



LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Date: June 28, 2018

To: Paul Schlichtman, Coordinator of Research, Testing and Assessment

From: Jennifer McCrystal, Director of Special Education

Re: District support to carry out school-based study

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the UMASS Lowell EdD program. The purpose of UML's practitioner-based EdD is to prepare PK-12 educators to be leaders who address seemingly intractable problems of teaching and learning in their local contexts. Now in the 3rd and final year of the program, I am ready to undertake my dissertation-in-practice study, which focuses on a problem of teaching and learning in my own school and is part of our school's efforts to address that problem.

The UML IRB considers the EdD dissertation-in-practice an "Organizational Problem Improvement Study;" such studies are not categorized as traditional research because they are not a systematic investigation for generalizable knowledge. The student-researcher may use existing school-level data and /or identify other data to collect (classroom observations, collect student artifacts, or conduct interviews, etc.) to investigate and address the problem, therefore, the student researcher does need to acquire consent from the institution, participants, and parents as appropriate.

As the student-researcher, I am reaching out to you for institutional support to carry out my dissertation-in-practice in my school. Below I have included a brief description of my study, including the study purpose/inquiry questions, my data collection strategies, and the study timeline. I do plan to ask for consent from all participants and, importantly, I do not evaluate any of the participants who will be invited into my study.

My theory of action is if general and special education teachers participate in coordinated professional development focused on aligned reading instruction, which is data driven and framed around a district created reading binder, special education students, will make effective progress in the area of reading. This will be a qualitative study to gain knowledge of the best approach to implementing and aligning the resources included in the district created instructional reading resource binder. The data will be acquired in a school-based context. There will be a small sample size of four teachers participating in the project with the intent of gathering in-depth data about the process of aligning and changing practice. The participants will be two third grade special education teachers and two third grade general education teachers.

The overarching questions and sub questions of this study are:

- How does the use of a district reading binder shape the instructional practice of two general education teachers and two special education teachers?
 - How, if at all, does binder implementation increase aligned reading instruction between the teachers?
 - How, if at all, does the teachers' reading instruction change as result of binder implementation?
 - In what ways, if any, does binder implementation shape the nature of the teachers' collaborative work?
- What do the teachers need in order to fully implement the binder in their classrooms?
 - What, according to the teachers, are the challenges of implementing the binder?
 - What professional learning opportunities do the teachers need in order to fully implement the binder in their classroom?

- What additional resources to teachers describe needing in order to fully implement the binder to align the instruction in their classrooms?
- What, according to the teachers, is the impact of binder implementation on their students’ reading performance?

The following is a table of the timeline and data collection strategies that I will use:

Sequence	Action or Task	Procedure
July 15 - August 15	Submit IRB application	Write application Reviewed by chair Submit to irb@uml.edu
Aug.-Sept.	District Training	Recruit participants and train
Sept. – Nov.	Interviews Surveys Observations	Conduct
Sept. – Nov.	Data Analysis	Transcribe, code, memo and check data
Nov. – Dec.	Submit Chapter 3	Develop and write
Dec. – Jan.	Submit Chapter 4	Develop and write
Jan. – Feb.	Submit Chapter 5	Develop and write
February	Final Edits	re-write, finalize chapters 1-5
March 1, 2019	Final submission	
April 15, 2019	Defend Dissertation	
April 20, 2019	Submit final materials	

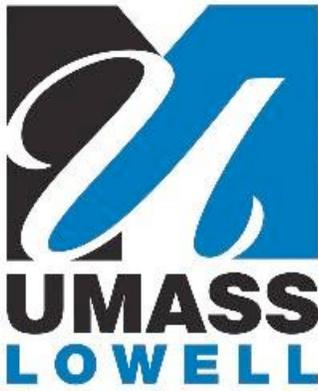
I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have any additional questions regarding my study.

Recruitment Script

Welcome back! I do hope that you all had a chance to relax this summer. It's hard to believe we'll be back to school in a matter of days! As many of you know, I've been working on my doctorate for the past two years. This year I'll be conducting the last major task for my degree, which is a 13 week study and I just want to tell you a little bit about it because I will be asking for teaching teams to volunteer to participate. We all know that our students with special needs do significantly worse on all academic measures as compared to their non-disabled peers. This is particularly observable in reading performance. The district has invested in the development of a district-wide resource that outlines effective (empirically supported, data-driven) strategies for reading instruction; it is referred to as "the binder." The purpose of my research is to examine how teacher teams implement the binder. Specifically, I'm looking to answer questions like: How, if at all, does binder implementation increase aligned reading instruction between the teachers?

- How, if at all, does the teachers' reading instruction change as result of binder implementation?
- In what ways, if any, does binder implementation shape the nature of the teachers' collaborative work?
- What, according to the teachers, are the challenges of implementing the binder?
- What professional learning opportunities do the teachers need in order to fully implement the binder in their classroom?
- What additional resources to teachers describe needing in order to fully implement the binder to align the instruction in their classrooms?
- What, according to the teachers, is the impact of binder implementation on their students' reading performance?

Participation in the study requires commitment from both teachers on a team. I'll ask those who choose to participate to respond to surveys that are emailed each week of the 13 week study; to be observed in their individual classroom during two lessons of reading instruction; to provide relevant redacted student work products and instructional artifacts; and to take part in three individual, semi-structured 60-90 minutes interviews and one 60-90 minute focus group discussion. If you're interested in doing something different now and helping me to understand what works and what we should continue to do and expand, I would sincerely ask you to consider taking part in my study. Participation is entirely voluntary and it is in no way related to your evaluation. Should you choose to participate, I would not serve as your primary evaluator and there would be no bearing on your continued employment at your school. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time during the study. If anyone has questions right now, I'd be happy to answer them. If not, I'll be sending a follow up email to formally invite you to participate. The email will include an informed consent that lays out everything about the study. Thanks for listening!



AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

IRB No.: 18-159-SZC-XPD Rev. No./Date:2/9-5-18

Consent Form Title: Teacher Consent to Survey, Individual Interview, Observation, Artifact Collection, & Focus Group Discussion

Project Title: Increasing Reading Achievement For Students Receiving Special Education Through Teacher Professional Development And Improved System Organization

Summary Statement: Participation in the study requires you to be observed in your classroom during two lessons of reading instruction, to provide relevant redacted student work products and instructional artifacts, and to take part in three individual, semi-structured 60-90 minutes interviews and one 60-90 minute focus group discussion. The primary risk is that your participation may be unintentionally disclosed, but the student researcher will take steps to reduce that risk to you. There is no direct benefit to you from participating in the study.

Study Purpose: The researcher conducting this study is the director of special education in a district where students with special needs significantly underperform on all academic measures as compared to their non- disabled peers. The purpose of her organizational problem improvement study is to examine how to implement and align the resources to support the teaching of reading, particularly for students with disabilities.

Procedure and Duration: If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will ask for permission to take part in the following:

■ Interviews: You will participate in three semi-structured, 60-90 minute interviews held at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study. The interviews will prompt you to discuss what you need to align your instruction with your co-teacher and to effectively implement the district's reading instruction resource binder. Additionally, you will be asked to provide feedback on what is helpful and if you notice an impact on student performance. With your permission, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional

service. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, the researcher will document the interview with handwritten notes. The interviews will take place in during or after the contracted work day and in your classroom to ensure that you feel comfortable and have access any materials you would like to reference during the interviews. In an effort to protect your confidentiality, the student researcher will ask you to identify a pseudonym for yourself prior to beginning the first interview. You will be asked to use the pseudonym in all study-related interactions and not to refer to yourself, your colleagues, or your students by name. At any time you may opt to withdraw from an interview; if you withdraw from an interview or you are unable to participate in all three interviews, you will still be included in the study.

📄 Surveys: You will be emailed a weekly survey that prompts you to share your thoughts and perceptions of the binder implementation and alignment. The survey will take roughly 20 minutes to complete. Survey questions may be repeated week to week to gain insight over time but the questions may also vary based on the feedback from the previous week. You will be asked to return the survey as an attachment and to use only your pseudonym on the weekly survey. Because the survey will be attached to your school email, the researcher will delete the email after saving the attachment in an electronic survey file on her password protected laptop and she will print and chronicle each weekly survey as a

hard copy in a notebook. At any time you may opt to withdraw from a survey; if you withdraw or you are unable to submit all thirteen surveys, you will still be included in the study.

📄 Observations: Observations of your reading instruction will be conducted during two 45 minute lessons. With your permission, the observations will be audio-recorded; if you prefer not to be audio-recorded, the researcher will document the lesson using a running record. The observation will focus on what you say and do as you deliver reading instruction; no student identifiers will be collected. If, for any reason, you choose to opt out of one of the observations of their classroom practice, you may still continue to participate in the study.

📄 Review of Artifacts: Over each of the 13 weeks of the study, the researcher will ask you to collect and share de-identified student work products and instructional artifacts; specifically, she will ask that you share the student progress forms, resource notebooks and completed reading assignments of your students with disabilities. She will also ask that you collect and share the modified assignments and support materials used with students with disabilities. The researcher will ask that you redact students' names and identify them as "Student A, B, C," and so on before sharing the information; all artifacts will be collected as digital images and shared each week following an email prompt from the student researcher.

Focus Group Discussions: The 60-90 minute focus group discussion occurs at the end of the 13 week study and provides all participants an opportunity to reflect on and engage in an informal conversation about their experiences implementing the binder. The focus group discussions will be held at a time convenient to participants, during or after the contracted school day. The researcher will lead the discussion by asking broad questions that are designed to provide insights about whether and how the binder helped coordinate teachers' reading instruction and improve student performance. For example, questions for you to consider might include: Did your work together in supporting students with special needs in reading change at all as a result of using the binder? How? What did you do differently? To what end? Are there things that you all did that went well? What would you change? Suggestions for improvement will be documented in order to improve the practice if implemented on a larger scale in the future. With your permission, the focus group discussion will be audio recorded. If you prefer not to be recorded, the researcher will keep written notes to document the discussion. If any one of the participants declines to be recorded, handwritten notes will be kept by the researcher.

Potential Risks and Discomfort: Although this research poses no more than minimal risk you may have feelings of discomfort when taking a survey or participating in discussions that require you to reflect on district improvement processes that may include instances in which you have delivered problematic or inconsistent teaching practices. You may also experience discomfort when participating in observations in which you are trying out new instructional approaches. These potential risks are inherent to district improvement efforts and non-evaluative observations. The researcher does not serve as your primary evaluator and your participation in the study has no bearing on your standing or continued employment in your school. However, you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time during the study. As with any study of this nature, there is always some risk that comes with participation. For example, with focus groups, you are asked to respect the confidentiality of each other and not to repeat what was said outside of the focus group. The researcher cannot guarantee that no one will speak about the focus group, but she will ask you to respect each other's confidentiality. She will ask that you do not say anything that would cause you embarrassment or distress if it were to be repeated. To further protect you and reduce this risk the researcher will not ask you for your name during the interviews or during observations and she will advise you to remember that you should not make any statements that could identify yourself or anyone else. Should your name be used during the interviews or observations, the

researcher will redact your name from the transcript. The survey, interview and observation data, along with relevant artifact data will be kept in locked files and on a password protected computer

under the control of the student researcher at all times.

Incentives/Compensation: Participation in this study is voluntary and no compensation will be offered or provided.

Anticipated Benefits to the Subject or to Non-subjects: While you may not benefit directly from your participation within this study, your contributions and responses will inform further refinement of the district's efforts to support students with special needs, particularly in reading. Furthermore, information from the study may help the district with regard to preparing and supporting the creation of professional development opportunities.

Right to Refusal or Withdrawal of Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or stop taking part in this study at any time. Early withdrawal from the study or a decision to not participate in the study will not influence or affect your work or your employment in any way. Please inform the researcher directly if you should elect to withdraw from the study. No one except the researcher will know whether you decide to participate or not.

Assurances of Privacy and Confidentiality: The researcher will do her utmost to protect your confidentiality by keeping survey data, audiotapes and transcriptions, and study-related artifacts in password protected drives only accessible to the researcher and her university advisor. All surveys, artifacts, and transcriptions of the recording will not include your name, but we will use your preferred pseudonym instead. No direct quotes will be used if such quotes have the slightest risk of revealing your identity. The recordings will be destroyed one month after the completion of the study (June 2019). The public report that comes from this study will contain no identifying information about you (or any individuals who participated in this research). The student researcher will not divulge any information about you. Immediately after the observations are completed, you will be given the opportunity to have us erase the recording if you decide you do not wish to participate in the study or have your observations used. All data derived from observations will be stored in a password protected laptop and in a locked cabinet in the PI's office at 523 O'Leary Building, 61 Wilder Street Lowell, MA. All data will only be accessible to authorized persons: the researcher and her faculty advisor. All data will be destroyed by June 2019.

Additional Information: If you have any questions after the interview, you may contact the student researcher, Jennifer McCrystal at Jennifer_mccrystal@student.uml.edu or please feel free to contact her faculty advisor, Stacy Szczesiul, Associate Professor, College of Education University of Massachusetts Lowell, 978-943-4633, stacy_szczesuul@uml.edu. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant you may also contact the UMass Lowell Institutional Review Board at 978-934-3452.

Principal Investigators Signature(s)

Printed Name: Stacy Szczesiul Date: Signature:

_____ **Student Investigator**

Signature Printed Name: Jennifer McCrystal Date: Signature:

Participant Signature: *I understand the potential risks and/or discomforts that have been described in this document and by the researcher. By signing below, I am indicating that I have read this document, had the opportunity to discuss any concerns and ask question about the research, and understand the risks and consequences of participating in this study.*

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Email: _____

Consent to Audio-

Recording: Please make an appropriate selection below:

I agree to be audio-recorded during the individual interviews I DO NOT agree to be audio-recorded during the individual interviews

I agree to be audio-recorded during the focus group discussion I DO NOT agree to be audio-recorded during the focus group discussion

I agree to be audio-recorded during the classroom observations I DO NOT agree to be audio-recorded during the classroom observations

IRB AUTHORIZATION

This research study and consent document has been approved for use by the UMass Lowell Institutional Review Board. For questions related to approval or to report anything about the study, please contact irb@uml.edu or call 978-934-3452.

IRB Authorized Signature: Approval Date: 9/5/18



