ABSTRACT

Title of Capstone: AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR READING COLLABORATION AROUND THE INSTRUCTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Lauren E. Duewer, Doctor of Education in Educational School System Leadership, 2026

Capstone directed by: Dr. Jean Louise Snell, Associate Director (CEII) and Senior Faculty Specialist, College of Education

Reading proficiency in the intermediate grades is a strong predictor of success in high school and beyond. However, the research indicates that lagging reading performance as early as 3rd grade is correlated to lower high school graduation rates. The connection between a lack of reading proficiency and negatively impacted graduation readiness is stronger for students with special needs. This exploratory qualitative research study aimed to understand the instructional challenges in planning effective literacy instruction for special education students in the intermediate grades (grades 3-5). The primary driver highlights the need to elevate the quality of intermediate elementary reading instruction for students with disabilities by addressing the interplay between the special educator and the general educator in effective collaborative planning. This study used focus groups/interviews and the short-cycle implementation of a structured collaborative planning protocol to engage educators in an intentional collaborative

planning process focused on reading across a sampling of elementary schools within the target district.

From this study, I hoped to learn whether there is a meaningful relationship between structured collaboration and the implementation of targeted literacy instruction for students with disabilities. While this study is small in scale, I learned that a collaboration support like the Strategic Collaboration Protocol can be influential in improving communication between the general education and special education teachers around the reading needs of students with disabilities. However, while the protocol appeared to improve collaboration around reading content accommodations for students with disabilities, it did not increase teaming around foundational decoding or comprehension instruction. This study also raised important questions about the variability in the implementation of accommodations, the foundational reading-skills training needed by intermediate educators, and the cultural shift needed to build buy-in for collaboration. The accompanying impact products – executive summary and invitational presentation – summarize the findings from the study and invite district leaders to initiate and join a Networked Improvement Community to continue the iterative improvement process with the Strategic Collaboration Protocol.

AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY EDUCATOR READING COLLABORATION AROUND THE INSTRUCTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

Lauren Elizabeth Duewer

Capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Ed.D. in School System
Leadership
2026

Advisory Committee:
Jean Snell, Ph.D., Chair
Christine Neumerski, Ph.D.
Cherise Hunter, Ph.D.
Katryna Andrusik, Ph.D.
Shannon Kane, Ed.D.
Donald Bolger, Ph.D., Dean's Representative

© Copyright by

Lauren Elizabeth Duewer

2026

Preface

My journey into this doctoral research process began in high school, when my National Honor Society group volunteered to tutor middle school students with disabilities. It was when working with them on their individual needs that I realized I had a knack for explaining things differently, which helped them feel successful with challenging skills. I also volunteered to teach in the children's program at my congregation with elementary kiddos who had a variety of needs, and it was then that my joy for teaching blossomed. I worked with some great educators who also taught in the children's program to learn teaching strategies and to understand that the joy of teaching is seeing kids learn and share their learning in their own words, through drawing, acting, and movement. Around this time, I went on a mission trip to Israel, and we learned and performed songs in both American Sign Language (ASL) and English. From this experience, I was inspired to learn more about ASL and the deaf experience, which I used to encourage peers at the high school to petition the district to make ASL classes available at our school. We succeeded, and I took those courses through the rest of my high school career.

My development continued into college on both fronts, championing learning for people with learning differences, as I joined the University of Maryland family at College Park in the College of Education's Special Education program during the day. In the evening, I took courses toward an ASL interpreting certificate at Catonsville Community College. After earning my bachelor's degree, I continued my studies by pursuing a master's in Special Education at UMCP, with a focus on learning disabilities and behavior disorders. I developed a strong sense of justice around learning for all people and the need for the learning process to be individualized.

As I worked as a special educator in self-contained classrooms early in my career, I realized that while I was often excluded from scheduled collaboration with my grade-level colleagues, I could learn so much more about making the curriculum accessible by intentionally setting aside time to meet with them. I also found that all our students received better, more targeted instruction when we brainstormed together. Even as I transitioned into being a resource teacher, chairperson, and special education instructional specialist throughout my 21-year career, I have championed the idea that improvement happens when educators develop collaborative relationships and are vulnerable together, as part of my convictions.

While reading has always been a focus of my teaching and a need for many of my students, I was struck, as we dug into the new Common Core standards, by how foundational reading seemed to dwindle after 2nd grade and was essentially eliminated in middle school. However, this really hit me hard when I first read about the findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) around reading. Less than half of 4th graders read at grade level, and students with disabilities were almost twice as likely to be below grade level (EAB, 2019; Hernandez, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). To me, this signaled that foundational reading skills were not just a gap for my students with disabilities, but needed nationwide focus. Seeing that data and talking with my general education colleagues in the intermediate grades, they did not see space in the curriculum to work on foundational reading, especially at the pace demanded. As a special educator, trying to fill the foundational reading gap was even more challenging when we could not plan together, especially to make the curriculum accessible with accommodation supports and strategies. It is the most motivated and collaborative educators who were able to create learning that not only addressed the needs of students but also created instruction that inspired.

In my recent role as a special education instructional specialist, my colleague encouraged me to pursue the dream that my late father gave me–to explore solutions to persistent problems through research–especially through a doctoral program. When the University of Maryland presented on the Educational Doctorate in School System Leadership, I was inspired to continue my learning journey to better understand the structures and systems that shape the outcomes for our students and, more broadly, our community. Beyond my own learning, I used the Capstone process to bring together my passion for individualized learning and to dig deeper into planning for effective reading. When I learned that children who do not read proficiently in 4th grade are more than 4x more likely to NOT graduate than their reading proficient peers, and even higher for students with disabilities, my sense of injustice peaked. I knew I needed to dive in to better understand the collaboration systems that impact the planning of effective instruction to improve reading outcomes for our students (see EAB, 2019; Hernandez, 2011; Lesnick et al., 2010).

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my late father, Dennis, and my mom, Melanie, who always believed that I would make this learning journey, even before I was willing to agree. To my husband, Rob, and son, Gavin – thank you for your love and beautiful understanding across the many iterations of this capstone process. To my family, friends, colleagues, and learning community – the reassurance, feedback, support, and positive words have kept me inspired and motivated. The ongoing encouragement from my #Cohort4Life, my professors, my advisor, Jean, and key colleagues who kept me going through thick and thin. Finally, to all the educators who devote their time, money, and brain space to improving the education of all of our students, especially those with the unique brilliance to learn differently.

Table of Contents

List of Tables xii

List of Figures xiii

List of Abbreviations xiv

Section 1 1

Introduction 1

Literature Review 3

The Problem 9

Local Background 9

The Problem of Practice 11

Components of Reading 11

Intermediate Reading Impacts Graduation 14

Collaboration in Reading 16

Students with Disabilities & Reading 17

Students with Disabilities & the Law in Schools 20

Causal Systems Analysis 22

Teacher Capacity 23

Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities 26

Collaboration Structures 31

Theory for Improvement 35

Develop Teacher Capacity Around Reading and Student Accommodations 36

Reenvision the Collaborative Mindset 38

Improve Collaborative Structures 39

Theory of Improvement 42
Section 2 47
Methodology 47
Research Aim & Questions 47
Subject Recruitment and Selection 48
Recruitment 48
Selection 50
Data Collection 54
Data Analysis 58
IRB & Human Subject Protections 60
Section 3 62
Qualitative Analysis 62
Participant Demographics 62
Focus Group Findings 64
Research Question 1: What Are Current Collaboration Practices Between Intermediate General and Special Education Teachers? 65
Finding #1: Significant Variability in CPB Implementation 66
Finding #2: The Prominence of the Rolling Agenda 69
Finding #3: Informal Collaboration Trumps CPBs 70
Finding #4: Collaboration Focuses on Accommodations 71
Research Question 2: How Do Special Education Teachers Experience Collaboration on Teaching Reading to Students With Disabilities? 74
Finding #1: Tier 3 Reading Supports 75

Finding #2: Reading Collaboration Extends Across All Intermediate Content Areas 77
Micro-Journal & Exit Ticket Findings 79
Research Question 3: How Can a Structured Collaborative Protocol Impact Collaborative Practice for Reading? 79
Micro-Journal Responses/Reflections 79
Exit Ticket Responses/Reflections 84
Discussion 89
Collaborative Planning Is (and Is NOT) the Answer 89
Collaborative Plans Do Not Equal Consistent Implementation 93
Limitations 96
Implications of this Research 100
Recommendations for District A 102
Impact Project Plan 105
APPENDICES 109
Appendix A: Invitation Email to Elementary Principals 110
Appendix B: Follow-up Email to Principals 112
Appendix C: Invitation Email to All Elementary Special Educators 113
Appendix D: Follow-up Email to Special Educators 114
Appendix E: Screening Questionnaire (Qualtrics) 116
Appendix F: Educator Confirmation for Focus Group Selection 117
Appendix G: Educator Informed Consent for Participation in Focus Group (Phase 1) . 118
Appendix H: Educator Informed Consent for Participation in Protocol Implementation (Phase 2) 121

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions and Protocol Review 124

Appendix J: Strategic Collaborative Planning Protocol 126

Appendix K: Protocol Initiation Email to Educators 127

Appendix L: Thank You Email to Focus Group Participants NOT Joining Implementation Study 129

Appendix M: Micro-Journal (Qualtrics) 130

Appendix N: Exit Ticket (Qualtrics) – RQ3/ OPEN-ENDED 132

Appendix O: Letter of Support from District A 134

Appendix P: IRB from the University of Maryland 135

Appendix Q: IRB from District A 137

Appendix R: District A Collaborative Planning Guide Sample (pg. 3, 7, and 8) 138

Appendix S: Research Study Flier 141

Appendix T: Individual Receipt Form 142

Appendix U: Full Participant Demographic Table 143

Appendix V: Executive Summary 144

Appendix W: District A Presentation 147

References 153

List of Tables

Table 1 Comparison of Overall versus SPED Student Proficiency Growth 4

Table 2 Participant Demographic Sampling 63

Table 3 Supports & Strategies Created by Special Educators 73

Table 4 Micro-Journal Reporting Summary 81

List of Figures

Figure 1 Causal Systems Analysis Fishbone 23

Figure 2 Driver Diagram 36

Figure 3 Theory of Improvement Diagram 43

Figure 4 Visual Model of Subject Recruitment 53

List of Abbreviations

504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
ASL	American Sign Language
CPB	Collaborative Planning Blocks
CPG	Collaborative Planning Guide
ELD	English Language Development
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 20 USC § 1400 et seq. (2004)
IEP	Individualized Education Program
MCAP	Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program
MCCRS	Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards
MLL	Multilingual Learner
MSDE	Maryland State Department of Education
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NIC	Networked Improvement Community of Pracice
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
PARCC	Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers
PD	Professional development
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
SCP	Strategic Collaboration Protocol
SDI	Specially Designed Instruction
SOR	Science of Reading

SVR	Simple View of Reading
SWD	Students with Disabilities (or Students with IEPs)
SY	School Year (time period from August to June)
USDE	United States Department of Education

Section 1

Introduction

If a student is not a proficient reader by 4th grade, there is a correlation that they are significantly more likely (up to four times more likely) not to graduate or have post-secondary opportunities, which is equivalent to 1 in 6 students (EAB, 2019; Hernandez, 2011; Lesnick et al., 2010). For students with disabilities, this number multiplies (EAB, 2019). The gap in reading proficiency between general education students and students with disabilities persisted both nationally and within the target district (Maryland State Department of Education, 2015, 2021a; NCES, 2022). This research set out to explore powerful instructional pivots to address this reading gap and to shift future opportunities for students with disabilities. The study aimed to address this specific problem of practice: **Intermediate (gr. 3-5) educators are not effectively collaborating to plan reading instruction for students with disabilities.** The possibility of using collaborative planning between general and special educators to provide more explicit foundational reading instruction and accessible instruction for students with disabilities, planned by a team of education professionals, was a key pivot point for this research.

By reflecting with educators on their experiences and collaborative practices in planning instruction for students with special needs, the intention was to understand and empower them to build fully readers and improve future outcomes for these students. The aim for educators was: **By June 2026, general and special educators in grades 3-5 will consistently collaborate around reading to appropriately instruct students with disabilities.** The purpose of this research project was to specifically ***investigate the impact of a structured collaboration protocol on the planning and implementation of reading instruction for students with disabilities in the intermediate grades.*** The study explored these specific research questions:

1. **What are the current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?**
2. **How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?**
3. **How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?**

This exploratory research study was grounded in the understanding that a meaningful shift in teacher collaborative practice in reading instruction is needed to achieve significant, long-term improvements in reading outcomes for students with disabilities, as shown by Goddard et al. (2007). In the first phase, the current collaborative practice, viewed through the lens of the special educator, was explored using focus groups and interviews. The second phase of the research used a short-cycle implementation of a Strategic Collaboration Protocol (SCP) to engage educators in a structured, intentional and collaborative planning process focused on reading across a sampling of elementary schools within the target district. The SCP was based on the collaborative research by Wendy Murawski (2012) on identifying roles (What, How, Who). From this study, I hoped to learn whether there is a meaningful relationship between structured collaboration. I targeted instruction and implementation in reading decoding, comprehension, knowledge-building, and content accommodation for students with disabilities. For the intermediate grades in reading instruction, there is a tension among reading standards and curriculum, individual needs within IEPs, and the legal expectations for educators to implement those programs. In particular, the hope is to better understand the lived experience of special educators in creating readiness for the curriculum, accommodating access to the curriculum, and providing foundational interventions to build independent reading skills. While this study is

small in scale, the insights from the educator input and experience with the SCP helped inform recommendations for further exploration.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in research that has identified a link between students' lack of proficient reading skills at the 3rd or 4th grades and their increased likelihood of not graduating from high school on time (Hernandez, 2011; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; National Research Council [NRC], 1998). For students with disabilities, reading proficiency often lags behind that of their peers at the same grade level (EAB, 2019). Moreover, their graduation rates are also notably lower (Hernandez, 2011; Lesnick et al., 2010). Within the target district, which is the focus of this study, the graduation rate for all students decreased by approximately 5% during the pandemic to 77.6% and has yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. In comparison, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is lower and more adversely affected, with a decrease of approximately 7 % points to 64.32% in 2021 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2020, 2025). National research indicates that this graduation gap emerges in elementary school, with an early pattern of lagging reading achievement among students with disabilities relative to their peers (EAB, 2019; Hernandez, 2011).

Looking at district-wide target reading achievement data from 2015 to 2025, as summarized in Table 1, before the pandemic, students in grades three through five showed growth in reading on the state PARCC assessment. The growth for those grade levels was about 7.1% in 3rd grade, 9.4% in 4th grade, and 5% in 5th grade for all students (MSDE, 2015). In contrast, students with disabilities in those same grade levels showed no notable growth in 3rd and 5th grades, and only a 0.3% increase in 4th-grade reading during the same time periods. It is

important to note that during this time period, the district shifted its approach to intermediate grade-level reading instruction from the previous reading programs (based in Balanced Literacy and Guided Reading) to those aligned with the Common Core State Standards (which transitioned to Maryland as the College & Career Readiness Standards in the 2013-2014 school year). However, these trends in reading achievement suggest that students with disabilities did not benefit equally from the district's instructional shifts during this period. So while overall intermediate student reading achievement proficiency growth in District A increased after the shift to the new standard-aligned curriculum, students with disabilities' reading acquisition and performance levels remained flat. There was also a post-pandemic transition in the assessment system starting in 2021 to the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program, which showed that student growth up until 2025 is still approximately + 8-12% for all students, while for students with disabilities, the growth has remained limited at +1-3%. The gap of around 25+ percentage points between students with disabilities and overall student performance has also remained (MSDE, 2021a).

Table 1

Comparison of Overall versus SPED Student Proficiency Growth

Testing Groups	Gr. 3 Reading	Gr. 4 Reading	Gr.5 Reading
		2015-2019 PARCC	
Growth for Overall Students	7.10%	9.40%	5%
Growth for SWD	NG**	0.30%	NG**
		2021 MCAP (Initial Year)*	
Initial Scores for Students	24.1	23.4	25.2
Initial Scores for SWD	6.2	6.1	5.6
		2022-2025 MCAP	
Growth for Overall Students	12.40%	10.90%	8.10%
Growth for SWD	3.10%	3.00%	1.20%

Notes: A Comparison of Longitudinal Data for Students with Disabilities (SWD) and Overall Performance in Reading PARCC/MCAP according to Maryland Report Card in District A (MSDE, 2015, 2021b)
**MCAP is a new assessment as of 2021*

***NG = No Growth Measurable = <5% proficient for all measures*

In District A and nationwide, reading curriculum and standards make an important instructional pivot in 3rd through 5th grade, in which explicit phonics instruction decreases and complex content and vocabulary reading increase across the curriculum and state standards (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024). In the primary grades (kindergarten through second), the foundational reading skills are a part of the curriculum. Students can receive a "double dose" of instruction by participating in an initial dose through whole-group instruction (introduction and practice) and a second dose in small-group instruction (targeted and repetitive) within the general education classroom. For SWD, special education staff supplement this double dose with an additional intervention or targeted instruction, which can be repeated or reinforced to target specific decoding strategies and skills in an individualized way, increasing the intensity and frequency of instruction (Torgesen et al., 2007). In the intermediate grades, in contrast, the basic sound-symbol foundations are no longer at the forefront of daily instruction; a broader, more complex set of comprehension and vocabulary development is the focus for the general educator (MSDE, 2013).

The intermediate grades represent not only a shift in instruction but also a shift in the style of collaboration between special and general educators in the latter part of elementary school. Whereas 'double dose' instruction is common practice in the primary grades and utilizes the combined expertise of both general and special education teachers, in the intermediate grades, SWD may find themselves subject to a 'single dose' model through pull-out instruction with a special education teacher when it comes to phonics and foundational reading development (Torgesen et al., 2007). While pull-out instruction can provide SWD a space to attend individually to their development as readers, this approach also separates these students from the

content lessons and learning that are proceeding without them in the intermediate-level general classroom, which can create a barrier between educators on how to incorporate the students' needs in the classroom (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). This 'single dose' model can also reduce collaborative engagement around making the curriculum accessible.

To accelerate the reading outcomes in the intermediate grades and increase the access required by law to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities, both general and special educators play critical roles in planning and delivering reading instruction. National research indicates that effective collaboration between the elementary general educator and special educator is essential to ensure that SWD receive instruction that both provides access to the standards-based grade-level curriculum and scaffolds appropriate reading supports and instruction (Lemons et al., 2016). More specifically, contemporary research highlights how the general educator can plan instruction around the curriculum and content, while the special educator can target the student's individual learning needs and strategies, but only together can they make content accessible by working through their roles and relationships (Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020; Friend et al., 2010). To provide effective instruction in reading and the core content, the research clearly shows that both sets of educators need to plan in concert (Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020; Friend et al., 2010; Lemons et al., 2016). However, national research also indicates that although both sets of teachers may be present in the classroom, it is not necessarily common practice for elementary educators to proactively collaborate on lesson planning or to share responsibility for leading reading instruction and accommodations (Ploessl et al., 2010; Supovitz, 2002). Consequently, SWD can be left behind when intermediate reading teachers and special educators do not consistently or strategically collaborate on lesson planning and delivery.

For students in intermediate grades who are struggling to master the foundational skills of reading, which is the case for most SWD (almost 85%), explicit instruction in decoding, fluency, and comprehension is still needed (Moats & Dakin, 2008). Given that the national data documents how SWD fall behind in reading and literacy in comparison to their peers during the intermediate grades (EAB, 2019), these students may be hindered in their access to core content area learning in math, literature, science and social studies from 3rd grade forward, 4th, and 5th grades and beyond, including math, literature, science and social studies, due to their underdeveloped skills in reading (Lesnick et al., 2010; Torgesen et al., 2007). However, in most intermediate classrooms, including those across the target district in this study, explicit foundational reading instruction has been replaced with a less structured phonics remediation model and a more content-driven focus on reteaching the curriculum (MSDE, 2013). Moreover, children who have not been able to master reading skills at the same rate as their classmates experience substantial decreases in their self-esteem, self-concept, and motivation to learn to read (Armbruster et al., 2001; Stanovich, 1986).

For this researcher, the impetus for this study was the fact that current reading instructional practices are leaving SWD behind and, as such, are not ensuring equitable access to future opportunities. The pedagogy and implementation of reading instruction are bound up in collaborative planning, which presents a dichotomy of instruction between the special educator and the general educator at the elementary level. Poor collaborative practices can directly or indirectly impact the fidelity and access to adequate foundational reading instruction (Denton et al., 2003). I believe that we can no longer afford to continue implementing ineffective instructional practices in literacy in the intermediate grades, especially for SWD.

Given my role and experience as a Special Education Instructional Specialist, I believe that intermediate-grade educators in District A, both general and special education, want to plan effective and meaningful reading instruction for their students, including their SWD. However, I have also observed how teachers are often hindered from proactively collaborating and, consequently, when working in their own silos, are unable to independently adjust the curriculum to meet the differentiated needs of their students. Instead, they are often left to use their limited collaboration time to respond to a variety of logistical, administrative tasks or grade-level event planning, rather than using their time for meaningful collaborative lesson planning, similar to findings in the research, even to the point of not addressing instruction (Hargreaves, 2000; Horn et al., 2017; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Talbert, 2009).

Given the current challenges for intermediate educators in working together to serve all their students well, I posited that effective collaborative planning could be the essential activity to maximize the effectiveness of reading instruction for ALL students. Therefore, the drive for this study was to create a context that promoted consistency in collaboration, clarity in leveraging the strengths of both educators, and the formalization of the selection of evidence-based instructional strategies and accommodations to be implemented by both to improve their students' reading outcomes (Roberts et al., 2008). This researcher hoped to work with a set of special educators to develop, through action research, a tool or process that could improve and shift practice in the district, focusing on instructional planning and on collaboration among a representative sample of special educators to forge a more effective path for collaboration with their general education partners.

The Problem

The study aimed to address this specific problem of practice: **Intermediate (gr. 3-5) educators are not effectively collaborating to plan reading instruction for students with disabilities.** This research study was grounded in the understanding that a meaningful shift in teacher practice in collaborative reading instruction is needed to achieve significant long-term improvements in student outcomes for SWD. The purpose of this research project was to ***investigate the impact of a structured collaboration protocol on the planning and implementation of reading instruction for students with disabilities in the intermediate grades*.** By reflecting with educators on their experiences and collaborative practices related to students with special needs, the intention was to understand and empower educators to build fully literate readers and improve future outcomes for these students. The aim for educators was: **By June 2026, general and special education teachers in grades 3-5 will consistently collaborate around reading to appropriately instruct students with disabilities.** The study is exploring these specific research questions:

1. What are the current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?
2. How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?
3. How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?

Local Background

At the initiation of this study, among the 136,000 students enrolled in District A, about 17,000 were special education students in grades birth to 12 (i.e., above 13% of the total student body) across 198 schools, including 141 elementary schools (District A, 2022a, 2022b). Special

education funding accounted for 13% of the district's total operating budget, according to the CEO's Proposed Budget for SY 2023, which was separate from and in addition to the per-pupil funding provided to schools. The budget dedicated this supplemental funding to providing additional supports, services, and staff in school buildings to allow students to access their least restrictive educational environment and grade-level peers.

Given the prevalence of this student population and the budgetary commitment, district leaders and educators throughout the system have acknowledged their concern regarding the fact that SWD lag behind their peers on every academic and outcome measure. However, district plans have not consistently prioritized improving outcomes for students with special needs and multilingual learners (MLL). The data in District A indicated that while the adoption of the Common Core-aligned curriculum and balanced literacy strategies helped to accelerate the reading proficiency levels for intermediate students in general, when looking more closely at the patterns from student subgroups, it appears that these strategies did not benefit SWD (see Table 1).

An initial survey identified "eliminating performance gaps between student sub-populations" as a continuing high-priority, low-performance area (Hanover Research Group & District A, 2020, slide 7). In response to the data and an intentional shift in the district's focus in 2021, the previous superintendent unveiled a new strategic plan that called for "excellence in equity" (District A, 2021). In the Transformation 2026 Equity Strategic Plan, there is a distinct difference in the language and focus, with a more targeted focus on addressing the gaps and needs of SWD and ELLs. The embedded Critical Success Indicators for academic innovation include special education and other key demographics as part of the measures of improvement (District A, 2021). Additionally, within the 2.0 Special Education Strategic Plan for 2024-2027,

the department is focused in Goal 3, Action Step 1 on "In collaboration with the Reading English Language Arts Curriculum and Instruction Office, build the capacity of general and special education teachers in prekindergarten through high school on the SOR and evidence-based reading practices to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities" and the supporting Measurement of Success outcome that by 2027, "students with disabilities will increase reading proficiency" by 5 percentage points over 2023-2024 baseline (District A, 2023). The imperative to shift strategies to improve outcomes for SWD has increased in recent years to support the implementation of innovative practices, especially in reading, as this study explores.

The Problem of Practice

Components of Reading

Reading is a complex process. Understanding the components of reading and the timing within the curriculum's scope and sequence helped identify a possible instructional gap to address intermediate reading concerns. The research community defines the key components of effective reading instruction in multiple ways, generally referred to as the Science of Reading (SOR). The National Reading Panel report from 2000 recommends that effective reading instruction incorporates five critical skills, including 1) Phonemic Awareness, 2) Phonics, 3) Fluency, 4) Vocabulary, and 5) Comprehension. While the seminal work called Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) defines skilled reading as the mastery of the components of language comprehension (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) and the components of word recognition (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition), Compton et al. (2014) emphasize the separate yet interconnected nature of these skills. Kamhi (2009) extends this by stating that reading comprehension is a set of complex higher-level mental processes that include thinking, reasoning, imagining, and

interpreting. Castles et al. (2018) consider reading an expansion of the component cognitive tasks: individual words, meanings, context, causal connections, background knowledge, inferences, working memory, and executive functioning, which aligns with the neurological research on reading by Sousa (2007). In 2021, Duke and Cartwright expanded on the original components of Scarborough's Reading Rope to develop the Active View of Reading, which starts with active self-regulation that influences the three key components of word recognition, bridging processes, and language comprehension, resulting in independent reading.

Nathalie Wexler (2025) notes that three components affect student reading outcomes: decoding, language comprehension, and knowledge building (also see Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019). She is "calling for a different approach to comprehension instruction alongside better decoding instruction could also serve to counter the accusation that SOR advocates believe phonics is the panacea for all reading problems" (Wexler, 2025). While approaching the topic through different lenses, Wexler (2025) and Sousa (2007) connect the need for explicit instruction to access rich content and build background knowledge, as well as to explicitly teach decoding skills through cognitive science-based learning strategies, to improve students' reading skill learning trajectory. As summarized by Kelly et al. (2025), "one thing that is clear from neuroscience is the brain's remarkable plasticity." With systematic, explicit instruction and targeted intervention when necessary, students, including those with reading difficulties, can develop the neural pathways needed to decode and encode with fluency. All of these models are meaningful in that they elevate the complexity of reading instruction and the instructional challenge of supporting a variety of learners across the learning spectrum. This task often relies on an assured ability to access and use written content effectively.

In the summary of research by Williamson et al. (2014), the authors stated that reading

growth trends accelerate rapidly, then slow around intermediate elementary grades or the beginning of middle school. There is a shift in the reading standards that may limit educator expectations and instruction regarding foundational reading beginning in the intermediate grades. According to the Maryland College & Career Readiness Standards (MCCRS) and the Common Core State Standards, Grade 3 is the last grade to include the teaching of specific structures of foundational language. Foundational skills in grades 4 and 5 require students to accurately read multisyllabic words, both in and out of context (MSDE, 2013, p. 5). The state standards last specify foundational reading skills (i.e., phonics, word recognition, and fluency) at all in fifth grade. Williamson et al. (2014) emphasize that "during later elementary years and middle school, less and less explicit reading instruction is provided for typically developing students, which could in turn slow students' reading progress" (p.233).

The decrease in explicit reading instruction for intermediate elementary students is often referred to in research as the transitional period of shifting from "learning to read" with foundational decoding skills to "reading to learn" to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize text of increasing complexity (Snow, 2018; Washburn & Pierce, 2025), however Cervetti and Hiebert (2019) call this a "false dichotomy" as student's knowledge building is ongoing while their independent access skills through decoding and fluency may be developing. For all students in grades 3-5, there is an increase in content reading for understanding across subjects, with decreasing support for developing phonics, decoding, and fluency skills that are required for independent reading (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024). For this study, reading literacy and proficiency are defined as the ability to use the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills needed to convey cogent understanding. Therefore, when the foundational skills in intermediate grades solely focus on prefixes, suffixes, and multi-syllable words (MSDE, 2013), a student with

a disability who has not yet developed their decoding or fluency skills may not be able to access or participate in activities effectively to show their comprehension and understanding, either orally or in writing. For students who are reading off-level, especially special education and ML students, this is a major impact of the shift in the reading curriculum: intermediate instruction does not adequately focus on the fundamental components of reading (Seidenberg, 2017).

Intermediate Reading Impacts Graduation

Reading is a fundamental life skill that impacts future outcomes for children and families across our American communities. Literacy performance, along with student achievement, is a strong predictor of success in high school, college, and beyond (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003; Sparks et al., 2014). However, the National Research Council report from 1998 on the NAEP, as well as subsequent analyses, has shown longitudinally that for students who are not reading on grade level by 3rd grade, there is a significantly increased possibility of not graduating on time or at all (NICHD, 2000; NRC, 1998). The National Research Council (1998) asserts that "academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone's reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school" (p. 21). This claim is alarming to this researcher!

In the United States in 2019, only about one-third of fourth graders assessed through the Nation's Report Card by NCES were found to be reading with the fluency and accuracy to demonstrate understanding of grade-level texts, and further analysis showed that this rate has been unchanging over time and is similar across eighth and twelfth grades (Stewart, 2020). "If children are allowed to fall behind in the development of word reading skills in first, second, and third grade, they miss out on the many thousands of accurate word reading repetitions necessary

to sustain normal growth in size of sight vocabulary" (Torgesen & Hudson, 2006). A recent policy report states that "millions of American children get to fourth grade without learning to read proficiently. And that puts them on the dropout track," highlighting a key concern that drives this research (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024, p. 15). The ultimate goal of education is to prepare functional, productive citizens. Currently, graduation from high school is an essential milestone for accessing further education and job opportunities. Beyond graduation, reading is also a life skill needed to engage as a community member.

In their longitudinal study of a large cohort over 12 years, Lesnick et al. (2010) found that fewer than 45% of students who were reading below grade level in 3rd grade graduated (compared to 60% and 80% of students who were on grade level or above grade level, respectively). Less than 20% went on to college, leaving more than 55% of the readers below grade level as dropouts or without a diploma. They also found that the third-grade reading level was a strong predictor of the 8th-grade reading level. According to Donald Hernandez (2011), in his findings from an analysis of NAEP data, "about 16 percent of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers" (p. 6). NAEP data reveal that approximately one-third of fourth-grade students are still failing to reach even a basic level of reading proficiency (NCES, 2022), a figure that rises to 71% among SWD (EAB, 2019). While NCES did not assess 12th grade in 2022, the 2019 findings show that students with a below-proficient reading level are at levels similar to those of fourth- and eighth-grade students without disabilities (around 25-32%) and to SWD (62-70%) (NCES, 2020).

Unfortunately, the most recent NCES data from 2024 support that a lack of reading skills is an increasing challenge across the nation for all 4th-grade students (40%) (NCES, 2025).

However, for SWD specifically, reading proficiency decreased further, with 72% scoring below Basic and 90% scoring Basic or below (What Works Clearinghouse, 2022). Hernandez (2011) also found that among those who drop out or do not graduate on time, more than three-fifths are below the basic reading level. Given research findings correlating early (3rd & 4th grade) lack of reading proficiency with a failure to graduate from high school across the last 20 years in various studies, this researcher aimed to explore change actions that could shift this trajectory and improve these outcomes for SWD in District A.

Collaboration in Reading

Whenever students struggle with a skill, especially reading, schools review data and plan to bring together resources and educators to address the need. According to Hargreaves (2021), collaboration among educators has become a universal expectation in modern education. For most students, including those with disabilities, most their time is spent in the general education classroom for reading, which means that implementing their individual plans (from their IEPs) requires an understanding of and co-planning for their needs, supports, and goals. Unfortunately, Conderman (2015) found that relationships are affected by the lack of time to understand each other as education partners and the needs of shared students, because building co-practice takes time and vulnerability. However, Ford and Youngs (2018) note that time and access to collaborative activities are insufficient to build teacher collaboration and learning. Collaboration for effective practice goes beyond traditional collaborative planning (which has many definitions) because it requires digging into the "how" of foundational reading and strategy implementation (Mitchell et al., 2020). Key factors include access to targeted resources, learning opportunities, and, in particular, a construct for collaborative support showing predictive positive outcomes for building teacher knowledge around language needs. (DeLuca et al., 2023). In fact,

Denton et al. (2003) found that competence in effective, evidence-based practice takes time (up to 25 teaching sessions) and requires ongoing collaboration for reading instruction and intervention to improve and practice, moving into maintenance for educators.

Intentionality and fidelity are necessary but challenging to achieve within structured collaborative time, given the multiple purposes and possible conflicting priorities set for the limited time available for collaboration (Hargreaves, 2000; Horn et al., 2017; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Patrick, 2022). The expectation that the special educator serves as the intervention specialist and, therefore, leads in planning and training the team, especially when co-instruction is considered to support modeling strategies for these evidence-based practices, adds complexity to the relationship. The research shows that specific types of teachers, including special educators, are less frequently included in school-based collaborative learning opportunities and are also underrepresented in the research base overall (Patrick, 2022). For students with reading disabilities, the specific factors that affect the implementation of supports and interventions by their main educators are: 1) General educator–extent of time, skill, knowledge, and interest in engaging in the needed instruction, and 2) Special educator–schedule control and caseload management to have time to implement sufficient explicit and systematic instruction and collaboration (Denton et al., 2003). For special education students, the need for educator understanding and intentionality goes beyond district policy and practice to the laws at the federal and state levels.

Students with Disabilities & Reading

The gap in reading performance between SWD and their nondisabled peers is wide: 64% of eighth-grade SWD read below the basic level compared to 20% of their peers without disabilities (NCES, 2012), which continued in more recent reviews with 67% of fourth and 63%

of eighth graders with disabilities (NCES, 2016). According to a data review by Moats and Dakin (2008), among the 13-14% of students nationwide who are identified with a disability and qualify for an IEP, about half (6-7% of all students) qualify as having a learning disability. From that group, about 85% (close to 6% of the total school-age population) have a specific primary learning disability that includes reading and language processing. Additionally, 15-20% of the population as a whole have reading difficulties that fit some (not all) of the symptoms of dyslexia (such as mixing up similar words, slow/inaccurate reading, poor spelling, or poor writing). The statistics indicate that about 2 to 5 students per class of 24 have a specific reading challenge that requires SDI to address their needs, but this could impact an additional four students, affecting a full quarter of the class on average (see International Dyslexia Association, 2025; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004; Vellutino et al., 2004).

While dyslexia as defined by the International Dyslexia Association in 2025 as "a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography," and more broadly learning disabilities, as defined by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) as "the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations," they are not the only disability codes impacted by reading challenges; it gives a baseline for understanding the breadth of impact (20 U.S.C Section 1401 (30)). Hoover and Gough (1990), building on Gough and Tunmer (1986), present the Simple View of Reading (SVR) to define and describe the continuum of reading disability. In the SVR, skilled reading (R) is simply the product of the word recognition/decoding (D) and oral language comprehension (C) strands braiding together, or D x C = R. Therefore, the definition of reading disability is based on three possible types of breaks in those strands: poor word recognition skills, difficulties in

comprehending language, or a combination of the two (Hoover & Gough, 1990).

However, by looking at Scarborough's (2001) and Duke and Cartwright's (2021) models, specific reading-related disability, like dyslexia, could occur through challenges with phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, phonics knowledge, decoding skills, recognition of words at sight, print concepts, reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, morphological awareness, and graphophonological-semantic cognitive flexibility. Rupley et al. (2009) assert that struggling readers need to learn these tasks through direct and explicit instruction and ample practice, with reading comprehension as the goal, a strategy that meta-analysis has found effective for SWD (Wanzek et al., 2016). Additionally, Sousa (2007) emphasizes the need for the reading strategies to be specifically neurologically-based (like chunking information, using multi-sensory tools, and providing executive support), similar to targeted accommodations.

Armbruster et al. (2001) found that prevention and intervention implemented before third grade can increase reading decoding skills to the average grade levels for 85 to 90 percent of poor readers. However, delaying intervention until after third grade resulted in approximately 75 percent of children continuing to have basic reading decoding difficulties throughout high school and into adulthood (Shaywitz et al., 1992). While there is a large body of research on reading interventions for SWD in the primary grades, the scope is more limited for intermediate elementary students (Demirkaya & Bakkaloglu, 2015; Hanselman & Borman, 2013). The national research continues to suggest that interventions for struggling readers after third grade are less effective than those for primary-grade students (Hernandez, 2011). Of the interventions evaluated by the What Works Clearinghouse (2022) as having positive or potentially positive effects on literacy, 81% for primary grades met the criteria, compared with 73% for intermediate

grades. Similarly, the evidence for SWD is 70% in primary grades but decreases to only 50% in intermediate grades. The implications are that, nationally, there is evidence that interventions after 3rd grade, especially for SWD, lack effective instructional practices and reading interventions, which are significantly more limited than those for primary-grade students (Compton et al., 2014).

Specific research on intervention programs effective in the primary grades has yielded mixed to limited results in the middle elementary grades. In Compton et al.'s 2014 study, researchers found that traditional content instruction was less effective than strategy instruction for developing vocabulary; there was no difference in knowledge or comprehension. Research on a packaged reading program "found neither a positive nor a negative effect of the instruction on student reading achievement in the upper elementary grades" (Hanselman & Borman, 2013). However, there were strong positive effects on students in kindergarten through second grade.

Therefore, it is important to examine how SWD are left behind or impacted by the shift in intermediate-grade reading instruction. Given the limited positive impacts of continuing interventions from earlier grades, it is even more important to explore the collaborative practice that could bring together access and improvement for special education students. It is well worth considering how to adapt instructional practices to both accelerate the sophistication of reading instruction in the intermediate grades and provide the scaffolding and explicit instruction needed for foundational reading skills.

Students with Disabilities & the Law in Schools

The IDEA, reauthorized by Congress in 2004, emphasizes that disability does not diminish a person's rights and that improving outcomes for SWD is an essential element of national policy to ensure equity in opportunities. Research shows that SWD learn and achieve

more in inclusive settings (Cole et al., 2021, 2023; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023), and the state of Maryland supports educating these students in their neighborhood schools as a general education priority alongside their peers (MSDE & Johns Hopkins Center for Technology in Education, n.d.). The reauthorized IDEA (2004) and ongoing national research have prompted districts, such as the one that is the focus of this study, to adopt a more inclusive model of support, thereby shifting the instructional focus to the general education environment.

The programming for SWD who require SDI is documented in their Individual Education Program (IEP), as required by IDEA. IEPs include supplemental supports, strategies, and instruction that are needed to make the general education environment and curriculum accessible to the student and enable the student to make progress. Because IEP accommodations involve both general and special educators, the current law requires that the services and supports provided to SWDs be implemented in coordination by both sets of educators. With this shift from more self-contained to more inclusive education, it becomes imperative that addressing the needs of SWD be a collaborative effort between general and special education teachers (Friend et al., 2010). Thus, while the shift to a more inclusive environment sounds like a positive move, it has also posed a challenge for general educators to ensure the instruction, curriculum, and environment align with the needs of SWD (Francisco et al., 2020).

The current IDEA law emphasizes the need for coordination among educators and service providers to increase equitable access to the educational environment and improve outcomes, especially for SWD (20 USC Section 1401(30)). With the emphasis on full inclusion in the reauthorized IDEA, it is imperative that the implementation of the IEPs, and the specially designed services and supports contained within, cannot be relegated to the purview of special educators only, but, instead, must be a shared responsibility of general and special educators, and

be addressed across the grade spectrum beginning in the early childhood years (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). Unfortunately, elementary reading general education teachers with more students with IEPs were "less likely to frequently engage their students in foundational reading activities" (Shapiro et al., 2024). The possibility of using structured collaborative planning (whether for co-planning, co-engagement, or co-teaching) between general and special educators to provide more explicit foundational reading instruction and accessible instruction for SWD, planned by a team of education professionals, was a key pivot point for this research. This study aimed to address this specific problem of practice: **Intermediate (gr. 3-5) reading educators are not effectively collaborating to plan instruction for students with disabilities.** For this study, basic reading skills are going to be defined with the following components from the above research: 1) **word recognition** as the foundational independent access skill, 2) **language comprehension** as the foundation sense-making skill, 3) **knowledge-building** as the exposure and experience to ground decision-making skill, and 4) **accommodations** as the targeted supports for equitable access to the learning process. (Scarborough, 2001; Sousa, 2007; Wexler, 2025). Therefore, for this investigation, ***foundational reading*** will refer to the basic word recognition and language comprehension components of reading. In contrast, ***content access*** will refer to the knowledge-building and more complex language requirements of the intermediate-grade-level curriculum, as well as the accommodations and modifications needed for SWD.

Causal Systems Analysis

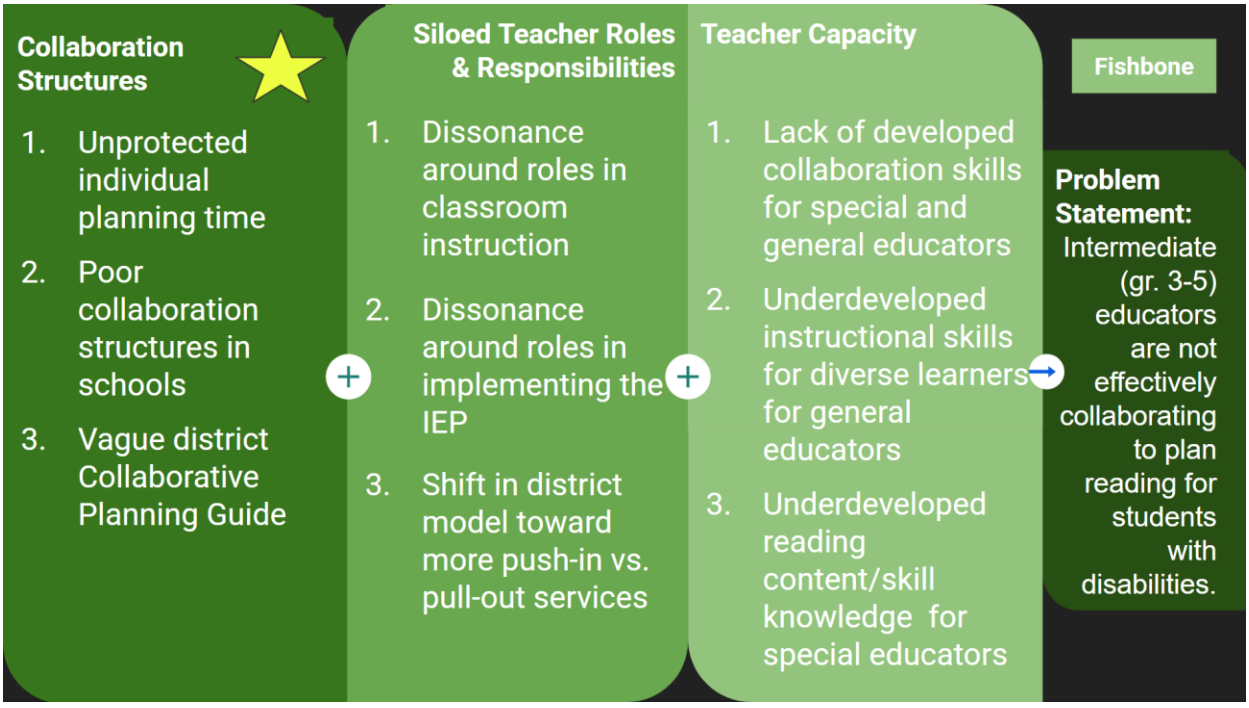
As part of the process of developing this research study, I began by exploring the causal factors that significantly contribute to the team of educators' ineffective collaborative planning around reading for intermediate SWD in the district (see Figure 1). Through my review of the research, I identified three core causal categories that impact this coexistence: **1) Teacher**

Capacity, 2) Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities, and 3) Collaboration Structures.

Teacher Capacity reflects on the lack of developed collaboration skills among educators in general, underdeveloped instruction for diverse learners by general educators, and underdeveloped reading content strategies by special educators. *Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities* focuses on the dissonance around shared roles in classroom instruction and IEP implementation in response to the shift in education toward more embedded services. *Collaboration Structures* builds on the impacts of unprotected individual planning and the vague district collaboration guide, and focuses on poor collaboration structures in elementary schools.

Figure 1

Causal Systems Analysis Fishbone



Note: Fishbone of Causal Systems Analysis of key factors resulting in the target problem, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2023. Own work.

Teacher Capacity

In District A, the MCCRS establishes mastery expectations for basic literacy skills that

are explicitly taught to all students, including SWD, in kindergarten through 2nd grade. Those standards become significantly more limited in scope at the intermediate level. As a result, intermediate teachers are often unprepared to establish a sufficiently explicit literacy environment and to use effective instructional methods to teach foundational reading skills to students who lack basic reading skills (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Moats, 2020). Moreover, the research suggests that teachers who do not possess an understanding of reading-related difficulties based on research are not able to provide effective content reading instruction for their SWD in the intermediate grades (Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Moats, 2014; Spear-Swerling, 2015; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012; Torgesen et al., 2001), which speaks to a need for intermediate general educators to have a working knowledge of literacy assessment. For example, Allington (2011) links students' reading difficulties to insufficient, high-quality reading instruction. More specifically, the research indicates that many elementary teachers lack knowledge of the English language and structure, particularly a sufficiently well-developed understanding of morphemes and phonemes (Joshi et al., 2009; Washburn & Pierce, 2025). These research trends indicate that both general and special education teachers may not feel prepared to teach reading to the full range of intermediate students, some of whom are reading well beyond grade level and others who are lagging two or more grades behind (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

General education teachers' preparation emphasizes subject-matter pedagogy and grade- and subject-level-specific content (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). This training focuses on the scope and sequence for the grade level and how to implement the curriculum aligned to the standards through engaging lessons. However, when students require intervention, differentiation, modification, or acceleration to access the skills and/or standards, many general

education teachers may not have the training to incorporate accessible instruction to foster or remediate student learning and performance (Washburn & Pierce, 2025), especially around effective multi-component intervention practices that include word-level instruction (e.g., multisyllabic word reading, structural analysis) (**Edmonds et al., 2009**; **Roberts et al., 2008**; **Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009**). Most general educators lack awareness of inclusion provisions or the range of accommodations they should incorporate into their lessons each day (Francisco et al., 2020), and some express "frustration and guilt over the amount of time required to accommodate and modify the lessons for students" with disabilities (Al Jaffal, 2022). Given their training in elementary content, general educators in elementary schools often rely on their special education colleagues as experts in student accommodations, modifications, and interventions. In fact, educator planning for SDI was "dependent on knowledge of special education practice and curriculum, knowledge for teaching reading, desire to learn, persistence in implementation, and use of PD (professional development)strategies to improve practice" (Brownell et al., 2014, p. 42).

In contrast, special educators are often certified more broadly to teach K-12 SWD, with the focus of their training on accommodations and modifications to SDI and on implementing their IEPs (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). As a result, their training as special educators often limits their exposure to subject-specific reading instruction. Santagata et al. (2010) noted that teachers with strategy knowledge, such as special education teachers, may lack content knowledge, which can result in an inability to explain the content effectively to students. It is, therefore, not surprising that special educators have often relied on their general education counterparts as experts in content and reading. However, Walsh et al. (2006) and Turner and Berube (2009) report that, while too many elementary teachers lack the training, experience, or

knowledge needed to teach reading effectively, limited opportunities to collaborate with and learn from their special education peers compound these limitations.

While educators may not have all the skills individually, students' varied needs often require educators to collaborate on instruction. The research indicates that teaming, on its own, is unlikely to improve instruction and student learning without the development of teachers' skills in effective collaboration (Supovitz, 2002). Ploessl et al. (2010) state that "co-teaching may be popular, but it does not come naturally... the greatest obstacle to co-teaching is the lack of preparedness of the educators involved... because it requires an additional set of skills that are rarely used when teaching alone" (p. 158). Both sets of educators may lack the capacity to make data-informed decisions, develop content and curriculum, provide supports and strategies, revise district materials, and understand the collaborative process itself (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017), underscoring the need to develop together as professionals. Additionally, positively and constructively critiquing fellow teachers is a delicate matter and does not always come naturally, which may result in conflicts that they may lack the skills to resolve (Bovbjerg, 2006; Main, 2007; Rone, 2009). Working together has many challenges, and a lack of understanding around the roles each person plays in the process often confuses the process.

Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities

From the traditional teacher role perspective, the general education teacher focuses on teaching students without special needs, while the special educator focuses solely on students with targeted educational needs (Schwab et al., 2015). When it comes to collaborating about instruction for students with IEPs, general educators may find an extra layer of challenge in incorporating the supports outlined in their IEPs. In contrast, special educators may find it difficult to incorporate key curriculum concepts into the background skill development outlined

in IEPs. However, as required by IDEA, both special and general education educators are expected to plan together to implement the IEP across all elementary and secondary environments. In many cases, without an adequate working relationship or knowledge of each teacher's roles and responsibilities in the learning process of SWD, potential teaming can readily break down (Truijen et al., 2013).

In the K-12 classroom setting, while the law requires that multiple teachers have a role to play in providing daily lessons to students, most educators are inexperienced in teaming practices and lack pre- or in-service training in teaming skills (Main, 2007), as it is not usually taught or modeled in university coursework (Goddard et al., 2007). In my experience as a district specialist in special education, I find that most educators do not know how to collaborate effectively with their colleagues to plan and deliver instruction for their diverse learners, including SWD. Goddard et al. (2007) found that school systems designed collegial structures to support teacher autonomy rather than collaboration, creating a dichotomy and confusion. For teachers with underdeveloped collaborative capacity, siloed roles can be a barrier to effective co-instruction. While there is more structure at the middle and high school levels for co-teaching in District A, elementary educators have not been trained in team-teaching (see additionally Schwab et al., 2015).

In District A, general educators at the intermediate level often schedule their classes either around a homeroom they teach content to throughout the day, or they are 'departmentalized,' in which they teach a set of content before rotating with a partner teacher (e.g., teaching reading and social studies, then sending the class to another teacher for math and science). They instruct a homogeneous grouping of students with a variety of needs. However, each school and grade level has some flexibility in its articulation planning to group and balance

needs in its class arrangements. The groupings can result in some classes with more intensive needs of various types (e.g., MLLs, special education, instructional levels, Talented & Gifted, student interests, 504, behavior needs, etc.).

Intermediate elementary schooling has traditionally been structured around individual classrooms where general educators work mostly with their students in isolation. The exception to this flow has been with pull-out activities for targeted subpopulations of students, including ML and SWDs. In these instances, a Special Education or English Language Development (ELD) teacher will 'pull' students from their regular classroom to work one-on-one or in small groups, in the hallway or an ancillary office, to provide supplemental lessons or support based on individual learning plans (Gajda & Koliba, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009). When the pull-out model is prevalent, there are limited opportunities for the intermediate generalist teacher and specialized support teachers to plan or deliver instruction together. Moreover, this model tacitly reinforces the belief that SWD are the responsibility of the special education teacher, ML students are the responsibility of the ELD teacher, and the students without IEPs are the responsibility of the general classroom teacher, etc.

Additionally, even the interventions (blended computer and human instruction) provided to these various subgroups are siloed by department. However, there is time allotted for the computer instruction access in reading and math blocks in District A. Some of the disconnect comes from coordinating the use, access, and use of the resulting data from the computer programs, along with the targeted human instruction that has to be provided by different people at different times. These siloed roles reduce intermediate teachers' orientation toward more active collaboration (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). This instructional model has contributed to poor collaboration by creating siloed roles for educators in addressing individual students' needs. The

unaddressed cultural shift of general education teachers to being a primary service provider for students with additional needs in their classroom has added potential tension and frustration to the teachers' beliefs about their responsibility.

Educators need support to speak the same language around support, strategy, and students. Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) identify that a language barrier can exist among educators due to differing definitions and refinements in understanding of the terms used to describe both curriculum and student expectations. Garcia and Weiss (2019) found that fewer than 40% of their study respondents received any professional learning on working with SWD after entering the school setting. However, even when receiving consistent, supported professional development, implementation is inconsistent when there is dissonance in beliefs about special education students (Brownell et al., 2006; Miller & Oh, 2013). The cognitive dissonance indicates that general educators feel ill-equipped to be successful in working with the supports and structures required for their special education students.

Byrd and Alexander (2020) identify that a "metaphorical wedge has been leveraged between the general and special education classroom stemming largely from a significant lack of communication" (p.79). The strained relationship is grounded in the tradition of isolation (Goddard et al., 2007) and in fear of judgment and loss of autonomy (Methlagl, 2022). The changing instructional model exposes the effects of poor collaboration between the special educator and general educator in preparing for their roles in reading instruction. Consequently, the shift toward more inclusive practice may create confusion or disagreement about educational goals when it comes to expectations for the other person's implementation (Datnow, 2011; Rone, 2009). Educators work best when they know what is expected and who is responsible for what actions, and they work poorly when they are unclear about what is expected and/or who is

responsible for what or whom (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). Knowing the dynamics and the role one plays in the educational pairing reduces decision fatigue when one is uncertain (Baumeister, 2003).

Educational leaders are not always prepared to guide their teachers to embrace and lead with a focus on collaborative, student-centered planning and accountability (Meirink et al., 2010). When collaboration is not reflected in school culture but is enacted at the teacher-to-teacher level, Vangrieken et al. (2015) identified negative consequences for consistency in their meta-analysis. These include competitiveness, interpersonal conflict, loss of autonomy, work intensification, tensions among colleagues, use of collaboration to enforce conformity, monitoring of colleagues, heightening of incompatibilities (teaching styles, personalities, and pedagogical beliefs), and often contrived collegiality. A lack of structured collaboration fails to account for the level of relationship needed among educators to understand their roles and responsibilities. Unsupported pairings often pay little attention to information exchange, add to suspicion, and engage in misleading communication (Vangrieken et al., 2015). When concerns about teaming are not addressed, they can lead to insufficient buy-in, a lack of willingness to cooperate, and continued negativity toward teaming (Main, 2007; Rone, 2009). Many teachers report and request support from administration to make collaborative coordination happen and often identify a lack of services and support not only for students but also for themselves as educators (Billingsley, 2004; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Wang et al., 2020). Administrative support is needed to address both the structural (time, protocols, scheduling, etc.) and cultural ("our kids" mentality, mindset, priority of inclusion, etc.) challenges.

In District A and across the country, there has been a national push to have SWD instructed alongside their peers in the general education classroom. The shift from pull-out

services to in-class instructional support aims to coordinate the core instructional curriculum with services better and to foster collaboration between general and special educators (Sindelar & Kilgore, 1995; Winfield & Hawkins, 1993). The purpose of push-in services is to increase access to explicit teaching and to more consistently connect students with their age-level peers within the educational environment (Friend et al., 2010). However, fundamentally shifting to a 'push-in' model in which special education staff enter the general educator's space does not necessarily increase collaboration or improve implementation as intended and may instead divide educators and maintain siloed roles (Byrd & Alexander, 2020).

While the challenge may not be around the model itself, the research indicates that educators need support to understand the fundamental shifts in their roles to move from siloed responsibilities to co-responsibility for learning (Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020). If school systems do not give educators time and space to plan and coordinate their practice, 'push-in' services can be little more than previous 'pull-out' services delivered in the classroom rather than a true instructional shift in mindset (Murawski, 2010; Winfield & Hawkins, 1993). Alternatively, worse, the new 'push-in' policies can create an even wider rift between educators without planning (Byrd & Alexander, 2020).

Collaboration Structures

The collaboration structures of scheduling and time allotment are core parts of systemic school structures (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Collaboration structures can negatively impact teachers consistently working together in the following ways: unprotected individual planning, poor collaboration structures in elementary schools, and vague district collaboration guidance. It is not enough for teachers to have one of these factors addressed, as each contributes to instructional misalignment in different ways.

At its core, teaching is the work done with students, but effective teaching requires significant planning, preparation, reflection, and collaboration. Generally, structural barriers at the organizational level exist in access to time, space, and resources for collaboration to occur (García-Martínez et al., 2021). Garcia and Weiss (2019) found in their research that educators often do not get the needed time to do these preparatory activities, and more specifically, educators often do not get their individual planning time (Erb & Stevenson, 2015; Mertens & Flowers, 2004), which can affect their willingness and availability during collaborative work time (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Even experienced educators can feel the pressure of the workload involved in addressing the variety of student needs in their classrooms, which can result in less time allotted to creating meaningful lessons (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). District A provided all elementary educators with 240 minutes of protected planning time per week, with most that time dedicated to individual planning, according to their Negotiated Agreement (District A, 2022b). The demands on teacher time have only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, as more time is needed to cover additional duty posts and to provide combined/substitute coverage for colleagues in the current vacancy climate, which further pressures their planning time.

If the individual's planning time is affected, collaborative instruction planning becomes even more complex. Even when there is embedded and protected planning time for collaboration, the experience is that special education, ELD educators, and other specialists are consistently included in these structures. District A does not currently require or promote co-teaching at the elementary level between special and general educators, including shared lesson planning and co-facilitation of daily instruction. However, District A does expect all grade-level teachers and specialists to participate in an established weekly collaborative planning block. Unfortunately, these planning blocks may or may not include the special educators, whose

schedules rely on principal approval and guidance. Whereas the generalist intermediate teachers have allotted time in their schedules for collaborative planning, special educators may be required to cover their caseloads, duty times, other grades, or students during this protected planning time. Given that collaborative teaming takes time, the lack of scheduled common planning and collaborative planning time is a common barrier to effective teaming (Denton et al., 2003; Erb & Stevenson, 2015; Main, 2007; Meirink et al., 2010; Murawski, 2010), especially if those meeting times are not consistent (Saunders et al., 2009).

The Negotiated Agreement did not encourage the inclusion of grade-level or content teams, special population specialists, and instructional leadership in collaborative planning, which is considered an instructional professional learning community (District A, 2022a). However, this time is not required by the contract, as it leans on the district collaborative planning process model. Collaborative planning, as documented in the district strategic plan (District A, 2023), must be regularly included in the master schedule and provider schedules. The Negotiated Agreement does emphasize that the purposes of collaborative planning to be: "work, study and plan together in a collegial manner to understand content better, ensure consistent delivery of instruction, analyze student thinking and performance to determine implications for instruction; and share best practices that will improve teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students." Most importantly, collaborative planning incorporates "educators in the grade level/content/department in collaboration with special population service providers and the instructional leadership team. The collective team shall determine which components will be discussed during each planning session" (District A, 2022a).

Another systemic structure beyond scheduling constraints that contributed to ineffective collaboration was the loosely structured Collaborative Planning Guide (CPG) provided by

District A (see Appendix R sampling). This guide was intended to create a general process for planning and delivering instruction across grade/subject areas to address the varied needs within the classrooms. The current CPG identifies four possible purposes for planning: "data inquiry, examining student work, lesson planning, and study groups." The current planning guide provided only generic guiding questions and generalized prework, process, and follow-up. It emphasized the use of a rolling agenda to memorialize what has been discussed and planned. Any planning area across grades can use this CPG, which focuses on creating a consistent cycle and on guiding questions for curriculum and instruction. The limitation of the current guide was that, while the collaborative practices outlined are very generic to allow for flexibility across school levels, they are not specific enough to address the needs of individual students (e.g., "How will the lesson be differentiated to meet the needs of all students?"). They are not specific enough to provide concrete guidance. This looseness can mean that the planning time does not adequately focus on students with specific needs.

While the CPG provided signals for targeting SWD or ELD students at the outset, there are no focus questions to guide the discussion or target outcomes for those groups. Moreover, there is no specific direction in the lesson planning guidance to include the ELD or SPED teachers (see Appendix R). The lesson planning questions do not currently provide any anchored guidance on best-practice reading instruction or on attending to the five components of reading. Consequently, the current protocol can leave planning for the needs of SWD unaddressed, as appears to be the case for developing readers in the intermediate grades in District A. The researcher chose not to explore the CPG as a primary focus for two reasons: 1) leadership guidance–the CPG is more focused on school leaders guiding collaboration rather than the educators involved, and 2) generality–the guiding questions did not target any of the key

components of reading instruction.

Theory for Improvement

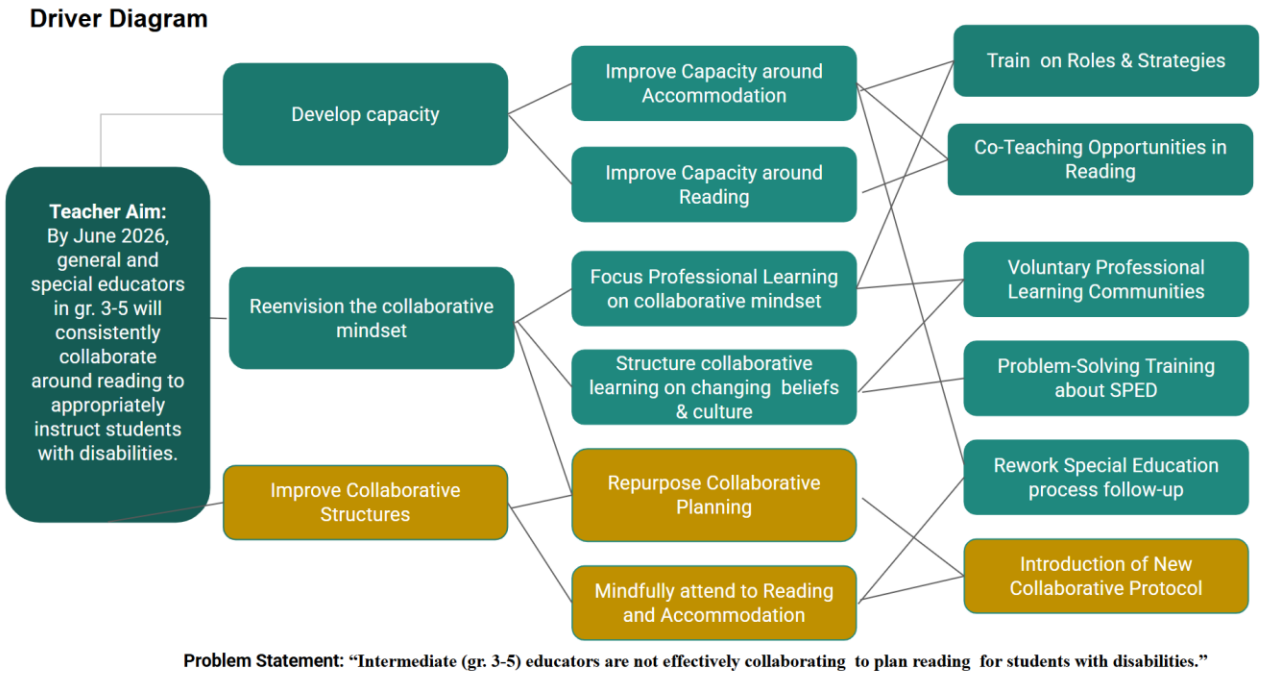
The theoretical framework for improvement (as laid out in Figure 2) is based on the analysis of primary and secondary drivers currently impacting the key factor of collaboration, as identified through the causal systems analysis. To identify the current change idea, there were three primary drivers considered for impact on the teacher aim, which include 1) developing capacity in educators, 2) reenvisioning the collaborative mindset, and 3) improving collaborative structures. During the exploration of improving capacity around IEP delivery, targeting secondary drivers of improving capacity around accommodations and reading sequence to drive collaboration was considered. However, the training on roles and strategies in the reading development process did not go far enough to directly impact reading instruction, and the shift to co-teaching opportunities in reading was too intensive for a short-cycle implementation. Similarly, when considering reenvisioning the collaborative mindset, the professional learning concepts for mindset, problem-solving, and professional learning communities, which focused on changing beliefs and culture, remained similarly distant from directly impacting reading instruction.

Therefore, the primary driver selected was improving collaborative structures to directly elevate the quality of reading instruction for intermediate SWD. The researcher selected this driver to address the aim: **"By June 2026, general and special education teachers in grades 3-5 will consistently collaborate around reading to appropriately instruct students with disabilities.**" The secondary drivers of repurposing collaborative planning and mindfully attending to reading and accommodations reflect the opportunity to transform the time already embedded in collaborative planning to focus on the foundational reading needs of SWD. The

targeted collaborative protocol creates a structure for mindful attention to reading and accommodation, and for addressing practices that can directly impact the teacher's aim, as the basis for this theory of improvement.

Figure 2

Driver Diagram



Note: Driver Diagram exploring primary, secondary, and tertiary drivers resulting in the teacher aim, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2025. Own work.

Develop Teacher Capacity Around Reading and Student Accommodations

The research supports the need for educators to receive targeted training on strategies to build their capacity to collaborate on accommodations and instruction for reading. Lemons et al. (2016) suggest that intermediate elementary-grade students need targeted instruction on the complexity of reading and effective interventions to build capable decoders and readers. Seidenberg (2017) similarly emphasizes that focusing on and reinforcing the scope and sequence

of reading decoding skills is needed to develop more efficient and effective readers at any grade level, much more than any other individual circumstantial factor. For students who are not reading on grade level, the importance of educator knowledge about reading development increases, especially as the curriculum reduces emphasis on these skills. The research is detailed that SWD would benefit greatly if both general and special educators developed their mastery as reading instructors and collaborators (Goddard et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Co-teaching is defined by Friend et al. "as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs" (2010, p.11). The co-teaching processes identified include co-planning, co-implementing, AND co-assessing instruction. True coteaching, when well implemented, creates space for educators to go through "each stage building their capacity to collaborate, take initiative, and solve problems" by observing, modeling, reflecting, and co-working around instruction (Mostovoy-Luna, 2025). However, the research also finds that co-teaching requires the support of an effective, experienced instructor for the team to increase its use of Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) to effectively meet the needs of SWD (Scruggs et al., 2007). Within District A, elementary schools lack sufficient special education staff to support the true definition of co-teaching with two educators across all grade levels consistently; therefore, the focus of this study is on co-planning as the pivotal instructional shift. While they may not be formally co-teaching, special and general educators–as instructors of the same students around reading–need to build their capacity to plan and implement coordinated reading instruction. As Murawski and Lochner (2017) share, "both

educators need to contribute to the proactive planning" of what occurs in the classroom– instruction, differentiation, accommodation, and assessment. High-quality outcomes for students require that districts and educators be prepared for and supported with interventions for special populations that historically perform below their grade-level peers, including a full range of supports for their specific needs (The Equity Assistance Centers, 2013). Therefore, together, both intermediate educators can better align the curriculum and instructional methods to enhance student learning (Hackmann et al., 2002).

Reading instruction that meets the needs of intermediate-grade SWD requires that both general education and special education teachers understand the accommodations, supports, and services that are part of students' IEPs and possess a full understanding of effective reading instruction. Sousa (2007) observed that all educators are teachers of reading and should be trained to strengthen the reading skills of students at every grade, which is part of why there may need to be more focus in the district on helping educators differentiate and customize their lessons for the needs of the students they teach. Even more strongly, Denton et al. (2003) emphasize that educators must routinely provide students who struggle with decoding with consistent, intensive instruction grounded in research-validated principles. For some educators, this guidance may need to be as specific as "what to teach, what order to teach it in, how to teach it, and to what level" (Haycock, 2009, Slide 104). However, this level of institutional shift extends beyond the purview of this investigation.

Reenvision the Collaborative Mindset

The current educational environment increasingly requires general and special educators to expand their beliefs about their roles and deepen their knowledge of diverse learners in relation to the curriculum, according to Van Garderen et al. (2012). Both special educators and

general educators need to understand their specific roles and the importance of their collaboration in improving outcomes for SWD. In my experience, the mindset around SWD is that special educators are responsible for them and need to provide for all their needs. If the continuum of services is to continue shifting toward more inclusive opportunities, educators need to be developed to shift their mindsets and beliefs through an intentional culture shift. Lemons et al. (2016) emphasize that the continuum of services in schools should include enhanced instructional and intervention intensity to ensure that SWD receive the free and appropriate education mandated by law. Achieving this continuum requires a transformed belief that all educators provide access to SDI throughout the school day.

The district can foster a collaborative mindset through voluntary Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), targeted training in problem-solving in the educational environment, and revisions to the special education process to build intentionality around implementation and team dynamics (Hord & Tobia, 2015). Garcia and Weiss (2019) suggest that PLCs are needed to help develop shared language and understanding around student needs. Lemons et al. (2016) emphasize the need for a "community of special and general educators who have expert knowledge and skills about their content area, as well as diagnostic and instructive practices for meeting the needs of students with significant learning problems" (pg. 139). To build their problem-solving, collaboration, and understanding skills, adults need purposeful time, choice, community, and time to work to understand one another and get the support needed to shift their mindset and beliefs. (Mehta & Fine, 2019). The time and breadth of involvement needed to create the broad mindset shift would be more extensive than this investigation proposed.

Improve Collaborative Structures

For the scope of this study, this researcher proposed adjusting current structures to create

space for the targeted implementation of reading and associated accommodations aligned with the planned direct instruction. The research of Connor et al. (2014) found that to improve students' reading outcomes, educators likely have to improve knowledge AND practice specifically. The district SPED department introduced evidence-based practices through the High-Leverage Practices for Special Education (McLeskey et al., 2017). The high-leverage practice that most closely applies to this research is high-leverage practice #1, which is to "collaborate with professionals to increase student success" (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 17), as supported by Paulsrud and Nilholm (2023). The current research theory brings together this high-leverage practice with the concepts of effective teaching from Danielson and Axtell's (2009) Framework for Teaching, which is the evaluation and model used within the district.

A collaborative structure is needed to effectively impact student outcomes, especially to address the time and purpose-setting required (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016). According to Patrick (2022), collaborative planning time needs to be sufficiently scheduled and protected by administration, which positively predicts the level of teacher collaboration and engagement. Effective collaboration is a job-embedded, strategic, capacity-building professional learning time with a strong professional climate, where attendees demonstrate competence, respect, and expectations, which differs from the shared space and time of the traditional model for educational planning (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Patrick, 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

Good collaboration was defined by the National Education Association (2022), based on Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016), to "establish an education partnership, commit to work together, and share in decision-making around shared student-centered goals ". Educators need development in the language, structures, and vocabulary used in instruction, curriculum, and

adaptations to build collaborative capacity (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Lemons et al., 2016). Schwab et al. (2015) identified that a truly inclusive environment includes educators with equal responsibility in strong collaborative teaching, instructional planning, classroom routines, and preparations within the support of a collaborative school culture. It is crucial for school culture to value educator collaboration and to dedicate time to collaborative decision-making (Katz & Dack, 2013). When collaboration occurs, improved student achievement is correlated (Goddard et al., 2007). In fact, "teacher collaboration is consistently associated with high-performing schools" (Center for the School of the Future, 2025).

This study was designed to enhance rather than supplant current practices, thereby allowing educators to drive the shift in the district's weekly grade-level collaborative planning allotment. To add intentionality to the proposed collaboration, the research used what Lipton and Wellman (2017) call a "third point" through the Strategic Collaboration Protocol (SCP). The researcher intended this collaboration structure to emphasize the legal responsibility of both educators to plan and implement SDI that aligns with the supports outlined in the individual student's IEP. Dickinson (2009) characterized productive team meetings as teacher-led, focused on planning and organization, and on topics that develop specialized knowledge, change beliefs, and support consistent, long-term implementation (see Connor et al., 2014). The study explored the connection between educator team engagement in collaboration and targeted planning time, with a focus on the shift toward mindfully attending to reading instruction and accommodations.

The goal of this investigation was to use the planning time already built into all teachers' schedules and to shift the interaction between general and special education teachers to help both intensify and adapt the reading lesson to address foundational and content-related needs, including better accommodations, supports, and strategies for students with IEPs. The district

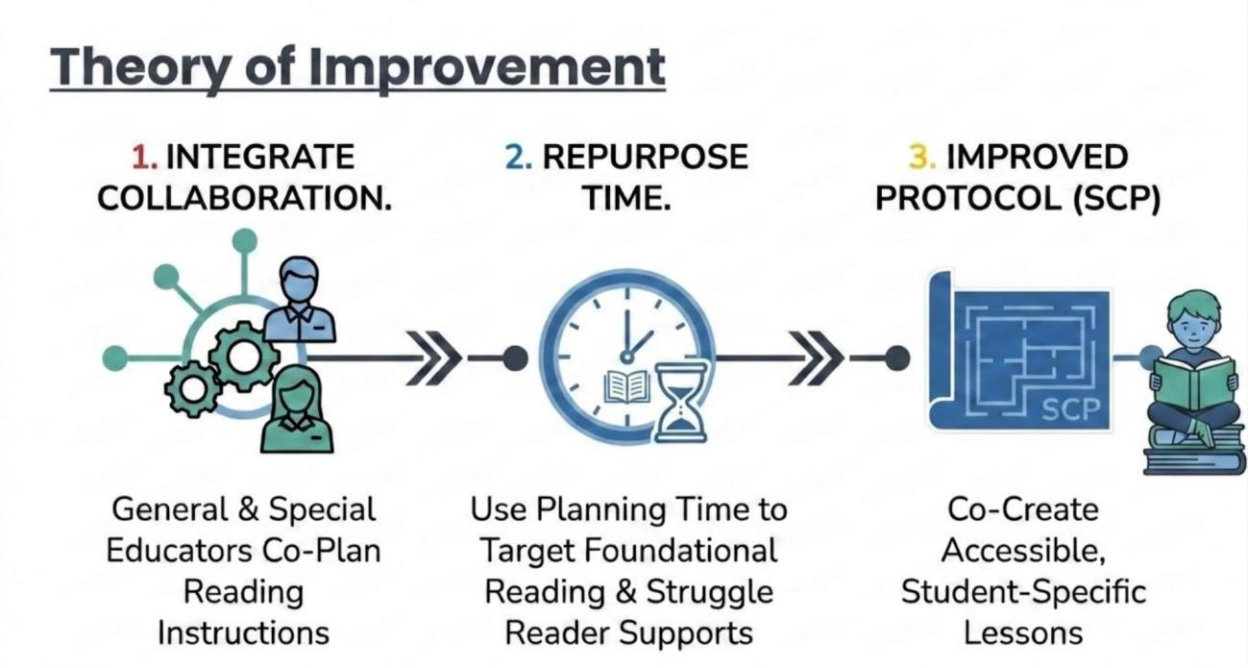
roughly defined collaborative planning as a designated 30–60 minutes of planning time with colleagues either in a vertical (e.g., by subject and broader age grouping) or horizontal (by grade) manner per week. The model intended to acknowledge the strengths of the general educator as a content leader and the special educator as a strategy leader, and to recognize that a shift in instruction requires the strengths of both educators to create learning by adapting, recreating, bridging, and scaffolding to "build success for our most marginalized students" (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Specifically, this study aimed to equip teachers with a tool to guide their collaborative planning and focus on improved reading instruction for SWD by creating space to target direct reading skills, strategies, and accommodations. Therefore, transforming the planning time currently available in the district is one route to building more effective collaboration and instruction to improve students' reading trajectories.

Theory of Improvement

This exploratory investigation aimed to identify evidence-based strategies to improve educator collaboration on reading instruction for SWD, thereby improving reading progress and outcomes for these students. I positioned this research project to address the intentionality of work around this Critical Success Indicator for the district: *How do we shift current instructional planning practices around reading to improve outcomes for special education students?* (from the District A Strategic Plan, 2023).

Figure 3

Theory of Improvement Diagram



Note: Summary visual of the theory of improvement, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2023. Own work.

The Theory of Improvement (Figure 3) focused on the following (as developed through the Driver Diagram in Figure 2): If we want **students with disabilities in the intermediate grades to become proficient readers, then general and special educators need to incorporate SDI in reading plans.** More specifically, we need to **repurpose currently available collaborative planning time to strategically and mindfully attend to foundational reading skills and supports needed for struggling readers**. I propose that the best way to accomplish this is **through an improved collaborative protocol to co-create accessible lessons that explicitly address student-specific literacy needs during the implementation of the intermediate reading curriculum.** Therefore, this would address my problem of practice: *Intermediate (gr. 3-5) educators are not effectively collaborating to plan reading for students with disabilities.*

The theory of improvement was based on the promising approach to educational improvement proposed by Ronfeldt et al. (2015), which yielded a strong correlation in their study of 9,000 teachers working with SWD. In summary, Ronfeldt et al. found that targeted improvements in collaboration within instructional teams led to better student outcomes. This positive finding is one of the key factors driving this study. Structured and focused collaboration time spent improving instruction and focused on student performance improves educator practice (Meirink et al., 2010). Additionally, the study by Goddard et al. (2007) specifically found that fourth-grade students achieve higher in mathematics and reading when they attend schools characterized by higher levels of teacher collaboration, which directly supports the age and strategy selected.

A SCP was selected as the pivotal practice for this exploratory study for the following reasons: focus, differentiation, implementation, and student-centered. In a recent study of protocol use for math planning, educators "reported greater confidence in designing differentiated lessons tailored to students' learning styles and readiness levels, strengthening co-teaching partnerships, and refining the planning and implementation of structured three-part lessons" (Gordon, 2025). Gordon's (2025) findings align with earlier research by DuFour and Eaker (2009), who found that schools that prioritized structured collaborative planning protocols saw significant improvements in student achievement and more refined instructional strategies. Structured protocols help focus productive conversations on student learning and equitable participation by minimizing distractions and off-topic discussion (McDonald et al., 2003). Structured protocols also assist with reflection on instructional approaches, informed decision-making, and strategy improvements (Cohen & Goodlad, 1994). Beyond developing instruction, educators engaged in structured collaboration are more likely to address the diverse needs and

implement innovative strategies targeted to student learning (Desimone, 2011). The structure of collaboration was found to be essential in the research of Andrews-Larson et al. (2017), who found that unstructured collaboration led to inconsistent results and implementation. Rather than providing additional training for educators, this investigation explores the impact of a shift in the planning structure and whether that alone has any initial, noticeable effects warranting further study. In summary, the research indicates that SCPs improve the intentionality of planning time, differentiation, and instructional outcomes, thereby enhancing practice and implementation.

The researcher hypothesized that by implementing a SCP for reading, educators would experience meaningful transformations in collaborative planning time by focusing on the foundational needs and reading support for SWD, and, consequently, the effectiveness of reading instruction for these students would improve. If District A wanted to improve student outcomes, I proposed changing the structure of collaborative planning (specifically during their Collaborative Planning Blocks, as a district-wide expectation) to actively engage the combined expertise of general and special educators working together on behalf of our SWD. This study was based on the premise that the use of a targeted planning protocol can improve the specificity of reading instruction for intermediate special education students, thereby enabling more intentional selection and incorporation of specially designed reading strategies, skills, supports, and accommodations in co-planned lessons. The study was grounded in the thinking that if the district provides general and special educators with focused guidance through a SCP on incorporating specific supports and instruction during reading lessons for SWD, then the co-planned reading instruction will better align and create access to targeted instruction for these students, which will, in turn, improve their learning outcomes in reading. The collaborative protocol was intended to engage and guide a conversation between both parties, focusing on

scaffolding foundational and content-based reading skills for SWD through intertwined instructional practices. The goal of this study was for both teachers to see the protocol as an improvement to their current planning routines and practices. While general educators were part of the collaboration process, only the special educator's feedback provided the comparison from their prior experience, during the proposed change, and after implementation, and whether there is a perceived impact. Furthermore, by focusing on improved reading foundations and access to content, this researcher posited that SWD' long-term reading outcomes can improve. However, this research will not directly measure students' reading results.

Section 2

Methodology

The researcher designed the study to engage a sample of intermediate-grade special education teachers who support SWD in general education classrooms. The first stage of the study was focus groups through which the researcher aimed to understand current collaborative practice and possible changes needed. The second stage of the study was a targeted implementation of the structured collaborative planning protocol. The time frame for subject recruitment and data collection was 7 months, slightly longer than the predicted 4 months.

Research Aim & Questions

The goals of this study were: 1) to improve collaboration between general and special educators around reading to instruct students with disabilities more appropriately, and 2) to explore whether a small change in the structure of collaborative planning can lead to meaningful improvement in instruction, as most instructional changes that are implemented and tested in the district have been larger-scale changes with professional development and additional resources. The overarching question for this research was **"What is the impact of a structured collaboration protocol on teacher collaboration and instruction in reading for intermediate students with disabilities?"** Three research questions guided the work, including:

- What are the current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?
- How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?
- How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?

Subject Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment

Subject recruitment was purposive (Creswell & Poth, 2016) and began by identifying all elementary special educators in District A by pulling names and email addresses from school websites, since there was no specific list of special educator assignments across the district at that time. There were 138 elementary schools with intermediate-level students in the target District (including academies and charters), and an estimated 450 special educators served elementary-age students (excluding schools and educators linked to the investigator). The researcher expected that about 200-225 special education teachers would not be eligible to participate in this study because they teach in self-contained environments. Removing this cohort left about 225-250 elementary resource teachers, and of those, approximately half (125) were likely to be assigned within their schools to work with intermediate-grade students. The goal of the initial recruitment screening questionnaire was to identify approximately 20-25 intermediate elementary special education resource teachers (15-20%) to volunteer for the study's focus groups. From this targeted group, the researcher invited volunteers (about half) to pilot a new collaborative protocol and document their experiences with the tool.

Given that school administrators do not consistently include self-contained special education teachers or those in special programs in grade-level collaboration with their general education colleagues, this subset of special education teachers was therefore excluded from the implementation selection. To maintain consistency in the focus on collaboration between general education and special education teachers around reading, the study included only special educators who are currently or have been included in this planning with their general education colleagues. Additionally, as a district special education instructional specialist, I did not recruit

teachers from schools under my caseload to ensure impartiality and avoid undue influence on the process.

To recruit a good representative sample of volunteers for the larger focus group part of the study, all elementary principals, excluding those with connections to the caseload of the researcher (13 in total), were sent email requests (Appendix A) for consent to involve their special education staff and to use collaborative time (including three primary email contacts and one final appeal to respondents–see Appendix B). Principal contacts were kept indirect as the positionality of the investigator as a Central Office Instructional Specialist could have unduly influenced the engagement of principals or changed their involvement in the collaboration process. The impact of positionality was also considered in the resulting contacts with educators throughout the research; therefore, university email was used to limit district-level position association, similar to the ***Hawthorne effect***. Of the 126 elementary principals contacted, only 31 responded affirmatively and signed consent for the researcher to contact their educators to seek their participation during the subject recruitment period from early January through early February 2025. Notably, an additional 10 principals stated that they did not consent to their staff being contacted for various reasons.

Among the accepting principals, only 150 special educators within their buildings were available for contact (out of the potential 661 staff on the district's public contact list, partly due to inconsistent role labeling on some school websites). While this is about half the expected number of staff, the researcher proceeded by contacting special educators who received an invitation/recruitment email (see Appendix C) containing a link to the screening questionnaire, through which they indicated their interest in participating in this study. Additionally, the researcher provided the principals with a flier to post and share about the invitation (see

Appendix S). The researcher designed the screening questionnaire (available through Qualtrics, see Appendix E) to gather basic demographic and key information (years of teaching, role, certification, willingness to participate in a focus group, etc.) about the volunteers. Similar to the principal recruitment consent, the researcher sent a total of three emails to solicit interest (also see Appendix D).

Selection

It was the intention for researcher to select a sampling of subjects who represent the diversity of the district, including representatives from each of the three regions of the district (north, central, south), varied sizes of schools, representative caseload sizes, and a mix of years of experience as a special education teacher, as well as a primary focus on teachers of reading in grades 3-5. Thus, I created a questionnaire that included the range of screening factors modeled in Appendix E. The questionnaire also asked respondents to indicate whether they were part of a special program or a self-contained classroom, to screen out any educators who did not meet the criterion for the study. I intended to select subjects whose schools would include at least one small-to-medium school (500 or fewer students) and at least one medium-to-large school (more than 500 students) per area. By selecting a cross-section of special education participants from grades 3, 4, and 5, from both large and small schools, and from the three major areas of the district, I intended the focus group subjects to be representative of the broader district. The study recruitment was designed to include educators from the same school to participate in the focus groups; the investigator would ensure they were in separate groups to allow for open sharing without undue influence. The researcher selected this cross-section to account for the fact that adult collaboration and instructional practice may differ or shift across grade levels and the administrative needs of various-sized schools. The initial questionnaire asked all participants

only about their interest in participating in the focus group, not in the additional implementation phase of the study.

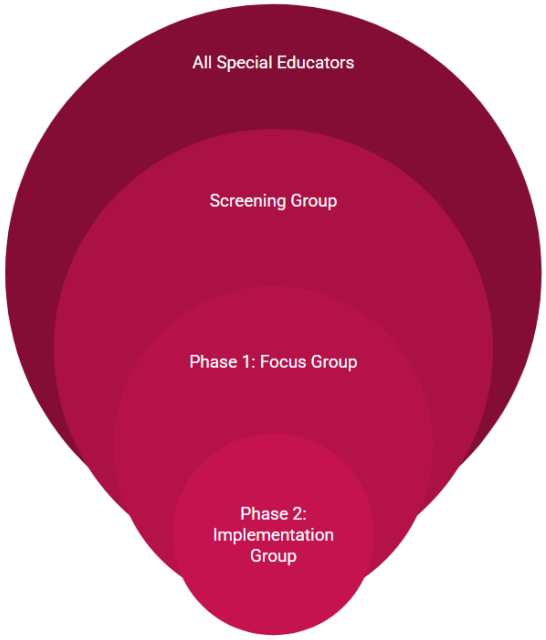
To entice educators to participate in the study, the researcher appealed to their interest in informing and influencing the district's understanding of current collaboration practices and in providing input and feedback to shape central office directives. I also emphasized that this study was an opportunity to receive free, targeted professional development on reading collaboration. Focus group participants were offered a small gift card ($5 Amazon/Target or the like; see Appendix T). Based on the response rate, the researcher sent follow-up emails/contacts to the elementary special educators every two weeks over two months to reach a representative sample of at least 20 focus group members and to make a final appeal as the focus group section of the study closed. Through multiple contact attempts, including three mixed contacts via email or phone and one follow-up email as needed, 33 special educators submitted responses to the screening questionnaire. Of those responses, 17 volunteered to participate in the focus group by providing their contact information and meeting the criteria across the Phase 1 period from mid-January through mid-March. The identified subjects were sent the confirmation of being selected to participate (Appendix F) and the Consent Form (see Appendix G). Once the investigator received the signed consent for Phase 1, the researcher sent the focus group dates/times outside of work hours. Ten respondents signed the consent form and participated in focus group sessions, which was roughly half of the 20-25 subjects I had hoped to recruit. Given that the contact sampling of 150 was about half of the expected 450 educators, this result aligns with the expected sampling percentages (see Figure 4).

According to Cheng's (2007) summary research, focus groups can include 4-12 participants; smaller groups allow for more sharing and higher-quality responses. The literature

supports the efficacy of small sample sizes and argues that the more usable data collected from each person, the fewer participants are needed (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Morse, 2000). The study used data collection and coding for the focus groups and interviews to address research questions 1 and 2. The 10 teachers in the focus groups accounted for about 7% of the district's target teacher group. They represented the intermediate grades to provide a sampling of the swath of educator experience. The researcher selected the focus group format to allow for "providing access to participants' own language, concepts and concerns; encouraging the production of more fully articulated accounts; and offering an opportunity to observe the process of collective sense-making in action" (Wilkinson, 1998). Especially for decision-making, where staff have direct involvement in the implementation process and are affected by the results in their jobs, the focus group allows them to convey their desires, current status, and experiences (Williams & Katz, 2001).

Figure 4

Visual Model of Subject Recruitment



Group	Selected from	Expected Size	Actual Size
All Elementary Special Educators	All special educators in 138 E.S. schools	~450	~700 (due to limited labeling of positions)
Elementary Resource Special Educators	Educators not in self-contained programs	~200 - 225 (~50%)	~100 - 150 (with principal consent) - 15 - 20%
Screening Group	Educators in gr. 3-5	~125 (~50%)	33 respondents (22%) with 17 volunteers (11%)
Focus Group	Respondents to screening questionnaire	20-25 (15 - 20%)	10 participants (59%)
Implementation Group	Participant volunteers	10-12 (50%)	5 implementers (50%)

Note: Visual of the recruitment process for the study across all phases, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2025. Own work.

The researcher invited all focus group participants at the end of the focus group to discuss their interest in volunteering to implement the SCP, as they had been pre-screened and deemed eligible through the screening questionnaire. The investigator hoped that a large majority of the focus group participants would be interested in the next phase, with at least nine implementers (half of the focus group members). However, due to a limited response rate of 17 eligible educators from the 31 responses and a smaller-than-expected participant group of 10, the five implementers did not meet the 50% expectation. The implementation volunteers agreed to: 1) attempt to implement the SCP and reflect through the Micro-Journal/Exit Ticket, and 2) share the intermediate grade levels with which they would be implementing. Each implementor was also

offered a small gift card ($20 from Amazon/Target, or a similar retailer) for their participation (Appendix T).

The researcher intended the protocol implementation to be across at least 12 schools (or representative sample of about 10% of schools and 5% of possible special educators, or a quarter of respondents) with at least two schools per geographic area of the district (north, central and south) to ensure that there is a representative sample from across the large district with at least resource special educators from each grade level (3rd, 4th, and 5th). The goal was to better understand the current process across district locations and determine whether the SCP could improve the collaborative planning process, though they did not achieve the hoped-for district representation by grade/region.

Data Collection

The study organized data collection into two phases: focus groups and interviews, followed by an implementation study. In the first phase, the researcher conducted two focus groups and three individual interviews, during which the researcher facilitated conversations about current collaboration practices and the role of current special education teachers in planning reading instruction for intermediate students. The focus groups and interviews took place during February and March of 2025, focusing on current collaboration practices to provide baseline information and feedback, and the protocol was the same for both. The researcher asked the participants open-ended probes listed in Appendix I, which allowed the investigator to tailor follow-up and probing questions to deepen and expand the group's responses. Each interaction was designed to last 1 hour and to be held via Zoom. The researcher recorded the focus groups and interviews and generated de-identified transcripts for each meeting. The researcher scheduled all five meetings as focus groups, but due to limited attendance, three of the five

meetings were conducted as individual interviews instead. While it was intentionally acknowledged in all communications around my positionality within District A, reflection on the candid responses (both positive and negative) by the participants indicates that a comfort level and safe space was created during the sessions was achieved for the most part.

In the second phase of the study, the goal of the new protocol was to strengthen the collaboration structure of reading planning during the district-allotted time within elementary school schedules for the Collaborative Planning Blocks (CPB) (See Appendix J). The new SCP included elements to address key curriculum components and individualization related to the IEP, as an opportunity to explore reading collaboration in relation to the protocol's influence AND the current collaboration experience through direct, in-the-moment feedback.

The investigator based this research and its protocols on the primary research of Marilyn Friend and Wendy Murawski, preeminent researchers in the fields of collaboration and co-teaching. Specifically, the *WHAT, HOW, WHO* approach as developed by Murawski (2012) is the basis for the SCP–*WHAT* refers to what is already known (like Unit, Key Strategies, Skills, Students, Focus Accommodations, etc.) which may be pulled from previously developed documents (like the District A curriculum, the IEPs, and reading interventions), *HOW* refers to the ways the content will be taught and targeted (targeting key students/groups, teaching approaches/models, access to all students, specific strategies to the skills at hand, differentiation, accommodations, modifications, etc.) as an intentional discussion between the educators, and *WHO* refers to which educator will implement which part of the plan through Next Steps, By Whom, and By When (ex. Making items, pulling groups, leads for rotations, etc.) (see Appendix J). The researcher organized these sections visually into a graphic organizer to embed in the current CPB, which the researcher trained the implementers about during a single session. While

not requiring co-teaching, the purpose of the SCP was to improve intentionality and make communication more explicit among educators teaching the same students.

The researcher asked pre-screened focus group members for volunteers for the implementation phase, and the investigator provided an introduction and training (see Appendix I) on the collaborative tool after subjects expressed verbal interest in participating in the short-cycle implementation during the focus group. The 10-minute training was followed by an email reminder with links to complete their consent for Phase 2 (see Appendix K). Ten participants were available at the intermediate elementary level to use the collaborative planning tool during scheduled or other collaborative planning time in their weekly schedules; however, in the end, the SCP implementation study had only five participants who signed consent for Phase 2 (Appendix H). For those not participating, the researcher sent a thank you for participating in Phase 1 (see Appendix L).

While this sampling may seem small, it allows for the analysis of educators' direct feedback and perceptions to determine whether the proposed protocol could be an improvement over current practices and to enable real-time adjustments to collaborative planning. Moreover, a small test sample is preferred before larger implementation, aligned with the concepts within the Improvement Science framework, to test small and fail quickly (Bryk et al., 2015), which was familiar to District A, as they already implement the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles through other school and district development plans. Conceptually, this applied research is based on the Improvement Science guidance from Bryk et al. (2015) stemming from three key questions and three key principles:

Questions:

1. What specifically are we trying to accomplish?

2. What change might we introduce and why?
3. How will we know that a change is actually an improvement?

Principles:

1. Wherever possible, learn quickly and cheaply;
2. Be minimally intrusive–some changes will fail, and we want to limit negative consequences on individuals' time and personal lives; and
3. Develop empirical evidence at every step to guide subsequent improvement cycles.

Implementers were requested to use the SCP to document their weekly collaborative planning time with their intermediate and grade-level colleagues on reading planning over eight weeks. The researcher projected that educators could implement the SCP 4-8 times during weekly planning, spread across the eight weeks from March through June 2025. The five participants who agreed to serve as implementers of the SCP for reading instruction during weekly collaborative planning were instructed to provide immediate feedback after each collaborative planning session via Micro-Journaling (collected via Qualtrics; see Appendix M). The journaling was designed to allow them to quickly reflect on how the session went and whether they were able to engage in productive collaborative planning with their general education colleagues on reading. The responses consisted of three data questions, seven ratings, and one open-ended response for the Micro-Journal, which focused on Research Question 2. It is worth noting that the ratings provided three options for each question, presented in a random order to mitigate the risk of unintentionally assigning positive or negative connotations to the options, since the purpose is to collect in-the-moment data.

At the end of the implementation phase, the researcher also asked implementers to complete an Exit Ticket via Qualtrics summarizing their overall experience with the SCP (see Appendix N). While the Exit Ticket focused on Research Question 3, it included three data questions and seven open-ended response questions to summarize the overall experience with the implementation of the SCP. While recording the collaboration or requesting access to the protocols throughout the planning process was considered, the researcher determined that it might affect outcomes along the lines of the ***Hawthorne effect***, which holds that people know when they are being watched and behave differently as a result. Therefore, the researcher requested a sampling of the protocols following the final Exit Ticket, with the request that the student information be de-identified/removed to ensure that no personally identifiable information about students is shared. However, because the study closed at the end of the school year, the return rate was very limited.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the collected data through a qualitative lens. The study used thematic analysis of qualitative research, as introduced by Merton (1975) and based on the current structures of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, to identify key learnings. Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework includes (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the report (2006). The strengths of the structures in thematic analysis include theoretical flexibility (constructivist), as themes emerge from data through active and reflexive review as codes evolve into themes (Ahmed et al., 2025). In particular, Clarke and Braun (2013) identify two potential influences on theming–assumptions about the research topic and the values and life experiences of the researcher–as both of these shape how the data is read

and interpreted. In my role as a special education instructional specialist in the district, I was familiar with the structures and supports the interviewees referenced, which helped me code their voices more effectively.

As the investigator, I also acknowledge that intimate knowledge of the district influenced how I viewed the potential impacts of collaboration, co-teaching, and a protocol, based on my experiences as a special educator, chairperson, and collaborator across the elementary grade levels. The coding focused on current structures, input on the new structure, teacher beliefs about the structures, and impacts on educators and students. The four focus themes identified previously around general practices and experiences in collaboration on reading included: access to planning, expectations of planning, equity in planning, and resulting implementation shifts, as well as any additional themes that emerged from the data. Additionally, reviewing the protocol feedback provided insight into whether there was sufficient support and instruction to improve the structure and whether implementers used it as intended.

The investigator began the analysis of the focus group responses with the following initial insights: special educators have inconsistent engagement in collaborative planning, special educators do not get the same planning supports as their general education colleagues, inconsistent understanding of student needs and supports by educators, challenges of working with multiple grades/subjects in planning, collaboration improves classroom supports, need for more focus on explaining accommodations, and the need for more guidance around collaboration to support students with special needs. The researcher based these themes on research questions 1 and 2, as well as the causal impacts identified in the Fishbone diagram for unprotected planning, poor collaboration, and vague guidance (Figure 1).

For the Micro-Journal and Exit Ticket, the additional insights focused on research questions 2 and 3 and include: buy-in takes time for a new protocol, structure helps organize the use of time to attend to reading/accommodations, the protocol supports discussion of student needs, clarity from the categories, and teachers benefit from structure. These insights also connect to the drivers of improving collaborative structures and to repurposing collaborative planning to mindfully attend to reading and accommodations through the introduction of a collaborative protocol. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher remained open to themes and meta-themes that emerged organically from the responses and data, and summarized and remained sensitive to the important information participants shared about their lived experience, both in their roles and in implementing the SCP within their environments. As previously acknowledged, as the coder of the data, I had to guard against confirmation bias, since collaboration was a prior conviction from my own educational experience. It was key to have some of the de-identified transcript and coding reviewed by an unaffiliated colleague and by one of the participants, who agreed to provide further support. In evaluating and synthesizing the findings of this research, I was positioned to play an active role in extending internal research, influencing policy, and sharing learnings within my sphere of influence as a special education instructional specialist.

IRB & Human Subject Protections

An expedited IRB was completed and submitted to the University of Maryland, College Park. The researcher also submitted and received permission from the district research office to conduct the study in District A, including consent from both principals to contact educators and from educators to participate directly in the study. The researcher adhered to all IRB procedures requiring that human subject data be kept confidential throughout the study. Principals were

requested to provide signed consent, as provided by the district, to approve contacting their staff. The researcher asked educators at the schools with approved contact to sign consent forms that outline the study, expectations, and give permission for participation in the study sections with separate consents for focus group participation and SCP implementation, as well as reminding participants of the voluntary nature of their participation (see Appendix G & H). Each email and consent for recruitment and participation will include contact information for subjects to withdraw at any time. The consent form and verbal introduction also indicated the confidentiality protections. The directives, introductions to the focus group participants, and the group protocol were shared before recording (Perry et al., 2020). The researcher administered the study screening questionnaires, micro-journaling, and Exit Tickets via the Qualtrics program under the University of Maryland license and collected them anonymously. The researcher also stored the results and evaluation in the University of Maryland-licensed Box and on a separate, secured flash drive. Both allowed for the secure and confidential storage of research information.

Section 3

Qualitative Analysis

To provide a roadmap for the reader, this chapter presents findings from the exploratory qualitative study in two phases. In Phase 1 of the study, I conducted three focus groups and three individual interviews. In the Implementation Phase 2 of the study, I collected Micro-Journal and Exit Ticket feedback from the participants. This chapter has four sections: 1) participant demographic profile, 2) qualitative findings from both phases, 3) discussion of the findings, and 4) limitations, recommendations, and impacts of collaboration practices.

Participant Demographics

As described in the methodology, subject recruitment began by emailing 126 principals (Appendix A) to request access to 661 special educators. Thirty-one principals responded, which enabled me to send individual invitations to 150 special education teachers (Appendix C). In response to my invitation, 33 special educators completed the screening questionnaire (Appendix E), 17 volunteered for focus groups, and 10 participated in a focus group or interview (Appendix G). I invited all ten to extend their participation in the study into the implementation phase. After the Phase 2 training, five participants volunteered to implement the SCP over an 8-12 week period (Appendix H). Table 2 summarizes demographics for Phase 1 participants and Phase 2 engagement (full demographic data is available in Appendix U).

Table 2

Participant Demographic Sampling

Participant Coding	Participant Aliases	School Alias	Role(s)	Grade Levels on Caseload	Gender	Focus Group (Phase 1)	Implementation (Phase 2)
FGA1	Hollis	School A	* Resource * Chair	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	F	yes	no
FGA2	Wendy	School B	* Resource	K, 2, 3	F	yes	yes
FGB3	Anthony	School C	* Resource * Co-taught Autism	4, 5, 6	M	yes	yes
FGC4	Marilyn	School D	* Resource * Chair	1, 3, 4, 5	F	yes	yes
FGC5	Laura	School E	* Resource	3, 4	F	yes	no
FGC6	Anne	School F	* Resource * Chair	K, 4, 5	F	yes	no
FGC7	John	School G	* Resource * Chair	K, 2, 3, 5	M	yes	yes
FGC8	Charlotte	School H	* Resource * Chair	4,5	F	yes	no
FGD9	Brenda	School I	* Self–contained * Co-taught Autism	3	F	yes	no
FGE10	Louisa	School J	* Resource * Chair	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	F	yes	yes

Note: Summary demographics of study participants across phases, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2025. Own work.

See Appendix U for the full demographics from the Screening Questionnaire.

As special education teachers, participants provided information about their school, role, and student caseloads (i.e., students in their assigned grade levels with IEP to service, monitor, and coordinate) via the screening questionnaire (Appendix E). The ten focus group and interview participants included two men and eight women. Most Phase 1 participants worked in medium-sized schools (300-700 students), two worked in small schools, and none worked in large schools. Nine participants had caseloads of 11-25 students, and one had a caseload of fewer than

five. Only one participant worked with a single grade; seven worked with 2-4 grade levels; and two coordinated with six or more grades, all of which included the intermediate grades (gr. 3-5). Most identified as special education resource teachers; one participant also served in a co-taught classroom, and one was a self-contained Autism teacher who participated in grade-level collaboration and, as a result, was included in the study. Six participants also noted that they served as special education chairpersons at their schools.

In Phase 2, the five implementers represented elementary schools of similar size to those in Phase 1. All had 11-25 students, including grades 3-5. The group included three women and two men, spanning a range of experience in education and special education. All participants identified themselves as resource special educators; three were also special education chairpersons, and one was also an Autism co-teacher. Overall, the representation in Phase 2 reflected that of the Phase 1 group. With participant demographics established, the next section examines the qualitative findings from both phases of the study.

Focus Group Findings

This exploratory study follows a theory of action that well-defined collaborative structures can shape teacher practice and boost reading outcomes (see Theory of Improvement, pp. 38–39). Through the focus groups and interviews of Phase 1, special education teachers described current collaborative structures and their planning experiences with general education teachers for students with special needs in the intermediate elementary grades. In Phase 2, the special education teachers who participated in implementing a SCP examined their experiences with planning reading instruction for SWD during CPB. The research questions focus on collaboration, reading planning, instruction experiences, and the SCP's influence.

The following sections organize the findings by research question, beginning with an

exploration of existing collaboration practices. Two research questions guided the focus group/interview protocol (Appendix I): ***What are current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?*** and ***How do special education teachers experience collaboration in teaching reading to students with disabilities?*** Participants shared insights, offered perspectives, and expanded on others' responses (in focus groups) about their experiences. The researcher reviewed anonymized Zoom transcripts, then coded and recoded them using qualitative thematic analysis methods (Ahmed et al., 2025; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The collaboration study set four focus themes at the outset: expectations, access to and equity in planning, and reading shifts from implementation.

In Phase 2, a smaller group of implementers responded to the Micro-Journal (Appendix M) after planning sessions and to the study-wide Exit Ticket (Appendix N). The researcher collected responses anonymously via Qualtrics and analyzed them in the same manner as in Phase 1. The key Phase 2 research question was: ***How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaboration for reading?*** The researcher identified additional themes raised by Phase 2 participants: variability in access, consistency in the Rolling Agenda, the role of informal collaboration, implementation and impact of reading supports, and the impact of the SCP.

Research Question 1: What Are Current Collaboration Practices Between Intermediate General and Special Education Teachers?

District A policy requires CPB in all elementary school Master Schedules. As described in Section 2, these blocks are guided by the District's Strategic Plan, CPG, and the Negotiated Agreement. All participants confirmed that their school's schedule includes a CPB, and all ten participants recognized the importance of collaborative planning. All also agreed that collaborative planning between special and general educators is important for helping SWD. As

Anne explained, collaboration brings together "the background, teacher pedagogy, and training on implementing accommodations. Planning with colleagues is so important." Generally, CPBs are scheduled weekly for grade-level teams (horizontal) and/or content teams (vertical), and the general educators' daily schedule includes individual planning time.

Finding #1: Significant Variability in CPB Implementation

What emerged from the focus groups and interviews was a clear pattern and finding that although Master Schedules include CPBs, participants reported inconsistent implementation of this block. Among all ten participants, most (n=7) said their school teams used the CPB consistently, though several indicated they did not have regular access to CPB. Three participants reported that the CPB had recently been "canceled" for the rest of the school year. Another participant mentioned that they would gain CPB time when scheduled, beginning in March.

The participants in the study indicated that their participation varied widely across grade levels and subjects. They also described notable variability in the extent to which they, as special educators, were included in their schools' CPBs. Only 7 out of 10 reported that scheduled collaborative planning included them at any point during the year. Moreover, only half of the participants were in schools that used dedicated collaborative planning time to support the instruction of SWD. While participants valued regular planning days involving all educators and administrators, most also reported that they were not able to, nor were they scheduled to, regularly attend weekly collaborative planning.

Overall, participants identified time as an important factor contributing to variation in their participation in the CPB. One participant, in particular, Louisa, reflected what others (FGC4, FGC5, FGB3, FGC8, FGD9) shared about attending formal CPBs each week: "There's

not enough people, and there's not enough time." When included, Hollis emphasized, "it wasn't realistic to be able to go and spend an entire day kind of jumping from planning to planning. That's just not realistic for the nature of our job." John estimated that covering every collaborative meeting would consume at least 30% of the week. Participants reflected that caseload sizes and the number of grade levels covered affected the time they could devote to attending the CPB (see Appendix U for more details). Most participants also described how, when invited to join CPBs, they had to prioritize which grades or portions of the meeting were the most effective use of their time while still dedicating time for SDI. John said he could only manage "to go to half of the planning sessions."

Due to competing demands and scheduling conflicts, many special educators in the study were unfortunately often excluded from collaborative planning sessions with their general education peers. Two participants reported being separated into siloed groups away from general education peers during CPB sessions intended for reading-focused planning with administrators or other leaders. Several participants expressed frustration that, as special education teachers, they are regularly asked to cover classes so that their general education peers can plan together as a grade-level team, while they are excluded. For many of those interviewed, teacher vacancies and absences also increased the demands on their time during the school day, thereby decreasing their available time to participate in collaborative planning with their general education colleagues.

One consistent finding from this study is that school administrators are a critical factor in determining whether and when to regularly include special educators in CPBs. All participants discussed the impact of their administrators' expectations on how collaborative planning unfolded in their buildings. Some participants reported that their administrators supported their

inclusion in CPBs, which set expectations and allocated time for their participation in professional learning. The seven participants engaged with some CPBs and highlighted how administrators (principals, assistant principals, and instructional leads) set the tone, values, and culture of rigor for all staff within the school, particularly around CPBs. Wendy stated that leadership set the tone by being a consistent model of "how important collaborative meeting for them." Laura identified that the best administrator "really values making sure that we are considering our students with disabilities when we plan" through data and progress monitoring. As echoed by all the participants, Wendy emphasized the importance of leaders who prioritize shared expectations for co-work and "put in... rigor for all teachers and they challenge the teachers to do more, to do better, for their students."

Several of the participants described how administrators created a safe learning space by consistently engaging, being open to feedback, and being aware of special education requirements. Two participants mentioned that their administrators provided professional development during their CPB focused on implementing targeted instruction for SWD, which they suggested demonstrated a commitment to the growth and development of their teams (see also Comer, 1996). Both within and beyond CPBs, all participants described how their administrators catalyzed the use of professional development through methods and topics such as feedback/learning walks (e.g., informal collegial observation and feedback cycle), accommodations, differentiated lesson planning, and disability awareness.

Charlotte and Hollis both expressed that they wanted their school leaders to ensure that collaborative planning included general education teachers, counselors, administrators, special educators, ELD teachers, and staff who understand the students in line with IDEA (2004). Anne said, "We [all] bring different perspectives... our understanding of the curriculum, as well as our

understanding of the kids, to support them in the class...It's a wonderful thing and we need more of it, [and] need dedicated time to be able to make it happen." The need for shared input time with a variety of education professionals aligns with MSDE's *Success for all Students in the General Education Classroom: A Guide for Inclusive Practices* that "Collaborative relationships serve as building blocks of both general education instruction and SDI increasing the quality and effectiveness of daily instruction, providing opportunities to reach all learners, and growing the capacity of all providers" MSDE (2024).

Finding #2: The Prominence of the Rolling Agenda

The next notable finding was that many subjects characterized the Rolling Agenda as a note-taking device, a prominent part of the collaborative planning process. The Rolling Agenda is a shared digital note-taking structure used across most schools in the target district to document CPB activities, according to many participants. Several of the participants described the Rolling Agenda as a useful tool for capturing meaningful discussion of instruction, such as "What are the next steps? Who's responsible for what? What are we going to come back and discuss?" (Louisa).

The Rolling Agenda was found to be helpful as a collaboration tool by the participants, especially when special education teachers could not attend the collaborative planning meetings. Several participants characterized the Rolling Agenda as a way to learn what happened in meetings when they could not attend, to provide written input beforehand, and to respond and comment after the meeting. Several participants noted that when they were unable to attend the CPBs in person, the grade-level team still expected them to provide input, communicate updates, accommodations, and modifications to work, and review all information presented in the meeting through the Rolling Agenda without additional time. Hollis remarked that their general education

colleagues had requested that she post “online tools that we’ll use to follow the scope and sequence” and “accommodate things and post things” within the Rolling Agenda when she was not able to attend.

While all of the participants noted how the Rolling Agenda played a prominent role in facilitating collaboration between them and their general education teachers, several of the participants acknowledged that it does not and cannot replace direct collaboration and interaction around the lesson planning and implementation process. A few participants described how their schools used the Rolling Agenda as a forum to share data or presentations, without specific next steps for either general or special educators. Wendy commented: “It’s mostly just talking about data, but not really collaborating. It’s just like, here’s your data, look at it, and fill out the form.” At the same time, several others portrayed the Rolling Agenda as more of a checklist of tasks than a catalyst for collaborative planning, especially for students with additional needs. Marilyn summarized how the Rolling Agenda did not function as a substitute for actual collaborative planning: “But no organized planning... planning time just seems to be a capture of things.”

Finding #3: Informal Collaboration Trumps CPBs

The third notable finding is that informal collaboration outside the CPB was when and how most of the shared planning between special educators and general educators occurred in this study. Participants described using a range of strategies to make time to consult with their general education colleagues, either as alternatives or in addition to the formal. In fact, several participants specifically stated that the “real planning” does not occur in the formal CPB (FGE10, FGC4, FGC5, FGC8). Participants characterized their informal collaborations as brief exchanges lasting only a few minutes. Wendy emphasized how important it was to have “some time to just talk,... like maybe five minutes” about supports, noticings, and reading instruction to

align understanding. Charlotte agreed that “It’s a lot of the informal [collaboration] that’s really effective.” Laura commented that educators have to make “time to intentionally connect” to make sure specially designed “instruction aligns with the general education instruction” for SWD. Overall, according to most of the participants, having short, focused time to share upcoming plans positively impacted instruction for SWD. Informal collaboration may be an underexplored asset for improving targeted collaboration for SWD.

Hollis remarked that “[they]’ve had to get creative” when it came to setting up planned, informal collaboration. Hollis, Marilyn, and John created office hours in the mornings before and/or afternoons after school to meet with their general education peers to plan, as needed. Many participants recounted how they joined informal planning huddles, such as teacher planning time with individuals and groups of educators, hallway conversations, grade-level meetups, and slide sharing about their scheduled availability. Several participants also reported using technology to support collaboration with their general education colleagues, including digital lesson plans, shared slides, and digital documents, and, in the parlance, “tag me in the comment, @ me, or send me an email” (FGA1). As Louisa stated, “not necessarily during a collab meeting, but a separate [planning time]... and that’s when they’re drilling down to reading.” By proactively seeking and creating alternative times and spaces to plan instruction with their general education colleagues, all of the special educators in the study reflected on how they created opportunities for collaboration outside of formal CPBs.

Finding #4: Collaboration Focuses on Accommodations

Responsive, proactive resource sharing by the special educators in the study with their general education colleagues was another extension of their adaptive approaches to collaborative planning. All participants identified specific resources they created to help their general

education partner plan more accessible instruction across content areas (see Table 3). The three categories of resources developed were documentation, accommodations, and strategies. All participants consistently reported that creating and implementing these supports, strategies, and accommodations for SWD took up a significant share of their time. These educators described their roles as participants, creators, supporters, implementers, trainers, and accommodation specialists, encompassing the varied practices they engage in throughout their day with colleagues around reading, as summarized in Table 3. All participants reported creating documentation of the legally required IEP accommodations and supports, including color-coded accommodations charts for planning, accommodation labels/stickers for documenting instructional usage, drafting IEPs, sharing IEP snapshots (summaries of the IEPs), and writing quarterly IEP progress reports with input from their colleagues.

For instructional accommodations, which support access to testing as well, many of the participants identified visual thinking tools (like graphic organizers, manipulatives, calculators, and highlighters), access tools (like scribe, Read&Write tool, human reader, text-to-speech audio books), and timing supports (extended time) primarily. Additionally, most participants coordinated classroom instructional supports from the IEPs, such as specific intervention programs, visual supports (anchor charts, videos, pictures, bulleted rubrics, etc.), and differentiated/modified work (fill-in-the-blank, word banks, checklists, multiple-choice, etc.). These are all items that need to be developed or discussed during the CPB to ensure consistency and implementation during instruction by all instructional parties.

Table 3

Supports & Strategies Created by Special Educators

Support Type	Support Examples (Referenced by Participants out of N=10)
Documentation	● Color-coded accommodation charts (3) ● Accommodation labels or stickers (6) ● IEPs/IEP snapshots/IEP progress reports (7)
Instructional Accommodations	● Graphic organizer (1) ● Manipulatives (3) ● Scribe/read & write tool (3) ● Human reader (3) ● Text-to-speech/read & write tool/audio books (4) ● Calculators (1) ● Extended time (1) ● Highlighters (1)
Instructional Strategies	● Fraction strips (1) ● Interventions (iReady, IXL, Mobius, DreamBox, Lexia) (4) ● Anchor charts (4) ● Visuals (1) ● Multiplication charts (1) ● Fill in the blank (1) ● Magnifying tool (1) ● Word banks (2) ● Checklists (1) ● Vocabulary supports (6) ● Pictures (3) ● Sentence starters (1) ● Multiple choice (1) ● Bulleted bookmarks/rubrics (2) ● Accommodated/modified work (6) ● Videos (2)

Note. List of instructional documentation, accommodations, and strategies brought forward by Phase 1 participants, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2025. Own work.

Research Question 2: How Do Special Education Teachers Experience Collaboration on Teaching Reading to Students With Disabilities?

While my initial analysis of the findings regarding CPBs was grounded in the District A policy guidance, the analysis in this section is established in the legal requirements and access guaranteed by the IDEA (2004). These three sections summarize the key guidance from IDEA:

1. The essential role of general educators as a key member of the educational team for SWDs:

"A regular education teacher of a child with a disability as a member of the IEP Team must, to the extent appropriate, participate in the development of the IEP of the child, including the determination of Supplementary aids and services, program modifications, and support for school personnel" (34 CFR Sec. 300.324 (a) (3), 2015).

2. The need for SWDs to have access to the general education curriculum through SDI:

"Specially designed instruction, which is delineated in the IEP, means that the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction is adapted to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability. The instruction must ensure the child's access to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children." (34 CFR §300.39(b)(1), 2015).

3. SWDs are also guaranteed individualized accommodations and supports:

"Supplementary aids and services mean aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and

nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate" (34 CFR Sec. 300.342, 2015).

In summary, in accordance with IDEA (2004), general educators are legally mandated to collaborate with special education colleagues to develop and implement the supports and strategies specified in students' IEPs, thereby ensuring access to the general curriculum. The central premise is that intermediate special education teachers serve as a bridge between curricular demands and IEP requirements for their general education colleagues, providing the necessary connections, supports, and instructional strategies to facilitate the development of foundational reading skills essential for equitable access within and beyond the general education setting. As Anne championed, "our students are capable, and they're capable of reaching great heights. They are capable of understanding so much when we provide them with unique accommodations that they need within their classes, and tak[e] on the teacher training side." Laura defined the differentiation balance in this way:

> If your expectations are too low. They don't have anything to reach for. So I think making sure you have reasonable expectations, but also expectations that are going to stretch the students to grow them in the areas that they need to grow in.

Finding #1: Tier 3 Reading Supports

The first finding is that all 10 participants reported providing Tier 3 instructional supports and foundational reading instruction to intermediate SWD in their caseloads. All participants noted that the MCCRS/curriculum after 2nd grade does not include most foundational reading skills. Instead, they described addressing more advanced reading skills within the curriculum, including: poems, stories, plays, books, author's purpose, main idea, author's craft, short stories,

and word study. Most participants reflected that, for many students with IEPs, accessing these skills within the curriculum requires significant support and embedded strategies to enable their full participation in curricular activities, including targeted reading instruction (small-group, pull-out, push-in). Many participants referenced a range of Tier 3 foundational reading interventions (including Lexia, IReady, and iXL) that focus on the individualized foundational reading skills identified in students' IEPs. Participants underscored that SWD require explicit, systematic instruction to address underdeveloped reading skills from prior grades that are not aligned with the curriculum. Foundational reading skills highlighted by the participants included: letter/spelling patterns, vocabulary, the consonant-vowel-consonant decoding pattern, short vowels, and comprehension questions.

A few participants characterized the tension between the two parts of reading as a "battle" with their general education colleagues over whether to develop students' foundational skills or focus on content expectations. As Louisa specified, "I don't know why doing your HD words is more important than them doing my Tier 3 reading intervention." For general educators, the reading curriculum provides a guide to the skill sequence and timing for intermediate-grade-level reading skills. For special education teachers, the IEP identifies specific skill gaps (which may be reading 2–5 grade levels below their grade level) that require more intensive, explicit, and systematic instruction of previously taught skills, as half of the participants specifically pointed out. Most participants explained that it is challenging to find the right balance for SWDs pulled away to receive targeted, not-yet-mastered literacy instruction, thereby missing valuable instructional time in the general education classroom. A question that emerges from the findings of this exploratory study is: *how aware were the general educators of their legal requirement to provide accessible instruction to educate children with disabilities to meet the reading*

standards?

Finding #2: Reading Collaboration Extends Across All Intermediate Content Areas

The second finding is that instructional support extends far beyond reading to all the intermediate content areas. While this study intended to better understand how special educators collaborate with intermediate general educators on reading, all participants elevated their role in incorporating reading supports as an integral part of accessing content instruction across all subject areas. The special educators who participated in this study affirmed how the underlying skill of reading affects every subject, and they indicated that prioritizing accommodations and instruction to make learning accessible for all SWD should be a daily priority for general and special educators. Anthony remarked that his SWD require "all the tools that they're going to need for that daily experience."

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the need to address reading needs in all content areas covered in the intermediate grades. The participants connected reading skills to content in health, science, mathematics, and history/social studies. Several participants indicated that, as special educators, they alternate attending content planning for reading, math, science, social studies, and/or health to ensure that reading accommodations are available to their SWD. Several participants revealed that reading skills are interconnected across all their collaborations with their general education counterparts, not just in reading instructional planning. Six participants emphasized vocabulary as a key skill they focus on to support reading and content planning. Brenda spoke about showing pictures, explaining them in different words, demonstrating and modeling, and acting them out to build vocabulary in science.

Regarding social studies, Charlotte mentioned, "So I... scaffold it,... it's an anchor chart."

Most the special education teachers in the study reported engaging in triaging and supporting reading across content areas in the intermediate grades, whether or not they were directly involved in collaborative planning time. As an example, Charlotte stated that "my principal is pushing [me], as well [as] the general educators, like, how do you differentiate it?" Beyond supporting reading across the content areas, many of the participants indicated that they also support writing across the content areas for SWD. As part of the state's outcome measures and district benchmark assessments across all content areas, students must demonstrate reading and writing skills to communicate their knowledge and understanding. Brenda remarked: "I teach all subjects like maths, reading, health, science, and social studies. I also do writing on the side." Hollis specifically said that writing ties to the content: "We've really focused on reading, writing, and writing in math and science." Specific writing skills referenced by the participants included: spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. Many participants reported that the specific writing structures taught included paragraphs, essays, sentences, writing prompts, and letter writing.

In addition to reflecting on the connection between reading and writing, all participants identified a related but unexpected sub-finding: the prominence of overlap between students' math learning and the need for reading supports. Three participants reported that math was more often and consistently the focus of their collaborative planning than reading, even including discussion of the reading implications in the math classroom. Hollis and Anthony mentioned that their schools have alternating "digs" in math, similar to, but separate from, reading. Participants noted that many of the reading supports identified in Table 3 were helpful for their SWD in accessing the mathematics curriculum. Brenda described the connection between vocabulary and math as "Keep on teaching them, break [up] the words."

Additionally, participants identified a range of learning supports specific to math, including: math interventions (such as Mobius, IXL, IReady, DreamBox), fraction strips, a calculator, a multiplication chart, division, vocabulary, and modified/accommodated work. Most participants referenced vocabulary and differentiated math assignments, noting that much of math in the intermediate grades involves real-world or problem-solving scenarios that require reading and understanding the language to apply the math skills. While math accommodation and instruction may seem separate from reading, many participants noted that the two are inextricably linked, especially once the work moves beyond basic calculation skills, which become prominent in the intermediate grades.

Micro-Journal & Exit Ticket Findings

Research Question 3: How Can a Structured Collaborative Protocol Impact Collaborative Practice for Reading?

While the first phase of the study provided participants an opportunity to examine their experiences with collaboration through three focus groups and three individual interviews, in Phase Two, a smaller number of participants became implementers by volunteering to lead the incorporation of the SCP into their regularly scheduled weekly CPB around reading over an 8-12 week period. The researcher instructed Phase 2 participants on how to use the SCP to engage their general education colleagues and staff in targeted, shared instructional planning in reading for SWD. All Phase 2 participants documented their implementation in a weekly Micro-Journal and reflected on their overall experience and impact in an Exit Ticket.

Micro-Journal Responses/Reflections

The Micro-Journal anonymously captured the reflective experience of the Phase Two participants; the five implementers submitted 10 entries. The entries are labeled R1-R10 due to

the anonymization. While this data is limited in scope, it does reveal snapshots of collaboration experiences over the 8-12 weeks of this phase of the study (see Table 4). Their usage catalyzed their reflections on the SCP experience across CPBs. The Micro-Journal allowed participants to reflect immediately on how the collaborative planning sessions went and whether they used their time to generate differentiation strategies and accommodations or to engage directly in co-planning for reading lessons.

During this study's implementation phase, the protocol was used a variable number of times by each of the five implementers. Four responses indicated initial use only, and the remaining responses indicated that they used the protocol 2-8 times. While there was still a range of 1-8 usages, there were more usages noted in the Exit Ticket than those captured by the Micro-Journal entries. The data indicate that most of the collaborative planning sessions involved 2-4 participants, with an average of 3.1 attendees. The Micro-Journals capture that CPB attendees included a special educator, general education reading teachers, a reading lead teacher, a general education math teacher, and an ELD teacher. The study implementers identified that the average number of actively engaged attendees was 2.6 across the collaborative planning sessions tracked. While it was expected that having an SCP would potentially increase both the use of supports and accommodations for the grade-level curriculum, it was also thought that it would engender further discussion of foundational literacy skills; however, the results were not that simple.

Table 4

Micro-Journal Reporting Summary

N = 10 responses (9 complete, 1 incomplete) from 5 respondents	Micro-Journal Questions						
Collaboration Level	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7
1. Less Collaboration	1. Little engagement from participants in collaborative planning	1.Unproductive	1. Unclear on the reading instructional plans for the upcoming week	1. Instructional plans focused on grade-level reading	1. Unclear on my role as the special educator in reading instruction	1. Did not consider IEP accommodations during collaborative planning	1. All participants' voices were not included or heard
# of responses	4	2	2	7	2	1	1
2. Neutral Collaboration	2. Inconsistent engagement from participants in collaborative planning	2. Somewhat productive	2. Some understanding of the reading instructional plans for the upcoming week	2. Instructional plans focused on foundational reading	2. Some understanding of the my role as the special educator in reading instruction	2. Touched on IEP accommodations, but did not include aligned strategies in planning	2. Some participant voices dominated more than others
# of responses	0	3	3	0	0	6	2
3. More Collaboration	3. Consistent engagement from participants in collaborative planning	3. Very productive	3. Clear on reading instructional plans for the upcoming week	3. Instructional plans focused on foundational and grade-level reading	3. Clear on my role as the special educator in reading instruction	3. Incorporated instructional strategies to reflect IEP accommodations into planning	3. All participant voices were actively included and listened to
# of responses	5	4	4	2	7	2	6

Note. Summary of Micro-Journal responses from Phase 2, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2025. Own work.

The first finding from the micro-journal data is that the SCP created renewed opportunities for special educators to engage in collaborative planning for students with IEPs. Many (n=7) of the submissions reported that the sessions were productive or somewhat

productive. Many of the entries reported that their planning sessions focused on grade-level curriculum, even as only two noted a focus on both the curriculum and foundational reading skills. Many submissions indicated that the collaborative planning sessions clarified their instructional role as special educators in planned lessons. Additionally, the majority (n=6) of entries reported that all participants' voices were considered and heard. Two of the submissions identified the use of the SCP, which organized their meetings to plan the upcoming week's lessons with accommodations for ELD and SWD.

While the intended purpose of the protocol was to spur collaboration on reading between special educators and their general education peers, another sub-finding from the Micro-Journals data analysis is that the use of the SCP did not foster shared instructional planning on reading as hoped. Instead, most entries reported that the focus of their CPB meetings was on generating and identifying curricular accommodations rather than on incorporating supports for foundational reading skills. Most of the collaboration time was reported to focus on access to the grade-level curriculum, which may be related to the focus on accommodations to make the learning accessible. Notably, none of the collaborative planning sessions documented in this study focused directly on foundational literacy skills for SWD in the intermediate grades. Therefore, it is concerning that in this sampling there was a lack of consideration of these skills, or it may reflect the reliance on the special educator to focus on these skills as a siloed role. This may also suggest that CPBs are not designed to support the development of foundational reading skills.

In the end, the final sub-finding is that the use of the SCP in CPB yielded very mixed results, based on the Micro-Journal responses. Most implementers documented how they provided curriculum accommodations to their general education colleagues, but some noted a lack of these accommodations in the reading plans implemented. One implementer commented:

"It is expected that the Special Education Resource Teacher add the modifications and aides needed." Two of the entries indicated that the productivity of planning instruction was minimal or unproductive and impacted by other factors, as an implementer noted: "Rather than focus on the next reading unit, the focus was on test preparation." Additionally, they stated: "This was an unproductive collaborative meeting week with fifth-grade reading due to an argument between one of the general education teachers and Instructional Lead Teacher over data that was not collected during the previous week. It was a mess!" Unfortunately, two implementers reported being silenced by dominant voices or excluded from the conversation they were supposed to be leading. Four implementers also observed low levels of engagement from their general education colleagues during collaborative planning, whereas the other half of the entries described more consistent engagement from their peers. Most submissions reported that all participants' voices were considered and heard. One implementer noted a conflict/argument between educators that disrupted the collaborative planning. Another implementer reported that administrators pulled them to substitute teach and respond to students' needs, keeping them from attending collaborative planning as intended.

After reviewing the Micro-Journal data, the inclusion of the SCP in the CPB Rolling Agenda did not significantly alter the collaborative experiences of the special educators who participated in the study's implementation phase. My analysis of this sampling of Micro-Journal data suggests that while the special educators may make supports leading to some small shifts, if general educators lack the pedagogical knowledge around foundation reading and accommodations, the implementation may not be meaningfully different. However, these data also reveal that, with the SCP, the special educators generated targeted plans for their SWDs and shared them with their colleagues, thereby increasing communication about SWDs compared to

previous CPBs. The SCP created more space within the CPBs to communicate those plans, even if the teachers did not discuss the plans during that time. In summary, while the SCP was intended to empower collaboration in co-planning, it came across more as an information-transfer tool. Rather than being a failure of the SCP design itself, the results of the SCP used during the CPB, in this researcher's opinion, reflect the roles and experiences within the district, which require more than a tool to shift practice.

Exit Ticket Responses/Reflections

While the Micro Journal included participant reflections from individual collaborative planning sessions, the Exit Ticket provided implementers with an opportunity to conduct a summative review of their experiences over a 6- to 12-week period. The Exit Ticket was completed anonymously by Phase Two implementers to reflect on their experience across the collaborative planning sessions using the SCP. There were five complete responses and one partial response. The responses are labeled E1-E6 due to their anonymized nature. The findings from the exit tickets varied in some meaningful ways from the Micro-Journal and Focus Group feedback. The first significant finding is that, while the Micro-Journal entries documented 10 uses of the Strategic Collaboration Protocol, the Exit Tickets reported 18. Based on the Exit Tickets, one respondent implemented the SCP just once, a second respondent used it three times, a third participant used the protocol a total of eight times, and three additional respondents used the protocol two times each, which adds up to a total of 18 sessions where respondents used the Strategic Collaboration Protocol during Phase Two of the study. This difference in tallies suggests that Phase Two participants may not have been as consistent in capturing the use of the SCP in the Micro-Journal, given that 18 is nearly double the 10 Micro-Journal submissions listed. The following analysis compares and synthesizes the Exit Ticket findings with those from

the Micro-Journal to highlight key themes and differences.

The Exit Tickets indicate that three respondents did not have access to formal collaborative planning during the implementation season, which aligned with the Micro-Journal reporting on the implementers' access to CPB. However, even for those without formal access, they still used the SCP to convey their reading-focused recommendations, supports, and strategies to their colleagues. Three respondents reported consistent attendance from the special educator and general education reading teacher(s) during their collaborative planning meetings, and one also identified the reading lead teacher as an additional support. Compared with the Micro-Journals, four implementers identified themselves as the only active participants, whereas one respondent identified the general educator and themselves as active participants.

Interestingly, the final respondent shared that the special educator and the reading lead teacher were identified as actively engaged, though the general educators were present. Though participants noted administrators as key to rigorous collaboration in Phase 1, Exit Tickets did not capture whether an administrator was included in Phase 2. Four out of five Phase 2 respondents noted that testing negatively impacted collaboration (E1, E2, E3, E6), including one instance in which administrators canceled collaborative planning after the testing window began (E3). While the Exit Ticket summary data indicates that some additional Micro-Journal sessions were missing, respondents still found ways to incorporate the SCP into their SWD planning, even when CPBs were canceled.

The first finding from my analysis of the Exit Tickets is that many of the special educators in the study appreciated that the SCP was a helpful tool, which parallels the findings from the Micro-Journals. Specifically, respondents identified multiple positive impacts around access to and tracking of accommodations and supports related to the IEPs for SWDs. Several

respondents indicated that the protocol had a positive impact on reading instruction by prompting discussion of how the lesson plan aligned with the necessary supports, accommodations, and aids to be used in the classroom (E3, E4, E6). One respondent described how the protocol supported the creation of appropriate plans by encouraging the analysis of "assessments by targeting the most at-risk students" (E6). A few participants indicated that their collaboration with their general education peers shifted focus to observe modeled supports and test-taking strategies (E3, E6). E4 specifically noted that in response to the use of the SCP, "the reading teacher started using more visuals, ones I provided, for upcoming lessons." Other respondents highlighted that accommodation labels (trackers of accommodation implementation) increased in use after the protocol (E3, E4), as evidence of the accommodations and supports embedded in the curricular instruction noted in the SCP. Perhaps most importantly, several respondents characterized the SCP as a vehicle to raise general educators' awareness of the specifics of their students' IEPs.

Moreover, implementers indicated that the SCP helped increase the active use of accommodations in planned lessons; as E6 stated, students "have continuously been receiving their accommodations and supports" due to greater awareness among general educators. Most of the Phase 2 participants credited the SCP with creating an organized opportunity to focus together on the SWDs and their IEPs, which improved the instructional plans (E1, E3, E4, E6). Overall, the respondents in Phase 2 attended CPBs and informal planning sessions, where they collectively described how they effectively used the SCP to pre-plan, discuss, and adjust upcoming instruction in the curriculum, mostly during the meetings.

In addition to catalyzing productive collaboration, all of the implementers highlighted the value and strength of using the SCP as a planning tool. A couple of implementers commented on the utility of the structured protocol for their individual planning (E1, E3). E3 stated that it

"helped to organize my thoughts." Several of the participants remarked on the user-friendly design (E1, E3), straightforwardness (E1, E3, E4, E6), and specificity (E6) of the tool. For example, two participants noted that the protocol helped them to streamline the limited time available for collaborative planning (E3, E4). As with the Micro-Journal data, most participants expressed their intention to continue using the protocol beyond the study. E4 commented that it was a "great planning protocol that I plan to use moving forward."

The participants in this study stated that having a structure, such as the SCP, helped to create intentional pre-planning and communication around student-specific needs. Several of the implementers described how the protocol created opportunities in the shared time, even when limited, to model, link supports, or dive deeper into the discussion of what accommodations could or should specifically look like to make the curriculum accessible (R3, R4, R6). All of the implementers agreed that the SCP would have been very helpful to introduce and use at the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, they noted that the timing of introducing a support like the SCP has a big impact on prioritization and on setting community expectations and agreements. Several participants indicated that they would have liked the opportunity to continue refining the protocol's use if they had been able to use it over the school year.

Respondents also offered meaningful suggestions to improve the implementation of the SCP. One participant offered that "having drop[down] boxes...to guide the process" would be helpful (E1). The addition of the SCP to the rolling agenda midyear was initially met with pushback from most implementers (E1, E3, E4, E5, E6), especially because "it was something else on top of the stack everyone has to do" (E4). Several participants remarked that "it would have been a great tool if it was implemented at the beginning of the [school year]" (E3, E5, E6), and one participant (E6) noted specifically that "it would've been a very useful tool, especially

for new special education resource teachers." Another participant echoed their colleagues in saying: "I think this will work really well as a school-wide/ team-wide tool. We just needed it to be part of our plan at the start of the year." (E3).

The final finding from the Exit Tickets was that there was inconsistent or unevident "buy-in" to collaborative planning between general and special educators, which the use of the SCP could not "fix." One participant (E1) described that when they used the SCP to share lesson plans, it did not elicit positive engagement from their general education colleagues. Another respondent noted that "other teachers still don't see the need to plan together" (E3). Without buy-in, E3 indicated that they did not see general educators apply the plans or supports, even when those supports were provided as part of the protocol by the special educator. A third participant (E4) reflected that "anytime something new is introduced, there's pushback, especially from general educators." Further evidence of inconsistent buy-in emerged in the data analysis through the reported pattern of inconsistent implementation of the strategies and accommodations identified through the SCP by the general educators. Half of the participants raised concerns that their general education colleagues did not implement the supports they, the special education teachers, provided through the SCP, mirroring Micro-Journal findings of inconsistent application. Another participant commented that while their general education colleagues acknowledged the value of the additional information provided through the SCP, they also recognized that meaningful instructional planning requires more than simply completing a protocol (E3). My analysis of the Exit Ticket and Micro-Journal data raised the question of whether, without genuine "buy-in" (E3) from all team members, the SCP risks becoming an added procedural task for special educators rather than a vehicle for shared planning and resulting accommodations and support. These findings underscore the complexity of achieving

effective collaboration and point to important considerations for future practice and research.

Discussion

The findings from my study reveal a need for a more consistent definition of collaboration to ground educators' shared instructional responsibility for SWDs. All Phase 1 participants consistently emphasized the variability in planning collaboration and resulting implementation, as well as in some of the Phase 2 feedback. The seminal definition of collaboration is a "style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal" (Cook & Friend, 1995). The simplicity of this definition signaled the complexity of productive collaboration: shared responsibility for student learning must be responsive and dynamic, which is where the gaps in my study lie. Friction emerged in this study around the definition of collaboration in three ways: 1) access to planning to create a sense of co-ownership; 2) equitable decision-making around instruction; and 3) implementing SDI for SWD. More broadly, the participants in this study emphasized the need for equipping all school team members for productive collaboration, including general educators, special educators, and administrators.

Collaborative Planning Is (and Is NOT) the Answer

My theory of improvement (pg. 41) aimed to address the gap between research on the importance of collaboration between special educators and general educators and current inconsistencies in instructional practice. The theory stated ***that, to appropriately instruct intermediate students with disabilities in reading, general and special educators need to incorporate accommodations and interventions into reading instruction through collaborative lesson planning*.** When planning meaningful instruction, many SWD require instruction with two purposes: access to grade-level curriculum and acceleration of foundational reading skills to

improve independent use. The IEP outlines accommodations and supports designed to improve access to and demonstrate more complex grade-level reading skills for SWD within the Tier 1 curriculum materials. Foundational reading instruction often focuses on basic decoding skills from an earlier scope and sequence of reading development (typically addressed at a Tier 3 level).

To access the Tier 1 curriculum materials for planning, the district provided general educators with online and physical access, including the teacher's edition, pacing guide/scope & sequence, and district Curriculum Instructional Map, which provides in-depth guidance on suggested lessons and materials, organized by annual, monthly, weekly, and daily increments. The focus group participants mentioned all of these resources as important access points to the general education curriculum. However, many (n=6) were also limited, as special educators, in their access to these curriculum materials and guidance. As Laura stated, "making sure you have access to all areas of the curriculum. I think that is a big piece. Especially when you are trying to collaborate because you want to make sure that your instruction aligns with the general education instruction." However, access to the materials is just a starting point for coordinated plans.

As for access to planning time, Jung et al. (2019) identify the need for regular, sustained common planning time on the master schedule during which educators and administrators should determine "the best deployment of human and material resources for the coming week." What emerged from my analysis of this study's data is that, while system leadership purported that collaborative planning is important enough to be built into the master schedule across all district schools, there was significant variability in how administrators protected and used time. Participants reported that, even with the use of the SCP, special education teachers were rarely included in collaborative planning that results in intentional AND SDI for SWD. For the special

education teachers in the study who attended scheduled collaborative planning meetings, they consistently described how the time was often not used to co-plan lessons or instruction in reading for their shared SWD. Additionally, all participants described significant variability in their co-planning experiences with a range of general educators within the same building or even the same grade, which made curricular and IEP alignment challenging.

While this study intended to use the SCP to facilitate targeted reading planning, the outcomes were often unbalanced around implementation. Anne elaborated, "Planning for gen ed teachers right now is definitely inconsistent within my school... We have some teachers that are really awesome that plan their lessons... for several weeks ahead of time, and then some that walk in the door and read what they're teaching the same day, so it's unbalanced right now," and "I can't accommodate when you don't know where you're at within your pacing." It is important to note that the majority (n=9) of participants reported being tasked by their general education peers with identifying, developing, and providing accommodations and supports for their colleagues to access and implement, even though the general educators did not necessarily use these accommodations and supports. All of the special educators in Phase 1 (also supported in the Phase 2 data) identified a multitude of differentiated supports (Table 3), adjusting and differentiating within and beyond the curriculum. John reported that "I look into the curriculum, what's coming up, and try to get some aids and stuff" to implement the individualized plans for his students. Seven participants specifically mentioned aligning their SDI with the district pacing guide, curriculum, and their students' IEPs. However, based on what was reported, the SCP seemed more supportive of curriculum supports, accommodations, and modifications than of embedding foundational literacy instruction.

What emerges from the findings is an almost unanimous concern among the special

educators in this study that some of their general education counterparts were using instructional materials without differentiating or incorporating the accommodation supports provided by their special education collaborators. However, even as they actively provided differentiated supports (see Table 3) to their colleagues, it did not mean that the participants observed consistent incorporation of these legally required accommodations. Charlotte spoke to the reluctance of some general education colleagues around accommodations: “Unfortunately, there are a couple of teachers who do not believe in providing accommodations, and they think it’s not fair. So I choose my battles.” Moreover, six participants reported that colleagues prevented or actively discouraged them from implementing accommodations and services to support reading instruction in the general education classroom, as aligned with the IEP. Incorrect, inconsistent, or lack of implementation of the accommodations may also represent a lack of pedagogical knowledge by general educators about how these actions may be out of compliance with the legal requirements of IDEA.

In summary, all participants agreed, in one way or another, that without collaborative lesson planning and intentional co-implementation, educators may not be appropriately serving SWD or providing them access to the curriculum. However, only one participant reported consistently co-planning and co-teaching with their intermediate general educators. My own experience as a special educator and leader in the target district aligns with the feedback from study participants. I have experienced how being a part of CPB for multiple grade levels (and with many general educators) can be significantly challenging for special educators, even as research has shown co-planning to be one of the consistent structures that is impactful in generating the conditions needed by SWDs to have meaningful access to the general education classroom (Mieliwocki, 2019; Murawski, 2012; Patrick, 2022). Therefore, it must be

acknowledged that collaboration time, even with a SCP to guide, was not enough to fully address the previously identified barriers around mindset, culture, access, and capacity without additional training and support for a meaningful shift around collaborative expectations and implementation.

Collaborative Plans Do Not Equal Consistent Implementation

The aim of this study was that ***"By June 2026, general education and special education teachers in grades 3-5 will consistently collaborate around reading to appropriately instruct students with disabilities."*** MSDE (2024) emphasizes the need to "use evidence-based practices" in teaching reading and calls out the essential role of collaborative planning to address reading instructional strategies to "help to raise the performance level of all students, but especially for those who are struggling or who have disabilities." They also issued guidance for all elementary (including intermediate) teachers to adopt reading instruction and intervention as a part of the Disciplinary Literacy Standards for Reading across other subjects/content areas to improve Tier 1 (general education) instruction (MSDE, 2024). While making a focused collaboration space for sharing reading plans through the SCP was to be a key pivot point, the results were mixed. Some implementers reported improvements in general educators' use of the developed accommodations and supports, while others reported no change or limited implementation. Notably, the focus on accommodations overall may be because general educators can see the connection between the curriculum and the accommodations versus a disconnect between the grade-level standards and foundational skills. Or as summarized by Porter et al. (2022), "these educators must understand the constructs of the language they are asked to teach."

Throughout the focus groups and implementation feedback, several special educators participating in the study raised concerns about the fidelity of the accommodations students with

IEPs deserve and are legally entitled to. As Charlotte & Brenda indicated, “It got me frustrated,... like it’s not modified at all,” to which Charlotte responded, “So it’s a lot of planning on my part as opposed to if we’re planning the curriculum [together].” Perhaps even more concerning is the trend reported by the participants that several of their general education colleagues are not using the suggested supports within the curriculum, nor, in some cases, are the general educators allowing the use of the accommodations from the IEP (provided by the special educator) in their classroom. Charlotte provided the following examples: “They’re reading a book, and they’re not being allowed to use text-to-speech, or they’re writing, and the Read&Write is not being used.”

What emerges from this investigation is a potentially alarming finding that the inconsistent implementation of foundational reading accommodations and supports for SWD is resulting in a lack of equitable access for SWD to the intermediate grade-level standards and curriculum. The IEPs mandate legally required accommodations and SDI, but this study reveals a disconnect in ownership and implementation expectations between special and general educators. Anne brought forward: “I’m not seeing a lot of accommodations implemented consistently, at least in the intermediate grade levels, especially as [the curriculum gets] more difficult to differentiate the work.” Cook et al.’s (2017) research similarly found that general education classrooms did not extensively implement evidence-based practices. In parallel, half of the participants in my study suggested that when their general education colleagues used the intermediate curriculum without actively collaborating with them, those colleagues impeded SWD’ access to the curriculum.

The data from my study highlight that developing a culture of shared responsibility for students’ individual learning needs within the school building often starts at the top with the administration. Participants in the study noted that by attending CPBs to monitor and champion

the priority of planning for SWDs, administrators reflect the principles of instructional leadership, emphasizing high expectations and academic success for all (see also Patrick, 2022). When administrators invited and supported special educators in CPBs, some study participants reported feeling valued for both their role as planning contributors and for their work with SWD within the school mindset. Multiple participants in the focus group expressed their wish that their school culture reflected a more "Our Kids" mentality and a "We Do" attitude toward co-planning, co-implementing, and co-assessing instruction for all students. As Wendy says, "it is leaders, culture, and then also... teachers." It should be noted that while not the focus of the study, all of the administrators of the buildings where the implementation phase was conducted were aware of the study.

Beyond meeting grade-level standards, the IEP identifies specific skill areas that need development and SDI to accelerate progress toward the grade-level expectation. This SDI may include targeted lessons and interventions, which are part of Tier 3 instruction. Four participants identified challenges in implementing an evidence-based Tier 3 reading intervention to develop students' foundational reading skills. One participant reported that ideally, there would be regular time to share and demonstrate the "specialized Tier 3 reading intervention" to build a shared understanding of the value. Louisa also expressed her frustration with the challenge, saying, "I don't know why doing your HD words [is] more important than them doing my Tier 3 reading intervention." Four participants also reported barriers to "pull-out" services, in which special education staff provide intensified, specially designed reading instruction. For SWD, the IEP identifies the required targeted instruction. Without access to the enhanced instruction and supports identified in their IEPs to access the curriculum, there may be a lack of access to the free and appropriate education mandated by the law (Lemons et al., 2016). Therefore, the tension

between special educators and general educators reflects the tension between grade-level standards and strategies to close the gap in missing reading skills. Similarly, when siloed planning separates general educators from special educators, a lack of a common understanding of how to implement planned reading accommodations and systematic reading skill instruction appears to persist.

Returning to my theory of improvement and teacher aim, the findings from my exploratory investigation suggest that if educators are not working from the same set of commitments, a technical support–like the SCP–cannot fix more entrenched implementation challenges. All participants in this study grappled with how, as special education teachers, they cannot be responsible for policing or convincing their colleagues of their legally required role in implementing IEP accommodations and supports. By placing special educators in the role of creators and providers of accommodations and supports, there is an implied responsibility for their colleagues' implementation, which creates friction. However, without explicit acknowledgment of this tension, participants reported that general educators exhibited resistance to collaborative work, especially when they had to share their space for push-in or co-implementation without the time to co-plan (see Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Furthermore, it is troubling that there does not generally appear to be a shared belief among special education teachers in this study and their general education peers that attending the CPB together to plan for foundational and reading skills is essential for accessing the content and curriculum.

Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative research, this exploratory investigation provided an initial, thematic understanding of the current state of collaboration and the impressions of the impact of a SCP on a small scale from the perspective of special educators. However, this study

does not provide data on the improvement value and does not follow a full experimental design with a control group. While the study supports positive student outcomes in reading, there was no direct interaction with students or measurement of student outcomes, aside from educators' impressions of changes in instruction. Therefore, the interpretation of the results should be limited to the design's context. From a representation perspective, the study did not include general educators' perspectives in the collaboration process; therefore, it does not provide a counterbalance to those perspectives, though this creates space for future research.

Additionally, the protocol implementation group was composed of volunteers from the pre-screened focus group participants. Therefore, the small group of volunteers was not fully representative of experiences within the district as a whole. Furthermore, this was a within-district study and may therefore not yield similar findings across all settings (even those with similar contexts). In fact, one of the impacts of the focus group plan was that attendance impacted whether the focus groups actually turned into interviews. By shifting to a more interview-based approach, participants had fewer opportunities for reflection because the component of colleague counterpoints and feedback was missing. The positionality of the researcher as an instructional specialist around special education who was known directly or indirectly by the study participants may have had some influence on the candid responses of the participants as well as on the interpretation of the responses. Additionally, the researcher conducted the study from the perspective of special educators around the implementation and monitoring of the structured collaborative planning protocol, as well as constraints on the collaboration between general educators and special educators.

The current study identified supports familiar to special education; however, further exploration of the general educator's knowledge, understanding, rationale, and the systematic

nature of SDI is needed. The study protocol also did not operationalize foundational reading collaboration as part of the collaboration planning block, thereby limiting the focus of the communications. The limited definitions around the expectations for the different components of reading instruction could have contributed to the limited impact of the tool and should be explored further. By extension, a comparative study could actually explore whether the implementation of the SCP actually created a lack of collaboration for some of the parties that did not exist previously. The SCP could be further empowered by connecting back to the district CPG to provide a clear link to systemic priorities as well. The current study clearly showed that simply requesting co-planning collaboration from one party, even with a guiding tool, was not enough to achieve consistent outcomes.

Future research would benefit from a more balanced approach by expanding to include the perspectives of general education teachers and, potentially, administrators to better understand the multiplicity of perspectives from collaborating stakeholders, as well as by incorporating training to increase shared ownership. In extension, including other interventionists, such as ELD and 504 coordinators, could help identify similarities and distinct differences, as well as varied needs, in planning for these populations. Given the response of the participants, exploring more around informal collaboration times may be able to target modeling and implementing more effectively than the formal CPB time in the future. It must also be acknowledged that due to the researcher's prior conviction around collaboration from personal experience could have influenced or shaped the coding, and while data checks were done in two small ways, the inclusion of member checks from more of the participants could have been more fully guarded against bias.

An impactful limitation throughout the study was the timing–specifically, the focus

groups and interviews conducted in January through March led to most of the implementation occurring from March through June. The implementation window overlapped with the state assessment testing window for the intermediate grades, which affected school-wide collaborative planning across all school buildings. Future studies should consider the effects of the testing schedule and the potential benefits of training early in the school year to embed the protocol into the collaborative routine. However, it should also be considered that the training in this study was limited on purpose; exploring broader training to include other educators could help to build the shared understanding around usage and collaboration in general.

Due to the close of the study at the end of the school year, there were limited opportunities to request samples of the actual use cases of the protocol. Future efforts could include the collection of the SCP for evaluating how they used the protocol beyond the feedback of the special educator. I was able to get their perspective on how it felt to use the tool, but not their detailed description of how they actually used it to plan together. Review of the usage could provide information on the variance across implementers and implications of this variation on potential instruction. Changes in methodology could allow for a more comprehensive experimental design to monitor students' reading proficiency levels and compare the impacts of educator collaboration, specifically the SCP, on student learning outcomes. While this study focused on the special educator's perspective in the learning equation, a counterstudy could be conducted to examine the general educator's experience collaborating with colleagues for comparison. Additionally, measuring shifts in practice could be more objective by including classroom observations to track the implementation of accommodations, strategies, and foundational reading skills, as planned during collaborative planning using the SCP.

Implications of this Research

Given the universal expectation of collaboration in contemporary public education (Hargreaves, 2021), it is assumed that teachers know how to collaborate, as documented in research on pre-service teacher preparation (Chitiyo & Brunda, 2018). McLeskey et al. (2018) found that educators are assumed to be prepared and willing to collaborate, yet receive no explicit training on how to do so. The demographic trend is clear: schools are integrating an increasing number of students with special needs into the general education classroom for most of the school day. Therefore, for SWD to have the legally required access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education, collaboration is a prerequisite skill for ALL educators to make these expectations a reality in inclusive education environments (MSDE, 2021b). This small study suggests that both special and general educators need training in building collaborative relationships, as well as consistent, sustained time to develop co-instructional plans and embrace the model (Causey et al., 2022; Friend, 2019; Murawski, 2010). The next iteration of this study could focus on formalizing targeted informational collaboration beyond the CPB time, as well as increasing participation through direct contact with potential sites and participants.

Nationally, educator preparation must take into account the shifts toward greater inclusion of SWD and the resulting increased collaboration between general and special educators, because leaders must teach all educators about both inclusion and collaboration strategies (Francisco et al., 2020; Murawski, 2012). Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education (2025) emphasizes “the collaboration between special and general education teachers, alongside the support of well-prepared school leaders, is central to providing meaningful educational experiences for children with disabilities.” However, it must be acknowledged that current exclusionary practices that prevent specialists (including special educators) from

attending collaborative planning sessions go beyond the purview of a collaboration tool. Further research on more direct training in collaboration for general and special educators and administrators, starting with pre-service courses, and the resulting shifts in practice could be very informative and meaningful. In particular, the state should consider potential micro-credentialing to emphasize the priority of collaboration in the elementary educator experience.

The alarming data from this exploratory study strongly suggest that extending training to both special and general educators in the intermediate grades in explicit, systematic foundational reading instruction is necessary to improve access for their students, especially those with special needs, which aligns with the literacy reforms in the research of Walpole et al. (2017). The recent NCES (2025) data indicate that instructional practices have not yet met the learning needs of 4th-grade students nationwide in reading. The shift in lagging data is a call for instructional accountability around all strands of the Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001) and the SOR more broadly, even in intermediate grades and above, as a national priority. Returning to the findings of Hernandez (2011) and Lesnick et al. (2010), the increased correlation between below-proficient reading levels at 3rd and 4th grade and the 16 times greater probability of not graduating reinforces the urgency of the current findings.

In addition to the implications around collaboration, many educators at the intermediate grades and above have not received the professional learning to teach systematic, explicit phonics instruction that many of their students need (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Unfortunately, the most recent NCES (2025) data indicate that a lack of reading skills is an increasing challenge nationwide for all 4th-grade students (69% Basic or below). However, for SWD, specifically, their reading proficiency decreased even more, with 90% scoring at Basic or below (What Works Clearinghouse, 2022). In turn, this knowledge gap impacts access to and effective instruction in

grade-level content and curriculum (Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Moats, 2014; Spear-Swerling, 2015; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012; Torgesen et al., 2001).

Additionally, Sousa (2007) emphasized that all educators are teachers of reading, thereby taking responsibility for addressing reading skills that connect with their content, regardless of grade. For most students across the nation, the preliminary evidence from this study underscores the need for their intermediate general educators to receive training in the SOR, which cannot be targeted solely to early elementary grades. For SWD, this also means educators need training and practice to ensure that accommodations, supplementary aids, supports, and strategies are available to ensure equitable access. In contrast, FGA2 and FGC6 also emphasized the importance of planning and implementation collaboration to improve educator practice and target reading instruction when lesson plans are shared. FGC7 implored that "I have all my students. I have their supplementary aids and services that they need," but this must include general education teachers, collaborators, and co-owners of accessible instruction.

Recommendations for District A

The complexity of collaboration is undermined by the lack of a consistent definition of collaboration across research, practice, and, specifically, within District A, even when referring to collaborative planning (as an experience) or collaborative planning (as a practice). There was an underdeveloped understanding of what "collaboration" entails, leading to inconsistent outcomes. While this study was limited in scope by the number of participants and by its focus on reading, the SCP tool's positive reception and noted improvements in sharing information specific to SWD provide hope that wider implementation could yield positive results. Broadening the SCP to be generalizable to any subject would allow its application across the school, improving planning and ensuring a consistent expectation of collaboration throughout the

elementary building. In alignment with the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle, the next steps for expanding to a larger trial include sharing the SCP during the summer through the department leaders with administrators and chairpersons to add to their collaborative meeting for a September launch. Incorporation in the expected Rolling Agenda for introduction in the fall within my caseload, or more broadly, would be a starting place for incorporation. Starting early in the year with training around collaboration would address one of the major concerns from the implementers.

Additionally, the district should consider re-integrating and reprioritizing a philosophy around Universal Design for Learning around removing barriers to instruction, inclusive practices, and the embedded nature of services (whether ELD, 504, IEP, community supports, social work, etc.) within curriculum, expectation, and messaging, as research has found this reduces resistance and makes co-teaching more desirable (Karten & Murawski, 2020). Increasing accountability, training, and monitoring of accommodation implementation, as a means to address accommodation-blocking noted in this study, could improve legally required access. This aligns with the Maryland Blueprint's push to improve coordination, collaboration, and professional development for individualized services across grade levels (Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education, 2020).

To enhance the understanding and transferability of the SCP, a comparison with Murawski's What/How/Who model (2012) and PLC best practices could be beneficial. Mapping the SCP steps (noted in parentheses below) onto the classic PLC 'four questions' framework, as outlined by DuFour et al. (2010), clarifies how this protocol aligns with recognized collaborative practices. This crosswalk includes: clarifying what students need to learn (WHAT), how educators will know when students have learned (HOW/WHO), how educators will respond

when students have not learned (HOW/WHO), and how educators will respond when students already know the content (HOW/WHO). This alignment could provide a familiar structure for educators already accustomed to the PLC model. The incorporation of both models could address the lack of a systematic toolkit for collaborative planning, which has led to variability in facilitation, focus, and implementation.

In support of next steps in District A, there is a tension between the time and value given to planning reading instruction specifically and the support for all subjects that reading impacts, as well as the necessary access supports. As a result of this research, the recommendation is to guide direct implementation of strategies previously shared by the Curriculum & Instruction department and the Department of Special Education in the district, with the addition of an expectation of structured collaborative discussion. Given the nature of the targeted large district, the focus was on whether the SCP could improve collaboration and, by extension, on the district's ability to implement it at scale with limited support or coaching. One-off training is the current structure of most professional development in the district. While research supports the use of mentoring and coaching (Lipton & Wellman, 2017), the SCP can be a primary structural shift to guide more targeted planning and efficient implementation without major changes to staffing or scheduling. The limited training could allow change to occur sooner for students, as staffing and scheduling take much longer and incur costs when implemented.

Additionally, the details provided in this research support further research into adult learning practices to improve collaboration and instructional planning, with a focus on SWD and the specific incorporation of SDI. The district can expand on these limited positive results from implementing the Strategic Collaboration Protocol to support the learning process for other student groups with special needs, such as MLL and students with Section 504 plans.

Incorporating the SCP expands not only the current collaborative planning structure but also the individualization and reflection process as a district cultural expectation. The district can also consider broadening the use of the SCP beyond its current focus on reading to support its shift toward mathematical literacy and other content areas. However, it should be considered that broadening or generalizing the use of the SCP could unintentionally dilute the focus on urgency. In alignment with the concepts of Universal Design for Learning and IDEA (2004), equitable access relies on the shared belief, planning, and structured implementation as part of community design. This also requires a cultural commitment to community learning to increase buy-in to improve implementation. It is the hope that by bringing this protocol and the learning from this research to the district leadership (including Special Education, instructional specialists, Curriculum & Instruction, ELD, 504, and Area 1 (Elementary)) this spring, it will allow time for the SCP to be embedded and potentially shift collaborative practices starting in the fall of SY 2027.

Impact Project Plan

Within what Black and Wiliam (1998) call “the black box” of education, the public often assumes that, given the curriculum and students, educators are prepared to create positive outcomes for students. However, from what participants and implementers shared in this study, many concurrent steps can derail this recipe for success. Based on this discussion, I propose that instruction is complex and layered in this way:

- Training educators and administrators in collaboration practices supports shared understanding, values, and a common language.
- Common understandings and intentional access to planning as a team support the preparation of purposeful, targeted, and accessible instruction;

- Co-planned instruction, if well implemented, supports improved outcomes for our students.

The fact that all of the teachers in the study agreed that the current inconsistent implementation of accommodations for SWD results in a lack of equitable access to the content, standards, and curriculum is alarming. However, the true breakdown occurs before planning and implementation, in the equipping of educators to be effective collaborators. This study and the use of the SCP showed glimmers of improvement in developing an intentional communicative collaboration space, as well as insights into potential gaps in the layers of assumed knowledge that warrant further investigation.

My impact product plan has three prongs. The first has already begun with the informal resource sharing within my sphere of influence focused on new and experienced special educators, which includes sharing the SCP with fellow district trainers (generalized for any subject, linked within Appendix W). A colleague developed a quick reference for new teachers to understand strategies to support their practice (including collaboration) in which she embedded the SCP as a support structure. The colleague requested this after seeing the document used in one of the implementation schools. This resource continues to be shared as part of the district training support tools. Additionally, as part of this prong, I shared the SCP with my caseload special education chairpersons through informal training to support their collaboration planning for the new school year, in response to feedback from the implementers in the study, to see if timing would improve incorporation and buy-in.

The second prong is the creation and distribution of an executive summary (see Appendix V) to share the results of this study with the district leadership within the Curriculum & Instruction (Reading), Elementary Instructional Directors and Special Education departments,

and to open it up to members of the Equity, ELD, and 504 departments. This format will allow me to share results and findings, as well as recommendations for a Networked Improvement Community and the inclusion of structured collaboration in their planning expectations, with a focus on key student needs. I will share the study results and how the SCP may be distinctly and meaningfully different from current practice.

As the third prong and extension on the sharing of the executive summary, these leaders will be invited to a presentation (Appendix W) to share a quick, deeper look at the results of the current study and a proposed expansion of the improvement process around collaboration for their approval and support. The proposal outlines a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) of Practice (NIC) with a small selection of 10-15 district elementary principals whose schools are in the Universal Tier of support (which indicates most other district practices are more effectively implemented) who would be willing to join the collaboration conversation across the school year. Based in the current research, the schools would implement the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle of Improvement Science to reflect on whether the implementation of the SCP is an improvement on current practice. Additionally, volunteer schools would also provide feedback and suggestions from their learning process through quarterly meetings and end-of-year recommendation sessions. Based on the feedback and learning from the NIC, the district will then have expanded data on a larger implementation and feedback from direct constituents on the value and validity of the tool in improving collaboration practice within the broader elementary context for reading instruction. Hopefully, this will, in turn, inspire continued and expanded opportunities around collaboration and collective growth in this context for the district. In the end, this study was a very small dipstick into current practices and potentially supportive changes that future researchers can explore further. However, this research has seen the impact

that small changes in structure can have on communication and thinking around collaboration.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Invitation Email to Elementary Principals

Subject: Seeking Principal Support for Researcher Contacting Elementary SPED Teachers for UMD Research Study

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. My name is Lauren Duewer. I am conducting a research study to explore the current collaborative planning process for reading instruction for special education students in the intermediate elementary grades. I am requesting your consent to recruit special education teachers from your school for my study, which I hope will inform and influence the district's understanding of current collaboration practices between general and special educators in elementary schools.

I am requesting your permission to contact the special educators on your staff to participate in a short Screening Questionnaire (about 5 minutes). Additionally, those who meet the qualifications below will be invited to participate in a single focus group outside work hours (about 45–60 minutes).

I am recruiting individuals who meet these criteria:

- Must be 21 years of age or older
- Must be involved in planning for intermediate-level elementary reading instruction (grades 3-5)
- Must be a resource special educator (not teaching solely in a self-contained program)

There will be an additional opportunity for a smaller sample of special education teachers who participate in the focus group to engage in a 6-8 week implementation study of a new collaborative planning tool within the currently scheduled collaborative planning structures within their school building. More information about this opportunity will be provided to voluntary participants during the focus group. The implementation study is optional and not required for any teacher who participates in the focus group. Schools and staff who will be selected for participation are those outside of my caseload as a district employee who works directly with specific schools.

The researcher will not request or access any student-specific information throughout the process. Your teacher's participation in this study is voluntary. All data in this study will be kept confidential, with no use of participants' actual names (or other identifiable information) in the final report. All data in this study will keep answers confidential. Only the researcher will know

the names and responses. All the results will be combined in the final report so that no one will know the responses. All data will be kept secure by the researcher and destroyed after 3 years.

If you are willing to allow educators in your building to engage in this process, or if you have questions about this study, please reply to this email with "Agree to Contact Teachers at my School" in the Subject Line, or contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724. I will provide the Principal Consent to Contact Staff form to confirm your agreement once you contact me. Thank you in advance! **If you permit me to contact the teachers in your school, I have also enclosed a Research Study Flier which I would be most appreciative of if you would put up in your Teacher Workroom.**

Sincerely,
Lauren Duewer
UMD Doctoral Candidate
(District Position Redacted for Anonymity)

Appendix B: Follow-up Email to Principals

(As a follow-up, if no response)

Subject: RE: Principal Support for Researcher–Elementary SPED Teachers for UMD Research Study

Dear Principals:

As previously sent, I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. My name is Lauren Duewer. I am conducting a research study to explore the current collaborative planning process for reading instruction for special education students in the intermediate elementary grades. I am requesting your consent to recruit special education teachers from your school for my study, which I hope will inform and influence the district's understanding of current collaboration practices between general and special educators in elementary schools.

Please see the previous email for more details on the qualifications and requested time.

If you are willing to allow educators in your building to engage in this process, or if you have questions about this study, please reply to this email with "Agree to Contact Teachers at my School" in the Subject Line, or contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724. I will provide the Principal Consent to Contact Staff form to confirm your agreement once you contact me. Thank you in advance! **If you permit me to contact the teachers in your school, I have also enclosed a Research Study Flier which I would be most appreciative of if you would put up in your Teacher Workroom.**

Sincerely,

Lauren Duewer
UMD Doctoral Candidate
(District Position Redacted for Anonymity)

Appendix C: Invitation Email to All Elementary Special Educators

Subject: Seeking Elementary SPED Teachers for UMD Research Study

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. My name is Lauren Duewer. I am conducting a research study to explore the current collaborative planning process for reading instruction for special education students in the intermediate elementary grades. Your input is requested to inform and influence the district's understanding of current collaboration practices between general and special educators, provide feedback to the central office, and support professional development. **I am requesting that ALL interested teachers complete a short Screening Questionnaire (about 5 minutes) within the next week by clicking the LINK below.**

I am recruiting individuals who meet these criteria:

- Must be involved in planning for intermediate-level elementary reading instruction (grades 3-5)
- Must be a resource special educator (not teaching solely in a self-contained program)
- Must be 21 years of age or older

If willing and qualified, you could also be asked to participate in a single focus group scheduled for 45-60 minutes. I am looking to recruit up to 25 teachers to participate in a set of focus groups. The focus group will be scheduled after school in January/February for 1 hour and recorded on Zoom.

If you are willing to participate in the focus group (as indicated in the questionnaire) and meet the study criteria, the researcher will reach out to you via email within a week with next steps and scheduling. The researcher will not request or access any student-specific information throughout the process.

For a smaller sample of special education teachers participating in the focus group, there will be an additional opportunity to participate in an 8-week implementation study of a collaborative planning tool. More information about this opportunity will be provided during the focus group. The implementation study is optional and not required for any teacher who participates in the focus group.

Your participation in all phases of this study is voluntary. All data in this study will be kept confidential, with no use of participants' actual names in the final report. All data in this study will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will know your name and responses. All the results will be combined in the final report so that no one will know your responses. All data will be kept secure by the researcher and destroyed after 3 years.

Please feel free to share this opportunity and flier with your special education colleagues, if you are willing. As you may know, I work in the district within the department of special education, but my contact and research will only be conducted in schools outside my caseload. **If you have questions about this study or would like to participate, please contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724. Thank you in advance!**

Appendix D: Follow-up Email to Special Educators

(As follow-up, after 2 weeks and as needed)

Subject: RE: Seeking Elementary SPED Teachers for UMD Research Study

If you have already responded to the previous email, thank you for your interest. For those of you who have not, there is still TIME! I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. My name is Lauren Duewer. I am conducting a research study to explore the current collaborative planning process for reading instruction for special education students in the intermediate elementary grades. Your input is requested to inform and influence the district's understanding of current collaboration practices between general and special educators, provide feedback to the central office, and support professional development. **I am requesting that ALL interested teachers complete a short Screening Questionnaire (about 5 minutes) by clicking the LINK below.**

I am recruiting individuals who meet these criteria:

- Must be involved in planning for intermediate-level elementary reading instruction (grades 3-5)
- Must be a resource special educator (not teaching solely in a self-contained program)
- Must be 21 years of age or older

If willing and qualified, you could also be asked to participate in a single focus group scheduled for 45-60 minutes. I am looking to recruit up to 25 teachers to participate in a set of focus groups. The focus group will be scheduled after school in January/February for 1 hour and recorded on Zoom.

If you are willing to participate in the focus group (as indicated in the questionnaire) and meet the study criteria, the researcher will reach out to you via email within a week with next steps for consent and scheduling. The researcher will not request or access any student-specific information throughout the process.

For a smaller sample of special education teachers participating in the focus group, there will be an additional opportunity to participate in an 8-week implementation study of a collaborative planning tool. More information about this opportunity will be provided during the focus group. The implementation study is optional and not required for any teacher who participates in the focus group.

Your participation in all phases of this study is voluntary. All data in this study will be kept confidential, with no use of participants' actual names in the final report. All data in this study will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will know your name and responses. All the results

will be combined in the final report so that no one will know your responses. All data will be kept secure by the researcher and destroyed after 3 years.

Please feel free to share this opportunity and flier with your special education colleagues, if you are willing. As you may know, I work in the district within the department of special education, but my contact and research will only be conducted in schools outside my caseload. **If you have questions about this study or would like to participate, please contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724. Thank you in advance!**

Appendix E: Screening Questionnaire (Qualtrics)

1) Do you currently participate in collaborative planning with any elementary intermediate (gr. 3-5) grade level teams? (Y/N)

2) Do you teach reading to the 3rd-5th grade students in Special Education at your school? (Y/N)

3) Role: Check all that apply (Special Educator Resource, Special Education Chair, Special Educator Autism Co-taught, Special Educator Autism Self-Contained, Special Educator CSEP Self-Contained, Special Educator CRI, Special Educator Regional, Special Educator, Other–Open-Ended)

4) Work location within the district (North (generally above route 50), Central (route 50 to above 495/route 4), South (below route 4/495))–Choices (a, b, or c):

i) **North–** ***(Redacted to maintain anonymity)***

ii) **Central–** ***(Redacted to maintain anonymity)***

iii) **South–** ***(Redacted to maintain anonymity)***

iv) **Other (Open-ended)**

5) Size of your school in hundreds–estimated (0–300, 301–500, 501–700, 701+)

6) Grade Levels Served (K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Other)

7) Years of Experience in Teaching (0–3, 4–7, 8–11, 12–15, 16-19, 20+)

8) Years of Experience in Special Education (0–3, 4–7, 8–11, 12–15, 16-19, 20+)

9) How many students are currently on your caseload? (0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, 20-25, 25+)

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions to further my research!

For those willing to share a bit more of your time by participating in a Zoom focus group discussion with other educators on current collaboration practices around reading instruction for students with disabilities, please also complete the next question. Participants will be compensated with an Amazon.com or Target gift card if selected to participate in the focus group.

10) Would you be willing to participate in a focus group? If you are interested, please share your name, personal phone number, and contact email. (Open-Ended Name), (Open-Ended Phone Number), (Open-Ended Email)

Appendix F: Educator Confirmation for Focus Group Selection

Subject: Thank you & Congratulations on Joining the Focus Group Research

As previously shared, my name is Lauren Duewer, a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Thank you for indicating your willingness to participate in my research focus group to explore the current collaborative planning process for reading instruction for special education students in the intermediate elementary grades. Your input is requested to inform and influence the district's understanding of current collaboration practices between general and special educators, provide feedback to the central office, and support professional development.

You are willing and qualified! Here are the next steps:

1) To be included officially in the focus group, I need to receive your signed consent for the Phase 1 focus group. Please review, complete, and sign the attached informed consent form and return it as a reply to this email.
2) Upon receipt of the signed consent, I will send focus group date and time options within 2 weeks.
3) Once you select your preferred times, a calendar invite with Zoom access information will be emailed to you (with a reminder 2 days prior).

The Zoom session will be 45–60 minutes on the selected date and will be recorded.

There will be an additional opportunity to engage in an 8-week implementation study of a collaborative planning tool. More information about this opportunity will be provided during the focus group. The implementation study is optional and not required for any teacher who participates in the focus group.

Your participation in all phases of this study is voluntary. All data in this study will be kept confidential, with no use of participants' actual names in the final report. All data in this study will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will know your name and responses. All the results will be combined in the final report so that no one will know your responses. All data will be kept secure by the researcher and destroyed after 3 years.

As you may know, I work in the district within the department of special education, but my contact and research will only be conducted in schools outside my caseload. **If you have questions about the study or this email, please contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724. Thank you in advance!**

Appendix G: Educator Informed Consent for Participation in Focus Group (Phase 1)



Institutional Review Board
1204 Marie Mount Hall • 7814 Regents Drive • College Park, MD 20742 • 301-405-4212 • irb@umd.edu

(Phase 1)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Supporting Intermediate Educators in Effective Reading Collaboration for Special Education Students
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Lauren E. Duewer as part of the requirements for receiving my Doctor of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am conducting this research under the direction of Dr. Jean Snell. You are invited to participate in this research project because your experience and expertise could provide the district and education research in general with insight regarding the current collaborative practices and the potential impact of a structured planning model in supporting intermediate educators in effectively and collaboratively planning for the reading instruction of special education students in grades 3-5 in **[Redacted for Anonymity]** The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a SCP on the planning and implementation of reading instruction for students with disabilities. You are being invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be actively teaching 3rd-5th grade as a special education teacher and agree to: 1. Participate in a focus group discussion of current collaboration practice. (Phase 1) And if willing to continue: 2. Use the provided protocol to collaboratively plan with your general education counterpart(s) at one of the above grades for the duration of this research and provide feedback on that collaboration. (Phase 2) Taking part in this research study is voluntary.
Procedures	**Phase 1 Consent:** If you choose to participate, you will engage in a 60-minute virtual focus group outside of work hours from a selected date/time on the Zoom platform about the current collaborative planning process and your experiences. Participants in the focus groups will be offered a $5 gift card. If you are willing to continue to the 2nd phase of the research, you will be allowed to consent at the end of the focus group to participate in the Phase 2 training.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	As an educator, you may feel some discomfort sharing your perspective in front of district colleagues. There are no evaluative connections to the information being collected, and it will not be shared with your administrator. Participants may encounter discomfort when asked to respond to a specific questionnaire or focus group questions. During these activities, you may

	decline to answer any question without giving a reason and move on to the next question. There are no other known risks.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include personal use of the collaborative discussion model and the district learning more about collaborative structures to support the instruction of students with disabilities. The school district and possibly others might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the collaboration needs of educators and effective structures for planning reading instruction for students with disabilities in the intermediate grades. This improved understanding may lead to better instructional reading outcomes and greater access to the curriculum for students with disabilities. It will be for educational purposes only.
Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by assigning each participant a code number and an identification key to be used throughout the study, rather than their name. Only I will have access to the code and the identification key, and the focus group data will be kept confidential and securely stored through the UMD Box Platform. No other identifying information will be collected, and personal information will not be shared with others. Zoom video/audio/transcripts will be analyzed and summarized to ensure that no names or potential identifiers are reported in the dissertation or any subsequent documents or reports, and that they are erased at the conclusion of the study. Only I will have access to the secured laptop computer and locked cabinet or to any of the research data. No personal information will be shared with any other individual within the district or any external entities. If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Compensation	You will be offered a $5 gift card for the focus group. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. If you do not earn over $100, only your name and address will be collected to receive compensation.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part or stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, have questions, concerns, or complaints, or need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator. Lauren E. Duewer lesollen@umd.edu 240-353-3724 Or Dr. Jean Louise Snell, Advisor of the EdD in School Leadership 2115 Benjamin Building University of Maryland, College Park, MD 301-405-2337 Jsnell@umd.edu If you are an employee at **[Redacted for Anonymity]** or the University of Maryland, your employment status or academic standing at **[Redacted for Anonymity]** or the University of Maryland will not be positively or negatively affected by your participation or non-

<table>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">participation in the study.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Participant Rights</td><td colspan="2">If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

University of Maryland College Park
Institutional Review Board Office
1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, Maryland, 20742
E-mail: irb@umd.edu
Telephone: 301-405-0678

For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:

https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants

This research has been reviewed in accordance with the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Statement of Consent</td><td colspan="2">Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and you voluntarily agree to participate in Phase 1 of this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Signature and Date</td><td>NAME OF PARTICIPANT
[Please Print]</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>DATE</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Appendix H: Educator Informed Consent for Participation in Protocol Implementation (Phase 2)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Supporting Intermediate Educators in Effective Reading Collaboration for Special Education Students
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Lauren E. Duewer as part of the requirements for receiving my Doctor of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am conducting this research under the direction of Dr. Jean Snell. You are invited to participate in this research project because your experience and expertise could provide the district and education research in general with insight regarding the current collaborative practices and the potential impact of a structured planning model in supporting intermediate educators in effectively and collaboratively planning for the reading instruction of special education students in grades 3-5 in **[Redacted for Anonymity]** The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a SCP on the planning and implementation of reading instruction for students with disabilities. You are being invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be actively teaching 3rd-5th grade as a special education teacher and agree to: 1. Participate in a focus group discussion of current collaboration practice. (Phase 1) And if willing to continue: 2. Use the provided protocol to collaboratively plan with your general education counterpart(s) at one of the above grades for the duration of this research and provide feedback on that collaboration. (Phase 2) Taking part in this research study is voluntary.
Procedures	As a participant in Phase 1, you already consented and engaged in a 60-minute virtual focus group outside of work hours on a selected date/time on the Zoom platform about the current collaborative planning process and your experiences. Participants in the focus groups will be offered a $5 gift card. **Phase 2 Consent:** For phase 2, if you are willing to continue to the implementation phase of the research, you will be provided with a planning protocol to use during reading planning for an intermediate grade of your choice. The training for implementation will take place immediately after the focus group session and will last 5-15 minutes. It will include professional development (PD) on the proposed tool and expectations. At the conclusion of the PD, you will have the opportunity to ask the researcher questions. Phase 2 includes a structured collaborative protocol around accommodations/supports and reading skills/strategies to create an implementation plan for general and special educators for their students with disabilities. The SCP is meant to be embedded in the existing collaborative planning rolling agenda and time, and the micro-journal will be an additional burden of about 5-10 minutes of reflective time. You will be asked to implement the planning protocol during your weekly reading planning sessions, followed by a quick 8-question multiple-choice micro-journal across an eight-week window. At the conclusion of the 8

	weeks, you will participate in an Exit Ticket that includes 10 questions reflecting on the collaborative process, learnings, and your experiences with student progress, as well as additional feedback to the investigator, which may take 10-20 minutes of your individual time. Those who participate in the implementation phase will be offered an additional $20 gift card (from Target/Amazon.com or the like).
Potential Risks and Discomforts	As an educator, there may be some discomfort in changing the collaboration structures that may differ from those of other staff and the relationships with your colleagues. There are no evaluative connections to the information being collected, and it will not be shared with your administrator. Participants may encounter discomfort when asked to respond to a specific questionnaire or focus group questions. During these activities, you may decline to answer any question without giving a reason and move on to the next question. There are no other known risks.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include personal use of the collaborative discussion model and the district learning more about collaborative structures to support the instruction of students with disabilities. The school district and possibly others might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the collaboration needs of educators and effective structures for planning reading instruction for students with disabilities in the intermediate grades. This improved understanding may lead to better instructional reading outcomes and greater access to the curriculum for students with disabilities. It will be for educational purposes only.
Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by assigning each participant a code number and an identification key to be used throughout the study, rather than their name. Only I will have access to the code and the identification key, and the focus group data will be kept confidential and securely stored through the UMD Box Platform. No other identifying information will be collected, and personal information will not be shared with others. Zoom video/audio/transcripts will be analyzed and summarized to ensure that no names or potential identifiers are reported in the dissertation or any subsequent documents or reports, and that they are erased at the conclusion of the study. Only I will have access to the secured laptop computer and locked cabinet or to any of the research data. No personal information will be shared with any other individual within the district or any external entities. If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Compensation	You have been offered a $5 gift card for the focus group. Participants who complete the implementation will be offered a $20 gift card. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. If you do not earn over $100, only your name and address will be collected to receive compensation.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part or stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, have questions, concerns, or complaints, or need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator. Lauren E. Duewer lesollen@umd.edu 240-353-3724

	Or Dr. Jean Louise Snell, Advisor of the EdD in School Leadership 2115 Benjamin Building University of Maryland, College Park, MD 301-405-2337 Jsnell@umd.edu If you are an employee at **[Redacted for Anonymity]** or the University of Maryland, your employment status or academic standing at **[Redacted for Anonymity]** or the University of Maryland will not be positively or negatively affected by your participation or non-participation in the study.	
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants This research has been reviewed in accordance with the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and you voluntarily agree to participate in Phase 2 of this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT** **[Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions and Protocol Review

(based on Research Questions 1 & 2)

- **RQ1: What are the current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?**
- **RQ2: How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?**

Focus Group Questions

A. Please describe your current assignment and caseload (grades, caseload, subjects, other duties, etc.)

B. Tell me about your current experience with planning practices in your school.

a. Share about collaboration in intermediate grade planning (gr. 3-5)
b. More specifically, do you collaborate on planning for reading (both formal and informal)?
c. How do special education and students with disabilities factor into collaborative planning practices?
d. How are students' accommodations incorporated into collaborative planning?
e. To what degree are you, as a special educator, supported by leadership in your collaborative planning, if at all? (master schedule, time, expectations, tools, etc.)

C. Tell me more about your experiences with collaborative reading planning between special and general educators.

a. When do you plan for reading (timing, grouping, focus, organization, etc.)?
b. How have you, in your role as a special educator, contributed to collaborative planning for reading?
c. What have you learned, and how have you developed from this collaboration with your colleague(s)?
d. What do you see as the value or impact (positive or negative) of collaborative reading planning between special and general educators?
    i. Share more about the impact on students
    ii. Share more about the impact on you

D. Please share any additional feedback you would like to provide to the researcher regarding planning, collaboration, reading, or anything else relevant at this time.

Consent for Phase 2 & Review of Collaboration Protocol

The researcher will model the Strategic Collaboration Protocol (see Appendix J), share it, and review the following information (see Phase 2 Training Slides).

The protocol implementation goes as follows:

1. Copy and paste the Strategic Collaboration Protocol into your rolling agenda for reading collaboration for the next 5-7 weeks before the meeting

2. Identify the following items generally for reading planning and document in the Protocol: Unit, Focus Decoding or Vocabulary Skill, Focus Comprehension Skill (as available for the upcoming lesson group)

3. Identify specifically: Key Strategies to be taught for either Focus, Accommodation Strategies (student-specific) for either Focus.

4. Identify Next Steps or Follow-up that is needed, including by whom and when

5. Click on the LINK here or as embedded in the Protocol to complete the 5-question Exit Ticket to indicate the use of the protocol.

If you would be willing to participate in the implementation of this protocol during the period of this research, please let me know, and I will follow up with you individually via email with the documentation.

Appendix J: Strategic Collaborative Planning Protocol

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">WHAT</td></tr>
<tr><td>Grade:
Subject:
Unit:</td><td>Decoding/ Vocabulary Skill:</td><td>Comprehension Skill:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Key Strategies:</td><td colspan="2">HOW</td></tr>
<tr><td>Focus Accommodation Strategies (Student-Specific):
•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">WHO</td></tr>
<tr><td>Next Steps:</td><td>By Whom:</td><td>By When:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Micro-Journal LINK</td></tr>
</table>

Derived from the *What, How, Who protocol* (Murawski, 2012)

Appendix K: Protocol Initiation Email to Educators

DATE:

Dear Educator:

Thank you so much for already participating in the focus group! Additionally, thank you for agreeing to participate in the protocol implementation as part of the research (Supporting Intermediate Educators in Effective Reading Collaboration for Special Education Students) with me, Lauren Duewer, through the University of Maryland, College Park. I appreciate the generous provision of your time and input as important data in my research. In the next few weeks, you should receive your gift card via mail to your school building for your focus group participation.

As a reminder, the protocol implementation goes as follows:

1. Copy and paste the Strategic Collaboration Protocol into your rolling agenda for reading collaboration for the next 4-6 weeks before the meeting
2. Identify the following items generally for reading planning and document in the Protocol: Unit, Focus Decoding or Vocabulary Skill, Focus Comprehension Skill (as available for the upcoming lesson group)
3. Identify specifically: Key Strategies to be taught for either or both Focus, Accommodation Strategies (student-specific) for either or both Focus.
4. Identify Next Steps or Follow-up that is needed, including by whom and when
5. Click on the LINK here or as embedded in the Protocol to complete the 5-question micro-journal to indicate the use of the protocol.

Repeat this process at any of the reading collaborative planning sessions that happen during the duration of this research period. You will receive an email at the conclusion of the research to complete an Exit Ticket.

If you have questions about this study, please contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724.

Thank you in advance!

Strategic Collaboration Protocol

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">WHAT</td></tr>
<tr><td>Grade:
Subject:
Unit:</td><td rowspan="2">Decoding/ Vocabulary Skill:</td><td rowspan="2">Comprehension Skill:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Key Strategies:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">HOW</td></tr>
<tr><td>Focus Accommodation Strategies (Student-Specific):
•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">WHO</td></tr>
<tr><td>Next Steps:</td><td>By Whom:</td><td>By When:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Micro-Journal LINK</td></tr>
</table>

Derived from the *What, How, Who protocol* (Murawski, 2012)

Appendix L: Thank You Email to Focus Group Participants NOT Joining Implementation Study

Dear Educator:

Thank you for participating in the focus group as part of the research (Supporting Intermediate Educators in Effective Reading Collaboration for Special Education Students) with me, Lauren Duewer, through the University of Maryland, College Park.

I appreciate the generous provision of your time and input as important data in my research. In the next few weeks, you should receive your gift card via mail to your address, if provided. If you have questions about this study, please contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724.

Sincerely,

Lauren Duewer

UMD Doctoral Candidate

(District Position Redacted for Anonymity)

Appendix M: Micro-Journal (Qualtrics)

General Data Questions

A. This is the _____ time we have used the Strategic Collaboration Protocol in part or whole. (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.–Single Selection).

B. List the team member roles who participated in the reading collaboration process today.

C. From this group, who were actively engaged in completing the reading protocol today.

RQ2: How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?

Please indicate the words that best describe *the results of* the **team collaboration** today:

1	Little engagement from participants in collaborative planning	Inconsistent engagement from participants in collaborative planning	Consistent engagement from participants in collaborative planning
2	Unproductive	Somewhat productive	Very productive
3	Clear on reading instructional plans for the upcoming week	Some understanding of the reading instructional plans for the upcoming week	Unclear on the reading instructional plans for the upcoming week
4	Instructional plans focused on foundational reading	Instructional plans focused on foundational and grade-level reading	Instructional plans focused on grade-level reading
5	Clear on my role as the special educator in reading instruction	Some understanding of the my role as the special educator in reading instruction	Unclear on my role as the special educator in reading instruction
6	Did not consider IEP accommodations during	Touched on IEP accommodations, but did	Incorporated instructional strategies to reflect IEP

	collaborative planning	not include aligned strategies in planning	accommodations into planning
7	All participants' voices were actively included and listened to	Some participant voices dominated more than others	All participants' voices were not included or heard

Feel free to explain any of the ratings above or share anything else the researcher may need to know. (Open-Ended)

Appendix N: Exit Ticket (Qualtrics) – RQ3/ OPEN-ENDED

General Data Questions

A. We used the Strategic Collaboration Protocol _____ times over the implementation period. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, Other–Single Selection)

B. List team member roles who participated in the reading collaboration process.

C. From this group, who were actively engaged in completing the reading protocol regularly.

RQ3: How can a Strategic Collaboration Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?

Tell me about your experience implementing the collaboration protocol:

a. How did the implementation of the collaboration protocol impact your team's reading planning overall?
b. How did the implementation of the collaboration protocol impact your team's reading planning for specific students?

Please share any benefits or barriers about the protocol/process overall:

c. Describe any changes in implementing accommodations and supports for students with disabilities.
d. Describe any changes in student reading or instruction for students with disabilities.

- **Feedback**

e. Overall, how did your team view the addition of the Strategic Collaborative Planning protocol to the current planning process?
f. Were there any adjustments to the protocol that your team made that were particularly helpful?
g. Please share anything else you would like the investigator to know.

Dear Educator:

Thank you for participating in the focus group & implementation protocol as part of the research

(Supporting Intermediate Educators in Effective Reading Collaboration for Special Education Students) with me, Lauren Duewer, through the University of Maryland, College Park.

I appreciate the generous provision of your time and input as important data in my research. In the next few weeks, you should receive your gift card via mail to your address, if provided, for the implementation research. If you have questions about this study, please contact me at lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724.

Sincerely,

Lauren Duewer

UMD Doctoral Candidate

(District Position Redacted for Anonymity)

Appendix O: Letter of Support from District A

(Redacted to Maintain Anonymity – For more information, please contact the author at:

laurenduewer.academicrequests@gmail.com)

Appendix P: IRB from the University of Maryland

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
FAX 301.314.1475
irb@umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

DATE:	October 11, 2024
TO:	Lauren Duewer
FROM:	University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[2090945-1] Capstone Research Proposal: Supporting Intermediate Educators in Effective Reading Collaboration for Special Education Students
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	October 11, 2024
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category #7.

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to final approval of this project scientific review was completed by the IRB Member reviewer.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate Amendment forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Generated on IRBNet

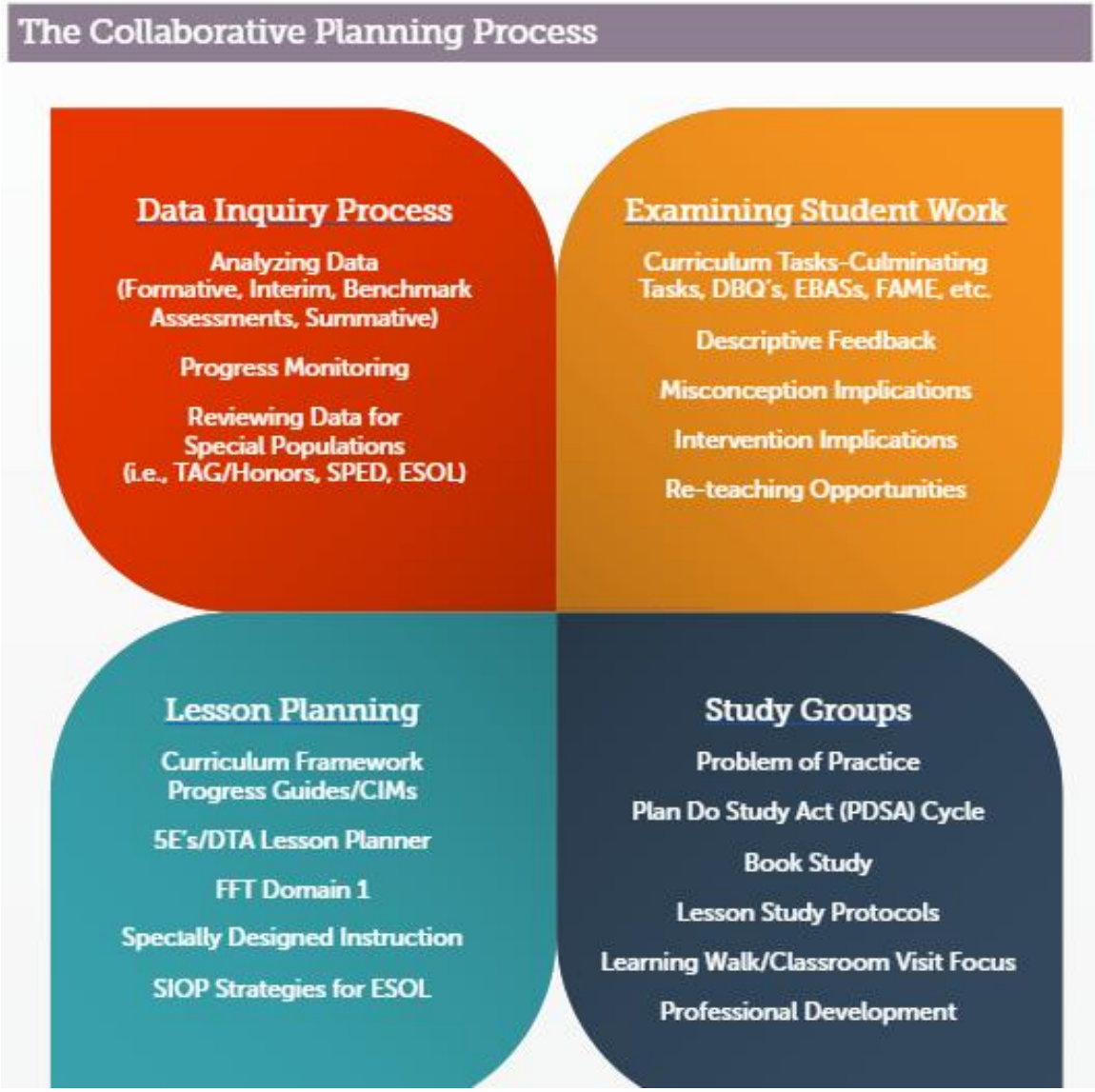
This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

Appendix Q: IRB from District A

(Redacted to Maintain Anonymity – For more information, please contact the author at:

laurenduewer.academicrequests@gmail.com)

Appendix R: District A Collaborative Planning Guide Sample (pg. 3, 7, and 8)





Lesson Planning

Purpose: To work collaboratively in a facilitated forum and provide teachers with best strategies to improve instructional practices of grade level content standards by creating units and/or lesson plans.

Goal(s): The team will develop a plan for instruction using their content area curriculum documents in order to improve student achievement.

Pre-Work for the Lesson Design Process

Facilitator

- Develop and distribute agenda with objectives and clear goals for the meeting.
- Send meeting notice with date, time, location, expected list of participants, and list of needed material/resources.
- Review data to determine strengths and weakness on specific standards.
- Identify the standard(s) being taught for the grade level/content area.
- Identify additional materials to enhance students' understanding of the standard.
- Gather any additional materials/resources to be referenced during the meeting.
- Provide an electronic of the lesson planner to be used (FFT, 5 E's etc.).
- If the curricula provides explicit lesson overviews, lesson seeds, etc., use these for planning.
- Be prepared to facilitate a discussion about initial findings.

Participants

- Conduct an initial analysis of your data to share with the group
- Review curriculum documents for pacing and where specific content standards are taught
- Identify resources and/or strategies that may benefit the group

Materials and Resources

- Rolling Agenda Template
- Student Data (Reports from Performance Matters, MAP, SchoolMax)
- Curriculum Documents
- Any other resources needed to plan your lesson

Lesson Design Process

Use the following steps and questions to help facilitate the discussion about standards and lesson planning.

1. Establish Purpose and Goals for Instruction

a. What is the purpose/goal?
b. Why were these data sources collected?
c. What other data sources could be utilized?
d. What questions will be asked when looking at the data?

2. Analyze Data

a. What patterns do you see in the data?
b. What questions do these patterns raise about students' understanding of the standards?
c. Where is the standard (s) taught in the curriculum? How often?
d. What do students have to do in order to determine proficiency of this standard?
e. What strategies would address the teaching of this standard(s)?

3. Create/Adjust/Enhance a Lesson Plan

a. What standard(s) will you implement? Which standards are being addressed in the curriculum lesson seeds?
b. Which standard(s)/lesson seed will we address?
c. How can we unpack the standard(s) or lesson seed to understand what students have to learn and do?
d. How will the lesson be differentiated to meet the needs of all students? Are there suggestions in the lesson seed for differentiation ?
e. How will you monitor student progress during the lesson?
f. What formative assessment will I use to assess student understanding of the standard(s)? Is there a suggested formative assessment?
g. What evidence will you gather to demonstrate the effectiveness of the lesson?

4. Action Plan

a. Who will implement the lesson plan? All teachers? One teacher?
b. What is the schedule for implementation?
c. Who will observe the lesson? Administrators? Other teachers?
d. What do you expect to see as evidence of implementation?
e. How will feedback be shared with the teacher(s) to promote reflection and improvement?

Follow-Up

These questions should be used to help plan next steps for the next lesson planning session.

1. After observing the lesson, how can the lesson be further refined by individual teachers to meet the needs of their various classes?
2. What future collaborative planning sessions and/or other supports will be planned to address needs identified from the lesson observation and debriefing?
3. What are the recommended next steps in the collaborative planning cycle?
4. Are all teachers attending collaborative planning and actively participating?
5. How are all teachers utilizing the work done in collaborative planning in the lessons they teach (making individual refinements and adjustments as needed for their students)?
6. How are all teachers reflecting on their lessons, how they have impacted student learning, their own strengths and areas for growth?

Appendix S: Research Study Flier

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Seeking Special Educators for Voluntary Study around Collaboration

You may qualify if:

- You are involved in planning for intermediate-level elementary reading instruction (grades 3-5)
- You are a resource special educator
- You are 21 years of age or older

Participant benefits may include:

- improved understanding of the collaboration needs of educators and effective structures for planning reading instruction for intermediate students with disabilities
- $5 gift card for Focus Group participation
- $20 gift card for Implementation participation

Participation involves:

Focus Group:

- Initial screening to confirm qualification
- For those qualified and willing, a 45-60 min Zoom focus group
- Opportunity to participate in the implementation group

Implementation Group:

- 8-week implementation of the planning structure
- Implementation micro-journal
- Final Exit Ticket

Doctoral Research Study being conducted by:
Lauren Duewer, Doctoral Candidate, UMCP, College of Education

If interested, please contact me at:
lesollen@umd.edu or 240-353-3724

Appendix T: Individual Receipt Form

University of Maryland College Park
Individual Receipt Form
[$100 and Below]

Initial Request:

☐ **I would like to accept a gift card for my participation.**

OR

☐ **I appreciate the consideration, but no gift card is requested.**

(No address needed below)

Participant Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Focus Group Participation:

☐ **I have received AMOUNT as participant compensation on DATE.**

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Implementation Participation:

☐ **I have received AMOUNT as participant compensation on DATE.**

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

IRBNet #: 2090945-1

Participant Study ID: Click here to enter text.

Total Amount Received: Click here to enter text.

Date(s): Click here to enter text.

Initials of Person Dispersing Compensation: Click here to enter text.

Appendix U: Full Participant Demographic Table

Participant Alias	School Alias	Size of School (Enrollment)	Location in District A	Role(s)	Grade Levels on Caseload	Gender	Years of Experience	Years of Experience in SPED	Caseload (# of students across assigned grade levels)	Focus Group (Phase 1)	Implementation (Phase 2)
FGA1	School A	501–700	North	Resource, Chair	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	F	8-11	8-11	21-25	yes	no
FGA2	School B	0-300	North	Resource	K, 2, 3	F	4-7	4-7	16-20	yes	yes
FGB3	School C	0-300	Central	Resource, Autism Co-taught	4, 5, 6	M	20+	20+	11-15	yes	yes
FGC4	School D	301–500	Central	Resource, Chair	1,3,4,5	F	12-15	12-15	11-15	yes	yes
FGC5	School E	301–500	North	Resource	3,4	F	0-3	0-3	11-15	yes	no
FGC6	School F	301–500	North	Resource, Chair	K, 4, 5	F	4-7	4-7	21-25	yes	no
FGC7	School G	501–700	Central	Resource, Chair	K, 2, 3, 5	M	16-19	0-3	21-25	yes	yes
FGC8	School H	301–500	Central	Resource, Chair	4,5	F	20+	20+	11-15	yes	no
FGD9	School I	501–700	Central	Self–contained/ Co-taught Autism	3	F	0-3	0-3	0-5	yes	no
FGE10	School J	501–700	South	Resource, Chair	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	F	16-19	16-19	21-25	yes	yes

Note. Demographics of study participants across phases from the survey data, as developed by Lauren Duewer, 2025. Own work.

Appendix V: Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Exploratory Investigation of Intermediate Elementary Educator Reading Collaboration around Special Education Students

Conducted by Lauren E. Duewer

This exploratory qualitative study examined how collaborative planning structures between special and general educators in intermediate elementary grades (3–5) affected reading instruction for SWD.

Problem and Research Aim

The study targeted the critical issue that the lack of proficient reading in the intermediate grades is a strong predictor (4x greater) of not graduating from high school. This link is especially pronounced for SWD. In the target district, the reading achievement gap between SWD and their peers remained wide (over 25 percentage points), with SWD reading proficiency remaining largely flat despite overall student growth. The central problem was that intermediate-grade reading educators were not collaborating effectively to plan instruction for SWD.

In the district, the current Collaborative Planning Guidance was too vague; CPBs lacked targeted inclusion of special educators (and other service providers); collaborative Rolling Agendas lacked focus on incorporating accommodations and SDI; and the curriculum and state standards reduced the foundational reading focus in the intermediate elementary grades. For SWDs, it is necessary to better identify what is happening during collaboration AND whether an added collaboration tool is enough to shift practice and, therefore, meaningfully improve reading outcomes.
The purpose was to investigate the current collaboration practices between general and special intermediate-grade educators and then test the impact of implementing a short-cycle change idea, the SCP, on the planning and implementation of reading instruction for SWD.

Research Questions

- **What are the current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?**
- **How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?**
- **How can a Strategic Collaboration Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?**

METHODOLOGY

Two phases involving 10 special educators in District A

- **Phase 1 (Focus Groups & Interviews):** Explored current collaborative practices, focusing on special educators' experiences planning reading instruction for SWD.

- **Phase 2 (Implementation Study):** Five participants volunteered to use the SCP–a tool based on the *WHAT, HOW, WHO* approach–during their weekly CPBs over an 8–12-week period, documenting their experiences via Micro-Journals and an Exit Ticket.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Inconsistent Collaboration:** Although CPBs are mandated, there was significant variability in their implementation and whether special educators were included in this weekly planning period. Many participants reported that informal collaboration (brief, outside-of-meeting exchanges) was used more frequently for shared planning between general and special educators than formal CPBs.

- **Focus on Accommodations over Foundational Reading Skills:** The collaboration efforts between the special educators in this study and their general education colleagues, regardless of setting, primarily focused on accommodations and responsive resource-sharing (e.g., graphic organizers, IEP snapshots, vocabulary supports) across all content areas, rather than Tier 3 instructional planning for foundational reading skills.

- **Impact of the SCP:**
  - The SCP was viewed as a helpful, user-friendly tool that created opportunities for general and special educators to engage in targeted instructional reading planning. It served as a vehicle to increase general educators' awareness of students' IEP requirements and improve communication about students' accommodations.
  - The SCP did not significantly alter shared instructional planning toward foundational reading skills.
  - The small sample of special educators in the study experienced inconsistent buy-in from general education colleagues for collaborating on literacy instruction, a problem that the SCP as a tool could not resolve.

RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Recommendations for District A:

BIG ROCK–Getting Smarter TOGETHER

Create a Networked Improvement Community to plan, do, study, and act on improving intermediate elementary reading collaboration to instruct SWDs more effectively and identify best-fit practices for District A.

Key Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Embed SCP Early:** Introduce and use the Strategic Collaboration Protocol at the beginning of the school year to establish it as an expected routine.
- **Develop Shared Commitment to Collaboration between General and Special Education teachers:** Train educators and administrators in collaboration practices to foster shared understanding, values, and a common language around shared instructional responsibility for all students, particularly those with disabilities.
- **Prioritize Foundational Reading Training:** Extend training for intermediate-grade general educators in explicit, systematic foundational reading instruction (SOR) to better support all struggling readers, especially for SWDs.

Conclusion:

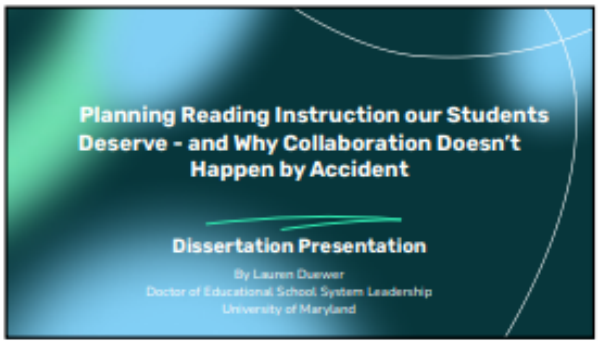
While the SCP proved to be an effective technical tool for structuring communication between general and special educators, it did not resolve larger cultural barriers around the ethos of collaboration between these two sets of educators, nor the implementation of specially designed reading instruction based on the sample of special educators in the study. The study concluded that inconsistent implementation of IEP accommodations and foundational reading instruction is creating an alarming lack of equitable access to the reading curriculum for SWDs. To improve practice, buy-in needs to be built with the input of schools, administrators, educators, and staff. Therefore, building improvement through a NIC would create space for action research to develop and trial a more effective collaborative practice for instructing SWDs in the district, which aligns with the DSE strategic plan and the Maryland Blueprint for Education.

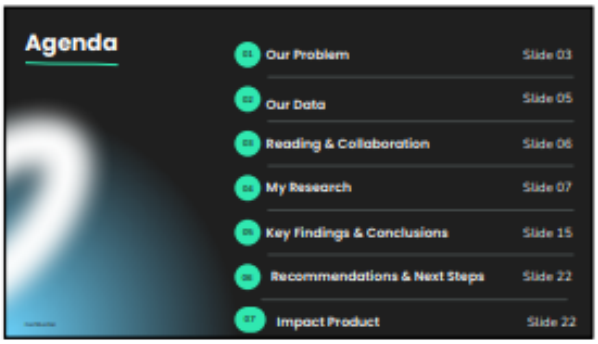
Potential District A Networked Improvement Community of Practice Structure:

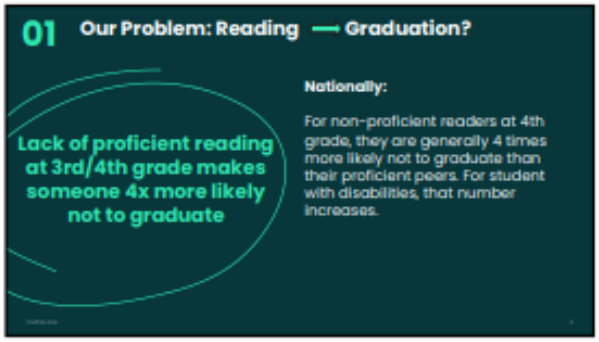
- **Starting Small Early**
  - Starting in September.
  - Voluntary–Solicit Principal volunteers from Universal Tier schools for the first round (10-15 schools) during summer.
  - Engagement–request that school teams include intermediate educators (teachers, special education case managers, reading specialists, ELD teachers, 504 coordinators, etc.).
  - Setting Regular Meetings–establish regular meetings to walk schools through the reflection and collaboration process discussed below.
- **Setting Purpose**
  - Current Outcome: Special Education students in grades 3-5 are not proficient in grade-level reading compared to their general education peers.
- **Exploring the Problem Together**
  - Causal Systems Analysis–5 Whys–problem-focused (pg. 21)
  - Organize the Problem into a Fishbone of Key Factors–user-specific
    - Teacher Capacity
    - Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities
    - Collaboration Structures
  - System Improvement Map–brainstorming
- **Creating a Theory of Improvement (pg. 32)**
  - Set a Strategic Aim: What will be an improvement, AND how will we know?
  - Identify Primary Drivers–potential high-leverage key shifts
    - Develop Teacher Capacity Around Reading and Student Accommodations
    - Reenvision the Collaborative Mindset
    - Improve Collaborative Structures
  - Identify Secondary Drivers–key hows to make the Primary Drivers work
  - Identify Specific Change Ideas–more specifically, what key practices
  - Keep in Mind–"Possibly wrong and definitely incomplete"
- **Trialing Solutions–Plan-Do-Study-Act**
  - Plan–Select and define the change, predict what will happen, and design the test
    - Embed SCP in reading collaboration rolling agenda
    - Training around foundational reading and accommodations
    - Consistent access to planning
    - Collect Feedback
  - Do–Implement the change and collect the data (and what happened)
  - Study–Analyze the data, compare results to predictions, and identify insights
  - Act–Decide what next from what you learned–Abandon?, Adjust?, Expand?
  - Repeat or Combine (2-4 iterations)
    - Repeat–Continue the learning work
    - Combine–shift, combine, or expand on key results across schools
- **Learning Together–Learning Schools to District Leaders**
  - Have NIC schools share their findings after 2-4 iterations of their PDSA
  - District Leaders reflect on impacting results and potential broader implications
  - Scale Up–key result expanded to a larger group of schools

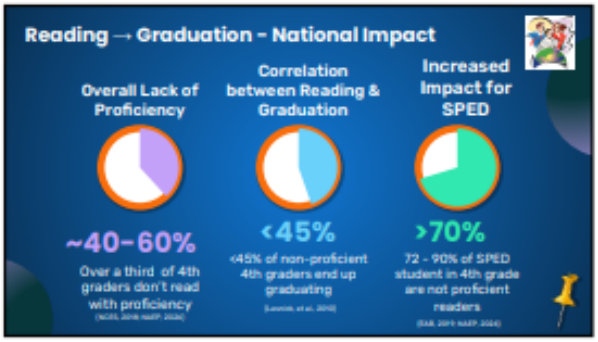
NIC information adapted from: Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Harvard Education Publication Group.

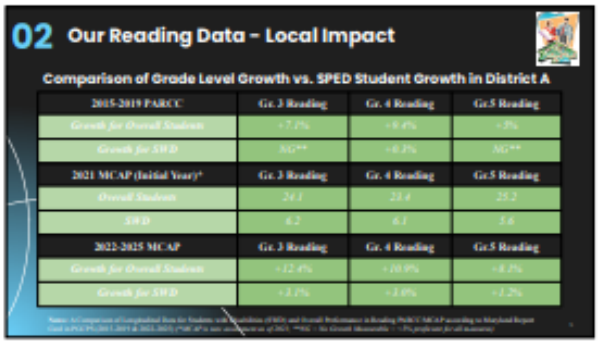
Appendix W: District A Presentation

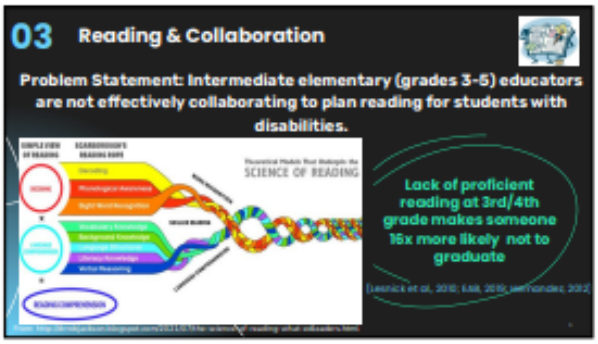


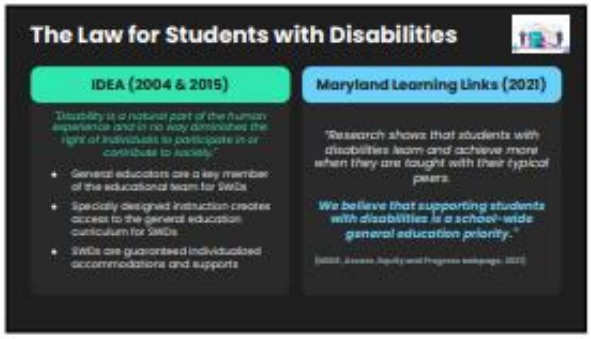




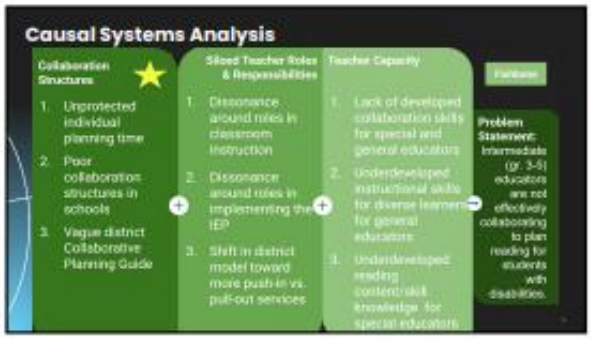


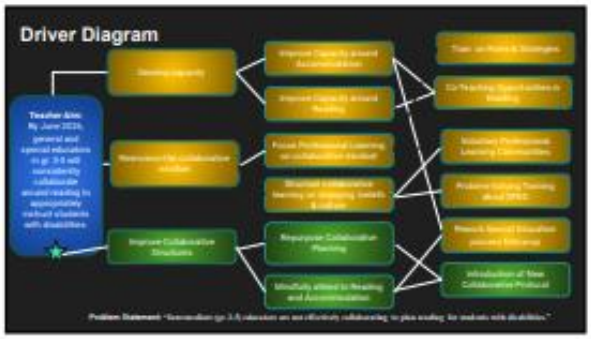





The Law for Students with Disabilities
IDEA (2004 & 2015)
"Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society."
General educators are a key member of the educational team for SWDs
Specially designed instruction creates access to the general education curriculum for SWDs
SWDs are guaranteed individualized accommodations and supports
Maryland Learning Links (2021)
"Research shows that students with disabilities learn and achieve more when they are taught with their typical peers.
We believe that supporting students with disabilities is a school-wide general education priority."


The Literature Review
Reading Decline
increased content reading focus leads to decreased instruction in:
Phonics
Decoding
Fluency
SWDs Impacted
Interventions after 3rd grade are less effective than early action.
Delayed support results in persistent reading difficulties.
Collaboration Shift
Critical Needs:
Time & Vulnerability
Co-learning Access
Targeted Collaboration
Focus on Foundational Reading
Missing: intentionality, fidelity, inclusion, and priority for special and other educators.


Causal Systems Analysis
Collaboration Structures
1. Unprotected individual planning time
2. Poor collaboration structures in schools
3. Vague district Collaborative Planning Guide
Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities
1. Dissonance around roles in classroom instruction
2. Dissonance around roles in implementing the IEP
3. Shift in district model toward more push-in vs. pull-out services
Teacher Capacity
1. Lack of developed collaboration skills for special and general educators
2. Underdeveloped instructional skills for diverse learners for general educators
3. Underdeveloped reading content/skill knowledge for special educators
Problem Statement: Intermediate (gr. 3-5) educators are not effectively collaborating to plan reading for students with disabilities.


Driver Diagram
Teacher Aim:
Improve Collaborative Structures
Problem Statement


Theory of Improvement 04
1. INTEGRATE COLLABORATION.
2. REPURPOSE TIME.
3. IMPROVED PROTOCOL (SCP)
SCP
General & Special Educators Co-Plan Reading Instructions
Use Planning Time to Target Foundational Reading & Struggle Reader Supports
Co-Create Accessible, Student-Specific Lessons


Current Research
Change Idea
The purpose of this research project was to investigate the impact of a structured collaboration protocol on the planning and implementation of reading instruction for students with disabilities.
Theory of Improvement
Study Goals

Current Research

What is the Strategic Collaboration Protocol?

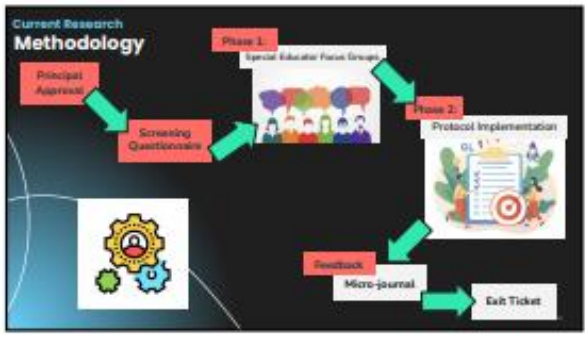
3 Key Components:

- What
- How
- Who



Current Research

Methodology



05 Research to Data

1 - What are current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?	2 - How do spec. educ. teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?	3- How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?
Phase 1: Focus Groups & Interviews	Phase 1: Focus Groups & Interviews	Phase 2: SCP Implementation

Research Question 1 Key Findings:

Research Question 1:
What are current collaboration practices between intermediate general and special education teachers?

- Significant Variability in Collaborative Planning Block (CPB) Implementation
- Prominence of the Rolling Agenda
- Informal Collaboration Trumps CPBs

Key Finding: Inconsistent Collaboration

- Charlotte - "So it's a lot of planning on my part as opposed to if we're planning the curriculum [together]."
- E3 - "other teachers still don't see the need to plan together"

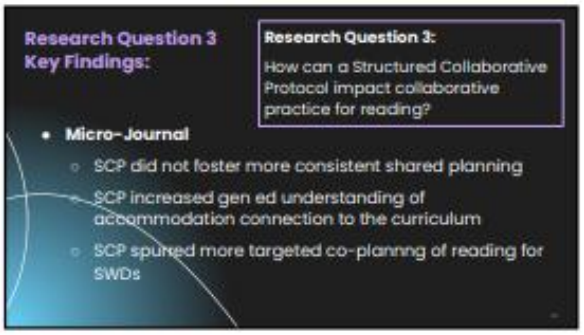


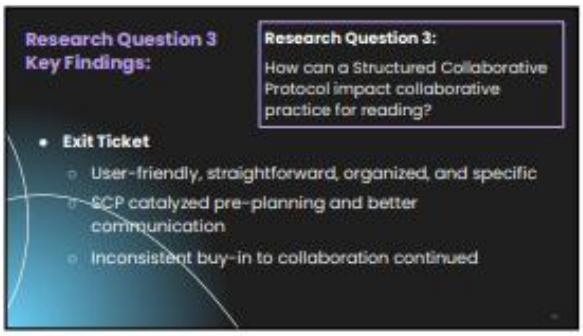
Research Question 2 Key Findings:

Research Question 2:
How do special education teachers experience collaboration on teaching reading to students with disabilities?

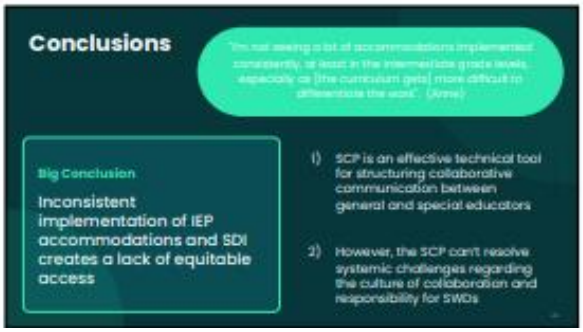
- Tier 3 Reading Supports
  - Intervention/Instruction
  - Accommodations and Supports
- Reading Collaboration Extends Across All Intermediate Content Areas


Key Finding: Focus on Accommodations over Foundational Reading
Anthony - SWD require "all the tools that they're going to need for that daily experience"
Anne - "I can't accommodate when you don't know where you're at within your pacing"
Charlotte - "They're reading a book, and they're not being allowed to use text-to-speech, or they're writing, and the ReadWrite is not being utilized."


Research Question 3 Key Findings:
Research Question 3:
How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?
Micro-Journal
SCP did not foster more consistent shared planning
SCP increased gen ed understanding of accommodation connection to the curriculum
SCP spurred more targeted co-planning of reading for SWDs


Research Question 3 Key Findings:
Research Question 3:
How can a Structured Collaborative Protocol impact collaborative practice for reading?
Exit Ticket
User-friendly, straightforward, organized, and specific
SCP catalyzed pre-planning and better communication
Inconsistent buy-in to collaboration continued


Key Finding: Impacts of the Strategic Collaboration Protocol
E4 - "the reading teacher started using more visuals, ones I provided, for upcoming lessons."
E6 - students "have continuously been receiving their accommodations and supports" due to better general educator awareness
"It would have been a great tool if it was implemented at the beginning of the [school year]" (E2, E5, E8)

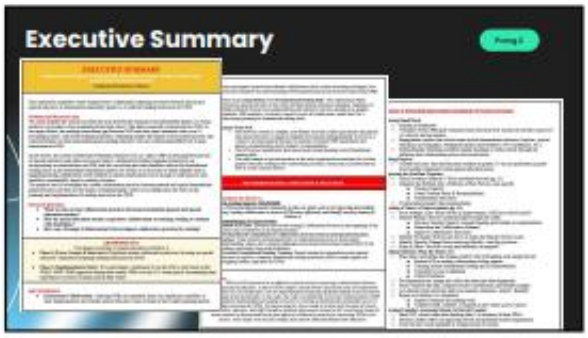

Conclusions
"I'm not seeing a lot of accommodations implemented consistently, at least in the intermediate grade levels, especially as [the curriculum gets] more difficult to differentiate the work." (Anne)
Big Conclusion
Inconsistent implementation of IEP accommodations and SDI creates a lack of equitable access
1) SCP is an effective technical tool for structuring collaborative communication between general and special educators
2) However, the SCP can't resolve systemic challenges regarding the culture of collaboration and responsibility for SWDs


Limitations
Small Scale, Qualitative
SPED Teacher Input Only (No Gen. Ed. Teachers included in Study Sample)
Timing - End of Year Impact
Limited Training on SCP Tool
Student Impact Unmeasured


Implications
Fostering shared responsibility and ownership of co-instruction requires building capacity of intermediate general and special educators by:
1) Ongoing training around collaboration as a skill
2) Training around systematic, explicit foundational reading skills based in the Science of Reading
CHANGE YOUR MIND
There is universal expectation of collaboration in contemporary public education (Hargreaves, 2019)
All educators are teachers of reading, regardless of grade or content (Sousa, 2007)


Recommendations & Next Steps
Recommendation 1
Embed planning for SWDs Early (SCP)
Recommendation 2
Develop Shared Collaboration Commitment
Recommendation 3
Prioritize Foundational Reading Training


07
Impact Product
Prong 1
Prong 2
Prong 3


Executive Summary
Prong 2


Networked Improvement Community of Practice
BIG ROCK - Getting Smarter TOGETHER
Key Features:
Prong 3
1. Starting Small Early
2. Setting Purpose
3. Exporting the Problem Together
4. Creating a Theory of Improvement
5. Trialing Solutions (Plan-Do-Study-Act)
6. Learning Together - Learning Schools to District Leaders


Networked Improvement Community of Practice
Prong 3
1) Starting Small Early
Starting in September
Voluntary - Solicit Principal volunteers from Universal Tier schools for first round (10-15 schools) during summer
Engagement - request school teams include intermediate educators (teachers, special education case managers, reading specialist, ELD teacher, 504 coordinator, etc.)
Setting Regular Meetings - establish regular meetings to walk schools through the reflection and collaboration process discussed below

Networked Improvement Community of Practice

2) Setting Purpose
- **Current Outcome:** Special Education students in grades 3-5 are not proficient on grade level reading in comparison to their general education peers.

3) Exploring the Problem Together
- Causal Systems Analysis - 5 Whys - problem-focused (pg. 21)
- Organize the Problem into a Fishbone of Key Factors - user-specific (consider: Teacher Capacity; Siloed Teacher Roles & Responsibilities; Collaboration Structures)
- System Improvement Map - brainstorming

Networked Improvement Community of Practice

4) Creating a Theory of Improvement (pg. 32)
- Set a Strategic Aim - What will be an improvement AND how will we know?
- Identify Primary Drivers - potential high-leverage key shifts
  - Develop Teacher Capacity Around Reading and Student Accommodations
  - Reenvision the Collaborative Mindset
  - Improve Collaborative Structures
- Identify Secondary Drivers - key hows to make the Primary Drivers work
- Identify Specific Change Ideas - more specifically what key practices
- Keep in Mind - "Possibly wrong and definitely incomplete"

Networked Improvement Community of Practice

5) Trialing Solutions - Plan-Do-Study-Act
- **Plan** - Select and define the change, predict what will happen, and design the test
  - Embed SCP in reading collaboration rolling agenda
  - Training around foundational reading and accommodations
  - Consistent access to planning
  - Collect Feedback
- **Do** - Implement the change and collect the data (and what happened)
- **Study** - Analyze the data, compare results to predictions, and identify insights
- **Act** - Decide what next from what you learned - Abandon?, Adjust?, Expand?

Networked Improvement Community of Practice

6) Learning Together - Learning Schools to District Leaders
- Have NIC schools share their findings after 2-4 iterations of their PDSA
- District Leaders reflect on impacting results and potential broader implications
- Scale Up - key result expanded to larger group of schools

Next Steps



District Approval

1. Principal Recruitment Invitation
2. NIC Intro & PDSA Process Meeting
3. School Implementation & Data Collection
4. Quarterly NIC Review Meetings
5. NIC EOY & District Next Steps

Thank you

For more information on this research, study and recommendations, please visit my full dissertation: LINK

Contact Information:
Lauren Duewer, Ed. D., NBCT
In partial fulfillment of defense of
Doctor of Educational School System Leadership, UMCP - lesollen@umd.edu

References

Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., M. Ameen, B. M., & Khdhir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, *6*, 100198. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198

Al Jaffal, M. (2022). Barriers general education teachers face regarding the inclusion of students with autism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.873248

Allington, R. (2011). *Research on reading/learning disability interventions* (pp. 236–265). International Reading Association. https://doi.org/10.1598/0829.10

Andrews-Larson, C., Wilson, J., & Larbi-Cherif, A. (2017). Instructional improvement and teachers' collaborative conversations: The role of focus and facilitation. *Teachers College Record*, *119*(2), 1–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811711900201

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2024, January 24). *Youth engagement strategies*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. https://www.aecf.org/blog/strategies-for-youth-engagement

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2001). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read: kindergarten through grade 3* (3rd ed.). DIANE Publishing.

Baker, S., & Edwards, R. (2012). *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research*. National Centre for Research Methods Review. https://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/id/eprint/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf

Baumeister, R. F. (2003). The psychology of irrationality: Why people make foolish, self-defeating choices. In I. Brocas, J. D. Carrillo, I. Brocas, & J. D. Carrillo (Eds.), *The*

Psychology of Economic Decisions: Rationality and Well-Being (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199251063.003.0001

Billingsley, B., & Bettini, E. (2019). Special education teacher attrition and retention: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, *89*(5), 697–744. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319862495

Billingsley, B. S. (2004). Promoting teacher quality and retention in special education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *37*(5), 370–376. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194040370050101

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. Granada Learning.

Bovbjerg, K. M. (2006). Teams and collegiality in educational culture. *European Educational Research Journal*, *5*(3–4), 244–253. https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2006.5.3.244

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brownell, M. T., Adams, A., Sindelar, P., Waldron, N., & Vanhover, S. (2006). Learning from collaboration: The role of teacher qualities. *Exceptional Children*, *72*(2), 169–185. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200203

Brownell, M. T., Lauterbach, A. A., Dingle, M. P., Boardman, A. G., Urbach, J. E., Leko, M. M., Benedict, A. E., & Park, Y. (2014). Individual and contextual factors influencing special education teacher learning in literacy learning cohorts. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *37*(1), 31–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948713487179

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press.

Buczynski, S., & Hansen, C. B. (2010). Impact of professional development on teacher practice: Uncovering connections. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(3), 599–607. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.006

Byrd, D. R., & Alexander, M. (2020). Investigating special education teachers' knowledge and skills: Preparing general teacher preparation for professional development. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, *4*(2), 72–82. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2020059790

Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K. (2018). Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *19*(1), 5–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100618772271

Causey, C., Soares, L., Howerter, C. S., & Shannon-Baker, P. (2022). Examining general education and special education teacher preparedness for co-teaching students with disabilities. *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals*.

Center for the School of the Future. (2025). *Teacher collaboration: Impacts on student learning and school effectiveness* [Policy and Research Brief]. Utah State University. https://cehs.usu.edu/csf/files/teacher-collaboration-pb-8-2025.pdf

Cervetti, G. N., & Hiebert, E. H. (2019). Knowledge at the center of English language arts instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, *72*(4), 499–507. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26801637

Cheng, K.-W. (2007). A study on applying focus group interview on education. *Reading Improvement*, *44*(4), 194. Gale Academic OneFile. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A175631370/AONE?sid=googleScholar&xid=bf893c46

Chitiyo, J., & Brunda, W. (2018). Teacher preparedness in the use of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. *Support for Learning*, *33*(1), 38–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12190

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, *26*(2). https://uwerepository.worktribe.com/output/937596

Cohen, E. G., & Goodlad, J. I. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom*. Teachers College Pr.

Cole, S. M., Murphy, H. R., Frisby, M. B., Grossi, T. A., & Bolte, H. R. (2021). The relationship of special education placement and student academic outcomes. *The Journal of Special Education*, *54*(4), 217–227. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466920925033

Cole, S. M., Murphy, H. R., Frisby, M. B., & Robinson, J. (2023). The relationship between special education placement and high school outcomes. *The Journal of Special Education*, *57*(1), 13–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669221097945

Comer, J. P. (1996). *Rallying the whole village: The Comer process for reforming education*. Teachers College Press.

Compton, D. L., Miller, A. C., Elleman, A. M., & Steacy, L. M. (2014). Have we forsaken reading theory in the name of "quick fix" interventions for children with reading disability? *Scientific Studies of Reading*, *18*(1), 55–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2013.836200

Conderman, G. (2015). Middle school co-teaching: Effective practices and student reflections. *Middle School Journal*, *42*(4), 24–31. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00940771.2011.11461771

Connor, C. M., Alberto, P. A., Compton, D. L., & O'Connor, R. E. (2014). *Improving reading outcomes for students with or at risk for reading disabilities: A synthesis of the contributions from the Institute of Education Sciences research centers.* (NCSER 2014-3000). National Center for Special Education Research. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED544759

Cook, L., & Friend, M. (1995). Co-teaching: Guidelines for creating effective practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *28*(3), 1–16. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/31ca/3592c18acdd238ce488cd7184017b904b646.pdf

Cook, S. C., & McDuffie-Landrum, K. (2020). Integrating effective practices into co-teaching: Increasing outcomes for students with disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *55*(4), 221–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451219855739

Cook, S. C., McDuffie-Landrum, K., Oshita, L., & Cook, B. G. (2017). Co-teaching for students with disabilities: A critical and updated analysis of the empirical literature. In *Handbook of Special Education* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Cunningham, A., & Stanovich, K. (2003). Reading can make you smarter! *Principal*, *83*(2), 34–39.

Da Fonte, M. A., & Barton-Arwood, S. M. (2017). Collaboration of general and special education teachers: Perspectives and strategies. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *53*(2), 99–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451217693370

Danielson, C., & Axtell, D. (2009). *Implementing the framework for teaching in enhancing professional practice*. ASCD.

Datnow, A. (2011). Collaboration and contrived collegiality: Revisiting Hargreaves in the age of accountability. *Journal of Educational Change*, *12*(2), 147–158. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-011-9154-1

DeLuca, T., Komesidou, R., Pelletier, R., & Hogan, T. (2023). What works in collaboration? Identifying key ingredients to improve service delivery in schools. *Language, Speech, and*

Hearing Services in Schools, *54*(4), 1103–1116. https://doi.org/10.1044/2023_LSHSS-22-00180

Demirkaya, P. N., & Bakkaloglu, H. (2015). Examining the student-teacher relationships of children both with and without special needs in preschool classrooms. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, *15*(1), 159–175. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1057456

Denton, C. A., Vaughn, S., & Fletcher, J. M. (2003). Bringing research–based practice in reading intervention to scale. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *18*(3), 201–211. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5826.00075

Desimone, L. M. (2011). A primer on effective professional development. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *92*(6), 68–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171109200616

Dickinson, E. (2009). *The impact of collaborative teacher teaming on teacher learning* [Masters Theses, Western Kentucky University]. https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/88

District A. (2021). *District A Strategic Plan SY 2021-2026*. District A. **[*Redacted to Maintain Anonymity – For more information, please contact the author at: laurenduewer.academicrequests@gmail.com*]**

District A. (2022a). *Negotiated agreement*. District A & District A Educators' Association. **[*Redacted to Maintain Anonymity – For more information, please contact the author at: laurenduewer.academicrequests@gmail.com*]**

District A. (2022b). *Official September 30, 2022 Enrollment by School & Grade*. District A — Pupil Accounting. **[*Redacted to Maintain Anonymity – For more information, please contact the author at: laurenduewer.academicrequests@gmail.com*]**

District A. (2023). *Realizing transformation: Supports and strategies for equity-based educational excellence (School year 2023-2024)*. District A, Office of the Chief Academic

Officer. **[*Redacted to Maintain Anonymity – For more information, please contact the author at: laurenduewer.academicrequests@gmail.com*]**

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (2nd ed.). Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2009). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing students' achievement*. Solution Tree Press.

Duke, N., & Cartwright, K. (2021). The science of reading progresses: Communicating advances beyond the simple view of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *56*(S1), S25–S44. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.411

EAB. (2019). Narrowing the Third-Grade Reading Gap Research Brief. *EAB*. https://eab.com/resources/research-report/narrowing-the-third-grade-reading-gap-research-brief/

Edmonds, M. S., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Reutebuch, C., Cable, A., Tackett, K. K., & Schnakenberg, J. W. (2009). A synthesis of reading interventions and effects on reading comprehension outcomes for older struggling readers. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(1), 262–300. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325998

The Equity Assistance Centers. (2013). *How the Common Core must ensure equity by fully preparing every student for postsecondary success: Recommendations from the Regional Equity Assistance Centers on implementation of the Common Core State Standards* [Position Paper]. The Equity Assistance Centers. https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/EquityCommonCore_120913.pdf

Erb, T., & Stevenson, C. (2015). What difference does teaming make? *Middle School Journal*, *30*(3), 47–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.1999.11494587

Ford, T. G., & Youngs, P. A. (2018). Creating organizational structures to facilitate collegial interaction among teachers: Evidence from a high-performing urban Midwestern US district. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *46*(3), 424–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216682501

Francisco, M., Hartman, M., & Wang, Y. (2020). Inclusion and Special Education. *Education Sciences*, *10*(9), 238. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090238

Friend, M. (2019). *Co-teach! Building and sustaining effective classroom partnerships in inclusive schools*. Marilyn Friend, Inc.

Friend, M., Cook, L., Hurley-Chamberlain, D., & Shamberger, C. (2010). Co-teaching: An illustration of the complexity of collaboration in special education. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *20*(1), 9–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474410903535380

Gajda, R., & Koliba, C. J. (2008). Evaluating and improving the quality of teacher collaboration: A field-tested framework for secondary school leaders. *NASSP Bulletin*, *92*(2), 133–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636508320990

Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2019). *The role of early career supports, continuous professional development, and learning communities in the teacher shortage. The fifth report in "The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market" series*. Economic Policy Institute. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED598210

García-Martínez, I., Montenegro-Rueda, M., Molina-Fernández, E., & Fernández-Batanero, J. M. (2021). Mapping teacher collaboration for school success. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *32*(4), 631–649. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2021.1925700

Goddard, Y. L., Goddard, R. D., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). A theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement in

public elementary schools. *Teachers College Record*, *109*(4), 877–896. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810710900401

Gordon, L. (2025). *Shifting instructional planning practices: Exploring high school mathematics teachers' perceptions of integrating the do the math protocol into collaborative instructional planning (Publication No. 32319674)* [Doctoral dissertation, Kennesaw State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://www.proquest.com/openview/0366477cecc0fbb67fd572b43642e863/1?cbl=18750&diss=y&pq-origsite=gscholar

Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, *7*(1), 6–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258600700104

Hackmann, D. G., Petzko, V. N., Valentine, J. W., Clark, D. C., Nori, J. R., & Lucas, S. E. (2002). Beyond Interdisciplinary Teaming: Findings and Implications of the NASSP National Middle Level Study. *NASSP Bulletin*, *86*(632), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650208663204

Hanover Research Group & District A. (2020). *District A preliminary diagnostic tool*. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dmY3otJzjmrlDu-8mfVjZhCgcdQVNRtL/view?usp=sharing

Hanselman, P., & Borman, G. D. (2013). The impacts of success for all on reading achievement in grades 3–5: Does intervening during the later elementary grades produce the same benefits as intervening early? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *35*(2), 237–251. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373712466940

Hargreaves, A. (2000). Contrived collegiality: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. In S. Ball (Ed.), *Sociology of education: Major themes* (pp. 1480–1503). Routledge Falmer.

Hargreaves, A. (2021). Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations, and effects. In *Policy, teacher education and the quality of teachers and teaching* (pp. 603–621). Routledge.

Haycock, K. (2009). Raising achievement and closing gaps between groups: Lessons from schools and districts on the performance frontier. *The Education Trust–Midwest*. https://midwest.edtrust.org/resource/raising-achievement-and-closing-gaps-between-groups-lessons-from-schools-and-districts-on-the-performance-frontier-4/

Hernandez, D. J. (2011). Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. In *Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED518818

Hoover, W. A., & Gough, P. B. (1990). The simple view of reading. *Reading and Writing*, *2*(2), 127–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00401799

Hord, S. M., & Tobia, E. F. (2015). *Reclaiming our teaching profession: The power of educators learning in community*. Teachers College Press.

Horn, I. S., Garner, B., Kane, B. D., & Brasel, J. (2017). A taxonomy of instructional learning opportunities in teachers' workgroup conversations. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *68*(1), 41–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487116676315

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).

International Dyslexia Association. (2025). *Definition of dyslexia*. International Dyslexia Association.

Joshi, R., Binks, E., Hougen, M., Dahlgren, M. E., Ocker-Dean, E., & Smith, D. L. (2009). Why elementary teachers might be inadequately prepared to teach reading. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *42*(5), 392–402. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219409338736

Jung, L. A., Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Kroener, J. (2019). *Your students, my students, our students: Rethinking equitable and inclusive classrooms*. ASCD.

Kamhi, A. G. (2009). The case for the narrow view of reading. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, *40*(2), 174–177. https://doi.org/10.1044/0161-1461(2009/08-0068)

Karten, T. J., & Murawski, W. W. (2020). *Co-teaching do's, don'ts, and do betters*. ASCD.

Katz, S., & Dack, L. A. (2013). *Intentional interruption: Breaking down learning barriers to transform professional practice*. Corwin.

Kelly, R., Pick, B., & Bolger, D. (2025). *Building strong readers, writers and thinkers: A fuller picture of effective literacy instruction*. Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies. https://www.schusterman.org/resource/building-strong-readers-writers-and-thinkers-a-fuller-picture-of-effective-literacy-instruction

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: A.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, *84*(1), 74–84. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751

Lemons, C., Otaiba, S., Conway, S., & Mellado de la Cruz, V. (2016). Improving Professional Development to Enhance Reading Outcomes for Students in Special Education. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *2016*(154), 87–104. https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20177

Leonard, L., & Leonard, P. (2003). The continuing trouble with collaboration: Teachers talk. *Current Issues in Education*, *6*. https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1615

Lesnick, J., Goerge, R. M., Smithgall, C., & Gwynne, J. (2010). *A longitudinal analysis of third-grade students in Chicago in 1996-97 and their educational outcomes*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

https://www.shastacoe.org/uploaded/Dept/is/County_Curriculum_Leads/Reading_on_Grade_Level_111710.pdf

Lipton, L., & Wellman, B. (2017). *Mentoring matters: A practical guide to learning-focused relationships* (2nd ed.). Solution Tree Press.

Lyon, G., & Weiser, B. (2009). Teacher knowledge, instructional expertise, and the development of reading proficiency. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *42*(5), 475–480. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219409338741

Main, K. (2007). *A year long study of the formation and development of middle years' teaching teams* [Doctoral dissertation, Griffith University]. https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/509

Maryland Commission on Innovation & Excellence in Education. (2020). *Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Final report*. Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis. https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnInnovEduc/2020-Final-Report-of-the-Commission.pdf

Maryland State Department of Education. (2013). *Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards for English Language Arts (grades 3–5)*. MSDE Office of English/Language Arts. https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/ELA/MCCR.aspx

Maryland State Department of Education. (2015). *Maryland Report Card: District A reading performance, grades 3–5* [PARCC data]. https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov

Maryland State Department of Education. (2020). *Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards for English Language Arts (grades 3–5)*. Office of English/Language Arts, Division of Curriculum, Instructional Improvement, and Professional Learning.

Maryland State Department of Education. (2021a). *Maryland Report Card: District A reading performance, grades 3–5* [MCAP data]. https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov

Maryland State Department of Education. (2021b). *What is specially designed instruction?* Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education. https://elevates.marylandpublicschools.org/what-is-specially-designed-instruction/

Maryland State Department of Education. (2024). *Success for all students in the general education classroom: A guide for inclusive practices*. Maryland State Department of Education.

Maryland State Department of Education. (2025). *District A report card*. Maryland State Department of Education. https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/

Maryland State Department of Education & Johns Hopkins Center for Technology in Education. (n.d.). *Access, equity, progress*. Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education and Early Intervention Services & Johns Hopkins University Center for Technology in Education. Maryland Learning Links. https://elevates.marylandpublicschools.org/aep/

McDonald, J. P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E. C. (2003). *The power of protocols: An educator's guide to better practice*. Teachers College Press.

McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). *Building School-Based Teacher Learning Communities: Professional Strategies to Improve Student Achievement*. Teachers College Press.

McLeskey, J., Barringer, M.-D., Billingsley, B., & Brownell, M. (2017). *High-leverage practices in special education*. Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. https://systemimprovement.org/uploads/files/CEC-HLP-Web.pdf

McLeskey, J., Billingsley, B., & Ziegler, D. (2018). Using high-leverage practices in teacher preparation to reduce the research-to-practice gap in inclusive settings. *Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education*, *42*(1), 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1017/jsi.2018.3

Mehta, J., & Fine, S. (2019). *In search of deeper learning: The quest to remake the American high school*. Harvard University Press.

Meirink, J. A., Imants, J., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2010). Teacher learning and collaboration in innovative teams. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *40*(2), 161–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2010.481256

Mertens, S., & Flowers, N. (2004). *Research summary: Interdisciplinary teaming*. North Carolina Association for Middle Level Education. http://www.ncmle.org/research%20summaries/ressum21.html

Merton, R. K. (1975). Thematic analysis in science: Notes on Holton's concept. *Science*, *188*(4186), 335–338. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.188.4186.335

Methlagl, M. (2022). Patterns of teacher collaboration, professional development and teaching practices: A multiple correspondence analysis of TALIS 2018. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, *3*, 100137. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100137

Mieliwocki, R. (2019). How the self-care narrative hurts the teaching profession. *National Network of State Teachers of the Year*. https://www.nnstoy.org/stoyblog/how-the-self-care-narrative-hurts-the-teaching-profession/

Miller, C., & Oh, K. (2013). The effects of professional development on co-teaching for special and general education teachers and students. *Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship*, *2*(1). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1127783

Mitchell, M. P., Ehren, B. J., & Towson, J. A. (2020). Collaboration in schools: Let's define it. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, *5*(3), 732–751. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_PERSP-19-00125

Moats, L. (2014). What teachers don't know and why they aren't learning it: Addressing the need for content and pedagogy in teacher education. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, *19*(2), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2014.941093

Moats, L. C. (2020). Teaching reading "is" rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do. *American Educator*, *44*(2), 4. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1260264

Moats, L. C., & Dakin, K. E. (2008). *Basic facts about dyslexia & other reading problems*. International Dyslexia Association.

Morse, J. M. (2000). Determining Sample Size. *Qualitative Health Research*, *10*(1), 3–5. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973200129118183

Mostovoy-Luna, E. (2025). *From play to learning: The power of co-teaching and UDL*. Novak Education. https://www.novakeducation.com/blog/co-teaching-collaboration

Murawski, W. W. (2010). *Collaborative teaching in elementary schools: Making the co-teaching marriage work!* Corwin Press.

Murawski, W. W. (2012). 10 tips for using co-planning time more efficiently. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *44*(4), 8–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991204400401

Murawski, W. W., & Lochner, W. W. (2017). *Beyond co-teaching basics: A data-driven, no-fail model for continuous improvement*. ASCD.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *The nation's report card: Reading 2011* (NCES 2012-457) [Dataset]. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *The nation's report card: Reading 2015* (NCES 2016-006) [Dataset]. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *The nation's report card: 2019 reading assessment* (NCES 2020-008). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *The nation's report card: 2022 reading assessment* (NCES 2022-126). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2025). *The nation's report card: 2024 reading assessment* (NCES 2024-218). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/

National Education Association. (2022). *Collaborating for student success: A guidebook for education partnerships*. National Education Association. https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/NLMP%20Collaborating%20for%20Student%20Success%20Guidebook%202022%205-5-22.pdf

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read–An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication

No. 00-4769). National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/smallbook

National Research Council. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children* (Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences, & Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Eds.). National Academies Press.

Patrick, S. K. (2022). Organizing schools for collaborative learning: School leadership and teachers' engagement in collaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *58*(4), 638–673. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X221107628

Paulsrud, D., & Nilholm, C. (2023). Teaching for inclusion – a review of research on the cooperation between regular teachers and special educators in the work with students in need of special support. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *27*(4), 541–555. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1846799

Perry, J. A., Crow, R., & Zambo, D. (2020). *The improvement science dissertation in practice: A guide for faculty, committee members, and their students*. 1–180. https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5671513

Ploessl, D. M., Rock, M. L., Schoenfeld, N., & Blanks, B. (2010). On the same page: Practical techniques to enhance co-teaching interactions. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *45*(3), 158–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451209349529

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the teacher shortage: How to attract and retain excellent educators*. Learning Policy Institute. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606767

Porter, S. B., Odegard, T. N., McMahan, M., & Farris, E. A. (2022). Characterizing the knowledge of educators across the tiers of instructional support. *Annals of Dyslexia*, *72*(1), 79–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-021-00242-0

Roberts, G., Torgesen, J. K., Boardman, A., & Scammacca, N. (2008). Evidence–based strategies for reading instruction of older students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *23*(2), 63–69. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2008.00264.x

Rone, B. (2009). *The impact of the data team structure on collaborative teams and student achievement (Publication No. 3397293)* [Doctoral dissertation, Lindenwood University]. https://www.proquest.com/openview/2f4dfb6f0223626696d25bcf9cec61cc/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750

Ronfeldt, M., Farmer, S. O., McQueen, K., & Grissom, J. A. (2015). Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, *52*(3), 475–514. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831215585562

Rubinstein, S. A., & McCarthy, J. E. (2016). Union–management partnerships, teacher collaboration, and student performance. *ILR Review*, *69*(5), 1114–1132. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916660508

Rupley, W. H., Blair, T. R., & Nichols, W. D. (2009). Effective reading instruction for struggling readers: The role of direct/explicit teaching. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, *25*(2–3), 125–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560802683523

Santagata, R., Kersting, N., Givvin, K. B., & Stigler, J. W. (2010). Problem implementation as a lever for change: An experimental study of the effects of a professional development

program on students' mathematics learning. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *4*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2010.498562

Saunders, W. M., Goldenberg, C. N., & Gallimore, R. (2009). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A prospective, quasi-experimental study of Title I schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *46*(4), 1006–1033. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831209333185

Scarborough, H. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In *Handbook for research in early literacy* (pp. 97–110). Guilford Press.

Schwab, S., Holzinger, A., Krammer, M., Gebhardt, M., & Hessels, M. G. P. (2015). Teaching practices and beliefs about inclusion of general and special needs teachers in Austria. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, *13*(2), 237–254. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1085154

Scruggs, T. E., Mastropieri, M. A., & McDuffie, K. A. (2007). Co-teaching in inclusive classrooms: A metasynthesis of qualitative research. *Exceptional Children*, *73*(4), 392–416. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290707300401

Seidenberg, M. (2017). *Language at the speed of sight: How we read, why so many CanÕt, and what can be done about it*. Basic Books.

Shaffer, L., & Thomas-Brown, K. (2015). Enhancing teacher competency through co-teaching and embedded professional development. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, *3*(3), 117–125. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1060818

Shapiro, A., Lee, S., & Woo, A. (2024). *Exploring Foundational Reading Skill Instruction in K-12 Schools: Findings from the 2023 American Instructional Resources Survey. Research Report. RR-A134-23*. RAND Corporation. https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA134-23

Shaywitz, S. E., Escobar, M. D., Shaywitz, B. A., Fletcher, J. M., & Makuch, R. (1992). Evidence that dyslexia may represent the lower tail of a normal distribution of reading ability. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *326*(3), 145–150. https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJM199201163260301

Shaywitz, S. E., & Shaywitz, B. A. (2004). Reading disability and the brain. *Educational Leadership*, *61*(6), 7.

Sindelar, P. T., & Kilgore, K. L. (1995). Teacher education. In M. Wang, M. Reynolds, & H. Walberg (Eds.), *Handbook of special and remedial education: Research and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 393–432). Elsevier Science.

Snow, C. E. (2018). Simple and not-so-simple views of reading. *Remedial and Special Education*, *39*(5), 313–316. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932518770288

Sousa, D. A. (2007). *How the special needs brain learns* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press.

Southern Regional Education Board. (2010). *The three essentials: Improving schools requires district vision, district and state support, and principal leadership*. Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/strategy-6-three-essentials-improving-schools.aspx

Sparks, R. L., Patton, J., & Murdoch, A. (2014). Early reading success and its relationship to reading achievement and reading volume: Replication of '10 years later.' *Reading and Writing*, *27*(1), 189–211. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-013-9439-2

Spear-Swerling, L. (2015). Common types of reading problems and how to help children who have them. *The Reading Teacher*, *69*(5), 513–522.

Spear-Swerling, L., & Cheesman, E. (2012). Teachers' knowledge base for implementing response-to-intervention models in reading. *Reading and Writing*, *25*(7), 1691–1723. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-011-9338-3

Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *21*(4), 360–407. https://www.jstor.org/stable/747612

Stewart, L. (2020). *The science of reading: Evidence for a new era of reading instruction*. Zaner-Bloser. The Reading League.

Supovitz, J. A. (2002). Developing communities of instructional practice. *Teachers College Record*, *104*(8), 1591–1626. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810210400805

Talbert, J. E. (2009). Professional learning communities at the crossroads: How systems hinder or engender change. In A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan, & D. Hopkins (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational change* (pp. 555–571). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2660-6_32

Torgesen, J., Houston, D., Rissman, L., & Kosanovich, M. (2007). *Teaching all students to read in elementary school: A guide for principals*. Center on Instruction. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED521606

Torgesen, J. K., Alexander, A. W., Wagner, R. K., Rashotte, C. A., Voeller, K. K. S., & Conway, T. (2001). Intensive remedial instruction for children with severe reading disabilities: Immediate and long-term outcomes from two instructional approaches. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *34*(1), 33–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/002221940103400104

Torgesen, J. K., & Hudson, R. F. (2006). Reading fluency: Critical issues for struggling readers. In S. Samuels & A. Farstrup (Eds.), *Reading fluency: The forgotten dimension of reading success*. International Reading Association.

Truijen, K. J. P., Sleegers, P. J. C., Meelissen, M. R. M., & Nieuwenhuis, A. F. M. (2013). What makes teacher teams in a vocational education context effective?: A qualitative study of managers' view on team working. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, *25*(1), 58–73. https://doi.org/10.1108/13665621311288485

Turner, M., & Berube, A. (2009). *Vibrant neighborhoods, successful schools: What the federal government can do to foster both*. The Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/30516/411927-Vibrant-Neighborhoods-Successful-Schools.PDF

U.S. Department of Education. (2025). *Building and Sustaining Inclusive Educational Practices Aligned with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. https://www.kyspin.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Inclusive-Educational-Practices-Guidance-01-16-2025.pdf

Van Garderen, D., Stormont, M., & Goel, N. (2012). Collaboration between general and special educators and student outcomes: A need for more research. *Psychology in the Schools*, *49*(5), 483–497. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21610

Vangrieken, K., Dochy, F., Raes, E., & Kyndt, E. (2015). Teacher collaboration: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, *15*, 17–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.04.002

Vellutino, F., Fletcher, J., Snowling, M., & Scanlon, D. (2004). *Specific reading disability (dyslexia): What have we learned in the past four decades? 45*(1), 2–40. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0021-9630.2003.00305.x

Walpole, S., Amendum, S., Pasquarella, A., Strong, J. Z., & McKenna, M. C. (2017). The promise of a literacy reform effort in the upper elementary grades. *The Elementary School Journal*, *118*(2), 257–280. https://doi.org/10.1086/694219

Walsh, K., Glaser, D., & Wilcox, D. D. (2006). *What education schools aren't teaching about reading and what elementary teachers aren't learning*. National Council on Teacher Quality. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED506642

Wang, J., Straubhaar, R., & Ong, C. (2020). Teacher and administrator experiences with teacher recruitment, retention and support in a California charter-led turnaround school. *I.e.: Inquiry in Education*, *12*(1). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1255676

Wanzek, J., & Vaughn, S. (2009). Students demonstrating persistent low response to reading intervention: Three case studies. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *24*(3), 151–163. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2009.00289.x

Wanzek, J., Vaughn, S., Scammacca, N., Gatlin, B., Walker, M. A., & Capin, P. (2016). Meta-analyses of the effects of tier 2 type reading interventions in grades K-3. *Educational Psychology Review*, *28*(3), 551–576. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9321-7

Washburn, E. K., & Pierce, A. (2025). Teaching older struggling readers: Novice 4–12th general and special education teachers' knowledge of foundational reading skills. *Education Sciences*, *15*(6), 745. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15060745

Wexler, N. (2025). *Beyond the science of reading: Connecting literacy instruction to the science of learning*. ASCD.

What Works Clearinghouse. (2022). *Find what works: Literacy interventions*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. What Works Clearinghouse. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW

Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus group methodology: A review. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *1*(3), 181–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.1998.10846874

Williams, A., & Katz, L. (2001). The use of focus group methodology in education: Some theoretical and practical considerations. *IEJLL: International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *5*(3). https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/iejll/index.php/iejll/article/view/496

Williamson, G. L., Fitzgerald, J., & Stenner, A. J. (2014). Student reading growth illuminates the Common Core text-complexity standard raising both bars. *The Elementary School Journal*, *115*(2), 230–254. https://doi.org/10.1086/678295

Winfield, L. F., & Hawkins, R. (1993). *Longitudinal effects of Chapter 1 schoolwide projects on the achievement of disadvantaged students* (Nos. 407412004–001) [Dataset]. Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students. https://doi.org/10.1037/e407412004-001