THE IMPACT OF PLEASURE READING ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

A Graduate Research Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Sam Houston State University

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Education

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

By

Christy L Whitten

November 21, 2015

# Title Page

# **Abstract**

Discovering ways to improve student academic performance is a common challenge in the modern classroom. This research study examined the reading habits of sixty-five high school juniors, aged fifteen to seventeen years, at Madisonville High School. It was theorized that students who engaged in reading self-selected literature for pleasure would average higher grades in English, mathematics, science, and history than their non-reading peers.

This study concluded that students who read for pleasure averaged higher scores than their non-reading counterparts in the subject areas measured. This study further concluded that educators are aware of the link between pleasure reading and academic success but feel limited by state curriculums and mandated tests.

Table of Contents

[Title Page 1](#_Toc435596257)

[Abstract 2](#_Toc435596258)

[List of Tables 4](#_Toc435596259)

[List of Figures 5](#_Toc435596260)

[Chapter 1: Introduction 6](#_Toc435596261)

[Background 6](#_Toc435596262)

[Definition of Terms 7](#_Toc435596263)

[Statement of Problem 8](#_Toc435596264)

[Research Questions 8](#_Toc435596265)

[Limitations 8](#_Toc435596266)

[Delimitations 9](#_Toc435596267)

[Assumptions 9](#_Toc435596268)

[Chapter 2: Literature Review 10](#_Toc435596269)

[Basic Reading 10](#_Toc435596270)

[Economic Considerations 11](#_Toc435596271)

[Influence of Technology 13](#_Toc435596272)

[Contradictory Opinions 14](#_Toc435596273)

[Conclusion 14](#_Toc435596274)

[Chapter 3: Research Methods 16](#_Toc435596275)

[General Description 16](#_Toc435596276)

[Participants 16](#_Toc435596277)

[Instrument 18](#_Toc435596278)

[Procedure 19](#_Toc435596279)

[Chapter 4: Results 20](#_Toc435596280)

[Student Data Analysis 20](#_Toc435596281)

[Educator Interviews 26](#_Toc435596282)

[Chapter 5: Discussion 27](#_Toc435596283)

[Summary 27](#_Toc435596284)

[Interpretation 28](#_Toc435596285)

[Implications for Future Research 29](#_Toc435596286)

[Conclusion 30](#_Toc435596287)

[References 30](#_Toc435596288)

[Appendix A: IRB Classroom Project Exemption 34](#_Toc435596289)

[Appendix B: CITI Training Certificate 36](#_Toc435596290)

[Appendix C: Informed Consent 37](#_Toc435596291)

[Appendix D: Survey Questionnaire 41](#_Toc435596292)

[Appendix E: Educator Interview Questionnaire 43](#_Toc435596293)

[Appendix F: Administrator Approval 44](#_Toc435596294)

# **List of Tables**

Table 1: Ethnicity of Participants………………………………………………………………18

Table 2: Student Reading Habits……………………………………………………………….22

# **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Participant Gender……………………………………………………………………18

Figure 2: Participant Class……………………………………………………………………...19

Figure 3: Self-Identified Pleasure Readers……………………………………………………..21

Figure 4: English Averages………………………………………………………………….….23

Figure 5: Science Averages………………………………………………………………….…24

Figure 6: Mathematics Averages…………………………………………………………….…24

Figure 7: U.S. History Averages…………………………………………………………….…25

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Background**

A foundation in reading and writing has been the basis of our educational system since its inception and discovering new ways to increase student interest in those basic components of learning is something that every teacher struggles with at one time or another. Many educators encourage their students to read outside of the classroom in order to increase reading comprehension, vocabulary, general knowledge, and cultural awareness; however, research indicates that pleasure reading may have a greater influence over a child’s overall academic performance than their socio-economic background (Pearson, 2015).

According to Bridges (2014), “Many of our revered celebrities and leaders are avid readers. Indeed, it’s hard to find successful people who aren’t” (p. 7). Reading opens up world-wide avenues for knowledge that non-readers are unable to access. Recent studies conducted by Kidd and Castrano of The New School for Social Research in New York City suggests that pleasure reading deepens empathy and temporarily allows the reader a greater understanding of others’ mental states (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014). In other words, the benefits of pleasure reading may have a much broader impact than previously thought.

This study will focus on comparing the overall academic success of pleasure readers (sometimes referred to as independent readers) and non-pleasure readers. According to Cullinan (2000) pleasure readers, at all grade levels, score higher on standardized tests in all subject areas, develop greater reading comprehension skills, have increased fluency, and display higher levels of general knowledge. However, in spite of the evidence that pleasure-reading has a positive impact on student academics, the number of students who read for pleasure has declined at an alarming rate. In fact, according to the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), “the percentage of 17-year-olds who read nothing at all for pleasure has doubled over a 20-year period” (p. 7). While the previous studies have focused on national reading patterns, this study will focus on eleventh grade students at Madisonville High School.

Although there have been numerous studies done on the impact pleasure reading has on the overall academic success of students, there is a lack of data on the measureable difference in grade average differences in specific subjects: English, mathematics, science, and history. This research is needed in order to determine if pleasure readers experience significant increases in core subjects, minimal increases in relationship to averages in core subjects, or if pleasure reading has no impact on students overall performance in their core subjects.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Core subjects:** for the purpose of this study, English, mathematics, science, and history

**Economically Disadvantaged:** any student is a member of a household whose income qualifies for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program

**Grade Point Average:** referred to as GPA

**Pleasure-readers:** Students who read self-selected literature for pleasure (also referred to as independent readers)

**Syntax:** grammar

**Accelerated Reading (AR):** a program implemented by schools, from elementary through junior high, where students earn “points” for reading self-selected literature.

## **Statement of Problem**

Determining ways to increase student willingness to engage in self-selected outside reading is becoming increasingly difficult in an age when students are inundated with digital distractions. 21st century students are electing to forgo reading for other pursuits at an alarming rate. As a result, reading comprehension skills are eroding to a point of being non-existent, which could lead to serious cultural and economic consequences (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 7). Establishing a correlation between pleasure reading and higher classroom performance may provide additional support for those educators who seek to encourage independent reading, and additional incentive for those students who do not see value in reading.

## **Research Questions**

Do 11th grade students at Madisonville High School who read for pleasure maintain higher grade averages than non-pleasure readers?

If pleasure readers experience higher grade averages than non-pleasure readers, would educators, in all subject areas, be more willing to encourage independent reading?

## **Limitations**

Due to time constraints, this study was limited a nine-week grading period. This study was further limited by the number of participants who were willing to complete the reading survey and who returned their parental consent forms. This study was also limited to eleventh grade students aged fifteen to seventeen.

## **Delimitations**

This study only applies to 11th grade students at Madisonville High School in the Madisonville Consolidated School District. The results of this study are based on a nine week study and are not meant to represent the population as a whole.

## **Assumptions**

It is assumed that all students and faculty provided truthful information during data collection and interviews. It is assumed that all persons interviewed spoke honestly and without bias.

# **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **Basic Reading**

According to Clark and Rumbold (2006), reading for pleasure can be defined as reading done in anticipation of the satisfaction it will bring or continuing required reading because you found the subject matter interesting. Pleasure reading is a personal experience that “typically involves materials that reflect our own choice, at a time and place that suits us” (Clark and Rumbold, 2006, p. 6). As such, a natural assumption would be that students would be more willing to engage in an activity over which they have full control; however, recent studies (Clark and Rumbold, National Reading Panel, National Endowment for the Arts), on the reading habits of children indicate that instances of pleasure reading begin to decrease around the age of thirteen and fourteen. Creel (2015) suggests that dissatisfaction with required reading has contributed to student reluctance to read self-selected literature. Unfortunately, the decline in pleasure reading is counter-productive to student success. In fact, “Acquiring the habit of turning to books for pleasure or to find out what you want to know does more for reading development than working on decoding words or trying to speed up fluency” (Strauss, 2014, para. 2).

According to a 2012 report by Common Sense Media, 33% of thirteen-year-olds and 45% of seventeen-year-olds report that they read for pleasure no more than one to two times per year. Additionally, only 19% of seventeen-year-olds read for fun on a daily basis, which is a drop of twelve percentage points from 1984. As a result, student achievement is also declining. Non-readers do not have the benefit of “the reciprocal effects of reading volume” and the resulting increase on “students’ knowledge” (Horbec, 2012, p. 59).

“Through independent reading children gain a wealth of background knowledge about many different things, come to understand story and non-fiction structures, absorb the essentials of English grammar, and continuously expand their vocabularies” (Strauss, 2014, para. 9). Pleasure reading would obviously have a positive influence on reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary; however, the impact it has on student success in other core subjects cannot be understated. Reading provides background knowledge and comprehension skills necessary for student achievement in the sciences, mathematics, and history. In fact, a recent study by the Institute for Education found that pleasure readers had a 14.4% advantage in vocabulary and a 9.9% advantage in math (Sellgren, 2013). The National Center for Educational Statistics maintains that there is a positive relationship between pleasure reading and achievement in mathematics (Fulks, 2010).

## **Economic Considerations**

Significant research by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, or OECD, (2002) has been conducted on how socio-economic status and parental education levels relate to student success; that research indicated that the reading habits of adolescent students could have a greater influence on student achievement than both socio-economic status and the level of education attained by parents, and the Institute for Education’s 1986 study determined that, “The influence of reading for pleasure was greater than that for having a parent with a degree” (Sellgren, 2013, para. 7-8). As academic success pertains to socio-economic status, economically disadvantaged students learn at the same pace as middle class students during the school year (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson, 2007); however, the learning gap widens during the summer months. Low-income students lose two or three months of reading growth during the summer, while their middle-class counterparts experience a month of reading growth (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2015). The gap in reading levels and lack of pleasure reading in poor neighborhoods could be attributed to the following:

Students from lower-income families experience summer reading loss because they don’t read much, if at all, during the summer months. Students from middle-class families, on the other hand, are far more likely to read during this same summer period. Low-income students don’t read during the summer months because they don’t own any books, and they live in neighborhoods where there are few, if any, places to purchase books. Middle-class students have bedroom libraries and live in neighborhoods where children’s books are readily available, even in the grocery stores where their parents shop (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2015, para. 6).

This would suggest that it is not socio-economic status that affects student success, rather the ability to access and utilize books. Of course, one of the primary reasons economically disadvantaged students do not have the ability to use and access books is directly related to their families financial status; therefore, rather than being independent from one another, it is more likely that socio-economic status plays a primary role in the reason why economically disadvantaged children do not engage in pleasure reading (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2008). Therefore, it is possible to reduce the gap between the overall academic success of middle-class students and economically disadvantaged students by simply providing greater access to books, and encouraging children to actively engage in pleasure reading outside of the classroom. According to Krashen,

When children read for pleasure, when they get “hooked on books,” they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all of the so-called “language skills” many people are so concerned about: they will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and become good (but not necessarily perfect) spellers. Although free voluntary reading alone will not ensure attainment of the highest levels of literacy, it will at least ensure an acceptable level. Without it, I suspect that children simply do not have a chance (as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006, p.6).

## **Influence of Technology**

With the push to incorporate 21st century practices into curriculum and instruction and incorporate technological literacy, it is vital that reading remain the foundation of our educational structure. According to the 2013 Nation’s Report Card only 38% of American high school seniors scored at or above the proficient level in reading, and students who strongly disagreed that reading was an enjoyable activity scored significantly lower than those students who reported reading as an enjoyable activity (Are the Nations, 2013). The key to developing pleasure readers is to help students find books that interest them (Pannoni, 2015). The consequences from a lack of interest in reading does not end in the classroom. Poor reading skills have been related to unemployment, low wages, reduced opportunities for advancement, and even incarceration (Gibbons, 2011). The good news is that 76% of students aged 14-16 years report that they do enjoy reading (Clark and Rumbold, 2006); as students advance past elementary, intermediate, and junior high school, they are given less and less time for classroom reading. Eliminating classroom reading time is counterproductive to student success. The more time students spend reading, the more their reading improves, and they become more willing to read outside of the classroom (Tankersley, 2005).

## **Contradictory Opinions**

In contrast to popular opinion, a study released by the National Reading Panel (2000) argued against providing time for students to engage in reading self-selected literature in the classroom. The report did not find any substantial evidence that increasing student reading time in the classroom had any bearing on reading ability (National Reading, 2000). As a result of this study thousands of educators concluded that pleasure reading didn’t matter, and policymakers began reducing independent, self-selected, reading time in favor of increased direct reading instruction (Sanden, 2014). One of the biggest considerations for eliminating pleasure reading from the school day has been time. According to Pennington (2011), there just aren’t enough minutes in the school day for small blocks of silent pleasure reading to have any real impact on student achievement. In short, if there isn’t enough time to develop any measureable improvement on student reading comprehension and vocabulary, why bother?

## **Conclusion**

Pleasure reading builds reading comprehension, it increases background knowledge (which is useful in all content areas), it increases student vocabulary skills, and has even been shown to increase our understanding of human behavior and help us to empathize with others (Murphy, 2013). Pleasure readers not only experience greater success academically than their non-reading counterparts, pleasure readers go on to experience greater success in the workforce (National Endowment of the Arts, 2007). Many language arts educators are aware of the benefits of pleasure reading and make every effort to immerse students in a wide selection of literature (Cullinan, 2000); however, schools, at all levels, fail to establish a culture that values reading (Rich, 2007).

There is a lack of current research on the potential academic and long-term benefits pleasure reading has for high school students. The large scale studies reviewed for this research primarily focused on the importance of developing independent readers in elementary school. Other large scale studies (Clark and Rumbold, National Endowment for the Arts) would indicate that pleasure reading and academic success are directly related; however, there are factors that need to be explored further (i.e. Are fiction readers or non-fiction readers more successful? Do specific genres influence academics in different ways? How much time must be spent reading in order to improve student performance?). Reading is the foundation on which academic and personal success can be built, and teaching students to love reading could fundamentally change the educational process.

# **Chapter 3: Research Methods**

## **General Description**

This study was designed to determine the potential academic benefits of pleasure reading. In order to thoroughly explore the potential benefits of reading on academic achievement, a mixed method study was conducted. Student participants were given a ten question quantitative survey in order to ascertain their current and past reading habits. Educator participants answered a five question qualitative interview to determine their philosophy on reading and what role, if any, educators should have on encouraging student reading.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were eleventh grade English III students at a rural Texas high school whose ages ranged from fifteen to seventeen years and current educators whose experience ranged from a second year teacher to thirty plus years teaching experience. The student participants in this study included both honors and level English III students. All participants in this study were from varied ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and the study included both male and female students and teachers. The sixty-three student participants were divided into two groups: those who self-identified as pleasure readers and those who did not. Educators from all core content areas, English, history, mathematics, and the sciences, were represented in this study.

All student participators were selected based upon enrollment in my English III classes. While all of my 105 students were given the opportunity to participate in the study, only sixty-five students returned both the participant consent form and parental consent form. Educator participants were selected randomly from each core content area: English, mathematics, science, and history.

Figure 1

The majority of the participants in this study were White – Non Hispanic, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Ethnicity of Participants*** | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  | **Number of Students** | **Percentage of Participants** |
| **White - Non Hispanic** | | | | 35 | **54%** |
| **Hispanic** | | | | 15 | **23%** |
| **African American** | | | | 13 | **20%** |
| **Asian** | | | | 1 | **2%** |
| **Other** | | | | 1 | **2%** |

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of the participants of this study were enrolled in level English III.

Figure 2

## **Instrument**

This research used a mixed method of quantitative survey for students and a qualitative interview for educators. The survey gathered data through student input and made use of several Likert-type scale systems. When “enjoyment of pleasure reading” was measured the survey range was: not at all, rarely, some, often, or a great deal. When measuring “past reading” the survey range was: never finished an entire book, rarely finish a book, one book every three-six months, one book per month, or at least one book per week. When “time spent reading for at least thirty minutes” was measured the survey range was: zero days, one-two days, three-four days, five-six days, or every day. Students were asked to provide a “yes” or “no” response when asked if greater access to books would increase the amount of time spent reading. The interview questions for educators were open-ended in nature and measured teacher opinion on the academic success and behavioral differences between pleasure readers and non-pleasure readers.

## **Procedure**

Student participants were asked to answer a ten question survey in regard to their reading habits. Participants had the option to answer all, some, or none of the questions. The total number of student participants was determined by the number of students who completed both the survey and returned their parental consent form. Student averages for the first nine weeks of instruction was collected from the counselor’s office. Student survey responses and grade averages were recorded in an EXCEL spreadsheet.

Educator participants were asked to answer five open-ended questions in regard to their opinions in implementing and/or encouraging self-selected reading in their classrooms. The total number of educator participants was determined by the number of educators who agreed to be interviewed; however, each of the four core content areas were represented for accuracy and fairness. Educator responses were gathered via email and compared to determine similarities and differences in opinions across content areas.

# **Chapter 4: Results**

## **Student Data Analysis**

This research surveyed sixty-five high school students to determine their pleasure reading habits. The goal of this research was to determine if, within the confines of a nine week grading period, pleasure-readers perform better academically, specifically in English, mathematics, science, and history, than their non-reading counterparts.

The data for this research was collected at the end of the first nine week grading period of the 2015-16 school year. Of the sixty-five students who returned their survey and consent forms, only nineteen, 29%, identified as pleasure readers. The remaining forty-six students surveyed, or 71% of participants, maintained that they either very rarely or never read for pleasure.

Figure 3

As seen in Figure 3, the vast majority of students did not engage in pleasure reading. In addition to not enjoying reading, or viewing it as a pleasurable activity, 20% of the student participators reported as never having finished a book, and 51% of participators reported as reading two or fewer books per year – including required reading for school. The majority of students, 54%, would read more if they had greater access to books and only 32% of participators personally own fifteen or more books. Table 2 shows the reading habits of the student participators.

Table 2

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Student Reading Habits*** | | |
|  | **Number of Students** | **Percentage of all participants** |
| Students who have never finished a book | 13 | 20% |
| Students who read two or fewer books per year | 33 | 51% |
| Students who would read more with greater access to books | 35 | 54% |
| Students who personally own fifteen or fewer books | 44 | 68% |

At the conclusion of the nine weeks, pleasure readers, though largely outnumbered by non-readers, averaged higher grades in all four measured areas: English, history, math, and science. Pleasure readers experienced a marginal advantage in English and the sciences; however, pleasure readers experienced a significant advantage in mathematics and history. Honors level non-pleasure reading students did maintain higher combined averages than level students, but that was not unexpected.

As stated above, pleasure readers experienced only a marginal advantage over non-readers in English III. The average grade for Honors and level non-readers were 88.63% and 78.63%, respectively. Honors and level students who identify as pleasure readers averaged grades of 91.82% and 75.63%, respectively. Figure 4 shows the combined averages for pleasure readers and non-pleasure readers as it pertains to English.

Figure 4

Not unlike English, pleasure readers experienced a marginal advantage over non-readers in the sciences. In regard to junior level science, Honors and level non-reading students averaged 93% and 83.97%, respectively. Honors level students averaged 95.73% and level students averaged 84.25%. Figure 5 shows the combined averages for pleasure readers and non-pleasure readers as it pertains to the sciences.

Figure 5

Pleasure readers achieved the largest gains over their non-reading counterparts in mathematics. Non-reading Honors and level students averaged grades of 87.53% and 82.33%, respectively; however, pleasure reading students produced average scores of 93.64% (Honors) and 83.75% (level). Figure 6 shows the combined averages for pleasure readers and non-pleasure readers as it pertains to mathematics.

Figure 6

The number of student scores available for U.S. History differ from other core subjects. Madisonville High School, like many other schools across the country, offers Dual Credit United States History to its students; therefore, I was not privy to the averages of the students enrolled in dual credit. As a result, the nine week averages for U.S. History are limited to level students only; however, pleasure readers still experienced higher averages than their non-reading counterparts. Non-readers had a combined average of 82.75%, while pleasure readers earned a combined average of 84.45%. Figure 7 shows the combined averages for pleasure readers and non-pleasure readers as it pertains to U.S. History.

Figure 7

While non-reading level students earned a higher nine week average, by 3.0 percentage points, than their level pleasure reading counterparts in English, pleasure readers earned higher averages, for both Honors and level students, in every other subject. Additionally, pleasure reading Honors students outscored their non-reading counterparts by a high enough margin, 3.19 percentage points, to raise the overall average in English for pleasure readers above their non-reading counterparts – albeit only marginally.

## **Educator Interviews**

Educators interviewed for this study all expressed interest in further exploring the benefits of pleasure reading in the classroom. Teachers from every content area measured agreed that encouraging students to engage in self-selected pleasure reading is beneficial, even essential, to “developing successful learners” (personal interview, November 12, 2015). Educators also agree that high schools no longer offer students class time to engage in pleasure reading because there isn’t time to do so. State mandated curriculum requirements and the ever increasing number of standardized tests have forced teachers to use their class time satisfying state standards and preparing students for state testing. According to one well-respected teacher, “pleasure reading is not an objective, although it would contribute to better performance on the tests” (personal interview, November 11, 2015).

Those teachers interviewed also agreed that pleasure readers not only earn higher scores in their respective classes, but readers are also better equipped to express themselves in writing. Teachers agree that the shorthand used in texting, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, et al, has had a negative impact on student writing across content areas. Teachers also agree that pleasure reading, while not a cure-all for writing woes, does expose students to higher level vocabulary, proper sentence structure, and syntax; as a result, pleasure readers often write at a more advanced level than their peers.

The teachers interviewed for this research project did not agree on providing class time for students to read self-selected literature; however, their objection was not because they did not agree that reading would be beneficial. Half of the teachers interviewed maintained that providing class time for students to read would be counterproductive to their classroom management plan because so few students would actually participate in silent reading. One teacher estimated that fewer than 50% of her students would choose to participate and “since most students would not be reading, this would quickly lead to class management issues” (personal interview, November 12, 2015).

While teachers are divided in regard to allowing class time for pleasure reading, they are in complete agreement that reading, all reading, is on the decline. The teachers interviewed for this project offered several reasons why they believe students no longer read for fun; those reasons were: reading is not modeled by people the students admire, burnout from Accelerated Reading (AR) programs in elementary, intermediate, and junior high school, parents who do not encourage reading or who are poorly educated and, therefore, do not value reading, students are overcommitted to jobs, clubs, and extra-curricular activities, and students having underdeveloped imaginations due to being constantly inundated with technology.

# **Chapter 5: Discussion**

## **Summary**

Educators are frequently looking for new and innovative ways to improve student performance in the classroom. Substandard writing skills, poor reading comprehension skills, low-level vocabulary, and lackluster scores on standardized tests are legitimate concerns in many school districts. The data collected in this study would indicate that there is a possible solution to the academic concerns plaguing many school districts. It was postulated that students who read self-selected literature for pleasure would experience greater academic success that their non-reading peers.

This research concluded that students who chose to read self-selected literature for pleasure performed better in English, mathematics, science, and history. Students who engage in pleasure reading experienced marginal average increases of .11% in English and 1.71% in science and higher increases of 4.43% in mathematics and 2.05% in history. While pleasure readers did not experience substantial increases, it is worth noting that the current valedictorian and salutatorian at Madisonville High School are only separated by approximately a tenth of a percent; in that situation, any increase is significant.

Student responses to the reading survey and educator responses to interview questions indicate that pleasure reading is on the decline. Students are preoccupied with technology and social media, overworked, and the majority, 71% of those surveyed, do not value reading. Educators, from the content areas measured, agree that pleasure reading would improve student performance in the classroom. Those educators interviewed have observed higher level vocabulary, an advanced ability to communicate in writing across content areas, and increased fluency in their students who choose to read. While the educators interviewed for this study disagree on including time for students to read self-selected literature in the classroom due to potential behavioral issues, they unanimously agree that pleasure reading is an essential component for academic and future success.

## **Interpretation**

Pleasure reading among teens aged fifteen to seventeen is on the decline. While teens give various reasons for electing to forgo reading for fun, professionals in education agree that choosing to read self-selected literature for pleasure can, and does, improve student academic performance. The decline of pleasure reading among teens could be responsible, at least in part, to low-level vocabulary development, subpar writing skills, and unsatisfactory performance in science, math, and history.

Reading helps students think critically and improves reading comprehension skills, which is beneficial in every subject area measured in this study. However, the benefits of pleasure reading do not end in the classroom. Students take the skills they have honed through reading into adulthood and, in turn, into the workforce and society.

Unfortunately, in spite of indications that pleasure reading is overwhelmingly beneficial to student progress, state-mandated testing, state curriculums, and an ever increasing push to incorporate more and more technology into the classroom reduce the amount of time students have available to spend reading while in school. Jobs, that are often necessary for the financial well-being of the student’s family, extra-curricular activities, the pull of social media, and active social lives limit the amount of time students have available to read outside of the classroom. Re-establishing reading as a valuable activity may help to rekindle student interest in reading for pleasure.

## **Implications for Future Research**

Further research is needed in order to determine if the results of this study are applicable on a broader scale. Continued research would indicate whether pleasure readers experience additional academic advances outside of the parameters of this study and, in theory, further validate the advantages of reading for fun. Because this study was limited to juniors at one high school during one nine week grading period, it would be beneficial to replicate this research at other schools, with a larger participant pool over an extended period of time, in order to determine if the results would be the same or similar.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study indicates that the pleasure-readers who participated in this research gained an academic advantage over their non-pleasure reading peers in the core subjects of English, math, science, and history. The study further concluded that educators in the subjects mentioned above agree that pleasure reading is beneficial, even essential, to student development and achievement.

# **References**

Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2007). Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap. *American Sociological Review, 72*(2), 167-180

Allington, D., & McGill-Franzen, A. (2008). Got books? *Educational Leadership*, 65, 20-23. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.shsu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=2e0a946e-856d-4bd1-9dc6-b62bdc513c62%40sessionmgr120&vid=16&hid=121>

Allington, D., & McGill-Franzen, A. (2015). Why do poor students lag behind rich students in reading development? Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://www.booksourcebanter.com/2015/05/08/why-do-poor-students-lag-behind-rich-students-in-reading-development/>

Are the nation's twelfth-graders making progress in mathematics and reading? (2013). Retrieved July 19, 2015, from <http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_g12_2013/#/>

Bridges, L. (2014). The joy and power of reading. *California English, 20*(2), 7-2.

Children, teens, and reading infographic from common sense media. Common Sense Media. (2014). Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/children-teens-and-reading-infographic>

Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). Reading for pleasure: A research overview. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496343.pdf>

Cullinan, B. (2000). Independent reading and school achievement. *Research Journal of the American Association of School Librarians,* *3*, 1-24. Retrieved July 15, 2015, from <http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol3/SLMR_IndependentReading_V3.pdf>

Creel, S. (2015). The impact of assigned reading on reading pleasure in Young Adults. *Journal of Research on Libraries & Young Adults,* *5*. Retrieved July 21, 2015, from <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2015/02/the-impact-of-assigned-reading-on-reading-pleasure-in-young-adults/>

Fulks, J. (2010). Reading may be the key to unlocking basic skills success. Retrieved July 21, 2015, from <http://www.asccc.org/content/reading-may-be-key-unlocking-basic-skills-success>

Gibbons, A. (2011). Why reading for pleasure matters. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/active/1/Reading-4-Pleasure-7225.pdf>

Horbec, D. (2012). The link between reading and academic success. *English in Australia,* *47*(2), 58-6. Retrieved from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.shsu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=94c6e963-4a26-4d43-b242-c1ae742fd237%40sessionmgr4002&vid=10&hid=4103>

Murphy Paul, A. (2013). Reading literature makes us smarter and nicer. *Time*.*com*. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://ideas.time.com/2013/06/03/why-we-should-read-literature/>

National Center for Educational Statistics (2006). Comparative indicators of education in the United States and other G-8 countries. Retrieved July 22, 2015 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007006>

National Endowment for the Arts. (2007). To read or not to read: A question of national consequence. Reading Report number 47. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. (2009). Retrieved July 22, 2015 from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/dt06_267.asp>

National Reading Panel. (2000). Report of the national reading panel: Teaching children to read. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

OECD (2002). Reading for change: Performance and engagement across countries. Results from PISA 2000. New York: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Pannoni, A. (2015, February 16). How high school teachers, parents can encourage teens to read for fun. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/high-school-notes/2015/02/16/how-high-school-teachers-parents-can-encourage-teens-to-read-for-fun>

Pearson UK. (2015). Why is reading so important? Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://uk.pearson.com/enjoy-reading/why-is-reading-so-important.html>

Pennington, M. (2011, June). Why sustained silent reading (SSR) doesn't work. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from [http://penningtonpublishing.com/blog/reading/why-sustained-silent-reading-ssr-doesn’t-work/](http://penningtonpublishing.com/blog/reading/why-sustained-silent-reading-ssr-doesn't-work/)

Rich, M. (2007, November 19). Study links drop in test scores to a decline in time spent reading. *The New York Times*, p. E1. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/arts/19nea.html?_r=1&>

Sanden, S. (2014). Out of the shadow of SSR: Real teachers' classroom independent reading practices. *Language Arts,* *91*(3), 161-175.

Sellgren, K. (2013, September 11). Maths advantage for pupils who read for pleasure - BBC News. Retrieved July 23, 2015, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/education-24046971>

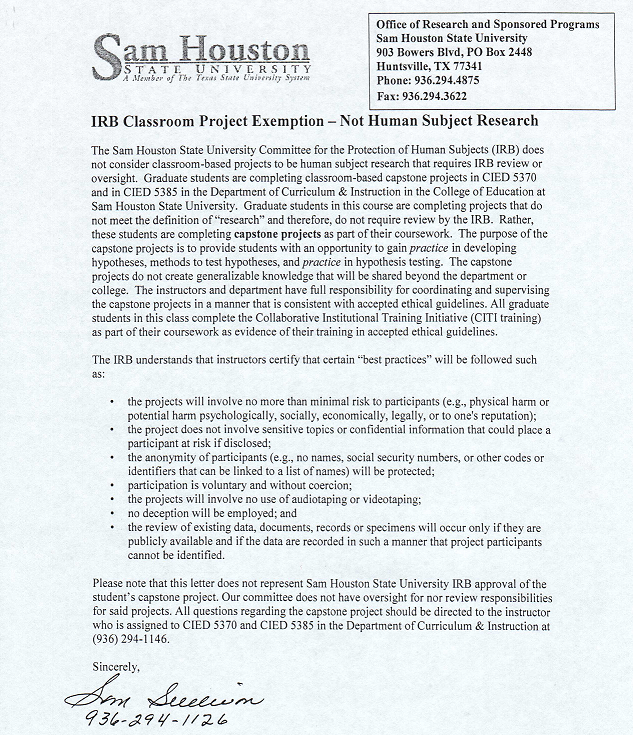
Strauss, V. (2014, September 8). Why kids should choose their own books to read in school. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved July 19, 2015, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/08/why-kids-should-choose-their-own-books-to-read-in-school/>

Tankersley, K., & Association for Supervision and Curriculum, D. (2005). *Literacy strategies for grades 4-12: Reinforcing the threads of reading.* Alexandria, VA: Assoc. for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

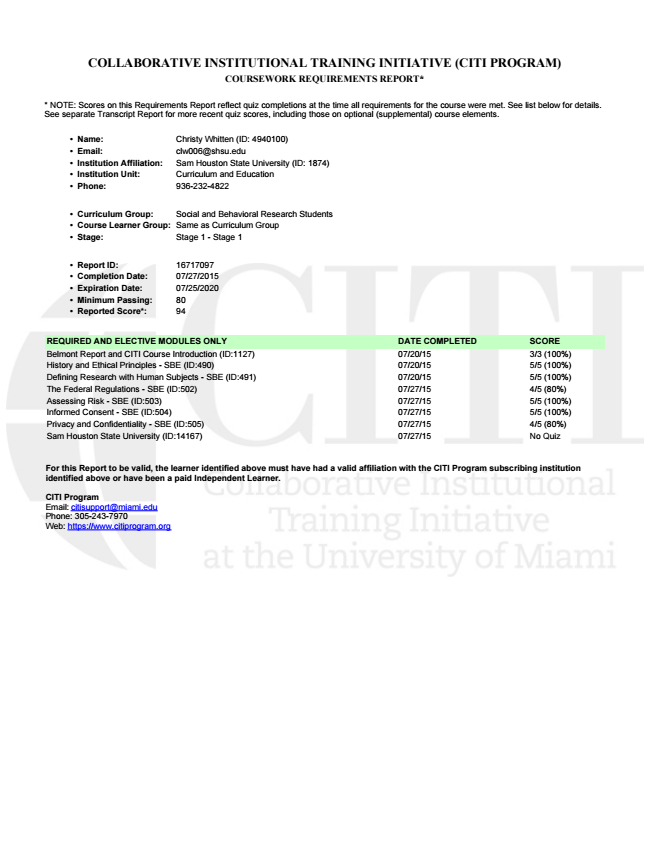
Wilhelm, J., & Smith, M. (2014). Don't underestimate the power of pleasure reading. Retrieved June 22, 2015, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/01/22/18wilhelm.h33.html>

# **Appendix A**

**IRB Classroom Project Exemption – Not Human Subject Research**

****

# **Appendix B**

**CITI Training Certificate**

# **Appendix C**

**Informed Consent**

**Sam Houston State University**

**Cover Letter to Participate in Research**

***The Effects of Pleasure Reading on Student Academic Achievement***

**WHY AM I BEING ASKED?**

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Christy Whitten of the Sam Houston State University School of Education. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a student in Ms. Whitten’s English class and because you meet the age criteria for the research, 15 – 17 years of age. Your participation is voluntary and, should you choose to withdraw at any time, it will not affect your standing in my class or our student/teacher relationship.

You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding if you wish to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read this consent form. Because you are a minor, you will also need to secure consent from a parent or guardian before being considered a research subject. If you decide to participate please sign the consent form at the back of this letter. This letter is yours to keep.

**WHY IS THIS RESEARCH BEING DONE?**

With so much research being conducted on the use of technology in the classroom, very little research is being conducted on the benefits pleasure, or independent, reading has on student achievement. If teachers are committed to using research tested strategies to improve student achievement then we must avoid fixating on technology based strategies and, instead, determine if retaining some of the more traditional strategies (i.e. students independently reading self-selected literature) have a greater impact on student success than previously thought. This research seeks to encourage teachers of all subject areas to implement reading as a performance strategy in all core subjects.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain if there is a positive correlation between a student’s overall academic success (in all core areas) and the act of pleasure reading. The study is designed to enable me to better understand the effect of pleasure reading on student grade averages and classroom behavior.

**PROCEDURES:**

Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 10 question survey indicating your reading habits. The questionnaire should not take longer than 15 minutes to complete.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORT:**

There are no known potential risks or discomforts associated with the survey.

**BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN RESEARCH:**

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. Society, and the field of education, may benefit from a greater understanding of the benefits of reading for pleasure.

**PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The only person who will know you are a research participant is Ms. Whitten. No personal information about you will be disclosed without your express written permission, except:

1. if necessary to protect your rights or welfare; or
2. if required by law.

Should the results of the research be published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Any information about you that is obtained in connection with this study, and that can be identified with you, will remain confidential. Such information will only be disclosed with your written permission or if required by law.

**WHAT IF I AM INJURED AS A RESULT OF MY PARTICIPATION?**

There is no risk of injury in this research study.

**PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION:**

There is no payment or compensation for participation in this study.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWL:**

You may choose whether to be in this study or not. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time, for any reason, without fear of consequence or reprisal. You may also refuse to answer questions you do not wish to answer and still remain in the study. I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

*Who should I contact if I have questions?*

*The researcher conducting this study is Christy Whitten. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions at a later date, you may contact Ms. Whitten at 936-232-4822 or her supervising professor, Sam Sullivan at 936-294-1126.*

**YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT:**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions of this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Sharla Miles at the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs: 936-294-4875 or via email at [sharla\_miles@shsu.edu](mailto:sharla_miles@shsu.edu).

*Agreement to Participate*

I have read (*or someone has read to me)* the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research study. As a minor, I understand that my parent/guardian must also consent for me to participate in this research.

**Consent:** I have read and understand the above information, and I willingly consent to participate in this study. Any questions I may have about my rights as a research subject may be directed to Ms. Christy Whitten at (936) 348-2721 or via email at [clw006@shsu.edu](mailto:clw006@shsu.edu). I have received a copy of this consent form.

Your Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian Consent:** I have read and understand the above information, and I willingly consent for my son/daughter/ward to participate in this study. Any questions I may have about my son’s/daughter’s/ward’s rights as a research subject may be directed to Ms. Christy Whitten at (936) 348-2721 or via email at [clw006@shsu.edu](mailto:clw006@shsu.edu). I have received a copy of this consent form.

Your Name: (please print): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to student: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# **Appendix D**

**Survey Questionnaire**

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Reading Interest Survey**

1. How much do you enjoy reading on your own?

1 2 3 4 5

not at all some a great deal

2. Outside of assigned homework, how much reading have you done in the past?

1 2 3 4 5

(never finished (1 book every (at least 1 book

an entire book) 3-6 months) per week)

3. In the past week, how many days have you read a self-selected book for at least 30 minutes?

1 2 3 4 5

zero days 1-2 days 3-4 days 5-6 days every day

4. How many books would you say you own?

1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

none 15 books 30+ books (approx. number)

5. How many books would you say are in your house?

1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

none 100 books 200+ books (approx. number)

6. When you read, which do you prefer?

\_\_\_ read 1 book at a time \_\_\_ have more than 1 going at a time

7. Would you read more if you had greater access to books?

\_\_\_ no \_\_\_ yes

8. If you read for pleasure, what types of books do you enjoy reading (i.e. science fiction, non-fiction, fantasy, romance, etc.)?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

9. Why do you think people read?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

10. What does someone have to do in order to be a good reader?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# **Appendix E**

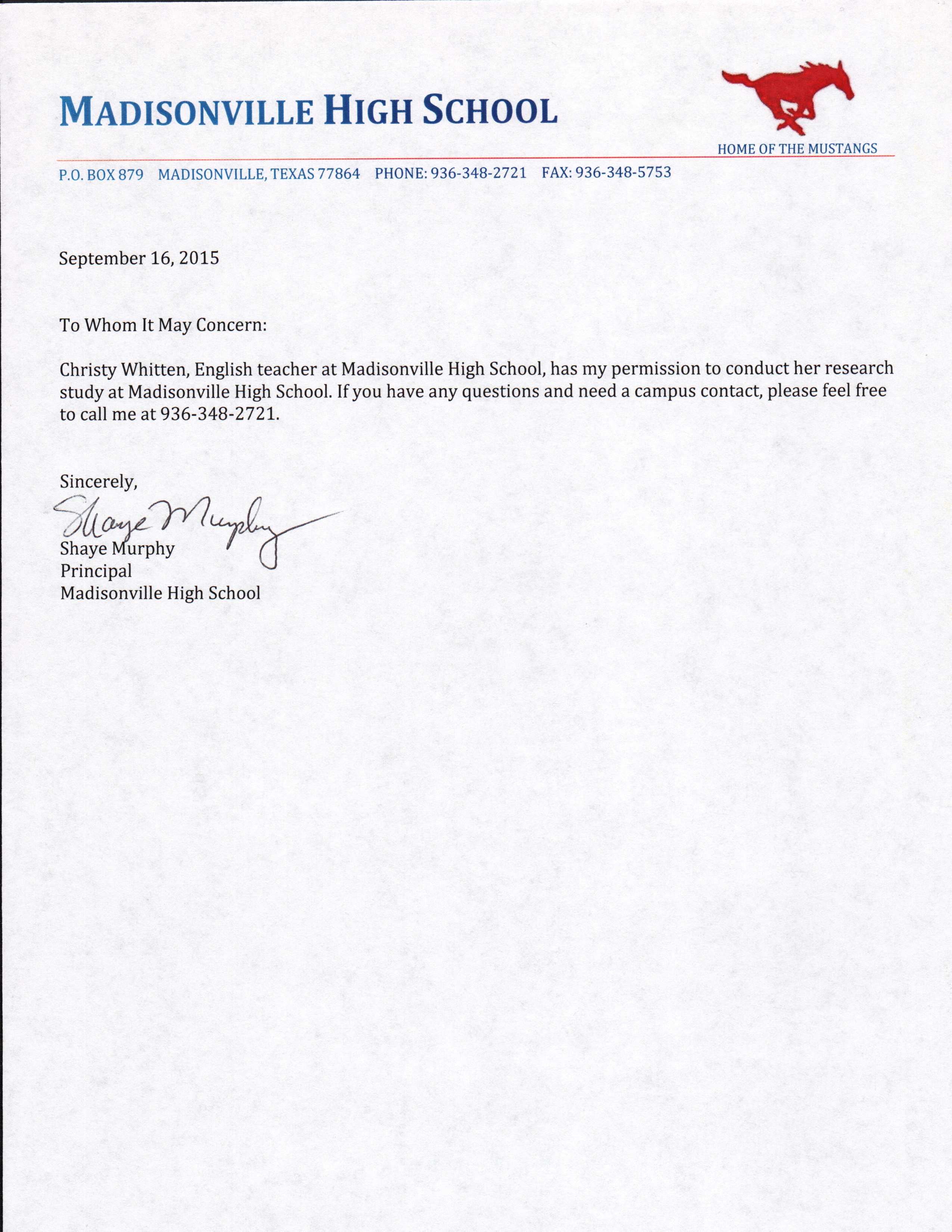
**Educator Interview Questionnaire**

Interview Questions for teachers:

1. What is your philosophy on reading (specifically self-selected pleasure reading)?
2. If studies show that pleasure reading improves student performance, why do you think that high schools do not allow class time for students to read self-selected literature?
3. We tend to focus on how much our students struggle with writing. Do you think it is possible that our students write poorly because they rarely read and are not exposed to examples of good writing?
4. If it could be proved that pleasure reading has a positive impact on academic success and student behavior, would you be willing to allow students time to read self-selected literature in your class?
5. In your opinion, why do so few students read for pleasure?

# **Appendix F**

**Administrator Approval**

****