

RUNNING HEAD: Workshop Model

Effectiveness of Reader's and Writer's Workshop Model in the school district studied.

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop model that has been implemented by a Midwest suburban school district. The workshop model focuses on short “focus lessons” followed by individual choice in reading material to practice the skill that was taught. This method of teaching is used in reading and writing in the district. Based on information gathered from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website communication arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the district are rising despite the increase in students living in poverty. Based on this information one can state that the switch to the workshop model of teaching reading and writing has had a positive effect on test scores. Research was conducted using the state website for elementary and secondary education. The data collected for the purposes of this study were state testing scores for the district for a period of 5 years since implementation of the workshop model in reading and writing. Research regarding poverty rates for the district was included as well. The purpose of this was to analyze student performance while being mindful of the changing demographics of the district. What was found was that student test scores in communication arts are growing despite growing numbers of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. In nearly every case, states assessment scores have grown in communication arts since implementation began.

Introduction

Background Issues and Concerns

There are many goals that schools are expected to meet. The most important of these is to prepare students for a changing workplace. Schools are evaluated at the elementary level by a yearly, standardized test called the Missouri Assessment Program (or MAP). The results of these tests are published each year and are the biggest factor when determining accreditation. With all that in mind, it's easy to see why it's so vital that schools use the most effective teaching techniques. The district being studied has switched to the workshop model to teach reading and writing. Considering what is at stake for the district and its students, it is very important to make sure that the processes being utilized are effective.

Practice Under Investigation

The practice that is under investigation is the utilization of the workshop model in reading and writing by the district. The researcher analyzed data to determine the effectiveness of this practice.

School Policy to be Informed by Study

This study will inform the effectiveness of the workshop model.

Conceptual Underpinning:

When evaluating the effectiveness of a reading program, it is important to understand the intended benefits and the strategy by which those benefits are realized. The workshop model in the elementary and secondary classroom is based on the ideas of student choice, differentiation of reading instruction, as well as authentic reading experiences. Students are brought together for a focus lesson. Focus lessons are short (10-15 minutes) that utilize a quality mentor text which is used to introduce a topic and allow the teacher to model the skill for students in a real world application of the skill. Once the focus lesson has been completed, students are given a task to complete. Instead of a worksheet or a story that everyone is required to read, the workshop model teacher will give his or her students a choice of which text they want to use to accomplish the task. During this independent work time, the teacher has an opportunity to meet with students either individually or in small groups to provide focused instruction on the students' level. Students are given time to accomplish the task and read a text on their level that they chose for a given amount of time (the more the better). Once the independent time has concluded, the students meet with the teacher to discuss their findings in a share-out. The purpose of this is to give closure to the lesson and prepare students for what they will be working on during the next day's lesson. The workshop model increases student achievement in a number of ways. The biggest part of the workshop model is choice. When students choose what they read they enjoy it more, and will therefore be able to read for longer periods of time. This allows for an increase in reading achievement. Students also benefit from reading a book on their own level. If a student is reading something that is either too easy or too difficult, they are not improving their reading

ability. Students who work with their teacher to find quality literature that is just above their reading level will improve more than a student that is reading a story that is not. The workshop model allows for the freedom and choice for students to excel while also allowing an organization style that grants the teacher time to work with students individually to increase achievement. This model of teaching communication arts is beneficial to all students.

Statement of the Problem:

The problem is whether or not the workshop model is truly helping students in the district achieve in reading.

Purpose of Study

In narrowing down topics for this research paper, the focus was on something that was practical and applicable to the district. The challenge was to find something that had changed recently or something that might need to be changed. This topic satisfied all of these criteria. The district has adopted the workshop model for reading and writing. This model has been implemented steadily over the last few years. It is now in full implementation and is an expectation for every teacher in the district, including encore teachers (Music, PE, Art, etc.). This purpose of this study was to research the effects this switch has had on state testing. Has there been a positive trend, a negative trend, or has the switch not made a difference either way? The district and the entire educational community recognize the importance of reading and literacy to a child's intellectual

development. The purpose of this study is to gauge the current focus of the district in reading and writing and its effect on state scores to see if changes should be made.

Research Question

Is there a significant difference in achievement between students that are currently participating in the workshop model and the students that were assessed before workshop implementation began?

Null Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in achievement between students that are currently participating in the workshop model and the students that were assessed before workshop implementation began.

Anticipated Benefits of Study

The more information available, the better the decisions to be made can be. This is particularly accurate when looking at education, due to the increased focus on data-driven teaching. One benefit of this study was to provide the district with a deep statistical analysis of MAP scores in reading. With this information, the district can either continue on the path it's on, or reevaluate the course with the workshop model. The benefit of this study is that, no matter what outcome is discovered (positive, negative, or no effect at all), there can be something positive for the district derived from it. If there appears to be a positive trend in the data for MAP scores, then the district can conclude

that it's doing the right thing and the current path should be continued. If the findings show that there is a negative or neutral trend, then it may be time to start thinking about what can be changed or if this model is the best way to teach reading and writing. Either way, there will be a benefit to the direction of the district. Above all, there will be a benefit to current and future students because curriculum and classroom practices can be adjusted based on the data that will be collected during this study. After all, it is the primary goal of all school districts to prepare their students for a changing world, and this study will give valuable information to the district regarding whether or not they are on the right path to achieve that goal.

Definition of Terms:

MAP: Missouri Assessment Program: The annual assessment that the state of Missouri gives to students between 3rd and 11th grade.

Workshop Model: A style of teaching in which students are taught small “focus lessons” as a whole group then break apart to practice those skills on their own level with their own text. Teacher works with individuals or small groups during that work time.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop model used in the district. A statistical analysis of the MAP data will be evaluated to gauge whether or not the workshop model implementation has had an effect on reading MAP scores. There will also be a T-Test analysis to determine the effect of poverty on the situation. The purpose of the look at poverty and its effect on scores will be to determine

how much of an effect poverty plays on achievement, as well as has the workshop model had a positive effect on all students, including students living in poverty. After this study is completed, the district, as well as other districts in the area, can inform their decision to continue using, begin using, or discontinue using the workshop model for reading and writing. For the purposes of this study the dependent variable is the results of the MAP Communication Arts test and the independent variable is the implementation of the reader's and writer's workshop model.

Review of Literature

In preparing for a study on the effectiveness of a communication arts program in schools, it was important to first get review some professional literature on the subject. There is not one specific type of student that benefits from the workshop model, according to research. Students in the adolescent stage of their growth can benefit from the positive aspects of the workshop model. "I believe that Reader's Workshop not only helped (the student) as a reader, but also permitted me to connect with my student in a way not possible in a traditional classroom environment." (Williams, 2001, p. 601) The student discussed was in a secondary school and was a struggling reader. The article discussed the processes by which the teacher was able to connect to the student and encourage her despite her reading difficulties. This was accomplished with the principals of choice and individual attention associated with the workshop model. One of the individual stories about successes of reader's workshop in an adolescent classroom situation was the story of students' growth of their interest in reading at a secondary school at an alternative school with "high-risk" adolescent students. "'Are we having readers' workshop today?'" a young male student asks in hopeful anticipation. In a classroom of readers, this may not be an unusual question. However, this is a surprising query from a young adolescent in a residential treatment center and school where the primary goals for students include preventing criminal morbidity and personal mortality." (Taylor, 2001, p. 308) This quote perfectly summarizes some of the core strengths of the workshop model. Students are engaged and, if implemented effectively, students want to learn. Students will actually be encouraged to read. This is particularly noteworthy in a

classroom situation that was mentioned in Taylor's article. If an educator can motivate teens in a situation such as that and get them on the track to literacy and perhaps graduation, then the program being used has to be considered quality.

Students in a secondary school are not the only ones that benefit from this model of teaching. Students at any level can benefit, including primary students that are just learning to read. Miller, Nesheim, Taylor, and Taberski (2011) proposed the implementation of the readers' workshop, a student-centered approach to teaching reading in the classroom which allows learners to be actively involved in the process of learning how to read at their own levels. (Mounla, 2011) What this is saying is that, even in a primary classroom such as first grade, students will benefit from the choice they get in what they read and will unknowingly benefit from the differentiation that is inherent in workshop lessons. "Student choice is perhaps the single defining feature of workshop teaching." (Feezell, 2012, p. 234) This quote summarizes the major point about teaching in a workshop classroom. Even when students are just learning to read, there needs to be a sense of choice. Students need to be the ones that choose what they enjoy. This was taken from an article that discussed specific strategies for vocabulary development using a workshop model. This is incredibly important, especially for the younger students that do not have the developed vocabularies required to make deep meaning yet. All of this quality instruction is possible through the use of the workshop model is an effective means of improving the reading levels of students from kindergarten all the way to high school.

One thing that cannot be forgotten is the emphasis that is put on state testing. Like it or not, the biggest factor in accreditation in Missouri is the MAP test. Therefore it is imperative that schools and teachers are utilizing the most beneficial teaching tools at their disposal to improve student learning. Although many states have been granted a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act, the emphasis on and consequences of state testing are still very much prevalent in schools. “The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act requires that schools make "annual yearly progress" in raising student achievement, or face possible sanctions.” (Primont, 2006) The point is that teachers have to get his or her students prepared for the reality of the situation, which is that performance on these assessments is vital to the school and the district. In order to do this, teachers must utilize best practices, which according to the professional literature includes reader’s and writer’s workshop.

A lot of emphasis is put on reader’s workshop specifically. This is only one part of the possible benefits of the workshop model classroom. Writing in a workshop style has a benefit all its own. “Teachers who participate by writing and sharing with their students model the value of conversation. Conversation is at the heart of peer feedback as students learn to create a classroom atmosphere that supports, encourages, and provides meaningful feedback.” (Rothermel, 2004, p. 34) The author focuses on a very specific part of the writer’s workshop classroom, but a very important one. Students who interact with each other and share their ideas will improve their writing in a community of cooperation. This will not only make them better writers, but better readers as well as they will be comfortable with thinking critically about their own writing as well as the writing of their peers.

With inherent differentiation comes a benefit for students that participate in the English Language Learners program. Students that speak a different language at home, or are simply in the process of learning English also benefit from the workshop model, according to professional literature. “Cooperative learning, improves student's learning when they work in groups with structured objectives, promotes individualized accountability, and provides each student with an opportunity to succeed.” (Tran, 2007, p. 61) This article discussed some strategies for the vocabulary development of students in the ELL program as taught through Reader’s Workshop. The same things that hold true for native English speakers hold true for these students. Student choice and cooperative learning are incredibly important to the teaching of any student, including ELL students.

Teachers are not the only professionals that are responsible for the implementation of reader’s and writer’s workshop. Administrators in some districts have the daunting task of preparing a teacher with no experience in the workshop model to become a productive workshop teacher. Principals need to provide quality professional development as well as provide motivation for teachers to improve their craft. The questions also provided information on how a principal ensured that teachers taught reading using the workshop model with fidelity and how the principal ensured that teachers received quality professional development. (Armstrong, 2013) The article makes it very clear that the role of the principal in the workshop classroom is to be a leader and provide the right type of learning experiences for teachers that will prepare them to better meet the needs of their students. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel are

responsibility for the education of students at their school, and must all work cooperatively to meet the educational goals.

Research Methods

Research Design:

The research design used was a thorough statistical analysis using what is called a descriptive analysis. The goal was to compare the MAP scores for the district starting just before the district switched to the workshop model to the most recent scores. After this, the goal was to create a chart showing the direction of the scores and in order to be able to see if there is a legitimate change in scores during that time. A t Test analysis was also administered to focus on the scores of those students on Free and Reduced Lunch. This will isolate one factor that affects test scores and gauge how much of a factor it is on the scores overall. The Free and Reduced Lunch Data will be used to decide whether or not the workshop model remains effective despite growing numbers of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Study Group Description

In 2013, the district had a total student population of 18,928. This includes percentages of the following populations: White: 64.3%, Black: 12.0%, and Hispanic: 12.7%. In 2013, the district had 9,098 students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. This represents 48.7% of the total student population. This number is just below the state average of 49.9% of all students in Missouri that are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. The district is located in a large Midwestern city's suburbs. This is typically seen as a middle class part of the city. One could argue that the area is becoming less and less middle class due to the climbing number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. While still below the state average, those numbers have climbed nearly 8% since 2009

and up nearly 19% since 2004. With these numbers in mind, one could make the argument that the district is one that is growing in terms of students in poverty. The purpose of looking at poverty is to bear in mind that there are multiple factors that affect student achievement. Can the workshop model help the district increase communication arts scores despite the growing number of students living in poverty? The MAP scores from the entire district will be used for the purposes of this study.

Data Collection and Instrumentation:

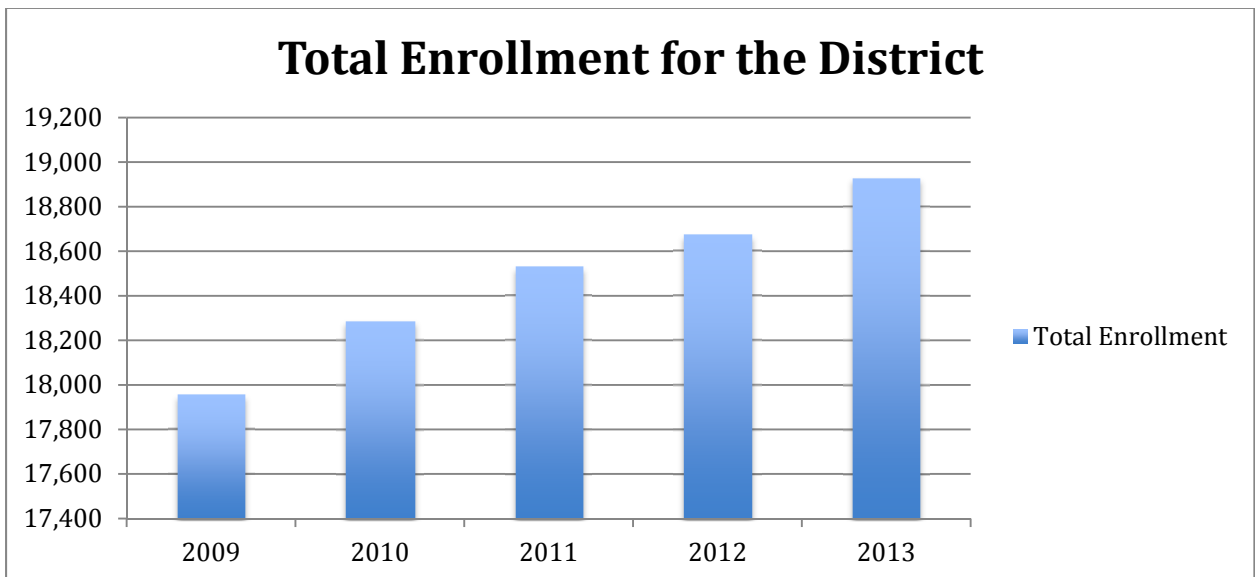
The information gathered for this study was done using the “District Grade Card” service on the DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) Website. All numbers are current up to 2013.

Statistical Analysis Methods:

A descriptive analysis of the DESE data was administered in order to analyze the numbers effectively and reach a logical conclusion about the direction of the scores. A t Test analysis was given as well to look at the effect of Free and Reduced Lunch students on those outcomes.

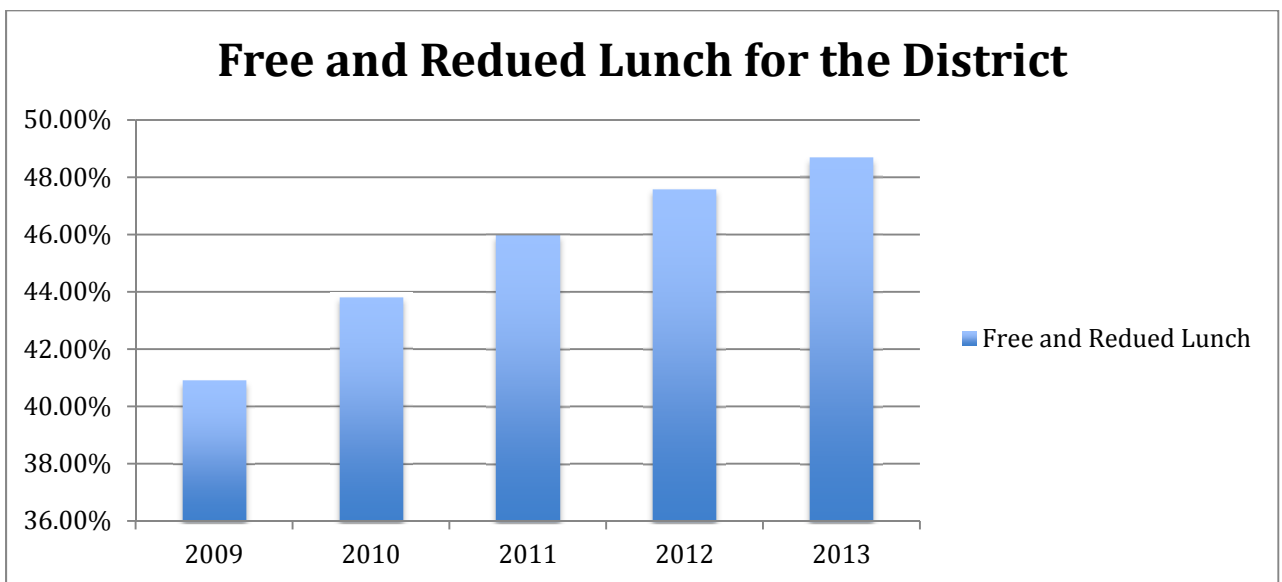
Findings

MAP data from 2009 through 2013 was compiled for the purposes of this study. The study also looked at the growth of the student population as a whole as well as the growth of the percentage of students that qualified for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. The information about free and reduced lunch numbers was included to be sure to keep in mind all possible factors that may have led to the scores discovered. The first graph was a look at the growth of the district with regards to student population. Overall, the district grew from 17,955 students to 18,928 in the time frame of this study. This represents a growth of 973 students, or 5% of the student population. This is represented in the following graph.



The next aspect was the effect of poverty on the scores. If there was a significant increase in the students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch program, the researcher felt that it would be worth noting. It is generally accepted that poverty does play a role in the performance of schools, and there is a T-Test that was conducted for district scores to

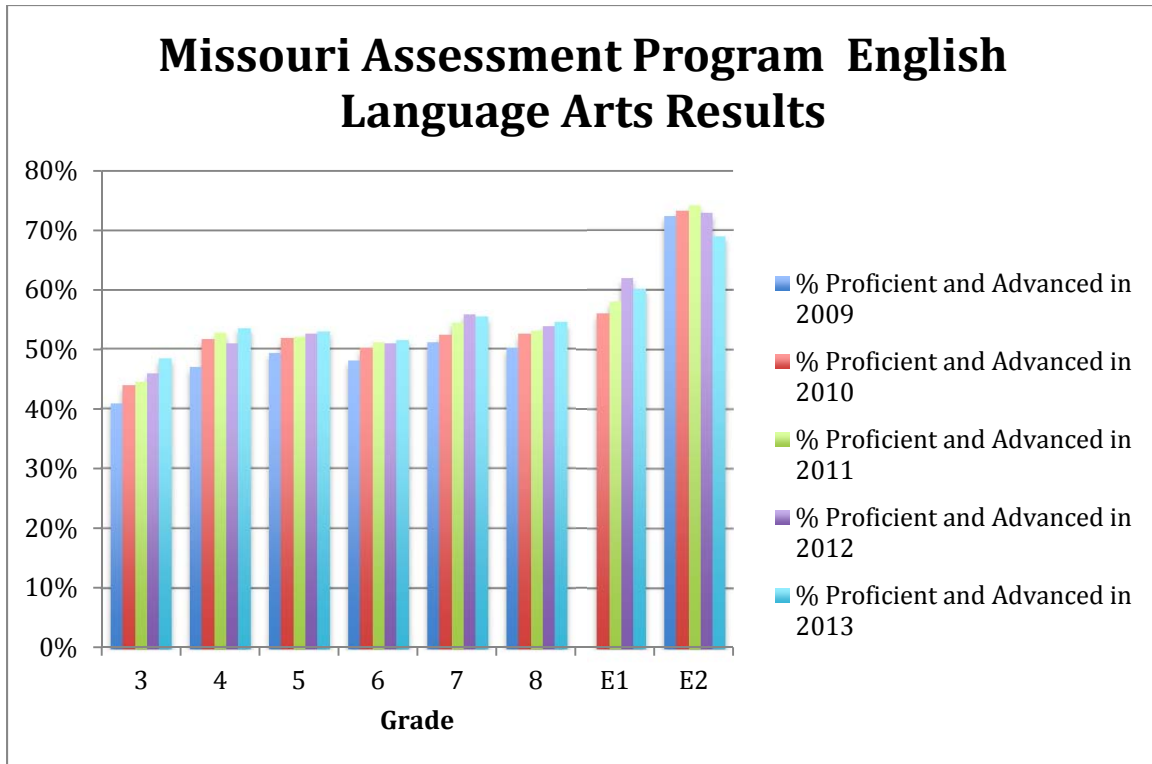
analyze the effect that poverty plays on reading scores. It is not the only thing that matters, nor is it a factor that is insurmountable. The researcher just felt it was important to include information about the growing number of free and reduced lunch students to illustrate another big factor that affects student achievement. Just as student enrollment grew during this span, students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch grew as well. In 2009, there were 40.9% of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. By 2013, that number grew to 48.7%. This represents a growth of 7.8%. These numbers are illustrated in the graph below.



After these numbers were gathered, it was time to take a look at the Missouri Assessment Program numbers. Overall, there was an across the board increase. Proficient and Advanced percentages from each year by each grade were compiled. The numbers are as follows. Third grade is the year that students begin taking the test. The third graders began at 41% proficient or advanced in 2009 and finished at 48.5% in 2013. This

is an increase of 7.5%. 47% of fourth graders scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2009. 53.5% of fourth graders were proficient or advanced in 2013. This represents an increase of 6.5%. 49.4% of fifth graders scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2009. 53% of fifth graders scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2013. This represents a growth of 3.6%. 48.1% of sixth graders scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2009. In 2013 that number grew to 51.6%. This represents a growth of 3.5%. 51.1% of seventh graders scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2009. This number grew to 55.4%. This represents a growth of 4.3%. 50.2% of 8th graders scored at the proficient or advanced level. At E1, 56.1% of students scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2010. 60.3% of those students scored at the proficient or advanced level in 2013. This represents an increase of 4.2%. At the E2 level, 72.5% of students scored at the proficient or advanced level. The scores actually fell for this group to 69.1% in 2013. This represents a decrease of 3.4%. This information is shown in the following table and graph.

Grade	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
3	41%	43.90%	44.50%	46%	48.50%
4	47%	51.70%	52.70%	50.90%	53.50%
5	49.40%	51.80%	52.10%	52.60%	53%
6	48.10%	50.20%	51.10%	50.90%	51.60%
7	51.10%	52.40%	54.40%	55.80%	55.40%
8	50.20%	52.50%	53.10%	53.90%	54.50%
E1		56.10%	58.10%	62%	60.30%
E2	72.50%	73.30%	74.20%	73%	69.10%

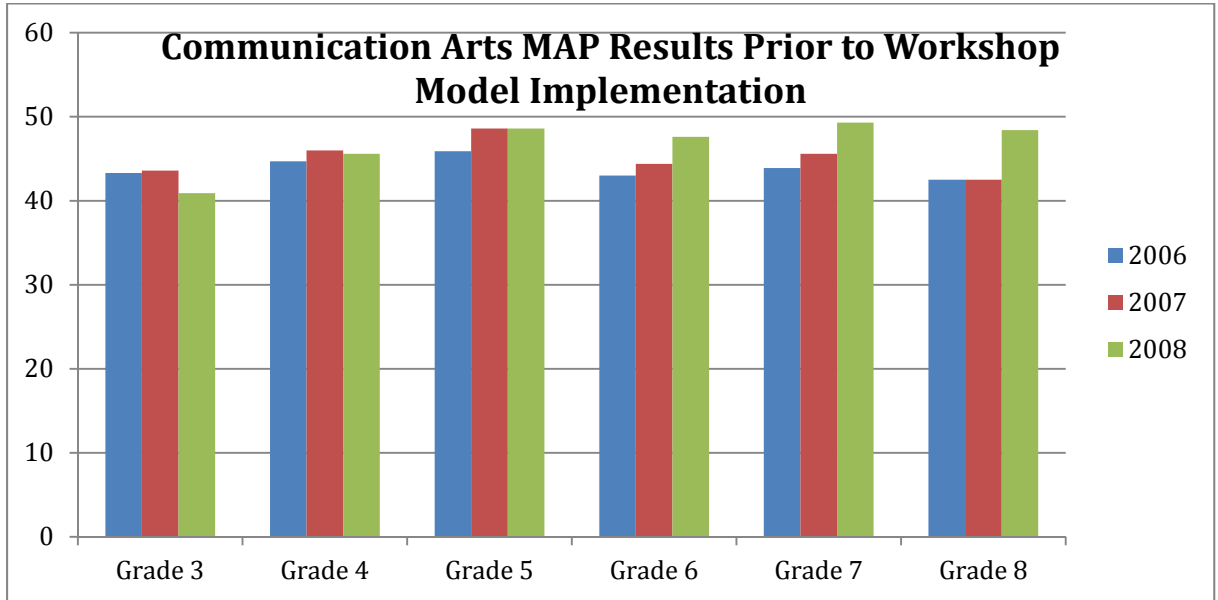


As seen in this graph, there was growth almost across the board. 2009 was the lowest score in every level excluding E2. The graph shows an upward trend at almost all levels. This shows that the decisions that have been made in regards to moving towards full implementation of the Workshop Model is working. According to the data, the increase in student choice has led to increases in achievement on this test.

In order to fully analyze this data, the results from the years preceding the switch to the workshop model must also be analyzed. By doing this the effectiveness of the workshop model for the district can be determined. The state website only included MAP data from 3rd grade through 8th grade going back to these years. Therefore only 3rd through 8th grade scores will be compared. The data are as follows:

Workshop Model 20

Grade Level	2006	2007	2008
Grade 3	43.3	43.6	40.9
Grade 4	44.7	46	45.6
Grade 5	45.9	48.6	48.6
Grade 6	43	44.4	47.6
Grade 7	43.9	45.6	49.3
Grade 8	42.5	42.5	48.4



It is easier to analyze the two sets of data by viewing it in a chart. The chart shows the percentage of growth or decline from the first year to the final year, comparing the data before implementation of the workshop model, as well as the data compiled after implementation began.

Pre Workshop Model		Post Workshop Model	
Grade 3	-0.60%	Grade 3	+7.50%
Grade 4	+0.90%	Grade 4	+6.50%
Grade 5	+2.70%	Grade 5	+3.60%
Grade 6	+4.60%	Grade 6	+3.50%
Grade 7	+5.40%	Grade 7	+4.30%
Grade 8	+5.90%	Grade 8	+4.30%

As shown in these graphs, there was growth in achievement in both cases with one exception being that 3rd grade scores were dropping in the years prior to implementation of the workshop model. The numbers that jump out in particular are the elementary school numbers. These numbers were rather stagnant and in the case of 3rd grade were actually going down. This changed considerably after 3rd grade began implementation of the workshop model. According to this data, there has been a considerable increase in student achievement for elementary aged children since implementation began. The higher grades have continued their increases as well. The growth has not been as steady, falling by around 1.5%, however the important thing is that the scores are still increasing. It can be concluded that, particularly in the elementary grades, not only has implementation been working, it has caused scores to outpace the increases the students were showing before implementation began.

The final statistical analysis conducted was a t Test to determine the correlation of poverty on MAP Scores to see if the scores are affected by the affluence of the students that attend the school. The goal is to inform district decisions about how best to increase achievement on the state test. The researcher wanted to make sure all factors were taken into account. One of the bigger factors is the effect of poverty on test scores. The researcher wanted to analyze this for the district. The results are shown in the table below.

t-Test Analysis Results for Free or Reduced Lunch and Proficient or Advanced on Missouri Assessment Program

Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Lower 50% (n=1)	57.61				
Upper 50% (n=2)	41.3	16.31	6.13	2.70	1.48E-6

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

The Free and Reduced Lunch numbers have been split into a “top half” of percentage which has been reclassified as “2”, and the “bottom half” of percentage which has been reclassified as “1”. Basically what this means is that that schools that have low numbers of students that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch are labeled with the number 1. Schools that have a greater number of students that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch are labeled with a 2. Group 1 consists of 15 schools with percentages of free and reduced lunch that range between 17.7% and 55.2%. Group 2 consists of 15 schools with percentages of free and reduced lunch that range between 57.6% and 80.4%. The

researcher then used the ASP software to figure out the mean MAP Score in Communication Arts for both halves. The results showed that the schools in the lower half of Free and Reduced Lunch outscored the schools with higher numbers of Free and Reduced Lunch. The mean for the lower half is 57.61% proficiency. The mean for the upper half is 41.3%. This is a difference of 16.31%. This shows that being in the bottom half of Free and Reduced Lunch numbers, on average, means an increase of 16.31% on the MAP for Communication Arts.

The P Value is extremely small. It is $1.48E-6$. Since this is well below the Alpha Level of .25, the null hypothesis must be rejected. In this case, the null hypothesis stated that poverty has no effect on test scores in the district. This must be rejected. According to this data, with this P Value, there is significant, statistical evidence that poverty (shown by percentage of free and reduced lunch) has a strong effect on the test scores for the district.

Conclusions and Recommendations

What does all of this mean for the district? First of all, it is a growing district. The student population has grown 5% since 2009. That's almost 1,000 students added to the enrollment of the district. It is also known that this growth has been accompanied by a growth of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. The pace of growth for Free and Reduced Lunch students is actually outpacing the overall growth of the district. The student population grew by 5% and the population of students that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch grew by 7.8%. Using the t Test analysis, it is also known that, for this district, higher numbers of Free and Reduced Lunch means lower test scores in Language Arts. There was found a significant statistical correlation between the percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch students and achievement on the Communication Arts MAP test. What this should mean is a drop in scores for the district. The poverty numbers are growing, so we should be seeing a drop in test scores, however that is not the case. Despite the increase in the poverty numbers, the district's reading MAP scores GREW an average of 3.8%. This is a sign that, despite the changing student demographics, reading instruction is becoming more effective. The research question was, "Has the switch to the Reader's and Writer's Workshop Model had an effect, positive or negative, on state assessments?" After statistical analysis and the t Test analysis, the answer to that question is yes, there has been a positive effect on test scores for the district by utilizing the Reader's and Writer's Workshop Model.

Recommendations for the district would be to stay the course on implementation of the workshop model. The district should continue to heavily focus professional development on effective techniques to make teachers more competent in this area. The district must also continue to invest in literature. Classrooms need quality literature on the shelves and teachers need quality text for focus lessons. In order for students to grow fully in their reading, they must be surrounded by quality literature. Another recommendation for the district is to continue community outreach that has been happening. Many schools are classified as Title 1 and receive special grants based on the household income of the families that attend. The statistical evidence shows that poverty has a very negative effect on test scores, so there needs to be a lot of work with low-income families. Parents in these homes need to be given the tools to help their children succeed. Some may need adult education, some may need books for their homes, and some may need to simply be instructed on how to get involved with their children's education and how to hold them accountable. Since the population of the district is typically growing to be less affluent, these community and social outreach programs must continue or the positive gains the district has seen may start to stall or even slide. With the continued emphasis on the Workshop Model as well as a continued investment in the communities, the district can continue to make the gains they have been making and will be preparing a new generation of students for an ever-changing world.

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