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# Reading Motivation, Parent Engagement, and Student Engagement as it Relates to Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents

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# Reading Motivation, Parent Engagement, and Student Engagement as it Relates to Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents

## **Abstract**

Education is a key factor linked to a nation's economic potential. Since the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law, much of the empirical research investigating the reading achievement of millions of students across the nation suggest that American students are not equipped with the advanced literacy skills to enter the 21st century workforce, specifically urban adolescents attending schools in economically disadvantaged areas. Although scholars have examined the critical concern for reading achievement, little is known about the factors contributing to the reading achievement of urban middle school students. Despite radical education reform efforts, there still exists a significant number of urban middle school students that are not meeting state reading proficiency standards. While scholarly focus has been on investigating practices that support struggling readers, this quantitative study examined the correlation between a student's reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class as it relates to a student's end of year average in literacy class. Approximately 135 grade 7 students in a New York City public middle school were surveyed using the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. The present study revealed that reading motivation had the only statistical significance on a student's end of year average in literacy class.

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Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
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Supervised by

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## **Dedication**

Above all, I give thanks to God, the center of my life.

## **Biographical Sketch**

Arabelle LaCroix is currently the Instructional Coach and Literacy Department Leader at a middle school in the New York City Department of Education. Ms. LaCroix has served as a lead teacher in the New York City Department of Education. Prior to these leadership positions, Ms. LaCroix was a grade 6 literacy teacher, elementary school teacher, and preschool teacher.

Ms. LaCroix graduated from Teikyo Post University in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science degree in International Business and Marketing. She attended Long Island University from 2008 to 2011 and graduated with a Master of Science in Urban Childhood Education in 2008 and an Advanced Certificate in Leadership in 2011.

Ms. LaCroix came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2012 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. LaCroix pursued her research in reading achievement of urban adolescents, specifically within grade 7, under the direction of Dr. Ronald D. Valenti and Dr. Pamela Njapa – Minyard. Ms. LaCroix received her Ed.D. in Executive Leadership in August 2014.

## **Abstract**

Education is a key factor linked to a nation's economic potential. Since the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law, much of the empirical research investigating the reading achievement of millions of students across the nation suggest that American students are not equipped with the advanced literacy skills to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, specifically urban adolescents attending schools in economically disadvantaged areas. Although scholars have examined the critical concern for reading achievement, little is known about the factors contributing to the reading achievement of urban middle school students. Despite radical education reform efforts, there still exists a significant number of urban middle school students that are not meeting state reading proficiency standards. While scholarly focus has been on investigating practices that support struggling readers, this quantitative study examined the correlation between a student's reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class as it relates to a student's end of year average in literacy class. Approximately 135 grade 7 students in a New York City public middle school were surveyed using the *Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents*. The present study revealed that reading motivation had the only statistical significance on a student's end of year average in literacy class.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Biographical Sketch.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	1
Theoretical Rationale.....	5
Study Significance.....	14
Purpose of the Study.....	14
Research Questions.....	15
Definitions of Terms.....	16
Chapter Summary.....	21
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	23
Introduction and Purpose.....	23
Review of the Literature Sections.....	23
Summary and Conclusion.....	45
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology.....	47



General Perspective .....	47
Research Context .....	48
Research Participants .....	51
Instruments Used in Data Collection .....	54
Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis .....	57
Summary of Methodology .....	59
Chapter 4: Results .....	59
Research Questions .....	60
Data Analysis and Findings .....	60
Summary of Results .....	65
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	66
Introduction .....	66
Implications of Findings .....	68
Limitations .....	72
Recommendations .....	73
Conclusion .....	76
References .....	82
Appendix A .....	90
Appendix B .....	93
Appendix C .....	93
Appendix D .....	95
Appendix E .....	98

## List of Tables

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 3.1	Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Gender and Ethnicity	52
Table 3.2	Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Ethnicity	52
Table 3.3	Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Classification	53
Table 3.4	Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' 2013 New York State ELA Score	53
Table 3.5	Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Lunch Rate	54
Table 3.6	Summary of Reliability Analysis of Predictor Variables	55
Table 4.1	Descriptive Statistics of Criterion and Predictor Variables	62
Table 4.2	Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics of Criterion and Predictor Variables	63
Table 4.3	Summary of Correlational Results between Predictor Variables	64
Table 4.4	Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis	65
Table 4.5	Summary of Results for Research Questions One to Three	66

## List of Figures

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1.1	Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model	12

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This study addressed the critical concern for reading achievement of adolescents, specifically, urban middle school students. The number of adolescents that are reading and writing below grade level is alarming. Eight million grade 4 to 12 students are reading at a basic level of proficiency (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). The workforce demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require an advanced set of literacy skills that many of the nation's students are not prepared to meet (Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012) or compete in today's rapidly changing global economy (Wiggan, 2008).

This study examined the reading achievement of urban adolescents in grade 7. The study explored the extent to which their reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and engagement in literacy class correlates to their end of year literacy class average. Additionally, this chapter provides a detailed description of the research problem, theoretical framework, proposed research questions, as well as the significance and purpose of the study. This chapter also includes a brief review of literature describing the challenges urban middle school students face in relation to reading achievement.

### **Problem Statement**

Education is a key factor in determining a country's economic performance and potential (National Intelligence Council, 2012) yet, the United States is under-educating

its citizens to meet the demands of a 21st century global economy (Haskins et al., 2012). Based on international comparisons, American students fall below global averages of international scholastic global measures (Wiggan, 2008). Twenty-first century jobs require advanced literacy skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and drawing conclusions from written texts (Haskins et al., 2012).

The misalignment between higher education academic expectations and the level of instruction students receive from kindergarten to grade 12 is cause for concern. American College Testing, (ACT) (2005) reported that American students are unprepared to work in a changing society. Roughly 32% of high school graduates cannot meet the demands of college-level English composition courses (American College Testing, 2006). Additionally, significant numbers of college students required remedial coursework when they entered college (Kirst & Venezia, 2004).

While education reform efforts have significantly improved reading achievement among students in the primary grades, advanced literacy instruction in the upper grades has been neglected (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). On average, 75% of the nation's students graduate from high school each year. The national graduation rate for minority students however was 23% lower. Of the 75% of students who did graduate, less than half were college ready (Lingenfelter, 2012). As a result, approximately one-half of the nation's college freshmen do not meet placement standards, resulting in the enrollment of nearly one-half of all college freshmen in remedial courses.

Many students in middle school, high school, and college know *how* to read, the problem is they do not comprehend *what* they are reading (Taylor, 2010). Middle and secondary school literacy skills require complex higher order thinking practices that are

ingrained in every content area (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Reading requires more than just sounding out words on a page (Taylor, 2010); it is learning from content-rich material and synthesizing new information with prior knowledge (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006).

Scholars suggest that one reason why upper grade students have not developed advanced literacy skills is because many middle and secondary school educators have not had significant training in advanced literacy instruction. Gilles, Wang, Smith, and Johnson (2013) claim that many content area teachers do not see themselves as teachers of literacy. Therefore, the lack of exposure to advanced literacy instruction in complex subject matters and content areas (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) causes student reading motivation to significantly decrease, resulting in a history of less successful reading experiences that produce a lower sense of self efficacy (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003).

Prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), state and federal initiated reform efforts were incoherent, inconsistent, and lacked in adequate resources. Fifty different state standards and 50 different definitions of proficiency resulted in confusion created by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Haskins et al., 2012). Government initiatives such as Head Start, Title I funding, and reformed state standards have not significantly reduced the literacy achievement gap among adolescents (Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006). The kindergarten to grade 12 ELA CCSS standards are a set of consistent benchmarks that provide teachers, parents, and students with a clear understanding of skills that are aligned to the expectations of college and careers (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). Studies suggest that

students who receive the fewest college preparation opportunities in school face some of their greatest challenges when they begin college (Kirst & Venezia, 2002).

Meeting the needs of low performing readers goes beyond the long term goal of preparing students for college and career. The consequences of the nationwide literacy crisis manifest into emotional, social, and public health costs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). While low education attainment, low reading levels, and poverty are not direct causes of crime, research suggests a significant correlation between illiteracy and high levels of crime and recidivism (Drakeford, 2002).

Years of empirical research that focused on reading instruction and reading achievement for schools in urban settings revealed the flaws of national policies on educational reform (Enriquez, 2013). Two out of every three students in urban schools across the nation have reading proficiencies below the level needed to complete grade level work (Allington, 2011). Recent data from the New York State Education Department and the National Assessment of Educational Programs (NAEP) demonstrates there has been no significant gains in reading proficiency scores since the 1990s (The Nation's Report Card, 2011; The University of New York [UNYS], 2011b). Although national reading scores of black and Hispanic students have helped to reduce the achievement gap, there remains a widening literacy gap between students from rich and poor families (Haskins et al., 2012).

Research suggests that students achieve in reading when they are engaged and motivated to read, when they are exposed to good teachers for several consecutive years, and when their parents play a prominent role in their reading habits (Gambrell, 2011; Haskins et al., 2012; Kluda, 2009). Yet, many urban middle schools focus on negative

student achievement results and implement policies that call for “innovative alternatives” (UNYS, 2011). Rather, urban middle schools should aim to address which factors have the most significant contribution to student reading achievement.

This quantitative research study aimed to identify if reading motivation, parent engagement, or student engagement had an impact on a student’s end of year average in literacy class. The study also aimed to examine the extent to which the findings can assist similar Title I urban middle schools with a significantly high population of underperforming literacy students, in developing and implementing effective academic achievement strategies, thereby reducing the Level 1 and Level 2 student populations significantly. The study investigated student reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class as factors related to reading achievement. Therefore, the dissertation involved reading achievement in urban middle schools.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

This section attempts to provide insight into literacy as it pertains to instruction, learning, and engagement through the theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of cognitive development, Bandura’s (1977a) social learning theory, Epstein’s (2001) six types of involvement framework, and Danielson’s (2007) framework for teaching.

**Learning theories: A historical context.** The origin of the aforementioned frameworks can be attributed to constructivism. Constructivism, one of the original learning theories, dates back to the time of Socrates. It is a learning theory deeply rooted in the Socratic idea of providing opportunities for students to realize for themselves the



weaknesses in their own thinking (Concept to Classroom, 2004). In this century, the merging of Dewey's progressivism and Piaget's constructivism led to the cognitive-developmental view. DeVries (1987) explains that in this view, knowledge evolves from an internal psychological core through a person's interactions with the physical and social environment.

Constructivists argue that individuals construct their own understanding and knowledge through experience and reflection (Concept to Classroom, 2004). Therefore, they reject the notion of students as "*tabula rasa*," meaning that a learner is a blank slate. Constructivists believe learning is both an active and a contextualized process of constructing knowledge where the learner brings past experiences and cultural factors to a situation (Learning-Theories, 2013).

In essence, cognitive development is a progressive process. Piaget's systematic study of cognitive development challenged the common assumption that children are less competent thinkers than adults (McLeod, 2009). He believed that cognitive development is a result of maturation and experience. Although Piaget was not an educator, his research prompted him to influence educational reform. Piaget argued:

For traditional education theory has always treated the child, in effect, as a small adult, as a being who reasons and feels just as we do while merely lacking our knowledge and experience. So that, since the child viewed in this way was no more than an ignorant adult, the educator's task was not so much to form its mind as simply furnish it; the subject matter provided from outside was thought to be exercise enough in itself. But the problem becomes quite different as soon as one begins with the hypothesis of structural variations. If the child's thought is

qualitatively different from our own, then the principal aim of education is to form its intellectual and moral reasoning power. (DeVries, 1987, p. 30)

Piaget's theory emphasizes three major themes: the use of schemas, the process of transitioning from one developmental stage to another, and the stages of development. Piaget identified schemas as the basic foundation of a child's intellectual behavior (McLeod, 2009). Schemas, better known as "prior knowledge" in today's educational terms, are a child's stored representations of the world. Even newborns have innate schemas such as their sucking and grasping reflex (McLeod, 2009).

Piaget concluded that intellectual growth occurs when children reach assimilation and use existing schemas to deal with a new object or situation. The process of accommodation occurs when the existing schema does not work and needs to be changed to fit the new object. Finally, a state of equilibrium is reached when a child's schema is used to perceive the world (McLeod, 2009).

Piaget also believed that children go through four universal and consecutive cognitive stages of development (Woolfolk, 2004). They are (a) sensorimotor, (b) preoperational, (c) concrete operational, and (d) formal operational. A child's academic readiness depended upon biological maturation. He believed a child should not be taught concepts until the appropriate stage of cognitive development is reached (McLeod, 2009). His counterpart, Vygotsky, strongly disagreed with that idea.

**Grand theory.** Vygotsky (1978) began developing his sociocultural theory of cognitive development around the same time as Piaget, during the 1920s and 1930s (McLeod, 2007). He began his work shortly after the Russian Revolution. The political environment at the time may have strongly influenced his social development theory.

Marxism replaced czarist rule and emphasized socialism, collectivism, and cultural history, the belief that any culture could be understood through its examination of ideas. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach to cognitive development places more emphasis on culture and language, whereas Piaget emphasized self-initiated discovery and the controlling factor of biological maturation (McLeod, 2007). Piaget emphasized the influence of biology on learning while Vygotsky emphasized the social nature of learning.

Vygotsky's (1962) social development theory differs from Piaget's cognitive development theory in many ways. First, Vygotsky (1978) argued that social learning precedes development, contrary to Piaget's view that development precedes learning. Second, Vygotsky placed a different emphasis on language than Piaget. Vygotsky (1962) concluded that language plays two critical roles in cognitive development: (a) it is the primary way in which adults transfer information to children, and (b) it is a powerful tool of intellectual adaptation.

Finally, Vygotsky (1978) believed that guided learning led to a greater understanding of content or academic performance than Piaget's suggestion of working alone. As previously mentioned, Piaget believed children should not be taught concepts until they are developmentally or biologically ready. Vygotsky (1978), on the other hand, believed that with the help of someone who has a better understanding or greater ability, a child can learn anything, regardless of difficulty, in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky identified the ZPD as the area where a child can learn with the guidance of someone with a greater understanding, which he called the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO is referred to as "scaffolding"

by today's educators. The MKO could be a teacher, a peer, a coach, a tutor, or even a computer program.

Both theorists have significantly influenced the fields of developmental psychology, pedagogy, and instruction. Critics of Piaget, however, argue that his research focuses on development and not learning; some have even questioned the age ranges of his stages, speculating that they may not be realistic (McLeod, 2009). For instance, Dasen (1994) reported that only one third of adults ever reach the formal operations stage. Other criticisms refer to Piaget's methods of research, namely his observations and clinical interviews. They claim his methods are open to biased interpretations.

Another criticism is Piaget conducted his studies with a small population of participants, including earlier studies of his own children (McLeod, 2009). As for Vygotsky, critics point out his theory is incomplete. Vygotsky started developing his theories during the 1920s and 1930s but died in 1934 without fully completing his research.

Today, a constructivist classroom differs greatly from a traditional classroom. A constructivist teacher encourages students to assess their understanding by questioning themselves and their strategies, takes an inquiry based approach to teaching and learning, and encourages group work and the use of peers as resources (Concept to Classroom, 2004). The constructivist teacher's role is interactive, and the teacher serves as a facilitator. The teacher dialogues with his or her students and the students construct their own knowledge. Learning is interactive, encouraging students to build on what they already know.

A traditional teacher, on the other hand, values a strict curriculum, teaches primarily from textbooks and workbooks, and bases learning on repetition. Teachers disseminate information and students are the recipients of knowledge. The traditional teacher's role is directive and students work primarily alone (Concept to Classroom, 2004). This instructional model, empirical research suggests, does not allow students to develop self-efficacy skills; therefore it does not guide student motivation (Kelley & Decker, 2009).

Opponents of constructivism argue the learning theory is elitist. Critics claim constructivism has been most successful with students from privileged backgrounds fortunate enough to have exceptional teachers, highly involved parents, and rich home environments. Disadvantaged students, they argue, lack such resources and would benefit from direct instruction. Critics also claim that by rejecting evaluation through assessments, constructivists have made themselves unaccountable for their students' progress (Concept to Classroom, 2004).

Proponents find several benefits to the constructivists' approach. For instance, there is an increase in motivation and engagement when students are actively involved in their learning. Also, education is more effective when focused on critical thinking rather than rote memorization. In constructivist classrooms, students develop critical thinking skills they can use in other settings. Students also sharpen their social and communication skills by creating classroom environments that emphasize collaboration and exchange of ideas (Concept to Classroom, 2004).

**Reading motivation and Bandura's (1977a) social learning theory.** Bandura's (1977a) social learning theory proposes that children learn from one another through

observation or modeling. This is commonly referred to as observational learning. A major component of social learning theory is motivation. Bandura (1977b) purports that children must be motivated to learn in order for observational learning to be successful. Children must be motivated to imitate the behavior, as a result, reinforcement and punishments play an integral role in a student's motivation to learn. Bandura (1977a) summarizes that a child that experiences these motivators is just as effective as a student that observes another student experiencing some type of punishment or reinforcement.

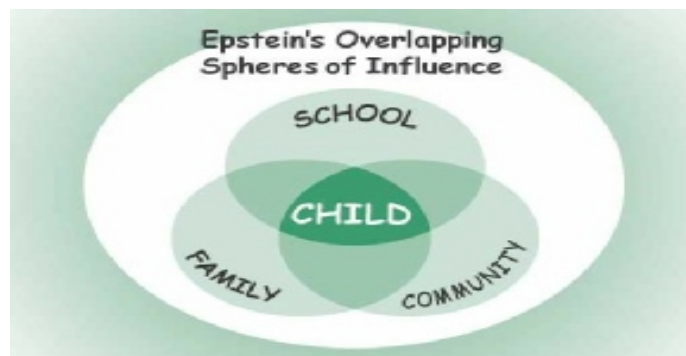
Another component to Bandura's (1997a) social learning theory is the notion of building self-efficacy to motivate students to learn. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capacity or capabilities to succeed in a particular situation (Bandura, 1977c). Self-efficacy plays a central role in student learning and performance because it determines how a student feels, thinks, and behaves (Bandura, 1977c).

**Parent engagement and Epstein's (2001) six types of involvement framework.**

Emerging from the sociocultural theory are several mini theories or frameworks on parent engagement and academic achievement. Specifically, Epstein's (2001) six types of involvement framework. Epstein (1995) describes parents that are involved in their child's education as parents who consistently communicate with the school staff, help their child with schoolwork at home, and volunteer their time in the school's decision making processes. Epstein et al. (2009) purports, "with frequent interactions among schools, families, and communities, more students will receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, working hard, thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school" (Epstein et al., 2009, p.10).

The framework was developed to guide schools when implementing parent involvement programs to strengthening home-school partnerships. Specifically, Epstein (1995) identifies the following key components when designing parent involvement programs: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community.

The parent involvement framework serves as a comprehensive tool for parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to develop programs for school and family partnerships. The purpose of the framework is to sustain or improve student academic achievement by fortifying the spheres of influence (the family, the school, and the community) that directly affect student learning and development. The overlapping spheres of influence, displayed in Figure 1.1, locates the student at the center, in which high quality school, family, and community partnership activities help to “engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes” (Epstein et al., 2009, p.10).



*Figure 1.1.* Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model. Each sphere plays a critical role in the social and cognitive development of a child. How well each stakeholder works together to support the child has an impact. Adapted from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook For Action* by J.L. Epstein, M.G. Saunders, B. S. Simon, K.C. Salinas, N.R. Jansorn, F. L. Von Voorhis, p. 150. Copyright 2009 by Westview.

### **Student engagement and Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching.**

Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching is a set of research based instructional components created to enhance student learning by assessing and supporting teacher practice. The framework, grounded in the constructivist view of teaching and learning, is divided into four domains and 22 components in which each component identifies a specific aspect of the domain. Domain one refers to *planning and preparation*, domain two refers to *classroom environment*, domain three refers to *instruction*, and domain four refers to *professional responsibilities*.

Specifically, this study addressed student engagement from the perspective of domain three *C, engaging students in learning*. Danielson (2007) acknowledges that student engagement is the center of the framework because engagement ensures learning, thus, all domains and components contribute to student engagement. The Framework for Teaching (2014) indicates that meaningful activities and assignments are the focal point of student engagement. Essentially, an engaged student is not “merely busy” nor “on task” (Danielson, 2014). Rather, an engaged student has an intellectual involvement with the content or activity such as engaging in a class discussion or debate, choosing their own task from a range of teacher arranged choices, and discovering patterns (Danielson, 2007).

In addition, student tasks are created by the teacher to provide cognitive challenge in which student learning is deepened by what they are doing. The teacher acts as a facilitator with scaffolding provided by the teacher or the activity. A teacher that effectively engages students in learning provides a learning environment in which (a) lesson activities require high levels of thinking and explanation of thinking, (b) students



are encouraged to improve or modify a lesson to make it more meaningful or to meet their needs, (c) the pacing of the lesson is appropriate, (d) students are encouraged to collaborate with their peers in small groups, and (e) students are given the opportunity for reflection at the end of the lesson to consolidate their thinking (The Framework for Teaching, 2014).

### **Study Significance**

A study investigating the correlation between student reading motivation, student perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class to student overall average in literacy class is important for several reasons: First, the findings of the aforementioned research questions aimed to contribute to the body of literature on factors that significantly relate to a student's reading achievement. Second, the findings aimed to inform policymakers and educators of urban school districts when modifying current strategies, re-evaluating policies, or developing programs focused on improving reading achievement data. Practitioners in the education field may also utilize the findings of this study for curriculum design and teacher professional developments.

Third, the findings aimed to identify strategies for closing achievement gaps (cultural, gender, and socioeconomic) in reading on a national level, thereby achieving a new level of literacy required for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. Last, the results of this study aimed to assist with strengthening partnerships with students, parents, and schools to improve short and long term student outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Although scholars have conducted extensive research on adolescent reading achievement, few researchers have examined the extent to which individual factors

correlate with a student's overall performance in literacy class. The purpose of this research study is to further investigate the correlation between student reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class as it relates to urban middle school students' end of year literacy average as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents (Appendix A).

In accordance with the aforementioned theories on reading achievement, this study also identified the recommendations and strategies that have emerged from studies focused on reading achievement. The study aimed to improve the reading achievement data of urban middle school students that have persistently scored below proficiency level on reading standardized tests.

### **Research Questions**

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. To what degree does a student's reading motivation, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?
2. To what degree does a student's perception of parent engagement, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?
3. To what degree does a student's engagement in literacy class, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?

The following null hypotheses were developed for this study: (a) there is no significant correlation between a student's reading motivation and that student's end of

year average in literacy class, (b) there is no significant correlation between a student's perception of parent engagement and that student's end of year average in literacy class; and (c) there is no significant correlation between a student's engagement in literacy class that that student's end of year average in literacy class.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are conceptually and operationally defined for better understanding:

**Achievement gap.** The term *achievement gap* refers to the disparity in academic performance between different groups. The groups differ by income, cultural background, or gender (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). For the purpose of this study, *achievement gap* is operationally defined to specifically refer to socioeconomic, race, or gender gaps in reading achievement.

**Adolescent.** The term *adolescent* is commonly understood as the period of time between childhood and adulthood (Kaplan, 2004). The terms *adolescents* and *students* are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this study, *adolescent* is operationally defined as an individual in grade 7 or 8.

**Career ready.** The terms *career ready* and *career readiness* are used interchangeably. *Career ready* refers to the defined qualities and achievements that students need to complete in order to gain entry into meaningful careers (The New York City Department of Education [NYCDOE], 2013a). For the purpose of this study, a student that is *career ready* is operationally defined as a student that has met or exceeded state proficiency standards as measured by the Common Core Aligned ELA test.

**College ready.** The terms *college ready* and *college readiness* are used interchangeably. The term *college ready* is commonly known as the level of preparation students need in order to succeed without remediation in credit-bearing entry level course work at a two - year or four - year institution, trade school, or technical school (ACT, 2006). For the purpose of this study, a student that is *college ready* is operationally defined as a student that has met or exceeded state proficiency standards as measured by the Common Core aligned ELA test.

**Common Core State Standards.** The terms *Common Core State Standard (CCSS)* and *Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)* are used interchangeably. The term *Common Core State Standards* refers to a set of national educational standards that help teachers ensure that students have the skills and knowledge to be successful (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). For the purpose of this study, *CCSS* is operationally defined as national learning standards adopted by 45 states, excluding Texas, Alaska, Virginia, Nebraska, and Minnesota.

**Literacy.** The term *literacy* and reading will be used interchangeably. Literacy is a student's competence and knowledge in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language; it is no longer merely the ability to recognize words and decode text (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012; Haskins et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, *literacy* is operationally defined as a student demonstrating the ability to read, write, and comprehend a range of complex texts in any content area. Moreover, *literacy* is operationally defined as a student's mastery of advanced reading and writing skills such as summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing ideas from a range of complex texts (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006).

**Parent.** “Parents are taken to mean parents, carers and those with parental responsibility” (National Governors’ Association, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the term *parent* is operationally defined as the primary caregiver of an adolescent. The individual may be a biological parent, grandparent, foster parent, family member, or any legal guardian responsible for the care and well-being of a child.

**Parent engagement.** The terms *parent engagement*, *parent involvement*, *parental support*, and *parental role* will be used interchangeably. Parent engagement includes any of the following behaviors: parenting, communicating, volunteering activities, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study, the term *parent engagement* refers to a parent’s positive and active engagement in a student’s academic and social life.

**Parenting style.** The terms *parenting style* and *parenting practices* will be used interchangeably. *Parenting style* refers to the different patterns of parental values, practices, behaviors, responsiveness, and demandingness (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the term *parenting style* will be operationally defined as one of the four types of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive/indulgent, and neglectful/uninvolved (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).

**Performance level 1.** Students who receive a Level 1 on the ELA test do not demonstrate an understanding of the English language arts knowledge and skills expected at grade level (UNYS, 2013a). For the purpose of this study, the term *Level 1* refers to a student’s scale score that is below standard in English language arts.

**Performance level 2.** A Level 2 student demonstrates partial understanding of English language arts knowledge and skills at grade level (UNYS, 2013a). For the

purpose of this study, the term *Level 2* refers to a student's scale score that meets basic standard in English language arts.

**Performance level 3.** A Level 3 student's performance demonstrates an understanding of the English language arts knowledge and skills (UNYS, 2013a). For the purpose of this study, the term *Level 3* refers to a student's scale score that meets proficiency standard in English language arts.

**Performance level 4.** A Level 4 student demonstrates a thorough understanding of the English language knowledge and skills expected at grade level (UNYS, 2013a). For the purpose of this study, the term *Level 4* refers to a student's scale score that exceeds proficiency standard in English language arts.

**Reading achievement.** Level descriptions that present expectations of student performance in relation to a range of text types and text difficulty and in response to a variety of assessment questions intended to elicit different cognitive processes and reading behaviors (United States Department of Education [DOE], 2011a). For the purpose of this study, the term *reading achievement* and *reading performance* are used interchangeably. The terms are operationally defined to refer to a student's performance, as measured by the performance levels on the New York state ELA test.

**Reading motivation.** The term *reading motivation* is the likelihood a student engages in reading or chooses to read (Gambrell, 2011) based on the students' values, beliefs, needs, and goals (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). The term *reading motivation* is different from reading attitude. For the purpose of this study, the term *reading motivation* is operationally defined as encompassing a variety of reasons as to why a

student may or may not engage in reading, whereas reading attitude refers to a student's like or dislike of reading (Klauda, 2009).

**Reading performance.** Level descriptions that present expectations of student performance in relation to a range of text types and text difficulty and in response to a variety of assessment questions intended to elicit different cognitive processes and reading behaviors (U. S. Department of Education [DOE], 2011a). For the purpose of this study, the term *reading performance* and *reading achievement* are used interchangeably. The terms are operationally defined to refer to a student's performance, as measured by the performance levels on the New York state ELA test.

**Student engagement.** The term *engagement* refers to a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of that construct (Axelson & Flick, 2011). School-related engagement behaviors include attending and participating in school, studying, and staying out of trouble. Psychophysical factors include self-efficacy, social connectedness to school, believing school is important and relevant, and students believing they can succeed in school (Orthner et al., 2010). For the purpose of this study, the term *student engagement* in schools is operationally defined as school-related behaviors and psychophysical factors. Student engagement also includes a student's persistence, effort, concentration and verbal contributions in class; emotional engagement includes ranges of emotions such as boredom, happiness, anxiety, and sense of belonging; cognitive engagement encompasses motivation to learn, setting goals for learning, and harnessing metacognitive strategies in pursuit of these goals (Kennedy, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the terms *student engagement* and *teacher engaging students in learning* are used interchangeably to mean

the time, resources, and energy a teacher spends on activities to enhance learning in the classroom (Exeter et al., 2010).

**Urban middle school.** A school serving grades 6 to 8 that is located in an area near the center of a large city, especially one associated with social and economic problems; a school with more than 40% of students receiving free or reduced lunch (Foster, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, 1996). For the purpose of this study, the term *urban middle school* is operationally defined as a public middle school located within a major city whose student population is predominantly black, Hispanic, or any race other than white and comes from lower socioeconomic background. In addition, for the purpose of this study, *urban middle school* or *middle school student* refers to an adolescent in grade 7.

## **Chapter Summary**

The aforementioned theories on cognitive development and reading achievement were relevant to the dissertation research for two primary reasons. First, they are the current instructional models used in a majority of NYC public schools. Second, despite the use of these models, NYC middle school data do not reflect significant gains in student reading achievement. The significantly high percentage of Level 1 and 2 students and the persistence of various achievement gaps in NYC public schools are both alarming and a cause for concern.

The level of rigor associated with the newly implemented CCSS may prove even more challenging for struggling readers, resulting in an increased number of Level 1 and 2 students after 2013's Common Core aligned ELA test. Although the constructivist and balanced literacy instructional approaches seem to better develop students' reading skills



in the lower grades, the disconnect lies in the significantly high number of Level 1 and 2 students in the upper grades.

Perhaps the solution to eliminating the stagnant proficiency rates and closing the literacy achievement gaps in urban middle schools lies in understanding what factors relate to reading achievement of urban middle students.

Chapter 2 will review the literature that dealt with the academic challenges adolescents face in urban settings. Chapter 3 presents the design methodology, reiterates the research questions, and introduces the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. The data results and findings as well as responses to the three research questions are described in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings aimed at informing policymakers and educators in developing strategies or programs that will move Level 1 and 2 students to a Level 3 or 4. Chapter 5 will also discuss the implications and limitations to the study.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

Many middle schools in urban settings serve students that do not meet proficiency standards in literacy. Despite the myriad of educational reform efforts over the years, there still remains a significantly high population of Level 1 and 2 students that continue to lag behind in literacy achievement. This chapter provides a focused literature review examining the topic of literacy achievement and urban adolescents. It begins with an overview of the types of challenges students and teachers face in urban middle schools and follows with relevant literature on reading motivation, parent engagement, and student engagement. Furthermore, the review of related literature will provide the reader with groundwork linking prior research studies with adolescent literacy achievement.

### **Review of the Literature Sections**

**The literacy crisis.** The definition of literacy has evolved over time. Generally, literacy is defined as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts” (Ahmed, 2011, p. 181). However, the CCSS defines literacy as a student’s competence and knowledge in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). A common understanding among researchers is that “it is no longer sufficient to define reading as merely the ability to recognize words and decode text” (Haskins et al., 2012, p. 2).

Limitations to studies on reading achievement present themselves in other areas. In addition to the lack of a uniform definition of literacy are ongoing debates on effective literacy instruction. Acute measurement instruments for literacy achievement also pose a challenge (Limbrick, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2010). Extensive research suggests several gaps in literacy instruction. The lack of consensus on the definition of literacy and poor measuring instruments used may not tell the entire story.

The nation's literacy problem is threefold. First, there is a lack of consensus on the most appropriate and effective way of teaching students advanced reading and writing skills. For decades, there have been two general literacy instructional approaches in education. The debate regarding which approach is more effective is most commonly known as "The Reading Wars." Proponents of the whole language approach argue reading is a natural process and children will naturally become literate without much explicit instruction in rules and conventions. Conversely, those who favor the philosophy of the phonics approach believe children require extensive exposure to direct instruction in rules of printed text (Wren, 2001).

A whole language classroom provides a student with simple, predictable, and repetitive text where emphasis is placed on appreciation and interest rather than precision and accuracy. Wren (2001) explains that children are not required to read verbatim; they are allowed to substitute words as long as the story makes sense. On the other hand, in a phonics classroom, great emphasis is placed on reading words exactly as they appear on the page. Children are explicitly taught rules about spelling, sound relationships, and grammar. Most educators today believe the solution to "The Reading Wars" is a balanced literacy approach.

The use of Atwell's (1998) balanced literacy and workshop model is considered progressive in an era of test driven reform policies (Enriquez, 2013). For instance, the balanced literacy model calls for guided reading and writing instruction in which the ELA teacher "scaffolds" student learning. In the balanced literacy model, students are encouraged to develop literacy skills by working in groups, a reflection of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. During a mini lesson, the teacher attempts to activate students' prior knowledge about a topic and builds upon what students already know, similar to Piaget's theory of utilizing schemas to drive cognitive development.

The balanced literacy framework focuses on both phonics and whole language but takes it a step further. In a balanced literacy classroom, students focus on different genres of reading and engage in different types of reading experiences such as read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, reading conferences, and independent reading. Students also engage in different types of writing experiences similar to the reading experiences (Atwell, 1998).

Each day, a teacher focuses on a reading or writing workshop. Explicit instruction is taught through think aloud, modeling, and mini lessons. Then, instruction progresses to varying experiences for students to develop their reading or writing skills in the form of sharing with peers, guided practice, independent activity, small group instruction, and conferences (Atwell, 1998).

The second problem is that approximately eight million students between grades 4 and 12 are not reading at grade level (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). In turn, a significant number of high school graduates are not prepared for the complexity of reading and writing associated with college level course work (Berkeley et al., 2011). The last

problem is that in a nation where equality is valued, there is an unequal distribution of opportunity and mobility due to a widening literacy gap between advantaged and disadvantaged families (Haskins et al., 2012).

Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) purport that if practitioners and policy makers are to close the reading achievement gap between low – income students and economically advantaged students, the first step is to create and implement a strategic plan to address a phenomenon known as summer reading setback. Findings from a longitudinal study conducted by Entwisle, Alexander, and Olsen (1997) reported that a widening achievement gap existed among 790 students from an urban school district in Maryland. The study investigated participants beginning in the fall of grade 1 until grade 5. Half of the students were from high poverty neighborhoods and schools while the other half were students from economically advantaged neighborhoods and schools. Every fall and spring, the participants were given a reading achievement test. The researchers found that the low-income students made achievement gains during each school year, but by the end of grade 5, the reading achievement gap between rich and poor students had widened three years.

Heyns' (1987) evaluation of two summer learning programs found that while student cognitive learning did not enhance significantly, disadvantaged students that were part of the summer programs did not demonstrated achievement loss. However, during the summer vacation, when school was not in session, any gains a low income student had made during the school year was lost due to that student's limited access to print resources and enrichment activities (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). Children who

read during the summer months experienced a steady level of reading achievement or were more likely to experience an increase (Heyns, 1987).

The concern for literacy achievement among students from economically disadvantaged families deemed at-risk now extends to an achievement gap between economically disadvantaged black adolescent females and males. While there is extensive research on black male performance on reading achievement, Groenke, Bennett, and Hill (2012) challenge past research by suggesting that poor black females are also at a deficit. The researchers' findings suggest the power of discourse obscures the legitimacy of an achievement gap in literacy (Groenke et al., 2012). Richardson's (2009) qualitative study challenges the term "at risk" and attributes it to societal biases. We are made "at risk" through socially constructed negative attitudes and ideologies, which are reproduced through text, talk, social interaction, and discourse. Studies on discourse, power, and knowledge demonstrate that through official institutions such as schools and the media, elites disseminate certain scripts which create inequality and value people differently based on White male patriarchal values. (Richardson, 2009).

In the primary grades, learning to read is a vital skill that students must master. It serves as a foundation for academic success in other academic subjects (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Peterson, & Pan, 2013). By the time adolescents reach middle school, the instructional focus shifts from learning to read to reading to learn. The reality is by the time they reach the middle grades, a great number of students have not developed the literacy skills crucial to their academic success.

This is especially the case for students of color. "Because disproportionately high percentages of low-income, African American and Latino children are found in most

urban environments, the achievement gap is a particularly acute issue for urban schools” (Teale et al., 2007, p.344). This phenomenon has resulted in the federal government advising schools on how to improve reading performance. Teale et al. (2007) purport students of color from poverty backgrounds score significantly lower on reading assessments than students from middle and high income backgrounds.

**The education reform crisis.** The 2002 passage of NCLB was the first wave of intense education reform that mandated the use of research based instructional strategies (Frey, Mandlawitz, & Alvarez, 2012). Since 2002, more than \$4 billion was spent on improving reading instruction in Title I schools through a NCLB mandated program called Reading First. The program focused utilizing research based methods of instruction in classrooms (Teale et al., 2007). NCLB required all states to set clear and high standards, implement standard aligned assessments to measure student progress annually in grades 3 to 8 and at least once in grades 10 to 12, and to report disaggregated results of four subgroups—economic disadvantage, race and ethnicity, disability, and English language proficiency. Schools that did not make adequate yearly progress were subject for corrective action (Frey et al., 2012).

NCLB, in theory, had great intentions. The law raised awareness of the achievement gap, holds state politicians and educators accountable by mandating them to address it, and set high expectations for all students (Frey et al., 2012). Critics of NCLB however, raised growing concerns. They argued that the law’s 12 year goal to make every student 100% proficient in state reading and math scores is unrealistic and unattainable (Taylor, 2010). The law allowed states to define proficiency, which resulted in some states setting low standards of proficiency and other states setting the bar too

high. President Obama recognized the limitations of NCLB, formally stating that the act was too rigid and offered states who implemented a teacher evaluation policy some flexibility about some of NCLB's requirements (Frey et al., 2012).

On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The purpose of the ARRA was to create jobs and promote economic recovery (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, 2009). In addition, the ARRA laid the foundations for standards based education reform (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The ARRA provided \$4.35 billion dollars to Race to the Top, a competitive contest encouraging states to make strides in “achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers” (U. S. Department of Education, 2009, p.2).

Race to the Top grant funding rewarded states that adopted the CCSS. Between 2010 and 2011, 45 states (including New York) and three U.S. territories adopted the CCSS. States that received Race to the Top funds were required to provide evidence of implementing CCSS plans in four core education reform areas. The first core area was adopting the CCSS and accompanying assessments that prepare students to succeed in college, the workplace, and in the global economy.

The second was building data systems that measure student growth and success, and informing teachers and principals how they can improve instruction. Third was recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals. Finally,



the fourth core area was identifying and turning around low-achieving schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2009). The CCSS identified cohesive skills students are expected to learn during their K-12 education careers.

The national standards were created to ensure that students are college and career ready upon graduating high school. The standards are consistent across states to provide administrators, teachers, parents, and students with a clear set of expectations that are aligned to the expectations of college (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). Currently, 45 states have adopted the CCSS for student learning. As of August 2014, states that have not adopted the CCSS are Texas, Alaska, Virginia, Nebraska, and Minnesota.

The recent implementation of the CCSS, some reading scholars claim, may be the long awaited panacea to the nation's reading problem. However, many schools are not making the connection that content knowledge is also needed in developing strong literacy skills. A recent study conducted by the Center on Education Policy (as cited in Teale et al., 2007) surveyed 349 school districts. District and school level interviews showed that 62% of districts and 77% of schools increased English language arts class time since NCLB and 44% of districts cut class time in other subject areas. Moreover, schools that were identified as needing room for improvement by NCLB went as far as to reduce social studies instruction by 90 minutes per week (as cited in Teale et al., 2007).

The CCSS provides students with rigorous learning opportunities that are challenging and empowering in every content area, including science and social studies. Yet many teachers, especially middle school educators, find it challenging to address the wide range of middle school students' reading needs "within the confines of a single class

period” (Morgan et al., 2013, p.16). The implementation of the CCSS drastically changed math and ELA instruction, but it also affected how science and social studies teachers were expected to teach their students.

The CCSS were created with the idea that all teachers are teachers of literacy. As a result, the rigorous reading and writing standards are expected to be reinforced in other content areas, not just English class. Proponents of the CCSS believe that reading competence is the key to competence in other human ventures (Fox, Dinsmore, & Alexander, 2010). The challenge, Gilles et al. (2013) claim, is that many middle school teachers, regardless of the subject they teach, may not know how to teach literacy skills through their subjects.

**The urban middle school crisis.** Adolescence is an awkward stage of life for many middle school students. They undergo emotional, physical, psychological, and intellectual changes at a time when their sense of themselves, the world, and the relationship between the two is tested every day (Atwell, 1998). When a child enters middle school, institutional restraints also pose a challenge. Sanacore (2000) attributes the decline in middle school reading achievement to trends that are causing teachers and administrators to focus on learning outcomes that appease parents, media, and boards of education. As a result, students fail to develop advanced literacy skills.

Sanacore (2000) purports that middle school students need to be exposed to a variety of reading and writing experiences that connect to their lives in order for them to consider reading as a serious part of their lives. Yet, socioeconomic constraints stand in the way of meaningful reading experiences. Urban middle school students from high poverty schools and neighborhoods report that most of their access to reading material is

restricted to their school or classroom libraries. Those book collections are “smaller, older, and less diverse” than that of economically advantaged school districts (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, p. 72).

Urban middle school adolescents from low income backgrounds face additional challenges. Alston (2012) identifies race, class, and urbanicity as factors that contribute to poorer instruction and lower test scores. For instance, in many urban middle schools also fail to address the instructional and cultural needs of diverse groups of students. A current factor posing a serious challenge in urban middle schools is the notion of hidden curricula. “In lieu of providing curriculum that addresses their academic, social, and emotional needs, African American students in urban settings are shackled by a curriculum that promotes inferiority by omitting the incorporation of culture into the educational setting,” (Strickland-Dixon, 2011, p.113). For many years, researchers have argued that educational institutions have hidden curricula that shape students’ identities and attitudes.

The term “hidden curricula” implies that the explicit curriculum material contains hidden messages about groups of individuals, whereas the absence of curriculum material implicitly suggests to students such content is unimportant (Rios, Stewart, & Winter, 2010). The result is a literacy curriculum that perpetuates the difference in academic performance by race and class. Rios et al. (2010) argued that hidden curricula convey powerful messages about people with marginalized identities and can influence subconscious self-perceptions that are reinforced over a period of time.

Another challenge, Teale et al. (2012) stated, is that many urban students do not receive much academic support at home or within their communities. It is imperative

that schools serve as an important source for developing their reading comprehension abilities. Promoting lifetime love of reading should be one of the primary goals in middle schools (Sanacore, 2000). However, due to aggressive federal mandates, educators focus more on short term literacy learning outcomes and less on long term benefits, “such a limited perspective usually translates into basic-skills-dominated instruction—spelling, vocabulary, grammar—and a de-emphasis on more meaningful interesting activities” (Sanacore, 2000, p. 157).

**New York’s urban schools crisis.** The state of New York is home to many large urban school districts. While New York City students performed better than “The Big Five” city school districts on the 2013 Common Core aligned ELA test, the data suggests that New York’s urban students are not demonstrating mastery of advanced literacy skills. Only 26.4% of New York City students met or exceeded proficiency standards while only 16.4 % of Yonkers students met or exceeded standards. An alarming 5.4% of Rochester students, 8.7% of Syracuse students, and 11.5% of Buffalo students met or exceeded proficiency standards (UNYS, 2013b).

Since the adoption of the CCSS in 2010, the New York State Education Department has changed the scale scores for each performance level. The new levels of achievement better reflect whether or not a student is on track to achieve college-ready scores on future exams (UNYS, 2011a). The New York State Education Department’s Board of Regents defines a Level 1 student as being below state standards, a Level 2 student as meeting basic standards, a Level 3 student as meeting proficiency standards, and a Level 4 student as exceeding proficiency standards (UNYS, 2013). Studies show that students who persistently score at a Level 1 or Level 2 on the ELA test face a greater

chance of encountering academic challenges in college and are more likely to be economically disadvantaged in their adult lives.

New York State Education Commissioner, John B. King, describes student outcomes of past ELA exams as “stubbornly flat,” and reaffirms the Regents’ reform agenda to turn around low performing schools by improving the training and support of teachers, providing useful student data, and replacing lowest performing schools with “innovative alternatives” (UNYS, 2011a). The Commissioner’s consensus is that these efforts will help to ensure that New York’s students are well-prepared for college and career. The New York State Education Department defines a student scoring at or above a Level 2 is on track to pass the English exam required for high school graduation. A student scoring at or above a Level 3 is on track to earn a college-ready score on the Regents exam (UNYS, 2013a).

The adoption of the CCSS further confirmed that the literacy skills of average American students are far below that of international standards (Haskins et al., 2012). For instance, the New York state assessment results of the Common Core aligned April 2013 grade 3 to 8 ELA test reflected a significantly lower percentage of students deemed proficient than in 2011-2012 (UNYS, 2013b). The commissioner stated that, “These proficiency scores do not reflect a drop in performance, but rather a raising of standards to reflect college and career readiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (UNYS, 2013b). The Common Core aligned April 2013 assessment was the first to measure New York students’ mastery of ELA knowledge and advanced literacy skills.

Scores from the April 2013 ELA test and past New York state ELA assessments reflects an alarming inconsistency in student performance. For example, 2011’s New

York state ELA test (the standardized test that was administered before New York state adopted the CCSS) results revealed 52.8% of grade 3 to 8 students met (Level 3) or exceeded (Level 4) the ELA proficiency standard (UNYS, 2011b). Meanwhile, 2013's test (which was aligned to the CCSS) results revealed 31.1% of grade 3 to 8 students met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard (UNYS, 2013b).

Data collected in 2011 revealed that statewide, 35% of black students and 37.2 % of Hispanic students in grade 3 to 8 met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard (UNYS, 2011b). However, 2013's ELA results show that only 16.1% of black students and 17.7% of Hispanic students met or exceeded the proficiency standard (UNYS, 2013b).

**Student reading motivation.** Research suggests that students' intrinsic motivation gradually declines from elementary school to high school (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006), resulting in students that may never reach their full literacy potential (Gambrell, 2011). Extrinsically motivated students are driven by external factors like social settings (Paige, 2011). Intrinsically motivated students, on the other hand, are driven by a desire for mastery, curiosity, and inquiry (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). The phenomenon known as the "fourth grade slump" refers to students' waning interest in and motivation for reading. Although the phenomenon is accepted by researchers, its cause is greatly debated. Some scholars suggest it is because students make the shift from learning to read to reading to learn, another explanation has been that students begin to read more difficult texts, thus causing a decrease in pleasure and engagement (Kelley & Decker, 2009).

Typically, by the time students who struggle to read reach middle school, they develop motivational problems due to negative self-perceptions of their academic ability (Paige, 2011). Adolescents' negative attitudes towards reading can be linked to the impact of weakening reading ability as they progress in the upper grades (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Petscher's (2010) meta-analysis of the correlation between student attitudes towards reading and achievement in reading revealed that the attitude-achievement relationship is of moderate size and is practically important enough to consider attitude manipulation. A major limitation to the meta-analysis however, is a lack in detailed information about the selected studies included in the meta-analysis.

Paige (2011) examined a four-phase model of situational interest used to engage adolescent readers who struggle with reading. Although a limitation to the study included a relatively small sample size, it revealed significant relationships between extrinsic motivation and oral reading proficiency, comprehension, and academic achievement. This echoes Petscher's (2010) argument that public schools spend little time in developing positive reading attitudes in students.

For instance, Enriquez's (2013) case study described an urban adolescent young male that enjoyed reading but believed that inconsistent school discourses hinder his enjoyment as a reader. He felt his challenges come from within the school, not outside where he lives in a neighborhood that experiences its share of crime and violence. Petscher (2010) purported building support for students around reading such as access to books, freedom to read books of interests, and providing classroom opportunities or social interactions with books enhances student motivation.

Fox et al. (2010) conducted a case study investigating the reading competence and interest in three middle school aged gifted readers. The study explored how the model of domain learning (MDL), a framework suggesting that a learner's knowledge co-develops and interacts with a learner's interest and level of strategic processing, offers an account of a learner's topic knowledge. Based on the MDL model, Fox et al. (2010) identified the characteristics of good readers. First, competent readers, the researchers concluded, have a wealth of structured and interconnected knowledge about reading. Second, they engage in deeper meaning building and are reflective and evaluative. Last, competent readers can achieve in any academic domain because they are capable of reading complex texts to gather knowledge on a topic relatively new to them. Groenke et al. (2012) also conducted a study that examined the reading attitudes, dispositions, and motivations of 17 black middle school students. Contrary to what empirical research suggests, their findings showed that black adolescents do indeed read for rich and varied purposes.

**Parent's role in child's achievement in school.** Lawmakers recognize parent involvement as an essential tool in improving student performance in school. Federal legislation promotes school-home partnerships by incorporating parental involvement policies into education reform acts (Hawes & Plourde, 2005). Empirical research also suggests that parents play a key role in helping students learn to read (Mullan, 2010). Parents' support for reading is directly related to their adolescents' reading habits, motivation, and attitudes (Klauda, 2009).

Mullan's (2010) study analyzed the reading habits of adolescents compared to the reading habits of their parents. The study examined how a parent's gender had a



significant impact on an adolescent's reading habits. The results of the study suggested that there is a strong association between a mother's reading habits and a female child's reading habits and a father's reading habits had a significant association on a male child's reading habits. Mullan (2010) concludes that parental engagement in reading activities had a significant influence on adolescent reading.

Petscher (2010) reaffirmed that a parent's influence on a student's reading attitudes cannot be ignored. A student's self-beliefs are shaped by the student's environment, namely their home and classroom. Empirical research indicates that when a parent does not view their child as bright, the child's self-concept diminishes. Findings from empirical work suggest culture and race also plays a role in parental involvement and parenting styles. Cultural values and beliefs can have an effect on students' motivation to achieve (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006).

Early development of positive attitudes towards reading appears to be vital, as reading motivation among students' begins to decline (Petscher, 2010). A lack of parental involvement in a student's education can prove detrimental. This is especially true for economically disadvantaged black male adolescents. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) reveal that poorly educated black males are over represented in juvenile detention centers, prisons, and special education classes. They are underrepresented in high school honors and advanced classes as well as in higher education institutions. Moreover, black males are "chronically unemployed, and underemployed, are less healthy, and have access to fewer health care resources, die much younger, and are many times more likely to be sent to jail for periods significantly longer than males of other racial/ethnic groups" (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).

Reglin, Cameron, and Losike-Sedimo's (2012) study examined the effectiveness of a parent support intervention program to improve parental involvement and students' scores in reading. The researchers randomly selected 30 parents of grade 7 students who failed an end of grade year test. The parents were encouraged to participate in a parent support intervention program. Participating parents learned support activities such as strategies to use at home to help a student prepare for a major test, questions to ask the student regarding classwork and behavior at school, effective listening strategies for the parent, and ongoing discussions with the student emphasizing the importance of attendance, were a few of the activities identified in the study as having a positive impact on improving student reading comprehension scores. The study revealed that parent support intervention models like the one the researchers examined contributed to the enhanced reading skills of adolescents. The students' post-test results increased. The increase had a statistical significance of .05 at an alpha level.

**Engaging the disengaged student.** A growing body of research suggests that student engagement in school is critical to long term student outcomes; the greater a student's school engagement, the greater the likelihood a student will attend college and successfully transition into a job or career (Orthner et al., 2010). Therefore, school engagement is crucial to a student's academic success; it plays a greater role in student achievement than a student's family background (Gambrell, 2011). Students with high reading engagement that come from families with low economic backgrounds and low parental education performed better in reading achievement tests than students with low reading engagement and similar background characteristics (Gambrell, 2011).

Adolescents who are disengaged in school ultimately lose motivation to read. Similar to Petscher's (2010) recommendations for improving student engagement, Gambrell (2011) suggests seven "rules" of engagement that educators and policy makers must know about motivating students to read. Students are more motivated to read when: (a) the reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives, (b) they have access to a wide range of reading materials, (c) they have ample opportunities to engage in sustained reading, (d) they have opportunities to make choices about what they read and how they engage in complete literacy tasks, (e) they have opportunities to socially interact with others about the text they read, (f) they have opportunities to be successful with challenging texts, and (g) when classroom incentives reflect the value and importance of reading.

The shift to explicitly teach students of color advanced reading and writing skills and strategies remains a debatable topic among scholars and practitioners. Some researchers believe explicit instruction is the key to the literacy achievement among students of color. Critics, however, believe limiting the teacher's role in instruction allows students to write authentically (Alston, 2012).

To effectively support students of color that are deemed "at risk," Groenke et al. (2012) purport that teachers' instruction should be tailored to the needs of individual students. For instance, teachers should provide adolescents with books they can read with success and conduct small group reading instruction. In addition, Groenke et al. (2012) encouraged educators and policy-makers to broaden their views of literacy rather than utilizing a one-size-fits-all approach that is more aligned to student individual needs.

Alston's (2012) study on African American student writers focused on two ELA urban middle school teachers' instructional practices. The study examined the teachers' value-added measures on student achievement. Alston (2012) recorded classroom observations, analyzed student work and artifacts, and conducted pre and post observation teacher interviews.

The data results suggested a teacher that provides significant scaffolds (rubrics, relevant and detailed teacher feedback on student work, and graphic organizers), and engages students in meaningful yet rigorous and challenging tasks has statistically significant student achievement gains. Alston (2012) did acknowledge that more research is needed to further link classroom structures and practices with value-added measures of teacher impact on student academic achievement as measured through standardized test scores. Alston (2012) also noted that more research is needed to better identify instruction that supports African American student writers.

The research demonstrated several strengths. Alston (2012) chose to study two teachers from a pool of 24 highly qualified teachers. Both teachers taught at the same school, had similar years of teaching experience, taught the same student population, taught the same curriculum, and both had high value-added measures. The only difference is the teachers' daily instructional practices varied. The study's limitation is that only two teachers were studied. Also, the population size was relatively small.

MacDonald (2010) purports that despite the concern about the level of reading competence among students; there is a lack of substantial research on appropriate strategies geared towards improving reading. This is because the federal government interfered at the state level and set mandates on improving reading competence

(MacDonald, 2010). On the contrary, Peterson and Taylor (2012) state that “40 years of research on effective teaching of reading has provided the education community with a great deal of knowledge about how to address the complexities and challenges of teaching a diverse student population to read” (Peterson & Taylor, 2012, p. 297).

The most recent research on reading improvement describes a shift in literacy instruction. The research on reading improvement strongly supports teaching explicitly through critical literacy. Critical literacy, as defined by Taylor and Brown (2009), is instruction that promotes critical thinking and opens dialogue that transforms learning. It is in essence a constructivist’s approach to teaching that allows students to participate in their own education. Students are provided the opportunity to agree and disagree in the classroom without authoritative threats of power dynamics that impede the learning environment (Taylor & Brown, 2009).

Several themes of teaching critical literacy emerged during the literature review:

1. Teaching critical literacy allows students to think critically about texts enabling them to become empowered and inspired (Taylor & Brown, 2009).
2. Implementing a unit of study approach for teaching CCSS standards of writing “offers an inquiry approach to learning, as students take the lead in what they notice as they read and study a genre together” (as cited in Pytash & Morgan, 2013, p.45).
3. Teaching critical literacy exposes students to texts that address social issues from the point of view of diverse authors (Taylor & Brown, 2009).

4. A teacher's use of higher order thinking questioning and discussion techniques accelerates students' growth in reading comprehension (Peterson & Taylor, 2012).
5. When taught in all content areas, critical literacy enables students to achieve across disciplines (Gilles et al., 2013).
6. Extensive professional developments for teaching advanced literacy skills using the CCSS reading and writing standards deepen teacher instructional practices (Gilles et al., 2013; Zakierski & Siegel, 2010).
7. Struggling and reluctant readers can be taught to read critically through guided reading or paired reading (Morgan et al., 2013; MacDonald, 2010).
8. A balanced literacy model explicitly teaches key reading and writing skills, engages students, and fosters independence (Peterson & Taylor, 2012).
9. Schools with effective literacy programs, where teacher teams work collaboratively, have positive student achievement outcomes (Zakierski & Siegel, 2010).
10. Explicit literacy skills and strategies instruction in word study, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and motivation is the key to improving competence in reading (Marchand-Martella et al., 2013).

MacDonald (2010) conducted a case study on the effectiveness of guided reading and paired reading on improving literacy outcomes in struggling readers. To evaluate the success of a paired reading program implemented in a school located in an economically disadvantaged area, MacDonald's (2010) research questions were:

1. Did reading significantly improve?

2. What was successful about the program?

Based on data using archival standardized testing results, questionnaires, and interviews, the study revealed that the guided reading program was effective. Student reading improved in all cases over an 18 month period.

Berkeley et al. (2011) conducted a causal-comparative research study of a middle school's reading instruction program for at-risk students. The Title I middle school, located in a small school district in rural Georgia, serves a diverse student population where 50% of students receive free lunch. The findings suggested that the reading intervention program was only effective when implemented with fidelity. The program requires a high degree of intensity and explicitness (Berkeley et al., 2011). The researchers' data sources were two types of reading fluency benchmark tests, anecdotal records, and observations. The following research questions were posed to evaluate the reading intervention program's effectiveness:

1. How does the CR (Corrective Reading) instruction impact the decoding and oral reading fluency skills of students in grades 6, 7, and 8 identified as struggling readers?
2. Do these students make more gains in decoding and oral reading fluency than in a semester when they do not receive CR instruction?
3. Is the CR program implemented with fidelity?

Based on the researchers' data, students did not demonstrate significant gains due to the teacher's lack of professional development of the CR program and lack of fidelity in terms of following the plans for implementing and teaching the program. It can be

inferred from the findings that a teacher's extensive professional development on reading programs or literacy instruction is key to student achievement in reading.

Zakierski and Siegel (2010) conducted a study on creating collaborative literacy teams to increase reading achievement in a New York state elementary school. The researchers implemented a literacy team model, extended the literacy instruction period to two-hour uninterrupted blocks per day, provided extensive professional developments of exemplary literacy instruction, and analyzed archival reading test results. Teachers were supported with coaches, and students were offered after-school tutoring. Prior to the researchers' intervention, 68% of the school's grade 4 students met state reading standards. After one year of intervention, 93% of students achieved mastery of the state reading standards. A change in existing structures combined with the creation of effective teacher teams (through extensive professional development) contributed to the school making strides towards closing its achievement gap (Zakierski & Siegel, 2010).

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Policy makers and educators have made numerous efforts to address the reading problems plaguing the nation's schools. Urban middle schools are not meeting national proficiency standards in reading. Underserved communities, poor instructional practices, and a lack of accountability by all stakeholders are some of the many factors researchers have identified as causes for persistently low reading achievement scores. On the other hand, reading scholars have also identified several factors that aid in improving reading achievement. Student engagement, effective teacher practices, and parent involvement are strongly linked to positive reading outcomes.



Effective literacy instruction cannot exist without clear, rigorous standards and objectives. A teacher's instructional practices such as guided reading and teaching critical literacy may help in closing the reading achievement gap however, the challenge is teaching content that is relevant to the lives and instructional needs of economically disadvantaged students while adhering to state or board of education policies. The recent implementation of the rigorous reading and writing CCSS coupled with an instructional approach that fosters higher order thinking learning opportunities for students can improve students' reading competency in all content areas. Ensuring that urban middle school students are academically prepared for college and career is a long term goal that must be met in order for students to have a fighting chance in the twenty-first century global economy.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **General Perspective**

Large numbers of urban middle school students across the nation struggle with reading (Kelley, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Faller, 2010). Specifically, Biancarosa and Snow (2006) reported that an estimated eight million adolescents struggled with reading. While the U.S prides itself in being a leader of the global economy, comparative achievement data indicates that student performances are sub-par (Wiggan, 2008). Researchers have sought to identify best practices to improve reading achievement data of urban middle school students. A myriad of studies examined reading motivation, parent engagement, and student engagement as factors related to adolescent achievement in school (Brinda, 2008; Spera, 2005; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006).

This correlational study examined the relationship between a student's reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class, to their end of year average in literacy class as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. This study was conducted as a quantitative study based on data collected from the survey and participant literacy class averages for the 2013-2014 school year at an urban public middle school in New York City.

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. To what degree does a student's reading motivation, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?

2. To what degree does a student's perception of parent engagement, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?
3. To what degree does a student's engagement in literacy class, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?

The following null hypotheses were utilized for this study: (a) there is no significant correlation between a student's reading motivation and that student's end of year average in literacy class, (b) there is no significant correlation between a student's perception of parent engagement and that student's end of year average in literacy class, and (c) there is no significant correlation between a student's engagement in literacy class that that student's end of year average in literacy class.

### **Research Context**

The proposed research study analyzed students' reading achievement at an urban public middle school in New York City. ABC school (school name is a pseudonym) is located within a working class neighborhood of a southeastern section of a borough in New York City. The neighborhood is a predominately African American community. The school is a Title I middle school from grades 6 to 8 (NYCDOE, 2012a).

ABC School's student body is served by one principal, four assistant principals, 126 teachers, three guidance counselors, 23 paraprofessionals, four secretaries, five school safety agents, and 19 school aides. Of the teachers in the school, 92.4% are fully licensed and permanently assigned to the school, 55.9% have more than five years teaching experience, and more than 78% hold a Master's Degree or higher (NYCDOE,

2012a). For the school year 2013 – 2014, the population of 1,588 students represent diverse backgrounds such as Asian, Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Haitian, and Middle Eastern. The student population is comprised of 45% Black, 23% Hispanic, 2% White, and 27% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 8% special education students. Males account for 48% of the students enrolled and females account for 52% of the total population. The average attendance rate for the school year was 93.2%. Many (61-70%) of the students are from families receiving public assistance (NYCDOE, 2014).

Like most New York City public schools, ABC School has implemented Atwell's (1998) balanced literacy framework for literacy instruction. It has utilized Atwell's (1998) instructional model for the past nine years. Teachers at ABC School are strongly encouraged to implement Atwell's (1998) seven principles to guide their instruction and impact student learning. The principles dictate that students need regular dedicated amounts of time to write, share, and reflect. Students should write about topics of their choice. In addition, writers need on-going feedback from their peers and from the literacy teacher to learn mechanics in context.

ABC School's literacy department is led by an assistant principal of literacy as well as a literacy instructional coach that provides ongoing in-house professional development experiences. Professional development opportunities occur once a week for literacy teacher teams in each grade level, every Thursday for the entire literacy department, and ongoing individual support for teachers that request the support of the coach. Additional support is also provided in the form of tailored professional development opportunities for teachers. Teachers that have been identified by the

assistant principal of literacy as benefiting from professional development based on specific needs are assigned as mentees to work with the instructional coach.

The school's students take literacy classes every day where they receive literacy instruction for 90 minutes. In September, 2013, the school adopted Code X, a middle school ELA curriculum created by Scholastic that is aligned to the ELA CCSS. Before 2013, the school did not have a city or state mandated ELA curriculum. During the 90 minute literacy block, literacy teachers teach CCSS aligned curricular units focused on exposing students to reading, writing, and responding to a variety of complex texts and genres utilizing grade appropriate reading and writing strategies.

ABC School's 2011-2012 quality review report suggested that a significant number of students did not meet reading proficiency standards because overall learning experiences do not consistently call for students to engage in rigorous reading, writing, thinking, or higher-order skills to produce meaningful work (NYCDOE, 2013b). The 2011-2012 quality review report also noted that only 36% of ABC School students did meet or exceed standards in ELA. The result is 64% of students at the school did not meet ELA standards (NYCDOE, 2012b). The data suggest a significant number of the school's students are not equipped with the necessary reading and writing skills needed to succeed in high school, let alone college and career. For the 2011-2012 school year, the school received a quality review overall evaluation of "developing."

The 2013-2014 quality review report noted a modest improvement, specifically in instruction. Among the improved instructional practices is teachers' use of various forms of assessment to monitor student progress. However, ABC School needs to refine teaching practices that meet the learning needs of English language learner students and

special education students (NYCDOE, 2014). For the 2013 – 2014 school year, ABC School received a quality review overall evaluation of “proficient.”

### **Research Participants**

With permission from the New York City Institutional Review Board, the total population of grade 7 students was given the opportunity to participate in the study. At the time of the study, there were approximately 535 grade 7 students enrolled at ABC School. The total population of grade 7 students included general education students, special education students, former English language learner students, and English language learner students. Specific criterion for sample selection included students that had the same literacy teacher for the entire 2013-2014 school year and students that were willing to participate in the study after parental consent and student assent was granted.

**Sample demographic profile.** Data were collected from a sample of 135 grade 7 students at ABC School. A purposive sample of 25% of the population was utilized for the study. The sample included general education students, special education students, former English language learner students, and English language learner students.

Specifically, 47% were male ( $n = 63$ ) and 53% were female ( $n = 72$ ). Additionally, the majority of participants were black ( $n = 69$ , 51.10%), 30% were Asian or Pacific Islander ( $n = 41$ ), 13% were Hispanic ( $n = 17$ ), and the remaining 6% were white ( $n = 5$ ), American Indian or Alaskan native ( $n = 1$ ), native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander ( $n = 1$ ), and multiracial ( $n = 1$ ).

Table 3.1 provides detail on participants’ gender. Table 3.2 illustrates participants’ ethnicity. Table 3.3 provides details on participants’ classification. Table 3.4 illustrates participants’ 2013 ELA score. Table 3.5 provides information on

participants' lunch rate classification. Lunch rate classification is representative of a student's family socioeconomic status.

Table 3.1

*Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Gender and Ethnicity*

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Boy	63	46.70
Girl	72	53.30
Total	135	100.00

Table 3.2

*Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Ethnicity*

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Ethnicity		
Black	69	51.10
Hispanic	17	12.60
Asian or Pacific Islander	41	30.40
White	5	3.70
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	0.70
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.70
Multiracial	1	0.70
Total	135	100.00

Table 3.3

*Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Classification*

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
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Classification		
General Education Student	96	71.10
Special Education	10	7.40
ELL	5	3.70
Former ELL	23	17.00
Special Education and F-ELL	1	0.70
Total	135	100.00

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Table 3.4

*Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' 2013 New York State ELA Score*

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
NYS 2013 ELA Score		
Level 1	37	27.40
Level 2	66	48.90
Level 3	17	12.60
Level 4	9	6.70
Missing	6	4.40
Total	135	100.00

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Table 3.5

*Frequency and Percent Statistics of Participants' Lunch Rate*



Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Free/Reduced Lunch or Full Rate		
Free	113	83.70
Reduced	14	10.40
Full Rate	5	3.70
No Form	3	2.20
Total	135	100.00

### **Instruments Used in Data Collection**

The proposed study utilized one instrument for collecting data, the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. The survey, developed by the principal investigator, intended to measure an adolescent's motivation to read, perception of parent engagement, and perception of engagement in literacy class. The Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents was originally developed in 2014 to fill the need for a multi-dimensional reading engagement test specifically designed for educational program evaluation and teacher development. The survey is designed for use with students ages 11 to 14 in a middle school setting.

Content validity was established by a panel of experts (Appendix B). The principal researcher organized a panel of experts that included a New York State Regent, a dissertation chairperson, a middle school principal, an assistant principal, a school psychologist, two teachers, a parent coordinator, and a Parent Teacher Association president. The panel examined the content of the survey to measure the degree to which each item accurately measures each variable (reading motivation, parent engagement, and

student engagement). After several revisions of the language of the items, the content validity panel of experts concluded that the items on the survey are essential and effective. The panel unanimously voted that the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents is valid.

Reliability was established by running reliability analyses. Reliability analyses were run to determine if the predictor variables (reading motivation, parent engagement, and student engagement) were sufficiently reliable. Specifically, the predictor variables were measured by ten items each on the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. Reliability analysis allows one to study the properties of measurement scales and the items that compose the scales (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Cronbach’s alpha reliability analysis procedure calculates a reliability coefficient that ranges between 0-1. The result of the reliability coefficient is based on the average inter-item correlation. Scale reliability is assumed if the coefficient is  $\geq .60$ . Results from Cronbach’s alpha reliability analysis procedure found that the variable constructs were sufficiently reliable (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6

*Summary of Reliability Analysis of Predictor Variables*

Predictor Variable	<i>n</i>	# of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Reading Motivation	134	10	.773
Parent Engagement	133	10	.820
Student Engagement	132	10	.666

Prior to administering the survey, approximately 10 grade 7 students were randomly selected for the purpose of conducting a field test. These students did not participate in the actual study. The field test aimed to clarify survey instructions and

language as well as provide the principal investigator with feedback regarding appropriateness for the setting and sample population, difficult sections, and length of time needed to complete the survey.

The Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents is a 30 item survey consisting of short, self-descriptive statements that can be completed in approximately 15 minutes. The survey is divided into three sub tests measuring an adolescent's reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and their perception of engagement in literacy class. Summative scores for the survey range from 10 to 30 while subtest scores range from 1 to 10. Respondents used a 3-point Likert scale response represented by 3 - Often, 2 - Sometimes, and 1 - Rarely.

The first sub test consists of statements that measure reading motivation based on responses to adolescents' self-concepts as readers and the importance they place on reading. For instance, items assessing self-concepts about reading and value placed on reading include:

1. I spend my free time reading,
2. I talk to my friends about books I read, and
3. It is important for me to do my best at reading.

Additionally, the second sub test measures an adolescent's perception of parent engagement based on the types of parenting style and parental support. For instance, survey statements for the parent engagement subtest include:

1. When I have a problem, I can count on my parent or guardian for help,
2. My parent or guardian encourages me to think independently, and

3. On school nights, my parent or guardian expects me to be home at a certain time.

The final subtest consists of items that measure an adolescent's perception of level of engagement in literacy class based on the instructional practices of the literacy teacher.

Survey items for the student engagement subtest include:

1. In my literacy class, we work in groups to apply what we learned,
2. I am given several choices on what literacy assignments or tasks to complete, and
3. My literacy teacher makes class discussions interesting.

### **Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

Upon receiving approval from both the New York City Department of Education and St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Boards in March of 2014, data collection began after the conclusion of the administration of the New York State Math and ELA standardized tests. Beginning in May 2014, parent consent forms (Appendix C) and student assent forms (Appendix D) were mailed to all 535 grade 7 students enrolled in ABC School as of May 2014.

Additionally, the principal of the school reminded students to ask their parents or guardians to review the consent forms during the morning announcements over the intercom. The principal investigator also hand delivered additional copies of consent forms to grade 7 students claiming they had not received any forms or stating they had lost the forms. For each grade 7 class visit, the principal investigator spent approximately five minutes to briefly introducing herself, share the voluntary nature, purpose, and confidentiality of the study, as well as address any student questions or concerns.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary however parent permission to participate in the study was mandatory. There was minimal risk for participating in the survey. The survey asks participants to respond to sensitive statements about child-parent relationships such as “My parent or guardian spends time talking to me,” or “My parent or guardian helps me with my homework” that could potentially cause stress to the respondent. Participant names were kept confidential and anonymous. A client identification number was utilized to track surveys. Surveys were kept in a safe location.

The principal researcher collected parent consent forms and student assent forms for approximately four weeks. Then, the principal investigator organized a total of two days for participants to complete the survey during non-instructional times. The survey was administered in paper and pencil format. To ensure the integrity and fidelity of the survey, an outside proctor was trained to administer the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. The proctor was trained based on administrator guidelines and rubric created by the principal investigator.

The principal investigator oversaw all exchanges of consent forms and surveys between the proctor and the participant. Within the two day administration period, the principal investigator obtained a total of 135 completed surveys, yielding an approximate 25% completion rate. All surveys were stored in a secured container located inside of the principal investigator’s office and will be kept in a secure location for three years (2017). Student end of year literacy class averages were accessed, with parental consent, from the NYCDOE’s online report card system. The data collected from this study were manually entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 19 software program. To investigate the correlation between student reading motivation, students’ perception of

parent engagement and student engagement as it relates to that student's end of year literacy class average, a multiple regression analysis was conducted.

### **Summary of Methodology**

First, a plan of action was developed to complete this quantitative study's methodology. Then, the process to develop the content validity on the survey instrument occurred in January, 2014. The process involved several practitioners, including a New York state Regent, a principal, an assistant principal, and two teachers to serve on a panel of experts. The process also included a school psychologist and the president of the Parent Teacher Association to serve on the content validity panel. Once content validity was unanimously established, strategies for participant outreach and survey administration began in April 2014. The survey data was then collected and analyzed in June 2014. Demographic statistics were provided including count and percent statistics. Reliability analyses were conducted to determine the internal consistencies of the variable constructs.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

Inferential statistics were used to draw conclusions from the sample tested. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to code and tabulate scores

collected from the survey and provide summarized values where applicable including the mean, central tendency, variance, and standard deviation. The data was examined for missing scores, univariate outliers, and multivariate outliers. Furthermore, the data was then evaluated for parametric assumptions including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. Lastly, multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the three research questions.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were:

1. To what degree does a student's reading motivation, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year grade point average in literacy class?
2. To what degree does a student's perception of parent engagement, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year grade point average in literacy class?
3. To what degree does student engagement in literacy class, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year grade point average in literacy class?

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Before the research questions were assessed, the data were screened for missing data, univariate outliers, and multivariate outliers. Missing data were investigated using frequency counts and six cases had one missing item each. These six participants had their missing score replaced by the series mean for that particular survey item as to retain as many participants as possible.

The data were screened for univariate outliers by transforming raw scores to z-scores and comparing z-scores to a critical value of +/- 3.29,  $p < .001$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Z-scores that exceed this critical value are more than three standard deviations away from the mean and thus represent outliers. The distributions were evaluated and no cases with univariate outliers were found.

Multivariate outliers were evaluated using Mahalanobis distance. Mahalanobis distances were computed for each variable and these scores were compared to a critical value from the chi square distribution table. Mahalanobis distance for three predictor variables indicates a critical value of 16.27 and no cases within the distributions were found to exceed this value. Thus, for research questions one to three, 135 responses from participants were received and 135 were evaluated by the regression models ( $n = 135$ ).

**Analysis of research questions 1 through 3.** Research questions 1 through 3 were evaluated using a multiple regression analysis to determine if any significant relationships existed between students' grade point average in literacy class and students' reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class. The criterion variable was students' grade point average in literacy class and was measured on a zero to 100 point scale.

The predictor variables were students' reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class. Ten items on the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents were used to measure each predictor variable. Response parameters for the predictor variables were measured on a 3-point scale where 1 = *often*, 2 = *sometimes*, and 3 = *rarely*. Composite scores were calculated for each participant by averaging case scores across the ten items of each predictor variable and



the composite scores were used in the multiple regression analysis. Descriptive statistics for the criterion and predictor variables are displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Descriptive Statistics of Criterion and Predictor Variables*

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Reading Motivation	1.20	3.00	2.087	0.385	-0.068	-0.512
Parental Engagement	1.30	3.00	2.447	0.416	-0.828	-0.019
Student Engagement	1.40	3.00	2.319	0.321	-0.298	0.087
Literacy Class GPA	55.00	100.00	76.044	11.247	0.100	-0.726

*Note.* n = 135.

Before the hypotheses were analyzed, basic parametric assumptions were assessed. That is, for the criterion (literacy class end of year average) and predictor variables (reading motivation, parent engagement, and student engagement) assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were tested. Linearity and homoscedasticity were evaluated using scatter plots and results indicated that the assumptions were not violated. To test if the distributions were significantly skewed, the skew coefficients were divided by the skew standard error (0.209), resulting in a z-skew coefficient. This technique was recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Specifically, z-skew coefficients exceeding the critical value of +/-3.29 ( $p < .001$ ) may indicate non-normality.

Thus, based on the evaluation of the z-skew coefficients, one predictor variable (parental engagement) exceeded the critical value (skew = -0.828, z-skew = -3.962). Kurtosis was evaluated using the same method and no distributions were found to be

significantly kurtotic (see Table 4.2). Although parental engagement was significantly skewed, according to the central limit theorem, sample sizes of 30 or more approximates the mean of the population (Durrett, 2004).

Table 4.2

*Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics of Criterion and Predictor Variables*

Variable	Skewness	Skew Std. Error	z-skew	Kurtosis	Kurtosis Std. Error	z-kurtosis
Reading Motivation	-0.068	0.209	-0.325	-0.512	0.414	-1.237
Parental Engagement	-0.828	0.209	-3.962	-0.019	0.414	-0.046
Student Engagement	-0.298	0.209	-1.426	0.087	0.414	0.210
Literacy Class GPA	0.100	0.209	0.478	-0.726	0.414	-1.754

*Note.*  $n = 135$

With this in mind, Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) posit that when a sample size exceeds 100, statistical tests that use the general linear model, such as regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA), are robust against violations of normality. Thus, the predictor variable (parental engagement) was conditionally assumed to be normally distributed and the remaining variables (literacy class grade point average, reading motivation, and student engagement) did not violate the assumption of normality.

The assumption of multicollinearity was tested by calculating correlations between variables and collinearity statistics (Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor). Correlations between predictor variables were not too low and correlations between predictor variables did not exceed .413. Tolerance is calculated using the formula  $T = 1 - R^2$  and variance inflation factor (VIF) is the inverse of Tolerance (1 divided by T).

Commonly used cut-off points for determining the presence of multicollinearity are  $T < .10$  and  $VIF > 10$ . No correlational results between predictor variables violated this assumption (see Table 4.3). Therefore, the presence of multicollinearity was not assumed.

Table 4.3

*Summary of Correlational Results between Predictor Variables*

Predictor Variable	Pearson Correlation		
	Reading Motivation	Parental Engagement	Student Engagement
Reading Motivation	1.000	0.293	0.389
Parental Engagement		1.000	0.413
Student Engagement			1.000

Using SPSS 22, multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if any significant relationships existed between students' grade point average in literacy class and students' reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class. Results indicated that a significant relationship did exist between literacy class grade point average and a model containing all predictor variables (all three predictors combined),  $R = .406$ ,  $R^2 = .164$ ,  $F(3, 131) = 8.596$ ,  $p < .001$  (two-tailed). That is, 16.4% ( $R^2 = .164$ ) of the variance observed in the criterion variable was due to a model containing three predictor variables.

The contribution of each predictor variable, when the others are controlled for, was evaluated using the standardized Beta for each coefficient. Results indicated that reading motivation made the strongest, and only significant, unique contribution in

explaining the criterion variable (Beta = 0.369,  $p < .001$ ). Further, 11.9% (*partial correlation*<sup>2</sup> = .345<sup>2</sup> = .119) of the variance observed in students' literacy class grade point average was due to reading motivation. Parental engagement and student engagement did not make a significantly unique contribution in predicting students' literacy class grade point average ( $p = .784$  and  $.514$ , respectively). See Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

*Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis*

Source	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Standard Error	F	Sig.	
Omnibus Model	.406	.164	10.398	8.596	< .001	
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Partial Correlation
(Constant)	47.031	7.454		6.309	< .001	
Reading Motivation	10.781	2.563	0.369	4.207	< .001	.345
Parental Engagement	0.660	2.400	0.024	0.275	.784	.024
Student Engagement	2.114	3.232	0.060	0.654	.514	.057

*Note.* Dependent variable = End of Year Literacy Class Average

**Summary of Results**

In summary, the demographic profile of 135 grade 7 students was presented including count and statistics. This chapter described the results that addressed the extent to which student reading motivation, student perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class correlates to a student's end of year average in literacy class. Last, the results for each variable were presented in respective tables. The results of the multiple regression analysis suggested that student reading motivation made

the only significant contribution to a student’s end of year grade point average (see Table 4.5). The meaning of the results and the implications for student reading achievement will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 4.5

*Summary of Results for Research Questions One to Three*

Research Question	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Analysis	Sig.
1	Literacy Class GPA	Reading Motivation	Multiple Regression	< .001
2	Literacy Class GPA	Parental Engagement	Multiple Regression	.784
3	Literacy Class GPA	Student Engagement	Multiple Regression	.514

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

Traditionally, public schools are regarded as public institutions instrumental in leveling the playing field. This is a fantasy. The reality is that too many of the nation’s urban public schools contribute *to* the inequalities plaguing our society rather than work

towards eliminating them. Whether intentionally or unbeknownst to policymakers and practitioners, the educational policies, instructional practices, and curricula implemented in many urban public schools perpetuate a White privilege ideology. As a result, urban adolescents, particularly students of color, remain marginalized.

Students of color that attend schools in economically depressed areas have a significantly lower chance at experiencing a greater quality of life. Poor urban adolescents receive inferior services from schools and community-based agencies compared to their economically advantaged peers (Noguera, 2008). Rather than equipping our urban youth with the necessary advanced literacy skills they need to compete in a global economy, too many urban schools arrest our children's potential by labeling, stigmatizing, and undermining them.

Urban public schools struggle daily to overcome structural and economic inequality constraints. Lack of resources, lack of experienced human capital, limited English proficiency, and high levels of crime and violence contribute to urban public school's alarming low achievement data. These systematic challenges cause many urban public schools to neglect properly educating our urban youth. The characteristics of urban public school systems pose a daily threat to student academic success. Typically, urban schools have a significantly higher population of students than their suburban counterparts. Urban adolescents that attend public schools are faced with a myriad of academic challenges including limited access to resources and opportunities. These students hail from diverse backgrounds such as cultural, linguistic, socio economic level, special needs.

The intent of this research study was to address the concern of low reading achievement among adolescents, specifically among grade 7 students at an urban public middle school. The Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents was the instrument used to provide quantitative data. As a result, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if any statistical significance existed between students' grade point average in literacy class and students' reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class.

This research focused on an urban public school that serves a significantly high population of students that are not meeting state reading achievement standards. The school also consists of a significantly high population of students classified as receiving free or reduced lunch. This study addressed three questions that are important to those interested in improving reading achievement among urban adolescents. This chapter will begin with an in-depth discussion of the findings as they relate to each research question and null hypotheses. Then, the chapter will examine the related literature as it relates to the findings. Next, the chapter will discuss the implications of the results well as limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter will close with recommendations for further research.

### **Implications of Findings**

This study revealed several findings. The first research question investigated: To what degree does a student's reading motivation, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class? The following null hypothesis was developed by the researcher to answer research question 1: There is no significant correlation between a student's reading

motivation and that student's end of year average in literacy class. The results of the multiple regression analysis determined that reading motivation made the strongest and only significant contribution to a student's end of year literacy class average;  $R = .406$ ,  $R^2 = .164$ ,  $F(3,131) = 8.596$ ,  $p < .001$  (two-tailed). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected given that the critical alpha was set at  $p < .05$ . A significant relationship between the criterion and predictor was empirically established.

The findings support previous assertions regarding reading achievement among adolescents. Students that are not motivated to read, whether it be intrinsically or extrinsically, do not meet grade level benchmarks. On the other hand, highly motivated students fare better in academic experiences than their counterparts. The findings support empirical research suggesting that highly motivated students read because they have high levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977c), the reading material is of high interest, meaningful, or relevant (Danielson, 2007). For these reasons, employing strategies to increase reading motivation and build self-efficacy among urban middle school adolescents must be a top priority for urban public school practitioners.

The second research question investigated: To what degree does a student's perception of parent engagement, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class? The researcher developed the following null hypothesis to answer the second research question: There is no significant correlation between a student's perception of parent engagement and that student's end of year average in literacy class. Based on the results from the multiple regression analysis, there was no statistical correlation between parent engagement and a student's end of year average in literacy class ( $p = .784$ ). The null



hypothesis for the second research question was not rejected given that the observed alpha was more than  $p < .05$ . A significant relationship between the criterion and the predictor was not empirically established.

While parent engagement, as defined by this study, did not contribute to student's end of year grade point average, it may demonstrate, according to Bandura's (1977c) social learning theory, practical significance on a student's self-esteem or self-perception, which in turn, may affect a student's motivation to read. As a result, consistent parent engagement sustains or accelerates student performance in school (Epstein, 2007). Bandura's (1977a) social learning theory proposes that children learn through observation and modeling. Therefore, practitioners may consider employing strategies aimed at educating parents on promoting effective reading behaviors in the home. Another practical significance can be attributed to the awkward stage of adolescents. During the adolescent years, children are less concerned with their parent's opinion or approval, and more concerned with fitting in with their peers (Atwell, 1998). To address this, practitioners may also consider employing strategies geared towards educating parents on managing their adolescent children's behavior.

The third research question investigated: To what degree does a student's engagement in literacy class, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class? The researcher developed the following null hypothesis to answer research question 3: There is no significant correlation between a student's engagement in literacy class that that student's end of year average in literacy class. The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that there was no significant correlation to a student's end of year average in

literacy class ( $p = .514$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected given that the critical alpha was more than  $p < .05$ . This means that a significant relationship between the criterion and the predictor was not empirically established.

Although student engagement did not warrant any statistical significance, practical significance can be assumed since research suggests a teacher's instructional practices are aligned to motivating students to read through engaging activities and tasks (Danielson, 2007). Compared to parent engagement, student engagement in literacy class had a stronger relationship, supporting Danielson's (2007) framework that states that student engagement is key to student academic achievement. Therefore, practitioners may consider employing strategies aimed at enhancing teacher instructional practices.

While increasing funding, providing continuous professional developments, fostering home-school partnerships, hiring and retaining experienced teachers, and implementing rigorous learning standards are essential to improving reading achievement of urban adolescents, if a child is not motivated to read, student achievement outcomes will remain grim. Collectively, the results lead me to believe that despite the various efforts policy makers and practitioners have made towards closing the reading achievement gap, no amount of effort can have a significant impact on student learning if students are simply not motivated to read.

The researcher recommends that further research be conducted to closely examine to what degree a relationship exists between student reading motivation and a student's end of year grade point average in literacy class. It can be presumed that urban adolescents are motivated to read for various reasons. Identifying these reasons may aim

to contribute to the body of literature on reading achievement as well as inform practitioners and policy makers on reading initiatives and reading programs.

### **Limitations**

This study had four major limitations. The first limitation is that this study focuses on grade 7 students from one urban middle school. Therefore, the findings are not a conclusive representation of all grade 7 students in the United States. A second limitation to this study refers to the number of grade 7 students that volunteered, after parental consent, to participate in the study. The NYCDOE's Institutional Review Board (IRB) strictly prohibits investigators from interviewing or administering surveys to students during official instructional time. As a result, students with parent consent forms were encouraged to complete the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents after official school hours. Due to this limitation, the sample (n=135) was 25% of the population. An ideal sample would have been 30% or more.

A third restriction was attributed to unique time constraints, specifically end of year standardized testing schedule. By the time the principal investigator received both St. John Fisher College and New York City Department of Education IRB approval, New York State students were scheduled to take the ELA and Math standardized test. In addition to taking the state tests, New York City students also were also administered ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies city performance tests. As a result, the principal investigator had three weeks to invite students to participate, mail consent forms, and organize dates and times for students to complete the survey before the end of the school year. The final major limitation to the study refers to teachers' grading practices. While ABC School does have a uniform grading policy in which categories and weighted scales

are consistent school wide, there are variations to the number of assignments and assessments teachers assign as well as variations in grade calculation practices.

### **Recommendations**

While the implementation of a nationwide set of rigorous learning standards appears to be an initiative that is expected to bring positive results, the CCSS cannot be the only solution to improving reading outcomes in urban public schools. Based on the results of the Reading Instrument for Adolescents and the theoretical frameworks that guided this study, there are a number of recommendations that can motivate urban adolescents to read. Combined with consistent effective instructional practices, two principles must be adopted in order to increase reading motivation among urban middle school students.

The first principle is engaging students in culturally relevant, meaningful, and rigorous reading activities throughout the school day and beyond the classroom (Heyns, 1987). The second principle is ensuring that students have fingertip access to a diversity of text in school and during the summer months (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). The following recommendations are suggested in order to uphold the two principles:

**Recommendation 1.** The researcher recommends that practitioners and policymakers select or develop comprehensive and coordinated curricula that integrate advanced literacy skills across disciplines. Implementing such a curriculum is crucial to improving urban adolescents' reading motivation for several reasons. First, if students are exposed to rich reading and writing experiences in every content area, they will refine and ultimately sharpen their reading and writing skills.

Second, if struggling readers and writers are given the opportunity to practice reading and writing in every class, they will become more confident in their abilities, thus improving their self-efficacy. Last, exposing students to meaningful and relevant reading and writing experiences in every content area will echo the importance of acquiring advanced literacy skills for their future lives. Continuous exposure to content rich text, diverse authors, and multiple media formats, as well as providing writing opportunities for extensive writing, allows urban adolescents the opportunity to be exposed to reading and writing experiences that challenge their thinking processes. Students should be exposed to meaningful reading and writing experiences every single day in every single class.

**Recommendation 2.** The researcher recommends that practitioners foster a culture of reading. The school learning environment must be print rich. Most importantly, stakeholder behaviors must align to the school's culture of reading. Therefore, adults in the school must model good reading behaviors. Teacher instruction should allow for engaging tasks and activities as well as text based collaborative learning where students discuss text with each other rather than engage in a conversation heavily directed by a teacher. Students should also have the opportunity to discuss literature outside of instructional time such as after school book clubs, participating in guest author presentations, or student reader of the month celebrations.

Faculty and administrators must actively promote reading. For instance, this can be achieved by displaying books and other reading material throughout the classrooms and school building, or actually engaging in reading activities with students. In addition, administrators must make it a priority to ensure that reading material is readily accessible

to *every* student, even when school is not in session. This includes seeking out partnerships with community based organizations that share the same vision. Book collections selected by the school must vary in content, topic, author, and reading level. Also, adults in the school building must encourage reading by talking about books they are reading or simply posting a “this month, I am reading” sign outside of their classrooms or offices.

Schools should view the students’ family as a critical resource. Therefore, parents should be invited to learn about ways to promote reading and writing in the home. Parents should be invited to participate in book clubs with their children and given opportunities to suggest ways to support the school’s culture of reading. A school that celebrates reading and recognizes readers will in turn increase the reading motivation of students over time.

**Recommendation 3.** The researcher recommends that every public urban middle school implement a strategic reading period for *every* student. Too many urban students are years behind in reading level. As a result, they start believing that they cannot read. Their self-perceptions of their reading ability are so negative that completing a reading or writing assignment is seems impossible. It is time schools strategically address student literacy needs. The tutoring periods should take place *during* the instructional day, made up of small groups of students that share similar reading habits. Tutoring periods are provided to *every* student, whether low performing or high performing. Students are taught by teachers who have undergone professional developments focused on teaching effective reading and writing strategies. Students with low reading achievement data are taught the skills they need to improve and can move into other reading groups once they

have mastered a set of skills. Students with high reading achievement data are placed in groups in which their reading skills are enriched.

**Recommendation 4.** Finally, the researcher recommends incorporating technology based reading programs as part of instruction as a means of increasing student motivation to read in the classroom as well as at home. Integrating technology with instruction meets the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner because technology has the capacity to appeal to a variety of learning levels and learning styles (Cowan, 2008). Technology based reading programs allow students to read and produce work at their own pace, are engaging, interactive, and cost effective. Most importantly, integrating technology with traditional print allows students to fully interpret and deepen their understanding of ideas they read in a book (Bromley, 2012). Moreover, the CCSS encourages the use of technology in instruction to enhance students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills by allowing students to select technological tools and mediums best suited for their learning needs (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). It is important for urban public schools to understand that new and innovative ways of meeting the needs of students warrant positive student behavioral and achievement outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Millions of adolescents are reading and writing at a basic level of proficiency (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Many of the nation's students are not prepared to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce (Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012) nor can they compete in today's rapidly changing global economy (Wiggan, 2008). In the past, education reform efforts have significantly improved reading achievement among

children in the primary grades, however, advanced literacy instruction in the upper grades has been neglected (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Roughly 32% of high school graduates cannot meet the demands of college-level English composition courses (American College Testing, 2006). In turn, a significant number of college students require remedial coursework when they enter college (Kirst & Venezia, 2004).

Practitioners agree that reading requires more than just sounding out words on a page (Taylor, 2010); it is learning from content-rich material and synthesizing new information with prior knowledge (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Yet, while many students in middle school, high school, and college know how to read, the dilemma is they do not comprehend the complex texts that they are reading (Taylor, 2010). Middle and secondary school literacy skills require a set of complex higher order thinking processes that are ingrained in every content area (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006).

There remains a reading achievement gap between students from rich and poor families (Haskins et al., 2012), specifically urban adolescents. Empirical research suggests that students from lower economic backgrounds achieve in reading when they are motivated to read, when they are taught by effective teachers, and when their parents are engaged in their school lives (Gambrell, 2011; Haskins et al., 2012; Klaua, 2009). Urban middle school students from high poverty schools and neighborhoods face several challenges. To summarize, a primary challenge is limited access to reading material. Book collections are “smaller, older, and less diverse” (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, p. 72). Second, Alston (2012) identifies race, class, and urbanicity as factors that contribute to poor instruction and low reading achievement data. “In lieu of providing curriculum that addresses their academic, social, and emotional needs, African American



students in urban settings are shackled by a curriculum that promotes inferiority by omitting the incorporation of culture into the educational setting,” (Strickland-Dixon, 2011, p.113). Last, many urban students do not receive much academic support at home or within their communities (Teale et al., 2012).

This study was guided by several theories and frameworks on improving reading achievement among urban adolescents. First, the researcher investigated student reading motivation from the perspective of Bandura’s (1977a) social learning theory. The theory claims that students are motivated to learn through observation, modeling, and a high sense of self-efficacy.

Second, to investigate students’ perception of parent engagement, the researcher examined Epstein’s (2009) six types of involvement framework. The framework suggests that students achieve in school if they are supported by parents that engage in partnerships with the school or community. Last, the researcher examined student engagement in literacy class from the perspective of Danielson’s (2007) framework for teaching. Student engagement is the center of the framework. Danielson (2007) purports that when students are effectively engaged in learning, positive student outcomes improve.

This research study was important for several reasons: First, the findings aimed to contribute to the body of literature on factors that significantly contribute to a student’s reading achievement. Second, the findings aimed to inform policymakers and educators of urban school districts when modifying professional developments, current strategies, re-evaluating policies, or developing programs focused on improving reading achievement data. Last, the results of this study aimed to assist with strengthening

partnerships with stakeholders to improve short and long term student outcomes thereby achieving a new level of literacy required for success in the twenty-first century global economy.

This study investigated the correlation between a student's reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class, to their overall average in literacy class as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. This study was conducted as a quantitative study based on data collected from the survey and participant literacy class averages for the 2013-2014 school year at ABC School, a public middle school in New York City.

Data were collected from a sample of 135 grade 7 students at ABC School. A convenience sample of 25% of the population was selected that included general education students, special education students, former English language learner students, and English language learner students. The entire sample population 47% were male ( $n = 63$ ) and 53% were female ( $n = 72$ ). The majority of participants were black ( $n = 69$ , 51.10%), 30% were Asian or Pacific Islander ( $n = 41$ ), 13% were Hispanic ( $n = 17$ ), and the remaining 6% were white ( $n = 5$ ), American Indian or Alaskan native ( $n = 1$ ), native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander ( $n = 1$ ), and multiracial ( $n = 1$ ).

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. To what degree does a student's reading motivation, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?

2. To what degree does a student's perception of parent engagement, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?
3. To what degree does a student's engagement in literacy class, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents correlate to a student's end of year average in literacy class?

The following null hypotheses were utilized for this study: (a) there is no significant correlation between a student's reading motivation and that student's end of year average in literacy class, (b) there is no significant correlation between a student's perception of parent engagement and that student's end of year average in literacy class, and (c) there is no significant correlation between a student's engagement in literacy class that that student's end of year average in literacy class.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if any statistically significant relationships existed between students' grade point average in literacy class and students' reading motivation, perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class. Results indicated that a significant relationship did exist between literacy class grade point average and reading motivation. The results of the multiple regression analysis determined that reading motivation made the strongest and only significant contribution to a student's end of year literacy class average;  $R = .406$ ,  $R^2 = .164$ ,  $F(3,131) = 8.596$ ,  $p < .001$  (two – tailed). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected given that the critical alpha was set at  $p < .05$ . Employing strategies to increase reading motivation among urban middle school adolescents must be a top priority for urban public school practitioners.

The researcher developed recommendations for improving student reading motivation based on two principles: (a) engaging students in culturally relevant, meaningful, and rigorous reading activities throughout the school day and beyond the classroom (Heyns, 1987) and (b) ensuring that students have fingertip access to a diversity of text in school and during the summer months (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). The researcher recommended improving student reading motivation in urban public middle schools by:

1. Implementing a comprehensive and coordinated curricula that integrate advanced literacy skills across disciplines,
2. Fostering a culture of reading,
3. Implementing a strategic reading period for *every* student, and
4. Incorporating technology based reading programs in instruction.

The contribution of this study and its findings will add to the body of literature on reading motivation. For instance, understanding how reading motivation contributes to a student's academic achievement can inform parents, educators, and policymakers when developing teaching and learning strategies, programs, and professional development opportunities. The principal researcher is interested in conducting future studies to investigate how parent engagement and student engagement correlates to reading motivation. A Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the statistical significance between parent engagement and student engagement on reading motivation (See Appendix E). The results of the analysis support the principal investigator's recommendations, suggesting that reading motivation is contingent upon parent and student engagement activities.

While no student is exactly the same, it is important that we understand the complex issue of reading achievement in order to meet the literacy needs of every struggling reader and writer. It is our responsibility to adequately prepare the next generation to becoming 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders of the global economy. Therefore, the principal researcher would be interested in conducting focus groups for the next phase of this study. The focus groups would provide an opportunity for grade 7 students to candidly express their responses to the items on the survey. In addition, it would provide the researcher with insight into challenges surrounding reading and reading achievement among urban middle school students. Last, it will assist practitioners at the school and district level in identifying best practices for meeting the needs of struggling readers and writers.

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## Appendix A

### Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents

#### Directions:

This survey contains statements that tell how some middle school boys and girls feel, think, and act. Read each statement carefully. For each statement, you will have three answer choices: often, sometimes, and rarely.

For example, circle “O” if your answer is often, circle “S” if your answer is sometimes, or circle “R” if your answer is rarely. This is NOT a test and there is no right or wrong answer.

This survey is confidential. Your answers will NOT be shared with anyone. If you feel stressed while taking the survey, you may STOP and ask to go speak with a guidance counselor. If you have any questions, please raise your hand.

This survey is untimed. You may use a pen or pencil. Please go to the next page and begin taking the survey.

**For principal researcher use only:**

Survey Code: \_\_\_\_\_

IV: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Official Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle your Gender:      Boy      Girl

<b>In this section, you will respond to statements about reading motivation.</b>				
1.	It is important for me to do my best at reading.	O	S	R
2.	I go to the library to find books to read for pleasure.	O	S	R
3.	I think reading is fun.	O	S	R
4.	If my teacher teaches me something interesting, I want to read more about it.	O	S	R
5.	I finish my reading assignments on time.	O	S	R
6.	I think reading is important.	O	S	R
7.	I spend my free time reading.	O	S	R
8.	I feel happy when someone gives me a book as a present.	O	S	R
9.	I talk to my friends about books that I read.	O	S	R
10.	I read because I want to.	O	S	R
<b>In this section, you will respond to statements about parent engagement.</b>				
1.	When I have a problem, I can count on my parent or guardian for help.	O	S	R
2.	When my parent or guardian wants me to do something, he/she explains why.	O	S	R
3.	My parent or guardian spends time talking with me.	O	S	R
4.	My parent or guardian listens to what I have to say.	O	S	R
5.	When I get a bad grade, my parent or guardian encourages me to do better.	O	S	R
6.	My parent or guardian asks me daily how school went.	O	S	R
7.	My parent or guardian encourages me to think independently.	O	S	R
8.	On school nights, my parent or guardian expects me to be home at a certain time.	O	S	R
9.	My parent or guardian helps me with my homework.	O	S	R
10.	My parent or guardian knows what activities interest me.	O	S	R
<b>In this section, you will respond to statements about student engagement.</b>				
1.	In my literacy class, we spend most of the time completing worksheets.	O	S	R
2.	In my literacy class, we work in groups to apply what we learned.	O	S	R
3.	My literacy teacher makes literacy class discussions interesting.	O	S	R
4.	There are a variety of class activities to participate in.	O	S	R
5.	My literacy teacher encourages me to do better.	O	S	R
6.	My literacy class challenges me.	O	S	R
7.	I am given several choices on what literacy assignments or tasks to complete.	O	S	R
8.	I look forward to going to literacy class.	O	S	R
9.	I pay attention in literacy class.	O	S	R
10.	I learn from the students in my literacy class.	O	S	R

You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your time. Raise your hand to be dismissed

**Appendix B**  
**List of Content Validity Panel of Experts**

<b>Panel Member</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr.	Regent at Large	New York State Board of Regents
Peter Leddy	Principal	New York City Department of Education
Georgette Malcolm	Assistant Principal	New York City Department of Education
Jessica Dawson	Teacher	New York City Department of Education
Tahisha Ayala	Teacher	New York City Department of Education
Betyne Farrell	School Psychologist	New York City Department of Education
Gaydly Beaubrun	Parent	N/A
Jennifer Boone	Parent Coordinator	New York City Department of Education

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**Appendix C**  
St John Fisher College  
Institutional Review Board

**Parent Informed Consent Form**



(for use with minors)

**Title of study:** Reading Motivation, Perceived Parent Engagement, and Student Engagement as it Relates to Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents

**Name(s) of researcher(s):** Arabelle LaCroix

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Ronald Valenti **Phone for further information:** (914) 654-5389

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this research study is to find out what helps students improve their reading skills. Your child's ideas will be used to help school leaders, teachers, and parents understand ways to help students improve their reading skills.

**Approval of study:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Place of study:** The Susan B. Anthony Academy, I.S. 238Q

**Length of participation:** April 2014 – June 2014

**Potential risks:** There is minimal risk to participating in this study. The survey asks your child to respond to some sensitive statements about your relationship with your child. A copy of sample survey statements will be sent home for you to review. If you decide to let your child participate in the study, your child's identity will be protected at all times. All information provided by your child will be kept in a safe location.

**Potential benefits:** The results of this study may help educators understand what helps improve students' reading skills. Also, educators can find ways to help all students do better on the ELA test.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:** Your child's name will be kept confidential and anonymous. All information will be stored and locked in a safe place. No one will be able to identify your child's survey.

**Your rights:**

As a parent/guardian of a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to allow your minor child to participate.
2. Withdraw your child from participation at any time without penalty. Your child's participation in this study is VOLUNTARY.
3. Tell your child to refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate treatment that might help your minor child.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.
6. Receive a copy of sample survey statements to review BEFORE you give your child permission to participate.

**Consent for a minor child:**

I, the parent of \_\_\_\_\_, a minor, \_\_\_\_\_ years of age, consent to his/her participation in the study **Reading Motivation, Perceived Parent Engagement, and Student Engagement as it Relates to Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents**. I have read the above, received a copy of this form and the survey, and I agree to have my child participate in the above named study. I give my permission for use of my child's survey results to

be used in presentations and publications. I understand that my child's identity will be protected at all times.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Parent/Guardian)                      Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Child/Participant)                      Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Investigator)                      Signature                      Date

**By signing below, I give the principal investigator permission to access my child's end of year literacy grade point average.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Parent/Guardian)                      Signature                      Date

Please provide your child's:

Student identification number \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher at (718) 297-9823 extension 1170 during normal school hours or by email at [al03798@sjfc.edu](mailto:al03798@sjfc.edu).

**Appendix D**

St John Fisher College  
Institutional Review Board

**Student Assent Form**  
(for use with minors)

**Title of study:** Reading Motivation, Perceived Parent Engagement, and Student Engagement as it Relates to Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents

**Name(s) of researcher(s):** Arabelle LaCroix

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Ronald Valenti **Phone for further information:** (914) 654-5389

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this research study is to find out what helps students improve their reading skills. Your ideas will be used to help school leaders, teachers, and parents understand ways to help students improve their reading skills.

**Approval of study:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Place of study:** The Susan B. Anthony Academy, I.S. 238Q

**Length of participation:** April 2014 – June 2014

**Potential risks:** There is minimal risk to participating in this study. The survey asks you to respond to sensitive statements about your relationship with your parent or guardian. You will receive a copy of sample survey statements to review at home. If you AND your parent or guardian give permission for you to participate, all your answers on the survey will be kept private and in a secure location.

**Potential benefits:** The results of this study may help educators understand what helps improve students' reading skills. Also, educators can find ways to help all students do better on the ELA test.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:** Your name will be kept confidential and anonymous. All information will be stored and locked in a safe place. No one will be able to identify your survey as yours.

**Your rights:**

As the research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, risks and benefits fully explained to you before you participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your participation in the study is VOLUNTARY.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question on the survey without penalty.
4. Be informed of treatment, if any, that might help you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.
6. Receive a copy of sample survey statements to review with your parent/guardian BEFORE giving permission to participate.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form and the survey, and I agree to participate in the study: **Reading Motivation, Perceived Parent Engagement, and Student Engagement as it Relates to Reading Achievement of Urban Adolescents**. I give my permission for use of my survey results to be used in presentations and publications. I understand that my identity will be protected at all times.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Participant)                      Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name (Investigator)                      Signature                      Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above at (718) 297-9823 extension 1170 during normal school hours or by email at [al03798@sjfc.edu](mailto:al03798@sjfc.edu).

## Appendix E

### Correlations

		Reading Motivation	Parental Engagement	Student Engagement
Reading Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.293**	.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000
	N	135	135	135
Parental Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.293**	1	.413**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.000
	N	135	135	135
Student Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.389**	.413**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	135	135	135

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).