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A Case Study of a Priority Middle School Involved in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative

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A Case Study of a Priority Middle School Involved in the North Carolina Turnaround
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Abstract

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In 2007, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction included low-performing middle schools in its Turnaround Initiative. The purpose of this initiative was to offer support and guidance to designated low-performing middle schools across the state. This research study was a descriptive case study that involved a North Carolina priority middle school located in the north central part of the Piedmont, which served a diverse, low socioeconomic population. This research study investigated how the implementation of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative impacted the school's culture and reviewed student achievement trends for the years 2007-2010, covering 3 school years.

This descriptive case study used a mixed-methods design and looked at the implementation of the required Framework for Action based on the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria, as required of North Carolina Turnaround Initiative for middle schools. Through descriptive statistics, it evaluated teacher perceptions of five constructs of the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. Also, this study conducted focus groups and individual interviews to assess for any changes in the school culture and reviewed end-of-grade scores during 2007-2010 to ascertain if student achievement trends presented any change during the time the school was in the Turnaround Initiative.

The findings of this study indicated that the study school implemented its Framework for Action as required of middle schools that were involved in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative, and there was both a positive change in school culture and an improvement evidenced in student achievement trends. The results of this study are consistent with previous research supporting the importance of a positive school culture to school improvement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nature of the Problem

On October 22, 2008, the *Washington Post* reported that during a recent speech at a conference for women, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that the greatest risk to national security was our failing public education system. She went on to say that this failure of public instruction "could undermine the United States' ability to compete in a global economy" (Whitcomb & Osterman, 2008, p. 1). Condoleezza Rice was not the only one to recognize the condition of the current American public school system. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2008) published a report titled "21st Century Skills, Education, and Competiveness" that called for the public education system to reinvent education in order to prepare American students to compete with international students both academically and with the skills necessary to fill a competitive job market.

Because national leaders and national reports support the notion the public education system is failing, it has posed problems for public leaders to address. Between 1995 and 2005, the United States witnessed the loss of three million manufacturing jobs; however, 17 million jobs were created in the service sector (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008). The loss of the manufacturing jobs and the lack of student preparation for the new jobs present a problem for the U.S. economy. Since the job market has undergone such radical restructuring, preparing students to meet the job market demands is not only recognized as a national concern but an issue for states as well.

In October of 2008, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction published "Response to The Framework for Change: The Next Generation of School Standards, Assessments and Accountability" in response to the national outcry to prepare

American students for the workplace of the 21st Century (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008c). The American workplace has changed, and American students are leaving high school without the skills necessary to be college-ready or to compete in a global economy.

> The majority of the fastest-growing jobs that require a high school diploma, pay a salary above the poverty line for a family of four, and provide opportunities for career advancement and require knowledge and skills comparable to those expected of the first-year college student. (ACT: Research and Policy Issues, 2008, p. 1)

> The American workplace has changed from one where even a limited proficiency

in basic skills could assure employment that would support a family to one where having minimal skills severely limits employment opportunities often rendering a person unemployable (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Bill Gates, Microsoft Chairman, emphasized the urgency of the situation in a 2005 speech to the governors' conference when he stated,

> I am terrified for our workforce of tomorrow. In math and science, our fourth graders are among the top students in the world. By eighth grade they are in the middle of the pack. By 12th grade, U.S. students are scoring near the bottom of all industrialized nations. (Friedman, 2005, p. 9)

Though many American public school reform efforts have focused on the early childhood educational years and the high school years, it is becoming increasingly evident that students are beginning to fall behind during the middle-grade years.

According to William Schmidt, a professor of statistics from Michigan State University and a co-developer of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, "America hasn't set high enough standards, especially in math, where students generally

begin to fall behind in middle school" (Education News, 2011, para. 4). The failure of the middle grades has become a critical issue and garnered national attention. On June 26, 2009, House Representative Raul Grijava and Senator Jack Reed reintroduced the Success in the Middle Act, a bill that would authorize up to one billion in Title I grants to improve middle grades education (NMSA, 2009). The failure to assure that middle grade students maintain grade-level proficiency in reading, math, writing, and science impacts their abilities to achieve success in high school and beyond, whether attending college or entering the workforce, thereby impacting the nation. "The Forgotten Middle," a research report published by ACT, stated,

> that under current conditions, the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school. (ACT: Research and Policy Issues, 2008, p. 2)

Recognizing a need for middle grades reform in North Carolina, a task force was created in 2004 by the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction that released a report entitled "Last Best Chance 2004: Educating Young Adolescents in the 21st Century" to address the need for reform at the middle school level in North Carolina (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2004). In this report, the North Carolina task force recognized the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform's Schools to Watch program as being "a road map for school improvement and reform efforts" (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2004, p. 9). However, merely providing a road map does not necessarily initiate school improvement, create improved student achievement, or develop the skills necessary to assure future success.

Another problem that has emerged from the research as necessary for sustained

school improvement is a positive school culture where teacher practices influence student achievement outcomes. According to Richardson (2005), "schools make little progress in changing student achievement until teachers change how they work with each other" (p. 3). When teachers change the way they work together, the culture of the school changes. When the culture of the school changes, students reap the rewards. Research has shown that increased student achievement, improved student motivation, enhanced teacher productivity, and satisfaction are strongly correlated to healthy and sound school cultures (Stolp, 1994). In order for a cultural change to occur, the school must be recultured by "developing values, norms, and attitudes that affect the core of the culture of schools, which drives structural change" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. 15). The fact of the matter is that in order to improve school culture in the middle schools, the structure must be examined.

To address the issue of failing schools, in 2005-2006, North Carolina implemented the Turnaround Initiative.

> The mission of the Turnaround Initiative is to increase student performance, to reduce the number of students who drop out, and to promote redesign of high schools so that students graduate prepared for democratic citizenship, college and/or the 21st century workforce. (Report to the Joint Legislative Education Committee on the Implementation of the ABCs, 2009, para. 1)

In 2005-2006, 35 high schools in North Carolina entered a 3-year cycle of support to increase achievement. In 2007-2008, North Carolina also recognized that feeder middle schools to Turnaround Initiative high schools needed support. Since high schools had previously been the focus of reform and were held accountable for student achievement, addressing the feeder middle schools would strengthen the process (Public

Schools of North Carolina, 2008d). That year, 37 middle schools were targeted to participate in the Turnaround Initiative (Report to the Joint Legislative Education Committee on the Implementation of the ABCs, 2009). The Turnaround Initiative required targeted middle schools to develop a Framework for Action using the eight standards from the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform's Schools to Watch program for Academic Excellence as the guide (see Appendix A). Without a strong foundation from middle school, students struggle or fail to meet requirements at the high school level to prepare them for further education and the new workforce. The research in *The Forgotten Middle* recognized that there is a critical juncture that is so important that if students are not on target for college and career readiness, the impact may be irreversible (ACT: Research and Policy Issues, 2008). In order for North Carolina to accomplish their mission, a laser focus should be on improving student achievement and culture in the "middle." "We must therefore also focus on getting more students on target for college and career readiness by the end of eighth grade" (ACT: Research and Policy Issues, 2008, p. 2).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate a North Carolina priority middle school that implemented a Framework for Action as required by the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative to determine the impact on student achievement trends and cultural change. Additionally, this study proposed to contribute to the body of research on middle grades reform and to focus on best practices and cultural changes that impacted the teaching and learning environment. This study also proposed to document procedures that could be replicated by other middle schools facing similar conditions. Finally, this study provides recommendations based on the findings of this study.

Background and Significance of the Problem

The importance of improved instruction for students entering the adolescent years was recognized as early as 1982 when the NMSA first published "This We Believe," outlining what later became accepted as the middle school concept (NMSA, 2003). By 1989, the Carnegie Corporation published "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century" calling for serious evaluation of educational practices in middle schools based on societal changes and the then current research (Turning Points, 2008). The 1990s witnessed the advent of state and federal accountability standards in the area of public education, and since then, middle schools have come under close scrutiny. In 1999, in an attempt to focus attention on the reform for the middle schools, The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform launched its Schools to Watch Initiative based on four criteria: Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity and Operational Structures (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013b). However, even with the focus on improving education for the students in the middle, in March 1998, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) published a report entitled "Education's Weak Link: Student Performance in the Middle Grades" which began with the statement: "The middle grades—grades five through eight—are the weak link in American education" (p. 1). The report based its findings on the mathematics, reading, and writing scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which also found that 13 of the 14 states served by SREB performed significantly lower than their counterparts across the nation (SREB, 1998).

North Carolina is one of the 14 states served by SREB, and the state's trend evidencing a significant number of students performing below basic proficiency has continued. In 2007, the NAEP Snapshot Report for North Carolina showed that of the

state's eighth graders, 29% scored at the Below Basic level and 43% scored at the Basic level in reading. In math, 27% scored at the Below Basic level and 38% scored at the Basic level (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). Students who score at the basic level possess "partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skill fundamental at each grade level assessed" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

North Carolina also has its own set of accountability standards, the ABCs of Public Education, which holds schools accountable for proficiency and growth. Proficiency is measured by receiving a Level III or Level IV on state end-of-grade (EOG) or end-of-course (EOC) tests showing that students have scored at or above grade-level mastery for that subject area. Along with proficiency, North Carolina holds public schools accountable for academic growth by designating schools as having met Expected Growth or High Growth as part of the state accountability model (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008a). Furthermore, during the years covered by this research study, North Carolina middle schools were responsible for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as mandated by the Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which required all states, school districts, and specifically designated subgroups to meet performance targets each year. In North Carolina, the 10 subgroups were

> School as a whole (all students); American Indian; Asian; Black; Hispanic; Two or More Races; White; Economically Disadvantaged Students (Based on Child Nutrition data files submitted in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement); Limited English Proficient (LEP); and Students with Disabilities (SWD) (based on the April 1 Headcount of Exceptional Children collected via CECAS). (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2011, para. 4)

Based on these accountability requirements, many North Carolina middle schools were

failing to meet both state and national standards for student achievement.

The 2007-2008 EOG assessment for middle schools saw a marked drop in proficiency scores. The state average for seventh-grade reading was 52.6%; the state average of math was 68.6%. The percent of students who scored proficient on the eighth-grade science test was 53% (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008b).

In 2006-2007, North Carolina had 52 middle schools recognized as priority schools and seven additional schools recognized as low-performing schools. In a North Carolina priority school, at least 40% of the students are not proficient in the skills necessary to be successful at the high school level or beyond. In 2007-2008, North Carolina raised the proficiency requirements on the reading tests in elementary and middle schools to more closely reflect the national standards set by NAEP (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008b). This realignment resulted in 140 middle schools being designated as priority schools and 20 middle schools being designated as low-performing (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008a). By failing to meet state and federal standards, North Carolina priority schools are failing to meet the educational needs of their students. In an effort to turn their schools' status from priority or low-performing to schools that are achieving higher levels of proficiency, many middle schools in North Carolina were designated to participate in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative.

Setting for the Study

The school chosen for this study was a North Carolina middle school located in the north central part of the Piedmont that began the implementation of a Framework for Action in the fall of 2007. The school, which served Grades 6-8, housed approximately 700 students with 51 teachers, seven support staff, and three administrators. The

demographical make-up of the school was 36% White, 50% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 4% other. Sixty-seven percent of the students were on free and reduced lunch. The daily schedule for sixth and seventh grades was a block schedule with core subject areas meeting for 90 minutes each; English and math were yearlong courses, while science and social studies were semester courses. In the eighth grade, core subjects were divided into four 65-minute, yearlong classes. The school offered academic services that included programs for Exceptional Children, Academically Gifted, and pre-International Baccalaureate and Honors (Anonymous, 2008). Students were assigned to a team of four core teachers. All teachers had two 45-minute planning periods daily with their perspective teams. One 45-minute block was personal planning time; one 45-minute block was team planning. All teachers met highly qualified status as defined and required under the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2000.

For this research study, 5 years of student achievement data trends were initially reviewed which included the school designation, growth, and AYP status.

Table 1

5-Year Data of Study School for North Carolina State Designation, North Carolina Growth Model and No Child Left Behind AYP

Year	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
State Designation	None	None	Priority	Priority	Priority
Growth	Not Met	Not Met	Not Met	Expected	Expected
AYP	25/25	17/25	22/25	19/27	15/25

The 5 years that were reviewed covered the 2003-2004 through the 2007-2008 school years. During those years, the school received no designation for the 2003-2004

and the 2004-2005 school years but was designated as a priority school for the next 3 years. Additionally, for the first 3 years reviewed, the school failed to meet state growth standards; the school made expected growth in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. Finally, the school met all AYP subgroups in 2003-2004; however, it failed to meet all APY subgroups in the subsequent 4 years.

Methodology and Research Design

In order to investigate the impact of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative on school culture and student achievement trends, this study was designed to be a descriptive case study using a mixed-methods design. The independent variable was the implementation of the Framework for Action as a requirement for a priority school in the Turnaround Initiative; the dependent variable was the school culture. Student achievement trends were also investigated to assess for any improvement.

Quantitative data were gathered from two sources. Since being designated as a priority school is based on testing data, student achievement data were retrieved from the NC School Report Cards for the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 school years to ascertain any improvement in student achievement trends. The second source of quantitative data was derived from the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys focusing on the areas of Time, Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development.

During the 2009-2010 school year, qualitative data were gathered through document collection, one-to-one interviews, and focus-group interviews. The transcripts of the individual interviews and focus-group interviews, together with collected documents, were analyzed for evidences and themes that emerged supporting the implementation of the Framework for Action and the standards set forth in the Schools to

Watch Academic Excellence and Organizational Structure Criteria (see Appendix A). In order to align with the characteristics of a positive school culture the researcher also utilized the criteria from the Organizational Structures from School to Watch (see Appendix B). The elements of a positive school culture were defined by a shared sense of values and purpose; commitment to continuous improvement with learning for all; acceptance of responsibility for student learning; strong collaboration; collegiality among staff; and opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of practices (Peterson, 2002).

In order to thoroughly understand the dynamics that resulted in change for the school, this study analyzed the quantitative data from EOG scores and AYP results to document student achievement trends and the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey as it related to the Schools to Watch Criteria to ascertain improvements in school culture.

However, to evaluate how the results occurred, it was necessary to analyze how the implementation of the Framework for Action impacted the beliefs and values of the school community through the interpretation of the qualitative data from the individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and document reviews. Therefore, the mixed-methods approach was the research design chosen for this study.

The timeline for this research study covered the initial year of implementation, 2007-2008, through the end of 2009-2010, approximately 3 years. The researcher for this study was not professionally affiliated with the study school or Local Education Agency (LEA). Permissions were obtained to collect and analyze the data regarding the study school from the LEA superintendent and the school principal.

Research Questions

The preliminary review of the literature revealed four recurring themes: the need

for middle school reform, the importance of a positive school culture, the characteristics associated with the middle school concept, and the degree to which these middle school components were implemented with fidelity. The initial research questions that were used to guide this study revolved around the guidelines set forth in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative, the characteristics of a positive school culture, and the effect of the Turnaround Initiative on student achievement trends. The research questions that were used to direct this study were

1. What was the impact of the Turnaround Initiative on school culture?

2. What were the barriers in implementing the Turnaround Initiative?

3. How did the student achievement trends change from 2006-2010?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were applied:

Achievement levels (NAEP). Performance standards set by the National Assessment Governing Board for NAEP and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for the North Carolina ABCs that provide a context for interpreting student performance. The levels (*basic*, *proficient*, and *advanced*) measure what students should know and be able to do at each grade assessed on the NAEP assessment instruments (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

Achievement levels (North Carolina). Achievement levels in North Carolina are defined as follows:

- Level I: Students performing at this level do not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level.

- Level II: Students performing at this level demonstrate inconsistent mastery of

knowledge and skills that are fundamental in this subject area and that are

minimally sufficient to be successful at the next grade level

- Level III: Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate mastery

  of grade-level subject matter and skills and are well prepared for the next

  grade level.

- Level IV: Students performing at this level consistently perform in a superior

  manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level. (Public

  Schools of North Carolina, 1999, p. 1)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). A series of performance targets that states,

school districts, and specific subgroups within their schools must achieve each year to

meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Public Schools

of North Carolina, 2011).

Basic. One of the three NAEP achievement levels, denoting partial mastery of

prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade

assessed. NAEP also reports the proportion of students whose scores place them below

the basic achievement level (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

Framework for Action. A written document that guides improvement activities

for the school. The Framework will involve the school district leadership; school

leadership; and faculty, students, and parents working collaboratively using the Standard

School Improvement planning process. Each Framework will include similar

components but will be individualized to reflect the Turnaround Assessment Team

findings and circumstances specific to the school. The Framework for Action should

incorporate a step-by-step description of the actions necessary to reach each objective and

the people and resources involved (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2009).

Low-performing school. North Carolina defines a low-performing school as one that failed to meet their expected growth standards and has less than 50% of their students at or above Achievement Level III (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008a).

Middle school. Those schools having a 5-8 grade span configuration or a 6-8 grade span configuration and are recognized by the State of North Carolina as middle schools (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2004).

Priority school. North Carolina defines a priority school as having less than 60% of their students' scores at or above Achievement Level III irrespective of making their expected growth and are not low-performing schools (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008a).

Proficiency. One of the three NAEP achievement (Proficient, Advanced) levels or one of the four North Carolina achievement levels (Level III, Level IV) representing solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Also known as "the Nation's Report Card," it is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, U.S. history, geography, civics, the arts, and other subjects (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

School culture. The set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, and symbols and stories that make up the persona of the school (Peterson, 2002).

School growth designation. School designations are based on comparisons of the actual growth of their students with the growth that was expected and can be classified as none, expected growth, or high growth for North Carolina (Cody, McFarland, Moore, & Preston, 2010).

Student growth. The amount of student progress that students make over the course of a grade or class (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2014).

Turnaround Initiative. A North Carolina initiative designed to help priority/low-performing schools improve their overall educational program by providing resources, training, and support (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2009).

Summary

Following the trend of American public schools, North Carolina middle schools were failing to meet the academic needs of 30-50% of their students in varying subject areas. This failure was evidenced on both national and state assessments and resulted in an increased number of North Carolina middle schools being designated as priority schools. This study investigated a North Carolina priority middle school participating in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative to determine if there was an improvement in student achievement trends and a change in school culture.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The late 1960s witnessed the emergence of the middle school configuration, Grades 6-8, in the United States. Spurred by the developmental research for different age groups, it was becoming increasingly evident that adolescents between the ages of 10 and 15 were experiencing physical and emotional growth that required different educational needs than students at the elementary or high school level. It also became apparent that the junior high model was not meeting the needs of this age group.

> While the junior high movement was an effort to separate young adolescents and to provide programs uniquely designed for them, a knowledge base was not available to sustain the uniqueness of the movement. Thus, the movement fell under the direction of the high school and gravitated toward a subject orientation, emulating the organization and practices of the high school. (Roney, Brown, & Anfara, 2008, p. 5)

Because of the fact that junior high schools were not meeting the developmental needs of the middle years adolescents, more and more educational systems began to turn to the middle school concept. By the mid-1970s, most states in the eastern and midwestern sections of the United States had adopted the middle school ideal based on the knowledge and needs associated with young people who fell into those middle years between the ages of 10 and 15 (Roney et al., 2008).

Even though the NMSA, the Carnegie Corporation, the National Association for Secondary School Principals, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform established guidelines for what the appropriate middle school should be doing to facilitate success for middle grades students, it soon became apparent that the middle

school concept was not working and reform was necessary.

Middle School Reform

Over the last 20 years, middle school education and reform have been the subjects of extensive research. The NMSA first published its position paper "This We Believe" in 1982, which became one of the cornerstones of the middle school concept. The position paper and its concepts were revisited and revised first in 1995 and again in 2003 to better align with the changes in current research that were emerging in public education. The 2003 document stated that

> The National Middle School Association believes that successful schools for young adolescents are characterized by a culture that includes educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so; courageous, collaborative leadership; a shared vision that guides decisions; an inviting, supportive, and safe environment; high expectations for every member of the learning community; students and teachers engaged in active learning; an adult advocate for every student; and school-initiated family and community partnerships. (NMSA, 2003, p. 7)

Furthermore, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation and published in 1989, called for a radical transformation of many of the educational practices that were not developmentally appropriate for students entering the early teenage years (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 2). In the 1989 study, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development stated that

> middle schools need to both strengthen their academic core, and establish caring supportive environments that value the young people they serve. Above all, each and every middle school teacher needs to develop strong relationships with his or

her students. Such relationships are the foundation for powerful learning.

(Turning Points, 2008, para. 1)

As with the NMSA, the Carnegie Corporation recognized that fundamental changes in society, coupled with the increased research in the field of middle level education, required an update of their original report in 2000 when they released *Turning Points 2000: Education Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

In 1999, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform launched its Schools to Watch program in an effort to recognize and learn from those middle schools that were performing at an exemplary level. The National Forum recognized four criteria that exemplary schools possess: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and processes (Lipsitz & West, 2006).

In 2000, when the Carnegie Corporation of New York published *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century,* they found that there had been little change at the core of the middle school experience in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Many middle schools failed to consistently use active/interactive learning strategies, cooperative learning experiences, and technology in science and math. Most middle school classrooms still emphasized passive learning based on drill and practice in basic skills and memorization of facts (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 2). *Turning Point 2000* offered eight recommendations to ensure success for every middle school student and reform middle grades education. The recommendations included the following:

- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.

- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.

- Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.

- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.

- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best.

- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.

- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development. (Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 23-24)

In 2006, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) published *Breaking Ranks in the Middle,* which stated, "The goal should be to create schools that are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable for each student" (p. xvi). These goals parallel the recommendations of the NMSA, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. As the demand for improved middle schools surfaced at the national level, several common themes began to emerge. Among the common themes were academic excellence and rigor, curriculum developmentally responsive to young adolescents, and social equity. Though the demand for middle grades reform has been in existence since the 1980s, little change at the school level had been witnessed.

Nationally, the crisis at the middle school level continued to rally support for

fundamental reform. In June 2009, House Representative Raul Grijalva and Senator Jack

Reed, recognizing the need for middle grades reform, reintroduced the Success in the

Middle Act. This bill, first introduced in 2008, "would authorize grants to states and

school districts to help improve middle grades education and turn around low-performing

middle schools" (NMSA, 2009, p. 1). The Success in the Middle Act of 2009 (H.R.

3006) based its need on 13 research findings supporting the need for middle school

reform. The purposes of the bill were to

> Improve middle grades student academic achievement and prepare students for
>
> rigorous high school course work, postsecondary education, independent living,
>
> and employment; ensure that curricula and student supports for middle grades
>
> education align with the curricula and student supports provided for elementary
>
> and high school grades; provide resources to State educational agencies and local
>
> educational agencies to collaboratively develop school improvement plans in
>
> order to deliver support and technical assistance to schools serving students in the
>
> middle grades; and increase the capacity of States and local educational agencies
>
> to develop effective, sustainable and replicable school improvement programs and
>
> models and evidence-based, or when available, scientifically valid student
>
> interventions for implementation by schools serving students in the middle
>
> grades. (Success in the Middle Act of 2009)

Not only has there been an intense focus on reform in the middle grades at the

national level and regional educational agencies, individual states also recognized that

middle schools were not consistently meeting the needs of middle-level adolescents. In

March 1998, SREB published a report entitled "Education's Weak Link: Student

Performance in the Middle Grades," which began with the statement, "The middle

grades—grades five through eight—are the weak link in American education" (p. 1). The report based its findings on the mathematics, reading, and writing scores from the NAEP. Nationally, 39% of eighth graders who took the math assessment in 1996 scored below basic. The study also found that 13 of the 14 states served by SREB performed significantly lower than their counterparts across the nation with almost 50% of eighth-grade students scoring below basic. The study further noted that there was an increase in the number of students who scored below basic at the eighth-grade level as compared to fourth-grade students (SREB, 1998). North Carolina was one of the states served by SREB and had also recognized the need for middle school reform.

North Carolina Middle School Reform

North Carolina began its own initiative based on the initial research in 1989 with the creation of the Middle School Task Force whose mission was to study the findings presented in *Turning Points* and make recommendations for improvement in middle school education for the state. They released the first edition of the "Last Best Chance," a report designed to guide middle grades reform in North Carolina, in 1990. This report advocated specific reforms in the areas of curriculum, instruction, student success, school organization, health concerns, teacher preparation, technical assistance, professional staff, parents, and communities (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2004). In 2001, the North Carolina General Assembly passed House Bill 15 officially recognizing middle schools as a classification of public schools, and North Carolina joined with SREB in the *Making Middle Grades Work* Initiative. This initiative recognized that too many students were leaving unprepared to be successful at the high school level. In 2002, North Carolina was chosen as one of three states to pioneer the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform's Schools to Watch Program and adopted their criteria as a tool for school

improvement (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2004).

Recognizing a continuing and growing need for middle grades reform in North

Carolina, a task force was again created in 2004 by the Board of Education and the

Department of Public Instruction that released an updated report entitled "Last Best

Chance 2004: Educating Young Adolescents in the 21st Century" to address the situation

in North Carolina (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2004). "Last Best Chance 2004"

embraced the tenets of the Schools to Watch criteria as a vehicle for reforming the middle

school.

In order to become a Schools to Watch school, the school must meet four rigorous

criteria that had been developed based on the research regarding middle-level reform.

Schools to Watch schools are academically excellent where all students are expected to

meet high academic standards built on curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are

aligned to those high standards. They recognize the importance of developmental

responsiveness and create small communities within the school to focus on individual

student needs. These schools are socially equitable providing every student with high-

quality learning opportunities. Schools to Watch schools implement organizational

structures and processes to drive, support, and sustain continuous improvement (Lipsitz

& West, 2006; Schools to Watch, 2008). Currently, 124 schools nationwide and 26

schools in North Carolina have been recognized at Schools to Watch (Schools to Watch,

2008).

Even with guidelines and support in place, North Carolina middle schools

continued to fail. In 2006-2007, North Carolina had 52 middle schools recognized as

priority schools and seven additional schools recognized as low-performing schools. In a

North Carolina priority school, at least 40% of the students are not proficient in the skills

necessary to be successful at the high school level or beyond. In 2007-2008, North Carolina raised the proficiency requirements on the reading tests in elementary and middle schools to more closely reflect the national standards set by NAEP (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008b). This realignment resulted in 140 middle schools being designated as priority schools and 20 middle schools designated as low-performing (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008a).

Therefore, North Carolina began the process to turnaround its struggling schools. The North Carolina Turnaround Initiative began in 2006 with 35 high schools originally targeted for support. The next year, 37 middle schools were added as the state recognized the need for a strong middle school foundation for success at the high school level. Originally, in an attempt to facilitate improvement, the state sent in assistance teams for 1 year to help struggling high schools. However, recognizing that sustained improvement required additional time, North Carolina implemented the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative. The Turnaround Initiative schools would receive support for 3 years with a strong focus on professional development for teachers, principals, and central office staff. Each school would receive a trained facilitator to help with the transformation. For the middle schools that were involved, training included 11 days for the school's leadership team—the principal, a teacher leader, and a central office representative—where the focus was on creating a Framework for Action based on the eight criteria of Academic Excellence developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform in its Schools to Watch program (Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the Implementation of the ABCs, 2009).

Culture

The implementation of rigorous criteria, standards, and support will only work if

the culture of the school is such as to embrace the ideals set forth. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the emphasis schools have put on the structures of the school without attention to culture has been noted as the major flaw in school reform.

> All schools have cultures. They may foster collaboration or isolation, promote self-efficacy or fatalism, be student-centered or teacher–centered, regard teaching as a craft that can be developed or as an innate art, assign primary responsibility for learning to teachers or students, view administrators and teachers as colleagues or adversaries, encourage continuous improvement or defense of the status quo and so on. (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 90)

Too often, school reform has taken on the image of reform by simply changing structures within the school. The changes that impact policies, procedures, rules, and relationships are external efforts to change schools that are immediately visible. Such reforms as the implementation of block schedules or moving to the middle school concept are examples of external structures. However, the culture of a school "helps to shape how people think, feel, and act" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p.131). "Schools make little progress in changing student achievement until teachers change how they work with each other" (Richardson, 2005). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) stated, "unless efforts to improve schools ultimately impact culture, there is no reason to believe schools will produce better results" (p. 91). Deal and Peterson (2009) echoed the belief that based on the evidence of multiple studies "where cultural patterns did not support and encourage reform, changes did not take place" (p. 9).

Research also recognizes that schools that experience significant improvement possess specific cultural characteristics. According to Peterson (2002), these characteristics include a shared sense of values and purpose; commitment to continuous

improvement with learning for all; acceptance of responsibility for student learning; strong collaboration; collegiality among staff; and opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of classroom practices. School culture is defined as the "norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories" that create the school persona (Peterson, 2002, p. 10). Over time, these unwritten expectations build up as the school community—teachers, administrators, students, and parents—work together to solve problems or face the challenges met by the school. These expectations define the perceptions of staff meetings, good teaching, change, and professional development (Peterson, 2002). Saphier and King (1985) considered school culture the foundation of school improvement that can either energize or undermine the process. According to Peterson (2002), a school culture can be either positive or toxic: Toxic school cultures "lack a clear sense of purpose, have norms that reinforce inertia, blame students for lack of progress, discourage collaboration, and often have openly hostile relations among staff" (p. 11); whereas schools with positive cultures share a sense of purpose, embrace continuous learning, accept responsibility for student learning, exhibit collegiality and collaboration, and create opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing (Peterson, 2002). "Healthy and sound school cultures correlate strongly with increased student achievement and motivation, with teacher productivity and satisfaction" (Stolp, 1994, para. 6).

Yet, impacting school culture involves the change process, which is often difficult for organizations. Muhammad (2009) stated that

> Cultural change is a much more difficult form of change to accomplish . . . but cultural change must be achieved—and it must be achieved well—if we are to prepare our current and future generations of students for an ever-changing world

that is becoming more demanding each day. Substantial cultural change must

precede technical change. When a school has a healthy culture, the professionals

within it will seek the tools that they need to accomplish their goal of universal

student achievement; they will give a school a new life by overcoming the staff

division that halts transformation. (pp. 11-12)

Because culture involves beliefs, values, expectations, and habits, many educators find it

extremely difficult to walk away from their assumptions to critically examine their

personal educational practices (DuFour et al., 2008). Without being able to critically

analyze current practices, educational reform cannot happen. In *Good to Great,* Collins

(2001) stated, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end –which you

can never afford to lose—with discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current

reality, whatever they might be" (p. 85). Often, culture becomes a roadblock to change

when it is used to describe how things are currently being done. At that point, culture is

used to maintain the status quo by blocking leadership initiatives and stifling innovation

(Reeves, 2009). In order for schools to improve and sustain student achievement, the

school community, including teachers and leaders, must be willing to examine current

beliefs and values that impact school culture.

In their research on the impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on

school improvement, Huffman and Hipp (2003) discussed the necessity of reculturing

schools to achieve the change necessary for reform. Reculturing occurs when the core of

the culture of the school is impacted by developing values, norms, and attitudes that lead

to positive change. Deal and Peterson (2009) concurred that the characteristics

associated with PLCs reinforce the cultural elements that lead to a school's successful

reform: These elements are "a shared sense of purpose, teacher involvement in decision

making, collective work around instruction, norms of improvement, professional learning by staff, a sense of joint responsibility for student learning" (p. 12).

Studies

Many educational studies have emerged tying the positive cultural concept to improved student academic success. In all cases, the schools that were most successful academically revealed evidences of a positive school culture as previously defined by Peterson (2002).

Roney et al. (2008) studied 12 middle schools in a large metropolitan area in the northeastern United States that had implemented components of middle grades reform as recommended by the NMSA and *Turning Points 2000*. This study used a qualitative, multi-site case study design to explore middle-level reform. The study was broken into two phases. The research questions that guided this study were

1. To what degree are high-performing and low-performing middle schools implementing the middle level reform components?

2. If the degree of implementation is different between high-performing and low-performing middle schools, what reform components are necessary for high student achievement? If the degree of implementation is similar, what helps explain the difference in student achievement between high-performing and low-performing schools? (Roney et al., 2008, p. 66)

The initial phase of this study was to "explore the implementation of middle level reform components in both high-and low-performing middle schools" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 65). The study involved six high-performing schools and six low-performing middle schools. The demographics of the schools varied significantly. Three percent of students in the high-performing schools came from low-income families while 88% of

the low-performing schools students were low-income. Eleven percent of students at the high-performing schools were minority; 82% of the students in the low-performing schools were minority. There was a 400-point discrepancy between test scores as reported on the State System of Assessment.

All of the schools involved in the case study were implementing eight of the 11 recommendations. The study used a semi-structured interview technique based on five questions regarding to what degree—highly evident, somewhat evident, and not evident—the specific recommendation was perceived to be evident in the schools. The interview protocols that were used focused on the following:

1. Structural features: Do I have the opportunity to do it?

2. Normative/attitudinal features: Do I believe in it and want to do it?

3. Skill and professional features: Do I know how to do it?

4. Climate and interactive processes: Do I have a school environment that enables me to do it?

5. Instructional/practice features: Do I actually do it? (Roney, Brown, & Anfara, 2004, p. 154).

The data showed that "a 73 percent rate of implementation in both the high-and low-performing schools" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 69). The findings also indicated that even with similar levels of the degree of implementation, average state test scores continued to show a significant difference. The first phase of the study stated, "Despite the great disparity in socioeconomic status, PSSA test scores, and funding between the two types of schools, these findings verify the claim the mere existence of middle school components is not sufficient to ensure high student achievement" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 69). This phase of the study focused on the implementations of middle school reform

recommendations.

Phase Two investigated possible reasons for the difference in student achievement between the two types of schools. The theoretical basis for this phase followed the notion of organizational health presented by Hoy and Hannum in 1997. Hoy and Hannum concluded that organizational health was divided into three levels: technical, managerial, and institutional (Roney et al., 2008, p. 70). Phase Two involved the researchers looking at the transcripts a second time through the "theoretical lens of school climate and organizational health" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 68).

Roney et al. (2008) found striking differences in the responses from teachers in the two different types of schools. Their analysis of the technical level, which included academic emphasis and teacher affiliation, found that teachers in high-performing schools felt that they were aware of curriculum standards, but the standards only reflected what they were already doing in their classrooms. Teachers in high-performing schools felt they were actively engaged in curriculum development and appreciated a strong curriculum focus. These teachers also felt that their students were capable of high performance and that teachers involved and challenged their students. Teachers at the low-performing schools consistently felt that the standards were forced on them by administration and voiced concern about their students' abilities to master such curriculum. They further expressed the ineffectiveness of programs that did not seem to work. In regard to students' abilities, low-performing teachers "commented about their students inability to take tests, their poor reading abilities, and the need to make accommodation to curriculum, instructions, and assessment" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 73). In looking at teacher affiliation, teachers at both schools expressed a commitment to their students. However, teachers in high-performing schools indicated enthusiasm about their

jobs, positive school climate, and feelings of security. There were positive comments regarding working as teams and working with administration. The teachers at the low-performing schools complained about working with teams and considered the administration incompetent.

The managerial level of organizational health includes collegial leadership, resource support, and principal influence. Once again, the study found significant differences in the replies that were submitted by the participants. Teachers at the high-performing schools focused on a collaborative relationship with their principal and felt he/she was approachable. They discussed a shared vision surrounding growth and development. They had positive comments about resources that were available to them. Teachers at low-performing schools focused on test scores. They were mixed in their comments regarding resources with some maintaining that they had the supplies needed to do their jobs while others commented on using their own money to purchase necessary materials. Both groups recognized that the principal had limited autonomy when faced with implementing a standards-based curriculum.

In their analysis of the institutional level—typical parental involvement, typical community involvement, degree of parental involvement, and acceptance of parental/community involvement—Roney et al. (2008) found that both groups listed traditional parental involvement activities. However, where the questions focused on community involvement, the high-performing teachers gave more examples of what the school was doing for the community (senior citizens, outreach, and community service), whereas the low-performing teachers focused on what the community did for the school. "In contrast, remarks from the low-performing schools denoted a sense of neediness versus helpfulness" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 82). High-performing teachers responded

more positively to the degree of parental involvement by discussing the amount of parental communication, an active PTO, and outreach to families. The low-performing teachers told how hard it was to get parental involvement in the middle school. One interesting finding was a "subtle sense of resistance on the part of teachers from both types of schools regarding the degree of family and community involvement, regardless of whether the level was seen as substantial or not" (Roney et al., 2008, p. 85). Teachers in high-performing schools commented on this aspect more frequently than those from the low-performing schools.

In their conclusion, Roney et al. (2008) found that implementing the recommendations for middle school reform was important but not sufficient for high student academic success. Roney et al. indicated that merely implementing the structures loses "sight of the purpose and meaning behind the recommendations" (p. 87). They encouraged more attention on improving school culture and climate.

Another study by Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel (2002) investigated seven high-performing, high-poverty middle schools from six states to discover why these schools were performing at levels that were consistent with, and often better than, higher income schools in their perspective states on state and national standardized tests. This study also used the recommendations from *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* to guide their study of middle school reform. The school selection process involved the following criteria:

- The school was a middle grades configuration, typically serving Grades 5-8. No K-12, K- 8, or 7-12 schools were included.
- At least 50% of the school's students participated in the free or reduced-priced lunch program for the most recent year for which data were available.

- The school's average achievement scores were at or above the state average on state mathematics and reading exams for the grade level tested in the most recent year for which data were available.

- The school showed a strong growth rate in reading and mathematics performance for at least the 3-year period between 1997-98 and 1999-2000.

- The school was a public, noncharter, and nonmagnet school so that only open enrollment schools were included.

- The school had a reputation among educational leaders for using effective practices and for having made reforms that led to improved academic performance, especially among students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.

- The school represented typical high-poverty schools in terms of the economic characteristics of their school communities and the challenges they had to face. (Picucci et al., 2002, p. 4)

The school settings ranged from low 291 to high 1,010 in enrollment. They also represented urban, central city, small town, and rural school settings. The ethnic makeups of the schools were also diverse; some schools had a wide range of ethnicities while others served students of one predominate ethnic group. The schools were located in Texas, Georgia, New York, Maryland, Kentucky, and Washington.

The study used a case study design. Teams were created with three staff members, each making one 4-day visit to each school. The visits were between November 2001 and March 2002. The teams looked at practices, processes, and beliefs that impacted student learning in these schools. They looked at persistent growth in student achievement over a 3-year period, 1997-1998 through 1999-2000. The study

utilized interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations to collect data other than student achievement. Observations were utilized "to get a sense of the school climate" (Picucci et al., 2002, p. 6). The teams also collected evidence from lesson plans, student work, and school improvement plans to ascertain embedded practices. The schools used in this study had implemented many of the middle school reform measures from the NMSA, such as democratic environment, team concept, common planning time, advisory programs, and block scheduling.

Interestingly, a high expectation for all was a focus of all the study schools. They shared a strong collaborative environment and shared decision making. The focus also included giving intensive attention to the needs of individual students, and they did this through the use of data to drive their instructional practices. The study found four characteristics that contributed to the success of the study schools: "driven by a common purpose, dedicated to collaborative environments, committed to supporting teaching and learning, attentive to individual students" (Picucci et al., 2002, p. 9).

This study revealed that the seven study schools were driven by a common purpose that centered on high expectations. Comments from the teachers at various schools consistently shared a philosophy of failure as unacceptable, and teachers would not allow a student to fail. Another theme that was prevalent was equity for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status. These students were assured the same educational standards as all other students. The teachers built a culture of caring for each other as teachers and for their students. There was also a sense of pride that developed from improved student performance that garnered both internal and external recognition resulting in a commitment to continual progress. There was also a sense of working hard for everyone. The challenges that were expressed included students had very little

nonacademic time and trying to determine the definition of high expectations.

Findings also supported that the seven study schools were dedicated to a collaborative environment. Teachers felt that they were involved in decisions that affected the school and believed that they could effect change. These schools also shared collaboration with other schools and with the district. Some of the schools had affiliations with outside agencies such as nonprofits and colleges for support. However, the study did reveal that four challenges were evidenced for collaboration. Collaboration required foresight and planning to be effective. State accountability standards hindered local control and decision making. Also, in some cases, central offices practiced a stronger hierarchical model of authority choosing to mandate and expect compliance rather than collaborate. Finally, all stakeholders expressed a desire for more parental involvement.

The study schools consistently engaged in strategies that supported high expectations. Organizational structures included teaming, common planning, block scheduling, and implementing appropriate positive behavioral strategies. Furthermore, they invested in building capacity, recognizing the importance of sustainability when there was a change in faculty or student body. They used data and ongoing professional development to increase capacity. The challenges that the study found regarding implementing practices that support teaching and learning were the ability to have common planning, the implementation of block scheduling, and balancing the need for a rich curriculum against the mandates of state accountability testing.

In this study, the seven study schools held a high commitment to attention to individual student needs. This goal was met through building relationships with the students through group meetings and mentoring programs, extending the school day,

expanding academic opportunities, and helping students transition. The challenges that were faced included the ability, hampered by financial and human resources, to effectively implement all of the strategies. Though the transition from elementary to middle school was usually strong, the middle to high school transition lacked a focus on transition and was geared more toward preparing students for the academics of high school.

Though all schools showed impressive student growth, this study concluded that the success experienced came from a shared purpose and a willingness to work hard together. The conclusion of "The Executive Summary" stated,

> The teachers, support staff, administrators, students, parents, district personnel and representatives from outside agencies who shared their stories for this study were able to eloquently and enthusiastically describe why their particular schools were successful and how these schools were able to improve. Equally as impressive was what they did not say—virtually none of the participants in this study made excuses for not holding all students to high expectations. They did not complain about a lack of time or resources. They did not disparage their administration or district. They did not protest against state standards and accountability systems. They did not place blame on colleagues. Most notably, they did not use the students' and their families' home and community situations as an excuse for poor student academic performance. (Picucci et al., 2002, p. xiv)

The conclusions of this study support the characteristics of a positive school culture as presented in the literature.

Another study that points to the importance of the cultural piece in middle school reform, "What Makes Middle Schools Work," was conducted by Wilcox and Angelis

(2007). This study was part of a national study of the Just for the Kids Project sponsored by the National Center of Educational Accountability. The study was broken into two parts. The "study sought first to describe the practices that teachers and administrators identified as most critical to their consistently higher performance and then to distinguish the differences in activities between consistently high-performing and average performing schools" (Wilcox & Angelis, 2007, p. 8). The purpose of the study was to identify elements that contributed to high student performance, especially at schools that experienced a high population of students living in poverty. Initially, this study used regression analysis to identify higher- and average-performing schools. The characteristics of the schools that were chosen were

- They served middle grades 5-8 or 6-8.

- Half the higher-performing schools met or exceeded the state's poverty rate as measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch for the most recent year for which data were available (2006); average-performing schools were as closely matched as possible in terms of school characteristics and students served.

- The schools were public and had open enrollment policies.

- District per pupil expenditures did not vary significantly from the state average.

- The schools represented a variety of school sizes, communities, geographic locales, and student populations. (Wilcox & Angelis, 2007, p. 9)

In this study, the researchers chose 16 New York middle schools; 10 of these schools were high-performing and six were achieving at an average level on New York state standardized tests. The school enrollment ranged from low 387 to high 1,237. Free

and reduced lunch ranged from 13% to 74%, and the schools experienced varying levels
of ethnic diversity.

The research was conducted by 2-person teams spending 2 days at each school
collecting written documents and conducting interviews. The team interviewed two to
five administrators, five to 10 teachers, including core and special services teachers.
Interviews were recorded and notes were taken. Then the lead researcher for that site
wrote an eight- to 12-page case study describing best practices from each location. The
research team then analyzed the interview transcripts and documents in order to identify
the practices that typified the high-performing schools.

The study found five common elements consistently evident in the high-
performing schools. These elements included building "trusting and respectful
relationships, students' social and emotional well-being, teamwork, evidence-based
decision making, shared vision and goals" (Wilcox & Angelis, 2007, pp.10-11). Wilcox
and Angelis (2007) found that the higher performing schools built a culture of success by
consistently implementing all five elements at a high level. They also discovered that a
high level of success was contingent on incorporating all elements simultaneously. Many
of the average-performing schools had implemented some of the elements but not all five.
This study reported that developing positive, trusting relationships was the cornerstone
for all the other elements. When things went wrong, or not as well as hoped, the teachers
did not blame each other. The higher-performing schools voiced the importance of
respect for all. To meet the social and emotional needs of all students, the high-
performing schools built a nurturing, inviting, and safe environment. Teamwork was
frequent and focused on student learning. The report also stated that teachers engaged in
collaborative meetings found that when work centered on student achievement, the work

was productive. Teachers and administrators used data to make informed decisions then based instruction on specific needs of students. The high-performing schools had clearly articulated visions with plans in place to accomplish that vision.

The conclusion of this study stated, "Findings from this study suggest that relationships characterized as trusting and respectful lie at the foundation of a set of successful practices made possible and nurtured by a supportive climate and culture" (Wilcox & Angelis, 2007, p. 31).

Furthermore, a case study from the University of Southern California emphasized the importance of culture in middle grades reform. In "Leadership in Middle School Reform and Its Impact on Students' Academic Performance: A Case Study," Branch (2005), focused on three areas pertinent to middle grades reform: leadership practices, intervention programs, and school culture. The researcher utilized a quantitative case study design to develop a comprehensive view of the study school. The study school was an urban middle school that had consistently experienced growth in student achievement even with high poverty, 75% below poverty level, and high minority student populations, with 75% of the students Latino. Ninety-nine percent of the student population was on free or reduced lunch. The student enrollment was 1,410. The research questions used in this doctoral dissertation were

1. What leadership practices of school reform should be exercised that may have the most positive impact on students' performance? How have such practices influenced the curriculum, instruction and assessment programs for improved student outcomes of the middle school?

2. How does the use of intervention programs/strategies of school reform under the guidance of leadership affect change in student performance?

3. What are the characteristics of school culture in middle school reform that positively affect the academic achievement of students at risk? (Branch, 2005, p. 72)

Data were collected through questionnaires distributed during a faculty meeting, interviews with the school staff, and observations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the researcher conducted reflective analysis. Documents for review were obtained from the school and district websites and the California Department of Education website. Each of the research questions was evaluated based on the research of Bolman and Deal (1997, as cited in Branch, 2005), which stated that "all organizations can be viewed through four perspectives or Frames; these four frames are structural, human resource, political and symbolic" (p. 36).

The conclusions drawn from this research project indicate that schools, which consistently meet or exceed their academic expectations, practice distributive leadership, maintain intervention programs, and have a positive school culture, have a positive impact on student achievement trends. The research found that the faculty was strong and worked cohesively as a team. Collaboration was used to assure school improvement and success. Both veteran and novice teachers were respected for the talents they bring to the job. There was a sense of pride in the accomplishments of the school (Branch, 2005). Taken together these evidences support a positive school culture.

Summary

A review of the literature evidences four strong reoccurring themes: the need for middle school reform, the characteristics associated with the middle school concept, the degree to which these middle school components have been implemented with fidelity, and the importance of a positive school culture. There is a critical need for middle grades

reform both nationally and in North Carolina. Research supports that middle schools

with highly diverse and high-poverty populations can make significant gains in student

achievement when they implement the research-based middle school reform components

with fidelity. However, it has become increasingly clear that implementation alone will

not guarantee the results needed without the elements of a positive school culture.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of the North Carolina School Turnaround Initiative at a priority middle school impacted school culture and student achievement trends. This was a descriptive case study of a singular school and used a mixed-methods design. Chapter 3 includes a review of the population of the school and a description of the participants of the study. In addition, the chapter describes the instruments used, how the data were collected, and how the data were analyzed for changes in school culture and trends in student achievement.

This study chose participants from a North Carolina middle school involved in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative between 2007-2010 to establish if there had been changes in the school culture and student achievement based on the implementation of the school's Framework for Action. Quantitative data were retrieved from a review of the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys and the North Carolina EOG tests in reading and math for the years 2007-2008 through 2009-2010. Qualitative data were obtained from individual teacher interviews, focus-group interviews, and review of school documents.

Population and Setting

The school chosen for this study was a North Carolina middle school that had been designated as a priority school and entered the Turnaround Initiative in the fall of 2007. At that time, the school began the development of a Framework for Action based on the components of the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence criterion (see Appendix A). The school, which served Grades 6-8, housed approximately 700 students with 51 teachers, seven support staff, and three administrators. This school served a

diverse and low socioeconomic population. The demographical makeup of the school was 36% White, 50% African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 4% other. Sixty-seven percent of the students were on free and reduced lunch.

At the time of the initial implementation of the Turnaround Initiative, the study school employed 51 classroom teachers, 80% of whom were fully licensed. All classroom teachers met the Highly Qualified criteria set forth under No Child Left Behind. Twenty-eight percent of the teachers had 0-3 years' experience, 26% had 4-10 years' experience, and 47% had 10 years or more of classroom experience. Two teachers had received National Board Certification, and 28% had advanced degrees (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006-2010).

Table 1 details the state proficiency designation, growth, and Annual Yearly Progress status for 4 years prior to the implementation of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative and the first year of implementation. The State of North Carolina designates a school as receiving No Recognition when a school has at least 60% of students at grade level but does not meet expected growth. A designation of priority school is given when less than 60% of students achieve grade level proficiency. A school receives expected growth when it meets preset growth goals. AYP measures how many target goals the school made as defined by federal mandates.

Table 1

*5-Year Data of Study School for North Carolina State Designation, North Carolina
Growth Model and No Child Left Behind AYP*

Year	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
State Designation	None	None	Priority	Priority	Priority
Growth	Not Met	Not Met	Not Met	Expected	Expected
AYP	25/25	17/25	22/25	19/27	15/25

During the 2003-2004 school year, this school did not meet expected growth on the state EOG reading and math assessments and received no state recognition; however, it did meet growth for 25 of 25 AYP subgroups. In 2004-2005, the school did not meet expected growth, received no recognition, and met growth in only 17 of 25 AYP subgroups. The 2005-2006 school year saw this school designated as a priority school, where the school did not meet expected growth but met growth in 22 of its 25 AYP targeted subgroups. The school remained a priority school based on the results of the 2006-2007 school year even though it met expected growth. The number of AYP subgroups increased to 27 with 19 subgroups meeting AYP that year (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2003-2007). In 2007-2008, the school was once again designated a priority school making growth in 15 of the 25 AYP subgroups; however, the school did meet expected growth (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006-2010).

In the fall of 2007, this school was included in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative for schools failing to meet both state and federal standards. The school developed its Framework for Action using the Schools to Watch criterion for Academic Excellence in the fall of 2007. In 2008-2009, the school experienced a change in the

administration through the appointment of a new principal.

Participants

The participants for this study were chosen from teachers who were currently employed at the school for the 2009-2010 school year. The selection included teachers who had been at the school since its inclusion in the Turnaround Initiative in 2007 and teachers employed since the initiative began which accounted for teacher turnover and attrition. This selection also included the initial staff who completed the 2008 Teacher Working Conditions Survey and the staff of the 2009-2010 school year who completed the Teacher Working Conditions Survey in the spring of 2010. It was necessary to utilize the entire staff to achieve a global view of the school working conditions.

All individual interviews and focus-group interviews were arranged with the assistance of the current principal. Initially, the researcher conducted a phone conference with the principal to set the dates for the site visit that would create the least intrusive opportunity so as not to interfere with instruction. It was decided that the site visit would take place on two of the final teacher workdays of the school year. The researcher sent a letter to all of the teachers informing them of the research study, explaining the process, and offering contact information for any concerns that might surface (see Appendix C). Teachers were also informed that the purpose of the study was to contribute to the body of research on middle school reform, which focused on practices and beliefs that impacted cultural change and enhanced student learning. In the letter, teachers were asked whether or not they were willing to participate and to return the letter to the principal, who then developed a spreadsheet of teachers who were willing to participate. The principal then supplied the researcher with the teachers' names, grade, and content information. Prior to the site visit, the researcher attended a faculty meeting to introduce

herself to the staff, provide an overview of the process, answer any questions that might arise and develop a sense of familiarity and trust.

Individual interviewees were chosen from the list provided by the principal. Individual interview groups were chosen randomly from the aforementioned teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. Individual interviews were conducted with 10 staff members, including the current principal. When possible, the interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms; other interviews were held in the conference room in the front office. All interviews were conducted using an 18-question protocol that had been modified from the original protocol developed by Roney et al. (2008; see Appendix D), which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Focus-group interviewees were also chosen from the list of volunteers supplied by the principal. Interview groups were comprised of a representative from each grade level: one elective teacher, one Exceptional Children's teacher, one teacher assistant, and one representative from the support staff. Groups were chosen to allow for a balanced representation of the school staff population. Both focus-group interview sessions were held in a classroom setting that was preselected by the principal. The researcher facilitated the focus groups by asking five open-ended questions developed by the researcher (see Appendix E).

Because the qualitative research was conducted by an individual researcher, precautions were taken to present the data in an unbiased manner. The researcher for this study was not professionally affiliated with the study school or LEA. Permissions were obtained to collect and analyze the data regarding the study school from the LEA superintendent and the school principal. The researcher filed the required research approval form with the Institutional Review Board with Gardner-Webb University (see

Appendix F). Furthermore, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. All identities were kept confidential and anonymous. When including statements in Chapter 4, the researcher utilized as many direct quotes as possible to reduce any indication of bias.

Research Design

In order to facilitate this research, the researcher conducted a descriptive case study exploring factors that contributed to a positive school culture and the impact on student achievement trends in a North Carolina priority middle school involved in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) defined a case study as "the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon it its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (p. 436). Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) further defined a case study as an "in-depth investigation of an individual, group, or institution to determine the variables, and relationship among the variables, influencing the current behavior or status of the subject of the study" (p. 662).

In order to investigate the impact of the implementation of the Turnaround Initiative on school culture and student achievement trends at the study site, this study used a mixed-methods design. According to Creswell (2003),

A mixed-methods approach is one in which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds. It employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand researcher problems. The data collection also involves gathering both numeric information as well as text information so that the final database represents both qualitative and quantitative information. (p. 18)

A mixed-methods design offered the opportunity to examine both the quantitative

data that was evidenced through student achievement trends and survey results for school culture while also offering the opportunity to analyze qualitative data to ascertain how the Framework for Action and the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence were being implemented throughout the school environment. The Schools to Watch Organizational Structure Criterion (Appendix B) was added as part of the research design to align with a shared vision, quality professional development, and responsibility for student learning, allowing for triangulation. These themes were present in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys as well and supported the components of a positive school culture.

To thoroughly understand the dynamics that resulted in change for the school, this study analyzed the quantitative data to document growth in the areas of cultural change and review student achievement trends. According to Creswell (2003), the quantitative research approach is one in which the investigator primarily uses postpositivist claims for developing knowledge, employs strategies of inquiry such as experiment and surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data (p. 18).

 For the purpose of this study, the independent variable was the implementation of the study school's Framework for Action; the dependent variable was changes evidenced in school culture. This study also monitored trends in student achievement. Quantitative data were gathered from two sources. Student achievement data were retrieved from the NC School Report Cards for the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 school years to ascertain any trends. The second source of quantitative data was derived from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys looking specifically at the results from the 2008 and 2010 Teacher Working Condition Survey using the constructs of Time, Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development. This

study compared the results of the 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey to the 2010 survey to analyze the results for impact on cultural change in the school setting and to assess for any impact on student achievement trends.

Furthermore, to evaluate how the results occurred, it was necessary to analyze how the implementation of the Turnaround Initiative impacted the beliefs and values of the school community through the interpretation of the qualitative data. Creswell (2003) stated,

> a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives or advocacy/participatory perspective or both. The approach also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. (p. 18)

Creswell further stated that

> Qualitative data takes place in the natural setting. The qualitative researcher often goes to the site (home, office) of the participant to conduct the research. This enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants . . . . They do not disturb the site any more than is necessary. (p. 181)

Therefore, qualitative data gathered through face-to-face individual interviews and focus-group interviews were held on site. Document collection was sent electronically from the principal. The transcripts of the individual interviews and focus-group interviews, together with the collected documents, were analyzed for evidences of recurrent themes that supported the study school's Framework for Action based on the elements of the

Schools to Watch Academic Excellence and Organizational Structures Criteria and the elements of a positive school culture. Positive school culture was defined by a shared sense of values and purpose; commitment to continuous improvement with learning for all; acceptance of responsibility for student learning; strong collaboration; collegiality among staff; and opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of classroom practices (Peterson, 2002).

Therefore, the mixed-methods approach was the best research design for this study. The timeline covered the initial year of implementation, 2007-2008, through the end of 2009-2010, approximately 3 years.

Research Questions

This research study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What was the impact of the Turnaround Initiative on school culture?

2. What have been the barriers in implementing the Turnaround Initiative?

3. How did the student achievement trends change from 2006-2010?

Instrumentation and Procedures

Documents. In order to discover if the implementation of the Turnaround Initiative impacted school culture or student achievement trends, the researcher had to discover if the components required for school improvement through the Turnaround Initiative were in place. Therefore, the researcher acquired documentation from the school. Copies of the 2008-2009 Framework for Action and the amended 2009-2010 Framework for Action were attained for this study. The documents reviewed were provided by the current principal with permission and transmitted to the researcher electronically.

The documents that were reviewed in this study included the study school's 2008-

2009 Framework for Action and the amended 2009-2010 Framework for Action, which were included as part of the 2007-2011 School Improvement Plan. The School Improvement Plan process was already in place and was required by North Carolina law under G.S. 115C-105.27. The development of a Framework for Action was required as part of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative. Middle schools in the Turnaround Initiative developed a Framework for Action using the eight components of the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria (Thompson, Brown, Townsend, Henry, & Fortner, 2011).

The Framework for Action template that was used by the study school included each component as one of eight school-wide goals, the current problem the component addressed, measurable objectives, strategies, and an evaluation for the goal. Though the school had to address all eight components in the Framework for Action, the focus was on Goal 3: All students are expected to meet high academic standards; Goal 7: Students are provided the support they need to meet rigorous academic standards; and Goal 8: The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and improve their standards-based practices. In addition to the Framework for Action, the researcher also reviewed The School Improvement Plan Monitoring Document 09-10 and 2009-2010 data included in the 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan for information on whether the school met the goals outlined in the Framework for Action.

Initially, the documents were reviewed to assess the school's goal alignment to the eight components of Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria. The researcher then reviewed the school's data that were submitted to determine the level of success for meeting each goal. Goals were determined met if the data showed an increase in student

achievement, strong examples of collaboration, and additional supports for student learning. The data were also reviewed for possible evidences of the characteristics for a positive school culture to triangulate the results.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Two instruments that were used to gather quantitative data to evaluate changes in school culture were the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Working Conditions Surveys. The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey was initially developed in 2001 by the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission after analysis of the state and national data from the National Center for Education Statistic's School and Staffing Survey, which analyzed the conditions teachers identified as those that impacted teacher satisfaction levels and career decisions. The Working Conditions Survey was first given in 2002 and then given every 2 years to allow feedback to schools and districts to facilitate school improvement. This survey allowed teachers to share their perceptions of the working conditions in their schools. Periodically, revisions have occurred in the survey.

> The same general core constructs have been utilized since 2002, although a section on beginning teacher support only for those teachers in their first 3 years in the profession was added in 2006 and items for principals only that assess district support were asked in 2008. In 2010 additional survey constructs were included to address conditions related to Managing Student Conduct, Community Support and Involvement and Instructional Practices and Support. (New Teacher Center, n.d., para. 9)

The 2008 North Carolina TWC Survey was revised from the 2002-2006 versions. The 2008 version looked at five constructs that included Time, Facilities and Resources,

Educator Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development and Decisions. The 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions survey included agreement items on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree). Validity and Reliability for this survey was conducted by the New Teacher Center (n.d.) through the University of California at Santa Cruz. The survey was checked for Content Validity, Construct Validity, Predictive Validity, and Reliability. For Reliability, Cronbach's alphas were computed on all five subsets of the survey resulting in an alpha coefficient of 0.8 or better on each subset (New Teacher Center, n.d.).

Between 2008 and 2010, the survey again underwent revision. The 2010 survey included eight constructs which included Time, Teacher Leadership, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Managing Student Conduct, School Leadership, Professional Development, and Instructional Practices and Support. The survey was changed to a new 4-point response scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) with a "Don't Know" option included, which was not reported in the percentages calculated from teacher responses. The survey was checked for Content Validity, Construct Validity, Predictive Validity, and Reliability. For Reliability, Cronbach's alphas were computed on all eight constructs of the survey resulting in an alpha coefficient above 0.859 on each (New Teacher Center, n.d.).

In order to collect the data from the surveys, copies of the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey were retrieved from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Initiative website. The survey was Internet based and each certified teacher was assigned a code to access the survey. The survey opened an approximately 5-week window when teachers could go online and individually take the

survey. Teachers were expected to access the survey through the website once the window opened and complete an individual, anonymous survey. In 2008, 98.39% of the teachers from the study school responded; in 2010, 98.33% of the teachers responded (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2011).

For the purposes of the study, data from the constructs of Time, Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development were used from the 2008 survey, and the constructs of Time, Resources and Facilities, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development were used from the 2010 survey. These constructs were used to align to the School to Watch Academic Excellence and Organizational Structure criteria and the school's Framework for Action.

For analysis, both the 2008 and 2010 surveys were analyzed separately for categories that aligned with the Schools to Watch criteria for Academic Excellence and Organizational Structures and the components of a positive school culture. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses from the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. The constructs of Time, Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development were used to ascertain changes in school culture and alignment to the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence and Organizational Structures criteria. The constructs of Time on the 2008-2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions surveys aligned to criteria six and eight from the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria, the constructs of Resources and Teacher Leadership aligned with criteria two and four from the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria, the construct of Professional Development aligned with criteria four and five from the Schools To Watch Organizational Structure Criteria, and the construct of School Leadership aligned with criteria one of Schools To Watch Organizational

Structure Criteria.

The survey results were presented online as color-coded bar graphs indicating the percentage of teachers who responded for each question in each category. On the 2008 survey, the numerical percentage was given with the graph. The numerical percentage, the number of those who responded to each individual question, and the number of respondents who gave neutral responses were also given on the graph the 2010 survey. Because the results were not archived on the website, the researcher printed a hard copy of both surveys to capture the percentages that were evidenced and recorded on each graph for each question. The percentages were rounded impacting the calculations in the constructed tables. The percentage of teachers who took the original survey in 2008 and the 2010 survey were extrapolated to define the number of teachers who answered each question in each category, a frequency distribution was calculated, and tables constructed.

Changes made between the 2008 and 2010 surveys included the adding of additional constraints as previously noted, questions added or deleted, changing the wording of some of the questions, and changes in the way data were supplied to include the actual number of respondents for each question in the 2010. The 2008 survey presented the data simply as a percentage. These changes impacted this research study by limiting the depth of statistical data that could be retrieved and analyzed for comparison purposes.

Within those constraints, the researcher reviewed the responses as being positive or negative. Teacher responses that had a high percentage of Somewhat Agree and Agree on the 2008 survey and Strongly Agree and Agree on the 2010 survey were considered indicative of a positive school culture. Teacher answers that had significantly high responses in the Somewhat Disagree and Disagree on the 2008 survey and Strongly

Disagree and Disagree on the 2010 survey were indicators of barriers to implementation

of the Framework for Action and cultural change. Responses that were recorded as

Neither Agree nor Disagree or Don't Know were not calculated in the data analysis.

North Carolina EOG tests in reading and math. For a North Carolina priority

middle school to be removed from priority status and exit the Turnaround Initiative, the

school must have 60% or more of the students achieving proficiency on the reading and

math EOG tests and meet expected growth. Therefore, student trends in academic

achievement were also examined. The instruments that were used to ascertain academic

achievement trends were proficiency rates on the North Carolina EOG tests in reading

and math, school recognition, growth status, and AYP designation as reported on the

Public Schools of North Carolina Report Card website. Reading and math tests covered

Grades 6-8. Proficiency was designated when students achieved a level III or IV on the

North Carolina EOG tests. The North Carolina State Board of Education selected

EVAAS, a value-added assessment system, as the statewide model for measuring student

growth on the state's standardized tests (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2014).

According to the North Carolina Reading Comprehension Tests: Technical Report

(2009), the North Carolina EOG in reading used alternative-form coefficients, test-retest

coefficients, and internal consistency coefficients to establish reliability. In order to

establish internal consistency, a coefficient alpha was used. North Carolina maintains a

reliability coefficient of at least 0.85. Validity for the North Carolina reading EOG was

provided by content relevance, response processes, relationship of test scores to other

external variables, and maintaining consistency in the testing environment (North

Carolina Reading Comprehension Tests: Technical Report, 2009, p. 50).

The North Carolina Mathematics Tests Technical Manual indicated that reliability

on the North Carolina math EOG also used alternative-form coefficients, test-retest coefficients, and internal coefficient. The internal coefficient also used a coefficient alpha where 87% of all North Carolina math tests "were at or above 0.94 and all were above 0.91%" (North Carolina Mathematics Tests Technical Manual, 2006, p. 64). Validity on the math EOG was established "through content relevance and relationship of test scores to other external variables" (North Carolina Mathematics Tests Technical Manual, 2006, p. 88).

To review for student achievement trends, data were retrieved from the North Carolina School Report Card website. Information regarding the study school's recognition, growth status, and AYP designations were taken from each year's report card by accessing the High Student Performance tab. The scores for the EOG tests in reading and math were taken from the school's report cards from 2007 to 2010 and were obtained from the North Carolina School Report Card also located under the High Student Performance Tab. For the purpose of this research, only the final proficiency composite based on student scores for reading and math respectively from sixth through eighth grade were utilized (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006-2010).

Tables were constructed for both data sets retrieved from the North Carolina Department of Public Schools Report Card website to assess for student achievement trends. One table included school designation, growth, and AYP status. A trend toward improvement was noted if the school exited priority status, met a higher level of growth, or met an increased number of AYP targets. Therefore, the school could show an improvement in meeting AYP targets while remaining a priority school, which would indicate improvement. The other table included student achievement trends in reading and math based on proficiency scores of a level III or IV on the North Carolina EOG

tests. Improvement was noted if there was a continuous increase in the percentage of students who achieved proficiency.

Focus-group interviews. The researcher conducted two focus-group interviews. The teachers were audiotaped, with permission, and the researcher took handwritten notes during each process. The audiotapes allowed the researcher to focus on emerging themes without missing the content of the interviews. Discussions were audiotaped and transcribed for accuracy and for evidences of the emergence of themes or patterns that supported a positive school culture and the implementation of the school's Framework for Action. Focus-group interviews ran approximately 45 minutes using five open-ended prompts written by the researcher focusing on the Schools to Watch criteria and the elements of a positive school culture (see Appendix E). Each group consisted of teachers of different grade levels and content areas. Both focus-group interviews were conducted on day one of the site visit.

For analysis, the open-ended prompts were written to align with qualities attributed to a positive school culture and Schools to Watch criteria. Question 1 aligned with the shared values and purpose as defined by a positive school culture and with high academic standards from the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence criteria. Question 2 supported continuous improvement and learning for all from a positive school culture and aligned with criteria four and five from Schools to Watch Organizational Structures. Question 3 aligned with a positive school culture's indicator of strong collaboration and with Schools to Watch Academic Excellence criterion six and eight. Question 4 specifically looked at perceived barriers to the implementation of the Turnaround Initiative. Question 5 addressed the need for collegiality within a positive school culture and Schools to Watch Organizational Structures criteria six. The transcripts were

reviewed for the aforementioned themes.

Individual statements were extracted from the transcripts and tallied that supported the components from the Schools to Watch criteria and the characteristics of a positive school culture. The following strength codes were assigned for analysis purposes for focus-group interviews: no response was given if there were no examples given for support, weak was assigned if there was only one example with no explanation or elaboration, moderate strength was given if there were one to two examples with minimum explanation or elaboration, and strong was assigned if there were two or more examples with explanation or elaboration that included processes or procedures.

Individual interviews. The instrument used to collect qualitative data during the individual interviews was a series of interview questions, Interview Protocol for Tennessee and North Carolina Case Studies, included in the text *Creating Organizationally Healthy and Effective Middle Schools* (Roney et al., 2008; see Appendix D). Permission for use was granted in the text. These questions were designed to use as an interview protocol for Tennessee and North Carolina case studies and presented by Roney et al. (2008). The questions allowed for a consistency of questioning for qualitative data collection and created a database for analysis. The original protocol consisted of 24 questions arranged in the categories of Technical Level, Managerial Level, and Institution Level. Researchers who chose to use this protocol were instructed that they "were free to add any additional questions" or focus on one or more of the three levels of the conceptual framework (Roney et al., 2008, p. 212). For this research study, the researcher chose to use the Technical Level and the Managerial Level. In addition, the Grand Tour and Final Questions were added, which gave a total of 18 questions that were asked of the individual interviewees.

In order to collect the qualitative data for this research study, the researcher conducted 10 individual interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each. Each individual interview was conducted privately and audiotaped. The interview questions that were chosen focused on academic achievement and teacher affiliation to align with the Schools to Watch Criteria and the elements of a positive school culture. Interviewees included classroom teachers, elective teachers, a teacher assistant, Exceptional Children's teachers, and the principal. The responses from the individual interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes supporting the purpose of this study. The researcher spent 2 days at the school site conducting the individual interviews.

To facilitate the analysis, questions were aligned to the characteristics of positive school culture. Interview questions 1, 10, 14, 16, and 17 concerned a shared sense of values and purpose. Questions 3, 4, 5, and 9 addressed the theme of commitment to continuous improvement with learning for all. Questions 2, 6, and 7 pertained to acceptance of responsibility for student learning. Question 15 dealt with strong collaboration. Questions 11, 12, and 13 addressed collegiality among staff. Question 18, which allowed for the teachers to offer additional information, was reviewed for information that supported the aforementioned themes. The researcher tallied the number of examples that were given that supported the previously mentioned themes.

Individual statements were extracted from the transcripts and references were tallied that supported the themes from the Schools to Watch criteria and the characteristics of a positive school culture. The following strength codes were assigned for analysis purposes for teacher interviews: no response was given if there were no examples given for support, weak was assigned if there is only one example with no explanation or elaboration, moderate strength was given if there were one to two

examples with minimum explanation or elaboration, and strong was assigned if there were two or more examples with explanation or elaboration that included processes or procedures. Once tallies were complete, individual statements were extracted to support the level of strength.

Final Analysis

A review of the literature indicates that for a school to truly "turnaround," it takes more than changes in systems and structures; it takes a shift in the culture of the school. In order to assess whether the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative had an impact on cultural change or student achievement trends, it was first necessary to analyze the success of the implementation of the school's Framework for Action for fidelity.

Next, an analysis of the teacher perceptions as evidenced on the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys was completed. Responses that fell into the Somewhat Agree and Agree categories for the 2008 survey and Strongly Agree and Agree from the 2010 survey were considered indicative of positive perceptions that would support characteristics from both the Schools to Watch Criteria and a positive school culture.

Then transcripts from the individual interviews and interview groups were analyzed for evidences that supported the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence and Organizational Structures criteria. Those evidences include references to high academic standards, rigorous curriculum, varied instructional strategies, supports for student learning, and collaboration. Transcripts from the interviews were also analyzed for evidences that support a positive school culture which are a shared sense of values and purpose; commitment to continuous learning for all; acceptance of responsibility for student learning; strong collaboration; collegiality among staff; and opportunities for

reflection, inquiry, and sharing. Once the theme analysis was complete, a data triangulation process was completed on the results. For the finding to be considered valid, responses had to match in at least three sources. For example, if a theme was considered strong in the individual interview process, it must also be strong on two of the other instruments.

Since exiting the Turnaround Initiative was based on at least 60% of students meeting proficiency and a year's growth, it was necessary to review student achievement trends. Student achievement for reading and math was also reviewed through the use of the data supplied from the North Carolina School Report Cards, as was the school recognition, growth status, and APY designations, to look for trends during the years of implementation of the Turnaround Initiative, 2006-2010.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations for this study include that only one priority middle school was involved in this case study, which covered approximately 4 years. The study focused on the Academic Excellence Criteria and Organizational Structures from the Schools to Watch. Developmental Responsiveness and Social Equity Criteria were not used in the study. Individual interviews and interview groups were conducted with teachers who had been employed at the school since the Turnaround Initiative began in the fall of 2007 and those employed between then and the spring of 2010. Therefore, not every participant experienced the same school years and student populations.

Limitations include that proficiency data were based on the North Carolina ABC Accountability and Growth Models that do not necessarily align with NAEP or other states' proficiency models. The 2008 and 2010 Teacher Working Condition survey underwent revision during the time the study was being conducted, impacting the

consistent alignment of data for comparison purposes. The change in principal and staff turnover throughout the initiative could impact the cultural piece. Also, the truthfulness of the respondents to the data collection instruments is a limitation.

Summary

This research study was a descriptive case study on one North Carolina middle school that had been designated as a priority school that entered the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative. The goal of this research study was to determine if there were changes in school culture and student achievement trends during the 3 years the study school was part of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative. Chapter 3 presented a discussion of the research design that was chosen for this study and the research methods that were used to collect and analyze the data from the study school's Framework for Action, the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, individual interviews, and focus-group interviews. This chapter included information regarding how student achievement trends were analyzed. This chapter also provided a description of the instruments that were used to collect the data along with the validity and reliability relative to this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This study examined the implementation of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative on a priority middle school located in the north central part of the Piedmont, which served a diverse, low socioeconomic population. The study school implemented a Framework for Action based on the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria from the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform that served as the roadmap for school improvement (Thompson et al., 2011). The research method for this study was a mixed-methods design, allowing for analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The research questions that were used to guide this research study revolved around the guidelines set forth in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative, which utilized the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria for school improvement, the characteristics of a positive school culture, and the effect on student achievement trends. Three research questions were used to direct this study.

1. What was the impact of the Turnaround Initiative on school culture?

2. What were the barriers in implementing the Turnaround Initiative?

3. How did student achievement trends change from 2006 to 2010?

This study further investigated the impact of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative on school culture and documented any changes that occurred in student achievement trends. A review of the literature underscores the importance of a positive school culture on sustainable improvement for student success (Deal & Peterson, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Muhammad, 2009; Peterson, 2002; Richardson, 2005; Saphier & King, 1985; Stolp, 1994). Student success was measured by an improvement in student achievement scores, which in North Carolina middle

schools was measured through the reading and math scores on the North Carolina EOG tests. For the purposes of this study, school culture was defined as a shared sense of values and purpose; commitment to continuous improvement with learning for all; acceptance of responsibility for student learning; strong collaboration; collegiality among staff; and opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of classroom practices (Peterson, 2002).

In order to assess the impact of the Turnaround Initiative, it was first necessary to ascertain whether the study school had met the school requirements set forth for schools involved in the Turnaround Initiative. Therefore, Chapter 4 initially looked at the 4-year School Improvement Plan, focusing on the section that included the study school's Framework for Action for 2008/2009 and the amended Framework for 2009/2010, the final year of this study. Evidences that supported meeting the goals were extracted and reviewed as an indication of the level of implementation of the Framework for Action with fidelity.

This chapter further examined five constructs from the 2008 (Time, Resources and Facilities, Educator Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development) and 2010 (Time, Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development) North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys as they aligned with the Schools to Watch domains of Academic Excellence and Organizational Structure and characteristics of a positive school culture. Because of the changes that occurred in the surveys, each survey was analyzed separately. Teachers were asked to rank statements on a 5-point Likert Scale in 2008 and a 4-point response scale in 2010 with a Don't Know option. In order to analyze teacher perceptions, teacher responses that had a high percentage of Somewhat Agree and Agree on the 2008 survey and Strongly Agree and

Agree on the 2010 survey were considered indicative of a positive school culture.

Teacher answers that had significantly high responses in the Somewhat Disagree and

Disagree on the 2008 survey and Strongly Disagree and Disagree on the 2010 survey

were indicators of barriers to implementation of the Framework for Action and cultural

change. Responses that were recorded as Neither Agree nor Disagree or Don't Know

were considered to be neither positive nor negative. This standard was maintained

throughout this research study for all five constructs on both surveys.

Also in this chapter, data from individual teacher interviews and focus-group

interviews were examined for themes that emerged in support of the characteristics of a

positive school culture and components of the Schools to Watch Criteria for Academic

Excellence and Operational Structures. Transcripts from individual interviews and group

interviews were reviewed by the researcher and tallied. Statements from the qualitative

data were first examined for themes that emerged and statements that aligned with the

characteristics of a positive school culture and supported the components of the Schools

to Watch criteria were extracted then grouped according to frequency of occurrence.

Framework for Action

During the time the school was involved in the North Carolina Turnaround

Initiative, it was required to submit a Framework for Action as part of the yearly School

Improvement Plan. Each year, the Framework for Action was revised and submitted to

the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Each Framework for Action

contained goals that aligned with the eight components from Schools to Watch Academic

Excellence Criteria.

Though the school had to address all eight components from the Academic

Excellence Criteria, during the years the school was in the Turnaround Initiative, the

school focused on three goals in the 2008-2009 Framework for Action and again in the 2009-2010 Framework for Action that would potentially impact student achievement. The three goals were Goal 3: All students are expected to meet high academic standards; Goal 7: Students are provided the support they need to meet rigorous academic standards; and Goal 8: The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and improve their standards-based practices. Furthermore, at the end of each school year, the school had to document data that supported that each of the three goals had been met and submit that to the district.

For both the 2008-2009 and the 2009-2010 Framework for Action documents that were submitted, all eight components from the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria were evidenced and utilized as school-wide goals. In both the 2008 and 2010 Framework for Action submissions, the school included the current problems that each goal would target and provided measurable goals to address the problem. The documents also included strategies to address each goal and provided a method that would be used to evaluate meeting the goal.

The following Table details the evidences included in the 2008-2009 Framework for Action and the amended 2009-2010 Framework for Action and whether the goals were met.

Table 2

Evidences from the Frameworks for Action that were submitted 2008-2010 for meeting the requirements of the Turnaround Initiative

Requirements	2008-2009 Framework for Action	2009-2010 Amended Framework for Action
Addressed all eight components of the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria	Met	met
Used the components as school-wide goals	Met	met
Assessed current problems	Met	met
Provided measurable objectives	Met	met
Included strategies to meet goals	Met	met
Provided method of evaluation	Met	met
Provided data that supported meeting goals 3, 7, and 8.	met	met

The results that supported meeting these goals for the 2008-2009 school year were recorded in the School Improvement Plan Monitoring 09-10 document based on 2008-2009 data. Evidences that supported meeting Goal 3 included

- Data Improvement

  1. Overall composite proficiency increased to 58.8% up from 44% the previous year.

  2. Growth ratio was 1.38 (highest among middles schools overall).

  3. Seventh- and eighth-grade math and reading had the highest growth among district's middle schools.

  4. Online tests of computer skills improved with 88.4% proficiency.

5. AYP Goal attainment 24 of 25 goals (improvement from 15 of 25 previous year).

- 100% of teachers met weekly to collaborate and communicate across content areas in weekly Monday grade level meeting and weekly grade level, subject specific planning meetings-teachers continued to refine CASA meetings.

- 100% of teachers received training on the instructional tool–Cornell Note Taking.

- Teachers mapped and organized their curriculum goals by grading period.

Goal 7 for the 2008-2009 school year was met through the following evidences:

- Student/Teacher/Parent communication was improved based on several communication efforts including:

    1. Sent Weekly Connect Ed telephone messages with a 92% success call rate.

    2. Mandated use of student planners for hall passes and parental communication.

    3. Implemented 6 parent newsletters distributed with report cards.

- Implemented the "I Decide Program (IDP)" to reduce out-of-school suspensions for level 2 and 3 offenses. This program reduced suspension days over 100 days for students who voluntarily participated through service learning and work detail activities rather that suspension.

- Three pronged remediation and enrichment program was developed to address student improvement in reading and math instruction:

    1. Thirty-minute daily enrichment period for all students for reading and math that was based on flexible student groupings.

    2. Targeted instruction for 108 students twice a week.

3. Remediation funding used to hire two tutors working with the Literacy Coach and Curriculum Lead Teacher four days a week for 60 students- 75% of these students exceeded expected growth predictions.

- Establishment of a Science Lab through funds from an area foundation.

Evidences that supported the accomplishment of Goal 8 included

- Grade level specific weekly meetings where curriculum maps and common assessments were created.

- School-wide data were provided early and often during grade level specific meetings.

- Daily schedule was modified to create back-to-back planning periods resulting in 82 minutes of daily planning.

- PD 360 used to increase instructional strategies; video clips were used to reinforce at grade level and staff meetings.

- Faculty turnover improved with all core and elective teachers returning, except for those affected by lower enrollment and budget cuts.

In May 2009, the school submitted its Framework for Action to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction where it revised and resubmitted Goals 3, 7, and 8 as Priority Goals for the 2009-2010 school year. The results that supported meeting these goals for the 2009-2010 school year were recorded in the 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan. Goal 3 was accomplished with the following evidences:

- The school met all goals for the sub-groups (25 of 25) for the first time since 2004.

- The school achieved school progress status with "high growth" and had the

highest growth among all middle schools within the system.

- There was a 100% pass rate for our Algebra I students.

- Growth in reading for students with disabilities improved by 8.3%.

- African Americans students increased in reading by a 6.2% increase.

For Goal 7, the school continued all areas that were implemented during the 2008-2009 school year and additional evidences included

- Established a Parent/Teacher Conference Week October 5-8.

- Improved parent communication through website development and updates.

- Continued three pronged remediation and enrichment program.

- Remediation programs such as Wilson Reading, ERG, SRA, and Just Words have shown higher growth for students who participated.

- Positive Behavior Supports and "I Decide Program" were continued and Office referrals were cut from 1335 to 800.

- Instructional time during the school day was extended resulting in increasing remediation/enrichment time from 28 to 35 minutes.

The school recorded the following evidences for meeting Goal 8:

- Teachers continued weekly grade level meetings and focused on professional development on the Integrated Matrix to improve differentiation.

- Staff was offered a variety of Staff Development allowing teachers to focus on research-based strategies for instruction.

- School partnered with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Instructional Facilitators to provide training on two early release days.

- Individualized student data and benchmark data was used to differentiate and

create remediation for all students.

Summary

For the years covering 2007 through 2010, the study school developed two Frameworks for Action documents that addressed all eight components of the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria that were required of middle schools in the Turnaround Initiative. The study school chose three focus goals for their Framework for Action documents. The school chose Goal 3: All students are expected to meet high academic standards; Goal 7: Students are provided the support they need to meet rigorous academic standards; and Goal 8: The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and improve their standards-based practices. Evidences presented in their Framework for Action showed that the school was progressing in meeting the goals that were chosen through increasing student achievement, focusing on collaboration, and developing additional supports for student achievement.

Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria

In addition to the review of the school's Framework for Action included in the School Improvement Plans, this research evaluated the 2008 and 2010 results from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey as it aligned with the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria and the characteristics of a positive school culture. The constructs from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey that were used to support the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria from the 2008 survey were Time, Resources and Facilities, and Educator Leadership; and from the 2010 survey, Time, Resources, and Teacher Leadership. Alignment with the characteristics of a positive school culture were that Time aligned with evidences of strong collaboration

and collegiality, Resources aligned with accepting responsibility for student achievement; and Teacher Leadership embraced the idea of continuous learning for all, especially as it pertained to all students.

Time

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform included time as a component for their Academic Excellence criterion. Component 8 stated,

> The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance
> student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and
> to improve their standards-based practice. They [teachers] collaborate in
> analyzing student achievement data and making decisions about rigorous
> curriculum, standards-based assessment practice, effective instructional methods,
> and evaluation of student work. The professional learning community employs
> coaching, mentoring, and peer observation as a means of continuous instructional
> improvement. (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a)

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. In order to assess teacher perceptions of the time they had to meet the needs of students and to collaborate with their peers, this research looked at the construct of Time from both the 2008 and 2010 Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. The 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included five statements that allowed teachers to share their perceptions of the way time was allotted to teachers (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2008).

Table 2 details the five statements and provides the number and percentage of teachers who answered the statements on a 5-point Likert scale including Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Disagree nor Agree (N), Disagree (D), and Somewhat

Disagree (SD).

The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 59 to 61. The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "Teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues," with 25 teachers responding with Somewhat Agree and 22 teachers responding with Agee for a total of 47 of 61 responses or 77%. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was "Teachers have reasonable class sizes, affording them time to meet the educational needs of all students." Fourteen teachers responded with Disagree and 13 teachers responded with Somewhat Disagree, which came to 27 of a possible 60 responses or 45% of the responses being considered negative for this research study.

Table 3

2008 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Time as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Teachers have reasonable class sizes.	9	15%	23	39%	1	2%	14	23%	13	21%	60
Teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues.	25	41%	22	36%	3	5%	7	11%	4	7%	61
Teachers are protected from extra duties.	10	17%	17	29%	7	12%	14	24%	11	19%	59
School leadership minimizes the amount of routine paperwork.	12	20%	25	42%	5	8%	8	13%	10	17%	60
The noninstructional time provided for teachers is sufficient.	13	21%	22	36%	4	7%	12	20%	10	16%	61
Total	69		109		20		55		48		301

Note. *Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Disagree nor Agree (N), Disagree (D) and Somewhat Disagree (SD).

Responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 69 for Somewhat Agree, 109 for Agree, 55 for Disagree, 48 for Somewhat Disagree, and 20 for Neither Disagree nor Agree. This resulted in 178 responses in the Somewhat Agree and Agree categories, which indicated that 59.1% of the responses were positive. There were a total of 103 responses that were either Somewhat Disagree or Disagree that indicated that 34.2% of the responses were considered to be negative.

The 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included seven statements regarding time and how teachers perceived the use of time in the school. The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 55 to 59.

Table 4 details the five statements and provides the number and percentage of teachers who answered the statements on a 4-point response scale with a Don't Know option including Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Don't Know (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2010).

Table 4

2010 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Time as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Teachers have reasonable class sizes.	11	19%	22	39%	2	4%	17	30%	7	12%	59
Teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues.	18	33%	27	49%	2	4%	8	15%	2	4%	57
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	5	9%	38	67%	2	4%	12	21%	2	4%	59
The noninstructional time provided for teachers is sufficient.	8	14%	34	60%	1	2%	11	19%	4	7%	58
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork.	6	11%	30	54%	3	5%	16	29%	4	7%	59
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	12	21%	32	57%	3	5%	10	18%	2	4%	59
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with educating students.	9	17%	28	52%	1	7%	13	24%	4	7%	55
Total	69		211		14		87		25		406

Note. *Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Don't Know (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "Teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues," with 18 teachers responding with Strongly Agree and 27 teachers responding with Agee, resulting in 45 of 57 possible responses or 78.9% positive responses for that question. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was "Teachers have reasonable class sizes, affording them time to meet the educational needs of all students." Seventeen teachers responded with Disagree and seven teachers responded with Strongly Disagree resulting in 24 of a possible 59 responses or 40.6%. Responses that were considered to have either positive or negative response were 69 responses for Strongly Agree, 211 responses for Agree, 87 responses for Disagree, 25 responses for Strongly Disagree, and 14 responses for Don't Know. The total of responses that fell into the Strongly Agree or Agree categories were 280 resulting in 68.9% positive responses, while 112 responses were recorded for Strongly Disagree or Disagree which showed 27.5% negative responses overall.

Focus-group interviews. Along with the data supporting the use of Time for teacher collaboration from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys, the data from the two teacher focus-group interviews were analyzed for themes and statements that supported the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria and the characteristics of a positive school culture that supported collaboration. Teachers were asked to explain what it meant to collaborate at this school and what it [collaboration] looked like. The data from each interview group were tallied separately then added together for the total number of responses that addressed collaboration in the school. There were 16 statements that specifically referenced collaboration with five references to the Collaboration About Student Achievement (CASA) meetings. When addressing

what it means to collaborate at this school, one teacher stated, "We have CASA meetings. Basically we meet once a week as a subject area by grade level. We plan and look at individual students." Another teacher when describing the CASA meeting said, "It used to be just for planning but twice a month it is for looking at data. Seeing where we are going, seeing where we are, seeing where we have come from." Another teacher described collaboration at a CASA meeting as

> Some days it is more reflective to data because we are data driven. That's it. But we don't let data be the thing. If we look at it and, let's say, my kids are having trouble with argumentative essays, this is her [another teacher's] strong suit, then we start going over how I can do it differently. What's a way I can do it? So data is the driver but it is collaboration that actually makes the stuff work. And I am convinced it is the collaboration.

Collaboration other than in CASA meetings was also described as teachers working together. "If you have an issue, if you have a question, if it is something you are not strong in, you go to somebody that you know is, and you ask." Other indicators that were shared supporting collaboration as teachers working together included references to team collaboration, visiting each other's classrooms and as one teacher stated, "most of it is in the hallway." No statements emerged from the focus groups that were negative regarding collaboration or that there was a lack of time to collaborate.

Individual interviews. Using the Interview Protocol for Tennessee and North Carolina Case Studies (Appendix D), the researcher used question 15 as it aligned to the positive school culture characteristic of collaboration. Question 15 asked how decisions were made at the school, and all 10 teachers responded with answers regarding the School Improvement Team and the role of the Administration. They shared that the team

was voted on by the staff, that concerns were taken to team members who shared them with the entire team, and information was then brought back to the teachers through grade-level meetings and minutes forwarded to the whole staff. One teacher stated that even with the direction of the School Improvement Team, "everything is always discussed as a staff, so it's not just like one person making the decisions." Another stated, "this particular year [we have] a lot more collaboration on making decisions."

Additionally, on review of the transcripts for all interview questions, two other factors emerged strongly supporting collaboration: their CASA meetings and working together to support students and each other. To capture this additional information from the individual interviews, the researcher tallied statements that supported collaboration for each individual teacher then added them together to arrive at the total. There were 30 total references regarding how teachers collaborated in the school. There were eight specific responses that dealt with CASA meetings. The principal discussed that the CASA meetings are held once a week "with a regularly scheduled time during their planning and they, number one, they plan instruction, plan common assessments and number two, they discuss specific individual students that have not mastered the subject." A sixth-grade teacher discussed diagnostic testing and then stated, "at that point we use our CASA meetings." In support of working together to help each other and students, a first-year teacher stated, "it didn't matter if it was in my team, it was in my curriculum, if it was in my grade level, if it was a sixth-grade person who knew how to do it, they showed me. It was great." A teacher shared when working with his colleagues, "We will talk about what needs to be done. We share ideas and come to a decision . . . but this particular year a lot more collaboration on making those kinds of decisions."

Collegiality. Another characteristic evidenced in schools with a positive school

culture was collegiality, which was addressed in questions 11, 12, and 13 from the Interview Protocol and prompt 5 from the focus-group interviews. However, collegiality was not specifically addressed in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey or the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence or Organizational Structures Criteria.

Focus-group interviews. In the focus-group interviews, prompt 5 asked the teachers to describe ways that the school celebrates traditions in support of building a collegial atmosphere. In reviewing the transcripts from both focus-group interviews, 15 statements surfaced that supported the theme of collegiality at the study school. The teachers spoke of how they celebrated the traditions at the school. One tradition that the teachers participated in yearly was to construct signs, stand in the bus parking lot, and send the students off for summer. The signs had messages that read "Have a Great Summer," "See you next year," "We will miss you," and similar sentiments. They shared that they celebrated "EOG success" and "eighth grade graduation." One teacher shared "We do like to eat. Like today we are having a covered dish lunch. That, that is good!"

In addition to the celebrations, the sense of family and community was also evidenced. One teacher stated, "It is a family faculty. Really here more than at other schools I have been at." Two teachers were discussing how teachers at the study school worked together and encouraged each other regularly. One of the teachers said, "When we get down, we just rally around one another." Finally, a veteran teacher stated, "I have been here forever, and I don't want to be anywhere else. I think part of it is the faculty; in fact, a big hunk of it is the faculty."

Individual interviews. To address collegiality, teachers were asked to describe how teachers feel about this school and if they enjoyed coming to work in question 11. One teacher expressed that "Every morning I think people enjoy coming to work. We

have got people who drive a long way to come to work. It is not just a job." The principal felt that since the school had embraced more staff celebrations, "I think this is just a positive place for people." Another teacher shared that over the last 2 years some people struggled with "either the administration or other people or whatever. What has been interesting this year to watch, is that, most of these people have come to the other side by the end of the year for whatever reason."

Also in support of the school's collegial relationships, question 12 asked teachers to respond to "Describe how teachers feel about one another. Is there a sense of family or community?" Review of the individual interviews resulted in all 10 interviewees commenting on the how the school was like a family or community. One teacher shared, "I think it is a big community here. Some people are really like sisters and brothers." The principal shared that the sense of family extends past the workday with "10-15 teachers that are going to the beach together today" and that he hears of teachers "going out to dinner together." He stated that they have their professional relationships, but they had also developed friendships outside of work. A teacher who had been at the school for 3 years described the atmosphere this way:

> There is definitely a sense of family community here. When I came here 3 years ago, there was a different principal. It was definitely a family atmosphere head-to-toe, and our current principal is much more business-like. This is now a business and no longer a family, all last year and part way through this year. Then at the end of the year, I realized that there really is still a family. But it is a family that has finally cleaned up its act. Put on its Sunday clothes and actually are ready to go.

Finally, question 13 asked teachers to give an example of typical interaction

between the teachers. An EC teacher said,

> We have a lot of meetings in the hallway and I know for myself that I am late to
> class because people are stopping me, but it is not about gossip, it is not to
> complain it is "you have a kid that I teach and I need help with him."

A teacher talked about meeting up with his teammate in the morning and "I ask her how
she's doing and we will start discussing student situations right away." He shared that
they would discuss options, share ideas, and come to a decision. He concluded with "I
think that reflects the typical sort of interaction." A second EC teacher shared,

> Most of the time it is laughter. We are out in the bus line and we have our duties
> in the afternoon, in the bus line in the afternoon, when everybody is exhausted
> laughing, carrying on, telling stories of the day. I think about that…and usually
> it's a champion story; that is what I call it. Let me tell you about so and so today
> what he did out of the hundreds of kids that have been taught that day.

Summary

In review of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, evidences
to support strong collaboration emerged. Both the 2008 and 2009 The North Carolina
Working Conditions Surveys showed that teacher perceptions indicated there was
sufficient time allowed for teachers to work collaboratively (North Carolina Teacher
Working Conditions, 2014a). Collaboration and collegiality were also supported in the
individual interviews and group interviews with answers that described decisions being
made collaboratively through the use of the School Improvement Team, opportunities to
work collaboratively through their CASA meetings, and a culture that encouraged
teachers working together to support each other and students independent of set systems
and structures. Furthermore, there were evidences of collegiality among staff members

that supported a sense of family and community that enhanced their collaborative efforts.

Resources

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform included teachers' use of instructional strategies, integration of technology and assessments as components for their Academic Excellence criterion. Component 4 stated,

> Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the grade-level standards, concepts, and skills being taught. To reach students, all teachers draw from a common subset of instructional strategies and activities such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, project-based learning, simulations, hands-on learning, and integrated technology. (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a)

To further support the Schools to Watch Criteria for use of resources, Component 5 stated,

> Teachers use a variety of methods to assess and monitor the progress of student learning (e.g., tests, quizzes, assignments, exhibitions, projects, performance tasks, portfolios). All teachers use frequent assessments to benchmark key concepts and the achievement of their students. Students learn how to assess their own and others' work against the performance standards, expectations, or levels. (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a)

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. The 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included eight statements regarding Resources and Facilities and how teachers perceived the availability of resources in the school. The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 60 to 61. The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "The

reliability and speed of internet connections in this school are sufficient to support instructional practices," with 34 teachers responding with Somewhat Agree and 20 teachers responding with Agee for 54 of 60 possible responses or 90% responding positively to the question. Two questions received the highest number of negative responses at 19 each. "Teachers have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies such as copy machines, paper, pens, etc." had 15 teachers respond with Disagree and four teachers respond with Somewhat Disagree for 19 of a possible 60 responses or 31.6%. "Teacher and staff work in a school environment that is clean and well maintained" had 15 teachers respond with Disagree and four teachers respond with Somewhat Disagree for 19 of a possible 60 responses or 31.6%.

Table 5 details the eight statements and provides the number and percentage of teachers who responded.

Table 5

2008 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Resources and Facilities as Factors in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Teachers have access instructional materials and resources.	14	23%	26	43%	6	10%	10	15%	5	8%	61
Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology.	23	39%	20	33%	3	5%	12	20%	2	3%	60
Teachers have sufficient access to communication technology.	26	43%	26	44%	2	3%	3	5%	3	5%	60
Teachers have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies.	18	30%	19	32%	4	7%	15	25%	4	7%	60
The reliability and speed of internet connections are sufficient to support instructional practices.	34	57%	20	33%	2	3%	3	5%	1	2%	60
Teachers have adequate professional space to work productively.	21	35%	21	35%	5	8%	11	18%	2	3%	60
Teachers and staff work in a school environment that is clean and well maintained.	14	23%	23	38%	5	8%	15	25%	4	7%	61
Teachers and staff work in a school environment that is safe.	20	33%	27	45%	9	15%	3	5%	1	2%	60
Total	170		182		36		72		22		482

Note. *Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Disagree nor Agree (N), Disagree (D) and Somewhat Disagree (SD).

The overall responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 170 responses for Somewhat Agree, 182 responses for Agree, 72 responses for Disagree, 22 responses for Somewhat Disagree, and 36 responses for Neither Disagree nor Agree. Overall for the 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey construct of Resources and Facilities, there was a total of 352 responses that were given for Somewhat Agree and Agree resulting in a 73% of the responses being considered positive. There were a total of 94 responses or 19.5% considered as negative responses falling into the Somewhat Disagree or Disagree categories.

The 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions was also analyzed for the construct of Resources to ascertain teacher perceptions of whether resources were available to meet the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria. The 2010 Survey included nine statements regarding resources and how teachers perceived the availability of resources in the school. The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 58 to 59. The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "Teachers have access to reliable communication technology, including phones, faxes and email," with 35 teachers responding with Strongly Agree and 23 teachers responding with Agee totaling 58 of 59 possible responses or 98.3% positive responses. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was "Teachers have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies such as copy machines, paper, pens, etc." Eighteen teachers responded with Disagree and four teachers responded with Strongly Disagree resulting in 22 of a possible 59 responses or 37.2% negative responses.

Table 6 details the nine statements and provides the number and percentage of

teachers who answered the statements.

Table 6

2010 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Resources as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		DN		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Teachers have sufficient access to instructional materials.	14	25%	31	55%	3	5%	10	18%	1	2%	59
Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology.	31	53%	19	32%	0	0%	7	12%	2	3%	59
Teachers have access to reliable communication technology.	35	59%	23	39%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	59
Teachers have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies.	15	25%	22	37%	0	0%	18	31%	4	7%	59
Teachers have sufficient access to professional support personnel.	20	34%	28	47%	0	0%	8	14%	3	5%	59
The school environment is clean and well maintained.	27	47%	29	505	1	2%	2	3%	0	0%	59
Teachers have space to work productively.	27	47%	26	46%	1	2%	3	5%	1	2%	58
The physical environment supports teaching and learning.	26	45%	28	48%	1	2%	4	7%	0	0%	59

(continued)

Question	SA		A		DN		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
The reliability and speed of internet connections support instructional practices.	28	48%	26	45%	1	2%	4	7%	0	0%	59
Total	223		232		7		56		12		530

Note. *Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Don't Know (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The overall responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 223 for Strongly Agree, 232 for Agree, 56 for Disagree, 12 for Strongly Disagree, and seven for Don't Know. The total number of responses given for Strongly Agree or Agree for Resources was 455 of 530 or 85.8%. Responses recorded for Strongly Disagree or Disagree were 68 or 12.8%.

Focus-group interviews. Furthermore, the data from the two focus-group interviews were analyzed for themes and statements that supported the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria which dealt with instructional practices, technology integration and assessments, along with the characteristic of a positive school culture that supported acceptance of the responsibility for student learning.

When analyzing the documents for technology integration there was only one statement made regarding technology integration for instruction. One teacher remarked since teachers now had access to new technology, the principal would grade the teachers "as to how well you are using the Active Board, new technology." Technology responses were most prevalent regarding the use of technology for communication among the administration and the teachers. For example, one teacher shared that they received

"instantaneous information from the principal," and another stated, "Everything is done electronically." There were two references to a new electronic learning network that would be a depository for instructional resources. One teacher described the new learning network that was being developed for the teachers as "trying to find ways you could structure and make resources so seamlessly shared that people are literally saying there are too many resources."

When reviewing the transcribed responses for instructional strategies employed, the strongest factors that emerged were more aligned to instructional practices. The strongest factor was data-driven decision making with five statements. One teacher expressed that the administration had focused on data and helped teachers to "look at where the kid needs help specifically." A second teacher shared, "Diagnoses were a big part. That was even getting the Schools to Watch Criteria. We needed to see where kids were because we didn't know where they needed to go." The teachers also stated that they shared the data with their students.

However, several instructional strategies were mentioned including using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy/Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Matrix for all lesson planning, implementing strategies from Framework for Poverty, SRA Reading Laboratory, summarizing, inferencing, and critical thinking with one example each.

When discussing how students were assessed, two statements addressed specific assessments. One teacher shared that they received data to drive their decisions through "teacher tests, teacher-made tests, common assessments, retests, and benchmark tests." Another teacher talked about the "skills test assessment" that was not used as a grade but only to assess where the students were to help "tell me where I am for the EOG."

Ten statements emerged when analyzing for accepting responsibility for student

learning. One teacher shared, "Yes, they may come from a poor family, but what can we do to make them successful in the real world?" Yet another teacher discussed how the teachers accepted responsibility for student learning stating, "we personalize for each child as best we could . . . by doing that we personalized in the students' thinking that this is what you [the student] need, not some number." Another teacher shared his pride that the teachers had "produced a place where kids think of learning and not just a place to go to school." A final statement summed up the acceptance of responsibility: "This *is* the village raising the child." When talking about how to get the students to where they needed to be, one teacher shared that this was the first time in her career she had actually shared the academic goals with her students. She discussed breaking the standards down for the students and how that was "really big for some of them." A fellow teacher followed her comment with "Also teaching them what they don't know. And part of it is getting them to realize what it is they don't know."

A factor that emerged through review of the transcripts that strongly aligned with accepting responsibility for student success was a slogan. During the 2009-2010 school year, the school adopted the slogan "Whatever It Takes." The principal shared that though he had initiated the slogan, the teachers, students, and staff "have run with it." He stated,

> When you come in the building there are posters up. I didn't make these. I didn't make the buttons. I didn't make the posters . . . we had a sixth-grade program and students had a dance and a song and a rap and it [the slogan] was in each one of these presentations. It is something that people have really embraced. It has really been good.

In the focus-group interviews, there were five specific references to "whatever it

takes." One teacher substantiated the principal's remarks with "We all have one focus-whatever it takes. And I do believe that we stay there and I don't believe that I have backed off of it." A second teacher described moving students in order to find a better fit for their learning and stated that teachers would do "whatever they [students] needed to succeed." Another teacher stated, "I am talking about the moment they step in here on the first day of school in sixth grade until they have their eighth-grade graduation. What is it we need to do?" Finally, a teacher talked about how in the past, students would be sent to the student assistance team as a roadmap to the alternative school, but now they were making changes in schedules, placements, and other things to do "whatever it took" for the student to be successful at this school. At one point in the first focus-group interview, the entire group chorused the slogan. Examples that supported how the teachers would do "whatever it takes" included changing schedules, changing teachers, and consistently using diagnostics to see where the children were academically to change their teaching for better success.

Individual interviews. Initially, statements were also extracted from the individual interviews that addressed technology integration, instructional strategies, and assessment practices alignment with the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence criteria four and five. Then the researcher focused on questions 2, 6, and 7 from the Interview Protocol for Tennessee and North Carolina Case Studies (Appendix B), which were used to address positive school culture in the area of responsibility for student learning.

There were six statements that addressed technology in the classroom. The principal described the learning environment as "one that is driven by technology now." He went on to say that all of the rooms had Active Boards, projectors, and document cameras and that "you are going to see technology in use always." When

describing a project that was assigned in one EC classroom, the teacher discussed how she tried to "incorporate as much computer time possible" for her students because of the lack of technology in the students' homes. Teachers also shared that they were using multiple websites for instruction and digital textbooks.

The individual interviews resulted in seven statements regarding instructional strategies. A physical education teacher shared that he incorporated word walls and reading strategies into his curriculum to "correlate with what the other people are teaching." One of the social studies teachers shared that he was now teaching history thematically rather than chronologically and was now focusing more on the skills the students needed for success. Many of the statements focused on remediation and tutorials as strategies to improve student performance. One teacher offered Saturday tutorials, and she shared that "four out of the six that came the entire time made 3's [on the EOGs]."

There were three statements that dealt with specific assessment practices. The principal shared that prior to his arrival most of the assessments had focused on district-wide benchmarks and EOGs. However, they had implemented training for common assessments and "we now have common assessments of 8-10 items" that were given every couple of weeks to gage student achievement and then "planning or replanning to address needs." An EC teacher talked about using the Wilson Reading Program and described using pre-assessments, weekly assessments, and unit assessments. She stated, "We are constantly assessing."

When answering question 2 that asked how students were assessed on their overall ability to succeed academically, a seventh-grade teacher said, "I try very hard to assess them individually." He went on to say that he when he assessed projects or writing assignments, he could explain to a student that "this is better than the last time,"

but that the State was going to expect very specific questions in a very specific format, and he wanted the students to know that they could do both. A first-year teacher shared that for her, "that's an ever-changing thing." She discussed her growth and change as a teacher; however, while talking about her test scores, she ended her answer with, "I had wonderful growth in all demographics." A self-contained EC teacher said, "They are probably not going to get 4's in their life. But how I judge them to be successful, is how are they prepared to meet the challenges that they are going to be challenged with in their life."

Question 6 asked each interviewee to respond to "describe the learning environment at this school." The principal described the learning environment as having "a focus, you can walk in classes and see an essential question or see a learning goal and outcomes. You can look on a teacher's desk for a lesson plan and you can see that the lesson plan matches the essential question and learning goal." A seventh-grade teacher replied that the environment was "constantly focused." An EC teacher shared, "Above all positive. Everybody here wants every child to succeed."

When asked question 7, "What do you do for students who do not excel academically," an EC teacher who served the middle and high school gave an example of changing what she does by stating that

> I try to flex my schedule . . . I would be able to go into classes, pull kids out, meet with teachers to find out where they are not doing well in their classes. So it kind of gives me an idea of what I need to be working on for them.

Another EC teacher shared, "You take them where they are and you get them to believe in themselves . . . you have to show them, hey, you know what, you *are* doing it." A social studies teacher's response was, "We do it again and do it again and do it again. If

you didn't get the concept, the skill, then we do the skill again, but we are doing it with new information."

Furthermore, the theme of "whatever it takes" emerged in 11 statements during the individual interviews. The principal, when speaking of his staff, said,

They really have embraced the "whatever it takes" mindset because if it takes this one day, then we will do it. If it takes something else another day, then we will do that. That's what has been most impressive here.

One teacher when discussing getting to the "root of why a child is not excelling" stated, "Teachers just, they go to 'whatever it takes' to find out why." A teacher assistant shared, "We do 'whatever it takes.' We put our whole hearts, souls, and minds into it." When discussing the school slogan, a sixth-grade teacher said, "Because every teacher was focused on that [the slogan], every student was focused on that, and learning was first and foremost what we are about here. Learning in a positive atmosphere." Another teacher shared a story about discovering a song titled "Whatever It Takes" while singing in her church choir. She shared it with her teammates and the principal and read the song as her presentation at the Beginning Teacher End-of-the-Year Celebration.

Summary

In reviewing the focus groups and individual interviews, support emerged that teachers accepted responsibility for student learning and was summed up in the teachers embracing the slogan, "Whatever It Takes." Evidences included changing teachers, changing schedules, and changing the way teachers instructed their students. Both transcripts from the focus groups and individual interviews included evidence of the use of technology, though there were limited evidences of it being integrated in instruction. There were specific evidences of instructional strategies and assessment practices. The

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions showed that the teachers felt that the resources were available to achieve instructionally (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a).

Teacher Leadership

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform included teachers as classroom leaders with a focus on curriculum decisions as a component for their Academic Excellence criterion states: "High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well" (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a). Criterion one further clarifies the Criterion.

> High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well. All students are expected to meet high academic standards. Expectations are clear for students and parents. Prior to students beginning an assignment, teachers supply students with exemplars of high quality work that meet the performance standard or level. Students know what high-quality work should be like. Students revise their work based on meaningful feedback until they meet or exceed the performance standard or level (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a).

Criterion two states,

> Curriculum, instruction, assessment, and appropriate academic interventions are aligned with high standards. They provide a coherent vision for what students should know and be able to do. Students, teachers and families understand what students are learning and why. In any class and at any time, students can explain the importance of what they are learning. The curriculum is rigorous, non-

repetitive, and moves forward substantially. Work is demanding and steadily

progresses (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a).

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. The North Carolina

Teacher Working Conditions Surveys also looked at teacher perceptions of the impact of

teacher leadership on student achievement. The 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working

Conditions Survey included five statements regarding how teachers perceived their roles

as educational leaders in the areas of educational issues within the school.

The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 60 to

63. The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "Teachers

are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction," with 23 teachers

responding with Somewhat Agree and 26 teachers responding with Agee with 49 of 60

possible responses or 81.6%. The question that received the highest number of negative

responses was "Teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational

issues." Six teachers responded with Disagree and five teachers responded with

Somewhat Disagree resulting in 11 of a possible 63 responses or 17.4%. The responses

that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 103 responses

were given for Somewhat Agree, 126 responses were recorded for Agree, 21 responses

for Disagree, and 11 responses for Somewhat Disagree, and 45 responses were Neither

Disagree nor Agree.

Table 7 details the five statements and provides the number and percentage of

teachers who responded to the statements.

Table 7

2008 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Teacher Leadership as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues.	19	31%	26	44%	7	11%	6	10%	5	9%	63
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	23	39%	26	43%	8	13%	2	3%	1	2%	60
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	20	33%	26	43%	9	15%	5	8%	1	2%	61
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	22	36%	26	43%	9	15%	3	5%	1	2%	61
Opportunities for advancement within the teaching profession (other than administration) are available to me.	19	31%	22	36%	12	20%	5	8%	3	5%	61
Total	103		126		45		21		11		306

Note. *Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Disagree nor Agree (N), Disagree (D) and Somewhat Disagree (SD).

Overall, there were 229 Somewhat Agree or Agree responses of 306 for 74.8% of the responses being considered positive. Fifty-six responses fell into the Somewhat Disagree or Disagree categories resulting in 18.3% of the responses being considered negative.

The 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included seven statements regarding how teachers perceived their roles as educational leaders in the

areas of educational issues within the school. The number of teachers actually

responding to each question ranged from 58 to 59. The question that received the highest

number of positive responses was "Teachers are encouraged to participate in school

leadership roles," with 33 teachers responding with Strongly Agree and 24 teachers

responding with Agree which resulted in 57 of 59 or 96.6 % of possible responses being

positive. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was

"Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction." Seven

teachers responded with Disagree and two teachers responded with Strongly Disagree

allowing for seven of a possible 59 responses, resulting in 11.8%.

Table 8 details the seven statements and provides the number and percentage of

teachers who answered the statements.

Table 8

2010 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Teacher Leadership as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Teachers are educational experts.	15	26%	35	61%	2	4%	5	9%	2	4%	59
Teachers are trusted to make professional decisions.	18	31%	31	53%	1	2%	7	12%	2	3%	59
Teachers make decisions about educational issues.	13	23%	37	65%	1	2%	5	9%	2	4%	58
Teachers participate in leadership roles.	33	56%	24	41%	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	59
The faculty makes decisions to solve problems.	19	32%	37	63%	0	0%	3	5%	0	0%	59
We take steps to solve problems.	21	36%	34	59%	0	0%	3	5%	0	0%	58
Teachers are effective leaders.	16	28%	40	69%	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	58
Total	135		238		4		27		6		410

Note. *Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Don't Know (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 135 responses for Somewhat Agree and 238 responses for Agree. There were 27 responses for Disagree and 6 responses for Somewhat Disagree. There were four responses given for Don't Know. Overall there were a total of 373 of 410 responses for Strongly Agree or Agree. This indicated a 90.9% positive response rate. For Strongly Disagree or Disagree there were 33 of 410 responses recorded, which indicated negative

responses at 8%.

Focus-group interviews. The focus groups were also analyzed for themes and statements that aligned with the Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria regarding high expectations as outlined in Elements One and Two and for continuous improvement and statements that evidenced learning for all as a characteristic of positive school culture.

There were a total of seven statements that spoke specifically to high expectations. When discussing the topic of expectations, one teacher stated, "I think the expectations are high and I think that the faculty has stepped up to that." This statement was echoed when another teacher stated, "The faculty has the highest standards for every child." In speaking about the school demographics, a teacher said, "we have to take them where they are and have high goals and high expectations for them and not let them fall in a trap." Still another teacher explained that though many of the students at the school come from impoverished homes, the teachers wanted to do "what we can do to make them successful in the real world." An inclusion teacher shared the experience of having academically gifted and exceptional children in the same classroom and maintaining high standards by saying, "we expect the same thing for every child. That is why our growth is what it is."

Interestingly, a strong factor that emerged only in focus group two, which supported continuous improvement and learning for all, was a focus on student growth. There were 14 references focusing on student growth as a shared value. One teacher shared a story about the principal coming to each class at the beginning of the year to talk to the students. According to this teacher, the message to the students was strong and clear, "our goal is to see growth." A second teacher stated, "This is the only school that I

have been to where there has been such an emphasis on growth and not just pass/fail."

Still another shared, "Some of my kids didn't pass the EOGs, but the made 10 points

growth, five points growth." Many teachers shared growth data with individual students

and classes. A math teacher celebrated his class growth with his students. "But in math

this year we celebrated because we beat their growth [projections]. That was good for

them to know that they could actually beat their growth." Another teacher expressed

sharing growth with students as "a really powerful thing for them."

      Individual interviews. Individual interviews were also analyzed for evidences

that teachers were leaders in assuring success for their students. Questions 3, 4, 5, and 9

from the Interview Protocol for Tennessee and North Carolina Case Studies (Appendix

B) were analyzed for evidences that supported the Schools to Watch Academic

Excellence Criteria regarding high expectations as outlined in Elements One and Two

and for continuous improvement and learning for all as a characteristic of positive school

culture. Review of the transcripts produced 14 statements that supported teachers having

high expectations for all students.

      When asked about having high academic expectations for your students in

question 3, one teacher shared regarding her personal expectations that

> I think that my expectations have always been high, but I think what my kids saw
>
> was that I expected them to do what I told them to do. Now I think that they see
>
> more of that I expect them to do it well . . . we expect them to do it very well.

A seventh-grade social studies teacher stated, "Sometimes I think my expectations may

be a little too high." Addressing examples to demonstrate his high academic standards,

he shared, "I teach them how to write an essay and how to form an argument. I teach

them how to create a logical train of thought that works."

Question 4 asked teachers to respond to "give an example or two to demonstrate your level of academic expectation." The question went on to ask the teachers to decide whether or not their students had "met, exceeded, or fallen below" expectations. A physical education teacher talked about his work with dropout prevention. "I find them, what are you doing in so-and-so's class . . . I ask to see their report cards. I expect them to be here and work hard." An eighth-grade teacher talked about her level of expectations as "Academic expectations for me, even though you might be targeting different students, different levels, differentiated instruction, my goal is the same and the material I am presenting is the same." A seventh-grade teacher shared a story about a student who during the first semester had been suspended 31 times, but

> As the year went forward, I just kept on with her. Kept pushing her. It wasn't just me. Her Mom is wonderful. Her Mom has really pushed her. I made sure that even though she was giving up, I didn't. I knew she wasn't going to make a 3 or 4, but I knew she was capable of making substantial growth. I made sure she got tutoring during our planning period. _____, I think had one of the highest growth rates in the entire seventh grade. She jumped from, I think, a 334 to a 350 this year, which was outstanding. So I think that is a good example.

When asked if the curriculum was challenging and was the school meeting those curriculum standards, addressed in question 9, a veteran teacher stated, "I would definitely say we are meeting them. Knowing how far we have come in 2 years, way exceeding what I would have expected." A second teacher echoed her with "I think we are exceeding." The In-School Suspension (ISS) teacher stated, "Everything that applies academically around the whole school, applies in here, so I do hold my expectations high in here."

When asked question 5, "tell me about some of the student academic goals that have been set by you, your team or your school," the factor of growth once again emerged and was evidenced with eight specific references in that question. Overall, in the individual interviews there were a total of 20 references to growth as a means for teachers to show continuous improvement and learning for all. The principal shared that as a school "we have focused more on growth and not so much on a level 3 or 4." He expressed that they celebrated successes even of students who made 1s on their tests. "I think that this has created a more positive environment here for all kids." He also felt that having teachers focus on growth had "really allowed teachers to embrace a new philosophy that kids can improve." A sixth-grade teacher shared, "For me personally, if I can just get the growth, that is what I was looking for even more that 3s and 4s." An EC teacher expressed the school's commitment to growth when she said,

> By the school, I think one of our biggest academic goals is in reading and math, to raise the achievement, not just the test scores, but, like we talked before, growth. Growth is very important to us to be able to show the kid, look what you did, and not look what you didn't do. I think that they found that in one overall [goal] in the school.

Summary

Review of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey indicated that the teachers felt they had a voice in decisions that not only impacted their classrooms but also influenced school decisions (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a). In focus groups and individual interviews, teachers shared examples of high expectations, which aligned with the School to Watch Academic Excellence Components One and Two, and a school-wide focus on growth for all students. Teachers shared evidences that

included holding all students to the same standards and not allowing their background to stand in the way of success. Teachers shared examples of school celebrations that showcased student growth as a measure of success.

Schools to Watch Organizational Structure Criteria

This research further evaluated the 2008 and 2010 results from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey as it aligned with the Schools to Watch Operational Structures Criteria. The two areas that were used for analysis were School Leadership and Professional Development.

School Leadership

The Schools to Watch Organizational Structures Criteria stated, "High-performing schools with middle grades are learning organizations that establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence" (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a). Element One further explains that a successful middle school has

> A shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does drives every facet of school change. The shared vision drives constant improvement. Shared, distributed, and sustained leadership propels the school forward and preserves its institutional memory and purpose. Everyone knows what the plan is and the vision is posted and evidenced by actions. (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a)

Element Two states that

> The principal has the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication. Lines of leadership for the school's improvement

efforts are clear. The school leadership team has the responsibility to make things happen. The principal makes sure that assignments are completed. (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a)

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. The 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included 14 statements regarding how teachers perceived their school leadership and how that leadership impacted on the school.

Table 9 details the 14 statements and provides the number and percentage of how teachers responded to the statements.

Table 9

2008 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding School Leadership as a Factor in Working Conditions.

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
There is an atmosphere of respect.	20	33%	29	49%	3	5%	6	10%	2	3%	60
Faculty are committed to student learning.	25	42%	28	47%	2	3%	4	7%	1	2%	60
Clear expectations to student and parents.	16	26%	31	52%	9	15%	3	5%	1	2%	60
School leadership shields teachers from disruptions.	7	11%	29	49%	10	16%	11	18%	3	5%	60
School leadership enforce rules for student conduct.	9	15%	23	38%	11	18%	13	21%	5	8%	61
School leadership support teachers' efforts to maintain classroom discipline.	14	23%	29	49%	6	10%	7	11%	4	7%	60
Community members have opportunities to contribute to the school's success.	16	26%	28	46%	12	20%	3	5%	2	3%	61
School leadership consistently supports teachers.	19	32%	24	40%	8	13%	8	13%	1	2%	60
The school improvement team provides leadership at this school.	22	36%	17	28%	17	28%	4	7%	1	2%	61
The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	18	30%	25	41%	14	23%	2	3%	2	3%	61

(continued)

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Teachers are held to high professional standards.	25	41%	25	41%	5	8%	5	8%	1	2%	61
Evaluations are handled appropriately.	31	51%	20	33%	7	11%	2	3%	1	2%	61
Procedures for evaluations are consistent.	31	52%	17	28%	8	13%	3	5%	1	2%	60
Teachers receive feedback to improve teaching.	25	41%	26	43%	6	10%	3	5%	1	2%	61
Total	278		351		118		74		26		847

Note. *Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Disagree nor Agree (N), Disagree (D) and Somewhat Disagree (SD).

The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 60 to

61. The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "The faculty

is committed to helping every student learn," with 25 teachers responding with

Somewhat Agree and 28 teachers responding with Agree, which totaled 53 of 60 possible

responses resulting in 88.3% of the responses being positive. The question that received

the highest number of negative responses was "The school leadership consistently

enforces rules for student conduct." Thirteen teachers respond with Disagree and five

teachers responded with Somewhat Disagree with 18 of a possible 61 responses or 29.5%

responses that were considered negative. The overall responses that were considered to

have either positive or negative responses were 278 responses given for Somewhat

Agree, 351 responses for Agree, 74 responses for Disagree, responses for Somewhat

Disagree, and 118 responses for Neither Disagree nor Agree. There were a total of 847

possible responses indicated with 629 Somewhat Agree or Agree, which was 74.2%. There were 100 responses that fell into the Somewhat Disagree or Disagree categories or 11.8%.

The 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included 11 statements regarding how teachers perceived their school leadership within the school and the impact of how leadership influenced their school environment. The number of teachers who actually responded to each question on the 2010 survey ranged from 57 to 63.

Table 10 details the eight statements and provides the number and percentage of teachers who responded.

Table 10

2010 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding School Leadership as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
There is a shared vision.	18	31%	40	68%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	59
There is an atmosphere of respect.	15	26%	32	56%	0	0%	9	16%	1	2%	57
Teachers feel comfortable raising concerns.	16	29%	28	50%	3	5%	8	14%	4	7%	59
School leadership supports teachers.	24	43%	25	45%	3	5%	6	11%	1	2%	59
Teachers are held to high professional standards.	28	48%	30	52%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	59
School leadership uses data to improve student learning.	31	54%	25	44%	2	4%	1	2%	0	0%	59
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	18	33%	32	59%	5	9%	2	4%	2	4%	59
Teachers receive feedback improves teaching.	21	38%	32	57%	3	5%	3	5%	0	0%	59
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	21	40%	26	50%	6	12%	4	8%	1	2%	58
The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	21	36%	36	62%	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%	59

(continued)

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	29	49%	27	46%	3	5%	3	5%	1	2%	63
Total	242		333		27		38		10		650

Note. *Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Don't Know (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

There were two questions that received the highest number of positive responses with 58 responses each. "The faculty and leadership have a shared vision" had 18 teachers responding with Strongly Agree and 40 teachers responding with Agree for 58 of 59 possible responses or 98.3%. "Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction" had 28 teachers responding with Strongly Agree and 30 teachers responding with Agree with 58 of 59 possible responses resulting in 98.3%. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was "Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them." Eight teachers responded with Disagree and four teachers responded with Strongly Disagree for 12 of 59 responses or 20.3%. The overall responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 242 responses were given for Strongly Agree, 333 responses for Agree of 650. This resulted in 575 responses or 88.4% that were considered positive for this study. There were 38 responses for Disagree and 10 responses for Strongly Disagree for a total of 48 or 7.3%. Twenty-seven responses were Don't Know.

Focus-group interviews. Group interviews were reviewed to ascertain the level of school leadership as evidenced by examples that supported Components One and Two of the Schools to Watch Operational Structures Criterion as well as shared values and purpose as defined in positive school culture.

When reviewing the transcripts of the focus-group interviews, the shared values and purposes that emerged were a focus on collaboration, collegiality, and responsibility for student learning with a strong emphasis on individual student growth, which were previously addressed.

Many of the references to leadership referred to the current principal and aligned with Component Two of the Schools to Watch Operational Procedures. The group interviewees had seven statements that dealt directly with the leadership at the school. One teacher told of coming into the school setting with an alternative license. Her daughter had attended the school for years, and she spoke of how supportive the administration had been and stated, "All I have seen since I have been here is improvement." Another teacher talked about the principal creating the opportunity for her, as a new teacher, to visit other classrooms to observe and learn from her peer teachers and the support she received during a particularly confrontational parent meeting. Finally, a teacher said,

> The difference to me is in whether or not the staff is cohesive and whether you have a good leader . . . but I have seen in this school a lot of principals come and go and also in the different places I have been. I think that this principal has made a big difference.

Individual interviews. Individual interviews focused on questions 1, 10, 14, 16, and 17 from the Interview Protocol for Tennessee and North Carolina Case Studies (see Appendix B), which dealt with shared vision and purpose for school culture and Element One and Two from The Schools To Watch Organizational Structures Criteria.

Question 1 asked the teachers to describe what it was like to be a teacher at the school. One teacher stated, "We feel like we have accomplished something. It's turned

around so much I think we feel like we are going in the right direction." Another teacher

shared regarding her feelings, "wonderful, challenging, I wouldn't want to be anywhere

else." One teacher shared, "It is about working to do what is right for the children. I do

believe that." The principal shared,

> it is not the success of the school; it is the result of everyone working together for
>
> a common purpose. You can't single it out. That is why I cannot single out one
>
> thing that has made the biggest difference. It's everyone buying into everything.
>
> When addressing question 10, "How would you describe teachers' attitudes about

their students' ability to learn," seven statements emerged supporting that all students

could learn. A seventh-grade teacher remarked,

> I don't think there is any teacher in this whole school who would say their
>
> children could not learn. I think we all feel, I know I certainly do, all of my kids
>
> can learn. Some them are faster than others, but they can learn. There's no doubt
>
> about it. That's an improvement. That's something that has really changed.

When addressing this question, an EC teacher expressed, "As a whole school, oh my

goodness gracious, I think everybody here, they know every student can learn." As a

final example of teachers' beliefs regarding students' abilities to learn, the principal

shared that when he had arrived at the school 2 years ago the philosophy of most teachers

was "you have the ability or you have not." He credited the focus on growth and

individual student improvement as what initiated a shift in his teachers' thinking. He

stated,

> I'm still not going to say that all my teachers have an all kids can learn and all
>
> kids can excel philosophy, but I do think the majority have an all kids can
>
> improve philosophy. I think that is a promising step.

Question 14 asked teachers to respond to "describe attitudes and feelings that teachers in your school have about completing assigned tasks and jobs." One teacher shared "there is enough respect for him [the principal] and his authority, but for him in general, that people, whether they want to or not, they are going to do it." A physical education teacher who had been at the school for over 10 years said,

Now it is as good as I have ever seen it at any school. Part of that is because everyone is supporting each other now and it is almost like, I think they have embraced the idea that if I am not doing my duty, then I am letting someone down.

An eighth-grade teacher stated,

If it is their assigned task and job, then it is a regular part of their job. They have no trouble doing it. Everybody goes out to the bus line at the end of the day, everybody does their planning.

When asked if the staff felt that they had contributed to the vision of the school, question 16, all 10 interviewees responded affirmatively. One teacher shared that the vision is written together and everyone voted on the vision and mission for the school. Another teacher stated that "the teachers did buy into it . . . we all had a stake in it." Finally, a teacher shared that he believed the teachers had taken ownership of the vision "especially the last 2 years. The last 2 years of assessment because that assessment is as much of us as it is of the students."

Question 17 asked "Is the principal friendly, supportive, and open in his or her interactions with the faculty and staff?" An EC self-contained teacher shared,

Very much so. Very professional 100% of whatever he does. He treats everybody fairly. If he had something that needs to be addressed, I always feel

like it is for our benefit. It has never been a gotcha card. It has always been this

is going to make you a better teacher or this is going to help you.

The EC inclusion teacher said,

His door is, unless he is in a meeting, his door is always open. He is around the

school all of the time. In the halls, going in and out of classrooms. He is very

visible . . . it's been wonderful.

Another teacher's perception was, "Yes and No. On a personal level he can be. But you

can tell when his is stressed and when things are coming down from above and

sometimes that causes our principal to be a little closed off."

Throughout the individual interviews there were 13 statements that dealt directly

with the impact of the current principal. When speaking of her principal, one teacher

shared her impression, "To be an administrator of a school, I think that it is so important

that the person is human first . . . and he is." A teacher assistant spoke of the principal

and the "backbone" of the school. Describing the principal, she said, "Looking at us with

all that passion in his eyes and said 'WE.' How could you not think about the kids when

he says 'WE?' not I, not Central Office, but 'WE'." An EC teacher shared,

I think that given that this school has really turned around, and I don't want to say

quickly because I know it was a process since before I was here, but in terms of

since I have been here, it has really moved. I always say that with the exception

of one or two, teachers are good. Some need more help than others. But

everything comes down to leadership. Everything.

Summary

For the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys, teacher perceptions

of School Leadership remained predominantly positive which indicated that the teachers

felt their concerns were addressed and that there was a trusting, supportive environment in the school (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a). In interviews, teachers continued to support shared values of collaboration, collegiality, and responsibility for student learning. In individual interviews, all teachers felt that they had contributed to the school vision. There also emerged a sense of respect and support for the principal as the leader of the study school.

Professional Development

The Schools to Watch Organizational Structures Criteria also defined the parameters for Professional Development. Element Four stated,

> The school and district devote resources to content-rich professional development, which is connected to reaching and sustaining the school vision and increasing student achievement. Professional development is intensive, of high quality, ongoing, and relevant to middle-grades education. Teachers get professional support to improve instructional practice (i.e., classroom visitations, peer coaching, demonstrations lessons, etc.). Opportunities for learning increase knowledge and skills, challenge outmoded beliefs and practices, and provide support in the classroom. (National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 2013a)

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys. The 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included five statements regarding how teachers perceived their Professional Development opportunities within the school. The number of teachers actually responding to each question regarding professional development ranged from 59 to 61. The question that received the highest number of positive responses was "Teachers are provided with opportunities to learn from one

another," with 26 teachers responding with Somewhat Agree and 20 teachers responding with Agree which totaled 46 of 59 responses, resulting in 77.9%. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was "Sufficient funds and resources are available to allow teachers to take advantage of professional development activities." Sixteen teachers responded with Disagree and nine teachers responded with Somewhat Disagree for a total of 25 responses of a possible 61or 40.9% of the responses being negative for the purposes of this study.

Table 11 presents the five statements and provides the number and percentage of teachers who answered each question.

Table 11

2008 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Professional Development as a Factor in Working Conditions

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Sufficient funds and resources are available for professional development.	12	20%	18	30%	4	6%	16	27%	9	15%	59
Teachers are provided with opportunities to learn from one another.	26	44%	20	34%	5	8%	7	11%	1	2%	59
Adequate time is provided for professional development.	16	27%	20	33%	14	23%	7	12%	3	5%	60
Teachers have training to utilize instructional technology.	15	25%	26	43%	11	18%	7	11%	2	3%	61
Professional development provides the knowledge and skill needed to teach effectively.	15	25%	29	48%	10	16%	4	7%	3	5%	61
Total	84		113		44		41		18		300

Note. *Somewhat Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Disagree nor Agree (N), Disagree (D) and Somewhat Disagree (SD).

The overall responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 84 responses for Somewhat Agree, 113 responses for Agree, 41 responses for Disagree, 18 responses for Somewhat Disagree, and 44 responses for Neither Disagree nor Agree. This resulted in 197 responses for Somewhat Agree or Agree of 300 possible responses for 65.6% positive responses. There were a total of 59 responses that

were either somewhat Disagree or Disagree for 19.6% negative responses.

The 2010 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey included 13 statements regarding Professional Development opportunities within the school.

Table 12

2010 Teacher Responses to North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions Regarding Professional Development as a Factor in Working Conditions.

Question	SA #	SA %	A #	A %	N #	N %	D #	D %	SD #	SD %	Total
Resources are available for PD.	7	13%	37	66%	3	5%	10	18%	2	4%	59
Time is provided for PD.	8	14%	37	66%	2	4%	10	18%	1	2%	58
PD offerings are data driven.	7	14%	41	82%	9	18%	1	2%	1	2%	59
PD opportunities align with the school's improvement plan.	12	22%	40	73%	4	7%	3	5%	0	0%	59
PD is differentiated for each teacher.	6	12%	30	59%	8	16%	10	20%	5	10%	59
PD deepens teachers' content knowledge.	12	21%	36	64%	2	4%	6	11%	2	4%	58
Teachers receive training for instructional technology.	12	21%	37	64%	1	2%	8	14%	1	2%	59
Teachers are encouraged to reflect their practice.	21	36%	37	64%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	59
Follow up is provided.	8	14%	46	81%	2	4%	3	5%	0	0%	59
PD provides opportunities for collaboration.	8	14%	43	75%	2	4%	6	11%	0	0%	59
PD is evaluated and results are communicated.	7	13%	33	62%	5	9%	11	21%	2	4%	58

(continued)

Question	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
PD enhances teachers' ability to individualize instruction.	9	16%	43	77%	1	2%	2	4%	2	4%	57
PD allows for improved student learning.	13	23%	40	70%	1	2%	3	5%	1	2%	58
Total	130		500		41		73		17		761

Note. *Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Don't Know (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD); *PD: Professional Development.

The number of teachers actually responding to each question ranged from 57 to 59. The concept of teachers reflecting on their own practice did not show up in the Teacher Working Conditions Survey until the 2010 survey. Interestingly, it was the question that received the highest number of positive responses. "Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice" had 21 teachers responding with Strongly Agree and 37 teachers responding with Agree, with 58 of 59 responses or 98.3%. The question that received the highest number of negative responses was "Professional Development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers." Ten teachers responded with Disagree and five teachers responded with Strongly Disagree totaling 15 of a possible 59 responses, resulting in 25.4%. The overall responses that were considered to have either positive or negative responses were 130 responses for Strongly Agree and 500 responses for Agree, which totaled 630 of 761 possible responses. This was 86.1% of the responses. There were 73 responses for Disagree and 17 responses for Somewhat Disagree, totaling 90 responses of 761 or 11.8%. Forty-one responses were Don't Know.

Focus-group interviews. When the interview groups were asked to describe professional development at this school, surprisingly, the groups gave very different answers. Interview Group One started with a teacher asking, "all nine hundred and ninety-nine of them?" The second response was "every time we get a new person, we get some new staff development program. Oh, my Lord." A comment was made that the teachers received hours of staff development that was "what we had in undergraduate school, God knows how many years ago." Another teacher shared how often presenters will show up in their CASA meetings and give a presentation, but "there is no follow up for those kinds of things. I just feel they are ineffective." However, as the conversation continued they mentioned four professional developments that they felt were personally valuable: SRA, Bloom's Taxonomy/Gardener's Multiple Intelligence Matrix, Framework for Poverty, and Fred Jones Activities. Also, there were five statements that talked about teachers teaching each other as being the most valuable of their professional development experiences. There were three statements that supported the teacher who expressed the desire "to be offered opportunities and choices."

Interview Group Two, when asked the same question, the first response was, "Basically, always collaborating." The example was given of spending a lot of their grade level time working on curriculum planning. One teacher stated, "we are getting to the point where we are starting to say this is what we need, rather than waiting for them to bring it to us." When talking about analyzing the curriculum, another teacher shared, "it is always good for us to see other approaches because we are so used to teaching a certain way." There were two statements regarding specific professional developments that were valuable. One was working on math strategies with a representative from Raleigh "who had some great ideas." The other was Active Board training. One elective

teacher expressed that even though he had received training to support other teachers, as an elective teacher he did not always get training specific to his content. He had to ask for help from the Central Office. He "had to go find the person to come in and then [ask] can you get the person to come in and train us" for support in the elective content areas.

Individual interviews. There were no specific questions from the Interview Protocol that directly addressed teacher perception or experiences in professional development; however, three references emerged regarding professional development at the school. Discussing the amount of work that is required of a beginning teacher, one teacher added, so "we need a new workshop so somebody has to lead it and the rest of you attend it. You don't catch your breath until summer." She went on to talk about teachers who were now being sent to week-long professional developments out of state, 2-day workshops that were being offered during the coming weeks, and summer presentations from teachers within the district. She stated, "It is on a day that isn't a teacher workday. We're not getting paid and we're going. It was not a requirement to do it; it was suggested." Another teacher shared his frustration, stating,

> But we are constantly barraged with new things that are temporary things. Here's a new workshop, here's a new thing, there's a new that . . . I honestly wish that people would stop looking for the magical button and just let something work or better yet, let teachers figure out what works for their actual students and do their own research. People are pouring research at us all the time.

However, the principal gave credit to professional development for helping to improve the rigor that was now present in lessons. He stated, 'I think that it is improving because of all the staff development we have been receiving, especially with our Math and Language Arts teachers." He also shared that there was more "bell to bell

instruction" and that teachers were relying less on "worksheet driven instruction."

Opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of instructional practices; focus-group interviews. Though a characteristic of a positive school culture, the concept of having opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of instructional practices was not specifically addressed in a prompt for the focus-group interviews; however, evidences still emerged. Statements showed a sense of self-reflection that impacted students. The first statement made in the first focus group was "With the past 2 years we have seen very positive changes in all areas. Academics first of all. Behavior, which was a major turnaround for us, and I personally have changed a lot of things in my own classroom." This was followed by two other teachers acknowledging personal change, with one stating, "I changed some things within myself, in my classroom which has helped improve with the students when they come in." In sharing what it takes to truly become a teacher, a first-year teacher stated, "I mean this has been a learning process for me, honestly." Another teacher shared her reflection in that "over the past 3 years, I have come to understand more about how these kids function." On the concept of being a turnaround school, one teacher explained, "Maybe we found out something, too. Maybe we had to change a failing school if not we are going to be looked at as failing teachers."

Individual interviews. In the individual interviews, examples of opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of instructional practices also emerged. One teacher stated, "To be a successful turnaround school, you have to turnaround the kids and the faculty has to be willing to turnaround and change what they are doing." A physical education teacher talked about what he had considered changing with his way of teaching health. He stated,

that it's just played in my mind, and I'm probably academic enough or whatever, but I would like to get the kids to create healthful formulas that would be part of the curriculum . . . it's just something I have played in my mind. It might help students somewhere else in another class.

When talking about working with her team to find new ways to support students, one teacher stated, "I need to know how it flows because it is learning for me. That is kind of how that [conversation] went. So it is changing. We are finding different ways. It is evolving."

Summary

The findings of how professional development was viewed at the school was mixed. The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys indicated teacher perceptions that the professional development was available and of a quality to impact teaching at the school (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a). However, focus groups and individual interviews found that teachers felt that much of the professional development offered was ineffective or simply repeated from something that was already offered. Teachers expressed a desire to have choices for professional development and the opportunity to learn from each other.

Barriers

Research Question 2 asked teachers to share their perceptions of "What have been the barriers in implementing the Turnaround Initiative?" There were five factors that were discussed in the two focus groups: consistency, parental involvement, money, reading levels, and student accountability when prompted to describe roadblocks in raising student achievement. No barriers surfaced in the individual interviews.

Lack of consistency had four statements that surfaced. Three of those statements

referred to a teacher's personal consistency and how that often stood in the way. The fourth statement dealt with the consistency of the reading programs that had been built into the school day four different ways over 4 years.

The second barrier to emerge was parental involvement, which also garnered four statements. In focus group one, a teacher remarked that she would love to have parental involvement that was not negative. However, the other three statements that came out in focus group two regarding parental involvement actually surfaced in their discussion of reading as a barrier. The teachers talked about figuring out ways to get the parents to buy into the idea that education is important. One teacher shared,

> I think, too, we have got to figure a way to get the parents bought into that education means something for them and them to understand their experience in school or their bad experience in school doesn't mean that Johnny's experience will be bad. So we have to convince these parents and work closely with the parents.

They also discussed improving attendance at the PTSO meetings and even suggested having PTSO before the football games that were highly supported in the community.

The third barrier to meeting the goals of the Turnaround Initiative was money, which also was voiced in three statements, all of which were in focus group one. The biggest concern voiced was that many of the ancillary materials were old and falling apart. When addressing the current budget cuts to the North Carolina state budget as a handicap toward improving student achievement, a teacher who announced she was retiring shared,

> Because I was moving my things over to Ms. _____ room and I looked at the shabby condition of my ancillary materials, and I thought, bless her heart and she

is not even going to have paper. And I am thinking, geez, there is no money for

just basic school supplies, basic teaching supplies.

Also, a concern about potential class size increase due to budget cuts was voiced.

However, the final wrap up of the conversation was "then again, the teachers, its sorta

sad, just keep on doing. They work so hard."

The next barrier was reading levels, which had three statements. Teachers

discussed how hard it was when students came into a grade level 3 or 4 years behind in

reading. However, they did not hold anyone else responsible. They discussed how the

grade levels below them were doing their jobs and they discussed the importance of

reading in all the content areas. Furthermore, they talked about how different teachers

used different strategies but how those strategies were also incorporated into science and

social studies. They expressed a belief that they had to take the students where they were

when they arrived and move them as far as possible.

Finally, the middle school model, as often perceived by others, was seen as a

possible barrier, which received two statements. The teachers discussed that sometimes

student accountability suffered because middle school teachers would replace

accountability with a focus on the nurturing concepts associated with middle schools. As

one teacher stated, "then accountability goes out the window."

Student Achievement Trends

For a school in North Carolina to be supported by the Department of Public

Instruction's Turnaround Initiative, student achievement data were used for purposes of

selection. Therefore, the researcher, in order to ascertain any changes during the years

that the study school received the additional support, reviewed student data trends. Table

13 represents a 3-year summary of the school's recognition status, growth, and AYP

designations during 2007-2010, the years the school was involved in the North Carolina

Turnaround Initiative.

Table 13

3-Year Data of Study School during North Carolina Turnaround Initiative for State
Designation, North Carolina Growth Model and No Child Left Behind AYP

Year	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
State Designation	Priority	Priority	Progress
Growth	Expected	Expected	High
AYP	15/25	24/25	25/25

During the 2006-07 school year, the school remained a priority school based on

the testing results even though it met expected growth. The number of AYP subgroups

increased to 27 with 19 subgroups meeting AYP that year (Public Schools of North

Carolina, 2003-2007). The school began the implementation a Framework for Action in

the fall of 2007-2008. In 2007-2008, the school was once again designated a priority

school that did make growth in 15 of the 25 AYP subgroups; however, the school did

meet expected growth (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006-2010). The 2008-2009

school year saw this school again designated a priority school that met expected growth.

It did not meet AYP with 24 of 25 subgroups meeting performance targets for growth.

The school was designated a School of Progress for the 2009-2010 school year. The

school met high growth and AYP with 25 of 25 subgroups meeting performance targets

(Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006-2010).

Since the North Carolina ABCs of Accountability used scores from the reading

and math EOG tests to assign school designations, the researcher also reviewed the scores

during the time the school was in the Turnaround Initiative. The following table shows

the percentages of students scoring proficient on the reading and math EOG tests for the

2007-2008, 2008-2009, and the 2009-2010 school years when the school was in the

Turnaround Initiative.

Table 14

3-Year Data of Study School for Percentages of Students Achieving Proficiency in
Reading and Math on the North Carolina EOG Tests

Year	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Reading	35.9%	48.7%	54.3%
Math	43.8%	59.6%	69.9%

During the years the school was involved with the North Carolina Turnaround

Initiative, scores in both reading and math showed steady improvement. Reading

increased 12.8 percentage points between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 and increased an

additional 5.6 percentage points between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Math also

improved with a 15.8 percentage point gain between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009. The

school further increased proficiency between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 by 10.3

percentage points. This improvement in student achievement led the school to being

exited from the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the data that were collected from the

priority middle school that was involved in this case study during the 2009-2010 school

year, the final year the school was involved in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative.

The evidences were collected through the 2008 and 2010 North Carolina Teacher

Working Conditions Survey, the Schools to Watch Academic and Operational Structures

Criteria, focus-group interviews, and individual interviews in order to discover if there

were changes that impacted school culture and student achievement trends. The analysis

of this data is discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 5 begins with a brief summary of the problem, methodology, and discussion of the results found through data analysis. This mixed-methods approach examined, through a descriptive case study, a North Carolina middle school for its continued struggle to meet the needs of its adolescent population and the processes that were utilized for school improvement in order to increase student achievement and other outcomes. This school, which served a diverse, low socioeconomic population, was designated as a priority middle school and participated in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative during the 2007-2008 through the 2009-2010 school years. In an effort to ascertain the impact of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative on school culture and student achievement trends, the researcher attempted to identify specific evidences of positive school culture and possible barriers which had the potential to impact student achievement. This study further attempted to share practices that could be replicated in other low-performing schools. The three research questions that guided this study were

1. What was the impact of the Turnaround Initiative on school culture?

2. What have been the barriers in implementing the Turnaround Initiative?

3. How did the student achievement trends change from 2007-2010?

In addition, this chapter not only offers an interpretation of the data from Chapter 4 but the relationship to current research. After the discussion of the results, there is a discussion about the interpretation of findings, along with the relationships of current study to previous research; an explanation of unanticipated findings; recommendations for educators; and suggestions for additional research followed by the conclusion.

Middle School Improvement Contentions

There has been sizeable research and policy about whether middle school improvement reforms yield academic and social advantages. This became especially important with the advent of accountability standards at both the national and state levels. Many organizations such as the Carnegie Corporation, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform offered recommendations that could be implemented for school improvement; however, unless these recommendations landed in the hands of the school administration, recommendations were not implemented. The call for reform continued and eclipsed all levels of education, including the middle school level.

At the middle school level, reforms called for increased academic excellence and rigor while assuring that instruction was developmentally appropriate for students aged 10 to 15. It also called for middle schools to assure social equity. North Carolina, recognizing that there was a need for its middle schools to have more support to meet the increasingly rigorous policy standards, included middle schools in its Turnaround Initiative. The state also required the schools to use the recommendations from the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform's Schools to Watch Criteria as the roadmap to school improvement (Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the Implementation of the ABCs, 2009).

However, other researchers were saying that simply having recommendations for improvement or implementing structural changes was not enough to create an optimal learning environment for students at any level. In order for a school to achieve sustainable improvement for high student achievement, the school had to embrace a culture based on shared values and purpose that accepted responsibility for student

learning in a collaborative and collegial atmosphere. The school also needed to have a commitment to continuous improvement with learning for all while offering opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of instructional practices (Peterson, 2002).

This study examined a North Carolina middle school for evidences of the implementation of the Turnaround Initiative as a support for school improvement and also observed if there had been changes to the school culture that impacted student achievement. This study found that the components that were used as guidance for school improvement were in place and founded on research-based recommendations. However, equally important, there had been a shift in the culture of the school that was evident through evaluation of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys and from the stories and experiences shared by the principal and teachers at the school.

Limitations

Even though this case study's results were consistent with previous research, the findings did have limitations that should be considered. The school in the study was only one priority middle school in the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative. Since the results focused on only one middle school in North Carolina, it created a limited sample size. This small sample could limit the ability to generalize the results to other low-performing middle schools. If the study were to be replicated with multiple schools, it could provide a more accurate generalization of the results.

The data gathered for analysis using the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys was limited due to the changes implemented between the 2008 and 2010 surveys. With the inclusion of additional data on the more recent surveys, this limitation has the potential to be reduced in future studies allowing a more comprehensive statistical evaluation of teacher perceptions as they align with positive

school culture.

Summary of the Results

Throughout this study, the participants displayed pride at the improvements that the school had achieved. There appeared to be strong interpersonal relationships that created a sense of family and community within the school. Furthermore, the adults at the school held high expectations for themselves and the students and also accepted responsibility for their students' academic successes by focusing on individual student growth. These factors created an environment that was positive and conducive to student learning. Though the study school evidenced many of the components of a positive school culture, the final area that was reviewed for this research that could have supported a positive school culture was opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing. The conclusion on this area was mixed and could not be considered as support. However, the findings revealed that the school did meet the requirements of the Turnaround Initiative through their Framework for Action. Additionally, the study found that responses from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys supported that overall teachers felt positive about the conditions that impacted teaching and learning in their school.

Based on the findings of this study, the implementation of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative had a positive impact on both the culture of the school and student achievement trends. The principal and teachers who were interviewed indicated a receptive attitude toward the changes that had been implemented and an optimistic attitude toward continued improvement. This study resulted in five themes that supported a shift in culture for the study school and four strong factors that impacted the school's success during the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative.

Discussion of the Results

Interpretation of the Findings

The data analysis process revealed patterns which eventually resulted in five major themes. The themes were supported by factors which the interviewed participants, the principal, teachers, and staff, believed were important to the improvement the school had witnessed. The themes and many of the factors were supported by research-based practices. A discussion of the themes in relation to previous research is shared in this section. These themes were (a) strong collaboration, (b) collegiality, (c) acceptance of responsibility for student learning, (d) continuous improvement for all, and (e) shared values and purpose.

According to the analyzed themes and their supporting factors, in order to develop an environment conducive for middle school adolescents to succeed academically, a school needs to implement new structures based on recommendations from research, but equally important, there needs to be a positive shift in the culture of the school.

Relationships of Current Study to Previous Research

Collaboration

The first theme that emerged from this research study was that the teachers had embraced a strong level of collaboration. The National Board for Professional Teaching supports that collaboration is a skill possessed by accomplished teachers. Proposition Five, which is a cornerstone for the development of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, states that teachers will be part of learning communities where they collaborate with others for increased improvement in student learning (National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2014). The study school's commitment to collaboration was first evidenced in its Framework for Action with the creation of CASA

meetings. Both the focus-group interviews and the individual interviews evidenced that

teachers shared their commitment to their CASA meetings as a form of collaboration. In

the individual interviews, all 10 of the interviewees spoke to how the school collaborated

to help students succeed. In the focus groups, there were 16 statements that involved

collaboration at the study school and how the teachers utilized collaborative meetings. In

these collaborative meetings, teachers worked on planning for instruction, received

professional development, disaggregated data, and mapped curriculum. Along with the

structured time allotted for their CASA meetings, teachers shared examples of informal

meetings between teachers in classrooms or hallways to discuss ways to address students'

academic issues. Teachers offered examples of collaboration through informal sharing of

practices such as having opportunities to visit other teachers' classrooms for observation

or having other teachers offer advice for improving classroom instruction.

Research also supports that strong collaboration influences culture and

improvement in student learning. DuFour et al. (2008) stated that educators have long

been aware of the importance of building a collaborative culture in order to create school

improvement that is sustainable. This research study also found that collaboration was

also supported in both the 2008 and 2010 Teacher Working Conditions surveys in the

construct of Time with the statement "Teachers have time available to collaborate with

their colleagues" receiving the highest number of positive responses on both surveys with

47 positive responses of 61 on the 2008 survey and 45 of 57 on the 2010 survey. Overall,

the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions surveys indicated that 59.1% of the

responses on the 2008 survey and 68.9% of the responses on the 2010 survey construct of

Time were positive. These responses indicated that teachers felt they had time available

to plan, collaborate with peers, and provide students with instruction. They also felt

positively that barriers were removed that allowed maximum time during the day (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a).

Improvement in student achievement trends as an indicator of school improvement was also apparent in the steady increase in the number of students who had achieved proficiency on the North Carolina EOG tests in reading and math. Research is emerging that indicates teacher collaboration has an impact on student achievement. Research conducted by Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) found that fourth-grade students who attended schools where teachers exhibited a higher level of collaboration had higher levels of achievement in both reading and math. During the 3 years the study school was in the Turnaround Initiative, the school showed an increase of 18.4 percentage points in reading and 26.1 percentage points in math. According to Kohm and Nance (2009), "Collaborative cultures take the brakes off and accelerate a faculty's capacity to improve instruction. When teachers have many opportunities to collaborate, their energy, creative thinking, efficiency, and goodwill increase—and the cynicism and defensiveness that hamper change decrease" (p. 67).

Collegiality

The second theme that emerged from the research was collegiality. Barth (2006) stated, "The nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else" (p. 8). Barth went on to say that in schools with collegial relationships, teachers spend time discussing educational practices with each other, sharing their knowledge, observing each other in practice, and supporting each other's successes. Also, according to Hoeer (2005), one of the most powerful characteristics a school can possess is a strong sense of collegiality. Though there was no specific reference to

teacher perceptions of collegiality in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys, the factor of collegiality was strongly evidenced in the focus groups and individual interviews.

In the focus groups, there emerged 15 statements that referred to collegiality at the study school. They discussed how the teachers got to know each other, making the school a "great" place to work. They also talked about the family or community atmosphere that had developed over the past 2 years. During the individual interviews all of the teachers remarked that the faculty at the school was more like a family or community. In the individual interviews there were 30 specific references to the school being a family or community. They spoke of how this sense of family included their students. They spoke of times when they spent time working together to find ways to support individual students. The teachers also talked of supporting each other when things were tough and sharing ideas and experiences with each other. The principal shared that there was a sense of professional collegiality that was evident in conversations that the teachers had regarding how to solve problems that arose at the school. The principal also supplied examples that the sense of family and the collegial relationships at the study school often extended past the school day for events such as going out to dinner or planning beach trips together.

Another element of collegiality that is supported by the research is the importance of stories, rituals, and celebrations. Cromwell (2002) stated that the rituals and ceremonies that are celebrated create the "persona" of an individual school. This element of collegiality was evidenced when the teachers shared their traditions and rituals that were celebrated at the school. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested that what the school celebrates will reveal a great deal about the culture of the school—"how its people link

their past with their present, what behaviors are reinforced, what assumptions are at work, and what is valued" (p. 141). In the focus groups, there were 11 specific statements regarding the study school's celebrations. The celebrations that were shared spoke of grade-level graduations/celebrations, celebrations for classes and students who made growth, EOC celebrations, and the end of the year tradition when all the teachers lined up in the bus parking lot holding signs to wish their students a wonderful summer vacation. Individual interviews had five specific references to celebrations that centered on student growth, teacher successes, Positive Behavior Support (PBS) celebrations, and staff celebrations. However, all 10 interviewees shared stories of celebration from not allowing students to fail to understanding and working with the dynamics of a diverse population to standing in the bus parking lot sharing "champion stories."

Accepting Responsibility for Student Learning

A third theme that was evidenced in this study was acceptance of responsibility for student learning. According to Laura LoGerfo, an education researcher at the Urban Institute, teachers who were willing to take personal responsibility for their students could show improvement in student achievement. Her study, which focused on reading, revealed that when first-grade students had a teacher who accepted responsibility for student achievement, students could see a 3-point gain in yearly achievement ("Students achieve more with teachers who take personal responsibility for student learning," 2006, para. 1). The study school's willingness to accept responsibility was first seen in its setting the goals for its Framework for Action; the school chose to personally take responsibility by implementing a 3-pronged remediation and enrichment program developed to address student improvement in reading and math instruction. The school also extended its school day 35 minutes to better meet the needs of its students.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys revealed that teacher perceptions were positive that they had resources to effectively impact student achievement. On the 2008 survey, 73% of the responses were positive; on the 2010 survey, 85.8% of the responses were positive. The surveys also indicated that teachers positively viewed the study school as supporting their instruction by having sufficient resources for teaching and learning (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a).

Most importantly, the principal and the teachers spoke of personally accepting responsibility for student learning, a characteristic of a positive school culture. Teachers who accept responsibility for student learning also "believe that they, the staff, have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery" of the essential curriculum addressed in the school (Lezotte, 2002, p. 18). In both interview groups, evidence emerged that supported a culture that accepted responsibility for student learning and showed that the teachers believed that they could assure student success. In the focus groups, there were 10 statements that addressed accepting responsibility. The teachers talked about setting and maintaining highs expectations for their students yet using data to find out where their students were academically to align instruction with student needs. They talked about "working to do what is right for students." They discussed how using their CASA meetings allowed them to focus on individual students. In the individual interviews, there were 22 statements referring to accepting responsibility for student learning and how this had become a part of their school culture. A teacher proudly shared that over the last couple of years the study school had become a place where students now came to learn and not just go to school. Teachers talked about sharing the content standards with their students, breaking the standards down for student understanding, and supporting the

students in understanding what each student needed to be successful. Several teachers

talked of the struggle of working with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds but

still expressed a desire for them to achieve in the "real world," even if it meant setting up

Saturday tutorial sessions. Also, the principal spoke of how instruction had changed to

allow a clearer instructional focus and a consistency with essential questions and lesson

plans being tied to standards. Teachers spoke of reteaching skills through new content

that were not initially mastered by their students. Finally, teachers shared stories of

setting students up for success and using praise to remind students of what they were

actually accomplishing.

One striking factor that emerged that supported accepting responsibility for

student learning was that the school had adopted a slogan, a theme that was part of the

fabric of the school: "Whatever it Takes." This was a slogan that was adopted for the

2009-2010 school year. There were four specific references to the theme of "Whatever it

Takes" in the focus groups and 11 in the individual interviews. Stories were told of how

the past purpose of the student assistant team seemed to be to assure that certain students

would go to the alternative school or alternative settings. Now teachers were willing to

do "whatever it took" to change schedules, change teachers, and differentiate lessons, all

in an attempt to keep the student at this school and assure that student's success. Another

important evidence was that teachers spoke to their willingness to take the time to get to

"the root" of why a child was not successful, being focused not only on the slogan but

also taking the slogan to the level of learning in a positive atmosphere and changing what

they were doing daily if it meant that the students were more successful.

Continuous Improvement and Learning for All

The fourth theme that emerged to support that the school had developed a positive

culture was continuous improvement and learning for all. This was especially true when it focused on student improvement. Barth (1991) believed that the most influential change that can be introduced into the school is to establish a norm continually striving for improvement, allowing for experimentation, and encouraging invention. In "School Context: Bridge or Barrier to Change," the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (n.d.) stated, "a norm of continuous improvement suggests that when problems surface, the information resources and training will be provided to address the problems" (p. 8).

Evidences from this study supporting that the study school was involved in continuous improvement emerged in the school's Framework for Action documents. Evidences included improvement in meeting AYP subgroups in 2008 when the school met 24 of 25 subgroups, which was an increase from the previous year when the school met 15 of 25. During the 2009-2010 school year, the school met all 25 subgroups. Between the 2007-2008 and the 2009-2010 school years, the school also showed a steady improvement in the areas regarding student achievement trends. Between 2007 and 2010, reading proficiency for the study school improved by 18.4 percentage points while math proficiency improved by 26.1 percentage points.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys also supported the idea of continuous improvement and learning for all with the majority of the teachers indicating that they perceived themselves as leaders in the school with the ability to make sound instructional decisions that impacted both the classroom and the school (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, 2014a). For example, in 2008, 78.6% of the teachers perceived that teachers in the study school took steps to solve problems. In 2010, 94.8% of the teachers surveyed believed that the staff at the study school took steps

to solve problems, leading to improvements for the school. Overall, the 2008 survey had a 74.8% positive response rate, and the 2010 survey had a 90.9% positive response rate on how the teachers perceived their roles at educational leaders at the school.

In focus-group interviews, there were five statements that related to continuous improvement and learning for all. Two teachers spoke of how they had not only changed things in their classrooms but also changed things within themselves that had improved how their students were learning. Teachers shared the improvements the school had experienced over the last 2 years that had a positive impact such as the implementation of PBS and the CASA meetings. Of the 10 individual interviews, five teachers commented on continuous improvement and learning for all. There were a total of 10 statements among the five teachers. Once again, the statements focused on the changes that had occurred over the past 2 years. One teacher discussed how the school had once been looked at "as a dumping ground"; but now that image had changed due to the improvements the school was incorporating and the improved student achievement data, and students who were once leaving the school were now returning. The principal talked about how changes in the scheduling had freed up more time for small group remediation and enrichment to enhance student learning.

In further support of the commitment to continuous improvement and learning for all, two factors to which the teachers were strongly committed emerged: high expectations and a focus on student growth.

High expectations. DuFour et al. (2008) indicated that one consistent message that has emerged from the research regarding both "effective teachers and effective schools is the significance of high expectations for student achievement" (p. 254). The teachers at the study school expressed that they held the students and themselves to high

expectations. In the focus groups, there were seven statements that reflected high expectations. Teachers talked about not allowing the students' low socioeconomic statuses to stand in the way of their successes. Teachers discussed having the same standards for every child regardless of whether the students received exceptional children services or were in the gifted classes. High expectations were expressed from what students were expected to do in ISS to expectations in regular classrooms to expectations working with the drop-out prevention specialist.

 Lezotte (2002) stated, "In an effective school there is a climate of high expectations in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school's essential curriculum" (p. 14). This belief was evidenced in the individual interviews where seven of the teachers discussed having high expectations that resulted in 14 specific references to expectations. That belief was evident when these teachers also spoke of working with children of poverty but not allowing that to stand in the way of student success. Teachers gave examples of holding students to the same standards in classes that were heterogeneously grouped with a wide disparity of ability and still expecting that all the students would be successful. They shared stories of students who did not have parental support or that the support was minimal for reasons such as work or a lack of trust in the school process. Yet, they worked together in an attempt to solve the issues that stood in the way to move their students to higher academic success.

One teacher talked about taking the time to support students by building up their belief that they could be successful. Green (2005) stated,

Teacher expectations affect student achievement primarily in two ways: first, teachers teach more material more effectively and enthusiastically to students for

whom they have high expectations; second, teachers respond more favorably to

students for whom high expectations are held–in a host of often subtle ways that

seem to boost students' expectations for themselves. (p. 29)

Teacher statements also reflected a level of high personal expectation that was evidenced

from not accepting failure from children to being willing to put in extra hours after school

or on weekends to support students for success. This reflection of teacher beliefs being

reflected in teacher actions is also supported by research. Muhammad and Hollie (2012)

described four kinds of schools that strive to meet the needs of students. Muhammad and

Hollie went on to say that a high will/high skill school is "an organization that had

matched its belief system with its practices. There is a philosophical agreement that all of

its students have the capacity to become successful" (p. 409). These schools also

exhibited the characteristic of having high expectations for all of their students

(Muhammad & Hollie, 2012).

Growth. Additionally, a strong factor emerged that indicated that the teachers

were committed to continuous improvement and learning for their students, which was a

focus on individual student growth. From the statements that the teachers shared, student

growth was something that the teachers valued as a part of their school. Interestingly,

focus group two was the first to introduce the school's commitment to growth with 14

references to assessing their students for growth. Recent research is emerging that

supports the development of a growth mindset. Students who view intelligence as

something that can be changed with individual effort develop a growth mindset.

According to Dweck (2007),

It is not surprising, then, that when we have followed students over challenging

school transitions or courses, we find that those with growth mind-sets outperform

their classmates with fixed mind-sets—even when they entered with equal skills

and knowledge. Growth mind-set fosters the growth of ability over time. (p. 36)

This research study found that both the principal and the teachers had a belief in the

importance of student growth.

This research aligned with the statements shared by the teachers at the study

school. Along with the statements from the focus groups, there were 20 specific

references to student growth from eight of the 10 teachers who were individually

interviewed. Teachers discussed that the principal had introduced the focus on growth

early in the year, and teachers and students had embraced the concept. A teacher shared

that the emphasis on growth at this school was unlike any other school in which she had

taught. The principal also expressed that he felt that this had not only improved the

environment, it had created a new philosophy for all of his teachers that all kids can

improve. This was viewed as an improvement from previous teacher attitudes.

Research also shows that when students face failure, they increase their efforts

and will look to find new ways and strategies to improve their learning outcomes

(Dweck, 2007). Furthermore, Flom (2012) suggested that the work of Dweck and her

colleagues is supported by brain science. This theory of growth mindset is supported by

research into brain plasticity and has proven to be pivotal in helping students improve

their academic achievement. This research study also found that students, who did not

traditionally do well on state testing, were showing a renewed interest in learning.

Teachers at the study school shared stories of students who traditionally did not

put forth effort or who had never achieved proficiency who now achieved substantial

growth and became more engaged in their own learning. Teachers spoke with pride that

even though their students had not achieved proficiency, their growth was strong. There

was a sense that this focus on growth had impacted both the teachers and students in a positive way as it resulted in a sense of success for both.

Shared Values and Purpose

A fifth theme was evidenced in this study that is also an important component in building a positive school culture—the concept of shared values and purpose. According to Blankenstein (2004), values are attitudes and behaviors that are embraced by an organization and to which the organization is committed. Values are the behaviors we exhibit daily in order to develop the school we want. Values are not impacted by budgets, staff fluctuations, or educational trends. "Values endure" (Blankenstein, 2004, p. 85). When the research from this study was reviewed for a shared sense of values and purpose, it became evident that many of the previously mentioned themes that supported a positive school culture were the foundation on which the ideals and core beliefs had been developed and were highly valued by the school. These values included the precepts of collaboration, collegiality, acceptance of responsibility for student learning, and continuous improvement to assure that students were successful.

Muhammad (2009) stated that any school that wants to produce a healthy learning environment for their students "must first and foremost be clear about their collective purpose" (p. 96). These values were clarified in the Framework for Action where the goals documented teacher collaboration through their CASA meetings, remediation measures that had been put into place, and the steady improvement in student achievement trends. The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys construct for School Leadership showed the teachers at the school felt that the environment of the school was conducive to trust, support, and empowerment for teachers and that the school made efforts to address teacher concerns (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions,

2014a). The 2008 survey indicated that 70.4% of the teachers perceived that the faculty and staff had a shared vision; the 2010 survey indicated a 98.3% positive response rate for the school having a shared vision.

Muhammad (2009) further stated that it is impossible for schools to make progress without a collective commitment for student achievement. This study found that the study school showed a strong commitment to success for their students and that commitment resulted in the study school being exited from the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative in 2010 based on improved student achievement trends.

Leadership. Another factor that emerged when the discussion turned to leadership was the important role the principal played in transforming the conditions at the school. Research supports that leadership is essential for schools to improve. Lezotte (2002) emphasized the important role a principal has in leading a school toward improvement. Lezotte stated,

> The principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. In addition the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. (p. 16)

During the interviews, it was shared with the researcher a realization that the transformation the school had experienced relied on effective leadership and that effectiveness was attributed to the current principal. There were seven statements that emerged from the focus groups that talked about leadership at the school. The group talked about the support of the administration and how the principal had initiated teachers visiting other teachers' classrooms to learn. They also spoke of collaboration with leadership on areas of concern such as discipline. Leaders have to cultivate a shared

sense of purpose, which is stated in the mission and vision of a school. All 10 individual interviewees responded that they felt they had contributed to the vision and mission of the school. Teachers shared that they not only supported a shared vision, but they also felt they had a true stake it that vision. One teacher in focus group two talked about building cohesiveness in the staff and feeling that this principal "made a big difference."

A 1989 Northwest Regional Educational Lab reported that the "change process begins with the tone of the relationship between the leader and the teachers, which then trickles down to affect the relationship between teachers and students" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 96). Schmoker (2006) said that when leadership maintains a focus on results through a formal emphasis on student learning, teaching improves. Teachers in both the focus and individual interview groups spoke of the principal as the catalyst for focusing the teachers and students on individual growth as a vehicle for student success. In the focus groups, there were nine comments regarding the timeline of change in the school over the last 2 years. In the individual interviews, there were 18 references to the change occurring over the last 2 years. Comments inferred that the last 2 years had not been an easy transition to the new principal for everyone; however, what he had asked them to do was viewed as either best for the students or best for them personally as teachers.

Johnson (1996) stated,

Today's school leaders must understand both the limits and the potential of their positions, carefully balancing their use of positional authority with their reliance on others, gradually building both a capacity and widespread support for shared leadership and collaborative change. (p. 11)

Also, Kanter (2004) stated, "Self-confidence is not the real secret of leadership. The more essential ingredient is confidence in other people" (p. 328). The principal shared

that the real reason for the success the school had accomplished could only be attributed to the fact that the teachers embraced all the change initiatives. He felt they made it happen. However, there was also a sense from the faculty of the large part the principal had played. People spoke of the respect they had for their principal and his willingness to work with the faculty. One person described his passion as he talked with the staff regarding what "we" could do to change the current conditions of the school. There was a strong implication that the improvement experienced by the study school was the direct result of the combined efforts of the principal and the staff.

Explanation of Unanticipated Findings

      Positive behavior supports. Another finding that emerged during the group interviews involved the school's adoption of the PBS Program (now called Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports). The Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Program was designed to impact the school environment in order to support high student achievement while reducing behavioral problems. It is systematic and involves teaching the social behaviors that are expected at the school, while implementing behavioral interventions for students who consistently struggle with behavior issues (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d.).

      This study school tried to implement PBS in the past and it was not successful. The reimplementation started with just the incoming sixth graders in 2007 and was implemented school-wide the next year. According to one teacher, "we brought it back like gangbusters." This was reflected in the data that the principal shared with the researcher (see Appendix G). From the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year, the number of students receiving out-of-school suspension (OSS) fell from 406 to 22, and the number of days that students were suspended out of school dropped from

1,867 to 743, resulting in 1,124 fewer missed instructional days. The total number of write-ups went from 1,135 to 710, indicative of a more positive school culture.

The impact of PBS was also evidenced in teacher responses during both the focus groups and individual interviews. There were 14 statements, 10 from the focus groups and four in the individual interviews, addressing the changes in student behavior from the implementation of PBS. One teacher shared that "behavior was a major turnaround for us." When talking about changes that had been made, one teacher said, "I do think that PBS made a dynamic change." The ISS teacher remarked that the students' behavior in ISS had "changed tremendously." Another teacher talked about teaching the behaviors to the students by showing that "this is how you behave, this is how you address one another." One teacher commented that the teachers had developed a "PBS mentality." Finally, a teacher told a story of how the teachers would stand in the hallways with "noise level signs" and soon the students were changing classes in an orderly fashion. She stated that the teachers would stand in the halls and say "Wow! It worked. SHHHH! Don't tell anybody. Really, that is how it empowered the teachers when you saw it worked." Teachers felt that a positive change had occurred in the school since the reinstatement of the PBS system.

Recommendations for Educators

Although the results of this descriptive case study are limited to the study of one North Carolina priority middle school that went through the Turnaround Initiative, insights can be gained through review of the data collected that have implications for district leaders, school leaders, teachers, faculty, and educational policymakers.

Principals, school-level leaders, and district-level leaders need to consider the relevance of school culture on student achievement and begin the conversation regarding

improving the culture in the schools where their students go to learn. They need to look for evidences that all students are attending a school with the characteristics of a positive school culture. In order to assure that all students are in a culture that supports them, leaders need to reflect on the overall culture of their schools for evidences which include collaboration; collegiality; acceptance of responsibility for student learning; continuous improvement for all; and opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of practices. The research is too compelling to leave it to chance.

All teachers, especially those who serve students in low-performing schools, need to understand the importance of the relationships that are built in the schoolhouse to their students' academic achievement. The relationships that are built through collaboration and collegiality between administrators and teachers, teachers and teachers, and teachers and students are the foundations on which student learning is built. Teachers need to accept the responsibility for student learning by realizing all students can grow. Teachers need to encourage their students to develop a "growth mindset." The teachers also need to embrace an attitude of growth over one that simply recognizes pass/fail; however, this often involves changes in how teachers implement instructional practices and how they interact with their students. By developing an understanding of the power of monitoring student growth and sharing that growth with their students on a regular basis, teachers can begin to see results of their efforts without relying on end-of-year standardized tests. When teachers focus on doing whatever it takes, students reap the rewards of increased academic success at every level.

Furthermore, the results of this research indicate that programs such as the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative can improve student achievement even in chronically low-performing schools when these schools are given support and guidance. This is

especially true when that support is partnered with concrete components such as the Framework for Action and research-based, evidence-proven programs such as Schools to Watch. However, educational support programs need educational policy support through legislation that guarantees the needs of all students are met through additional state-level support, adequate funding, and equitable opportunity for all children.

Suggestions for Additional Research

This case study utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative on a priority middle school. Though this study used one school and constitutes a limited sample, the work that was done at this school had an impact on student achievement, and the school witnessed an improvement in the culture. Based on the results of this study and a review of related research, recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. Due to limitations of this research study, it is recommended that studies be conducted to further investigate initiatives, such as the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative, for impact on school culture and student achievement trends.

2. It is recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted on such programs as the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative to assess their impact and to evaluate how the programs may have evolved over time.

3. It is recommended that additional studies be conducted to assess the impact on student achievement in schools that have adopted a focus on growth versus proficiency.

4. It is recommended that additional studies be conducted to assess how the level of teacher perceptions on the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions

Survey serve as an indicator of positive or negative school culture.

5. It is recommended that studies be conducted to explore the impact of professional development when it is teacher-initiated and/or based on teacher choice verses the traditional methods of professional development.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Initially, this study found that the school had successfully implemented a Framework for Action that was required of schools in the Turnaround Initiative and reported data that documented meeting the goals that were set. Furthermore, five themes emerged that supported the characteristics of a positive school culture of shared values and purpose, acceptance of responsibility for student learning, collaboration, collegiality, and continuous improvement for all. These themes were supported by four factors that emerged and supported values that were embedded in the school's daily work: "whatever it takes," high expectations for students and teachers, individual student growth, and the importance of leadership. The findings that resulted for the positive school culture characteristic of opportunities for reflection, inquiry, and sharing of instructional practices were mixed. Barriers emerged through discussions in the two focus-group interviews that included consistency, parental involvement, money, reading levels, and student accountability. However, there was no evidence that the barriers seriously impeded the implementation of the initiative. Furthermore, a review of the student achievement trends showed improvement during the 3 years of the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative and resulted in the study school being exited from the initiative.

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Appendix A

Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria

Schools to Watch Academic Excellence Criteria

High-performing schools with middle grades are academically excellent. They challenge all students to use their minds well.

1. All students are expected to meet high academic standards.

- Expectations are clear for students and parents.
- Prior to students beginning an assignment, teachers supply students with exemplars of high quality work that meet the performance standard or level.
- Students know what high-quality work should be like.
- Students revise their work based on meaningful feedback until they meet or exceed the performance standard or level.

2. Curriculum, instruction, assessment, and appropriate academic interventions are aligned with high standards.

- They provide a coherent vision for what students should know and be able to do.
- Students, teachers and families understand what students are learning and why. In any class and at any time, students can explain the importance of what they are learning.
- The curriculum is rigorous, non-repetitive, and moves forward substantially.
- Work is demanding and steadily progresses.

3. The curriculum emphasizes deep understanding of important concepts and the development of essential skills.

- Teachers make connections across the disciplines to reinforce important concepts and assist students in thinking critically and applying what they have learned to solve real-world problems.
- All teachers incorporate academic and informational literacy into their course work (i.e., reading, writing, note taking, researching, listening, and speaking)

4. Instructional strategies include a variety of challenging and engaging activities that are clearly related to the grade-level standards, concepts, and skills being taught.

- To reach students, all teachers draw from a common subset of instructional strategies and activities such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, project-based learning, simulations, hands-on learning, and integrated technology

5. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess and monitor the progress of student learning (e.g., tests, quizzes, assignments, exhibitions, projects, performance tasks, portfolios).

- All teachers use frequent assessments to benchmark key concepts and the achievement of their students.
- Students learn how to assess their own and others' work against the performance standards, expectations, or levels.

6. The faculty and master schedule provide students time to meet rigorous academic standards.

- Students are provided more time to learn the content, concepts or skills if needed.
- Flexible scheduling enables students to engage in academic interventions, extended projects, hands-on experiences, and inquiry-based learning.

7. Teachers know what each student has learned and still needs to learn.

- Students are provided the support they need to meet rigorous academic standards.
- Students have multiple opportunities to succeed and receive extra help as needed, such as: co-teaching or collaborative resource model, support and intervention classes, before- and after-school tutoring, and homework centers.

8. The adults in the school are provided time and frequent opportunities to enhance student achievement by working with colleagues to deepen their knowledge and to improve their standards-based practice.

- They collaborate in analyzing student achievement data and making decisions about rigorous curriculum, standards-based assessment practice, effective instructional methods, and evaluation of student work.
- The professional learning community employs coaching, mentoring, and peer observation as a means of continuous instructional improvement.

Appendix B

Schools to Watch Operational Structure Criteria

Organizational Structure

High-performing schools with middle grades are learning organizations that establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their trajectory toward excellence.

1. A shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does drives every facet of school change.

- The shared vision drives constant improvement.
- Shared, distributed, and sustained leadership propels the school forward and preserves its institutional memory and purpose.
- Everyone knows what the plan is and the vision is posted and evidenced by actions.

2. The principal has the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication.

- Lines of leadership for the school's improvement efforts are clear.
- The school leadership team has the responsibility to make things happen.
- The principal makes sure that assignments are completed.

3. The school is a community of practice in which learning, experimentation, and time and opportunity for reflection are the norm.

- School leadership fosters and supports interdependent collaboration.
- Expectations of continuous improvement permeate the school culture.
- Everyone's job it to learn.

4. The school and district devote resources to content-rich professional development, which is connected to reaching and sustaining the school vision and increasing student achievement.

- Professional development is intensive, of high quality, ongoing, and relevant to middle-grades education.
- Teachers get professional support to improve instructional practice (i.e., classroom visitations, peer coaching, demonstrations lessons, etc.)

- Opportunities for learning increase knowledge and skills, challenge outmoded beliefs and practices, and provide support in the classroom.

5. The school is not an island unto itself; it is a part of a larger educational system, i.e., districts, networks and community partnerships.

- There are deliberate vertical articulation and transition programs between feeder elementary schools and destination high schools.
- The district supports (funding and time) its schools' participation in best practice networks, associations, learning communities, and professional development focused on middle grades improvement and achievement.
- School and district work collaboratively to bring coherence to curriculum, instruction, assessment, intervention, data collection, analysis, and accountability for student achievement.

6. The school staff holds itself accountable for the students' success.

- The school collects, analyzes, and uses data as a basis for making decisions.
- The administrators and faculty grapple with school-generated evaluation data to identify areas for more extensive and intensive improvement.
- The staff delineates benchmarks, and insists upon evidence and results.
- The school staff intentionally and explicitly reconsiders its vision and practices when data call them into question.

7. District and school staff possess and cultivate the collective will to persevere, believing it is their business to produce increased achievement and enhanced development of all students.

- The faculty and administrators see barriers as challenges, not problems.

8. The school and district staffs work with colleges and universities to recruit, prepare, and mentor novice and experienced teachers.

- Principals insist on having teachers who promote young adolescents' intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and ethical growth.

9. The school includes families and community members in setting and supporting the school's trajectory toward high performance.

- The administrators and teachers inform families and community members about the school's goals for student success and the students' responsibility for meeting those goals.
- The administrators and teachers engage all stakeholders in ongoing and reflective conversation, consensus building, and decision making about governance to promote school improvement.

Appendix C

Letter of Invitation

Dear Educator,

I am a student at Gardner-Webb University working on my doctoral degree in the Department of Educational Leadership. My advisor is Dr, Douglas Eury, Associate Dean of the School of Education. I am conducting a research project to study the impact of the North Carolina Turnaround Project on cultural change in a Priority Middle School. This research has been approved by the Superintendent, the principal and the Gardner-Webb Institutional Review Board.

There are no material benefits, costs to you, or payments for participating in the study. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you wish to withdraw, simply make this researcher aware. This will not affect you in any way. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this research poses minimal risk to any participants.

As a participant in this project you will be asked to serve on a focus group and/or be personally interviewed. Your name and teaching assignment is only required to schedule an interview with you. Each experience should take approximately 45 minutes. These interviews will be audio taped to allow the researcher to assure the accuracy of all comments. All information that is shared with this researcher is confidential and anonymous. Your participation in this project will contribute to the body of research on middle school reform, which focuses on practices and beliefs that impact cultural change and enhance student learning.

Questions, concerns or complaints about this project can be answered by contacting Jo Beth Clark at XXXXXX or XXXXXX or Dr. Douglas Eury at XXXXXXX. By checking yes below, you are agreeing that you have read this consent information, or that it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. You are also agreeing that all of your questions concerning this study have been answered and that you are 18 years of age or older. Thank you for your time and help.

Respectfully,

Jo Beth Clark

____Yes, I agree to participate in the research study.
Name_____
I teach _____
____No, I do not wish to participate in the research study.
Name_____

Appendix D

Individual Interview Protocol Questions

Interview Protocol for Case Study Data Collection

The Middle School Movement and Student Achievement: Creating
Healthy and Effective Middle Schools

Grand Tour Question
1. Tell me what it is like being a (teacher, principal, staff member) at this middle school?

Technical Level and Academic Emphasis
2. How do you assess your students' overall ability to succeed academically?
3. Do you have high academic expectations for your students? Is your level of expectation
similar to that of other teachers and the school as a unit?
4. Give an example or two to demonstrate your level of academic expectation. Have your
students met, exceeded, or fallen below your level of expectation?
5. Tell me about some of the student academic goals that have been set by you, your team,
or the school.
6. Describe the learning environment in this middle school.
7. What do you do for students who do not excel academically?
8. Describe how students in this middle school react to students who excel academically.
9. Is your curriculum academically challenging? Are you meeting, exceeding, or falling
behind in relation to the curriculum standards that have been set?
10.How would you describe teachers' attitudes about their students' ability to learn?

Technical Level and Teacher Affiliation
11. Describe what teachers feel about the school. Do they enjoy coming to work?
12. Describe how teachers feel about one another. Is there a sense of family or
community?
Give an example or two of typical interactions between and among teachers.
13. How would you assess your overall job satisfaction at this middle school?
14. Describe the attitudes and feelings that teachers in your school have about completing
assigned tasks and jobs.

Managerial Level and Collegial Leadership
15. How are decisions made at this middle school? By the principal? By principal and
teachers? By committees? By someone else?
16. Do teachers believe that they have contributed to the mission and vision of this middle
school? Have they contributed significantly to changes that have been implemented
in the recent past?
17. Is the principal friendly, supportive, and open in his or her interactions with faculty
and staff? Explain by citing an example.

Final Question
18. Is there anything you want to share with me that I have not addressed in one of the
interview questions?

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Prompts

Focus Group Interview Prompts

1. What is it like to work at _____ Middle School?

2. Can you tell me about your staff development experiences here at the school?

3. Explain what it means to collaborate at __MS.

4. What do you feel is the biggest roadblock you face in raising student achievement?

5. What traditions do you celebrate?

Appendix F

IRB Approval Request

Gardner-Webb University

Institutional Research Board
Application to Conduct Research with Human Subjects

Name: Jo Beth Clark   Date: November 16,
2009   (Principal Investigator)

Permanent Address: XXXX

Phone: XXXX

Department: Education

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Doug Eury

Title of Research Project: A Case Study of a Priority Middle School Involved in the
North Carolina Turnaround Initiative

What is your hypothesis?
This study is not designed to test a hypothesis; it is designed to answer the following
research questions:
        1. What is the impact of the Turnaround Initiative on school culture?
        2. What have been the barriers to implementing the turnaround Initiative?

How many subjects do you expect to use, and how will you obtain this sample?
        The participants for this study will include the initial staff who completed the
Schools to Watch Self-Study and Rating Rubric and the 2008 Teacher Working
Conditions Survey and the staff of the 2009-2010 school year who will retake the Schools
to Watch Self-Study and Rating Rubric in the fall of 2009 and will complete the Teacher
Working Conditions Survey in the spring of 2010. Because both instruments are
anonymous, it is necessary to utilize the entire staff.
        Interviews and focus groups will be chosen from teachers who have been at the
school since its inclusion the Turnaround Initiative in 2007. If the teachers who were
originally there have left the school, teachers who have been there the longest will be
asked to participate. Teachers will be invited by letter to participate in either an interview
process or as part of a focus group. Interview and focus groups will be chosen randomly
from the aforementioned teachers. Interviews will be conducted with ten staff members.
The researcher will also interview the previous principal, who was there for the beginning
of the initiative, the current principal, as well as the two assistant principals who have
been at the school since the project began.
        Focus groups will be comprised of a representative from each grade level, one
elective teacher, one Exceptional Children's teacher, one teacher assistant and one
representative from the support staff. The researcher will conduct two focus groups.

What is your research methodology? Attach any tests to this form with the appropriate references.

This will be a descriptive case study. No tests will be used in the research.

Describe the research procedure. Attach a copy of the consent form and a copy of the debriefing statement. Describe how and when these will be used.

Teachers will be sent the letter of intent electronically. Responses will be returned to the researcher. The researcher will then schedule the teachers in either focus groups or personal interviews. The researcher will then conduct the scheduled procedure in the spring of 2010.

1

Does this research pose risk to the subject? If so, what protocol will be enacted to protect the subject?
No

Does this research involve deception of any kind? (If applicable, please explain.)
No

Will any incentives be used? If so, please explain.
No

How will you protect the subject's right NOT to participate in your research?
The introduction letter will allow for the subject to reject the opportunity to participate.

How will you protect the subject's confidentiality of results?
No names will be used in the research paper.

How, when, and where will the research results be reported?

The results of the research will be reported upon completion of the study. The estimated completion of the research is August 2010. The dissertation defense will be at Gardner-Webb University. The research document will be housed at Gardner-Webb University.

2

If this changes, be sure to contact the IRB with an update. If, for example, a faculty member publishes research results, he/she should forward this information to the IRB.

When do you anticipate completing this research?
August 2010

Approved by Dissertation Chair

_____
Date

Approved by IRB Representative

_____
                        Date

_____Exempt _____Expedited _____Fall Review

Appendix G

Study School's Discipline Referral Data

Study School's
Discipline Referrals Data

Description 2007-2008	
Total # of students sent to ISS partial day	255
Total # of students sent to ISS all day	317
Total # of student ISS days	
Total # of students sent home early	37
Total # of students with OSS	442
Total # of student OSS days	1473
Total # of students expelled for the year	0
Total # of write-ups	1398
Total enrollment 2007-2008	697

Description 2008-2009	
Total # of students sent to ISS partial day	270
Total # of students sent to ISS all day	285
Total # of student ISS days	
Total # of students sent home early	10
Total # of students with OSS	406
Total # of student OSS days	1867
Total # of students expelled for the year	1
Total # of write-ups	1335
Total enrollment 2007-2008	684

Description 2009-2010	
Total # of students sent to ISS partial day	22
Total # of students sent to ISS all day	183
Total # of student ISS days	331
Total # of students sent home early	5
Total # of students with OSS	229
Total # of student OSS days	743
Total # of students expelled for the year	0
Total # of write-ups	710
Total enrollment 2007-2008	616

* Data compiled May 27, 2010