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School reform: the impact on teaching practices

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SCHOOL REFORM

THE IMPACT ON TEACHING PRACTICES

by
Carol J. Reynolds

A Thesis

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Abstract

Carol J. Reynolds

School Reform- The Impact on Teaching Practices
2003
Dr. Theodore Johnson
School Administration

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of school reform on teaching practices at the Middle School of Pleasantville. The district, a special needs (Abbott district), receives 85% of its funding from the state, therefore must provide all children with a "Thorough and Efficient" education

The overall approach of this study was to use a survey to investigate the effects of school reform on teaching practices. Thirty teachers of grades 5-8, representing a variety of subject areas, completed a survey. The survey was used to determine if professional development provided teachers with effective supported throughout the change process.

It was evident in the data that teachers were motivated to make changes in their practices. The results also indicate that a professional development program that provides on-going support, feedback, and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues is essential as a school develops a staff that can assist students in meeting the challenges of the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Mini-Abstract

Carol J. Reynolds

School Reform-The Impact on Teaching Practices
2003
Dr. Theodore Johnson
School Administration

The purpose of this study was to learn how school reform efforts have impacted teaching practices in the Middle School of Pleasantville.

The findings of this research suggest modifications must be made to the structure of the professional development improvement process for teaching practices to change significantly. A process must be in place that will assist teachers in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to increase student achievement.

Acknowledgements

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

Comprehensive School Reform became a mandate for schools in the state of New Jersey as a result of the Abbott versus Burke decision of 1998. Abbott Schools as defined by the courts include the following characteristics: low SES (most students are receiving free or reduced lunch) and failing test scores on state mandated tests. Abbott schools were ordered to implement reform initiatives that would ensure that public school children from the poorer urban districts received the educational entitlements guaranteed them by the Constitution. This mandate forced districts to change the way children were educated. The changes required of districts had its greatest impact at the building level and on teachers in particular. Many teachers had to reflect on their teaching pedagogy, the kinds of activities that students were engaged in, and the way in which students' learning was being assessed. These changes brought feeling of inadequacy, resentment, confusion, and dissent from teachers. Teachers questioned which pedagogy was most effective and what would be considered as acceptable evidence of student learning. Teachers were no longer able to take the teaching and learning relationship for granted.

Many schools going through school reform are faced with at least three dilemmas. The first dilemma is how to get teachers, principals, and other district administrators to come to an agreement or a common understanding as to which are the most effective methods of instruction to improve student learning. For students who had a history of school failure, who had difficulty engaging in classroom activities and therefore tended to be behavior problems, and who had very limited literacy skills,

effective instruction would make the difference between success or failure both in and out of the classroom. Another dilemma found by schools going through reform was how to get staff to buy into the reform effort and commit to do the work required to implement school reform. Staffs in many urban schools have been through many "programs" that claim to "make a difference". Many of these programs last a short time and are then replaced by something new. Can one blame the staff at these schools for not investing much time and energy into what they considered a "fly-by-night program"? The third dilemma faced by schools is how to provide support for staff. Change is not an easy process for some. The way in which a district provides staff development and provides opportunity for staff   buy-in is crucial to the success of school reform. The problem is increased when the courts have mandated the change and the districts are being held accountable under a strict timeline. The pressure is always felt to change quickly and to show improvements fast!

The focus of this study was to discover how school characteristics, teacher variables, and different support variables (especially those related to school leadership, external assistance, and professional development) affect the implementation of school reform at The Middle School of Pleasantville. This study attempted to explain why some teachers implement new teaching practices more successfully while others remain stagnant.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the implementation of school reform at the Middle School of Pleasantville and to evaluate its impact on staff and school organization. The study will result in an informative report to teachers, administrators,

and members of the board of education. This study will inform those responsible for implementing school reform of the strategies and obstacles related to the implementation of school reform, as well as the value to supporting the continual learning of the professional staff.

I hypothesize that there is little buy-in to school reform at the Middle School and that teacher have not been included in the decision making process regarding the implementation of new practices (reform has been viewed as a mandate which has been handed down to teachers). As a result of "mandated changes" only a few teachers are implementing instructional strategies and best practices that have been proven to have a positive effect on student achievement and engagement. By looking at implementation issues involved with school reform the intern can assist in finding ways to resolve problems associated with implementation. Findings from this research will be used to improve strategies to develop staff support for school reform.

Significance of the Study

The implementation of school reform requires schools to make significant changes in the instructional practices of teachers, the organization of staff and the leadership style of the administrators. This study will serve to identify and evaluate the changes that have taken place at the middle school with regard to the implementation of school reform.

3

Definitions

The following terms and definition are important to the understanding of this study:

Action Research Teams – Teams formed for the purpose conducting inquiry to inform and improve the practice of educators. Teams of educators study their practice and its context, explore the research base for ideas, compare what they find to their current practice, participate in training to support needed changes, and study the effects on themselves and their students.

Authentic Assessment – Methods of assessment that allow educators to observe directly students' work and their skilled performances.

Best Practices – Key classroom activities and practices that embody the new teaching paradigm.

Co-nect – A model for school reform whose primary goal is to improve achievement in core subjects.

Cooperative Learning – Structures used in a classroom that allows students to interact positively, holds students individually accountable, allows for equal participation, and simultaneous interaction among a group of students.

Critical Friends – A structure in which teachers work together to improve their teaching by giving and receiving feedback after examining student work and the teacher work that prompted it, for the purpose of improving the day-to-day learning of all students.

Effective – Having an intended or desired effect.

Environment – Surroundings

Intern – An advanced student or recent graduate undergoing supervised practical training.

Project-Based Learning - Project based learning is an educational approach that emphasizes learning of essential knowledge and critical skills through work on authentic issues and problems. The basic premise of project-based learning is that children and young adults learn best by doing. When students produce work that fulfills a real need or purpose, expectations for quality increase, along with the motivation to do well. Authentic student work of this kind can more clearly demonstrate progress on critical skills and an in-depth understanding of complex issues and concepts than traditional worksheets or problem sets.

Method- A systematic means or manner of procedure.

Peer Coaching – An activity used for staff to observe and provide feedback to colleagues after observing a teaching session.

School reform – The actions that a school takes to improve the conditions and outcomes of schooling- especially in urban communities and in schools serving disadvantaged children.

Student centered instruction – Instruction/and curriculum that allows the students to be active in his or her environment. Learning is based on students' lives, their needs and interests. Students gain ownership of their knowledge as a result of student centered instruction.

Subject – An area of study

Teacher-centered instruction – Instruction led and controlled by the teachers. This type of instruction is often used when teachers are under pressure for their students to pass high-stakes test. Teachers teach to the goals and objectives of the high-stakes rather than those of the curriculum. The achievements of students taught in a teacher-centered environment align more closely with examination objectives than the objectives developed for the local curricula.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted at the Middle School of Pleasantville. The study was limited to a random sample of teachers and students that have been involved in school reform for a minimum of four years. The Middle School educates students in grades 5-8, and is one of six schools in the Pleasantville Public School District. The Pleasantville School District is located in southern New Jersey and has been identified as an Abbott school district. The Middle is in its fourth year of state mandated school reform. After a faculty vote of 85 % in favor, the school chose to adopt Co-nect as its school reform model.

This looked at the impact of school reform on teachers, curriculum, policy, and student achievement.

<u>Setting of the Study</u>

The Pleasantville Public School District is located in Pleasantville, New Jersey. Pleasantville is located in Southern New Jersey in Atlantic County. It is a shoreline community covering five square miles on the mainland. Pleasantville is six miles from Atlantic City and is surrounded by Absecon on the north, the east and west by Egg Harbor Township and the south by Northfield.

Pleasantville has a solid mixture of urban characteristics. Lead by an active mayor and city council government, the community features full-time police and fire department, a public library and a large recreation center.

Pleasantville's housing is diverse and includes single family, duplex and multi-family homes, apartments and condominiums. The city's population is 16, 945, median family income is $34,905, median age of the residents is 32.8 years, there are approximately 6,601 households in the city, and a total civilian labor force of 8,499. (New Jersey State Data, 2001, n.p)

The City of Pleasantville has a council type of government with an elected mayor. City government and the school district have a history of good relations. There are nine members of City Council including the council president. Other city official include: the City Administrator, Treasure, City Clerk, UEZ Coordinator, City Solicitor, Fire Chief, Chief of Police, Recreation Director, Economic Development coordinator, Tax Assessor, Tax Collector, Housing Director, Zoning & Construction Coordinator, and Public Works Superintendent.

There was a 1.5 cent reduction in school taxes on the Pleasantville Public School's 2001-2002 budget from the previous year decreasing the tax rate from $1.193 to

$1.178 per $100 of assessed property value. Over 90 percent of funding comes from the state and the federal government because of Pleasantville's classification as an Abbott District. This funding has allowed the district to implement needed programs without burdening city taxpayers. The student population has continued to increase. During the 2001-02 school year, the school district enrolled over 609 new students.

The city has begun to attract industry and commercial enterprise as the result of the city being identified as an urban enterprise zone. It is hoped that this addition to the city will bolster the tax base.

The Pleasantville School District is a Type II Urban school district governed by a nine member elected board of education. Board meetings are held bi-weekly starting at 6:PM. A Superintendent of schools leads the district. The district has 21 administrators, which gives the district a ratio of 171.5 students and 15 faculty members to 1 administrator.

The city of Pleasantville has six schools. One high school (grades 9-12), one middle school (grades 5-8), and four elementary schools (prek-4). Pleasantville recently opened two brand new schools, the high school and the middle school. These two state of the arts facility provide students and teachers with access to modern technology. The completion of these two schools has provided students and teachers with smaller class size district wide.

The median salary for district administrators is $84,404 and $37,378 for faculty. The median years of experience for district administrators is 28 for teachers the median years of experience is 7. The student to faculty ratio is 11.6:1. The length of the school day is 7 hours and instructional time averages 6 hours per day. The curriculum of the

schools in Pleasantville has been aligned to the New Jersey's State Core Curriculum Standards.

There is a larger segment of the population of Pleasantville, which does not use public schooling. The area Parochial, private school, and charter schools are being utilized by a large number of school age children resulting in a majority school population of African-American and Hispanic students.

The State of New Jersey New Jersey has assigned Pleasantville a District Factor Grouping (DFG) of A. The district has been identified as one of New Jersey's 28 Abbott School Districts. As an Abbott District, schools were mandated to adopt a school reform model and to function under the guidelines set forth in the Abbott v Burke decision of 1996. Under school reform it was expected that the number of students meeting proficiency on state mandated test would increase. Students in all of New Jersey's Public school are expected to be exposed to the standards as outlined in the New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. The Abbott decision also addressed the school funding disparity among school districts throughout the state. Funding for the adoption and implementation of school reform is supplemented by the state. In turn schools and school districts are held accountable for reforming practices and producing evidence of growth in student academic achievement as measured on the state mandated test at grades 4, 8 and 11.

<u>Organization of the Study</u>

The remainder of this study will be organized as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a summary of the research literature from primary sources. It will give information about the research context of the study and support rationale for the importance of the study.

Chapter 3 addresses the five areas related to the research design used for the study. The first area is a general description of the research design. Second is a description of the development and design of the research instrument actually used in the study. Third is a description of the sample and sampling technique used in the study. Fourth is a description of the data collection of the study. The fifth is description of the analysis plan. This chapter will answer the question, "What type of evidence can be gathered to prove that the project is having an impact on teaching practices?"

Chapter 4 will be the presentation of the research finding. This section will answers two major question, "What information was found?" and "What did it mean?"

Chapter 5 will highlight the conclusions and corresponding implications of both the study and the interns' leadership development. Highlights and implications of the study on this intern's leadership development will be addressed in this section. Any changes in the organization as a result of the study and needs for further study can be found in this section.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

<u>Introduction</u>

The need for school reform is not new. For the last century calls for changes in

almost all aspects of the educational delivery system have been continuous. The need for

more effective schools, and the need to reform the schools beyond changes in curriculum

were prominent in the early 1980's through reports such as that of the National

Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and in the United States called *A Nation*

at Risk: the imperative for educational reform.

The studies on effective schools make it clear that curriculum is not the only

source of change. The literature on school reform points to two aspects of change and

they are the structure and processes used to carry on its business (how it works). All parts

of the system must be looked at and considered in order to bring about meaningful

reform. It is evident from the literature that the potential of school reform efforts for

improving teaching and learning is great once schools overcome the obstacles of

choosing, implementing, and sustaining the right school wide program. Implementing

school reform requires a thorough examination of all parts of school life, from attitudes

and culture, to leadership and curriculum. School reform involves all stakeholders in the

school, home, and community.

In the last decade reforms have tended to be justified as necessary to improve the

academic achievement of children living in poverty. The scrutiny of public school

performance has increased the pressure on legislatures to act quickly. The data supporting

proposals to reform public education varies. There is a range of research from carefully

10

conducted reviewed research to personnel commentary. The majority of the literature reviewed for the purpose of this research focused on examining schools as institutions and their structure, including leadership styles of the building principal and the changing role of the teacher. Other literature reviewed mainly focused on teacher characteristics and instructional behaviors of teachers. Much of the literature concluded that for reform efforts to work it should be understood that it is not about merely working smarter. Reform requires a deep investment in time and energy.

Review on Major Concepts Related to the Problem

The majority of literature on school reform and change discusses the importance of change happening from the bottom up. In most instances schools that had the greatest support for reform efforts started the change process with key individuals. Many schools had tremendous support and guidance from the school principal. With regard to change in instructional practice, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, and engaging students in meaningful and authentic activities were crucial to student motivation and academic success. Most of the literature points to the importance of getting students involved consistently with learning activities. It became evident that the best pedagogy would not offer the academic gains that schools were looking for if students were not engaged in the activity for large amounts of time.

Using interviews and surveys, Mitman and Lambert (1993) examined the characteristics of schools meeting with success in implementing school reform. By studying approximately 250 schools in California that were implementing heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, and interdisciplinary instruction Mitman and Lambert (1993) concluded that individuals or small groups within the school took charge as

11

change agents. Schools that had the most inconsistent change had reforms forced on them by the principal. Mitman and Lambert (1993) also concluded that school wide consensus and conformity was not necessary as a starting or end point.

Jenkins and his colleagues (1994) studied the effects of planning and decision making on school reform efforts, implementation of program changes and the outcomes resulting from change. These researchers wanted to see how program implementation was affected when teachers were given a sense of ownership of the programs and when technical assistance and resources were provided. The researchers were especially interested in the result of change at the classroom and school level when teachers felt more included in the change process. Through surveys given to teachers and principals, the authors found that the more collaboratively teachers and principals worked, the more responsible teachers felt for the success of reform efforts. The researchers found that students, especially special education students, showed gains in academic achievement after the implementation of reform efforts. The authors link these gains to the teachers' buy-in of changes that were asked of them.

Bruno (2000) conducted a study of the effect of temporal orientation on teachers' investment in school reform effort. In his study Bruno (2000) looked at the effects of age, gender, and longevity on teachers' willingness to engage in reform efforts. He also studied the impact of the cyclical nature of teaching on the change process and the impact of tenure and upward mobility on the efforts that teachers are willing to put forth toward reform efforts. Using survey data collected from 1,000 classroom teachers at inner city schools, he concluded older female teachers invested nearly ¼ of their time in relationships outside of school. Time spent by teachers outside of school was viewed

by teachers as being too valuable to give up in order to devote more time to learning about new practices. The study found that as teachers aged there was a shift in the desire to invest time in reform efforts, and that tenure and the lack of upward mobility opportunities negatively affected the desire of teachers to invest in reform effort. Teachers who were not committed to reform efforts felt that there was no personal pay-off for change (Bruno 2000). The author also concluded that many teachers came into the profession with preconceived ideas as to the commitment level and time required of teachers. Because reform efforts have caused the demands of the profession to change, many teachers are rethinking their commitment to these new demands.

These conclusions identify many important issues that must be addressed by school administration. Administration must consider a variety of factors that cause teachers to be reluctant to change. Reluctance to change is not always the result of a disinterested staff (Bruno, 2000). It becomes important to offer encouragement and rewards as motivation to staff for participating in school reform.

Allen and her colleagues (1991) examined the impact of literacy practices on student engagement and achievement and discovered six practices that contributed positively to the improvement of the literacy level of students that were at risk of not becoming successful readers and writers. These practices included: (1) engaging student in whole text, (2) allowing student to observe others that are engaging in literacy activities, (3) making learning purposeful, (4) giving students time to read and to interact with peers to extend learning, (5) giving students choices in their classes and (6) by developing a sense of community in the classroom. The authors also concluded that by creating successful students, social behavior improves. The researchers interviewed

students, teachers and parents and visited classroom to determine if the six practices in literature instruction made noticeable gains in students who were identified as being at risk for school failure.

Greenwood (1991) studied the relationship between the amount of time that students received instruction in academic subjects and engaged in academic responding versus time spent in inappropriate behavior and linked these two behaviors to student achievement. He used CWPT (class wide peer tutoring) to involve students in meaningful use of time that also engaged students in behavior that reinforced academic learning. The author found that CWPT increased levels of engagement because teachers used CWPT to organize the academic content to be tutored and because the tutee and tutor roles were highly defined. Classes using CWPT had less discipline problems, more student engagement and more students on task than classes not using CWPT. The study concluded that student achievement improved because of the increased time on task by students and because students felt a sense of responsibility to the learning process.

Conclusion

School reform has the best chance of being effective when there is involvement of staff at all levels in collaborative planning, problem solving and decision -making. On going staff development for all involved with planned follow up coaching and support in applying new skills and knowledge is critical to the success of school reform. The involvement and leadership of the principal increases the chance of successful implementation of school reform. School reform challenges schools to become learning organization where change is viewed as a way of life and the goal becomes an increased capacity for change.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Introduction

The design of this study was to identify the impact of school reform on teaching practices. A survey was used to answer the question "How shall we teach?"

Schools are faced with meeting the challenge of how to prepare all students to meet state standards. The data collected through this research described procedures and processes used by teachers as they support students in the attainment of proficiency or advanced proficiency in meeting state standards. By looking at the change or lack of change in teaching practices at the Middle School, teacher willingness to change, and academic progress of students, the school can revise the professional development process in order to support teacher growth and maximize student learning.

By neglecting to look at how we teach will result in students sitting in the same classrooms, divided into the same instructional groups, doing the same activities, working through the same textbooks and worksheets, and getting the same or lower scores on the many new standardized test. To change student achievement in schools, teaching behaviors must change. More of the same is not the answer.

Description of the Research Design

A survey was administered to a select staff at the Middle School in order to gather data that identified the frequency of teaching practices prior to and after school reform. (see Table 1). Teachers were asked to respond to fifteen questions regarding the frequency of use of specific teaching practices and strategies. Two answers were asked to be circled for each response: one to indicate how often a strategy was used before implementation of school reform and one to

indicate how often the same strategy is currently used. Each response was coded 1-4 with one

representing rarely and four representing routinely.

Teachers were asked to respond to the following statements:
I have my students use computers to:
- conduct electronic searches for information;
- to write, revise, or communicate
- to create presentations

I have my students:
- participate in planning instructional activities.
- participate in creating scoring rubrics.
- revise and extend their previous work
- participate in peer writing conferences
- work in teams
- apply rubrics to their own or their peers' work

I use the following strategies...
- linking class activities to student interests
- constructing opportunities for each student to contribute meaningfully
- giving students direct and explicit instructions in writing skills
- framing questions to elicit critical thinking
- using authentic problems to teach concept and skills
- using rubrics to specify success criteria prior to students completing tasks

Information was gathered to identify the impact of workshops and professional

development opportunities on increasing teacher knowledge and understanding of pedagogy.

Four questions regarding workshop and professional development were asked. Teachers were

asked to indicate a response from one to five. The response indicated a range from strongly

disagree to strongly agree to the statement: Workshop and professional development

opportunities: have given me ideas and procedures applicable to many lessons; have

increased my understanding of content concepts and principles; have helped me learn how to

use research-based practices; have helped me fill gaps in my ability to use technology.

Student engagement and level of understanding as a result of the implementation of new teaching practice was also analyzed. Teachers were asked to respond from strongly disagree to strongly agree to the following statements: Compared to students I taught before our school implemented new teaching practices: my current students act more engaged in meaningful work more "on task"; my current students show deeper levels of understanding of key ideas.

Data was collected to identify teachers' level of desire and motivation to make changes in teaching practices. Responses to the following statements were asked: I am committed to maintaining the changes that I have made in my teaching; since the Middle School has adopted reform practices I have: Tried to change what and how I teach; Succeeded in changing what and how I teach.

Development and Design of the Research Instrument

This survey was divided into four sections. Teachers were asked a total of 29 questions using a likert scale format for responses. Responses were scored 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree with each statement. Section one asked teachers to rate the extent to which reform practices are helping students meet state standards. The intent of school reform is to develop strategies that will improve student achievement as measured by state standards. It was important to identify teachers' perception regarding the impact of reform on meeting this goal. Teacher were also asked to rate the extent to which workshops and professional development activities were supportive in helping teachers to implement reform practices. Because reform is closely linked to staff development, having data to identify the success of staff development provides insight to possible causes or solutions to the change made in teacher behaviors

Section two addressed the planning strategies used by teachers and the use of technology to extend instruction. The use of technology for the purpose of extending and enriching teaching and learning has been a major component of educational reform. Identifying the frequency of use and teacher knowledge in the use of technology provides insight into the impact that technology has had in the classroom. Teachers indicated the frequency certain strategies were used both prior to and after school reform.

Section three focused on the frequency in which teachers used a variety of teaching and learning strategies. As in section two, teacher identified frequency of various strategies used prior to and after school reform. The purpose of this research was to identify the impact of reform on teaching practices. By identifying practices before and after the initiation of reform an analyses can be made of the changes in teaching practices and strategies.

Section four gathered demographic data about survey respondents. This includes years of teaching experience, gender, number of hours spent attending professional development activities related to reform practices, and school responsibilities beyond teaching. The demographic information will be used to identify any correlation between teaching experience and willingness to make change, in addition to any correlation between the number of hours spent in staff development and making change in practices.

Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The research was conducted with 30 Middle School teachers. Research was limited to teachers who have been teaching a minimum of four years. It was felt that teachers with less than four years experience would not provide have enough experience to identify changes in teaching practices. The survey was designed in October of 2002 and given to the teacher in November of 2002. Teachers participated in the survey by use of a self-selection process. Only

those teachers who were interested in volunteering to participate in the survey were asked to place their name in a "hat".

Description of the Data Collection Approach

Each Wednesday and Thursday teachers meet in grade level meetings to discuss a variety of issues ranging from student performance issues of time management. With the permission of the Principal, grade level meetings were used to meet with teachers for the purpose of explaining the project and the survey. At the meeting volunteers were asked to participate in the survey. Names of participant were selected randomly to complete a survey. Teachers were asked to complete and return the surveys in sealed envelope by the end of the school day on which the survey was handed out. Having the surveys returned in the same day would eliminate than possibility of having participants forgetting to respond. All surveys were returned as requested.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

Upon return of the surveys responses to the questionnaire was analyzed. The responses were analyzed by noting the teachers' perception of reform practices and its impact on student achievement in the classroom. Responses were also analyzed to identify the major teaching practices used by teachers and determine if these practices reflect those that have been identified as researched based "best practices". The result of the survey was used to identify the success of staff development in supporting teachers as they experiment with new teaching practices.

Each response corresponded with a point value. A score was determined by adding the point values for each statement. An average point value was be given for each response. By assigning an average point value to each response it was then possible to infer how teachers felt about the effects of school reform on teaching practices, student achievement and opportunities for professional development.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

Introduction

This study was designed to determine the effectiveness of school reform on changing teaching and classroom practices in the Middle School of Pleasantville. The study was also designed to look at how staff development supported teachers through the change process. Data was collected using a 29 question survey measuring teacher commitment to reforming teaching practices, perception of workshops and professional development opportunities, perception of student achievement, and identify classroom practices before and after implementation of reform practices (N=30).

Data was collected over a three-month period from the survey instrument that assessed the attitude of teachers with a minimum of four years teaching experience (N=30) toward school reform and the impact of reform on classroom practices.

The sources of information and method of data collection for the teacher survey process are shown in Table 1. Findings from the data collection was organized into five sections: Attitude Toward School Reform, Professional Development, Student Achievement, Teacher Motivation to Change, and Changes on Teaching Practices.

Demographics

Table 2 Illustrates teaching experience and professional development time of the respondents. Fourteen respondents have been teaching between 0 and 5 years, two respondents have been teaching between 6 and 10 years, seven respondents have been teaching between 11 and 15 years, four have been teaching between 16 and 20 years, and three have been teaching more than 25 years. Sixty percent of the respondents have been

teaching in the Pleasantville School District between 0 and 5 years. Only one respondent

has been in the district over 21 years. Ninety-six percent of the respondents spent

between 0-60 hours per year in professional development sessions during the last school

year. Two percent responded that they spent between 61-120 hours per year in

professional development sessions during the last school year.

In analyzing the data, five categories emerged, (a) attitude toward school reform

(b) professional development (c) student achievement (d) teacher's motivation to change

practices, and (e) changes made in teaching practices. Each category was unique in terms

of the problems it addressed, however by analyzing the data as a whole a better

understanding of the perplexity of the issues surfaced

School Reform

The data revealed that the majority of the teachers disagreed that school reform

has helped students meet state standards. The teachers surveyed indicated they do not

support the reform practices that were in place in their school. When asked the question,

are you committed to maintaining the changes that they made in teaching practices, the

overwhelming number of respondents were in agreement. Twenty-two out of the 30

respondents were neutral when responding to the question asking if they felt it was

necessary to change how they worked with students when reform practices were adopted

at the Middle School.

Professional Development

More than half of the respondents felt that ideas and procedures has been

presented through professional development. Many of the ideas presented were felt to be

applicable to many lessons. The data revealed that an understanding of content concepts

and principles has increased as a result of professional development. The data also

showed that more than half of the respondents felt neutral about the impact of professional development in helping to learn how to use research-based practices. More than half of the respondents were neutral in their response to the question of whether or not professional development helped to fill in gaps in their ability to use technology to improve teaching and learning.

Student Achievement

With regard to student achievement, 73% responded that students were not more engaged in meaningful work and on task as a result of professional development. Eighty percent of the responses indicated that students were not showing a deeper understanding of key ideas.

Motivation to Change

Twenty-three responses indicated there has been an attempt to change teaching practices. Twenty responses indicated a neutral feeling about the success teachers were having in changing what and how they taught. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that as a teacher they are motivated to learn more about teaching strategies and classroom practices.

Change in Teaching Practices

The data collected in this category offered a comparison between teaching practices prior to the adoption of Core Curriculum Content Standards and mandated school reform and after adoption.

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of practice on a scale of one to four with one being rarely practiced and four being routinely practiced. The responses to the twelve questions in this section revealed little change from practices prior to school

reform and present practices. The data revealed that prior to school reform less than 20%
of the respondents rarely engaged in practices such as: having students participate in
creating scoring rubrics, revise and extend their previous work, participate in peer writing
conferences and providing students with direct and explicit instructions in writing. Four
years after instituting professional development to support reforming teaching practices,
the data indicates that there is little to no change in the frequency in use of those
practices.

Practices of students working in teams, linking classroom activities to student
interest, and constructing opportunities for each student to contribute meaningfully were
practiced by 40 % of respondents prior to reform. The same 40 % indicated that these
practices are now used more frequently. The data also suggest that the largest increase in
frequency of teaching practices include: framing questions to elicit critical thinking, using
authentic problems to teach concepts and skills, and using rubrics to specify success
criteria prior to students completing tasks.

Interpretation of the Data
Data was collected for the purpose of studying the impact of school reform on
teaching practices. Research was also conducted for the purpose of studying how staff
development supported teachers as the school engaged in mandated school reform. Based
on the analysis and interpretation of the data, an insight can be gained regarding the
change in teaching practices since adopting a school reform model. Additional
information is given regarding the effectiveness of professional development.

It is my hypothesis that professional development that focuses primarily on
expanding a teachers repertoire of well-defined classroom practices is not adequate to
meet the needs of reform initiatives. The transformation of schooling as indicated by the

demands of core curriculum content standards and state testing requires a very ambitious staff development program. Changing pedagogy creates a demand on changing teachers' established beliefs as well as present practices. Teachers are expected to make many changes at once. Changes in content and methods associated with a "new" curriculum and the tension created between reforms aimed at encouraging critical thinking while teachers are focused on improving basic skills can create a sense of panic or anxiety in teachers. The results of such feeling can be the cause of teachers making little or no change in practice.

The data indicated that teachers want to make changes in their teaching practices. There seemed to be a problem with teachers actually making the changes. Data suggest a need for additional follow through processes be put in place. After staff development has been delivered to teachers, specific next steps need to be in place for administrators and staff.

The data suggested that teachers feel school reform has not helped students to meet state standards and that teachers do not support school reform. If teachers are not in support of school reform it could explain why effort has not been made by teachers to transfer new philosophy, training and pedagogy to the classroom.

The data inferred that teachers were not using many recommended practices, yet, are expecting change in behavior and achievement of students. Teachers are looking for changes in students but are not changing their teaching behavior.

Based on the analysis of the data collected teachers are motivated to make changes in teaching and classroom practices. Teachers have been involved in professional development. This finding will be used to develop a professional development processes

24

that will support teachers as they develop the necessary skills to prepare students to

master the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards.

Chapter 5

Conclusion, Implications, and Further Study

Introduction

The review of the literature on school reform and professional development

revealed that professional development programs model good teaching, provide teachers

with opportunities to explore, question and debate in order to integrate new ideas into

teachers repertoires and classroom practices. Sufficient time and follow-up support for

teachers to master new content and strategies must be provided. Teachers must be

included in the decision making process of the school. Teachers must be given

responsibility and resources to identify and implement school and classroom goals.

The purpose of this project was to study and assess the effectiveness of school

reform on changing teaching practices. In addition this study was to recommend changes

to the implementation of school reform, in particular, professional development.

Conclusions and Implications Concerning Professional Development Activities

In this paper it has been identified that although teachers are interested in

changing instructional practices, no significant changes have been made since the

implementation of school reform. Teachers appear to be knowledgeable about a variety

of pedagogy yet are not making the effort to use this knowledge on an ongoing basis in

the classroom. Teachers are not using the information they have to make decisions in the

classroom that could possibly have a positive impact on student achievement.

The results of this study offer strong support for the need to create a high-quality professional development plan that will support the potential of individuals to improve and for students to excel. Teachers and other educators play crucial roles in educational reform strategies intended to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to achieve high standards of learning and development.

Professional development in the Pleasantville School District is thought of in terms of workshops. Several times a year, school administrators release students for half or full day workshops and hold an "in-service" program that may or may not be relevant to teachers' professional development needs. Teachers typically spend a few hours listening and, at best, leave with some practical tips or some useful materials. There is seldom any follow- up to the experience and subsequent in-services may address entirely different sets of topics.

A number of experts and organizations have suggested that the most promising professional development programs and policies are those that:

- Are closely linked to school initiatives to improve practices.

- Support teacher initiatives as well as school or district initiatives.

- Are grounded in knowledge about god teaching.

- Model constructive teaching. Teachers need opportunities to explore, question and debate in order to integrate new ideas into their repertoires and their classroom practice.

- Offer intellectual, social and emotional engagement with ideas, material and colleagues. If teachers are to teach for deep understanding, they must be intellectually   engaged in their disciplines and work regularly with others in their field.

- Draw on the expertise of teachers and take differing degrees of teacher experience into account.

27

- Provide for sufficient time and follow-up support for teachers to master new content and strategies and to integrate them into their practice.

- View professional development as an integral part of teachers' work rather than as an addition to their workday and responsibilities.

Most researchers agree that local professional development programs typically have weak effects on practice because they lack focus, intensity, follow-up, and continuity. Lack of follow-up appears to be the most significant reason for the weaken effect on practice. After staff development is presented to teachers specific next steps need to be in place. Such steps include gathering planned lesson activities that use specific strategies; physical observation of strategy being implemented, as well as collect student work samples demonstrating understanding based on use of strategy. When evidence is not present one-on-one small group coaching begins. Teachers should be provided the necessary to feel safe as they make changes to their teaching.

More time is required for professional development and cooperative work. Teachers need more time to work with colleagues, to critically examine new standards and to revise curriculum. They need time to develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with children (Bruno, 2000). The changes teachers must make to meet the goals of reform demand much more than learning new techniques. These changes go to the core of what it means to teach. Because these changes are so important most teachers will require considerable time to achieve them (Bruno, 2000). Teachers need time to work in study groups, conduct action research, participate in seminars, coach one another, plan lessons together, and meet for other purposes. Greenwood (1994) states, "School change is the results of both individual and organizational development" (p.2). Time must be made for professional development to be a part of almost every school day.

Technology can support and broaden professional development learning communities and help teachers make better use of their time. Through the Internet and video conferencing teachers can access both instructional and collegial networks. (pp.5-6). Electronic mail and bulletin boards can assist teachers in sharing information and solving problems with colleagues at any time. Videoconferencing allows teachers to connect to different sites without spending time and money on travel.

The following are recommended goals for a staff development model:

- Moving away from past models of professional development (where it took place only on in-service days or during the summer) to new models that make professional development a part of the daily lives of teachers.

- Restructure teachers' work to create the needed space and time necessary for ongoing professional development.

- Develop strategies for informing and convincing the public and policy makers that professional development is not only critical but is as much a part of teachers' work as instruction.

This study would like to propose that by providing teachers with professional development that allows all teachers to engage in discussions of good practices and that supports teachers efforts to learn and to use more effective pedagogy may be the first real step toward higher standards for all children.

Implications of Study on Leadership Skills

According to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders, standard 1 states that the administrator has knowledge and understanding of information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies in addition to effective consensus-building and negotiation skills. Standard 1 also state that the administrator believes in, values, and is committed to continuous school improvement

and ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become successful adults. To effectively support teachers as they become better prepared to improve the academic performance of their students, an administrator must identify the needs of the students, the knowledge levels of the teaching staff, and make decisions regarding appropriate staff development needs. One avenue for continuous school improvement is for administrator to include staff in the decisions that are made that will impact on classroom practices and student performance. Teachers who are made to feel part of the process will also feel responsible for the outcome. A well-trained teaching staff will result in students that develop the skills to be successful adults.

Standard 2 states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. The administrator has knowledge and understanding of applied learning and motivational theories, principles of effective instruction, adult learning and professional development models, the change process for systems, organizations, and individuals, and the role of technology in promoting student learning and professional growth. A solid professional development program promotes among other things, a focus on student learning, identifies and addresses barriers to student learning and encourages and models life long learning. As schools undergo constant change an administrator is responsible for providing staff with all the information and tools required to be successful.

Implications of study on Organizational Change

Professional development is not a new concept to schools or teachers. Professional development is more complicated than in the past. With the onset of teachers entering the field from an alternate route and many veteran teachers who have resisted entering the 21st century and all the challenges that it brings, providing professional development brings new challenges. Just as schools are looking for ways to extend the student's day, offering professional development could result in the extension of the teacher's day. Support provided to teachers may not necessarily come solely from an administrator. Peer coaches and teacher leaders could provide the feedback and encouragement that teachers need while they practice new techniques and strategies. Technology can to provide teachers with the opportunity to discuss pedagogy with experts in the field through video conferencing. Schools will become a place of learning for both teachers and students.

Further Study

The data gathered provides a snap shot of one of the issues concerning the implementation of a change process. It is recommended that further study take place to identify the quality of the staff development provided to teacher in addition to identifying teacher's perception of the support provided while attempting to implement many of the mandated reforms. A study of the evaluation processes would be helpful in identifying the level of teacher accountability to the implementation of new teaching practices.

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Appendix A
Tables

TABLE 1

Sources of Information and Methods of Data Collection

Source	Quantitative Collection	Purpose
Certified Teachers with Four or More Years of Teaching Experience at the Middle School of Pleasantville	Teacher Survey	Assess Attitude and Teaching Practices

TABLE 2

Demographics of Survey Respondents

	Number	Percent
Teaching Experience in Years		
0-5	14	46
6-10	2	.06
11-15	7	23
16-20	4	13
21+	3	1
Years Teaching in the Pleasantville School District		
0-5	18	60
6-10	7	23
11-15	5	16
16-20	0	0
21+	1	.03
Hours spent in professional development sessions over the last three-year period		
0-60	28	93
61-120	2	.06
121-108	0	0
109-240	0	0
over 240	0	0

Appendix B
Research Instruments

October 29, 2002

Dear Colleagues:

I am requesting a few minutes of your valuable time to assist me in studying the impact of reform on teaching practices and student achievement.

I am completing my graduate program in School Administration at Rowan University. As a requirement of my course, I must write a thesis using research methods and instruments. Your participation is very important to me.

Enclosed is a survey that should take no more than ten minutes to complete. Will you please complete and return them to me by the end of the day.

The results of the survey will be shared with you at a later date.

I appreciate your cooperation. Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

Carol Reynolds

Teacher Survey
Fall 2002

1. The school reform model has helped my students meet state standards.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

2. I support the reform model my school is using.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

3. I am committed to maintaining the changes that I have made in
   my teaching.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

4. When we adopted school reform, it was necessary to change
   how I worked with students.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

5. I am motivated to learn more about teaching strategies
   and classroom practices.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

6. The school schedule provides sufficient planning time
   to implement new teaching practices.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

7. Workshop and professional development opportunities:

   a) have given me ideas and procedures applicable
   to many lessons.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

   b) have increased my understanding of content concepts
   and principles.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

   c) have helped me learn how to use research-based
   practices.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

   d) have helped me fill gaps in my ability to use
   technology.　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

Section I. (continued)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree

8. Compared to students I taught before our school implemented new teaching practices:

a) my current students act more engaged in meaningful work, more "on task".

       1   2   3   4   5

b) my current students show deeper levels of understanding of key ideas.

       1   2   3   4   5

9. Since the Middle School has adopted reform practices I have:

a) Tried to change what and how I teach.

       1   2   3   4   5

b) Succeeded in changing what and how I teach.

       1   2   3   4   5

SECTION II. For each item, circle two numbers: One to indicate how often you used the strategy Before implementing school reform and one to indicate how often you use the strategy now.	Before reform implementation		Now	
	Rarely	Routinely	Rarely	Routinely

I have my students use computers…

1. to conduct electronic searches for information.	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4	
2. to write, revise, or communicate.	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4	
3. to create presentations.	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4	

I have my students…

4. participate in planning instructional activities.	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4	
5. participate in creating scoring rubrics.	1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4	

Teacher Survey
Fall 2002

Section II (continued)	Before reform Rarely Routinely	Now Rarely Routinely
6. revise and extend their previous work	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
7. participate in peer writing conferences	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
8. work in teams	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
9. apply rubrics to their own or their peers' work	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

I use the following strategies…

	Before reform Rarely Routinely	Now Rarely Routinely
10. linking class activities to student interests.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
11. constructing opportunities for each student to contribute meaningfully.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
12. giving students direct and explicit instructions in writing skills.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
13. framing questions to elicit critical thinking.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
14. using authentic problems to teach concept and skills.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
15. using rubrics to specify success criteria prior to students completing tasks.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

Tell me about yourself…

    1. How many year have you taught …

    At any school _____
    At this school

    2. How many hours have you spent attending professional development sessions?

    0-60   61-120   121-108   109-240   over 240

3. How many times during the last school year have you ...

a) observed other teachers in their classroom? 0-3   4-6   7-9   10 or more
b) been observed in your classroom by teachers? 0-3   4-6   7-9   10 or more

I am a ...   regular education teacher   special education teacher (circle one)

4. Beyond teaching, my other school responsibilities include (check all that apply) ...

Serving on the School Instructional Team _____

Coaching colleagues in their classroom _____

Serving on the School Design Team _____

Serving on a curriculum committee _____

Other _____

5. Please indicate your gender: Male _____   Female _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information that you provided will be used to identify the impact of school reform on instructional strategies and student achievement.

Please return the questionnaire to Carol Reynolds in the envelope provided and seal well.

Appendix C
Survey Results

Middle School of Pleasantville Teacher Survey Results	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
The school reform model has helped my students meet state standards.	0	25	2	3	0
I support the reform model my school is using	0	21	5	4	0
I am committed to maintaining the changes that I have made in my teaching.	0	0	0	28	2
When we adopted school reform, it was necessary to change how I worked with students.	0	4	22	3	1
I am motivated to learn more about teaching strategies and classroom practices.	0	0	4	21	5
The school schedule provides sufficient planning time to implement new teaching practices.	18	6	4	2	0
Workshop and professional development opportunities:					
have given me ideas and procedures applicable to many lessons.	0	2	3	20	5
Have increased my understanding on content concepts and principles.	0	1	1	26	2
Have helped me to learn how to use researched-based practices.	0	2	23	3	2
Have helped me fill in the gaps in my ability to use technology.	0	2	26	2	0

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Compared to students I taught before our school implemented new teaching practices:					
My current students act more engaged in meaningful work, more on task.	3	22	3	3	0
My current students show deeper understanding of key ideas.	2	24	3	1	0
Since the Middle School has adopted reform practices I have:					
Tried to change what and how I teach.	0	1	3	22	4
Succeeded in changing what and how I teach.	3	3	20	3	1

Before Reform	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)	After Reform	Rarely (1)	Sometime (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)
I have my students use computers:									
To conduct electronic searches for information	18	6	2	4		15	6	5	4
To write, revise, or communicate.	15	7	5	3		12	7	8	3
To create presentations.	20	6	2	2		17	6	4	3
I have my students …									
Participate in planning instructional activities.	26	3	1	0		26	2	2	0
Participate in creating scoring rubrics.	28	2	0	0		27	2	1	0
Revise and extend their previous work.	12	0	8	10		12	0	8	10

Before Reform	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)	After Reform	Rarely (1)	Sometime (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)
Participate in peer writing conferences.	12	6	7	5		12	6	7	5
Work in teams	5	4	9	12		2	5	7	16
Apply rubrics to their own or their peers' work.	12	6	7	5		5	10	8	7
I use the following strategies …									
Linking class activities to student interest.	12	3	3	12		8	4	3	15

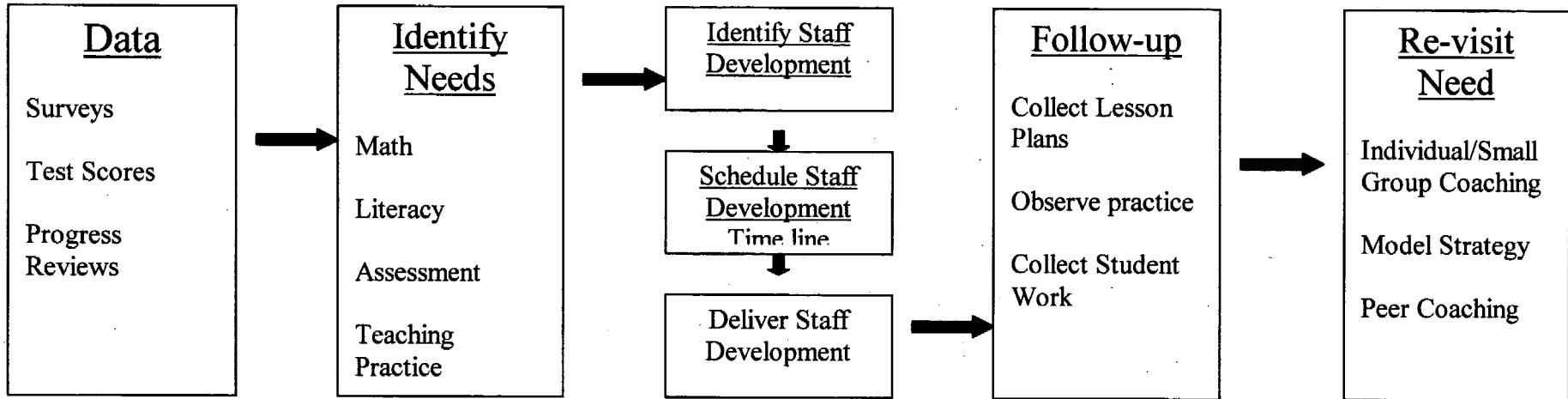| Before Reform	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)	After Reform	Rarely (1)	Sometime (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)
Constructing opportunities for each student to contribute meaningfully	6	3	9	12		4	5	6	15
Giving students direct and explicit instructions in writing skills.	5	8	8	9		5	8	8	9
Framing questions to elicit critical thinking.	3	15	3	9		3	9	3	15
Using authentic problems to teach concept and skills.	18	3	2	7		7	3	2	18
Using rubrics to specify success criteria prior to students completing tasks.	17	5	3	5		7	1	2	20

Appendix D
Staff Development Proposal

Staff Development Improvement Process Proposal

Data	Identify Needs	Identify Staff Development	Follow-up	Re-visit Need
Surveys Test Scores Progress Reviews	Math Literacy Assessment Teaching Practice	**Identify Staff Development** ↓ **Schedule Staff Development Time line** ↓ Deliver Staff Development	Collect Lesson Plans Observe practice Collect Student Work	Individual/Small Group Coaching Model Strategy Peer Coaching

Biographical Data

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High School   Springfield Gardens High School
                             Springfield Gardens, NY

Undergraduate   Bachelor of Arts
                             Elementary Education
                             Northeastern University
                             Boston, MA

Graduate   Master of Arts
                             School Administration
                             Rowan University
                             Glassboro, NJ

Present Occupation   Whole School Reform Facilitator
                             Middle School of Pleasantville
                             Pleasantville, NJ