetition.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.	33%	67%	0%	0%
4. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.	33%	17%	17%	33%
5. I believe the strategies being used with my child are working.	50%	33%	17%	0%
6. I believe the following strategies are best for my child. Circle those that apply or add more. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	83% small groups 67% lessons driven by my child's interests 67% lessons for my child's skill level 67% positive behavior incentives 50% culturally sensitive lessons			

Table 3 (continued)

Learning Survey for Parents at China Elementary School

7. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:		17% "Pinellas County Schools should stop teaching to FCAT and teach children critical thinking skills." 17% "The only issue I have is with him not completing work."		
Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	67%	33%	0%	0%

Note. Six parent participants out of 197 distributed surveys

Table 4 reveals the perceptions of the Black parents who completed the surveys. One hundred percent of them stated that their child was learning in each subject area, they new how their child learned, and believed the teacher was teaching according to how their child learned. Fifty percent of Black parents were familiar with the Bradley MOU while 50% were not. Fifty percent of the Black parents believed the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan were working for their child. One hundred percent of the Black parents indicated that small groups worked best to help their child learn.

Table 4

Learning Survey for Parents at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My child is learning in each subject area.	50%	50%	0%	0%
2. I know my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing, or by repetition.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.	50%	50%	0%	0%
4. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.	50%	0%	50%	0%
5. I believe the strategies used with my child are working.	50%	0%	50%	0%

6. I believe the following strategies are best for my child. Circle those that apply or add more. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	100% small groups 50% culturally sensitive lessons 50% lessons driven by my child's interests 50% lessons for my child's skill level 50% positive behavior incentives
7. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:	"The only issue I have is with him not completing work." 50%

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
8. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Two Black parents participated out of 197 distributed surveys

I also distributed a learning survey to teachers (Appendix C) at China Elementary School. Out of 11 surveys I distributed, four were returned, for a response rate of 36%. Table 5 includes the survey results from the teachers at China Elementary School. All (100%) of the teachers were familiar with the Bradley MOU and felt the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) were effective with the Black students. All of them also stated they incorporated the strategies within their classrooms daily. Seventy-five percent of teachers indicated that they observed Black students making progress and they would try a different strategy when students were not making progress. Fifty percent of the teachers indicated that the most effective strategies listed in the SIP were differentiated instruction and small groups. Twenty-five percent of the participants wrote in a comment concerning Black History Month in regards to it being the most effective strategy used by teachers in the classroom. However, this was not an option listed on the survey, and consequently was not a strategy to use with students.

Table 5

Learning Survey for Teachers at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).	50%	50%	0%	0%

Table 5(continued)

Learning Survey for Teachers at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. The strategies listed in my school's School Improvement Plan for Black students are effective in the classroom and are assisting in their learning.	0%	100%	0%	0%
3. I incorporate the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan for Black students on a daily basis..	50%	50%	0%	0%
4. I understand by using these strategies, they will assist in decreasing the achievement gap between Blacks and non-Blacks. I observe progress being made by these students.	25%	50%	25%	0%
5. When they are not making progress, I try a different strategy to help them be successful.	50%	25%	25%	0%
6. The most effective strategies (listed in the SIP) being used are: *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	50% differentiated instruction [lessons related to culture, interests (25%), background, skill (25%), etc.] 25% positive behavior supports 50% small groups			
[25% Black History Month: This was a comment handwritten on the survey, which was not listed in the SIP]				

Note. Four teacher participants out of 11 distributed surveys

Additionally, I distributed a learning survey to administrators (Appendix D) at

China Elementary School. Out of one survey distributed, one was returned, for a response

rate of 100%. Table 6 reveals that the administrator strongly agreed that she was familiar

with the Bradley MOU, has almost always observed the use of the strategies in the

classroom, has always felt that the strategies were effective in the classroom as to assisting Black students' learning, has almost always felt the strategies were effective, and has almost always observed teachers stopping to assist students when they do not understand the lesson. The administrator felt that all strategies were effective with Black students and included the use of the Multi-tiered Support System (MTSS) as an effective strategy to meet the needs of students.

Table 6

Learning Survey for Administrators at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).	100%	0%	0%	0%
2. I have observed the use of the instructional strategies listed in our school's School Improvement Plan for Black students in this school's classrooms.	0% always	100% almost always	0% sometimes	0% never
3. I have observed the use of various instructional strategies during a lesson to reach all students, especially Black students (i.e. hands-on activities, chunking the lesson into digestible bites, relevance, etc.).	0%	100% almost always	0% sometimes	0% never

Table 6 (continued)

Learning Survey for Administrators at China Elementary School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4. The strategies listed in my school's School Improvement Plan for Black students are effective in the classroom and are assisting in their learning.	100% always	0% almost always	0% sometimes	0% never
5. I have observed teachers recognizing when a student doesn't understand the lesson and stopping to assist that student.	0% always	100% almost always	0% sometimes	0% never
6. The most effective strategies for Black students (listed in the SIP) I have observed are:		100% differentiated instruction (lessons related to culture, interests, background, skill, etc.)		
Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:		100% positive behavior supports 100% Multi-tiered Support System		

Note. One administrator participant out of one distributed survey

Learning Surveys: Middle School

I distributed 516 surveys to students (Appendix A) at ABC Middle School. Of these, three student surveys were returned, for a response rate of 0.6%. Table 7 reveals that 67% of student respondents knew how they learned, while 100% of them believed their teacher knew how they learned. However, only 67% believed that the teacher used how they learn to teach them in the classroom. Sixty-seven percent of the students indicated that small groups were utilized in the classroom and that small groups worked best to help them learn.

Table 7

Learning Survey for Students at ABC Middle School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I know how I learn.	0%	67%	0%	33%
2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.	33%	67%	0%	0%
3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.	67%	0%	0%	33%
4. The strategies we use in the classroom include the following (circle the ones that apply to your class or write in your own). Strategies are the classroom activities that you do with your teacher in order to learn. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	67% small groups 33% lessons driven by my interests 33% positive behavior incentives 0% lessons at my skill level 0% culturally sensitive lessons			
5. Of those strategies, which ones work best for you? (You may list more than one.)	67% small groups 33% lessons driven by my interests			

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	33%	67%	0%	0%

Note. Three student participants out of 516 distributed surveys

Table 8 contains the responses of the Black students who completed the survey. Fifty percent of the students knew how they learned, but 100% of the students believed their teacher knew how they learned. Fifty percent of the student respondents believed the teacher used how they learned to teach them in the classroom. Fifty percent of the students identified lessons driven by their interests, small groups, and positive behavior incentives as strategies being used in the classroom. Fifty percent of the students

indicated that small groups and lessons driven by their interests worked best for them to

help them learn.

Table 8

Learning Survey for Students at ABC Middle School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I know how I learn.	0%	50%	0%	50%
2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.	0%	100%	0%	0%
3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.	50%	0%	0%	50%
4. The strategies we use in the classroom include the following (circle the ones that apply to your class or write in your own). Strategies are the classroom activities that you do with your teacher in order to learn. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*		50% lessons driven by my interests 50% small groups 50% positive behavior incentives 0% lessons at my skill level 0% culturally sensitive lessons		
5. Of those strategies, which ones work best for you? (You may list more than one.)		50% small groups 50% lessons driven by my interests		

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Two Black student participants out of 516 distributed surveys

I distributed a learning survey to parents (Appendix B) at ABC Middle School.

Out of 516 surveys distributed, three were returned, for a response rate of 0.6%. Table 9

reveals that 100% of the parents surveyed believe their child was learning in each subject

area, they knew how their child learned, and that the teacher was teaching their child

according to how the child learned. Sixty-six percent of the parents were familiar with the

Bradley MOU, while 100% of them believed that the instructional strategies were working for their child. Thirty-three percent of the parents indicated the lessons driven by their child's interests, small groups, and lessons at their child's skill level were the best strategies for their child.

Table 9

Learning Survey for Parents at ABC Middle School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My child is learning in each subject area.	33%	67%	0%	0%
2. I know my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing and/or by repetition.	67%	33%	0%	0%
3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.	67%	33%	0%	0%
4. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.	33%	33%	33%	0%
5. I believe the strategies being used with my child are working.	33%	67%	0%	0%
6. I believe the following strategies are best for my child. Circle those that apply or add more. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	33% lessons driven by my child's interests 33% small groups 33% lessons at my child's skill level 0% culturally sensitive lessons 0% positive behavior incentives			

Table 9 (continued)

Learning Survey for Parents at ABC Middle School

7. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:	No comments were given.			
Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
8. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Three parent participants out of 516 distributed surveys

Table 10 reveals the survey results of the Black parents who completed the survey. All of the parents (100%) indicated that their child was learning in each subject area, they knew how their child learned, and believed that the teachers taught according to how their child learned. Fifty percent of Black parents were familiar with the Bradley MOU, but 100% of the parent respondents believed the strategies were working for their child. Fifty percent of Black parents indicated that lessons driven by their child's interests, small groups, and lessons at their child's skill level were the best strategies for their child.

Table 10

Learning Survey for Parents at ABC Middle School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My child is learning in each subject area.	0%	100%	0%	0%
2. I know my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing, or by repetition.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.	50%	50%	0%	0%

Table 10 (continued)

Learning Survey for Parents at ABC Middle School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.	0%	50%	50%	0%
5. I believe the strategies being used with my child are working.	0%	100%	0%	0%
6. I believe the following strategies are best for my child. Circle those that apply or add more. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	50% lessons driven by my child's interests	50% small groups	50% lessons at my child's skill level	0% culturally sensitive lessons	0% positive behavior incentives
7. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:	No comments were given.			

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
8. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Two Black participants out of 516 distributed surveys

Learning Surveys: High School

I distributed 646 surveys s (Appendix A) to students at Peace High School. Of these, five student surveys were returned, for a response rate of 0.8%. In Table 11, 100% of the students surveyed indicated that they knew how they learned, believed their teacher knew how they learned, and believed the teacher used how they learned to teach them in

the classroom. Eighty percent of the students indicated that small groups were a strategy

used in the classroom which worked best for them to help them learn. Sixty percent of the

students indicated that positive behavior incentives were also a strategy used in the

classroom.

Table 11

Learning Survey for Students at Peace High School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I know how I learn.	80%	20%	0%	0%
2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.	60%	40%	0%	0%
3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.	60%	40%	0%	0%
4. The strategies we use in the classroom include the following (circle the ones that apply to your class or write in your own). Strategies are the classroom activities that you do with your teacher in order to learn. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	80% small groups 60% positive behavior incentives 20% lessons at my skill level 20% culturally sensitive lessons 20% lessons driven by my interests			
5. Of those strategies, which ones work best for you? (You may list more than one.)	80% small groups 20% culturally sensitive lessons 20% lessons at my skill level			

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Five Black student participants out of 197 distributed surveys

      I distributed a learning survey to parents (Appendix B) at Peace High School. Out

of 646 surveys distributed, six were returned, for a response rate of 0.9%. In Table 12,

67% of Black parents surveyed indicated that their child was learning in each subject

area. One hundred percent of Black parents stated that they knew how their child learned.

Sixty-seven percent of parents believed that the teacher taught according to how their

child learned. Fifty percent of the parents were familiar with the Bradley MOU, but

believed the strategies were working for their child. Eighty-three percent of parents

believed that lessons driven by their child's interests worked best for their child.

Table 12

Learning Survey for Parents at Peace High School

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My child is learning in each subject area.	33%	34%	33%	0%
2. I know my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing, or by repetition.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.	33%	34%	33%	0%
4. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.	33%	17%	17%	33%
5. I believe the strategies being used with my child are working.	33%	33%	17%	17%

Table 12 (continued)

Learning Survey for Parents at Peace High School

6. I believe the following strategies are best for my child. Circle those that apply or add more. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	83% lessons driven by my child's interests 50% positive behavior incentives 33% small groups 33% lessons at my child's skill level 17% culturally sensitive lessons
7. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:	"That teachers understand that each student is unique and learns things at different pace than one another and some students may require a little more time and attention."

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
8. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Six parent participants out of 646 distributed surveys

There were 22 teacher surveys and four administrator surveys distributed to ABC Middle and Peace High schools. None of those surveys were returned completed. As a result, there was no school employee data to analyze for those schools. I believe some of the obstacles that decreased the number of participants in the secondary (middle and high school levels) schools included teachers being told it was optional, therefore not doing it. Perhaps for the administrators, completing the surveys was not on their priority list, therefore it did not get done. Even though it was optional for teachers to participate, I believe the request for participation was inadequately conveyed because I was not able to speak with them myself.

At the elementary school, the principal allowed me to meet with the teachers to explain my research and what I needed from them, which included sending home the consent forms, collecting them, and administering the surveys only to the students who returned the consent forms. At the secondary level, I only met with the principal who then spoke with the Reading Department heads, who then conveyed the information to the reading teachers. I believe the interpretation of the purpose and intent of my research was lost from one person to the next. Thus, I received less surveys from the secondary group than from the elementary group.

Learning Surveys: Summary by Participant Groups

The following are summaries of the learning surveys from all three schools, tabulated by all students, and all parents who responded to the survey. Table 13 is a summary of all Black students surveyed at all three schools. The majority (92%) of them knew how they learned, 93% believed their teachers knew how they learned, and 84% believed the teachers used how they learned to teach them in the classroom. Eighty-three percent of the students stated small group instruction was a strategy used in the classroom, of which 58% stated small groups worked the best to help them learn.

Table 13

Learning Survey for Students: Summary of Surveys Completed at all Three Schools by Black Students

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I know how I learn.	50%	42%	0%	8%
2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.	34%	58%	8%	0%
3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.	42%	42%	1%	1%

Table 13 (continued)

Learning Survey for Students: Summary of Surveys Completed at all Three Schools by Black Students

4. The strategies we use in the classroom include the following (circle the ones that apply to your class or write in your own). Strategies are the classroom activities that you do with your teacher in order to learn. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	83% small groups 42% positive behavior incentives 34% lessons driven by my interests 17% lessons at my skill level 17% culturally sensitive lessons
5. Of those strategies, which ones work best for you? (You may list more than one.)	58% small groups 25% lessons driven by my interests 8% culturally sensitive lessons 8% lessons at my skill level 8% one-on-one

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
6. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Twelve Black student participants out of 1,359 distributed surveys

Table 14 contains a summary of all Black parents surveyed at all three schools. It reveals that 80% of Black parents indicated that their child was learning in each subject area. All parents stated they know how their child learned. Eighty percent believed the teacher taught according to how their child learned. Fifty percent of Black parents were familiar with the Bradley MOU, even though 70% believed the strategies being used were working for their child. Seventy percent of them believed that lessons driven by their child's interests were best for their child, while 50% believed small groups were best to help their child learn.

Table 14

Learning Survey for Parents: Summary of Surveys Completed at all Three Schools by Black Parents

Question/Inquiry	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My child is learning in each subject area.	30%	50%	20%	0%
2. I know my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing, or by repetition.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.	40%	40%	20%	0%
4. I am familiar with the specific instructional strategies for Black students listed in our School Improvement Plan in accordance with the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.	30%	20%	30%	20%
5. I believe the strategies being used with my child are working.	30%	40%	20%	10%
6. I believe the following strategies are best for my child. Circle those that apply or add more. *Participants responded accordingly to each strategy:*	70% lessons driven by my child's interests 50% small groups 40% positive behavior incentives 40% lessons at my child's skill level 20% culturally sensitive lessons			
7. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:	10% "That teachers understand that each student is unique and learn things at different pace than one another and some student may require a little more time and attention." 10% "The only issue I have is with him not completing work."			

Table 14 (continued)

Learning Survey for Parents: Summary of Surveys Completed at all Three Schools by
Black Parents

Question/Inquiry	White	African American	Hispanic	Multiracial
8. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below	0%	100%	0%	0%

Note. Ten Black parent participants out of 1,359 distributed surveys

Interpretation

Although I have included data from all participants, the focus is on data collected from Black students and parents. These results appear to reflect the fact that the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) are being used in the classroom. The majority (58%) of Black students felt that use of small groups was the most effective strategy for them, followed by "lessons driven by my interests" at 25%. There were some areas in need of improvement as to usage in the classroom, such as culturally sensitive lessons, lessons at their skill levels, and one-on-one instruction, each scoring at 8% by the students. As for the Black parents, 70% of them perceived that lessons driven by their child's interests worked best for their child, while 50% selected small groups as what worked best. Twenty percent felt culturally sensitive lessons worked best for their child to learn. These findings indicate the differences among perceptions of students who were actually within the classroom and their parents who were not.

The discrepancy among the perceptions of the students and those of the parents may indicate the students may be better able to gauge what works best for them with certain teachers and they know the flow of the classroom. Parents are not in the classrooms on a daily basis and sometimes do not have a complete understanding of the

curriculum that is required to be taught to their children. Nevertheless, according to the data, it is evident that some of the strategies were working for many of the students, which is the most important aspect to consider.

The results from the teachers and one administrator survey specified observations within the classroom, as displayed in Tables 5 and 6. The teachers' survey results indicated areas to improve as 25% of them sometimes observed Black students making progress and 25% of the teachers sometimes tried a different strategy to help Black students be successful. The honesty of these teachers was appreciated, but such results led me to the interpretation that more needs to be done to ensure the success of all Black students, and all students for that matter.

Although the data revealed such results, it probably would have turned out differently if more people would have participated in the survey. The sample size of returned surveys was so small that the data did not present a good representation of the views of the population. The biggest problem with conducting this research was not being allowed to build relationships with the students and parents because I was not allowed to have any student's personal information. My original plan was to make home visits to conduct the surveys, but without having their addresses, I was unable to speak to parents personally to explain the research. This portion of the research procedure was modified to gain approval, but was a big hindrance to accurate data collection. Overall, I am glad to report that the strategies listed in the SIP are being used in the classroom, which indicates the list is not merely in compliance, but is in operation within the schools at the elementary, middle, and high schools.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgment

My primary research question asked, Which academic strategies were most effective to assist in decreasing the achievement gap among Blacks and non-Blacks, as perceived by students, parents, teachers and administrators at selected schools? According to the student and teacher surveys, the data suggest that small groups are most effective as to assisting in decreasing the achievement gap.

The first related question asked, Were the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) of the three schools implemented to attain the goal of increasing student achievement among Black students? In light of the data I collected, I would conclude that yes, the strategies listed in the SIPs were implemented to attain the goal of increasing student achievement among Black students. The results of the surveys showed that teachers did use the strategies and that the majority of Black students benefited from their usage.

My next related question asked, What level of progress did the teachers observe in the Black students by using these strategies? In Table 5, 25% of the teachers stated they always observed Black students making progress when they used these strategies. Fifty percent of the teachers stated they almost always observed Black students making progress using these strategies. Twenty-five percent of teachers stated they sometimes observed progress of Black students who use these strategies.

Another related question asked, If the Black students were not progressing, what could we do to make it happen? When students were not making progress, teachers stated they used a different strategy to help student success.

The last related question asked, If they were implemented, which strategies were most effective so they may be implemented in other schools? The data showed that most schools used the same strategies and found that small groups was the most effective strategy to use with Black students with 100% of Black elementary students, 50% of Black middle school students, and 80% of Black high school students agreed that utilizing small groups was the most effective strategy with them.

According to the data, all of the strategies listed in the SIP were implemented within the classrooms. However, not all of them were utilized to the same extent. There were some strategies (i.e., culturally sensitive lessons and lessons at my skill level) in which 17% of the students indicated their usage during class. Seventy-five percent of teachers always or almost always observed progress being made by Black students. Twenty-five percent stated they sometimes observed progress being made by Black students. This is an indication that some students were lagging behind. Seventy-five percent of teachers indicated that they always or almost always tried a different strategy when students were not making progress, while 25% stated they sometimes tried a different strategy. This was not good because we are expected to leave "no child behind" when it comes to education. However, it appears from this study's data that it is still happening in the sense that 25% of the teachers indicated that they shift strategies only occasionally. If a teacher is not taking the time to try something different, then he/she is not helping all children to succeed; merely teaching lessons without differentiating to meet the needs of all students sometimes does not suffice. The answer to the question, If the student is not progressing, what can we do to make it happen? is to try something different until you find something that works for that child. This is an example of what is

known as differentiated instruction (Robb, 2014). Of the strategies that were implemented routinely, the most effective strategies were small groups based on the student (58%) and teacher (50%) surveys, and lessons driven by my child's interests according to the parent surveys (70%). Overall, the results were positive because they confirmed that the strategies listed in the SIP were being used in the classrooms. Very few negative interpretations were derived from the data.

Recommendations

Despite a low survey return rate, this research project produced some new data that leads to some recommendations aimed at improving student achievement and supporting Pinellas County Schools' efforts to implement instructional strategies that advance the aspirations of the Bradley MOU. These recommendations focus on the aggregated student and parent responses that reported which classroom strategies were working best from their perspectives. On that basis, the researcher offers the following recommendations to support the Bradley MOU's aspirations to elevate Black student achievement and close the academic achievement gap for Black students.

1. I recommend that Pinellas County Schools reinforce classroom emphasis on lessons driven by student interests as the top instructional strategy favored by a majority of Black parents and students responding to the survey.

2. I recommend that schools emphasize academic work in small groups as an instructional strategy favored by Black students and parents in the survey.

3. I recommend that schools continue to promote positive behavior systems and strategies favored by Black students and parents.

4. I recommend that schools intensify efforts to assure that all teachers strive to adjust instruction and use differentiated lessons aimed at individual student skill levels. Finally,

5. Based on this study's finding that only 50% of parents indicated awareness of specific instructional strategies associated with the Bradley MOU, I recommend that affected schools adopt a communications initiative to disseminate details about the Bradley MOU goals and specific instructional strategies.

In summary, this research study succeeded in generating new data that determined levels of school awareness about instructional strategies associated with the Bradley MOU and the results affirmed which strategies are favored by school-level stakeholders. Fulfilling this project's function as a program evaluation, the study interpreted stakeholder survey data and offered five recommendations for school district improvement of detailed awareness of the instructional strategies that are most accepted in the community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, conducting this research was a long journey. But in the end, I am proud to report that teachers are using the strategies listed in the SIP. This is important to know that the strategies are not in the SIP just for compliance, but are being used. In fact, not only are they being used, but they are effective with the majority of Black students who completed the survey, as reported by the data collected from the surveys.

As a program evaluation, this project succeeded in engaging in content analysis of the Bradley MOU's declared interest in closing the Black student achievement gap and the related identification of specific instructional strategies captured in the School

Improvement Plans of the participating schools. This study provided a reality check in the form of assessing whether students, parents, and teachers reported awareness and use of the instructional strategies included in the SIPs. In addition, the project reported the instructional preferences of Black students and parents in particular, providing some valuable insight into what is working academically from the perspectives of the students served by the schools and districts. In that sense, I believe that this project makes a meaningful contribution to educators' understanding of which learning strategies evoke the most positive responses from the students examined in this study.

I wish I could have collected more data to make the results more meaningful, but I am appreciative of the principals who allowed me the opportunity to conduct this research at their schools. One of the downfalls of collecting data was the teachers' misinterpretation that passing out of the surveys to parents and students was not important when they were told that their participation was optional. I found it difficult to effectively conduct my research due to the strict guidelines of the district's research policy. The restraints included not being able to interview students and parents and not being able to distribute the surveys only to Black students. As part of the district guidelines, researchers are not allowed to have any student's personal information. Despite the fact that I am a school board employee, in conducting this research, I was treated as a researcher. Originally, I wanted to do home visits and speak with parents and students at the same time. I believe this method would have produced more data that I could have used and thus more reliable and useful data. As far as not being able to only survey Black students, I made an accommodation by including a section on my surveys

for students and parents to mark their races. This was a lesson learned to try something different next time.

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Appendix A: Learning Survey for Students

The purpose of this survey is to understand what helps you learn the material in the classroom.

1. I know how I learn.
   - o Strongly Agree
   - o Agree o Disagree
   - o Strongly Disagree

2. I believe my teacher knows how I learn.
   - o Strongly Agree
   - o Agree o Disagree
   - o Strongly Disagree

3. I believe the teacher uses how I learn to teach me in the classroom.
   - o Strongly Agree
   - o Agree o Disagree
   - o Strongly Disagree

4. The strategies we use in the classroom include:

5. Of those strategies, _____ works best for me. (You may list more than one.)

6. Please indicate your race:

□ White   □ African American   □ Hispanic   □ Multiracial

□ Asian/Island Pacific   □ Native American

Appendix B: Student Learning Survey for Parents

The purpose of this survey is to determine whether or not Black students are learning by the use of the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan under the Bradley Memorandum of Understanding.

1. My child is learning in each subject area.
   o Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

2. I know how my child learns (by seeing, listening, doing, or writing, and/or by repetition).
   o Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

3. I believe my child's teacher is teaching according to how my child learns.
   o Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

4. I believe the strategies being used with my child are working.
   o Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

5. I believe the following strategies are the best for my child.

6. Additional comments I have concerning my child's academic growth are:

7. Please indicate your race by placing a checkmark in one of the boxes below:

   □ White   □ African American   □ Hispanic   □ Multiracial

   □ Asian/Island Pacific   □ Native American   □ Other _____

Appendix C: Student Learning Survey for Teachers

The purpose of this survey is to determine whether or not the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan for the Bradley MOU are being implemented and are effective in the classroom.

1. I am aware of the strategies listed in my school's School Improvement Plan for Black students and I incorporate them in my classroom.
   - o   Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

2. The strategies listed in my school's School Improvement Plan for Black students are effective in the classroom and are assisting in their learning.
   - o   Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

3. I incorporate the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan for Black students on a daily basis.
   - o   Always   o Almost Always   o Sometimes   o Never

4. I understand by using these strategies, they will assist in decreasing the achievement gap between Blacks and non-Blacks. I observe progress being made by these students.
   - o   Always   o Almost Always   o Sometimes   o Never

5. When they are not making progress, I try a different strategy to help them be successful.
   - o   Always   o Almost Always   o Sometimes   o Never

6. The most effective strategies being used are:

Appendix D: Student Learning Survey for Administrators

The purpose of this survey is to determine whether or not the strategies listed in the School Improvement Plan for the Bradley MOU are being implemented and are effective in the classroom.

1. I have observed the use of the strategies listed in our school's School Improvement Plan for Black students in the classrooms.
   - o   Always   o Almost Always   o Sometimes   o Never

2. I have observed the use of various strategies during a lesson to reach all students, especially Black students (i.e. hands-on activities, chunking the lesson into digestible bites, relevance, etc.).
   - o   Always   o Almost Always   o Sometimes   o Never

3. The strategies listed in my school's School Improvement Plan for Black students are effective in the classroom and are assisting in their learning.
   - o   Strongly Agree   o Agree o Disagree   o Strongly Disagree

4. I have observed teachers recognizing when a student doesn't understand the lesson and stopping to assist that student.
   - o   Always   o Almost Always   o Sometimes   o Never

5. The most effective strategies for Black students I have observed are:

Appendix E: Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.
I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study   Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect. I have provided them a copy of this form to take with them.
I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:
• What the study is about.
• What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
• What the potential benefits might be.
• What the known risks might be.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT
**Information for parents who are being asked
to allow their child to take part in research**

Melissa Porter **and** Pinellas County Schools are concerned that as a parent you are aware of a request (for your child's participation in this study) and you have either given your permission or declined your child's involvement.

Title of study: Addressing the Achievement Gap in Pinellas County Schools

Person in charge of study and contact number: Melissa Porter , 727-298-1616

Study staff who can act on behalf of the person in charge: Dr. Stuart Carrier

Where the study will be done: The study will be done at the child's school.

Should your child take part in this study?
This form tells you about the study. You can decide if you want your child to take part in it. They do not have to take part. Your response to this form tells us your desires.
Before you decide:
• Read this form and any other information that you are given about the study.

• You may ask questions of the individual who is asking for your child to participate (the researcher). Their name and number are at the top of this page. Talking to them does not indicate your agreement for your child to participate. DO NOT sign this form to indicate your consent until all of your questions are answered to your satisfaction.

• All research projects conducted in Pinellas County Schools are reviewed by district level personnel and by the principal of your child's school. This is to ensure your child's safety; it does not mean that you should or should not allow your child to participate – that is your decision.

You can ask questions:
• You may have questions that this form does not answer. If you do, ask the person in charge of the study or the study staff. Remember, that this is not always the school personnel. The person you should address your questions to is at the top of this form.

• You don't have to guess about things that you don't understand or that are not clear. Ask the people doing the study to explain things in a way you can understand.

• You should only agree to let your child take part in this study if both you and your child agree to their participation.

After you read this form:
If you choose to allow your child to participate, then indicate your consent and sign the attached form. If you do not want your child to take part in this study, that is okay. Just indicate your decision and sign the attached form.

Appendix G: Consent Form Information

"Why is this research being done?" and "Why my child?"
The purpose of this study is to determine which strategies are effective.

What information is being collected?
The following information will be collected from each participant: answers to survey questions and the ethnicity.
Students will NOT put their names on the survey**.**

You have the right to inspect any materials prior to allowing your child to participate.

The study has been designed to protect your student's privacy.

What are the potential benefits to your child if they take part in this study?
Your child's participation or non-participation in this study will not affect their education or the relationship with their teacher or other school district personnel.
We do not know if your child will get any direct benefits from taking part in this study.
The potential benefits are: increased academic achievement in the classroom.

What are the risks if your child takes part in this study? There are no risks for your child.

What will be done to keep your child's study records from being seen by others?
This survey is anonymous; your child will not be identifiable by his/her response.
Federal law requires your child's study records to be kept private.
However, certain people may need to see your child's study records. By law, anyone who looks at your child's records must keep them confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:
• The study staff.
• People who make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also make sure that we protect your child's rights and safety:
o The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
o Pinellas County Schools personnel

What if you let your child join the study and then later decide you want to stop?
You are free to change your mind at any time. If you decide that you do not want your child to participate in the study after signing this consent form, tell the study staff as soon as you can.

If you have any questions about this study, call
If you have general questions about research being done in Pinellas County, contact the Research & Accountability office at 727-588-6253.
If you have questions about your rights as a person whose child is taking part in a
     research study, the federal government agency to contact is the Office for Human

Research Protections. You can call toll free at 866-447-4777 or email
ohrp@osophs.dhhs.gov

Appendix H: Consent for Child/Student to Take Part in This Research Study

- -

Consent for Child/Student to Take Part in this Research Study

STUDY NAME
It's up to you. You can decide if you want your child to take part in this study.

_____
Printed Name of Child/Student

Please choose one of the options:

I. – <u>Participation</u>

I freely give my consent to let my child take part in this study. I understand that this is for research purposes. I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Parent/Guardian   Printed Name of Parent   Date
of child taking part in study

OR

II. - <u>Non Participation</u>
III.

I do not want my child to take part in this study.
I DO NOT give my consent to let my child take part in this study.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Parent/Guardian   Printed Name of Parent   Date
of child taking part in study