Many students experience difficulties when reading informational text (Duke, Bennett-Armistead, & Roberts, 2002; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). And, although basal reading texts in the early grades primarily use literary text to teach the basic strategies and procedures needed for learning to read (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004; Stephens, 2007), most academic achievement depends, in part, on the ability to read and write informational text (Duke, 2004; Hall & Sabey, 2007). Furthermore, as beginning readers are taught to read with primarily literary text (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004), they may be unprepared for the challenges of informational text and content-specific vocabulary (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). This is especially evident in the fourth grade, where there is a marked increase in student interaction with content area materials (McNamara, Ozuru, & Floyd, 2011; Meyer & Ray, 2011). Researchers have dubbed this the “fourth grade slump,” and attribute it to difficulties with informational text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009).

One major challenge facing researchers and practitioners is the lack of a unified definition of informational text (Williams, 2009). Those using the term may define it in a variety of ways (Duke, 2004; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Moss & Newton, 2002). Using this term as a synonym for nonfiction is confusing given that many informational texts are nonfiction, but not all nonfiction texts are necessarily considered to be informational texts. According to Duke (2004), text that conveys information about the natural and social world could be considered informational text, while Marinak and Gambrell (2008) suggested that informational text be typified as any type of written material that is designed to convey any kind of information, such as books, magazines, newspapers, brochures, and technological resources, such as websites. Organizations also have different definitions and understandings of the term: The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE; 2011) and the International Reading Association (IRA; 2012) group informational text in the nonfiction genre. The American Library Association (ALA) describes informational text as books that are written and illustrated to present, organize, and interpret documentable, factual material (American Association of School Librarians [AASL], 2011). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), texts are either literary or informational (National Assessment Governing
Board [NAGB], 2008). Educators need to be aware that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) uses the definition of informational text found in the NAEP framework (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA Center and CCSSO], 2010a). This is important when interpreting research, as the definition is not always used in the same way across studies.

Children’s use of informational text increases as they advance through school (Hall & Sabey, 2007; Jeong, Gaffney, & Choi, 2010). Much of the reading that students will encounter in later grades, and continue to negotiate during life, is of an informational nature (Baker et al., 2011; Brozo, 2010; Heider, 2009). Although narrative text comprises a major proportion of the materials children encounter during reading instruction (Jeong et al., 2010; Moss, 2008; Ness, 2011), a major predictor of overall student achievement is the skillful use of literacy strategies during content area reading (Vacca et al., 2009). It has been determined that the percentage of informational text found in standardized tests can be as high as 70% to 80% (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). Consequently, students who have little experience with informational text are likely to score lower on standardized achievement tests (Heider, 2009).

The Common Core State Standards for English and Language Arts (CCSS-ELA) will have a significant effect on what teachers teach and what primary students are expected to be able to read (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). According to the CCSS-ELA, by the end of fourth grade, reading experiences should be evenly balanced between literary text and informational text (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b). In addition, instruction for acquiring the skills needed to comprehend informational text in the content areas must be incorporated into the reading and language arts curriculum starting in the second grade (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b). Although Moss (2008) found that nonfiction text was represented in about 40% of the total text found in two California basal reading series, only 50% of nonfiction text selections were informational, which amounted to only 20% of the overall text. A more recent study conducted by Yopp and Yopp (2012) revealed that narrative text constituted 77% of the books that were read aloud to preschool to Grade 3 children, whereas only 8% were described as informational text. Jeong et al. (2010) found that third- and fourth-grade students averaged only 16 minutes per day of informational text use in the classroom. Finally, it has been reported that only 33% of classroom libraries contain informational text (Ness, 2011). This evidence suggests that student exposure to informational text is lacking in most classrooms.

Research has determined that the volume of text and opportunities to read significantly predict text comprehension (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). However, the concept of reading volume is more complex than simple tabulations of the number of words contained in text. Allington (2009) suggested that mastery of specific skills (such as identifying the number of syllables in a word or reciting phonics generalizations) did not necessarily lead to fluency and comprehension skill in reading. After reviewing research, Hiebert and Martin (2009) postulated that reading volume is affected by variables such as text complexity, instructional context, and students’ reading engagement or interest. In addition, the CCSS-ELA specifically addresses students’ ability to read increasingly more complex text; explicit guidelines are included in the form of quantitative indices in Appendix A and in the listing of example texts in Appendix B (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b). Hiebert (2013) suggested that when students get “easier” texts, these texts are often simply shorter in length and not substantially different in the load of vocabulary. As informational text can contain graphs, diagrams, and other illustrative renderings (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b), it is impossible to determine exposure to reading volume by calculating word count.

According to Education Market Research (2012), approximately 84% of American teachers use basal reading programs for classroom instruction. Moreover, studies have estimated that 80% to 90% of elementary teachers predominately depend on basal readers, its accompanying workbooks, and other commercially prepared ancillary materials as a literacy instruction (Stephens, 2007). Three major textbook companies, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, and Pearson Scott Foresman, publish the most widely purchased basal reading programs in the United States. These companies represent 83% of the overall U.S. sales for the elementary market in basal reading textbooks (Education Market Research, 2012).

As many teachers may need to change their curriculum and adjust instruction to meet the informational text recommendations as defined by the CCSS-ELA, they need to be aware of the types and extent of informational text found in newly published basal reading texts to align curriculum and instruction to meet the defined fourth-grade informational text recommendations of the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b; Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012). Examining the contents of basal reading texts is one means of understanding the extent to which students are exposed to informational text during reading instruction.

**Method**

The method of quantitative content analysis was used in this study (Krippendorff, 2012; Neuenendorf, 2002). In this study, data were gathered from 3 fourth-grade basal reading textbooks: (a) *Journeys*, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2012); (b) *Treasures*, published by Macmillan/McGraw-Hill (2011); and (c) *Reading Street*, published by Pearson Scott Foresman (2011). These documents are published texts and are publicly available.

The percentage of informational text, as defined by the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b), was examined within each basal reading text using procedures of
quantitative content analysis. The results were subdivided according to three categories: (a) genre (informational or literary), (b) type of text (fiction, literary nonfiction, poetry, informational text, argumentative or persuasive text, and procedural text or documents), and (c) publisher (Journeys, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011; Treasures, Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 2011; and Reading Street, Scott Foresman, 2012). The percentages of text type for each category were reported to display differences based on genre, type of text, and textbook publisher. Data were collected using Krippendorff’s (1980) structure for collection and analysis, and were coded by two individuals to ensure reliability.

This study utilized “hand coding,” where one actually reads the text passages to critically understand and think about the text before coding. While computer analysis is useful for working with structure, human coders are more capable of assigning meaning and establishing relations between text features (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). For these reasons, hand coding was the most valid method of collecting data for this study, allowing for effective analysis of the informational text categorical content that aligned with the definitions of the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b).

**Materials**

The codebook and coding form used in this study were developed prior to the data gathering, following procedures developed by Flood and Lapp (1986) and Moss (2008), and most recently utilized by Watkins (2010; see Appendix A). The codebook contained detailed procedures for coding each text selection, detailed descriptions of each variable, and step-by-step instructions of the coding process (see Appendix A). The coding form acted as an organizational tool for recording data, and encompassed the following categories: publisher, title and author of selection, start page, number of pages, and text type classification (see Appendix B). Using the coding form, the text types and the percentage of each type contained in each publisher’s basal student textbook were calculated and presented as a table. Then, the overall totals were used to compare each publisher with CCSS-ELA recommendations (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b).

Many basal text publishers advertise on their respective websites that their basal reader materials adhere to the CCSS (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011; Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 2011; Pearson Scott Foresman, 2012). Selections that appear only in the teacher’s manuals or in ancillary resources may be included in this claim. While selections from these materials may be presented during classroom instruction, they were not included in this study because they were not presented as inclusionary text in the main student basal reader. Because of this, only selections that appeared in the main student textbook, directed to all learners, were analyzed and coded.

**Procedures**

To enhance the levels of reliability, this study assessed intercoder reliability, using a full sample, during the pilot. Pilot coding was conducted to train the coder with the coding system. The coding method was calibrated to stabilize the coders’ techniques, so that the coders viewed the content in the same way without discussion or collaboration. Consensus was reviewed during training and piloting, and revisions were made before final coding commenced. As blind coding, in which coders are unaware of the research questions or hypothesis that guide the investigation, is preferable to reduce bias (Neuendorf, 2002), the coder in this study understood the categories and measures, but was not informed of the purpose of the study. In addition, as human text coding works best with hard copies of text (Saldana, 2013), only hard copies of the textbooks were analyzed in this study.

In this study, a pilot study was conducted prior to commencing data collection. During the pilot, identical copies of the fourth-grade edition of Harcourt Trophies (2003) were used to assess intercoder reliability. Forty selections were examined, and Krippendorff’s alpha was used to measure the reliability coefficients between coders. Interrater reliability was determined to be .94. Therefore, the reliability of the coders was deemed acceptable to continue with the main study.

Data concerning the text types and percentage of total text were collected during the main study by examining and hand coding the text selections. Coders categorized each variable and referenced where each recording unit was found. Definitions of units, including procedures for identifying them, were established according to the definition of informational text types found in the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b). The data were hand coded as software programs do not accurately quantify text by genre (Saldana, 2013). In addition, given that historical fiction and poetry are not included by the CCSS-ELA in this genre, the coders may need to revisit text selections to confirm adherence to specifications of the CCSS-ELA’s informational text definition (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b).

Two measures were used to determine the percentage of informational text found in each grade-level text. The first classified text by genre; the second calculated the number of pages devoted to each genre. Text genre was coded and data were collected according to the CCSS-ELA definition of text types (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b). The number of instances each text type appeared and the total number of pages for each text type were tabulated according to publisher. The volume of total text presented, as opposed to the number of stories, provided in basal readers is significantly related to the amount students have to read (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). As informational text can contain graphs, diagrams, and other illustrative renderings that present information, determining the number of pages devoted to
informational text provides an accurate description of the extent of informational text presented to students.

A matrix listing the types of informational text was developed and used to record the types of genres and the percentage of text. The number of instances each genre appeared and the total number of pages for each genre selection were coded and calculated according to publisher.

The observed frequency in each category was reported and compared for significant differences in the expected frequencies for each publisher using a chi-square goodness-of-fit test. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was used to test the association between the null hypotheses from which the data sample was drawn to the hypothesized distribution. The difference between the observed frequency distributions was reviewed to determine statistical significance.

Data collection occurred during the examination and coding of text selections presented in the three most widely published 2011-2012 fourth-grade basal reading texts. Text selections were restricted to actual student reading selections listed in the table of contents of each text. After the basal texts were coded, information from the coding forms was transferred to the database and tabulated. Final calculations were used to determine the percentage of informational text found at the fourth-grade level for each type of informational text (expository, argumentative or persuasive texts, and procedural texts or documents) and for each of the three textbooks. The percentages of text types for each category were reported, with tables to display differences based on type of text and textbook publisher.

### Results

Although the percentage of genre selections was fairly consistent across publishers, results indicated that the total number of text selections varied among publishers. Overall, Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures contained the highest number of selections, whereas Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys had the least number of selections (see Table 1). However, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys devoted the largest percentage of text selections to literary text, whereas Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures (2011) contained the largest percentage of informational text selections. This finding is similar to previous studies that found differences in the number of text selections across publishers (Moss, 2008; Stephens, 2007).

### Number of text pages

The percentage of text pages devoted to the different text genres was also fairly consistent between the three publishers. However, the total number of text pages varied among publishers (see Table 2). Overall, Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures contained the most text pages with a total of 587 pages. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys, with 492 pages, had the least number of text pages. In contrast, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys devoted the largest percentage of text pages to literary text, whereas Pearson Scott Foresman Reading Street (2011) contained the smallest percentage of literary text pages.

Results from the frequencies and percentages of text selections (see Table 3) show that basal readers contain a greater number of literary text selections (fiction, nonfiction, and poetry) compared with informational text selections (expository, argumentative or persuasive, and procedural text or documents). This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies, which indicated that literary text comprises a major proportion of the materials children encounter during reading instruction (Jeong et al., 2010; Moss, 2008; Ness, 2011).

While the CCSS-ELA recommends 50% of the text students are exposed to be of the informational genre, the basal

### Table 1. Overall Number of Text Selections by Publisher.

| Publisher               | % of literary text selections | % of informational text selections | Total number of text selections |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys (2012) | 72 (n = 36) | 28 (n = 14) | 100 (N = 50) |
| Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures (2011) | 67 (n = 69) | 33 (n = 34) | 100 (N = 103) |
| Pearson Scott Foresman Reading Street (2011) | 68 (n = 44) | 32 (n = 22) | 100 (N = 66) |

### Table 2. Overall Number of Text Pages by Publisher.

| Publisher               | % of literary text pages | % of informational text pages | Total number of text pages |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys (2012) | 86 (n = 427) | 14 (n = 65) | 100 (N = 492) |
| Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures (2011) | 83 (n = 491) | 17 (n = 96) | 100 (N = 587) |
| Pearson Scott Foresman Reading Street (2011) | 82 (n = 437) | 18 (n = 96) | 100 (N = 533) |

### Table 3. Overall Percentage of Literary Texts vs. Informational Texts by Publisher.

| Publisher               | % of literary text selections | % of literary text pages | % of informational text selections | % of informational text pages |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys (2012) | 72 (n = 36) | 86 (n = 427) | 28 (n = 14) | 14 (n = 65) |
| Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures (2011) | 67 (n = 69) | 83 (n = 491) | 33 (n = 34) | 17 (n = 96) |
| Pearson Scott Foresman Reading Street (2011) | 68 (n = 44) | 82 (n = 437) | 32 (n = 22) | 18 (n = 96) |
| Total average           | 50 (n = 69) | 84 (n = 452) | 31 (n = 23) | 16 (n = 86) |
readers examined in this study averaged only 31% of overall text selections, which amounted to approximately 16% of the overall number of pages (see Table 3).

Discussion
The data in this study indicated that the percentage of informational text, as defined by the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b), found in each of the fourth-grade basal reading textbooks is less than the standard set by the CCSS-ELA. While the CCSS-ELA suggests that informational text must constitute 50% of the text that students are to read at the fourth-grade level, these basal readers contained an average of 31% of selections devoted to informational text. In addition, the number of pages devoted to informational text ranged from 14% to 18% across publishers. This current finding is distressing as many teachers depend on basal readers as a primary instructional resource for teaching reading. As a result, the selection of a basal reading program can be compared with choosing a reading curriculum. Consequently, choosing a reading program that does not meet the benchmarks specified by the CCSS-ELA could inhibit student learning by denying them the opportunity to experience the text types needed for college and career readiness.

Potential limitations may affect the interpretation of the results of this study. One potential limitation deals with the text selections that were presented in the main student text and listed in the table of contents. Uncategorized segments of text that were not listed in the student basal table of contents, including study guides and extension activities, were not included in the analysis. In addition, selections that appeared in the teacher’s manuals, but were not contained in the main student text, were not included in the analysis. Although these selections may be presented during classroom instruction, they were not examined because they were not offered as specific inclusionary text in the main student basal reader.

In addition, the determination of text length of the selections could impair the interpretation of the results. While word count may have provided a more accurate understanding of the reading volume for each text selection, this total would not take into account font size, picture size, margin width, pacing, or complexity. As the CCSS-ELA specifies that informational text can contain graphs, diagrams, and other illustrative renderings (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b), determining the number of pages devoted to informational text more accurately answered the research questions.

Conclusion
The CCSS-ELA requires the integration of a substantial amount of informational text into curricula to ensure that students are prepared to meet the requirements of college and career readiness (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). As instruction in the use of informational text rarely occurs during content area lessons, instructing students on how to read these texts often becomes the responsibility of the classroom reading teacher (Lenski, 2011).

Basal readers play a central role in preparing students for the types of texts they will encounter as they move through school (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). This study analyzed the amount of informational text found in the three most widely purchased, commercially published fourth-grade basal reading texts. The percentage of informational text, as defined by the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b), was examined within each basal reading text using procedures of quantitative content analysis. The results suggest that the newly published basal readers contain an unbalanced amount of literary versus informational text. To make effective instructional decisions regarding reading curriculum, it is imperative for principals, curriculum leaders, and teachers to be aware of the amount of informational text that appears in fourth-grade basal reading texts. Findings from this study will allow practitioners to make effective instructional decisions regarding reading curriculum, including the purchase of basal ancillary materials or supplemental texts that contain the necessary amount of informational text.

The data results of this study also indicated differences in the number of text selections presented in basal readers as well as the number of pages of total text presented. These are significant findings that can be associated with the amount of reading experiences presented to students during classroom instruction. As text can contain graphs, diagrams, and other illustrative renderings, the number of pages devoted to specific text genre provides an accurate description of the volume of informational text presented to students. Previous research determined that the volume of text in basal readers is significantly related to the amount students have to read and interact with text (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010).

Future research might include examination of all text associated with a student basal reading series. Different types of text genre may be presented throughout the book that is not listed in the table of contents. For example, Pearson Scott Foresman Reading Street (2012) had a great deal of informational text that was presented as review throughout the text. However, as these review pages were not included in the table of contents, they were not counted as a text selection or totaled into the number of pages. In addition, some publishers may include text found in ancillary materials as contributing to the overall totals of text genre exposure. Examining all materials that are associated with a basal reading series may affect the amount of text that is presented to students.

Future studies might also be conducted to (a) compare the amount of genre types found in basal readers with
standardized reading tests and (b) examine the amount of genre types found in standardized tests to the Common Core Standards recommendations. As part of the Race to the Top program, the U.S. Department of Education (2012) has authorized the development of new standardized tests to be aligned with the Common Core Standards. These tests are scheduled to be released during the 2014-2015 school year, with testing to be conducted annually on students from third grade through high school. If schools are using basal reading programs for the majority of reading instruction, teachers need to be cognizant of the types and amounts of text genres that students will be expected to understand.

In conclusion, research has shown that as students progress through grade levels, they are expected to comprehend and learn from an increasing amount of informational text (Baker et al., 2011; White, Chen, & Forsyth, 2010). Thus, skill in utilizing informational text is critical to achievement in school and beyond (Kraemer, McCabe, & Sinatra, 2012). As approximately 84% of American teachers utilize a commercially prepared basal reading series for classroom reading instruction (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Education Market Research, 2012), it is imperative that school administrators, teachers, and other educational stakeholders closely examine basal student reading texts to verify the amount and type of informational text. School districts and teachers may need to purchase basal ancillary materials or supplementary texts to address the standard set for informational text set by the CCSS-ELA (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010b).

Appendix A

Codebook

Procedure for coding text selections for text type and content area

1. Locate the table of contents. Identify the text selections that are listed in this table of contents. Only the text selections listed in the table of contents should be coded.

2. Prior to reading the text selection, record the publisher’s name, grade level, title and author of the selection, and the start page number of the selection. The start page number is the page where the title appears.

3. Count the total number of pages for the selection, including the title page. Pictures, photos, charts, etc. should be included in page number count. Pre- and postreading information and end-of-text questions should not be included. Include half-pages in total count.

4. Read the selection in its entirety.

5. Categorize the text selection according to the text type definitions described below. Sidebars should not be included when determining the text type. When multiple text types are included, categorize the text according to the majority text type.

Definitions of categories

Publisher/series: The publisher and series name of the text.

Title/author: The title and author(s) last name(s) of the selection.

Start page: The page number of the first page of the selection. This is usually the title page of the selection.

Number of pages: The total number of pages, including photos, illustrations, and graphical representations. This may include half-pages in total. Prereading information and end-of-text questions should not be included.

Common Core State Standards for English and Language Arts (CCSS-ELA) text type definitions. Literary text includes one of the following:

1. Fiction (short stories): Text that follows a story grammar (character, setting, plot, and conclusion) structure. Characters are included in the story in either major or minor roles. Themes or major ideas are stated either implicitly or explicitly.

2. Poetry (poems): A highly imaginative form of writing that may use very rhythmic and metrical patterns, or free verse without a regular pattern. It conveys the symbolic nature of ideas, emotions, and actions using picturesque and evocative words, similes, metaphors, personification, imagery, and other literary devices.

3. Literary nonfiction (essays, speeches, and autobiographies or biographies): Text that usually presents information and ideas, but follows a story grammar structure with some narrative elements.

4. Informational text contains structural features such as problem and solution, explanation and definition, sequential, causal, or compare and contrast. It does not contain a narrative, story grammar element. It includes one of the following:

5. Expository (news stories, informational trade books): Text that presents information, provides explanations and definitions, and compares and contrasts. It may contain pictures, charts, tables, and other graphic elements that enhance text and contribute to its meaning.

6. Argumentative and persuasive text (political speeches, editorials, advertisements): Text that seeks to influence, convince, or change the reader’s opinion for a cause or belief.

7. Procedural texts and documents (manuals and product support materials, directions, maps): Text that conveys information in the form of directions for accomplishing a task. It usually specifies distinct and sequential steps to be performed with an end product or goal.
Appendix B

Coding Form.

Publisher
Title/author
Start page
Number of pages: Record the total number of pages, including photos, illustrations, and graphical representations, and half-pages.
CCSS-ELA text type:
(a) Fiction
(b) Literary nonfiction
(c) Poetry
Informational
(d) Expository
(e) Argumentative and persuasive
(f) Procedural text and documents

Source. Adapted with permission from Naomi Marie Watkins, University of Utah, 2010.
Note. CCSS-ELA = Common Core State Standards for English and Language Arts.
*Text descriptions retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/whatmeasure.asp#sec2

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