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THE SCHOOLWIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOLS ATTUNED,  
A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DEDICATED TO  
MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE LEARNERS

by  
Lauren Hegge McGroarty

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
April 15, 2005

Approved by  
Professor

Date Approved 4/20/05

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## ABSTRACT

Lauren Hegge McGroarty

THE SCHOOLWIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOLS ATTUNED,  
A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DEDICATED TO  
MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE LEARNERS

2004/05

Dr. Robert Kern

Master of Arts in School Administration

Schools Attuned, the professional development program, was developed to provide educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of all students. Schools Attuned, based on 30 years of work by Dr. Mel Levine, had offered new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with differences in learning. Parkview Elementary School in Westville, New Jersey adopted the Schools Attuned program in order to fulfill the expectations that have been prescribed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This qualitative study was dependent on the population of 33 educators' perceptions about the Schools Attuned program, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the professional development program. Through the distribution of a questionnaire, an in-service evaluation, and conducting an open-forum discussion group with a sample of the population that represented the teaching faculty, the study also defined effective strategies that should accompany the implementation of school-wide initiatives.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Westville School District for recognizing the importance of higher education and supporting professional growth and development. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to begin my teaching career at Parkview Elementary School, and allowing me to work with many special children in Westville.

I would like to acknowledge my professors at Rowan University for sharing their expertise and knowledge in educational leadership. My university mentor, Dr. Robert Kern, provided me with invaluable guidance to successfully complete the school administration program. I have much respect for his contributions to the field of education and the impact that he has had as an educational leader.

I would also like to acknowledge my family for their unconditional love and support. My mother has served as my most influential role model by continuously instilling the importance of education. When I was a child, she inspired me to follow her footsteps in becoming a teacher. As an adult, my mother has motivated me to strive to become an educational leader.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Brian, for respecting my decision to continue my education. I appreciate Brian's patience, interest, and enthusiasm throughout my academic journey. Thank you for believing in me and giving me the strength to be successful. I am so grateful to share my life with you.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of the Study

The entire teaching staff at Parkview Elementary School participated in the Schools Attuned training prior to the start of the 2004-2005 school year. Schools Attuned is a professional development program, offered by All Kinds of Minds, based on 30 years of work by Dr. Mel Levine. This program was developed to provide educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of all students. Schools Attuned has offered new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with differences in learning.

Throughout the training, educators were focused on eight neurodevelopmental constructs that affect learning: attention, language, memory, servomotor function, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, higher order cognition, and social cognition. This program prepared classroom teachers to make the best instructional decisions to ensure that each student can find academic and social success. The teaching staff was fortunate to be trained in such a program given the expectations that have been prescribed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. General education teachers have been required to meet the diverse needs of all of their students. This program was intended to provide educators with the tools necessary to meet those needs.

## Purpose of the Study

With the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation, Parkview Elementary School made a commitment to adopt and implement the comprehensive professional development program Schools Attuned. Parkview Elementary School decided to invest in the implementation of this program with the goal of improving student performance. This study evaluated the needs of the teachers during the first year of implementation, ensuring that the program was successful.

## Definitions

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*: President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law on January 8, 2002. This legislation is based on the following four education reform principles: increased accountability for student performance, increased flexibility and local control, additional options for parents, and an emphasis on implementing research-based teaching methods and educational programs.

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: AYP is a state developed measure of progress for all local educational agencies, local school districts, and schools in the state. States must define AYP where all students are expected to improve and achieve the proficient level on state reading and math assessments by 2014.

*Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC)*: The Pupil Assistance Committee held monthly meetings in which teachers were able to discuss students that are having a difficult time in the classroom. The PAC Committee offered suggestions to the teacher and decides if the student should be recommended for testing by the Child Study Team.



*Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA):* The IDEA provides federal funding for the education of children with disabilities and requires the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

*Schools Attuned:* A comprehensive professional development program offered by All Kinds of Minds, and is based on 30 years of work by Dr. Mel Levine. This program provides educators with new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with diverse learning needs.

*Neurodevelopmental Constructs:* The 8 neurodevelopmental constructs that affect learning include: attention, language, memory, neuromotor function, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, higher order cognition, and social cognition. The Schools Attuned program allows educators to understand the role of the neurodevelopmental constructs in building the foundation for learning.

### Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitation of this study was the limited amount of time to gather information regarding the effectiveness of the Schools Attuned program. There was not enough time to accurately evaluate the impact that the program had on increasing student achievement. Therefore, this study focused on effective implementation strategies that were utilized during the first year of the school-wide initiative to institute the Schools Attuned program. This study was limited to providing other educational institutions, planning to adopt the Schools Attuned program, with information that will assist them during the first year of implementation.

### Setting of the Study

The study took place at Parkview Elementary School, which is the only school representing the Westville School District. The Borough of Westville is located in Gloucester County, New Jersey (Westville, New Jersey Resource Guide, 2003). The community of Westville is composed of approximately 4,500 residents, residing over 1 square mile. The Westville community includes the following racial percentages: 92% White, 3% Hispanic, 2.7% Black, and 2.3% of the population include other races. The median age of Westville residents is 37 years old. In regards to the members of the community that are above the age of 25, approximately 76% have completed high school and approximately 9% have earned a bachelor's degree. The median yearly household income is approximately \$40,000 and the median house value is about \$92,000 (Westville, New Jersey Resource Guide, 2003).

Parkview Elementary School houses approximately 400 students in Pre-Kindergarten through sixth grade (New Jersey Department of Education, 2003). The percentage of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) was 21%, and the percentage of students that have Limited English Proficiency (LEP) was 0.5%. Parkview School has a significantly high student mobility rate of 20% when compared to the state average of 13% of students who entered and left during the school year. In 2003, the results of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK4) indicated that 63% of the fourth grade class was proficient in Language Arts Literacy and 41.3% of the fourth grade class was proficient in Mathematics, with an additional 6.5% showing advanced proficiency (New Jersey Department of Education, 2003).

### Significance of the Study

At the time of this study, Parkview School had an extremely high percentage of students that were referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) because the regular education teachers were having a difficult time meeting the needs of diverse learners. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind legislation, it was necessary for schools to provide support and assist their teachers in meeting the diverse academic and social needs of their students. Therefore, Parkview Elementary School invested in and adopted the comprehensive professional development program, Schools Attuned to meet the demands of the current legislation. However, it was critical for the teachers to be provided with ongoing support throughout the school year in order to ensure successful implementation of the program.

### Relationship of the Study to the ISLLC Standards

Schools Attuned is a professional development program that requires educators to collaborate with parents to identify student strengths and weaknesses. Strategies are developed and should be implemented both in school by the teacher and at home by the parent. A cooperative relationship ultimately allows the student to be successful. Therefore, the fourth standard that has been defined by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium directly relates to this study.

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

4.a.2. Knowledge: The administrator has knowledge and understanding of conditions and dynamics of diverse school community.

4.b.2. Disposition: The administrator believes in, values and is committed to diversity.

4.c.1. Performance: The administrator facilitates and engages in activities ensuring that there are comprehensive, active, visible, and mutually serving school and community relations; outreach to and partnerships with all segments of the diverse community.

Schools Attuned also provides educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of all students. Schools Attuned offers new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with differences in learning. Throughout the training, educators focus on eight neurodevelopmental constructs that affect learning: attention, language, memory, servomotor function, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, higher order cognition, and social cognition. This program prepares classroom teachers to make the best instructional decisions to ensure that each student can find academic and social success. Therefore, the sixth standard that has been defined by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium also directly relates to this study.

Standard 6: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

6.a.6. Knowledge: The administrator has knowledge and understanding of issues and forces that affect teaching and learning, including issues of diversity and equity.

6.b.2 Disposition: The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to diversity in ideals, values, and cultures.

6. c.1 Performance: The administrator facilitates activities ensuring a school environment that focuses on students and learning.

## Organization of the Study

This study is organized as follows:

In Chapter 2, Review of the Literature, information is provided about the No Child Left Behind Act and the implications for school districts across the nation, including the educational programs at Parkview Elementary School. As a result of the No Child Left Behind Legislation, Parkview Elementary School has adopted the professional development program, Schools Attuned. It is important for school districts to foster the implementation of school-wide initiatives. There were several factors that contribute to the effective implementation of new school programs and professional development in the educational literature that was reviewed.

Chapter 3, The Design of the Study, includes the description of the three research instruments that were used to collect the qualitative data throughout the course of the study. The design of the study included the population of 33 faculty members at Parkview Elementary School. In this chapter, the sample and the sampling techniques that were utilized throughout the study are identified. The design also reveals information regarding the process of data collection. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the data that was collected during the first year implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview Elementary School.

The research findings, which were dependent on the research instruments that were utilized throughout this study, are presented in Chapter 4. The first instrument assessed the perceptions about Schools Attuned and elicited feedback regarding the school-wide implementation of the program. The second instrument allowed the faculty to evaluate the Schools Attuned In-Service. The final research instrument was utilized during an

open-forum discussion group with a representative sample of the Parkview staff at the conclusion of the study. The participants discussed the first-year implementation of Schools Attuned, and made suggestions for the second year of implementation.

Chapter 5, Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study, provides the conclusions of the research study that was conducted at Parkview Elementary School. The conclusions are based on the data that was collected during the initial year of the implementation of the professional development program, Schools Attuned. The implications that this study had on the Westville School District and similar educational institutions are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 concludes with suggestions that would enhance the implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview Elementary School during the second year of implementation as well as suggestions for further study.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The act includes four education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility, and local control, an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work, and expanded options for parents.

Under the act's accountability provisions, No Child Left Behind requires states to develop a plan and describe how they will ensure that all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. States are responsible for keeping parents and community members informed about both state and school progress through the development of annual report cards. Schools that are not progressing will be required to initially offer students supplemental services, including tutoring and after-school assistance. If a particular school fails to make adequate yearly progress for a period of five years, the school will be identified for restructuring or vulnerable to being taken over by the state (U.S. House Committee, 2004).

In exchange for greater accountability for results and student performance, No Child Left Behind further provides states and school districts with flexibility in determining how federal education funds should be allocated. In order to assist schools in making adequate yearly progress and narrowing achievement gaps, states and school districts are

now able to consolidate their federal funds and apply them towards any educational purpose authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. House Committee, 2004).

Through the new Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, states and districts are encouraged to choose professional development programs and teaching strategies that will help to increase student achievement. No Child Left Behind relies on using scientific research to help determine what educational programs and practices have been proven effective. Federal funding is provided to support effective programs and teaching methods that improve student performance and achievement. The government supports the Reading First program because it is a scientifically based reading program that established comprehensive reading instruction for children in kindergarten through third grade (U.S. House Committee, 2004).

Parents of children in schools that are not making adequate yearly progress are also provided with options under the No Child Left Behind legislation. Parents with children in schools that have not met the state standards for at least two consecutive years are provided with the option to transfer their children to another public school within the district that is meeting the standards. Schools that have not met the state standards for at least three years are responsible for providing students from low-income households with supplemental services, including tutoring, after-school services, and summer school. No Child Left Behind also encourages communities to establish charter schools (U.S. House Committee, 2004).

In the field of education, much controversy surrounds the expectations that are defined by the No Child Left Behind Act. No Child Left Behind expects that *all* students will



achieve the state defined “proficient” level on state reading and mathematics assessments by 2014. Legislators defend the law by claiming, “If the goal were anything short of 100 percent proficiency, Congress would in effect be saying--in federal law--that it is acceptable for states to leave a certain percentage of their students behind.” (U.S. House Committee, 2004, p. 5).

Moreover, NCLB and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require all students to participate in the state accountability and assessment system. States are also required to include the scores of students with disabilities when determining whether school districts have met their annual yearly progress goals for the school year. Legislators further argue, “All parents want to know that their children are learning. Parents of children with disabilities are no different.” (U.S. House Committee, 2004, p. 3).

The state of educational institutions across our nation is extremely dependent on the effective leadership from school administrators, the daily instruction of highly qualified teachers, and the academic performance of the students. Schools must implement programs that will allow administrators, teachers, and students to be successful (U.S. House Committee, 2004).

Schools Attuned is a professional development program offered by All Kinds of Minds, based on 30 years of work by Dr. Mel Levine. This comprehensive program provides educators with new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with diverse learning needs (All Kinds of Minds, 2004). Schools Attuned provides educators with a training program of 35 hours, with an additional 10 hours of follow-up experiences. Throughout the training, educators are introduced to and explore

the eight neurodevelopmental constructs that affect learning: attention, language, memory, neuromotor function, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, higher order cognition, and social cognition. The program allows educators to understand the role of the neurodevelopmental constructs in building the foundation for learning (All Kinds of Minds, 2004).

Schools Attuned participants are encouraged to select a student whom they identify as struggling with learning. The student becomes that participant's case study throughout the training. Educators learn to respond to learning differences through several critical processes. The process of attuning requires the teacher, parent, and student to complete comprehensive observation instruments. This information allows the teacher to devise an educational plan, which addresses the strengths and weaknesses that are exhibited by the student. The process of demystification provides an opportunity for teachers, students, and their parents to meet and discuss the strengths and learning difficulties that the student has been experiencing. The teacher employs classroom accommodations and offers suggestions to parents that build on student strengths and work around their weaknesses to produce better learning results. This program prepares classroom teachers to make the best instructional decisions to ensure that each student can experience academic and social success. When implemented within schools, this program is able to enrich the way all children are educated (All Kinds of Minds, 2004).

All Kinds of Minds has been working with independent researchers, including Dr. Gordon Gates and Dr. Gladys Pack, to measure the impact that Schools Attuned has on students, teachers, and schools. Their research has indicated that teachers feel more prepared to address differences in learning after completing the Schools Attuned training.

Schools Attuned has also improved student academic achievement and classroom climate. This improvement has reduced the number of disciplinary referrals and special education referrals in schools implementing the Schools Attuned program.

Numerous studies have supported that Schools Attuned is an effective program, producing positive results in many schools across the country. Therefore, it was critical that attention be given to the actual implementation of professional development programs. Research consistently indicates that professional development programs should: be school-wide; be long-term with follow-up; encourage collegiality; foster agreement among participants on goals and vision; have a supportive administration; have access to adequate funds for materials, outside speakers, and substitute teachers; develop buy-in among participants; acknowledge participants' existing beliefs and practices; and make use of an outside facilitator (Richardson, 2003).

Virginia Richardson and Tony Wagner agree that the 'egg crate' environment of schools, in which teachers do not have the opportunity to interact with colleagues during the workday, hinders professional development (Richardson, 2003 and Wagner, 2001). However, Wagner disagrees with the characteristic of evoking "buy-in" among professional development participants and proposes that teachers need to create "ownership" (Wagner 2001). In order to establish "ownership", he claims that the following conditions are essential for adult learning in schools to develop educational change: shared vision of the goals of learning, good teaching, and assessment; understanding of the urgent need for change; relationships based on mutual respect and trust; and engagement strategies that create commitment rather than mere compliance.

Commitment is one of the key components in the five-stage model, defined by Gordon Donaldson, to assist educators in determining the effectiveness of program implementation (Donaldson, 1993). Stage 1, Criticism, allows educators to use criticism to identify ways to improve performance. Stage 2, Self-Examination, encourages staff members to examine student outcomes and how they are affected by current practices. Stage 3 requires the staff to collectively establish goals. During Stage 4, the entire staff needs to commit to the planning and implementation of new efforts. Stage 5, Consolidation, requires effective monitoring of a new program. The implementation of a program that is based on careful goal setting, honest assessment, and supported by a committed faculty will be successful. The implementations of professional development programs are successful through continuous efforts to monitor progress through collective reflection (Donaldson, 1993).

## Chapter 3

### The Design of the Study

#### Research Design

The research design of this qualitative study was intended to foster the adoption of the Schools Attuned Program during the first year of implementation at Parkview Elementary School in Westville, New Jersey. Although this study could only be conducted during the first six months of the school year, data was collected through a variety of means in order to compensate for the limited amount of time. Data was collected from a needs assessment questionnaire, an in-service evaluation, and during an open-forum discussion group. This phenomenological research provided information about the experiences of the participants during the first year of the school-wide implementation of Schools Attuned. Information was also gathered regarding changes that should be made during the second year of implementation. The research that was conducted during September 2004 through February 2005 has provided a sufficient amount of qualitative data to measure the participants' perceptions of the implementation of the Schools Attuned program at Parkview Elementary School.

#### Focus of Research Instruments

There were three types of research instruments utilized to collect data throughout the study. The first type of instrument was a questionnaire that was distributed to 24 participants at the end of the first Schools Attuned Practicum Course that took place in November 2004. This questionnaire asked the participants to describe the student that

was being attuned, including strengths and weaknesses. The participants were also asked to identify the strategies that were being used to accommodate the students' needs. The questionnaire further included questions regarding the participants' feelings, attitudes, and perceptions about the Schools Attuned program. The participants were specifically asked about the effect that Schools Attuned would have on student achievement, behavior problems, and the number of referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). The participants were also provided with an opportunity to identify additional resources and offer suggestions regarding the effective implementation of the Schools Attuned program.

The second type of instrument used during the study was an evaluation of an in-service meeting that was held in January 2005. This evaluation was distributed to 33 participants at the end of the professional development meeting. This instrument allowed the faculty to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development in-service meeting. Participants described what was learned during the Schools Attuned in-service. The faculty also listed other areas of Schools Attuned that they would like to learn more about in upcoming meetings. The participants were provided with another opportunity to identify additional resources and offer suggestions regarding the effective implementation of the Schools Attuned program.

The final research instrument that was used at the conclusion of the study included a list of questions, which provided guidance and structure to the open-forum discussion group. After the final training session, the second Practicum Course, a representative sample of the faculty participated in an open-forum discussion group. There were questions regarding the roles of the teachers and the administration in implementing a

new program. The participants were also asked about the accommodations that were made for the teachers throughout the study. During the discussion group, the participants also provided suggestions for the second year of implementation of Schools Attuned.

The qualitative research instruments that were utilized throughout the duration of the study have measured the participants' perceptions of the first year implementation of the Schools Attuned program. The instruments have also provided information regarding the changes that should be made during the second year of school-wide implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview School.

#### Sample and Sampling Technique

The entire population of this study included 33 faculty members from Parkview Elementary School in Westville, New Jersey. The population included all of the teachers that participated in the Schools Attuned training. The population included 16, Kindergarten through sixth grade, regular education teachers, 3 self-contained special education teachers, 3 resource room teachers, 2 basic skills teachers, 1 Reading Recovery teacher, 6 specialists, 1 school nurse, and 1 school social worker.

During the 2003 - 2004 school year, 9 teachers were selected to attend the initial training program. The first group of teachers included: 1 Kindergarten teacher, 1 first grade teacher, 1 third grade teacher, 2 fourth grade teachers, 2 fifth grade teachers, 1 math resource room teacher, and 1 technology coordinator. After receiving a \$20,000 grant from the Dodge Foundation, the rest of the teaching staff was provided with training during the 2004 – 2005 school year. The second group of 24 teachers included: 2 Kindergarten teachers, 2 first grade teachers, 2 second grade teachers, 1 third grade teacher, 2 sixth grade teachers, 3 self-contained special education teachers, 2 resource

room teachers, 2 basic skills teachers, 1 Reading Recovery teacher, 1 music teacher, 1 physical education teacher, 1 art teacher, 1 Spanish teacher, 1 librarian, 1 school nurse, and 1 social worker.

This study consisted of gathering information from three different samples of the population. The first sample included the group of 24 faculty members that were being trained during the 2004 – 2005 school year. A needs assessment questionnaire was distributed during the Schools Attuned Practicum Course that was scheduled in November 2004.

The second research instrument was distributed to the entire population of 33 faculty members that were being trained in the Schools Attuned program. An evaluation of the in-service meeting was distributed to all of the participants at the conclusion of the professional development workshop.

The third sample was determined using the stratified random sampling technique. The sample consisted of 2 primary regular education teachers, 2 upper grade teachers, 1 self-contained teacher, 1 resource room teacher, 1 basic skills teacher, and 1 specialist. This sample represented the members of the school faculty that have been trained in the Schools Attuned program. This representative sample of teachers participated in a discussion group in which they were asked questions to guide the conversation about the implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview School.

#### Data Collection Approach

Throughout this study, it was necessary to collect data through a variety of means in order to accurately measure the effectiveness of the first year implementation of the school wide program, Schools Attuned. Data was collected through the distribution of a



questionnaire that focused on the teachers' perceptions of the Schools Attuned program and first year implementation. Information was also gathered through the distribution of an in-service evaluation. Finally, a representative sample, of Schools Attuned participants, was invited to attend an open-forum to discuss the first-year implementation of Schools Attuned.

The focus of this study was to measure the effectiveness of the first-year implementation of the Schools Attuned program. However, the *goal* of this study was to foster the adoption of the school-wide program. In order for the needs of the faculty to be accommodated during the first year of implementation, it was essential for a needs assessment to be distributed to the Schools Attuned participants. The faculty members that were being trained during the 2004 – 2005 school year, were provided with a needs assessment at the conclusion of the first Schools Attuned Practicum Course in November 2004. The participants were informed that the purpose of the questionnaire was to gain information regarding the first-year implementation of the Schools Attuned program. Although the participants were assured that the questionnaires would remain anonymous, they were informed that the compiled results would be shared with the administration. This information would allow the administration to meet the needs of the staff and provide the necessary support in successfully implementing the program.

Information regarding the Schools Attuned program was also gathered at the end of an in-service meeting that was held in January 2005. An in-service evaluation was distributed to 33 participants at the end of the professional development meeting. The instrument allowed the faculty to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development in-service meeting. They also described what was learned during the

Schools Attuned in-service and listed other areas of Schools Attuned that they would like to learn more about in upcoming meetings. Although the participants were assured that the evaluations would remain anonymous, they were informed that the compiled results would be shared with the administration and the Westville Board of Education. The results would provide the administration and board members with information regarding the implementation of the Schools Attuned program and determine the need for ongoing professional development.

Towards the end of the study, a representative sample of the Schools Attuned participants attended an open-forum to discuss the implementation of the school-wide program. The discussion group took place in the school library, which was a mutual, comfortable setting for all of the participants. During the open-forum, teachers were encouraged to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and make suggestions for changes that should be made for the second year of implementation.

#### Data Analysis Plan

The data that was collected from the distribution of questionnaires was compiled. The information from the questionnaire included questions that were limited to a yes, no, or undecided response. Calculating percentages of the responses regarding the effect that Schools Attuned would have on student achievement, behavior problems, and the number of referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) provided objective data.

The qualitative data gathered through the questionnaire, evaluation, and during the discussion group also had to be analyzed. Data analysis of open-ended questions consisted of organizing and classifying the information, in which patterns were able to be identified. This data provided the implications of the research study that was conducted at

Parkview Elementary School in Westville, New Jersey. After the information was analyzed and compiled, the results were shared with the administration and the Westville Board of Education.

## Chapter 4

### Research Findings

#### Findings

The staff members that received Schools Attuned training before the start of the 2004-2005 school year were required to attend the first practicum, a follow-up in-service, on November 3, 2004. At the conclusion of the meeting, a questionnaire was distributed to each of the faculty members. The teachers were encouraged to complete and hand in the questionnaire before leaving the in-service.

Twenty faculty members completed the survey and provided feedback about the implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview Elementary School. On the survey that was distributed, each participant provided information about the student that he or she was attuning. The participants were asked to provide a list of student strengths and weaknesses. They were also required to provide strategies that were being implemented in school and at home.

For instance, one teacher highlighted that the student that he or she was attuning is a “creative writer, has excellent penmanship and is liked by peers”. The teacher revealed that the student has “difficulty with attention”. The student is very fidgety and seems to be socially immature. The strategies that were being implemented in school include “the use of a stress ball to limit fidgeting with other things” and “teacher-assisted organization”. The strategies that were being implemented at home include the parents

checking and signing homework assignments. The parents were also providing “a to-do list to keep the child on-task in the morning”.

The participants were asked to explain what they liked about the Schools Attuned program. The majority of the participants, 16 staff members, revealed that they liked the strategy component of the program. One participant commented, “I like that the program provides a resource manual of useful strategies to use with the student being attuned, as well as the whole class.” Five of the staff members also identified the program’s initiative to meet individual needs. A staff member indicated that he or she had a “better understanding of children’s needs, feelings, and causes of their behavior”. Five of the participants also revealed that they perceived Schools Attuned as being a positive, beneficial program. One teacher confided, “The program really made me understand and become more sensitive to my students.”

The participants were also asked to explain what they did not like about the Schools Attuned program. The majority of the participants, 16 staff members, indicated that they were exposed to too much information and not provided with enough time during the core course of the training program. A participant admitted, “We moved way too fast through the material.” Another staff member commented that there was “not enough time to feel comfortable with the terminology”. Some of the teachers felt that there was a “lack of time in school to brainstorm ideas and strategies with coworkers”.

The questionnaire also included a section, which required the participants to answer closed-response questions. When comparing Schools Attuned to other professional development workshops, 1 participant, or 5% indicated that Schools Attuned was as useful, 10 participants or 50% felt that Schools Attuned was more useful, and 9

participants or 45% believe that Schools Attuned was much more useful than other workshops that they have attended. None of the participants indicated that Schools Attuned was much less useful or less useful than other professional development workshops.

When asked how significantly your teaching or work has changed as a result of Schools Attuned at this point in the school year, 13 participants or 65% experienced some change and 7 participants or 35% experienced moderate change. None of the participants indicated that they have experienced no change. None of the participants also indicated a significant change to their teaching or work.

The questionnaire also inquired about the accuracy of the student profile, which included the process of consolidating the teacher, parent, and student views, in pinpointing student strengths and student weaknesses. In regards to pinpointing student strengths, 2 participants or 10% indicated that the student profile was not at all accurate, 3 participants or 15% felt that the student profile was somewhat accurate, 12 participants or 60% indicated that the student profile was moderately accurate, and 3 participants or 15% felt that the student profile was very accurate. In regards to pinpointing student weaknesses, 2 participants or 10% indicated that the student profile was not at all accurate, 4 participants or 20% felt that the student profile was somewhat accurate, 7 participants or 35% indicated that the student profile was moderately accurate, and 7 participants or 35% felt that the student profile was very accurate.

The participants were also asked their opinions regarding the effect that the implementation of the Schools Attuned Program would have on student achievement, discipline problems, and the number of student referrals to the Pupil Assistance

Committee (PAC). While 4 participants or 20% are undecided, 16 participants or 80% believe that the implementation of Schools Attuned will improve student achievement at Parkview Elementary School. In regards to behavior, 7 participants or 35% feel that the implementation of Schools Attuned will decrease the number of discipline problems. While 7 participants or 35% are undecided, 6 participants or 30% do not feel that the implementation of Schools Attuned will decrease the number of discipline problems at Parkview Elementary School. In regards to the impact that Schools Attuned will have on the number of student referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC), 12 participants or 60% believe that the school-wide implementation of the program will decrease the number of students that are referred to the PAC Committee. The other 8 participants or the remaining 40% indicated that they were undecided about the impact that Schools Attuned would have on PAC referrals.

The final question on the survey asked the participants to provide other suggestions that would ensure the successful school-wide implementation of the Schools Attuned Program at Parkview School. The majority of the staff, 18 participants or 90%, suggested that the administration provide monthly in-services for staff to meet and discuss the program. One staff member identified the need for “more time to review the constructs and to discuss the positive strategies being implemented”. Another teacher argued, “If the school wants us to implement the program, then the school needs to give us the time to learn more about the program.” One participant simply stated, “Monthly in-services would allow all of the Schools Attuned groups to meet, brainstorm, share, and learn.”

After the results of the questionnaire were compiled and shared with the administration, the Westville Board of Education recognized the teachers’ requests for

ongoing professional development and approved a half-day in-service on January 14, 2005. The Board of Education requested to be provided with feedback regarding the half-day in-service. The Board of Education acknowledged that they would base their decision to provide additional monthly in-service meetings on the results of the survey.

At the conclusion of the January in-service meeting, the faculty members were encouraged to complete an evaluation of the in-service. Only 18 members of the faculty completed and handed in the survey. On the evaluation, 14 staff members or 78% gained a better understanding of Schools Attuned during the in-service. While 4 participants or 22% were undecided, no teachers indicated that they did not gain a better understanding of Schools Attuned during the meeting.

The evaluation required the participants to describe what they learned from their colleagues about Schools Attuned during the meeting. The feedback fell into two major categories including construct review and strategies. Several teachers indicated that the whole group reviewed the construct of temporal sequential ordering and spatial ordering. One teacher admitted, "It was interesting to hear the strengths and weaknesses of a student that are represented by a specific construct." In regards to learning about strategies one participant commented, "I found it interesting listening to my peers' experiences with attuning their students and learning about strategies that have been successful." Another participant also valued the time to "talk about different strategies to use with individual students".

The results of the evaluation also revealed that 14 participants or 78% believe that regular in-service meetings would have a positive impact on the implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview School. While 4 staff members or 22% were undecided,



none of the teachers indicated that regular meetings would not have a positive impact on the implementation of the school-wide program at Parkview School.

The evaluation allowed the participants to list areas of Schools Attuned that they would like to learn more about in upcoming meetings. The majority of the feedback referred to continued review of the learning constructs. Many of the teachers want to “continue to discuss the constructs and strategies to help children having difficulty with a specific construct”. Another participant identified a need for learning more “lessons that incorporate Schools Attuned strategies that would help the entire class, instead of just one student”.

The final question on the survey asked the participants to provide other suggestions that would ensure the successful school-wide implementation of the Schools Attuned Program at Parkview School. The majority of the staff suggested that the administration continue to provide monthly in-service meetings for the faculty to meet and discuss the program. One staff member requested that the administration “continue to provide time to discuss strategies with our peers”. Another teacher explained that the teachers need to be provided with “regular communication and guidance through the program”. Many teachers also suggested that the school needs to establish a record of students that have been attuned. One participant further suggested keeping a record of Schools Attuned students using an on-line database, “which includes names of the students, strengths, weaknesses, and strategies that have been implemented”.

The results of this evaluation were shared with the members of the Westville Board of Education at the January board meeting. The Board of Education was pleased with the positive feedback that was provided by the teachers. The members of the Board of

Education acknowledged the teachers request for ongoing professional development and agreed to scheduling additional monthly in-service meetings.

At the conclusion of the study, 8 Schools Attuned participants attended an open-forum to discuss the implementation of the school-wide program at Parkview Elementary School. The representative group consisted of 2 primary teachers, 2 upper grade teachers, 1 self-contained teacher, 1 resource room teacher, 1 basic skills teacher, and 1 specialist. Following the second Schools Attuned Practicum Course on February 22, 2005, the discussion group took place in the school library. The library was a mutual, comfortable setting for all of the participants. The discussion was led and guided by the questions that were asked by the principal investigator of this study.

The discussion began with asking the participants to discuss how they each felt about Schools Attuned after completing the entire training program. The participants admitted that they were initially “overwhelmed” by the content of the program, but they were beginning to feel more comfortable with the components and terminology of Schools Attuned. All of the discussion group participants agreed that the resource manual of strategies is their favorite component of the program. Some of the teachers also confirmed that they referred to the resource binder for many students in their class. The teachers explained that it was not necessary to go through the “timely process” of building a student profile and completing the teacher, student, and parent views to identify a problem. One teacher stated, “Teachers know their kids. They know the strengths and weaknesses of every student.”

The principal investigator asked how the participants felt about the first year of implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview School. The group admitted that, “it

takes time to learn and implement a new program”. Although the group appreciated the half-day in-service, they worried that the administration and the board of education would neglect to provide on-going professional development.

The entire group further argued that Parkview School lacks direction and leadership in regards to the implementation of the Schools Attuned Program. One teacher confided, “I feel like I am going through this with a blindfold. I need to feel like I have someone to go to if I have a question.” Another teacher commented that we need someone to guide the entire group of teachers in order to successfully implement the program school-wide. She stated that, “Everyone needs to be on the same page. Everyone needs to be held accountable for implementing the program.”

One teacher discussed the implementation strategies that are being utilized at another school that is implementing the program. She explained that Schools Attuned is part of their daily routine. For instance, the administrator distributes a newsletter that includes information about Schools Attuned and a “daily tip” to implement in the classroom. All of the teachers need to be involved in the implementation in order for this to be a successful, school-wide initiative.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the participants offered suggestions for changes that should be made during the second year of implementation. The first suggestion was appointing a leader that will provide direction for the entire staff. The teachers really feel that the implementation of Schools Attuned will dissipate if this program lacks leadership. They also feel that the implementation of Schools Attuned will fail if it is not being consistently implemented by all of the staff members.

Therefore, the participants believe that all faculty members that have attended the Schools Attuned training should be held accountable for implementing and staying involved with the program. The participants believe that the staff will stay involved in the program through ongoing professional development. Consequently, the administration and board of education should provide monthly in-service meetings for the staff to learn more about Schools Attuned at Parkview Elementary School.

### Analysis

The results of the questionnaire that was distributed to the faculty members after the first practicum, on November 3, 2004 indicated that every participant was working on “attuning” a student. Every participant provided information about the student that he or she was attuning. The participants provided a list of student strengths and weaknesses. They also provided strategies that were being implemented in school and at home.

The results of this questionnaire indicated that the majority of the teachers liked the Schools Attuned strategies that are in the resource binder. However, many teachers were overwhelmed by the amount of information and felt that they were not provided with enough time to learn about the program. When comparing Schools Attuned to other professional development programs, all of the teachers found this program to be as useful, more useful, or much more useful. No one indicated that this was not a useful program. When asked how significantly your teaching or work has changed as a result of Schools Attuned at this point in the school year, all of the teachers have experienced some change or a moderate change. No one indicated that they have experienced a significant change to their teaching or work.

The questionnaire also inquired about the accuracy of the student profile, which included the process of consolidating the teacher, parent, and student views, in pinpointing student strengths and student weaknesses. Most of the participants indicated that the student profile was moderately accurate or very accurate in pinpointing student strengths and weaknesses.

The participants were also asked their opinions regarding the effect that the implementation of the Schools Attuned Program would have on student achievement, discipline problems, and the number of student referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC) at Parkview Elementary School. The majority of participants believe that the implementation of Schools Attuned will improve student achievement. In regards to behavior, the results indicated that there was not a clear majority and the faculty was split as to whether the number of discipline problems would decrease. In regards to the impact that Schools Attuned will have on the number of student referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC), more than half of the participants believe that the school-wide implementation of the program will decrease the number of students that are referred to the PAC Committee. The remaining participants were undecided about the impact that Schools Attuned would have on PAC referrals.

The final question on the survey asked the participants to provide other suggestions that would ensure the successful school-wide implementation of the Schools Attuned Program at Parkview School. An overwhelming majority of the staff suggested that the administration provide monthly in-services for the staff to meet and discuss the program.

At the conclusion of the January in-service meeting, the faculty members were encouraged to complete an evaluation of the in-service to provide feedback regarding the value of ongoing professional development. The results of this evaluation indicated that the majority of the staff members gained a better understanding of Schools Attuned during the in-service. The evaluation revealed what the teachers had learned from their colleagues about Schools Attuned during the meeting. The results indicated that the teachers reviewed one of the learning constructs and discussed strategies to use with students in the classroom.

According to the evaluation, the majority of teachers believe that regular in-service meetings would have a positive impact on the implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview School. The teachers suggested that the administration continue to provide monthly in-service meetings for the staff to meet and discuss the program. The participants would like to continue reviewing the learning constructs.

At the conclusion of the study, a representative sample of Schools Attuned participants attended an open-forum to discuss the implementation of the school-wide program at Parkview Elementary School. The participants were initially asked to discuss how they each felt about Schools Attuned after completing the entire training program. The majority of the participants revealed that it takes time to absorb this overwhelming program. All of the participants agreed that the resource manual of strategies is the most beneficial part of the program.

When asked about the first year of implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview School, the group agreed that the teachers lacked guidance and the school lacked direction. As a result, the participants began to brainstorm changes that should be made

during the second year of implementation to ensure the successful adoption of the program. The suggestions included: naming a designated leader to provide direction for the entire staff, consistent implementation of Schools Attuned by every staff member in every classroom, and ongoing professional development.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

#### Conclusions

The intention of this study was to evaluate the first year implementation of the professional development program, Schools Attuned at Parkview Elementary School in Westville, New Jersey. This research study has revealed the educators' perceptions about the Schools Attuned program during the first year of implementation. The results of the initial research instrument indicated that the teachers at Parkview Elementary School agreed that Schools Attuned was a worthwhile program. However, the post-training evaluation also indicated that the teachers were overwhelmed by the amount of information that they were expected to absorb during the core course training.

The teachers conveyed that the Schools Attuned program has much to offer the faculty, students, and families of the Westville School District. The majority of the faculty liked the Schools Attuned resource binder because it provides effective strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom. The teachers also predicted that the implementation of the Schools Attuned Program would have a positive effect on student academic performance and decrease the number of students that are referred to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC). The teachers, however, did not believe that the implementation of Schools Attuned would have a significant impact on decreasing discipline problems.



With the faculty feeling overwhelmed during the core course training, the teachers suggested that ongoing professional development would enhance the first year implementation of Schools Attuned. Consequently, the administration and the board of education recognized the needs of the teachers and provided a half-day in-service devoted to the development of Schools Attuned at Parkview School. The Westville Board of Education requested that the teachers complete an evaluation of the half-day in-service.

The results of the in-service evaluation revealed that the faculty appreciated the time that was provided to discuss the overall implementation of Schools Attuned, including the specific strategies that are being implemented in the classrooms. The faculty revealed that they would benefit from reviewing the neurodevelopmental constructs of Schools Attuned, and discussing specific strategies that would help children that have weaknesses in each construct. On the evaluation, the teachers also requested further professional development and additional time to discuss the school-wide implementation of the program. The board of education was pleased with the compiled results of the evaluation and agreed to consider providing additional professional development to the teachers of Parkview School.

At the end of the study, a representative group of teachers participated in an open forum to discuss the first year implementation of Schools Attuned. Once again, the teachers revealed that Schools Attuned is a valuable program and has the potential to benefit the community of Parkview Elementary School. However, the group of teachers also felt that changes needed to be made during the second year of implementation. It was evident that the teachers felt as if they were lacking direction and guidance from the administration. Lacking leadership has had a profound impact during the first year of

implementation because the program is not being implemented consistently throughout the school building. The teachers provided specific suggestions for the second year implementation of Schools Attuned. The suggestions required the teachers and the administration to become more committed and invested in the program.

In conclusion, this study revealed that a successful school-wide initiative requires effective leadership, ongoing professional development, and consistent implementation. It was necessary for all of the participants, board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, to foster the adoption of a new program. The teachers, who were primarily responsible for implementing the program, needed direction from the board of education and guidance from the administration. It was essential for the board of education and the administration to provide the faculty with continuous professional development. Ongoing professional development provides opportunities for discussion between colleagues. Communication was an essential element in effectively implementing a program in a thorough and consistent manner.

### Implications

The results of this study provided Parkview Elementary School and other educational institutions with critical information regarding professional development and implementing school-wide programs. The information, which was collected, compiled, and analyzed throughout the course of this study, defined the elements that were required to effectively implement the school-wide program, Schools Attuned.

The Westville School District learned that it was necessary to provide the teachers with ongoing professional development for Schools Attuned. Ongoing professional development provided educators with opportunities to become comfortable with the

terminology, the concepts, and the components of a comprehensive program like Schools Attuned. Unfortunately, the nature of the teaching profession does not provide quality time for colleagues to meet, discuss, and share professional experiences. Therefore, it was necessary for the administration to coordinate professional development time for the entire staff to meet as a group and make decisions as a group. Providing ongoing professional development for teachers improved the communication in the school building. Consequently, open communication had a positive effect on the school-wide implementation of a new program. Scheduling regular in-service days kept the entire faculty actively involved in the implementation of Schools Attuned.

The Westville School District also identified the need for a leader to provide guidance and direction to the faculty members that are implementing the program. Parkview Elementary School needed a Schools Attuned leader that would assume the responsibility of facilitating the ongoing professional development. The Schools Attuned leader should also be accessible if a teacher had a question or concern about the program. The leader should communicate with the faculty by distributing correspondence that includes information about Schools Attuned. The Schools Attuned leader would keep the faculty actively involved in the program.

Finally, the Westville School District recognized the need for making every teacher accountable for implementing the program. A successful school-wide educational program was dependent on the consistent implementation in every classroom, across all grade levels. Therefore, the teachers should be required to provide evidence that they are implementing the Schools Attuned strategies with the students in their classrooms that have diverse learning needs.

## Leadership Growth

The professional development program, Schools Attuned required the educators at Parkview School to collaborate with parents to identify student strengths and weaknesses. As a result of the collaboration, strategies were developed that should be implemented both in school by the teacher and at home by the parent. The intention of the cooperative relationship was to help the student improve his or her academic performance and social development. Therefore, the fourth standard that has been defined by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium directly relates to this study.

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

4.a.2. Knowledge: The administrator has knowledge and understanding of conditions and dynamics of diverse school community.

4.b.2. Disposition: The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to diversity.

4.c.1. Performance: The administrator facilitates and engages in activities ensuring that there are comprehensive, active, visible, and mutually serving school and community relations; outreach to and partnerships with all segments of the diverse community.

Schools Attuned also provided the faculty members of Parkview Elementary School with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of all students. Schools Attuned offered new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with differences in learning. Throughout the training, educators focused on eight neurodevelopmental constructs that affect learning: attention, language, memory,

servomotor function, spatial ordering, temporal-sequential ordering, higher order cognition, and social cognition. This program prepared the classroom teachers to make the best instructional decisions to ensure that each student could find academic and social success. Therefore the sixth standard that has been defined by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium also directly relates to this study.

Standard 6: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

6.a.6. Knowledge: The administrator has knowledge and understanding of issues and forces that affect teaching and learning, including issues of diversity and equity.

6.b.2 Disposition: The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to diversity in ideals, values, and cultures.

6.c.1 Performance: The administrator facilitates activities ensuring a school environment that focuses on students and learning.

### Organization Change

This research study has provided the Westville School District with critical information regarding the school-wide initiative to implement the comprehensive professional development program, Schools Attuned. The first year of implementation provided the teaching faculty with the opportunity to be introduced to the program. The teachers participated and completed the 35 hour training program, becoming certified members of Schools Attuned. Every teacher was responsible for attuning a minimum of two students. The teachers were also required to design and teach a lesson that incorporated Schools Attuned strategies.

Although the teachers fulfilled the requirements to become certified members of Schools Attuned, the Parkview faculty recognized the changes that should be made during the second year of implementation. For the successful adoption of a school-wide initiative, the Westville School District learned that it is necessary to provide the teachers with effective leadership, ongoing professional development, and consistent implementation.

### Further Study

This study was limited to measuring the effectiveness of the first-year implementation of Schools Attuned at Parkview Elementary School in Westville, New Jersey. Therefore, further research should be conducted regarding the continued implementation of the program. Needs assessments should continued to be distributed to the Parkview faculty members to gather information regarding the school-wide implementation. It is essential for the faculty to be given the opportunity to provide feedback about the implementation of Schools Attuned and discuss their experiences with the program. The administration should specifically assess the impact of on-going professional development of Schools Attuned, as well as, the impact that a Schools Attuned leader is having on the implementation of the program. This will allow the Westville School District's Administration and Board of Education to make informed decisions and provide the necessary support that will enable the teachers to successfully implement the program.

The teachers at Parkview Elementary School need a leader to provide guidance and direction to the faculty members that are implementing the program. The board of education and the administration need to appoint a Schools Attuned leader that will assume the responsibility of facilitating the ongoing professional development and keep

the faculty actively involved in the program. The Schools Attuned leader should be available if a teacher has a question or concern about the program. The leader should also communicate with the faculty by distributing correspondence that includes information about Schools Attuned.

Furthermore, ongoing professional development provides teachers with the opportunity to become comfortable with the terminology, the concepts, and the components of a comprehensive program like Schools Attuned. Therefore, it is necessary for the administration to coordinate professional development time for the entire staff to meet as a group. Every Schools Attuned participant should be actively involved in the school-wide implementation of the program.

A successful school-wide educational program is also dependent on the consistent implementation throughout the school. Therefore, the teachers should be required to provide evidence that they are implementing the Schools Attuned strategies with the students in their classrooms that have diverse learning needs. The creation of a Schools Attuned database would further allow all of the teachers to access information regarding students that are being attuned. The Schools Attuned database would make the specialists aware of student strengths and weaknesses, as well as, strategies that allow the student to be successful. The database would also provide future teachers with some background information about a student that has been attuned. This will allow the teachers to consistently implement effective strategies from one year to the next.

Further study should also include measuring the overall impact that the professional development program, Schools Attuned has had on the progress of Parkview Elementary School. Research should be conducted regarding the effect that Schools Attuned has had

on the academic performance and social development of students that have been attuned. Research should specifically evaluate the impact that Schools Attuned has had on the teachers' ability to meet the needs of diverse learners. Analyzing school data would reveal specific information regarding the effect the program has had on standardized test results, student discipline and behavior problems, as well as the number of referrals to the Pupil Assistance Committee (PAC).



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