AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUCCESS

IN A LOW SOCIEOECONOMIC GEORGIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Faith Mims Simpson

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An Analysis of Factors that Influence Success

In a Low Socioeconomic Georgia Middle School

By Faith Mims Simpson

APPROVED:

COMMITTEE CHAIR   Karen Parker, Ed.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS   Ann Langford, Ed.D.

                                             Mark Lamport, Ed.D.

CHAIR, GRADUATE STUDIES   Scott B. Watson, Ph.D.

Abstract

Faith Mims Simpson. AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUCCESS

IN A LOW SOCIEOECONOMIC GEORGIA MIDDLE SCHOOL. (Under the direction

of Dr. Karen Parker) School of Education, March, 2008. The purpose of this study was to

analyze teacher perceptions as they relate to practices considered critical to success

within low socioeconomic middle schools. Teacher perceptions from four schools with

similar demographics were included, and survey research was utilized in this quantitative

study. The general question addressed in this study was: To what extent is there a

difference when comparing teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a

"needs improvement" school to the teacher perceptions in a school that has been

identified as a "successful" school? Analyses showed a significant statistical difference in

five of the seven areas based on the response of the teachers. The five areas that

appeared to be more prevalent in the successful schools were: Curriculum, assessment,

and instruction; planning and organization; student, family, and community support;

collaboration; and leadership. Teacher perceptions from the two groups in the areas of

resources and professional development were not statistically significant. Comments

gleaned from the survey revealed a critical attitude from the teachers of the two schools

that had yet to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress. The two schools that achieved

Adequate Yearly Progress shared comments that were positive in nature.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family. Without their support and love none of this would have been possible or meaningful. To my husband David, my love and appreciation for your patience and understanding through all the dramatic events that have occurred during this educational experience; you are and have always been my rock. To our daughter Joy and her husband Bryan, thank you for providing love, laughter, and two gorgeous grandsons. To our son John and his wife Ashley, thank you for your love and support even while working on your own degrees. To Melanie, who edits my papers, shares in leading worship, and keeps smiling, thank you. To Jacob, Rhett and those grandchildren yet to come, Gran loves you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

The single most important need for our future existence is the education of

children. Politicians use this ideal as their platform which results in increased educational

legislation such as the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* that was

reauthorized in 2001 as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). With this political focus, schools

are re-examining their practices and redesigning ways to improve the measure of success.

Children who may have been overlooked previously have benefited as schools have been

held accountable for each child.

This study was based on the analyses of factors that impact school achievement.

This study was based primarily on the perceptions of teachers from successful schools

and the perceptions of teachers from struggling schools. The first chapter of this

dissertation examined the background of the study, stated the problem addressed,

described the professional significance, and presented an overview of the methodology

used. The chapter concluded by defining specific terms used through the study.

Background of the Study

A turning point in public education took place in 1954 when Brown vs. Board of

Education took the stage. An emphasis was put on the need for all students to have an

equal opportunity to learn after this ruling. A discussion concerning the needs of children

who came from poor families or who had other disadvantages was brought to light in the

midst of this legislation (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). The issue of educational

need was brought to the political forefront and began to pique the interest of those in this arena.

After President Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson began his presidency working to improve public education where Kennedy left off. He signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 which allowed for everyone to be treated equally regardless of race, color, religion, or national origin (Loevy, 1997). President Johnson gave authority to The Gardner Commission to develop implementations to improve academic achievement. The Gardner Commission proposed that federal aid not be general in nature, but targeted on a particular category of needs, especially the education of poor children (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001).

After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Johnson, being aware of the needs of the poor, passed the Economic Opportunity Act that focused on the authorization of an adult education program for illiterate Americans and high school dropouts (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). The Head Start program was established for poor pre-school aged children (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). The Higher Education Act (HEA) was created to allow children with limited financial means to go on to college. Each of these laws was built on the idea of categorical aid to provide extra assistance for children with disadvantages: migrant children, children for whom English was a second language, delinquent and neglected children, and children with mental and physical handicaps (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). After this, high hopes were placed on the Title I program; however, there were concerns on how funds were to be utilized for disadvantaged children through the 1970s. The final solution was to provide Title I funds to schools and districts in high poverty areas, thereby assisting students within the school

based on the students' academic need. Adopting Title I in 1965 allowed Congress to endorse the ideas that additional financial resources could make a difference in the education of poor and educationally disadvantaged children and that concentrations of poverty had an especially adverse impact on the ability of school districts to provide that aid (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). As a result, federal funds were closely monitored, making sure that disadvantaged schools were the recipients for all Title I funds.

For decades, there has been a debate about the effectiveness of the Title I program (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). Concerns have been raised about whether Title I in itself can be praised for raising test scores among broad groups in society or whether it should be condemned for not closing the gap between the poor and the affluent (Borman, Stringfield, and Slavin, 2001). Children from families that are challenged with low incomes must be afforded the opportunities to excel in academic endeavors. Overcoming the odds in the field of education must be the goal of politicians and educators alike.

The failure of the Excellence Movement in the 1990s called for new approaches for school reform. This movement did not portray much effectiveness, therefore labeling the United States Education Department as *A Nation at Risk* (Bracey, 1999). In the first approach to this movement, a list of goals, including accountability for education, was set by President George Bush along with the nation's governors (DuFour and Eaker, 1989). The National Center on Education and the Economy joined forces with the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh to design a national exam system in 1991 (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). In 1994, the National Education Standards and Improvement Council was created by Congress to evaluate and adopt

national and state curriculum standards. In 1996, the standards movement was transferred from the federal to the state government and from the White House to the State House (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The role of developing national standards began to emerge, and because of this, curriculum specialists and professional organizations such as the National Education Association and the American Teachers Association evolved.

The Restructure Movement began to establish national goals and provide local independence in education (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The main objective of the movement was to increase academic achievement. The movement included site-based management with authority over staffing, programs, and budget; shared decision-making; staff teams with frequent, shared planning time and shared responsibility for student instruction; multi-year instructional or advisory groups; and heterogeneous grouping in core subjects (Newmann and Associates, 1996).

Within the last 10 years, legislation has been working diligently to improve the public school system. Educators have enforced the No Child Left Behind Act, state requirements, and school board policies to enhance the educational expectations of all students. Educators have become more diligent in the quest for excellence. These policies have encouraged educators to develop solutions to improve academic success within schools.

American public schools were originally organized according to the concepts and principles of the factory model, the prevalent organizational model of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the professional learning community is based on a different model. They believe that in order for schools to become transformed into professional learning communities

educators must be prepared to acknowledge that the traditional way is no longer relevant and that new ideas and assumptions should be totally different from the ideas of the past.

The atmosphere that has prevailed within the walls of educational facilities over the last 20 years has experienced significant instructional changes, such as the focus on testing, as a result of both federal and state policies (Jennings, 1998; Sunderman, Kim, and Orfield, 2005). *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education), published in 1983, could be considered a tremendous influence on the educational reform movement (Berger, 2000). The response to these types of legislation has caused much anxiety among educators, not all without merit. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the impact of federal law on the educational practices has applied pressure on every individual involved with the educational community including children, parents, and the community at large.

The NCLB legislation was signed into law by President George W. Bush and became the standard by which all schools nationwide must perform (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). Federal law has indeed expanded within the role of education and has made quite an impact. The decisions vital to determining the characteristics of a failing school and the measures taken to improve these schools are formed within the hall of political institutions. This legislation set certain timelines for performance goals. Within these timelines there lies the ultimate performance goal which proclaims that all states will achieve 100 percent proficiency (all students passing state mandated assessments) by the 2013-2014 school year (U. S. Department of Education, 2001).

In April 2005, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced a new path for the No Child Left Behind Act—a set of common-sense principles and approaches to

guide states as they measure their progress in meeting the law's important "bright line" goals (U. S. Department of Education, 2005). These goals include assessing all students in grades three through eight every school year and once in high school every year, breaking down results by student subgroup to help close the achievement gap, thus improving teacher quality and informing parents of their options in a timely manner. Above all, these goals must lead to all students achieving at grade level or better in reading and mathematics by 2014.

Growth-based accountability models are being designed to produce reliable and innovative methods to measure student achievement over time. In November 2005, Secretary Spellings announced a pilot program for qualified states to request to evaluate the use of growth-based accountability models on their ability to maintain their fairness and effectiveness. Given the success in the first two years of the pilot, in December 2007, Secretary Spellings invited all eligible states to submit a growth model proposal for the 2007-08 school year. Five states (Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania) and the District of Columbia submitted growth model proposals that have been forwarded to a panel of outside experts. There are nine states currently in the pilot that meet the bright line principles of NCLB, and their growth model proposals met all seven core principles outlined by the Department in November, 2005. These principles are:

1. Ensure that all students are proficient by 2014, and set annual goals to ensure that the achievement gap is closing for all groups of students;

2. Set expectations for annual achievement based on meeting grade-level proficiency, not on student background or school characteristics;

3. Hold schools accountable for student achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics;

4. Ensure that all students in tested grades are included in the assessment and accountability system, hold schools and districts accountable for the performance of each student subgroup, and include all schools and districts;

5. Include assessments in each of grades three through eight and in high school for both reading/language arts and mathematics, and ensure that they have been operational for more than one year and receive approval through the NCLB peer review process for the 2005-06 school year. The assessment system must also produce comparable results from grade to grade and year to year;

6. Track student progress as part of the state data system; and

7. Include student participation rates and student achievement on a separate academic indicator in the State accountability system (cited in U. S. Department of Education, 2005).

The Department of Education is using a rigorous peer review process to ensure that the selection process is fair and transparent for all participating states. A panel of nationally recognized experts has been reviewing and making final recommendations on states' proposals. The peer reviewers represent a wide range of perspectives and expertise, from academia to the private sector to state, local, and community organizations. These measures for needed improvement are being forged for the enduring education of children.

Statement of the Problem

According to a recent press release, Kathy Cox, the Georgia state school superintendent, said that there are 340 schools in Georgia that are in Needs Improvement (NI) status, meaning these schools have missed making Adequate Yearly Progress for two or more consecutive years. The state of Georgia has 435 schools that are identified as middle schools. In the 2006-2007 school year, over 32 percent of Georgia's middle schools were in NI status, and the following year, 35 percent were in NI status (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Needs Improvement schools must offer options to parents – such as tutoring or school choice – and may need to take specific action to improve student performance. The consequences a school faces depend on how long it has been in NI status (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

Maryland State School Superintendent Nancy Grasmick is working on creating a statewide center offering technical assistance to schools trying to improve. "If people knew what to do [to fix schools] they would do it. I truly believe that. But they don't know what to do," she said (Bowie, 2008). School systems are not failing for lack of trying; they seem not to have the direction needed to overcome the issues. The answer may not be universal; each school must find a set of strategies customized for the student population the school serves. However, there may be particular trends or practices that lend themselves to success.

It is critical to the understanding of the influence of NCLB on schools to differentiate between *standards* and *accountability* and their impact on high-stakes testing. Standards refer to the content or curriculum that will be used to teach the students at a minimum throughout the courses being used for instruction. These standards drive

the notion that equal outcome should be expected for all students (Dorgan, 2004). Standards are what should be taught; however, how these standards are taught is not dictated by legislation.

On the other hand, accountability is the driving force behind NCLB, creating pressure to perform in a high-stakes testing environment (Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas, 2000). Accountability from state and federal laws, as well as high expectations from school officials, makes the pressure of continuous improvement in the classroom imperative. The success of a school should be viewed from all areas; however, high-stakes testing stands as a major area of accountability. State law in Georgia presently demands a single test to measure the academic success or failure of students, and this test determines the status of a school system under NCLB. Response to current accountability laws imposes many pressures, some that are justified, and others that leave educators weary from the weight. Accountability is an instrument that holds teachers and students responsible for scores on standardized tests. Accountability serves to "inform investments and curricular changes that will strengthen schools" (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 1047).

Researchers Ruebling, Stow, Kayona, and Clarke suggest that leaders can never forget the role they have taken. Their thoughts conclude that, "Leaders must take responsibility and be held accountable for poor results. Different leadership practices must be instituted" (2004, p.245). Stein and Spillane (2003) found that high expectations and administrative involvement are critical to school success. It is clear that the quality of a school depends on leadership; however, many school leaders lack strategic vision.

The academic leadership of a school system, which includes the superintendent, principals, and teachers, is the partnership with which the teaching strategies and other

key points of strategic planning are implemented. The state educational standards by which lessons are taught are of the utmost importance to the success of a school. The learning that takes place within the walls of every classroom must be preeminent. Legislation can dictate reform; however, the local school must provide for the needs of children on a daily basis. Children simply need the best we have to offer. What are the factors that need to be present in the learning community within each school? This study has chosen to seek answers by analyzing the perceptions and trends of a faculty that has achieved success and increased results on state-mandated test scores for the past four years.

<div align="center">Professional Significance of the Study</div>

In the gloomy light of negative test results there shines a school in which success has been achieved and test scores have increased each year for the past four years. The replication of the practices within this school may provide an example for schools that are less fortunate. Schools nationwide are struggling to sustain success in this day of accountability. The objective of this study is to analyze trends practiced within a particular rural middle school that is yielding high test results.

While children are experiencing success at a higher rate, school systems are struggling to show Adequate Yearly Progress. If schools do not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years, they are placed in the NI category, resulting in loss of jobs, sanctions, and the possibility of state take-over (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). The tipping point of school success lies in meeting every Adequate Yearly Progress goal, as determined by the state department of education.

The question must be posed, "What is Adequate Yearly Progress?" The answer, though complicated, is found within the following definition. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, each state has developed and implemented measurements for determining whether its schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) are making Adequate Yearly Progress. Adequate Yearly Progress is an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving according to state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math. It sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators. Parents whose children are attending Title I (low-income) schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress over a period of three years are given options to transfer their child to another school or obtain free tutoring (supplemental educational services).

The consequences of not obtaining the goals of Adequate Yearly Progress can be life altering for those in administrative positions. The consequences for those students not receiving proper educational opportunities can also be life altering; therefore, measures are in place to correct the problem. The following information must be shared with the parents of students enrolled in a school that has not met the qualifications:

- Explain in understandable terms the school's status.

- Give reasons the school is identified for improvement needs.

- List actions the school will take to improve student achievement.

- Explain the need for parent involvement in issues contributing to the school's failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

When there are more than three consecutive years of a school not attaining Adequate Yearly Progress, further steps are taken, including placing the school on a School Corrective Action Plan. This plan may include the replacement of school staff responsible for the school not achieving Adequate Yearly Progress as well as the implementation of new curriculum and providing professional learning opportunities that are scientifically-based and that offer substantial promise for improving educational achievement for low-achieving students. There may also be a decrease in the management authority at the school level. An appointment of outside experts to advise the school on meeting progress may be required in addition to restructuring the internal organizational arrangement of the school.

Often the opinion of our nation toward the educational system tends to be negative. There must be credit given when educators strive for excellence. When a school that has a high percentage of low-income students (which is a predictor of poor test performance) (Coleman, 1990; Jencks, 1972; Payne, 2001) manages to outperform other similarly-populated schools, it is important to analyze the factors present within that school. The characteristics that lead to its success may lead other schools to incorporate these characteristics into their practices and policies. In turn, this could help low-performing schools improve and become more successful. The particular low socioeconomic middle school (being coded as S 1) studied in this project has shown increase in the results of standardized tests in the content areas of math and reading. Table 1 illustrates the specific area of special needs. Other schools participating in this research are coded by S 2, NI 1 and NI 2 (see Table 1). The following coding is used: S 1 represents "successful school 1", S 2 represents "successful school 2", NI 1 represents

"Needs Improvement School 1", and NI 2 represents "Needs Improvement School 2". All of the schools represented in the 25 middle schools in North Georgia are coded as A through Y.

Results of Criterion Referenced Competency Tests

25 Middle Schools in North Georgia

School Years 2005-2008

School	05 Math	06 Math	07 Math	08 Math	05 Rank	06 Rank	07 Rank	08 Rank
S 1 Rural Middle	53.8	61.9	66.3	75.3	5	3	1	1
B Middle	32.6	44.8	57.4	70.8	16	10	2	2
C Middle	37.9	63	50	59.1	15	1	8	3
D Middle	NA	NA	NA	56.4	NA	NA	NA	4
E Middle	NA	NA	NA	56.1	NA	NA	NA	5
F Middle	58.4	50.5	41	54.1	3	6	10	6
G Middle	37.9	59.3	52.2	52	14	4	7	7
H Middle	27.8	22.7	28	48.1	18	20	18	8
S 2 I Middle	59.2	54.5	55.5	47.3	2	5	5	9
J Middle	NA	NA	NA	46.9	NA	NA	NA	10
K Middle	53.1	43.6	53.1	46	6	11	6	11
L Middle	66.2	62.2	55.5	44.3	1	2	4	12
M Middle	NA	NA	NA	44	NA	NA	NA	13
N Middle	48.4	47.2	40.1	43.6	10	8	11	14
O Middle	44.9	49	55.7	42.1	12	7	3	15
P Middle	44.6	39.3	39	41.8	13	14	14	16
Q Middle	NA	NA	NA	40.9	NA	NA	NA	17
R Middle	27.6	35.6	32.8	38.9	19	15	16	18
S Middle	49.3	34.7	40	38.3	9	17	12	19
T Middle	54.4	40.5	32.1	38.2	4	13	17	20
NI 1 U Middle	25.3	27.2	19.4	33	20	18	19	21
NI 2 V Middle	52.1	45.9	42.9	30.6	8	9	9	22
W Middle	52.2	35.1	39.4	29.6	7	16	13	23
X Middle	30.7	23.3	13.3	27.2	17	19	20	24
Y Middle	46	43.5	38.6	21.5	11	12	15	25
School	05 L.Art/Read	06 L.Art/Read	07 L.Art/Read	08 L. Art/Read	05 Rank	06 Rank	07 Rank	08 Rank
S 1 Rural Middle	56.9	76.2	71.1	81.8	13	1	8	1
D Middle	NA	NA	NA	81.8	NA	NA	NA	1
B Middle	36.8	59.5	74.1	77.1	19	16	5	2
L Middle	82.7	74.8	76.5	77	1	3	1	3
E Middle	NA	NA	NA	76.2	NA	NA	NA	4
G Middle	49.1	75.7	75.2	76	17	2	4	5
K Middle	71.6	74.3	73	74.2	3	4	7	6
H Middle	66.7	66.7	38	74.1	4	11	20	7
S 2 I Middle	65.4	71.1	75.6	73.3	6	6	3	8
C Middle	63.2	68.1	73.4	73.2	9	9	6	9
M Middle	NA	NA	NA	72.9	NA	NA	NA	10
T Middle	61.7	59.5	53.6	71.6	11	15	17	11
P Middle	66.2	65.3	62.7	67.9	5	12	12	12
R Middle	42	61.1	56.7	67.8	18	14	16	13
N Middle	64.8	67.7	66.7	67	7	10	11	14
O Middle	55.1	68.4	67.6	65.8	14	8	10	15
J Middle	NA	NA	NA	64.6	NA	NA	NA	16
S Middle	54.5	53.3	60.7	64.2	15	17	13	17
F Middle	72.1	68.8	76.2	63.5	2	7	2	18
Y Middle	62.1	71.6	70.6	60.2	10	5	9	19
NI 2 V Middle	NA	NA	NA	59.5	NA	NA	NA	20
Q Middle	34.6	44	43.7	57.4	20	20	18	21
NI 1 U Middle	51.6	47.8	41.7	56.3	16	19	19	22
X Middle	60.4	51.4	59.6	47.4	12	18	14	23
W Middle	63.2	62.9	58.6	42.3	8	13	15	24

TABLE 1.1

CRCT result comparison

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to compare teacher perception of factors identified by the state of Georgia as indicators of best practices. Survey research was chosen as the method for this study due to the dramatic and consistent increase in the success of student and teacher achievement at a particular low socioeconomic, rural middle school. The survey instrument was administered to teachers within four North Georgia middle schools with similar student demographics. Two of the middle schools surveyed have been placed on the "needs improvement" list, and two have achieved the Adequate Yearly Progress status. The results of the survey instrument were used to compare teacher perceptions of factors that are considered critical in the success of a school.

Teacher perceptions were measured using the Certified Staff Survey included in the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards review (Keys to Quality, 2007). This survey is routinely used by the state of Georgia to enhance school improvement practices and planning. The areas addressed in this survey include:

- Curriculum

- Assessment

- Instruction

- Planning and Organization

- Student, Family and Community

- Professional Learning

- Leadership

- School Culture

Responses from the survey will be compared among the four schools, and a *t*-test will be performed to determine the statistical significance of the differences. The results of the *t*-test should give insight to the distinguishing factors among the four schools.

Based on the results of the survey, the interval data from zero percent to 100 percent was used for analysis. Survey questions were grouped, and a percentage score was calculated for each of the following factors: instructional leadership, collaboration, long-term vision, shared decision-making, assessment use, resource allocation, and professional learning. Once a mean score was calculated for each category, a *t*-test was used to determine if the difference in scores between the two schools is statistically significant. For example, if school A's survey shows that 85 percent of teachers collaborate frequently and school B's survey shows that 25 percent collaborate frequently, a *t*-test will be used to determine the significance of this difference. This method was repeated for each of the seven factors.

This quantitative study analyzed factors influencing success within four specific schools. The general question addressed in this study is: To what extent is there a difference when comparing teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "needs improvement" school to the teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "successful" school? The general question subsumes related questions as follows:

1. To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?

2. What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?

3. To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making?

4. To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty?

5. To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction?

6. To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods?

7. How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies?

As emphasized by Ary et al. (2006), there was a need for this survey to seek to measure intangibles, such as attitudes, opinions and various psychological and sociological constructs. Each section contains an area for comments; these were utilized to allow for better description of responses. The discussion of the results focused on the effects of the teachers' perceptions on the research questions presented in the study. A qualitative element, gleaned from the comment sections of the survey, was used to gain insight from the teachers' perceptions. This qualitative analysis searched for recurrent themes that appear to support teachers' responses to the questions.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding throughout this study.

Accountability - Schools are required to provide information about themselves to the community in the form of an annual School Accountability Report Card (SARC). These report cards provide a variety of data to allow the public to evaluate and compare schools in seven major areas:

- demographic information

- school safety and climate for learning

- academic data

- class size

- teacher and staff information

- curriculum and instruction

- fiscal and expenditure data (U. S. Department of Education, 2008).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – Adequate Yearly Progress is an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving to state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math. It sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators (U. S. Department of Education, 2008).

Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) – AMO represents the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state assessments in reading/English language arts and mathematics. The minimum group size is 40 or 10 percent of the students enrolled in

Adequate Yearly Progress grades, whichever is the greater (with a 75 student cap) (U. S. Department of Education, 2008).

Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) – CRCT is an assessment designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The assessments yield information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels. This information is used to diagnose individual student strengths and weaknesses as related to the instruction of the GPS, and to gauge the quality of education throughout Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) – GPS refers to curriculum that is standardized and required for each teacher to use that has been aligned by the state to be used to drive both instruction and assessment (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Middle School – For the purpose of this study, a public school consisting of grades six, seven, and eight.

Needs Improvement (NI) - A Needs Improvement school district is simply a school district that has been identified as needing to improve in specific areas. Needs Improvement school districts are not "failing" schools. School districts that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress for two or more consecutive years in the same subject at both grade spans are in need of improvement or are simply under-performing (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Holds states responsible for the education of all children within their charge. The NCLB legislation was signed into law by President George W.

Bush and became the standard by which all schools nationwide must perform (U. S. Department of Education, 2001).

School Reform – Activities that alter existing procedures, rules and requirements to enable the organization to make a change in the way it functions (Conley, 1993).

Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) – The percentage of students that qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program due to their families' economic income.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is a review of literature by categorical topics of factors that impact

the education experience. Topics are divided into areas designed to examine growth

within an educational institution. This literature review highlights research publications

coupled with substantial and comprehensive studies that have been conducted with the

specific intent to examine school reform, professional development, and school success.

Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction

Accountability is a key to the sustained success of all educational endeavors. High

stakes testing has recently taken the lead as the indicator of success or failure. As cited by

the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association,

and National Council of Measurement in Education (1999), a problem exists when a

single test score determines whether a student will move to the next grade level or receive

a diploma. These types of decisions may cause a stigma on students with residual, life-

altering effects. However, without the use of test measurement, low-performing students

and schools could go unnoticed and not receive the assistance necessary to ensure their

success. Steps must be taken to ensure that all students are prepared to successfully

participate in these assessments.

In the world of economic investments, there are phrases such as leading indicators

and lagging indicators that investors use to make decisions. In the academic world,

educators may need to consider such indicators to aid in the success of student

achievement. Standardized tests administered near the end of the school year are

considered a lagging indicator. It has been said that lagging indicators are like autopsies,

while leading indicators are comparable to physicals. Leading indicators, in this case, would be properly-prepared, standards-based instruction and assessing students throughout the lesson as well as with benchmark assessments administered throughout the school year. Teachers must use exemplary teaching strategies to assure the success of their students.

Testing has always been the primary tool of assessment in education. Having the ability to respond correctly at the appropriate time is critical. As our government provides the funding for the educational system, it stands to reason that a basis for accountability or the proper use of the money provided should be in place. The state of Georgia implemented the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests as the means of measurement in the spring of 2000. The CRCT is designed to measure how well students have learned and acquired the knowledge and skills from the specific curriculum. The CRCT is intended to test students on the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and/or the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) that is used in the Georgia school system. This assessment is a measurement of academic achievement at the student, class, school, system and state levels. The information gathered is used to diagnose individual student strengths and weaknesses.

Georgia Performance Standards came into being partly as a result of an outside organization, Phi Delta Kappa, being asked to audit the state's Quality Core Curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Georgia's QCCs were indeed shown to fall short of the standards. The audit showed the curriculum failed to meet national standards and was too shallow to allow real learning to take place. The curriculum did not meet the needs of students and did not provide an adequate guide for teachers to use in order to

deliver quality instruction. Since that investigation, the entire state has revised and adapted curriculum that will drive both instruction and assessment. Teachers are to teach to a curriculum, not to a test or a textbook. These steps provide guidance for teachers, schools, students, and test makers.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 presently stands as the key to accountability in the nation. The state of Georgia, as well as each local school district and individual school, is held accountable for the academic success of its students. The federal law requires high academic standards that are measured by the results of a single standardized test. Federal legislation has given rank to school accountability since the passage of this act. Brooks and Miles (2006) have stated, "In the United States, 2001's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signaled the beginning of an educational policy era marked by accountability and an emphasis on increasing student achievement" (p.26). The practice of closing the classroom door and allowing each teacher to teach his/her own methods and materials changed. Katzman (2004) suggested, "No Child Left Behind was a declaration of martial law. Before NCLB we had an education system with no accountability at all. We had something different and unknowable happening virtually in every classroom and in every school" (p. 87).

Specifically, NCLB is intended to: improve student achievement by showing the basics of what will be taught and an expected level of performance, construct an equality of opportunity, coordinate the operation of a district, refocus the efforts of education on student learning, alleviate variability by ensuring more consistency from school system to school system and from state to state, provide feedback on performance to students and parents, act as a watermark for expectations, help create high expectations, and align

instruction to the curriculum (Berger, 2000; Goertz, 2005). In short, NCLB is intended to raise the standards of academic achievement of students (Bush, 2001).

The term that is used to validate the success of these systems is known as achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. In defining Adequate Yearly Progress, each state sets the minimum levels of improvement, based on student performance on state standardized tests, and the school districts and schools must achieve specific levels within time frames specified by law in order to meet the 100 percent proficiency goal. These levels of improvement are known as Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO). They increase yearly to ensure that all student groups, schools, school districts, and the state as a whole reach 100 percent, meeting or exceeding standards by 2013-2014. In order to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress, each school and district must meet the following criteria: 95 percent participation in each school, as a whole, and all student groups with at least 40 members must have a participation rate of 95 percent or above on the selected state assessments in reading/English language arts and mathematics, and AMO. Each school, as a whole, and each student group meeting the minimum group size must meet or exceed the state's AMO regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state assessments in reading/English language arts and mathematics. Each school, as a whole and as subgroups, must meet a second standard or show progress on a second indicator, typically student attendance). The minimum group size for the second indicator is 40 or 10 percent of the students enrolled in Adequate Yearly Progress grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap). Upon reaching Adequate Yearly Progress, the goals of each school are raised.

One of the most remarkable changes in educational policy was created by the NCLB Act. Each of the following policy goals outlined in NCLB emphasizes the need for standards and accountability in public K-12 schools and reflects the intentions as noted:

1) Closing the achievement gap

- Accountability and high standards for all students, including those who are disadvantaged.

- Annual academic assessments to provide parents with information on the performance of their children and the schools they attend. Each state will design appropriate assessments and also will be assessed through random National Assessment of Academic Progress (NAEP) testing.

- Consequences for schools that fail to educate disadvantaged students. If schools do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress, then they receive assistance for three years. After this point students in failing schools are allowed to transfer to other public or private schools.

2) Improving literacy by putting reading first

- Focus on reading in early grades

- Early childhood reading assistance

3) Expanding flexibility and reducing bureaucracy

- Title I flexibility to combine federal and state funds if states quality.

- Increased funds to schools for technology based on need.

- Reduction in bureaucracy by streamlining the grant process for schools and states.

- New state and local flexibility options like charter status for states with 5
  year performance plans in accordance with federal guidelines.

4) Rewarding success and sanctioning failure

- States rewarded for closing the achievement gap.

- One-time accountability bonuses for states that meet accountability
  requirements.

- No Child Left Behind school rewards: bonuses for schools making the
  most gains.

- Consequences for failure: reducing funds if states fail to meet performance
  objectives.

5) Promoting informed parental choice

- School reports sent to parents so they can make informed decisions as to
  their child's academic well-being.

- Charter schools given money to assist with the start-up costs.

- Innovative school choice programs and research: grants given for these
  initiatives.

6) Improving teacher quality

- All students should be taught by quality teachers, with flexibility for funds
  to increase teacher quality.

- Schools will fund what works and maintain high standards for professional
  development to ensure research-based, effective practice.

- Strengthening math and science, teaming up with higher education to
  improve instruction and curriculum.

7) Making schools safer for the 21st century

- Teacher protection by giving them the ability to remove violent students from schools.

- Promoting school safety by providing funding to promote safety and drug prevention programs before and after school.

- Rescuing students from unsafe schools by providing them with a safe alternative if they go to school in violent environments.

- Supporting character education by providing grants to states and school systems to train teachers in methods of character building (United States Department of Education, 2001).

Planning and Organization

Characteristics of Effective Schools

In 1966, James Coleman, an educational researcher, issued a report titled the Education Opportunity Report, which is referred to as the "Coleman Report." Using the data from over 600,000 students and teachers in 4,000 schools nationally, the researcher found that academic achievement was less related to the quality of the student's school and more related to the social composition of the schools. Also, Coleman's research showed the student's sense of control of his environment and the verbal skills of teachers, along with the student's family background, had an impact on the student's academic achievement. The findings of the study pointed out the disparities in funding between schools attended by blacks and whites were smaller than anticipated. The funding of schools was more related to family economic status than school achievement. Peer

relations within the schools mattered a great deal. Sharing in a school with middle-class peers was an advantage, while going to school with lower-class peers was a disadvantage.

Coleman's final report, Coleman Report, Public and Private Schools, conducted in 1981, suggests that even after family background factors were controlled, private and Catholic schools provided a better education than public schools. Coleman's report credited the students' family background as the utmost reason for students' success in school. His findings proposed that children from low socioeconomic families, lacking the prime conditions or values to support education, could not learn, regardless of what the school did. He concluded that school inputs, such as books in the library and teacher's years of training, were not as significant to student learning as the family background.

Gamoran and Long (2006) concluded in their research that after 40 years, Coleman's findings unquestionably documented that difference between schools in their resource levels mattered. The resource level of a school has shown an insignificant effective among individual students in U. S. sociology of education. Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS) also known as the "Coleman Report," has inspired researchers to study the impact of socioeconomic status on school achievement for decades. The shift was made from racial issues to achievement issues for all students. The most controversial finding of the Coleman report was that school resources had little effect on educational outcomes once family background was controlled. Carter (2000) recommended in his study on high-poverty high-performance schools that the schools establish relationships with the parents in order to support and motivate students. Effective educational leadership should teach parents as well as students. Education must become a thing of pride and a force of stability in an impoverished community.

Researchers Ron Edmonds and Larry Lezotte refused to acknowledge the findings of James Coleman that schools make no significant difference in the education of children. These researchers set out to study schools serving the schools where low socioeconomic students were learning. Ron Edmonds, the Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, along with other researchers, set out to prove that schools can and do make a difference. Achievement data from schools in major cities where student populations were comprised of those from poverty backgrounds was studied. Findings confirmed that schools with low socioeconomic students were learning. Though these results contradicted Coleman's research, Edmonds and Lezotte had no conclusions as to why certain schools succeed and others did not.

Edmonds (1979) suggested that children will master the challenging standards set for them through the hard work, dedication, knowledge and skills of their teachers. This statement is based on what the research emphasized as a set of characteristics that has been identified as "effective school correlates." These correlates are identified as follows:

- Clear School Mission

- High Expectations for Success

- Instructional Leadership

- Frequent monitoring of student progress

- Opportunity to learn and student time on task

- Safe and orderly environment

- Relationship with parents

These unique characteristics and processes are common to schools where all children are learning, regardless of family background. Because these characteristics

found in schools where all students learn are correlated with student success, they are called *correlates*. This body of correlated information began what is now referred to as Effective Schools Research.

The attributes of successful schools serving low socioeconomic communities were at the beginnings of research in the 1980s. Pechman and Fiester (1996) suggested, although school-wide programs are locally devised and unique, the most successful are built on a framework that includes these eight features: a shared vision, time and resources for planning and program design, skillful management and a well-defined organizational structure, a clear focus on academics, continuing professional development, a commitment to cultural inclusiveness, parent and community involvement, and an accountability orientation. Their study reflected practices that future Title I school programs can adopt to rearrange schools, streamline management, and upgrade the curriculum for children in schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of poor families.

Larry Lezotte (1992) suggested that the implementation of any effective school process is simple; it is just not easy, and it is never ending. Lezotte continues that teachers often complain about the concept that all students can learn. Lezotte (1992) stated that these educators would change the mission of the school to read, "Learning of all who are motivated to learn." It may be difficult, but it is possible to motivate each child to learn. Teaching strategies such as classroom procedures, the use of previewing the lesson, and graphic organizers can be created, shared, and practiced with quite effective results. Students do tend to learn those things they are taught, especially if they are taught well.

In his book, *Creating the Total Quality Effective School,* Lezotte (1992) compared the 14 principles of Edward Deming's (1982) *Total Quality Management* and the tenets of effective schools research. Edward Deming is considered to be the father of Modern Quality, which was the theology of Dr. Deming to seek the highest level of performance by making a change in behavior, and has been credited with the suggestion that one may achieve the highest level of performance by following his 14 principles. These 14 principles are as follows: create consistency of purpose, adopt the new philosophy, cease inspection – require evidence, improve the quality of supplies, continuously improve production, train and educate all employees, supervisors must help people, drive out fear, eliminate boundaries, eliminate the use of slogans, eliminate numerical standards, let people be proud of their work, encourage self-improvement, and commit to ever-improving quality. These principles have been implemented worldwide with much success. Lezotte raises this level of expectations to educators and for them to implement of these principles within the educational venue.

Lezotte (1992) suggested "There is no magic formula for quickly creating the total quality effective school. As Deming has suggested, the aim must be to seek, always to *seek*, total quality" (p. 56). He goes on to state that even if the total quality school was a reality, the chance of a long-term existence may be unlikely. This is because the world in which our schools and children reside is rapidly changing. Therefore, a school faculty must constantly scrutinize its inputs, processes, and results and recreate itself as a total quality effective school regularly, day in and day out.

Lezotte (1992) stated there must be a clear vision of an effective school which would include the need to restructure schools years ago. Using the analogy of remodeling

a home, one would not repaint the walls of a home that were to be removed. Contractors would never advise to build new structures over the old structures and then remove both. Such is the implementation of school reform. Lezotte (1992) advised to first pilot a project in a small scale in order to sort out details prior to implementing a school or district-wide change.

Effective schools are defined by standards of high-performing schools. There are public schools in poor communities that are making substantial progress in their mission of teaching children. Carter (2000) challenged school leadership with his "no excuse" statement that the failure of most public schools to teach poor children is not acceptable. His study of 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools shows that hard work is compensated by success. He suggests their success is the result of "hard work, common sense teaching philosophies, and successful leadership strategies" (p.58). He goes on to explain that "school is hard work" and that school leaders should be expected to extend the day or year with weekend programs and summer school because these should not be wasted times (p.58).

There are seven common traits of high-performing, high-poverty schools that Carter has suggested through his research: 1) Principals must be free to make creative and critical decisions within their school. Carter (2000) suggests that without freedom, a school principal is powerless. 2) Principals should use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement. There must be tangible goals such as 100 percent attendance, all students taking a specific class, or some other area that is evident for students to visualize. 3) There must be master teachers to bring out the best in a faculty. Carter (2000) suggested, "Teacher quality is the single most accurate indicator of a student's

performance in school" (p. 9). 4) Rigor in the instruction and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement according to Carter (2000). Testing must include high expectations. 5) Achievement is the key to discipline. Students that are self-disciplined, due to the meaningful nature of their academics, are critical to a great discipline plan. 6) Principals must work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning. The lack of parent involvement is often the first excuse for poor performance according to Carter (2000). However, he suggests that principals of high-performing schools must establish contracts with parents to support their children's efforts to learn. 7) Lastly in the seven common traits of high-poverty high-performing schools, Carter (2000) would stress effort. He gives thought to the elimination of social promotion and the expectation of students to clearly demonstrate mastery.

Gordan Cawelti (2000) suggested that there must be many factors present to achieve academic success in the low socioeconomic community. He calls the combination of change across these factors *systemic change*. In the state of Texas, the 1998 passing rate on state assessments was 90.7 percent, compared to 41.2 percent in 1993. Factors influencing the increase included committed faculty, a strong principal, extended reading practice and instructional time, incentives and recognition, and pre-assessment practice.

The commonality of factors revealed within this review all include expectations and effort. Within the realm of quality education the two ideals tend to be connected. These two factors are critical and are to be practiced by students as well as educators for success to be reached. Excellence in the academic community must be the only acceptable expectation.

Student, Family and Community

Middle School Concept

Schools are ever-changing, seeking improvement, facing new frontiers, and becoming increasingly technologically sophisticated. Major changes in educational practices came during the early 1900s when reading, writing and arithmetic became inadequate preparation for an increasingly complex society. The terms "developmentally appropriate" and "developmentally responsive" became interchangeable in the discussion of children and their education between the ages of elementary school and secondary school. Ages 10 through 14, known as adolescence, required educational expertise that served grades 6 through 8. This model came to be called a Middle School.

The Middle School Concept has been in existence for a little over 30 years. More and more, academic achievement in middle grades is unimpressive (Mizell, 1999). There are district-level leaders providing unclear direction on philosophical, educational and operational needs for middle schools. Mizell (1999) suggested there are groups believing that young adolescents are so vulnerable that all a school can do is take care of them, not expect too much of them academically, and hope that the students make it through middle school without harming themselves or others.

The No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation focused much attention on highly-qualified teachers. The topic of effective teaching of young adolescents seems to be problematic. Broudy (1972) noted that effective teaching can be subdivided into three categories: didactics, philetics, and heuristics. Kellough and Kellough (2003) identified the characteristics of effective middle school teachers as follows: 1) a philosophy and action plan that places the student at the center of the learning process, 2) a belief in the

process of collaborating with students regarding instruction and curriculum, 3) a strong sense of their own identity, and 4) a wealth of knowledge about young adolescent development. Kellough and Kellough's list also includes characteristics of middle school teachers, such as the fact that they are open to change, willing to take risks, and willing to be held accountable. They must also put forth specific effort to demonstrate how the subject content may be related to the lives of their students.

The recommendations from the task force, Turning Points: *Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989), suggested the following to improve the educational experiences of middle school students: Create small communities for learning, teach a core academic program, and eliminate tracking by achievement level. The task force also recommends empowering teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students. Creative control by teachers over the instructional program should be linked to greater responsibilities for students' performance. Creating governance committees that assist the principal in designing and coordinating school-wide programs will benefit the growth of teacher ownership in academic excellence. The staffing of middle grades teachers, who are experts at teaching young adolescents, as well as improving academic performance through fostering their health and fitness, is critical to a successful school climate. Families must be engaged in the education of their children by having meaningful roles in school governance. Middle school students should also be connected to their communities by taking on a service responsibility.

Picucci (2004) suggested that successful middle schools share a belief in excellence and equity for all, a challenging curriculum with high expectations and the provision of expert instructional methods that prepare all students to achieve at higher

levels, a collaborative school environment that shares a developmentally and intellectually appropriate purpose, and a partnership involving parents and the larger community in supporting student learning. Educators from the Charles A. Dann Center (1999) argued there should be no disagreement with the above statement concerning successful middle schools; however, there are questions as to the implementation of the curriculum. Dickinson and Butler (2001) suggested five factors to the detriment of middle school success: the lack of teacher education programs, lack of attention to curriculum, failure of organizations to fully realize leadership for the middle school level, absence of research to sustain the middle school concept, and an overall misunderstanding of the original concept.

All of these elements combined give new meaning to the term "teaching." Chenoweth (2007) cited several practical factors that must not be overlooked pertaining to the culture of success of a middle school. Educators think deeply about what their students need to learn and how to make sure they learn it. Teachers begin with state standards and teach complex material, aiming for their students to exceed standards. They do not teach to the state test, but they make sure their students know what their state's test looks like in terms of the format, and they ensure that students are not surprised by the material or kinds of questions asked. There may even be a pep rally prior to the testing day. The teachers have high expectations for their students and talking to them about going to college or into high-level technical training is a common practice. Teachers embrace and use all the data to understand how their students are performing and they use research to discover new methods of reading instruction. Teachers are professional and accountable, using school time wisely by setting classroom routines. The community

is involved through the use of outside mentors and volunteers. The expanded time that students have in school is used in after-school programming. They like kids. Careful attention is paid to the quality of the teaching staff and they are provided time to plan and work collaboratively. Time is also provided for teachers to observe each other. Professional development is taken seriously by teachers and administrators, and office and building staff are included in the educational mission of the school.

Family

Haynes, et al. (2003) suggested that parents take the responsibility for the upbringing and education of their children. However, there are many stakeholders involved in the completion of this process. There is a benefit for parents, students, educators and community members who work closely to promote a shared vision for the betterment of all throughout the school culture and across the country. Communities that have stakeholders in areas such as school systems create strong bonds and lasting interests for excellence in that community. A family must grow together with the school and community to prepare proper citizens within a democratic society. The family structure must provide a base from which children can take root as well as wings. There is much to be addressed within the family structure and the task is of a continuing nature. Educators in their pursuit for successful test scores should not overlook the connection between school and home.

Researchers Fields and Smith (1998) assessed data from the new Child Well-Being Topical Module of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), collected in the fall of 1994. They tested the data within established conceptual frameworks using logistic regression correlated with children's current well-being status

indicated by their current grade and age. Their findings identified the expected

background correlates of the children's' well-being, in addition to showing associations

between child well-being and household stressors, family characteristics, and

participation in enrichment activities.

Children's successful progress in the school system is one important marker for

their well-being. Falling behind or being retained in a grade may be a first indication of

potential risk for an off-time transition to adulthood (Hogan and Astone 1986). Falling

behind while in school may also serve as a predictor of future negative academic

achievement and social adjustment outcomes (Alexander, Entiwsle, and Horsey 1997).

Children must be nurtured and educated in areas of academics with high expectations.

High educational standards must increase in order for the success of our democracy to

continue. Specific parental activities within the school have been found to be successful.

Lonoff (1971) found the practice of parental involvement in the school environment,

whether it is in activities such as field trips, cafeteria, sports, or other areas, promoted

success. Sizemore, Brossard, and Harrigan (1983) even suggested that having parents sit

in on classroom instruction promotes academic success.

Poverty

Among the factors that impact our educational system, low socioeconomic status

is one of the most significant. Payne (1998) suggested that a working definition of

poverty must be understood. She stated that the extent to which an individual does

without resources defines poverty, the eight elements of which are: financial

independence, emotional maturity, mental stability, spiritual development, physical well-

being, support systems relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules.

Emotional resources are most important because they allow a child to change habits and patterns. In order to move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth a child must be able to recondition his thinking. There must be persistence and the ability to stay with change until it can be a feeling of comfort. These change agents or teachers are the emotional resources commonly called role models.

Children who live in poverty often attend the lowest performing schools. State and national assessments consistently show poor children lagging behind in performance. Poor communities face many difficulties. Children, families, and the schools that serve them confront a host of challenges. For schools, these challenges include children who start school without such skills as early literacy. There is often a high rate of absenteeism within the low socioeconomic communities. Along with all of these challenges comes the difficulty in attracting experienced teachers (Stiefel et al. 1999).

Parents are not able to participate in the educational opportunities of their children due to many factors. One of these factors would be the availability to be present at the actual school building due to the demand of hours necessary to report to work. Flexible schedules often determine whether parents can meet with teachers, specialists, and counselors to address their children's needs. Numerous studies have shown that regardless of how it is defined, parental involvement is important to children's success at school (Finn, 1998). There may be opportunities for teachers to visit with parents by phone, letter, or meeting during breaks at the parents' places of employment that would serve children to have the much-needed connection with teachers and parents.

From an economic perspective, social capitals such as relational systems and societal norms have been linked to student success. Furstenberg and Hughes (1995)

suggest that students who experience higher level social experiences are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college. The expectations from peers and those within the family structure have made an impression on these students. Teachers must create an environment of high expectations that may often need to over rule the home environment to instill a sense of pride and performance in the hearts of their students. The teacher must provide students with hope.

The practice of a school environment that has the expectations of success of all students may well be giving the social capital that is missing within the walls of the family structure. Success is not always the expectation present in the homes of children. Goddard (2003) suggests high expectations impact students of low income to a great degree. The research suggests that school practices that lead to higher social capital level the playing field for low socioeconomic students.

Haberman (1999) identified the ability of teachers to create relationships with children in poverty and connect with them as a key factor in successful schools. These appropriate relationships that form a bond that will never be forgotten will set the foundation for success in children. Students given the proper opportunities and relationships will succeed.

<center>Professional Learning</center>

Professional development at high-performing schools differs from the norm. Jesse et al. (2004) suggested in order to improve student achievement, teachers are changing their instructional practices. These changes come through the improvement of learning on the part of the instructor. As a life-long learner, professional development on the part of a teacher is an obligation. Lauer (2001), in her study of teachers' perceptions of

professional development, concluded that learning within the content area made for much improvement in their teaching as well as allowed for more diverse instruction within the classroom.

The United States Department of Education's Professional Development Team (2002) concluded that professional development was found effective by focusing on individual, collegial and organizational improvement, requiring substantial time and resources, collaborative planning from those who will participate in and facilitate the school's development, having a coherent long-term plan, and promoting continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools. They continued by saying schools promoting these types of activities, learning attitudes, and behaviors are more effective in increasing student achievement.

Kennedy (1999), after comparing results for 12 studies on the professional development of teachers, suggested that in order to be successful in this endeavor, schools need to address what and how to teach in a particular subject. His study found professional development varied in program content in the following four ways: 1) generic teaching behaviors, 2) generic teaching behaviors applied to a specific subject, 3) subject-specific curriculum and pedagogy, and 4) knowledge about how students learn a specific subject. Kennedy has described this as, "continua from more prescriptive to more discretionary, and from more focused on behaviors to more focused on ideas" (p. 3).

Sparks and Hirsch (2000) concluded in their report from the National Staff Development Council that the improvement of student achievement in a standards-based school system is critical to academic success. They also suggested that teacher quality should be enhanced through professional development that is: 1) focused on helping

teachers become deeply immersed in subject matter and teaching methods, 2) curriculum-centered and standards-based, 3) results-driven and job-embedded, 4) sustained, rigorous, and cumulative, and 5) directly linked to what teachers do in their classrooms. The content and the format are key influencers in the area of professional development and must be considered for the success of this important aspect of continual academic growth and the impact this area serves to provide for student success.

<div align="center">Collaboration</div>

All too often, when school officials are feeling the pressure of meeting externally-induced goals, they seek the help of an overnight answer or some type of magic pill. There are new curriculum materials, alternative scheduling, and new methods of reporting student achievement that would seem to be the answer. However, when they talk about school improvement, they must consider that we are talking about people improvement (DuFour, 1995). Focusing on people is the most effective way to change any organization (Fullan, 1993). The key to school improvement is the willingness and ability of principals to assume the role of staff developers who make it their mission to "alter the professional practices, beliefs and understandings of school personnel toward an articulated end" (Fielding and Schalock, 1985). Schools will become learning organizations capable of change when administrators and teachers realize that improvement is complex and ongoing rather than a task to be completed. A successful faculty needs to create a consensus or a shared vision of the school's future. This takes time and sharing to describe that end result in clear and compelling terms. It is the duty of an educator to identify, promote and protect values that are shared. It is essential for a staff to support specific values in the endeavor to move from the future to the present and

from the abstract to the concrete. There must be monitoring of new skills that are expected of teachers. Classroom observations must be used to encourage teachers and their implementation of the expectations.

One sure way to spot an improving school is to listen to the professional talk in the hallways and faculty lounges, and at faculty meetings. In schools where teachers are active learners, excitement and curiosity contribute to a rich learning environment for students (Sagor, 1995). The flow of wisdom and knowledge must emanate from novice to veteran teacher. The traditional isolated teacher is a luxury our school systems can no longer afford. The plurality of our students, combined with the high demands of our society, calls upon educators to combine resources and together work toward the success of our children. Elmore's (2000) research affirmed, "Privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement" (p. 20). Therefore, working together to achieve much more than any individual could is such an important area to emulate within a team of teachers. Teachers often feel a global kinship among colleagues and work together to improve the lives of the children with which they work. They realize that the lives of the children they are teaching are the only hope to retaining responsible citizens and a future that needs to be filled with innovation, possibility and change.

Fullan (2002) stated that "most people want to be part of their organization; they want to know the organization's purpose, [and] they want to make a difference" (p. 52). There are a few educators that resist the togetherness that is needed to create an environment of learning. These individuals tend to paralyze collegiality within their school. With the encouragement and support of professionals, the change must be made

to focus on the task of working together to build a stronger society by providing a combined effort to educate.

Protected time for collaborative and community bonds for the success of students is critical (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993). Teachers that are not only allowed but expected to plan together for the success of student achievement increasing the strength of educators in the system of those they work. A desire to collaborate is one of the key characteristics found to increase student achievement (Louis, Kruse, and Marks, 1996). An effective collaborative effort on the part of teachers using the data provided by results of universal screening such as the benchmark assessments is an effective way to provide for student success.

When there are high standards of professionalism and collegiality in a school building, there will be higher achieving students. Faculties seem to intuitively understand that two (or more) heads are invariably better than one. There must be systematic collaboration throughout the school. Teacher isolation is an inherent part of traditional school practice which has brought about harm for the educational opportunities of our students. A collaborative culture is strongly linked to improvement of the educational process; therefore, principals must take steps to ensure that collaboration is part of the school culture. A middle school uses a team of teachers, each teaching a specific content or subject, such as reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies or science. They collaborate with peers on grade level, as well as in content areas, in order to provide consistent and pervasive instruction. The teams should assume responsibility for carrying out activities, such as developing curricular outcomes, assessing student achievement, selecting instructional materials, planning special projects, participating in peer

observation and coaching, pursuing professional growth topics, and developing schedules.

It is important that principals support collaboration by providing staff time to meet. Administrators and teachers must understand the difference between congeniality and collegiality. There must be a culture in which teachers discuss teaching and learning; observe each other teach; plan, design, research and evaluate the curriculum; and share with each other (Barth, 1991). Administrators must encourage, provide time, protect, and monitor a collaborative culture. This type of culture is of extreme importance to creating a sustained culture of school success.

<div align="center">Leadership</div>

There must be within high-performing schools a fundamental culture of high expectation that is shared by the administration, teachers, staff and students. The belief that all children can achieve academic success must be the dominant theme. The instructional leader of the school – which must be the principal – must establish high expectations for himself or herself and the staff; teachers must set high expectations for themselves and their students; and the students must learn to have high expectations for themselves and the adults around them. Everyone must model the process of continual learning and self-assessment that is asked of the students (Barth et al.1999, Kannapel and Clements 2005, Ragland et al. 2002).

Researchers James Coleman and Lawrence Lezotte tend to disagree on points of critical need when it comes to excellence in education. Coleman (1990) suggested that teachers and leaders within a school building have little to do with the achievements of

the student in the areas of academic gain. However, Lezotte (1991) maintained that instructional leadership is critical for the success of the school.

There must be learning for all that permeates throughout an educational facility. Coleman would defend that the building is such a critical point of success; however, the vision that must come from the school leadership is even more critical. The thought that effective leadership means the principal runs the school and teachers are compared to tyrannical slaveholders must be changed. Effective leaders lead through their passion and commitment, not through their authority. Teachers will follow because they share a leader's dreams, not because they are afraid.

Lezotte (1991) examined a change in school administrators as changing from managers to becoming the visionaries of transformational leadership. Formally, the school principal was given this position due to effective management skills and continued to supervise from that perspective. Presently, there is a need for vision and a democratic leadership style that disperses the leadership among followers. Lezotte (1991) stated, "The real unknown is how many administrators are waiting to be given the encouragements to exercise the transformational leadership role needed to galvanize schools, districts, and even whole states. Instructional leadership and effective schools have gone hand in hand from the beginning. This long-standing relationship may be the best hope for public education through this decade and into the twenty-first century" (p 28).

Kouzes and Posner (2002) stated five practices of exemplary leadership, the first of which is for the leader to Model the Way. A leader must lead by example just as our Lord did when He donned the towel and washed the disciples' feet as recorded in the

Gospel of John, chapter 13. A true leader believes in every department of the institution they are leading and that there is not a single action that would not have the importance of being executed by anyone, especially the leader. Certainly there must be tasks that are to be carried out by every individual within the organization, but from time to time, a true leader should take the opportunity to model a "shoulder to shoulder" experience. A leader should not consider himself or herself above the opportunity to serve in any level of their building.

The second in the list of Kouzes and Posner's fundamental principles for leadership is "inspire a shared vision." As Proverbs 29:18 states, "Without a vision, the people perish;" so must we all share a vision as leaders. Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested that leaders live their lives backwards. They have a vision and live out their days working toward that end. Educators have so many opportunities; the future depends on how these are addressed.

Third on Kouzes and Posner's list of fundamental principles for leadership is to "challenge the process." How does one stretch to greater heights without pushing oneself to a higher level or challenging the process by which the measurement is made? Prior to challenging the process, one must understand the process. There are many strong traditions or values within an organization to be embraced and not challenged. Through present experiences there will be ideas for growth must take place and bright futures to arise. How can academic instruction improve? What might give students more enduring understanding? How can our teachers prepare our students for the best possible future? The possibilities are endless. The process must be challenged daily.

Fourth in Kouzes and Posner's list of fundamental principles for leadership is to "enable others to act." A leader is only as effective as those by whom he or she is surrounded. Just as stated in Ecclesiastes 4:12, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken," so a leader must seek the support and trust of those with whom he or she serves.

The building of trusting relationships is a critical part of leadership. Much like an account at the local bank, the deposits made are necessary in order for withdrawals to be taken. If withdrawals are made prior to the deposits, there is a notice of insufficient funds that can be quite painful. Relationships must have deposits in order to maintain a healthy growth. Enabling others to act is a display of trust. The opposite of micromanaging, enabling allows for many to grow. Encouraging others to think and apply their creativity creates an atmosphere of learning and excitement within an organization. The development of trust and responsibility in a relationship provides for growth creating leaders the opportunity for replication.

Last of the five of Kouzes and Posner's list of fundamental principles for leadership is to "encourage the heart." Leaders must seek to focus on the positive. Pointing out the fundamental goodness and celebrating these factors can be the tipping point for greatness. When those around great leaders are given trust and praise, greatness is increased in many ways. No matter the situation, celebration is a critical point to a good start. Throughout the day as observations are made in each classroom, leaders must make a point to find a positive action to be encouraged. The "thumbs up" sign can be given to teachers and students as a display of recognition. Students need to see the praise and celebration for the accomplishment of their teachers. Teachers need to share in the

celebration of the accomplishment of their students. Leaders must seek to find specific reasons to celebrate, and those being praised must have the opportunity to accomplish what is praiseworthy.

Smith and Andrews (1989) concluded that leaders are a talent drawn on when necessary for instructional issues. They state, "The most obvious role of the principal as an instructional resource is to facilitate good teaching" (p. 12). They continue to suggest that "Strong instructional leaders encourage the use of different strategies and serve as cheerleaders, encouragers, facilitators, counselors and coaches for expanding the teacher's repertoire of instructional strategies one step at a time" (p. 34). Quite possibly, the instructional leader may need to continuously guide those who educate within their building. Researchers agree that successful educational leaders have knowledge of instruction techniques, curriculum and standards. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) recommend, "Successful school leaders have high expectations for the quality of the curriculum, and insist on adherence to such standards" (p. 27). Sergiovanni (1995) stated that the principal should be the "clinical practitioner" of the school; therefore, he or she should be knowledgeable in instructional and curriculum issues in order to help teachers accordingly. The principal must be "adept at diagnosing educational problems; counseling teachers; providing for supervision, evaluation and staff development; and developing curriculum" (p. 86).

School Culture

The term "school culture" describes a wide range of influences on how people behave. In general, it refers to a set of common values, attitudes, beliefs and norms, some of which are explicit and some of which are not. Administrators, teachers and students in

a particular culture may or may not be conscious of its influence, and may or may not be able to articulate its elements. They do what they do and say what they say because that is the way things are commonly done or said. Students bring numerous ethnic cultures, languages and habits of mind to the classroom, each of which is associated with varying child-rearing and educational traditions. Layered on these are class cultures, each of which can be distinguished by formal and informal communication. Ruby Payne has suggested that the cultures of the impoverished, the middle class and the wealthy differ markedly in ways that affect literacy acquisition and attitudes toward schooling (Payne, 2001). The formal education system is a product of middle class assumptions and traditions.

Studies of effective schools have established a number of cultural elements that seem to have impacted student achievement. Fyans and Maehr (1990) singled out academic challenges, a sense of community, recognition for achievement and perception of school goals as effective variables. Cheong (1993) related organizational ideology, shared participation, charismatic leadership and intimacy to stronger teacher motivation and satisfaction. Senge (1990), Fullan (1992), and Deal and Peterson (1990) all pointed to the importance of a shared vision championed by a strong leader with a sense of moral purpose. From the work of these and many other researchers and practitioners of school reform, a few general principles emerge. The following ingredients have been suggested as supportive to school culture:

- An inspiring vision, backed by a clear, limited and challenging mission.

- A curriculum, modes of instruction, assessments and learning opportunities that are clearly linked to the vision and mission and tailored to the needs and interests of the students.

- Sufficient time for teachers and students to do their work well.

- A pervasive focus on student and teacher learning, coupled with a continual, school-wide conversation about the quality of everyone's work.

- Close, supportive teacher-student, teacher-teacher and student-student relationships.

- Many opportunities and venues for creating culture, discussing fundamental values, taking responsibility, coming together as a community and celebrating individual and group success.

- Leadership that encourages and protects trust, on-the-job learning, flexibility, risk-taking, innovation and adaptation to change.

- Data-driven decision-making systems that draw on timely, accurate, qualitative and quantitative information about progress toward the vision and sophisticated knowledge about organizational change.

- Unwavering support from parents.

- District flexibility and support for multiple school designs, visions, missions and innovations.

Although no single, universally-accepted definition of school culture has been established, there is general agreement that school culture involves, in the words of Deal and Peterson (1990), "deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have formed over the course of the school's history." Over time, a school leader can, in conjunction

with other stakeholders in the school, change its culture by discarding old values and beliefs, establishing new ones, or modifying elements that need to be changed.

Maehr and Fyans (1989), described culture building in organizations in general, characterizes culture as a fluid process: Groups tend to work out ways of getting along among themselves. They arrive at certain shared understandings regarding how, when and where activities are to occur. Above all, they specify the meaning, the value and the purpose of these activities. In particular, thoughts and perceptions about what is worth striving for are a critical feature of any culture. Thus, a principal interested in establishing the motivation to learn and academic achievement as central features of a school's culture must first persuade everyone – students, teachers, parents, staff, and school board – that goals related to those areas are desirable, achievable and sustainable. The goals can ultimately become important enough to take on a life of their own, to become invested with meaning that reflects the basic purpose of the school and its reason for being. They can become part of the value system in which each participant in the school willingly and enthusiastically participates.

Old practices and other losses need to be buried and commemorated. Meaningless practices and symbols need to be analyzed and revitalized. Emerging visions, dreams and hopes need to be articulated and celebrated. The culture can be embodied and transformed, Deal says, through such channels as the school's shared values, heroes, rituals, ceremonies, stories and cultural networks. If motivation and academic achievement are to be a definitive part of a school's culture they must be communicated and celebrated in as many forums as possible. There are a variety of practical ways that goals related to motivation and academic achievement can be communicated. In his

review of studies focusing on organizational culture in effective schools, John Davis (1989) cited several studies that indicate that school leaders can communicate their goals by using a wide variety of concrete and symbolic tools. An extremely important component of the climate of the effective school is the presence of visible symbols which illustrate and confirm what is considered to be important in the school. Put another way, visible symbols manifest the school's underlying values and assumptions; school newsletters, statements of goals, behavior codes, rituals, symbols, and legends are all part of the culture of the organization and convey messages of what the school really values.

Johnston (1987) echoed this point when he says, "Values are the bedrock of any institution. They articulate the essence of the organization's philosophy about how it goes about achieving success" (p. 87). He, too, pointed out that a school's values are communicated and disseminated through familiar means: leaders and heroes, the cultural network and rituals and ceremonies. The dynamics and logistics of most schools are such that the principal cannot possibly oversee the motivational needs of each and every student. But groups of people can be affected by the culture in which they participate, and this domain *is* under the control and stewardship of the administrative team.

Exemplary Teaching Strategies

The consistent and pervasive use of exemplary teaching strategies allows students to develop a routine throughout the school day. The implementation of exemplary teaching strategies may be considered a key to the success of a school. Providing staff development for professional growth and redelivery of effective strategies are key to team building. Administrators who pursue training opportunities, participate in study groups, forward articles to faculty and solicit their comments, and engage in action

research at the school site are using their own behavior to communicate the importance of professional growth. Good staff development procedures result in teachers sharing with peers about effective teaching.

The use of common exemplary teaching strategies must be consistent and pervasive. Students must become attuned to key phrases and common practices. The consistency of using certain summarizing techniques, specific requirements, areas of focus, and a true culture of learning that students can come to know and understand, will take place with the implementation of common exemplary teaching strategies.

Fullan (2002) suggested in his book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, the importance of learning in context. "Learning in the setting where you work, or learning in context, is the learning with the greatest payoff because it is more specific (customized to the situation) and because it is social (involves a group). Learning in context is developing leadership and improving the organization as you go. Such learning changes the individual and the context simultaneously." Leaders learn how to make learning in context possible for everyone in the organization.

School success depends on a pervasive focus on student and teacher learning. When educators look at disappointing student achievement indicators, they often say, "I taught it; they just didn't learn it." This evasion of responsibility is detrimental to success. This kind of culture creates an environment in which it seems perfectly natural to blame students for their failures. Students themselves even buy into it. This "I Taught It" culture is not conducive to maximum learning. It must be converted into a "They Learned It" culture. The shift from a teaching focus to a learning focus may sound simple, but

it actually requires profound changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, management, organization and leadership. It turns the school on its head. This concept requires a sense of urgency that permeates the building. Instead of beginning with what the school offers, you have to begin with what the student requires. Teachers must know their students and their learning capacities and paces, their interests, their concerns, their hopes prior to setting the curriculum. The job of the teacher is to know the student and draw him or her toward the curriculum.

Senge, (1990); Wilson (1996); and Brown (2003) studied the topics of learning environments and learning communities. They suggested in both settings the key to the learning taking place in multiple ways with multiple sources is that the learners assume more control over the goals, content, forms of instruction and learning opportunities. Learning communities involve much more group learning and interdependent support than one finds with traditional instruction. They involve much less teacher control and pre-specification of ends. Students tend to work together in groups to solve problems of mutual interest, deliver services they consider important, or develop an expertise they all seek. Everyone learns – including the teacher or group leader (Wilson and Cole, 1997; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993). Learning communities involve a high level of dialogue, conversation, discussion and collaboration. Because much of the dialogue focuses the group on values, goals and quality, learning communities can become self-correcting and highly adaptive to change. As open systems, they are also more likely to stimulate creativity and innovation than traditional instructional systems.

The shift from traditional school structures to more open systems for learning is difficult and time consuming. As Wilson and Ryder (2000) pointed out, the approach

involves short-term inefficiencies, because learning communities do not lend themselves to centralized control and are somewhat unpredictable, they try the patience of bureaucrats and others who may be rule-bound or in a hurry. Teachers, too, may be reluctant to change their current roles for fear of losing some measure of control and satisfaction. The best way to bring teachers along is to create professional learning communities first, with a view toward spreading the model throughout the school once teachers have experienced its benefits. The foundation of an educational institution must be firm and steadfast, relying on the principles and standards of sound educational practices. Educators must have a heart for children, a mind for improvement and the soul of a higher calling.

Cawelti (2000) referred to multiple factors such as curriculum aligned with performance standards, strong leadership, and shared vision to sustain school success. He suggests that schools do not achieve high performance standards by changing a few strategies. There must be a change in many areas all at the same time to achieve the critical mass that will make a difference. These changes must be sustained over time to impact the culture of a school.

Summary

Throughout this literature review the studies reveal that the success in the education of children though multifaceted, is simple to comprehend. Carter (2000) focused on teacher quality as an indicator of student performance. Lezotte (1992) stated that the education process is never ending. The No Child Left Behind Act that came into effect in 2000 marked an era of accountability within our nation (Brooks and Miles, 2006). Researchers such as James Coleman and Ron Edmonds who have analyzed the

educational process and given the results of their efforts many years ago are being sought for answers. Gamoran & Long (2006) suggested, after their research on James Coleman's findings, high-poverty high-performance schools need an established relationship with parents and community.

The categories addressed in this chapter are key components to the attainment of a successful education environment. The critical mix of these correlates which include, clear school mission, high expectations, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home to school relations must be applied within a school in order for the success to be possible (Edmonds, 1979). He suggested the challenging standards set such as hard work, dedication, knowledge and skills of the teachers must all be present for success to be achieved.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

After reviewing the literature on factors that influence academic success, this researcher determined a need for this particular study. This chapter explained why survey research was used, the method of the survey, the validity and reliability of the instrument used, the demographics of the schools, and the participants involved in the study. Also found in this chapter was the researcher's theoretical framework, and the procedure used in the statistical method.

This dissertation analyzed the factors that impacted school achievement. This study was based primarily on the perceptions of teachers from two schools that met the requirements for adequate yearly progress and the perceptions of teachers from two schools that failed to meet adequate yearly progress. The purpose of this study was to compare teacher perception of factors identified by the state of Georgia as indicators of best practices. Survey research was chosen as a method to analyze the data for this study due to the dramatic and consistent increase in the success of student and teacher achievement at a particular low socioeconomic rural middle school. The survey instrument was administered to teachers of four north Georgia middle schools with similar student demographics. Two of the middle schools surveyed have been placed on the "needs improvement" list and two have achieved the Adequate Yearly Progress status. The results of the survey instrument were used to compare the perceptions of the teachers on factors that are considered critical in the success of a school.

General Perspective

This quantitative study analyzed factors influencing success within four specific schools. The general question addressed in this study is: To what extent is there a difference when comparing teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "needs improvement" school to the teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "successful" school? The general question subsumes related questions as follows:

1. To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?

2. What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?

3. To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making?

4. To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty?

5. To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction?

6. To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods?

7. How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies?

As emphasized by Ary et al. (2006, p. 402), there was a need for this survey to seek to measure intangibles, such as attitudes, opinions and various psychological and sociological constructs. Each section contains an area for comments; these were utilized to allow for better description of responses. The discussion of the results focused on the effects of the teachers' perceptions on the research questions presented in the study. A qualitative element gleaned from the comment sections of the survey, which provided for open-ended responses, was used to gain insight from the teachers' perceptions. This qualitative analysis searched for recurrent themes that appear to support teachers' responses to the questions.

<div align="center">The Research Context</div>

On July 1, 2003, the Georgia Department of Education created the School Improvement Division in the Office of Teacher and Student Support. Their goal was to design and implement a coherent and sustained statewide system of support and process for improvement. The goal of the department of education is to provide local education agencies and schools in Georgia with tools and resources, as well as intensive support, for schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress. Schools that are identified within the Needs Improvement status are required to participate in this study (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). However, there are schools that find this review an informative and helpful tool to provide information for their edification. Within this study four schools were considered. Two of the schools had obtained the status of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress, and two of the schools had not yet obtained this status at the time the surveys were conducted.

The Research Participants

Within the theoretical framework of this researcher's thought, the question of how a school finds and sustains educational practices that assure academic success continue to develop. Researchers (Lezotte, 1992; Pechman and Fiester, 1996; and Carter, 2000) found specific factors such as teacher collaboration, the use of data to drive instruction, and a shared vision for academic improvement that are required for academic success. Continuing in the quest to find a feasible solution for sustaining success within educational institutions, this researcher sought the perceptions of local educators. A comparison of two sets of teacher perceptions was studied. Two schools considered by the state of Georgia as "successful" schools and two schools considered by the state of Georgia as being in the category of "needs improvement" were selected for the evaluation.

The demographics of the four schools are broken down as follows: teachers, students and community. The schools are coded to assure anonymity as Rural School S1, Rural School S2, Rural School NI1, and Rural School NI2. Table 2 will illustrate:

	Rural Middle S1	Rural Middle S2	Rural Middle NI 1	Rural Middle NI 2	State Average
Number of Teachers	47	65	70	77	
Student/ Teacher Ratio	14 to 1	15 to 1	14 to 1	13 to 1	14 to 1
Teachers with Advanced Degree	20 percent	31 percent	26 percent	31 percent	57 percent

Teacher's years experience	9 years	16 years	14 years	11 years	12 years
Students with free or reduced lunch	58 percent	56 percent	44 percent	71 percent	51 percent
Total Enrollment	614	927	919	876	
Gender	Male 52 percent Female 48 percent	Male 51 percent Female 49 percent	Male 50 percent Female 50 percent	Male 52 percent Female 48 percent	
Ethnicity					
White	89 percent	77 percent	87 percent	32 percent	46 percent
Black	3 percent	16 percent	1 percent	9 percent	38 percent
Multiracial	0 percent	4 percent	3 percent	2 percent	3 percent
Hispanic	6 percent	2 percent	7 percent	46 percent	10 percent
Asian	1 percent	1 percent	1 percent	1 percent	3 percent
American Indian	0 percent	1 percent	1 percent	1 percent	0 percent

Table 3.1

Demographics of schools

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The Certified Staff Survey used by the Georgia Department of Education includes

Likert-scale questions that were scored for each of the eight categories on the survey. A

Likert scale (1932), named for developer Rensis Likert, is one of the most popular

techniques used in the measurement of attitudes. The questions are ranked based on the

participant's attitudes from that range from no basis to judge, never, infrequently, often,

or consistently. Responses are assigned a numeric value, and the total scale score is given

by adding the numeric responses given to each item. The perceptions of the teachers

participating in the surveys were computed, and they provided crucial data in responding

to the factors researched. The survey was composed of 84 questions in 8 categories relating directly to fundamental aspects of education. This survey is routinely used by the state of Georgia to enhance school improvement practices and planning. The areas addressed in this survey include:

- Curriculum

- Assessment

- Instruction

- Planning and Organization

- Student, Family and Community

- Professional Learning

- Leadership

- School Culture

The survey instrument was created by the Georgia Department of Education's School Improvement Division in conjunction with a group of educational leaders from across the state. These educators compiled a list of qualities of high performing schools and created this survey based on these qualities. Many professionals have given credibility to this instrument by their constant critique and continued use.

The School Keys: *Unlocking Excellence through the Georgia School Standards* (formerly GSS) are what schools need to know, understand and be able to do while implementing a continuous school improvement process. The School Keys have recently undergone a validation study. As a result, the School Keys have been revised. There are two versions available: the School Keys including the Implementation Rubric and a Condensed version that contains the standards and the elements. Additionally, the School

Keys can be utilized as the standards for school level SACS/CASI Accreditation. The survey is a perception survey, designed as no more and no less than an indicator of attitudinal trends and general school climate. The data serve as a one-time reference point within a specific context (Keys to Quality, 2007).

Procedures Used

Teachers at each of the four schools were asked to participate in the online survey during a two week period. An online window was provided by the Georgia Department of Education for the purpose of teacher participation. Administrators were not present while teachers completed the survey, allowing them the freedom to answer honestly and anonymously. Surveys were collected from the four schools being researched; all teachers from the four schools were asked to participate in the survey.

The survey called the Certified Staff Survey by the Georgia Department of Education includes 84 items that are considered to describe actions or conditions. The teachers were asked to respond to the choices that range from no basis to judge, never, infrequently, often, or consistently. They were asked to select the option that best reflected their opinion regarding the item's frequency or status. There were additional comments or clarification that teachers added in the comment column or at the end of the survey.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using Stat Crunch which is an integrated system of software providing complete control over data management, analysis and presentation. Responses from the survey were compared among the four schools, and a *t*-test was

performed to determine the statistical significance of the differences. The results of the *t*-test gave insight to the distinguishing factors among the four schools.

Each response option of the Likert-Scale survey was given a point value from one to five, with one being no basis to judge and five being consistently. Survey questions were grouped, and a mean score for each group was calculated for each of the following factors: curriculum; instruction; assessment; planning/organization; student, family, and community support; professional learning; leadership; and school culture. Once a mean score was calculated from each category for each group representing the S1 and S2 schools and the NI 1and NI 2 schools, a *t*-test was used for each category to determine if the difference in scores between the two groups of schools was statistically significant.

This study utilized quantitative research. Ary et al. (2006 p. 31), describes survey research as instruments that include questionnaires, interviews, or surveys to gather information from groups. This information allows researchers to summarize the characteristics of different groups or to measure attitudes and opinions toward certain topics. The utilization of this survey allowed this writer to gather essential information and data which provided the details to assist this writer in answering the research questions addressed by this study.

Comments collected from the open-ended section of the survey were analyzed. "It is impossible to imagine a person leading a life without making judgments or without making discriminations," write Smith and Deemer (2000, p. 888). Merriam (2002) suggests that qualitative research seeks to probe deeper into the meaning related to the participants associated with the study. This section of the study served to address a qualitative analysis of the comments, not a qualitative study. The comments were

gathered and analyzed utilizing the narrative method. Creswell (2003) states that qualitative procedure should end with comments about the narrative that emerges from the data.

Recurrent themes were sought throughout the comments as each item in the study was reviewed. The use of the comments provided a rich, thick description conveyed within the findings. This allowed for the reader to experience the setting being communicated by the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze factors that influence success

within a low socioeconomic Georgia middle school. This chapter describes the process

involved in the data analysis and presents the results of the content analysis study. Data

from the Certified Staff Survey is found in Appendix B. The data shown in this table

categorized Group 1 which signified teacher responses from the two schools that

achieved Adequate Yearly Progress and Group 2 which signified the teacher responses

from the two schools that at the time of the survey had yet to achieve Adequate Yearly

Progress. Figures 4.1 – 4.7 provide the results of the *t*-test administered by grouping the

responses from the items included in the Certified Staff Survey. Table 4.1 includes the

results of the *t*-test as grouped by research questions that the review of the literature

suggested. Table 4.2 includes the number of comments taken from the survey and

categorized; the nature of the responses is identified within this chapter. Samples of the

actual comments from the teachers are shared within this chapter.

The survey, constructed by the Georgia Department of Education, titled Georgia

Assessment of Performance in School Standards: Closing the Gap, was completed by

97% of the teachers from the four schools studied. The areas in the survey included:

curriculum; instruction; assessment; planning and organization; student, family, and

community support; professional learning; leadership; and school culture. The data from

the Certified Staff Survey were compiled into two groups consisting of teacher

perceptions from the survey from schools that achieved Adequate Yearly Progress and

the teacher perceptions from the survey from schools that had not achieved Adequate

Yearly Progress. The schools will remain anonymous due to any stigma that may be associated with those in the process of attaining their goals. For the sake of this study, the two groups are referred to as Group 1 and Group 2. Group 1 consists of the two schools previously referred to as S1 and S2, and Group 2 consists of the two schools previously referred to as NI1 and NI2.

This quantitative study analyzed factors influencing success within four specific schools. The general question addressed in this study is: To what extent is there a difference when comparing teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "needs improvement" school to the teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "successful" school?

The general question subsumes related questions as follows:

1. To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?

2. What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?

3. To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making?

4. To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty?

5. To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction?

6. To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods?

7. How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies?

<div align="center">Results</div>

The following figures indicate the *t*-tests resulting from the responses on the Certified Staff Survey. The items were grouped in reference to research questions as follows:

Research Question 1: To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?

Hypothesis test results:
μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(with pooled variances)

Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$	0.71428573	0.120655805	12	5.9200277	<0.0001

Figure 4.1

t-Statistic for Research Question 1

At the probability level of .05, DF=12, the *t*-stat value of 5.92 is larger than the table value of 2.18, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 10, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71 and 72 (see

Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented a significant

statistical difference between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being

analyzed. The answers given by the teachers from the two schools that achieved

Adequate Yearly Progress rank the visibility and support of the administrators on a much

higher scale than the two schools that had not attained Adequate Yearly Progress. The

perceptions of the teachers reveal the need for a stalwart administration.

Instructional leadership within high-performing schools is fundamental (Lezotte,

1991). The modeling of the process of continual learning and self-assessment can not be

overlooked (Barth et al., 1999; Kannapel and Clements, 2005; Ragland et al., 2002). Data

based upon the results found within this study would show the perception of the teachers

from the schools that achieved Adequate Yearly Progress, as compared to the perceptions

of the teachers from schools that had yet to obtain this performance level, holds true to

the ideals of leadership. The administrators within successful schools are physically

present within the hallways and classrooms conducting academic conversations with

teachers and building relationships with the students. As mentioned in the review of

literature, school principals in the past were given positions in administration due to

effective management skills. Due to increasing accountability, administrators of today

must provide instructional leadership and guide teachers toward excellence if they are to

be successful.

The physical presence of school administrators is necessary for excellence to be

obtained. Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest the leader use the Model the Way approach

to demonstrate desired outcomes for teachers. The Gospel of John, Chapter 13,

encourages leading by example as Jesus donned the towel and washed the disciples' feet.

The visibility as well as the availability of a school leader must be maintained in a school that is expected to achieve and maintain success.

Research Question 2: What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?

Hypothesis test results:
μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(without pooled variances)

Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$	0.52	0.20542638	7.4910192	2.5313203	0.0371

Figure 4.2

t-Statistic for Research Question 2

At the probability level of .05, DF=7, the *t*-stat value of 2.53 is larger than the table value of 2.37, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 14, 29, 57, 59 and 43 (see Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented a significant statistical difference between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being analyzed. Data collected from the survey showed the practice of collaboration ranked much higher on the Likert-Scale instrument by the teachers from the two schools that obtained Adequate

Yearly Progress in comparison to the responses from the teachers of the two schools that

not obtained Adequate Yearly Progress. The perceptions of the teachers from the two

schools that at the time of this study had yet to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress revealed

high numbers in the categories such as "never" or "infrequently" on the survey

instrument in the area of collaboration.

Collaboration among teachers provided with protected time creates an atmosphere

of working together to achieve much more than any individual could (Elmore 2000,

Sagor 1995). Elmore's (2000) research affirmed, "Privacy of practice produces isolation;

isolation is the enemy of improvement" (p. 20). The data provided by this study confirms

the suggestion that collaboration among teachers needs to be an integral part of a

successful educational institution. Louis, Kruse, and Marks (1996) suggested

collaboration is one of the key characteristics found to increase student achievement.

Protected time for collaborative and community bonds for the success of students are

critical (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993). The practice of collaboration is evidenced within

successful schools. There must be a culture in which teachers discuss teaching and

learning; observe each other teach; plan, design, research and evaluate the curriculum;

and share with each other (Barth, 1991).

Research Question 3: To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making?

Hypothesis test results:

μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(without pooled variances)

Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$	0.52	0.168523	4.931882	3.0856323	0.0278

Figure 4.3

t-Statistics for Research Question 3

At the probability level of .05, DF=5, the *t*-stat value of 3.09 is larger than the table value of 2.57, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 37, 38, 39, 40 and 56 (see Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented a significant statistical difference between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being analyzed. The margin of response from the teachers' perceptions within the schools being compared was smaller in the area of school improvement and long-term vision, yet did provide this study with a statistically significant difference.

Among the correlates in an effective school are clear goals, missions, and high expectations. Edmonds (1979) suggested that children will master the challenging

standards set for them through the hard work, dedication, knowledge, and skills of their teachers. As the results of this study have shown through the statistical difference found within this research question, there are distinctions found between schools that lack direction, such as the two schools that have yet to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress, when compared to schools that have apparent ideals, such as the two schools that obtained Adequate Yearly Progress. Direction through the utilization of standards-based instruction, in conjunction with data-driven adjustments within the learning, is critical to the success of students. Without these tools, the teacher may have an aimless focus and produce lessons that tend to replicate the past or cater to personal interest.

Senge (1990), Fullan (1992), and Deal and Peterson (1990) all pointed to the importance of a shared vision, championed by a strong leader with a sense of moral purpose, which creates an atmosphere of excellence and success. Decisions that are shared by those within an educational institution allow for the trust and support of all involved. Maeher and Fyans (1989) described culture-building in organizations in general and characterized culture as a fluid process: Groups tend to work out ways of getting along among themselves. They arrive at certain shared understandings regarding how, when, and where activities are to occur. These values become a part of the system in which each individual willingly and enthusiastically participates.

Research Question 4: To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty?

Hypothesis test results:
μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(without pooled variances)

Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$		0.5 0.13385315	5.7992682	3.735437	0.0103

Figure 4.4

t-Statistics for Research Question 4

At the probability level of .05, DF=5.8, the *t*-stat value of 3.74 is larger than the table value of 2.45, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 54, 73, 74, and 76 (see Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented a significant statistical difference between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being analyzed. Data collected from the teachers' responses from the two schools that obtained Adequate Yearly Progress indicate the value of shared decision making within the school. The absence of this practice within the two schools that had yet to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress was evidenced by the teachers' responses.

Anchored within a successful school is not only a common goal and vision but the foundation of shared decision making. Embedded within the school culture is the ownership needed to prompt the extra preparation and hours of thought poured into exemplary teaching. When an educator is embraced as a team member and considered a partner in the educational institution, success is much closer to being obtained. When the practices of a team of educators are consistent and pervasive with the use of exemplary teaching strategies, the success of the students is not only achieved but sustained.

Deal and Peterson (1990) suggested the value of stakeholders within the school and found this characteristic to be important for the success of a school. Maehr and Fyans (1989), described the building of shared decision-making imperative for teachers to arrive at certain understanding regarding how, when, and where responsibilities are formulated and conducted.

Research Question 5: To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction?

Hypothesis test results:
μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(without pooled variances)

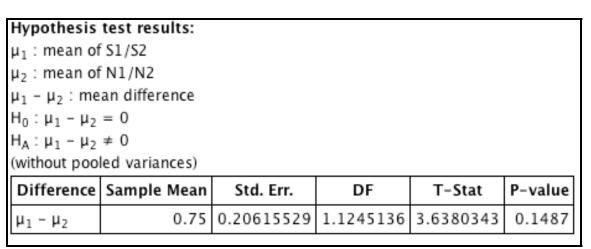| Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$	0.64	0.16431677	4.5019455	3.894916	0.0141

Figure 4.5

t-Statistics for Research Question 5

At the probability level of .05, DF=4.5, the *t*-stat value of 3.89 is larger than the table value of 2.57, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 78, 35, 6, 33 and 21 (see Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented a significant statistical difference between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being analyzed. Among the perceptions of the teachers from the two schools that obtained Adequate Yearly Progress, there were much higher rankings in the areas of data-driven instruction through the use of benchmark assessments. The perceptions of the teachers from the two schools rated "needs improvement" responded with lower numbers in the "consistently" column on the survey instrument.

An effective collaborative effort on the part of teachers using the data provided by results of universal screenings, such as benchmark assessments, is an effective way to provide for student success (Louis, Kruse, and Marks, 1996). Teacher perceptions found within this study confirm the research lead by Brooks and Miles (2006), as well as Katzman (2004), that federal legislation gives school accountability a higher ranking. The benchmark assessments guide lesson preparation among educators. As stated in the review of literature, there are leading indicators and lagging indicators considered in the economic world. Standardized tests, such as the CRCT, that are administered near the end of the school year are considered lagging indicators. There must be indicators, such as universal screenings, that are utilized by educators to provide a leading opportunity for adjustments in classroom instruction.

Educators must not wait on the results of standardized tests to indicate the success or failure of a school, or the results will serve much like an autopsy. The successful schools have shown a more effective way to ensure success through the utilization of testing throughout the school year, much like a physician would provide a physical examination. The use of assessment tools to drive the instruction, as indicated by this study, is needed for success to be obtained.

Research Question 6: To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods?

Hypothesis test results:

μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(without pooled variances)

Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$	0.75	0.20615529	1.1245136	3.6380343	0.1487

Figure 4.6

t-Statistics for Research Question 6

At the probability level of .05, DF=1.12, the *t*-stat value of 3.64 is smaller than the table value of 12.71, resulting in the retention of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 11 and 41(see Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented no significant statistical difference

between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being analyzed. The greatest

resource in any classroom is the teacher among those students. The perceptions of the

teachers from the schools that obtained the ranking of success, as well as the perceptions

of the teachers from the schools that had yet to obtain this goal, have been found to be in

agreement that research-based methods effectively deliver content to their students. The

effective teaching of standards-based curriculum is an imperative characteristic of a

successful school.

An audit of Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum showed a short fall when

compared to the national standards and was too shallow to allow real learning to take

place (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). The curriculum did not meet the needs

of students and did not provide an adequate guide for teachers to use in order to deliver

quality instruction. As this study confirms, there must be proper resources and methods

within a quality educational institution. Brooks and Miles (2006) stated, "In the United

States, 2001's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signaled the beginning of an

educational policy era marked by accountability and an emphasis on increasing student

achievement" (p.26). Performance of educators must be that of excellence and content

based upon standards-based curriculum that is held within the highest expectations.

Research Question 7: How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies?

Hypothesis test results:

μ_1 : mean of S1/S2
μ_2 : mean of N1/N2
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$: mean difference
$H_0 : \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$
$H_A : \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$
(without pooled variances)

Difference	Sample Mean	Std. Err.	DF	T-Stat	P-value
$\mu_1 - \mu_2$	0.3	0.15748015	7.557631	1.9050019	0.0954

Figure 4.7

t-Statistics for Research Question 7

At the probability level of .05, DF=7.56, the *t*-stat value of 1.91 is smaller than the table value of 2.31, resulting in the retention of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the two groups for this item.

The results of teacher perception as obtained from the items of the survey that pertained to the above research question were items 52, 53, 55, 62 and 58 (see Appendix B). The results of the *t*-test performed on the data presented no significant statistical difference between the teacher perceptions within the two groups being analyzed.

The area of professional learning is part of the contractual agreement with which educators are familiar. The results of the Certified Staff Survey that show no statistically significant difference in comparison with the two groups of educators is surprising to this researcher. However, the fact that all educators must participate in continuous learning in

order to remain employed by the state of Georgia may have influenced the responses of the teachers.

Lauer (2001), in her study of teachers' perceptions of professional development, concluded that learning within the content area made for much improvement in teaching as well as allowing for more diverse instruction within the classroom. The enhancement of professionalism, while providing specific content focus, is one of the keys to continuous improvement of educators which directly impacts the success of the educational institution.

The summary table below provides quick reference of the results as grouped per research question. Listed are the degree of freedom, t-Test statistics, table values, and the statistical difference. The mean score of the two groups of teacher perceptions from the four schools is included in the table below. The table includes a series of seven research questions addressed through the use of the t-test that allowed the researcher to compare the perceptions of teachers surveyed from Group 1 and Group 2:

R. Q.1: To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.67	3.95	12	5.92	2.18	YES
R. Q. 2: What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.46	3.94	7	2.53	2.37	YES
R. Q. 3: To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.6	4.08	5	3.09	2.57	YES
R. Q. 4: To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.47	3.97	5.8	3.74	2.45	YES
R.Q. 5: To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.56	3.92	4.5	3.89	2.57	YES
R. Q. 6: To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.55	3.8	1.12	3.64	12.71	NO
R. Q. 7: How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies?					
x̄ Group 1	x̄ Group 2	DF	*t*- Stat	Table Value	Statistically Significant
4.38	4.08	7.56	1.91	2.31	NO

Table 4.1

Summary of *t*-Tests

Analysis of Teacher Comments

     The table below categorized the number of comments gathered from the Certified

Staff Survey. Each of the eight sections indicated by the instrument allowed for

participants to communicate. The table specifies the number of comments that were

single word answers, and comments which were elaborated, including sentences as well

as paragraphs. Differentiated within the table is also the nature of the comments, ranging

from thoughts that are critical in nature, favorable in nature, and those communicated as

neutral. This table provides the necessary components to complete the findings set within

this study. Based upon this information is the descriptive nature of the environment

within which the educational environment occurs.

Comments Collected per Group from Certified Staff Survey	Number of comments as single word answers	Number of comments of which were elaborated	Number of critical comments	Number of favorable comments	Number of neutral comments
Item 12. Curriculum					
Group 1	2	12	2	10	2
Group 2	10	36	40	4	2
Item 26. Instruction					
Group 1	1	7	3	4	1
Group 2	9	26	34	2	0
Item 36. Assessment					
Group 1	2	8	1	7	2
Group 2	5	18	14	6	3

Comments per Group from Certified Staff Survey	Number of comments as single word answers	Number of comments of which were elaborated	Number of critical comments	Number of favorable comments	Number of neutral comments
Item 45. Planning/Organization					
Group 1	1	10	2	8	1
Group 2	5	42	40	12	5
Item 51. Student, Family and Community Support					
Group 1	1	10	0	10	1
Group 2	3	16	11	5	3
Item 65. Professional Learning					
Group 1	1	8	2	5	1
Group 2	6	31	21	7	3
Item 79. Leadership					
Group 1	1	11	2	9	1
Group 2	4	44	41	4	3
Item 85. School Culture					
Group 1	1	7	0	7	1
Group 2	2	18	15	5	0
Total					
Group 1	10	43	12	60	10
Group 2	44	231	216	45	19
% per Group					
Group 1	19%	81%	15%	73%	12%
Group 2	16%	84%	77%	16%	7%

Table 4.2

Categorization of Comments from Certified Staff Survey

Sample of Teacher Comments

The following are samples of the actual statements taken from the survey administered to the teachers from the four schools studied. These comments provide a qualitative analysis to the findings and allow for the responsiveness of recurrent themes. Group 1 consists of the two schools previously referred to as S1 and S2, and Group 2 consists of the two schools previously referred to as NI1 and NI2. The comments were grouped in reference to the research question to which they pertain.

Research Question 1. To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?

Group 1 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "Our administrators are present in our classrooms on a daily basis."

- "Our A.P. is visible in the hallways and cafeteria, giving us and the students opportunities to communicate."

- "The leadership in our building is fully aware of the standards as well as the teaching strategies that we are expected to use in our classrooms."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "No, there is no standard operating procedure, you can never find him, he loses things, and often times has no idea about the situations that are going on."

- "NEVER"

- "Other than hiring us to teach classes, this one is doubtful."

Research Question 1 addressed the leadership within the building and the visibility of administrators. The comments from the teachers that work in the two schools

that have yet to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress shared many critical comments in regard to the relationships they have with the administrative team. An attitude of distrust and lack of support was expressed by these teachers.

In contrast, the comments from the teachers who serve in the schools that obtained Adequate Yearly Progress showed an admiration for their administrative team. The professional compliments that were given by the teachers' thoughts provided a picture of respect and trust for the leadership within their schools.

Research Question 2. What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?

Group 1 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "We are required to meet and account for our work weekly."

- "In this school we have done an excellent job of using 'Learning Focused Schools' to implement GA standards through much planning and collaboration."

- "Our peer observations are guided by our administrators; we meet as teaching partners to plan our lessons almost daily."

- "We allow the GPS to guide our lesson plans."

- "There are just a few interruptions such as calling students out of class to go to the office."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "Every Tuesday is for either a content or a grade level/team meeting during planning."

- "We don't have a systematic process, just a common planning period."

- "Some teachers work together, others work on their own."

Research Question 2 addressed collaboration and the understanding of the effects collaboration has on the success of student progress. The positive statements gleaned from Group 1 provided this researcher with insight to the success that has been obtained through the use of collaboration among the teachers at those schools. The comments given alluded to peer observations, shared planning time, and administrator commitment to protecting instructional time.

Group 2 shared mundane comments. As stated by Sagor (1995), one sure way to spot an improving school is to listen to the professional talk in the hallways and faculty lounges, and at faculty meetings. There appears to be a lack of guidance and support for Group 2 in the area of collaboration.

Research Question 3. To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making? Group 1 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "Our school is very focused in doing what is in the best interest of the students and for their success."

- "Revisions are made each year in order to help all students learn according to their individual needs."

- "We have a clear focus on meeting the needs of our students; our school vision is communicated to all."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "What is our school's mission?"

- "The last I heard, it was getting off Adequate Yearly Progress. I'm going by what I've heard from other staff members."

- "I guess because of our SACS study last year, most of the teachers have knowledge of this."

Research Question 3 addressed the school improvement plan and long-term vision. Comments shared by Group 2 continued to be critical in nature. Over half of the comments given by the teachers in this area focused on the school being removed from the "needs improvement" list. This group had no statements that indicated a clear understanding of the vision for the school.

Comments shared by Group 1 were concise and directed toward the actual school improvement team and the work that had been completed to create the long-term vision of the school. The words and phrases that were used suggest an understanding on the part of the educators in this group.

Research Question 4. To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty? Group 1 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "Our leadership team works hard, makes great decisions, but I'm not so sure they are all decisions representative of the entire staff."

- "Not all 'leaders' in our school are called upon to help with the decision-making."

- "Not sure that all the decisions are shared."

- "Administrators don't often discuss thoughts with faculty prior to making decisions."

- "Our administrators make good decisions. We just aren't given opportunity to share before they are made."

- "We have a very effective, team-oriented school."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "We are told what we will do."

- "Only his favorites – the teachers that think like he does."

Research Question 4 addressed the shared responsibility of decision-making throughout the faculty. The comments from Group 1 gave praise to the leadership team for their hard work. Comments suggested not all decisions were shared prior to policy or procedures. Group 2 made statements to the effect that they were given little opportunity to share in the decision-making process. The statement, "We are told what we will do," is critical in terms of the attitude of an educator.

Research Question 5. To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction? Group1 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "In my opinion, our Student Learning Maps are the key to our consistency in curriculum here. They keep our instruction focused on the curriculum (GPS) that we are required to teach."

- "Performance data yes – not much review of student work."

- "Teachers constantly monitor student achievement so they may be placed into an acceleration/enrichment group that meets daily. This helps to preview lessons or review any content the student is having trouble with."

- "We use our curriculum maps to guide our planning."

- "The Benchmark data is used to help with what is needed to review."

- "We analyze data and use it to guide students with error analysis."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "I do, but I can't tell you what everyone else does."

- "Most teachers that I know give tests to assess students."

- "Our school is currently under severe scrutiny by the state so that we in turn can meet Adequate Yearly Progress. There is no flexibility and autonomy at this time."

Research Question 5 questioned the various types of assessment tools and the use of data from these assessments. Group 1 praised the efforts on the part of universal screening that is administered on a regular basis at their schools. The performance data was mentioned by the teachers as part of the comments. Another comment was the use of Student Learning Maps as a key to consistency in curriculum. Carter (2000) suggested, "Teacher quality is the single most accurate indicator of a student's performance in school" (p. 9). The greatest resource in a classroom is the teacher; there is no greater tool.

The statements given by Group 2 in this area were quite concerning. The term "under severe scrutiny by the state" was included in the comments. This type of attitude expressed by educators could negate creative thinking and productive thought. Group 2 admitted to the use of teacher-constructed tests as their means of measurement. Brooks and Miles (2006) suggested in their studies that the time of accountability has come for teachers to emphasize increased student achievement. The occasion when teachers closed their doors and used their own style of measurement ended with NCLB. Katzman

(2004) acknowledged a past when "we had something different and unknowable happening virtually in every classroom and in every school" (p. 87).

Research Question 6. To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods? Group 1 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "Technology is always limited."

- "We could use more technology that works."

- "Kids could always use more access to computers, especially in Title I schools like this one."

- "We are blessed to have so much in the way of technology."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "We are expected to practice new skills, but we receive no feedback."

- "Students are taught the minimum required to pass the CRCT. Many students are not challenged enough."

- "We need textbooks, we are developing all materials/units access to materials/manipulatives VERY limited."

Research Question 6 included the availability of resources and skills to effectively deliver content. Comments gleaned from the teachers in the area of resources produced more thoughts in the area of technology. Though helpful in the classroom as well as throughout society, technology pales in comparison to the creativity of the teacher and the impact that inspiring student relationships can achieve.

Research Question 7. How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up

provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies? Group 1

incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "I wish we had more time to practice and master new strategies before

  learning new ones."

- "Not provided funds for professional learning opportunities to strengthen

  knowledge in some content areas. Teacher has to pay for staff

  development in that content area without reimbursement."

- "We have had some wonderful new strategies and professional learning

  activities for teachers, I wish we had more time to implement and get a

  grip on them before new ones are presented."

- "Professional development should not be done on pre-planning days."

Group 2 incorporated the following comments in the survey:

- "We had more training last year."

- "We are trained in the Georgia Performance Standards only."

Research Question 7 sought the perceptions of the teachers on the subject of

professional learning. Comments from Group 1 and Group 2 revealed a frustration in this

area. The time spent in the area of professional development was mentioned as required

and not always helpful in the instructional practices of the teachers. However, Kennedy's

(1999) research revealed the professional development of teachers was beneficial in the

endeavor of success. The United States Department of Education's Professional

Development Team (2002) suggested professional development was most effective when

focusing on individual, collegial and organizational improvement. This would require a

sustained time and commitment on the part of educators within a building.

In summary of the statements shared by the teachers in the comment section of the Certified Staff Survey, 77% of the comments shared by Group 2 were critical. In comparison, 73% of the comments from Group 1 were favorable. These comments provide an image of the environment within which the educators work. The evidence of negative attitudes in Group 2 is cause for concern. The comments shared by Group 1 provided confirmation that a successful attitude shown by others will enhance productivity.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of the study. The implication of the study, which includes a description of the Rural Middle School Model, is found within this chapter, and limitations are discussed. The recommendations for further research, based on the findings of this investigation, are the final thoughts.

Summary

The factors that ensure successful educational opportunities within low socioeconomic middle schools were analyzed in this study. The Federal No Child Left Behind Act requires that every child achieve 100% mastery by the year 2014 (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). The awareness of this goal creates opportunity for educators to rise to occasion or fall under the weight. This study utilized the perceptions of teachers from four schools with similar demographics. Previous studies by Ron Edmonds (1979), Lawrence Lezotte (1992), Samuel Carter (2000), and Gordan Cawelti (2000) include universal factors of success addressed in this study. The commonality of factors included expectations, effort, shared decision-making, vision, and educational standards. This study is unique in that the focus is given to four specific low socioeconomic middle schools within a small geographic location.

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to compare teacher perception of factors identified by the state of Georgia as indicators of best practices. Survey research was chosen as the method of research for this study due to the dramatic and consistent increase in the success of student and teacher achievement at a particular low socioeconomic rural middle school. The survey instrument was administered to

teachers within four North Georgia middle schools with similar student demographics. Two of the middle schools surveyed had been placed on the "needs improvement" list, and two achieved Adequate Yearly Progress status. The results of the survey instrument were used to compare the perceptions of the teachers regarding factors that are considered critical in the success of a school.

This quantitative study analyzed factors influencing success within four specific schools. The general question addressed in this study was: To what extent is there a difference when comparing teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "needs improvement" school to the teacher perceptions in a school that has been identified as a "successful" school? The general question subsumes related questions as follows:

1. To what extent are school leaders viewed as instructional leaders, and are they supportive and clearly visible throughout the building?

2. What indicates teacher understanding of how collaboration affects the quality of instruction, and do administrators provide protected time for this collaboration?

3. To what degree is the school improvement plan aligned with the long-term vision of the school, and is it used as a tool for decision-making?

4. To what extent is the responsibility of decision-making shared throughout the faculty?

5. To what level are various types of assessment tools used frequently, and are the data from the assessments used to drive instruction?

6. To what level are teachers equipped with resources and skills to effectively deliver content to all levels of learners using research-based methods?

7. How is long-term, job-embedded professional learning that aligns with classroom instruction available for teachers, and is there sufficient follow-up provided to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies?

The survey constructed by the Georgia Department of Education, titled Georgia Assessment of Performance in School Standards: Closing the Gap (see Appendix A), was completed by 251 teachers from the four schools studied. The data from the survey consisted of eight constructs and was compiled using two groups: The two schools that achieved Adequate Yearly Progress and the two schools that had not achieved Adequate Yearly Progress.

Survey questions were grouped, and a percentage score was calculated for each of the following factors: Instructional leadership, collaboration, long-term vision, shared decision-making, assessment use, resource allocation, and professional learning. Once a mean score was calculated from each category for each group, a *t*-test was used to determine if the difference in scores between the two groups of schools was statistically significant. Statements gathered from the comments sections of the survey instrument were analyzed to consider recurrent themes.

There were differences between the practices and attitudes suggested by the teacher perceptions of the two groups of schools being studied. The visibility and academic leadership of the administration within a school is essential for success. Strong leadership must be noticed by teachers, students, and parents in order for the goals and visions of an educational institution to become reality. This data suggests that the leadership of the two schools that obtained Adequate Yearly Progress at the time of this study have administrative staffs that display this type of leadership.

The pressure that is placed on teachers to produce successful students who will obtain 100% mastery in all content areas by the school year 2014 could possibly be creating a classroom environment that may be unproductive. Comments given by teachers from the schools that have yet to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress showed that the pressure created by the No Child Left Behind law was affecting their attitude toward their profession. Accountability and standards must be included within the classroom rigor; however, these situations call for leadership that is supportive and resourceful to combat the pressure many teachers are currently experiencing.

Collaboration of teachers, or the lack thereof, was evidenced within this study. The review of research and data collected from this study show that teachers working together to create quality, standards-based instruction was a critical factor in the success of a school. Exemplary teaching strategies that are consistent and pervasive create a classroom that emulates exemplary learning. Elmore (2000) suggested that "isolation is the enemy of improvement" (p. 20). Teachers working for the common goal of greatness will certainly improve classroom instruction. The two schools that obtained Adequate Yearly Progress gave high regard to collaborative planning in comparison to the two schools that had yet to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress.

Another key ingredient ensuring success is the high expectations of all involved within a school. The common thread of quality work throughout an academic institution creates an atmosphere of excellence that invites all within the building to produce greater achievements. The positive expectations permeate the classrooms, hallways, and even the community of a successful school. James Coleman (1966) and Samuel Carter (2000) believe in the symbiotic relationship between schools and their communities and stress

that quality and attitude are important for success. The need for excellence in our world is ever present.

The lack of a universal screening or data-driven instruction was made evident through the information shared in the survey instrument. The knowledge of student academic growth prior to a one time assessment that is administered at the end of a school year is critical for the success of a school. The data gleaned from this study revealed that schools failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress did not utilize benchmark assessments or uniform formative testing to guide instruction. Students deserve a constant monitoring of progress prior to the critical testing that takes place at the end of the academic year to ensure instruction is tailored to meet their needs and readiness levels. With high stakes testing set as the pinnacle of the student's academic achievement, there must be indicators prior to this point.

In accordance with No Child Left Behind, to attain Adequate Yearly Progress, the achievement of a successful school hinges upon two main areas: Student test scores and student attendance. These two areas, though somewhat achievable through the encouragement of the teacher, often are impacted by the weather, the mood of the home, or the strain of influenza that may appear on the horizon. Theoretically speaking, one must pose the question, if a school is dramatically affected by any of the above mentioned maladies, should that school be labeled a failure? Would the application of successful practices be considered null and void? Certainly an educational institution that demonstrates best practices would be promised a productive school year, or would they? This study shows dedication to academic achievement within the classroom on the part of the individuals involved within successful schools and the pursuit of excellence to be a

critical ingredient contributing to their achievement. Should the label of "needs

improvement," with the impact felt by a community, be so easily given as the result of

poor attendance and a single assessment given to the students? Would the review of the

practices found within a school be a more fitting assessment?

There is a lack of data collected by the Georgia Department of Education during

reviews of schools that have failed to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress. When this

researcher asked for the state average of the data collected through the utilization of the

Certified Staff Survey instrument, the answer "no records are kept to that effect" was

given. The survey instrument is required by the Georgia Department of Education as part

of the review of all schools in the "needs improvement" status, and this information could

serve the leaders in the Department of Education in the recommendations made for the

improvement of schools. As recorded in the Gospel of Luke 12:48b, "From everyone

who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been

entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

The results of this study found five of the seven areas compared to be statistically

significant. Based upon these findings, the characteristics of success analyzed within this

study appear to coincide with the characteristics suggested by the research of others, such

as Ron Edmonds (1979), as he suggested that mastery of challenging standards will take

place through the hard work, dedication, knowledge and skills of the teachers. Lawrence

Lezotte (1992) challenged educators with the use of exemplary teaching strategies, such

as previewing the lesson and graphic organizers used by expert teachers. Samuel Carter

(2000) suggested that principals must exercise their freedom to produce a positive school

culture. This freedom must be used to create an atmosphere of trust and positive school culture for all involved within the institution and throughout the community.

The practices found effective by the researchers mentioned in the previous paragraph continue today in successful schools. Carter (2000) challenged school leadership with his "no excuse" statement that the failure of most public schools to teach poor children is not acceptable. He suggests their success is the result of "hard work, common sense teaching philosophies, and successful leadership strategies" (p. 58). In this study, teacher perceptions from the schools that achieved Adequate Yearly Progress reflect this same dedication to hard work and strong leadership. The perceptions of the teachers gathered from all four schools reveal the need for leadership with clear expectations, collaboration for quality instruction, long-term vision of the school, shared decision-making, and assessment tools used to adjust instruction based on standards.

Comments that were gleaned from the survey gave significant recurrent themes of contrasting attitudes between the two groups of schools being studied. Group 1 revealed a positive approach through the entire investigation while Group 2 revealed a critical approach in the responses. Is the failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress the reason for the negative attitudes throughout the building, or are the negative attitudes throughout the building the reason for not achieving Adequate Yearly Progress? Is the achieving of Adequate Yearly Progress the reason for the positive attitudes throughout the building, or are the positive attitudes throughout the building the reason for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress? The comments made by the teachers would suggest that there is a relationship between attitude and school performance. The positive attitudes or comments of trust and pride that were shared by the teachers from the schools that

achieved Adequate Yearly Progress may be the cause of the accomplishments of those schools, or could the accomplishments of the schools be the cause of pride? The effects of attitudes are like seeds planted in a garden. The same way these attitudes impact an organization. There must be precise care applied, both critical and favorable, for success to be achieved and sustained.

The goal of this study was to make a comparison of specific teachers' perceptions in the critical areas related to school effectiveness. The replication of practices that are included within this study may provide for the success of other educational facilities. The results should provide insight for the leadership of the particular schools involved as well as other school leaders interested in the outcome of this study.

The data on the items related to resource availability showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups. It appeared as though teachers in all four schools were satisfied that they had the appropriate materials and resources to work effectively. It is possible, however, that the teachers in the schools that have not yet achieved Adequate Yearly Progress do not have enough understanding of best practices to know what resources are needed to maximize instructional efforts.

Professional development is another area from the survey that yielded no statistically significant difference between the groups. Perhaps professional development programs are not viewed by teachers as crucial to success. It may also be possible that most of the teachers in the study feel as though they are receiving enough training to be able to do their jobs.

The specific factors such as curriculum; assessment; instruction; planning and organization; student, family, and community; professional learning; leadership; and

school culture needed for a "successful school" are present in every school; however, each factor must be strategically and passionately utilized through the meticulous touch of an educational leader working with masterful educators. The presence of factors alone cannot create success. The teacher is the most significant resource in the classroom. The perceptions of educators have a direct influence on their classroom performance. The classroom teacher is responsible for the presence or lack of the factors of success applied to individual classroom instruction. The culmination of success may be found in the strategic mixture of key ingredients such as collaboration, strong leadership, and professional learning within a school. The process of growth must be present in every educational institution. This researcher would illustrate this point by considering a baker preparing a cake. There are key ingredients present in every cake that has ever been served. However, the strategic combination and measurement of the ingredients, the precise temperature of the oven, and the presentation of the delicacy make all the difference in the enjoyment of the culinary delight.

Factors of success, or to use Edmonds' (1979) term, "effective school correlates," must be present within an educational community in order for there to be an atmosphere of academic achievement. As researcher Larry Lezotte (1992) stated, "Effective school process is simple; it is just not easy, and it is never ending." Carter (2000) recommended in his study on high-poverty, high-performance schools that the schools establish relationships with the parents in order to support and motivate students. Effective educational leadership should teach parents as well as students. Education must become a thing of pride and a force of stability in an impoverished community. James Coleman (1966) believed that a student's sense of control of his environment, the verbal skills of

teachers, and the student's family background had an impact on the student's academic success.

Based on the results of this study, it is critical for administrators to "set the sails" of a school toward the positive and the pursuit of excellence in all areas. It is imperative that the teachers work together to meet the needs of the students within the middle school team. As seen from the data gathered from the teacher perceptions within this study, teachers feel they are adequately educating. The area of concern, as gathered from comments given by teachers within this study, is that the attitude that permeates throughout the classrooms and hallways must be that of excellence and high expectations, and the avoidance of distrust and frustration. The positive attitudes of Group 1 created a difference in comparison to the negative attitudes exhibited in the comments of Group 2. The mantra of S1 School, "Attitude is Everything," may be a truism upon which educators need to focus.

Implications

The findings of this study imply that the combination and strategic application of many factors must be orchestrated within a school to achieve success. The question of how a successful school creates and sustains success must be considered. The practices of one school within this study that was at one time considered a "needs improvement" school but has achieved and sustained success over the past five years may be found and replicated through the daily expectations listed. The model that follows has been created by the administrative team within this middle school. The school, for the purpose of this study, will be called Rural Middle School.

An increase in test scores over a five year span suggests the practices of Rural Middle School to be worthy of replication. The steadfastness of the work ethic combined with the teacher retention rate contributes to the sustained success of the program. The model illustrated below reflects the identified factors of a successful school. The four basic areas that construct The Rural Middle School Model are the culture of success, the school focus, the daily expectations, and the best practices of the effective teaching component. All of these factors are mirrored in the survey items utilized for this study. Further examination into each area reveals the intricate connection and the underlying culture of the school. The culture of success component at Rural Middle School is multi-faceted. "The Big 3" is a daily reminder of the high expectations for students and faculty. These three major indicators consist of attendance, discipline and school work. Daily attendance is expected of all involved, including the custodians, cafeteria staff, office staff, teachers, students and administrators.

Kai Zen Continuous Improvement

Love Kids

Be Positive

Content Maps

Look Fors

Extending/Refining
Specific strategies to gain deeper understanding of content

Celebration

The Big 3

Writing in all subjects

Summarizing
Check for understanding during the lesson

Build Confidence

Our Culture of Success

Units

Take responsibilty for the success of all students

LFS

Rural Middle School

Vocabulary
Content maps to emphasize, Frayer Model, word maps, use in context during lesson

Prepare for Game Day

High Expectations

No Excuses

Graphic Organizers
Talk/write about them

Standards Based

Enagage all Students

Think Safety Supervision

Paid to Plan

Make Kids Think

Our Focus

Help our weakest players

Collaboration

LFS

Daily Expectations

Enthusiasm

The 3 Rs: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships

Make Learning Fun

Humor

Figure 5.1

Illustration of The Rural Middle School Model

Next on the major indicator list is discipline. The number of discipline referrals has decreased due in part to the daily reminder to improve behavior. Third on the major indicator list is school work. High expectations are placed on each student by each teacher. There is bell-to-bell instruction, meaning that quality instruction is carried out from the beginning of class to the end of every class with each student actively engaged in academics. The school administrators continually remind teachers of these goals and monitor practices to ensure all individuals are working toward them.

Teachers are expected to take responsibility for the success of their students. Summarizing strategies take place throughout the lesson to ensure that learning is taking

place. If appropriate learning is not evidenced, teachers are responsible for using differentiated instruction, which involves re-teaching the content in ways that all students can grasp the concepts. Building confidence and being positive are important parts of the culture of success in that our students are with us to be "built up," and never "torn down." At Rural Middle School the educators set high expectations for all with a "no excuses" attitude. The mantra of "no excuses" serves well the attitude for the sustained success of this school. The Japanese phrase "Kai Zen" translates to "continuous improvement," and this is yet another mantra with which the faculty and students are familiar. This thought emphasizes the desire for daily improvement.

The Rural Middle School Model includes celebration in academics, attendance and discipline. There are reward celebrations each quarter which provide credibility for the goals set by our students. Preparation for "Game Day," the culmination of the academic year, when the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) is given, is the ultimate achievement for our students. Undergirding all else, however, is the all-important component of our culture of success: Love kids.

The focus component consists of five areas: Standards-based curriculum and assessments, teacher collaboration, use of Learning Focused School (LFS) strategies (research-based teaching methods) engagement of all students, and helping students who need extra attention. The implementation of these exemplary teaching strategies is a critical part of the success of the students. Benchmark assessments are given using questions based on the instruction from state-mandated curriculum. These are tests that are given to all students on a regular basis using questions that are formatted much like the standardized test that is given at the end of the year.

The daily expectations of The Rural Middle School Model are all-encompassing. The high expectations of all students and faculty in the building are key components, and thus the motivation. The faculty is "paid to plan," and they know that the expectation of collaborative planning and the monitoring of this program are ongoing. Making students think is not just an understanding; it is the Rural Middle School way. Safety of the students is prioritized by constant supervision. Enthusiasm, humor, and making the learning fun are emphasized daily in the classrooms. Rigor, relevance, and relationships are foundational in the educational experience of Rural Middle School.

Last in The Rural Middle School Model is the exemplary teaching model of implementing strategies consistently and pervasively in every classroom. These strategies are the key elements used in the teaching of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), which is the required curriculum that has been written and approved for the use of all students in Georgia. Content maps, which organize the order in which standards are taught, are posted for the clarity and direction of each subject. Graphic organizers, another part of the teaching strategies that are designed to allow students to organize their thoughts, are used as platforms for writing in all subjects. Extending and refining strategies are used to ensure deeper understanding of the content for all students. Summarizing by the students to check for understanding is used throughout the lesson. Administrative teams constantly check the implementation of all the elements of the teaching strategies using the "5 by 5 Look-For" checklist, which consists of all administrators using a checklist to observe at least five classrooms for five minutes each day.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to four public middle schools located in the North Georgia area. Maintaining the pristine effect of comparing only four schools within a small geographic area such as North Georgia allowed for more precise information. The study was based on the perceptions of the teachers as given within a survey constructed by the Georgia Department of Education. While it may not be appropriate to generalize results to other populations and schools, the data does give information on factors that are addressed in all schools.

Teachers may feel answers given on an instrument created by the state may impact their employment, which could skew their answers. Open-ended comments were taken from the anonymous contributions of the teachers allowing for any type of response to be accepted. Though anonymity was assured for all participants, it is impossible to know if all teachers were truly honest in answering survey items.

Also among the limitations of this study was the amount of time within which this research took place. An instrument that is limited to a single assessment may not realize its full potential. The pressure associated with achieving Adequate Yearly Progress may well alter the responses of the teachers. Educators' responses requiring self-evaluation would most appropriately be positive in the area of academic achievement, due to their direct involvement, while they may rate lower on areas that concern performance of others in the school, such as leadership.

The analysis of factors of success within education is an intricate topic. The factors prevalent in this particular study, though research-based, are limited to time and

the ability of this researcher. The parameters of a topic of success for the pursuit of

excellence in education are far-reaching and never-ending.

Recommendations

The results of the data found within this study may prove helpful within the

specific schools from which the teacher perceptions were given. Each school has a unique

set of factors that should be practiced in precise ways to secure success for each specific

learning community. Communication among administration and teachers is essential for

the continuation of success. Replication of factors that have proven successful for a

particular school may be found helpful for another, as well as the continued practice of

these strategies insuring sustained success within the schools being studied.

Other researchers are encouraged to continue in this study of factors that influence

success in education. Teachers' perceptions, as well as their attitude toward teaching and

learning, are critical to the education of children. Replication of this study using a more

precise survey instrument could prove beneficial in the quest for seeking the differences

between failing schools and successful schools.

The question of how success can be sustained as well as how the change toward

success took place needs to be addressed. A pre-post study could be conducted in order to

obtain this information. The information gathered from past test scores as well as

thoughts gleaned from teachers would supply valuable data to be considered.

The use of qualitative methodology may prove to be effective in the study of the

perceptions of the teachers. An in-depth look at the thoughts, feelings, and ideas

concerning the factors of success within education from the aspect of teacher perception

may be more fitted to qualitative research. Taking the opportunity to allow for a true

description of the environment within which the research took place would enlighten the

insight of the study. Giving the reader a detailed snapshot of the participants in the

research would enhance the analysis.

Education is a never-ending process. Leadership in every aspect of every

community should strive for excellence and Godly wisdom to create successful

environments to nurture children. Prayer in public school may be for some a topic of

controversy; however, prayer for public school should be on the hearts of all involved in

the field of education. Repeating the opening sentence of this study, the single most

important need for our future existence is the education of children.

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APPENDIX A

Certified Staff Survey

DIRECTIONS: Carefully consider each of the described actions or conditions. Then select the option that best reflects your opinion regarding its frequency or status. Additional comments or clarification may be added in the comment column or at the end of the survey. Choices for responses will be: **No Basis to Judge, Never, Infrequently, Often, Consistently**

GAPSS Analysis

Georgia Department of Education

Kathy Cox, State Superintendent

1. What is your school/system seven digit code?

2. What is your school name?

3. What system do you teach in?

CURRICULUM:

4. Our written curriculum documents (e.g., maps and units) are aligned to GPS/QCC and are used to guide instruction. C-1.1

5. Our curriculum has been aligned horizontally and vertically in order to support students' mastery of the GPS/QCC standards. C-1.2

6. Our curriculum maps and units are designed to ensure all students participate in a curriculum that requires depth of understanding and rigor. C-1.3

7. We meet to collaborate on the design and implementation of the curriculum. C-2.1, C-2.2

8. Our teachers have a shared understanding of what students are expected to know, do and understand at all grade levels and in all subject areas. C-2.1, C-2.2

9. Our teachers analyze student work collaboratively to build consensus for a common understanding of proficiency and rigor. C-2.2, C-3.2

10. Administrators and teacher leaders monitor and evaluate implementation of the curriculum through a consistent and systematic school-wide process. C-3.1

11. Performance data and the review of student work are used to revise curriculum implementation and to align resources. C-3.2

12. Comments:

INSTRUCTION:

13. An organizing framework (e.g., Opening/Activating Strategy, Teaching/Student Work time, Summarizing/Sharing Work) that aligns curriculum, assessment, and instruction is utilized to plan quality teaching and learning. I-1.1

14. Teachers plan together to design, monitor, and revise instruction. I-1.2

15. Learning goals are aligned with GPS/QCC. I-1.3

16. Learning goals are explicitly communicated to our students. I-1.3

17. Teachers use a variety of research-based instructional strategies. (e.g., compare/contrast, summarizing, higher-order questioning, advanced organizers) I-2.1

18. Teachers emphasize and encourage learners to use higher-order thinking skills (e.g., compare/contrast, classify), processes (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making) and mental habits of the mind (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking). I-2.

19. Differentiated instruction, adjustment of content, product, process and/or learning environment, is provided to support students according to their instructional needs. I-2.3

20. We utilize flexible grouping based on ongoing diagnosis and formative assessment to enhance student learning. I-2.5

21. Systematic and data-driven interventions are required for our students who need additional assistance to master standards. I-2.6

22. Technology is effectively used to maximize student learning. I-2.7

23. Our students are engaged in work that is authentic, standards-driven and requires higherorder reasoning. I-3.1

24. Teachers and students work collaboratively to establish high expectations and challenging learning goals. I-3.2

25. Students identify and apply evaluation criteria and monitor achievement of those criteria utilizing such tools as benchmark work, rubrics, anchor papers, scoring guides, and evaluation checklists. I-3.3

26. Comments:

ASSESSMENT:

27. We use a comprehensive system for assessing student progress toward meeting the GPS/QCC. A-1.1

28. Based on learning gaps and problems identified through assessment data, instruction is adjusted to improve overall and individual student achievement. A-1.2

29. Teachers collaborate to design assessments aligned to the GPS/QCC. A-1.3

30. We utilize flexible grouping based on ongoing diagnosis and formative assessment to enhance student learning. I 2.5

31. Teachers use a variety of formative assessments to monitor student progress and adjust instruction. A-2.2

32 Teachers use a variety of summative assessment tasks to evaluate student achievement of GPS/QCC. A-2.3

33. Collaboration on data analysis guides and informs grade-level and school-wide decisionmaking. A-2.3

34. Our student's ability to self-monitor and self-evaluate is enhanced through the use a variety of assessments (e.g., constructed-response test items, reflective assessments, academic prompts, performance tasks and projects) A-2.4

35. Assessment data is used to plan and adjust for instruction for each student, subgroup of students and the school as a whole. A-3.1

36. Comments:

PLANNING/ORGANIZATION:

37. Our school's vision and mission guides and informs our continuous school improvement process. PO-1.1

38. Our school improvement plan was created with staff input. PO-2.1

39. Our administrators and the school leadership team monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan and its impact upon student achievement. PO-2.3

40. Our school and our district work together to ensure resources are allocated to support the achievement of our school improvement goals. PO-3.1

41. Human, technological, and material resources are effectively selected and used to ensure the academic success of all learners. PO-3.2

42. A safe learning environment is planned, implemented, and maintained by our school staff and administrators. PO-4.1

43. Instructional time is maximized, and no interruptions occur to detract from time on learning. PO-4.2

44. Our school facility is adequately maintained, clean, and conducive for teaching and learning. PO-4.3

45. Comments:

STUDENT, FAMILY, and COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

46. Opportunities for communication exist in both directions between the home and school. SFC-1.1

47. Opportunities exist for parents to participate in training and informational sessions to enhance student performance. SFC-1.2

48. Parents feel welcome in our school. SFC-1.4

49. Opportunities exist for parents and community members to participate in school governance, decision-making and problem-solving. SFC-2.1

50. School and community partnerships exist to provide a network of support for our students. SFC-3.1, SFC-3.2

51. Comments:

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

52. Teachers and administrators participate in job-embedded professional learning and collaboration addressing curriculum, assessment, instruction, and technology (e.g. developing lesson plans, examining g student work, monitoring student progress) PL-1.1, PL-1.5

53. The principal and other school leaders set clear expectations and monitor the effectiveness of professional learning on teacher practices and student learning. PL-1.2, PL-2.2, PL-2.5

54. Opportunities exist for teachers in our school to participate in instructional leadership

development. PL-1.3

55. The principal and other leaders plan professional learning by utilizing data (student learning, demographic, perception, and process) to determine adult learning priorities. PL-1.4, PL-2.1

56. Resources are allocated to support job-embedded professional learning that is aligned with high priority school improvement goals. PL-1.6

57. Teams meet to review and study current research to make informed instructional decisions. PL-2.3

58. The staff participates in long-term (two- to three-year period) in-depth professional learning which is aligned with our school improvement goals. PL-2.4

59. Teachers and administrators have the knowledge and skills (e.g., group decision-making strategies, stages of group development, setting norms, using protocols, etc.) necessary to collaborate. PL-2.7

60. Our professional learning prepares us in practices that convey respect for diverse cultural backgrounds and high expectations for all students. PL-3.1

61. Our professional learning prepares teachers to adjust instruction and assessment to meet the needs of diverse learners. PL-3.2

62. Our teachers participate in professional learning to deepen their content knowledge. PL-3.2

63. Our professional learning designs are purposeful, and are aligned with specific individual and group needs. PL-3.3

64. Professional learning in our school provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn how to involve families in their children's education. PL-3.4

65. Comments:

LEADERSHIP:

66. Our principal and school administrators exhibit a deep understanding of curriculum, assessment and instruction. L-1.1

67. Our principal and school administrators are actively involved in the learning community, including serving as active members on study teams and promoting meaningful professional learning. L-1.2, L-1.3

68. Our principal and school administrators keep the school focused on student learning and promote sustained and continuous improvement. L-1.3

69. Our principal and school administrators utilize multiple types of data to drive and monitor school-wide instructional decisions. L-1.4

70. Our principal and school administrators implement policies, practices, and procedures that ensure a safe and orderly learning environment. L-2.1

71. Our principal and school administrators maximize the availability and distribution of instructional resources (human, material and technology) focused on school learning goals. L-2.2

72. Our principal and school administrators are visible to staff, students and parents, and participate in subject and/or grade level meetings. L-2.3

73. Our principal and administrators collaborate with staff members and other stake holders to elicit input and provide opportunities for shared decision-making and problem solving. L-3.1

74. Staff members have opportunities to serve in a variety of leadership roles. L 3.2

75. Our school uses external resources (e.g., Central Office, RESA, GLRS, Universities, ETTC, GaDOE) to support school improvement initiatives. L-3.3

76. Our school has a fully operational leadership team (school improvement team, design team, etc.) that is representative of our entire staff. The team conducts regular, results-driven meetings and exists to address student achievement and overall academic success. L-4.1

77. Our leadership team has developed and uses a protocol for handling business, making decisions, and solving problems. L-4.2

78. Our leadership team uses an ongoing, data-driven decision-making process to identify student achievement and organizational productivity needs. L-4.3

79. Comments:

SCHOOL CULTURE:

80. Our school provides support to promote the academic achievement of all learners. (Examples of support: counseling, academic advisements, transitional experiences) SC-1.1

81. Our school supports and enhances the social and emotional growth and development of all learners. (Examples of support: advisement, mentoring, coaching, shadowing, counseling services) SC-1.2, SC-1.3

82. School policies, practices, and experiences promote respect for individual differences. SC- 2.1

83. Our school celebrates the achievements and accomplishments of our students, staff and school community. SC-2.2

84. Our school culture reflects an atmosphere of trust and openness among all

stakeholders. SC- 2.4

85. Comments:

APPENDIX B

Results of Certified Staff Survey by Groups

The table below lists the results of the Certified Staff Survey as administered to the participants at the four schools included in this study. Group 1 consists of teachers from two schools that have obtained Adequate Yearly Progress; Group 2 consists of two schools that at the time of this study had not obtained Adequate Yearly Progress. The items that called for the perceptions of those included in the study are listed as well as the number of responses given on the instrument. The percentages per each group are also indicated.

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 4. Our written curriculum documents (e.g., maps and units) are aligned to GPS/QCC and are used to guide instruction.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	7 5%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	0 0%	21 15%
Often	4 4%	25 17%
Consistently	104 96%	90 63%
Item 5. Our curriculum has been aligned horizontically and vertically in order to support students' mastery of the GPS/QCC standards.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	7 5%
Never	0 0%	8 6%
Infrequently	4 4%	16 11%
Often	23 21%	37 26%
Consistently	80 74%	75 52%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 6. Our curriculum maps and units are designed to ensure all students participate in a curriculum that requires depth of understanding and rigor.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	17 12%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	14 10%
Often	21 19%	47 33%
Consistently	86 80%	56 39%
Item 7. We meet to collaborate on the design and implementation of the curriculum.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	2 1%
Never	0 0%	8 6%
Infrequently	2 2%	17 12%
Often	22 20%	46 32%
Consistently	83 77%	71 50%
Item 8. Our teachers have a shared understanding of what students are expected to know, do and understand at all grade levels and in all subject areas.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	16 11%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	3 2%	3 2%
Often	30 28%	56 39%
Consistently	74 69%	69 48%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 9. Our teachers analyze student work collaboratively to build consensus for a common understanding of proficiency and rigor.		
o Basis to Judge	3 3%	3 2%
Never	2 2%	16 11%
Infrequently	13 12%	46 32%
Often	44 41%	67 47%
Consistently	56 52%	12 8%
Item 10. Administrators and teacher leaders monitor and evaluate implementation of the curriculum through a consistent and systematic school-wide process.		
No Basis to Judge	2 2%	1 1%
Never	0 0%	10 7%
Infrequently	2 2%	33 23%
Often	20 18%	52 36%
Consistently	84 78%	48 43%
Item 11. Performance data and the review of student work are used to revise curriculum implementation and to align resources.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	11 8%
Never	0 0%	6 4%
Infrequently	3 3%	23 16%
Often	27 25%	79 55%
Consistently	78 72%	24 17%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 13. An organizing framework (e.g., Opening/Activating Strategy, Teacher/Student Work Time, Summarizing/Sharing Work) that aligns curriculum, assessment, and instruction is utilized to plan quality teaching and learning.		
No Basis to Judge	2 2%	2 1%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	5 3%
Often	25 23%	59 41%
Consistently	80 74%	77 54%
Item 14. Teachers plan together to design, monitor, and revise instruction.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	0 0%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	2 2%	25 17%
Often	22 20%	25 17%
Consistently	83 77%	90 63%
Item 15. Learning goals are aligned with GPS/QCC.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	3 2%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	4 3%
Often	6 6%	8 6%
Consistently	101 93%	128 90%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 16. Learning goals are explicitly communicated to our students.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	2 1%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	4 3%
Often	23 21%	50 35%
Consistently	83 77%	88 62%
Item 17. Teachers use a variety of research-based instructional strategies. (e.g., compare/contrast, summarizing, higher-order questioning, advanced organizers)		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	3 2%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	8 6%
Often	20 19%	48 34%
Consistently	86 80%	85 59%
Item 18. Teachers emphasize and encourage learners to use higher-order thinking skills (e.g., compare, contrast, classify), processes (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making) and mental habits of the mind (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking).		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	0 0%
Never	0 0%	9 6%
Infrequently	4 4%	17 12%
Often	40 37%	52 36%
Consistently	64 59%	65 45%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 19. Differentiated instruction, adjustment of content, product, process and/or learning environment, is provided to support students according to their instructional needs.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	9 6%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	5 4%	15 10%
Often	43 40%	71 50%
Consistently	59 55%	49 34%
Item 20. We utilize flexible grouping based on ongoing diagnosis and formative assessment to enhance student learning.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	2 1%
Never	1 1%	4 3%
Infrequently	8 8%	23 16%
Often	50 46%	55 38%
Consistently	49 45%	59 41%
Item 21. Systematic and data-driven interventions are required for our students who need additional assistance to master standards.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	3 2%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	2 2%	19 13%
Often	36 33%	72 50%
Consistently	70 65%	47 33%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 22. Technology is effectively used to maximize student learning.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	0 0%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	10 9%	13 9%
Often	38 35%	39 27%
Consistently	58 54%	92 64%
Item 23. Our students are engaged in work that is authentic, standards-driven and requires higher-order reasoning.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	10 7%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	2 1%	19 13%
Often	32 30%	55 38%
Consistently	74 69%	60 42%
Item 24. Teachers and students work collaboratively to establish high expectations and challenging learning goals.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	4 3%
Never	3 3%	18 13%
Infrequently	9 8%	56 39%
Often	43 40%	40 28%
Consistently	53 49%	35 24%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 25. Students identify and apply evaluation criteria and monitor achievement of those criteria utilizing such tools as benchmark work, rubrics, anchor papers, scoring guides, and evaluation checklists.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	2 1%
Never	1 1%	18 13%
Infrequently	13 12%	42 29%
Often	38 35%	58 41%
Consistently	55 51%	24 17%
Item 27. We use a comprehensive system for assessing student progress toward meeting the GPS/QCC.		
No Basis to Judge	2 1%	2 1%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	1 1%	21 15%
Often	18 17%	77 54%
Consistently	87 81%	39 27%
Item 28. Based on learning gaps and problems identified through assessment data, instruction is adjusted to improve overall and individual student achievement.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	1 1%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	0 0%	22 15%
Often	31 29%	59 41%
Consistently	77 71%	62 43%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 29. Teachers collaborate to design assessments aligned to the GPS/QCC.		
No Basis to Judge	3 3%	6 4%
Never	0 0%	2 1%
Infrequently	2 2%	22 15%
Often	25 23%	45 32%
Consistently	78 72%	69 48%
Item 30. Diagnostic assessments are used to adjust instruction to accommodate students' readiness levels.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	6 4%
Never	0 0%	3 2%
Infrequently	5 4%	21 15%
Often	44 41%	78 55%
Consistently	59 55%	36 25%
Item 31. Teachers use a variety of formative assessments to monitor student progress and adjust instruction.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	2 1%
Never	0 0%	2 1%
Infrequently	1 1%	13 9%
Often	33 31%	76 53%
Consistently	74 68%	51 36%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 32. Teachers use a variety of summative assessment task to evaluate student achievement of GPS/QCC.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	4 3%
Never	0 0%	2 1%
Infrequently	2 2%	12 8%
Often	25 23%	78 55%
Consistently	80 74%	48 34%
Item 33. Collaboration on data analysis guides and informs grade-level and school-wide decision-making.		
No Basis to Judge	2 2%	9 6%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	10 7%
Often	36 33%	63 44%
Consistently	69 64%	62 43%
Item 34. Our students' ability to self-monitor and self-evaluate is enhanced through the use of a variety of assessments (e.g., constructed-response test items, reflective assessments, academic prompts, performance tasks and projects).		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	3 2%
Never	0 0%	9 6%
Infrequently	22 20%	54 38%
Often	46 43%	74 52%
Consistently	39 36%	7 5%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 35. Assessment data are used to plan and adjust instruction for each student, subgroup of students, and the school as a whole.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	8 6%
Never	1 1%	2 1%
Infrequently	4 4%	17 12%
Often	36 33%	64 45%
Consistently	66 61%	53 37%
Item 37. Our school's vision and mission guides and informs our continuous school improvement process.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	6 4%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	2 2%	13 9%
Often	22 20%	50 35%
Consistently	83 77%	72 50%
Item 38. Our school improvement plan was created with staff input.		
No Basis to Judge	4 3%	6 4%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	0 0%	8 6%
Often	17 16%	15 10%
Consistently	86 80%	116 81%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 39. Our administrators and the school leadership team monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan and its impact upon student achievement.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	12 8%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	2 1%	20 14%
Often	20 19%	38 27%
Consistently	85 79%	74 52%
Item 40. Our school and our district work together to ensure resources are allocated to support the achievement of our school improvement goals.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	17 12%
Never	3 2%	7 5%
Infrequently	1 1%	12 8%
Often	31 29%	53 37%
Consistently	73 68%	55 38%
Item 41. Human, technological, and material resources are effectively selected and used to ensure the academic success of all learners.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	5 3%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	3 3%	19 13%
Often	35 32%	57 40%
Consistently	70 65%	59 41%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 42. A safe learning environment is planned, implemented, and maintained by our school staff and administrators.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	3 2%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	8 6%
Often	7 6%	14 10%
Consistently	100 93%	119 83%
Item 43. Instructional time is maximized, and no interruptions occur to detract from time on learning.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	4 3%
Never	0 0%	3 2%
Infrequently	7 6%	32 22%
Often	42 39%	68 48%
Consistently	59 55%	37 26%
Item 44. Our school facility is adequately maintained, clean, and conducive for teaching and learning.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	0 0%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	3 3%	9 6%
Often	10 9%	21 15%
Consistently	95 88%	114 80%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 46. Opportunities for communication exist in both directions between the home and school.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	2 1%
Never	1 1%	1 1%
Infrequently	2 2%	21 15%
Often	35 32%	80 56%
Consistently	70 65%	40 28%
Item 47. Opportunities exist for parents to participate in training and informational sessions to enhance students' performance.		
No Basis to Judge	10 9%	12 8%
Never	13 12%	24 17%
Infrequently	40 37%	55 38%
Often	28 26%	48 34%
Consistently	17 16%	6 4%
Item 48. Parents are welcome in our school.		
No Basis to Judge	4 3%	5 3%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	6 6%	24 17%
Often	30 28%	52 36%
Consistently	67 62%	62 43%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 49. Opportunities exist for parents and community members to participate in school governance, decision-making, and problem-solving.		
No Basis to Judge	8 7%	6 4%
Never	1 1%	7 5%
Infrequently	20 19%	37 26%
Often	39 36%	54 38%
Consistently	40 37%	40 28%
Item 50. School and community partnerships exist to provide a network of support for our students.		
No Basis to Judge	2 2%	12 8%
Never	0 0%	13 9%
Infrequently	7 6%	23 16%
Often	45 42%	66 46%
Consistently	54 50%	30 21%
Item 52. Teachers and administrators participate in job-embedded professional learning and collaboration addressing curriculum, assessment, instruction, and technology (e.g., developing lesson plans, examining student work, monitoring student progress).		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	4 3%
Never	0 0%	1 1%
Infrequently	6 5%	6 4%
Often	32 30%	39 27%
Consistently	70 65%	94 66%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 53. The principal and other school leaders set clear expectations and monitor the effectiveness of professional learning on teacher practices and students learning.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	1 1%
Never	0 0%	1 1%
Infrequently	3 3%	28 20%
Often	17 16%	56 39%
Consistently	88 81%	58 41%
Item 54. Opportunities exist for teachers in our school to participate in instructional leadership development.		
No Basis to Judge	5 4%	5 3%
Never	0 0%	11 8%
Infrequently	16 15%	29 20%
Often	28 26%	59 41%
Consistently	59 55%	40 28%
Item 55. The principal and other leaders plan professional learning by utilizing data (student learning, demographic, perception, and process) to determine adult learning priorities.		
No Basis to Judge	8 7%	12 8%
Never	1 1%	1 1%
Infrequently	6 6%	31 22%
Often	27 25%	58 41%
Consistently	66 61%	42 29%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 56. Resources are allocated to support job-embedded professional learning that is aligned with high priority school improvement goals.		
No Basis to Judge	3 3%	8 6%
Never	1 1%	4 3%
Infrequently	8 7%	39 27%
Often	32 30%	55 38%
Consistently	64 59%	37 26%
Item 57. Teams meet to review and study current research to make informed instructional decisions.		
No Basis to Judge	7 7%	9 6%
Never	3 3%	13 9%
Infrequently	14 13%	48 33%
Often	36 33%	49 34%
Consistently	48 44%	24 17%
Item 58. The staff participates in long-term (two-to-three year period) in-depth professional learning which is aligned with our school improvement goals.		
No Basis to Judge	5 5%	12 8%
Never	6 6%	8 6%
Infrequently	10 9%	45 31%
Often	26 24%	42 29%
Consistently	61 56%	47 33%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 59. Teachers and administrators have the knowledge and skills (e.g., group decision-making strategies, stages of group development, setting norms, using protocols) necessary to collaborate.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	3 2%
Never	0 0%	9 6%
Infrequently	4 4%	37 25%
Often	22 20%	40 27%
Consistently	81 75%	55 38%
Item 60. Our professional learning prepares us in practices that convey respect for diverse cultural backgrounds and high expectations for all students.		
No Basis to Judge	3 3%	4 3%
Never	1 1%	11 8%
Infrequently	7 6%	30 21%
Often	31 29%	57 40%
Consistently	66 61%	41 29%
Item 61. Our professional learning prepares teachers to adjust instruction and assessment to meet the needs of diverse learners.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	3 2%
Never	1 1%	7 5%
Infrequently	9 9%	28 20%
Often	35 32%	61 43%
Consistently	63 58%	45 31%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 62. Our teachers participate in professional learning to deepen their content knowledge.		
No Basis to Judge	5 5%	4 3%
Never	1 1%	9 6%
Infrequently	7 6%	11 7%
Often	42 39%	67 46%
Consistently	53 49%	52 36%
Item 63. Our professional learning designs are purposeful and are aligned with specific individual and group needs.		
No Basis to Judge	2 2%	7 5%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	5 5%	29 20%
Often	35 32%	63 44%
Consistently	66 61%	41 29%
Item 64. Professional learning in our school provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn how to involve families in their children's education.		
No Basis to Judge	6 6%	7 5%
Never	8 7%	39 27%
Infrequently	37 34%	43 30%
Often	30 28%	43 30%
Consistently	27 25%	11 8%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 66. Our principal and other school administrators exhibit a deep understanding of curriculum, assessment, and instruction.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	2 1%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	26 18%
Often	25 23%	38 27%
Consistently	82 76%	68 48%
Item 67. Our principal and other school administrators are actively involved in the learning community, including serving as active members on study teams and promoting meaningful professional learning.		
No Basis to Judge	2 2%	14 10%
Never	1 1%	2 1%
Infrequently	4 4%	17 12%
Often	31 28%	44 31%
Consistently	70 65%	67 47%
Item 68. Our principal and other school administrators keep the school focused on student learning and promote sustained and continuous improvement.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	0 0%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	0 0%	22 15%
Often	15 12%	50 35%
Consistently	93 88%	72 50%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 69. Our principal and other school administrators utilize multiple types of data to drive and monitor school-wide instructional decisions.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	7 5%
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Infrequently	1 1%	16 11%
Often	17 16%	45 31%
Consistently	90 83%	66 46%
Item 70. Our principal and other school administrators implement policies, practices, and procedures that ensure a safe and orderly learning environment.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	2 1%
Never	0 0%	5 3%
Infrequently	0 0%	21 15%
Often	15 14%	36 25%
Consistently	93 86%	80 56%
Item 71. Our principal and other school administrators maximize the availability and distribution of instructional resources (human, material, and technology) focused on school learning goals.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	9 6%
Never	0 0%	2 1%
Infrequently	2 2%	9 7%
Often	22 20%	43 30%
Consistently	83 77%	70 48%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 72. Our principal and other school administrators are visible to staff, students, and parents and participate in subject and/or grade level meetings.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	3 2%
Never	3 2%	1 1%
Infrequently	8 8%	28 20%
Often	28 26%	59 41%
Consistently	68 63%	53 37%
Item 73. Our principal and other school administrators collaborate with staff members and other stakeholders to elicit input and provide opportunities for shared decision-making and problem-solving.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	1 1%
Never	0 0%	9 6%
Infrequently	2 1%	24 17%
Often	46 43%	56 39%
Consistently	60 56%	52 36%
Item 74. Staff members have opportunities to serve in a variety of leadership roles.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	4 3%
Never	0 0%	5 3%
Infrequently	8 8%	33 23%
Often	37 34%	60 42%
Consistently	63 58%	42 29%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 75. Our school uses external resources (e.g., Central Office, RESA, GLRS, Universities, ETTC, GaDOE) to support school improvement initiatives.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	7 5%
Never	0 0%	5 3%
Infrequently	5 4%	26 18%
Often	18 17%	46 32%
Consistently	84 78%	59 41%
Item 76. Our school has a fully operational Leadership Team (School Improvement Team, Design Team, etc.) that is representative of our entire staff. The team conducts regular, results-driven meetings and exists to address students' achievement and overall academic success.		
No Basis to Judge	1 1%	11 8%
Never	0 0%	19 13%
Infrequently	2 1%	11 8%
Often	19 18%	45 31%
Consistently	86 80%	68 48%
Item 77. Our Leadership Team has developed and uses a protocol for handling business, making decisions, and solving problems.		
No Basis to Judge	7 7%	28 20%
Never	1 1%	0 0%
Infrequently	2 2%	12 8%
Often	23 21%	41 29%
Consistently	75 69%	62 43%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 78. Our Leadership Team uses an on-going, data-driven decision-making process to identify student achievement and organizational productivity needs.		
No Basis to Judge	6 5%	7 5%
Never	0 0%	5 3%
Infrequently	2 2%	33 23%
Often	15 14%	32 22%
Consistently	85 79%	67 47%
Item 80. Our school provides support to promote the academic achievement of all learners (examples of support; counseling, academic advisement, transitional experiences).		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	6 4%
Never	1 1%	1 1%
Infrequently	1 1%	11 8%
Often	22 20%	56 39%
Consistently	84 78%	90 63%
Item 81. Our school supports and enhances the social and emotional growth and development of all learners (examples of support: advisement, mentoring, coaching, shadowing, counseling services).		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	4 3%
Never	1 1%	3 2%
Infrequently	2 2%	9 6%
Often	26 24%	59 41%
Consistently	79 73%	70 49%

Choices for responses	G1 N= 108	G2 N= 143
Item 82. School policies, practices, and experiences promote respect for individual differences.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	6 4%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	2 2%	16 11%
Often	26 24%	50 35%
Consistently	80 74%	68 48%
Item 83. Our school celebrates the achievements and accomplishments of our students, staff, and school community.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	4 3%
Never	0 0%	4 3%
Infrequently	1 1%	18 13%
Often	24 22%	58 41%
Consistently	83 77%	60 42%
Item 84. Our school culture reflects and atmosphere of trust and openness among all stakeholders.		
No Basis to Judge	0 0%	6 4%
Never	0 0%	7 5%
Infrequently	5 4%	34 24%
Often	37 34%	36 25%
Consistently	67 62%	51 36%

Table B.1

Results of the Certified Staff Survey

APPENDIX C

Human Subjects Review Committee Forms – Research Exemption Request

Research Exemption Request   Ref. # _____

Liberty University
Committee On the Use of Human Research Subjects

_____

1. Project Title: An Analysis of Factors that Influence Success in a Low
Socioeconomic Georgia Middle School

2. Please list all sources of funding. If no outside funding is used state "unfunded".
    Unfunded

3a. Principal Investigator: Faith Simpson – Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
        Phone – 770-654-6989, E-mail – fsimpson@banks.k12.ga.us,
        correspondence address – 1446 Lakeshore Circle, Gainesville, GA 30501

3b. Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Karen Parker – Professor, Liberty University
        Department - School of Education, Phone,
        E-mail - kparker@liberty.edu

Anticipated Duration of Study   November 2008   March 2009
                                From   To

4. Briefly describe the purpose of the study.
        The purpose of this study is to analyze factors that influenced the success of
a low socioeconomic middle school in North Georgia. The characteristics of
failure were evidenced within the makeup of this particular school setting yet there
has been an increase in student achievement in many areas including Adequate
Yearly Progress for the past four years. This study will search for specific factors
that account for the continued success.

5. Description of the study:
        A survey conducted by the Georgia Department of Education used to gather
teacher perception in reference to specific areas such as curriculum, assessment,
instruction, planning and organization, student, family and community,
professional learning, leadership and school culture. This instrument is utilized
within the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards review. The
teacher perceptions resulting from data collected using that instrument will be
compared to create an analysis.

Teachers will be asked to log on to a specific web site in order to participate in an electronic format of the instrument. The results of the information will be compiled by the Georgia Department of Education and sent to the researcher. Teacher perceptions from each school will be analyzed to seek recurring trends. A T-test will be performed to determine the statistical significance of the differences.

The discussion of the results will focus on the effects of the teacher's perception of the research questions presented in the study. A qualitative component, gleaned from the comment sections of the survey, will be used to gain insight from the teacher's perceptions.

Data will be stored confidentially by the researcher. Information from each school will be coded i.e. "school A" for the purpose of comparison.

6. Will subject's data be gathered anonymously? Yes, however schools will be coded in order to be compared.

7. Describe the subjects you intend to recruit. Teachers within the specific schools will be asked to participate in the survey.

I have read the Human Subjects *"Research Exemption Request Guidelines"*.

Principal Investigator Signature   Date   11/3/08

_____   _____
Faculty Sponsor   Date

APPENDIX D

Human Subjects Review Committee Forms – IRB Approval

Dear Faith,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. Attached you'll find the forms for those cases.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project. We will be glad to send you a written memo from the Liberty IRB, as needed, upon request.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

IRB Chair, Liberty University

Center for Counseling and Family Studies Liberty University

1971 University Boulevard

Lynchburg, VA 24502-2269

(434) 592-4054

Fax: (434) 522-0477