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BUILDING A COMMUNITY FOR LEARNING BY
CREATING A SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM
AT RITTENBERG MIDDLE SCHOOL

By
John P. Griffith

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
March 27, 2003

Approved by _____
Professor,

Date Approved May 15, 2003

Abstract

John P. Griffith

Building a Community For Learning
by Creating a School Management
Team at Rittenberg Middle School
2003

Dr. Dennis Hurley
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to determine if the formation of a School Management Team (SMT) at the Rittenberg Middle School in Egg Harbor City, New Jersey, would foster positive academic change in the subject of eighth grade mathematics. The creation of the SMT was part of a comprehensive whole school reform. The instrument used by Rittenberg Middle School to measure student achievement was called Edutest. Edutest is a comprehensive, online assessment software that provides immediate results of student performance. Results from the Edutest provide confirmation that work done by the School Management Team did facilitate improvement in mathematics scores of eighth grade students. Rittenberg eighth grade students were first assessed on September 18, 2002, 43.7% of the students scored at or above eighth grade level in mathematics. Upon their next scheduled assessment on November 19, 2002, 48.9% of eighth grade students scored at or above their grade level in mathematics. Finally, on February 4, 2003, 53.8% of the same students scored at or above grade level in mathematics.

Mini-Abstract

John P. Griffith

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by Creating a School Management
Team at Rittenberg Middle School
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Dr. Dennis Hurley
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to determine if the formation of a School Management Team at Rittenberg School would foster positive academic change in the eighth grade mathematics. Results provide confirmation that work done by the School Management Team did facilitate improvement in mathematics scores of eighth grade students.

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INTRODUCTION:

Every classroom in every school has students with unique interests, talents, and learning needs who learn in assorted ways and at different rates. The primary task of any school staff is to identify and provide for the diverse educational needs that are required to ensure schooling success for every student. Programs that effectively provide instruction and are responsive to the individual learning needs of students utilize a variety of instructional methods and learning opportunities. In implementing the instructional component of the whole school reform model, Community For Learning, or CFL, school administrators and teachers will use systematic planning, including the formation of a School Management Team, for the delivery of instruction. This system also includes a school-wide instructional needs assessment and adaptive learning that addresses the individual needs of the student.

Community for Learning is a model for comprehensive and continuous school improvement based on a body of research on the influences that school, family and community have on student learning and educational resilience. CFL is designed to guide schools in providing powerful forms of instruction to ensure high standards of academic outcomes for all students. The CFL model also recognizes that significant learning occurs in environments outside the school, and the conditions for learning must be established at home and in the community. Community for Learning draws on more than two decades of research on what makes schools work and what helps each student learn, even those children who are faced with challenging circumstances. CFL builds on the strengths of diverse communities by redeploying existing resources and professional

expertise to achieve the most positive impact on children's development and educational success.

The key to a well-defined organizational support structure is to build upon existing resources and expertise among the school staff to create a climate for continual improvement, coordination of services, and program coherence – *a shared responsibility approach*. Implementation of a shared responsibility approach requires bringing together the complementary skills and perspectives of all of the stakeholder groups and an organizational structure that provides flexibility and demands accountability. Thus, an integral and necessary part of the CFL design is the establishment of a School Management Team, or SMT.

The SMT will be comprised of administrators and eight subject area and grade team leaders. The purpose of the team is to improve the organizational function of education within the district. Empowerment, communication and shared vision are a few of the desired results of employing the SMT. The primary goal is to improve student achievement through effective leadership of the professionals directly involved with the delivery of instruction. By organizing the school into small units, it is believed that smaller learning communities will be formed where students will feel a stronger bond to their teachers and school.

SMT meetings will be held at a maximum of three meetings per month after school hours. Minutes of each meeting will be kept on file with the intern and the Community for Learning Facilitator. SMT members will be notified of all meetings through the building administrator or the CFL Facilitator. SMT members will meet weekly during school hours with their respective grade level or subject area team at common prep time to:

- Relay communication from the SMT
- Gather feedback, comments, recommendations, ideas, etc. to bring back to the SMT
- Discuss with the team the pace of delivery of instruction and the Degree of Implementation (DOI) of each district classroom
- Prepare for the district's quarterly and annual assessments
- Make recommendations of students for the Gifted and Talented, ASAP and/or PASS programs

Central to establishing a School Management Team (SMT) is the building of a school community with specific program goals to ensure high standards of educational outcomes for every student and a formalized delivery mechanism for action by the school staff, parents, and students. The SMT will act as a unified force for school-wide improvements including the successful implementation of CFL's instructional component, adaptive learning. The goal of the SMT is to develop a coherent school improvement vision and coordinate efforts in implementing a comprehensive approach to school improvement. A major expected outcome of the SMT is significant improvement of student development and achievement.

As the Egg Harbor City School District begins whole school reform, it is necessary to implement a School Management Team, or SMT, to provide the necessary support to teachers in the first full year of CFL. This includes helping teachers implement the tools of CFL, develop a diagnostic/prescriptive approach to instruction, aiding in their understanding of differentiated instruction, creating exploratories and

learning centers and understanding Bloom's Taxonomy and the idea of multiple intelligences when developing prescription plans.

The SMT will be made up of administrators and teachers, and eventually support staff, parents, and community members. The whole school reform model chosen for the Rittenberg Middle School is Community for Learning, or CFL. The purpose of the SMT will be to improve Rittenberg School by working cohesively on plans that focus on student success. The SMT seeks to achieve its goals by implementing four critical components of Community for Learning:

- School Wide Restructuring
- Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM)
- Staff Development
- Linking School, Family and Community

The Rittenberg building administrator as the instructional leader of the school is the chairperson of the SMT. Other members of the SMT include grade level and subject area leaders, the Family Support Team Leader and the CFL Facilitator. The SMT meets a minimum of two times per month. Minutes of the meetings are e-mailed to all staff members after each meeting and are posted on the whole school reform website. Decisions made by the SMT are made by consensus rather than by voting. The chairperson is to review the SMT decisions with the Superintendent of Egg Harbor Schools.

The SMT also has the responsibility for assisting in the successful implementation of CFL's eight program components. The Rittenberg Middle School is embarking upon whole school reform for the 2002-2003 school year and a major piece of the reform is the creation of a school management team. The purpose of the SMT is to ensure

participation of staff, parents, and community members while developing a culture of cooperation, accountability, and commitment. The team's responsibility is to develop a whole school reform plan based on the needs assessment of our school and to ensure that curriculum instruction, and delivery are aligned with the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) of New Jersey. Furthermore, the SMT must also monitor the effectiveness of CFL and be sure it is being properly implemented. The SMT may also review statewide assessment (testing) results, eventually help to develop the school budget, and participate in the hiring of new staff members within the school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this study is to discover how the formation of a SMT at the Rittenberg School will help foster positive academic change in the subject of mathematics by assisting the Rittenberg Middle School Staff in successfully implementing the eight program components of Community for Learning. Furthermore, through the creation of the School Management Team, the intern seeks to redefine the perceived roles and the responsibilities of school staff members to promote CFL implementation and also to actively encourage links between schools, families and the community. The study will result in a summary of accomplishments to inform administrators, teachers and board of education members and also examine pre/post Edutest scores to see if implementation of CFL has contributed to higher student achievement in eighth grade mathematics.

DEFINITIONS:

1. Adaptive Education – an alternative educational model that attempts to maximize the school success of each student, regardless of innate academic ability, thereby providing a more responsive and effective learning environment for all. Key components of adaptive educational models include:
 - a. Use of varied instructional techniques and grouping arrangements (i.e., individual, small-group, whole-class)
 - b. Individualized planning for each student based on unique learning strengths and weaknesses
 - c. Flexible application of “best practices” techniques and strategies to accommodate changing student needs over time.
2. Adaptive Learning – the classroom component of Community for Learning (CFL), a comprehensive school improvement model. Through adaptive learning, teachers learn to adapt instruction to meet individual student needs, while students participate in the planning and management of their educational experience, thereby becoming more responsible for what and how they learn.
3. ASAP – After School Assistance Program that provides after school academic help to students identified as below grade level in mathematics or reading.
4. Bloom’s Taxonomy – a method for meeting student objectives that allows teachers to create learning strategies that address different cognitive skill levels. The levels in ascending order of difficulty are: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

5. Community for Learning (CFL) – a multifaceted and coordinated school-based program designed to increase the academic achievement of every student in the classroom, regardless of innate ability, or previous school performance. The four main components of CFL are school-wide restructuring, adaptive learning, professional development, and the school-family-community connection.
6. Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) – a process for educational reform designed by the U.S. Department of Education in 1998 to overhaul schools' failing academic systems using research findings and best practices; emphasizes basic academics and parental involvement; and helps all children meet state content standards and performance goals.
7. CFL Facilitator – a school staff member (generally a teacher released of classroom duties) chosen to service as the on-site resource in helping implement CFL at his or her respective classroom.
8. Data – in the field of education, various sources of factual and numerical information (e.g., test scores, student demographics, absenteeism rates, teacher instructional styles) that help clarify what is happening in the classroom and inform decision making to improve the educational environment for administration, teachers, and students.
9. Degree of Implementation (DOI) Assessment – a survey battery composed of classroom observations and teacher interviews that are designed to formally measure how well CFL is being implemented in a given school setting.
10. Diagnostic/Prescriptive Process – a method for determining how best to meet individual student learning needs by first determining a student's learning level, including strengths and weaknesses (diagnosis), then designing an instructional

plan of action to meet the student's diagnosed learning needs (prescription). The process is ongoing and should be flexible enough to address changes in learning needs over time.

11. Differentiated Instruction – an instructional technique, attributed to Carol Ann Tomlinson that requests a teacher to adapt his or her teaching style through content, process, product or environment to accommodate the many differences among individual learning styles of all students.

12. Edutest – a comprehensive online assessment that benchmarks and charts student progress throughout the school year.

13. Eight Tools of CFL – the following tools assist in the implementation of the 12

Critical Dimensions:

- a. Prescription plans
- b. Learning centers
- c. Wait-time activities
- d. Teacher calls
- e. Student work folders
- f. Self-scheduling forms
- g. Self-scheduling board/charts
- h. Student curriculum objective progress charts

14. Exploratories – hands-on projects or activities designed to teach students specific content knowledge in the classroom (e.g., having students plant a seed and explain its growth process).

15. Four Components of CFL – areas utilized for establishing a comprehensive school-wide reform.

- a. School-Wide Restructuring
 - b. Adaptive Learning
 - c. Professional Development
 - d. Family-Community Support
16. High Implementing Classroom – a CFL classroom selected to be a mentor/model for new CFL schools because it has demonstrated the following:
- a. High scores on the Degree of Implementation (DOI) Assessment
 - b. Consistent use of exploratories in the classroom for each subject taught (as noted through classroom observation)
 - c. Consistent use of prescription plans for every subject
 - d. Measurable improvements in overall student achievement due to CFL implementation.
17. Implementation Specialists – a CFL staff member who assists the facilitator at various schools in implementing CFL and serves as the immediate CFL contact person for school personnel.
18. ISLLC Standards or the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium - a consortium of thirty-two education agencies and thirteen education administrative associations that have worked cooperatively to establish an education policy framework for school leadership. The Consortium's vision of leadership is based on the premise that the criteria and standards for the professional practice of school leaders must be grounded in the knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning.
19. Learning Centers – a method of integrating instruction through designated areas and specifically designed activities within the classroom where students can

engage in concrete, goal-specific exploratory tasks. Learning centers allow teachers to interact with and provide feedback, while students learn to operate with self-direction in more authentic settings.

20. Multiple Intelligences – a theory developed by Howard Gardner which suggests that each student has innate areas of strengths and weaknesses that can be used as ‘entry points’ for capturing interest and applying understanding of new material.

21. Needs Assessment – as part of the school-wide restructuring process, CFL staff work with school administrators to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the schools individual needs and resources. Areas addressed include:

- a. Student population to be served
- b. Staffing resources and patterns
- c. Current school goals, policies and practices
- d. Classroom teaching practices
- e. District and school curricula
- f. Physical facilities
- g. School records and documents
- h. Family involvement

22. PASS Program – A voluntary summer school program held over the month of July for students who are identified below grade level in mathematics or reading. There is also an enrichment component to this program for students identified as gifted and talented.

23. Prescription Plans – based on information from formal and informal assessments, teachers develop, or “prescribe,” individualized instructional plans to help inform and focus students on their work responsibilities, while allowing a variety of work

opportunities and experiences directed toward mastering curriculum objectives.

Teachers should consider the following in the development of prescription plans:

- a. State standards
- b. Curriculum areas
- c. Instructional strategies
- d. Assessments

24. Professional Development – also known as staff development, includes the use of all purposeful interactions, assignments and experiences provided specifically for the growth of educators as individuals, teams, or staffs; and correlates to the school’s growth plan. This may include internal opportunities with principals, team leaders, SMT members, or colleagues, as well as external opportunities with districts, educational companies, or professional resources and affiliations. Many districts provides credit hours for a teacher’s allotted time in ‘development.’

25. School Management Team (SMT) – the group of teacher and administrators who will meet bi-monthly. The SMT is comprised of administrators and thirteen subject area and grade team leaders. The purpose of the team is to improve the organizational function of education within the district. Empowerment, communication and shared vision are a few of the desired results of the SMT. The primary goal is to improve student achievement through effective leadership of the professionals directly involved with the delivery of instruction.

26. Scope and Sequence – the system of alignment, usually found in curriculum guides, identifying what skills or content area will be taught and how it will be applied across the grade levels. This system can be applied to any product or

process that is established throughout the school (e.g. teacher calls, discipline plan, etc.).

27. Self-Scheduling System – the process that utilizes a self-scheduling sheet, a self-scheduling board or chart, and a progress chart to manage self-direction and accountability among students in a classroom. The process can vary for age levels and interests of students', however; the teacher's use of prepared management remains the same.

28. Twelve Critical Dimensions of Adaptive Learning:

- a. Arranging space and facilities
- b. Creating and maintaining instructional materials
- c. Developing student self-responsibility
- d. Establishing and communicating about rules and procedures
- e. Coordinating and managing support services and personnel resources
- f. Monitoring student learning progress
- g. Instructing
- h. Motivating
- i. Interactive teaching
- j. Prescribing
- k. Record keeping

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The study will occur in the United States, in the state of New Jersey, in the county of Atlantic, in the small, rural town of Egg Harbor City. It will take place in the Egg Harbor

City School District in only one school, the Fanny D. Rittenberg Middle School, which only houses grades five through eight. There are only 260 students in these four grades. The study will take place for seven months, from September through March. Finally, the study will only be done using 8th grade mathematic scores from the Edutest. There are 81 eighth grade students currently enrolled in Rittenberg School.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY:

The focus of this study is to understand if the creation of a School Management Team will help improve the delivery of instruction and improve student achievement through the measurement of comprehensive data supplied by Edutest.

SETTING OF THE STUDY:

Egg Harbor City is a small rural community in southern New Jersey, with a population of 4,502 residents, spread over 11 square miles. There is an 8% unemployment rate, more than double the state average; income levels and property values are approximately 50% of the state average, with a 61.1% owner-occupancy rate. There is no public transportation in this section of Atlantic County, which is a significant barrier for a disadvantaged community.

The Egg Harbor City School District has two public schools within two blocks of each other, The Charles L. Spragg Elementary School (PreK-4) and the Fanny D.

Rittenberg Middle School (5-8). Nearby is St. Nicholas School, a K-8 parochial elementary school. The District sends their students to Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School, which is located more than 15 miles from the city line. The District has a District Factor Group *B* identification (*A* being the lowest, *J* the highest), with 73.1% Free or Reduced Lunch eligible students, an 80% E-Rate, with 27.2% of our students receiving Title I services (See Table 1). *There are no library services in the district or the community.* The closest public library is more than 10 miles away. The lack of a library in the community and no public transportation are significant community factors that diminish students' exposure to the world around them. The high poverty rate, combined with limited resources for students in the area has made the public schools the center of the community. This district has one recreational field, and no recreation center or other centers for youth activities. Sports, social events, and school-related events are all held at the centrally located school sites.

The Rittenberg Middle School has a student population of 241 students in grades 5 to 8. The diverse population is composed of 27% African-American, 28% Hispanic, 41% Caucasian, and less than 3% other. The socioeconomically disadvantaged populations among African-Americans, Hispanics and classified students have typically been under-represented in opportunities afforded the majority of the American population.

The district has a history of poor academic achievement, inadequate resources and limited instructional programs for years. In 1998, a *Community Summit* was held by various sectors of the community to discuss the disappointing academic outcomes of the school district and the economic plight of the community. As a result of this effort, the Board of Education hired an education consultant to assist with developing a school

reform plan that would meet the requirements of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) as well as improve the learning opportunities of the community's children. Within a year-and-a-half a new administrative team was hired at the Rittenberg Middle School to articulate and implement school reform.

The Rittenberg School has a history of poor parental involvement. With an owner-occupancy rate of 61.1% within the community, the mobility rate at the Rittenberg School is almost 30%. This high transient population mainly consists of socio-economically deprived families, where parental involvement has typically been minimal. An interview with the president of the Parent Teacher Organization, school administrators and teachers resulted in the following list of factors contributing to the low parental involvement:

- Poor communication between the teachers and administration with parents;
- Lack of after-school activities; neither academic nor recreational;
- Lack of a consistent published School Newsletter;
- Winter and Spring Concerts are held during school hours instead of at night;
- Low PTO involvement (average parental attendance has been 7 parents).

A survey of the staff and parents done in May of 2001 shows 70% of the staff and 100% of parents strongly agree with greater parental involvement.

According to the most recent New Jersey Report Card, in the Rittenberg Middle School, the average class size is 18 students. The attendance rate is 93.6%, the student mobility rate is 26.2%, the student/faculty ration is 8.7:1, the faculty attendance rate is 98.8%, the student/administrator ratio is 252:1 and the student/computer ratio is 3.3:1. The educational levels of the faculty of the Rittenberg Middle School are as follows: 80% have their BA/BS, 20% have their MA/MS and 0% has PhD/EdD.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

A frequent cause of unsuccessful reform programs is failure to implement programs as they are designed. The evaluation of this model will include observation of the implementation of all program elements with a particular emphasis on the Community for Learning instructional practices model, Adaptive Learning Environmental Model (ALEM). The School Management Team will closely monitor all Edutest results, the Degree of Implementation, or DOI, and determine the staff's relationship to CFL and their classroom instructional practices to insure connectedness between district staff and CFL's program goals.

This design will concentrate on student achievement but will also determine the efficacy of the Whole School Reform process in the district. There is a connection between student outcomes and the process activities of the district. Successful achievement of process activities has an impact on staff and community morale. The key to the implementation of process activities is the School Management Team (SMT). The SMT has its focus in four areas:

1. Managing the implementation of the WSR and CFL models
2. Using the Edutest data, managing the analysis of assessment data as it relates to instruction
3. Managing the alignment between the written and taught curriculum
4. Managing parent and community involvement and family support activities

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY:

The remainder of this study will be organized as follows:

- Chapter 2: Review of Literature
- Chapter 3: Design of Study
- Chapter 4: Presentation of the Research Findings
- Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

CHAPTER 2:

There is a national recognition of the urgent needs of children and youth in highly economically and educationally disadvantaged communities (Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1997). The Egg Harbor City Public School District unfortunately fits this description of being economically and educationally disadvantaged. When children and youth lack the care they need, when they see too little progress and promise in their own lives as well as in their families and neighborhoods, they lose hope and motivation for schooling success (Wang, 1998). Such is the story for many students in Egg Harbor City. Schools and other community institutions are undergoing major restructuring in an effort to better meet the diverse needs of urban and poor rural families. Traditionally, schools have been and should continue to be the primary focus to significantly improve the capacity for educational success of our nation's children and youth (Wang, Haertel, Walberg). This concern for improving the prospects for educational success and life circumstances of children and families sparked the design and implementation of the Community for Learning, or CFL, program at the Laboratory for Student Success, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (Wang). By implementing CFL, school leaders in Egg Harbor City are adhering to ISLLC Standard 4. Schools must operate as an integral part of the larger community. CFL requires principals to collaborate with families and community members to meet the various needs and interests of any diverse community.

The Egg Harbor City School District recently began pre-implementation for CFL with several important goals in mind. First and foremost, the number one goal of the Egg Harbor City School District is to develop all students into self-motivated learners. A self-

motivated learner is one who is on a life-long quest for knowledge. Our second goal is to have every child reading by third grade. The most important academic achievement of a child is the ability to communicate effectively. Reading is the basis for effective communication. The district's third goal is to develop the ability of our students to think critically, solve problems, create ideas and products, and to be prepared for the challenging world that awaits them. This goal requires each child to be aware of what he or she knows and what he or she can do with the knowledge they possess. One of the important ways in which the Egg Harbor City School District plans on meeting these goals is by implementing Community for Learning. Implementing whole school reform successfully requires the district's administrators to adhere to ISLLC Standard 1. The administrators must articulate his or her vision of learning and develop support for it within the school and within the community. The process of school reform requires the coordinated efforts of three aspects of a child's life: parent involvement with the educational goals of the school; developing a sound and realistic school program for a child and involving the community in the process of a child's education. The family/home, the school, and the community are the consistent environments that influence a child's life. Having the coordinated efforts of these three aspects of a student's life improves the learning opportunities of all students.

Community for Learning, or CFL, is a comprehensive whole school reform program developed at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education. As with any whole school reform model, to successfully implement CFL a school needs to be prepared to reexamine and change all parts of school life, from attitudes and culture to leadership, parent and community involvement, curriculum,

facilities, and, of course, budgeting and spending (McChesney, 1998). Although whole school reform models have differing emphases, they do share several characteristics:

- The aim to help all students reach high academic standards.
- They are comprehensive in their approach; address all core academic subject areas, all types of school organization, and all grade levels; and align all resources (human, financial and technological).
- They incorporate best practices research and are the subjects of ongoing evaluation aimed at continuous improvement.
- They provide faculty and community with a shared vision, focus and organizing framework that shapes and directs reform efforts.
- They provide high-quality professional development for teachers and administrators. Providing adult learning and worthy professional development will require the Egg Harbor City school leaders to meet ISLLC Standard 2.
- They offer innovative and effective ways to involve parents and community in schooling (McChesney, 1998).

The CFL program aims to significantly improve the capacity of schools to promote healthy development and academic success of each student. Community for Learning is a whole school reform model developed by Margaret C. Wang. The program was initially designed as a demonstration program under the auspices of the National Follow Through Program, a compensatory education initiative established by the U.S. Department of Education in the late 1960s. The implementation of the program, then known as the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM), has since been extended to serve students from preschool through high school of varied demographic characteristics in urban, rural and suburban settings (Wang, 1992).

An important underlying premise of CFL's design is that students learn in different ways and require different amounts and varying rates of instruction. Moreover,

with CFL, schools must accommodate and build upon this diversity through differentiated instruction, varied learning sequences, and by meeting the needs of individual students. An important aspect of CFL is that the delivery of instruction is based upon the use of individualized progress plans, or a diagnostic prescriptive monitoring system, and a well-organized classroom management system that helps students take more responsibility for their own learning. Classroom time is divided into whole group instruction, small group instruction, and individual instruction. In other words, students are learning at their own pace, with a variety of instructional methods and teachers act as facilitators directing students to become self-motivated learners. Consequently, for the Egg Harbor City school leaders to successfully implement CFL, they must possess a good understanding of ISLLC Standard 2. This would enable them to understand how to best create a school culture conducive to student learning.

A CFL classroom is inclusive. Special education students as well as those who are academically gifted are in the same classroom. All general education students, Title I students, students with special education disabilities, and ESL students learn at the own rate, side by side.

The Community for Learning program includes five major program components. These include: (1) an instructional program; (2) a site based management and decision-making process; (3) a family community involvement program; (4) a school-linked, comprehensive service delivery component; and (5) a continued staff development program.

- The **instructional component** focuses on a high standard of achievement in basic subjects using a variety of strategies including direct instruction; student centered exploratory learning; cooperative learning; individualized instruction. A diagnostic-prescriptive process that provides individualized

learning plans for each student and includes varied approaches to instruction based upon the needs of the child.

- The **site-based management and shared decision-making process** component is designed to provide participation by the school staff, parent and the community to develop a distinctive restructuring and improvement plan.
- The **family-community involvement** component is designed to mobilize the resources and expertise of families and the community to achieve student learning.
- The **school-linked, comprehensive service delivery** component is designed to utilize all of the important services and resources that should be available to the students of the school. This would link schools with medical, psychological, legal, recreational and social service institutions.
- CFL's **continuous staff development** program provides ongoing professional development and technical assistance tailored specifically to the implementation needs of the individual staff.

The Community for Learning program and its instructional component have been implemented in more than 250 schools and states across the country. Findings from internal and external evaluations of CFL show well-documented positive changes (Brookhart, Casile, & McCown, 1997). Results from recent implementation studies in several inner cities show a positive pattern of achievement, with CFL students outperforming comparison students in both reading and mathematics (Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1997). CFL brings together and coordinates educational sound practices and policies that have been used in classrooms and school for years. The program reconfigures these ideas, according to Wang, to create a coherent program that has positive effects on student achievement. The Community for Learning program provides a powerful instructional program that draws on multiple learning environments and is supported by a comprehensive services delivery system (Wang, Haertel, Walberg).

Although student academic achievement is of paramount importance to CFL's success, school, family, and community resources are also invested in meeting a variety of other important goals to help the whole child. The Egg Harbor City School District hopes to realize positive change for every student and for the entire community. The district firmly believes that good schools equal good communities.

CHAPTER 3:

As part of its function, the newly formed School Management Team managed the analysis of assessment data as it related to instruction. All eighth grade Rittenberg Middle School students were tested using Edutest, a comprehensive, online assessment that quickly and efficiently charts the academic progress of students. Eighth grade students were initially tested in September upon entering school and were also tested at the conclusion of every marking period. Edutest produces immediate reports of individual student results and real-time aggregated reports. Each time the Edutest assessment was given, the results were brought to the School Management Team where it was closely examined, discussed and scrutinized by the team. By providing the SMT with these reports, the group made data driven decisions to improve instruction and student achievement. With timely information regarding student performance, the SMT decided upon which instructional options best fit student needs. Furthermore, the curriculum director, as part of the SMT, was able to make informed decisions regarding the professional development needs of the mathematics teachers. Simply stated, when the SMT as an instructional team could understand the needs of the students, they were better prepared to train the teachers within their teams on how to best develop classroom lesson plans and individual student learning plans.

The test was taken in mathematics only since this is the most deficient academic subject within the Rittenberg Middle School. For the purposes of this study, only eighth grade student data was examined and their Edutest scores were averaged together to find the mean. There are three eighth grade mathematics classes in the Rittenberg Middle

School. Each eighth grade class took the Edutest on September 18, 2002; again on November 19, 2002, and again on February 4, 2003. Edutest provided the data necessary to measure any movement, positive or negative, in student achievement in eighth grade mathematics. The assessment itself was simple to administer and to schedule.

The instrument used by Rittenberg Middle School to measure student achievement was called Edutest. This was the tool the intern used to measure student achievement before and after the formation of the SMT to establish if there was any change in eighth grade student performance in the academic subject of mathematics.

Edutest is an assessment product created by the company, Lightspan. Edutest is a comprehensive, online assessment software that provides immediate results of student performance. The product was developed in 1995 to help school districts make critical instructional decisions based upon the Edutest results.

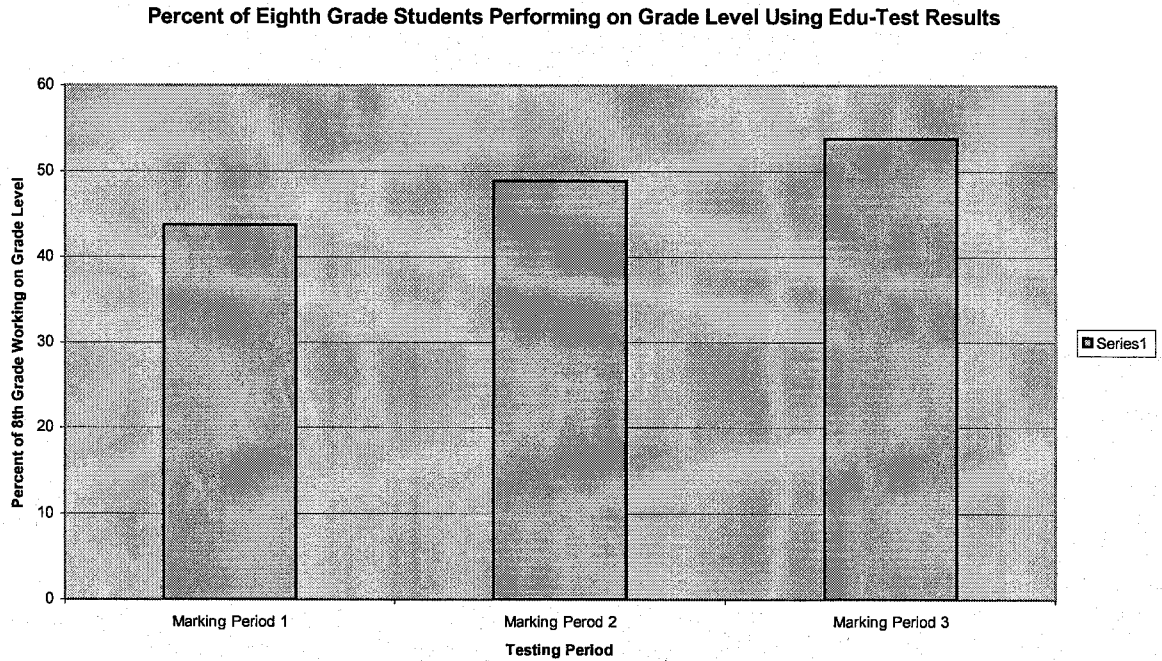
CHAPTER 4:

This research was conducted to determine if the formation of a School Management Team as part of a whole school reform process at the Rittenberg School could help foster positive academic change among the eighth grade students in the subject of mathematics. The determination of whether or not academic progress was made in math was accomplished by administering the Edutest assessment three times throughout the school year to ascertain the percent of students working on or above an eighth grade level in the subject of mathematics. After each administration of the Edutest, members of the SMT used the specific data the assessment provided to help teachers differentiate instruction for eighth grade math students. The Edutest results of all eighth grade students were averaged together by the software itself to determine the percentage of students working on or above grade level in the subject of mathematics.

The Edutest assessment was administered at the conclusion of each marking period and the results appear to provide confirmation that the work done by the School Management Team did facilitate improvement in mathematics scores of eighth grade students. When the Rittenberg eighth grade students were first assessed using the Edutest on September 18, 2002, 43.7% of the students scored at or above eighth grade level in mathematics. Upon their next scheduled assessment on November 19, 2002, 48.9% of the eighth grade students scored at or above their grade level in mathematics. Finally, on February 4, 2003, the students were assessed once again and 53.8% scored at or above grade level in mathematics. The graph that follows clearly illustrates the rise that took

place in Edutest scores for eighth grade students at the Rittenberg Middle School during the first three marking periods of the 2002-2003 school year.

Table 1



These assessment results from the Edutest represent that the creation of a school management team as part of whole school reform at the Rittenberg Middle School was a needed undertaking and a sound decision in attempting to improve student achievement in mathematics. These rising results demonstrate that shifting instruction based on assessment data and on the reassessment of student needs are a necessary component to affect academic achievement in poor performing schools such as Rittenberg Middle School in Egg Harbor City. On the recommendation of the School Management Team, teachers were able to provide basic instruction in new tasks and review math lessons in

small groups, individually, and for the whole class when the data showed it was necessary.

Rittenberg School's School Management Team met regularly during the first three marking periods of the school year with a planned agenda each time and focused on the sole purpose of raising student achievement in all academic subjects, but especially mathematics. During the first two-thirds of the school year, the School Management Team accomplished a great deal of work, and truly has become a central organizing body of the Rittenberg School. The SMT's major function, as it continues to evolve and grow, has been to develop and monitor the degree of implementation of the Community For Learning whole school reform model. Additionally, the SMT has made instructional decisions and recommendations to teachers in hopes of producing improved academic achievement, a better social climate and relevant staff development for the teachers of Rittenberg Middle School. It clearly is doing this

A significant part of the bi-monthly SMT meetings were dedicated to closely examining the Edutest mathematic results to help Rittenberg math teachers plan effectively and for the SMT to help develop an improved K-8 mathematics curriculum. As previously mentioned, the SMT members poured over useful Edutest data, provided feedback and recommendations to teachers when program modifications might be necessary, and established new curriculum goals and objectives for the Egg Harbor City School's mathematics program. By attending and participating in the SMT meetings, the participants created marking period benchmarks for grades kindergarten through eighth grade and created positive change toward improving academic achievement at the Rittenberg Middle School.

CHAPTER 5:

The road to develop a well-organized support structure at the Rittenberg Middle School was to use existing resources and expertise among the school staff to establish a climate for continual academic improvement, coordination of services for students, and program consistency – *a shared responsibility approach*. This shared responsibility approach was key to establishing a true learning community. Implementation of this shared responsibility approach required bringing together the skills and perspectives of all of the stakeholder groups within the school to create an organizational structure that would provide data driven decisions and demand accountability by the teaching staff. Thus, a vital and necessary part of the Community For Learning design was the establishment of a School Management Team at the Rittenberg Middle School. The results provide evidence that the establishment of the SMT was basic to improving student achievement in eighth grade mathematics.

The key to establishing the School Management Team at Rittenberg was based on creating a small unit organizational structure in which learning teams would evolve and begin to more effectively deliver the prescribed curriculum to the students. Each team had one member on the School Management Team. The basic premise of restructuring the Rittenberg Middle School into academic teams proved to establish the necessary sustaining support for the school staff to more effectively and efficiently provide for the variety of student academic levels in classrooms. Furthermore, this organizational shift provided academic program consistency.

The Rittenberg Middle School administered the Edutest to create a baseline assessment for each student at the conclusion of the first three marking periods of the

2002-2003 school year. The results of the assessment was used by the School Management Team to determine teacher capacity, implementation of the aligned district curriculum, maintaining pace to deliver the curriculum, and making instructional adjustments based on student needs as discovered by the Edutest results. Working together, the School Management Team accomplished an exceptional amount of tasks in its first year of existence.

The Edutest assessment will be given again at the Rittenberg Middle School during the week of June 9, 2003. The eighth grade students will once again be tested to see how many are functioning at or above grade level in the subject of mathematics. Without delay, the final results will be examined by the School Management Team to determine the next course of action appropriate to needs. If a steady improvement in Edutest results continue, the school district will know it is correctly instituting whole school reform and will persevere in order to move in the present direction the SMT has the district moving in. However, if scores decline, or if the curriculum, for example, is found still be nonaligned to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, the district may need to continue with curriculum development, change personnel on the curriculum committees, revise professional development activities or, as a last resort, ask the State to assist the Egg Harbor City School District with curriculum alignment.

Based on the data that continues to be collected, and whatever the needs may be in the future, the appropriate and immediate response will be made by the Rittenberg SMT and the administration to resolve all significant issues. Continual evaluation and assessment are necessary and essential to ascertain the needs of the school and the students. This is ultimately what whole school reform is about and what it entails. The lessons learned from this research clearly show that schools who begin the whole school

reform process must be prepared to reexamine and change all parts of school life, from attitudes and culture to leadership, parent and community involvement, curriculum, facilities, and, of course, financing. The permanent and ongoing process of whole school reform provides faculty, administration and the entire school community with a shared vision, focus, and an organizing framework that shapes and directs all reform efforts.

Success, then, of whole school reform and increasing academic achievement depends on many factors. A school's staff, under the direction of an effective School Management Team, must share a common image of a different, more rigorous kind of schooling. Traditional ways of delivering instruction must be replaced with new and more innovative methods. Furthermore, the staff must be able to deal directly with difficult and often controversial issues, including repeated assessment and the monitoring of teacher capacity. Finally and most importantly, teachers must be willing to receive and act on critical feedback from external sources, such as the Edutest assessment.

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