

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS AS TO HOW THE MISSOURI LEARNING  
STANDARDS ARE IMPACTING THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AT-RISK  
STUDENTS

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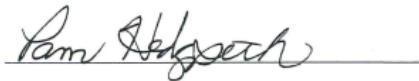
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have examined a dissertation entitled:

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS AS TO HOW THE MISSOURI LEARNING  
STANDARDS ARE IMPACTING THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AT-RISK  
STUDENTS

Presented by, Debbie Ross, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education and hereby  
certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.



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STUDENTS

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department

Southwest Baptist University

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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By

Debbie Ross, B.A., M.S. M.S. Ed., Ed. Administration, Ed.Spec.

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May 2018

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## Abstract

The role of the government in creating standards from which curriculum was to be developed, caused states to realize a need for curriculum specific to the educational needs of students. In the 1990s, Missouri began the process of creating standards from which curriculum would be developed. Once the Common Core State Standards were created and adopted by states, political leaders and educational leaders in Missouri began to realize that Standards specific to the students in Missouri needed to be developed. A committee of politicians, educational leaders and parents began writing a new set of standards from which curriculum would be developed.

The committee created the Missouri Learning Standards. The Missouri Learning Standards with an increased emphasis in the English language Arts Standards. With the creation of the Missouri Learning Standards and the increased emphasis on the reading and writing standards, English Language Arts teachers in public middle school and high schools in Missouri perceived the increased rigor in the English Language Arts standards may impact the success of at-risk students.

The purpose of this study was to determine if English Language Arts teachers in Missouri public middle school and high schools perceived the new English Language Arts Standards may be impacting the success of at-risk students. Statistical analysis included Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-tests adjusted for unequal sample sizes at the  $p < 0.05$  level, and ANOVA, and CrossTab analysis. The key findings gleaned from the data could be the basis for further research.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) (2016), the graduation rate for Missouri students rose slightly from 88.40 percent in 2015, to 88.80 percent in 2016. Although there was a slight increase, there are some contributing factors impacting the less than significant growth in the graduation rate such as poor attendance, the idea that obtaining a General Educational Development (GED) Diploma is easier, feeling alienated at school, having poor relationships with students or teachers, the need to work to support their family, dislike of school, failing grades, and failure to keep up with the rigorous curriculum (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Political factors are impacting the curriculum used for instruction in today's classrooms. In 2009, a committee of Chief Council of State School Officers (CCSSO) and governors met to begin the task of creating a set of standards each state would adopt known as the Common Core State Standards. The group's focus was to provide targets or goals designed to ensure the educational needs of all students would be met and at the same time decrease the dropout numbers for at-risk students (Common Core Standards, 2017). While some states embraced the idea of a universal set of standards to develop curriculum, Missouri decided to establish a set of standards that would meet the needs of students enrolled in Missouri public schools. Governor Jay Nixon signed Senate Bill (SB) 380, moving away from the Common Core State Standards and allowing teacher and parent groups to develop recommendations for revising the Common Core State Standards (Bidwell, 2014).

Prior to the development of the Common Core State Standards, Missouri had a set of standards referred to as the Show-Me Standards from which Grade Level Expectations

(GLEs) for grades K-8 and Course Level Expectations (CLEs) for secondary courses were created. Educators focused instruction and assessment around the learning goals set forth in the Show-Me Standards and implemented those standards through the GLEs and CLEs, which were used as the guide for the statewide Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) summative assessment. Missouri House Bill (HB) 1490 provided for a seventeen-member panel comprised of educators, parents, and school administrators to develop a set of standards to meet the educational needs of students enrolled in public schools in Missouri (Missouri House Bill (HB) Number 1490, 97<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2014). A set of standards known as the Missouri Learning Standards was developed by the panel and approved by the Missouri State Board of Education. From the Missouri Learning Standards, educators were to create curriculum (Missouri House Bill (HB) Number 1490, 97<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2014).

The Missouri Learning Standards increased rigor and accountability in the classroom to ensure every student enrolled in Missouri schools would be prepared to meet the demands of a global economy (Bidwell, 2014). The Missouri Learning Standards mirrored the Common Core State Standards' premise that all students should be "college and career ready". This study focused on examining whether the increased rigor of the Missouri Learning Standards impacted the success of students already struggling in Missouri schools.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study used the conceptual framework of "at-risk". Graduating from high school continues to be a challenging goal for many students. There are many reasons students drop out, and some of the most prevalent reasons include student's

socioeconomic level, disengagement from school, absenteeism, educational level of the parent(s), failure in the classroom and failure to be promoted to the next grade. For these reasons, students may decide dropping out of school is the only recourse available to him/her (American Psychological Association, 2012).

The Missouri Learning Standards and the increased rigor of those standards, may pose another barrier for at-risk students graduating high school. In fourth grade, the number of standards required to be taught in the classroom by the Missouri Learning Standards increased from thirty to one hundred nineteen (Sparks, 2016). This study was based on the premise the Missouri Learning Standards, specifically the English Language Arts Standards, were more rigorous and as such, hindered at-risk students from achieving success in the classroom. At-risk students face problems and issues that hinder success in their educational endeavors. The perceived increase in rigor of the Missouri Learning Standards, in the area of English Language Arts, may also impact the success of at-risk students. With the increased rigor of the Missouri Learning Standards, students who are already considered to be at-risk, will become more disenfranchised and drop out of school. The increased rigor of the Missouri Learning Standards requires all students, including at-risk students, be successful with the content and performance expectations in order to graduate from high school.

The term “at-risk” usually describes students who have experienced or who are predicted to experience failure during their schooling years (Beken, Williams, Combs, and Slate, 2009). At-risk students are students who are not experiencing success in school, are low academic achievers, exhibit low self-esteem and may leave school before high school graduation. They come from all socioeconomic levels, and tend to be from a

variety of ethnic backgrounds (Leedy & Omrod, 2012). The level of education that the parent or parents attained, the socioeconomic level of the parents, and the employment status of parents all have an impact on a student being labeled “at-risk”, and students living in a non-English speaking household are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1995). Statistically, in 2009, students from low-income families dropped out of school five times more than students from higher socioeconomic levels (American Psychological Association, 2012). Dropping out of high school limits chances of future success for many children, and it deepens and continues the cycle of poverty into future generations. An education is the lifeline that enables young people to lift themselves out of poverty (Greenberg, M., Weissberg, R., O’Brien, M., Zins, J., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M., 2003). Students who experience academic failure, due to absenteeism or a lack of engagement are in the category of failure to succeed and leave school (Balfanz, 2007).

The Department of Elementary and Secondary education has a Crosswalks document comparing the Show-Me Standards adopted in 2010 to the Missouri Learning Standards adopted in 2016. On the Crosswalks document, the term *rigor* is used when comparing the Show-Me Standards to the Missouri Learning Standards in the area of English Language Arts (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). At-risk students who are not experiencing success with the Grade Level Expectations and Course Level Expectations in the area of English Language Arts may be even less successful with the perceived rigor of the English Language Arts Standards.

## **Problem Statement**

The introduction of the Missouri Learning Standards may have an impact on the success of at-risk students. At-risk students are students who are affected by environmental conditions that negatively impact educational performance or threaten the likelihood of promotion or graduation (Juneau, 2010). Raising standards and continuing to implement more rigorous standards may ensure the majority of Missouri students will graduate with the skills needed to be successful in future endeavors, but at-risk students in the state of Missouri may have been adversely impacted by increased rigor in Missouri Learning Standards, specifically in the area of English Language Arts (Bidwell, 2014).

## **Purpose of the Study**

A transient population with a high degree of mobility necessitated the need for a universal set of standards to create curriculum to be implemented in all public school classrooms across the United States irrespective of district size or location. The universal set of standards would ensure students were receiving the education necessary to be successful in a global market (Kelley, 2004). Once the Common Core State Standards (2010) were adopted by the states, educational leaders began to realize curriculum needed to be designed specifically to meet the needs of students enrolled within the respective states (Bidwell, 2014).

Missouri, initially adopted the Common Core Standards, but later passed Missouri House Bill 1490, in 2014, which created a work group consisting of parents and educators to develop a set of viable standards specifically, designed for Missouri public schools. (Bidwell, 2014).

With the introduction and implementation of the new Missouri Learning Standards there may be cause for an increased level of concern as to whether at-risk students would be able to meet the rigor of the curriculum. The Missouri English Language Arts Standards have an increased focus on informational reading, literary reading, expository writing, narrative writing, argumentative writing, and speaking and listening which may contribute to a lack of success for at-risk students (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Students who do not complete high school not only affect themselves, but also have a negative impact on society. During the lifetime of a dropout, he/she could potentially cost the nation \$260,000 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). High school dropouts are more likely to be on welfare, have poorer health, have reduced intergenerational mobility, become teenage parents, be unemployed or depressed, have substance abuse problems, engage in violent behaviors, and end up incarcerated (Diament, 2016).

This study collected and reviewed data from rural, suburban and urban public middle schools and high schools in Missouri that have implemented the Missouri Learning Standards. It analyzed the perceptions of English Language Arts teachers in Missouri's schools to determine if the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards was impacting the success of at-risk students.

The researcher chose to do a quantitative study with the focus on the existing relationships and perceptions among the different variables. In addition, the researcher included a qualitative review using open-ended questions in an attempt to uncover the meaning of people's experiences by understanding their point of view (Kvale, 1996). Using open-ended questions generated responses, which were a source of raw data

(Patton, 1987). Qualitative research involved breaking the data into manageable parts, organizing and discerning whether patterns emerged and making a decision as to what was important and what should be shared from the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The researcher sought to explain, predict, or control the data under study based on relationships (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). A quantitative approach is a systematic and acceptable means for a researcher to look at data and draw solid conclusions (Burns, 2000). Missouri public middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers were surveyed to determine perceptions of the impact of the Missouri Learning Standards on the success of at-risk students.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed within the context of this study:

1. What are the differences in perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards that impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?
2. What are the differences in perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on the geographic location of the district related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?
3. What are the differences in perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience related to the Missouri English Language Arts Learning Standards that impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

4. What are the perceptions of Middle School and High School English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

### **Research Hypotheses**

In an effort to answer the aforementioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were investigated:

1.  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant relationship between the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language arts teachers and the Missouri Learning Standards impacting at-risk students' success in completing English Language Arts courses.
2.  $H_0$  There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on location of their district related to the Missouri Learning Standards impacting at-risk students' success in completing English Language Arts courses.
3.  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of experience related to the Missouri Learning Standards impacting at-risk students' success in completing English Language Arts courses.

### **Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions**

#### **Limitations.**

The limitations for this study were derived from a perceptual survey given to Middle School and High School English Language Arts teachers.

1. Schools in the study have varying demographics.

2. Perceptions may change over time
3. The number of participants who respond to the online survey
4. The willingness of English Language Arts teachers to participate in the survey.
5. Perceptions of English Language Arts teachers in rural, suburban and urban areas may vary.

### **Delimitations.**

Delimitations may exist in the research study and are as follows:

1. This study was limited geographically to Missouri.
2. The study was limited to Middle Schools and High Schools.
3. The study focused on schools in Missouri as classified by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).
4. The study did not include charter or private schools.

### **Assumptions.**

1. It is assumed that participants who received electronic invitations chose to participate and took the survey themselves.
2. It is assumed not all surveys were completed and returned.
3. It is assumed participants responded honestly.

### **Design Controls**

A quantitative study was utilized with some qualitative, descriptive and inferential support. Descriptive research was used to summarize or describe a set of observations on current characteristics of given populations (Pelham, 2013). Survey research can be used to gather various types of information about a particular group's attitudes toward a

specific research topic. Survey data are collected by asking members of a population a set of questions, which can be administered in a questionnaire mailed or emailed (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009).

Participation by respondents can be problematic; therefore, the researcher, in this study, utilized electronic responses along with a follow-up two weeks after the original survey was sent to allow additional time for non-respondents to participate by submitting responses to the survey.

An advance email was provided to all district administrators explaining the purpose of the study, the study's significance, and commitment to share results with participants upon request. A request was made of the district administrators to forward the survey instrument to all English Language Arts teachers. Contained within the email, the assurance of both anonymity and confidentiality were addressed which would help to increase the truthfulness of responses as well as the percentage of returns (Gay, et. al., 2009).

### **Significance of Study**

Meeting the needs of all students and ensuring the acquisitions of skills necessary to become a productive member of society is the goal of education through implementation of a viable curriculum (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Standards provide the basis for writing a viable curriculum ensuring the success of students rather than impeding the at-risk student from obtaining a quality education. It is imperative students' educational needs are met and with the implementation of the English Language Arts Standards and the increased rigor, at-risk students may not experience success in the classroom.

Students, who do not graduate, create many societal issues for which there are no easy solutions. This study strove to determine if the Middle School and High School teachers in Missouri had concerns about the rigor of the English Language Arts Standards affecting the success of at-risk students. The study examined whether the geographic location of the district, years of experience, or the grade configuration impacted English Language Arts teachers' perceptions of at-risk students' success with the English Language Arts Standards. The findings of the research provided educational leaders with information and insight that may drive policies and practices which advocate for appropriate and relevant standards and curriculum for at-risk students. Understanding the difficulties at-risk students face and understanding the rigor of the English Language Arts Standards, will enable educators to better understand the situations at-risk students face when challenging curriculum is introduced in the classroom.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms are important to the understanding for the purpose of this study. A definition of each term was described to provide clear understanding of these components.

**At-risk.** For the purpose of this study will be defined as a “pupil who leaves school for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school” (Underwood, 1980).

**Missouri Learning Standards.** The Missouri Learning Standards define the knowledge and skills students need in each grade level and course for success in college, other post-secondary training and careers (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

**Course Level Expectations.** The basic and higher-order skills, including problem solving and critical thinking for each course taught in school (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

**Rural Schools.** A territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).

**Suburban Schools.** A territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).

**Urban Schools.** A territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population for 250,000 or more (Department of elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).

## **Summary**

The intent of this study was to examine the impact of the Missouri Learning Standards, specifically the English Language Arts Standards on the at-risk student population in public middle schools and high schools in Missouri. In order for Missouri's public middle schools and high schools to meet the needs of all students, a viable curriculum must be implemented to ensure students are successful in the acquisition of skills necessary to be productive members of society (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). When creating and implementing curriculum, it is imperative to address the needs of all students including the subgroup of at-risk students. The at-risk subgroup poses a great challenge to educators who must ensure these students are engaged in the learning process.

Chapter One provided an overview and introduction to the rationale for researching the possible impact the Missouri Learning Standards might have on the population of “at-risk” students in English Language Arts classrooms in Missouri public middle school and high schools. Chapter Two provided a review of literature dealing with the development of curriculum and its impact on the at-risk students in English Language Arts classrooms across Missouri. Chapter Three provided an overview of the research design. Chapter Four provided results of the data collection used in this study. Chapter Five summarized the findings and provided implications and recommendations related to the research questions.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The graduation rate in Missouri for 2016 was 88.8%. (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). Some of the factors contributing to students failing to graduate include poor attendance, the idea that obtaining a General Educational Development (GED) Diploma is easier, feeling alienated at school, having poor relationships with students or teachers, needing to work to support family, dislike of school, failing grades, and failure to keep up with the rigorous work (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Instruction in today's classrooms has also been impacted by many political factors that could possibly impact the success of at-risk students.

A committee of Chief State School Officers and governors came together to begin the task of creating a set of standards each state would adopt known as the Common Core State Standards. The focus of this group was to design targets to help ensure that students' educational needs would be met and at the same time decrease the drop out number of at-risk students (Common Core Standards, 2017). Jay Nixon joined other governors and moved away from the Common Core State Standards when he signed Missouri House Bill (HB) 1490 allowing teacher and parent groups to develop recommendations for revising the Common Core State Standards (Bidwell, 2014). Missouri House Bill (HB) 1490 established work groups that created a new set of standards referred to as the Missouri Learning Standards currently being implemented in Missouri's classrooms. Prior to these new targets, Missouri had a set of standards referred to as the Show-Me Standards from which curriculum known as the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) for grades K-8 and Course Level Expectations (CLEs) for the high

school level were created. Educators focused instruction and assessment around these legislated targets, which were used as the guide for the statewide Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) summative assessment.

This study examined the effect of the Missouri Learning Standards, specifically the English Language Arts Standards, on the graduation rate of at-risk students. For the purpose of this study, the term “at-risk” referred to students who were affected by environmental conditions that negatively impacted their educational performance or threatened their likelihood of promotion or graduation (Juneau, 2010).

This chapter provided a review of the literature covering the following topics: history of education accountability, Missouri accountability history, creation of the Missouri Learning Standards, Missouri English Language Arts Standards, characteristics of at-risk students, factors impacting graduation, literacy’s impact on the graduation rate, and the effects on society of dropouts. The history of education accountability provided an overview of the federal government’s passage of educational legislation and how, over time, those laws have impacted education at the state and district levels. A review of the development of the Show-Me Standards to the Grade Level Standards (GLEs) and the Course Level Standards (CLEs) to the Missouri Learning Standards was covered in this chapter. The Missouri English Language Arts Standards were reviewed as well as the increased rigor of the standards and the effects the standards may have on students deemed at-risk of achieving success in the classroom. The study-analyzed characteristics of at-risk students, reasons at-risk students drop out of school, literacy and at-risk students, and the impact dropouts have on society.

Themes covered in the literature review provided insight for educators as to why students drop out of school, the characteristics educators need to look for in students to determine whether they are at-risk of not graduating, the importance of literacy skills in equipping students for success in school and after graduation, and finally the impact that dropouts have on society.

### **History of Education Accountability**

The beginning of the Industrial Revolution prompted a shift from an agrarian culture to an industrialized – urban culture, which created a need for educated workers; thus, the era of compulsory education was born and mandatory school attendance until the age of 14 was required by law (Dorn, 2010). At the turn of the century, America realized public education was a necessary social investment (Clifford, 1978). Educating the youth of America has presented a challenge since the formation of America’s public school system (Clifford, 1978).

With the continuous evolution of society and the numerous changes after two world wars, leaders decided the education system needed to be more rigorous in order to ensure that Americans would be successful in their future endeavors and would meet the demands of the world as it evolved (U.S. Council of Economic Advisors, 2000). According to the U.S. Council of Economic Advisors (2000), “Education played an important role in the advancement of the individual worker, the workforce, and the economy; and during the 20th century, there was a steady increase in educational attainment” (p. 278).

The launch of Sputnik I on October 4, 1957, spurred new technological, scientific, military and political developments and ushered in the beginning of the space age and the

U.S. – U.S.S. R. space race (Garber, 2007). The space race led to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) creating a demand for a more highly skilled and educated workforce. Advancements in technology and the focus on science, due to the space program, created an increased demand for skilled laborers and in the 1960s, no one would hire anyone without a high school diploma (Toepfer, 1992).

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) a fundamental component of the “War on Poverty”. President Johnson believed the ESEA would provide "full educational opportunity" which should be "our first national goal" (Education Act of 1965).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was the first time the government had passed a comprehensive act regarding the education of American children. President Ronald Reagan issued The Nation at Risk (1983) report, which named American education as the reason the United States was lagging behind other countries in technology, industry and science. Education in the past had been something of which to be proud, but the report indicated education in America had become mediocre at best and Americans seemed willing to settle for mediocrity. The foundation of education was being eroded by mediocrity that threatened the future of the nation and a people and the only hope the nation had was through education (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

Leaders recognized the ESEA of 1965 did not help to close the achievement gap between ethnic groups and socioeconomic groups; thus, it became necessary to pass legislation to address this gap. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was the reauthorization of the ESEA, and was aimed at education reform to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. No Child Left

Behind was a comprehensive program designed to meet all of the facets of education as well as the subgroups being educated in American schools. President George W. Bush described this law as the "cornerstone of my administration." The comprehensive plan contained the following four principles: accountability, flexibility, research-based reforms, and parental options (United States Department of Education, 2006). Continuing with federal involvement in education, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law on December 10, 2015. Every Student Succeeds Act included provisions to promote success for students and schools by ensuring all students would be taught to high academic standards that would prepare them for success in college and their futures (Compulsory Education Laws: Background, 2017).

With continued increase in technology and the increasing demand for a skilled labor force, political leaders once again looked at the education being provided to students in American schools. In 2009, Arizona Governor, Napolitano, decided the education being offered in American schools was not preparing students with skills to be successful in the future. To begin the process, a task force composed of commissioners of education, governors, corporate chief executive officers and experts in education from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia began work creating a set of standards to promote college-and career-ready standards in mathematics and English Language Arts (Bidwell, 2014). As the group began the work, they realized the task might prove more difficult than was first anticipated due to the variance of standards from state to state (Bidwell, 2014). The process began by researching the expectations of high performing countries around the world as well as what students needed to know to be considered college and career ready. Based on the data gathered from the committee's

research, the Common Core State Standards were developed which encompassed the skills students needed to know and be able to do to be successful in all aspects of life (Bidwell, 2014). Development of the learning standards included defining expectations for what every child should know and be able to do when they graduate from high school and then creating content standards for grades K-12 aligned with these expectations (Bidwell, 2014). To ensure involvement from all stakeholders, the committee continually sought input by putting the draft online for comments (Caldwell, 2015). In 2009, much of the work done at the state level was completed with feedback from patrons and in 2010, the standards were completed and published (Bidwell, 2014). Publication and review of the Common Core State Standards was available June of 2010. At this time, states were encouraged to review, consider, and voluntarily adopt the Common Core State Standards (Caldwell, 2015).

### **Background of Missouri Standards in English Language Arts**

In 1993, Missouri legislators passed Senate Bill (SB) 380, the Outstanding Schools Act. The intent of the bill was to improve the quality of education for all students through improved academic performance, increased educational funding, innovative and enhanced programs, and increased accountability. To ensure this would occur the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) was created to provide a system of accountability for Missouri schools (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Missouri School Improvement Plan's goal was to ensure all schools met certain standards and worked toward excellence (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). Missouri's accountability today includes test scores, college

and career readiness measures, graduation rates, attendance rates, and subgroup achievement scores (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

In January 1993, with the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 380, Missouri adopted the Show Me Standards from which grade level expectations and course level expectations were to be created (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1996). The Show-Me Standards were approved by the Missouri State Board of Education, January 18, 1996. The standards were built on the belief the success of Missouri's students depended on both a solid foundation of knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply knowledge and skills to the types of problems and decisions students would likely encounter after graduation (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). The Show-Me Standards had four goals for students in Missouri: the art of questioning and data gathering, communicating in a clear and precise manner, problem solving and responsible decision-making. The Show-Me Standards provided a blueprint for districts to develop curriculum (Department of elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

Once the Show-Me Standards were created, the task of creating standards at each grade level began and from this work curriculum frameworks for each grade was established which later became the grade level expectations (GLEs). The GLEs were created to serve as a blueprint for teachers in creating instruction to meet the targets specified in the Missouri Show-Me Standards (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education., 2017). The GLEs specifically targeted elementary grades so for high school courses Course Level Expectations (CLEs) were created for each course taught on the secondary level. State assessments were created to ensure schools were providing a quality education to students. The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) was created to

assess the learning of students from grades 3 through 8 in the areas of English Language Arts, math, social studies and science. On the secondary level to ensure that, students were receiving the highest quality education, end of course exams (EOCs) were eventually created for courses taught at the secondary level (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

The purpose of the Missouri Learning Standards was to ensure students learned basic and higher-order skills, including problem solving and critical thinking. The standards are relevant to today's world and reflect the knowledge and skills students need to be successful in the future (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). All students need to have the necessary English and mathematics, science and social studies knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the future (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

### **Creation of Missouri Learning Standards and English Language Arts Standards**

The Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 required schools to ensure students graduated with the skills necessary to be successful after graduation. Missouri legislators and Missouri educators created the Show-Me Standards that schools used to develop curriculum. The Show-Me Standards contained a set of seventy-three standards that listed the skills students would likely encounter after graduation (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Along with the Show-Me Standards, an assessment program was also created to ensure students were mastering the standards set forth in the Show-Me Standards. The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) was created to assess students across the state of Missouri. A framework was created from which curriculum would be written and implemented in classrooms. The framework was divided into two

sections. The first section contained the standard goals and the second section presented the Show-Me content or the knowledge standards. Four process standards were identified in the first section of the frameworks. From the frameworks, grade level expectations were created based on the standards detailed in the Show-Me Standards. Grade level expectations were created for the elementary grades and course level expectations were created for courses taught on the secondary level. The course level expectations were created based on the Show Me Standards (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005).

Missouri State Board of Education opted to adopt the Common Core State Standards in 2010. Representative Kurt Bahr, of O’Fallon, Missouri, and other legislators began working to block the implementation of the standards. Bahr sponsored Missouri House Bill (HB) 1490, signed into law in July 2015, by then Governor, Nixon, which formalized Missouri’s decision to create standards specifically aimed at meeting the educational needs of students in Missouri schools. The law established a committee of education professionals, Nixon, the state education commissioner, and the state board of education to design standards for English, math, science, history and government specific to the needs of students in Missouri schools (Missouri House Bill 1490, 97<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2014).

The committee created the Missouri English Language Arts Standards with increased rigor and expectations for reading and writing skills. Third-graders under the GLEs were required to meet thirty standards, but the new standards required the same students to meet one hundred nineteen standards requiring specific skills (McKinney, 2016). In the area of English Language Arts, the Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education provided a set of Crosswalks to help educators navigate from the Grade Level Expectations and the Course Level Expectations to the Missouri Learning Standards. The English Language Arts Standards utilized the word rigor to indicate the level of increased skill necessary to achieve success on the particular strand. For example, one of the reading standards uses the word rigor to explain the difference from the Grade Level Expectations to the Missouri Learning Standards. Children are asked to “explain” and “analyze” rather than “determine” (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). In the area of curriculum, sixth through twelfth grades, the terminology “increased rigor” is used fourteen times when comparing the standards (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). The increased rigor correlates to the skills a student would need to be able to accomplish the given task.

### **Characteristics of At-Risk Students**

The term at-risk usually describes students who have experienced or who are predicted to experience failure during their schooling years (Beken, et al., 2009). At-risk students are students who are not experiencing success in school, are low academic achievers, exhibit low self-esteem and may leave school before high school graduation. They exhibit impulsive behavior and their peer relationships are problematic (Beken, et al., 200). They have disciplinary and truancy problems family problems, drug addictions, pregnancies, habitual truancy, incarceration and delinquency. Other characteristics include family welfare, marital status of the family, parental educational attainment, income levels, employment status, or immigration status as well as the primary language spoken in the household not being English (Rumberger, 2008). Students considered at-risk tend to display low academic self-concept and low self-efficacy (Ender & Wilkie,

2000). An at-risk student has the potential to drop out of school due to circumstances over which the student has no control such as living in a single parent household, an older sibling dropped out of school, and low grades between sixth and eighth grades all have been suggested as reasons that students drop out of school prior to graduation (Horn, 1997). Other research suggests that students at risk of dropping out of school come from all socioeconomic levels, and tend to be of various ethnic backgrounds (Omrod, 2012). Students can be considered at-risk for a variety of reasons and may display any number of characteristics recognized as at-risk (Ender & Wilkie, 2000).

Students at risk come from all socioeconomic levels, but children of poor, single-parent families are especially likely to leave school before high school graduation. Characteristically, at-risk students are typically non-participatory students in the classroom and school activities, have lived in poverty and are not reading proficiently in third grade are about three times more likely to dropout or fail to graduate from high school than those who have never been poor (Sparks, 2011).

Educators fear placing labels on students may cause students to be denied the right to an education. Students who leave school prior to graduating tend to not pursue a certificate of graduation (Azzam, 2007). Despite the negative consequences of dropping out of school, many students, particularly those from low-income families, have continued to be problematic (Hammond, 2007).

### **Factors Impacting Graduation**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the high school graduation rate was about 6 percent and by the end of the century it had risen to about 80 % (Educational Projects in Education Research Center, 2012). In the early twentieth century, 96 percent of

individuals 18 and older had not completed school but were employable (Thurlow, M. L., Sinclair, J. F. & Johnson, D.R., 2002). The term “drop out” entered the lexicon in the 1960’s when a number of students were withdrawing from school prior to graduation (Underwood, 1980). In 1962, the Department of Education defined “dropout” as a “pupil who leaves school for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school (Underwood, 1980). A dropout can be defined as any child who is unlikely to graduate, on schedule with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to have meaningful life experiences (Underwood, 1980). Students drop out of school every day in the United States for a variety of reasons. Students who dropped out of school were interviewed regarding their reasons for leaving school prior to graduation and the reasons given were 47 percent were bored with school; 43 percent chronic absenteeism; 42 percent spent time with individuals not interested in education; 38 percent had too much freedom and not enough structure in their lives; and 35 percent were failing (Azzam, 2007).

Potential high school dropouts have been categorized into four categories, which are life events, fade-outs, push, outs and failure to succeed (Balfanz, 2007). Life events may include situations outside of school such as teen pregnancy, foster care placement, or moving and changing schools frequently. Fade-outs are students who leave school due to frustration, boredom or lack of success in the classroom. Push-outs are students encouraged, sometimes by school officials to withdraw or transfer because they are perceived to be difficult, discipline problems and/or detrimental to the success of the school and other students. Students in the category of failure to succeed are students who

leave school after continually experiencing academic failure, due to absenteeism or simply a lack of engagement (Balfanz, 2007).

School attendance is vital for success in school and many of the students targeted as at-risk have poor attendance records, which exacerbates the struggle with academics. At the eighth grade level, being absent an average of one day per week is an indicator of a student potentially dropping out in high school (Convissor, 2015). Students who do not attend school regularly have lower academic performance, limited future employment opportunities and experience social and emotional problems in adulthood (Askeland et al., 2015; Buscha & Conte, 2014; Nolan et al., 2013; Thorton, Darmody & McCoy, 2013).

Relationships students form at school with peers and teachers is vital for a sense of belonging and students perception of the ability to succeed in school. Transitioning to the ninth grade or to high school can be very difficult for youth already struggling for reasons such as poor academic success, alienation, and the increased rigor of the curriculum (Balfanz, R., Legters, N., 2006). A critical point in the educational career of a student is the transition into ninth grade and the possibility of failing at this juncture higher than at any other grade level and is a good predictor of whether a student will choose to leave school before graduating (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).

Socioeconomic level has also been listed as a reason for young people to drop out of school. Statistically, in 2009, students from low-income families dropped out of school five times more than students from higher socioeconomic levels (American Psychological Association, 2012). Dropping out of school limits the potential of students and continues to perpetuate the cycle of poverty from which they may come, and it deepens and

continues the cycle of poverty into future generations (Greenberg, et al., 2003). A good education is the lifeline that enables youth to lift themselves out of poverty (Greenberg et al., 2003). Students who graduate today find themselves competing for jobs in a global market, one that requires a high degree of skill and begins with a high school education. Since today's students are the future workers, citizens, and leaders, the mission for every school should be to educate students and prepare them to become knowledgeable, responsible, socially skilled, healthy, caring, and contributing citizens (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Single-parent homes have become the norm in the United States and many older children in this type of home believe it is their responsibility to help support the family and therefore drop out of school to go to work. Due to a family's financial situation, older students feel the need to drop out of school to obtain a job to help family (Schargel, 2013).

Student mobility has an impact on academic success (Astone & McClanahan, 1994; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). A change in a student's location at the ages of seven years or younger or ages twelve to fifteen has a negative effect on student achievement. Adolescents who are mobile during high school face an interruption in their social group and school and these items are harmful to academic performance (Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding (1991). Students changing schools even once between grades eight and twelve were less likely to complete high school (Rumberger and Larson, 1998). Increased mobility results in discipline problems (Chen, 2008).

One of the most noticeable factors impacting the graduation rate was the number of minorities and non-English speaking students. The percent of Caucasian students enrolled in American schools declined from 66 percent to 59 percent from 1993 to 2003 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

### **Literacy's Impact on the Graduation Rate**

American youth need strong reading and writing skills to succeed in school, work, and in general, life. Most students are able to decode or sound out words on a page, but many fail to master critical reading and writing skills that include the ability to comprehend, understand the use of increasingly complex vocabulary, or to write for various purposes (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011). Literacy development at an early age is vital to later academic success. By the time students reach the third grade, there are indicators as to whether the child will be successful or may be at risk of dropping out of school. Learning to read by the third grade is very important, as future learning in the upper elementary grades where more complex reading skills are required (American Psychological Association, 2012). A student's reading level in the third grade is one of the most significant predictors of eighth grade reading level and ninth grade course performance (Lesnick, Joy., George, Robert m., Smithgall, Cheryl., Gwynne, Julia, 2016). A student without proficient reading skills by the end of third grade is unlikely to graduate from high school (Washington DC National Academy Press, 1998).

Children who are not reading proficiently by fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school and according to the NAEP only thirty-four percent of America's fourth graders read at grade level (Dell, 2012). Reading proficiently is

generally considered an important factor in influencing graduation rates. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) implemented in 1969 is a testing procedure that has become the “yard stick” measuring what students know and can do in certain curricular areas. National Assessment of Educational Progress (2006) data determined only three percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and five percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders are reading at advanced levels. Even more troubling 25 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 26 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders do not have even partial mastery of the fundamental reading skills that are expected at their perspective grade levels. Hodges stated in a report published in 2001, that 40 percent of American 10 year olds cannot pass a fundamental reading test (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Students with low literacy skills ultimately drop out, making up a sizeable portion of the nearly 7,000 students who drop out of high school every day. Half of the incoming ninth graders in urban, high-poverty schools read three years or more below grade level (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). A student who cannot read on grade level by third grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 and a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time (Sparks, 2011). Another group of researchers found that reading scores in kindergarten were significantly lower for high school dropouts (Hickman, G.P., Bartholomew, M., Mathwig, J., & Heinrich, R.S., 2008). Poor reading performance of students is a substantial academic barrier in all areas of the curriculum. Students who cannot read at grade level will continue to struggle as they proceed through school. Reading proficiently is generally considered an important factor in influencing graduation rates (Hickman, et. al., 2008).

An estimated 1.3 million American high school students drop out every year and many are youth of color. It is also estimated that half of the incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders in urban, high poverty schools read three years or more below grade level (Alliance for Educational Excellence, 2011). Kindergarten reading scores were a good indicator of students potentially becoming a high school dropout (Hickman, et al., 2008).

International measures of reading place American 15 year-olds 14<sup>th</sup> among developed nations in reading, lagging behind countries such as Poland, Estonia, and Iceland. According to NAEP, known as the nation's report card, 70 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students read below grade level, which is a major predictor for students at risk of dropping out of high school (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011). Literacy skills are critical to academic success and life opportunities for every child and student.

### **Effects of Dropouts on Society**

The number of dropouts may increase over the next decade causing substantial problems for the United States, and statistically one study reported that a student drops out of high school every nine seconds (Hickman, et.al, 2008). One estimate suggests that approximately 12 million students will drop out over the next decade costing the United States approximately \$3 trillion dollars (Alliance for Educational Excellence, 2011). At the state level, 36 billion dollars and on the federal level, 158 billion dollars or more were lost every year due to the lower wages earned by high school dropouts whose average annual income was \$19,540 compared to \$27,380 for a high school graduate (American Psychological Association, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the median income of persons ages 18

through 67 who had not completed high school was roughly \$25,000 in 2009 (2011). The future job prospects for many dropouts continued to be one of low paying jobs (Woods, 1995). The relative earnings of high school dropouts are lower than those for students who complete high school and/or college. High school dropouts experience more unemployment during their work careers. At the current rate, America will continue to lag behind on the global scale with a less than prepared work force and many of the potential dropouts will be enveloped in a life of poverty and disappointment (American Psychological Association, 2012).

High school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated and three times more likely to be unemployed, which has a profound economic impact on the individual and the community (Bridgeland, J., Diulio, J. and Morison, K., 2006). The risk of incarceration (jails, prisons, juvenile detention centers) for male dropouts is significant. In 2007, male dropouts aged 16-24 were 6.3 times more likely to be institutionalized than high school graduates and compared to those with a bachelor's degree or higher, the risk skyrocketed to 63 times more likely. The cost of incarcerating youth can range anywhere from \$35,000 to 70,000 per bed per year (Leone, P. E., Christle, C., Nelson, Michale, Skiba, Russell, Frey, Andy, and Jolivette, Dristine, 2003). Overall, the outlook for dropouts holds very little promise of success, but the odds increase dramatically for dropouts to be living in poverty on government assistance or worse to be incarcerated (American Psychological Association, 2012).

Young women that drop out of school are more likely to become a single parent living on welfare and/or receiving some type of government assistance. Again, the cost of supporting these households puts an additional strain on the government budget and

affects every member of society. Young women who drop out of high school are more likely to become pregnant at a younger age and more likely to become single parents (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995).

Students dropping out of school has a negative impact on the economy of the United States. If dropouts from the class of 2009 had graduated, the nation's economy would benefit from nearly \$335 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). When students drop out of high school, it has wide-ranging effects on society because a high school dropout rate diminishes the pool of qualified people from diverse backgrounds who will enter the professional and political ranks that make important public policy decisions (American Psychological Association, 1996). The life style that high school dropouts seem to be unable to escape may cause them to have shorter life spans than their peers who graduate from high school (American Psychological Association, 2013). Curbing the dropout rate will have positive effects on the nation as a whole. Ensuring that students graduate from high school has increased benefits for the nation due to the increased purchasing power, higher tax rates, higher levels of worker productivity, and increased civic activity of high school graduates (American Psychological Association, 2013).

### **Summary**

Governmental leaders have sought ways to improve the education being offered to students in the United States. Although many laws have been passed to improve the quality of education, the number of students considered at-risk of not graduating continues to be an issue. Students leave school for many reasons and as the government seeks ways to improve education, the state of Missouri has implemented the new set of

Missouri Learning Standards that are more rigorous and may further impede the graduation chances of at-risk students in Missouri public schools.

Students are at risk of not graduating for many reasons. A student's inability to be successful in the classroom is a factor indicating whether a student is at risk of dropping out. Increasing the rigor of curriculum may serve to hinder those students at-risk and struggling in the classroom.

Students dropping out of school have a negative impact on the economy of the United States. Many of the students that leave school prior to graduation end up on welfare or in low paying jobs that do not permit advancement. The cost of dropping out of school presents a financial loss to the economy. It is imperative that educators find ways to ensure the academic needs of all students are being met which will in turn protect the economy of the country as well as the future of the individual student.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

In consideration of the problem statement presented in Chapter One, a quantitative study was chosen with additional qualitative open-ended questions. The introduction of the Missouri Learning Standards may have an impact on the success of at-risk students in Missouri public middle schools and high schools as perceived by English Language Arts teachers. At-risk students are students who are affected by environmental conditions that negatively impact their educational performance or threaten their likelihood of promotion or graduation (Juneau, 2010) Presented in this methodology chapter are: purpose of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, participants, pilot process, research procedures, research design, instrumentation, data analysis, and summary.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study focused on identifying the perceptions of English Language Arts teachers in Missouri regarding the impact of the English Language Arts Learning Standards on a- risk students in Missouri public schools. Due to the transient population today, educational and political leaders determined there was a need for a universal set of standards from which curriculum could be developed and implemented in all states and in all schools regardless of district size or location. The standards would ensure all students across the United States were receiving the education that would make students able to be successful in a global market (Kelley, 2004).

Once the need for a universal curriculum was realized, educational and political leaders of America created Common Core State Standards (Kelley, 2004). After the adoption of Common Core State Standards, state educational leaders realized the need for a curriculum specifically designed to meet the educational needs of students. While some states developed a set of standards specifically designed to meet the educational needs of their students, other states simply chose to continue using the Common Core State Standards by just renaming the standards (Bidwell, 2014).

Initially, several states, including Missouri, adopted the Common Core Standards, but later Missouri passed House Bill (HB) 1490, which required educational standards be developed by Missouri's parents and educators. These work groups were charged with creating a viable set of educational standards to meet the educational needs of Missouri's students. Once the educational standards were created, curriculum would be developed at the local level. Missouri House Bill (HB) 1490, passed in 2014, provided the guidelines for the development of the standards as well as the required committee members. The committee created the Missouri Learning Standards from which school districts across Missouri would develop curriculum to be implemented in classrooms (Bidwell, 2014).

Limited research has been done in Missouri examining Missouri Learning Standards' impact on the success of at-risk students. The CLEs and GLEs include the reading standards of literary reading and information reading and all of the writing standards which include narrative, expository, and argumentative writing and standards in reading and writing, but there is more of a rigorous emphasis specially on us on informational reading and argumentative writing, which may be prove to create a lack of success for at-risk students (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

At-risk students, experiencing a lack of success may see no other option, but to drop out of high school negatively impacting themselves and society. During the lifetime of a dropout, he/she will cost the nation approximately \$260,000 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). High school dropouts are more likely to be on welfare, have poorer health, have reduced intergenerational mobility, become teenage parents, unemployed, depressed, have substance abuse problems, engage in violent behaviors, and end up incarcerated (Diament, 2016).

This study looked at rural, suburban and urban public middle schools and high schools in Missouri and analyzed the perceptions of English Language Arts teachers to determine if the increased rigor of the Missouri Learning Standards was impacting the success of at-risk students. The researcher chose to do a quantitative study, which is a systematic and acceptable means to look at data and make solid conclusions (Burns, 2000). The researcher sought to explain and predict the phenomena under study based on the relationships between the variables (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). In addition, the researcher did a qualitative review utilizing open-ended questions. Open-ended questions attempted to uncover the meaning of people's experiences by understanding their point of view (Kvale, 1996). Using open-ended responses provided raw data, which gave the researcher the respondents' thoughts and experiences (Patton, 1987). Qualitative research involves disaggregating the data into manageable parts, organizing and discerning whether patterns emerge and then making a decision as to what is important and what should be shared from the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

English Language Arts teachers in Missouri were surveyed to determine perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards on at-risk students. Analysis determined

if the perception of the English Language Arts teachers in Missouri believed the English Language Arts Standards to have an impact on the success of at-risk students.

This study attempted to research the impact the current Missouri English Language Arts Standards may have on at-risk. With the introduction and implementation of the new Missouri Learning Standards, there could be cause for an increased level of concern for at-risk students' success in meeting the rigor of the curriculum and potentially dropping out of school. The literature examined the potential impact dropping out of school has on the individual student as well as the impact on society. This study looked at rural, suburban and urban middle schools and high schools in Missouri that have implemented Missouri Learning Standards and analyzed the perceptions of English language arts teachers in those schools to determine if the increased rigor of the Missouri Learning Standards was impacting the success of at-risk students.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed within the context of this study:

1. What are the differences in perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards impacting the success of at-risk students?
2. What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on the geographic location of the district related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?
3. What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience relative to

the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

4. What are the perceptions of Middle/High School English/Language Arts teachers relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

### **Research Hypotheses**

RQ4 used the descriptive approach to the data, thus, no null hypothesis was tested. In an effort to answer the aforementioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were investigated:

- 1  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers and the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.
- 2  $H_0$  There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on geographic location of the district relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.
- 3  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of experience related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in completing English Language Arts courses.

## **Participants**

The researcher utilized a selection process surveying rural, suburban and urban middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers in Missouri public school districts. Four hundred ninety middle school and high schools were identified from the 2017-2018 data base on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website (“District and School Information”, 2017). The study included publically funded schools and excluded those that only serve students with disabilities and gifted. The accountability system for the aforementioned schools require students to be tested on the English Language Arts Standards.

The district administrators from the list were contacted to gain permission to survey the middle school high school English Language Arts teachers in their districts. Once school district administrators granted permission, the survey was administered electronically to all English Language Arts teachers. Four hundred ninety Missouri public schools were invited to participate in the study. Twenty-nine Missouri schools opted not to participate leaving 461 public middle schools and high schools as participants. Four hundred sixty-one superintendents were sent the email with the survey and were asked to forward the email to the English Language Arts teachers in their middle school and high school. Each district administrator superintendent was informed Chapter Five would be available upon request once the study was completed.

Approximately 2,957 teachers received the survey via forwarded email from their district superintendent with 87 English Language Arts teachers participating. Of the approximately 2,957 English Language Arts teachers received the survey via forwarded email from the district superintendent, 347 viewed the email. Furthermore, 116 English

Language Arts teachers started the survey, and 87 English Language Arts teachers completed the survey for a completion percentage of 2.9 percent. Of the 116 English Language Arts teachers that began the survey and the 87 English Language Arts teachers that completed the survey there was a 75 percent completion rate based on this data. All demographic information and survey responses were secured and password protected with QuestionPro software. QuestionPro software has built-in safeguards to ensure the study remained anonymous and confidential.

Ethical considerations were made to ensure there were no risks for participants including anonymity and confidentiality from whom research data were collected. An email was sent inviting all to participate, explaining the purpose of the study, its significance, and a commitment to share the results with the participants. By inviting a large sample size, the opportunity to collect data from all demographic areas in Missouri was attempted.

A permission letter was sent to all public middle school and high school district administrators in an electronic format. The introduction and permission letter (Appendix A) were disseminated to Missouri public school administrators to seek permission for participation of English Language Arts teachers in the middle schools and high schools within their districts. Once permission was obtained, the introductory letter, and survey (Appendices A and B) were disseminated to Missouri public middle school and high school district administrators.

The survey posed demographic questions to identify the geographic location of the district, grade configuration, years of teaching experience, and the number of at-risk students in English Language Arts classrooms throughout the day. The survey provided

open-ended questions for participants to provide input regarding the impact of the Missouri Learning Standards on the success of at-risk students assigned to their classrooms. Data relating to the number of years of experience was divided into subgroups of experience from 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 15-20 years, 21-25 years, 25-30 years, and more than 30 years of teaching experience. The survey also asked for the number of at-risk students the English Language Arts teachers had in their classroom through the course of a day. The data relating to the number of at-risk students was divided into subgroups from 1-5 at-risk students, 6-10 at-risk students, 11-15 at-risk students, 16-20 at-risk students, 21-25 at-risk students, and more than 26 at-risk students.

The researcher took careful consideration to maintain the anonymity of the participants by only asking questions directly related to the study. The participants were not asked to identify the district in which they were employed nor were they asked to provide any personally identifying information.

### **Pilot Process**

Once the questions for the survey tool were created using the literature review, the researcher and university professors thoroughly examined each statement to ensure the statements aligned with the designated purpose of the tool. A panel of experts, including 20 retired English Language Arts teachers, came together to test for construct validity. The results of the pilot panel were used to modify and improve the survey tool. The pilot was designed to address the content validity of survey questions. The survey tool, as presented in Appendix B, was used to gather feedback from education experts.

The survey results were uploaded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for data analysis. Construct validity is the degree to which the questions

measure the intended purpose of the study. To measure the strength and consistency of the items, a Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability and validity of the items. The survey was edited for clarity and reliability.

### **Research Process**

The survey, the ethics certificate, the consent form and the Research Review Board (RRB) application were submitted to the RRB. Upon completion of the pilot survey, necessary revisions and edits were made. The period of data collection began following approval from the RRB. The researcher chose to utilize QuestionPro to create the online survey. The use of QuestionPro, as the survey method, permitted the researcher to disseminate the survey and obtain survey responses in a very timely manner. A list of schools included in Missouri was obtained from DESE ("School Information, 2018). The researcher initiated distribution of the survey on March 22, 2018, by contacting district administrators and sending invitation emails. District administrators were asked to forward the survey to the English Language Arts teachers in their districts. The email to the district administrators explained the nature of the study along with the directions for those who wished to participate in the study. District administrators agreeing to participate, forwarded the surveys and instructions to the English Language Arts teachers in their district. Participants were given the opportunity to accept or decline participation at the beginning of the online survey. The data collection window remained open approximately four weeks and closed on April 24, 2018.

By utilizing an electronic survey format, and selectively choosing the time frame to implement the survey, the researcher hoped to increase the response rate. In addition to utilizing the electronic survey format, the researcher also provided an opportunity for an

optional incentive in the form of a drawing for a gift card for interested participants. Participants who wished to provide their name and district via email to the researcher were entered in a drawing to win one of 20, ten-dollar Amazon gift cards.

The researcher initiated the first attempt in data collection for this study March 22, 2018. Once the initial time frame for the completion of the survey was closed, a follow up email was sent with an extension of one week for respondents to participate in the survey. Finally, one week later on April 24, the window for survey participation was closed after four weeks and no further responses were collected. The researcher used QuestionPro to store the data.

### **Research Design**

A quantitative research design was utilized for this study using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Additionally, the open-ended questions of the survey were analyzed using a qualitative approach looking for themes from participant responses. Qualitative data provided the researcher the opportunity to study the open-ended responses in the context of the participants in the field (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). In accordance with the guidelines of Southwest Baptist University, a review was conducted by the Research Review Board to ensure participants were adequately protected. There was minimal to no risk to participants in this study. Information regarding the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality was provided in the email invitation to participate (See Appendix A). A district administrator was contacted by the researcher to gain permission and serve as a distributor of the survey via email.

The study attempted to encompass all public middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers across the state of Missouri to offer a comprehensive

analysis to identify the perception of the English Language Arts teachers on the impact the English Language Arts Standards have on at-risk students. The results were disaggregated according to the descriptive questions, the inferential questions and the qualitative questions to gain insight into the perceptions of the English Language Arts teachers who participated in the survey. For RQ1 and RQ2, the Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test was used, then for RQ3, the ANOVA was used to look at possible strong points of differences in the teachers' responses. For RQ4, data was analyzed using CrossTabs and open-ended questions to analyze the perceptions of English Language Arts teachers regarding the Missouri Learning Standards impact on the success of at-risk students.

### **Instrumentation**

To meet the requirements of the study the instrument was designed by the researcher and advisors and revised based on feedback provided by the pilot group. The researcher used the Web-based survey tool, QuestionPro to design a survey sent to all 490 Missouri public middle schools and high schools in an electronic format. The survey utilized questions that provided demographic information. This information was collected to assist in separating groups for analyzing and comparing the perceptual data collected. Perceptions of the English Language Arts teachers regarding standards were rated using a 1-6 Likert scale. A selection of 1 indicated the respondent strongly agreed, 2 moderately agree, 3 agree, 4 disagree, 5 moderately disagree, and 6 strongly disagree. The survey instrument also provided respondents with the opportunity to answer open-ended questions providing insight into the thoughts and perceptions of the participants.

An email was sent to each Missouri public school with an introductory letter (Appendix A) and the attached survey (Appendix B). District administrators were then asked to forward the attached survey to English Language Arts teachers in their districts. A completed survey was recorded as the teacher's agreement to participate in the study. Results of the survey instrument would remain anonymous. A follow-up email was sent two weeks after the initial email as a reminder to complete the survey. An additional email was sent as a follow-up as an attempt to prompt participation in the survey.

Participants were made aware participation in the study was voluntary. The researcher developed the survey to send to all public middle school and high school district administrators. Then the surveys were then sent to the English Language Arts teachers in their districts. Prior to distribution, the survey was piloted to 20 English Language Arts teachers. The pilot group included teachers representing the targeted survey group of the study. The pilot group was asked to answer all questions on the survey instrument. Upon completion of the survey, by the pilot group, the collected data was analyzed.

The degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results is known as reliability (Phelan & Wren, 2007). Using SPSS, an Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test adjusted for unequal sample sizes to determine if there was a significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level. RQ1 and RQ2, were analyzed using Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-tests. For RQ 3 the ANOVA statistical test was used. For RQ4, a Cross Tab analysis was utilized to consider the various groups of teachers' responses to the survey items and the researcher further considered open-ended question data to triangulate and support the statistical data collected.

In research, validity refers to how well a test measures what it meant to measure (Phelan & Wren, 2007). The validity in quantitative research has been described as “construct validity”. The construct is the initial concept, notion, question or hypothesis that determines which data is to be gathered and how it is to be gathered (Wainer, Braun, 1998). Quantitative research actively causes or affects the interplay between construct and data to validate the validity of the research (Joppe, 2000). The results collected from quantitative data can be further examined by reviewing the responses of participants to related open-ended questions. This evidence can provide additional insight and help gain a deeper understanding of participants’ thinking related to a study’s focus.

To test the validity, the researcher piloted the instrument on 20 retired English Language Arts teachers. The individuals were familiar with English Language Arts Standards and helped to help determine if questions measured what was intended by the overarching research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The data for this study was collected using QuestionPro software and then transferred to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis. Demographic data were analyzed to describe the characteristics of the participants in this study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze all components of the survey. This quantitative study was conducted to determine if English Language Arts teachers perceived the English Language Arts Standards provided an opportunity for at-risk students to experience success. The study also utilized qualitative open-ended questions to support the quantitative data.

Analysis for RQ1 and RQ2 included the inferential statistic Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test which was conducted on each of the survey's individual items and used to adjust for unequal sample sizes. Significance was noted at the  $p < 0.05$  level. An ANOVA was used to determine if there was a difference in one independent variable from another for RQ3.

RQ3 was analyzed by running the data with the ANOVA statistic examining the perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of experience. There were seven groups designated for years of experience for this question. The ANOVA for this data was tested at the .05 level of significance. If a statistical significance is found using the ANOVA for years of experience, then Tukey's HSD will be run as appropriate

Research Question 4 was analyzed using CrossTabs to compare the perceptions of each demographic group. Participants responses to each research question was analyzed based on the respondents' geographic location, grade configuration, years of teaching experience, and the number of at-risk students seen during the day in their respective classrooms. Information provided from the open-ended questions was disaggregated and the researcher drew conclusions using the number of responses to determine if the perceptions and opinions of the English Language Arts teachers correlated to the possible impact of the English Language Arts Standards on the success of at-risk students. Qualitative research is concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Open-ended responses were analyzed inductively with abstractions built as the particulars were gathered and grouped together (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

## **Summary**

This chapter outlined the process and methodology for this study. The chapter also focused on details of the methodology used in this study. The details included information regarding the purpose of the research, research questions and hypotheses, validity and reliability of the instrument used in data collection. Chapter Four will offer an analysis of the collected data. Chapter Five will provide a summary of the research and the significance of the findings for educational decisions and future studies.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

### Introduction

Increased rigor in learning standards may be an impediment for at-risk students. The Missouri Learning Standards were adopted in 2016, and with the adoption of the Standards, a new set of English Language Arts Standards was introduced in Missouri schools. The English Language Arts Standards may have an impact on the success of at-risk students. Currently, there is a lack of research on the impact of the English Language Arts Standards on at-risk students in Missouri schools. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards' impact on the success of at-risk students. The researcher sought to identify the perceptions of middle school and high school English Language Arts (ELA) teachers with a survey focusing on the Missouri reading, writing, and speaking/listening standards.

In chapter Four, the researcher detailed the methodology of the study including participants, the research setting, research design, sampling selection, instrumentation, and data analysis. The final survey results were uploaded into SPSS and Microsoft Excel software programs for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic data. Inferential statistics were applied to infer what the data revealed about the given population. The Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test and ANOVA statistical analysis both were used to determine if any significant differences were noted in middle school and high school teachers' perceptions about the designated standards and were further analyzed to determine if district geographic location or educators' years of experience influenced their perceptions. Qualitative data provided additional insight into the

perceptions using open-ended questions. Overall findings will be presented at the end of this chapter related to the significant perceptions noted from the CrossTabs data collection analysis and then further supported by the open-ended results. The following research questions were addressed:

### **Main Research Questions**

This study attempted to determine if the Missouri Learning Standards in English Language Arts impact the success of at-risk students. This was structured with the following specific research questions for the purposes of this study: The following research questions were addressed within the context of this study:

1. What are the differences in perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards impacting the success of at-risk students?
2. What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on the geographic location of the district related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?
3. What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

4. What are the perceptions between Middle/High School English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

### **Research Hypotheses**

RQ4 used the descriptive approach to the data, thus, no null hypothesis was tested. In an effort to answer the aforementioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were investigated.

1.  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers and the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.
2.  $H_0$  There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on geographic location of the district related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.
3.  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in completing English Language Arts courses.

### **Summary of Methods**

The research first contacted administrators for permission to survey English

Language Arts teachers in their districts. An invitation and instructional email was sent to the district administrator, with a request to forward the email to the English Language Arts teachers in the district. (See Appendix A). The email contained an introduction, instructions, confidentiality and consent information, and a link to the survey, which was administered using QuestionPro online survey utility. The survey was sent out and two weeks later, due to a low response, the survey was once again sent out with the promise of a gift card for those who completed the survey and submitted their name via email to the researcher. The researcher followed up with an additional email after three weeks to garner additional participation in the survey. The researcher sent additional emails to specific administrators and teachers to encourage participation.

Upon closing of the four-week survey window, all responses were downloaded to Microsoft Excel for analysis. Descriptive statistics regarding respondents' district geographic location, grade level(s) taught by respondent, years of teaching experience, and the number of at-risk students seen through the day were obtained through questions 1-4 on the survey instrument. To address the main research question more comprehensively, an open-ended question was posed in conjunction with survey questions 6 -11.

Quantitative statistics were used to analyze each of the subset research questions. RQ1 was analyzed by conducting an Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-tests to determine the statistically significant differences between middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of the Missouri English Language Arts (ELA) Standards on the success of at-risk students. RQ2 also used the same Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test to determine differences in the two groups of

teachers based on the geographic location of their districts. RQ3 delved into whether the years of teaching experience made a difference in their perceptions and was analyzed using an ANOVA. CrossTab analysis was utilized to address RQ4, which was designed to compare how the different groups of teachers perceived the various ELA standards. Open-ended response data was collected and analyzed to support the CrossTab findings. Responses were analyzed and grouped according to reoccurring themes. Open-ended questions were included in the survey instrument and used to compare participants' responses based on demographic data provided by respondents.

### **Participation and Completion**

Administrators from 490 middle schools and high schools in Missouri were contacted via email for permission to include their districts' middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers in the study. There are approximately 3,392 middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers in Missouri. The district administrator was asked to forward the survey email to all of the middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers in their district. The email included an invitation to participate in the study along with the accompanying documents. The larger schools in Missouri required a vetting process for their teachers to participate in surveys. Twenty-nine of the larger school districts in Missouri opted out of the survey and did not participate in the study. The total number of schools remaining in the survey was 461 and the total number of participants remaining in the survey was 2,957.

There were approximately 2,957 middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers who received the survey via forwarded email from their district/building administrator. Eighty-seven teachers completed the survey for a

participation percentage of 2.9 percent. Of the English Language Arts teachers that received the survey via forwarded email, 347 viewed the survey, 116 teachers started the survey, and 87 completed the survey for a completion percentage of 2.9 percent.

Demographic data was first analyzed to identify the geographic location of teachers participating in the study.

Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-tests adjusted for unequal sample sizes were used to determine if there was a significant difference between the perceptions of middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers regarding the Missouri English Language Arts Standards impacting the success of at-risk students. An additional Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test analyzed the perceptions of the two groups of teachers based on the geographic location of their district. ANOVA statistical analysis was also utilized to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the groups based on various years of teaching experience. Additionally, a CrossTab analysis was utilized to consider the various groups of teachers' responses to the survey items relative to each Missouri Learning English Language Arts Standard and the researcher further considered open-ended question data to triangulate and support the statistical data collected. Despite a lower than desired participation rate ( $N = 87$ ), this study still provided some important findings that have practical applications for middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers and school leaders.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to provide information regarding the geographic location of the district, years of teaching experience, and the

number of at-risk students seen through the day. The results are displayed in the following tables.

Participants were asked to provide the demographics of the school district as urban, rural or suburban. Table 1 explains the demographic setting of the school district in which the participants taught based on the categories of urban, rural and suburban.

Table 1.

Demographic Setting of Participants (N=86)

Setting	N	Percent
Urban	1	1.2
Rural	3	3.5
Suburban	82	95.3

The total number of participants was 86 with 68.3 percent of participants teaching in a school district in a suburban setting.

Participants were asked to indicate the grade configuration in their building. Table 2 displays the demographics related to the grade configuration in which the participants work. The results are below in table 2.

Table 2.

Grade Configuration (N=84)

Grade Configuration	N	Percent
5-8	36	42.86
9-12	32	38.10
7-12	16	19.05

Participants teaching in a 5-8 setting were the largest group of respondents with 42.86 percent while 38.1 percent of participants were teaching in the 9-12 setting. The 7-12 grade setting represented the smallest group of respondents with only 19.05 percent. The middle school setting of 5-8 and the high school setting of 9-12 comprised 80.69 percent of the total respondents to the survey.

Participants were asked to indicate their years of teaching experience. The years of teaching experience were broken down into seven increments with varying years of teaching experience. Table 3 provides an overview of the participants' years of teaching experience. Table 3.

Participants Level of Teaching Experience (N = 85)

Years of Experience	N	Percent
1-5	25	29.4
6-10	18	21.2
11-15	16	18.8
15-20	13	15.3
21-25	10	11.8
26-30	2	2.4
31+	1	1.4

Participants with 1-5 years of teaching experience were the largest group of respondents with 29.4 percent while respondents with 6-10 years of teaching experience comprised 21.2 percent. The two groups represented 50.6 percent of the total number of respondents.

Participants were asked to indicate the number of at-risk students they saw in their classroom over the course of a single day. The number of at-risk students seen in the respondents' classrooms was broken down into six increments with a varying number of at-risk students in each of the respondents' respective classrooms. Table 4 provides this information.

Table 4.

Number of At-Risk Students (N = 85)

At-Risk	N	Percent
1-5	20	23.5
6-10	26	30.6
11-15	19	22.4
16-20	7	8.2
21-25	4	4.7
More than 26	9	10.6

Twenty-six of the total number of respondents had 6-10 at-risk students in their classrooms over the course of the day, which represented 30.6 percent of the total respondents participating in the survey. Respondents who had 1-5 at-risk students in their classroom over the course of a day comprised 23.5 percent of the total. Respondents that saw 11-15 at-risk students over the course of a day comprised 22.4 percent of the total respondents.

At the beginning of the survey, participants indicated the setting of their district, the configuration of the district in which they taught, years of teaching experience and the number of at-risk students they had in their classrooms through the course of a day. In the

following section, each of the research questions will be analyzed. RQ1, and RQ2, will be analyzed using the data provided from an Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test and RQ3 will be analyzed using the data generated from the ANOVA tests.

### **Research Question 1**

*What are the differences in perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards' impacting the success of at-risk students?*

The survey contained six Likert items: 1 strongly agree, 2 moderately agree, 3 agree, 4 disagree, 5 moderately disagree, 6 strongly disagree, which measured middle school and high school (Secondary) English Language Arts teachers' perceptions related to the Missouri Learning Standards' impact on the success of at-risk students. An Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test adjusted for unequal sample sizes was conducted to determine if there was a key difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level. The results are below in Table 5.

Table 5

Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test of Learning Standards' Impacting the Success of At-Risk Students Between Middle School and High School Teachers

	*MD	SD	t	P
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.0243	.2660	.091	.927
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.1146	.2585	.443	.659
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	-.0538	.2603	-.207	.837
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.0385	.2562	.150	.881
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	-.1095	.2960	-.369	.713
English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.1667	.2735	.609	.544

The Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test for the survey questions showed no statistical difference between middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers based on perceptions regarding the rigor of the Missouri English Language Arts standards positively impacting the success of at-risk students. These results failed to reject the null hypothesis.

**Research Question 2**

*What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on the geographic location of the district related*

*to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?*

The survey measured the differences in perceptions between middle high school (Secondary) English Language Arts teachers' based on the geographic location of the district related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses. Since there was a large discrepancy in the location group numbers, nothing was found to be significant. An Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test adjusted for unequal sample sizes was conducted to determine if there was a key difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level. The results are below in table 6.

Table 6

Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test of Learning Standards' Impacting the Success of At-Risk Students Based on the Geographic Location of the District

	*MD	SD	t	P
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	-.0494	.7087	-.070	.945
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.2099	.6387	.329	.743
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.3792	.6437	.589	.557
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.3917	.6356	.616	.539
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.1282	.7172	.179	.859
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	.3208	.6457	.497	.621

The Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-test for the survey questions showed no key differences between middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers based on the geographic location of the district related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses. The results failed to reject the null hypotheses.

### **Research Question 3**

*What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on their years of teaching experience relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?*

The survey measured the differences in perceptions between middle school and high school (Secondary) English Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses. An ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Refer to Table 3 for the breakdown in the number of years of teaching experience. The results are below in table 7.

Table 7.

One-way ANOVA of Learning Standards' Impacting the Success of At-Risk

Students Based on Years of Experience

	F	P
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is <u>positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	.414	.868
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading <u>is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	.676	.670
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is <u>positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	1.048	.401
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing <u>is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	.954	.462
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing <u>is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	.734	.624
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening is <u>positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	1.139	.348

The ANOVA showed significant findings in perceptions between middle school and high school (Secondary) English Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience as related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses. The data failed to reject the null hypotheses.

**Research Question 4**

*What are the perceptions between Middle School and High School English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?*

The survey measured the differences in perceptions between middle school and high school (Secondary) English Language Arts teachers based on geographic location, years of teaching experience, grade configuration, and the number of students seen through the day in their classrooms related to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.

A CrossTab analysis was run to determine if there was a key difference based on the geographic location of the district. The limited number in the sample made disaggregating the data out into specific groups not relevant for analysis. Since the *N* group was so small, it was more important and relevant to look at the data holistically. The results are below in table 8.

Table 8.

CrossTab Analysis of Frequency Based on Geographic Location of District

1. (N=85); 2. (N=85); 3. (N=84); 4. (N=84); 5. (N=82); 6. (N=84)

	Agree	Disagree
1. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading <u>positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	35	50
2. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	42	43
3. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing <u>is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	36	48
4. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing <u>is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	36	48
5. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative <u>writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	32	50
6. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening <u>positively impacting the success of at-risk students?</u>	56	28

Fifty respondents disagreed increased rigor in the area of literary reading was having a positive impact on at-risk students, while 35 respondents agreed the increased rigor had a positive impact on at-risk students. In the area of informational reading, 43 respondents disagreed with the question while 42 respondents stated the increased rigor had a positive impact on at-risk students. There was no discernable difference between the number of respondents that agreed and disagreed with informational reading positively impacting the success of at-risk students.

Forty-eight respondents stated the increased rigor in the area of narrative writing was negatively impacting at-risk students while 36 respondents perceived narrative

writing had a positive impact on at-risk students. Thirty-six respondents perceived expository writing to positively impact the success of at-risk students while 48 respondents disagreed. In argumentative writing, 32 respondents perceived the increase in rigor positively impacted the success of at-risk students while 50 respondents disagreed. In the area of speaking and listening 56 respondents perceived the increased rigor in the standard had a positive impact on at-risk students while 28 respondents disagreed.

A CrossTab analysis was run to determine if there was a significant difference based on the grade configuration. The results are below in table 9.

Table 9

CrossTab Analysis of Frequency Based on Grade Configuration

(A=Agree/D=Disagree) 1 (N=85); 2 (N=94); 3 (N=83); 4 (N=83); 5 (N=81); 6 (N=83)

	5-8 A/D	7-12 A/D	9-12 A/D
1. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	12 /25	7 /9	13 /19
2. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	13 /23	6 /10	14 /18
3. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	19 /17	5 /11	17 /14
4. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	18 /18	5 /11	13 /18
5. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	16 /19	4 /12	12 /18
6. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of Speaking and listening is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	22 /14	12 /4	21 /10

Fifty-three respondents disagreed with increased rigor in the area of literary reading positively impacting the success of at-risk students while 32 respondents perceived the increased rigor in the area of literary reading positively impacted the success of at-risk students. Fifty-one of the respondents disagreed with the increased rigor in informational reading having a positive impact on at-risk students while 33 respondents agreed.

In the narrative writing standard, 41 respondents perceived the increased rigor as positively impacting the success of at-risk students while 42 respondents disagreed. Thirty-six respondents perceived the increased rigor in expository writing positively impacting the success of at-risk students, while 42 respondents disagreed. Thirty-two respondents saw the increased rigor in argumentative writing positively impacting the success of at-risk students, and 49 respondents disagreed. The perception of fifty-five respondents was that the increased rigor in the area of speaking and listening positively impacts the success of at-risk students and only 28 respondents disagreed. Fifty-seven respondents believed the increase in rigor in the speaking and listening standard was a positive.

A CrossTab analysis was run to determine if there was a difference based on years of experience. The limited number in the sample made breaking the data out into specific groups not relevant for analysis. Since the *N* group was so small, it was more important and relevant to look at the data as a whole. The results are below in table 10.

Table 10

CrossTab Analysis Frequency Based on Years of Teaching Experience

1 (N=85); 2 (N=85); 3 (N=84); 4 (N=84); 5 (N=82) 6 (N=84)

	Agree	Disagree
1. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	35	50
2. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	42	43
3. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	36	48
4. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	36	48
5. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	32	50
6. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	56	28

Thirty-five respondents believed the increased rigor in literary reading had a positive impact on at-risk students, and 50 respondents disagreed. Forty-three respondents disagreed the increased rigor in informational reading had a positive impact on the success of at-risk students while 42 respondents believed the increased rigor had a positive impact on the success of at-risk students. Forty-eight respondents disagreed the increased rigor in narrative writing had a positive impact on at-risk students and 36

respondents agreed. Forty-eight respondents disagreed the increased rigor in the area of expository writing positively impacted at-risk students and 36 agreed. Fifty respondents disagreed the increased rigor in argumentative writing had a positive impact on the success of at-risk students and 32 respondents agreed. Speaking and listening was perceived by 56 respondents as having a positive impact on the success of at-risk students while 28 respondents disagreed.

A final CrossTab analysis related to middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers' perception of the impact the number of at-risk students seen through the day had on the success of at-risk students' in English Language Arts courses was run to determine if there was a difference based on the number of students seen through the day. The limited number in the sample made breaking the data out into specific groups not relevant for analysis. Since the *N* group was so small, it was more important and relevant to look at the data as a whole. The results are below in table 11.

Table 11

CrossTab Analysis Frequency Based on the Number of At-risk Students Seen Through the Course of a Day (N=84)

	Agree	Disagree
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	34	50
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	42	42
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	38	46
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	38	46
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	34	50
Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening positively impacting the success of at-risk students?	56	28

In the area of literary reading, 34 respondents believed the increased rigor in the standard had positively impacted the success of at-risk students while 50 participants disagreed. Informational reading saw no difference in the number of respondents that agreed or disagreed regarding the increased rigor positively impacting the success of at-risk students. In narrative writing and expository writing, there was no difference in the number of respondents as 38 respondents agreed the increased rigor was positively

impacting the success of at-risk students, while 46 participants disagreed. Thirty-four respondents disagreed the increase in the rigor of the argumentative standard positively impacted the success of at-risk students and 50 disagreed. There was a positive response regarding the impact of speaking and listening positively impacting the success of at-risk students with 56 respondents agreeing and 28 disagreeing.

The literary standard, and the writing standards of narrative writing, expository writing, and argumentative writing may not have a positive impact on at-risk students. Analysis of the data indicated English Language Arts teachers perceived the speaking and listening standards were positively affecting at-risk students. Data analysis also showed a mixed agreement from respondents around the positive impact of informational reading on at-risk students

### **Open-ended Question**

Each of the questions on the survey had an open-ended question permitting respondents to provide input relating to each of the survey questions. The qualitative data were organized and analyzed using the Bogdan and Biklen Constant Comparative Analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The responses were analyzed for recurring themes and patterns.

Table 12.

In what way do you perceive the English Language Arts Standard in the area of literary reading to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

Themes	Responses	Percent
Reading below grade level	47	73.4
Difficulty with figurative language	8	12.5
Home life lack of parental support	5	7.8
Interest	4	6.2

Respondents were asked to provide information regarding their perception of the way(s) literary reading was impacting the success of at-risk students. Common themes that appeared when analyzing the first question of the survey regarding the rigor of literary reading included: reading below level, figurative language, home life, and interest. The respondents provided no positive responses regarding literary reading standards and at-risk students. The fact at-risk students are reading below grade level was the most prominent theme that emerged in the area of literary reading with 73.4 percent.

One respondent provided the following input regarding the reading abilities of at-risk students, “If they are not given passages to read at their ability, they will give up and not even try”. Students not reading on grade level have difficulty reading or comprehending required reading material outlined in the literary reading standard in the English Language Arts Standards. Difficulty with figurative language was mentioned by 12.5 percent of respondents. One respondent stated, “Making inferences and analyzing figurative language is challenging for the at-risk student whose focus might be more on

what the words are and what they literally mean.” Home life and lack of parental support was mentioned by 7.8 percent of respondents. One respondent noted, “Because their reading level is already low, the standards are much more difficult and rigorous for the students to read and comprehend. They also lack the parental support to help them at home.” Lack of interest was mentioned by 6.2 percent of respondents. Noting this concern, one respondent stated, “Students who become frustrated and lose interest in the material give up and see no need in attending school.” The data was conclusive in identifying at-risk students, reading below grade level, have difficulty reading literary material on the level required by the new Missouri Learning Standards. This supports the findings from the CrossTabs analysis.

Table 13.

Survey Question 2 (N = 63)

In what way do you perceive the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

Themes	Responses	Percent
Requires higher level thinking	25	39.6
Difficult vocabulary	21	33.3
Lack of background knowledge	9	14.2
Applicable to real world	5	7.9
Strengthens reading skills	3	4.7

Three themes of concern emerged and two themes noting a positive perception were identified when analyzing the second question of the survey related to the rigor of

informational reading in the Missouri English Language Arts Standards. Teachers in the study indicated the new standards may create difficulty for at-risk students because of the requirement to apply higher level thinking skills. Additionally, it was noted that the vocabulary may be more difficult and at-risk students have a lack of background knowledge to successfully engage in this more technical reading material. A higher level of thinking was the most prominent theme with 39.6 percent of respondents listing this as a negative. One respondent noted, “Traditionally, informational text is challenging for average readers; is multiplied for at-risk readers,” due to the fact informational reading is a much different type of reading, one with which many at-risk students are unfamiliar”. It was identified in the comments from teachers, students not classified as at-risk also had difficulty with informational reading. In particular, one participant indicated, “The increased rigor of the English Language Arts standards in the area of informational reading is challenging enough for our students not considered at-risk; therefore, it is just another issue negatively impacting the success of at-risk students.” Difficult vocabulary was listed by 33.3 percent of respondents. One participant noted, “Informational reading has more difficult vocabulary which is unfamiliar to at-risk students”. The unfamiliar vocabulary increases the level of difficulty for at-risk students. Lack of background knowledge was mentioned by 14.2 percent of respondents. Respondents indicated the lack of background knowledge hinders at-risk students from engaging successfully with informational text.

Participants indicated positive responses regarding the informational reading standards as they relate to at-risk students. Some responses indicated informational reading provides students with applicable, real world material and helps strengthen

reading skills. Another respondent noted, “Despite the heavy weight of reality for these students, the key to a better future, as always, is education. Don’t make it easier, make it more effective.” Respondents indicated it is necessary for at-risk students to become familiar with informational reading as real-life applications exist in the format of informational reading. The Informational reading standard was indicated by 12.6 percent of participants with a positive response. The results of the open-ended responses reflect similar data that was noted in the earlier CrossTabs analysis, which demonstrated a mixed perception on the value of technical reading expectations for at-risk students.

Table 14.

Survey Question 3 (N = 49)

In what way do you perceive the English Language Arts Standard in the area of narrative writing to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

Themes	Responses	Percent
Students experience success	15	30.6
Allows students to express themselves	12	24.4
Students make connections with their life	8	16.3
Lack of language skills	9	18.3
Lack of imagination	5	10.2

Common themes that emerged when analyzing the third question of the survey regarding the rigor of narrative writing expected from the Missouri English Language Arts Standards impacting the success of at-risk students included the following positive responses: students experience success, allows students to express themselves, and

students can make personal connections to their life. At-risk students experiencing success with narrative writing was noted by 30.6 percent of the respondents. One respondent noted, “Of the types of writing, at-risk students usually demonstrate success on narrative writing. They all have a story to tell.” Allowing students to express themselves was listed by 24.4 percent of the respondents while permitting students to make connections with their life was listed by 16.3 percent. One respondent stated, “I think narrative done by the at-risk student or reading someone else's narrative might be the one area at-risk students might experience success. They get to talk about themselves and their interests, or read about someone else's interests. Their reading and writing skills may not be equal to their level of education, and that is a disadvantage, but here they can possibly turn it to their advantage. If they can speak in their own voice for the assignment, they may jump into the assignment head first.” Respondents indicated narrative writing was the easiest of the English Language Arts Standards for at-risk students to experience success. In narrative writing, at-risk students are able to connect to their own lives, which makes the task of writing much easier.

The negatives listed were lack of language skills by 18.3 percent of respondents and lack of imagination by 10.2 percent. A respondent noted, “Some students may lack the ability to imagine or to think creatively or logically. This impacts their understanding of and enjoyment of any narrative.” Respondents stated at-risk students do not have the language skills to write a paper. Another respondent noted, “Some students may lack the ability to imagine or to think creatively or logically. This impacts their understanding of and enjoyment of any narrative.” Teachers’ perceptions indicated narrative writing for at-risk students could be a challenge due to various barriers, but this type of writing

appeared also to have some benefits for at-risk students and may be the least rigorous of all the types of writing. This data supported the earlier CrossTabs data indicating the rigor expected from the narrative writing standard may have some benefit for at-risk students. Respondents indicated narrative writing was the easiest of the genres of writing for at-risk students to experience success in writing. In narrative writing at-risk students are permitted to write about a topic of which they are familiar, namely themselves.

Table 15.

Survey Question 4 (N = 46)

In what way do you perceive the English Language Arts Standard related to expository writing to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

Themes	Responses	Percent
Students experience frustration	16	34.7
Lack of grammar mechanics	15	32.6
Difficulty with research	10	21.7
Need balance between reading and writing	3	6.5
Class time used for research	2	4.3

Common themes that appeared when analyzing the fourth question of the survey regarding the rigor of expository writing in the Missouri English Language Arts Standards included the following: students experience frustration, lack of grammar mechanics, difficulty with research, need balance between reading and writing, and class time is used for research taking away from instructional time. Students experiencing frustration and a lack of grammar mechanics accounted for 67.3 percent of the total responses. A respondent noted, “The conventions, mechanics, and usage of English pose

a problem for at-risk students.” The main challenges of expository writing are organization and including enough detail to completely convey thoughts. Students who struggle with reading and vocabulary also struggle with expressing thoughts in an organized fashion. Another respondent noted, “Some middle school students still struggle to write in complete sentences and follow basic conventions of English. They become frustrated and defensive when told to revise their logic or organization. This may be because the process of writing anything is so laborious they feel exasperated when asked to go through the whole thought-intensive process of revision.” Respondents were in agreement that at-risk students struggle with any type of writing skill that requires higher order thinking.

Difficulty with research was mentioned by 21.7 percent of the respondents. One respondent noted, “Lack of language skills, the ability to comprehend, cannot cite information appropriately are all frustrations for at-risk students in this genre of writing.” Needing a balance between reading and writing was mentioned by 6.5 of respondents. At-risk students are unable to make the connection between reading and writing necessary to become proficient writers. One respondent noted, “Students need to be able to see a link between reading and writing. At-risk students have difficulty making connections between reading and writing.” Respondents indicated taking time from instruction to provide time for in-class research was an issue for 4.3 percent. Expository writing was believed to be a difficult task for at-risk students due to the inability of at-risk students to make the necessary connections and understand the research material needed to address a specific topic. This data confirmed similar results identified in the CrossTabs analysis.

Table 16

Survey Question 5 (N = 44)

In what way do you perceive the English Language Arts Standard of argumentative writing to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

Themes	Responses	Percent
Very difficult for at-risk	18	40.9
Lack of language skills	10	22.7
Lack of critical thinking skills	6	13.6
Research difficult due to reading level	5	11.3
Good for students to be able to voice their argument through writing	5	11.3

Common themes that emerged when analyzing the rigor of argumentative writing, were the difficulty in writing argumentatively for at-risk students, lack of language skills, lack of critical thinking skills, and research material was difficult to comprehend due to reading level. Research was difficult for at-risk students due to reading level was noted by 11.3 percent of respondents. Eighteen respondents indicated overall, argumentative writing was difficult for at-risk students. Sixteen respondents indicated the lack of language skills and lack of critical thinking skills made argumentative writing a difficult process for at-risk students.

Additionally, five respondents identified the reading level of the at-risk student may be part of the difficulty in completing research for an argumentative paper. One respondent noted, “With components such as claim, counterclaim and rebuttal, at-risk

students tend to be overwhelmed since their basic reading and writing skills need significant improvement. Expecting at-risk students to succinctly comprise an argumentative piece when other basic standards have not been met is challenging”. At-risk students are lower-level readers and any research-based writing was difficult for the at-risk student.

A positive noted by 11.3 percent of the respondents was it is good for students to be able to voice their argument through organized writing. The majority of teachers indicated concern about argumentative writing, but some teachers acknowledged this type of writing may prove to be beneficial for the at-risk students because this type of skill may be needed in the future. The findings from this section supports the earlier analysis from the CrossTabs analysis.

Table 17.

Survey Question 6 (N = 44)

In What Way do You Perceive the English Language Arts Standard of Speaking and Listening to be More Rigorous for At-risk Students?

Themes	Responses	Percent
Opportunity to share ideas	12	27.2
Learn importance of speaking	11	25.0
Need further help to be more successful	10	22.7
Struggle with formal levels of speech	9	20.4
Lack of participation	1	2.2
Not modeled at home	1	2.2

Common themes that emerged when looking at the speaking and listening strand as noted in the Missouri English Language Arts Standards included the following positives for at-risk students: the opportunity to share ideas, and learn the importance of speaking. These positives were noted by 52.2 percent of respondents. The speaking and listening standard affords students an opportunity to share ideas as noted by 27.2 percent of respondents. Twenty-five percent of respondents perceived speaking and listening as a positive since it connects the importance of public speaking and future job opportunities for at-risk students. One participant indicated, “Students who learn the importance of formal communication and how to speak and listen tend to perform better at job interviews as well as provide better customer service when they have jobs.” The negatives that emerged included students needed further help to be more successful. Students struggle with formal levels of speech, and a lack of participation. The negatives constituted the remaining 47.8 percent of respondents’ comments, “Speaking and listening is so important in any career or relationship. Increased rigor and higher expectations would really help at-risk students learn”. Respondents saw speaking and listening as a positive skill that was beneficial for at-risk students with 52.5 percent responding in the positive regarding the standard. These findings supported earlier data analyzed in the CrossTabs section.

### **Overall Results**

The study included 461 schools with 2,957 English Language Arts teacher participants in an effort to determine significant differences in the perception of Middle School and High School English Language Arts teachers and the English Language Arts Missouri Learning Standards related to the impact on the success of at-risk students. The

researcher recognized the response rate was lower than desired, but the findings of this study still provided valuable insight into the perceptions of teachers related to the Missouri English Language Arts Standards impact on at-risk students. This study indicated no statistically significant differences in perceptions between Middle School and High School English Language Arts teachers when addressing RQ 1, RQ2, and RQ3. RQ 4 indicated teachers did have some key concerns regarding the current standards impact on at-risk students based on the data collected and analyzed from the CrossTab statistics and the responses to open-ended questions.

Questions on the survey were related to the three English Language Arts Anchor Standards of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The reading standard was broken into two strands, literary and informational reading. The first overall finding for this study related to the literary reading standard, indicated teachers in the study felt some concern about the level of rigor being expected of the at-risk student. In examining the data, based on district geographic location, grade configuration, and years of teaching experience, 50 of the English Language Arts teachers believed the rigor of the English Language Arts Standards was not positively impacting the success of at-risk students, with 35 respondents having an opposing view. The data from the various demographic groups indicated concern related to the literary standards potentially creating challenges for at-risk students. The open-ended responses further supported these perceptions, with 45 responses indicating concern that the current reading level of at-risk students creating a barrier for them to be successful with the newer, more rigorous literary reading standards. One respondent noted, “If they are not given passages to read at their ability, they will give up and not even try”. Another respondent noted a similar perception,

“Because their reading level is already low, the standards are much more difficult and rigorous for the students to read and comprehend what is being asked of them. They also lack the parental support to get help at home”. Overall, respondents believed the increased rigor of the literary standard did not positively impact the success of at-risk students.

The second overall finding for this study related to the informational reading standard, which indicated teachers in the study, valued the benefits of this more technical reading standard for at-risk students when compared to their perceptions of the literary reading standard. Forty-two of the respondents agreed the increased rigor of the informational standard was positively impacting the success of at-risk students while a similar number of 43 disagreed. Responses based on years of teaching experience were equally divided as to the increased rigor positively/negatively impacting the success of at-risk students. Respondents indicated informational reading was a life skill necessary for success in future endeavors. One respondent noted, “Despite the heavy weight of reality for these students, the key to a better future, as always is education. Don’t make it easier, make it more effective”. About half of the participants perceived informational reading as challenging, but possibly still a positive skill that would be beneficial to at-risk students. The other respondents indicated informational reading presented barriers and challenges for at-risk students. The mixed results of this finding indicated teachers may be struggling to effectively address this standard in the classroom.

Teachers in the study indicated at-risk students lack the necessary higher order thinking skills and the technical vocabulary foundation necessary to read informational texts. A respondent noted, “Lacking technical vocabulary makes reading informational

texts for at-risk students very difficult and frustrating”. Another respondent noted, “Poor vocabulary and the inability to use context clues to understand the meaning of a passage makes informational reading impossible for at-risk students.” Overall, the survey results indicated that the informational reading standard required higher order thinking skills and technical vocabulary proficiency, which are expectations noted as difficult for the at-risk student. However, it is important to make the connection at-risk students will still be expected to demonstrate proficiency in this area once they graduate from high school to compete for future jobs. While literary reading skills are necessary, this standard is potentially not as critical to at-risk students’ success due to the types of careers they may choose to pursue.

The third overall finding for this study was related to the writing standard. This standard addressed three types of writing: narrative, expository, and argumentative. Teachers in the study disagreed that the increased rigor in the writing standards were having a positive impact on the success of at-risk students. Overall, respondents, irrespective of the district location, teaching configuration, years of teaching experience, and the number of at-risk students seen during the day, believed the writing standards would be difficult for at-risk learners. Participants indicated expository and argumentative writing required higher level thinking skills, which proved problematic for the at-risk learner. These two writing standards required the proficient learner to have strong foundational skills and a high level of motivation. Respondents did indicate the ability to make arguments and support those opinions were seen as life skills for at-risk students, but the current rigor of the standards was still highly difficult for at-risk students. Narrative writing was seen as the least difficult writing standard for at-risk

students and some teacher participants even indicated this type of writing might be helpful as a reflective tool for these learners. One respondent noted, “The increased rigor in writing in the English Language Arts Standards cannot be done by at-risk students who lack the basic vocabulary skills and writing experience to meet the demands of the increased rigor.” Overall, the writing standard, with the exception of narrative writing, was seen by respondents as difficult for at-risk students. Argumentative writing was seen as important for at-risk students, but the current level of rigor was highly problematic.

A final overall finding indicated the speaking and listening standard had a positive impact on the success of at-risk students. Regardless of the respondents’ geographic location, grade configuration, years of teaching experience, and number of at-risk students seen through the day, participants agreed speaking and listening were necessary skills for at-risk students to be successful in the future as well as being a standard with which at-risk students might feel comfortable. Speaking and listening was seen as an opportunity for at-risk students to share ideas was noted by 27.2 percent of participants. A respondent noted, “Students who learn the importance of formal communication and how to speak and listen tend to perform better at job interviews as well as provide better customer service when they have jobs.” Speaking and listening as a positive attribute for at-risk students was noted by 72.9 percent of participants. Only 24.8 percent of respondents perceived speaking and listening as a negative for at-risk students. Higher expectations for at-risk students to have strong speaking and listening qualities was seen as a positive by teachers in the study and this finding noted the importance of these skills in obtaining future jobs.

## Summary

This chapter provided the findings of the study. The survey results of the 87 English Language participants were analyzed descriptively, inferentially, and qualitatively. First, descriptive statistics were reported to give the demographics of the district, grade configuration, years of teaching experience, and the number of at-risk students seen through the day. The participants included 461 school districts in Missouri. Next, inferential statistics, consisting of Independent Sample Two-Tailed *t*-tests adjusted for unequal sample sizes were used to determine statistical significance of the perceptions of Middle School and High School English Language Arts teachers related to the standard positively impacting the success of the at-risk student. No significant differences were found in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3; therefore, the data failed to reject the null hypotheses. In RQ4, using CrossTabs supported by open-ended responses (qualitative analysis) indicated key findings allowing for the null hypotheses to be accepted. Chapter 5 will further examine the overall findings of this study and present conclusions, implications and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In 2014, Missouri legislators adopted the Missouri Learning Standards, which brought a new set of English Language Arts Standards to every classroom in Missouri. The Missouri Learning Standards increased rigor and accountability in the classroom to ensure every student enrolled in Missouri schools were prepared to meet the demands of a global economy (Bidwell, 2014). Implementing a new set of standards, with increased rigor in the area of English Language Arts, posed an issue for middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers in educating at-risk students. The introduction of the English Language Arts Standards may have an impact on the success of at-risk students. Raising the standards and continuing to implement more rigorous standards may ensure the majority of Missouri students will graduate with the skills needed to be successful in future endeavors, but at-risk students in the state of Missouri have been adversely impacted by increased rigor specifically in the area of English Language Arts, (Bidwell, 2014). The purpose of this study was to determine the impact the English Language Arts Standards may have on the success of at-risk students. To do so, the following research questions were addressed:

#### **Main Research Question**

This study attempted to determine if the Missouri Learning Standards in English Language Arts impact the success of at-risk students. This was structured with the following specific research questions for the purposes of this study:

1. What are the differences in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers related to the Missouri Learning Standards impacting the success of at-risk students?
2. What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on the geographic location of the district relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?
3. What are the differences in perceptions between Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of experience relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?
4. What are the perceptions of Middle/High School English/Language Arts teachers relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses?

### **Research Hypotheses**

RQ4 used the descriptive approach to the data; thus, no null hypothesis was tested. In an effort to answer the aforementioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were investigated:

1.  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant relationship between the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers and the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.

2.  $H_0$  There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on geographic location of the district relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in English Language Arts courses.
3.  $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of Middle/High School (Secondary) English/Language Arts teachers based on years of teaching experience relative to the Missouri Learning Standards that positively impact the success of at-risk students in completing English Language Arts courses.

Conclusions based on the findings discussed in Chapter Four were provided along with professional implications for practice. Then, recommendations for future research were suggested in an effort to expand the body of education literature related the English Language Arts Standards positively impacting the success of at-risk students.

### **Conclusions**

The adoption of the Missouri Learning Standards may have implications affecting the success of at-risk students. The adoption of the Missouri Learning Standards in 2016, brought a new set of English Language Arts Standards to be implemented in schools across Missouri. While much research has been conducted on the impact of learning standards on at-risk students in general, very little, if any research, exists regarding the impact of the increased rigor of the standards on at-risk students in middle school and high school English classrooms. Despite a lower than desired participation rate under 5% ( $N = 87$ ), findings from Independent Sample Two-Tailed  $t$ -test and ANOVA analysis

indicated no significant differences in perceptions across the various groups of teachers. However, when disaggregating the data through CrossTabs and analyzing percentage responses, this study did uncover some interesting findings regarding the perceptions of middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers as they consider the success of at-risk students in their classrooms. The analysis of the open-ended responses to the questions provided additional insights into the perceptions of teachers. The findings from Chapter 4 have been synthesized into the following four conclusions:

1. The increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards related to literary reading may create additional struggles for the at-risk student. These students often lack basic reading skills, so requiring them to do tasks that are more engaging and reading text that is more difficult may prove frustrating to these students. The third grade reading level is one of the most significant predictors of eighth grade reading level as well as course performance in high school (Lesnick, et al., 2016). Students having less than proficient reading skills by the end of third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school (Washington, DC National Academy Press, 1998). Students, who are already struggling to read when entering high school, will require much scaffolding and support to meet the rigorous standards.
2. The increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards related to informational reading is a necessary skill for at-risk students to be successful in future endeavors. At-risk students lack the scaffolding of knowledge necessary to comprehend informational texts and the technical language contained within the text. Acquiring the necessary reading skills by third grade is a very important

predictor of future learning where more complex reading skills are required (American Psychological Association, 2012). At-risk students lack the knowledge to interpret and comprehend informational texts. Informational reading is a required skill in the real world and strengthens reading skills of at-risk students. The inability to read at grade level serves as an academic barrier in all areas of the curriculum, (Hickman, et al., 2008). Teachers in this study did see the value in a more rigorous informational reading standard for at-risk students.

3. The increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards related to writing may be problematic for at-risk students. Expository writing and argumentative writing are the most difficult for at-risk students due to a lack of adequate vocabulary skills and the inability to use higher order thinking. Most students are able to decode or sound out words, but fail to understand context in an increasingly complex vocabulary, or to master the basic mechanics of writing (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011). Higher-level thinking skills are required for at-risk students to experience success with expository and argumentative writing. Many at-risk students fail to master critical writing skills (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011). Narrative writing provides at-risk students an opportunity to express themselves, which might be an opportunity for students to manage personal or family issues. Narrative writing gives the at-risk student a way to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of negative feedback from peers. Narrative writing allows the writer to draw from personal experience. Argumentative writing was seen as a problem for at-risk students, but teachers in the study indicated this was still an important expectation

for at-risk students. The teachers in the survey indicated the ability to state opinions and justify them effectively was an essential future career expectation.

4. The increased rigor of the English Language Arts speaking and listening standards was identified by teachers in the study as necessary skills for the at-risk student. Speaking and listening are skills necessary to be successful in all aspects of life. The capacity to put words together in a meaningful way to reflect thoughts, opinions, and feelings provides the speaker with skills useful in life (Gillis, 2013). To become comfortable with speaking in front of an audience, at-risk students need opportunities to practice. Speaking and listening are opportunities to share ideas. “The four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all interconnected,” (Gillis, 2013). Speaking and listening skills are important in a career choice but also important in the personal life of at-risk students. Speaking and listening skills, as noted by the participants in the study, are a necessary component in all facets of everyday life.

Three of the research questions in the study provided no key findings, based on the CrossTabs analysis and the opened-ended questions posed to the participants as listed on the survey. The less than desired response rate could account for the results of the study and as such should be considered cautionary and preliminary.

### **Professional Implications**

Conclusions from this study provided professional implications for school leaders and teachers on the impact of the increased rigor in the Missouri English Language Arts Standards’ impact on the success of at-risk students. A total five professional implications were recognized and noted below:

1. The first professional implication is directed at school leaders and policy makers. Middle School and High School English Language Arts teachers need more support and professional development in research-based strategies for teaching the fundamentals of reading and writing. This work cannot be accomplished only in the English Language Arts classroom, but must be done across the curriculum. Specific vocabulary is required for each content area and the acquisition of vocabulary skills needs to be addressed by educators when implementing the newly adopted English Language Arts Standards. “Students who cannot read at grade level will continue to struggle as they proceed through school. Reading proficiently is generally considered to be an important factor in influencing graduation rates” (Hickman, et.al, 2008). Professional development must be provided to teachers on how to meet the needs of at-risk students. Professional development is necessary and should be ongoing to ensure middle school and high school English Language Arts teachers have the knowledge and skill set required to help at-risk students in the acquisition of this skill set. English Language Arts teachers must receive professional development training on methodologies and teaching strategies to help at-risk students identified with low thinking and foundational skills. Additionally, at-risk programs need to focus on providing reading and writing support. Providing students with the education necessary to be successful in life is the essence of education. “A good education is the lifeline that enables youth to lift themselves out of poverty,” (Greenberg, et.al, 2003).
2. Another professional implication is connected to the literary standard. In order for the at-risk students to manage the rigor, the standard needs to be introduced with material easier for the at-risk student to manage. The task may be more rigorous, but the text

must be at their current instructional level. English Language Arts teachers need additional professional development in reading strategies as well as how to implement these strategies in their classrooms. Reading is vital for students to be successful in and out of school. “Reading proficiently is generally considered to be an important factor in influencing graduation rates,” (Hickman, et al., 2008).

3. A third professional implication notes educators must ensure at-risk students have opportunities to acquire the reading skills necessary for understanding informational texts. Teachers must work on building vocabulary skills that would provide the foundation necessary for at-risk students to read and comprehend informational texts. According to NAEP, known as the nation’s report card, 70 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students read below grade level, which is a major predictor for students at risk of dropping out of high school, (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011). Vocabulary-building skills need to be introduced in the classroom. English Language Arts teachers need to equip students with the knowledge of how to divide words into subparts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words to determine the meaning of unknown or unfamiliar words when reading informational texts. Context clues and the ability to recognize and use this skill is vital in helping students decode the meaning of informational texts. The researcher would reiterate the need for informational text reading to be an emphasis across the curriculum. Professional development for teachers should be ongoing and continuous as reading is a fundamental skill upon which all others are built. “Half of incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders in urban, high poverty schools read three years or more below grade level,” (Alliance for Educational Excellence, 2011).

4. To ensure at-risk students acquire the necessary writing skills that may be required in future employment, real-world applications need to be utilized to ensure proper training. At-risk students need to learn the basic writing skills, but in addition, they need to acquire the technical writing skills that may be needed in the work place. Practice in completing job applications, work orders, invoices, etc. are essential skills for at-risk students. Vocational education should be available for at-risk students to ensure acquisition of these skills. “Students who graduate today find themselves competing for jobs in a global market, one that requires a degree of skill and begins with a high school education,” (Greenberg et. al., 2003). Administrators need to provide the necessary tools and trainings not just for English Language Arts, but also for all across the content areas. Technical writing is a skill all students should have and all teachers need to receive the necessary professional development required to teach the skill set. Real-life application opportunities should be provided for students, which could include job shadowing and completing paper work, associated with the job shadowing experience. English Language Arts teachers need to implement technical writing into the curriculum. The ability to communicate effectively through writing may be an indispensable skill for the at-risk student to ensure success after school.
5. Equipping at-risk students with the skills to be successful communicators is essential for success in life. Speaking and listening is natural and is a positive for at-risk students. By working with a skill set in which most students feel comfortable, confidence can be built in students that may impact other areas of students’ lives. The ability to communicate effectively, on the job or even in a social setting, is very

important. English Language Arts teachers need to emphasize speaking and listening in the classroom. Students should be given the opportunity to become comfortable with public speaking by giving speeches in class. English Language Arts teachers and teachers across the content areas need professional development to acquire strategies for teaching effective verbal communication skills. The art of writing and utilizing acquired vocabulary can be incorporated into speaking and listening. Professional development should be provided for teachers to enable them to provide the skill set needed by their students to be successful in listening and comprehension. Speaking and listening are necessary skills required in all aspects of life. Speech should be taught as a stand-alone subject or, at the very least, should be an important part of the curriculum used in the English Language Arts classrooms. "Proficiency in each skill is necessary to become a well-rounded communicator, but the ability to speak skillfully provides the speaker with several distinct advantages. The capacity to put words together in a meaningful way to reflect thoughts, opinions, and feelings provides the speaker with these important advantages," (Gillis, 2013).

These professional implications are purely generated from the open-ended questions and are in some respects seen as valid as feedback coming from professionals in the area. However, since these were not tested in a controlled research sense, these too can be cautioned as to the extent of such an implication

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Very little previous research exists on the impact the English Language Arts Standards have on the success of at-risk students. Findings in this study regarding the impact of the English Language Arts Standards on the success of at-risk students have

brought insights, as well as questions, that permit further research. The following recommendations will extend this study and add to the body research the English Language Arts Standards have on the success of at-risk students.

1. Since there were a small number of participants overall, it is recommended that this study be replicated to include a larger sample size of participants, possibly looking at multiple states.
2. Future study of schools that have multiple English Language Arts teachers who are able to teach reading, writing, and speaking and listening in separate blocks of time should be compared with schools that provide one block of time for teaching all of the strands of the English Language Arts Standards. The study should look at and compare the success of at-risk students in the respective settings.
3. Future study of instructional strategies used to teach the required skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening needs to be examined as well as their effectiveness on the success of at-risk students. Researching whether the professional development available for English Language Arts teachers is effective or are changes needed in the professional development offerings is vital in meeting the needs of at-risk students.
4. Future study examining the use of co-teaching in classrooms as well as having a class within a class (CWC) should be looked at to determine if implementing the use of either would be beneficial to at-risk students in the English Language Arts classroom.

## Summary

Adoption of a new set of rigorous English Language Arts Standards has raised questions as to the impact the standards have on the success of at-risk students. With the implementation of the new standards and the increase in rigor, teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities to ensure the needs of at-risk students are being met daily. Professional development would help to ensure at-risk students acquire skills necessary to be successful in school as well as future employment. However, very little research exists on the effect the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards has on the at-risk student. The primary research question addressed whether the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening was impacting the success of at-risk students. A set of research questions examined each of the standards and the perceptions of English Language Arts teachers as to the impact the increased rigor of the standard had on at-risk students. A review of literature regarding the history of educational accountability, Missouri accountability, the creation of the Missouri Learning standards and the English Language Arts Standards, characteristics and factors impacting the graduation of at-risk students served as the conceptual framework.

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## Appendix A

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### **Perceptions of High School and Middle School English Language Arts Teachers as to How the Missouri Learning Standards are impacting the Academic Success of At-Risk Students.**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Debbie Ross enrolled in the EdD program at Southwest Baptist University. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are an English Language Arts teacher in a Missouri public middle school or high school. The purpose of this research project is to examine the perceptions of English Language Arts teachers and the impact the Missouri English Language Arts Learning Standards may have on the success of at-risk students.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or skip any question that you are not comfortable in answering. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, there is no penalty.

The procedure involves completing an online survey that will take approximately ten minutes. As this is an online survey, participants can complete the survey in the location of his/her choice. Your responses will be confidential and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address.

The questions presented in the survey are focused on your perceptions regarding the Missouri Learning Standards. The questions are designed to solicit information about perceptions of English Language Arts teachers.

Data gathered will be completely confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research study, please contact Debbie Ross at [teachdeb57@hotmail.com](mailto:teachdeb57@hotmail.com)

The Research Review Board (RRB) at Southwest Baptist University has approved this study. You may contact the RRB for questions or concerns regarding this study at [rrb@sbuniv.edu](mailto:rrb@sbuniv.edu). Appendix B

## Survey

Please answer the following questions. For the purpose of this study the following definitions will be utilized.

*At-risk - a “pupil who leaves school for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school” (Underwood, 1980) “set by classroom teacher”.*

*Success – achieving desired aims or outcomes (Oxford Dictionary).*

1. Which of the following best describes the district in which you teach?
  1. Urban
  2. Rural
  3. Suburban
  
2. Which of the following best describes the setting in which you teach?
  1. 5-8 grades Middle School
  2. 9-12 grades High School
  3. 7-12 grades Combined Middle School and High School
  
3. How many years of experience teaching Communication Arts?
  1. 1-5 years
  2. 6-10 years
  3. 11-15 years
  4. 16-20 years
  5. 21-25 years
  6. 26-30 years
  7. More than 31 years
  
4. How many at-risk students do you have in your classroom throughout the day?
  1. 1-5 students
  2. 6-10 students
  3. 11-15 students
  4. 16-20 students
  5. 21-25 students
  6. More than 26

5. Which of the following characteristics describes an at-risk student? (Please select all that apply).
1. Poor reader
  2. Absenteeism
  3. Socioeconomic level
  4. Family status
  5. Discipline issues
  6. Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of literary reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?

**Strongly Agree**

**Moderately Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Moderately Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

In what way(s) do you perceive the standard to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

7. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of informational reading is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?

**Strongly Agree**

**Moderately Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Moderately Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

In what way(s) do you perceive the standard to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

8. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of narrative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?

**Strongly Agree**

**Moderately Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Moderately Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

In what way(s) do you perceive the standard to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

9. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of expository writing is impacting the success of at-risk students?

**Strongly Agree**

**Moderately Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Moderately Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

In what way(s) do you perceive the standard to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

10. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of argumentative writing is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?

**Strongly Agree**

**Moderately Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Moderately Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

In what way(s) do you perceive the standard to be more rigorous for at-risk students?

11. Do you believe the increased rigor of the English Language Arts Standards in the area of speaking and listening is positively impacting the success of at-risk students?

**Strongly Agree**

**Moderately Agree**

**Agree**

**Disagree**

**Moderately Disagree**

**Strongly Disagree**

In what way(s) do you perceive the standard to be more rigorous for at-risk students?